

Does Bush support drugpeacenik Friedman?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Drug Policy Foundation, possibly the most well-heeled lobby for dope legalization in the United States, has named extremist economist Milton Friedman—the darling of the “Reagan Revolution” and the Republican Party’s free trade wing—as the winner of its 1991 Richard J. Dennis Drug-peace Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Drug Policy Reform.

The award, which includes a check for \$100,000, was issued to the University of Chicago guru at the Drug Policy Foundation’s fifth annual convention in Washington, D.C. Nov. 13-16, 1991, and was trumpeted in recent full-page ads published in the *New Republic*, *National Review*, and *Reason* (sic) magazines.

This latest blatant reminder that Friedman’s notion of “economic freedom” means freedom for organized crime, not for honest citizens, ought to prompt some sharp questions from voters to George Bush in his reelection campaign. After all, the President has made no bones about the fact that his “new world order” is a policing plan for such Friedmanite economic-warfare schemes as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The voice for ‘legalizing drugs’

In a press release announcing the award, the dope lobby group wrote of Friedman: “For over two decades, Professor Friedman has been a leading and powerful voice for ending drug prohibition and legalizing drugs. In 1972, while President Nixon was engaging in his war on drugs, Dr. Friedman wrote in *Newsweek*: ‘Prohibition is an attempted cure that makes matters worse—for both the addict and the rest of us.’ In 1989, after drug czar William Bennett announced his drug war, Dr. Friedman wrote to him in the *Wall Street Journal*: ‘I know you . . . must be as revolted as I am by the prospect of turning the United States into an armed camp, by the vision of jails filled with casual drug users, and of an army of enforcers empowered to invade the liberty of citizens on slight evidence.’ ”

In its 428-page primer arguing for dope legalization, *New Frontiers in Drug Policy*, the Drug Policy Foundation reprinted a March 7, 1991 article by Friedman in the *Wall Street Journal*. In that article, Friedman made the argument that the leading cause of drug-related violence in America is the war on drugs. Taking homicide statistics and statistics on

the number of people sent to jail, Friedman argued that both statistics skyrocketed during periods when there was a serious war on drugs undertaken by the federal government:

“There seems little doubt that the war on drugs is the single most important factor that produces such drastic increases. Even if only half the effect is attributed to the war on drugs, 5,000 extra homicides a year and 45,000 extra prisoners is a high cost, and that price does not include the lives lost in Colombia, Peru, and elsewhere, because we cannot enforce our own laws, or the lives lost through adulterated drugs in a black market or the culture of violence, disrespect for the law, corruption of law enforcement officials, and disregard of civil liberties unleashed by the war on drugs.”

Bush did not ‘say no’

The Reagan-Bush slate won election in 1980, in part because most Americans were disgusted with the drug lobby’s flaunted power in the Carter White House. Right after the election, the Drug Policy Foundation shifted its strategy from the direct drive for legalization. They targeted the new administration’s weakness for laissez-faire economics to make the war on drugs appear “unwinnable” and pave the way for surrender. The record shows that this was a strategy George Bush—both as Reagan’s war on drugs honcho, and as President—could not “just say no” to:

- Last summer, when the Colombian government of César Gaviria cut a sweetheart deal with the Medellín Cartel, ending an extradition treaty with the United States that had been one of the few effective weapons in the anti-drug arsenal, President Bush raced to embrace the sellout as a “victory.”

- Late in 1991, after the majority of senior staffers of the President’s White House Office on Drug Abuse Policy either quit or were fired, evidence surfaced that drug czar Robert Martinez had turned the heavily budgeted office into a Bush reelection outpost. In the President’s State of the Union message, even more funds were promised for the war on drugs effort.

- Even the most doctored federal government statistics reveal that the United States is being flooded with high-grade heroin, arriving not only from the Golden Triangle of Southeast Asia, but now from South America as well.

- The biggest supposed victory of the Bush “war on drugs” was the December 1989 invasion of Panama, a blatant violation of international law which was justified to—and accepted by most—Americans as an action to arrest an alleged drug kingpin, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega. Yet two years later, as the U.S. military occupation persists, even many who cheered for the invasion admit that drug trafficking through Panama has *increased*.

We think candidate Bush should be called upon to denounce the free-market drug paradise of Friedman and his extremist backers. The reply should be interesting.