

A Snapshot of the Nation's Drug War Since 1989

Drug War Budget

- Annual federal anti-drug spending ballooned under the Bush presidency, starting at \$6.7 billion per year and ending at over \$12 billion.
- **The federal anti-drug budget is now more than four times what it was in 1988, \$19.2 billion compared with \$4.7 billion.**
- State governments are estimated to spend twice what the federal government spends each year fighting drugs, nearly \$40 billion this year.

Drug Price and Purity

- **Average purity of illicit heroin has risen substantially since 1990.** Confiscated retail samples of heroin averaged 18% purity in 1990, and 24% purity in 1998. Wholesale samples averaged 31% purity in 1990, and **51%** purity in 1998.
- The rise in purity of retail heroin is a trend dating back to 1981, when samples averaged 5% purity, just over *one-fifth* of current average purity.
- **Heroin prices have fallen** in both wholesale and retail samples. A pure gram of heroin was worth about \$2,600 at the retail level in 1990, but sold for \$1,800 in 1998, a decline of 31% in price.
- Cocaine wholesale prices have remained level since 1989, while **retail prices have decreased**. The price per pure gram at the wholesale level in 1989 was about \$55, and it remained close at \$49 in 1998. Retail prices per pure gram dropped from about \$200 in 1989 to \$170 in 1998.

The Colombian Front

- In 1989, a trafficking group called the Medellín cartel ran the chief drug distribution network.
- By 1993, the Medellín group had been broken up — its principals dead or jailed — only to be fully replaced by the Cali cartel.
- By 1995, the Cali group's leaders had been jailed.
- Meanwhile, in the mid-to-late 1990s, Colombian growers and traffickers **branched out into opium poppy cultivation, heroin manufacture and distribution**. Colombia is now a chief source country for heroin entering the United States, contributing to the drug's increasing purity on the streets. *Before the 1990s, no country in Latin America was a factor in the international heroin trade.*
- Decentralized drug crop growers and traffickers have forged alliances with left-wing *and* right-wing armies engaged in Colombia's ongoing civil war, making the drug trade central to that war's escalation on both sides.
- The United States has begun an increasing military commitment to assisting the Colombian government in its fight against guerrilla armies under the auspices of a **\$1.3 billion anti-drug aid package called "Plan Colombia."**

Sources for all statistics: Office of National Drug Control Policy, White House, Washington, D.C.