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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

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TEENAGE DRUG USE

"PRIDE" SURVEY SHOWS TEENAGE DRUG USE ON THE RISE, DOLE URGES JUMP-START FOR FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS

We can no longer ignore the fact that teenagers across America are now resorting to illegal drugs in ever increasing numbers. The most recent national household survey reveals that marijuana use among teenagers has nearly doubled since 1992, after 13 years of decline. It also reveals that attitudes toward illegal drug use are softening: fewer and fewer teenagers now believe that using illegal drugs is an activity that should be avoided.

Teenage Drug Use on Increase; Interdiction, Prosecutions Down

Earlier today, the National Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education--"PRIDE"--released its own annual survey of drug use by junior and senior high school students. According to the survey, not only are more and more high school students smoking marijuana, they are using it more frequently: one-third of high school seniors smoked marijuana in the past year and more than 20 percent now smoke it on a monthly basis. The survey also shows that teenage use of "hard drugs"--cocaine and hallucinogens--is also on the rise: since 1991, there has been a 36% increase in cocaine use by students in grades 9 through 12 and use of hallucinogens has risen a staggering 75% since 1988.

Tomorrow, we will probably hear some more disturbing news: if preliminary reports are correct, the "Dawn Survey," conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services, will show that emergency-room admissions for drug overdoses are on the increase.

War on Drugs in Retreat Under President Clinton

Although then-Governor Clinton boasted during the 1992 Democratic Convention that President Bush "hasn't fought a real war on crime and drugs... [and] I will," his record in office has not matched his campaign rhetoric. Through neglect and mismanagement, bad policy and misplaced priorities, the Clinton administration has transformed the war on drugs into a full-scale retreat.

Drug interdiction is down. Drug prosecutions are down. The General Accounting Office tells us that the anti-drug effort in the "source" countries is badly mismanaged. And, perhaps most importantly, the moral bully pulpit has been abandoned.

Regrettably, the Administration's most memorable voice on this issue has been a Surgeon General who believes the best way to fight illegal drugs is to legalize them.

Obviously, we cannot continue down this path. Failing to control illegal drug use has real-life consequences that affect not only the user but the rest of society. Drugs and violent crime, for example, are inextricably linked. Forty-one percent of all reported AIDS cases are drug-related. Drugs are a major contributor to child abuse. And past studies show that heavy drug-users are twice as likely to be high school drop-outs than those who do not use drugs.

So, we must ask ourselves: what can we do to jump-start the fight against drugs?

Restore Stigma Associated With Illegal Use

For starters, we must restore the stigma associated with illegal drug use.

Those of us in positions of authority--whether it's parents or teachers, religious leaders or those who hold elective office--must be willing to repeat over and over again the simple message that using drugs is wrong and that drugs can and do kill.

This message has worked before. It was called the "just say no" campaign. Illegal drug use declined dramatically throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in large part because our culture

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stigmatized drugs and shamed those who used them. This message got through to millions of teenagers and saved thousands of lives in the process.

Perhaps one of the best kept secrets is that, between 1980 and 1992, overall drug use declined by 50 percent. Cocaine use dropped even further--by more than 70 percent. These successes were the result of many factors, but perhaps the most important factor was the steady anti-drug message that came out of Washington and through the media.

As Jim Burke, Chairman of the Partnership for Drug-Free America, has explained: "Looking back at the progress made in changing attitudes in the 80s, it is very clear that the media played a very important role in shaping children's antidrug attitudes. We need them now to again increase their role in that regard." I agree.

So, I rise today to do my own part, to help raise public awareness about the disturbing increases in teenage drug use. We must say "enough is enough." Our children must understand that using drugs is not only stupid but life-threatening. This is a message that can never be repeated too often.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 3:20 p.m.