



1623 Connecticut Avenue NW; Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: (202) 293-4414
Fax: (202) 293-8344
Web: www.SchoolsNotPrisons.com
Blog: www.DAREgeneration.com

Eliminate the Wasteful *National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign*

In 2007, Congress appropriated \$99 million to fund the Office of National Drug Control Policy's National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, which features ads claiming that using marijuana supports terrorism, causes people to shoot their friends in the face, run over little girls on bikes, and become pregnant. While ONDCP continues to claim their anti-drug ads are an important tool in the fight to reduce youth drug abuse, scientific studies have repeatedly shown the campaign to not only be an ineffective waste of taxpayer money, but that the ads may actually *increase* pro-drug attitudes and drug use by teens.

What's Wrong With the Media Campaign?

It is ineffective and may actually cause more teen drug abuse

A series of scientific evaluations of the ads' effectiveness – funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse – have repeatedly called into question the wisdom of maintaining the campaign, finding “little evidence of direct favorable campaign effects on youth” and that “effects were consistently in an unfavorable direction, i.e., higher exposure leading to weaker anti-drug norms. In addition, there may have been a significant unfavorable effect of exposure from the Marijuana Initiative period on initiation of use, i.e., higher campaign exposure leading to higher rates of initiation.”¹

Similarly, a 2006 Texas State University study found that “exposure to [ONDCP's] anti-marijuana advertising might not only change young viewers' attitudes to more positive toward this substance, but also might directly increase risk of using marijuana.”²

Obviously, these findings don't bode well for the campaign's continuation, as they directly contradict its stated justification of reducing youth drug abuse. ONDCP went so far as to attempt to prevent the public release of NIDA's 2004 evaluation until compelled to do so by an August 2006 Government Accountability Office report detailing its results.

The ads backfire because the messages don't resonate with young people. Not surprisingly, teens react negatively to the ads' misleading and alarmist messages. Young people want to know the truth about the effects of drugs and their real risks, but ads that obviously exaggerate and stretch reality are offensive to teens and turn them off to ONDCP's overall anti-drug message.

It is expensive

ONDCP has spent more than \$1.5 billion on the campaign since it was first authorized in 1998. Groups like the National Taxpayers Union, Citizens Against Government Waste,³ and Taxpayers for Common Sense⁴ have criticized the campaign's excessive spending and lack of results. Even the 100-member Republican Study Committee in the House called for the campaign to be

¹ <http://www.nida.nih.gov/DESPR/Westat/>

² Maria Czyzewska. Explicit and implicit effects of anti-marijuana and anti-tobacco TV advertisements. *Addictive Behaviors*. May 3, 2006.

³ http://www.cagw.org/site/DocServer/Drug_Report.pdf?docID=1661

⁴ <http://www.taxpayer.net/drugreform/intro.htm>

completely eliminated, finding that doing so would save taxpayers \$631 million over five years and \$1.3 billion over ten years.⁵

The White House Office of Management and Budget gave the campaign a rating of just 6% for results and accountability, finding that it has “little or no direct positive effect on youth behavior and attitudes.”⁶ Nonetheless, President Bush requested \$130 million to fund the program for FY2008. Congress has repeatedly warned ONDCP to produce results with the campaign or lose funding.⁷ But while appropriations declined 47% between 2001 and 2006, the program will receive increased funding under the president’s FY08 request unless Congress acts.

In 2006, GAO recommended that “Congress should consider limiting appropriations for the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign beginning in the fiscal 2007 budget year until ONDCP is able to provide credible evidence of the effectiveness of exposure to the campaign on youth drug use outcomes or provide other credible options for a media campaign approach.”⁸

ONDCP has notoriously mismanaged the campaign

In addition to being criticized for its ineffectiveness and costliness, the campaign has also been mired in controversy over a number of other issues:

- * In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, ONDCP spent \$4 million to run two controversial 30-second ads linking drug use to terrorism during the 2002 Super Bowl, angering even longtime allies like the Partnership for a Drug-Free America.
- * In 2005, the Government Accountability Office found that ONDCP illegally used campaign appropriations to produce and distribute “covert propaganda” in the form of fake TV news stories featuring actors posing as reporters, which aired on nearly 300 television stations and reached 22 million households nationwide.⁹
- * Due to ONDCP’s lack of a competitive bidding process, advertising executives contracted by the campaign were indicted for conspiring to defraud and over-bill taxpayers.
- * In 2000, ONDCP was caught giving financial incentives to TV networks in exchange for altering their programs’ scripts to include anti-drug messages.
- * The campaign has been criticized for its obsessive focus on marijuana. None of ONDCP’s recent ads have even mentioned other drugs like cocaine, heroin, or alcohol.
- * ONDCP has been repeatedly accused of using their taxpayer-funded ads to illegally advocate against citizen ballot initiatives and state legislation that would reform current drug policy.

Solution: Cut Funding From the Financial Services Appropriations Bill.

There are many deserving programs that aren’t adequately funded, but are actually effective at reducing youth drug abuse and keeping teens out of trouble. The \$130 million that President Bush has requested for the ineffective and harmful media campaign in FY08 would be much better spent elsewhere.

For more information, please contact Tom Angell with Students for Sensible Drug Policy at (202) 293-4414 or tom@ssdp.org, or visit <http://www.SchoolsNotPrisons.com>.

⁵ http://johnshadegg.house.gov/rsc/RSC_Budget_Options_2005.pdf

⁶ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/summary.10000356.2005.html>

⁷ U.S. Congress, Conference Committees, 2003, Making Further Continuing Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2003, and for Other Purposes, conference report to accompany H.J.Res. 2, H.Rept. 108-10, 108th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 2003), pp. 1345-1346.

⁸ <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06818.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.gao.gov/decisions/appro/303495.htm>