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FIGHTING DRUGS IN AMERICA

Today in America a lot of young people have experiments with illegal drugs. Some people try drugs for recreational purposes, others are addicted to drugs and can't survive without them. Usually it starts from recreational purposes, and people who cannot control their recreation become drug addicts. There are many different types of drugs, but they have similar result - change one's understanding of

the environment, feelings, senses and mood. Some drugs cause physical addiction, which means that after several times of using the particular drug, the body requires that chemical in order to function. Some drugs destroy lives; people use drugs so much that it changes their personality and acceptance of environment; people become happy and sad, active and weak under influence of drugs. It makes their mind and body sick.

The United States has focused its efforts on the criminalization of drug use. The turn of the century witnessed a heightened awareness that psychotropic drugs have a great potential for causing addiction. The abuse of opium and cocaine at the end of the 19th century reached epidemic proportions. Local governments began prohibiting opium dens and opium importation. In 1906 the Pure Food and Drug Act required all physicians to accurately label their medicines. Drugs were no longer seen as harmless remedies for aches and pains.

In 1971 President Richard Nixon declared war on drugs. He proclaimed, "America's public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive" Nixon fought drug abuse on both the supply and demand fronts. Nixon's drug policies reflect both the temperance view and disease view of addiction.

Nixon initiated the first significant federal funding of treatment programs in. In 1971, the government funded the then experimental and enormously controversial methadone maintenance program. In June 1971, Nixon addressed Congress and declared, "as long as there is a demand, there will be those willing to take the risks of meeting the demand." In this statement he publicly proclaimed that all efforts of interdiction and eradication are destined to fail. Nixon launched a massive interdiction effort in Mexico. The Drug Enforcement Agency was created in 1973. They initiated Operation Intercept, which pressured Mexico to regulate its marijuana growers. In the end, Nixon achieved his goal of curtailing the supply of Mexican marijuana in America. Columbia, however, was quick to replace Mexico as America's marijuana supplier.

In 1977 President Carter called for the decriminalization of marijuana. In a speech to Congress he said, "...penalties against

possession of the drug should not be more damaging than the drug itself.” Although Carter endorsed lenient laws towards marijuana use, he was against legalization. Carter’s drug policy was focused on the supply front, with most funding going to interdiction and eradication programs.

In 1981, President Reagan gave a speech mirroring Nixon’s admission that fighting the supply side of the drug war was a losing proposition. Reagan’s demand side initiatives focused on “getting tough” on drugs. The program became known as the “zero tolerance” program, where punitive measures against users were emphasized. The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse gave the drug user full accountability. Drug users were to be prosecuted for possession and accordingly penalized. Although some block grants were given for drug treatment, the rehabilitative efforts were insufficient to meet the overwhelming amount of drug abuse. Reagan’s demand side drug policy largely reflects the colonial, or moralist view of addiction. Despite headlining innovative drug policies, Clinton has largely continued the Republican’s supply sided drug policy. In the 1995 budget, Clinton earmarked an extra \$1 billion for both the demand and supply fronts of the government’s drug policy. Clinton attracted the media’s attention when he doubled the spending for rehabilitation and prevention programs. However, more substantial increases were made for eradication programs and law enforcement. The 1995 budget included \$13.2 billion for drug policy. \$7.8 billion was spent on supply sided efforts, while only \$5.4 billion was spent on education, prevention, and rehabilitation. Although Clinton did increase the percentage spent on the demand front of the drug war, his policy clearly reflects supply sided tactics.

It is important to note that Congress has a significant influence on shaping America’s drug policy. The Republican 104th Congress successfully killed many of Clinton’s attempts to spend more on the demand side. Even the Democratic 103rd Congress of the early 1990’s fought shifting the drug policy towards prevention and rehabilitation. Both Democratic and Republic Congresses overwhelmingly favored continuing with supply sided efforts.

Although Clinton didn’t significantly change the direction of US drug policy he presented some innovative proposals. Clinton

encouraged Community Action Programs and grass roots organizations to participate in the demand side of the drug war. However, of the \$1 billion given to the Community Empowerment Program only \$50 million was allocated to drug education, prevention, and treatment. Thus, the potential of the programs was never realized.

The modern drug war began in the 1960s, and for thirty five years it has failed to produce and real success. Which is better for America during the next 35 years, prohibition with the continuing costs and ineffectiveness, or reform policies that approach the problem from a different angle? Instead of spending so much money on imprisoning drug offenders and preaching why drugs are bad, why not spend the money on schools, and school programs? The idea is to keep kids from using drugs, and this will in turn reduce the numbers of adults that use drugs. The same goal is present in alcohol and cigarettes, and it is handled much differently. Why not treat at least Marijuana just like cigarettes and alcohol. Don't make it illegal; just take steps to discourage people from using it. Education is a must, but prosecuting small time offenders is pointless. The facts just don't do much to support the war on drugs.

Increasingly we see drug cartels collaborating with terrorist groups, using drugs to purchase their weapons. The political, social and economic stability of nation states is, therefore, being affected by the drugs trade. The main victim of drugs is and will continue to be those young people who are ensnared into taking drugs and becoming addicted to them. However, whilst crime at street level may continue to be more immediately apparent as a threat to our daily safety, it is the steady enlargement of the power of big time criminal organizations which feed for growth on drugs trafficking that is the main threat of our time.

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