

OUR VIEW Brain on Drugs

The headline above is the best explanation we can come up with for a report put out by The Sentencing Project that under-emphasizes, and almost trivializes, the impact of methamphetamine use in America.

Ryan King, a policy analyst at The Sentencing Project, a not-for-profit group that supports alternative to incarceration for convicted drug users and other criminals, wrote in a report leased on Wednesday that "meth is a dangerous drug but among the least commonly used," noting that usage rates have stabilized since 1999 and teen use has dropped.

"The portrayal of methamphetamine in the United States as an epidemic spreading across the country has been grossly overstated," King said.

An *Associated Press* story quoting King stated: "Overheated rhetoric, unsupported assertions and factual errors about the use of the drug—including frequent, misguided comparisons between meth and crack cocaine—lead to poor decisions about how to spend precious public dollars combating drug addiction."

With all due respect, it seems that King might have been on meth when he wrote the report. Publications spanning the gamut from *Newsweek* to *Rolling Stone* have chronicled this drug's pernicious rampage across the United States. First it tore through rural America and the Midwest like a narcotizing Hurricane Katrina. Then the meth scourge moved to the Pacific Northwest, later ravaging its way on down to the southwest.

Right here in Clark County, meth is wreaking incredible havoc. Authorities annually bust nearly 1,000 labs (finding the ingredients is as easy as going to a supermarket and setting up a lab is as easy finding a place to sleep—cops have found labs in hotel and motel rooms, homes, garages, trunks of cars, in the desert). Prison officials will tell you that meth users populate local jails. Child care workers will tell you that meth is one the chief causes of family break-ups; mom or dad are addicts. Cops in the know will tell you it's the preferred drug of choice and that they're more worried about meth than crack.

And they should be. King's research minimizes meth as a "highly localized" problem, acknowledging the problem predominantly affects West Coast cities. He cites "government statistics" that note five percent of men arrested had meth in their system, versus 30 percent testing positive for cocaine and 44 percent for marijuana. While these numbers may carry a glint of truth, they fail to acknowledge that meth receives scant portion of the War on Drugs' attention given to cocaine and marijuana. Why the unconcern? Simple. Cocaine and marijuana are perceived as inner-city drugs used by minorities and the poor. And meth? It's simply a rural or suburban (read: a Caucasian) issue or problem, treated much the same hands-off way as powder cocaine.

Nor does King mention that meth is making slow inroads in the South and steady gains on the East Coast, primarily through Hispanic gangs. Back across the country, there are reports that Black youth in Oakland are increasingly turning to meth. With minorities getting involved in making, trafficking and using meth, it's a fair bet that authorities will soon come knocking and the meth epidemic will be viewed as what it truly is: an epidemic.

Bank of America

As it relates to the distraught federal relief effort in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, we should start calling the White House the Bank of America. Now this isn't a bank in the truest sense. Rather it's a mint for companies and special interests with a connection to the Bush White House? How else to explain why billions of dollars in federal funds have been misappropriated, lost, misused and abused and there's been no congressional investigation and limited outrage on the part of lawmakers.

Were the monies directed to where they should've been, folks in the South wouldn't be as jittery as they are as this year's tropical storm/hurricane season gets underway. If the administration doesn't act quickly to stop the fraud and put the money where it belongs, we could be looking at another human-exacerbated natural disaster.



Binge drinking: Life or death

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

As another school year comes to an end, high school seniors graduate with high expectations. Many of them are getting ready to go to the next level — college, a time of new experiences, new friendships and making memories that will last a lifetime. For some students, unfortunately, college will be a time of excessive drinking and dealing with the aftermath, which, in some cases, could be death. Some parents' children will go to college but will never return.

Why? Because there is a phenomenon running rampant in this country that is not only destroying lives but killing young adults. That phenomenon is binge drinking.

Technically, that's when a woman downs four alcoholic drinks in a row at one sitting or a man consumes five drinks in a row at one sitting. While that seems like a lot, at most college campuses, it's just the first course. It is nothing for some participants in binge drinking to ingest 10, 15, or 20 drinks in one night.

A national survey found that 40 percent of America's college students routinely drink that much or more and that every year that kind of drinking accounts for 70,000 cases of sexual assault and 1,400 deaths from alcohol poisoning, falls and car accidents. It's an issue that America's college presidents say is a matter of life and death. By contrast, it's an is-



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

sue that America's college students see very differently; they see it as a normal part of college socializing.

The drug of choice at many college campuses is not cocaine or marijuana, it's alcohol. College students drink an estimated 4 billion cans of beer each year. And the total amount of alcohol consumed by them annually is enough for each college and university in the United States to fill an Olympic-size pool.

Binge drinking is more prevalent than we realize, and most parents are unaware that it is taking place. Each year, students spend \$5.5 billion dollars on alcohol, mostly beer, which is more than they spend on books, soda, coffee, juice and milk combined.

An alarming 80 percent of those students who live on college campuses but do not binge drink report that they have experienced at least one second-hand effect of binge drinking, such as being the victim of an assault or unwanted sexual advances, having property vandalized or having sleep or study interrupted as a result of others bingeing.

While drinking to excess has always been a tradition

and a problem among college men, there is increasing concern over binge drinking for college women. They're binge drinking in alarming numbers — and not just on spring break. They are out in public, staggering in the streets, speaking loud, cursing, falling down drunk and becoming easy targets for sexual assault.

Within the last 10 years, there has been a huge amount of effort put into stopping underage drinking in this country and it has made some impact on boys, but researchers find that they are not getting anywhere with the girls. The girls are not only drinking more than their male peers are, but they are now more likely to drink heavier than their male peers.

Based on a report from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, girls are bingeing more than boys. It also reports that among girls binge drinking is growing at a faster rate. Twelfth grade female drinkers and binge drinkers are now more likely to drink hard liquor than beer.

About 10.4 million adolescents ages 12 to 20 reported using alcohol. Of that group, 5.1 million were binge drinkers and included 2.3 million heavy drinkers who binged at least five times a month. These frequent binge drinkers were eight times more likely than non-binge drinkers to miss a class, fall behind in schoolwork, get hurt or injured and damage property. Statistics reveal that if they binge in high school, they'll binge heavier in college.

There is speculation that binge drinking during college may be associated with mental health disorders such as compulsiveness, depression. (See LaGrande, Page 11)

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