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Clinton announces new anti-drug efforts

his strategy is similar to Nancy Reagan's "just say no" campaign

MIAMI (AP) — Criticized as weak in the war on drugs, President Clinton announced a drive Monday to curb a sharp rise in marijuana use among young people and to stop the spread of the dangerous drug methamphetamine.

The administration said Clinton's election-year initiative was the opening shot in a 10-year effort aimed at returning America to a 1960s, pre-Vietnam level of drug use.

"Make no mistake about it, this has got to be a bipartisan, American, non-political effort," said Clinton, even as Republicans scoffed at his drug-fighting record.

"Since Bill Clinton was elected, the number of illegal aliens is up, the number of drug addicts is up," House Speaker Newt Gingrich said in a Las Vegas speech.

The administration acknowledged that Clinton erred early in his administration by cutting staff in the White House drug control office.

It would amount to a 9.3 percent increase in drug-fighting funds.

Clinton made his proposal in a schoolyard at the George Washington Carver Middle School in front of hundreds of young people who have taken a pledge to abstain from drugs and alcohol.

"We are here because of what you have done: zero guns, zero assaults, zero incidents of drug-related violence, zero drugs," the president said. "That's where America ought to be."

White House drug policy chief Barry McCaffrey acknowledged later there were no major new elements in Clinton's program.

"Everything in this strategy is already being done, absolutely," McCaffrey said. There is no magic solution, he added.

Despite Clinton's political disclaimer, there was a heavy political air around his trip.

After the drug speech and an afternoon of golf with brothers-in-law Hugh and Tony Rodham, Clinton was to raise more than \$3 million for the Democratic National Committee at a fund-raising reception and two dinners.

For example, presidential spokeswoman Ginny Terzano said that the GOP "Contract With America" made no mention of fighting drugs.

Likewise, she said, Sen. Bob Dole, Clinton's Republican rival, made "zero" mention of drugs in his rebuttal to the president's State of the Union address.

Yet, even McCaffrey said the president's 1993 cuts in the Office of Drug Control "didn't work out."

And, a day before Clinton announced his policy, Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, said the president "has failed to speak. This president is silent on the matter."

Florida has been hostile territory for Democratic presidential candidates for 20 years but Clinton's advisers believe he has a shot at the state's 25 electoral votes this year, because of his defense of Medicare against Republican budget attacks and his tough stand against Cuba's Fidel Castro.

Drugs also are an important issue in Florida, sometimes viewed as the nation's gateway for cocaine and other drugs.

The administration said there was cause for guarded optimism on some fronts, with the number of illegal drug users reported to

have fallen by half since 1985 to 12.2 million now.

However, drugs are being used increasingly by young people. The use of marijuana almost doubled between 1992 and 1994 among children aged 12 to 17.

The chief goal of Clinton's program is to motivate the young to reject illegal drugs and substance abuse — much as Nancy Reagan tried in the 1980s with her "just say no" advice.

Clinton's campaign calls for state governments and community organizations to help develop national prevention standards and a program to implement it. Further, it encourages schools to adopt comprehensive drug prevention strategies and says the nation must curb the use of alcohol and tobacco by young people.

Clinton also proposed making it a crime to store, use or handle chemicals for the purpose of manufacturing methamphetamine. The drug can create a euphoric high followed by depression, paranoia and, when used long term, violent rages.

Deaths from the use of methamphetamine — also known as speed — have doubled in the past four years, Clinton said. In Los Angeles alone, deaths rose from 68 in 1992 to 219 in 1994.

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TAAS test scores are up from last year

Students have up to eight chances to pass the test

AUSTIN (AP) — About 6.7 percent of this year's senior class, or 12,579 students, have yet to pass all sections of the state test required for them to receive their diplomas, according to figures released today.

A total of 21,531 seniors — out of a class of 186,229 — took the exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in March. Students have eight chances to pass the reading, writing and mathematics test while they are in school, starting when they are sophomores.

The seniors who still haven't passed will have another chance at the test this week.

Education Commissioner Mike Moses said he expects the upcoming administration of the test to increase the passing rate for this year's seniors beyond the final 95 percent

passing rate for the 1995 senior class. Moses emphasized that high school students recorded significant gains on the TAAS exit-level test, according to preliminary results.

Of 208,774 10th-graders tested, 60 percent passed, up from 54 percent last year.

Eighty-one percent of them passed the reading section of the test, up from 76 percent last year, and 65 percent passed math, up from 59 percent.

There was a 1 percent decrease in the passing rate for writing, to 85 percent.

In grades 11 and 12, students also improved in reading and math compared with last year, and the percentage passing writing also went down.

Forty-three percent of the 52,141 11th-

graders who took the test passed reading, up from 32 percent the previous year. Thirty-five percent passed math, up from 28 percent.

But the 43 percent passing writing represented a 5 percent drop from the percentage who passed in 1995.

Of the 12th-graders tested, 44 percent passed reading, up from 33 percent, and 45 percent passed math, up from 35 percent. The percentage passing writing dropped from 51 percent to 45 percent.

Texas Education Agency spokesman Joey Lozano said those tested in grades 11 and 12 are students who didn't pass in the 10th grade.

He didn't have an explanation for the smaller percentage of students passing writing. But he said that math is generally perceived as the more difficult section and an emphasis on that area "might possibly account for some" of the difference.

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