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Brown declines to welcome judge

By THOM MARSHALL

This is about a couple of former drug warriors who now hold down jobs they got elected to -- a judge in California and a mayor in Texas -- and how only one of them listened to what the other had to say.

James Gray has been a judge in Orange County for the past 16 years. Before that, he was a federal prosecutor who, for a while, held the record for the nation's largest heroin bust. But nine years ago he came out publicly against the drug war and all the damage he has seen it cause.

He will be coming to our town in a couple of weeks to speak at a lunch sponsored by the Drug Policy Forum of Texas, and he is the author of a new book due to hit stores this month, *Why Our Drug Laws Have Failed and What We Can Do About It: A Judicial Indictment of the War on Drugs*.

Lee Brown is the mayor of Houston, where he also was police chief a few years ago. In between those two jobs he worked for a little while as drug czar, top banana of the drug war being waged by this Great Land.

As mayor, many of his duties are ceremonial. He generally is considered a logical choice to welcome distinguished visitors to the city. And so DPFT officials extended Brown an invitation to sit at the head table and to welcome and introduce Gray at that lunch meeting on April 26.

Brown doesn't stick around

Last time Brown and Gray both appeared at a public meeting regarding drug policy issues was seven years ago in Cambridge, Mass. Brown was keynote speaker at an event billed as "Crime, Drugs, Health & Prohibition II: The Great Harvard Drug Debate."

It was a speech that hit all the traditional drug-war buttons and at one point, Brown declared: "to me and to the Clinton Administration, drug use is among the important domestic issues that our nation faces."

So it must have seemed a bit odd when he didn't stick around at such a prestigious gathering to defend the drug war.

"I am truly filled with sorrow," Gray said when starting his response to Brown's remarks, "that we were not able to engage in a dialogue with Dr.

Brown. He left -- he came here and spoke with us and he listed his thoughts, which I would like to address in a moment -- and then regretfully was not able to stay and respond to, I think, some very legitimate questions."

Gray noted that it was difficult to find people to debate in favor of the drug war and said he had not heard the position "expressed as eloquently" as Brown had expressed it in the preceding minutes that day.

"And so," Gray said, "I am invigorated to believe that we're going to be successful, because that's the best they can do and there simply is a response to everything they bring up."

You can find the speech made by Brown at this Harvard Law School event, as well as the comments Gray made that Brown wasn't there to hear by going on an Internet search engine and asking for Darkening Shades of the Drug War:
Brown vs. Gray.

Drug-war debates avoided

In the seven years since that event, the drug war has filled a great many new prisons with users and dealers and yet drugs remain plentiful and profitable. Increasing numbers of people are becoming convinced the drug war is lost and must end.

Meanwhile, former drug czar Mayor Brown has maintained a low profile on drug issues and other officials known to favor continuing the drug war still avoid debate.

But public awareness has been advanced by other means, most recently by the hit movie Traffic. And also by books.

In a phone conversation the other day, Gray said his book differs from others written about the nation's failed drug war in that he discusses viable options for combating drug use problems. And his book also contains comments from some 40 other judges around the country who concur the war must end.

Gray said people whose names you will recognize have endorsed his book, including Houston native and retired national TV news anchor Walter Cronkite, former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, and Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman.

A DPFT official said Tuesday that Mayor Brown, due to prior commitments, will be unable to accept the invitation to welcome Judge Gray.