

## Congressional GOPers join forces with Cali drug cartel

by Joyce Fredman

During the first week of August, when the Colombian government of Cali Cartel-linked President Ernesto Samper Pizano was being felled by corruption scandals, one would think that the U.S. war on the illegal drug industry, already energized by the June 5 Miami indictments against the Cali Cartel, would be bolstered into a unified assault on the narcotics traffickers. Instead, the Conservative Revolution Republicans in the U.S. Congress have launched a full-scale assault on every anti-drug effort being undertaken by the Clinton administration, including an unprecedented call for dismantling the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).

On July 27, the Senate Appropriations Treasury, Postal Service, General Government Subcommittee approved a proposal to abolish the job of White House drug policy adviser, a position created by the Congress seven years ago to coordinate efforts in this area, and one that President Clinton saw as so crucial to the anti-drug fight, that he elevated it to a full cabinet position.

Dr. Lee Brown, ONDCP director, responded instantly to the subcommittee vote, in a strongly worded statement: "In the name of cost savings and efficiency, they would generate the far higher cost and inefficiency of individual agencies' gunning for control on their own—exactly the problem ONDCP was created to solve in the first place."

President Clinton announced that he would veto the bill if this proposal, part of a \$23 billion appropriations bill that would finance the Treasury Department, White House, and small agencies for fiscal year 1996, beginning Oct. 1, passes both houses of Congress. The President said any removal of funds would "seriously undermine the nation's battle against drug abuse and drug-related crime." He also said shutting the office "would severely curtail my ability to sustain a

coordinated strategy among some 50 federal agencies involved in drug control. Just when this coordinated effort is showing sustained success, the subcommittee is proposing we go back to the days when the nation did not have coordinated drug-control strategy." He added that Director Brown is doing "an extraordinary job."

The question on the table is not Dr. Brown's performance: It is what kind of a job the Republican majority in Congress is doing, or rather, on whom are they doing a job? The proposed shutdown of the White House anti-drug office is part of a broad budget-slashing offensive by the GOP congressional leadership that could cripple the Clinton anti-drug effort just when some serious victories are being won.

Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), the chairman of the committee which produced this latest fiasco, blustered, "If this administration will not facilitate and prosecute the drug war, then Congress is forced to do it for them. I believe my subcommittee will go to the mat on this issue." He even claimed that if the administration "had worked as hard at making this position effective as it has at trying to save this office, then the committee would likely be looking to *increase* rather than reduce funding."

How likely? The actions of these legislators speak far louder than any of their sanctimonious words. Simply take a gander at their July activities.

- The House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Subcommittee voted to cut by 60% the only school-based federally funded drug prevention program, the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, cutting it from \$500 million to \$200 million. The program serves 94% of the country's school districts and 39 million students.

- On July 19, the House Appropriations Committee vot-

ed to remove all money for the President's community policing program that has already put 16,351 new police officers on the streets. The appropriations bill puts all funds into a \$1.9 billion block grant with no guarantee that the money will go to hiring more police. The Commerce, Justice, State and Federal Judiciary Appropriations bill eliminates funds for the drug court program, which requires drug-using offenders to get treatment or go to prison.

- On July 20, the House voted to cut the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program. This, in light of the fact that the Miami HIDTA joint task force agencies ran the investigation that led to the indictments of Cali drug cartel lawyers (including former senior Justice Department prosecutor Michael Abbell) and arrests of cartel leaders in Colombia. The Treasury, Postal Service, General Government Appropriations bill also includes cuts in the Counter-Drug Technology Assessment Center, a program which provides new counter-drug technology for U.S. law enforcement.

- On July 18, the House Appropriations Committee blue-penciled the Housing and Urban Development drug elimination grants program designed to fight drug-related crime in public housing projects.

- On July 20, the House Appropriations Committee slashed the budget for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services which provides substance abuse treatment, prevention, and mental health services for tens of thousands of pregnant women, as well as other high-risk groups. The Labor-HHS-Education bill cut \$371 million from the \$1.4 billion requested, one-third of the overall \$1.1 billion in cuts to the Health and Human Services Department.

- On July 10, the House voted to cut from \$213 million to \$113 million the International Drug Law Enforcement Bureau at the State Department. The ONDCP assessment is that this will "have a devastating effect on our efforts to combat international drug-trafficking efforts, and sends the wrong message to the countries we urge to fight drug production and trafficking."

## Newt floats dope legalization

Never one to miss a chance at the microphone, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), during July's Republican National Committee policy forum, called for a national referendum on legalization. He, too, claims to be an anti-drug warrior. He says, let the American people choose between legalization and the death penalty. Drug policy adviser Lee Brown called this "the ultimate in extremism and defeatism," and noted that "drug abuse is an American crisis, not a partisan political opportunity. It does not help kids or serve them well, when our leaders play partisan politics with an issue that goes to the heart of everything we hold dear."

Despite the GOP attacks, Brown has continued on the anti-drug offensive. In July, Brown issued a statement calling on the entertainment business and the Madison Avenue ad

agencies to stop glamorizing the drug culture in their product promotions. He also attacked the idea of holding up professional athletes who use drugs as role models for youth, citing the case of professional baseball player Daryl Strawberry, who has repeatedly gotten into trouble for drug abuse, yet was recently hired by the New York Yankees.

In the same statement, Director Brown cited recent statistics showing that marijuana-related emergency room visits have nearly doubled in the last five years and are now recorded nearly as often as cocaine. "These numbers rebut the notion that marijuana is a benign drug."

Brown continued: "Perhaps there is some nervousness about our recent efforts to take on major sports leaders for sending a terrible message to youth by condoning repeated drug abuse. Or maybe there is a reaction to our taking on industry officials. . . . Right now, as we speak, HIDTA joint task forces, which my office funds, are working on additional cases like the Cali drug cartel indictments successfully arranged by the Miami HIDTA agencies. Our office worked closely with the President in his decision to decertify Colombia from aid and loans if they do not cooperate on drug control. As a result of the President's action, we have seen three of the top five Cali Cartel leaders arrested over the past few weeks. . . . Right now, we are in the process of designating additional federal-state-local partnerships across the country in order to focus anti-drug efforts where they can be most productive."

He reiterated his intent to continue fighting any initiatives by any group for the legalization of marijuana. He also cited a recent national survey showing that adolescents aged 12 to 17 view drugs as the most serious problem they face—"more than sex, violence, or their parents." The survey says more than 80% of 10th and 12th graders said marijuana is easy to get; 54% said that cocaine or heroin were also accessible.

Yet, as recently as July, William F. Buckley Jr., a leading figure in the radical, free market Mont Pelerin Society circles, wrote in his *National Review* that the war on drugs has been lost, and the United States should legalize all drugs. Gingrich's call for a national referendum posing draconian police-state measures, including an increased use of the death penalty, as the only alternative to outright legalization, brought him squarely in line with the Conservative Revolution.

The efforts of this gaggle of Adam Smith clones to paint President Clinton and drug adviser Brown as the "softies" on drugs may well backfire. It was, after all, under the direction of George Bush that a character as unsavory as Oliver North employed both the Medellín and Cali cartels as "assets," "piggy banks" in his secret wars. Beginning on July 31, even the *New York Times* published a series revealing that the Bush administration had maintained a policy of "benign neglect" toward the growing influence of Colombian drug cartels in Mexico as part of a deal with then-Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to secure the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement.