

Office of Drug Control Policy needed and is proving that with its successes

As a member of the Partnership for a Drug Free Iowa, I have a few points I would like to make about the recent editorial questioning the need for the Office of Drug Control Policy ("Right Pick for 'Drug Czar'? That's the Wrong Question," June 10). While raising valid questions about efficiencies, key points were overlooked.

Government should become more efficient. The ODCP is taking steps to do just that. First, the office and the Department of Public Safety plan to merge office space. This makes good fiscal sense while helping streamline communication.

Second, ODCP is exploring ways to improve administrative efficiency. While currently leveraging a 30-to-1 ratio of federal to state money, it is exploring ways to contract administrative services with other agencies to save taxpayer money.



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Additionally, passionate advocates exist to combat drug abuse in the public health and public safety fields. ODCP exists to blend these camps into one effective strategy.

ODCP has done this in the past with impressive results for taxpayers. For example, the office led in the creation of pseudoephedrine controls to crack down on the manufacturing of meth in Iowa. Meth labs have been reduced by 70 percent, and each day ODCP is on the forefront of the fight, helping save lives and millions of dollars in costly cleanup that taxpayers would otherwise have to shoulder. This year, the office

was instrumental in helping lead the successful bipartisan effort to ban chemicals used in synthetic marijuana.

Each year, ODCP is responsible for creating a state-wide plan to combat drug use. The office works across 10 state agencies and with local partners, taking the best ideas from public health, treatment and public safety professionals to create a multidisciplinary strategy that is balanced and reduces redundancy and inefficiency.

It is important that an independent voice performs this critical function so a balanced strategy can be created.

Such a strategy has yielded results. On a national survey, Iowa recently ranked lowest among all states in overall drug use by population. Also, in part through efforts of the ODCP and private-sector partners, youth drug use in Iowa has seen a

slow and steady decline for the past 10 years.

Thanks to ODCP's efforts, 155 drug-control projects serving about 80 percent of the state's counties were supported; 2,850 pounds of illegal drugs and 745 firearms used in the trafficking of drugs were taken off the streets; 229 drug trafficking rings were dismantled; and Iowa has seen a nearly 50 percent increase in referrals to treatment centers.

Still, much work remains to be done, and the office is reprioritizing efforts to deal with emerging threats like prescription drug abuse.

The new director, Steve Lukan, has numerous contacts on both the federal and state level in key areas from his years of service as a legislator. He has hit the ground running and has an aggressive agenda for the office.

Working together, we can win this battle.