

## Drugs – Threat to National Security

*J. Dennis Hastert\**

Let me begin by thanking those who have worked so hard to organize the Second International Symposium Against Drugs. I'd like to specially thank those who serve on the organizing committee, including AIDS Information Switzerland and Swiss Physicians against Drugs. I would also like to thank everyone in this room, both doctors and world leaders. Each of you is engaged in the critical fight against drug abuse, drug-related crime and international drug trafficking.

It is a privilege to be here in the company of so many well known experts from Switzerland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada, the United States and elsewhere. I would also like to extend special thanks to Dr. Haller for so thoughtfully planning a tour, on Friday, of the Swiss heroin projects.

Before I get into details, let me begin with a few general observations.

First – America and Europe are both under siege from international drug traffickers. Equally disturbing, we are facing a the well-financed drug legalization movement. That's the bad news.

The good news is that this conference could not be better timed. This is the year, the day, the hour – when we must stand together – as men and women of conscience, to say without equivocation that drug abuse and drug-related violence have no place in a healthy, safe and moral society.

Second – before I move into a discussion of national security, let me say just a word about drug legalization.

Proponents of drug legalization are, at best, a dangerous and misguided crowd. For many, it is an elaborate game, a way to retaliate against those who condemn drug-using behavior. For others, legalization is a means of achieving other ends – undermining moral values and democratic institutions, turning profits by expanding the user population, or creating new industries around the maintenance of addiction.

\* Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security, International Affairs and Criminal Justice, Congress Member for the Illinois District, Speaker of the House of Representatives, USA

Whatever the motivation, drug legalization is wrong-headed and destined to hurt those societies which indulge the instinct to experiment with the most vulnerable segments of their population, including their children.

So let's be clear about this legalization idea. Even being charitable toward those who promote such experiments, these promoters seem to forget basic facts.

They forget, for example, that drug abuse always and everywhere follows drug availability. They forget that there will always be more users trying drugs when there are more drugs to try.

This is clearly the experience of the United States. Between 1992 and 1995, the Administration experimented with reduced drug interdiction. The result was more drugs inside our country, and more kids trying those drugs. In 1994, there were three quarters of a million more teenagers using drugs than in 1992, a reversal of the 1981 to 1992 downward trend.

By contrast, between 1985 and 1992, when the United States was firmly committed to halting the inflow of drugs, casual teen drug use fell dramatically. Regular drug users fell by 80 percent, from 5.8 million to 1.3 million. Crack use declined from nearly a million in 1990 to just over 300,000 in 1992 and marijuana use plummeted from 22 million regular users in 1985 to 8.5 million in 1992, a 61 percent fall. That is what can happen when a society is serious about turning back the tide.

Legalization promoters also forget that the number of addicts invariably rises with the number of casual or experimental users. In the United States, as casual teen drug use rose after 1992, so did addiction.

Legalization advocates forget that the political leadership of a country that embraces legalization is also teaching its children a dangerous lesson. I was a high school teacher for 16 years, and I know kids. Kids are not stupid. They know if the adults in their lives are giving consent or expressing disapproval. They need and want limits set, even if they occasionally test those limits. When there are no limits, they respond accordingly.

If someone is looking the other way and letting them get high, they know it. If society legalizes drugs – in any measure – kids get the message: Society cannot then turn around and say this drug abuse is okay but that drug is not okay. Kids know hypocrisy when they see it.

Finally, legalization promoters forget three other terrible and compelling facts. First, a drug overdose, for example by heroin, is not a simple or sterile, quick or painless event. It is a horrible, choking, suffocat-

ing event. The lungs fill with liquid in a lung oedema, and the person – often a child – slowly chokes to death. Second, they forget that there will always be a black market for drugs that are more pure than those being made legally available, and there will always be those who cannot get the drugs but want them.

Finally, most drug-related crime is not between dealers or gangs. Most is committed by those on drugs, so called “pharmacological crime”. Up to 70 percent of U.S. state prisons are filled with criminals who committed their crime on drugs; legalization only increases this population.

However, let me turn now to the heart of the matter, national security. This is the third big area I want to discuss.

I chair the subcommittee in the U.S. Congress responsible for oversight of the U.S. drug war. This includes oversight of prevention and treatment programs, as well as law enforcement and international supply reduction efforts. By no coincidence, this is the Subcommittee on National Security, International Affairs and Criminal Justice.

In America and increasingly in Europe, public complacency and indifference by the media are permitting drugs to erode public security, personal security, and – ultimately – national security. We must all recognize the enormity of the threat.

This threat to our societies comes from the international cartels in Colombia and Mexico, who export literally hundreds of millions of tons of heroin, cocaine, crack and marijuana annually. But the threat also comes from within. In the United States, we have been timid about confronting it on both fronts.

In Europe, just as in the United States, we are accustomed to thinking about national security – and threats to national security – in traditional ways. When I say, for example, that America and Europe face a national security threat – and we do – most people think of bombs and tanks, espionage and intercontinental ballistic missiles, maybe theater nuclear weapons. They do not think of hypodermic needles filled with 90-percent pure Burmese or Colombian heroin. They do not think of crack or LSD, THC or methamphetamine.

When I say that the world’s leading democracies are in the jaws of an insidious national security threat – and they are – most people think of spies and uniformed soldiers, body bags and conventional warfare.

The truth is different. Often, the most serious threats are those that masquerade as solutions or mere distractions. In my view, the legaliza-

*Dennis Hastert*

tion initiatives popping up in California and Arizona, like efforts here in Europe, are the Trojan Horses of the 21st Century.

My message, and I have been holding continuous hearings on the drug problem in America, is that this is not a game or a harmless distraction. And it is certainly not a solution. The drug cartels are sophisticated, and they welcome the legalization movement.

This is a war, and the traffickers and legalizers are intentionally slipping a Trojan Horse within the gates. On the whole, we in the United States have been too complacent. We have underestimated the organization and power of this 40 billion dollar annual industry – the power to corrupt, the power to kill, the power to destroy the heart and soul of our societies.

We have underestimated the threat for a simple reason: Drug traffickers and promoters are not the sort of threat that we are used to responding to. They do not wear uniforms or come in battalions. Instead, they often come with stealth, and inject society under the shroud of darkness.

But let's get to the heart of it. This adversary is well financed, powerful, and violent – at its source and wherever it is allowed to take root. It kills more people in one year than died during the entire Cold War. Last year, in the United States last year, this underrated adversary killed more than 10,000 children.

On a personal note, I come from the heartland of America, from Illinois, and my brother works in a public school. Already this school year, he has buried two of his students – from drugs and drug related crime. In my congressional district – one of 435 – six children have already died in 1997 from drugs and drug-related violence.

On the national level, the numbers are stark. Over the past three years, we have witnessed a 200 percent increase in drug use by America's children – kids between 8 and age 17. The price of dangerous drugs has fallen by several magnitudes as availability has increased. Street purity of cocaine, heroin and marijuana have all jumped to record levels. All this because we let down our guard between 1992 and 1995, and have been slow to see the national security implications.

This year, for the fourth year in a row, a national reporting system by U.S. hospitals called DAWN (the 13 Drug Abuse Warning Network) showed record-level emergency room admissions for cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, and THC or marijuana. In 1995, overall drug-related emergency room episodes jumped 12 percent. Cocaine-related episodes leaped up 21 percent. Heroin-related episodes skyrocketed 27 percent.

THC or Marijuana-related emergencies are up 32 percent. This is the result of purity that is 25 times greater than in the 1970s and also the lacing of marijuana with PCP. Methamphetamine emergencies were up 35 percent. In short, drugs are destroying young lives in record numbers.

So, the crisis is here. This crisis is as real as World War II's air battle over Britain, when Winston Churchill called on his nation to respond. It is as grave a national security threat to the generation which must follow as the threat that animated the French Resistance to act. The difference here is that this threat is insidious – it is slow-growing, like a cancer that metastasizes below seemingly healthy skin.

We are united by our heritage and our respect for life, and we must now jointly recognize this threat and move. That is the core of my message. The definition of national security will always be a threat to the health and safety of any nation. Today, what has changed is the nature of the threat.

We must respond. We must see the Trojan Horse is slipping, even now, between our gates – and turn it back. We must recognize that drugs fund the crime and dissolution of all that is best about Europe and America. They criminalize our banking and commercial systems. They finance

terrorist groups from Russia and the Middle East to Peru and Colombia. And they undermine the future we wish to pass on to our children.

In closing, I must say that I have now been to the drug producing and shipping nations of Burma, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Panama, and Mexico. I have seen what we are up against, and travelled into the jungles where coca and poppies are grown and processed. I think we have a mighty adversary to confront in those nations.

But I also think we have a mighty adversary to confront here and in America, on our own home turf. Together – we must recognize this adversary for what it is – a grave threat to our national security – and we must resolve to act.

In my view, we do have time. If we work together, even as Europe and America cooperated to win the Cold War and cooperated to keep our societies free in World War II, we can prevail over those who are seeking to spread drug trafficking and legalization.

There will be those who seek to dissuade us in our efforts, to trivialize the creep of this rising tide, to praise the beauty of the Trojan Horse. But my closing hope is that we will not be misled or deceived – not for long – that we will see this national security threat for what it is, and will respond with all the energy that will be needed to respond.

Thank you.