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THE WHITE HOUSE  
OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY'S PRESS SECRETARY

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MRS. REAGAN'S REMARKS  
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM LUNCHEON  
DETROIT - APRIL 13, 1984

Thank you very much for that warm reception. I'm delighted to be with you here in Detroit, celebrating the 40th anniversary of this wonderful organization. And I'm genuinely honored to receive this award from people I so deeply respect.

For four decades now, the National Council on Alcoholism has been working to shed light on a subject too often kept in the dark. N.C.A. has brought problem drinking out of the shadows by teaching us that alcoholism isn't something the alcoholic does to himself, but a disease, just like any other, that should be treated as such. Once we understand that, we realize that we have no excuse for inaction, and that the national epidemic of alcoholism demands the very best efforts that each of us has to offer.

Statistics tell us that 10 million Americans suffer from alcoholism and alcohol-related problems, and that more than 3 million teenagers drink regularly and show signs of becoming alcoholics. But no statistics can convey the pain of lives destroyed and families ripped apart.

As I've traveled across the country, I've seen many tragedies -- the kids who have wasted the years they should

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have spent getting a good education, the men and women whose drinking has cost them the respect of their husbands and wives, sons and daughters and, finally, their own self-respect; the families who will always have an empty place in their hearts for a child who was killed by a drunk driver.

One 17-year old girl wrote to tell me her story. She started drinking and taking drugs, she said, mainly because of peer pressure. "I think everybody has inferiority problems in junior high... The most important thing is getting accepted. I lied to my mother on a daily basis from eighth grade on. She wouldn't accept that I had a . . . problem, and I wouldn't accept it either. It just got worse and worse. I knew I was going to have to quit (drinking) or run away."

She chose the easy way out -- she ran away. For 1 1/2 months, she writes, she was "living on beer." Then she was caught stealing a carton of cigarettes and was locked up in a juvenile detention center. "It was hell for me," her letter says. "I cried for hours almost every day." That young girl and her family are back together now, but they will have scars they'll always carry.

One father wrote, "Dear Mrs. Reagan, my son Mitch was a typical all-American teenager. He played football in high school, was popular with his classmates, and was planning on going to college." The father described how his son had quite a lot to



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drink one night, then wandered on foot into the center lane of a super-highway. He was killed by a tractor-trailer. "Losing a child," he ends his letter, "is the ultimate tragedy for a parent . . . and a tragic loss for America."

Every life has its share of sadness. But there are some tragedies -- tragedies like the ones described in those letters -- that don't have to happen. But out of this despair, I can see lights at the end of the tunnel.

These lights are projects like THE CHEMICAL PEOPLE television broadcasts, which have been a big help. Celebrities, many of them sponsored by N.C.A., have begun to speak out, telling all Americans that you don't have to die for a drink. Where school-age alcohol and drug abuse is concerned, parents are becoming more knowledgeable and have begun banding together to take action in their communities. In the past three years alone, the number of drug and alcohol task forces made up of parents had quadrupled. And, of course, groups like yours have been leaders in education -- through your important projects like, "Operation Understanding."

All of these vital efforts have been powered by dedicated, hardworking volunteers like you, giving of their time, their money, their love -- always giving.

And the results are beginning to show. One impressive fact tells the story: This past New Year's Day weekend, the first major holiday weekend of 1984, was the safest on America's

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highways in 35 years. This is something we can all be grateful for, and a tribute to the hard work of groups like yours.

Someone once said that "courage is the price that life exacts for peace. . . ." N.C.A. has always understood that if our country is to have the peace that can only come from putting an end to alcohol abuse, then we must have the courage to fight alcohol abuse until the battle is won. For 40 years, N.C.A. has been fighting the good fight. And, for that, people in all walks of life throughout our country are grateful. I know I speak for all Americans when I thank you for the great and good work you have done.

Thank you, and God bless you.

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