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DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

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NATIONAL HEROIN CONFERENCE

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Keynote Address by

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Attorney General Janet Reno

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Wednesday, February 5, 1997

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12:30 p.m.

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. CONSTANTINO: The Attorney  
3 General has adjusted her schedule in that the  
4 difficulty yesterday in the office, they lost  
5 one of their employees, which was a fairly  
6 young woman who had a heart attack and was  
7 close to the Attorney, which, I think, has  
8 obviously placed a strain on the schedule in  
9 dealing with the families and wakes and all  
10 that. It's always dangerous, I think, to  
11 introduce your own boss.

12 (Laughter)

13 MR. CONSTANTINO: If you don't do it  
14 right you will feel uncomfortable. If you're  
15 too flattering, it looks like a self-serving  
16 introduction.

17 (Laughter)

18 MR. CONSTANTINO: Given the two  
19 choices I allot for the latter.

20

(Laughter)

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MR. CONSTANTINO: But what I say

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comes from the heart, I've said it before. If

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there's a person with class and integrity and

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character that I know of, it is the Attorney

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General of the United States.

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I've watched her again and again in

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very difficult circumstances where it will be

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easy for her to say something that wouldn't be

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correct or warrant decision-making. And in

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each and every one of those occasions I have

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been impressed by her courage, and always

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wondered whether or not, if I was placed in the

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same circumstances, I would have had the same

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reaction which she's had the strength to have.

13

For those of you who work in law

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enforcement, it's really -- especially the

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state and local government -- you should know

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that virtually every two weeks both myself and

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a senior member of my staff meet with the

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Attorney General as does the record (inaudible)

19 and alternating case.

20 At probably, at least 80 percent of  
21 those meetings, an issue is arrived at whereas  
22 the Attorney General has been off in the United

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1 States and has seen something that she is  
2 impressed with or concerned about and wants to  
3 find some way that she can bring a reaction on  
4 the part of the Justice Department and, in our  
5 case, specifically the DEA.

6 The other thing I'll tell you that we  
7 couldn't do any of these things, hold any of  
8 these conferences or run any of the enforcement  
9 programs if it wasn't for budget support. And  
10 all of you know that, who work in law  
11 enforcement. She has been a tiger in fighting  
12 for all of the budget enhancements that have  
13 been essential to DEA.

14 So we're really beyond the  
15 (inaudible) to just carry out a lot of those  
16 philosophical, practical judgments that are set  
17 for us. And with that I hope I have found the

18 right balance between the two, and, Attorney  
19 General, it's now up to you.

20 (Applause)

21 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you,  
22 Tom.

5  
1 I just appreciate what you do day in  
2 and day out. And what all of you do. I have  
3 just -- as I came I recognized faces that I  
4 have gotten to know and others that I've known  
5 for a long time, and I just appreciate your  
6 efforts on behalf of the American people. And  
7 I want you to know that.

8 For this conference Tom has brought  
9 together representatives of federal, state and  
10 local law enforcement, prosecutorial demand  
11 reduction agencies and members of  
12 nongovernmental organizations, to respond with  
13 a threat facing our communities by the growing  
14 supply and consumption of heroin.

15 Prosecutors aren't going to win this  
16 battle by themselves. DEA isn't going to win

17 the battle by itself. The local police  
18 department is not going to win. The only way  
19 you're going to do this is by coming together,  
20 not just in conferences such as this, but in  
21 our daily operations, unconcerned about perks,  
22 unconcerned about credit, but one common goal

6  
1 that is, the best way to stem the growth of  
2 this problem in this country. And I want to do  
3 everything I can to be a partner with you in  
4 that effort.

5 Recent trends in heroin's  
6 availability, purity and price clearly indicate  
7 that this is one of the most critical problems  
8 we face in fighting narcotics in this country  
9 today.

10 Worldwide production of heroin has  
11 increased drastically. It is more plentiful on  
12 our streets. It's, on average, five to six  
13 times more pure than a decade ago. And it's  
14 less expensive.

15 A formula that has increased heroin

16 addiction for our country by 20 percent and  
17 brought about the usual parade of terrible  
18 results: Violence, theft, despair, neglect and  
19 abuse of our children. And now, more  
20 frequently than ever before, death.

21 Now is the time to act, to develop a  
22 comprehensive plan to this nation. It is time

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1 to develop enforcement and prevention  
2 strategies together before we have this demon  
3 totally out of control.

4 Historically, heroin use and abuse  
5 has been consigned to the margins of our  
6 society. Even in the 1960's, when large parts  
7 of mainstream America experimented with drugs,  
8 heroin was generally feared and refused to  
9 carry the stigma which set it apart from other  
10 drugs.

11 Since then a stable addict population  
12 of about half a million people grew older, and  
13 through few new recruits, heroin consumption  
14 remained relatively constant throughout the 70s

15 and the 80s because of lower availability,  
16 poorer quality and higher street prices, caused  
17 in large part by law enforcement pressure and  
18 then by the emergence of crack and cocaine.

19 The predominate trend in America  
20 since the excesses of the 60's and the 70's has  
21 been an overall decrease in drug use. Today an  
22 estimated six percent of Americans have used

8  
1 illicit drugs within the last month. Less than  
2 half of the 14 percent in 1979.

3 But heroin has not followed that  
4 trend. It is now being supplied in greater  
5 quantity, higher purity; it's being purchased  
6 by a growing number of users and addicts.  
7 Within the last few years the number of addicts  
8 has increased from 500,000 people in the 1970's  
9 and 1980's to approximately 600,000 heroin  
10 addicts today.

11 For more and more drug users it is  
12 replacing crack and cocaine as the drug of  
13 choice. And for others it is being used in



14 conjunction with those drugs to enhance their  
15 highs and to relieve their aftereffects.

16 The expanding number of users in the  
17 United States has been propelled in large part  
18 by an increase in the purity of heroin sold on  
19 our streets. A trend which not only reflects  
20 heroin's increased availability, but it has  
21 broadened its allure and potential users.

22 Expanded availability of heroin

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1 worldwide and the competition for greater  
2 market share among producers and distributors  
3 has reduced the need for heroin dealers to  
4 dilute their product to satisfy the market  
5 demand.

6 Ten years ago heroin street level  
7 purity averaged 7 percent. But since 1988 it  
8 has increased more than five-fold to an average  
9 purity of between 35 and 40 percent.

10 Higher purity heroin has enabled  
11 users to administer the drug through  
12 alternatives to injection, like inhaling or

13 snorting, which are less efficient methods and  
14 capable of producing substantial euphoric  
15 effects at lower purity levels.

16 The availability of snorting has  
17 attracted many new users, especially in the  
18 Northeast, where street purities regularly top  
19 50 percent are highly conducive to this method.

20 Snorting not only circumvents the  
21 stigma traditionally associated with needles,  
22 and eliminates the direct risk of contracting

10

1 AIDS and other communicable diseases in  
2 contaminated syringes, but it also fosters the  
3 mistaken view held by some that it is less  
4 addicting than injection.

5 Indeed, snorting heroin is as  
6 addicting as injection, and may just as likely  
7 result in that fatal overdose.

8 Snorting heroin is also unlikely to  
9 the lesson the drugs practiced consequences.  
10 Many addicts will continue to contract AIDS  
11 from prostitution, which the history of the

12 crack epidemic teaches us, is a common method  
13 to finance a drug habit.

14 And many users will more likely  
15 return to more efficient methods, like an  
16 injection, to boost their drug-induced stupors.  
17 As a result of increased street-level purities  
18 and the rising popularity of snorting, heroin  
19 consumption has become more widespread in  
20 mainstream society.

21 More and more of middle class and  
22 working class teenagers, young adults in

11  
1 suburban residences with otherwise bright  
2 futures, are joining the older, long-term users  
3 who have more recently (inaudible) the addict  
4 population.

5 Unless we do something now, we can  
6 expect this trend and it's consequences to  
7 continue and to become one of the most critical  
8 crises we face in the area of narcotics  
9 enforcement.

10 If we do not counteract the heroin

11 threat now, we risk repeating the terrible  
12 consequences of the 1980's cocaine and crack  
13 epidemic.

14 I remember as it started to become  
15 epidemic, I just wish that in those days in the  
16 80's we had the opportunity to come together to  
17 find out what was happening in communities  
18 across the nation, to share intelligence and to  
19 develop a comprehensive plan, that together, we  
20 can spend this time before it becomes  
21 ingrained.

22 Heroin and other illegal drugs exact

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1 a tremendous toll on society, both financially  
2 and morally. The economic costs alone are  
3 absolutely staggering. We spend billions of  
4 dollars annually to combat drug-related crime,  
5 to cure the illnesses related to drug abuse and  
6 to compensate for productivity losses in our  
7 workplace.

8 But the other costs, the ones that  
9 stir our sense of true moral outrage, are the

10 human costs. Childhood essence lost in  
11 drive-by shootings. Infants who are addicted  
12 to drugs. School children of course place a  
13 higher premium on survival than on education,  
14 and their decadence and their misery are  
15 engulfing larger and larger segments of our  
16 population.

17 The increase in heroin use and purity  
18 has also spawned a substantial increase in the  
19 number of users seen in hospital emergency  
20 rooms. The Drug Abuse Warning Network, which  
21 helps people treated for drug-related problems  
22 and hospital emergency departments, estimates

13  
1 that 76,000 people sought emergency treatment  
2 for heroin-related problems in 1995, more than  
3 double the estimated 34,000 in 1990. Heroin  
4 overdoses bring a tragic end to nearly 4,000  
5 lives each year.

6 AIDS, the prevalent disease among the  
7 injection users and drug addicts who finance  
8 their habit through prostitution, has become a

9 common and especially anguishing cause of death  
10 among heroin addicts and users.

11 At times it seems that society's  
12 awareness of these costs and the dangers of  
13 illicit drug use has decreased. A disturbing  
14 number of heroin-related deaths and arrests  
15 have occurred among the prominent entertainers,  
16 underscoring an image problem among those who  
17 young people often seek to emulate.

18 I congratulate those members in the  
19 entertainment industry who are addressing these  
20 problems, and I commend their efforts to fight  
21 drugs and violence in this country.

22 Unfortunately, heroin's allure has

14  
1 broadened at the same time that the drug's  
2 presence in cult culture has risen. Many of  
3 those who are best positioned in our society to  
4 influence young people's attitudes have been  
5 sending the wrong message, or no message at  
6 all.

7 The recent rash of talented young

8 lives snuffed by heroin, and prominent people  
9 arrested for heroin use, suggest the drug may  
10 have acquired a dangerous new cache in some  
11 entertainment circles.

12 A tacit acceptance of heroin is  
13 reflected not only by the prominent users'  
14 actions and the pervasiveness of drug entry in  
15 film, fashion and music, but by the apparent  
16 willingness of some of the entertainment  
17 industry to condone rather than to condemn its  
18 use.

19 Those from the industry who have  
20 joined us this week are representative of so  
21 many in the field who know that substantial  
22 progress in curtailing America's drug problem

15  
1 will not come about unless people under 20, who  
2 are more likely than any other age group to  
3 begin using drugs and are more susceptible to  
4 messages in the meaning from the celebrities,  
5 receive a clear and unequivocal message from  
6 all corners that heroin usage is dangerous and

7 it is wrong.

8 The recent spate of deaths and  
9 arrests undermines this message, making it  
10 harder for children to say no when so many  
11 influential role models say yes.

12 An unequivocal message from  
13 Government and private industry on the perils  
14 of the illegal drugs is especially important  
15 now that heroin is in the position to become  
16 our next major epidemic.

17 Demand reduction through education  
18 and treatment is crucial to keeping people off  
19 drugs in the first place, and to breaking the  
20 cycle of crime and addiction among drug users.

21 But such a limited strategy, without  
22 strong law enforcement, will not deter the

16  
1 hardcore users and the traffickers who stand  
2 ready to exploit any demand, especially now  
3 that the enormous global heroin supply has the  
4 potential to overwhelm current treatment and  
5 prevention efforts.



6                   In this respect, a strong law  
7                   enforcement establishment encompassing federal,  
8                   state and local jurisdictions, and a link to an  
9                   efficient, effective intelligence-gathering  
10                  apparatus is essential.

11                  The recent trend in heroin's  
12                  availability, purity and consumption point to  
13                  the urgency of our tasks. Without an effective  
14                  nationwide enforcement strategy, we will be  
15                  overcome by trafficking organizations that are  
16                  more sophisticated and more elusive than ever  
17                  before. They are poised to exploit every crack  
18                  and fissure in our enforcement system, and we  
19                  must be prepared to respond.

20                  The effect of such a strategy must  
21                  take into account several features of the  
22                  heroin crave that presents unique obstacles to

17  
1                  law enforcement. Unlike cocaine and other use  
2                  of drugs, the bulk of the world's heroin supply  
3                  is produced in countries that are particularly  
4                  immune to the United States' influence,

5       particularly Burma and Afghanistan, making  
6       cooperation to source countries difficult.

7               Moreover, since a relatively small  
8       percentage of the total worldwide heroin supply  
9       is actually consumed in the United States,  
10      large seizures in this country are likely to  
11      have a relatively smaller effect on the  
12      worldwide heroin market than a similar seizure  
13      of cocaine would have on the cocaine market.

14             Heroin's price structure also tends  
15      to favor traffickers over law enforcement by  
16      allowing drug trafficking organizations to  
17      profit from the relatively -- from the  
18      smuggling of relatively small quantities.

19             Although heroin and cocaine prices  
20      are comfortable, on the street level, heroin  
21      offers a substantially larger profit margin on  
22      the wholesale level. Heroin is best being

18  
1       moved in much smaller quantities than cocaine,  
2       but still realizes the same financial windfall,  
3       making it easier to conceal and ensuring that

4 seizures and arrests large enough to disrupt  
5 the overall heroin market will be in treatment.

6 Perhaps as a result of heroin's price  
7 advantage, many South American cocaine  
8 trafficking organizations are now distributing  
9 heroin. In the last three years, South  
10 American heroin has accounted for a  
11 progressively larger proportion of the  
12 substance seized in this country.

13 And South American organizations,  
14 with their very aggressive marketing tactics,  
15 have begun to cultivate extensive heroin  
16 clientele. These organizations are attracting  
17 new addicts by offering reduced prices and  
18 increased periods, thereby ensuring themselves  
19 a significant long-term market share.

20 The upsurge in South American heroin  
21 reaching our shores represents an especially  
22 serious threat because of the proximity and

19  
1 production potential of South American producer  
2 countries and the extensive trafficking

3 resources controlled by South American  
4 organizations.

5 Mexican organizations which also  
6 control substantial trafficking resources  
7 continue to supply large amounts of black tar  
8 and brown heroin in the rest of the United  
9 States.

10 In the law enforcement arena we are  
11 building effective federal, state and local  
12 partnerships, and multi-agency task forces, as  
13 well as working to secure the cooperation of  
14 source-country governments.

15 I cannot stress to you how important  
16 it is that the federal agencies that I  
17 represent do everything they can to be a  
18 partner with those of you who are out on the  
19 front line in state and local law enforcement.

20 Many of you know my background as  
21 that other state prosecutor. It is so  
22 important for me that you let me know about any

20  
1 occasion that I can do anything that promotes,

2       that enhances, that encourages that cooperation  
3       and that partnership. A two-way exchange of  
4       information, not just one-way.

5               A recognition that, in some  
6       instances, the case is better prosecuted in  
7       state court and some instances it's better  
8       prosecuted in federal court.

9               We need to do things not based on who  
10       get's the credit, but who can take the most  
11       effective step in stemming this surge of  
12       heroin.

13               So, my telephone number is 514-2002.

14                       (Laughter)

15               If there are problems, let me know.  
16       Somebody said, "Well, you're too busy." I  
17       think most people in this room will know that  
18       I'm not too busy to get back to you to  
19       follow-up to make sure that we're doing  
20       everything we can to be a partner.

21               We give higher priority and more  
22       resources to heroin investigations. Especially

1 in gateway cities like New York and Miami,  
2 where a significant amount of heroin enters our  
3 country.

4 We must also develop effective  
5 prosecution strategies that ensure heroin  
6 traffickers receive stiff penalties, that their  
7 money launderers are identified and prosecuted,  
8 and that they are denied the benefit of their  
9 ill-gotten gains.

10 We want to reach out to other federal  
11 agencies to make sure that there are no turf  
12 battles. And in money laundering  
13 investigations we want to be a partner, work  
14 together, ensure the exchange of information,  
15 follow patterns and trends that lead us to the  
16 sources where we can truly take effective  
17 action without regard of who gets the credit,  
18 but with regard with who get's the money  
19 launderer.

20 The heroin market has the  
21 vulnerability to be exploited. It is the  
22 exceptionally high-level superiority which has

1       been largely responsible, as I noted  
2       previously, for the upsurge in use.

3               The last 10 years have demonstrated  
4       that heroin purity is closely related to its  
5       availability. As I have noted, the rise in  
6       street-level purities has enabled users to  
7       administer the drug through less efficient but  
8       more popular alternatives.

9               And effective enforcement strategy  
10       that reduces the amount of heroin reaching our  
11       shores could, by forcing lower purities, have  
12       the simultaneous effect of reducing both supply  
13       and demand.

14              At the same time that we disrupt the  
15       heroin retail enterprises, we must also devote  
16       resources to education and treatment to provide  
17       users and addicts the capacity and the  
18       incentive to overcome their drug problem.

19              Current treatment programs can become  
20       even more effective if we link them more  
21       closely to the criminal justice system's unique  
22       ability to coerce participation. I call it the

1 good old fashioned carrot-and-stick approach.  
2 It makes sense and it works if we back up what  
3 we've said.

4 Although our nation's drug abuse  
5 problem is not as severe as it was in the  
6 1970's, and during the height of the cocaine  
7 and crack epidemic in the 80's, the problem is  
8 still a very serious one for this nation.

9 The challenge before us is to reduce  
10 the distribution and consumption of illegal  
11 drugs, and to not be lured into the complacency  
12 by the gains we have made in the previous  
13 decades.

14 It is this latter problem,  
15 complacency, that I would like to close with.  
16 Despite rising budgets for counterdrug  
17 agencies, our national attention seems to have  
18 become diverted from the problem at hand.

19 There has been a large decrease in  
20 the number of public service announcements  
21 available in the last years that have dealt



22 with the dangers of illicit drugs.

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1 Our children's disapproval of drugs  
2 and knowledge of their dangerous consequences  
3 have decreased through the 1990's. Indeed,  
4 young people exhibit an increased fascination  
5 for drug use.

6 Many people now see drug use less as  
7 an abhorrent behavior than as a prominent and  
8 moral part of the times. As a result, our  
9 children have begun to use illegal drugs,  
10 alcohol and tobacco in greater numbers in the  
11 last six years.

12 We can reduce the distribution and  
13 the consumption of heroin and other illicit  
14 drugs if we maintain and resolve and allocate  
15 our limited resources very carefully, and in a  
16 comprehensive effort combining all aspects of  
17 law enforcement.

18 We are a great nation with a  
19 tremendous capacity for resolute action and  
20 creative problem-solving. It has been so

21 impressive for me to have a chance to travel  
22 across this nation and see what police

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1 departments and sheriff's offices are doing,  
2 what federal agencies are doing in working in  
3 partnership with them.

4 The focus on involvement. The focus  
5 on the major organization to take it out and to  
6 keep it out. Law enforcement in these last  
7 five years has proved we can be effective if we  
8 give them the tools to do the job.

9 But law enforcement has also shown  
10 that, to be effective, we must not only have  
11 the tools to do the law enforcement part of it,  
12 we must have the tools to do the education,  
13 prevention and treatment part of it as well.

14 We cannot afford to be complacent.  
15 If we let the genie out of the bottle by  
16 scaling back our efforts or by ignoring the  
17 problem, our country will pay an enormous  
18 economic and moral cost. And it is neither a  
19 benevolent genie nor an easy one to squeeze

20 back into the bottle.

21 The decline in drug abuse in the last  
22 20 years demonstrates that effective

26  
1 enforcement, treatment and prevention can and  
2 does reduce our drug problem.

3 We will succeed here this week and in  
4 the weeks and months and years to come if we  
5 can raise some measure of national  
6 consciousness as to the current threat posed by  
7 heroin.

8 We also note that this conference  
9 will contribute to the develop of a national  
10 heroin strategy that can truly be effective in  
11 combatting this blooming problem.

12 I am confident, based on what Tom has  
13 told me of the progress of this meeting today  
14 that, with your experience, your professional  
15 excellence and your dedication during the  
16 remainder of this conference, and as we work  
17 together in the weeks and months to come, that  
18 we can articulate and implement an effective

19 solution diverting in this nation our heroin  
20 crisis.

21 Just let me tell once again how much  
22 I admire you: The federal agencies represented

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1 here, state and local officials, treatment  
2 professionals; those who understand how  
3 important it is to come together and look at  
4 the problem in a common sense way and then do  
5 something about it.

6 On behalf of all the people in this  
7 nation I thank you so much for all that you do.

8 (Applause)

9 (End of Address)

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