

Drug Policy: A 21st Century Approach to Reform

Jane Harman:

-- or the Lincoln Memorial, the Wilson Center is the living memorial to our first internationalist president. Chartered by Congress in 1968, it is the United States' key, non-partisan policy forum for tackling global issues. Our goal here is to build a global brain trust, a network that generates actionable ideas and prepares the next generation of leaders for the policy challenges ahead.

As many of you know, the Wilson Center recently -- not so recently -- joined forces with NPR to create a public event series, which we call "The National Conversation." Note that we call it "The National Conversation," not "The National Debate." We feel very strongly that people should have conversations around the tough issues.

The quality of the debates -- the quality of the discussion during our last few NATCONs has been truly spectacular. Our audience engaged with leaders like General Keith Alexander on cybersecurity, Graham Allison on the relevant lessons on the Cuban Missile Crisis on its 50th anniversary, and Henry Kissinger on China's once-in-a-decade leadership transition and its implications for the U.S.

Today I am very pleased that we are hosting an event that tackles one of the most pressing issues the world faces: the international trade of illicit drugs. At the center, we have dealt with drug policy primarily in the context of our work on organized crime and growing insecurity in Latin America. And I'd like to recognize Cindy Aronson, who's talking in the corner, with the red jacket, who runs our vaunted Latin America program; and also Eric Olson, who is a star of our highly regarded Mexico Institute. For example, in January 2013, Cindy Aronson and Eric Olson, along with Andrew Seeley, who was the head of our Mexico Institute, now heads -- is our vice president for programs, published a report that analyzed the causes for the marked spike in criminal activity in Mexico and Central America's northern triangle, while assessing the effectiveness of U.S. policy responses to date. This report included actionable recommendations to policymakers in the hopes of addressing the underlying problems that make these regions incubators for criminal organizations and extreme violence.

The most recent worldwide threat assessment published by the Director of National Intelligence, Jim Clapper, labeled drug trafficking as a major transnational organized crime threat to the United States. In fact, South American drug traffickers and Middle Eastern militant groups like Hezbollah, and I would certainly add al Qaeda and the Taliban, are becoming increasingly intertwined. It was reported yesterday that two Lebanese money exchange houses helped launder funds for drug traffickers.

Illicit drugs cost tens of billions of dollars each year in destroyed lives, lost incomes, and economic opportunity, widespread violence and insecurity, and environmental damage. Illegal drugs also generate enormous profits that corrupt governments, undermine democracy, and fund violent organized crime. These impacts are observed all over the world, from Atlanta to Afghanistan, from Argentina to Guinea, and beyond. The international community led by the U.S. has spent billions to stop the cultivation, processing, trafficking, and consumption of illegal drugs. These efforts have been sincere and determined, but the results are paltry. And having been to -- myself, as a member of Congress, to Afghanistan many times, I cringe at the thought that the poppy trade is booming.

The question is, "What can be done that would be more effective? What kinds of reforms are needed to lessen the risks and threats posed by illegal drugs?" Simply pursuing a war on drugs doesn't seem viable or cost-effective, given what's come before. Our prevention and treatment options, viable alternatives -- is decriminalization or legalization an option? Well, a couple of states of the United States think so. Is there a middle ground between staying the course and legalization?

Our speaker -- our keynote speaker is a man I've known for some time, Gil Kerlikowske, currently the director of Drug Control Policy, aka the drug czar at the White House. Gil is the former chief of police of Seattle and knows firsthand the damage caused by illegal drugs. He also knows that the "war on drugs" motif is outdated and inaccurate, and he has worked hard to promote reforms to drug policy that are more effective.

As part of these innovative efforts, just yesterday -- what a coincidence in timing -- the White House released the 2013 National Drug Control Strategy, which emphasizes less

incarceration and more diversion, treatment, and prevention. The strategy also calls for a renewed focus on reducing consumption in the U.S., which would weaken drug trafficking organizations in Latin America and reduce the violence they produce.

Given the recent news, it's timely that today we are joined by a rock star panel of experts to help us explore the options and possibilities after our drug czar's talk. Tom Gjelten, who covers global security and economic issues for NPR, will introduce our other terrific panelists and moderate the discussion. And, no, I'm not going to call Tom Mr. Martha Raddatz. Not one more time. I will not call Tom Mr. Martha Raddatz, and I will salute him publicly for his astounding coverage and personal stamina last Friday during the horror at Boston. If you tuned in to NPR, you heard Tom Gjelten.

It's now my pleasure to introduce Gil Kerlikowske, who is at the forefront of the issue, and I think -- I don't know whether I need to provide more background about Gil, but I think we have enough. And you're all familiar with him, and he will now make some keynote remarks. Welcome to the Wilson Center, Gil. It's lovely to see you.

Gil Kerlikowske:
Thank you, Congresswoman.

[applause]

Few years ago, I wouldn't have needed these, but now -- well, listen, first of all, let me thank the congresswoman, not only for the introduction but also to her and the staff here at the Wilson Center. It's really an honor to be here. For my four years in this job in particular, you know, I follow very closely the writings, the analysis, the comments that the staff has made throughout the Western Hemisphere on these issues, not only around drug issues but around safety and security. And it's also a great honor to be with Tom and Scott and the ambassador, later on, on the panel, and I look forward very much to that.

And as the congresswoman mentioned yesterday, we did release the National Drug Control Strategy. I know you all have copies, and you've read it thoroughly since it was out yesterday, but it's an important blueprint for the federal government because it's the president's strategy for how we

should deal with our drug problems, how we should spend our money, where should our focus be, what should we be doing. And it actually has the force of law behind it in directing the federal government, but I think, just as importantly, has a huge amount of influence both nationally, because so much of the drug issues are dealt with by our state and local governments, but also internationally, because we have a very excellent group of people that have worked very hard to put together what really is a comprehensive strategy.

And it's important to provide some context about how this administration views drug policy, but also how we see drug policy reform. You know, I was confirmed four years ago, when the time has gone by just incredibly fast. The first week, I think I did an interview, and I said, "Look, this war on drugs issue is just a terrible analogy to use. It is just such an inappropriate bumper sticker to what is such a difficult and complex problem, and it wouldn't really define the approach that the Obama administration wish to take. I chose to banish the phrase, although it still continues to live on. We seek to reduce the drug use and the consequences of drug use, and that analogy -- that war analogy -- is just incredibly misleading.

As a police chief, actually, I never used the drug war analogy, and actually I didn't ever hear many of my colleagues, ever, around the country. In fact, if I thought about one phrase that they often used it was, "We can't arrest our way out of this situation," meaning our drug problems. And I say that as somebody's that's spent four decades in law enforcement.

Well, unfortunately, today our nation is really involved in this counterproductive ideological debate over these extreme visions of drug policy in America. On the one side, those insisting that this outdated war on drugs law enforcement-centric approach -- building more prisons, more mandatory sentencing, arresting more users -- that's one side. Now, on the other side are the groups selling legalization as a silver bullet solution to the drug problem, promising to fill state coffers with increased tax revenue and downplaying the impact on public health and public safety. And predominantly what we're talking about here with drug use is a public health problem.

Truth is that neither of these extreme approaches is -- it's not guided by experience, it's not guided by compassion, but, most important, it's not guided by science. And the true nature of substance use and substance disorders really is guided by science and guided by medicine.

So this administration decided to reform the path and move to a third way, one that very clearly balances public health, law enforcement, and international partnerships. And the third way is rooted in the drug addiction is a disease of the brain. Addiction can be prevented, can be treated, and people can recover. The decades of scientific research from the National Institutes of Health and others have demonstrated this time after time. And the strategy acknowledges that while law enforcement is always going to play a vital role in protecting communities and protecting families from drug-related crime and violence, the drug problem is more than just a law enforcement issue. And the strategy highlights the historic progress that has been made in achieving drug policy reform in these last four years. And the strategy begins with an emphasis, quite clearly, on prevention. We know that preventing drug use before it begins, particularly among young people, is the most effective way to reduce drug use and its consequences in America. And the researchers concluded that every dollar invested in specific, evidence-based substance use prevention programs in schools has the potential to save up to \$18 in the costs that are related to substance use disorders later on. And that's why the 2013 strategy calls for national- and community-based programs; for example, our drug-free community support program to prevent substance use in schools, on college campuses, and in the workplace.

Strategy also points to an important public health role that the professionals play. Health care professionals have the opportunity to intervene in substance use disorder early, before it becomes chronic. Addiction is a progressive disease. Most people see their physician or their health care professional about once a year. So early detection and treatment of a substance use problem by a health care professional is an essential element in the public health approach to drug policy, that's why it's so important that we think about this, also, as part of primary care, not being some separate silo away from the other public health concerns.

The strategy emphasizes drug treatment because treatment works and it saves lives. And the Affordable Care Act, or ACA, provides for substance abuse and mental health benefits that will be included as part of the health insurance plans. And the fact that the President's 2014 budget requests an increase of \$1.5 billion for treatment and prevention programs over the 2012 amount -- that's the largest requested increase in two decades.

And the ACA is the most significant piece of drug policy reform in generations. By expanding insurance coverage, it extends coverage for addiction treatment to millions of Americans who now can't afford it and don't get it. Treatment isn't -- shouldn't be a privilege limited to those who can afford it; it should be a service to everyone who needs it. And with this in mind, the strategy outlines steps to support implementation of the Affordable Care Act in providing treatment. And because of our renewed emphasis on prevention and treatment, the United States is also providing more than just military aid in support of our counter-drug efforts across the world.

And during these last four years, as I've had that opportunity to travel the world on behalf of the administration, we often export and work together with other countries on a variety of treatment and prevention programs, although too often the popular myth is that we're only interested in securing that border to keep drugs out. We actually have some of the world's finest research and prevention and treatment.

We also have some of the best research in building up community capacity because the work gets done at the local level, no matter where you are on the globe. Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America -- they're known as CADCA -- have funded -- they have been funded to do training and technical assistance to community coalitions since 1992. And in the past seven years, the international interest in these kinds of programs at the local level has really surged. They now operated, in fact, in 16 countries and on three continents.

We're providing international support for treatment, also. In Afghanistan, for instance, where 90 percent of the world's opiates are grown, where drug consumption is a great threat to the future of the country and its people,

the United States government directly supports 64 of the country's 82 drug treatment centers. And by partnering with foreign governments to invest in the health and future of the young people in these countries, we also lay the groundwork for increased international stability.

Well, as you're all aware, we're engaged in confronting violent, transnational criminal organizations. The drug legalization lobby often suggests that criminal operations would be significantly reduced or diminished if government would just legalize and regulate the sale of drugs like marijuana and cocaine. You know, I wish that solution to this complex problem -- this simple solution was actually -- would work. But, of course, it won't work, just like any simple solution to a complex problem.

And the research backs that up. In 2010, the RAND Corporation found that Mexican criminal organizations derive less than a quarter of their revenue from marijuana sales in the United States. And last year, a distinguished journalist, Alejandro Junco from Grupo Reforma, made another compelling point, that dominating the cartels that established territorial control -- it turns out that most of the profit from what they do is engaged in selling protection, stealing from Pemex, kidnapping, et cetera; extortion, piracy, prostitution. These are criminal organizations, and even if one part of their revenue stream is reduced or cut off, there's no belief on my part -- having spent a good bit of time on this, there's no belief on my part that they're going to suddenly turn to some legitimate enterprise.

The profitability of drugs is actually quite low compared to the profitability of many of their other activities. So the suggestion that legalization would reduce transnational organized crime is a fallacy, and it's a distraction from the hemispheric efforts to dismantle violent transnational criminal groups through strong government partnerships. And the government partnerships have really yield some extraordinary results, especially in Colombia where a decades-long effort between the United States and Colombian government has freed Colombia from the grip of violent drug trafficking organizations.

And as citizens of really what we are, an interconnected global community in human history -- the biggest global community -- interconnected global community in history --

we know that it is so important to support peace and stability across the world, and that's why this government is so committed to international partnerships that reduce both the demand and the supply of illicit drugs.

Well, that's the big picture, but, as I mentioned before, our drug policy is based on the knowledge that addiction is a disease that can be prevented in treatment and treated and people can recover. It's based on policies designed to support the health and well-being of people. It's premised on a pledge that government will support evidence-based solutions to substance use disorders that work, and it's a drug policy that's -- one that is global, and it addresses, really, a spirit of shared responsibility.

There's no silver bullet solution to these drug issues within the United States or anywhere else in the world, and the problem is complex and it requires a sophisticated solution, yet the administration is confident that a balanced, strategic approach to the drug problem -- one that emphasizes public health and effective international law enforcement -- cooperation is one that will work.

And we're not working in a vacuum. At an international summit on drug policy that I attended last June in Peru I made many of these same points. I encountered near-unanimous support for this balanced approach. And at that summit, representatives from more than 60 countries were clearly on board with these ideas. With the level of international consensus, I'm confident we're going to continue to build and strengthen partnerships domestically and abroad to reduce both drug use and the consequences.

And I thank the Wilson Center for hosting me, and I look forward to this panel. Thank you all.

[applause]

Male Speaker:
Thank you, Ambassador.

Tom Gjelten:
Well, hello, everyone. I don't know what this is. I don't think I need this.

Gil Kerlikowske:
The ambassador will be speaking.

Tom Gjelten:

Oh, I see. Okay. Yeah, by the way, Ambassador Pita will be speaking in Spanish, and for those of you who do not understand Spanish, you should raise your hand -- we can do that right now -- and a headset -- if you haven't picked one up already, a headset will be delivered to you. So, just keep your hands up until you get your headset or when they come around make sure that you get your headset.

So, I'm Tom Gjelten and it's -- on behalf of NPR, it's my pleasure to be moderating one more of these terrific National Conversations. They've been hugely successful. It's a great collaboration between NPR and the Wilson Center, and thank you, Congressman Harman, for promoting it.

We do have a distinguished -- you've already met Mr. Kerlikowske, and then we have Ambassador Carlos Pita from Uruguay, and Ambassador Pita has a distinguished career not only in his country's foreign service, but also in collaborating with the United States on drug enforcement policies. He was instrumental most recently, and most importantly, I would say, in reestablishing the Drug Enforcement Administration's presence in Uruguay. And before that, he was active in Uruguay and Congress and was president of the Committee on International Affairs, where he had been a member for 14 years.

Daniel Mejia is director of the Research Center on Drugs and Security at the University of the Andes, which is a very prestigious university in Bogota, in Colombia, and also president of the government of Colombia's Advisory Commission on Drug Policy. So, Daniel is a real expert on the way the Colombia government has addressed drug trafficking. And as Director Kerlikowske said, Colombia has been a real success story in recent years. I remember my first foreign assignment as a Latin America correspondent was in Colombia in 1987. It was a time when many of us were really pessimistic about the future of Colombia. It appeared it was on the verge of becoming a narco-state. So Colombia is a real success story.

And Scott Wilson, a distinguished former foreign correspondent for The Washington Post, a former assistant managing editor for Foreign News, and now chief White House correspondent for The Washington Post. And one of the

interesting things about Scott that makes your presence here today important, Scott, is that you were most recently at the Summit of the Americas Conference. Was it Summit of the Americas in Cartagena?

Scott Wilson:
That's right.

Tom Gjelten:
When hemispheric drug policy was, of course, a big issue. So, again, a really terrific panel. I do want to begin, Director Kerlikowske, with one domestic political question, and I think it's important, and then we'll get it out of the way, but I think it's probably on a lot of our minds right now. You mentioned --

Gil Kerlikowske:
I wonder what it --

Tom Gjelten:
You probably have the answer already. One-point-five-billion -- you're requesting \$1.5 billion increase over 2012 for drug treatment. And you also reference this ideological debate between the law enforcement folks and the other folks. And there is a -- clearly a lobby for a hardcore enforcement approach. How hard is it going to be to get the money shifted -- resources shifted -- from that enforcement approach to a drug treatment approach in this environment of sequestration?

Gil Kerlikowske:
I think the important part about all of this is that when we first talked about, saying, "Look, this War on Drugs analogy is just so inappropriate," people warned me and said, "Oh, you should be very concerned because it's the third rail. You will be charged with being soft on drugs or, heaven forbid, soft on crime." It's a little hard with four decades of law enforcement experience to be either -- to have either of those charges.

And we -- one of the enterprising reporters said, "Well, you know, that's maybe what he says, but I'm not sure that's actually true." So he called six police chiefs around the country, and all said, "No, it's not a war on drugs, and we really need to invest more in treatment." Once you have that kind of support from prosecutors, police chiefs, sheriffs, and others, and the fact that even our

most conservative governors throughout the country are reducing their incarceration rate, we know that we can still keep communities safe, we can give drug treatment, and we can do it for less money than keeping people locked up. And so it seems like a very common sense answer to that part of the problem. So we'll push hard for it.

Tom Gjelten:

Common sense answers may be common sense but doesn't mean it always get funded, does it?

[laughter]

We'll see about that.

Gil Kerlikowske:

Yes.

Tom Gjelten:

So, Ambassador Pita, Director Kerlikowske made some statements about the international support for this U.S. policy of emphasizing treatment over enforcement. As a former Latin American correspondent -- and Scott was, as well -- I know there were many, many complaints in Latin America that the big problem is consumption in the United States -- not supply of drugs, but the demand for drugs. Would you say that -- do you detect an important change in this administration's approach in terms of that dichotomy between supply and demand?

Carlos Pita:

I have the sensation that -- first I wanted to tell you something: in Uruguay, we have in the current administration and in the previous one, the same political party as this one. And in the previous administrations of different parties, we have an approach to the problem based on public health and human rights. We never agreed with the War on Drugs slogan. We always expressed our dissent as far as the efforts that have been made focusing too many resources on [unintelligible] combat, so to say, and very few on [unintelligible]. We are in disagreement with some of the foundations that have been applied. And I appreciate and note the large, to a degree, emphasis [unintelligible] in the [unintelligible] of health; approaching this from a reduction of damage, prevention, and from an education, treatment, and rehabilitation standpoint. But I can't share the opinion with respect to

the eventuality of good results by regulating the market of some substances. In other words, we are, in Uruguay, in the middle of a process in which the executive power and the president of the republic, as well as the majority of the Parliamentary Commission on Drugs, believe that it is time to experiment with regulating the market of one of the substances; in this particular case, marijuana, with the objective of seeing if we can reduce many of the problems that illegal commerce, linked with felony and organized crime, generates for society and for consumers. In addition, Uruguay does it because it has a totally different problem than the northern countries, in particular North America, but also in Europe.

Interpreter:

-- particularly in North America, but also in Europe.

We have a level of consumption of a product that is made from the residuals, or waste, of cocaine production. Here it's called "cocaine paste." And the household survey last year shows a very low level, but the estimates of hidden consumption -- this is a drug that is used by the poorest sectors of society. There's a 1.1 percent prevalence level throughout society, or society-wide. But what happens? This cocaine paste -- well, the drug traffickers, the criminals, are beginning to mix it with marijuana.

Cocaine paste is acutely destructive substance. Marijuana has negative health effects but it is infinitely different -- absolutely different.

So we have two concerns. Organized crime, working with the marijuana market, and with the cocaine paste in the poorest sectors, and that there would be a coming together of consumption of cocaine paste, which is pure poison, which is mixed with and leads to consumption of marijuana mixed with cocaine paste.

Now, since there's no agreement -- that is to say, I don't have agreement on that aspect with Mr. Kerlikowske, but in Uruguay, we're not agreed on it, either. So, there's not even agreement on this particular path within the government party. I say this with my heart open. There's not agreement.

So what do we do? The president, the executive branch, and the parliamentary commission -- or committee -- began a

process of public hearings. Five large hearings have been held that are open to members of society. In coming weeks, it is estimated that 30 public hearings are going to be held, with participation of the government, the private sector, the citizenry at large, from the health sectors, university sectors, academics, and the public in general -- parents and youths -- to try to take stock of what the country's opinion is on the subject.

The president of the republic believes that it would be worth experimenting with having market regulation of marijuana and see if it yields the results that one hypothetically could expect it to yield. But without any -- there's no being convinced ahead of time that whenever being absolutely certain that this is going to be the solution.

Gil Kerlikowske:

-- [inaudible] -- explaining his country's -- or his party's, or his own, approach to drug policy seems to focus on some factors that are unique to Uruguay. For example, the problem of using cocaine base -- or paste -- in a mixture with marijuana and also the involvement of organized crime in marijuana trafficking, as well. And so for that reason, that sort of explains why his government is interested in experimenting with some regulation of the marijuana market.

My question is whether the factors that he describes in Uruguay, in that sense, are -- can be seen throughout Latin America, or does each country, in your view, in Latin America, sort of have its own unique problems in confronting the drug problem.

Daniel Mejia Londono:

First of all, I think that the problem is divided in Latin America. I think in the south you have -- most of the problem is drug consumption, not production, trafficking. And in the north, in Peru, Bolivia, probably is in the middle, but in Peru, Bolivia, and also Central America, Mexico, although drug consumption has been rising, the main problem still is drug production, trafficking, and, most importantly, violence. And this is, I think, the main factor that led former presidents of Latin America, like Cecil Garvedia [spelled phonetically], Fernando Cardoso, and Ernesto Zedillo to run the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy, but during the last year we've seen

many acting presidents, many sitting presidents, asking for an urgent debate on what works, what doesn't, and at what cost, in terms of drug policy, for the Latin American countries.

And I think most of the debate is explained by the fact that Latin American countries cannot continue paying the cost of a policy that has failed. I mean, I don't think that the 50,000 homicides in Mexico recently or the 420 homicides for 100,000 individuals in Colombia, in Medellin, in the peak of the war against Pablo Escobar justifies anything. And I think the call -- it's an urgent -- a respectful, but an urgent call to the U.S. and to Europe to hold a debate about Latin American countries continue paying the cost of the war on drugs.

Of course, Colombia has received \$600 million per year during the last 10 years for Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia has been extremely successful in reducing violence, no question about that, but in terms of reducing the supply of drugs I think the results are not so good. Colombia has been recently successful after 2008, when we stopped -- not stopped, but diminished the amount of aerial spraying of coca crops and put more emphasis on interdiction. There was a large reduction in supply in Colombia, but at the regional level, coca crops went back to Peru and Bolivia. The labs that are used to process coca leaf into cocaine moved to Venezuela and to Ecuador, where actually they find gasoline -- where gasoline is less expensive. And the basis of operation of drug cartels moved to Central America and Mexico.

So at the regional level, we haven't done much, and I think it's time to evaluate what has been reached, at what cost, and I think that the debate that President Santos is calling for, President Calderon, the former president of Mexico called for, Guatemala, many Central American countries, is a respectful but urgent call to see if we can find more effective policies that are less costly to Latin American countries.

And I think this is fair. I think Mexico cannot continue putting the homicides so that less drugs reach the U.S. and Canada and Europe. So, we need to have a debate -- an open debate based on evidence, detached from ideological positions or religious positions, and evaluate the evidence in the same way that -- I do fully agree with Director

Kerlikowske that there is a lot of evidence -- a lot of research evidence in the U.S. about what works in treatment, what works in prevention, but we cannot ignore that in Latin America we have produced a lot of evidence about what works in reducing supply. What amount -- to what extent drug policies lead to more violence?

And I think we should take into account the other part of the market, which is the supply part of the market, and try to find the more effective policies to confront the problem that is going to be with us forever. I mean, it's a myth that we're going to cut to zero the demand for drugs, but we need to find more effective policies not only for the U.S. and Europe, but for Latin America, as well.

Tom Gjelten:

And, briefly, do you think that this new drug policy, which has just come out yesterday, is -- how important a step is it in the direction of promoting that very debate that you say is so urgently needed?

Daniel Mejia Londono:

I think it's a good initial step. Personally, I would like to have seen a more aggressive change in the policies. I do agree with less enforcement and more treatment and prevention, but in Colombia, in Mexico, we need to see less spraying and more development, less repression and more focus on reducing violence, and I would have liked to see more of that in the document that was presented yesterday.

Tom Gjelten:

Thank you. Scott, I have a couple of questions for you that probably should go to Director Kerlikowske, but knowing he's on a hot seat, it might be easier for you to deal with them than him.

[laughter]

Gil Kerlikowske:

That's right

Tom Gjelten:

The big issue, domestically, politically, has been marijuana. I read the other day that now -- talking about how many, you know, 20 states or something like that are now started moving in that direction. How big a problem does -- is that -- from your point of view as a White House

correspondent, how big a problem is that for this administration in term -- and I'll let Director Kerlikowske to talk about it, as well, but to what extent does that sort of overshadow, you know, the need to sort of come up in the policy how to deal with these states like Washington and California that are legalizing marijuana, you know, when there are still federal crimes against it? How is the administration dealing with that?

Scott Wilson:

It's -- awkwardly at the moment. They're not quite sure what to do, I think, in terms of going after some of those referenda. The Justice Department examined some of these things, but after they were passed, we all asked right away, "What are you going to do about these -- this movement to legalize?" And it was unclear at that point what to do. And Director Kerlikowske can speak better to this, but from a perspective of being in Cartagena, for example, you have -- the problem with U.S. drug policy in Latin America writ large has long been a sense of hypocrisy, from their point of view.

Director Kerlikowske's comments, though, you know, with the emphasis they're placing on consumption demand in the United States really flips from 10 years ago what the emphasis would have been. The proportion that he spent talking about treatment compared to eradication was basically the opposite when I was working in Colombia 2000, 2004.

But with states -- so, but there's still, though -- it's a difference between what they're hearing from the United States and what they're seeing in the United States. Addressing treatment, consumption is one step. But while the United States may express some angst over President Mujica's move in the marijuana market, they're seeing -- they keep hearing, "Eradicate. This won't work," and yet you have states legalizing marijuana. It's not coherent to them, and it's harder to build political consensus around some of those -- against some of those ideas, the experimenting that Uruguay's doing.

Some of the issues raised by President Calderon and President Perez Molina, the first two sitting presidents at the time to really call for a serious discussion about legalization. And, like Director Kerlikowske, who has great credibility with law enforcement, these were two not-

soft-on-drugs people. These were, you know, more right than left, certainly on that issue, and began to raise these issues running up to the Cartagena summit, largely because they took office. Calderon had been in office five years by the time he spoke at the U.N. to talk about moral obligations and to cut consumption.

The problem was much bigger than they realized. And I think they're still trying to figure out what exactly the United -- what direction the United States is going to take domestically before it really begins to tell publics that legalization isn't a good idea.

Tom Gjelten:

Well, Director, a couple of points here that I'm sure you're anxious to respond to. One is Ambassador Pita's explanation of his government's reasoning in doing this experimentation in the marijuana market and also, as Scott says, the -- how do you present a coherent and rational explanation of your policy to your neighbors when there seems to be kind of a disjointed approach taken here in this country between states and the feds?

Gil Kerlikowske:

I think the ambassador's explanation is really quite helpful and quite useful. And I certainly understand, looking at the problem of cocaine paste, because we have gone through the crack cocaine issue, just as Brazil is going through that significantly now, but I think the point that I would make, that I would push back on with the ambassador, is about the regulation, that you'll be able to actually regulate the market. And our experience in the United States -- and believe me, every country is certainly free to make those choices and those decisions that they do, but our experience in attempting to regulate the use of alcohol or to regulate the use of tobacco, I don't think anybody sees as particularly successful.

We're not able to keep one of the most controlled substances in our country out of the hands of children, and that is our very powerful prescription pain killers. Those are highly regulated, highly taxed, highly controlled for market to consumer, and yet we have over 16,000 deaths just from the painkillers alone. So the regulation issue is a very difficult one.

I think on Scott's point, he's very much right. One of the great difficulties I have in explaining to my counterparts, particularly in the Western Hemisphere, is our federation and the fact that we have a certain number of states that are able to put propositions or initiatives in front of the voters. And at one time, those initiatives had to be based upon a number of signatures that could only be gathered voluntarily. But once that restriction was lifted, and you could pay for people to gather the signatures, during my nine years in Washington State, I saw a rather large number of bizarre initiatives that would actually be in front of the voters. And when you receive a voter pamphlet to explain things to you, and it's over 100 pages long, you know, I'm not so sure every voter goes into the level of detail. All of that on the Justice Department's positions are questions that the Department of Justice, of course, will answer. But on the public health approach, we think that this middle ground of moving toward a much better approach to education and public health will be helpful. Legalization is not a good answer to a public health problem.

Tom Gjelten:

You've made that point persuasively, but you're not -- do you want to offer a kind of a personal view on this issue of whether the federal government should stand in the way of states that want to --

Gil Kerlikowske:

No.

[laughter]

Tom Gjelten:

[unintelligible] --

Gil Kerlikowske:

But it was very well done.

[laughter]

Tom Gjelten:

That accounts for something. Well, Ambassador Pita, Director Kerlikowske, in his initial comments, pointed out that this idea that you can sort of weaken organized crime groups by legalizing marijuana is based on the idea that marijuana trafficking is important to those groups. You

made that same linkage in your remarks, that there is -- one of the reasons that your government is going down this path is in order to weaken these organized crime groups. What about this idea that that may not be a fruitful way to go?

Interpreter:

The thing I'd like to say is that it's very difficult if you have four people seated talking about these issues. It's very difficult for all four to have reached agreement. It's practically impossible. Second, in Uruguay, the main substance consumed is alcohol, followed by tobacco, then psychopharmaceutical products -- so psychoactive pharmaceutical products. They're all treated or regulated differently. Some are repressed and the others are relatively regulated.

Marijuana is the main illegal substance that is consumed. And the experience is that there has been a sustained gradual increase in consumption in recent years. We look at household surveys and marijuana, as reflected in a household survey, gives you reliable data.

We are fearful that this issue could become contaminated with cocaine paste. I think that everybody who is here is a specialist, but there's a world of difference between cocaine paste, and you don't have this problem. Here you don't have it. Cocaine paste is made with the residuals, or residues, of cocaine. It's diluted with kerosene, a petroleum by-product, and other organic solvents. And it has a brutally addictive effect, which has multiple killing of neurons. Each time you consume it, it kills a large number of neurons, a much larger number the second time, and so forth, all very quickly after a very short time.

The issue in Paraguay, we say that there's about 1.1 percent prevalence. In Argentina, it's much greater. Brazil has a very serious problem. So it's a very different situation.

We have practically no problem with cocaine because it's a drug that does not provoke serious public health problems. And the percentage of consumption is not very great. What we need to do is focus on the problem that we have.

Now, how do I know that regulation doesn't work? For the substance -- well, it's not of any use for me to make a

comparison with tobacco. We repressed it very harshly. We are perhaps the country that has most harshly repressed tobacco, and we've had great success in reducing consumption. We tested it out, and it worked out. It might not have worked out, but it did. And there is a certain worldwide consensus that repressing tobacco is a way to diminish tobacco consumption, and so much so there's a multimillion dollar lawsuit against -- by Philip Morris against Uruguay for adopting these public policies. Alcohol situation's like here. And consumption is more or less the same.

Now, what we're looking at is marijuana and not wanting it to become contaminated by cocaine paste. First, because the people who consume marijuana just -- marijuana of quality with -- who are on record with the Ministry of Public Health as being users, and this is not for some kind of tourism-type experience, moving away from other experiences. And we're consulting this. It's something that we're talking about, because there's not a consensus. As I say, it's very difficult to talk about drugs in general and the regulation and legalization and reach consensus. There is no such consensus. Each substance is different.

Alcohol has nothing to do with cigarettes, with marijuana, with cocaine paste, with cocaine. We practically don't have synthetic drugs, but with amphetamines, it's all different. Each drug requires a particular analysis. That is the discrepancy that I have with Mr. Kerlikowske. It's impossible to say that anyone at work -- and here it's not the case, either. We just don't know.

Tom Gjelten:

-- [inaudible] useful for our audience to -- [inaudible] -- distinction here. Ambassador Pita says you guys don't know how serious a problem this smoking this cocaine paste is. Director Kerlikowske, you did compare it to crack, and maybe you could just give sort of a quick explanation of the -- of what is the ambassador talking about when he talks about cocaine paste? And how is it different from crack cocaine?

Gil Kerlikowske:

As I understand what the ambassador is saying, is that the cutting agents that the -- that are used to make the cocaine paste, which is very powerful and goes to the brain

very, very quickly through the inhalation with the marijuana -- and we've seen that with PCP here, also laced marijuana -- is that the cutting agents are so incredibly powerful and cause so much of the neurological damage. And he mentioned some of the more common and more available cutting agents, like kerosene.

Tom Gjelten:

Right. And that -- and that's more potent even than smoking crack cocaine.

Gil Kerlikowske:

You know, I actually wouldn't -- I couldn't tell you the difference, but I certainly agree with the ambassador on the damage.

Tom Gjelten:

Okay. Moving on, Daniel, it caught my attention that you, even speaking from a Colombian point of view, think it's important to sort of keep a focus on the supply side, because we used to hear in Colombia, you know, 10 years ago or 15 years ago, when I was there and probably Scott, as well, you know, there seemed to be much more of a focus in many of those countries that it's all -- it's demand, it's demand, it's demand. Is there a sort of new thinking now in your country and in some of the other countries that maybe it is time to really focus on the supply side?

Daniel Mejia Londono:

Well, my point is that, although consumption has been increasing in all Latin American countries, my point is that the main problem still for most of the countries in the region, especially in the northern part of South America or in Central America, is that illegal armed groups that are linked to drug trafficking. That's my point. It's not that I'm pushing for more supply reduction efforts. On the contrary, I think we should think of wiser ways of confronting supply instead of focusing only on supply, because it's the market trends associated with this illegal market that creates the large amount of violence that we see in Latin America. Look, producing one gram of pure cocaine in the jungle of Colombia costs \$2.5. That gram, that's \$25,000 per kilogram. That kilogram in the Pacific of Colombia, once it leaves the labs, costs anything between \$4,000 and \$5,000. When it reaches Mexico, it costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000. When it

crosses the border, it's \$35,000. And in the streets in the U.S., it costs anything between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

So it's the market trends -- the large market trends associated with illegal drug trafficking what makes these groups fight as hard as they can to control the business, to kill policemen, to kill each other, to corrupt the system, et cetera. So I think the best contribution that the U.S. can do to Latin America is to reduce the demand for drugs. Why is this so? Because it would reduce the size of the market. It would shrink the profits in this illegal business, and basically it would reduce the amount of funding that these groups get to create violence. And that's why I think most Latin American countries also push for ways to not only reduce the demands -- the demand for drugs in the U.S., in Europe, et cetera, but also we keep -- we have to keep fighting, not necessarily the illegal drug trafficking, but the violence associated with illegal drug trafficking. As long as drugs remain illegal, there is going to be violence and we have to stop violence. And that's what I think most of us in Latin America have been focusing on.

Tom Gjelten:

To what extent are the coca growers -- I know the coca growers were sort of an important base of support for Evo Morales in Bolivia. What about more broadly? Are the coca growers a political force in your region?

Daniel Mejia Londono:

Not in Colombia. Not in Colombia.

Tom Gjelten:

No, not in Colombia --

Daniel Mejia Londono:

Not in Colombia. In the region, in Bolivia, it's a different situation. In Colombia it's not a big political force and they don't get reach out of this -- out of cultivating coca. They actually get less than the minimum wage out of cultivating coca. The real guys making profits on this industry are the traffickers. Not even the producers; I mean, \$2,500 for a kilogram of cocaine is not that much. Actually, we've done the calculations, and in Colombia the amount of resources that enter Colombia -- the Colombian economy out of the drug -- cocaine production and trafficking business is around \$8 billion. That's 2.5

percent of GDP. That's the largest industry in Colombia. But -- although it seems like a small number, it's 2.5 percent of GDP concentrated in the hands of illegal armed groups, creates a lot of damage to the countries.

Tom Gjelten:

Scott, you were in Colombia. You were -- when you were in Latin -- covering Latin America for The Post, were you actually based in Colombia?

Scott Wilson:

I was based in Bogota, yes.

Tom Gjelten:

In Bogota from 2000 to 2004.

Scott Wilson:

2000 to 2004. So the first two years of President Pastrana, and the last two of President Uribe.

Tom Gjelten:

Right. And you were back for the Cartagena Summit last year. Have you sort of stayed with this -- you know, kept an eye on this story? And I'm curious what trends you've seen over the last 15 years.

Scott Wilson:

A bit, not as much as I would have liked, but I still have a lot of friends there and I've traveled back several times. And I would say to 1987, even as recently as 2000/2001, a lot of us feared for Colombia's future. There were 18,000 members of the FARC under arms, 15,000 to 25,000 paramilitary groups fighting for the trafficking routes, fighting for control of the coca fields, in the south in particular. And it -- right up around Bogota, the FARC was very close. It was a very -- and had their cleared area in the south where peace talks were taking place that did not result in anything.

So it was a very sort of dire situation when I was first there. And the -- one thing that struck me, and that I was reminded of in -- with Director Kerlikowske's remarks was the United States does see its drug policy as supporting peace and stability, I think is your words, and I believe that. There is a difference, though, in -- there's a disparity between our interests and obviously the Colombian government's interests, to take Colombia in particular.

Stability is upset by eradication. And there was -- particularly when I was there, there were large, industrial-sized coca farms in the south in particular, which were fairly easy to spray. That was impoverishing to a lot of the local coca growers, and caused a great deal of unrest, who -- as Daniel said, they were growing largely at the behest -- at the -- at gunpoint by the FARC or the paramilitaries, depending on who controlled regions.

And it was also more lucrative, I won't dispute that, than the yucca and rice and other things that they were trying to grow. My understanding, though, is that -- and it happened even while I was there -- those large farms broke into small ones. It became extremely hard to hit those plots with spray, and so you started spraying food crops more and more, and you got real foment, which helped the insurgencies, which helped the paramilitaries, and which upset Colombian stability and spiked violence quite a bit.

Those are the -- still is, I think, some of the conflicts that take place and some of the challenges that Daniel highlighted and that the Director highlighted. And yet there has been a -- you know, as Daniel traced the profits, I believe that the armed groups there -- paramilitaries have been demobilized, broken into de facto drug gangs, I suppose, even if they were largely that when I was there. But they don't have as much money, and I suppose that is one reason, not only playing Colombia -- the military training component of playing Colombia really taking grip and taking hold and becoming a much more professional army and anti-guerilla force, but also fewer profits for the FARC, which even when I -- while I was there, was increasing dependent on an assortment of fronts that it had in the drug-producing areas and were largely drug trafficking operations.

Tom Gjelten:

Director Kerlikowske, Scott's comments sort of underscore what is a reality in terms of policy challenges in this country in a wide variety of areas, and that is that sometimes policy goals in different sectors of government policy can conceivably come into conflict. He mentioned how a focus on eradication can sort of jeopardize the social and political stability and economic stability in a country. Classic interagency question for you: how do you -- in this administration, and you in the Office of Drug

Control Policy, how do you deal with these potentially conflicting policy goals?

Gil Kerlikowske:

Well, I think that -- and I agree very much with what Scott has said, that the perception for quite a while has been that you're interested in providing us with spray and planes and paraguay [spelled phonetically] and information for one reason, and that is to keep the drugs out of the United States; to keep them away from our children. And in turn, we would come back with the discussion that it's much more important now, in these last four years in particular, for us to be able to talk about this issue as not just a shared responsibility for us to reduce our consumption, because our consumption of cocaine, for example, is down by about 40 percent, and that's only in the last six or so years. So we actually think we've made great progress in this country on cocaine consumption reduction. And that's by every measure, and we have a number of measures.

But it's also important that the United States, because about 85 to 90 percent of the drug treatment research in the world is conducted or paid for through NIH, is that we also be able to export to these other countries the important things that we have learned from treatment and the important things that we have learned from prevention. And I had mentioned that our methamphetamine consumption, as a country, is down a great deal.

So I think it's important for people to recognize that the shared responsibility -- which I think both formerly Secretary Clinton, the president have really admitted we have to do more, and that's what his policy is doing to reduce our own consumption. But we also have to do more to be able to help, because every other country that I have visited, and now I have visited a number of countries, there is no one immune from a drug consumption problem, whether it was in Guatemala City or in other countries. And so, really, we're kind of all in this boat together, and the less kind of finger-pointing that we do and the more recognition that we should be taking this very balanced approach with all of our neighbors I think is probably -- would be -- have the potential to be a very successful program.

Tom Gjelten:

I have a question -- another question for Ambassador Pita, and then I'm going to open it up. We have about -- we got a little bit late start, so I'm going to really try and kind of keep this to our original timetable. But one thing we haven't talked about, Ambassador Pita, is your role in helping promote the establishment of a office of drug enforcement administration in Uruguay. And, of course, President Mujica is a pretty interesting individual: former political prisoner, correct? And famous for his very modest lifestyle. And, you know, in the sort of pantheon of Latin American presidents he's often considered to be more on the left side. And yet his administration, with your assistance, helped get drug enforcement administration established in Uruguay. How much of a challenge was that? Is -- was that -- did you have to overcome some political arguments to doing that? And why was it important for your government to take that step?

Interpreter:

Thank you for the question, Tom, because otherwise there might be some confusion. Actually, we have a cooperation policy on fighting drug trafficking, asset laundering in seeking to fight drugs with an excellent relationship with the United States and with Colombia. Just a few weeks back, we received an outlay on -- to fight asset laundering to Uruguay through the Department of Justice. It's a two-way program and we also have a cooperation with Colombia where the Colombian government is helping us out a great deal.

The progress that's been made in Uruguay is in the National Drug Board. There we have a head who coordinates everything, and it -- this is an office under the president of the republic. The pro-secretary of the president is there and the head of the anti-asset-laundering commission. And they coordinate inter-ministerial action that brings together all of the ministries involved in this: health, education, interior, security, defense. And there's wide range in cooperation at all levels, in this particular case with the United States.

But I'd like to reiterate, before -- under our previous president, Tabare Vasquez, who was elected by a leftist coalition in Uruguay, in -- under the Vasquez administration, this work was continued and enhanced. And under the administration of President Mujica, we are continuing along the same path. Fighting crime has no

ideology; it's a fight against crime. And we've made a great effort as a country to cooperate along those lines and to actively fight crime, and we've met with many successes thanks to the cooperation, the assistance, and our determination.

What we have done is to raise this issue a short time ago at the 56th meeting of the U.N. Commission, noting that Uruguay is studying taking the step of regularization or legalization, because we want to see if that helps. So that would be the substantial difference that we have. We're convinced that it would be worthwhile -- not all of us are, I say, but we are convinced. And President Mujica is a man who is convinced, from a public policy standpoint and from the institutions, we need to speak about these matter clearly. That is not taking a cup of wine or a glass of whiskey in your hand, that it's normally terrible to smoke marijuana. You can't be talking to a young person and tell them that. "Well, this is a glass of water, of course." But if you were at a reception holding the glass of water -- whiskey in your hand and tell them that, it's impossible. So this government has looked at this. And since President Mujica is so direct and sincere, he has given impetus to this idea. And, I reiterate, it does not even enjoy consensus backing in the party. But he is convinced that it's worth trying this path out without any prejudices; to try it out to see if it helps us.

Tom Gjelten:

Okay, let's -- we got about 23 minutes here, and we have a number of questions. Antonio, I saw your hand go up first, so if you can wait for the microphone and you should identify yourself, Antonio.

Antonio Gayoso:

In Spanish?

Tom Gjelten:

In English, I think would be better.

Antonio Gayoso:

My name is Antonio Gayoso, and I'm retired from the U.S. Agency for International Development, where we conducted extensive research on prevention. And, basically, one of the things that -- I haven't read the policy paper that you just announced, but one of the things that we have not done in this country is to do what we did with tobacco: intense

advertising, intense education. Nowhere I hear the word education. We need to educate the children and the parents on the dangers and the damages caused by it. Without that, we are not going to tax -- tax has been very effective in taxing tobacco, but if you go to the Congress nowadays and say, "We're going to tax marijuana," they'll kill you.

Gil Kerlikowske:

I mean, you raise an excellent point on the fact that only two years ago the lines crossed on the charts, where young people now smoke more -- smoke marijuana in place of or ahead of nicotine. And that's a significant concern. It tells you that the perception of risk has been reduced and we've seen that go down in the surveys since about 2007.

So at one time, the United States had a media campaign which was almost \$190 million. The media campaign has now, for the last two years, been zeroed out by Congress. President Obama has asked for \$20 million each of the last two years, and Congress has not funded the media campaign.

We have two peer-reviewed journal articles about our media campaign, which is not a scare tactic and it's not about ideology. It's about giving young people the tools they need to make good decisions about their health and about taking care of themselves. And both of the articles say that young people that have been exposed to these, through social media mostly, are more resistant to drug use.

Unfortunately, we have no R.J. Reynolds of marijuana, although the tobacco companies certainly would see a potential market there as they have -- was mentioned in the papers that were released during the tobacco lawsuit, but there is no one to sue to gain the literally billions of dollars that were gained as a result of the tobacco settlement to educate and inform. And, remember, it wasn't just education and information and the warning signs on the cigarettes. They also paid for law enforcement to enforce the underage sale of tobacco issues so that they would not be able to go into the local neighborhood underage and be able to buy tobacco. So it was a great combination of education, information, and enforcement that worked together.

Tom Gjelten:

Right behind --

Drew Stromberg:

My name is Drew Stromberg. I'm with Students for Sensible Drug Policy. My question is for Director Kerlikowske. You say that we can't arrest ourselves out of this problem, but you have presided over a drug policy that has led to the arrest of three-quarters of a million people for marijuana every year in the United States. I don't hear you proposing any policy solutions to actually ending the practice of locking human beings in cages for taking drugs. So my question for you is this: rhetoric aside, when do you actually plan on ending this war?

Gil Kerlikowske:

Well, I think that it might be important to recognize that we arrest three times the number of people for legal alcohol that we arrest for marijuana. So, we, apparently, in the legalization issue haven't done a particularly good job with alcohol.

I would say that the majority of -- the vast majority of any arrests for marijuana occur at the state and local level, and as we know so clearly, the federal government doesn't direct those laws. We've seen a number of changes, whether it was in Mayor Bloomberg's State of the City speech just last month, or the changes in the city of Chicago, or in other places around other states where marijuana possession has been a ticket or a civil fine. No one wants to see young people get arrested and have a record that is going to haunt them. And so I think we're starting to see a lot of those kinds of changes. But we certainly don't think legalizing and making the drug more widely and easily available is a very good path to public health.

Tom Gjelten:

Okay. Way in back there, by the cameras.

Female Speaker:

Thank you, my name is [unintelligible] from Venezuela. I was wondering if anyone can answer, are the drug cartels in Colombia a problem of the past? What happened to them? And I was wondering if Mr. Kerlikowske can talk about the cooperation with Venezuela. Still ongoing, nothing happens? If you can give us an update on that. Thank you.

Tom Gjelten:

Daniel, why don't you take the first one?

Daniel Mejia Londono:

The drug -- I don't think drug cartels are an issue of the past. I think they've been evolving for sure, the Medellin cartel with Pablo Escobar was a completely different thing than the new criminal bands in Colombia are. They are smaller, more fragmented, sometimes more violent because they are fighting against more groups for the control of routes. And the history tells us that if you go after one cartel and dismantle it, as long as the market trends are there, you're going to have another cartel running the business in the next stage; in the next year or in the next two years. So what we've been doing is changing the actors that are creating violence, but in the end we still have cocaine flowing to the U.S. Consumption of cocaine has gone down dramatically in the U.S., but we have groups diversifying to other illegal drugs that are -- whose demand is increasing in the U.S. or Europe or in Latin America. So I think as long as there is an illicit market and there are large market trends to go for, you're always going to have an illegal group after it. So, that's why I'm pushing so much the idea of you have to go after the focus of violence and not necessarily after the drugs. And that's the -- that's what the countries in Latin America are demanding.

Tom Gjelten:

Director Kerlikowske, I know that the State Department -- there was some contact between the State Department and then Vice President Maduro in Venezuela last year sort of to kind of try and get U.S.-Venezuelan anti-narcotics cooperation back on track. Where does it stand?

Gil Kerlikowske:

Well, I would tell you that with the changes and the recent election that I wouldn't be able to answer the question about what's ongoing, other than to say that certainly the United States would like an improved cooperation and relationship with the government of Venezuela.

Tom Gjelten:

And right next to you, there's another question in the back row there, and then we'll come back down front.

Female Speaker:

Thank you very much, my name is [unintelligible] from the German Press Agency. Mr. Kerlikowske, President Obama is

going next week to Mexico and Central America, and a big part of the discussions are going to be drugs. And the region is asking -- Mexico for one side is asking for a different -- maybe not different approach, but a progression of trying to push the drugs issue a bit to the side. And on the other hand, President Funes said just last week in Washington, "We expect more from the U.S." My question is, I don't know how far you're preparing part of the trade, what can you advise President Obama if you do? But what would be the message that you think President Obama can deliver in both countries, Mexico and Costa Rica, on what the U.S. has done and what more can the U.S. do in regards to drugs? Thank you.

Tom Gjelten:

Are you going with him on the trip?

Gil Kerlikowske:

I am not going with him on the trip. And I think the sequester has something to do with --

[laughter]

Tom Gjelten:

I suppose it does.

Gil Kerlikowske:

-- how many people can go and where. But I would very much tell you that the relationship, particularly now with the new government of Mexico and the cooperation over safety and security is very important. I know a great deal of the trip is devoted to talking about jobs and the economy and trade issues, and I think that's also very important. But it was during -- particularly during this last year in Mexico that -- after almost five years of that very intense effort by President Calderon, that within the last year the numbers of violent acts and homicides really began to decrease. So I would tell you that the relationship and the spirit of cooperation at many levels within the Obama Administration, with our partners in Mexico, is very solid and will continue.

Tom Gjelten:

Cynthia Arnson from our own Latin America program here at the Wilson Center.

Cynthia Arnson:

Tom, thanks. I have a question for Daniel Mejia. Daniel, you were talking about the need to reduce violence in the region and among the suppliers of illegal narcotics. And I was wondering about what specific measures are being debated in the region in order to accomplish that, and what would be a way that the United States could contribute constructively to that effort beyond continuing, you know, the efforts to reduce drug consumption in this country?

Daniel Mejia Londono:

Thank you. I think that the focus that Latin America's demanding in reducing violence is less focused on interdicting drug shipments and showing that 100,000 hectares of land were sprayed with herbicides, and more focused on reducing the homicide rate, extortion rate, kidnappings, et cetera. That's what we need, and that's what Colombia has been doing for the last 10 years. Actually General Naranjo, who has been here many times in Washington speaking, at some point he told the U.S. authorities in Colombia that he focus shouldn't be interdicting more drugs and reducing the number of hectares of land with coca crops, but on reducing violence. And his message was basically we have to stop mortgaging the security interests of the country for \$500, \$600 million per year. If that means less eradication and more drugs flowing to the U.S., we cannot do anything about it, but we cannot continue sacrificing the security situation in the country for -- just for having less drugs flowing to the U.S.

Let me give you an example. This is a very respectful example, but I think it's informative. Suppose for a moment that -- the following thought experiment: suppose that all cocaine consumption in the U.S. goes down to zero and everything goes to Canada. Do you think the U.S. authorities would be willing to confront drug cartels transporting drugs to Canada to the point of seeing the homicide rate in Seattle go to 150 per 100,000 individuals? I think they would say, "That's the Canadians' problem. We have to focus on ours." And that's what Latin America has been doing. Having homicides rate -- homicide rates are much above 50 or 100 per 100,000 individuals just with the purpose of reducing the amount of drugs reaching the U.S. And I think -- as I said before, the call that Latin Americas is making is we have to stop this. At some point we have to stop this and we have to change the policy that has been implemented to reduce violence.

Tom Gjelten:

Provocative question. Provocative answer, I should say. Provocative scenario you just laid out, I meant to say. You, sir. Yeah. I think you had your hand up for a while, right? I thought so. One of you did, I know.

Grant Smith:

Grant Smith from the Drug Policy Alliance. I wanted to follow-up on a comment that Director Kerlikowske made. He referenced the Chicago example of issuing a civil -- a ticket for marijuana possession, and some other examples around the country, and some other states have done this, as well, some going back all the way to the 1970s. And we know that -- and you mentioned also that we don't want to arrest young people for marijuana; we don't want to see them with a criminal record that haunts them for the rest of their life. But we also know that criminalization is a barrier to services, it prevents people who are at high risk of overdose, of contracting HIV and other infectious diseases from getting services. And I was wondering why -- you know, how can we have a public health approach to dealing with drugs without, you know, encouraging state and local governments and the federal government to look at -- look more closely at decriminalization along the lines of what you mentioned earlier, and other examples, too.

Gil Kerlikowske:

I think there's an important part here, and that is particularly around overdose. So we're seeing a number of states, just most recently California, pass Good Samaritan laws, essentially laws that tell people that, look, if someone is overdosing and it's because of drugs you should not be fearful of calling 911, because there's not going to be prosecutions, and the laws are written differently depending on whether it was New York's Good Samaritan Law or California. But the last thing you want is to someone -- for someone not to ask for help in an overdose situation because they're afraid that the law will interfere.

The other part of overdose lifesaving has been the example we've been using now for a while: Quincy, Massachusetts. So this is a small city, about 100,000 people, bordering Boston that issued Naloxone, or for some people call it Narcan. It's an overdose miracle drug. It essentially brings people back to life who are in the throes of an overdose. In just a short period of time, that police

department has done 156 reversals. People who were in life-threatening overdoses and the original officer who happened to come across this or was dispatched to that call actually saved that life, and it's also within their police department. So, next week we'll be at a conference of law enforcement officials to talk about Good Samaritan laws, to talk about the importance of overdose recognition, and also to talk about Naloxone being much more widely distributed in order to save lives. And I just don't see the decriminalization and the wider availability and accessibility of drugs as being also a part of the public health approach.

Tom Gjelten:

You did have an important initiative, didn't you, in changing policy where students who were convicted of a drug possession were no longer to be barred from receiving college financial aid or something like that.

Gil Kerlikowske:

Yeah, there have been a number -- there are a number of myths that kind of have occurred around some of this, and the Attorney General has led a task force. He asked every attorney general in each of our different states to look at any laws that may be barriers. There are a lot of laws that are barriers: getting back into public housing, getting a driver's license, getting your voting rights restored, being able to access student loans, et cetera. And I think that reducing those kinds of barriers and recognizing that people that have -- that treatment is a better option than incarceration and then penalizing somebody for a long time.

Tom Gjelten:

Yeah, you got the microphone [laughs].

Chris Hernandez-Roy

Chris Hernandez-Roy from the OAS. Scott Wilson mentioned that he was in Cartagena at the Presidential Summit of the Americas. He didn't say why that was relevant for this discussion, which is that the presidents of the region asked the OAS to prepare a hemispheric drug report. The report is in its final stage of presentation, should be issued soon, and in anticipation of our general assembly in Guatemala. Are the panelists aware of this report, and what do they expect will come out of the report and a

subsequent discussion by our foreign ministers in Guatemala on this very important topic?

Tom Gjelten:

Let me ask Ambassador Pita to respond to that. Did you get the question? About the report that will be coming out from the OAS? Are you up-to-date on that issue?

Interpreter:

Uruguay's position is being furthered by a mission to the OAS, and it is the same position that we've just expressed at the U.N. Commission. We are working within the OAS with this approach, which is based on health -- public health -- and, I reiterate, human rights. The three -- these are the three crucial aspects. Now, in terms of fighting crime, organized crime, and money laundering, we have assumed all inter-American and international commitments, we implement them, and we promote that position.

Scott Wilson:

Sorry for the oversight, for not mentioning that when I spoke about it earlier. That study emerged actually as a compromise at that summit. President Calderon at the last minute wanted the final declaration of the summit to have very strong language about legalization, and President Obama had to personally intervene at the last minute and say, "You really shouldn't do this." And basically they left it up to President Santos to make a decision and they agreed on a "let's study these kinds of market-based solutions," in the idiom, and so that was kind of -- there was no declaration -- final declaration for other reasons in that summit. Cuba was the reason why there was none, but that was a last-minute sort of barrier that the study emerged from as a compromise.

Tom Gjelten:

Okay. We need to wrap up here so we can get out of here on time. There is a tradition here at the Wilson Center where we each, with the exception of the moderator who doesn't like to put himself on the spot, sort of sum up sort of one point that you want to take away, either a message that you want to underscore or something maybe that you learned from your fellow panelists; sort of sum it up in one brief message. We'll begin with you, director Kerlikowske.

Gil Kerlikowske:

Well, first of all, I learn something from the panelists every time I meet with them, and it's a real pleasure for us to be able to have these exchanges and further exchanges. I would sum up that this president's drug policy is the most dramatic shift toward public health that I think generations from now will be very pleased with and will make a significant difference in not only the problems that drugs cause in our country, but hopefully will be of greater help and greater assistance to our partners throughout the world.

Tom Gjelten:
Ambassador.

Interpreter:
I would fundamentally underscore our agreements on a public health approach, on the importance of education, and, fundamentally, the unity of values that are transmitted when we talk about fighting consumption, trying to have an integral message that doesn't end up dis-authorizing us when we make these statements.

Daniel Mejia Londono:
Thank you. I think that the message that we all agree with is that have to give a debate based on evidence and not on ideological positions, and up to recently the debate was purely an ideological debate. And the evidence shows more and more that the current prohibitionist regime hasn't worked, and we have to find alternatives. And I think no one is asking for full legalization, too. No one is asking for drugs to be sold in the schools, nothing like that. Regulation doesn't mean being soft on crime; quite the opposite, regulation means concentrating police resources on criminals, not on drug users, and I think this is what everyone is looking for. And I -- finally, I want to thank Director Kerlikowske for opening to this debate. I think this is the first time I'm with -- I know many people in the audience who has been in -- we've been doing a late of debates in Latin America, in different countries, but almost -- in no -- in none of the debates in the past U.S. government officials have participated. So I'm happy to have this debate with the US officials because this is important to have a respectful debate, but based on evidence.

Scott Wilson:

Just following a bit on Daniel's, I mean, I do think that the policy parameters that the Director has outlined does put the United States much closer to the Latin American consensus on this issue, that it is the emphasis on the domestic American issue of this is important, while also saying the problem is becoming more complicated to some degree because of Latin America in some ways being a victim of its own economic success. The reason Uruguay has problems even though that what they're going after affects the poorest of the poor, and Brazil and Argentina is a rising middle class that is becoming a drug-consuming class. And that does echo the administration's message of shared responsibility with evidence, that didn't exist, say, 10, 15 years ago. Those sorts -- that kind of rhetoric did not ring true nearly to the degree that it does now in Latin America, so it's a step in the right direction but it's also a problem that is becoming more complicated.

Tom Gjelten:

Indeed. All right. Well, I'd like to thank our panelists: Scott Wilson, chief White House correspondent for The Washington Post; Daniel Mejia from Universidad de los Andes; Ambassador Carlos Pita from the Republic of Uruguay; and Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Policy at the White House. And thanks to the Wilson Center, and thanks to my organization, NPR. I think these are terrific national conversations, and thanks to all of you for coming today.

[applause]

[end of transcript]