

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Keep the drug czar

As a longtime drug-prevention activist, I see Timothy Lynch's proposal to get rid of the U.S. drug czar's office ("Drug czar should go," Commentary, Monday) as seriously irrational.

Both Mr. Lynch and the Cato Institute, where he works, are on record as advocating ending America's war on drugs. Such perverse thinking ignores the fact that drug overdoses kill nearly 3,000 Americans every month. Nearly double that number die from drug-related accidents, illnesses, murders and suicides. The first figure is derived from the latest annual national mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Contrary to Mr. Lynch's claim, drug czars have been very valuable in our war on drugs. President Clinton's drug czar, retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey, began tracking the vital statistic of drug-related deaths in order to have a sound scientific basis for anti-drug policies. President George W. Bush's drug czar, John Walters, shored up support at the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) for random student drug testing after it was authorized in federal law in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and approved by two Supreme Court rulings as constitutionally sound. Such ONDCP support for random testing has resulted in its use in more than 4,000 schools and has contributed to a nearly 20 percent decline in teen drug use.

Today, President Obama's drug czar, R. Gil Kerlikowske, continues support for random testing for early detection and treatment of teen exposure to the deadly disease of drug addiction as a preferred alternative to youth incarceration.

At a time when drugs are destroying so many children, families, schools and communities, any public official who endorses Timothy Lynch's deadly recommendations should be turned out of office at the earliest opportunity.

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