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Who is winning the war on drugs, the warriors or the drugs? It's time for a change in policy.

by Douglas Hill

America is losing a war that we can't win and that we never should have started, and it's all happening right inside American borders. Chinese revolutionary Mao Zedong defined war as "politics carried out with bloodshed," and our policymakers and law enforcement officers seem to have taken that definition seriously in their outlandish support of America's war on drugs.

In every respect, the war on drugs is an embarrassment to American policy. For one, consider its ridiculous premise. The idea behind the policy is that by passing and enforcing strict drug laws, many users and distributors will be arrested and jailed, driving up the risk of drug use, and thereby increasing the price and decreasing the size of America's drug-using population. In reality this policy misunderstands the drug market. Those distributors who become casualties in the war are, obviously, not as good at their job as those who don't. Thus, the best distributors are left with fewer competitors and higher prices, allowing them to become very wealthy and successful, all the while using their substantial drug profits to help sell more drugs at a lower risk. And because of the way the drug market functions, the higher prices don't hurt their sales.

Economics majors will understand the way the drug market works in terms of something called elasticity of demand. The drug war might make sense if demand for drugs were very elastic, meaning a ten percent increase in the price of drugs would decrease demand by, say, twenty or thirty percent. In such a world, the impact of arrests would be strongly noticeable in overall drug use—that is, the deterrent

would be strong. More than a dozen studies, however, show an altogether different trend. Drugs are an inelastic good; the data indicates that a ten percent increase in the price of drugs actually decreases demand by only about five percent. Any economist knows that if a good is inelastic, sellers should increase prices. Ironically, drug dealers and DEA agents both want higher drug prices. When price rises faster than demand falls, the overall size of the drug market explodes, with more money being spent on drugs. The bottom line is this: the drug war, even when successful, increases the size and profitability while decreasing the risk of the drug industry.

So, the drug war can never be expected to succeed in reducing drug abuse. What can it be expected to do? For one, it has an excellent track record for spending money. In 2003, for example, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP—you may have seen their hilarious television advertisements) spent \$19 billion on the drug war, roughly \$600 every second of that year. Talk about an expensive habit. Since then, their budgets have boomed. According to the Drug Sense drug war clock, so far this year, roughly \$40 billion has been spent on federal and state drug enforcement. Those figures also fail to account for the burden drug offenders place on our criminal justice and prison systems, with each incarcerated prisoner costing roughly \$40,000 a year to hold behind bars. Those dollars pile up quickly, considering that a new drug arrest is made every twenty seconds. Over 1.6 million Americans will be arrested this year alone as part of the war
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Be Heard: *Hilltopics* is always looking for good submissions on virtually any topic. Email your ideas, feedback, or articles to hilltopics@hotmail.com.

We welcome submissions from all members of the SMU community. Letters to the editor should be up to 300 words in response to a previously published article. Contributions should be articles of up to 300–600 words on any topic or in response to another article. Please email your submission to hilltopics@hotmail.com by Wednesday at 7:00 PM to be included in the following week's publication. Special deadlines will be observed for breaking campus events. The opinions expressed in *Hilltopics* are those of the authors solely and do not reflect the beliefs of *Hilltopics* or any other entity. As such, *Hilltopics* does not publish anonymous articles.

Riding the DART: The ups and downs of Dallas's underappreciated public transit system

by Monica Chavez

For the first two years of my college experience, I lived on campus. I got to roll out of bed five minutes before class, partake in the gourmet experience that is RFOC, and wander all over campus in the middle of the night. But those days are over now, as I've been commuting to and from North Garland every day this semester, and not by car, but by bus and train.

Dallas and most other U.S. cities farther west than Chicago are not well-known for their public transportation. The DART light-rail system is not particularly extensive, and the fact that most middle-class workers here drive cars means that DART passengers, particularly on the buses, work largely blue-collar jobs, and are sometimes homeless. This lower-class association has led many people (SMU students, for instance) to unfairly avoid public transportation and hole themselves up in their little bubbles of moveable space known as cars, even though public transportation, even in Dallas, is fairly accessible and cheap.

But rising gas prices have finally pushed some white-collar workers and students onto the trains, which are actually pretty packed now at certain times during rush hour.

Personally, I would like to see the popularity of public transportation rise so that it can take more people more places, more efficiently. And the more people ride, the safer the environment will be, though I regularly take the buses and trains late at night and have not felt unsafe or threatened. You're bound to run into weirdos occasionally, but typically people leave you alone, and it's a nice experience. DART passes at SMU are available at the Park & Pony for just \$5; with one, you can ride all the trains and buses in the DART system, as well as the adjacent TRE line that goes out to Fort Worth. All you do is replace the sticker every year, which is free. Imagine the gas you'll save. Imagine how many fewer friends you'll have to bother for rides. If you commute, think about how much homework you can get done in-transit because you don't have to drive. And the ozone layer will thank you too.

With that, I'll leave you with a few interesting observations

I've made while riding the DART these past couple of years.

1) You learn really good balance when you have to stand on the trains while avoiding the temptation to hold onto the handrails; after all, you don't know how many people have touched those things...

2) You learn to avoid people; if you run into someone you know but don't particularly like or want to see at that moment, or just happen to sit next to someone who's a bit creepy, you get off at the nearest stop and run as fast as you can to the next car. Yes, I have done this a few times.

3) Running after buses becomes less embarrassing each time you do it.

4) You learn to walk behind the buses when you get off; the driver may actually forget you just got off and start to drive into you if you cross in front of them. This also happened to me.

5) Even if on average the commute may take longer than going by car, on the DART

you'll almost never get tied up in traffic.

6) Half of all riders will not respond if you talk to them, not because they're deaf, but because they're all tuned into their iPods and CD players. I actually use my iPod to avoid people talking to me...

7) If, however, you do get involved in a conversation, the results are bound to be interesting. One time while I was engrossed in my Japanese homework at a bus station, a lady walked by and asked what kind of math I was doing.

8) Finally, don't ever get caught without your DART pass. They don't have a ticket-checking machine at the train stations, but if you happen to be riding without a pass when the DART ticket patrol rolls through, they'll make you pay a \$90-plus fine and get off the train. Ouch.

SMU students, Mockingbird Station is waiting for you.

Leave your car keys at

home, and go have an adventure!

Monica Chavez is a junior political science and foreign languages major.



Do you have an opinion about... politics, music, class, television, football, shopping, intramurals, fraternities, movies, tests, the Mavs, sex, restaurants, religion, sororities, driving, study abroad, Umphrey Lee, fashion, news, the war, parking, technology, magazines, bars, baseball, the weather, professors, the Mustang Band, dating, books, nightclubs, Texas, the Daily Campus, pets, club sports, or anything else ?

we're listening at hilltopics@hotmail.com

Wii can't wait for Nintendo's new home gaming system: the future is coming this holiday season

by Sterling Morriss and Josh Wood

A revolution in gaming is coming this holiday season. Nintendo's new gaming console, the Wii (pronounced "we"), promises to change the way people play video games. Even non-traditional gamers will want to pay attention. While it boasts some impressive technical specifications such as an unparalleled performance from its processing and graphics chips, the most exciting feature is its unique controller. It's shaped like a TV-remote, has a simple button layout, and contains internal motion sensors to detect where it is in 3-D space. What this means for players is a more active and interactive gaming experience. For example, instead of using only thumbs on buttons to drive a car or swing a sword, players will be finding themselves tilting the controller back and forth or slicing it through the air to play these games. With a more involved gaming experience that includes jumping around your living room and wielding a virtual sword, the Wii's users certainly can't be called couch potatoes. If anything, it's a positive step in injecting more physical activity into the everyday lives of America's youth.

Among the ramifications of this new control scheme is the creation of a new target audience for Nintendo's games; not only will hard-core gamers appreciate its innovative efforts, but non-traditional gamers can, too. Nintendo hopes that the simple controls, inviting games, and opportunity for a sociable gaming experience will attract not just the pimply

13-year-old, but also his family. Even the name itself is inviting; it is easily pronounceable in multiple languages and the unique spelling suggests two players side-by-side.

Another key selling point to this console involves Nintendo's famous franchises: Mario, Zelda, and Donkey Kong, to name a few. The *Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* is scheduled to launch with the Wii, and Mario and Donkey Kong games will follow soon thereafter. Along with a great lineup of first-party titles, Nintendo is offering free online service to connect and play with people around the world and the ability to download older Nintendo games beginning from the first NES console. This means you'll be able to play *Super Mario 3*, *Bomberman*, and *Goldeneye* on the Wii. These games will not be free with the new console, but their downloads will be reasonably priced.

Perhaps the most exciting feature of this new console is the price tag: \$249 will get you the new Wii console, a controller, and Wii Sports, a package of sporting games. At a price well under Microsoft's and Sony's new systems, the Wii, launching November 19, 2006, will turn some heads without emptying wallets. Nintendo's non-traditional entry into the next generation of gaming consoles will set the bar for fun for years to come.

Sterling Morriss is a senior art history major. Josh Wood is a sophomore electrical engineering and math major.

Drug policy in America is wrong in every way: it is immoral, ineffective, and illogical

continued from page 1
on drugs.

Because of the backwards logic on which the drug war is founded, it should not be surprising that all of that money spent on the drug war has resulted in nothing but more drug use. Even according to the ONDCP itself, from 2000 to 2001 (the last year they published their embarrassing stats), illegal drug use increased in every single age group. In fact, since 1979, the fraction of Americans reporting having used illegal drugs has increased by over ten percent. Yet American policymakers are still addicted to their war on drugs.

Not only are drug warriors doing a poor job of fighting their war, they are also fighting it against the wrong people. By far the largest number of drug arrests in America come from marijuana, which shows less potential for dependence, withdrawal, or overdose than caffeine. Furthermore, nine out of ten of the people arrested for marijuana are users, not dealers. In the drug war, the rich dealers get richer, and the poor users get imprisoned.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of the time those poor users are minorities. Blacks, who account for about twelve percent of the American population, account for roughly forty percent of American drug arrests. Between eighty and ninety percent of those arrested for crack cocaine are African American. Meanwhile, in many urban areas, penalties for crack cocaine violations are up to a hundred times tougher than those for powder cocaine violations, a drug more commonly used by whites. In 1995, five hundred grams of powder cocaine could get you, on average, a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison. Crack, in comparison, could put you away one hundred times faster; just five grams of crack rock incurred the same average mandatory sentence.

While I am unwilling to go so far as to call American drug warriors racist, the war on drugs is certainly doing nothing to improve race relations in the United States.

Like all wars, nowadays, this war has its weapons of mass destruction. Chemical warfare is used in South and Central America, where DEA and CIA agents spray dangerous and poisonous pesticides over huge tracks of privately-owned farmland where drug production is suspected. Biological warfare happens right in America's inner cities, where needle exchange programs for heroin users are shut down, forcing drug addicts to share needles and spread HIV/AIDS. According to a University of California study, over a third of all new HIV cases are related to needle sharing, and for black Americans the number is closer to half. The list goes on and on: in every respect, the drug war is bad policy.

By ending the war on drugs, the government could begin regulating and taxing drug sales, turning a bottomless money pit into a source of revenue. Drug abuse could be treated for what it is, a public health crisis. Our prisons would be less crowded, as fewer lives would be ruined by unneeded jail time. Our streets would be less dangerous, as drug purchases would be divorced from the criminal nature of the current drug trade and law enforcement resources would be freed up to fight real crime. In almost every way, we'd be better off without the drug war than with it.

Drug addicts are an illogical bunch. They repeatedly and compulsively engage in self-destructive behavior. They spend all their money on something that only makes their problems worse. Sometimes, they even turn violent. How are the drug warriors different?

Douglas Hill is a senior international studies major.

Todd Baty presents part 4 of the 10 things I love about SMU. This week: campus beauty

#7: Cox School of Business

While I have never personally taken a class in the Cox School of Business, no list of admirable SMU qualities would be complete without mention of the internationally respected business school. Indeed, Cox is statistically the “most popular” school on campus, meaning more students choose to major in its studies than any other SMU school. Furthermore, it is Cox’s notoriety among business districts outside of Dallas that attracts many students to SMU, and the university should be very grateful for its contribution.

Certainly, SMU should be very proud of the reputation that Cox has earned for itself. Most business schools are havens for students that are looking to coast through college, filling their schedules with crazy frat parties rather than challenging classes. Yes; unfortunately, at most business schools, students are usually only required to take the minimum twelve hours per semester (except for a few “heavy semesters” of fifteen might be required after one has failed or dropped most of his or her freshman classes...). However, I am proud to say that at Cox, that is not the case.

Luckily, Cox is not like the norm, where party culture and Greek “networking” take priority over intellectual growth. Fortunately, the classes in Cox demand their students to focus on their rigorous and demanding studies. Cox courses expect students to read critically, write analytically, and discuss abstractly business students with Cox degrees don’t have time for parties—they are too busy studying. Obviously, Cox is not like most business schools.

However, to be fair, there are those at business schools elsewhere, that do not always fall into the contemptuous

categories I have already explained. These are the people that major in business to make their fathers happy, or those that double major in another subject area (such as Art History, Communication, or Political Science) to complement their elementary degree from the b-school. And those people are obviously the exception to the rule, but at Cox, I can proudly say that the exception is the rule.

The Cox School of Business should be a source of pride for all SMU students, regardless of major. Students from Meadows, Dedman, and the School of Engineering can proudly call Cox students their intellectual equals. SMU is lucky to have a business school that is the exception to the rule, an institution of learning where academics, intellectual growth, and the pursuit of knowledge is the self-defined purpose of all its students.

So the next time you walk past the business school quad, be sure to thank someone over there for contributing to the intellectual life of this great university.

(And of course Cox professors should be paid more than other SMU professors, as the Mustang Post asserted last Thursday. With a business school this good, who



could contest otherwise?)

Next week.....#6 President Turner and the Board of Trustees

Todd Baty is a junior music and history major.

Miss one of the other parts?

Check out the last three installments of Todd’s “Things I Love About SMU” column online: www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics.

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