

Statement of Hon. Geo. W. Crockett, Jr.

on

DRUGS

April 28, 1988
Detroit, Michigan

Recently I received a letter from a constituent who was concerned about drug use in Detroit, and the users' consequent loss of "control of their lives." She felt that drug use was caused by "the South Americans ... using our country to make big money selling (drugs)."

Unfortunately, while it is comforting to blame our drug problem on "outsiders," such a diagnosis will never help us solve what is the true cause of this devastating "disease." And that cause is, simply, hopelessness.

As our experience with Prohibition demonstrated, it is impossible to eliminate a substance if people still want it: they will simply find new ways of making or procuring what they want. Therefore, we need to concentrate less on the vain attempt to eliminate the supply of drugs, and concentrate on eliminating the demand for them.

Our current attempt at eliminating the demand, the "Just Say No" campaign, is not a complete failure. Studies have shown that it is having some effect in lowering drug use. However, this success is solely among middle-class, educated young people. Such young people expect and are preparing for a bright future, and are willing to forego experimenting with drugs once they understand the dangers drugs pose to their health and their ability to achieve their many goals.

The "Just Say No" campaign is not working, however, and cannot work, with poor or educationally disadvantaged young people. These children DON'T see a bright future that will be threatened by drug use. Life for them has been an unbroken series of disappointments.

These children use drugs because drugs provide a temporary escape from unrelenting hopelessness. For these children, drugs are not a danger to their future: they are what help them to bear the pain of not having a future.

We need to give these children a present worth being awake for, and a future worth working toward. We don't need an army of soldiers at our borders; we need an army of workers in our barrios and ghettos. We need to employ these children's parents. We need to ensure they have housing that promotes health and dignity. We need to provide them with schools and teachers who believe in their potential, and who know how to spark it into a fire that will light their way forward. We need to make sure their bodies are nurtured by decent food and quality health care. We need, in short, to provide them with an environment that inspires the kind of hope that replaces the need for the "escape" of drugs.

We have not created this environment; we haven't even decided to dedicate ourselves to having such an environment. That's short-sighted. What will happen when demographic and technological changes cause a huge shortage in highly-educated and highly-trained American workers? What price are we paying