



Pennsylvania State Rep. Proposes Drug Tests for Lawmakers

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Pennsylvania State Representative Angel Cruz has proposed legislation to require all state lawmakers to be tested for illegal drugs in a symbolic gesture meant to draw attention to what he has deemed an unfair requirement for welfare recipients.

Cruz's proposal is an amendment to another bill, Senate Bill 6, which calls for drug testing for Pennsylvanians who receive welfare and other state assistance.

"I will support Senate Bill 6 only if the legislators in the House and the Senate are included," Cruz said. "If I'm going to make you do something, then I should be the one leading the example."

This is not the first time Cruz has attempted to pass a bill requiring lawmakers to be drug tested. In fact, he has introduced the bill in three consecutive legislation sessions. And though it's unlikely that his proposal will be passed in the few remaining days of this session, he intends to make his point. He also has assured his constituents that he will reintroduce the bill again in the next session.

"The lawmakers are the lawmakers, and we're not above the law," said Cruz. "If it's good for one, it's good for all."

In an interview with *Philadelphia* magazine, Cruz said he got the idea from Puerto Rico, which conducts drug tests at random on its lawmakers.

"They do this at the call of the speaker and the call of the senate president at random," Cruz said. "He'll walk in and say, 'We're doing drug testing today.' It puts the fear of God in everybody."

Cruz is not alone in his thinking. Last month, U.S. Representative Clay Higgins (R-La.), introduced legislation that would require U.S. senators and representatives to submit to random drug tests once every term, Roll Call reports. Any lawmaker who refuses would be reported to the Ethics Committee, under Higgins' proposal.

"Elected officials in Washington D.C. should be subject to the same kind of random drug screenings that blue-collar, working-class Americans have to endure," Higgins said in a statement. "Congress shouldn't get to live by a different set of rules. This effort is about maintaining accountability and ensuring sober service to We, the People."

Of course, one wonders if these lawmakers would feel the same way on other issues, such as Second Amendment-protected rights. For example, if lawmakers support laws that restrict a citizen's gun rights, should they still be allowed to utilize armed guards? After all, isn't that a prime example of living "by a different set of rules"? If lawmakers support universal healthcare, should they then be permitted to use government's private and very extravagant health insurance? Certainly not, if you subscribe to this philosophy. And it's likely that many voters would agree that what's good for the goose should be good for the gander. But without consistency, demands like these from outraged politicians are merely rallying cries for hypocrites.

The theory behind drug-testing welfare recipients is a sound one. Welfare recipients receive taxpayer dollars for specific purposes, and it would be an injustice to taxpayers if the recipients were using their funds for illegal purposes, including the use of illegal drugs. Unfortunately, the reality seems to indicate that the cost to execute drug-testing programs for welfare recipients is higher than any savings salvaged by uncovering drug users on the government dole.

While it is commendable to seek out efforts to reform assistance programs to ensure that they are not being abused, lawmakers should consider alternative approaches. Simple short-term solutions include caps on welfare benefits. But better, long-term solutions to the exhaustion of the welfare system and programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, and WIC require a sharp return to free-market values that emphasize work ethic and promote lifestyles that are conducive to staying out of poverty. The Cato Institute sums it up rather simply: stay in school, don't get pregnant outside of marriage, and get a job and keep it.

Unfortunately, governments incentivize poverty by making people more comfortable with generous benefits that exceed what recipients would earn if they worked. Instead, federal, state, and local governments should be focused on ending policies that are harmful to economic growth and job creation, such as regulations and high taxes. They should focus reform on failed government schooling to enable competition and choice. And they should encourage the poor to save and invest for their future.

Sadly, it seems that most lawmakers who support and those who oppose drug testing for welfare recipients are guided by emotion rather than common sense.