



PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WEIGH IN

 [Print](#)  [Email](#)

12/13/2007 11:48:31 AM

In anticipation of the Iowa Caucuses, the first major electoral event of the 2008 Presidential elections, the Partnership for Drug-Free America and the Partnership for Drug-Free Iowa invited all of the candidates to answer two questions to help voters understand their position on drug prevention and seven responded. Here are the two questions we asked, and they answered:

- 1. If you become President, how will you bolster efforts to reduce alcohol and drug abuse in communities throughout America?**
- 2. A recent national survey found a significant decline in the number of parents talking to children about the risks of drugs and alcohol. If you become President, how will you encourage parents to engage with their kids on this health issue?**

RELATED INFO

[Senator Biden Supports Time To Talk](#)

[CEO and President Steve Pasierb Discusses the Monitoring the Future Study](#)



Response of Senator Christopher Dodd

1. Alcohol and drug abuse are major problems in America that must be dealt with. As President, I will continue the efforts I have begun in the Senate to help reduce the abuse of alcohol and drugs. Along with Senator DeWine, I wrote the Sober Truth on Preventing (STOP) Underage Drinking Act in 2004, legislation based on the Institutes of Medicine's recommendations to help prevent underage drinking. This bipartisan, bicameral legislation emphasizes coordinating the efforts of various government agencies to combat underage drinking, a national media campaign against underage drinking, forming coalitions to prevent underage drinking, and research on underage drinking patterns.

As President, I will continue to work with the Institutes of Medicine to enforce this bill and expand these efforts to include alcohol and drug abuse prevention. I will also continue my efforts to bolster the Safe and Drug Free Schools (SDFS) program in the No Child Left Behind Act. As co-author of this program, I am committed to ensuring that it continues to play an active role in providing financial assistance for drug and violence prevention activities and activities that promote the health and well being of students. Sadly, SDFS has been subject to budget cuts since the current Administration has come into office. I have been the leader in restoring critical funding to this program in my time in the Senate and will ensure that the program remains strong when I am President.

Additionally, by improving our healthcare system we can help those already suffering from addictions to take back control. That is why among the wide variety of providers taking part in my universal healthcare plan, some will cover the cost of rehabilitation programs. By including rehabilitation options in my healthcare plan, no American will be prevented from seeking the treatment they need because of access or cost.

2. As a parent, I understand the importance of passing knowledge on to our children, and I take this issue very seriously. When parents don't talk to their kids about the risks of drugs and alcohol, they are putting their children at risk. Research indicates that parents are the most influential voice in determining whether or not kids will use drugs and alcohol. As President, I will work to reach out to parents about the importance of talking to their kids about the risks of using and abusing drugs and alcohol.



Response of Senator Barack Obama

1. I believe that successfully keeping drugs off of America's streets requires a comprehensive approach that transcends the boundaries between local, state, and federal law enforcement. As president, I will take several steps to bolster efforts to reduce alcohol and drug abuse in communities throughout America.

First, I believe that the fight to combat drug abuse requires the close cooperation of international allies like Mexico and Canada. I have worked to secure federal funding for inter-jurisdictional task forces in Illinois, and I have supported the State Department in enlisting the international community to fight the vast network of drug cartels that find clients here

in the United States. As president, I will expand such initiatives to all corners of the drug enforcement apparatus.

Second, I will ensure that states have the resources to support existing drug courts, which have been proven successful in dealing with non-violent offenders. These courts offer a mix of treatment and sanctions, in lieu of traditional incarceration.

Currently, the Department of Justice makes grants available to state and local governments to establish drug courts. I will replicate these efforts within the federal criminal justice system by signing a law that would authorize federal magistrates to preside over drug courts and federal probation officers to oversee the offenders' compliance with drug treatment programs.

Third, I will continue to fight against meth abuse, and to strengthen meth enforcement. In the U.S. Senate, I cosponsored the Combat Meth Act of 2005, major parts of which became law in 2006. The bill puts federal funds into the fight against methamphetamine, provides assistance to children affected by meth abuse, and places restrictions on the sale of the ingredients used to make the drug. I also cosponsored and fought for a Justice Department amendment to increase funding for enforcement programs, and support taking on the Mexican cartels that are supplying the chemicals to make methamphetamines.

Fourth, I will support afterschool programs. These programs keep kids safe and away from bad influences, and help build safer and stronger communities. I believe we need to increase federal support for after-school programs with proven records of success at helping children avoid crime and drugs.

Finally, I will promote healthy communities and work to strengthen our public health and prevention systems. I will promote healthy environments, which would include restricted advertising for tobacco and alcohol to children and wellness and educational campaigns. I will increase funding to expand community based preventive interventions to help Americans make better choices to improve their health.

2. Parents are our first line of defense against alcohol and drug abuse, but we have to support them in this effort. First, some parents lack the knowledge and tools to talk about this problem with their children, and we need to provide these parents with resources and information. We must inform parents about substance abuse problems early on and then reinforce it as their children reach the vulnerable years. My health care plan includes strengthening our public health and prevention infrastructures so that parents get the information they need about substance abuse, and guidance on how to talk about it. And my poverty plan calls for the creation of "Promise Neighborhoods" in our cities that will support similar public health initiatives.

Second, some parents are just not taking the time to engage with their kids on this issue. We need to tell parents to turn off the television, put away the video games, and spend some time providing the guidance our children so badly need and desire. Parents need to strike up a conversation with their kids and warn them against the perils of drug use. As President, I will ask parents to do this.

I understand the importance of parents being fully engaged with their kids about the perils of drugs and alcohol. I've been quite open about my struggles as a young man growing up without a father in the home. I had to learn very early on to figure out what was important and what wasn't, and exercise my own judgment and in some ways to raise myself. Along the way, I made mistakes. And so I recognize the importance of parents talking to their children and actively engaging them on this issue, and will promote these values as president.



Response of Senator John Edwards

1. We need a comprehensive policy to address drug abuse in this country. I will work to make our nation's anti-drug policy stronger, fairer and more effective.

Effective drug treatment is the best solution to drug addiction. Early and comprehensive substance abuse treatment can improve outcomes for individuals and their families. My plan for truly universal health care will cover substance abuse treatment and I will support drug treatment and other rehabilitation programs for first-time, non-violent offenders.

Many areas of America are facing the devastating effects of methamphetamine abuse. It can be easily, quickly, and cheaply produced and is highly addictive. Fighting the abuse of meth was one of the priorities I identified in my plan to revitalize rural America. I will invest in enforcing drug laws, help states make meth ingredients more difficult to get and expand programs that successfully treat addicts, such as the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment program for prisoners.

Finally, we need to demand corporate responsibility. Government can help send better messages to young people about alcohol, but corporate America needs to be more responsible, too. Young people under age 21 drink one-fifth of the alcohol sold in America each year, and that drinking contributes to all kinds of health problems and fatalities. Yet while this is happening, the alcohol industry spends a small fortune on ads geared to teenagers. Teens see more magazine ads for

alcohol than adults do. This is wrong. It's time for the alcohol industry to quit making millions encouraging teen drinking that destroys thousands of lives each year.

2. Helping parents speak with their children about drugs and alcohol is a huge challenge. Because we care about their health and safety, Elizabeth and I have had honest and open discussions about drugs and alcohol with all of our children. These can be difficult conversations, but they're a critical part of being a parent.

We cannot assume that every mother and father knows everything there is to know about responsible parenting. Unfortunately, some of the larger initiatives aimed at educating parents have had mixed results.

Programs that encourage collaboration between parents, schools, children, and community organizations have been shown to be particularly effective at helping parents prevent their children from using illegal drugs, and to lower drug use among children. I will support this kind of multi-dimensional approach as president.

A few things should be all too clear: life is fragile, families are joy, and children mean hope. It is time to recommit this government to strengthening America's future by strengthening America's families. They are the solid rock that this great country was built upon, and they deserve our support.



Response of Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

1. As President, I will approach the challenges in combating alcohol and drug abuse with the same vigor and commitment that I have demonstrated on these issues during my 35 years in the Senate: I have learned that an effective strategy begins by recognizing that addiction is a real problem and must be taken on with robust funding for prevention, education and treatment. Most of us know someone- a family member, maybe a neighbor, a colleague, or a friend-who is addicted to drugs or alcohol. That's because over 23 million Americans struggle with addiction. On the flip side, this work must be coupled with tough enforcement penalties against drug traffickers and improved funding and techniques for law enforcement. These issues need a coordinated effort at the federal, state and local level to fight the demand and supply of these dangerous substances, which is why I fought to create the Drug Czar's office in the White House and continue to support expanding these coordinated efforts.

In the White House, I will build upon my strong record in the Senate as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs of the Judiciary Committee, as well as Chairman of the Senate Drug Caucus. I will send to Congress a budget each year that provides not just adequate, but robust funding for prevention and treatment – two critical elements in this fight. It's simple: prevention and education help to keep people kids and others from stepping onto the slippery slope of drug use; and treatment funding gets the 23 million individuals the medical assistance they so desperately need.

We need to make a renewed effort to keep our kids safe from the dangers of drug use. In an effort to keep our kids safe, I wrote the Drug Free Schools Zone law, imposing special penalties for dealing drugs within 1,000 feet of a school, and enabling schools to provide drug education and prevention programs like DARE. I also worked to pass legislation instrumental in classifying steroids as a drug, helping to deter their use by students and jettison the notion that professional athletes' use of these drugs is in any way acceptable or "cool." This year, I will introduce legislation to address a new youth drug epidemic – teenagers abusing (and sometimes injuring or killing themselves in the process) cough and cold medicines that contain dextromethorphan.

I believe that we need to help those addicted to drugs and alcohol, not simply throw them in jail without any sort of treatment program. That's why I wrote the landmark Biden Crime Law which, among other important provisions, created specialized Drug Courts as an alternative to incarceration and traditional probation. When folks graduate from the Drug Courts program they have undergone treatment and are clean and sober and more prepared to contribute to society. They finish high school or obtain a GED, hold down a job, and keep up with financial obligations, including drug-court fees and child-support payments. And, not only does the program work, but it saves thousands of dollars per offender each year in prison costs alone, not to mention the societal costs saved by having one less drug user on the street. Many of our existing programs – like the Drug Courts program – have been under-funded or simply eliminated by the current Administration; as President, I will expand these successful programs.

Unfortunately, because treatment has not been a focus of the current Administration, only 2.5 million – less than 10% – are receiving the medical treatment they need. I support expanding treatment for all Americans struggling with addiction. I worked closely with Senators Hatch and Levin to pass the Drug Addiction Treatment Act which allows physicians to prescribe critical medications from the privacy of a doctor's office rather than just at public clinics and treatment centers, and worked to expand the availability of this avenue of treatment by raising restrictive caps on the number of patients to whom this treatment is available.

We need to expand programs like these so that even more Americans struggling with addiction can get the treatment they need.

While I am proud to have spearheaded these laws that have made great progress, clearly there is much work yet to be done. For example, nearly 20% of prison inmates committed their crimes to

obtain money for. We need to target drug prevention and treatment programs to prison inmates, which is why I have introduced the Second Chance Act, which addresses this problem by ensuring that prisoners are given the tools they need to reenter society and become productive members of their communities. The bill provides states and local governments with grants to help their prisoners kick their addiction and reduce the number of chronic drug users and repeat offenders.

Organizations such as the Partnership for a Drug Free America bring deep levels of expertise and innovation to this area, and their input and knowledge will be valued in my Administration. From the White House, I will be able to help move our nation to the next level in a strategy to combat drug and alcohol abuse and addiction. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these issues.

2. There is no question that parent-child dialogue is critical to keeping kids off drugs and alcohol. Indeed, research shows that kids who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are up to 50% less likely to use than those who do not. Yet, only about 3 in 10 kids report talking to their parents about these important issue. I've worked to turn up the volume on this issue. This summer I wrote a resolution that designated August as National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month, in the hopes of spurring parents to educate themselves and talk to their teens about the dangers associated with all kinds of drug and alcohol use. Measures that raise awareness are critical because the statistics show that we've got a problem among our youth. The rate of binge alcohol use in 2006 was 42.2 percent for young adults aged 18 to 25. Even 20 percent of kids aged 16 or 17 reported binge drinking. And, 10 percent of kids aged 12 to 17 are using illegal drugs. These problems don't simply pose serious health risks, but they are also closely linked to low educational achievement and increased risk of illegal activity and crime. Many parents just don't know about the dangers that their kids are exposed to each and every day. So much of this is just about education and simply talking about these issues. I have and will continue to talk about them and enact policies that work.

To combat this, a decade ago I helped create Drug Free Communities Support Program, a successful imitative that continues today to provide funds to coalitions of parents, teachers, business people, police, medical professionals and other local leaders working to prevent drug use and addiction in their communities. I've also been a strong supporter of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, a coordinated media effort aimed at educating youth about the dangers of drug use. It is through programs like these and initiatives like the Partnership's "Time to Talk," that we can work together to emphasize to parents the importance of discussing drug and alcohol use with their kids and provide them with the tools they need to facilitate and encourage these discussions. It's simple: the more we do to educate and raise awareness, the more likely parents will talk with their reach kids and the less likely kids will abuse drugs or alcohol. When I am President, efforts to raise awareness and educate parents and kids about these dangers will be a top priority for my national Drug Czar.

Drug and alcohol addiction transcends economic, social, cultural, and political strata. It sees no boundaries, and the efforts to address these very real issues should similarly see no limits. Like the Partnership and other outstanding organizations, I will continue to talk about the issue, raise awareness, and when I am President, devote federal resources to making addiction and drug and alcohol abuse a real part of the national dialogue.



Response of Senator Mike Gravel

1. I believe it's time we start treating drug and alcohol addicts as human beings and not criminals. The tactic of spending billions of dollars and filling our prisons has only driven the rate of addiction up. The War on Drugs has been proven ineffective in addressing drug abuse in America because, instead of giving addicts treatment—which has been proven to be both cheaper and more effective than incarceration—we send them to prison where they often learn to be better criminals. This approach has failed to serve its purpose: rising addiction rates illustrate the failure to decrease demand while the lower cost and greater availability of heroin and cocaine illustrates a failure to decrease supply.

The key to the drug problem is to take money out of the equation, just as we did in ending alcohol prohibition. The best way to keep hard drugs away from our children is to make the drug market financially unrewarding to criminals. When we ended prohibition in 1933, we should have ended drug prohibition as well. The murders, corruption, and criminal underworld spawned by illicit drug trafficking can be prevented by more effectively utilizing our resources. This can be accomplished by changing the way we approach drug abuse in America. Treating illicit drug use as a public health concern instead of an epidemic of criminality is the first step. Educating individuals on the dangers posed by illicit drug use and emphasizing rehabilitation for drug abusers will have a more lasting effect on drug use in America than incarceration ever could.

2. By treating tobacco use as a public health concern and working to educate Americans on the dangers of smoking, we were able to cut in half the use of tobacco. The same can be accomplished for underage alcohol use by emphasizing the consequences that result from irresponsible drinking. Parents can be encouraged to talk with their children about the risks of drugs and alcohol by combining parent involvement with the public school system's instruction on drugs and alcohol in physical education and health classes. Interactive assignments in which parents and students are asked to discuss the various consequences of drug and alcohol use will get the conversation

started. This will give parents the opportunity to advise their children on how to refuse drugs and share personal experiences from when they were young and faced similar social pressures. Alcohol-related car accidents, especially those involving our youth, devastate entire communities. Parents should make clear to their teenagers that it is better to call home when they need a ride than get in a car with a friend who has been drinking. However, we should also be willing to take a hard look at whether the current drinking age of 21 is sound public policy. In all other legal arenas, the age of 18 has been established as the age of adulthood. This is the age at which we allow people to actively participate in government by allowing them to vote and serve as jurors. This is also the age at which we hold individuals unequivocally responsible for their criminal actions and force men to join the Selective Service for possible drafting. If, as a nation, we can knowingly send our men and women of the armed forces into harm's way and give them the responsibility of defending our country at the age of 18, it is only appropriate that we deem them responsible enough to purchase, consume, or possess alcohol.



Response of Mike Huckabee

1. Our criminal justice system is vital to reducing drug and alcohol abuse in our communities, but it has to rehabilitate non-violent drug offenders, as opposed to just incarcerate them, in order to be effective.

80% of all those incarcerated are there because of drugs or alcohol--they were drunk or high when they committed their crime, or committed their crime in order to get drunk or high. We don't have a crime problem as much as we have a drug and alcohol problem.

A major reform in dealing with drug offenders in Arkansas was the establishment of drug courts, where a non-violent drug offender can be directed to enroll in drug treatment programs or heavily supervised community service. The drug courts helped our recidivism rate drop to 31%. The cost per day is lower than that of prison, while at the same time allowing offenders to regain their lives, so that they return to their communities as healthy, addiction-free people.

As President, I will work with the states to increase drug courts and treatment programs for non-violent offenders throughout the country, so there will be fewer absent fathers and mothers sitting in prison for a drug charge, and more rehabilitated adults in our communities who can use their experience to help steer our youth away from drug and alcohol abuse.

2. Parents are failing to talk to their children about a lot of health issues. In addition to drug and alcohol abuse, the rates of child obesity, and sexual activity among minors, including very young minors, suggests that parents aren't talking to their children about many of the biggest threats to their health. Parents need to take an active role in helping children avoid these hazards, and they need to start much earlier.

I think the government can help parents discuss these issues by taking the first step to break the ice. As President, I would suggest increasing public advertising that encourages parents to talk to their kids about drugs and alcohol.

I believe federal and state governments should periodically cooperate with local media and vendors to launch high-profile campaigns encouraging parents to talk with their children. I would also have the Secretary of Education work with school boards to make drug and alcohol education a standard component of parent-teacher conferences, so that teachers can tell parents what kind of drug or drinking activity their children might be exposed to, and to provide materials and suggestions to help parents have constructive, trust-building conversations with their kids about this difficult topic.



Response of New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson

1. We need to reinvigorate the fight against drugs with fresh policies and perspectives. We ought to expand drug treatment and diversion programs. As President, I'll demand more cooperation from countries importing illegal drugs and link it to other sources of aid. We should expand anti-gang programs in schools via education, after-school programs, and increased penalties for gang-related crimes. In New Mexico, I shut down 400 meth labs and decreased the number of deaths caused by drug overdoses through a partnership between law enforcements, community leaders, and first responders. I also dramatically increased the penalties for those who expose children to drugs.

We've got be better on both ends – supply and demand. On the supply end we have to be smarter on our borders with higher technology security and doubling the border guards. We need to invest in security for our ports, and that means more funding for better detection and inspection. On the demand side, it's important that we expand outreach for education and rehabilitation. Drug rehab really works and we need to model the best programs around the country to give people an opportunity to beat addiction. You can't just fight drugs at one end of the scale – you have to have an integrated approach.

2. Parents need to be more involved in their children's lives, and nowhere is that more true than when it relates to talking to them about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, these

conversations, as the survey demonstrated, simply do not take place. As President, I will use the power of the bully pulpit to encourage parents to speak with their children, and I will work closely with organizations such as Partnership for a Drug-Free America and through Parents: The Anti-Drug, in order to spread the word of the importance of communicating with your children. In addition, I will issue an Executive Order so that all federal employees receive eight hours of paid leave annually for the purpose of attending parent-teacher conferences and other school events. In this way—and through encouraging state and local governments to follow suit—I will set the tone throughout the country that we must never forget that whatever our employment, our most important job will always be taking care of the next generation.