

Cost Cutting and the War on Drugs

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Ron Paul and Barney Frank – HR 2306 cosponsors

Thanks to the recession and debt crisis, progressives seeking to end the failed War on Drugs have some curious bedfellows, including the ultra-conservative Cato Institute, grassroots Tea Party groups and even mainstream Republicans. Drug Policy Alliance founder and executive director Ethan Nadelmann draws interesting parallels between the decision to end the Prohibition on alcohol during the Great Depression in the 1930s and recent calls to end the prohibition on marijuana – and possibly other drugs (<http://reason.com/blog/2011/04/15/reasontv-drug-policy-alliances>)

Like Prohibition during the 1930s, the War on Drugs is an immense burden on cities and states forced to lay off teachers and cops due to budget deficits. On June 23, Representatives Ron Paul and Barney Frank made the first attempt to tackle this fiscal disaster on a national level with the Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act of 2011. The goal of HR2306 isn't to legalize marijuana, but to remove it from the register of federally controlled substances, while allowing the states how to regulate it. Obama, predictably, opposed the bill, insisting the War on Drugs is working.

Six weeks ago analysts predicted HR 2306 had no chance of getting out of committee. However the recent debt downgrade and market crash means there's a whole new ball game in Washington. Former sacred cows, such as defense spending, are no longer sacred with the market down more than 7%. Lawmakers who oppose legislation that could save taxpayers \$9-41 billion dollars annually (according to a 2010 Cato Institute Study) will have a hard time answering to voters in 2012.

Pouring Money Down a Rat Hole

Drug policy experts across the board recognize that using the criminal justice system to “punish” drug addicts – as when Prohibition was used to punish alcoholics – is like pouring money down a rat hole. Studies show that criminalizing addictive drugs, significantly worsens the drug problem, in part by creating a highly lucrative black market. The financial incentive for drug dealing and money laundering is so massive that criminal penalties are no deterrent.

It's not just corner dealers we're talking about. Judging from past Department of Justice indictments for drug money laundering, nearly all major financial institutions in the US and some in Europe have a piece of the action (Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Union Bank, Bank of America, American Express, Wachovia, Thomas Cook, Citibank, Chemical Bank, Chase Manhattan, Barclays, Deutsche Bank, among others – I blog about specific dates and fines at <http://stuartbramhall.aegauthorblogs.com/2010/05/06/the-scope-of-corporate-drug-money-laundering/>). Moreover the CIA role in trafficking heroin from Vietnam, Southeast Asia and Afghanistan and cocaine from Central America has been well documented by the 1986 Kerry Committee report, Alfred McCoy, Peter Dale Scott and Gary Webb.

The Only Solution is Reducing Demand

As retired Missouri Supreme Court Chief Justice and former police commissioner Ray Price pointed out at the 2011 American Bar Association (ABA) meeting in Toronto, the only effective strategy for curbing the drug problem is to lessen demand through prevention and treatment. According to Price, decriminalizing addictive drugs enables us to shift resources

from criminal justice to public health, where they will do real good. At the same time it puts criminal dealers out of business, as with bootleggers in the 1930s, reduces crime and makes streets safer.

During the ABA Drug Control Panel, Price revealed that the federal government currently spends \$26 billion annually across several agencies on the War on Drugs. Of this 34% goes to treatment, 7% to treatment and 36% to support local law enforcement. Cities and states spend around \$30 billion annually on the drug war, with only \$9.5 billion of this coming from the federal government.

To be continued.

63 year old psychiatrist, activist and author of new novel THE BATTLE FOR TOMORROW about a 16 year old girl who participates in the blockade and occupation of the US Capitol. She's arrested and sent to juvenile hall, where she finds herself fighting for the right to live independently, in opposition to laws that require her to be released to a parent or guardian. In 2010 I published a memoir THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY ACT: MEMOIR OF AN AMERICAN REFUGEE. It describes my decision in 2002 - owing to extensive government harassment for my political activities to close my 25-year Seattle practice and begin a new life in New Zealand. It won a 2011 Allbooks Review Editor's Choice Award.

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