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National Elks Convention
Plenary Remarks
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The Global Counter-Drug Frontier

Thank you, Kent, for that kind introduction, and on behalf of the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Department of Justice, thank you for allowing me to be a part of the National Elks Convention.

And thank you National Elk's President Michael Luhr [Lure], and *all* of the Past Presidents on stage for your leadership and for choosing one of our nation's *greatest* cities as your host city.

St. Louis does many great things for the soul, but what it does better than *all* other cities is celebrate the human spirit in the face of risks, specifically the spirit of the frontier which is such a central part of the history of our nation - a history that, to this day, cannot fail to remind each of us of the *hardship, sacrifice, and courage* displayed during the era when St. Louis was the gateway to the West.

Perhaps founding members of the Elks club felt that spirit when, in 1868, they founded your fraternal order. Since then, your Order has grown nicely, boasting nearly 2000 lodges and one million members.

Not to be left out, the U.S. has also grown nicely since that time, adding its remaining 13 states - that is if my math, geography, and history haven't let me down.

The St. Louis Gateway Arch reminds us of those historic days of westward expansion. But the Oregon, the Santa Fe, and the other famous trails of our past have long since yielded to today's interstates, airlines, and railroads.

Yet the famous Gateway Arch endures.

It endures because it celebrates the *Spirit of America*. It is a spirit from which we should all draw enormous strength and pride.

I believe the Gateway Arch stands to symbolize the hardships, sacrifices, and courage of American men and women, not only from the past, but from our present and our future as well.

And so, while our western frontier has been tamed and has faded into history, for many, a new global counter-drug frontier has taken its place for law enforcement professionals, and that is what I want to talk about today

So, what does this new frontier look like? Well, not to mince words, but, like most frontiers, it looks dangerous and unforgiving. It is one where the death toll and the societal costs of drug abuse to our nation have never been higher.

From 2012 to 2017, the number of drug overdose deaths per year in the United States has increased by nearly 70 percent. In 2017, one American died of drug overdoses every eight minutes, on average.

That makes 192 overdose deaths per day, according to the CDC.

And sadly, overdoses only tell part of the story. The scourge of drug abuse has also led to millions of violent crimes as well as millions of broken families, broken relationships, and broken lives.

It is a national crisis and it should alarm all of us.

To describe the global counter-drug frontier as large would be an understatement. While westward moving Americans departing from St. Louis in the 19th Century would marvel at the golden expanse of our Great Plains and the lofty heights of Pike's Peak, today's 21st Century global counter-drug frontier has no such romantic landmarks. It encompasses the entire globe with hot-spots in Central America's Northern Triangle, the former Soviet States and the Pacific Rim, to name just a few places where our Special Agents currently serve.

It is a frontier where every tiny Ranchero in Mexico wants to develop *that one special thing* to set them apart from the others. . . and for some of those rancheros, that special thing is Black Tar Heroin.

It is a frontier where narco-traffickers are now in bedroom communities throughout our nation that have never previously seen hardened drug criminals. This is because excessive opioid prescriptions have created new markets of suburban opioid addicts needing their next fix.

It is a frontier where our domestic rehabilitation programs struggle to offer eight-year programs that have very low success rates.

It is the frontier that hosts our nation's war on drugs, which has now spanned over 40 years, at a cost of over \$41 trillion dollars.

And it is a frontier that has taken the lives of thousands of brave law enforcement officials, including 84 DEA Special Agents, all who have paid the last full measure of devotion. [Pause]

Suffice it to say, this new frontier before us is daunting, and therefore, [to borrow from the frontier historian Steven Ambrose], our courage must be undaunted.

I don't wish to spend much time today speaking about how we got here, because I don't believe that would be helpful. But I do want to point out an important insight: I believe the opioid crisis has been ignored by both sides of the political aisle, and it has been ignored long enough.

I believe drugs, particularly opioids, don't care about voter registrations or election cycles, they just kill. This is why every administration from here on forward must attack this crisis with a courage and conviction as strong as those first frontiersmen and women striking westward and into the unknown.

I know, given your focus on the youth of America, the entire membership of the Fraternal Order of the Elks understands what is at stake for our nation. And I know the men and women of the Drug Enforcement Administration, with whom I have the honor to serve, understand the undaunted courage required in the years ahead....

But before I share some thoughts on what the DEA and our federal partners are doing to curb this crisis, I'd like to spend some time *recognizing you* and what the Elks are doing on this front and nothing showcases that better than your National Drug Awareness Program.

For those here who may be visitors or friends of the Elks, I'd like to point out that this great program, in place since 1982, and under the Leadership of Kent Gade [GAY-dee - he introduced you] strives to teach all children and parents about the dangers of illegal drug use and prevent the abuse of prescription drugs.

I am also told that yours is the largest volunteer drug awareness program in the United States. Through the promotion of drug-free lifestyles, *you take pride* in America's communities and youth, *and you take action* against youth drug use through education and inspiration.

You take pride...

You take action...

These are powerful phrases that I don't take lightly. So, allow me to expand a bit.

You take pride in your communities by developing an effective, whole of community-based drug prevention programs and by partnering with federal agencies including the Drug Enforcement Agency, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and national organizations such as Pride Youth Programs. These partnerships are key to ensuring that the Elks are addressing the leading drug abuse issues facing our communities today.

You take pride in our youth by believing that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. With that in mind, your Drug Awareness Program reaches out to youth of all

ages and backgrounds. Through the 2,000 Lodges in communities across the country, *you*, the Elks, work to combat youth substance abuse.

Elroy the Elk, the program's mascot, [who I believe is around here somewhere], reminds young kids that hugs are better than drugs, while older kids can engage with your volunteers to see, first hand, the effects of alcohol consumption by wearing fatal vision goggles.

You take action through education by handing out millions of pieces of anti-drug literature to parents, teachers and kids, not only door-to-door, but through the mobilization of your program's 90 drug-education trailers, which travel to community gatherings, such as fairs and sporting events.

You have also teamed with [one of my favorite distractions as a kid,] Marvel Comic Books, to produce a book featuring the world-famous Marvel superheroes and [smile, and gesture if Elroy is in audience] the almost equally famous Elroy the Elk in a battle against underage drinking.

[Optional... offering a round of applause to Elroy would be break for the audience during this long speech]

Well, Elroy the Elk, along with all of your other educational materials offered by your drug awareness program, including prevention tools, all make an impact.

So, what is very clear to me is that the Elks take pride... the Elks take action... and the Elks inspire our nation's youth by asking them to think about what it means to be drug free. And I find your pride and actions inspiring as well, which not only renews my conviction, but the convictions of those throughout the Drug Enforcement Administration.

But before I transition to the DEA portion of my remarks, I'd like to thank you for *all* your program is doing, and let you know, with my sincerest admiration, how great it is to *see so many Elks with us on this new frontier*.

You are standing proud and we at the DEA salute you. [Lead Applause]

It is great to have partners in what we do, because this frontier, like all frontiers, is wild and has its own unique set of risks and threats.

Out there, diabolical drug cartels, ruthless gangs, and remorseless criminals control vast areas and are willing to poison communities merely for profit.

Out there, criminals seldom give second thought to their victims, the devastation their poison spreads, and the violence that often shatters the communities they invade - perhaps even your own community.

Out there, they use powerful military-grade weapons, employ methods that are oftentimes brutal, and sell drugs deliberately laced with fentanyl to add to the rolls of their expanding economies of the addicted.

But the risks being faced on this global counter-drug frontier are offset by the powerful United States of America and her allies.

Which brings me back to the spirit of the Gateway Arch.

“Its real symbolism,” writes Tracy Campbell in the biography, *The Gateway Arch*, “is not to the westward expansion of the nineteenth century, but to the power and dominance of the United States in the twentieth century.” [Pause] And might I add “and beyond.”

With the Arch and that great quote as our inspiration, let me now update you on the DEA.

From where I sit, I believe America and her partners are beginning to tame the global counter-drug frontier, and this is how we are doing it.

We are taming this frontier with strong fortresses - and one of these fortresses, and the one I have the honor of overseeing, is the DEA Academy.

The selection process to get there is tough... it must be. Of the thousands of applicants who possess the required credentials, only a handful make it through to enter the agency as special agent recruits. Once selected, this elite group is welcomed into the Basic Agent Training Program held at the DEA Training Academy in Quantico, Virginia. There, they will undergo 18 weeks of rigorous training.

The training covers firearms, specialized narcotics and dangerous drug law enforcement, asset forfeiture, intelligence, clandestine laboratories, pharmaceutical diversion, and international programs, just to name a few areas.

But what this academy does best is that it creates the special agents that serve on point for our nation during global counter-drug operations.

Thus, we are taming this frontier with Special Agents like Tyler Anderson, the Academy’s first wounded warrior graduate who, with a **prosthetic leg** and a missing trigger finger, graduated as the top gun for his class and chose to serve in Puerto Rico. Why? Because he wanted a challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen make no mistake, we have built a strong academy that for 20 years has been graduating talented special agents to serve in tough corners of the world and who are getting the job done. We should all be enormously proud of them.

We are taming this new frontier with a new breed of law men and women. They are the elite group of 5000 active DEA Special Agents that specialize in arresting drug traffickers in large and small towns all across the United States by working with local law enforcement counterparts and prosecutors. Like the sheriffs and marshals from days gone by, they too work tirelessly using every investigative tool available.

But today's Special Agents are better armed and better equipped, employing state-of-the-art training and technologies developed specifically to prevent the expansion of drugs. These DEA Special Agents, along with their law enforcement partners, arrest the bad guys, break up drug gangs, and help keep us safe. Our communities are better in every aspect because of what they do.

And in support our special agents and law enforcement officers is the power and prestige of the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security. While Posse Comitatus laws prevent our nation from using our military in law enforcement operations, they often share the same risks and hardships of serving our nation in our war on drugs.

The brave men and women of today's armed forces are reminiscent of the mounted U.S. Horse Calvary, positioned just over the horizon, and ready to support our global counter-drug missions.

We are also taming this frontier with experts. The DEA employs intelligence analysts, diversion investigators, chemists, and even a number of historians who draw critical insights from the study of regions around the globe that inform our counter-drug strategies.

Additionally, we use special investigators, with education and expertise to provide the critical information that fuels our ongoing investigations. Still other experts plug into the very tissues that make up the heartbeat of our organization - procurement, HR, and logistics - just to name a few.

Breaking with my frontier metaphor for a moment, and very much *unlike* the Old West, we have *A LOT* of excellent lawyers that are, in recent years, significantly increasing the prosecution of drug offenders.

According the Department of Justice, in 2018, the United States charged 28 percent more opioid defendants than the year before and 36 percent more than the previous four-year average.

We have also increased the number of Federal heroin defendants charged by 14 percent and oxycodone defendants by 37 percent - all while tripling the number of defendants whose primary charge was a fentanyl crime two years in a row.

Additionally, beginning in April 2019, the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice announced the indictment of 60 defendants, including 31 doctors, for opioid

related crimes. According the allegations, these defendants are responsible for illegal prescriptions for more than 32 million pills across nine states. The Division has also identified 120 additional targets for investigation, and so I expect there will be many more indictments in the coming months from the Department of Justice.

All of this appears to be making an impact and we are seeing encouraging signs of progress.

It appears that after steep increases, drug overdose deaths are finally starting to come down in this country. According to provisional data from the CDC, the number of reported drug overdose deaths *decreased* by 5 percent nationwide from November 2017 to September 2018. I recognize that this is only provisional data - but it is still encouraging and I felt the need to share this with you today.

And if this decline continues, then it would represent more than 3000 lives saved in one year.

This positive news, I believe, may be attributed in no small part to those leaders and volunteers that, like modern-day pony express riders, spread key counter-drug messages throughout the new frontier.

One of those key messages is DEA's 360 Program, a program whereby we show compassion for victims of drug addiction and get them the help they need. Getting dangerous drugs off our streets and out of neighborhoods is necessary to achieve the objectives of DEA's 360 Program.

This program responds to the heroin and prescription opioid pill crisis by taking an innovative three-pronged approach that includes [one] coordinated Law Enforcement actions against drug cartels and heroin traffickers, [two] Diversion Control enforcement actions against those prescribers and manufacturers operating outside the law, and [three] Community efforts to take back affected neighborhoods following enforcement actions and prevent the return of the same problems.

Another key message being spread is our Red Ribbon Program, an eight-day celebration that is our annual catalyst to show intolerance for drugs in our schools, workplaces, and communities. Each year, on October 23-31, more than 80 million young people and adults show their commitment to a healthy, drug-free lifestyle by wearing or displaying the red ribbon. We know this program is a significant part of *your efforts*, and all of us at the Drug Enforcement Administration thank *you for your* unwavering support.

At this point in my remarks, I'd like to mention that we will be honored this afternoon to watch a video by Mrs. Mika Camarena, president of the Enrique S. Camarena Educational Foundation, where she and her son Enrique, along with other retired DEA agents keep the law-enforcement torch burning for her late husband, Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, who gave his life, in 1985, in service to our nation.

It is always moving to mention her at events such as these. Many of you may know that when Mika is not supporting great programs like Red Ribbon, she can be seen giving regular talks about drug awareness in schools and libraries across the nation.

I will speak more on Special Agent Camarena near the end of my remarks, but I believe *everyone* gathered here today shares his belief that giving up on the war against drugs would allow the drug traffickers to win.

This willingness to gather and be inspired by leaders like Mika Camarena, President Michael Luhr [Lure], and Kent Gade illustrates that this new frontier is being tamed in large part due to *like-minded visionaries like you*.

This is important because law enforcement alone can't solve our nation's drug crisis. Communities need to follow Mika's lead, need to follow Kent's lead, and need to follow the Elks' lead and come together as one team in a whole of community, whole of government approach.

And while this new frontier is vast, our likeness of mind illustrates that we are not alone. We are travelling through this crisis together, and always helping each other along the way.

And this is why DEA wants, and needs your help too. With Red Ribbon Week approaching this fall, it is ultimately my desire for it to span the entire month of October. You can help DEA make that goal a reality. You can do this by continuing to host Red Ribbon rallies in your communities, get the word out about this effort, get kids to sign anti-drug pledges, talk to other community leaders about our programs, and ensure you attend to the session being held this afternoon here at the convention on the Elks Drug Awareness Program where you can learn how you can become more involved.

This is important because each of you are wonderful role models for our youth, and America needs more people like you. In a world of change, the Elks provide hope and inspiration.

I have now arrived at my final metaphor.

Like the frontier of years past, our global counter-drug frontier also has heroes.

Therefore, I feel it fitting and appropriate to return to Special Agent "Kiki" Camarena and say a few words about this hero - for he is a special agent whose life and service exemplify the honor and dedication of all of us in the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Special Agent Camarena holds a special place in my heart because for a time lived and worked in the same part of Southern California where I was born and raised.

While some in the room know the story of Special Agent Camarena, I always think it's worth mentioning, even if only briefly, at events such as this, and because it's a reminder of what it means when we talk about our nation's war on drugs.

Special Agent Camarena was assigned to DEA's Guadalajara Resident Office in Mexico and was working to identify drug trafficking kingpins when he left his office to meet Mika for lunch on February 7, 1985.

He never made it to lunch.

Immediately after Mrs. Camarena reported her husband missing, the DEA family sprang into action, establishing a special group to coordinate the investigation by deploying 25 additional agents to Guadalajara.

Throughout February of 1985, witnesses were interviewed, and leads were followed. Searches of several residences and ranches in Mexico took place.

While the investigation progressed, a local farm worker discovered two bodies in a field adjacent to a busy road about one kilometer from a small Mexican ranch.

One was Mexican pilot Alfredo Zavala and the other was Special Agent Camarena.

For the DEA and the American public, the 1985 loss of Agent Camarena marked a turning point in the war on drugs.

His death brought the American public face-to-face with the vicious brutality of drug trafficking.

DEA launched the most comprehensive homicide investigation ever undertaken into the abduction and death of Special Agent Camarena - an investigation that has never ended.

One thing remains very clear: *no single event* had a more significant impact on DEA than Special Agent Camarena's abduction and murder in 1985, because it forever galvanized us as a community of dedicated professionals, and as a DEA family, vowing that we will never forget.

And I know each member of the DEA Family will never forget.

And it is my hope that all members of the Fraternal Order of the Elks will not forget, and from here will go forth from this great city and strike boldly into this new frontier where you will make a difference.

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Look to your left and look to your right... you will not be alone.

“Saddle up,” and ride to where you will leave *your* mark.

“Go West,” and find where you can make a difference in *someone else’s* life...

And do this in full knowledge that you will be fueled by the Fraternal Order of the Elks’ four cardinal virtues of charity, justice, brotherly love, and fidelity, inspired by the selfless service exemplified by Special Agent Camarena, and driven by the Spirit of America.

Thank you.