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MRS. REAGAN: PROS FOR KIDS
OCTOBER 29, 1986

Thank you, ** Mr. Robinson **, for those very kind remarks. And thanks to all of you for your warm welcome. I'm delighted to be here.

You know, we often hear about an athlete's heart, meaning his will and determination to win. Pros For Kids shows that the heart of an athlete means something more. It means caring and giving and helping.

And Devlin Williams' heart is a prime example. I don't know how many of you know this, but for the first three and a half years of Pros for Kids, Delvin didn't take a penny of salary for his work. I can't tell you how much I admire his commitment. And to tell you the truth, Devlin, I'm a bigger fan of yours now than when you played football--although to be honest, I didn't know you played football.

But over the past five years as I've travelled around the country working against drug abuse, I've been asked one question repeatedly. And I know Devlin must be asked this, too. That question is why. Why do our children, who have so much to live for, why do they use drugs?

Why do they give up their health, their future, their families, their faith, their identities, and sometimes their lives? Why do they risk all that life has to offer for a

chemical reaction? And another thing I hear so heartbreakingly often--why my child?

Those questions are what I'd like to focus on this evening.

I recently received a very moving letter from a woman in the Southwest. Although she never specifically raises the question of why, it burns through every word she writes. I'd like to read part of her letter to you.

May 21, 1986 2 a.m.

Dear Mrs. Reagan,

I can't sleep, I miss my son. He died of a massive overdose of heroin. He was 24 years old. He had a 25th birthday last week; but he wasn't here; he missed coming around on Mother's Day, too. My other five children were here, but a part of my heart was missing...

David used to miss other Mother's Days and birthdays, mine and his; and I would be hurt and I would be angry at him the next time he showed up--he always came by later, when he was broke or hungry, and I guess, maybe just needed to know that I was there and that I cared.

This year I couldn't be angry. All I could do was go to him with flowers at the cemetery. I'd rather have been angry than to have him gone and never get to tell him...I love him.

Please let me know how I can help...Please help me to keep other mothers from hurting from such needless

deaths...Please, I'd like to talk to people, to young school kids, to anybody...I need to do something. I miss my son.

There are so many why's. Why a mother must lose a son. Why a child feels the need to take a poison that can destroy mind and body and life. Why this pain has to go on.

We know some of the answers.

We know that drugs are readily available in this country. And no matter how tightly we board up our windows and doors, drugs would still get through. They travel at gale force, beating their way in wherever there is demand. Yet although availability is an important factor, it doesn't really explain why young people use drugs.

We also know that peer pressure has a great deal to do with drug use. Young people don't want to be left out; they want to belong; they want to be accepted; they want friends and good times. Sometimes they think this means using drugs. Fortunately, there are positive peer pressure groups forming, such as the Just Say No Clubs, which are countering the pressure to use drugs. Still, like availability, peer pressure doesn't fully explain why either.

We also know that for many years drugs were glamorized on television, in the movies and on records. They were joked about by comedians and sung about by rock groups. Glamorization is still present, but decreasing.

But I could list a number of factors that contribute to our young people taking drugs--academic pressures, boredom,

normal adolescent rebellion and so on, but let me raise something that I think is much more basic than anything I've mentioned this evening. Self-esteem, or more correctly, the lack of it.

The lack of self-esteem is an open door to drugs. And the presence of self-esteem is the best barricade against them.

You know, someone was once sitting next to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at an educational conference. And a woman had just presented a paper entitled, "First Teach Them To Read." Dr. King leaned over and said, "First, teach them to believe in themselves."

I think that's the key. I believe drugs rush in to fill the void where a child's supply of self-esteem should be. The consequences of that void are greater today than ever before in history. Other eras have had their own means of escape. Alcohol, which is also a drug, comes immediately to mind. The danger today is that with something like crack addiction can be almost instantaneous. The stakes of experimentation and searching for oneself have been greatly increased.

I was once on a TV show that involved audience participation. A teenage girl put her hand up and said, "No one can possibly understand the pressures kids live under today with tests and sex and everything else." And I said something and we went on to other questions, but I felt I hadn't really given a good answer, so I went back to her and

in effect said, "Look, you're going to have pressures your entire life, and the only thing that changes is that they get worse. If you don't learn how to handle them when you're young, you really will be in trouble when you get older. You have to learn to cope."

My mother had a saying, "Little children, little problems--big children, big problems." And that is still true, except that many little children today have big problems in the form of drugs. Here they are trying to defend themselves against drug abuse, a problem even many adults can't handle.

I believe self-esteem gives children the strength to cope, not just with cocaine or alcohol, but with life itself? They get this essential quality from us. If we read to them, talk to them, play and work with them, we'll be affirming their value as individuals. Our presence will tell them they have worth.

They'll respond naturally. They'll grow in self-confidence and self-esteem and in the process build an internal defense against the seduction of drugs.

You know when Harmon Killebrew entered baseball's Hall of Fame, he recalled, "My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, "You're tearing up the grass." And Dad would say, "We're not raising grass. We're raising boys." Well, that commitment is what kids need.

All the statistics, all the medical reports, all the horror stories in the world will not keep our children from drugs. But what will keep children from drugs is faith --faith in themselves, faith in those who love them, faith in those they admire, such as professional athletes.

The role of a pro athlete goes far beyond performance on the playing field. And to the professional athletes here tonight, let me say you have the chance to make a difference in a child's life. You stand for everything a young person wants to be: you're strong; you're popular; you're courageous; you're successful; you're part of something. And when you speak, young people listen. Your influence can be tremendous.

Drugs are contrary to everything sports represent. Sports build self-confidence; drugs destroy it. Sports encourage achievement; drugs make it impossible. Sports expand aspirations; drugs kill them.

You know there's a true story about the time Babe Ruth was asked to autograph a baseball for a seriously ill boy in the hospital. Well, instead, Ruth went to the hospital himself, gave the boy the baseball, and promised to hit a home run for him in the game that afternoon. And sure enough, he did. And when the boy recovered, the Babe observed, "Best medicine in the world, a home run."

Today's athletes, too, can hit home runs and score touchdowns for our children. They can help give our

children the best medicine in the world--self-esteem. Pros
For Kids is the way.

And before I leave, I want to thank each of you here
tonight for your support of this wonderful organization and
for what you're enabling it to do for our children. You
have my enduring gratitude.

Thank you for inviting me and thank you for your
hospitality.

MRS. REAGAN'S REMARKS
PROS FOR KIDS DINNER
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

October 29, 1986

-- THANK YOU, JIM, FOR THOSE VERY KIND REMARKS. AND THANKS TO ALL OF YOU FOR YOUR WARM WELCOME. I'M DELIGHTED TO BE HERE.

-- YOU KNOW, WE OFTEN HEAR ABOUT AN ATHLETE'S HEART, MEANING HIS WILL AND DETERMINATION TO WIN. PROS FOR KIDS SHOWS THAT THE HEART OF AN ATHLETE MEANS SOMETHING MORE. IT MEANS CARING AND GIVING AND HELPING.

-- AND DELVIN WILLIAMS' HEART IS A PRIME EXAMPLE. I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW THIS, BUT FOR THE FIRST THREE AND A HALF YEARS OF PROS FOR KIDS, DELVIN DIDN'T TAKE A PENNY OF SALARY FOR HIS WORK. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH I ADMIRE HIS COMMITMENT. AND TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, DELVIN, I'M A BIGGER FAN OF YOURS NOW THAN WHEN YOU PLAYED FOOTBALL -- ALTHOUGH TO BE HONEST, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU PLAYED FOOTBALL.

-- BUT OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS AS I'VE TRAVELLED AROUND THE COUNTRY WORKING AGAINST DRUG ABUSE, I'VE BEEN ASKED ONE QUESTION REPEATEDLY. AND I KNOW DELVIN MUST BE ASKED THIS, TOO. THAT QUESTION IS WHY. WHY DO OUR CHILDREN, WHO HAVE SO MUCH TO LIVE FOR, WHY DO THEY USE DRUGS?

-- WHY DO THEY GIVE UP THEIR HEALTH, THEIR FUTURE, THEIR FAMILIES, THEIR FAITH, THEIR IDENTITIES, AND SOMETIMES THEIR LIVES? WHY DO THEY RISK ALL THAT LIFE HAS TO OFFER FOR A CHEMICAL REACTION? AND ANOTHER THING I HEAR SO HEARTBREAKINGLY OFTEN -- WHY MY CHILD?.

-- THOSE QUESTIONS ARE WHAT I'D LIKE TO FOCUS ON THIS EVENING.

-- I RECENTLY RECEIVED A VERY MOVING LETTER FROM A WOMAN IN THE SOUTHWEST. ALTHOUGH SHE NEVER SPECIFICALLY RAISES THE QUESTION OF WHY, IT BURNS THROUGH EVERY WORD SHE WRITES. I'D LIKE TO READ PART OF HER LETTER TO YOU.

"DEAR MRS. REAGAN,

I CAN'T SLEEP, I MISS MY SON. HE DIED OF A MASSIVE OVERDOSE OF HEROIN. HE WAS 24 YEARS OLD. HE HAD A 25TH BIRTHDAY LAST WEEK; BUT HE WASN'T HERE; HE MISSED COMING AROUND ON MOTHER'S DAY, TOO. MY OTHER FIVE CHILDREN WERE HERE, BUT A PART OF MY HEART WAS MISSING...

DAVID USED TO MISS OTHER MOTHER'S DAYS AND BIRTHDAYS, MINE AND HIS; AND I WOULD BE HURT AND I WOULD BE ANGRY AT HIM THE NEXT TIME HE SHOWED UP -- HE ALWAYS CAME BY LATER, WHEN HE WAS BROKE OR HUNGRY, AND I GUESS, MAYBE JUST NEEDED TO KNOW THAT I WAS THERE AND THAT I CARED.

THIS YEAR I COULDN'T BE ANGRY. ALL I COULD DO WAS GO TO HIM WITH FLOWERS AT THE CEMETARY. I'D RATHER HAVE BEEN ANGRY THAN TO HAVE HIM GONE AND NEVER GET TO TELL HIM...I LOVE HIM.

PLEASE LET ME KNOW HOW I CAN HELP...PLEASE HELP ME TO KEEP OTHER MOTHERS FROM HURTING FROM SUCH NEEDLESS DEATHS...PLEASE, I'D LIKE TO TALK TO PEOPLE, TO YOUNG SCHOOL KIDS, TO ANYBODY...I NEED TO DO SOMETHING. I MISS MY SON."

-- THERE ARE SO MANY WHY'S. WHY A MOTHER MUST LOSE A SON. WHY A CHILD FEELS THE NEED TO TAKE A POISON THAT CAN DESTROY MIND AND BODY AND LIFE. WHY THIS PAIN HAS TO GO ON.

-- WE KNOW SOME OF THE ANSWERS.

-- WE KNOW THAT DRUGS ARE READILY AVAILABLE IN THIS COUNTRY. AND NO MATTER HOW TIGHTLY WE BOARD UP OUR WINDOWS AND DOORS, DRUGS WOULD STILL GET THROUGH. THEY TRAVEL AT GALE FORCE, BEATING THEIR WAY IN WHEREVER THERE IS DEMAND. YET ALTHOUGH AVAILABILITY IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR, IT DOESN'T REALLY EXPLAIN WHY YOUNG PEOPLE USE DRUGS.

-- WE ALSO KNOW THAT PEER PRESSURE HAS A GREAT DEAL TO DO WITH DRUG USE. YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO BE LEFT OUT; THEY WANT TO BELONG; THEY WANT TO BE ACCEPTED; THEY WANT FRIENDS AND GOOD TIMES. SOMETIMES THEY THINK THIS MEANS USING DRUGS. FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE POSITIVE PEER PRESSURE GROUPS FORMING, SUCH AS THE JUST SAY NO CLUBS, WHICH ARE COUNTERING THE PRESSURE TO USE DRUGS. STILL, LIKE AVAILABILITY, PEER PRESSURE DOESN'T FULLY EXPLAIN WHY EITHER.

-- WE ALSO KNOW THAT FOR MANY YEARS, DRUGS WERE GLAMORIZED ON TELEVISION, IN THE MOVIES AND ON RECORDS. THEY WERE JOKED ABOUT BY COMEDIANS AND SUNG ABOUT BY ROCK GROUPS. GLAMORIZATION IS STILL PRESENT, BUT DECREASING.

-- BUT I COULD LIST A NUMBER OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING DRUGS -- ACADEMIC PRESSURES, BOREDOM, NORMAL ADOLESCENT REBELLIONS AND SO ON, BUT LET ME RAISE

SOMETHING THAT I THINK IS MUCH MORE BASIC THAN ANYTHING I'VE MENTIONED THIS EVENING. SELF-ESTEEM, OR MORE CORRECTLY, THE LACK OF IT.

-- THE LACK OF SELF-ESTEEM IS AN OPEN DOOR TO DRUGS. AND THE PRESENCE OF SELF-ESTEEM IS THE BEST BARRICADE AGAINST THEM.

-- YOU KNOW, SOMEONE WAS ONCE SITTING NEXT TO DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AT AN EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE. AND A WOMAN HAD JUST PRESENTED A PAPER ENTITLED, "FIRST TEACH THEM TO READ." DR. KING LEANED OVER AND SAID, "FIRST, TEACH THEM TO BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES."

-- I THINK THAT'S THE KEY. I BELIEVE DRUGS RUSH IN TO FILL THE VOID WHERE A CHILD'S SUPPLY OF SELF-ESTEEM SHOULD BE. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THAT VOID ARE GREATER TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE IN HISTORY. OTHER DRUGS HAVE HAD THEIR OWN MEANS OF ESCAPE. ALCOHOL, WHICH IS ALSO A DRUG, COMES IMMEDIATELY TO MIND. THE DANGER TODAY IS THAT WITH SOMETHING LIKE CRACK, ADDICTION CAN BE ALMOST INSTANTANEOUS. THE STAKES OF EXPERIMENTATION AND SEARCHING FOR ONESELF HAVE BEEN GREATLY INCREASED.

-- I WAS ONCE ON A TV SHOW THAT INVOLVED AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION. A TEENAGE GIRL PUT HER HAND UP AND SAID, "NO ONE CAN POSSIBLY UNDERSTAND THE PRESSURES KIDS LIVE UNDER TODAY WITH TESTS AND SEX AND EVERYTHING ELSE." AND I SAID SOMETHING AND WE WENT ON TO OTHER QUESTIONS, BUT I FELT I HADN'T REALLY GIVEN A GOOD ANSWER, SO I WENT BACK TO HER AND IN EFFECT SAID, "LOOK, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE PRESSURES YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, AND THE ONLY

THING THAT CHANGES IS THAT THEY GET WORSE. IF YOU DON'T LEARN HOW TO HANDLE THEM WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG, YOU REALLY WILL BE IN TROUBLE WHEN YOU GET OLDER. YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO COPE."

-- MY MOTHER HAD A SAYING, "LITTLE CHILDREN, LITTLE PROBLEMS -- BIG CHILDREN, BIG PROBLEMS." AND THAT IS STILL TRUE, EXCEPT THAT MANY LITTLE CHILDREN TODAY HAVE BIG PROBLEMS IN THE FORM OF DRUGS. HERE THEY ARE TRYING TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST DRUG ABUSE, A PROBLEM EVEN MANY ADULTS CAN'T HANDLE.

-- I BELIEVE SELF-ESTEEM GIVES CHILDREN THE STRENGTH TO COPE, NOT JUST WITH COCAINE OR ALCOHOL, BUT WITH LIFE ITSELF? THEY GET THIS ESSENTIAL QUALITY FROM US. IF WE READ TO THEM, TALK TO THEM, PLAY AND WORK WITH THEM, WE'LL BE AFFIRMING THEIR VALUE AS INDIVIDUALS. OUR PRESENCE WILL TELL THEM THEY HAVE WORTH.

-- THEY'LL RESPOND NATURALLY. THEY'LL GROW IN SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM AND IN THE PROCESS BUILD AN INTERNAL DEFENSE AGAINST THE SEDUCTION OF DRUGS.

-- YOU KNOW, WHEN HARMON KILLEBREW ENTERED BASEBALL'S HALL OF FAME, HE RECALLED, "MY FATHER USED TO PLAY WITH MY BROTHER AND ME IN THE YARD. MOTHER WOULD COME OUT AND SAY, "YOU'RE TEARING UP THE GRASS." AND DAD WOULD SAY, "WE'RE NOT RAISING GRASS. WE'RE RAISING BOYS." WELL, THAT COMMITMENT IS WHAT KIDS NEED.

-- ALL THE STATISTICS, ALL THE MEDICAL REPORTS, ALL THE HORROR STORIES IN THE WORLD WILL NOT KEEP OUR CHILDREN FROM

DRUGS. BUT WHAT WILL KEEP CHILDREN FROM DRUGS IS FAITH -- FAITH IN THEMSELVES, FAITH IN THOSE WHO LOVE THEM, FAITH IN THOSE THEY ADMIRE, SUCH AS PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES.

-- THE ROLE OF A PRO ATHLETE GOES FAR BEYOND PERFORMANCE ON THE PLAYING FIELD. AND TO THE PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES HERE TONIGHT, LET ME SAY YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN A CHILD'S LIFE. YOU STAND FOR EVERYTHING A YOUNG PERSON WANTS TO BE: YOU'RE STRONG; YOU'RE POPULAR; YOU'RE COURAGEOUS; YOU'RE SUCCESSFUL; YOU'RE PART OF SOMETHING. AND WHEN YOU SPEAK, YOUNG PEOPLE LISTEN. YOUR INFLUENCE CAN BE TREMENDOUS.

-- DRUGS ARE CONTRARY TO EVERYTHING SPORTS REPRESENT. SPORTS BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE; DRUGS DESTROY IT. SPORTS ENCOURAGE ACHIEVEMENT; DRUGS MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE. SPORTS EXPAND ASPIRATIONS; DRUGS KILL THEM.

-- YOU KNOW THERE'S A TRUE STORY ABOUT THE TIME BARE RUTH WAS ASKED TO AUTOGRAPH A BASEBALL FOR A SERIOUSLY ILL BOY IN THE HOSPITAL. WELL, INSTEAD, RUTH WENT TO THE HOSPITAL HIMSELF, GAVE THE BOY THE BASEBALL, AND PROMISED TO HIT A HOME RUN FOR HIM IN THE GAME THAT AFTERNOON. AND SURE ENOUGH, HE DID. AND WHEN THE BOY RECOVERED, THE PAPER OBSERVED, "BEST MEDICINE IN THE WORLD, A HOME RUN."

-- TODAY'S ATHLETES, TOO, CAN HIT HOME RUNS AND SCORE TOUCHDOWNS FOR OUR CHILDREN. THEY CAN HELP GIVE OUR CHILDREN THE BEST MEDICINE IN THE WORLD -- SELF-ESTEEM. PROS FOR KIDS IS THE WAY.

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-- AND BEFORE I LEAVE, I WANT TO THANK EACH OF YOU HERE
TONIGHT FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF THIS WONDERFUL ORGANIZATION AND FOR
WHAT YOU'RE ENABLING IT TO DO FOR OUR CHILDREN. YOU HAVE MY
ENDURING GRATITUDE.

-- THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR
HOSPITALITY.

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