

As Prepared for Delivery

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DEA Red Ribbon Rally
DEA Headquarters
Arlington, Virginia
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Thanks Jim Handly for your kind introduction, and for being our master of ceremonies today. It's great to be here with so many friends of DEA who know how important Red Ribbon Week is.

Red Ribbon Week is celebrated here at DEA, but also at the Office of National Drug Control Policy; in the Young Marines program; at the Georgetown Day School; as well as through our many outstanding education and prevention partners. I can't thank you enough for your participation in this program, and for your commitment to this incredible, national movement.

For more than thirty years during the last week of October, we've honored our heroes by renewing our commitment to reducing addiction in America, and encouraging our children to live drug free.

Red Ribbon Week supports the shared goal of the law enforcement and prevention communities, which is to decrease substance abuse in our country, and the pain, suffering, and death that it causes.

This Administration is committed to this goal, and we believe that strong, effective enforcement of our drug laws is critical to achieving this objective.

The more we reduce access to drugs, the fewer drugs there are to be abused: and as a result, fewer people will use them. Aggressive enforcement by the brave men and women of DEA, and our partners, takes drugs off our streets, and keeps Americans from becoming addicted and from dying.

Strong, targeted, and strategic supply reduction isn't just wise policy: it's also compassionate. It's a measurable, effective, and efficient investment of resources, complementing and supporting the work of our prevention partners by stopping drug abuse before it starts.

This does not happen without cost. We wear red not only to remember Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, whose kidnaping, torture, and murder by Mexican drug traffickers drove the creation of Red Ribbon: we wear red to keep the memory alive of those on our Wall of Honor, and all those who have died enforcing our nation's drug laws.

They did not die in vain: they died so the lives of others could be saved. Because of their sacrifice, and their legacy, which we build upon here at DEA, countless American lives have been saved.

Yet far, far too many people still begin using drugs and are killed by them, often at a young age. For example, I was shocked to hear that last year an estimated 1 in 4 young adults used an illicit drug in the past 30 days, and 100,000 kids under the age of 18 used cocaine for the first time.

72,000 Americans, nearly the capacity of FedEx Field, died from a drug overdose in twenty seventeen.

What this tells me is that we have our work cut out for us, and that we need more, not less, education, prevention, treatment *and* enforcement.

Red Ribbon is a much better way to learn about drug use than discovering why drugs are so dangerous firsthand.

While millions have learned about the dangers of drugs through Red Ribbon Week, millions more need to do so.

In addition to Red Ribbon, we must engage in other ways: such as National Prescription Drug Take Back Day, which takes place on Saturday, October 27th; with Operation Prevention; in DEA 360 Strategy cities; and through other school and community-based programs.

Nothing less than our future is at stake: we need the energy of the Red Ribbon campaign to not only honor our heroes, but also to make America a better place.

In 1985 the first red ribbon club was formed in Calexico, California, which is located on the California border with Mexico in an area known as the Imperial Valley. It was at Calexico High School, the high school attended by Special Agent Camarena, where the first red ribbon celebration occurred in his honor.

And, I'm very proud to tell you that it was my brother, David, who was an instructor at Calexico High School, who was responsible for organizing that very first red ribbon event 33 years ago. Perhaps I'm saying this because he's my brother, but it's possible we may not be here today celebrating Red Ribbon Week if not for the visionary efforts of David, who just so happens to be here today.

David please stand up and everyone please join me in thanking David for making that first red ribbon day happen 33 years ago.

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