



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Legalize Drugs?

There are many arguments for legalizing drugs. The main argument is that people should have the right to do whatever they want as long as it does not harm others. But is this really a good idea? Should people be allowed to eat lead paint if they want? Should children be allowed to wear flammable clothing? Walking in public in the nude does not really harm others, but that does not give us the right to public nudity, does it?

Legalization advocates say that the government does not have a right to interfere in the life of a person who chooses to use drugs. The claim is that the government should only be allowed to prevent a person's actions if someone else is being harmed. But what if the actions are causing the person who is using drugs to become addicted?

Addicted people do ultimately hurt others, don't they? Ask the spouse of a drug addict or alcoholic if they have been affected. Spend some time with the parent of an addicted teenager. Talk to the family of an innocent victim killed by a drunk or drugged driver. Consider the more than 300,000 crack babies born in this country every year. If a woman chooses to use crack cocaine, becomes addicted, and later becomes pregnant, her baby *involuntarily* becomes addicted through the umbilical cord. To say that drug use only hurts the user is naïve and irresponsible.

Most kids don't use drugs, but many children are *predisposed* to addiction, and virtually every child will be offered drugs during their teenage years. It is during adolescence that kids believe they are invincible and that

nothing can harm them. For this reason, and because the teenage brain is not fully formed and impulse control is not yet developed, teens are much more susceptible to drug use and addiction. Legalizing drugs would increase availability and would encourage kids to experiment with drugs—leading more children into addiction.

Research has proven that the greater the chance of getting caught and punished for using drugs, the less chance that people will use them. America became the strongest country on earth because the American government protects its people. In some instances, the government must act to protect its people from themselves. The government has an interest in—and a right to protect—America's children by keeping illegal drugs illegal. What would happen to our kids if we legalized drugs?

Some say that legalized drugs would only be available for adults. But how could that be possible? Cigarettes and beer are not legal for children but they are able to get *them* anyway. And people don't usually begin using drugs as adults; they begin drug use as teenagers. Legalizing drugs would put our children at greater risk of addiction, and would eventually create a nation full of drug addicts. Drug addicts hurt themselves, and they hurt society.

The Cost of Legalizing Drugs

Who ultimately ends up paying the bill for drug use? We all do. The bills for criminal costs, for example, have to be paid by someone, and taxpayers get stuck with the bill. Crime, violence, and drug use go hand in hand. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, six times as many murders

are committed by people under the influence of drugs, as by those who are looking for money to buy drugs. Most drug crimes aren't committed by people trying to pay for drugs; they're committed by people who are *using* drugs.

Soaring Health Care Costs

Should people be allowed to use drugs if it harms their bodies and they have to seek public health care? As taxpayers, we all pay for the rising health care costs caused by drug users. Everyone knows that alcohol has caused major health problems in this country, and drugs are even more addictive than alcohol. Alcohol use in the U.S. has taken a tremendous physical and social toll on Americans, but only 10 percent of drinkers become alcoholics, while almost 75 percent of drug users become addicted. Because alcohol is legal, it is used by seven times more people than drugs, but the number of drug induced deaths in the U.S. is almost the same as alcohol related deaths. Additionally, the health related costs for a drug addict are more than twice as much as for an alcoholic.

Currently, there are 60 million smokers and 20 million alcoholics in America. If drugs suddenly would become as easy to get as cigarettes and beer, the number of drug addicts would soar along with health care costs to treat them. Society, social services, schools, and businesses would bear the burden. Legalizing drugs would

make America's health care problem much worse and end up costing billions of taxpayer dollars. We would all pay in one way or another. Illegal drugs are addictive, mind altering, and in some cases lethal. They are illegal for a very good reason; they're harmful physically and emotionally.

Will Illegal Drugs Ever Become Legal?

Legalizing drugs never has been—and never will be—the solution to America's drug problem. Legalization has been tried in other countries and has failed. England, the Netherlands, Italy, and Switzerland have all tried it with devastating results. In fact, legalization was tested in America in the 1970s with the decriminalization of marijuana. The result was that the use of marijuana increased dramatically. In Alaska, when marijuana was legalized, the teenagers there began to smoke pot at twice the national rate. As a result, Alaskans voted to recriminalize marijuana.

In spite of the fact that legalization advocates can be quite outspoken, the majority of Americans do not support legalizing drugs. According to Public Agenda, *Illegal Drugs: Overview 2006* at www.publicagenda.org, Americans overwhelmingly favor keeping illegal drugs illegal. As long as the majority rules on this issue, illegal drugs will remain illegal.

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