

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***2006 Drug Czar Conference:
A Reflection on Three and a Half Decades of National Drug Policy***

By Robert DuPont, Institute for Behavior and Health

On June 17th, 2006, the 35th anniversary of President Nixon's appointment of the first White House Drug Czar, CESAR and the non-profit Institute for Behavior and Health sponsored a Drug Czar Conference at the University of Maryland. The one-day meeting of academics and policy experts featured seven* of the eleven men who have served as heads of the White House drug abuse prevention office, each of whom were given time to describe the major events of their appointment and their current thinking about the nation's drug policy. The panels of Czars were creatively moderated, promoting lively discussions within the 50-person group. While it is not possible to fully summarize the wide ranging and varied contributions made by the former Czars and others at the meeting, following are some major themes that emerged. The unedited proceedings of the full day are available on DVD (see box below for ordering information).

- All of the speakers appeared to support a policy of balancing a law enforcement approach to drug abuse (supply reduction) with a commitment to treatment, prevention, and research (demand reduction). There was an active interest in finding ways to make both sides of the policy equation work better together.
- There was no enthusiasm at the meeting for legalizing drugs as a policy option despite the incessant media attention to this "alternative" drug abuse prevention policy option.
- There was a general sense that the national policies that have been pursued during the past 35 years have succeeded in containing illegal drug use to levels far lower than those of alcohol and tobacco use, despite the biological attractiveness of many of these drugs.
- However, there was no self-satisfied sense that the nation had "won" the war on drugs. None of the speakers were entirely happy with all the national drug policies during this extended period of time, and many speakers offered suggestions for ways to improve national drug abuse prevention policies.

The level of civility and mutual respect at the meeting was striking given the often inflamed attitudes that drug policy can evoke. Many new ideas were proposed to improve on what was generally seen as a strong beginning in dealing with the modern drug abuse epidemic, which everyone at the meeting assumed would be an enduring and significant part of the national health and safety agendas for decades to come.

*Drug Czars in attendance: Peter Bourne, Lee Brown, Lee I. Dogoloff, Robert L. DuPont, Jerome H. Jaffe, Donald Ian MacDonald, and Barry R. McCaffrey. Moderators/Panelists: John Ball, Peter Bensinger, David Courtwright, Mark Kleiman, David Musto, Sally Satel, J. Michael Walsh, and Eric D. Wish.

Drug Czar Meeting DVD Now Available

The unedited 6 DVD set of the 2006 Drug Czar meeting is now available for \$95, including shipping. Please email cesar@cesar.umd.edu or visit CESAR's website (www.cesar.umd.edu) for ordering information.

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