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ADDRESS

BY

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AND

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



PRESENTED TO THE SURGEON GENERAL'S WORKSHOP

ON PORNOGRAPHY

JUNE 22, 1986

(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I WANT TO THANK EACH OF YOU FOR ACCEPTING MY INVITATION TO THIS WORKSHOP. LET ME ASSURE YOU THAT I DID NOT LIGHTLY OFFER THOSE INVITATIONS. I WAS GIVEN GOOD AND SERIOUS COUNSEL ABOUT THE KINDS OF PEOPLE WHO OUGHT TO BE INVITED. I ACCEPTED THAT COUNSEL. AND THEN, WITH ADDITIONAL HELP FROM A NUMBER OF PEOPLE BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT, I CHOSE EACH OF YOU BY NAME.

I ASKED YOU TO COME TO WASHINGTON THIS WEEK TO HELP ME AND THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE ACHIEVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT THAT PORNOGRAPHY HAS UPON THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF OUR CITIZENS, ESPECIALLY OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

SOME CRITICS HAVE SAID THAT I'VE BEEN RELUCTANTLY PUSHED INTO THIS EVENT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE. OTHERS, HOWEVER, SEEM TO THINK I'M PLUNGING INTO THIS QUESTION WITH QUESTIONABLE HASTE.

BOTH ARE WRONG.

THE ISSUE OF PORNOGRAPHY IN AMERICAN LIFE HAS BEEN A PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL CONCERN OF MINE FOR MANY YEARS, BEFORE MY APPOINTMENT AS SURGEON GENERAL BACK IN 1981 AND CERTAINLY AFTER MY APPOINTMENT.

I BROUGHT THAT CONCERN TO THE JOB. NOT THE REVERSE.

BUT I WILL BE COMPLETELY CANDID WITH YOU: ALTHOUGH I'VE BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT THIS ISSUE FOR MANY YEARS, I DON'T COUNT MYSELF AS ANY GREAT EXPERT. AS A PRACTICING SURGEON FOR 35 YEARS, I DON'T EASILY COME BY SUCH HUMILITY, SO I HOPE YOU'LL ACCEPT THIS CONFESSION AS GENUINE.

I'M TELLING YOU THIS SO THAT YOU MIGHT UNDERSTAND, FIRST, WHY I'VE GONE AHEAD WITH THIS EVENT DESPITE CRITICISMS OF EVERY SHADE AND STRIPE, AND SECOND, WHY I INTEND TO REMAIN THROUGHOUT THIS WORKSHOP TO LISTEN AND TO LEARN.

IN THAT REGARD, LET ME ADD THIS FURTHER NOTE. WHILE THIS IS A "SURGEON GENERAL'S WORKSHOP," I DO NOT WANT THESE PROCEEDINGS TO HAVE EVEN AN APPEARANCE OF BEING MANIPULATED IN SOME WAY BY ME OR BY ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

HENCE, I ASKED DR. ALBERTO SERRANO TO ASSUME THE CHAIR OF THIS WORKSHOP AND KEEP IT MOVING ALONG. WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE HIM.

AS DIRECTOR OF THE PHILADELPHIA CHILD GUIDANCE CENTER, DR. SERRANO IS FAMILIAR WITH MANY OF THE QUESTIONS TO BE RAISED THIS EVENING, TOMORROW, AND TUESDAY. AND, AS A RESPECTED PROFESSOR OF CHILD PSYCHIATRY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, HE ALSO RECOGNIZES YOUR LEADERSHIP IN THIS AREA.

HIS WILL NOT BE AN EASY TASK. YET, I REGARD IT AS IMPORTANT FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF OUR OBJECTIVE, WHICH IS, AS I'VE INDICATED, THE FRAMING OF A CONSENSUS AS TO WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE PORNOGRAPHY'S IMPACT ON PUBLIC HEALTH IN AMERICA.

I HOPE WE WILL ALL GIVE OUR SUPPORT TO DR. SERRANO DURING THESE THREE DAYS OF WORK.

AS I SAY, I'VE HAD A LONG-STANDING INTEREST IN THE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY UPON AMERICAN LIFE. HOWEVER, AS I INDICATED IN MY LETTER, THE IMMEDIATE REASON FOR THIS WORKSHOP GOES BACK ONLY A YEAR -- ALMOST TO THE DAY -- WHEN I TESTIFIED BEFORE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S COMMISSION ON PORNOGRAPHY.

AT THAT TIME I SAID WHAT I'M SAYING TONIGHT, THAT PORNOGRAPHY HAS BEEN A SERIOUS CONCERN OF MINE AND I BELIEVED THERE WERE IMPORTANT PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECTS OF THE ISSUE THAT OUGHT TO BE ADDRESSED.

I VOLUNTEERED TO HELP DEVELOP THOSE DATA FOR THE COMMISSION, IF ITS MEMBERS SO DESIRED.

CHAIRMAN HENRY HUDSON AND OTHER COMMISSION MEMBERS TOOK ME UP ON MY OFFER. BUT THERE WAS A SNAG, CHIEFLY BECAUSE OF THE FUNDING. WHAT WE HAD ORIGINALLY AND MAYBE UNREALISTICALLY CONCEIVED AS A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH EFFORT HAD TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED BOTH IN SCOPE AND COST, YET STILL BE A THING OF SUBSTANCE.

AFTER SOME DEBATE WITHIN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE ITSELF, I APPROVED THE CONVENING OF THIS "SURGEON GENERAL'S WORKSHOP ON PORNOGRAPHY." ITS PURPOSE WOULD BE TO IDENTIFY SEVERAL KEY POINTS OF CONSENSUS TO BE REACHED BY SOME OF THE BEST PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICAL TALENT AVAILABLE.

THIS GATHERING, THEN, IS BOTH AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO A REQUEST BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S COMMISSION AS WELL AS A BENCHMARK EVENT FOR THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE ITSELF.

I HOPE YOU ARE AS CLEAR ON THIS AS I AM. I'M AWARE THAT THERE MAY BE SOME QUESTION IN THE MINDS OF A FEW OF YOU AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS WORKSHOP, GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S COMMISSION IS EVEN NOW COMPLETING ITS WORK AND IS ABOUT TO CLOSE UP SHOP.

IT'S A PECULIAR TURN OF EVENTS, I'LL GRANT YOU THAT. BUT THIS IS WASHINGTON, AFTER ALL, WHERE, TO RECALL THE WORDS OF LITTLE BUTTERCUP IN H.M.S. PINAFORE...

"THINGS ARE RARELY WHAT THEY SEEM,  
SKIMMED MILK MASQUERADES AS CREAM,  
HIGH-LOWS PASS AS PATENT LEATHERS,  
JACKDAWS STRUT IN PEACOCK'S FEATHERS..." AND SO ON.



IRRESPECTIVE OF THE TIMING, YOUR DELIBERATIONS, THEREFORE, ARE IMPORTANT.

I INTEND TO SEND THE FINAL REPORT OF THIS WORKSHOP TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL -- WHOSE MONEY, AFTER ALL, WE ARE SPENDING -- BUT I WILL ALSO DISTRIBUTE IT TO

MY COLLEAGUES IN THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE AND ELSEWHERE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,

TO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CUSTOMS SERVICE, THE F.B.I., AND THE POSTAL SERVICE, WHO ARE ALSO CONCERNED WITH THIS ISSUE,

AND TO THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL, IN WHOSE NAME ALL THIS WORK IS BEING DONE.

THIS MEETING MAY BE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC, BUT ITS RESULTS ARE NOT.

NOW, ONE FINAL COMMENT.

A YEAR AGO, WHEN I TOLD THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S COMMISSION THAT I'D BE PLEASED TO HELP THEM IN THEIR WORK, SOME MEMBERS OF MY STAFF WARNED ME THAT PORNOGRAPHY WAS A "NO-WIN" ISSUE...THAT I SHOULD PROCEED WITH EXTREME CAUTION...OR, BETTER YET, NOT PROCEED IN THIS AREA AT ALL.

I BRUSHED ASIDE THAT ADVICE. I'M GLAD THAT I DID, ALTHOUGH TODAY I'M INCLINED TO BE LESS CAVALIER ABOUT IT.

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS I'VE BEEN ROUNDLY CRITICIZED BY LIBERALS WHO WARN OF THE THREAT TO OUR CIVIL LIBERTIES POSED BY THIS WORKSHOP. ON THE OTHER HAND, I HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO TASK BY CONSERVATIVES WHO WARN OF THE THREAT TO THE NATION'S MORAL FIBER POSED BY THIS WORKSHOP.

BOTH GROUPS HAVE URGED ME TO CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF.

BOTH GROUPS ARE WRONG.

THIS IS A PUBLIC HEALTH MEETING AND I DON'T EXPECT US TO ARGUE LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CIVIL LIBERTIES. BUT TO CANCEL THIS WORKSHOP AND STIFLE THE DISCUSSION OF THE HEALTH ASPECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY WOULD BE, IN MY OPINION, AN ARROGANT BREACH OF FAITH WITH EVERYONE HERE AND AN ABRIDGEMENT, OF SORTS, OF YOUR RIGHT TO ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT ABOUT A MATTER OF GREAT PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEREST.

SO I HAVE HEARD THE COMPLAINT OF THE LIBERALS, BUT I MUST REJECT IT.

SIMILARLY, I HAVE BEEN WARNED BY SOME CONSERVATIVES THAT THIS WORKSHOP WILL BE JUST ANOTHER FORUM FOR THOSE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO DESTROY EVERY VESTIGE OF MORALITY IN OUR SOCIETY. BUT I EXPECT THAT ALL OF US HERE THIS EVENING ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT ANY HARMFUL EFFECTS PORNOGRAPHY MAY HAVE UPON CERTAIN VULNERABLE GROUPS IN OUR SOCIETY, ESPECIALLY YOUNG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS. HENCE, IN THOSE TERMS, I ANTICIPATE OUR DISCUSSIONS WILL BE PROFOUNDLY MORAL.

SO I HAVE HEARD THE COMPLAINT OF THE CONSERVATIVES, BUT I MUST REJECT THEIRS, ALSO.

NOBODY SAID THIS WOULD BE A BED OF ROSES. BUT TODAY I COULD DO WITH THE BENIGN THORNS OF A ROSE GARDEN, COMPARED TO THE BARBS I'VE RECEIVED FROM THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT DURING THE PAST COUPLE OF MONTHS.

BUT I'M NOT ASKING FOR YOUR SYMPATHY -- ALTHOUGH I WOULDN'T TURN IT AWAY. RATHER, I'M ASKING FOR YOUR VERY BEST THINKING BETWEEN NOW AND TUESDAY AFTERNOON, WHEN WE SHOULD BE FINISHED WITH OUR WORK.

I HAVE STEADFASTLY BELIEVED THAT, IN THE GENERAL DISCUSSION OF PORNOGRAPHY THUS FAR, AMERICANS HAVE PAID SCANT ATTENTION TO THE IMPORTANT EFFECTS PORNOGRAPHY MAY HAVE UPON THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF OUR CITIZENS, PARTICULARLY UPON OUR CHILDREN.

THAT'S THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE WE'RE CONFRONTING IN THESE FEW DAYS TOGETHER.

SO I MUST ASK YOU THE THREE KEY QUESTIONS OF THIS WORKSHOP:

FIRST, WHAT DO WE KNOW WITH SOME DEGREE OF CERTAINTY ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY UPON THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF OUR PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY UPON YOUNG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS?

SECOND, WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DO WE STILL NEED TO KNOW...IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT IS OUR RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE?

AND THIRD, AS PROFESSIONALS IN PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICINE, WHAT DO WE THINK OUGHT TO BE DONE NEXT, EITHER BY OUR COLLEAGUES IN RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE OR BY OUR GOVERNMENT?

IF WE GIVE GOOD, THOUGHTFUL ANSWERS TO THESE THREE QUESTIONS, WE WILL HAVE ACQUITTED OURSELVES WELL BEFORE OUR RESPECTIVE PROFESSIONS, AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST WILL HAVE BEEN SERVED IN A TIMELY AND VITAL MANNER.

NOW, WITHOUT ANY MORE FANFARE, I WOULD LIKE TO TURN THE WORKSHOP OVER TO MY FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE -- AND OUR FACILITATOR AND CHAIRPERSON FOR THE REMAINDER OF OUR TIME TOGETHER -- DR. ALBERTO SERRANO.

THANK YOU.

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