



Opening Argument



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Our Drug Laws Work, Don't Tinker With Them

To keep our neighborhoods safe, we must not tinker with our current drug laws.

Remember the late 80s and early 90s? It was the height of the crack epidemic. There were drive-by shootings, innocent bystanders including women and children, caught in lethal crossfire as rival drug gangs shot it out in turf wars. The sound of gunfire crackled in the night, and, sometimes, in broad daylight. The City was a combat zone with numbing daily casualty reports of wounded and dead drug war victims which too often led the evening news and the next day's newspapers.

Today New York City is known as one of the safest large cities in America and also as the Capital of the World.

Remarkable Turnaround

The remarkable turnaround took place because police, prosecutors and the courts vigorously enforced existing laws, especially our drug laws.

Let's not forget that most drug offenders are repeat offenders who were convicted of having sold drugs or possessed them with intent to sell. Let's not forget that the sale, possession and distribution of drugs has devastating impact -- it destroys lives, it tears families apart, it drives up crime rates and it ruins neighborhoods. Let's not forget that the drug trade is violent. It kills too many of its customers over time, and it kills too few of its purveyors in turf battles in which bullets fly and innocents sometimes fall.

Prosecutors are neither hard headed nor hard hearted. We strongly support drug treatment for those offenders with genuine sub-

stance abuse problems who do not pose a public safety risk. We support appellate review of those exceedingly rare cases in which justice warrants sentence reductions. If you believe that you were wrongly accused, or unfairly tried or unjustly sentenced, we fully support your right to appeal. We also strongly support diversion programs, such as Drug Treatment Alternatives to Prison -- DTAP -- which offer non-violent substance abusers treatment, hope and a chance to change.

Mandatory Sentences

But don't take away mandatory sentences. It is the leverage of mandatory sentences for drug offenses that gives judges the chance to punish the implacable drug trafficker and to refer for treatment the drug user/abuser who is a public enemy only to himself or herself.

Most drug offenders are in prison today not because they possessed a small amount of marijuana and were unfairly hammered by the Rockefeller Drug Laws. Almost 70% of drug felons are in prison because they did the same thing before. They sold or intended to sell felony weight controlled substances like crack, cocaine and heroin. They are in prison because they belong in prison, and all of us are safer because they are behind bars for long sentences.

We have taken back our City from the drug dealers who held us hostage to fear and danger. We have cut violent crime. We have made tremendous progress in improving the quality of life.

Let's be safe, not sorry. Let's not make our past our future. Don't tinker with our drug laws.