



Chris Christie for Drug Czar? Let's hope the Donald cuts that out of the budget

Paul Mulshine

May 18, 2017

Hardly a day goes by without Chris Christie showing up at some drug-rehab center to repeat his assertion that drug abuse is a disease and should be treated as such.

It looks like he's campaigning for something. And that something looks like the position of federal "Drug Czar."

That's the informal term for the director of the "Office of National Drug Control Policy." That job remains open five months into the Trump administration, and the Donald is looking for someone to head up the office.

One problem: His administration is also looking to cut the office's budget by 95 percent.

If those two goals seem incompatible, then welcome to life under the Donald.

During the campaign, Trump endorsed the concept of permitting states to adopt their own policies on marijuana legalization.

Once in office, he named as his Attorney General a senator from Alabama who endorsed a return to the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" philosophy of drug law enforcement commonly known as the War on Drugs.

But he also named as head of Management and Budget a small-government conservative from South Carolina obsessed with cutting unnecessary expenditures.

And to Mick Mulvaney, the Office of National Drug Control Policy fit that description.

I recently spoke with a drug-policy expert from the free-market Cato Institute who agrees with Mulvaney that the Drug Czar should go the way of the last Russian Czar.

"I would abolish the office, tear down the building and fill the ground with salt," said Ted Galen Carpenter.

Carpenter recently authored a book titled "The Fire Next Door: Mexico's Drug Violence and the Danger to America."

In it, he documented the way in which the War on Drugs in the United States led directly to the creation of the drug-smuggling cartels of Mexico. The War on Drugs just made the drug trade more violent and the products more powerful, he said.

Drug warriors like Christie and Sessions don't get that, he said.

Given his inability to control his own behavior, our governor is the last person on the planet who should be telling us what we should be consuming

"They're up against the fact that if the War on Drugs had worked, we wouldn't be awash in drugs," Carpenter said. "When you're talking about cocaine and heroin, there has been very strict prohibition for decades in administrations Republican and Democrat. They can't blame the upsurge in opioid use on a lack of enforcement."

What we've got here, he said, is a classic case of "whack-a-mole." That's the strategy that has also failed in the War on Terrorism. You attack in one spot and the opponent just moves to another spot.

When the feds went after marijuana, he said. The smugglers simply shifted to harder drugs.

Sessions is simply an anachronism with his insistence that tougher enforcement will solve a problem that it created, he said.

But Christie is confused. He wants both tough enforcement as well as lenient treatment of those caught breaking drug laws.

"I think he's trying to square the circle of the inherent contradiction between those two objectives of enforcement and treatment," he said. "He wants to do both simultaneously, but that would require a significant increase in funding, not a decrease."

Meanwhile, Christie's "Reefer Madness" stance on marijuana legalization in the states would wipe out the only progress that's been made in reducing drug smuggling - a loss of business for the cartels.

"Measures legalizing medical marijuana and recreational marijuana knocked a big hole in their market," he said. "It undermined their market because consumers preferred getting marijuana with reliable sources."

As legalization spreads to other states, the cartels could be put out of the pot business, he said. That should appeal to thinking people.

As for Christie, "He just doesn't seem to be that smart," Carpenter said.

As someone who's been observing the governor since before he became governor, I would agree with that assessment.

Christie is quick-witted but he's hardly what you would call a deep thinker.

Since the beginning of the War on Drugs, conservative intellectuals like economist Milton Friedman and author William F. Buckley observed that government interference simply caused the smugglers and dealers to look for products that are easier to smuggle and more profitable.

The recent rise in opioid traffic is evidence of that, he said.

"If opioids are the new 'in' drug, that's not necessarily better," said Carpenter.

No, it's not. The last thing America needs is another Drug Czar. Let's hope the budget-cutters win out over the drug warriors in the Donald's mind.

I'm sure Christie could find another job that suits him.

Governor, perhaps?