

Georgia editorial roundup: Columbus Ledger-Enquirer on methamphetamine

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You hear few if any arguments that the dangers and devastating effects of methamphetamine are overstated. The evidence of meth's toll is everywhere. Jails and prisons are increasingly crowded with meth users and meth makers.

The Georgia Meth Project's dramatizations of meth tragedies are as graphic and uncompromising as any public-service spots that have ever appeared on television; yet nobody is saying - as has been said of other, earlier anti-drug campaigns - that the approach is hyperbolic to the point of being counterproductive. You don't hear people accuse the anti-meth campaign of crying wolf.

So why, in the name of everything that makes sense, does anybody still do meth?

"First of all, it's a great drug," says Barry McCaffrey, the retired four-star general who served as President Bill Clinton's drug czar - "great," in this context, quite obviously meaning powerful and seductive. ...

As drug problems go, McCaffrey says, meth is "the worst, hands down." One reason is its almost instantly addictive. Another is its well-documented physical devastation: permanent neurological damage, personality disintegration, rotting teeth. But even that can pale next to meth's mental and emotional toll: "It is destructive of the human spirit like nothing we have ever seen," McCaffrey said.

Yet another frightening fact about meth now is its ties to the Mexican drug cartels. The horrific drug violence of those organizations is now subsidized by a substantial American market, McCaffrey called Mexican meth suppliers "the dominant criminal enterprise in America right now."

Meth also reflects the perennial Catch-22 of illegal drug use: When addictive drugs are more expensive, addicts have to commit more crime to get the money to support their habits. Because meth is relatively cheap - far cheaper than cocaine, and with a longer-lasting effect - meth addicts can get and use more, and thus do more damage to themselves, their lives, their loved ones and everyone around them. Lose-lose.

But the first approach to fighting the meth epidemic, says this career military man, is not "battling cartels," but education and prevention.

"Step No. 1 is go tell the American people, watch your children. Explain what meth is and why it is a fatal option."

If Step No. 1 works, there is no Step 2. Or any of the other, bleaker ones that follow.
