



## **Rocky Balboa's Philadelphia: New Policy a Must to Reduce US Poverty**

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In April 2021, I went to Philadelphia for my bachelor party with my brothers and some of my closest friends.

On the first day, we got to see the Liberty Bell. On the second day, I got to finally run up the "Rocky Steps" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The plan was that we would take two cars so that we would all see some of the locations of the Rocky films. While these neighborhoods were poor in the Rocky films, they have only gotten worse over time.

When we drove by Rocky Balboa's apartment in the first Rocky film (1818 Tusculum St.), we saw a half-naked homeless person doing drugs in the street. Not far from that apartment were tents of homeless people.

When we went to Mighty Mick's Gym, which is only a short drive from Rocky's first apartment, that neighborhood was a little better. It felt safe to drive slowly and walk outside.

What I love about the Rocky movies is how Rocky Balboa was given a shot at the American Dream. The people who are suffering in this neighborhood deserve a chance at the American Dream.

We need to have a serious discussion on how we can improve our strategy regarding the war on drugs and the war on poverty. Since 1971, the United States has spent more than a trillion dollars enforcing drug policy.

Over a trillion dollars spent and the problem keeps getting worse.

In 1999, according to the CDC, only 16,849 people died of drug overdoses and approximately 48 percent of them involved opioids. By 2019, 70,630 Americans died from drug overdoses and 70 percent of those deaths were from opioids.

In 2020, 91,799 Americans died of drug overdoses. Nearly 75% of those overdoses in 2020 (68,630 people) involved opioids.

It is likely that the COVID pandemic contributed to the dramatic increase in the number of overdoses from 2019 to 2020.

In Philadelphia alone, 1,214 people died of overdoses in 2020. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), 81 percent of those people had fentanyl in their system.

According to the DEA, "Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 80-100 times stronger than morphine."

In his book, "Issues on My Mind: Strategies for the Future," former Secretary of State George Shultz explains how we can reduce the demand for drugs:

"It seems to me we're not really going to get anywhere until we can take the criminality out of the drug business and the incentives for criminality out of it. Frankly, the only way I can think of to accomplish this is to make it possible for addicts to buy drugs at some regulated place at a price that approximates their cost.

"When you do that you wipe out the criminal incentives, including, I might say, the incentive that the drug pushers have to go around and get kids addicted, so that they create a market for themselves. They won't have that incentive because they won't have that market."

Decriminalizing drugs alone is not the answer. It will require the federal government to provide treatment for drug users and harsher policies toward drug dealers.

If more federal spending was the answer, we could have ended poverty a long time ago.

From March 2020 to March 2021 alone, the federal government spent \$2.2 trillion on the CARES Act (March 2020), \$900 billion in additional relief from the Consolidated Appropriations Act (December 2020), and \$1.9 trillion on the American Rescue Plan (March 2021).

In November 2021, Congress passed an infrastructure bill, which cost \$1.2 trillion.

Even before the massive COVID relief spending, the federal government spent trillions of dollars on the "war on poverty." According to the CATO Institute, from 1965 to 2019 we spent over \$23 trillion on anti-poverty programs (Social Security and Medicare are not included).

Many people have benefited from these programs while others have fallen through the cracks.

According to The Heritage Foundation, from 1959 to 2012 the number of two-parent families in official poverty has dropped from almost 4 million to just over 2 million. The number of single-parent families in official poverty has risen from 1.6 million in 1959 to 4.8 million in 2012.

In his 2008 presidential campaign, then-Sen. Barack Obama gave a speech on the consequences of absent fathers. "We know the statistics — that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and 20 times more likely to end up in prison."

We need a new strategy to reduce poverty in America. Our current policy is unsustainable, and the results are mixed at best.