Marijuana: Time To Legalize Essay, Research Paper

The war on drugs failed. The government spent billions of dollars fighting drug use to no avail. Statistics shown in The Boston Globe state overall drug use among children ages twelve to seventeen had actually gone up from 5.7% in 1993 to 9% in 1999(Health Central). Other statistics reveal areas of decreased usage; however, the same statistics do not show the vast numbers of addicted people abusing Methamphetamines or popular club drugs like Ecstasy. Ending drug usage is likely impossible. So why are we spending billions of dollars on a lost cause? Legalization of drugs would decrease tremendous amounts of wasted money, money that could be spent on treatment for addiction. Although many people feel that legalizing drugs would increase the amount of use, marijuana should be legalized because it will reduce massive amounts of money spent on enforcement, increase our country’s revenue, and provide some relief from chronic pain caused by diseases like multiple sclerosis and others.

Making drugs legal will reduce massive amounts of money spent on enforcement every year. The MPP (Marijuana Policy Project) estimates that marijuana consumers cost taxpayers more than $7 billion dollars annually (MPP). Year after year, money is thrown away trying to stem the flow of illegal drugs into our country. When one drug lord is caught, two show up somewhere else to take their place. For every drug bust, four more make it through to the United States. For example, in his book Intoxication, Ronald K. Siegel talks about the very first significant international anti-drug campaign: Operation Intercept, the first major assault on marijuana use. This operation captured 493 drug runners at the Mexican border. Very few drugs were confiscated, and no change in marijuana use inside the United States was recorded (280). Today, billions of dollars are spent each year to combat drug use, but no real concise victories are evident. Drugs are still bought, sold, and used everyday. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse found that the number of first-time marijuana users in 1998 was 2.3 million. This number increased significantly compared to 1.4 million in 1989 (DEA). These figurers alone show that money spent on enforcement has had no effect. President Ronald Reagan said it best, “Despite continuing expressions of determination, America’s war on drugs seems nowhere close to success.”(Intoxication p.317)

In addition to the cost of enforcement, the cost associated with imprisonment of drug offenders is high. For example, as of December 31, 1998, there were 22,386 drug offenders in New York prisons, about 33% of the prison population. The costs of incarcerating these drug offenders rose to a staggering $715 million per year. Furthermore, nearly 80% of these prisoners were never convicted of a violent felony. Drug offenders take up much needed space in prisons, allowing rapists and murderers to be released early because of over-population problems (Issue).

Another cost not included in the drug enforcement price tag is fact that perhaps most of these offenders were employed full time, prior to incarceration. The average yearly household income in America is $40 thousand (Census). Much of this money is spent on taxes, rent, utilities, food, entertainment, and other necessities. When an employed drug offender goes to jail, it not only costs money to imprison them, but or communities loose out on the revenue from the offender, as well.

Not only would legalizing marijuana free up billions of dollars spent on enforcement, it would also increase our country’s revenue. First, the sale of marijuana could be taxed. Right now, drug dealing is a tax-free operation. In 1990, it is estimated that United States consumers spent $9 billion on consumption of marijuana (Cannabis Use In The United States). If cannabis was legalized, and corporate taxes were applied at a flat rate of 35% (Corporate and Individual Tax Rates) then there would be $3.15 billion increase in our treasury. This money alone could get our government out of its multi-billion dollar debt.

In addition to financial benefits of marijuana legalization, there are many medical uses for it as well. There are a growing number of people who believe marijuana is effective for pharmaceutical purposes. “I have patients who say it works better than anything else they have tried, and these are patients who have tried everything for chronic neuropathic pain,” says Dr. May Lynch, who leads the Canadian Consortium for the Investigations of Cannabinoids in Human Therapeutics (Sibbald). In Canada, on July 4, 2001, federal Health Minister Allan Rock announced that the federal regulators for medical marijuana had been completed and will go into force July 30,2001. Mr. Rock told reporters “[W]ill improve the quality of life of sick Canadians, particularly those who are terminally ill.”(Cosh)

Other countries are not as convinced as the Canadians that the drug is safe and effective in pain management. In England, ongoing studies do not support beliefs about marijuana’s usefulness. The conclusions of a controlled trial are as follows:

Cannabinoids are no more effective than codeine in controlling pain and have depressant effects on the central nervous system that limit their use. Their widespread introduction into clinical practice for pain management is therefore undesirable. In acute postoperative pain they should not be used. Before cannabinoids can be considered for treating spasticity and neuropathic pain, further valid randomized controlled studies are needed (BMJ).

No more effective than codeine? Codeine is a very successful pain reliever

prescribed by millions of doctors every year. More than 28.5 million prescriptions for acetaminophen-codeine combinations were filled in 1989 in American drugstores (FDA Consumer Magazine).

Better pain management is found using marijuana, but there are several other areas in which cannabis seems to help with medical conditions. According to the book Marijuana, The Forbidden Medicine, cannabis use was effective in treating nausea from cancer chemotherapy, glaucoma, epilepsy, the muscle spasms of multiple sclerosis, paraplegia, quadriplegia, the weight loss syndrome of AIDS, migraines, rheumatic diseases, PMS, depression, and other mood disorders (62).

Drug use is widespread in many countries around the world. Throughout history, drugs have been used for many reasons. The American-Indians used peyote and other mind-altering drugs in religious ceremonies, and other cultures used marijuana in their everyday lives. While the United States has outlawed drug use, other countries have approached the drug problem with an open mind. Amsterdam, for example, has legalized drugs and their overall drug use has declined. Not only has their drug use declined, but also they have created millions of dollars in revenue. Is legalizing marijuana in our country an easy decision? No, of course not. Legalizing marijuana in our country is a very complex issue and any decisions made on this need to be carefully weighed. One thing is very clear; something must be done about fighting a losing battle on the enforcement of drug policies and wasting tax dollars. Year after year, money is thrown away trying to stem the flow of drugs in our country. This waste of money has failed to bring down the numbers of addicted people in our nation. In fact, the number goes up continuously. By legalizing marijuana, our country would relieve the burden of billions of dollars spent on enforcement of drug policies, increase revenue for our troubled economy, and provide relief for many kinds of diseases.

“US ‘drug czar’ offers final report on substance abuse.” Health Central Jan.2001. August 24, 2001