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COURIER photo/Nicole Padilla

**Dr. Kevin Sabet, speechwriter for two U.S. drug czars during the Clinton and Bush administrations, believes overarching drug policies are necessary and the current "War on Drugs" should be mended, not ended.**

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## Drug policy debate elicits frank questions, few answers

"If I gave you \$50 tonight, how many could come back with \$50 worth of marijuana tomorrow?"

At Pitzer College on Wednesday night, nearly 150 students raised their hands.

The question, addressed to an audience of students, faculty, and community members, came as part of a much-anticipated debate on national drug policy hosted by Pitzer College. The two-hour event saw a vigorous collision of perspectives on a range of drug issues, including legalization, the War on Drugs, and the nature of drug abuse.

Some community members who attended the debate were shocked by what they heard about the availability of drugs on campus, and students' favorable opinions toward the loosening of drug restrictions.

"Decriminalization of drugs will harm the community and endanger youth," said Paul Chabot, an advisor at the Inland Valley Drug Free Community Coalition.

Gabe Loewinger, the Pitzer sophomore who spearheaded the event, has heard this line before.

Mr. Loewinger is the founding president of the Pitzer chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), which coordinated the debate. SSDP is an international grass-roots organization that opposes zero tolerance policies toward drug offenses, but acknowledges the “very real harms of drug abuse.”

Mr. Loewinger said he worries about these harms, the misinformation that can lead to accidents with drugs, and the way poorly enforced policies undermine kids’ respect for law.

“Even if you favor prohibition [of drugs], I think it’s hard to argue that our current policies—at least all of them—are effective. I wanted to grab people’s attention on this issue.”

The debate featured two experts with different backgrounds and perspectives on drug policy.

Judge Jim Gray, who presides over Orange County’s Superior Court, is a former federal prosecutor and criminal defense attorney. A former Republican, he ran against Senator Barbara Boxer as a Libertarian in 2004. He is a member of Law

Enforcement Against Prohibition, a national advocacy group that favors strict regulation rather than prohibition of drugs.

Mr. Gray’s opponent, Dr. Kevin Sabet, has a background on the policy-making side. He worked as an advisor and speechwriter for drug czars in the Clinton and second Bush administrations. Having earned a doctorate in Social Policy from Oxford University, he is now a private consultant on drug policy for local governments and non-profits.

The two rarely agreed during the debate. Mr. Gray argued for an intricate regulatory scheme to replace simple drug bans. Invoking the principles of personal responsibility and states’ rights, he encouraged the audience to separate their personal approval or disapproval of drugs from policy considerations.

“Just because we might adopt some reforms doesn’t mean we condone drug abuse,” he said.

Dr. Sabet responded with a more cautious approach, and concluded that the potential ill effects of legalization are too dangerous to risk.

“Commercialization [of drugs] will fuel profits and use,” he said. “We’re not living in a world where our actions are done in a vacuum. What you do affects other people ... it’s not your business—it’s everyone’s business. To say that your actions are your business is a pipe dream.”



COURIER photo/Nicole Padilla

**Judge James Gray, a member of LEAP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition), believes drugs should not be prohibited, but regulated and controlled.**