

Mr. Cote Goes To Washington

Mr. Cote Goes To Washington Step 13 Shelter Founder Meets At White House With Walters, Bush

by Laura Lieff

As far as Bob Cote is concerned, he ends up in the oddest places. On December 11, 2008, Cote found himself at the White House for a meeting with President George W. Bush, U.S. Drug Czar John Walters and 15 other treatment prevention professionals from around the country. The meeting was set up to discuss the new data that demonstrates "significant success reducing drug availability and use," even as President Bush was wrapping up his term in office.

"I was very humbled to be there," said Cote. "John Walters is a first class person and he always thinks of me which I really appreciate. I'm running a little shelter down on Larimer and Walters invites me to the White House. He is always including me and I feel very lucky to have him as a friend."

At a roundtable discussion with national leaders in drug use prevention, treatment and enforcement, the former President highlighted results from the University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future Study (MTF), the DEA's System to Retrieve Information from Drug Evidence (STRIDE) and workplace drug tests performed by Quest Diagnostics.

Work Recognized

"The president commended meeting participants for their dedication to reducing America's drug problem," said Spokesperson for the Office of National Drug Control Policy Jennifer de Vallance.

de Vallance went on to say that the meeting was an opportunity for President Bush to discuss new data trends in youth drug use and the availability of cocaine. He also used the meeting as a chance to thank some of the people from all over the country who have been instrumental in prevention, treatment and supply reduction.

"Through his work at Step 13, Mr. Cote has helped thousands of men in the Denver area achieve and maintain sobriety," de Vallance noted. "President Bush wanted to bring Mr. Cote and his colleagues from the treatment profession to recognize their good work."

Strategy Working

The meeting was held in the Roosevelt Room of the West Wing of the White House, where participants looked over the data that covered a broad spectrum of key indicators that offered strong evidence of the effectiveness of a counterdrug strategy. These indicators balanced reducing drug availability along with drug demand.

"There has been quite a reduction of drug use in this country because of the stoppage of drugs coming in to the U.S.," explained Cote. "Prices have jumped on both cocaine and pot and although preventing drugs from getting into the U.S. is

a major hassle, it seems to be working.”

The MTF Study, which surveys 8th, 10th and 12th graders nationwide, shows that in 2008, illicit drug use among youth continued to decline from 2001, with a 25 percent reduction in overall drug use over the past seven years. This reduction equates to approximately 900,000 fewer young people using drugs today, compared to 2001.

Drugs Off Streets

Within the context of progress against drug use overall, the three data sets reveal steep reductions in availability and use of cocaine specifically over the past two years. Significant changes in the street-level price and purity of cocaine (key indicators of stress in the drug market) suggest the supply of the drug on American streets is dropping.

As reported in the 2009 National Drug Threat Assessment of the National Drug Intelligence Center, “counterdrug agencies have made measurable progress against cocaine production, transportation and distribution, contributing to a reduction in cocaine availability in the United States.” Among youth, MTF finds a 15 percent reduction in past-year use of cocaine from 2007-2008.

“John Walters has done a tremendous job trying to keep drugs out of this country,” said Cote. “He has spread miracle grow over small grass roots organizations like Step 13. He has brought the press over to us and has explained our ideas. He even wrote a personal note thanking me for years of friendship and leadership in saving lives.”

Awed By Experience

Upon looking back at his experience at the White House, Cote is in awe. “Only in America could someone be standing in front of a bar 26 years ago, vowing to never take another drink again, and end up at the White House meeting the President of the United States,” he noted. “It takes a lot to impress me but I was impressed by President Bush and John Walters. It really was the highlight of my life so far.”