

Drug czar Martinez comes under attack

by Jeffrey Steinberg

When George Bush came into the White House, no domestic issue enjoyed greater verbal priority than excising the "scourge" of drugs. Nine months after his inauguration, in his first televised address from the Oval Office, President Bush labeled drugs "the gravest domestic threat facing the nation."

Now, three years later, in the midst of a hotly contested reelection effort, the drug epidemic is the furthest thing from Bush's mind. Despite record-setting levels of spending (this year's White House Office of Drug Abuse Control budget is a projected \$12.7 billion) the administration's anti-drug effort is foundering; since last January, White House drug czar Robert Martinez has been the subject of an FBI probe into illegal campaign financing; every top White House anti-drug official has either been fired by Martinez or has resigned; and every important government statistic—with the exception of the White House's own dubious January 1992 drug survey—shows a leap in illegal dope trafficking and related violence.

The Bush so-called war on drugs is such an obviously low priority that the February drug summit with five Ibero-American heads of state in San Antonio, Texas scarcely interrupted President Bush's frenetic campaign schedule and was virtually blacked out of the U.S. media.

Cocaine and heroin epidemic

In a Feb. 25 interview in the *Washington Post*, Stanley Morris, the former deputy chief for supply reduction of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (who was dumped by Martinez), bluntly stated: "There's no indication anywhere that there's less cocaine coming out of South America than there was coming out three years ago. Indeed, there is such a surplus that they are pushing new markets in Europe because they have saturated the market" in the United States.

The White House admits that cocaine production is back up to 1988 levels—over 900 metric tons in 1991. But European Community estimates place that figure at over 1,100 metric tons. The EC study attributes this jump to expansion of cocaine production into Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Central America.

While the Bush White House claims that there is a decline in "casual" drug use, the number of hard-core cocaine users increased in 1991 by over 200,000, up to the 1988 official high of nearly 886,000 individuals in the United States.

Further, Ibero-American cocaine cartels have expanded

into the heroin business, producing bumper crops of opium poppy in Colombia, Brazil, and throughout Central America, and forging ties to the Chinese opium barons of the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia and the Sicilian mafia networks now operating in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

A great deal of the public blame for this state of affairs has been directed at Martinez, the former Florida governor and a crony of Jeb Bush, the President's son. Last January, according to a report in the March 4 *Washington Post*, the FBI launched a probe of Martinez after he used White House letterhead to arrange for leftover funds from his failed gubernatorial campaign to be funneled to the Florida GOP "to support George Bush and Dan Quayle for reelection in 1992."

Right after Martinez arranged for nearly \$64,000 to be routed to the Florida Republican Party, he received a thank-you note from White House political director Ronald C. Kaufman. Kaufman has been identified by sources close to the White House as a political dirty trickster who is operating on behalf of the Bush-Quayle reelection effort in a fashion reminiscent of the 1972 Nixon "plumbers." The Martinez-Kaufman link has prompted speculation that the White House drug czar office is being used to conduct dirty tricks.

The real thrust of the criticisms of Martinez, however, centers around his poor performance as the nation's chief drug cop. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), chairman of the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, complained to reporters recently about the collapse of the White House anti-drug effort: "If you told me Martinez resigned three months ago, I couldn't argue with you. I never thought I'd see the day I'd miss Nancy Reagan, but at least she was out there pushing."

Annual drug report a fraud

Nothing is more symptomatic of the Bush regime's abandoning of even a pretense of concern about the drug epidemic than the January 1992 National Drug Control Strategy report, issued under George Bush's signature. The report, issued annually under congressional mandate, is a pastiche of manipulated statistics aimed at concealing the simple fact that the country is being overrun with illegal drugs. Even in the course of trying to paint a favorable picture, the report admits that drug use among Americans 35 years of age and up is skyrocketing, and that the United States is being flooded with high-grade, cheap heroin; the result has been that heroin use and reported incidents of heroin overdoses at hospital emergency rooms is also rising.

Although the survey claimed that there has been a net decrease in drug use among American youth, the information was based primarily on a study of high school seniors. But increasingly, larger numbers of American teenagers are dropping out of high school before they reach their senior year. The statistics are, therefore, almost useless in measuring overall drug use by the nation's young people.