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Our Nation's New Drug Policy - NOT!

Hey, good news! We've got a new National Drug Control Strategy!

Yup, this "Blueprint for reducing illicit drug use and its harmful consequences in America," as our President described it, was just announced by Mr. Obama and Drug Czar, Gil Kerlikowske.

So we can all breathe easier now. America is sure to make major strides in ridding our nation of this terrible scourge, right?

Not so fast.

While announcing this new strategy, and throughout the companion 126 page report, the administration emphasized its "new balanced approach" to fighting drugs. They referred often to a troika of ideas centered on prevention, treatment and law enforcement.

Don't swallow the spin.

Upon analyzing the "new" plan it's easy to see that it smells just like the same old misguided War-on-Drugs idea we've been waging for decades, to no avail. Just like President Bush's drug plan two-thirds of the 15.5 billion (yes, billion!) allocated by the Obama administration will go to law enforcement. Left in the dust are the ideas that treatment of addicts, education and decriminalizing drugs could help eradicate the problem.

Nearly every year since 1969 when President Richard Nixon first uttered the phrase "War on Drugs" the nation's drug problem has gotten worse. Decades later illegal drugs still pour across our southern border and criminals in our own communities cook up batches of poison to ruin our kids and line their pockets. Every year millions of American families are affected by a relative determined to blot out reality with street drugs. Over-prescribing doctors have assured that

prescription drug abuse is now at epidemic proportions. The Justice Department says drugged driving arrests are now more common than drunk driving arrests. There are more deaths caused by drug overdose than deaths by gunshot. In 16 states more people die from overdosing than die from car accidents.

We pick up the tab for all of it.

Think about it. What we've done for the last 40 years has not worked. So, why would we continue down the same path? 65% of America's drug policy money goes for law enforcement while only about 30% goes for treatment. What would happen if we flipped those numbers and put the emphasis on anti-drug therapy and education?

It worked in Portugal. In 2001 Portugal abolished all criminal penalties for personal possession of drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines. Instead of expensive police operations, trials and incarcerations they offered addicts treatment and long range therapy. Guess what's happened?

According to a 2009 Cato Institute study the overall crime rate in Portugal fell, new HIV infections caused by sharing contaminated needles plummeted and the number of addicts seeking treatment more than doubled. Most compelling: drug use among Portuguese teenagers dropped by about half as education efforts kicked in.

In Canada, Switzerland and the Netherlands similar programs to decriminalizing drugs have met with similar success.

There is clear evidence that removing criminal penalties doesn't create more drug users as many feared. It entices addicts to seek help, it encourages their friends to take them to the emergency room if they overdose, it reduces disease and it keeps kids in school rather than dropping out to join a drug gang. With decriminalization gang profits dry up.

"And if the drug user is getting help somewhere they aren't breaking into your car or home or bopping you on the side of the head for your wallet," says 33 year veteran police officer Major Neill Franklin. "

Franklin is executive director of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, a group of officers who think legalizing drugs is the only way to stop this hideous spend-and-fight spiral we've been in for so long. L.E.A.P. believes, like the prohibition days outlawing alcohol, the American prohibition can never succeed.

Cops, nationwide, will tell you that every day they are overwhelmed with the drug trade's death and destruction. So much of their time, strength and budget are consumed with trying to stamp out drug related crimes, like burglaries and homicides. It's a no-win cycle for the officers and for society.

Imagine if we'd use more of our crime fighting dollars to treat and educate young people that a life of drugs is no life at all. Our concerted national effort to demonize cigarette smoking worked. Using money generated from the tobacco companies and from cigarette taxes the nation was able to change the public's acceptance of smoking until now a majority considers smoking taboo.

"How do you eat an elephant?" Franklin asks. "One bite at a time and then before you know it it's gone ... Same thing can be true with eradicating the drug problem."

What's stopping us from taking a different path? According to Franklin, who has sat at many a negotiating table where possible changes in our drug policy have been discussed, "for many in

the system the way we do it now is their meal ticket. They need to stop being selfish, they need to think about what's best for America."

Now that would be a refreshing new policy.

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