

FROM GEORGE BUSH, A CONVINCING DECLARATION OF WAR ON DRUGS

The *National Drug Strategy* (NDS) announced last week by George Bush is a major turning point in America's war on drugs. For the first time, a national anti-drug effort is unambiguous in stating priorities. In contrast with past efforts from both the executive and legislative branches, including both the 1986 and 1988 drug bills, the NDS proclaims that the top priority in fighting drugs is to shore up the criminal justice system. The plan calls for tough, certain punishment for drug dealers and measured response penalties for users. Other strategies, including treatment, education, and interdiction, are recognized as important — but the plan emphasizes correctly that none of these can be effective unless America restores the rule of law in its cities and holds drug users accountable for the damage they cause society.

When taken together with the Administration's proposals for combatting violent crime, the NDS constitutes the largest increase in resources for law enforcement in the nation's history. The crime package, which has languished in committee since being sent to Congress this May 15, would expand use of the federal death penalty, reform *habeas corpus* procedures to streamline appeals by state prisoners, create a "good faith" exception to the exclusionary rule and, perhaps most important, allocate nearly \$1.5 billion in fiscal 1990 outlays for construction of 24,000 new federal prison beds (an increase of nearly \$1 billion over fiscal 1989). The crime package also includes funding increases for U.S. Attorneys to combat drug rings, court expenses in dealing with offenders, and for the pre-release drug testing of federal prisoners.

Crucial Role for States. In addition to these initiatives, NDS would double to \$350 million the amount of federal assistance for state and local law enforcement activities. It would increase funding for security patrols in federally funded housing projects from \$8 million to \$50 million. And, it requires the states, as a condition of receiving federal criminal justice funds, to introduce comprehensive drug testing programs for all arrestees, as well as prisoners, parolees, and those out on bail.

While some lawmakers have criticized the NDS for suggesting that states expand their anti-drug abuse activities and spending, the fact is that states must play the crucial role if America is to prevail against illegal drugs. States cannot sit on the sidelines and ponder whether or not to join the war effort — they must be full participants in the campaign. The NDS recommends to state governments possible actions for combatting drug use: increased prison construction, minimum mandatory sentences for serious drug crimes, seizure of drug-financed assets, and revoking driver's licenses for those convicted of possessing drugs. But with the

exception of a requirement on states to introduce drug testing in their criminal justice systems as a condition of receiving funding, there are no specific incentives or general requirements in the NDS for states to take tough action.

While the NDS clearly places greatest emphasis on domestic law enforcement, it also offers important proposals for eradicating the drug trade abroad, interdicting drugs entering the U.S., educating Americans about the dangers of drug use, and treating and rehabilitating those Americans who have fallen prey to drugs. But rather than simply pouring more money into old programs, the NDS recognizes that interdiction and education are secondary to policies aimed at cutting the use of drugs by Americans. In addition, the plan wisely links funding to specific actions to curb use. Example: funding for schools and colleges is made conditional on those institutions introducing "drug-free campus" programs. Example: funding for drug treatment programs is contingent upon the adoption of drug testing in such programs as a means of assuring that beneficiaries actually stop using drugs; participants in drug treatment programs currently are not required to stop using drugs.

Setting New Priorities. Liberal congressional critics of the President's plan make their reflexive claim that his initiative will require a tax increase or an across-the-board cut in the federal budget. But Bush correctly insists that what is really needed to win the drug war is for Congress to set new priorities in the massive \$1.2 trillion federal budget. Bush should challenge lawmakers to go on record and choose between voting dollars for the drug war or voting:

- ◆ ◆ \$50 million for free mailings for congressmen to aid their reelection;
- ◆ ◆ \$150 million for the National Endowment for the Arts, whose programs benefit primarily the wealthy;
- ◆ ◆ \$500 million for the Rural Electrification Administration, which continues to exist and find ways to spend money even though 99 percent of all rural Americans now have electricity;
- ◆ ◆ \$3 billion on cotton, dairy, honey, wool, and peanut price supports, which mainly benefit wealthy agribusinesses;
- ◆ ◆ \$500 million for that portion of the school lunch program which subsidizes lunches for children from middle-class families.

The Bush Administration has declared war on the drug trade. Drugs are challenging the economic and social foundations of the entire nation, and are destroying the country's poorest neighborhoods. The National Drug Strategy serves notice on drug users, as well as drug suppliers. Congress should applaud that tough, realistic approach to the problem, and move swiftly to move resources from less important federal programs to fund the war.

Jeffrey A. Eisenach
Visiting Fellow

For further information:

Jeffrey A. Eisenach, "Winning the Drug War: What the States Can Do," Heritage Foundation *State Backgrounder* No. 715/S, July 7, 1989.

Stephen Moore, ed., *Slashing the Deficit, Fiscal 1990* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1989).