

Common Sense for Drug Policy

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Anti-Drug Media Campaign Even Less Effective Than Drug Czar Admits

Youth Who See Ads More Likely to Use Drugs

Is the Campaign Being Used for Political Purposes?

Washington, D.C.: As Drug Czar John Walters goes to Congress asking for more money for his advertising campaign, research conducted for the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the National Institute on Drug Abuse on the effectiveness of the campaign indicates that it may be doing more harm than good – it may actually be resulting in greater drug use among American youth. The report provides even worse news than the drug czar acknowledged in a preemptive media strike before the report was release.

According to the “Evaluation of the National Youth Anti-Drug Campaign: Fourth Semi-Annual Report of Findings,” while more people are remembering seeing the ads it is either having no effect or is related to increased adolescent drug use. The report states (on page xi):

[The] analysis raises the possibility that those with more exposure to the specific Campaign ads . . . had less favorable outcomes. . . . This was true for the youth respondents who were nonusers and aged 10 to 12 at the start of this phase, with regard to their intentions to use marijuana in the future and for all youth 12 to 18 for their perceived social norms about marijuana use. Girls with the highest exposure to Campaign ads at the start were more likely than less exposed girls to initiate marijuana use. This effect was not seen for boys. This unfavorable association with initiation was also significant for the youngest respondents and for the low risk respondents.

The report concludes (on pages xxx and xxxi):

Unequivocally, there is no evidence yet consistent with a desirable effect of the Campaign on youth. The trends in behavior and in the beliefs that underpin behavior are either flat or, in a few cases, in a direction that suggests that the Campaign is having an unfavorable effect. There is no evidence that those who have been more exposed to the Campaign espouse desired beliefs more than others. . . . In addition, there is a suggestion at least for the 12- to 13- year-old subgroup that those who were more exposed to the Campaign moved toward less favorable beliefs, and for 12- to 13-year-olds and for all girls that they had increased levels of initiation.

Effective Prevention of Adolescent Drug Abuse Requires Investment in Youth Not in Propaganda

The campaign budget is larger than the *entire* \$175 million annual budget for federal substance abuse prevention programs (Center for Substance Abuse Prevention) as well as the entire \$224.9 million budget of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The drug czar wants to pour more money into a failed ad campaign while other prevention programs suffer.

According to Kevin Zeese, President of Common Sense for Drug Policy: “The only proven effective method of preventing adolescent drug abuse is after-school programs for youth. Yet, this is drastically under-funded while hundreds of millions are poured into the failed ad campaign. After-school programs for youth keep kids interested in life, busy with activities that educate and train them and supervised by caring adults. If the drug czar and Congress really want to prevent adolescent drug abuse they would shift the \$180 million in annual spending on the ad campaign to funding after school programs. This would be a huge increase in after school program spending.”

Is the Anti-Drug Ad Campaign Being Used for Political Purposes?

As disclosed in an investigative report,¹ the drug czar’s initial five-year media campaign was developed at a meeting convened in Washington nine days after medical marijuana initiatives passed in Arizona and California in 1996 by then-drug czar Barry Mccaffrey. Minutes of the meeting reveal that some forty officials and private sector executives, including the Partnership for a Drug-Free America – the drug czar’s ongoing partner in the ad campaign – met to discuss the need for taxpayer-funded messages to thwart any potential medical marijuana initiatives in the other 48 states and perhaps even roll back the two that had just passed. They included two policy advisors from the Clinton White House, the head of the DEA, representatives of the FBI, Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Treasury and Education, along with state law enforcement personnel. One private participant was quoted in the meeting’s minutes as saying, “We’ll work with Arizona and California to undo it and stop the spread of legalization to [the] other 48 states.”

A recent report published by the Institute for Policy Studies indicates that the effort continues to use Public Service Announcements to undermine votes favoring treatment instead of prison and other reforms. The IPS report, *The Governor's Sub-rosa Plot to Subvert an Election in Ohio*, available on-line at: <http://www.ips-dc.org/projects/drugpolicy.htm>. The IPS report indicates federal and state officials planned to develop ads, masquerading as prevention and treatment ads, designed to sway the vote in Ohio against reform.

In addition to the scandal of misuse of public funds on political efforts, the ONDCP advertising campaign has been plagued by scandals concerning the misuse of funds by the advertising agency conducting the program and by disclosures that the campaign sought to influence the content of television entertainment and news shows.

Recent ads produced by the drug czar have focused on the supposed links between drug use and terrorism. These ads which have been derided by media reviews, tie the increasingly unpopular drug war to the popular war on terrorism. “These ads seem more designed to increase drug-control budgets than prevent adolescent drug use,” observed Zeese.

“Knowing that alternative prevention methods are more effective, the only explanation for continued federal funding of the failed advertising campaign is that it serves another purpose. Propaganda supporting present policies seems to be that purpose. Before Congress approves more wasteful funding of ineffective ads it must investigate whether the ad campaign is really being used for political purposes – to prop up the failed drug war waged against citizens who are seeking more effective alternatives,” charged Zeese.

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¹ Forbes, Dan, *Fighting "Cheech & Chong" Medicine*, Salon, July 27, 2000.