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[Anti-Marijuana Zealot Still Employed By Obama](#)

August 26th, 2009 By: Allen St. Pierre, NORML Executive Director

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No employee of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) sants the director has ever drawn more public and academic criticism than David Murray, ONDCP’s chief scientist.

Virtually an entire book was derived from the ONDCP’s twisting science and statistical data during Murray’s eight-year tenure—Dr. Matthew Robinson’s *Lies, Damn Lies and Drug War Statistics, A Critical Analysis Of Claims Made By The ONDCP*. You can watch Murray and Robinson debate about the drug war and ONDCP’s methodology at the Cato Institute [here](#).

Question: When will Obama and Holder finally kick Murray to the curb and replace him with someone other than another anti-cannabis zealot masquerading as a ‘scientist’?

The [Washington Monthly’s](#) Charlie Homans cast some much needed, white hot light in Mr. Murray’s direction.

The Bushie Obama Can’t Fire

by Charles Homans
August 25, 2009

Obama vowed to reverse Bush’s hard-line drug policies, but Dubya still has a man raising havoc in the White House drug office. Problem is, Obama can’t fire him.

The Bush years were not the finest hour for the White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy. Drug czar John Walters, who ran the place beginning in late 2001, waged a militaristic drug war, pouring money into dubiously effective efforts to fight trafficking abroad while letting treatment programs stagnate at home, and obsessing over marijuana at the expense of more

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dangerous drugs.

It's an approach that Barack Obama's drug czar, Gil Kerlikowske, is now trying to steer away from. He has vowed to end the use of the phrase "war on drugs," and the hard-liners who filled out Walters' office are now gone. All of them, that is, except one guy: David Murray, the drug czar's chief scientist, and Walters' most enthusiastic disciple.

David Murray is a lone human memento of the Bush administration's drug war, surrounded by people who are trying to undo the work on which he has spent the past eight years.

"He was brought in as a political hatchet man," says Ross Deck, a former ONDCP analyst and a 16-year-veteran of the office who quit during the Walters years. Before joining in the ONDCP, Murray had no prior experience in addiction science, or law enforcement, or anything else particularly related to drug policy.

He is on the record questioning many of the drug policies espoused by Kerlikowske. Congress has spent three years trying to get him fired.

Why, then, does Murray somehow still have a job in the Obama administration? The reason can be found in the fine print of the federal bureaucracy. Midway through his tenure, Walters moved Murray—at the time his special assistant—from a politically appointed job to the chief scientist's post, a theoretically apolitical position that makes him much harder to fire. By law, Kerlikowske can't touch a hair on his head for the first 120 days of his own stint as drug czar. Which means that until the middle of September, Murray is living in a peculiar limbo: a lone human memento of the Bush administration's botched prosecution of the drug war, surrounded by people who are trying to undo the work on which he has spent the past eight years.

ONDCP veterans speak fondly of Murray's predecessor, a defense research veteran named Al Brandenstein, who was the drug czar office's only previous chief scientist from 1991 until Walters removed him in 2004.

Brandenstein worked to put advanced drug-detection technologies in the hands of law-enforcement agencies, but he was also interested in advancing the understanding of the demand side of the drug-use equation. In the 1990s, he got government funding for brain-scanning equipment that medical researchers would use to better understand the biochemistry of addiction. Critics in the drug-policy community argue that Brandenstein's work produced little of value, and that his post existed mostly to provide a pretext for government spending on gadgetry—but for better or worse, that was what Congress had asked for when it created the chief scientist job.

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Murray, on the other hand, was not. A former cultural anthropologist who had left academia for the conservative think-tank circuit, he had made a name for himself in Washington a decade earlier with an [article](#) in Policy Review about the danger out-of-wedlock births posed to the fabric of American society. (It began, memorably, “America is becoming a nation of bastards.”) As Walters’ special assistant, he had made headlines in Canada in 2003 by suggesting that the U.S.’s northern neighbor’s experiments with marijuana decriminalization could cause diplomatic problems along the border.

Shelving most of Brandenstein’s work, Murray pursued the occasional science project—he was enthusiastic about testing the Beltway’s sewage for traces of cocaine—but mostly used his office as a political soapbox, lambasting opponents and burying unflattering data that suggested his boss wasn’t exactly winning the drug war. (The Statistical Assessment Service, a research organization that Murray himself launched in 1994, has in recent years devoted much ink to debunking its own founder’s claims on drug-policy issues like needle exchange.)

In congressional testimony, Murray branded medical-marijuana advocates “modern-day snake-oil proponents”; in a 2007 appearance on a panel at the libertarian Cato Institute, he derided the think tank’s pro-legalization stance to be “an illusion” that “grows out of late-night dormitory engagements in college that one hopes one outgrows.” He also alienated more middle-of-the-road drug-policy experts both inside and outside the bureaucracy; one outside expert recalls attending a drug-research group meeting with Murray and hearing him offhandedly refer to the pot-friendly Netherlands as a “narco-state.”

“David acted as though he had said nothing the least bit unusual in saying that,” the expert says. “It’s indicative of how off the map he is—he simply doesn’t understand how strange his own views are about these things.”

Congress felt similarly. In the fall of 2005, as the panic over methamphetamine use in rural America was reaching its apex, Walters sent Murray to brief the members the House of Representatives’ Meth Caucus—a group formed by mostly rural and Western congressmen in 2001—on what the administration planned to do about the burgeoning problem. The assembled lawmakers were so spectacularly unimpressed that one of them, Indiana Republican Mark Souder, marched out of the meeting and promptly demanded that Murray step down from his post, calling his briefing “pathetic” and an “embarrassment.” Murray’s performance was so bad, Souder declared, that “if Director Walters and anyone else in that office agrees with what was said today, they should resign.”

This was grandstanding, of course. But Congress made more substantial efforts to oust Murray after the Democrats came to power in 2006. Over the next three years, the Senate Appropriations Committee—which controls the federal government’s purse strings—used its annual report to criticize the chief scientist directly, a highly unusual gesture. “The Committee,” one of the reports reads, “is highly disappointed in the director of this program”—Murray—“and is troubled by his ideas for research and development that appear to have little or no value.” When Walters insisted on keeping him in the post in the face of such criticism, the Appropriations Committee responded by slashing funding for it. Murray’s office, which received nearly \$47 million in 2003, got just \$1 million this year.

The committee has made it clear that ONDCP’s science shop won’t see another dime until Murray is gone, at least from his current job. What happens after that is an open question. (Repeated calls to the ONDCP’s press office for an interview with Murray or a comment on his future prospects went unreturned.) While most drug-policy watchers assume Kerlikowske will kick him out of the chief scientist post as soon as he can, actually firing him is trickier. There are ways to encourage burrowed-in ideologues to quit, however—ONDCP veterans recall that George Bush Sr.’s drug czar, Bob Martinez, used to do it by assigning them to an office with no windows, phones, or computers.

“He’ll be there until somebody runs him off,” Ross Deck, the former ONDCP analyst, says of Murray. “What can they do with him? They can give him a job counting paperclips.”

Charles Homans is an editor of the [Washington Monthly](#).

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31 Responses to “Anti-Marijuana Zealot Still Employed By Obama”

1. [Mike Stroup](#) Says:
[August 26th, 2009 at 12:51 pm](#)

Wish I had a nickel for every idiot on the public payroll. And these are the people telling us how to run our lives.

2. [S. Benetowa](#) Says:
[August 26th, 2009 at 2:16 pm](#)

Too many people know the truth about cannabis's medical efficacy and several thousand year history as a medicine for our government to pay people to spread blatant lies about cannabis.

Obscuring, distorting and/or concealing vital medical information is unconscionable and un-American. Even more unconscionable is the fact Murray gets paid 6-figures to spread fear and blatant lies.

Hopefully, Gil or Barack will collar Murray and assign Murray to the window-less, computer-less room ASAP. And if Gil continues to lie about cannabis's medical efficacy, maybe he can get his special room too.

3. *John* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 2:25 pm](#)

Watching the debate with Murray is absolutely infuriating. It took all I had to make it through the entirety of it. He needs to be fired immediately.

4. *ray* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 2:57 pm](#)

go David Murray go...get the hell out of here....we don't want you any more; you have overstayed your welcome

5. *General-Jake* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 3:36 pm](#)

Dam relic bastard. Representative of archaic and inhumane ideals and beliefs. Like a prohibitionist Frankenstein locked away safely in keep. Id like to lead a pitchfork and torch equiped mob to oust him from his government paid sanctuary.

6. *The Oracle* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 3:49 pm](#)

Murray has definitely got to go. Help him get a job that pays better with a conservative think tank that we can ignore.

(I make plenty of spelling mistakes myself and have let spellcheck change things to the wrong word and missed it so I'm no one to criticize, but as a city boy I believe the expression is to kick someone to the curb, as in put them out on the street.)

Kick him the hell out of the country, along with El Sohly!
Singapore can have them!

Kerlikowske had better show everyone he is in charge, he is running the place and get rid of this prohibitionist. If he doesn't it just demonstrates the the prohibitionists are still in charge and Murray still has enough influence to be calling the shots. If he doesn't change things around, it's a sick and twisted ONDCP version on Animal Farm where Kerlikowske says beforehand that he's going to change things but once he gets in charge keeps things the same for all of us misrerable wretches beneath him while he covers his own ass and serves only

himself and networks to enrich himself with the DC elite.

7. *Benjamin Mann* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 4:10 pm](#)

“kick Murray to the curb,” not “kick Murray to the curve.”
The latter makes no sense.

[**Editor's note:** Thank you!]

8. *Bobreaze* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 4:16 pm](#)

Man 47 million dollars to lie must be nice to work in the government. Now only if we could get real change and stop wasting our resources fighting the devil weed. Then we could spend that extra money on violent crimes, improving education, and bringing the cost of secondary education down to a reasonable level. These are things i support changes that will change the US instead of the same old same old with a new face and name. So whats so funny Mr.Obama you did pot so have millions americans. Stop wasting our money on bad policies it is not funny so I suggest you change your attitude if you want to have my support.

9. *Bobreaze* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 4:17 pm](#)

Edit to my earlier post spend the money catching violent criminals not on them like giving it to them.

10. *Just Legalize It* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 4:48 pm](#)

everyone should watch the ONDCP video at the top of this page! the only thing i dont like about it is that the quality is very poor and you cant read whats displayed from the projector and of course i dont like how insanely cocky and unprofessional David Murray is. I am convinced that if you put David Murray and Allen St. Pierre in a marijuana only debate that Murray would crumble, just like he did after Allen's 3rd question. We need to get this guy out of Washington! Great work Allen and to all at NORML!

11. *Alex* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 5:15 pm](#)

Well... Someone has to kick him to the curb. Why should we have a drug czar trying to protect us from what he knows very little about? He flat out said Marijuana has no medical use, up until people started correcting him reminding him how clueless he is. Hint to the drug czar: Medical marijuana dispensaries exist for a reason, BECAUSE IT DOES IN FACT HAVE A MEDICAL USE. Just from him saying Marijuana had no medical use should of been enough reason to kick him to the curb, considering you have to be pretty clueless to state such a terribly incorrect statement. We need people who know what they're talking about to run as drug czars, not just some clueless dude who hates pot smokers because of his incorrect

beliefs.

12. *scott* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 5:39 pm](#)

wow.. Murray is an asshole. He really believes his bullshit lies.I hope he gets canned in Sep

13. *Mike* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 5:42 pm](#)

Sounds like a good time to flood the ONDCP with letters and emails demanding the removal of Mr. Murray. It's people like this who refuse to understand that what they are doing is causing more harm than good that need a reality check and a pink slip.

14. *mark* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 5:55 pm](#)

Maybe they could assign him the job of researching the use of cannabis through the ages. He did a lot of research about marriage through the years, how about pot through the years. I can't wait to here his science based research on medical uses, food uses, clothing, building materials and all the other things cannabis can be used for.

15. *Anonymous* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 6:15 pm](#)

uhh hello, <http://stallman.org/extra/bills2633.html>

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Senate is poised to pass legislation that would give federal prosecutors new powers to shut down hemp festivals, marijuana rallies and other events and punish business owners and activists for hosting or promoting them. The proposed law would also potentially subject people to enormous federal sentences if some of their guests smoked marijuana at their party or barbecue. It would also effectively make it a federal crime to rent property to medical marijuana patients and their caregivers.

The bill, known as the Reducing American's Vulnerability to Ecstasy Act (RAVE Act), was just introduced in the Senate on June 18th and has already passed the Senate Judiciary Committee. It is moving VERY rapidly and could be passed by the Senate as early as this week. While it purports to be aimed at ecstasy and other club drugs, it gives the federal government enormous power to fine and imprison supporters of marijuana legalization, even if they've never smoked marijuana.

[**Editor's note:** The [RAVE](#) act was passed and signed into law in 2003...about the group it has been used against is....[NORML](#).]

16. *Rick* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 6:21 pm](#)

What a nice guy, that Murray. Perhaps we can have lunch some time

17. *Jed The head* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 7:04 pm](#)

Great example of how fucked up things can get in Washington. You have an asshole in a position and you can't get rid of him. I think he should be sent to help fight the war on the Mexican border. If he really wants to stop drugs that's where all the action is. I don't think it would be a good idea to give him a gun as he might hurt himself or someone else by accident.

18. *tkwelge* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 7:28 pm](#)

This article tries to make it seem like Bush is still in power and if only Obama could get rid of this guy, things would really change. However, what power does this guy have? I mean, if the rest of the department is completely against him, his position should be essentially meaningless. Do you really think, after what we've seen, that Obama has any different a stance on drugs as Bush?

19. *Relax* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 8:17 pm](#)

We won't get it legalized until we all get out and vote for candidates who promise to legalize.....

20. *Vladimir* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 8:45 pm](#)

Fire this fool now! And have Kerlikowsky follow him to. For lying to the ppl! I don't care who you are or what position you have, you should never have the right to lie to ppl the drug czars have lied to us! Both of you should be fired and everyone that's an anti-cannabis! (added by Mobile using [Mippin](#))

21. *Joseph "Ironman" Siler* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 10:13 pm](#)

One can only hope that Murray is a dinosaur, and needs an appropriate job, not counting paper clips, but assessing the scientific value of having paper clips at all. Perhaps he will come up with a reason paper clips are dangerous, and need to be eliminated. We need to be patient, but not complacent.

22. *claygooding* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 10:38 pm](#)

bravo, when you remove this idiot, only about 100 senators and 200 reps to go to remove all the corruption from our system.

23. *Cherokee Fred Jesus* Says:

[August 26th, 2009 at 10:41 pm](#)

How much money do the ones that profit from the war on us. Pay to have a person in this position? That advocates more of

our children be locked up and destroyed. Why don't they use to same money (ours) they use to destroy us and help the few that need help and leave the rest of us the hell alone....

CFHJ

24. [William Beyer](#) Says:
[August 26th, 2009 at 11:43 pm](#)

well may-be he can fire him now for not doing his job in Beverly hills and Holly Wood checking the drug stores where the rich force the doctors to write powerful drugs for them...yes this is right mike jacksons famly should go after the DEA instead of the doctor,just think if they were out thir doing thir jop mike jackson may still be alive today. but instead they pull old people out of bed smokeing weed.some one go to the jacksons and let them know and let them think about it thank you Bill

25. [psychedelic pancakes](#) Says:
[August 26th, 2009 at 11:44 pm](#)

and people believe this propaganda bull shit aswell.

26. [R.O.E.](#) Says:
[August 26th, 2009 at 11:54 pm](#)

Just another tick to be burned off, there are a lot of those in government.

27. [masterkyiron](#) Says:
[August 27th, 2009 at 1:40 am](#)

obama is an usher for the new world order criminals you think he cares about weed as medicine .obama is only for big parma.obama is a liar!

28. [masterkyiron](#) Says:
[August 27th, 2009 at 1:44 am](#)

as the war on drugs is on the people,who do you think is controlling most of the drug trade to pay for there black operations?

29. [ol tex](#) Says:
[August 27th, 2009 at 2:10 am](#)

Reading this today just irritates me. I just lost my job today. I took a really crappy job after being laid off in Feb. from a really good one, spending months on unemployment before taking a job I really didn't want. I am actually glad to be gone. Now I am back out in the market again although I may have a new one to go to (fingers crossed) next week, out of town though, so will have to commute. These Bush idiots ran our economy into the ground and us workers are paying for it. When I read about these guys who can't be fired it makes me angry.

30. [Phil E. Drifter](#) Says:
[August 27th, 2009 at 4:48 am](#)

prison labor replaces slave labor. outlaw what the minorities are using instead of drinking the white man's alcohol. Lock up minorities, stop them from voting. can't have minorities in control, that would distort the WHITE way of life.*

*I in no way endorse this.

But it's a multibillion dollar industry; keeps gun suppliers busy, keeps police busy, keeps minorities in prison.

tinyurl.com/1mn
tinyurl.com/potconviction
half.com/themarihuanaconviction

/burn your wicked garden down

31. *D-Bag* Says:

[August 27th, 2009 at 6:32 am](#)

Make him count the ways in which marijuana has helped millions of people to live better, more productive lives. Basically, his new job should be to undo everything he's done.

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