

Governor's Column – 6/2/02

We're all aware of the devastating impact of drugs on our society, our communities and our people.

Our work to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, that impact demands strong cooperation between local, state and federal agencies. It also requires a renewed sense of direction from adults to our children.

This past week, Asa Hutchinson, head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, was in Jackson to discuss a new program aimed specifically at curbing the production, sale and abuse of methamphetamine in Mississippi.

This drug is unlike many others on the streets today. With street names like meth, speed, ice, chalk, crank, fire, glass and crystal, methamphetamine is a powerful stimulant. It increases the heart rate and blood pressure. It damages brain cells. It spurs behavior that can be violent and out-of-control.

The words of those who have taken meth relate the horror: "While I write this now, I'm seeing mild visual distortions. Blurryness, slight double vision, sparkles in my peripherals. It's been only 29 hours since I last had real sleep..."

Or this story: "I saw my eyes so wide, dilated pupils, like on acid, my skin was so deathly pale I wondered where all my blood went..."

These two stories barely begin to relate the thousands of tragedies that happen every day, that happen every time someone makes the decision to try meth.

Part of the challenge in dealing with a drug like methamphetamine is that the source is not a South American drug lord, but often someone from within the community. It is

easily produced and, more often than not, is sold between friends and social connections rather than on the streets.

Another challenge lies in dealing with the traffickers who specifically target rural communities. For a state like ours, we are seeing all too often the impact of their work.

The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, along with the Mississippi Department of Public Safety, has worked closely with local and federal law enforcement agencies to address the problems of methamphetamine in the state.

We are making strong progress. In 2001, we seized 201 meth labs around the state – an increase of more than 75 percent over the previous year. Our efforts will not stop or slow down until we have this problem under control.

During the 2002 legislative session, I signed a new law into effect that increased the penalties for the manufacture of methamphetamine, especially in cases where children were present. On a national level, 20 percent of meth labs are operated in the presence of children.

We simply can't allow that to happen here. The new law sets a maximum of 30 years' imprisonment for violators, with financial penalties ranging from \$5,000 to \$1 million. If violators are caught in the presence of children below the age of 18, the penalties can be doubled.

The scourge of drugs in our communities can be stopped, but it will take a committed and cooperative effort at all levels. We will do our part to keep the effort alive with local and federal law enforcement agencies.

There is just too much at stake here. Our people – our children – have too much promise and potential for it to be wasted through the use of meth or any other drug. Don't let the drugs rob us all of the future.

