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(Parvin/AB)
March 19, 1982
10:30 a.m.

MRS. REAGAN: WHITE HOUSE DRUG CONFERENCE
SUMMARY REMARKS, MARCH 22, 1982

- Before I do anything else, I want to thank the wonderful speakers who joined us this morning. Important messages have flowed from the White House ever since it was built. But seldom has this house heard a message as immediately important to our children as the one this morning. And let me add, please don't leave, because we have a brief but major session following this lunch.
- As you may know, my husband has this habit of pulling letters out of his pocket and reading them. Well, I'd like to take a cue from him and read you a short excerpt from a letter we received not long ago. I can tell you, though, it is not light reading.
- This young man, who is a reporter, wrote, "Three years ago my 23 year old sister died from an overdose of cocaine. She left behind a 9 month baby, a husband, and her family. I still cannot believe she would use drugs and never suspected she did. Her death still haunts my mother and deeply troubles me. Perhaps other young girls like my sister and my many friends caught up in the drug world can be saved. At least I sure hope so." . . . Well, I hope so, too.

-- And that is why I invited you here today. Perhaps you will help. Because that letter is not a singular one. I receive thousands of them from all over the country -- letters of sorrow and confusion. Many times the letters are long and emotional as the parent or spouse or friend releases the pressure, and the hurt and heartbreak pours forth. Very often I get letters from young people who have fought and freed themselves of drugs and the lifestyle that goes with it. And almost always these kids offer to do whatever they can so that others won't have to endure the anguish they've experienced. I hope that today many of you will make similar offers of help.

-- This morning you heard the dangers and degree of drug abuse among our youth. I don't believe as leaders, as employers, or as parents, you can sit by while such destruction occurs. With all you have heard and learned today, you may feel overwhelmed. But we need not be overwhelmed by the drug problem itself. We need only take concerted, determined action. We genuinely can reduce drug abuse among our young people. It is a bully that simply needs to be stood up to.

-- By your leadership positions, I know you are activists; and by your very natures, you seek to solve problems. You and the organizations you represent are powerful and, in turn, can have a powerful impact on the drug crisis. I am asking

you today to use your influence, your energy, and your resources to prevent drug abuse.

-- You will not be working alone. We in the White House are anxious to provide support and ACTION stands ready to provide technical assistance. What is more, there is a Nation of parents, community groups and professionals out there that are longing to unite with you. We need you. We need you to help protect America's children. We can't afford to lose them. Please, will you join us?

(Parvin/AB)
March 19, 1982
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(Parvin) ^{AB}
March 18, 1982
11:00 a.m.

MRS. REAGAN: WHITE HOUSE DRUG CONFERENCE
OPENING REMARKS, March 22, 1982

- Let me extend a very warm welcome to you all this morning. Before the experts begin their briefings, I'd like to make just a few personal remarks. First of all, I want to express my genuine thanks for your coming. I know an audience as distinguished and influential as this one has a very busy schedule. I wouldn't have asked for your time today, if I didn't think the drug problem was absolutely urgent. I wanted to reach you personally, and in my own way, convey the peril of drug abuse among our young.
- Over the past year I've become increasingly disturbed by America's drug epidemic and its effect on our youth. I have talked to the experts, as well as parents, and, of course, young people themselves. And do you know what I learned above everything else? I learned that I am scared to death for our children. I don't think ever in my life have I felt as compelled to do something about an issue as I feel about youthful drug abuse. Drugs ruin lives before they've even had a chance to develop and ^{then} compound the damage by destroying the family ties that offer the best hope.
- You will hear statistics today that are as chilling as they are impressive. But please remember that behind the numbers there are young lives and lost dreams. You will hear

matter-of-fact terms like ["]burnout.["] But please remember we are talking about children who often had excellent grades, athletic promise, and cheery personalities -- children who are now dulled and listless -- burnt-out remains of their former selves.

-- I think the speakers today will startle you with how much times have changed since we were young. A few weeks ago when my husband and I were in California, Merle Haggard sang about a time "when coke was still a cola and a joint was a bad place to be." I wish our young people's lives were still that innocent. But this is not the age of innocence; it is the age of vicious drugs.

-- I want you to know that the White House is committed to this drive against drugs. My husband's concern has grown along with mine, and I intend to keep the spotlight on drug abuse as long as I'm here.

-- As you listen to the briefings, I hope you will think prevention, prevention, prevention. That is our top priority. It is safer and more effective to thwart drug abuse before it begins; than to ~~wait after the fact and hope the young person will come in for~~ ^{Sometimes} ~~often~~ ^{rely on} treatment -- an emergency procedure where we ~~often~~ ^{Sometimes} lose the patient. Again, I want to thank you personally for coming. Now let's begin.

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