



Legalize drugs. Next problem, please.

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By Jeff Edelstein

Well, seems time for another shot at the stupidity of drug laws, yeah? Especially after New Jersey legislators seem to have some momentum to get a law decriminalizing marijuana possession up to about a half-ounce.

□ While that's all well and good, why don't we take it to its logical conclusion: Legalize everything.

□ You ask me, illegal drugs are only a problem because they are illegal. If you agree with me, you may as well stop reading now. Go fishing or something. If you don't agree with me, I'm now going to hammer you over the head with statistics. Read on. The first three, which I've numbered for your convenience, are courtesy of the [Centers for Disease Control](#).

□ 1) Cigarettes kill 443,000 Americans each year.

□ 2) About 15,000 Americans die from alcoholic liver disease, and another 11,000 or so from drunk driving.

□ 3) More than 36,000 Americans died from drug overdoses, and "most" of these deaths were from prescription or over-the-counter drugs. While the number of illegal drug deaths vary, a safe bet is around 17,000.

□ Let's stop here for a moment. Cigarettes, booze, and legal drugs kill almost a half million Americans each year. For some perspective, that's just about every man, woman and child in Mercer and Hunterdon counties. That said, illegal drugs kill about 17,000. That's a little bigger than Robbinsville. (Sorry, Robbinsville.)

□ Putting that 17,000 illegal drug death number in further perspective, over 22 million Americans copped to using illegal drugs in 2010, according to the government's 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. And according to that same survey, some 17 million of those users are just - yes, just - smoking marijuana. Math is simple on this one. People who do drugs — including that devil weed — run a one in 1,300 risk of dying each year. (And no one's died from too much pot, right?)

□ Furthermore — there's a lot of furthermore — that 22 million number of drug users in America is based on people older than 12; so take out the pre-teen American population, and what you're looking at is shocking, namely: One in eight Americans aged 13 and over used illegal drugs in 2010. Which means one in eight Americans are criminals.

□ Now ...

Now I could end right here and feel I stand on the moral high ground. How could

anything that one in eight people do be illegal? Shouldn't there be a better way to deal with this issue?

But I'm not done. Consider this ...

In the fight to stop the use of illegal drugs, the American government [spent](#) over \$15 billion in 2009, according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and state and local governments spend an additional \$25 billion, according to a [CATO](#) Institute study.

And those numbers are the lowest ones I've found.

A little simple math yields this: The government spends nearly \$2,000 a year on each drug user in their failed attempt to keep drugs off our streets.

Because it is a failure, right? I'm confident I can get my hands on any drug in the next 45 minutes, and I haven't bought anything illegal since the turn of the century. (And it was just pot.)

In fact, let's take pot off the table for a moment. Just legalize it already. That leaves the harder stuff. What should we do there?

Well, again, after looking at all the numbers up there, I say legalize 'em all. Take the money spent trying to keep it off the streets and turn it into treatment and education. You do that, I bet the number of users goes down within half a generation.

Not only that, imagine the reduction in crime if drugs were legalized.

Now I'm sure there's holes in my argument, and I'm equally sure someone else can take all those numbers I vomited up up there and make them say something else, but from where I'm sitting, America's stance on drugs only serves to make criminals out of one in eight of us and keeps the spectre of drug violence shining bright in our cities and towns.

Legalize it all, tax it all, education, treatment and patience. Seems a lot smarter than prison, murder and ruined lives.

But that's just me.

Read Jeff Edelstein every Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. He can be reached at jedelstein@trentonian.com, [@](#)

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