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**NEWS RELEASE**



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**Governor Murkowski and National Drug Czar Take Their Case to School:**  
**Drug Forum Allows State and Federal Officials to Give Alaska Students the**  
**“Straight” Scoop on the Dangers of Drug and Alcohol Use**

**(Anchorage, AK)** – Today a delegation of state and federal officials, led by Governor Frank Murkowski and National Drug Czar John P. Walters met with Service High School students to talk about the dangers of drug use in Alaska and nationwide. The presentation was part of a cooperative effort to increase awareness about drug use, its cost to society and state and federal efforts on dealing with this problem.

“Two weeks ago we talked tobacco with a great group of teenagers in Juneau and I told them they have a choice to make and that they should choose to kick butts,” said Governor Murkowski. “Today we are talking about drugs – especially marijuana – and again the choice is clear. Get off the pot.”

John Walters, Director of National Drug Control Policy (also known as President Bush’s “Drug Czar”) spoke at today’s event announcing that there has been an 11 percent decline in youth drug use nationwide. This drop, which translates to approximately 400,000 fewer teens using drugs each year, exceeds the goal set by President Bush in 2002 for a 10 percent reduction over two years. Walters pointed out that challenges remain in Alaska communities.

“The efforts of officials like Attorney General Renkes, Governor Murkowski and countless others throughout the nation are paying off. Through their leadership and dedication to reducing substance abuse, the nation’s drug problem is getting smaller,” said Walters. “But we cannot allow the progress we’ve made to be undermined by those seeking to legalize marijuana and other drugs. Alaskans should not be conned into believing that their state would be better off with more drugs and more drug use. Marijuana is a dangerous substance with serious consequences, and legalizing it would put our families, our communities, and our society in harm’s way.”

Marijuana use was also a major focus of discussion for Gregg Renkes, Alaska Attorney General. Renkes addressed the growing desire by a majority of Alaskans to criminalize marijuana use in the state.

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In 1972, when considerably less information was available about the effects of marijuana, the state Supreme Court ruled that the right to privacy provision of the state constitution extended to personal use of this drug at home. Later state laws placed restrictions on public usage and the amount that could be possessed. In 1990, a ballot initiative criminalized all possession of marijuana.

In State v. Noy the supreme court held that a ballot initiative process cannot overturn the court's previous interpretation of the right to privacy. The state is challenging the Noy decision under several theories, one of which relates to the state's right to protect the health and welfare of its citizens.

"The right to privacy is strongly protected under state law but that right is not absolute and must be weighed against the state's right to protect its citizens," said Renkes. "A substantial body of scientific and medical evidence makes it clear that marijuana is substantially more potent today than it was 20 years ago. Given the documented dangers this drug poses to society, a compelling case can be made that the state's obligation to protect its citizens outweighs any private interest in possessing and using marijuana."

Information shared with the media and students today noted that levels of THC, the psychoactive agent in marijuana, are substantially higher in the drug used today. THC impairs learning and memory functions, attention span and the ability to work, drive and make clear decisions. It is also linked to mental impairment by limiting motivation and causing depression and paranoia.

For additional information pertaining to drug use and policies, go to: [www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov) or [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov). To obtain specific information for the State of Alaska, go to: [www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/statelocal/ak](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/statelocal/ak).

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