



My favorite holiday

Kenny Tan

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Recent surveys have shown that a majority of Americans now favor the legalization of marijuana. It is becoming clearer everyday that the war on drugs has failed. But the federal government continues to raid dispensaries of medical marijuana in states that have legalized its use, and since 2006, 40,000 individuals have been killed in Mexico as a result of the drug war.

To protest the drug war and raise awareness of its failures, Young Americans for Liberty, Vanderbilt's official libertarian student organization, will be hosting a "4/20 Bake Sale" on Rand Wall from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Friday, April 20th. As President of the YAL chapter at Vanderbilt, I want to explain some of the reasons why this issue is important to us.

In a free society, individuals should be able to make their own choices about their own bodies. We believe that individuals have the right to consume, smoke or drink any substance as long as their resulting actions do not harm another individual who does not wish to be harmed. But regardless of their initial intentions or motives, those individuals who choose to exercise this right must also take full responsibility for the choices that they make while under the influence of any substances, including any actions that cause injury or death to another individual.

In direct contradiction to libertarian principles is the war on drugs that has been ongoing in America since alcohol prohibition, from 1920 to 1933. Since 1971, the war has been focused on the prohibition of a wide range of illegal substances including marijuana.

During these periods of prohibition, the statistics gathered clearly indicate that homicide rates and police enforcement costs have increased as a result of the drug war. A simple economic analysis shows that whenever a consumer good is prohibited, a black market will result in order to meet supply with demand. However, a black market lacks both a legal system and assurances of product quality, often becoming a dangerous trade.

This is exactly what has happened in the U.S. and in almost all countries in the world that have prohibitionist drug policies. Prohibition has made it extremely profitable for major drug cartels to traffic drugs into the U.S., while causing unnecessary violence and death to innocent bystanders and law enforcement officers.

To further educate members of the Vanderbilt community about this issue, Young Americans for Liberty will also be hosting guest speaker Radley Balko on

Monday, April 23rd, who will discuss the collateral damage from America's ongoing drug war. His lecture will be hosted in Buttrick 206 at 6:30 p.m. America's century long war on drugs has cost hundreds of billions of dollars and left a catastrophic trail of damage in its wake. There is no area of public policy — or even our public and private lives — that it hasn't impacted. And yet, illicit drugs are as easy to obtain today as they were in the early 1900s, as they were in the 1960, and as they were in the 1980s. Radley Balko will survey the damage — from the tens of thousands of homicides in just a few years in Mexico and poisoning of the land in South America, to the damage wrought here at home, including the corruption and militarization of police; the erosion of the Fourth Amendment; and the destruction of the doctor-patient relationship and handicapping of palliative care.

Balko is a senior writer and investigative reporter for The Huffington Post. Previously, he was a senior editor at Reason magazine and a policy analyst for the Cato Institute, specializing in vice and civil liberties issues.

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