

Analyst recommends US end ‘War on Drugs’ to save billions from fed. budget

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David Rittgers, of the Cato Institute, gives a talk on the war on drugs at Barristers Hall Tuesday afternoon. NEEL DHANESHA/ Daily Free Press Staff

The domestic “war on drugs” may someday come to a ceasefire if the United States implements the laissez-faire policy of other countries, said a legal policy analyst said in Barristers Hall to an audience of Boston University students.

In a discussion hosted by the BU Federalist Society, David Rittgers, a member of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said the United States has been funding a war on drug abuse and narcotics trafficking since Congress passed the National Prohibition Act in 1919, spending billions of dollars in effort to end drug-related crimes and imprison offenders.

“There would be significant cost savings if we ended the war on drugs,” Rittgers said. “If we tax drug revenues at rates comparable to those of alcohol and tobacco, we’d save about \$46.7 billion annually in marijuana [enforcement].”

Americans are more involved in issues with narcotics than any other civilized country, he said.

“The United States is the lynch-man,” Rittgers said. “The United States has both the highest per capita drug use and the highest per capita level criminalization of drug use in the first world.”

Rittgers said the high rate of crimes associated with drugs could be due to the accessibility of narcotics trafficking.

“The allure of the drug trade is that you don’t need an education to do it,” Rittgers said. “You can drop out of school at 15 and make money off it.”

Rittgers said advisors would have to thoroughly consider laws before enacting them if they want the regulations to be enforced.

“There are drugs that we aren’t comfortable legalizing, but marijuana would be a good start,” Rittgers said. “I think it’s less dangerous than alcohol in terms of health. I don’t think that crystal meth is something that we’ll ever be comfortable legalizing.”

Rittgers said he served three tours as an Army and Special Forces officer in Afghanistan, where he gained insight into U.S. drug enforcement policy in the Middle East, specifically concerning Afghanistan’s poppy industry, which produces most of the world’s opium.

“What we have right now is madness in Afghanistan with regards to drug eradication policy.”

Since poppy crops are such an enormous industry in Afghanistan, Rittgers said expulsion of this drug would be detrimental to the country’s economy.

Rittgers also discussed the effects of drug decriminalization in Portugal, which has experienced a significant drop in its rate of drug abuse.

“The bottom line is that drug use went down in the category that they worried most about, the eighth-grade demographic.”

Rittgers said drug cartels south of the border are also a growing issue for domestic policy on drugs.

Not only are illegal cartels capable of transporting narcotics, they also have the power to transport potentially dangerous cargo-like weapons.

“They have \$1 million submarines that they use to get across the maritime boundaries,” Rittgers said.

Daniel Suraci, president of the Federalist Society and second-year student in the BU School of Law, said that Rittgers’ opinions align with those of the Federalist Society.

“I had Mr. Rittgers come because the Federalist Society embraces an original view of the Constitution,” Suraci said.

“They get good speakers and this is a topic that interests me. I think they should make everything legal,” said Kevin Gregg, a first-year School of Law student.

Some students in the audience are skeptical about drug legalization.

“I think legalization is a good idea, but it’s legally impossible,” said first-year LAW student Bert Forsyth.

Many students at the discussion said they believe that too much money is being put into drug eradication.

“I think throwing money at the problem isn’t doing anything unless interventions are more effective and preventative,” said School of Education freshman Esther Marsden.

“I think that a lot of money that could be used elsewhere goes to punishing people who are involved with drugs instead of helping them in some way,” said SED freshman Julian Haller.

Haller said he thinks that current U.S. drug policy creates a permanent lower class.

“It definitely creates a cycle where you are punished, go to jail and are prevented from getting a job when you get out,” Haller said.

SED freshman Victoria Bado said confronting drug use is hopeless.

“Obviously it’s a growing problem, but there’s really no way to stop it,” Bado said.