

# Justice Department: Federal drug charges rise

WASHINGTON (AP) - Over 30,000 people were charged with federal drug offenses in 1999, more than double the number 15 years earlier, and most of those convicted were drug traffickers, a Justice Department study says.

Attorney General John Ashcroft said the report shows federal drug laws are succeeding in catching the serious criminals and keeping them behind bars longer.

"One crime expert disputed that, saying only a fraction of traffickers are being arrested.

The study released Sunday by the department's Bureau of Justice Statistics found only 4 percent of drug criminals were convicted of simple possession. Ninety-one percent were convicted of trafficking.

It also found drug offenders are serving longer sentences. The average prison stay rose to 5 1/2 years in 1999 from 2 1/2 years in

1986.

The longer prison times are the result of federal laws passed over the past two decades that require mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes, researchers said.

"Tougher federal drug laws are making a real difference in clearing major drug offenders from our nation's streets," Ashcroft said. "Federal drug offenders are predominantly hard-core criminals with prior arrest records who are convicted for drug trafficking, not first-time, nonviolent offenders charged with drug possession."

The report showed that 30,099 defendants were charged with a federal drug offense in 1999, the most recent year for which data was available. In 1984, 11,854 were charged with drug crimes.

James Alan Fox, a criminologist at Northeastern University, said that while the jump reflects the government's increased drug-

fighting efforts, prosecutors are only getting the tip of the iceberg.

"We are devoting a tremendous amount of money and resources to this relentless war on drugs, which is not winnable" he said.

Almost half of those charged with drug offenses in the period studied were Hispanic, 28 percent were black and 25 percent were non-Hispanic white.

John Scalia, the report's author, said the Hispanic count was high because many cases involved drug smuggling across the U.S.-Mexico border.

"A lot of cases prosecuted by U.S. attorneys involve importation, especially of marijuana," Scalia said.

About a quarter of defendants were not U.S. citizens.

Other findings in the report:

- About half of defendants had a previous conviction and a third were under justice

supervision when they were arrested.

- Drug prosecutions made up 32 percent of the federal criminal caseload in 1999, compared with 18 percent in 1984.

- More than 25,000 defendants were convicted. Almost half had no prior convictions. Nearly a third were involved with marijuana, 42 percent with powder or crack cocaine and 13 percent with methamphetamines.

- Most were subject to mandatory minimum prison sentences. But about 21 percent of convicted drug criminals received a reduced sentence under a 1994 law exempting many first-time, nonviolent drug offenders from mandatory sentences.

- The average sentence rose to 74 months from 62 months in 1986. Actual time served jumped to 66 months from 30 months.

- As of September 1999, 68,369 drug offenders were in federal prisons and 34,452 were under post-incarceration supervision.

## Broadband

(Continued from Page 6) efforts to ensure equitable installation of this major technology shift are not employed.

Much congressional discussion is going on about facilitating installation in various areas, urban and rural communities among those concerns, although it is fair to say that African-American and Latino leadership in the corridors of power in the nation's capital is sorely ab-

sent and there is very little attention being given to the issue around the nation.

The Washington-based Progress and Freedom Foundation, a digital think tank, initiated "Project Broadband" to bring attention to the issue of the impact of high-speed data transport on public policy and largely advocates "a deregulatory, free-market solution to speed the delivery of electricity infrastructure upgrades to consumers," con-

sistent with the Bush administration's "hands-off" technology policy.

The Urban Technology Infrastructure Development Act (UTIDA), an initiative being advanced by the Los Angeles-based Institute For Strategic Thinking and Technology Development (ISTTD), led by this author, is also designed to intensify focus on private sector momentum, through the use of tax incentives on urban tech-

nology infrastructure development, broadband installation included in that portfolio, but with a little help.

As we transition, not terribly unlike a time more than 30 years ago when 8-track tapes captured our attention because of the elevation they gave to the driving experience, only to give way to cassettes and then to compact discs, we are seeing the dawn of what will no doubt be profound change, trans-

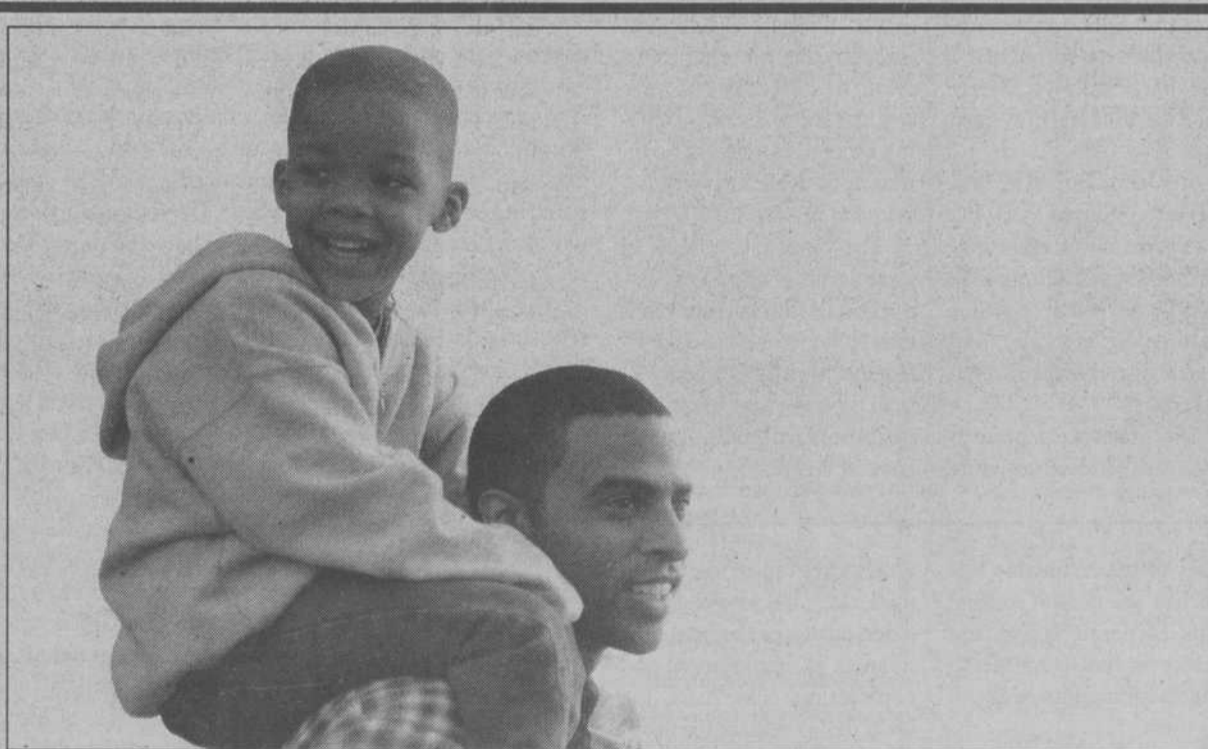
forming information and knowledge delivery in ways that will potentially enrich the lives of many.

The downside of that platform is that we also risk displacement of those outside of that rich bandwidth of economic vitality that have historically been last to be part of the path of progress.

If we want to see a strengthened nation, as a result of this increase in capability, each of us has a re-

sponsibility to engage our voice to prevent that same mistake again.

*Professor Morse is president and CEO of The Institute For Strategic Thinking And Technology Development (ISTTD) and is also an adjunct professor at both Pepperdine University's George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management and National University's School of Business and Technology*



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