

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
May 25, 2006

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S. 2560, to reauthorize the Office of National Drug Control Policy
Executive Business Meeting
May 26, 2006

I support this reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. This bill includes some excellent modifications and clarifications that I believe will improve the ONDCP.

The bill provides important clarification concerning the most significant objectives, goals, and responsibilities of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. It requires the President to submit to Congress a yearly National Drug Control Strategy, and then requires the Director of ONDCP to submit to Congress a performance measurement system that includes 2-year and 5-year targets for each of the Strategy's objectives. It also expands ONDCP's reporting requirements to Congress on numerous areas of ONDCP's responsibility and requires ONDCP to give a full accounting of the budget for all aspects of the government's drug control efforts, instead of the partial accounting given up until now. In addition, this legislation goes a long way toward ensuring essential information sharing by requiring that various government agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, and the Departments of Agriculture and Defense, submit to ONDCP and Congress reports relating to their agencies' drug control efforts. Given the attitude of this Administration toward Congress and required reports, I have some concern that all our hard work may come to naught. We will need to be vigilant in our oversight and to seek accountability.

Significantly, the bill authorizes \$30 million a year for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to establish five National Guard Counterdrug Schools to train personnel from Federal agencies, State and local law enforcement agencies, community-based organizations, and other groups in drug interdiction and demand reduction activities. I am a strong supporter of the National Guard.

I am pleased that the bill calls for the creation of a National Methamphetamine Information Clearinghouse, an idea which I have long supported. This web-based source of information would promote sharing of "best practices" regarding law enforcement, prevention, treatment, environmental, social services, and other programs related to combating the scourge of methamphetamine. Many local law enforcement and drug prevention officials support this legislation, as well as a range of national organizations including the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America, the National Fraternal Order of Police, and the National Narcotics Officers' Associations Coalitions.

While I support passage of this reauthorization legislation, I am disappointed that my recommendations to remedy a few key weaknesses in the bill were not adopted. I am most troubled by provisions that prohibit the expenditure of more than 5% of the federal funds appropriated for High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area programs for drug prevention programs, and prohibit the use of any federal HIDTA funds to establish new or expand existing drug treatment programs.

I have witnessed firsthand the damage that illegal drugs can do to rural areas, and the difficulty that people in my State have sometimes had in obtaining drug treatment. Vermont has been struggling for years now with a severe heroin addiction problem, and we now see methamphetamine abuse on the rise. Our law enforcement officers are acting valiantly to stem the tide of illegal drug use, but they cannot do it alone. They are the first ones to say that we need to do more in providing treatment, and in funding programs to prevent drug abuse in the first place. I will continue working to improve the bill in these regards.