Drug Policy: A 21st Century Approach to Reform

Jane Harman:
-- or the Lincoln Memorial, the Wilson Center is the living memorial to our first internationalist president. Chartered by Congress in 1968, it is the United States' key, non-partisan policy forum for tackling global issues. Our goal here is to build a global brain trust, a network that generates actionable ideas and prepares the next generation of leaders for the policy challenges ahead.

As many of you know, the Wilson Center recently -- not so recently -- joined forces with NPR to create a public event series, which we call “The National Conversation.” Note that we call it “The National Conversation,” not “The National Debate.” We feel very strongly that people should have conversations around the tough issues.

The quality of the debates -- the quality of the discussion during our last few NATCONs has been truly spectacular. Our audience engaged with leaders like General Keith Alexander on cybersecurity, Graham Allison on the relevant lessons on the Cuban Missile Crisis on its 50th anniversary, and Henry Kissinger on China's once-in-a-decade leadership transition and its implications for the U.S.

Today I am very pleased that we are hosting an event that tackles one of the most pressing issues the world faces: the international trade of illicit drugs. At the center, we have dealt with drug policy primarily in the context of our work on organized crime and growing insecurity in Latin America. And I'd like to recognize Cindy Aronson, who's talking in the corner, with the red jacket, who runs our vaunted Latin America program; and also Eric Olson, who is a star of our highly regarded Mexico Institute. For example, in January 2013, Cindy Aronson and Eric Olson, along with Andrew Seeley, who was the head of our Mexico Institute, now heads -- is our vice president for programs, published a report that analyzed the causes for the marked spike in criminal activity in Mexico and Central America's northern triangle, while assessing the effectiveness of U.S. policy responses to date. This report included actionable recommendations to policymakers in the hopes of addressing the underlying problems that make these regions incubators for criminal organizations and extreme violence.

The most recent worldwide threat assessment published by the Director of National Intelligence, Jim Clapper, labeled drug trafficking as a major transnational organized crime threat to the United States. In fact, South American drug traffickers and Middle Eastern militant groups like Hezbollah, and I would certainly add al Qaeda and the Taliban, are becoming increasingly intertwined. It was reported yesterday that two Lebanese money exchange houses helped launder funds for drug traffickers.

Illicit drugs cost tens of billions of dollars each year in destroyed lives, lost incomes, and economic opportunity, widespread violence and insecurity, and environmental damage. Illegal drugs also generate enormous profits that corrupt governments, undermine democracy, and fund violent organized crime. These impacts are observed all over the world, from Atlanta to Afghanistan, from Argentina to Guinea, and beyond. The international community led by the U.S. has spent billions to stop the cultivation, processing, trafficking, and consumption of illegal drugs. These efforts have been sincere and determined, but the results are paltry. And having been to -- myself, as a member of Congress, to Afghanistan many times, I cringe at the thought that the poppy trade is booming.

The question is, "What can be done that would be more effective? What kinds of reforms are needed to lessen the risks and threats posed by illegal drugs?" Simply pursuing a war on drugs doesn't seem viable or cost-effective, given what's come before. Our prevention and treatment options, viable alternatives -- is decriminalization or legalization an option? Well, a couple of states of the United States think so. Is there a middle ground between staying the course and legalization?

Our speaker -- our keynote speaker is a man I've known for some time, Gil Kerlikowske, currently the director of Drug Control Policy, aka the drug czar at the White House. Gil is the former chief of police of Seattle and knows firsthand the damage caused by illegal drugs. He also knows that the "war on drugs" motif is outdated and inaccurate, and he has worked hard to promote reforms to drug policy that are more effective.

As part of these innovative efforts, just yesterday -- what a coincidence in timing -- the White House released the 2013 National Drug Control Strategy, which emphasizes less

incarceration and more diversion, treatment, and prevention. The strategy also calls for a renewed focus on reducing consumption in the U.S., which would weaken drug trafficking organizations in Latin America and reduce the violence they produce.

Given the recent news, it's timely that today we are joined by a rock star panel of experts to help us explore the options and possibilities after our drug czar's talk. Tom Gjelten, who covers global security and economic issues for NPR, will introduce our other terrific panelists and moderate the discussion. And, no, I'm not going to call Tom Mr. Martha Raddatz. Not one more time. I will not call Tom Mr. Martha Raddatz, and I will salute him publicly for his astounding coverage and personal stamina last Friday during the horror at Boston. If you tuned in to NPR, you heard Tom Gjelten.

It's now my pleasure to introduce Gil Kerlikowske, who is at the forefront of the issue, and I think -- I don't know whether I need to provide more background about Gil, but I think we have enough. And you're all familiar with him, and he will now make some keynote remarks. Welcome to the Wilson Center, Gil. It's lovely to see you.

Gil Kerlikowske:
Thank you, Congresswoman.

[applause]

Few years ago, I wouldn't have needed these, but now -- well, listen, first of all, let me thank the congresswoman, not only for the introduction but also to her and the staff here at the Wilson Center. It's really an honor to be here. For my four years in this job in particular, you know, I follow very closely the writings, the analysis, the comments that the staff has made throughout the Western Hemisphere on these issues, not only around drug issues but

Truth is that neither of these extreme approaches is -- it's not guided by experience, it's not guided by compassion, but, most important, it's not guided by science. And the true nature of substance use and substance disorders really is guided by science and guided by medicine.

So this administration decided to reform the path and move to a third way, one that very clearly balances public health, law enforcement, and international partnerships. And the third way is rooted in the drug addiction is a disease of the brain. Addiction can be prevented, can be treated, and people can recover. The decades of scientific research from the National Institutes of Health and others have demonstrated this time after time. And the strategy acknowledges that while law enforcement is always going to play a vital role in protecting communities and protecting families from drug-related crime and violence, the drug problem is more than just a law enforcement issue. And the strategy highlights the historic progress that has been made in achieving drug policy reform in these last four years. And the strategy begins with an emphasis, quite clearly, on prevention. We know that preventing drug use before it begins, particularly among young people, is the most effective way to reduce drug use and its consequences in America. And the researchers concluded that every dollar invested in specific, evidence-based substance use prevention programs in schools has the potential to save up to $18 in the costs that are related to substance use disorders later on. And that's why the 2013 strategy calls for national- and community-based programs; for example, our drug-free community support program to prevent substance use in schools, on college campuses, and in the workplace.

Strategy also points to an important public health role that the professionals play. Health care professionals have the opportunity to intervene in substance use disorder early, before it becomes chronic. Addiction is a progressive disease. Most people see their physician or their health care professional about once a year. So early detection and treatment of a substance use problem by a health care professional is an essential element in the public health approach to drug policy, that's why it's so important that we think about this, also, as part of primary care, not being some separate silo away from the other public health concerns.

The strategy emphasizes drug treatment because treatment works and it saves lives. And the Affordable Care Act, or ACA, provides for substance abuse and mental health benefits that will be included as part of the health insurance plans. And the fact that the President's 2014 budget requests an increase of $1.5 billion for treatment and prevention programs over the 2012 amount -- that's the largest requested increase in two decades.

And the ACA is the most significant piece of drug policy reform in generations. By expanding insurance coverage, it extends coverage for addiction treatment to millions of Americans who now can't afford it and don't get it. Treatment isn't -- shouldn't be a privilege limited to those who can afford it; it should be a service to everyone who needs it. And with this in mind, the strategy outlines steps to support implementation of the Affordable Care Act in providing treatment. And because of our renewed emphasis on prevention and treatment, the United States is also providing more than just military aid in support of our counter-drug efforts across the world.

And during these last four years, as I've had that opportunity to travel the world on behalf of the administration, we often export and work together with other countries on a variety of treatment and prevention programs, although too often the popular myth is that we're only interested in securing that border to keep drugs out. We actually have some of the world's finest research and prevention and treatment.

We also have some of the best research in building up community capacity because the work gets done at the local level, no matter where you are on the globe. Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America -- they're known as CADCA -- have funded -- they have been funded to do training and technical assistance to community coalitions since 1992. And in the past seven years, the international interest in these kinds of programs at the local level has really surged. They now operated, in fact, in 16 countries and on three continents.

We're providing international support for treatment, also. In Afghanistan, for instance, where 90 percent of the world's opiates are grown, where drug consumption is a great threat to the future of the country and its people,

the United States government directly supports 64 of the country's 82 drug treatment centers. And by partnering with foreign governments to invest in the health and future of the young people in these countries, we also lay the groundwork for increased international stability.

Well, as you're all aware, we're engaged in confronting violent, transnational criminal organizations. The drug legalization lobby often suggests that criminal operations would be significantly reduced or diminished if government would just legalize and regulate the sale of drugs like marijuana and cocaine. You know, I wish that solution to this complex problem -- this simple solution was actually -- would work. But, of course, it won't work, just like any simple solution to a complex problem.

And the research backs that up. In 2010, the RAND Corporation found that Mexican criminal organizations derive less than a quarter of their revenue from marijuana sales in the United States. And last year, a distinguished journalist, Alejandro Junco from Grupo Reforma, made another compelling point, that dominating the cartels that established territorial control -- it turns out that most of the profit from what they do is engaged in selling protection, stealing from Pemex, kidnapping, et cetera; extortion, piracy, prostitution. These are criminal organizations, and even if one part of their revenue stream is reduced or cut off, there's no belief on my part -- having spent a good bit of time on this, there's no belief on my part that they're going to suddenly turn to some legitimate enterprise.

The profitability of drugs is actually quite low compared to the profitability of many of their other activities. Sothat

Tom Gjelten:
Oh, I see. Okay. Yeah, by the way, Ambassador Pita will be speaking in Spanish, and for those of you who do not understand Spanish, you should raise your hand -- we can do that right now -- and a headset -- if you haven't picked one up already, a headset will be delivered to you. So, just keep your hands up until you get your headset or when they come around make sure that you get your headset.

So, I'm Tom Gjelten and it's -- on behalf of NPR, it's my pleasure to be moderating one more of these terrific National Conversations. They've been hugely successful. It's a great collaboration between NPR and the Wilson Center, and thank you, Congressman Harman, for promoting it.

We do have a distinguished -- you've already met Mr. Kerlikowske, and then we have Ambassador Carlos Pita from Uruguay, and Ambassador Pita has a distinguished career not only in his country's foreign service, but also in collaborating with the United States on drug enforcement policies. He was instrumental most recently, and most importantly, I would say, in reestablishing the Drug Enforcement Administration's presence in Uruguay. And before that, he was active in Uruguay and Congress and was president of the Commission on Narcotics and Drug Abuse in Uruguay. Ambassador Pita has been with the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C. since 2005 and has been in charge of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, CICAD, since 2006. Ambassador Pita, welcome.

most conservative governors throughout the country are reducing their incarceration rate, we know that we can still keep communities safe, we can give drug treatment, and we can do it for less money than keeping people locked up. And so it seems like a very common sense answer to that part of the problem. So we'll push hard for it.

Tom Gjelten:
Common sense answers may be common sense but doesn't mean it always get funded, does it?

the eventuality of good results by regulating the market of some substances. In other words, we are, in Uruguay, in the middle of a process in which the executive power and the president of the republic, as well as the majority of the Parliamentary Commission on Drugs, believe that it is time to experiment with regulating the market of one of the substances; in this particular case, marijuana, with the objective of seeing if we can reduce many of the problems that illegal commerce, linked with felony and organized crime, generates for society and for consumers. In addition, Uruguay does it because it has a totally different problem than the northern countries, in particular North America, but also in Europe.

Interpreter:
-- particularly in North America, but also in Europe.

We have a level of consumption of a product that is made from the residuals, or waste, of cocaine production. Here it's called "cocaine paste." And the household survey last year shows a very low level, but the estimates of hidden consumption -- this is a drug that is used by the poorest sectors of society. There's a 1.1 percent prevalence level throughout society, or society-wide. But what happens? This cocaine paste -- well, the drug traffickers, the criminals, are beginning to mix it with marijuana.

Cocaine paste is acutely destructive substance. Marijuana has negative health effects but it is infinitely different -- absolutely different.

So we have two concerns. Organized crime, working with the marijuana market, and with the cocaine paste in the poorest sectors, and that there would be a coming together of consumption of cocaine paste, which is pure poison, which is mixed with and leads to consumption of marijuana mixed with cocaine paste.

Now, since there's no agreement -- that is to say, I don't have agreement on that aspect with Mr. Kerlikowske, but in Uruguay, we're not agreed on it, either. So, there's not even agreement on this particular path within the government party. I say this with my heart open. There's not agreement.

So what do we do? The president, the executive branch, and the parliamentary commission -- or committee -- began a

soft-on-drugs people. These were, you know, more right than left, certainly on that issue, and began to raise these issues running up to the Cartagena summit, largely because they took office. Calderon had been in office five years by the time he spoke at the U.N. to talk about moral obligations and to cut consumption.

The problem was much bigger than they realized. And I think they're still trying to figure out what exactly the United -- what direction the United States is going to take domestically before it really begins to tell publics that legalization isn't a good idea.

Tom Gjelten:
Well, Director, a couple of points here that I'm sure you're anxious to respond to. One is Ambassador Pita's explanation of his government's reasoning in doing this experimentation in the marijuana market and also, as Scott says, the -- how do you present a coherent and rational explanation of your policy to your neighbors when there seems to be kind of a disjointed approach taken here in this country between states and the feds?

Gil Kerlikowske:
I think the ambassador's explanation is really quite helpful and quite useful. And I certainly understand, looking at the problem of cocaine paste, because we have gone through the crack cocaine issue, just as Brazil is going through that significantly now, but I think the point that I would make, that I would push back on with the ambassador, is about the regulation, that you'll be able to actually regulate the market. And our experience in the United States -- and believe me, every country is certainly free to make those choices and those decisions that they do, but our experience in attempting to regulate the use of alcohol or to regulate the use of tobacco, I don't think anybody sees as particularly successful.

We're not able to keep one of the most controlled

made that same linkage in your remarks, that there is --

comparison with tobacco. We repressed it very harshly. We are perhaps the country that has most harshly repressed tobacco, and we've had great success in reducing consumption. We tested it out, and it worked out. It might not have worked out, but it did. And there is a certain worldwide consensus that repressing tobacco is a way to diminish tobacco consumption, and so much so there's

very, very quickly through the inhalation with the marijuana -- and we've seen that with PCP here, also laced marijuana -- is that the cutting agents are so incredibly powerful and cause so much of the neurological damage. And he mentioned some of the more common and more available cutting agents, like kerosene.

Tom Gjelten:
Right. And that -- and that's more potent even than smoking crack cocaine.

Gil Kerlikowske:
You know, I actually wouldn't -- I couldn't tell you the difference, but I certainly agree with the ambassador on the damage.

Tom Gjelten:
Okay. Moving on, Daniel, it caught my attention that you, even speaking from a Colombian point of view, think it's important to sort of keep a focus on the supply side, because we used to hear in Colombia, you know, 10 years ago

crosses the border, it's $35,000. And in the streets in the U.S., it costs anything between $150,000 and $200,000.

So it's the market trends -- the large market trends associated with illegal drug trafficking what makes these groups fight as hard as they can to control the business, to kill policemen, to kill each other, to corrupt the system, et cetera. So I think the best contribution that the U.S. can do to Latin America is to reduce the demand for drugs. Why is this so? Because it would reduce the size of the market. It would shrink the profits in this illegal business, and basically it would reduce the amount of funding that these groups get to create violence. And that's why I think most Latin American countries also push for ways to not only reduce the demands -- the demand for drugs in the U.S., in Europe, et cetera, but also we keep -- we have to keep fighting, not necessarily the illegal drug trafficking, but the violence associated with illegal drug trafficking. As long as drugs remain illegal, there is going to be violence and we have to stop violence. And that's what I think most of us in Latin America have been focusing on.

Tom Gjelten:
To what extent are the coca growers -- I know the coca growers were sort of an important base of support for Evo Morales in Bolivia. What about more broadly? Are the coca growers a political force in your region?

Daniel Mejia Londono:
Not in Colombia. Not in Colombia.

Tom Gjelten:
No, not in Colombia --

Daniel Mejia Londono:
Not in Colombia. In the region, in Bolivia, it's a different situation. In Colombia it's not a big political force and they don't get reach out of this -- out of cultivating coca. They actually get less than the minimum wage out of cultivating coca. The real guys making profits on this industry are the traffickers. Not even the producers; I mean, $2,500 for a kilogram of cocaine is not that much. Actually, we've done the calculations, and in Colombia the amount of resources that enter Colombia -- the Colombian economy out of the drug -- cocaine production and trafficking business is around $8 billion. That's 2.5

percent of GDP. That’s the largest industry in Colombia. But -- although it seems like a small number, it’s 2.5 percent of GDP concentrated in the hands of illegal armed groups, creates a lot of damage to the countries.

Tom Gjelten:
Scott, you were in Colombia. You were -- when you were in Latin -- covering Latin America for The Post, were you

Stability is upset by eradication. And there was -- particularly when I was there, there were large, industrial-sized coca farms in the south in particular, which were fairly easy to spray. That was impoverishing to a lot of the local coca growers, and caused a great deal of unrest, who -- as Daniel said, they were growing largely at the behest -- at the -- at gunpoint by the FARC or the paramilitaries, depending on who controlled regions.

And it was also more lucrative, I won't dispute that, than the yucca and rice and other things that they were trying to grow. My understanding, though, is that -- and it happened even while I was there -- those large farms broke into small ones. It became extremely hard to hit those plots with spray, and so you started spraying food crops more and more, and you got real foment, which helped the insurgencies, which helped the paramilitaries, and which upset Colombian stability and spiked violence quite a bit.

Those are the -- still is, I think, some of the conflicts that take place and some of the challenges that Daniel highlighted and that the Director highlighted. And yet there has been a -- you know, as Daniel traced the profits, I believe that the armed groups there -- paramilitaries have been demobilized, broken into de facto drug gangs, I suppose, even if they were largely that when I was there. But they don't have as much money, and I suppose that is one reason, not only playing Colombia -- the military training component of playing Colombia really taking grip and taking hold and becoming a much more professional army and anti-guerilla force, but also fewer profits for the FARC, which even when I -- while I was there, was increasing dependent on an assortment of fronts that it had in the drug-producing areas and were largely drug trafficking operations.

Tom Gjelten:
Director Kerlikowske, Scott's comments sort of underscore what is a reality in terms of policy challenges in this country in a wide variety of areas, and that is that sometimes policy goals in different sectors of government policy can conceivably come into conflict. He mentioned how a focus on eradication can sort of jeopardize the social and political stability and economic stability in a country. Classic interagency question for you: how do you -- in this administration, and you in the Office of Drug

ideology; it's a fight against crime. And we've made a great effort as a country to cooperate along those lines and to actively fight crime, and we've met with many successes thanks to the cooperation, the assistance, and our determination.

What we have done is to raise this issue a short time ago at the 56th meeting of the U.N. Commission, noting that Uruguay is studying taking the step of regularization or legalization, because we want to see if that helps. So that would be the substantial difference that we have. We're convinced that it would be worthwhile -- not all of us are, I say, but we are convinced. And President Mujica is a man who is convinced, from a public policy standpoint and from the institutions, we need to speak about these matter clearly. That is not taking a cup of wine or a glass of whiskey in your hand, that it's normally terrible to smoke marijuana. You can't be talking to a young person and tell them that. "Well, this is a glass of water, of course." But if you were at a reception holding the glass of water -- whiskey in your hand and tell them that, it's impossible. So this government has looked at this. And since President Mujica is so direct and sincere, he has given impetus to this idea. And, I reiterate, it does not even enjoy consensus backing in the party. But he is convinced that it's worth trying this path out without any prejudices; to try it out to see if it helps us.

Tom Gjelten:
Okay, let's -- we got about 23 minutes here, and we have a number of questions. Antonio, I saw your hand go up first, so if you can wait for the microphone and you should identify yourself, Antonio.

Drew Stromberg:
My name is Drew Stromberg. I'm with Students for Sensible Drug Policy. My question is for Director Kerlikowske. You say that we can't arrest ourselves out of this problem, but you have presided over a drug policy that has led to the arrest of three-quarters of a million people for marijuana every year in the United States. I don't hear you proposing any policy solutions to actually ending the practice of locking human beings in cages for taking drugs. So my question for you is this: rhetoric aside, when do you actually plan on ending this war?

Gil Kerlikowske:
Well, I think that it might be important to recognize that we arrest three times the number of people for legal alcohol that we arrest for marijuana. So, we, apparently, in the legalization issue haven't done a particularly good job with alcohol.

I would say that the majority of -- the vast majority of any arrests for marijuana occur at the state and local level, and as we know so clearly, the federal government doesn't direct those laws. We've seen a number of changes, whether it was in Mayor Bloomberg's State of the City speech just last month, or the changes in the city of Chicago, or in other places around other states where marijuana possession has been a ticket or a civil fine. No one wants to see young people get arrested and have a record that is going to haunt them. And so I think we're starting to see a lot of those kinds of changes. But we certainly don't think legalizing and making the drug more widely and easily available is a very good path to public health.

Tom Gjelten:
Okay. Way in back there, by the cameras.

Female Speaker:

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going next week to Mexico and Central America, and a big part of the discussions are going to be drugs. And the region is asking -- Mexico for one side is asking for a different -- maybe not different approach, but a progression of trying to push the drugs issue a bit to the side. And on the other hand, President Funes said just last week in Washington, “We expect more from the U.S.” My question is, I don’t know how far you’re preparing part of the trade, what can you advise President Obama if you do? But what would be the message that you think President Obama can deliver in both countries, Mexico and Costa Rica, on what the U.S. has done and what more can the U.S. do in regards to drugs? Thank you.

Tom Gjelten:
Are you going with him on the trip?

Gil Kerlikowske:
I am not going with him on the trip. And I think the sequester has something to do with --

[laughter]

Tom Gjelten:
I suppose it does.

Gil Kerlikowske:
-- how many people can go and where. But I would very much tell you that the relationship, particularly now with the new government of Mexico and the cooperation over safety and security is very important. I know a great deal of the trip is devoted to talking about jobs and the economy and trade issues, and I think that’s also very important. But it was during -- particularly during this last year in Mexico that -- after almost five years of that very intense effort by President Calderon, that within the last year the numbers of violent acts and homicides really began to decrease. So I would tell you that the relationship and the spirit of cooperation at many levels within the Obama Administration, with our partners in Mexico, is very solid and will continue.

Tom Gjelten:
Cynthia Arnson from our own Latin America program here at the Wilson Center.

Cynthia Arnson:

Tom, thanks. I have a question for Daniel Mejia. Daniel,

Tom Gjelten:
Provocative question. Provocative answer, I should say. Provocative scenario you just laid out, I meant to say. You, sir. Yeah. I think you had your hand up for a while, right? I thought so. One of you did, I know.

Grant Smith:
Grant Smith from the Drug Policy Alliance. I wanted to follow-up on a comment that Director Kerlikowske made. He referenced the Chicago example of issuing a civil -- a ticket for marijuana possession, and some other examples around the country, and some other states have down this, as well, some going back all the way to the 1970s. And we know that -- and you mentioned also that we don't want to arrest young people for marijuana; we don't want to see them with a criminal record that haunts them for the rest of their life. But we also know that criminalization is a barrier to services, it prevents people who are at high risk of overdose, of contracting HIV and other infectious diseases from getting services. And I was wondering why -- you know, how can we have a public health approach to dealing with drugs without, you know, encouraging state and local governments and the federal government to look at -- look more closely at decriminalization along the lines of what you mentioned earlier, and other examples, too.

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Well, first of all, I learn something from the panelists every time I meet with them, and it's a real pleasure for us to be able to have these exchanges and further exchanges. I would sum up that this president's drug policy is the most dramatic shift toward public health that I think generations from now will be very pleased with and will make a significant difference in not only the problems that drugs cause in our country, but hopefully will be of greater help and greater assistance to our partners throughout the world.

Tom Gjelten:
Ambassador.

Interpreter:
I would fundamentally underscore our agreements on a public health approach, on the importance of education, and, fundamentally, the unity of values that are transmitted when we talk about fighting consumption, trying to have an integral message that doesn't end up dis-authorizing us when we make these statements.

Daniel Mejia Londono:
Thank you. I think that the message that we all agree with is that have to give a debate based on evidence and not on ideological positions, and up to recently the debate was purely an ideological debate. And the evidence shows more and more that the current prohibitionist regime hasn't worked, and we have to find alternatives. And I think no one is asking for full legalization, too. No one is asking for drugs to be sold in the schools, nothing like that. Regulation doesn't mean being soft on crime; quite the opposite, regulation means concentrating police resources on criminals, not on drug users, and I think this is what everyone is looking for. And I -- finally, I want to thank Director Kerlikowske for opening to this debate. I think this is the first time I'm with -- I know many people in the audience who has been in -- we've been doing a late of debates in Latin America, in different countries, but almost -- in no -- in none of the debates in the past U.S. government officials have participated. So I'm happy to have this debate with the US officials because this is important to have a respectful debate, but based on evidence.

Scott Wilson:

Just following a bit on Daniel's, I mean, I do think that the policy parameters that the Director has outlined does put the United States much closer to the Latin American consensus on this issue, that it is the emphasis on the domestic American issue of this is important, while also saying the problem is becoming more complicated to some degree because of Latin America in some ways being a victim of its own economic success. The reason Uruguay has problems even though that what they're going after affects the poorest of the poor, and Brazil and Argentina is a rising middle class that is becoming a drug-consuming class. And that does echo the administration's message of shared responsibility with evidence, that didn't exist, say, 10, 15 years ago. Those sorts -- that kind of rhetoric did not ring true nearly to the degree that it does now in Latin America, so it's a step in the right direction but it's also a problem that is becoming more complicated.

Tom Gjelten:
Indeed. All right. Well, I'd like to thank our panelists: Scott Wilson, chief White House correspondent for The Washington Post; Daniel Mejia from Universidad de los Andes; Ambassador Carlos Pita from the Republic of Uruguay; and Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Policy at the White House. And thanks to the Wilson Center, and thanks to my organization, NPR. I think these are terrific national conversations, and thanks to all of you for coming today.

[applause]

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