

Can We Win the War on Drugs by Ending the Fight?

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Adam Barney's report from the front lines of drug rehabilitation, Florida Beach Rehab, takes a national policy view of main aspects of substance abuse. Culture Change's editorial commentary on healing and on hemp follows this post. - ed.

Uruguay made a groundbreaking legislative change in 2013 when the nation legalized the growth, sale, and consumption of marijuana all at once. That monumental change appears to have accelerated the legalization of the plant across parts of the U.S., which has subsequently reduced much of the stigma attached to marijuana.

U.S. Marijuana Legalization

In 2012, Colorado became the first U.S. state to legalize marijuana. There are now expectations that weed dealers will become defunct as consumers can now purchase honestly and for lower prices. In essence, this is a test to determine the outcome of regulating drugs with the purpose of decriminalizing their status – even though that was never the intention.

Joining Colorado's experiment in 2014 is Washington State, which will add further credence to the Rocky Mountain Empire. Next in line could be Arkansas, California, and Oregon, plus a couple of others. However, those states are first making small steps, such as making it legal for possession or medical use.

Colorado Leading the Way

In Colorado, the typical cost for an ounce of legal marijuana is \$400. But if you are one of the thousands of U.S. citizens that required marijuana for medical purposes, then you can obtain your ounce for about half the going rate at \$200. Without medical grounds for a discount, \$400 isn't exactly a bargain basement price. But then again, the state is trying to earn taxable revenue here.

With marijuana now legalized, there is now room for legal marijuana suppliers to set up legitimate businesses. To get state approval, though, vendors will have to demonstrate that they have control at every level of their supply chain. The illegal status in the states surrounding Colorado means that tight control will have to be maintained over legal vendors.

Origins of the War on Drugs

The above measures taken by U.S. states are the first signs of real change for how North America views drugs. Ever since 1971, when then U.S. president Richard Nixon declared drug abuse to be "public enemy number one," the nation has been all too familiar with the War on Drugs. And they should be, because the "war" demands billions of dollars annually from the government.

When you look at the returns of those billions of dollars over the past four decades, the results have delivered little. Sure there have been covert operations made against South American cartels and some criminals facing justice in the U.S., but ultimately there has been no lasting impact – not unless you count ineffectiveness.

Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter offered an alarming summary of the War on Drugs to the New York Times, in which he explained that approximately 500,000 people had been incarcerated within the country by the time he vacated office in 1980. The number of people incarcerated in connection to the war had exploded past 2.3 million by the beginning of 2010. Convinced that current legal penalties are doing more harm than good, Carter is a firm advocate of decriminalizing drugs.

Changing the Public Perception

Culture Change would add that marijuana legalization also makes legal beneficial industrial hemp. Hemp -- very minimal drug-content marijuana -- was central to commerce and crafts in North America for a couple of centuries before being criminalized (which benefited major competing industrial interests). In regard to health, refraining from drug abuse both of recreational/illegal and legal/medical is essential for good health. Detoxification and rehabilitation from an unsustainable lifestyle are crucial, whereas mere treatment of symptoms gets us nowhere as to causes. The War on Drugs may have been fought by some in the name of healing, but results were otherwise. Profits for the huge prison industrial complex have little to do with a healthy society. Medical insurance is to some synonymous with health, but pharmaceuticals prescribed and over-the-counter can be toxic and a way to try to maintain a stressful lifestyle. They are of concern to Culture Change partly because these substances are primarily made from fossil fuels. - ed.