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Opening Statement of Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Drug Abuse Hearings of July 7, 1971

Edmund S. Muskie

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MUSKIE

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FOR RELEASE

FOR RELEASE:
10 A.M.
July 7, 1971

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE AT THE
DRUG ABUSE HEARINGS OF JULY 7, 1971

The epidemic of heroin addiction threatens the very social and economic fabrics of our society.

Heroin addiction is taking a terrible toll on our Nation and our people.

In all, 250,000 Americans have had their lives ruined by that evil white powder Stewart Alsop has called the "city killer."

The statistics of the drug plague are grim:

-- The 100,000 addicts in New York City, the 30,000 in Los Angeles, 25,000 in Cleveland, 20,000 in Newark, and 16,000 right here in the Nation's Capital.

-- The 1,000 babies born each year in New York City as addicts, helpless heirs to the terrible pain of their mothers' habit.

-- The soldiers who did not go to jail or flee to Canada but served our Nation and are now carrying a horrible curse home to their towns and families.

-- The 50 percent of our urban crime which is committed by desperate addicts in search of money to buy more drugs.

Heroin addiction is everywhere in our land -- wherever there are people. To be sure, it is in our large cities like New York and Newark, but it is also in more affluent communities like Palm Beach and Bethesda.

And it is right here -- at the doorstep of the Capitol. In the model cities area of Washington, a scant four blocks from this room and just six blocks from the White House, 24 percent of boys between 15 and 19 years old and 36 percent of the young men between 20 and 24 are addicted to heroin, according to a recent study. These are frightening statistics.

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to the heroin plague. And our efforts as a Nation to control drug abuse have failed more often than they have succeeded.

But at least part of the reason for failure is that we have not always made the effort. Together, Federal, State and local programs are today reaching just a small percentage of America's addicts. That is unacceptable.

The cost of addiction in terms of human lives, in terms of crime and violence, is too great for our society to allow it to go untreated. And any delay in curbing addiction can only compound that cost.

This morning we are considering two important pieces of legislation. One is a bill I introduced in May, and Representative Scheuer introduced in the House, which would create a special office of drug abuse control in the White House. The second is similar legislation called for by the President, which I was pleased to co-sponsor.

Both S. 1945 and S. 2097 would lend order to the chaos of the Federal anti-drug effort. They would put into law the special-action office on drug abuse the President recently created by Executive order. The need for such legislation is immediate. Without it, the Federal anti-drug effort would continue in disarray with agencies involved in the drug fight all too often inadvertently working at cross

purposes. We need an office in the White House to direct the Federal war against drug abuse so that we can get the maximum benefit out of the resources we put into the drug fight.

Both of these bills are good bills and their enactment would aid our fight against drug abuse.

But neither bill alone is enough. Because the heroin threat is so urgent, I am now certain that every recent proposal from every source is too little and too late. We are accomplishing and even asking for much less than we should.

Our job will not be completed until the Federal Government can guarantee a comprehensive drug abuse program in every city and town facing a serious drug problem. And every local program must have enough room for every local addict -- whether he volunteered for treatment or is required to take it after arrest. There must be no more waiting lists -- while addicts wait, citizens are robbed and mugged. And there must be no competition for scarce Federal funds -- we must find enough money to combat heroin wherever it strikes, in our cities and among our soldiers.

That is why last week Senator Hughes and I, with Senators Javits and Williams, introduced legislation to reform the entire Federal attack on dangerous drugs. That bill would, as would the bills we are hearing today, create a special White House office to coordinate the anti-drug effort. But it would, in addition, provide desperately needed funds to State and local governments to establish and evaluate their own treatment systems. It would provide new dollars for research and experimental programs. And it would double the Federal commitment to treat addicts through local community mental health centers. In all, it will add more than 350 million new dollars to the war against narcotics. In other words, it would nearly double our current effort.

Even enactment of that legislation would leave us with a long way to go. That bill would create the basic structure for a comprehensive attack. We must use that structure to the maximum by appropriating more and more money for it over the next few years until we reach the level of a billion dollars a year -- enough for a comprehensive Federal guarantee. We owe that much to our children and ourselves.

There is no cheap way to conduct a war against heroin. There will be no gains without financial pains. There is no escape from a fundamental choice.

We must set our goal at eradicating the heroin plague from our land.

Achieving that goal must be our common task -- the task of the President and of the Congress and of the American people working together to defeat a common enemy.

This morning we hear from the Attorney General, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and the Deputy Secretary of Defense in the spirit of cooperation. That must be the spirit of these hearings.