

Beacon Hill Byline – By Rep. Mary Rogeness

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Shoulder to Shoulder

As school opens again this week, I am taking some time to talk about a new drug prevention campaign sponsored jointly by the National Order of Women Legislators and the Drug Enforcement Agency. Last spring I took on the role of Massachusetts Chair of the endeavor, Shoulder to Shoulder. It is a two-pronged campaign focusing on informing people of the dangers of “club drugs” while also educating the public about links between illegal drugs and terrorists.

The phenomenon of club drugs is affecting more young people each year although it is unknown to many parents. When we talk about drug and alcohol abuse, our concern does not extend to the dangers of Ecstasy, the most well known of the club drugs. Such drugs are a new phenomenon beyond the knowledge and experience of our generation. Like other club drugs, Ecstasy is taken in pill form, often at raves and all night dance parties.

In the past four years alone, Ecstasy use among young people has nearly doubled. Today, 11% of high school seniors admit having tried the drug. Known as the "love drug," it is far from being harmless. In fact it damages nerve cells and can result in psychiatric disturbances, long-term cognitive impairments, and even death. Many raves are advertised as drug and alcohol-free events giving parents and teens a false sense of security. Young people are under the mistaken impression that casually or infrequently using Ecstasy won't hurt them, but there are documented cases of fatalities after such use.

When I stood shoulder to shoulder with District Attorney Bill Bennett and an agent from the DEA to announce our joint effort, we spoke of the effects of Ecstasy. Pills are easily concealed in a teen party environment. The pills cause dehydration and tremendous thirst as well as behavioral changes, all symptoms made more dangerous because of the crowded uninhibited environment that usually surrounds their use. Topping it off, parents are unaware of the danger.

The second focus of the program, terrorism, links naturally to club drugs. Known in law enforcement as narco-terrorism, it is the use of drug money to fund international terrorist organizations. Ecstasy tablets are especially attractive to traffickers because of their huge profit margins (most pills cost pennies to make and sell for upwards of \$25 each). Continuing demand for all such drugs enriches those who wish to harm the United States.

It might seem that illegal drug use in Massachusetts could not be related to the terrorist threat facing our nation and the world, but the money from traffickers does make its way into the terror cells. The DEA just last week announced arrests of a drug ring in the elsewhere in the country with documented links to international terrorist organizations.

My colleagues in legislatures across the country are committed to working, shoulder to shoulder, with DEA officials to stop the supply of and demand for illegal drugs in our communities. Currently we are working on a series of educational videos and classroom materials, identifying and supporting effective drug education and developing new policy initiatives.

You can join the campaign by calling me at 567-1661 or sending an e-mail to Mary@Rogeness.com. In addition to promoting the health of our community, we will be fighting narco-terrorism.