

TEEN ADDICTS SAY YES TO STIFF ANTI-DRUG BILL

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Teen-agers at Orlando's Straight Inc. drug treatment center told U.S. Rep. Bill McCollum on Friday that solving the drug problem requires stronger action by parents and communities, as well as tough penalties for juvenile drug abusers.

McCollum, R-Altamonte Springs, visited the private rehabilitation center to gather ideas and talk about a proposed anti-drug bill that would for the first time make drug users more accountable for their behavior.

Teen-agers in the intensive, long-term Straight program said over and over that stiffer penalties are needed for drug users and that law officers must enforce existing laws. The average stay at Straight is 11 months.

Under the bill, users convicted of possessing small amounts of drugs could lose their drivers' licenses, their right to federal programs such as mortgage or school loans, or pay fines of up to 10 percent of their incomes.

McCollum said the user accountability "is an element that we've missed" in the war on drugs. Trying to intercept drugs heading to the country has failed because traffickers always will find a way to deliver the goods, he said.

More than 50 teens listened to the congressman. Several said taking their drivers' licenses would not have affected them because they drove without licenses, often in stolen cars, and if caught, were given a mild reprimand.

The teens said school anti-drug programs aren't intensive enough, parents don't recognize signs of drug use in their children, and that police seem to let kids go, rather than take steps to get them off drugs.

One youth named Matt said adults should consider sending juvenile drug users to jail, since existing penalties don't work.

"Whenever I got caught, I would just tell myself I won't get caught again," he said.

McCollum said the idea behind the anti-drug bill is to scare people who are dabbling in drugs or haven't yet become fully addicted. "This won't work for those who already are down the stream," he said.

Fining a person 10 percent of their income "might hurt the cocaine- snorting stockbroker more than it will the street drug user," he said.

The bill also includes the death penalty for major drug traffickers, creation of a drug czar to oversee anti-drug activities, and money for more rehabilitation and education programs. It also would mandate that businesses receiving federal funds establish drug-free work environments.

McCollum said he expects most of next month's debate over the bill to focus on the penalties for users.

Although the American Civil Liberties Union has described some of the provisions as unconstitutional, McCollum said the Judiciary Committee approved the proposals.

As much as \$6 billion could be appropriated for the anti-drug bill, he said, but "this legislation won't win the war."

McCollum said that's why he's focusing on user accountability as a way to decrease the demand, since controlling the appetite for drugs ultimately is the only way to stop their use.

His visit to Straight Inc. was the second such session with drug abusers.

Last week, he met with adults at Orlando's Center for Drug Free Living. He said he is interested in learning more about the problem from the users themselves.

- Caption: PHOTO: Bill McCollum PHOTO: (Bill) McCollum hears straight talk from teen-agers who said law enforcement officers, parents often let them get away with drug use, theft. JOE BURBANK/SENTINEL
- Memo: Photo of McCollum with teenagers ran on D10 in PMA Edition.

- *Index terms: TEENAGER FEDERAL LEGISLATION FLORIDA SUPPORT DRUG ABUSE REFORM; JUVENILE GROUP CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE BILL MCCOLLUM POLICY INCREASE; CHANGE*

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