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## **Our Drug Policy Is a Success**

### **Workplace tests for cocaine show the lowest use on record.**

By [JOHN WALTERS](#)

Whatever challenges await him, President-elect Barack Obama will not have to reinvent the wheel when it comes to keeping a lid on the use of illegal drugs. Our policy has been a success -- although that success is one of Washington's best kept secrets.

Reported drug use among eighth, 10th and 12th graders has declined for six straight years. Teen use of cocaine, marijuana and inhalants is down significantly, while consumption of methamphetamine and hallucinogens like LSD and Ecstasy has all but collapsed.

The number of workplace tests that are positive for cocaine is down sharply, to the lowest levels on record. Even the sudden spike of meth use -- remember the headlines from just a few years ago? -- has yielded to a combination of state and federal regulations controlling meth ingredients. And abroad, crackdowns in Colombia and Mexico have caused the price of cocaine to roughly double in the past two years.

These results are testament to the efforts and teamwork of men and women who are virtually unknown to most Americans. They include people like community organizer Rev. Richard McCain in southeast Cleveland, who risked his life to drive crack dealers out of his neighborhood; drug-treatment experts like Dr. Johanna Ferman, who developed new ways to reach female addicts with young children in the nation's capital; and principals like Lisa Brady, who instituted a drug-testing program and watched drug use fall like a rock at her Flemington, N.J., high school. They include Nashville, Tenn., Judge Seth Norman, who got tired of seeing the same faces over and over again and decided to found a drug court, where he coaches defendants to stay clean and sanctions them when they fail.

Pundits like to break drug policy down into soft and punitive approaches -- think social worker versus SWAT team. But most successful drug control interventions are impossible to pigeonhole. How to describe, for example, a drug-treatment counselor who works with a police officer and a drug-court judge for the benefit of her patient? Pundits debate endlessly whose funding should be cut and whose should grow -- whether money should flow to middle-school teachers or narcotics detectives -- when the truth is that different approaches reinforce one another.

Children are the prospective drug users of tomorrow, so the role of parents and educators in keeping them away from drugs is obvious. But just as important is the law-enforcement mission of keeping drugs away from kids, and giving the addicted that first push into a drug-treatment program.

Overseas seizures make life easier for all. It should be pretty obvious that when the Coast Guard seizes, as they did last March, a one-month supply of cocaine destined for the U.S. market from Colombia, availability on U.S. streets is going to suffer.

Some people believe drugs such as cocaine and heroin should be legal, sold by the government and regulated like alcohol. Our experience with alcohol (some 127 million regular drinkers as compared to fewer than 20 million drug users) suggests this would be a huge mistake. It is hard to imagine an aspect of American life that would be enriched by millions of new cocaine, heroin or marijuana users.

The good news in drug policy is that we know what works, and that is moral seriousness -- an unpopular term that is nevertheless immediately understandable to any person whose family member or loved one has struggled with addiction. Cutting through the evasions of a dependent drug user takes the right blend of confrontation and tough love.

Society conveys the dangers of drugs to young people through the right mix of parental concern and legal strictures. And driving down the availability of dangerous drugs requires all the skills of agencies such as the DEA and local law enforcement. None of these approaches can work if drugs are simply legal.

Mr. Obama will be called upon for leadership in many areas, including this one. He will not lack for advice by those who want to take money from hard-side to soft-side approaches. Hopefully when he makes his first decisions he will think about Rev. McCain, Judge Norman and Ms. Brady, and how much less effective their work would be in isolation.

**Mr. Walters is director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.**

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