

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

George Shultz backs the drug pushers

Drug czar William Bennett accuses the former secretary of state of undermining the U.S. anti-drug effort.

Former Secretary of State George Shultz's shocking revelation Oct. 7 that he personally favors the legalization of drugs drew sharp fire from Drug Czar William Bennett, and elicited embarrassment and confusion from official spokesmen for the White House and State Department.

When this was first brought to the attention of members of the Washington press corps, the response was disbelief and horror. "Does this man have children?" one woman asked.

It took over three weeks for the first news of Shultz's speech to the alumni at the Stanford University Business School to break into the *Wall Street Journal*.

The first official response came in the form of quotes attributed to Drug Czar Bennett in a small *Washington Times* article Nov. 2. "This explains some things for me over the last eight years, when I was in the Reagan administration," Bennett reportedly said on Oct. 31 while in Madison, Wisconsin. "It explains some problems we had. As many people have pointed out, the State Department in those days did not seem to be as avid on this issue as it should have been."

On the same day, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, when confronted with the news, said, "I am not aware of all this, so I don't really have any comment," but added that "anti-narcotics efforts are a high priority of this administration."

"Can you get a specific reply on that, because it's coming from a high government official. It appears to be

a quite serious allegation against this institution," the reporter followed.

"I don't think we have any desire to reply, really," Boucher snapped.

The reporter persisted, "He's talking about this institution [the State Department], which has a certain memory that goes through the various administrations, and by not replying you seem to be accepting the criticism of what was happening a year ago."

"I'm just saying I'm just not going to get into the past," Boucher answered.

At the following day's State Department briefing, the question was raised again. But this time, Boucher replied, "That issue was fully covered in yesterday's briefing."

"No, it wasn't covered," a UPI reporter interjected. "It was avoided."

In the meantime, Shultz had sent a letter of support to a pro-drug legalization conference in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Drug Policy Foundation. In that letter, on Hoover Institution letterhead, Shultz thanked the pro-drug foundation for its invitation to him to speak at their conference, and said, "I look forward to receiving more information about your foundation, and I will be happy to refer people to you who are interested in supporting reform of the current policy." The letter was proudly read from the podium of the conference.

Thus, at a White House briefing on Nov. 6, spokesman Marlin Fitzwater had an even harder time skirting the matter. This reporter asked him,

"In light of former Secretary Shultz's recent speech advocating drug legalization, does President Bush share the view of William Bennett that—"

Fitzwater interrupted, astonished: "Secretary Shultz—former Secretary—who did this?"

"Former Secretary of State George Shultz."

"He advocated legalizing drugs?" Fitzwater said, wide-eyed.

"In a speech at the Stanford Business School, he advocated the legalization of drugs."

This was too hot for Fitzwater. He tried to deflect the issue with a quip: "Whoa! He's been on the West Coast too long, hasn't he? The guy slips into retirement and right away he starts saying things that are strange."

But this being a serious matter, this reporter proceeded to present the facts. "You can read all about it in the *Wall Street Journal*." But even after Bennett's attack on Shultz was cited, all Fitzwater would say was, "I don't have any first-hand comment simply because I was unaware of this. But clearly, we do not believe drugs should be legalized."

So, neither Boucher nor Fitzwater, in professing ignorance of Shultz's views, was willing to address the issue as Bennett raised it: Namely, that Shultz may have been undermining official policy during his entire tenure as secretary of state.

Nonetheless, Fitzwater's penchant for resorting to humor to get out of tight spots did give some other reporters the opportunity they needed to more widely expose Shultz's treachery.

The *Washington Times*, in a small article, quoted Fitzwater's joke about being on the West Coast too long, and Cable News Network cited him each half hour the following day, saying the White House was "ridiculing" Shultz's pro-drug position.