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Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

I address this message to the Congress on a matter which strikes at the very heart of our national well-being -- drug abuse.

The cost of drug abuse to this Nation is staggering. More than 5,000 Americans die each year from the improper use of drugs. Law enforcement officials estimate that as much as one half of all "street crime" -- robberies, muggings, burglaries -- are committed by drug addicts to support their expensive and debilitating habits. In simple dollar terms, drug abuse costs us up to \$17 billion a year.

But these statistics -- ominous as they are -- reflect only a part of the tragic toll which drug abuse exacts. For every young person who dies of a drug overdose, there are thousands who do not die but who are merely going through the motions of living. They sit in classrooms without learning. They grow increasingly isolated from family and friends. At a time when they should be preparing for the future, they are "copping out" on the present.

The problem, moreover, is not limited to youth or to the disadvantaged. It extends to citizens of all ages and all walks of life -- from the housewife to the college professor. The cumulative effect is to diminish the quality and vitality of our community life; to weaken the fabric of our Nation.

When this problem exploded into the national consciousness in the late 1960's, the response of the Federal Government was swift and vigorous. Federal spending on a comprehensive program to control drug abuse grew from less than \$100 million in 1969 to over three-quarters of a billion in 1974; specialized agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration and the National Institute on Drug Abuse were created; and international diplomatic efforts to mobilize the assistance of foreign governments in a world-wide attack on drug trafficking were intensified.

With the help of State and local governments, community groups and our international allies in the battle against narcotics, we were able to make impressive progress in combatting the drug menace. So much so that by mid-1973 many were convinced that we had "turned the corner" on the drug abuse problem.

Unfortunately, while we had won an important victory, we had not won the war on drugs. By 1975, it was clear that drug use was increasing, that the gains of prior years were being lost, that in human terms, narcotics had become a national tragedy. Today, drug abuse constitutes a clear and present threat to the health and future of our Nation.

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The time has come to launch a new and more aggressive campaign to reverse the trend of increasing drug abuse in America. And this time we must be prepared to stick with the task for as long as necessary.

Because of my deep concern about this problem and my personal commitment to do something about it, last year I directed the Domestic Council to undertake a thorough review and assessment of the adequacy of the Federal drug program. That review, which culminated in the publication of the White Paper on Drug Abuse, has helped tremendously to refocus and revitalize the Federal effort. We have made substantial progress in implementing the many sound recommendations contained in the White Paper, but more needs to be done.

And more will be done. The first need for stronger action is against the criminal drug trafficker. These merchants of death, who profit from the misery and suffering of others, deserve the full measure of national revulsion. They should be the principal focus of our law enforcement activities -- at the Federal, State and local level. In this regard, I am pleased to note that arrests by Federal law enforcement officers of major drug traffickers are up substantially over previous years. However, the progress we have made in improving our ability to apprehend these traffickers will be lost unless major changes are made in the way our criminal justice system deals with drug traffickers after arrest.

Justice Department statistics show that one out of every four persons convicted of trafficking in heroin received no prison sentence at all. One out of every three received a sentence of less than three years. And since convicted traffickers are eligible for parole upon the completion of one-third of their sentence, even those who received longer sentences rarely served more than a few years.

I believe this is wrong. It is wrong for the criminals who profit by selling drugs, it is wrong for the victims of drugs, and it is wrong for our system of justice. Laws which permit traffickers to go free to prey again on society should be changed. These criminals must know with certainty that, if convicted, they will go to jail for a substantial period of time. Only then will the risk of apprehension be a deterrent rather than just another cost of doing business.

Accordingly, I will submit to the Congress this week legislation which will require mandatory minimum prison sentences for persons convicted of trafficking in heroin and similar narcotic drugs. Sentences under this legislation would be at least three years for a first offense and at least six years for subsequent offenses or for selling to a minor.

I want to emphasize that the purpose of this proposal is not to impose vindictive punishment but to protect society from those who prey upon it and to deter others who might be tempted to sell drugs. Considering the terrible human toll that drug addiction takes and the extent to which it contributes to more and more crime, it is a matter of high priority that Congress make our laws more effective in curbing drug traffic.

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Another serious problem with current Federal law is that even the most notorious drug traffickers are usually released on bail soon after arrest. The bail is often small and the profits from drug trafficking are large, so raising and then forfeiting the bail is just another cost of doing business. A 1974 Justice Department study shows that 48 percent -- nearly one out of two -- of a sample of individuals arrested for trafficking in narcotics were implicated in post-arrest drug trafficking while out on bail. Other studies show that approximately one-fourth of all bail-jumpers in drug cases are aliens who were caught smuggling drugs into the country. These offenders simply flee to their homelands upon posting bail. There, they serve as walking advertisements for international traffickers attempting to recruit other couriers.

This, too, is wrong. Therefore, in addition to asking Congress to establish mandatory minimum sentences, I shall submit to Congress legislation that would enable judges to deny bail if a defendant arrested for trafficking heroin or dangerous drugs is found (1) to have previously been convicted of a drug felony; (2) to be presently free on parole; (3) to be a non-resident alien; (4) to have been arrested in possession of a false passport; or (5) to be a fugitive or previously convicted of having been a fugitive.

Next, the Federal government must act to take the easy profits out of drug selling.

We know that tremendous amounts of money are illegally taken out of the country each day, either to purchase drugs or to transfer profits made by selling drugs to safe and secret bank accounts abroad. To prevent this money from being smuggled out of the country, I will ask Congress to grant to the U.S. Customs Service the authority to search persons suspected of smuggling money out of the country as Customs now has the authority to search for contraband entering the country.

I shall ask Congress to pass legislation requiring the forfeiture of cash or other personal property found in the possession of a narcotics violator -- where it is determined that it was used or was intended for use in connection with an illegal drug transaction.

I shall ask Congress to change provisions of the law which allow the seizure of vehicles, boats and aircraft used to smuggle drugs. At present, these may be seized by administrative action only if the value of the property is less than \$2,500; otherwise action by a Federal judge is necessary.

This \$2,500 limitation is out of date and must be changed. Therefore, I shall ask Congress to raise to \$10,000 the ceiling for administrative forfeitures. This will not only make law enforcement against traffickers more swift and more effective but it will also help to relieve court congestion.

I shall ask Congress to tighten the provisions of the law relating to small privately owned boats reporting to Customs after their arrival. At present, the masters of these vessels have 24 hours to report their arrival to Customs -- and that is ample time to unload contraband. I shall ask Congress to pass legislation requiring such vessels to report to Customs immediately upon their arrival.

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I call on Congress also to ratify an existing treaty for the international control of synthetic drugs.

Over the past fifty years the major nations of the world have worked out treaty arrangements for the international control of drugs with a natural base, such as opiates and cocaine. But no similar arrangements exist for the control of synthetic drugs -- such as barbiturates, amphetamines and tranquilizers; and the abuse of these synthetic drugs is a growing problem which is now almost as serious as the abuse of heroin in the United States.

Five years ago the United States played a major role in the preparation of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, a treaty to deal with international traffic in synthetic drugs. But the Senate has not yet ratified this treaty, and Congress has not yet passed the enabling legislation.

The delay in U.S. ratification of the Convention has been an embarrassment to us. Moreover, it has made it extremely difficult for us to urge other countries to tighten controls on natural-based narcotic substances, when we appear unwilling to extend international controls to amphetamines, barbiturates and other psychotropic drugs which are produced here in the United States.

So far, I have emphasized the need for additional legislation and Congressional action.

But there are Executive actions which I can take and I am today doing so.

The Federal program to control drug abuse is as diverse as any in government, involving some seven Cabinet departments and seventeen agencies. It is vitally important that the efforts of these departments and agencies be integrated into an effective overall program but that responsibility for specific program management rest with the appropriate departments and agencies.

Accordingly, I am today establishing two new Cabinet committees -- one for drug law enforcement and the other for drug abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

The Cabinet Committee for Drug Law Enforcement will consist of the Attorney General as chairman and the Secretaries of the Treasury and Transportation. The Cabinet Committee on Drug Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation will consist of the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare as chairman, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Labor and the Administrator of the Veterans Administration. I charge the Attorney General and the Secretary of HEW, as chairmen of these committees, with responsibility for oversight and coordination at all Federal activities within their respective areas.

In carrying out his responsibilities as Chairman of the new Cabinet Committee on Drug Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation, the Secretary of HEW should give particular attention to developing expanded vocational rehabilitation opportunities for drug addicts. Experience has shown that treatment alone is not enough. Unless something is done to alter the fundamental conditions which led the individual to seek escape through drug use, a relapse is likely. A job,

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with the dignity and self-esteem it brings, is essential to help the individual re-enter the mainstream of American life. Further, the Secretary of HEW and the Attorney General will work together to develop plans for improving the coordination between the drug abuse treatment system and the criminal justice system.

I am directing the Secretary of the Treasury to work with the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue, in consultation with the Attorney General and the Administrator of the Drug Abuse Enforcement Administration, to develop a tax enforcement program aimed at high-level drug traffickers. We know that many of the biggest drug dealers do not pay income taxes on the enormous profits they make on this criminal activity. I am confident that a responsible program can be designed which will promote effective enforcement of the tax laws against these individuals who are currently violating these laws with impunity.

No matter how hard we fight the problem of drug abuse at home, we cannot make really significant progress without the continued cooperation of foreign governments. This is because most dangerous narcotics are produced in foreign countries. Thus, our capability to deal with supplies of drugs available in the United States depends largely on the interest and capability of foreign governments in controlling the production and shipment of illicit drugs.

Many countries still see drug abuse as primarily an American problem and are unaware of the extent to which the problem is truly global in scope. Poorer nations find it difficult to justify the allocation of scarce resources to deal with drug abuse in the face of many other pressing needs. Also, some opium producing countries lack effective control over, or access to, growing areas within their boundaries and, thus, their efforts in drug control programs are made more difficult.

Still, we have been reasonably successful in enlisting the cooperation of foreign governments. We must now intensify diplomatic efforts at all levels in order to encourage the greatest possible commitment from other governments to this international problem. We must continue to provide technical and equipment assistance through cooperative enforcement efforts with U.S. agents stationed overseas, all aimed at strengthening drug control organizations within foreign countries. And we must continue to participate in building institutions and a system of international treaties which can provide a legal framework for an international response to this international problem.

I have spoken personally to Presidents Echeverria of Mexico and Lopez-Michelsen of Colombia and with Prime Minister Demirel of Turkey in an effort to strengthen cooperation among all nations involved in the fight against illicit drug traffic. I intend to continue to urge foreign leaders to increase their efforts in this area. Attorney General Levi has recently discussed drug control problems with the Attorney General of Mexico and Secretary of State Kissinger has discussed narcotic control efforts with senior officials in Latin America on his recent trip there. I have asked both of them, as well as our Ambassador to the United Nations, William Scranton, to continue to expand these important discussions.

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The reactions of the governments which we have approached have been positive -- there is a genuine and healthy air of mutual concern and cooperation between our countries and I am confident that our joint efforts will bring about a real reduction in drug trafficking into the United States.

One recent example of the new awareness and commitment of foreign governments to this struggle deserves special mention. President Echeverria has written to inform me of his intention to set up a cabinet level commission to coordinate all law enforcement and drug treatment programs within Mexico and to suggest that his commission might periodically exchange information and ideas with a counterpart here. This proposal, which was the result of discussions between President Echeverria and concerned members of the United States Congress, stands as a clear signal that the Mexican government recognizes the need to build a coordinated response to the problem of drug abuse. I believe the periodic exchange of views on this matter between our two nations would be helpful. Accordingly, I am assigning responsibility for liaison with the Mexican Commission to the Cabinet Committee on International Narcotic Control and I am directing the Secretary of State, as Chairman of the CCINC to immediately form an executive committee to meet with its Mexican counterpart to discuss ways in which our government can collaborate more effectively. We shall of course consult with concerned members of Congress as these efforts are carried on.

Drug abuse is a national problem. Our national well-being is at stake. The Federal Government -- the Congress, the Executive Branch and the Judicial Branch -- State and local governments, and the private sector must work together in a new and far more aggressive attack against drugs.

I pledge that the Federal Government will maintain the high priority which it has given this problem. We will strengthen our law enforcement efforts and improve our treatment and rehabilitation programs. With Congress' help, we will close loopholes in our laws which permit traffickers to prey on our young; and we shall expect the courts to do their part.

All of this will be of little use, however, unless the American people rally and fight the scourge of drug abuse within their own communities and their own families. We cannot provide all the answers to young people in search of themselves, but we can provide a loving and a caring home; we can provide good counsel; and we can provide good communities in which to live. We can show through our own example that life in the United States is still very meaningful and very satisfying and very worthwhile.

Americans have always stood united and strong against all enemies. Drug abuse is an enemy we can control but there must be a personal and a national dedication and commitment to the goal.

If we try, we can be successful in the long run. I am convinced we can -- and that we will.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,

April 27, 1976.

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