

30 Unintended Consequences of the War on Drugs

By John Chase, November Coalition Regional Leader and Advisor

When a democracy chooses to implement public policy, it does so with the best of intentions. As the policy begins its work, it is adjusted to make improvements. Such corrections are normal, unless a policy is illogical or is labeled as a 'war.' Under such contrary conditions, an ordinary citizen calling for evaluation and change in the 'war on drugs' policy faces being called a traitor instead.

The so-called 'drug war' has become an end unto itself, self-serving with no public oversight. This failed policy is never evaluated by lawmakers who ought to know if it is effectively addressing the 'drug problems' it was designed to solve. Likewise, these same leaders never tell us the cost in dollars and wasted lives.

Many politicians become trapped by their own rhetoric and vested interests and may lose the ability to competently evaluate public policy. Thus, the collateral damage - the unintended consequences - of failed drug policy continues to accumulate.

1. Patients are arrested for the only medicine (marijuana) that works for them.
2. Kids are fascinated by the glitter of illegal substances.
3. Urine tests for drugs - but not breathalyzer tests for alcohol - required to keep a job.
4. "No-Knock" searches have been legal under federal law since 1972.
5. Entrapment has now been institutionalized as "Drug Stings".
6. Physical evidence is no longer required to sustain a conviction; just the word of a 'snitch' who's been told he'll get off easy if he says what the prosecution wants him to say.
7. \$400 million in property is seized each year without any charges brought under our civil asset forfeiture laws.
8. Hearsay testimony defense now irrelevant, since government witnesses can now testiLIE under oath.
9. Prosecutors may now meet with defendants without counsel present.
10. Mandatory sentencing laws preordain the sentence. Then prosecutors inflate charges and allow confidential informants to commit perjury to get conviction.
11. 400,000+ nonviolent drug prisoners housed at \$25,000 /year each, including about 30,000 women, most of them for 'drug conspiracy'.

12. It's a "youthful indiscretion" if you're rich and white but zero tolerance if you're poor or black.
13. Black and Hispanic drivers are frequently profiled and intimidated.
14. Innocent citizens are increasingly terrorized by police home invasions.
15. Many law enforcement officers are killed during violent drug busts.
16. Neighborhoods have been destroyed by the underground drug market.
17. Parole and earned early release were virtually abolished from the federal prison system (and many states) in the 1980s.
18. Prison-toughened minority males earn respect among their peers; prison is now considered a "rite of passage" in many urban communities.
19. Over half of those who ask for drug treatment are turned away.
20. Illegal drug use by blacks & whites is identical, but blacks are sent to state prisons on drug charges 13 times as often as whites.
21. Property crime are committed by addicts desperate for cash for their next fix at black market inflated prices.
22. Pain is consistently undertreated by doctors fearful of DEA surveillance.
23. A sharp increase in poisoning and overdose deaths by adulterated, unregulated drugs.
24. International narco-terrorists and drug cartels have destabilized many small countries.
25. Forced fumigation of many small farms in South America.
26. Student loans are denied for a drug conviction, but rape and murder are OK.
27. Entire families are evicted from public housing if any member or friend is caught with drugs.
28. Employees are fired for speaking out against the drug war.
29. High school seniors' drug use is unchanged for the past 7 years: 25% for "any illegal drug"; 10% for "any illegal drug other than marijuana".
30. Growing public perception that the drug war will never work.

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Working to end drug war injustice

November Coalition is a non-profit, grassroots organization that depends on membership donations to develop public educational programs that promote dramatic reform of punitive drug laws. Since the group's founding in 1997 by prisoners and their family members, the Coalition has grown into a national group of volunteers actively educating others where they live.

The November Coalition

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