

Spoils of the Drug War

Alexander T. Shulgin, Lafayette

The article by Craig Reinerman and Harry G. Levine (Perspective, March 1) was a superb review of the origins of the “war on drugs” and presented a chilling analysis of both the rapid rate of growth of the battle and its spiraling costs.

Unfortunately they only touched lightly on just who is being rewarded by maintaining and expanding this war. The mileage to the politician running for re-election is only a small part of this picture.

The U.S. State Department can (and does) use it as a leverage for influencing the politics of other countries. The Defense Department can (and does) use it as a military excuse for requesting funds using the argument of national security. Law enforcement agencies, at the federal, state and local levels, can (and do) use it both as a reason for demanding increased power (to fight crime) and as a source of revenue (through seizure and forfeiture procedures).

Many corporations benefit from this war, from the prison construction industry to the manufacturers of expensive instruments required for urine testing in the work place as well as in the expanding justice system. And all of the growth industries mean increased employment, jobs that would be lost if the war were to end.

A more subtle reward is to those who stand to gain from the frightened common man who is convinced that the drug “monster” is a threat to him and can justify the relinquishment of some of his civil freedoms in the name of controlling it. The erosion of our constitutional rights with the excuse of “eliminating” this social problem is a direction that this country cannot continue to take.

San Jose Mercury News (CA), March 10, 1998