

July 8 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998

[Ms. James responded that people were most likely to talk about race by relating personal experiences.]

Ms. Chao. I think the bottom line is, I think there has to be not allocation of programs based on preferential treatment but that there is equal opportunity. And going back to Clarence's issue about merit—

Mr. Lehrer. We're talking about talking bluntly about race.

Ms. Chao. Right. I think this is part of it. And I think the President wanted me to answer Clarence's comments, Clarence's question about merit.

Mr. Lehrer. Okay, but we have to—I have to interrupt you all now to say, thank you, Mr. President, and thanks to all the rest of—

The President. We're just getting warmed up.

Mr. Lehrer. I know, I know, I know.

Ms. Chao. It's got to be the same standards for everybody, however merit is defined.

Mr. Lehrer. Okay. But from Washington this has been a conversation with President Clinton about race. I'm Jim Lehrer. Thank you, and good night. And as you see, may the conversation continue.

NOTE: The program was recorded at 2 p.m. in the WETA-TV studios in Arlington, VA, for broadcast on PBS at 8 p.m. on July 9.

Remarks on Launching the National Youth Antidrug Media Campaign in Atlanta, Georgia

July 9, 1998

Thank you very much. Thank you. First of all, let's begin by giving Kim and James another hand. Didn't they do a good job? [Applause] They spoke well for you.

Mr. Speaker, Governor Miller, Mr. Mayor, General McCaffrey, General Reno, Secretary Shalala, I thank you all for your superb efforts in this endeavor. I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to Jim Burke, the president of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. He's not as well-known to most American children as the President or the Speaker or the Governor, but no American has done more to save the children of this country from the horror of drug abuse than Jim Burke. And we all owe him a very great debt of gratitude. Thank you.

I'd also like to thank the Ad Council, the Community Anti-Drug Coalition, the athletic teams and sports figures that are represented here today, the business groups, the Georgia attorney general and agriculture commissioner, and the other State and municipal and county officials. And Congressman Peter Deutsch from Florida is here with us today. I thank all of them for being here. And there are many others who aren't here who are supporting what we are doing together as Americans.

I was interested, when we just watched the ads, to see what the young people's reaction

was to the various ads. I was wondering to myself whether the ads that were most effective with me were also the ones that were most effective to you, or whether they were different. I say that to make the point that the Speaker made so eloquently. In the end, this is about you, what touches you, what you believe, what your convictions are.

We know from the stories that we just heard from James and from Kim, we know from all the available scientific research, that what Governor Miller said is right: Attitudes drive actions. There are lots of other factors. There are some places where kids are subject to more temptation than others; there are some blocks where there are more drug dealers than others. All of us have to deal with that. But we know that the more young people fear drugs, the more they disapprove of them, the less likely they are to use them. Therefore, kicking America's drug habit requires a dramatic change in attitudes, accompanied and reinforced by a dramatic increase in personal responsibility by all Americans.

Parents have the greatest power. That's what one of the ads showed us. The ads we saw today are not meant to replace parents' voices but to reinforce them. Ultimately, the best drug enforcement program, the best drug prevention

program is an effective, caring, loving parent sitting down with a child and talking seriously about drugs early.

Parents have already told us that these ads help to break the ice with their children. So I ask the parents of America today, don't wait until your children are using drugs to talk to them about drugs. Watch the ads together and discuss them, beginning tonight.

Every one of the rest of us can and must help parents to teach their children to turn away from drugs. The entertainment industry can shape attitudes, as anyone who has a teenager can tell you. The media should never glamorize drugs. I'm pleased that, across the entertainment industry, a real effort is now being made to help, with the antidrug messages on the Wonderful World of Disney, antidrug chat groups on America Online, even training sessions about youth drug use for screenwriters and producers at Fox—something I hope we will see for all people who prepare television programs on all networks.

Professional athletes can shape attitudes. I thank Major League Soccer, the Florida Marlins, the New York Mets, Atlanta's own Braves for agreeing to air the ads during their home games. And while one of government's primary responsibilities is to enforce the law—and we should—we can also support this change in attitudes.

As General McCaffrey said, with the help of the Speaker and people from across the political spectrum, we have aggressively pursued a comprehensive antidrug strategy. We've put more police on our streets. We've strengthened our border patrols. We've toughened penalties. We do more drug testing of prisoners and parolees to break the link between crime and drugs. We work more with countries where drugs are grown and processed to try to stop the drugs from coming into the United States in the first place.

But with this ad campaign, in which the public's investment is matched, dollar for dollar, by private partners, America is mounting a new and sweeping effort to change the attitude of an entire generation of young people.

Already, we've seen an impact in the 12 cities where the ads have run as a pilot project. Calls—listen to this—in just those 12 cities, calls to local antidrug coalition hotlines have increased by up to 500 percent. Calls to our national antidrug helpline have nearly tripled. Young people here in Atlanta say that the ads

make them realize the serious consequences of using drugs. In Denver, middle school students think the ads could “scare kids out of using drugs,” to quote one of them. In Washington, DC, young people say, to quote one, “the ads make them stop and think about what illegal drugs can do.”

Tonight, when these ads run on every national television network, they will reach more than 40 million Americans, including millions and millions of children. That is just the beginning. Over the next 5 years, we'll help to make sure that when young people turn on the television, listen to the radio, read the newspaper, or surf the Web, they get the powerful message that drugs are wrong, illegal, and can kill.

I'm proud to say, as has already been said by General McCaffrey, that this national media campaign was a part of the historic bipartisan balanced budget agreement reached last year with Speaker Gingrich and the other leaders of Congress. And I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for including this in our budget agreement. It shows what we can accomplish when we put progress ahead of partisanship. I will work with the Congress to fund other important programs in our drug control strategy.

All of us—parents, the media, athletes, business, government—have an opportunity and an obligation to make a real difference in the fight against drugs. But nothing we do will succeed, as the Speaker said, unless young people also take responsibility for themselves.

We've heard some personal stories; I'd like to close with two: one from my family and one from the job the American people have so generously given me these 6 years. Let me begin with the job.

I spent a lot of time haranguing, cajoling, trying to persuade, sometimes putting brutal pressure on countries where drugs are grown or processed, or through which drugs pass, trying to get people to stop doing things that send drugs to us. And we've had some success. We supported remarkable efforts by the Coast Guard, for example, to cut off drugs before they get to this country. But we can never cut off the whole flow. And every time I'd do this, some leader of a country where drugs are grown will say, “You know, Mr. President, you're right. We have a lot of poor farmers in our country, and I wish they'd grow something else. But America has 4 percent of the world's people, and you're buying almost 50 percent of the

world's drugs. Nobody is making you buy those drugs. So you can say whatever you want to us. If you just said tomorrow—everybody in America said, we're not going to buy any more drugs, all our farmers would immediately start to grow something legal and good." And that's true.

Now, that doesn't let them off the hook; it doesn't excuse the inexcusable behavior of the Colombian drug cartels or any other groups in any part of the world. But it is true. It is true. It doesn't mean we should stop trying to kill the drugs at the border and stop the imports and break the drug gangs. But it's true. If every American young person tomorrow said, "No, thank you," they would grow something else. The laboratories would make other chemicals that are legal and not harmful.

I'll tell you another story that's fairly well-known, but I want you to think about what it means for families. This young man was brave enough to say that his mother used drugs and talk about what—the pain it caused the family. My brother nearly died from a cocaine habit. And I've asked myself a thousand times, what kind of fool was I that I did not know this was going on? You know, I got myself elected President; I'm supposed to know what people are thinking, what's going on in their minds. How did this happen that I didn't see this coming and didn't stop it?

And when it all happened he said—I said, "When did this start?" He said, "Well, in high school; I started using marijuana and drinking beer." I said, "How often?" He said, "Every day." And I thought to myself, what kind of family member was I?

And these things make you do really bad things. They make you abuse other people. Most of the people selling drugs on the street are out there supporting their own habits. So you take other people, people who are basically good people, and you turn them into animals, because they don't care what they do to anybody else because they've got to get the money, if they have to destroy somebody else, so they can keep feeding their own habits. They destroy families. Mothers who love their sons wind up neglecting them, abusing them, walking away, weakening the family. Everybody gets hurt. Nobody in America is free of this. Not the President; not any community, any school, any church, any neighborhood.

So the hardest thing in the world to do is to get people to change their habits, especially if what you're doing feels good in the moment. But it's very important. Nothing is so important, not the laws, not the investments, not anything. Nothing is so important as what the American people get up and do every day just because they think it's the right thing to do. Nothing comes close to it.

So we're here today because we took a little bit of the money the American people gave the National Government—a billion dollars over the next 5 years—put it with at least that much and maybe more coming from private sources, to send a message to all these kids. I look at all these little girls out here in their Girl Scouts or their Brownie uniforms; the message seems simple today. When they're 14 or 15 or 16 or 17 or 18, and life gets more complicated, it's real important that they carry with them the message that they have today deep in their heart.

I look at all these kids with these America's Pride T-shirts on, and what I want them to do is to go back and somehow reach all those kids that are in their schools that don't wear those T-shirts. There's somebody like my brother back at your school who is a good kid, just a little lost. Somebody told him something is all right that wasn't. And the family members were just a little out of it and couldn't believe it was going on. You can save them. That's what these ads are all about.

These ads are designed to knock America upside the head and get America's attention and to empower all of you who are trying to do the right thing. Please do it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in the Sidney Marcus Auditorium in the Georgia World Congress Center. In his remarks, he referred to student antidrug organization leaders Kim Willis of Erie, PA, and James Miller III, of Portland, OR; Gov. Zell Miller, Attorney General Thurbert E. Baker, and Agriculture Commissioner Tommy Irvin of Georgia; Mayor Bill Campbell of Atlanta; and James E. Burke, chairman, Partnership for a Drug-Free America.