

Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign

On May 28th 2002, I helped launch Alaska's participation in the nationwide Shoulder to Shoulder campaign. This is a joint effort with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the National Foundation of Women Legislators (NFWL) to focus on narco-terrorism as well as the dangers of "club drugs." Since the attack on America September 11th, the war on drugs has turned into a war on narco-terrorism. Drug trafficking has become a national security issue because it is often drug money that finances terrorist operations.

Club drugs, such as ecstasy, have become increasingly popular among young people across the country. DEA agent, Tony Grootens, also a participant in the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign, reports that the prevalence of Ecstasy in Alaska is definitely on the rise. In addition to teen usage, the military have also reported an increase in use of Ecstasy. The *Baltimore Sun* reported on March 14, 2002 that the overall use of illicit drugs has steadily fallen since the military began random testing two decades ago, the number of active-duty personnel testing positive for Ecstasy grew exponentially since 1998. The article further reported that the military formed a club drug task force two years ago to advertise the dangers of Ecstasy noting that use of the drug was a "hazard to readiness and force protection."

What has caused the dramatic increase in usage of this illicit drug over such a short time period? Several factors can be cited:

- Ecstasy has been touted as a harmless drug.
- It has been assumed that the drug will leave the body in a few hours, thus being less susceptible to detection through drug testing.
- It is readily available and inexpensive

Only two of these three factors are true.

In fact, Ecstasy is not harmless. It is a synthetic amphetamine-like drug that has an undeserved reputation of safety. While Ecstasy may produce a sense of euphoria and increase energy, it also may produce nerve cell damage that can result in psychiatric disturbance, and long-term cognitive impairment. The user can also experience increased muscle tremors, blurred vision, and hyperthermia, increasing the body to temperatures as high as 117 degrees, which can cause organ failure and death. Ecstasy can produce significant increases in heart rate and blood pressure lasting from three to six hours, with side effects such as anxiety, depression or paranoia occurring even weeks after the drug is taken. The deaths attributed to Ecstasy use should clearly dispel the misconception that this drug is harmless.

It has also been falsely assumed that Ecstasy leaves the body quickly, and thus is less susceptible to detection by drug testing. With improved testing technology, Ecstasy can be detected in the system for up to three days after use. A user should no longer assume because they took the drug on Friday night they will test clean on Monday.

The third factor contributing to increased use of Ecstasy is true: the drug is readily available and can be purchased for between \$10 and \$25 per dose. Club drugs like Ecstasy are popular among 14 to 32 year olds and are prevalent in all night parties known as raves.

Let there be no mistake – club drugs are dangerous and illegal. I hope that over the course of the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign I can help educate Alaskans of all ages about the dangers of club drugs. There are several websites I found to be helpful in obtaining information on Ecstasy and other club drugs. For more information on the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign, club drugs, or narco-terrorism, please contact my office at (907) 269-0174 or Representative_Lisa_Murkowski@legis.state.ak.us.