Esquire

Peter Ueberroth: There's no benefit for what I've been doing to fight drugs. No money, no glory, no anything. You just do it. You find yourself being a fireman. You don't say, "Well, let's think about this..." You try to put out the fire.
Q: But why this *fire?*
Ueberroth: This is the only one I've been thrust into. If I was, for instance, thrust into the...
Q: Import quotas, the trade deficit?
Ueberroth: Yes. Or the Soviet-U.S. relationship. In these I have some expertise. I don't think I could be effective with our space program, NASA. I don't think I have the technical background.
Q: But if they offered you the problem of drugs...?

Citizen Ueberroth

By Richard Ben Cramer

Before we go nose to nose, as he says, I want to tell a story behind the commissioner's back. This might seem cowardly. But after five interviews with Mr. Ueberroth, I am in possession of these facts: when he turns his face to the matter at hand and fixes it with the crooked grin and eyes that crinkle but do not smile, we are going to talk about what he wants to talk about, in a way he wants it talked about. And we'll talk in a place he has chosen for our talk. Over a span of three weeks last fall, I talked to Peter Ueberroth in seven states spread over half the continent, but always in one of his places—in New York, a pricey hotel coffee shop; in Boston and Houston, presidential suites à la Sheraton and Hyatt; twenty thousand feet above Louisiana, in the white-leather cocoon of a *USA Today* jet. After a while, they all seemed to be one place—clean, neutral, and well padded, somewhere in the middle of corporate America. All the interview tapes hum with the background noise of climate control. But to make any study of the man himself (a topic that has no place on his agendas), it's best to catch the commissioner off his turf, from behind.

We were on our way into the Astro-

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dome for a play-off game, and Mr. Ueberroth was doing his Walk of the Public Man. This is the brisk gait that implies a killing schedule, appointments stacked up, and uncertain results, at best, for those bold enough to interrupt. Actually, we were early, with forty-five minutes to the national anthem, and I couldn't understand the haste. As we made our way through the gathering crowd, I was thinking there might be something to all the talk about his ambitions. I remembered the schedule for that morning:

7:40–PVU introduced . . .

7:50–PVU speaks . . .

8:15–PVU's car at Washington Hilton . . .

Yes, very much like a campaign. *JFK, LBJ, RMN...PVU.* And we were, after all, just going to the game, but here in his scurrying entourage were a couple of aides, some security, and a traveling newsman whose interviews filled the interstices of PVU's day. The commissioner was talking volubly about that night's singer of the national anthem, a naval officer who'd sung at the Little League World Series. "I saw him there, and he was great!" Ueberroth arrived in time for that anthem because he was helicoptered right to the little stadium in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. I pretended to take notes on the singer. *Does PVU,* I wrote in my book, *always go quasi-presidential?*

"*Heyy,* Ah know *this* guy...."

All at once I saw the reason for the Walk of the Public Man. She was a large woman with an untidy tease of bleached hair spilling onto the shoulders of her Astros T-shirt. Her voice, beery, coy, and taunting, was like a wet slap on the ear.

"*Heyy,* Ah'd shake *your* hand."

Ueberroth picked up the pace. He was good. No one who wasn't trying to walk with him would have noticed. But he just wasn't quick enough.

"*Hey!*"

So he stopped, turned, stuck out his hand, looked her in the eye ("Never shake without looking at their eyes," he counsels), murmured, "How're you...nice t'see..." with that cock of the head, shy little grin, straight at her, full bore, a crinkly-eyed moment with the very Face of Baseball.... That ought to fix her.

She wouldn't fix. "Heyy, you c'wear mah li'l *Astros button!*"

Ueberroth smiled and shuffled, mumbling inaudible negatives. At the woman's side, her friends were giggling. "The *towel,*" one of them whispered.

"Yeah, you c'wave mah li'l *Astros towel!*"

She finished this offer at a shout because PVU was moving fast. You read it here first: he scooted. He was out in front of the security now, making time for the stadium gate. I trotted to keep up, thinking: *This guy run for President? No, he's got no taste for pressing the flesh....* From behind, the voice was sharper, harsh:

"Hey, how 'bout a T-shirt, says kiss my Astros?"

All I could see was his back, hunched in self-protection. I wanted to see if he was blushing....

But wait. Before we sprint to catch him again, let's use the time (another Ueberrothian counsel) to take a hard look at the commissioner's back. It is a very broad back, filling the no-wrinkle jacket of his standard CEO suit. He has the shoulders of a milkman, with muscle in slabs up the slope to his neck, a size 16½. The man is currently working in a face job, yes, the Friendly Face of Baseball, at $400,000 a year, thank you. But his back tells another story. This man is made for bearing loads.

Of course, if he speaks about strength at all, he tosses a shrug and calls himself a broken-down old water-polo player. But in fact he hasn't found anything yet that can break him down. When he drifted into the travel business, he had no capital under him, nothing to build on but himself. Businessman Ueberroth piled it on, and when the business was second in size only to American Express, the weight of it still couldn't break him down. It couldn't even hold him in place. He sold out for an eight-figure price and took on the Olympics.

That was 1979, and his L.A. games stretched over the next five years, culminating with the part we remember, two sunny weeks in the summer of 1984, when the nation, astonished that Americans could carry this off, reveled in an orgy of patriotic pride and vicarious self-satisfaction. Few had paid attention to the years of preparation, the weight of opposition from the Los Angeles citizenry, indifference and obstruction from Washington, hostility and finally a boycott from Moscow. Olympian Ueberroth piled it on: a $500-million budget (with a $215-million surplus), more nations attending than ever before, more TV viewers than ever before, a massive force of seventy thousand volunteers, and we didn't feel the need to pay attention, because Ueberroth barely showed the strain.

Now Commissioner Ueberroth has twenty-six fractious bosses, with operations across the continent, a staff of more than fifty, a second home on a second coast, and it hasn't even loused up his golf game. When he took the job a couple of years ago, there were stories on baseball as a failing industry: rumors about a dozen teams teetering on the brink of insolvency, tattle on drugs in this or that clubhouse, and cameras trailing players into the courthouse. But as he strode onto the runway of the Astrodome, the doleful stories were gone: baseball was finishing its first year in which every team drew a million fans or more, and true to Ueberroth's boast of the previous winter, there had been no more drug scandals. What had he done? The short answer: not very much. The job is too easy—no heavy lifting. So Ueberroth is looking for something to do, a problem he can work up a sweat on, a load he can feel on his back.

That problem is drugs. Not just for baseball, or even sports in general. No, we're talking big ball-yard now: the schools, offices, factories, the nation's streets, its homes, even that discreet little bag under the socks in your dresser drawer. Peter V. Ueberroth wants to stamp out drugs in America. And, of course, he's got a plan. That's why the trip to a night game in Houston starts with a breakfast speech to a parents' group in Washington, D.C. That's why the seat on Ueberroth's left in the front row at the Astrodome is reserved for the Houston chief of police. That's why I'm tagging along across the continent: we're going to talk about drugs. That's why, even in our seats, as the anthem ended and the crowd cheered and I turned to the commissioner to say: "I see what you mean about the singer..." all I saw was his no-wrinkle back. He had turned to ask the chief of police: "What's your biggest problem, lack of funding?"

I. Drugs and the Man

Q: Commissioner, do you have any notion of what it feels like to be "high"?

Ueberroth: I'm not going to get into that. I don't think it's appropriate....

Q: Well, you'd want to know what it is you're up against and . . .

Ueberroth: And I'm not going to get into it because I don't like the question that comes after it, and the next one, and all the questions that follow.

Q: Well, you were in high school in California in the '50s. Didn't any of your friends get high?

Ueberroth: Sure. But it didn't concern me much because it wasn't very pervasive. Marijuana was available, but by the time I could afford it, I had virtually no interest. I had started smoking cigarettes and was losing my scholarship to college, so I gave up smoking, and that pretty much eliminated

PHOTOGRAPH: JEAN MOSS

Ueberroth: From the Olympics to baseball to Commissioner of America?

any other interest at the time. But there was no great moral judgment involved. I didn't say this is some sin. I kind of looked the other way.

Q: So, when did drugs become an issue for you? When did they become your *problem?*

Ueberroth: Well, at the Olympics, we had to test all the athletes at the games. What I found was that this country did not have a single internationally recognized drug-testing facility. At the Lake Placid Winter Olympics, they had to send their samples up to Canada. So we built the first lab in this country at UCLA. So that's where the real interest started.

Q: But even then, drugs did not become for you an issue larger than, say, security or any other problem. When did that happen for you? Clearly drugs moved up on your agenda.

Ueberroth: Well, let me think about the trigger date. It happened after I came to baseball and started to gather information about the drugs in professional sports. And I realized well before the Pittsburgh trial that we had a real problem. Basically, you had to be blind not to know that society as a whole was having a problem, so baseball players, with their leisure time, with money, with all the other things, were obviously more susceptible than most of the general public. As I've done many times, I underestimated the problem by a large margin. I ranked it as problem number three in a total, maybe, of four, but quietly I began to get information from various organizations and independent medical people.

Q: People who had worked for the clubs?

Ueberroth: No, they had worked with individuals, not directly with the clubs. Then I was visited by some very recently retired players, players who had played the year before or had just been released. Basically

PHOTOGRAPH: PETE SOUZA/THE WHITE HOUSE

A "papal" audience in Washington: Ueberroth takes his holy war on drugs to the Oval Office.

they came to say, "I made a great living off this game; I don't see a future in coaching; I'm going to live on a farm. But you ought to know, Mr. Commissioner, that the problem has a lot more depth than you ever thought."

Q: They called you up to tell you?

Ueberroth: No, they came physically. To sit down and talk about it—not to name names. But then we got some law-enforcement advice: a law-enforcement agency would say, "Look, we don't have a case, we're not filing charges, but in *x* den of iniquity, in *x* city, ballplayers are doing it every night—virtually everybody in this place has got a problem...." And so those kinds of things started to build up left, right, and center; the grand jury started to meet in Pittsburgh; investigations were going on in Atlanta and other cities. I felt, which is my normal management style, the best thing I could do was to get ahead of the problem, get in front of the problem so I could see it coming. And then make some judgments.

Q: What does that mean?

Ueberroth: Well, it depends on what the problem is. In this case, I contacted Dr. Tony Daly, director of medical services for the Los Angeles Olympics, and said, "Look, put together a program that will guarantee security...." I'd never want an owner to be able to find out what player might or might not have a problem, because he could use it against the player. I wanted a system that protected players from courts that might want to subpoena information, but I wanted drug testing.... I wanted a program I could take to all facets of baseball—umpires, minor leaguers, everybody—and say, "Look, why don't we embrace this program?" I didn't know at the time that there would be no program that would be acceptable to the union. That I learned later.

Q: How much did you consider that the problem lay not in baseball but in society?

Ueberroth: I might have realized that intellectually, but that's like saying that we really have a whole city that doesn't have good fire laws. But when your building is on fire, you're going to be thinking about your own building.

Q: Right, but at some point you started to address the problem in the larger society.

Ueberroth: I'm not sure when. There was a period of time when drugs and baseball were almost synonymous, and I decided I wanted to be sure I was in every ball park in every city so I could meet with political leaders, law-enforcement leaders, city and business leaders. And as I visited the cities, because I had taken a strong stand against drugs, people were crying out—from all walks of life. There was panic. "Commissioner, we'd like you to look over this, but do it quick because there's a disaster, in our time, in our place...." And then at the same time I knew the military had a major problem, so I went to Washington to try and find out what our government was doing—and then I found myself swept up.... Now I'm ahead of the curve . . . and I'm going to stay ahead. I mean, you know about crack. You read about it on the cover of every magazine. But do you want the next word? *Bazuco.*

Q: That's the even cheaper stuff they're doing down in Colombia.

Ueberroth: Yes. So I found myself becoming an expert on drugs because of two factors: interest and access.

Q: Because you were playing on the front lines.

Ueberroth: Right, exactly. And I was having some success and was about to issue a discipline that was historic in baseball, in sports history. So those things were all factors. Sometimes the experts would come to me. The Secretary of Education contacted me, William Bennett. The head of Health and Human Services, brand-new, Dr. Otis Bowen. The good thing is, the commissioner's position does have stature. There are probably a hundred people whose telephone calls are normally returned in this country, and one of them is the baseball commissioner. Plus, I think I had developed some confidence from the administration. And I'd known some of them before. The Attorney General, Ed Meese, did a good job. Bill Webster, the director of the FBI, is a personal friend.

Q: So you started talking around Washington. At what point did you decide that nobody was carrying this ball?

Ueberroth: Oh, I could get you the exact date. I'd have to look it up on my schedule. When I realized they were all striking out at this problem, there was nothing coordinated and cohesive, it really hadn't been pulled together...

At this point, Ueberroth began to hem and haw, stood up, and said he had to go to the men's room. I assumed this was tactical. We were doing this bit of the interview in the restaurant of New York's Regency Hotel. At Sixty-first and Park, it is power-breakfast headquarters for a host of rich white men who like to tuck some bran flakes into their day's first meeting. At strategic points in the interview, Ueberroth would look up and recognize an acquaintance coming in (the commissioner's seat at his corner table commanded the view of the entrance) or a breakfasting CEO friend with whom he needed to have a word. These interruptions were quick and polite, followed by a shrug of apology. But they always ended with Ueberroth asking: "Where were we?" And when he was told, he always seemed to rephrase the answers he'd given. A few weeks later, when I made a passing wisecrack about his tactical calls of nature, he was surprised, amused, and said he'd never do *that*. But as he came back to the table at the Regency that morning, he dispensed with apology. Clearly, he'd thought things over, and his first words were about the tape: "Turn that thing off, will you?"

Now, there is method here, or at least instinct. Ueberroth's favorite term is *proactive*. It is his high compliment, used to describe a person who is driving toward his goal, setting his own agenda, refusing to be caught in a reactive stance. He's always teaching his staff to get on the offensive: get ahead of the problem

and *hit* it, don't let it hit you first. And this counsel underlies his own off-the-record twitches. Ueberroth will forge ahead on the tape when he thinks he is saying anything that leads toward his goal. The moment he is asked about anything else—his feelings, for instance, or details of a story that might endanger his aims—the moment he is asked to *react*, he tries to go off the record. Failing that, he'll dig in his heels and say, simply: "I don't know."

When he has me turn off the tape at the Regency, to talk about what *really* happened in Washington, it was with a heavy air of confidentiality. In fact, he had no bombs to drop, mostly a list of high officials who had heard Ueberroth's drug plan. Most of their names got onto the tape in subsequent sessions, anyway. The upshot of the story was, he did well enough with the cabinet to get meetings with Nancy Reagan, and then with the President. But on the conduct of those meetings, Ueberroth dug in his heels absolutely. He simply refused to paraphrase them, or even describe them. Conversations with the Chief Executive were "papal," he said. "You just don't talk about them." It turned out, this was Ueberroth at his most proactive. For his drug plan begins with the President. Without the President, there is no plan.

II. Drugs and the Plan

Ueberroth: It all has to start with a rallying cry from the President, and he has to say: "We're going to make war on drugs. It's rat poison. We hate it. We're going to get rid of it. We're going to war against drugs, and we're going to win." The plan really has two parts: one part is government action against the supply of drugs, and the other—the demand side—shouldn't be the government's problem at all. I believe that can be done, and done better, without any big government-handout programs. If there's ever going to be any meaningful progress, the President is going to have to say to the private sector and the grass roots in this country: "It's your fault. It's your problem." We must as a people stop kids from doing drugs, whether they're new designer drugs or cocaine—which is the epidemic now—or whatever, we've got to stop them from doing it. This is basic. I remember hearing the Mexicans argue their point: they manufacture the drugs, but we're the drugstore. We buy and ingest this stuff. We have to shift the responsibility from a government-spending program to a program where we get agitated and do something about it. It has to be a top national priority. Now, specifically...

Q: Why don't you begin with the first half, the supply side, since you say it has to start with the President and government action.

Ueberroth: Well, both sides have to start with the President. That's the point, because rallying the private sector would fail if it was done on its own. But if you want to rally the private sector because you're on your way with planes into Tripoli against Colonel Qaddafi, they'd say, "Right, all right, whatever you need, Mr. President!" It needs to be that kind of initiative. But specifically, on the supply side, I've listened to experts in literally every branch of government, and from all walks of life, from law enforcement to education, and the problem is that the supply is growing so fast that any attempt to catch it at the border, or have policemen interdict it by catching the dealers in the street, is going to be ineffective, and very costly. It just won't get the job done. We have to cut the supply of illegal drugs drastically, which to me means defoliation or some kind of eradication of the plants, before they're harvested into poison. Once they're harvested and refined, it's too easy to carry, it's too easy to hide, and it's too easy to get into the school systems of our country.

Q: So defoliation just for starters? Where? Mexico? Colombia?...

Ueberroth: All they have to really do is get the Bolivians and the Colombians—excuse me, the Peruvians and the Bolivians. They grow 95 percent of the [coca] crop. It worked in 1971, when they went to get 80 percent of the opium-poppy crop in Turkey, and it just dried up the world supply. And it worked for years and years, and it never really got a head of steam going again. And it wasn't anywhere near as bad a crop as cocaine is for this country.... You know, [FBI] Director [William] Webster told me [that] when he took the job, he didn't put cocaine in the top ten problems he was facing. Now it's problem number one, two, three, and four....

Q: So, suppose our planes are on their way to Peru and Bolivia. What next?

Ueberroth: The call to arms to the private sector in this country to go to work on the demand side. They have to be accountable in their own areas, and I mean everybody. Right now, nobody is accountable. Parents: they have to do more than be afraid for their kids. They have to educate themselves to go head to head with their kids on drugs. Parents' groups have to do more than complain, they have to develop real programs that get to the parents in their communities. Education: you know, the head of the New York City schools came to *me* to ask for help. Labor has not made one strong statement that I've heard, has not taken any stand at all. Labor was the most effective tool to fight communism in this country. Now labor's position has got to be: "We're on the offense, we're going to fight drugs...." Business: I never talk to the corporate sector without saying, telling them, they are the worst villains in this. They have to take the lead, and they haven't. They have to make a statement, and they have to make a major contribution. Not only in their own businesses. They also have to pay for the curriculum and the materials for education. They have to use the support systems that they already have in advertising and media to make a major change in the attitude of kids in the country, because that's where the real battle...

Q: How are they supposed to change the attitude of the country?

Ueberroth: Well, the attitude of the young people in this country. The same way they change people's attitude to buy their music videos, to buy their blue jeans and their fast foods. What has to be done is, you get the hundred major advertisers in this country, the biggest advertising budgets, and you say to them: "Look, I want 3 percent of your advertising budget to go to antidrug ads." And this is not public-service ads at 4:00 in the morning. This is paid advertising, as good as their ads for their top product lines for people of that age group. And it's good business for them. Because if they don't get rid of drugs in this country, they're not going to have anybody to sell to. They're not going to have very good markets. And they have to be accountable, and their ad departments and agencies are accountable for results, just like they are when they're selling cars or clothes or soft drinks or anything else. This is not a pep rally, a giant, nationwide pep rally. It's something that has to be ingrained in our country for a lot of years to come—if we care.

Q: How about...

Ueberroth: And incidentally, this would be the largest advertising budget in the history of the world, and there's a very interesting offshoot that you might not like to agree with, or understand. But I believe it would have a very interesting effect on the media. They're corporations. They'd have to do the same. They'd have to make a commitment. And I think they would....

Q: Sure, they'd get up and march.

Ueberroth: Right, they would.

Q: So, this job we're talking about, do you ever...

Ueberroth: What job?

Q: Drug czar.

Ueberroth: There is no job, and I don't think it's in the best interest of the government to have a drug czar.

Q: Well, you screwed up my lead, which was: I'd finally figured out what you were running for.

Ueberroth: Well, I screwed it up. And if I did, I did it correctly, positively, and I'll do it one more time in case the tape didn't hear it.

Q: So you don't want the job?

Ueberroth: I don't think there should be or is a job. And my involvement in this thing is really trying to fight drugs and has nothing to do with any personal goals. I find myself in a position to be able to do it, and I do it.

Q: All right, let's not dicker about the word job. *There's something you want to do. It would require that some authority be vested in you, because you couldn't just start doing it from your office right now.*

Ueberroth: No, I don't want to do any-

thing. I'd like to see something done.

Q: But would you agree that there are precious few people who are in a position to do it? And you are?

Ueberroth: I'm one of some—a very few, I think, is correct....

I think I can save a lot of time here by summarizing the rest of this dance. There's a job to be done, but it's not a job, and if it is a job, he doesn't want it. Of course, if they came to him and made him do it...well, then...

This, too, is classic Ueberroth, the ever-reluctant salesman. He didn't want the baseball job, or the Olympics job either. This is his natural negotiating stance. It's he who has to be convinced. It's his decision on which matters pend. That way, even with his hands idle at his sides, it's he who's leading the dance.

But people mistake him who see in these rondos a grand Machiavellian gyre in the White House that winds him up. In fact, they underestimate him, because Ueberroth needs no grand scheme. His great strength lies in his instincts; they operate constantly and without his having to plan. He could no more cede the lead on this drug plan than he could take the wrong chair at breakfast. He could no more let slip a needless slur about some dork in Washington than he could leave the Houston police chief in peace through nine innings in the Astrodome. There are management books to teach the rest of us about "networking." But for Ueberroth, this is life itself. He already seems to know every rich white man in America—or at least, they know of one another. When he wants something done, he calls up "the top guy" and, together, they "cut to the bottom line."

Characteristically, when the dance is done on the drug plan, what he wants is a small group of top guys convened under the President's wing. Then within that group, Ueberroth will simply trust his instincts. Cream rises, after all. And authority would likely devolve to him because he would make sure to know more, to be ready, to stay one step ahead.

Of course, if that should happen, if responsibility should fall to him, he'd have to ask the baseball owners for time off to do the job. So I asked him, one day, if he'd cleared it with the owners.

"Oh, yes," he said. "About a year ago."

III. The Ultimate Solution

Q: Maybe Reagan's got somebody better....

Ueberroth: He does. George Bush is in a better position by a thousand yards—if he's given the direction by the President.

Q: Okay, suppose President Reagan, seeing that his task now is to leave some political legacy, says, "I'm going to do something for my friend George Bush." And he, from our house to your house, with Nancy at his side, throws his arm around George and says, "George, I'm giving you the nation's future. You are going to be the man to rid this country of drugs." And Bush says, "Thank you very much, Mr. President," takes two steps to his right, and throws his arm around you and says, "Peter, a heavy burden rests upon your capable shoulders. I'm giving you the private sector on drugs." Now what are you going to do?

Ueberroth: You're painting a humorous scenario. I will do anything that I can do within my skills, abilities, power. I mean, in the context of the scenario you painted, I'd say, "Okay." I'd say, "Let's go." But in so many words, I've told that to everybody in government who asks me the same question—and they virtually all asked.... If that scenario would go further, what he'd need to do is call on a small group, seven or eleven, some number like that. And then, whoever is the natural leader, let him emerge. And I would probably emerge as the person to do it. Get a cross section of, say, ten other leaders on the corporate side, and get it done. Not dissimilar to what I think was a heck of a job that Lee [Iacocca] did with the Statue of Liberty.

Q: But no committee of white men is going down to Peru with machetes. How is that going to get done?

Ueberroth: It would be done by government action. The government can take whatever role it wants to. They can work out a way to buy the crop and destroy it. They may have to do it by tough bargaining. They may have to consider this kind of agriculture an aggressive act. I'm not going to tell them the most diplomatic and forceful way to get it done. But to think that two countries that are not major players in the world scene can supply the world with cocaine, and we watch it happen—and call them allies—it's not to be believed. It's unacceptable, inexcusable.

Q: How would you start—cut off aid?

Ueberroth: Certainly cutting off aid. Or another plan that I played with and discussed with certain officials is to increase the aid. The money involved is still not much compared to the economic consequence of drugs in this country. You could quadruple aid, but suspend it until we achieved a satisfactory relationship vis-à-vis the growing of coca plants. So aid would be quadrupled and sitting there in a big pot, building, gaining interest, and it would be of importance to those two countries, but they wouldn't get the first penny until we got rid of the coca plants.

Q: Compared with the $1.7-billion cost of the latest antidrug bill, what do you think it would take to compensate Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia for their total coca crop?

Ueberroth: I think it would cost a fraction if you do it at a campesino's level, if that's who they're worried about, these poor farmers who won't make a living. Of course, these poor farmers were farming something else until recently, so they did make their living quite well.

Q: And if our government were to buy the crop, without helicopters or troops, it'd still cost less?

Ueberroth: I'm convinced it would cost pennies on the dollar. I don't have in front of me the gross national products of these countries, but it's not all that impressive a number. Those nations have a combined population smaller than the state of California's. The economy of a major county in California will be larger than the economy of these countries. Yet we sit there and let it happen. And there are a lot of government officials in the various countries involved, so in some ways it's like a Qaddafi, a state that's warring against the United States.

Q: So there's precedent for government action against them?

Ueberroth: Well, I think there's a bluff that can be called. If this is just a criminal element and the government people aren't involved, then help us get rid of it—now, underline, exclamation point. *Now!*

Q: So, if I understand correctly, you would give them a simple choice: Our Air Force is coming. Do you want your troops on the choppers, or ours?

Ueberroth: I won't go that far, to say it demands military action. What I'd say is it's more important than any aid or military aid regarding Nicaragua. That's a political choice, and political intervention, but they're not providing the poison to kill millions of our kids.

Q: How about California's number-one agricultural product, marijuana? How can we expect the Bolivians to know what the hell is going on in their mountains if we can't get the marijuana out of our backyards?

Ueberroth: We have the same satellite capability to identify that crop where it is, and that's part of the call to arms. You know, we've got to stop it in our own country, and that's very doable and, properly done, it's no real cost.

Q: Why?

Ueberroth: Because every summer we have these wonderful encampments of National Guard. How much better would they feel if, instead of playing war games, they'd be getting something done that's going to be helpful to their kids? That would be really good.

Q: So while you're eradicating next year's cocaine in Bolivia, you're eradicating next year's marijuana in California?

Ueberroth: And in Hawaii and elsewhere—at virtually no cost... You know, there are billions of dollars thrown at projects by the government, and almost without exception they've failed. Or they succeed in such a small way, compared with the money spent, they might as well not have done it.

Q: So the rest of your program is supposed to be without government cost.

Ueberroth: It will work better without any government cost. Because as soon as you get government cost you get government regulation. And you can't go fast enough. I learned that in the Olympic games. If I wanted to build a little stadium, I'd work through a city and get three bids, and they'd all be in the $17, $18, $19 million range. I'd go out to some unincorporated county area and get a private contractor to bid on the same job, and it would cost $4 million. So the private sector can take the demand side, with government encouragement and okay. Labor would have to be rallied. They have not made a powerful statement...

Q: What do you actually want labor to do?

Ueberroth: I'd want them to take on the responsibility of ridding their membership of illegal drugs.

Q: Well, how?

Ueberroth: How? There are simple answers and complicated answers. I wouldn't want to have to tell them. They know how to deal with their membership. They know how to be effective. They have responsibility to the health and welfare of their membership. Somebody who's doing illegal drugs is guilty of killing himself and paying money to criminals who might be killing somebody else. So it starts with saying, "We, the *xyz* union, declare that illegal drugs are the biggest menace on society, and we don't want anyone in our union who's going to commit crimes like that...."

Q: Okay, a declaration. And then?

Ueberroth: Secondly, they get in and educate their people from start to finish. They should probably pay for that. Then they have to make it known—there are no secrets among employees—that drugs will not be... We don't want a police state, we don't want a gestapo state, but...

Q: Suppose there is testimony that somebody is using drugs. Is he out of the union?

Ueberroth: I don't think so. But they'd better get him help or they're going to have a bigger problem. If they let him stay in, especially in a union that has to do with public safety, in my opinion they're being criminally negligent. And they know. Employees know.

Q: At the same time you would want every business to say: "If you are not clean you are out the door"?

Ueberroth: Well, not clean or out the door. It's unfortunately not as simple as that. I think you give somebody a chance to recover, you have an obligation to do that. A lot of people will say that's far too liberal. But we've been growing generations of people thinking this is okay, it's recreational and hip. There are some people who can't stop, so I think we have to try and help them.

Q: And if they cannot be helped?

Ueberroth: Well, there's a difference—cannot be helped or will not be helped. If they won't be helped they're history. I think then they're saying, "I want to continue to commit a crime..." They want to continue to ruin their health and they want to continue to commit mayhem on society. Then, I think you open the door and let them go. If they want to be helped but they can't, then I don't treat them more seriously—not a great deal more seriously—than an alcoholic. You try, and sometimes you're going to fail. If you fail on some, so be it.

Q: So business, besides paying the freight, would have to clean up its own house.

Ueberroth: Right. Each segment of society has to stand up and say: Illegal drugs are a menace. We don't want them in our whatever—our union, business, school. We don't want anyone around us who uses drugs. We think they're vile, vicious, un-American. They cause crimes on our sisters and our brothers. Let's get rid of them. Companies have policies on the most mundane things. You get policies on chiropractors, on dress codes, Christmas giving, all kinds of policies. Here's an item that's ripping the country apart, and business looks the other way. If they find somebody, they quietly fire him and try to avoid a lawsuit. Stick him with somebody else. That's what baseball used to do. If a guy had a problem, teams had a great solution—they'd trade him.

Q: The Whitey Herzog solution...

Ueberroth: You're speaking. You know I'm careful not to use names.

Q: All right, let's talk timetable. Say February 1, U.S. helicopters bearing Bolivian and Peruvian troops descend on those coca fields....

Ueberroth: The minute they started, the President has to call on the private sector, he's got to call on a labor panel, a business panel, an education panel, and a couple of others, maybe a religious panel. And say to each...

Q: Okay, but clearly, he'd have to have that arranged before he goes out and...

Ueberroth: He could have it arranged. It's sitting there somewhere already. I've been advocating it.

Q: You mean it's sitting there because you handed it to him, didn't you? In writing?

Ueberroth: Right. I made those kinds of proposals in writing and I've continued to make them.... You don't ask the private sector to get involved unless there's a real emergency. Well, I think there's an emergency. That's my whole point.

Q: And unless you mean to win...

Ueberroth: Yes. It's not a Vietnam. I mean, the nice thing is, it *is* a win. In eighteen months, you have a dramatic jump shift, and then you get the momentum going....

Q: What's the jump shift after eighteen months?

Ueberroth: Supply has dried out. It's been confiscated or used up. You've got a long time before they get geared up in any other country, and anyway it wouldn't be the same. That stuff doesn't grow very well in many parts of the world, number one. Number two, countries would see that it's not fa-

vorable for them, that we didn't think it was nice. And you could get a lot done...the same way they can bring out a product that's virtually unknown, and in a few months, everybody knows about it. The youth in this country have chosen to spend over five hours watching television every day. It's an attentive audience, an easy-to-influence audience. So we could do it using every technique, from superstars to music to innuendo. Every skill that's available. If we have the best budget, we can obviously afford to do it right.

Q: So, at that point, you've started drying up supply, and you're after the younger generation. What do you do about the thousands of users who are left out somewhere in the generational shift?

Ueberroth: There will be casualties and the casualties are going to be casualties anyway. The users—the majority of them—are people who are pleased by drugs, and drugs are part of their life, but they're not yet chemically dependent, where they've lost control. They're going to be very unhappy that their playtime has been taken away. They're also going to have to realize that it's very criminal. And they're going to be getting older. Those who are—the smaller percentage—who are shivering in the streets, having withdrawal symptoms, some may die, some may get help. I think you try and be as humane as possible, and the cost of that can be borne through insurance and the rest, anyway. Because what this would do for the country, just from a macroeconomic point of view, the impact would be unbelievable.

Q: Okay, let's talk about impact. You've talked to experts about rehabilitation?...

Ueberroth: Right. Government-run, private sector–run, expensive, cheap, all of them, to get a feel for the recovery rate. What chance do we have? What's happening? Who's bringing these kids in? What ages are they? What are the problems?

Q: What is the recovery rate? Are we talking about, say, 10, 20 percent, or can people be reached if they are treated?

Ueberroth: Well, I get a lot of different opinions. No opinion that I've heard gets up to 50 percent.

Q: So if somebody has a real problem now, no matter what programs we have, basically more than half are going down the tubes.

Ueberroth: Yes, in some form or another. Look, it's not a pleasant predicament, but I would not have them be the highest priority. I would put out the fire before you worry too much about those who have already been burned. Period.

At this point, I asked Ueberroth, "Well, then, who *are* you saving?" But he said all he wanted to do was stop a crime against our children.

I tried again: *Who is this for?* But he just looked at me in confusion. We were missing signals, and it was my mistake. I realized only gradually that this drug plan isn't for (or even against) any people I might know—any individuals at all. It is a macrosolution to a macroproblem, and Ueberroth doesn't want to fool with cases.

I realized only later that Ueberroth likes the drug problem because, in his view, it's *everybody's* problem, to which he'll supply a solution that is *everybody's* solution, just as his Disney World package tours were for *everybody* in America, and the Wolperesque Olympic pageants were for *everybody* with a TV, just as he's cleaning up baseball as a family show for *everybody*, just as his friends at *USA Today* bought this jet by inventing *everybody's* paper, just as this Hyatt is the hotel for *everybody*.... Of course, one sees these issues clear and cool from above, looking down the Hyatt's thirty-story atrium from the Presidential Suite....

Ueberroth brooks no argument on whether his macro drug plan actually needs doing. From his perch in the climate-controlled aerie, there is no argument: Who is *for* drugs, after all? His point: ***All right, if we're cleaning up drugs, well, I can do it in eighteen months.***

But it's another question whether people want it done his way, with satellites trained on this country, and National Guardsmen as national police, tramping through our backyards, hunting the dreaded weed. ("That's well within the President's emergency powers," Ueberroth insists. "That's my whole premise. This is an emergency.")

And it is still another question why he thrusts himself forward as the designated doer.

I asked him, finally, what were his ambitions. He said: "I don't have them in any practical sense, any ambitions personally.... I guess I'm going to end up in commerce again, because I enjoy that. I enjoy..."

Q: I'm not asking you for a career path. I know you don't have any master plan.

Ueberroth: Ambitions?... Try a different word.

Q: Let's put it this way. What would you like to have on your tombstone?

Ueberroth: Let's leave tombstones out of this. What's important to me? Is that better? If you ask what's important, I'd say I want to be respected by my children, and I want them to have a good running start with their lives, and...I don't spend much time thinking about it....

Q: How about the title Citizen?

Ueberroth: Well...I think I'm a good citizen. I think I have been. And am now. And will be. So...so be it. ◆