Legalization Of Drugs 2 Essay, Research Paper

Legalization: Problem or Solution to the War on Drugs

Legalization of drugs is a very controversial topic that is being discussed in the United States. Currently there is an intense debate to legalize marijuana as a medicine. To most people, legalizing drugs seems like something insane. They probably ask how can they legalize something that the government furiously tries to eradicate. The problem is exactly in what the government tries to do. Eliminate drugs. The drug problem will never go away. A drug free society is something that will never happen. The amount of money made from illegal drugs is so great that the police have no force to fight this situation.

Pro legalization advocates say the drug war has failed. They claim legalization will reduce the huge costs of drug enforcement, prosecution, and imprisonment. The anti- legalization advocates say that legalization will increase crime and cause more addiction. They also say that the war on drugs is a success. The question at issue arises from these two different viewpoints. Will legalization of drugs be more beneficial than continuing the drug war?

Joseph McNamara is a former Police Chief of San Jose and other large cities. He is a research fellow of the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California. Mcnamara believes that the drug war is violent, corrupt and unsuccessful. McNamara questions the principle behind the war on drugs. He says the drug war is racist, violent, corrupt, unsuccessful and confusing. Alcohol and tobacco, the most dangerous drugs that kill around a million Americans a year, are legal. McNamara says the drug war cannot succeed because of the profit of drug dealers. About 500 dollars of cocaine or heroin in a source country, brings about $100,000 on an American city. No cops, prisons and armies can stop this because of the tremendous profit. A big problem is our thinking towards drugs, which is frozen a century ago. This enables us to look at what the drug war is causing to America.

McNamara is against the way America says it will stop foreign production of drugs. The source countries are poor and they don’t want to destroy their country in a civil war because Americans can’t control their demand for drugs. This problem exists because millions of Americans are willing to spend a lot of money in drugs knowing they are illegal and cause health problems. It only takes about 50 square miles anywhere in the world, to produce the entire drug supply for America. That really makes it difficult for the USA to stop foreign production of drugs. The border control of drugs is another problem. The government estimates it stops about 10 percent of drugs. Even with this seizure of drugs, the street price remains stable because the supply here is America is already huge. McNamara says early in the drug war, tough enforcement was supposed make drugs harder to get by making drugs more expensive and harder to get. But what happened was it made drug users commit more crimes to get money for drugs. Other problems McNamara points are USA’s huge borders and the great volume of international trade which makes it impossible to control everything that is coming in.

McNamara questions the way society acts towards drug users. People who have been punished for drug use don’t have the chance to rehabilitate themselves. There are drug free workplaces where nobody with a drug record can get a job. There is drug free housing. Another problem McNamara mentions is the enormous corruption. The same Drug enforcement agent that arrested General Noriega, was arrested for stealing 720,000 in laundered drug money. The corruption has reached in the federal law enforcement. The police are corrupted and the legal system is paralyzed. The FBI and the Coast Guard had to admit to corruption.

McNamara says the DARE program, which runs about 1 billion a year, is ineffective. Two studies by the government proved that but the government didn’t dare to publish this study because it didn’t want to admit it failed. McNamara thinks marijuana should be legalized because marijuana is as dangerous as alcohol and tobacco. Even Clinton and Newt Gingrich have smoked marijuana and this has not lead them to other drugs or criminal behavior.

Steven B. Duke professor at Yale University Law School and Albert C. Gross a lawyer in San Diego wrote an article about the benefits of legalization. More than 60 percent of federal prison inmates are in jail because of drug violations. Now we spend about 159 dollars a day to house a prisoner in one of many overcrowded jails. It is estimated that about one third of a million people are in jail because of drug violations and three times that number are in probation or parole for drugs. Legalization will create more space in jails for real criminals once the previous drug offenders are set free. About one third of all prisoners would be set free. Also about a quarter of other convicts in prison are there because of property crimes committed to buy drugs. This will create space to punish criminals that commit rape, murder, robbery and burglary, the real threat to society.

The next benefit Gross and Duke claim from legalization would be safer neighborhoods. Drug commerce is the major cause of the destruction of the inner cities. Open-air drug markets and gang violence makes life hell in poor neighborhoods. Around half of violent and property crimes would be eliminated by legalization. Legalization will also create an increase in property values in former drug zones. Teenagers from poor neighborhoods are attracted to drug dealing because that is the only chance they have to make money. Legalization will stop the continuing number of poor teens that take drug dealing as a career.

James Ostrowoski, vice chairman of the New York County on law reforms beliefs that legalization will be beneficial to America. According to him the war on drugs is immoral and impractical. It creates huge costs from citizens in an attempt to save a small group of hard core drug abusers from harming themselves. Once legalization takes place America would be a safer place to live. There won’t be no more drug dealers, no local warfare between them. Innocent bystanders won’t be murdered. Police officers would be free to imprison violent career criminals who commit 50 to 100 serious crimes per year. Drug addicts won’t be doing criminal acts to support their addiction. It is estimated that drug users commit 40 percent of all property crime to support their habit. That is around 4,000,000 crimes a year and $7.5 billion in stolen property. Ostrowoski prefers to call “drug” related violence, “prohibition” related violence. This includes all the murders occurred in black market transactions. The President’s commission on Organized Crime and the FBI estimates there are around 750 murders each year from “prohibition” violence.

The economic problem of the drug war is another reason why Ostrowski beliefs in legalization. The total cost of drug law enforcement is around $20 billion a year. Organized crime gains as much as $80 billion a year. This $20 billion from taxpayers causes drugs to increase in price creating this huge profit for them. Users also steal $7.5 billion from taxpayers to buy drugs. Other costs that are hard to estimate are the lost of productivity of those who die or are in jail because of prohibition. Costs imposed by organized crime activities funded by narcotic profits, government and private funds spent on prohibition related illness such as Aids, and accidental overdose, and the funds spent on private security to fight drug related crime are other expenses.

Ostrowoski says that legalization will make drugs less dangerous. Illegal drugs produced in the black market contain chemicals and poisons of uncertain potency. Around 80 percent of deaths attributed to cocaine and heroine occur because of infections, accidental overdoses, and poisoning. Today, about 25% of all acquired AIDS cases in the United States and Europe, as well as the majority of human HIV infected heterosexuals, children, and infants, contracted the disease directly or indirectly from illegal drug use. Simple distribution of syringes would reduce this number drastically.

In an article in U.S. News and World Report magazine, Mortimer B. Zuckerman editor of the magazine, discusses the problems that drug legalization will cause on society. He states that America has not lost the drug war. In 1979 about 25 million people had tried drugs. In 1997 the figure decreased to 11 million. Zuckerman says America’s drug war caused this decline with stricter drug laws, more societal disapproval, and more information on the negative effect drugs causes. The more dangerous problem with legalization is with teens. Drug use has increased threefold among teens in the past five years from 1997. Legalization advocates say that legalization will not increase the number of addicts because if somebody wants drugs they can buy it now. Zuckerman shows that in a research, less than 50 percent of people under 22 believe they could obtain cocaine fairly or very easily. Only 39 percent of the adult population said they could get cocaine. Legalization will double or triple the number of people who would have access to drugs and who would use them. Legalizing drugs will make them available for adults only. The problem according to Zuckerman is that since we have not been able to keep alcohol and tobacco away from teens, how can we keep the new legalized drugs away from them. In another study 60 to 70 percent of New Jersey and California students declared that the “fear of getting caught by authorities was a major reason why they did not use drugs.”

According to an expert interviewed by Zuckerman, there would be an increase in the number of addicts to about 20 million. An important statement made in the article is that if millions of people become addicted to drugs when they are illegal, socially unacceptable and hard to buy, surely there will be an increase number of addicts when they become easily available and socially acceptable.

Joseph A. Califano, president of the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University is a major force against the legalization of narcotics. According to him there has been progress in the war on drugs. A survey by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ National Household Drug survey, says that from 1979 to 1994 the number of current drug users had dropped from 24.8 million to 12 million. Marijuana users dropped from 23 to 10 million and cocaine users from 4.4 million to 1.4 million. The number of addicts has not changed and is around 6 million people because of unavailability of treatment. Califano is concerned about the problems that legalization will have on children. Almost no one in America begins drug use after 21. Legalization will make drugs available for teens just like alcohol and cigarettes. Even though they are illegal for minors about 3 million teens smoke an average of half a pack a day, a $1 billion a year business. And twelve million teens consume alcohol, a $10 billion a year business.

Califano does not believe there would be crime reduction because of legalization. He writes that the reduction in arrests from drug laws would be nothing in comparison with the increase in drug usage. Drugs like cocaine and methamphetamines will cause an increase in criminal conduct-assaults, murders, rapes, child molestation and vandalism. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, criminals commit six times as many homicides, four times as many assaults and one and a half times as many robberies under the influence of drugs in order to get money to buy drugs. This statement is why drugs should be legalized. There won’t be any reason for this crimes to happen once drugs are legalized.

An increase in the number of addicts is major reason to put aside the idea of legalization. Califano gives the example of the 1970′ when Nixon and Carter recommended decriminalization of marijuana and there was a huge increase in marijuana use, mostly among teens. Dr Kleber, an expert from Columbia University believes that legalizing cocaine will increase the number of addicts beyond the number of alcoholics. This is not the only problem that will arise from legalization. In 1995 illegal drugs killed 20,000 Americans. Tobacco was responsible for 450,000 deaths and alcohol for more than 100,000. Studies from the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reveal that of $66 billion of substance abuse costs of Federal health and disability entitlements programs like Medicare and Medicaid, $56 billion is comes from tobacco and alcohol. Califano is afraid that this costs will increase when the number of addicts from other drugs increase.

Califano uses the examples of European countries to prove his point. He writes that Switzerland, England and the Netherlands have suffered by the drug legalization philosophy. Switzerland’s “Needle Park” was reserved to separate a few hundred heroin addicts to a small area. It turned to a tourist attraction of 20,000 heroin addicts and junkies, which had to be closed down before it infected the city of Zurich. In England, the idea to let doctor prescribe heroin was eliminated when heroin use increased. The Netherlands legalized marijuana for anyone over age 15. Teen pot use rose 200 percent while in the States it dropped 66 percent. Complaints from city residents about the decline in their quality of life have multiplied in Amsterdam because of an increase in crime and the availability of drugs like heroin and cocaine. The Amsterdam city council moved to raise the age for legal purchase of marijuana from 16 to 18 and cut back the number of pot distribution shops in Amsterdam. Many other sources contradict the situation from the Netherlands. Some other statistics show that teen pot smoking has actually declined.

After studying all the evidence from both sides has lead to one conclusion. There are much more benefits from legalization than just having the situation continue like it is. Too much money is being expended in trying to reduce drug trafficking. There is no way to stop the sale of drugs. The huge profits drug dealers make is the reason it can’t stop. More and more drug criminals enter this business for the huge profit they can make. They have money to use to corrupt officials to facilitate their dealing. Cops and federal agents are humans and like all humans they are addicted to money.

By legalization the government would have a benefit of $10 billion or more per year by taxes from drug sales and the reduction on drug enforcement. This money would be available for drug treatment programs and other types of social and educational programs to help drug addicts. Urban life will rise by the elimination of drug dealing. Homicide and robbery rates will decline. Police and courts will have more resources to fight other crimes and they will have space in prison for dangerous criminals. The health and quality of life of drug users will increase.

The only drawbacks from legalization would be an increase in addiction. But it is hard to prove if this will happen. Even if there were more addicts there would be enough money for rehabilitation. Even though kids will have easier access to hardcore drugs, there will have much more information on drugs. Critics of legalization also say an increase in crime will occur. But the contrary will occur. Addicts won’t have to steal to support their drug habits once drugs are sold at a cheaper price. Even if they don’t have enough money to buy drugs, there would be many more and better rehab centers that will help them. Alcohol is a drug on the market that causes people to lose inhibitions an act with greater freedom. This is the perfect drug to commit crimes because it gives you courage. But it doesn’t cause millions of users to commit crime.

The major problem most people have with legalization is an ethical one. They are scared of seeing someone crazy on LSD walk next to them, in the supermarket or anywhere around the city. But these people don’t seem to be bothered by seeing the problems in poor neighborhoods where minorities suffer from all the drug crime being committed in their neighborhoods. They have also begun accepting tobacco and alcohol in society, the drugs that causes the largest number of deaths. They don’t see teenagers experimenting with dangerous drugs, risking overdose and poisoning by chemical substances. Many ask that more money should be expended to keep drugs away from kids. This is ridiculous. Teens take drugs because they are wild, and want to do anything that they are not allowed to do. People are scared of drugs because they don’t know their real effects. Marijuana can be used as a medicine but the government is afraid to legalize it

It is time for the population to be informed about the current problems with the drug war. Many people don’t know the financial and physical losses that occur in trying to fight a war that cannot be won. As the public gets to know the real facts, legalization of drugs will become the solution for a better America.

Works Cited

Califano, Joseph A. “Fictions and Facts About Drug Legalization.”

America 16 March 1996: 7.

Duke, Steven B, and Albert C. Gross. “Legalizing Drugs Would Benefit

the United States.” Legalizing Drugs. Ed. Karin L. Swisher. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1996. 32-48.

McNamara, Joseph. “The Drug War: Violent, Corrupt and

Unsuccessful.” Infotrac College Edition. March 16, 1996.

Ostrowoski, James. “Has the Time Come to Legalize Drugs?” Drugs in

America. Ed. Robert Emmet Long. New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1993. 203-212.

Zuckerman, Mortimer B. “Great Idea for Ruining Kids: The Case for

Legalization is Seductive and Completely Wrong.” U.S News and World Report 24 February 1997: 68.