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## Denying Success of Anti-Drug Policy

By Robert Weiner and Brad Star

### ANALYSIS/OPINION

Known as a “murder capital” just a few decades ago, Washington D.C. is experiencing an encouraging decrease in violent crime. In 2017 there were 116 homicides in the district, a rate of 16.72 murders per 100,000 people, which continues a sharp decline from 80.6 murders per 100,000 in 1991.

This drastic decline can be attributed to the fading of the crack epidemic and the U.S.’ implementation of a stronger drug strategy. While there has been a surge in opiate-related deaths over the past decade, overall drug use in the U.S. has nearly halved since the late 1970s. Crack is down by a whopping 70 percent. Yet Democrats have been deafeningly silent on the topic of anti-drug success and its role in the U.S.’ decreasing crime rate. The party’s legalization voting base, not policy, is driving the rhetoric. They are engaging in a subtle strategy of silence.

On Jan. 4, Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded a trio of memos from the Obama administration that had encouraged non-interference with marijuana-friendly state laws. This will allow federal prosecutors to decide individually how to deal with possession, distribution and cultivation of marijuana in states where it is legal. While more than 20 states have legalized either “medical” or recreational pot at the state level, marijuana remains illegal under federal law, creating a rift between federal and state law.

“The DEA said that a huge percentage of the heroin addiction starts with prescriptions,” Mr. Sessions said. “That may be an exaggerated number; they had it as high as 80 percent. We think a lot of this is starting with marijuana and other drugs.”

The reaction thus far has been outrage from Democratic political leaders across the country and in the district. Mr. Sessions’ decision contradicts legal marijuana in D.C.

“We do disagree on a matter of law,” D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser said when D.C. made the decision to legalize marijuana against Congress’ wishes. “We would encourage the Congress to not be so concerned about what seven out of 10 voters said should be the law in the District of Columbia.”

Democrats are reluctant to acknowledge anti-drug successes because legalization is so overwhelmingly supported by young people, a bastion of Democratic votes. This has led many

prominent Democrats, such as Ms. Bowser and Sen. Cory Booker, New Jersey Democrat, to blindly push for legalization while ignoring progress made on the anti-drug front.

On Jan. 17 this year, New York City Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio told MSNBC's Joe Scarborough that the murder rate in the U.S.' largest city achieved a record low in 2017. De Blasio mentioned several factors he believes critical to the New York Police Department's effectiveness in reducing crime especially good "precision policing" to knock out gangs — but ignored the drop in drug use.

The police have done a spectacular job with new strategies and enforcement. However, Mr. de Blasio left out an important contributor: the significant decrease in drug use in the city and nation.

"The striking reduction in homicide in New York City is related logically to the contraction of crack cocaine markets," said Benjamin Bowling, Dean of the Kings College School of Law.

According to HHS, 14.1 percent of Americans over the age of 12 were using illicit drugs at least monthly in 1979, and by 2010, that number had decreased to 8.9. New York is not alone as far as declining violent crime. Murders per 100,000 people in the U.S. have decreased from 27 in 1990 to 10 in 2017.

The "war on drugs" often gets a bad rap, but, despite the current opioid crisis, illicit drug use has declined about 40 percent since the 1970s, and crack is down as mentioned by over two-thirds. If any other major U.S. social or health problem dropped by two-thirds or even 40 percent — hunger, illiteracy, heart attacks, diabetes, or cancer — would we call it a "failure"?

Although drug addiction and the surge of opioids remain a major issue in the U.S. — 64,000 died in the U.S. last year from drug abuse including 40,000 from opioids according to NIDA Director Nora Volkow — significant strides in the right direction have been made. The comprehensive National Drug Strategy espoused by the White House Drug Policy Office of education, treatment, prevention, law enforcement, foreign policy, community anti-drug coalitions, and drug courts (now 3,100) to replace imprisonment of nonviolent offenders, is working.

Exceptions to the silence from Democrats have been appointed Drug czars including Lee Brown and Barry McCaffrey, who knew better when they created their comprehensive National Strategies. "Drug war failure" is a fun party talking point. Otherwise, it's time for Democrats to acknowledge the benefits that accompany the country's significant decrease in drug use.

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