

**Prevention Youth Rally
Rotunda
January 20, 2014**

Yesterday's (big) win by the Seahawks was something we could all get excited about and over the next couple of weeks the excitement will be building as we cheer our Hawks on to the Super Bowl.

That they made it this far is an incredible feat for which we are very happy, but I am just as excited that you are all here today in the rotunda to cheer on another great cause— the prevention of substance abuse and violence in our schools, communities and in our families.

It is always wonderful to see our legislative halls packed with so many young people who are dedicated to prevention. You are here as leaders and as examples to everyone else. You are making a huge statement by saying let's make a stand, let's draw the line against substance abuse, teen drinking, bullying, domestic violence, gang activity and all of the things that are causing harm and hurt.

As you meet with your legislators and elected officials you are no doubt hearing a positive response to your message and having some great conversations. Your messages to them reinforce the need for constant communication on these important issues.

I said at the recent Prevention Summit and I will say here again: We know who the black-hatted people are – the ones who work hard to hook our kids and communities on alcohol, marijuana, molly, heroin, crack and other dangerous substances.

You are all part of the posse riding the trails of prevention, keeping the outlaws at bay, and I applaud you for all that you do. I know many of you are giving up countless hours of your precious free and fun time so that you can work on keeping your classmates out of trouble. Please know that your work is not going unnoticed. The problem is that there simply not enough of you to go around. You are their lifeline, and the more lines that you cast out the better our future becomes.

As a statewide elected official, a father and a grandfather, I am concerned about the messages we are collectively sending to the youth of our state. Together we need to set the record straight, to let them know that danger lurks around every corner, or in these parts you could say around every hill.

Every year we see legislation that seeks to increase the availability of beer, wine and hard spirits in our stores and communities. This year, for instance, there is a bill that would allow alcohol to

be sold openly on fairgrounds so that adults could walk around with a beer in one hand and an elephant ear in the other. What kind of message is that sending to kids?

There is other legislation that also eases access to beer, alcohol and spirits in a number of ways. While I understand the need for our craft industries to market their products, this needs to be balanced by good judgment and common sense. We need to be careful not to harm our youth while promoting certain industries.

The recent legalization of marijuana is sending word to our children that smoking pot or ingesting marijuana-laced edibles is harmless, which we know is not. The increased availability of hard spirits on grocery store shelves, all in sleek bottles or in tightly tucked in appealing packaging, encourages our youth to believe that drinking is a “must try.”

Unfortunately, many do. The 2012 Healthy Youth Survey tells us that 115,000 kids between 12 and 17 have had a drink in the past 30 days, with nearly a fifth of our seniors saying they’ve been drunk or high while at school. And, perhaps even more shockingly, the percentage of marijuana use is nearly double that of tobacco use among our 10th and 12 graders.

The good news is that alcohol consumption rates actually went down from previous years. The bad news is that use is still too high, way too high, especially that we now know that excessive use of drugs and alcohol is unequivocally linked to serious health issues, depression and even suicide, keeping our young people from reaching their full potential.

Experts tell us that greater availability for adults leads to a lowered perception of harm among youth. We all know either by firsthand experience or, by reports in the news media, that our cemeteries are full of people, many kids and teens, who died too young either due to their own harmful addictions of drug and alcohol abuse, or as the direct or indirect results of abuse by others.

Every year we pay out billions of dollars in treatment, rehabilitation, mental health and incarceration costs on people who once thought that trying dangerous substances a time or two could lead to no harm. And by the way, they were wrong. We know that marijuana use by young people has a significant impact on our students’ ability to learn and achieve their full potential.

The best way to prevent abuse, addiction, illness and death is to start teaching our kids early and by doing what you all are doing, by getting involved. We want to surround youth with positive messaging that lets them know it’s not okay not to drink alcohol, smoke pot or try other harmful substances.

We want to continue to work within our communities to discourage harmful behavior and to encourage positive role models. This is National Mentoring Month, and I happen to believe that

organized or even informal mentoring programs can go a long way toward making our communities a positive place.

Together we can work to stop violence. We can improve our communities and we can all make a difference. Each and every one of you can and should be a mentor to young people who are struggling to get by. Each and every day thousands of kids are bullied and harassed, threatened and physically attacked. It is essential that each and every one of us work to be good role models, and to help those who may be in need by telling a responsible adult about the situation. If we take the time to intervene, we can prevent devastating tragedies such as those that have occurred most recently in Colorado and New Mexico.

The work that all of you do in your schools and communities are very important not only to your own personal success and safety, but others that can benefit from your positive influence as well.

Thank you for coming to Olympia, thank you for all that you do in your school and community, and thank you for caring. Prevention is the ticket to success and your engagement today is exactly what we need to move ahead. You are a testament to the positive impact that young people can have on the lives of others, youth and adult.

Congratulations to all of you for making the right choices. Enjoy your visits today with your legislators. Share with them the great work that you have going on in your communities and schools. Have a great day here at the Capitol.