

Drug Policy News

A Publication of the Drug Policy Education Group, Inc.

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New Ideas from State Police Director

Col. Don Melton, the new director of the Arkansas State Police, is a man with a lot on his mind. We spoke with him in early November in hopes of learning more about his plans to address racial profiling in Arkansas, and quickly learned that he is a man passionately concerned with the "big picture".

"If our officers are using racial profiling, I want to know about it," he stated firmly. "It's not right."

But Director Melton wants to be proactive. In noting that racial profiling bills have been introduced in each of the last two legislative sessions, Melton says he is opposed to those bills as written. "We would be foolish," he says, to let laws be put on the books that did not gather the best data in the most efficient way.

A blue-ribbon committee is Director Melton's first step in addressing the racial profiling question. He's asked Sherman Tate (Alltel) to chair and Dr. Wynona Bryant-Williams (Director of Black Family Studies at Philander Smith College) to co-chair a group carefully chosen to fairly represent the African American and Hispanic communities of the state. He wants this committee to look at the research and to find an easy, reliable method that can be implemented in Arkansas by which state troopers can document key information about each person stopped.

In his quest for support in addressing racial profiling, Director Melton will look to the federal government for funding to place video cameras in every patrol car. This data collection method will not only help gather evidence and increase conviction rates, but will also help promote good behavior on the part of the officers. Some of this funding can come through the Drug Enforcement Agency.

(Continued on Page 2)

Stand Up! A Celebration

6: 30 pm Saturday December 1 – Mark your calendar now to join the fun and feasting! The location is the Ozark Mountain Smokehouse, 215 W. Dickson St., Fayetteville. **STAND UP!! A CELEBRATION** is the official two-year anniversary of drug policy reform work in Arkansas.

As reward for all our hard work, we have planned a night with something for everyone. We'll hear some of NW Arkansas' finest jazz musicians, sample exotic wines, and enjoy a buffet of dishes from local chefs. And as if an evening in the company of like-minded folks enjoying the cheery fireplace, great music, and fabulous feasting is not enough, there will be an astonishing collection of items available for silent auction. Hand-woven rugs and fine ceramics, web services and massage, gift certificates and gift baskets from some of the area's top retailers and restaurants, artisan items of interest to collectors, and many more desirable gifts in time for the holidays.

Tickets for **STAND UP!! A CELEBRATION** are \$15 per person, or \$25 per couple, and includes dinner and two glasses of wine. Space is limited, so advance tickets are recommended. Please return the enclosed card to make your reservations.

If you have a craft item, service, or product you'd like to add to the silent auction, please call.

All proceeds from this event benefit the medical marijuana campaign

3rd Annual Arkansas Poll released October 2001 showed that 63% of Arkansans support legalizing marijuana for medical use. To see the full results, visit <http://plsc.uark.edu/arkpoll/>

“I’ve met with (DEA chief) Asa Hutchinson and his staff on more than one occasion,” he explains, pointing out that the DEA wants the state police to take a more aggressive role in enforcing drug laws. “But I want a comprehensive plan in place before we do anything.”

Citing concerns over limited resources, Director Melton points out that it wouldn’t do much good to go out and start arresting a lot of people if there’s not enough room in the state’s prisons to hold them. He wants to consider the whole picture, to look at who are the offenders and the need for a network of good informants to help find them, to set up good warrants and do the raids with adequate plans and funding to clean up the mess they may find (in methamphet-amine production). He wants to look at the need for better education so that people can make informed choices before risking the use of potentially addicting drugs like methamphetamine.

Don Melton grew up in Los Angeles and even though the big city held all the typical temptations, he knew that his parents didn’t approve even of alcohol. It made a difference to him, knowing the rules and seeing them enforced consistently.

“That’s what we need,” he said, “consistency and certainty. Discipline is a positive thing if it’s done right.”

The state police has some distance to go before it meets Don Melton’s standards. He’s interested in setting some administrative and organizational objectives. The effort to address racial profiling is just one part of his plan. “I don’t respect the system,” he says. “I’m too close. The intent is good, but right now the results and the message is terrible.”

Don Melton seems a man amazingly suited to his job. He sees the public disrespect that comes in society when a white collar criminal may steal millions and barely gets slapped on the wrist, while a poor man may steal \$50 and face years of hard time. He is determined that the Arkansas State Police become an agency worthy of respect that will, in turn, bring greater respect to the state and the entire criminal justice system.

He was not put off in discussing his thoughts and plans, even though he was made aware that this organization and its supporters are interested in reforming some of the very laws his agency is expected to enforce. In some ways, his objectives are the same as the objectives of drug policy reform, in that we both wish to incorporate greater fiscal responsibility in improving life for individuals, families, and communities. We look forward to seeing more of Don Melton and wish him, the agency, and the racial profiling committee the best in implementing a new vision for the Arkansas State Police.

Racial Issues Discussed

In an August meeting hosted by Drug Policy Education Group, representatives of several organizations sought to compile a list of issues, situations, or policies in Arkansas that could explain the fact that half the people incarcerated in Arkansas prisons are African-American, although this group comprises only 17% of the population. Statistical studies have shown that blacks and other minorities are slightly less likely than whites to use drugs or violate drug laws.

Racial profiling, a practice of some law enforcement officers or agencies which singles out minorities for a disproportionate number of traffic stops and other detainments, was considered a part of the problem. Another contributing factor may be the poverty of many individuals in minority groups. Poverty and other aspects of social disenfranchisement contribute to a sense of hopelessness, so that a detainee and his/her family members may not contest a questionable arrest, prosecution, and jail sentence. A sense of powerlessness leads to fear of repercussions for “making waves.” Also, police may find that poverty neighborhoods where people congregate outside tend to be more exposed to observation than suburban neighborhoods where activities may be more hidden.

Lack of access to suitable advocates who might assist in a person’s defense or other important legal and social resources contribute to a higher incarceration rate for minority individuals. While people who are well educated and economically successful may be acquainted with lawyers, judges, and other key players in the justice system, poor whites and minorities usually end up at the mercy of the public defenders office which is chronically understaffed and underpaid for their workload.

Mandatory sentencing guidelines add to the inequities of such situations, especially for judges who do not have time or inclination to hear all the pertinent factors of a case. By setting formulaic sentences under law, mandatory guidelines make it all too easy for an individual to end up with a lengthy sentence for a relatively minor drug offense, in spite of contributing factors which might have suggested a more equitable alternative, such as drug treatment, counseling, family intervention, or other approaches which ultimately would have served the individual and community in a more beneficial manner.

Finally, focus group participants agreed that upon release from incarceration, minority individuals may find it much more difficult than whites to obtain employment and to re-establish a successful life in the community. In turn, these individuals would be more likely to resort to drug use out of despair and untreated addiction or to rely upon drug trafficking in order to earn income, which would lead to a greater likelihood of re-arrest.

DPEG will host future focus group meetings to follow up on racial issues as well as a new group on women's issues in drug policy. To join an email discussion group, call DPEG at 501-839-8543 or email dpeg@mindspring.com

News Briefs

New York – Casual drug use does not affect employment, according to a new study released in the October issue of Southern Economic Journal. The study, based on data from the 1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, concludes that casual users – who say they have used drugs no more than once a week over the past year – are as likely to look for work or hold a job as those who say they use no drugs at all.

The study team, headed by Dr. Michael T. French of the Univ. of Miami, FL, concludes that employer-based treatment programs should focus on chronic “problem” drug abusers rather than all users. Chronic drug abuse, like alcohol abuse, was confirmed to reduce the likelihood of holding a job, and researchers hope that these findings can help employers develop more effective employee drug testing and assistance programs.

Chronic abusers of illegal drugs accounted for 4% of those surveyed while casual users comprised 8% from a national sample of 4000 men and 5700 women between the ages of 25 and 59.

Washington DC – A mid-October Gallup Poll shows that concern over drugs has fallen to a realm of low concern. Not surprisingly, terrorism, unemployment, fear of war, and many other concerns have nudged worries about drugs to near the bottom of everyone's list, one of the most dramatic changes of opinion of any item polled.

Guest Opinion

Can't Win War on Terror Fighting a War on Drugs by Neal Pierce

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Reprinted from 11/3/01 Houston Chronicle

If we expect to win the war on terrorism, we have to call off the war on drugs. There are three reasons:

We can't afford both.

The drug war feeds terrorist networks and diverts law enforcement from focusing on immense new perils.

The drug war was failing anyway. If we want to reduce drug dependency and the crime associated with it, then intensive treatment programs will be far more effective.

Sadly, official Washington isn't admitting any of these truths. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., has gone so far as to declare that "by going after the illegal drug trade, we reduce the ability of terrorists to launch attacks against the United States."

First flaw in the argument: If our primary goal is Osama bin Laden and his Middle East-based network, choking off drug demand here (even if we could) wouldn't help much. Virtually all the heroin flowing out of Afghanistan goes to Europe, not the United States.

But there's a larger flaw: What makes America's drug market so lucrative to suppliers in Latin America and elsewhere is our efforts to keep it illegal. Black markets always generate huge profits and networks of brutal, underground operators. Ties to terrorists are inevitable.

"We have spent a half-trillion dollars on the drug war since 1990 and we are less safe and less healthy than ever," says Kevin Zeese, president of Common Sense for Drug Policy and long-term opponent of the prevailing national policy.

Zeese, like most reformers, favors a legally controlled market that would focus on treatment and remove the hyperprofits of today's illegal trade.

He charges the drug war actually "blinded our government to terrorism," citing reports in Boston news media that

FBI agents in the '90s actually apprehended Raed Hijazi, an admitted al-Qaida member. Hijazi, according to the reports, provided the agents with information on the Boston area terrorist cell later involved with the Sept. 11 hijackings. But the FBI was reportedly interested only in information Hijazi had on heroin trafficking.

Such incidents suggest that even if our federal, state and local governments found enough cash to fight a simultaneous war on drugs and war on terrorism, split agendas could mean that we end up losing both struggles.

In a contorted way, one can argue America could "afford" to lose the war on drugs. Through the 1990s, times were good, government budgets sufficiently elastic, and the criminal justice system was kept busy. City neighborhoods may have been devastated, but there was little political outcry because the millions who got incarcerated tended to be politically less potent -- the poor and minorities.

But terrorism is different. It's not some social choice (alcohol is OK, marijuana or crack get you prison, etc.). Rather, terrorism is a grim, undeniable force. Fed by global poverty and religious extremism, it could well be the most frightening, multifaceted threat to the lives, homes, cities and livelihoods of Americans since the Civil War.

The harsh fact -- especially for state and local governments -- is that resources are finite. Every cop who isn't chasing a kid selling cocaine on a city street is a cop

who could be guarding a subway station, a stadium or public plaza. Every detective not tied up in drug cases can be checking leads on potential assaults on city water reservoirs or local power stations.

"Every dollar spent intercepting cocaine, heroin or marijuana," suggests Zeese, "is a dollar that could be spent intercepting bombs."

Or take the federal Drug Enforcement Administration. Every DEA agent who isn't involved in a futile effort to stop an easily replaceable drug shipment from entering the United States can be investigating terrorist cells or working to prevent bioterrorism or nuclear terrorism. Yes, nuclear terrorism, which almost surely will be tried against us in the coming years.

It is time to get serious, and deal with dire threats first. Instinctively, some federal agencies are shifting already. The FBI has changed its focus to terrorism. The Coast Guard has reportedly switched close to three-fourths of its personnel and boats from drug interdiction to antiterrorist patrols. Sharp moves in priority are also reported at the Customs Service, Public Health Service and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

But until we flip our drug policy, putting prevention and treatment first, and stop pursuing the millions of drug users in our own population, we'll have neither the resources nor the focus to pursue the very real terrorist threat that we face.

Friends and Supporters –

It's nearly the end of the year 2001, and time to take note of our exciting progress in drug policy reform in Arkansas. We're proud to have one of the fastest growing reform efforts in the nation!

We couldn't do this without you. Your volunteer work and financial support are critical. Thank you!

As we face 2002 and the challenges ahead, we will be donating books and articles on drug policy and research to libraries across the state, sponsoring workshops that teach meditation as a successful tool in substance abuse treatment, and starting our speakers bureau with a dazzling slate of speakers on topics including racial inequities, parents in prison/children in crisis, decriminalization, methadone for opiate addiction, women's issues, harm reduction, the fiscal irresponsibility in prohibition, and much more.

Please consider giving to Drug Policy Education Group at this important time!

Your donation to DPEG is TAX DEDUCTIBLE and COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL!

Please give generously.

Make your check payable to Drug Policy Education Group, Inc. or DPEG.

Send to 541 West Meadow, Fayetteville 72701. Call 501-839-8543 for more information.

Visit DPEG's website at www.dpeg.org

Drug Policy Education Group, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable, educational organization working in Arkansas to reduce the harm caused by drug prohibition.