

Nova Law Review

Volume 11, Issue 3

1987

Article 9

The National Strategy-An Overview

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Abstract

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KEYWORDS: illegal, drugs, society

The National Strategy — An Overview

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I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the use of illegal drugs in the United States has spread at an unprecedented rate and has reached into every segment of society. Illicit drug use is, in my view, the most serious social as well as law enforcement problem facing the United States today. As the chief federal prosecutor in the Southern District of Florida, I deal on a daily basis with the impact of the illegal drug trade on the federal criminal justice system.

This paper will briefly summarize the Administration's National Strategy for Prevention of Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking promulgated in 1984. Before I discuss the national strategy, I would like to provide some statistics illustrative of the impact that drug abuse and trafficking has had on the criminal justice system in South Florida.

South Florida's drug trade has been documented in every major publication and television network in the country. It has been featured in numerous articles and television stories. South Florida is the point of entry for more than 80 percent of the marijuana and cocaine imported into the United States from South America and the Caribbean.

In large part, as a result of this trafficking, the federal courts in South Florida are faced with a burgeoning caseload that is larger than in any district in the United States. The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida indicts more cases involving more defendants than any other district in the United States. Today, we have pending for trial more felony defendants than the Southern District of New York (New York City) and the Northern District of Illinois *combined*. Almost fifty percent of this extraordinary caseload is drug related. The violent nature of this problem is made apparent by the fact that this district also has the dubious distinction of having the largest number of weapons violations in the United States.

At the outset, the Administration recognized that in order to successfully contain the drug crisis, a systematic approach would have to be employed. It was simply not enough to rely on law enforcement or

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even the resources of the federal government alone. An interdisciplinary and intergovernmental strategy would have to be devised.

III. The National Strategy

The National Strategy promulgated in 1984 goes beyond Federal responsibilities and establishes a comprehensive national strategy where all individuals; all business, civic and social organizations; all levels of government; and all agencies, departments and activities within each level of government are called upon to lead, direct, sponsor and support efforts to eliminate drug abuse in the family, businesses and communities.

The Strategy is a comprehensive approach aimed at reducing the availability of illicit drugs and reducing the adverse effects of drug abuse on the individual and society. The five major elements of the Administration's drug program are:

- Drug abuse prevention through awareness and action;
- Drug law enforcement;
- International cooperation to control narcotics;
- Medical detoxification and treatment; and
- Research directed at causes, treatment and understanding.

III. Drug Abuse Prevention

Drug abuse prevention — through awareness, education and action — is the key element for success in stopping drug abuse and drug related crime in our society. Prevention must begin with public awareness of the problem, an understanding of what can be done to improve the situation and a willingness to do something about it. The prevention strategy includes educating young children to actively resist drug-taking behavior and convincing those of all ages who are currently involved in drugs to stop.

In the past four years, community groups have recognized that their involvement is essential to combatting drug abuse. Spear-heading the national effort are organizations such as National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth and National Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education, Inc. In addition, organizations have been formed at the state and local levels in practically every state.

IV. Drug Law Enforcement

The drug law enforcement strategy is designed to destroy criminal

drug trafficking networks, both international and domestic, and to intercept and eradicate illicit drugs enroute to consumers. Effective drug law enforcement reduces the availability of illicit drugs in the United States, deters drug-related crime and, most importantly, creates an environment favorable to the implementation and development of long-range programs to eliminate the production and abuse of illicit drugs.

The intensified effort has involved a number of interlocking parts: (a) an expanded interdiction effort; (b) increased efforts to identify, penetrate and prosecute major international and domestic narcotics organizations; (c) increased efforts to target, penetrate and prosecute the major money laundering enterprises which enable foreign narcotics cartels to launder and remove billions of dollars from this country; (d) increased investigation and prosecution of foreign officials from source and transshipment countries involved in the international chain of drug smuggling; (e) intensified prosecutive efforts in the area of violent crime inexplicably tied to narcotics; (f) increased investigation and prosecution of officials and political corruption; and (g) increased emphasis on the forfeiture of narcotics dealers' assets, including cars, planes, boats, real property and proceeds.

Because no single agency — be it state, local or federal — can successfully deal with the enormous and unprecedented law enforcement tasks spawned by drug trafficking, the Administration in 1984 created the thirteen regional Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces. These regional task forces bring together the various federal agencies who deal with narcotics law enforcement problems. Different agencies are now working together under a single organizational structure to provide better communication and coordination. Each agency draws on the special expertise of the other to attain our ultimate goal of putting an end to narcotics trafficking. Equally important, federal, state and local law enforcement are closely working together to insure that our scarce resources are utilized as effectively and efficiently as possible.

V. International Cooperation

The Administration has implemented a foreign policy that vigorously seeks to interdict and eradicate illicit drugs, wherever cultivated, processed or transported. The international effort is an integral part of the total effort by the U.S. Government to stop drug abuse by reducing both availability and use of illicit drugs in the United States. Fundamental to the overall supply reduction efforts is the elimination of ille-

gal drugs as close to their source as possible. The major gains will be realized in the longer term by reduction in the availability of illicit drugs.

There have been significant achievements during the past five years. Key source countries have acted to stop drug trafficking. For instance, major law enforcement and eradication efforts have begun in Colombia; Pakistan has taken steps to gain control over the outlying opium-producing areas; Thailand's military forces have attacked opium traffickers on the border areas of their country; and, closer to home, the Bahamas has been working closely with the U.S. Coast Guard to assist in the interdiction of transshipments of narcotics passing through that country's waters.

The United States is also encouraging foreign governments to control cultivation, production, and refining of illicit drugs. To assist them in narcotics control, the U.S. Government is providing aid for crop control and other law enforcement activities, complemented where appropriate by development activities.

VI. Medical Detoxification and Treatment

The National Strategy recognizes that detoxification and treatment of individual drug abusers is a critical element in the comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing the effects of drug abuse in the United States. These treatment programs, in part funded through matching grants, have been directed at overcoming the physical problems of drug addiction and providing psychological and social counseling to help the individual drug abuser live without drugs.

The treatment strategy is based on:

- Recognizing the existence of a national network of drug treatment programs and establishing referral systems;
- Continuing the evolution of effective drug and alcohol treatment delivery systems by encouraging the states to allocate an appropriate level of funding based on local needs and priorities;
- Seeking less expensive, more effective treatment alternatives;
- Integrating drug and alcoholism treatment services into the general health care system;
- Encouraging private industry, religious groups, private organizations and state agencies to work together to support treatment programs; and
- Promoting drug-free treatment programs.

VII. Research

Research, carefully planned and widely undertaken, will reinforce all efforts to prevent, treat and control drug problems.

The research strategy emphasizes:

- Investigating the biological interaction between the combination of marijuana and alcohol and between other drugs and alcohol;
- The development of chemical agents that will block or change the expected psychological effects of a drug or provide pharmacologic support during treatment;
- The development of an effective system to monitor the composition and potency of illicit drugs;
- Longitudinal and other epidemiological research to expand knowledge of drug and alcohol use patterns, risk factors and long-term health consequences;
- Basic research on the biological and psychological determinants of drug and alcohol abuse;
- Studying the effectiveness of prevention and treatment approaches; and
- Stimulating interdisciplinary research which allows the integration and analysis of data from the criminal justice system, social sciences, biochemistry, etc.

VIII. Summary

The strategy outlined above represents a comprehensive program geared to reducing drug abuse in the United States. The program relies on the integrated and cooperative efforts of federal, state and local governments, as well as on the close involvement of the private sector — through the business community, social and civic organizations, and volunteers. No one piece of this effort is the panacea. Drug abuse is a national epidemic and despite the record number of seizures, arrests, and prosecutions, drug availability remains high.

There are some who say that this effort is already lost and we ought to give up. I believe that the stakes are too high for us to take that attitude. We are dealing with the lives and well-being of our children — this country's future. Moreover, we must continue to refine and develop new methods to deal with this national problem. We must keep reminding ourselves that this is a long term project that began only a few short years ago. The problem has developed over the past two decades and it is only in the past few years that we have recognized that

there is a crisis which needs a comprehensive long term approach. There have been successes as well as failures in this effort. However, I believe that a combination of efforts outlined in the National Strategy can diminish our drug problem.