

## Commentary

February 12, 2009

### *IBH Welcomes the 12<sup>th</sup> White House Drug Czar, Seattle Police Chief R. Gil Kerlikowske*

Capping his distinguished 36 year history in law enforcement, we expect Chief Gil Kerlikowske to be confirmed within the next several months as Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). This position holds abundant challenges for a man whose career is distinguished by the breadth of his vision, his ability to implement cutting-edge programs, and his skill as a communicator who can mobilize wide support. Kerlikowske will step into a minefield of controversies over the future of drug prevention policies. He will face especially daunting challenges abroad where Mexico and Afghanistan are beset by menacing problems caused by illegal drug cultivation and traffic.

The opportunities for new ideas in drug abuse prevention are especially significant. They hold the key to lasting success by shrinking the demand for illegal drugs. We are optimistic that the new team at ONDCP will build on the bipartisan successes of the past 40 years to create more effective strategies to reduce illegal drug use and to reduce the tragic consequences of drug use. Chief Kerlikowske will find huge potential for curbing the demand for illegal drugs in the four areas IBH has targeted as essential priorities.

Some critics of drug policy pose the question of the future of national drug policy as a choice of either law enforcement or treatment. This is an old, flawed and failed way to see drug policy options. The central challenge today is to find ways to encourage the criminal justice system and drug abuse treatment to work together to enhance the effectiveness of both. This linkage is the most important opportunity for the future of American drug policy. Chief Kerlikowske's long public record of achievement and innovation in law enforcement makes him the perfect choice to build this link and to make it work throughout the nation. These new programs will simultaneously reduce crime, reduce illegal drug use and reduce incarceration. Achieving these goals is Chief Kerlikowske's biggest challenge -- and his greatest opportunity.

The Chief's initial moves to recruit an ONDCP team with fresh ideas and his long public record of leadership predicts lasting success built on dramatic innovation -- just what the Obama administration promises.

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