

Testimony of
A. Thomas McLellan

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STATEMENT OF A. THOMAS McLELLAN
NOMINEE FOR DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
OF THE
UNITED STATES SENATE

Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Sessions, and Members of the Judiciary Committee, I am honored to come before you today seeking your confirmation of my nomination as Deputy Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). I appreciate the time and effort you and your staffs have spent with me over the past weeks to educate me about the drug-related issues which are of special importance to you and your constituents. I believe I am better informed as a result of these meetings and there is already a basis for continued collaboration.

In the course of your review of my qualifications, you may have seen that I have spent over 35 years doing research in all areas of substance abuse treatment and policy. Two colleagues in particular have been integral to all I have done professionally, and I want to acknowledge the special debt I owe to Drs. George Woody and Charles O'Brien. I have been awarded many national and international honors for the research done with these and other colleagues at the Treatment Research Institute and at the University of Pennsylvania. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my many colleagues in the field who are on the frontlines of this issue providing services and getting treatment for those who need it. I appreciate their support of my nomination and thank those who took the time to be here today.

Despite more than three decades in a career dedicated to advancing the science and understanding of the disease of addiction, I was unprepared to deal with it in my own family. All my expertise could not avert the losses of my brother four years ago and my son just last year to addiction. My wife and colleague, Deni Carise, my sister and colleague, Bonnie Catone, my son Andrew and my daughter-in-law Liz are here with me today. They have suffered with me through the pain from these losses. Worse, we are not alone. Over 20 million families are directly affected every year by addiction. There are tens of millions more families whose members have had car accidents, gotten arrested, or lost jobs or relationships due to substance abuse. So, while I am grateful to all of my research and academic colleagues for the knowledge they have helped me acquire; what I have learned from my family and friends who succumbed to addiction; and particularly from family and friends who have achieved recovery, is equally valuable to my understanding of this terrible disease. Thus, if confirmed, I will join Director Kerlikowske and the rest of the ONDCP team to help other families and their communities avoid the kinds of losses my own family has experienced.

I can assure this committee that our country has a first-class team of capable, enthusiastic professionals who are eager to develop and implement a new approach to dealing with addiction in this country. In this regard, my prior research and my own experience suggest a need for focus on two critical issues. First, families and communities must become more aware of, and better able to act effectively upon the early signs of substance abuse. This is necessary for more effective prevention and early intervention. Second, families and communities must come to recognize substance dependence or addiction as a disease. This is the key to helping the afflicted acquire and support effective and enduring treatments to promote recovery.

These two critical issues have obvious, direct public value in their own right, but they have less obvious and even greater indirect benefits. Substance dependence is found in no less than 60% of those incarcerated in jails and prisons, 70% of the parents of children in foster care, and 30% of emergency room cases. Drug abuse is a significant factor in the onset, failed management, re-treatment, and excessive costs associated with the treatment of common chronic illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, hypertension and many forms of cancer. Thus, our country simply has to help communities and families address substance use problems if we are to achieve the broader goals of healthcare reform, welfare and child welfare reform, and prison reform.

While the outcomes of addressing these two critical issues should be measurable at the national level, please note that I have stressed a focus on educating and empowering families and communities. Additionally, we must bring balance among the three elements of national drug control policy - law enforcement, prevention, and treatment, as well as, foster close collaboration and coordination within government at all levels and within the field.

There are excellent examples of sensible and effective collaborations at the community level. Drug courts were started by community judges who obtained the collaboration of district attorneys, public defenders, and addiction treatment providers to bring about not only sustained individual recovery, but also fewer new arrests and incarcerations by working together. Screening and brief interventions for substance abuse problems is a research- derived intervention originally developed with addiction research dollars. These interventions have shown added health and economic value to trauma centers, emergency rooms, and primary care physicians, helping them identify and intervene early with emergent cases of substance abuse, and to reduce the attendant excessive healthcare costs produced by these unrecognized but omnipresent disorders. Again, a productive partnership between mainstream healthcare and the substance abuse field has led to added value and shared benefits.

I will close my testimony with thanks for the opportunity to appear. I bring experience and a passion for finding the solutions our country needs, but I have much to learn and many to learn from. I look forward to working with Director Kerlikowske, the rest of the ONDCP team, and this Congress to achieve the potential I know resides within our communities and families, for effective law enforcement, prevention and treatment of substance use problems. I look forward to answering any questions the Committee may have.