

Pasadena City College Courier

OP-ED: U.S. War on Drugs, an expensive exercise in futility

By: Justin Clay -October 23, 2013

Decriminalization means that drugs would still be illegal, but instead of mandatory prison sentences for personal drug use, users are required to attend drug therapy.

The War on Drugs has been a costly failure since its inception in the 1970's, costing the country \$1 trillion with very little effect on the illegal sale of narcotics.

According to drugpolicy.org, the U.S. War on Drugs has cost the country more than \$51 billion dollars annually. That's money that can be used for other government duties like schools or emergency services.

All that money spent, and the results aren't promising.

A 2013 study published in the British Medical Journal found that the price of drugs has gone down in the last 20 years, even though the potency of the drugs themselves has actually gone up.

12 years ago personal drug use was decriminalized in the European nation of Portugal. According to a report by the CATO institute, Portugal has some of the lowest rates of drug usage in the EU.

We should focus more resources on trying to cure the disease that is addiction than locking people up for it. We wouldn't spend millions of dollars trying to lock people away for having cancer, so why incarcerate people for addiction?

According to the Drug Police Alliance, 1.5 million people were arrested in 2012 for nonviolent drug offenses. Those 1.5 million bodies are partly the reason the U.S. has the highest number of incarcerated people, according to prisonstudies.org

To make matters worse, some of the most harmful drugs statistically, are already legal.

Alcohol contributes to approximately 75,000 deaths per year.

What's the point of locking people away for certain substances while others are allowed to freely use others while running the risk of being punished with a much less severe penalty?

The government needs to take a hard look at its drug policy. Instead of incarcerating people at our current staggering rate, we should be trying to help them cure the scourge of addiction. Prison should be for violent offenders and not for people suffering from sickness.