



## Liberating drug usage would improve economy

by Ian Mark February 13, 2013

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Governments exist to regulate interactions between people, often strangers, and prevent one party from injuring the other party in any way. What governments are not supposed to do is control individuals. The government has no right to tell citizens what they can put into their bodies.

This is not an argument for marijuana legalization — this is an argument for the legalization of all drugs. I am not saying that drugs should be available to children or that people should be allowed to shoot up in the streets. I am simply arguing for the right of adults to, in the privacy of their own homes, control what substances enter their bodies. The philosophical part of my argument is as simple as stated above.

As for the practical side, the effects on the economy would be incredible. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the federal government spent \$15 billion fighting the war on drugs in 2010 alone, while state and local governments spent \$25 billion more. That doesn't even count the average \$50,000 it costs to incarcerate one prisoner per year. Since 1995, about 25 percent of the average 43,000 new inmates every year have been arrested for drug-related crimes.

And all that money (and resources like police officers who could focus on preventing violent crimes instead of drug use) is nothing compared to the amount of money spent by users in the United States, estimated at about \$60 billion a year, according to PBS Frontline. Where does that money go? Gangs and drug lords. Legalizing drugs would send that money to business owners instead, not to mention the billions the government would make from sales taxes.

The biggest fear I believe people have about legalization is that it would dramatically increase drug use. But this is not backed up empirically. Consider Portugal, which decriminalized all drugs in 2001. Eleven years later, the Cato Institute reported that drug usage in Portugal was half what it had been, and was actually among the lowest of EU member states and that drug-related diseases like STDs and addiction had also decreased.

It makes sense why this happened. I am an underage college freshman. I assure you, I could get almost any drug I wanted within a week. The reason I don't is not because it is

illegal, but because I don't want to do cocaine or PCP. And I believe the opposite is true as well: anyone who wants to do these drugs doesn't care if they are illegal. Part of the allure of drugs is their illegality. Legalizing them removes this and makes it easier for addicts to find help.

Legalizing drugs would help the country financially, while also not drastically worsening usage rates. As long as it is regulated like alcohol and cigarettes, there would be little to worry about. Legalization would make us a freer society, which should be the ultimate goal of any government.