



Just say yes to saying no



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Lofgren invites group to Muscatine to promote anti-drug message

MUSCATINE, Iowa — A panel consisting of the state's top drug-fighter, local law enforcement officials, a treatment provider, a local legislator and the county attorney shared their thoughts Wednesday on how to make Iowa a safer and healthier place, especially for its residents under 18.

At the invitation of Rep. Mark Lofgren, R-Muscatine, on hand at the forum at city hall were:

Steve Lukan, director of the Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy
Peter Komendowski, president of the group Partnership@ [DrugFreeIowa.org](#)

- Local law enforcement officials
- Paula LeVasseur, program director for Trinity Muscatine's New Horizons
- Muscatine County Attorney Alan Ostergren

The speakers may have outnumbered the audience of three, but the group still stayed on task and promoted their message.

During the 90-minute public forum, the panel touched on a handful of topics, including:

n The potential for decriminalizing or even legalizing marijuana in Iowa. Each panelist opposed the idea.

"I may go home tonight and have a glass of bourbon," Ostergren said. "I'm not going to get drunk. Plenty of people use alcohol responsibly. The whole point of marijuana and other drugs is to get impaired." People who think legalizing marijuana will reduce the crime rate are "hopelessly naive," Ostergren said.

"We know about the devastating effects of alcohol abuse, but we don't have that much research on marijuana," Komendowski noted.

“If marijuana helped as much as [legalization proponents] say it does, it would be a freaking miracle drug,” LeVasseur said.

“The governor is not interested in signing marijuana legislation,” Lukan said. “Think about it: Do you want your doctor or your kid’s teacher using it?”

n The importance of parents spending time each day talking with their children. A statewide initiative urges parents to spend at least five minutes each day doing just that. “I can’t imagine talking to my child just five minutes a day,” said C.J. Ryan, chief deputy in the Muscatine County Sheriff’s Office. “We can’t legislate people to be good parents.”

If parents can talk their children into not trying drugs or alcohol until age 18 — or better, until 21 or 25, after their brains are fully developed — the risk for becoming addicted recedes dramatically, LeVasseur said.

n Some drug prevention laws are working well, and drug treatment programs are a success story that most of the public doesn’t even know about, Komendowski said.

“Only about 15 percent go off the wagon,” he said, while a patient being treated for, say, a heart condition is much more likely to suffer another heart attack.

Lukan and Ostergren both praised Iowa’s system of electronically tracking the sale of pseudoephedrine, a key component of producing methamphetamine. Ostergren called the current control system “one of the Legislature’s most dramatic success stories” because it’s greatly reduced the number of meth labs in Iowa. Lukan said the number has dropped from about 1,500 seven years ago to about 300 this year.

n On changing society’s norms from acceptance of drug and alcohol use among young people — especially through such media as reality TV — to rejecting it, Ostergren, who’s 40 and graduated from high school in 1990, recalled how his school had a designated smoking area and teachers would routinely light up in the halls outside their classroom.

“Now even the most derelict criminal puts out his cigarette before going into the Courthouse,” Ostergren quipped.



Anti-drug meeting set in Muscatine

NOVEMBER 30, 2012 4:00 AM • [MIKE FERGUSON](#)

MUSCATINE, Iowa — Simply by showing up for a meeting next week, Muscatine residents can help two of Iowa's top anti-drug officials formulate plans for fighting drug use in the coming year.

Steven Lukan, director of the Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy, and Peter Komendowski, president of the [Partnership@DrugFreeIowa.org](#), will hold a listening post at 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 5, in council chambers at Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore St.

The event is being billed as "Speak Out for Kids." The purpose of the listening posts, which are being offered in a handful of communities across the state, is to hear directly from residents about their top concerns, needs and solutions related to illegal drug activity impacting Iowa youth.

Rep. Mark Lofgren, R-Muscatine, will host the event. The public is invited to what's expected to be the final listening post scheduled for 2012.

The listening posts will continue in 2013.

Rep. Jeff Kaufmann, R-Wilton, plans to attend, as does his son, Rep.-elect Bobby Kaufmann, R-Wilton. Muscatine County Attorney Alan Ostergren, Muscatine County Sheriff Chief Deputy C.J. Ryan and Paula LeVasseur, program director at Trinity Muscatine's New Horizons, are also scheduled to attend.

Speaking on behalf of Lukan, Dale Woolery, the assistant director of the Office of Drug Control Policy, said the listening posts "are an attempt to find out from professionals who work in drug prevention and law enforcement — as well as citizens with children or grandchildren — who have an interest in what's happening" with efforts to control drug use, both good and bad.

"It's much easier to identify what is wrong or what's not working, and we need to know that," he said. "But we also want to know if individuals are making inroads in addressing substance abuse so that other Iowans can benefit. We are happy to play the role of Johnny Appleseed," spreading the news around the state and incorporating community solutions into the Drug Control Strategy.

Komendowski said his partnership "looks a lot at healthy communities and the social stresses that may invite the use of drugs and alcohol. You have shifts in home ownership or jobs, and it puts people in different situations."

He said legislators rely on his and Lukan's organizations "because we can get a great overview of all the issues we need to consider together. We hear real stories in real communities."

Issues like marijuana decriminalization laws in select states — legislators plan to introduce a similar bill in Iowa, too, although Gov. Terry Branstad has said he'll veto it — can send a harmful message to Iowa children, Komendowski said.

“We are trying to build the healthiest state in the U.S., but this message to children (for example, having a beer or two when one is underage is OK) is subtle and dangerous,” he said. “I hope people will feel that by coming to our listening post, there will be stuff out there that will help them.”



Speak Out for Kids

NOVEMBER 29, 2012 8:15 PM

What: Residents are invited to speak with two of Iowa's top anti-drug officials during a community forum.

Who's speaking: Steven Lukan, director of the Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy, and Peter Komendowski, president of the Partnership@DrugFreeIowa.org.

When: 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 5

Where: Muscatine City Hall, 215 Sycamore St.

Why: The state annually publishes its Drug Control Strategy, and officials want to learn more about concerns in communities across the state as well as programs and strategies that are working to curb drug use in Iowa communities.

What if I can't come? Email comments that might be helpful for the state's next Drug Control Strategy to susie.sher@iowa.gov. Sher is editor of the Drug Control Strategy.

More info: www.iowa.gov/odcp or www.drugfreeiowa.org.