




[Column] Failure in drug war means spend more

September 19th, 2010, 7:03 am · 2 Comments · posted by rlederman

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Having spent all kinds of money on weight loss, a gain would have most people disappointed. A weight gain after following the program to the letter, and we'd be demanding our money back. Failure doesn't keep many people from wanting to spend even more money than we already have fighting drugs.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported Wednesday that the nation last year saw a sharp increase in illegal drug use. Some 8.7 percent of the U.S. population over age 12 reported using illegal drugs in 2009, according to the government agency. The number of people using — about 21.8 million — was the highest since the survey began in 2002.

So what does the federal government do after seeing its ever-growing effort to fight drugs is still failing? Find someone else to blame, of course.

"I think all of the attention and the focus of calling marijuana medicine has sent the absolute wrong message to our young people," Office of National Drug Control Policy director Gil Kerlikowske told The Associated Press.

Clearly, the drug war is a success and the only thing to do is to spend even more tax money combating drugs. Many Californians think otherwise, albeit much to Kerlikowske's chagrin. Voters there will decide in November whether to legalize small amounts of pot.

Marijuana, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, remains the most commonly used illegal drug. Marijuana use went up 8 percent last year.

Cocaine use was down 32 percent, the survey found. But use of ecstasy and meth went up — way up. Ecstasy use rose by 37 percent, and meth use rose by 60 percent.

Such results are why taxpayers spend some \$70 billion each year, according to an estimate by Cato Institute senior fellow Jeffrey A. Miron. Miron brought up the number in a June essay in National Review Online examining which side of the drug war the tea partiers will come down on.

Social conservatives, certain they know best how to live, favor the ongoing drug war. Their libertarian brethren oppose it — both for reasons of personal freedom and, more importantly, because it's a waste. Miron urges the tea partiers to come down on the side of common sense.

"Fiscal responsibility means limiting government expenditures to programs that can be convincingly said to generate benefits in excess of their costs," Miron wrote. "... Any significant expenditure, however, should come with a credible claim that it produces a benefit large enough to outweigh both the expenditure itself and any ancillary costs. From this perspective, drug prohibition is not remotely consistent with fiscal responsibility. This policy costs the public purse around \$70 billion per year, according to my estimates, yet no evidence suggests that prohibition reduces drug use to a significant degree.

"And prohibition has unintended consequences that push its cost-benefit ratio even farther in the wrong direction. Prohibition generates violence and corruption by pushing drug markets underground and inflating prices. Prohibition inhibits quality control, so users suffer accidental poisoning and overdoses. Prohibition destroys civil liberties, inhibits legitimate medical uses of targeted drugs, and wreaks havoc in drug-producing countries.

Closer to home, drug-fighting salaries alone each year cost the Allen County Sheriff's Office about \$185,000 and the Lima Police Department about \$167,000. That's eight positions between the two agencies that could go toward other crime.

The local matches to bring in grants only run in the tens of thousands each year, but those are tens of thousands that could be spent elsewhere. Or not spent at all.

That says nothing of the costs of locking up drug offenders, particularly nonviolent ones. American taxpayers have spent \$1 trillion since 1970 trying to prevent people from using illegal drugs, Cato Institute Vice President Gene Healy wrote in The Washington Examiner in May. Taxpayers have spent \$450 billion to imprison 37 million nonviolent offenders, 10 million for marijuana possession. Maybe we should throw some more money at fighting drugs.

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2 Comments



Robzip says:

September 19, 2010 at 8:08 am

What you don't touch on still lurks in the background. The narco wars in Mexico that regularly spill across the US border are a direct product of our nation's drug laws. It won't get better. We continue attempting to reform Mexico with large infusions of cash (don't we ever learn) and military intervention designed to make them more like us. How absolutely arrogant.... WE have the drug problem that creates the demand. THEY have the narcotraffickers willing to shoot the region to pieces for control of the market. Take a look at this piece on the subject from one who lives there: <http://www.fredoneverything.net/MexicoDrugs.shtml>
"The government is outgunned by the narcos. Further, the traffickers have the advantage of being dispersed and invisible. The situation is, or quickly could be, exactly that faced by the US in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan: narcos can appear from nowhere, blow up police stations, assassinate judges, or kill a dozen teenagers at a party. Then they disappear."
Absurd? No.... It has already happened. It will happen even more frequently. When the narcos realize that the impact of their actions is greater if the carnage happens on this side of the border, expect Laredo to become a war zone.
Three or more generations of collective wisdom has pretty well put the lie to the harm of pot. Whether someone wishes to wreck their liver or their lungs with the intoxicant of their choice is purely a personal decision. For all the talk about pot being a gateway drug, so what? Encourage those so inclined to overindulge in meth and coke (with minimal support services) to destroy themselves until their numbers dwindle. There comes a point where society runs out of people willing to die for their stupidity.
But how long will it take for society to run out of people willing to make criminals of their kids for smoking a joint? How long will we brand people as felons, forever consign them to the scrap heap of society? Blowing a joint is a good reason to make a kid with a potentially great future just about unemployable? Wunnerful logic.....



Robzip says:

September 19, 2010 at 8:13 am

I might add that the Mexico narco wars have already played out in Columbia. Huge amounts of American money pumped in, the military reinforced by US forces, judges, legislators, private citizens murdered, kidnapped, and terrorized.... Yet for all the expense and intervention, the coke still flows. Let the regulated free market (oxymoron?) preside. Once the forbidden fruit factor and the narco terrorist profit motives are removed, much of our 'problem' will disappear.