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ON Nicholas Kristof's "Drugs Won the War" (June 14)

DRUGS HAVE NOT "WON THE WAR", LEGALIZATION WOULD BE CATASTROPHE

To the Editor:

Drugs have not "won the war." With a comprehensive anti-drug strategy in place, involving foreign policy, enforcement, education, treatment, prevention and media, America's overall drug use has declined almost by half in the past three decades from 14.1 percent of the population in 1979 to 8.3 percent now who used drugs in the past month. In addition, cocaine use, including crack -- the source of much of the former record-high violent crime numbers -- is down 70 percent. Want to go back?

Legalization would be a catastrophe. Nicholas D. Kristof uses the analogy of legal alcohol. But there are an estimated 15 million alcoholics in this country and 5 million drug addicts; do we want the 5 to become 15?

Parents, police and the American people know that taking away the incentive of the normative power of the law would increase drug use and related car crashes, school dropouts and work absences. That is why the law has remained in place.

Hospital emergency rooms would be flooded, and crime would return to the crisis levels of the 1970s and '80s, when drug use was at its highest. Domestic violence and date rape would be substantially higher. The majority of arrestees in 10 major American cities recently tested positive for illegal drugs, a remarkable indicator of a link between drugs and crime.

The new director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, R. Gil Kerlikowske, and another recent drug czar, Gen. Barry McCaffrey, are both correct that we must remove the phrase "war on drugs" and fight drugs like a cancer, which can be managed and treated.

Robert Weiner  
Washington, June 14, 2009

The writer was spokesman for the White House National Drug Policy Office from 1995 to 2001.