

TUA NEWS RELEASE

TAXPAYERS UNITED OF AMERICA

407 S. Dearborn Street • Suite 1170 • Chicago, IL 60605-1150

Phone: (312) 427-5128 • Fax: (312) 427-5139 • Web: NTUI.org • E-mail: ntui@NTUI.org

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Contact: Jim Tobin (773) 354-2076
(312) 427-5128

WAR ON DRUGS SNAKE OIL CURES NOTHING AND COSTS EVERYTHING

After 40 years of selling more than \$1 trillion worth of War on Drugs to American taxpayers as an effective treatment for the drug problem, more and more taxpayers are questioning the soundness of this investment. Has the government delivered the product as promised? Has the problem been solved, or at least reduced?

By the numbers, the War on Drugs is an abject failure. The costs in dollars and human life are steep. Most current studies show that increases in inner-city drug-law enforcement appear to create spikes in urban violence. Drug offenders, the vast majority of them nonviolent, comprise half of all federal prisoners in the U.S. Locking them up cost taxpayers \$450 billion, and that does not include the cost of local jails and state prisons. So far this year, there have been approximately 900,000 drug arrests -- more than half (about 464,000) of those arrests involved only marijuana, an estimated 412,960 of those for simple marijuana possession.

If we reap any benefits from this costly war, they are not obvious. The most recent report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) shows that well over half (56.1%) of American children report that they could easily obtain drugs if they wanted them. Among children between 12 and 17 years old, 14.3% (3,511 of those in the study) report being approached by a drug dealer in the past month. Drug use has declined a bit since the 1990s, but use fluctuates and the numbers will rise again in the future. Cocaine use spiked in the U.S. in the 1980s, American heroin use in the early '90s. There is no clear evidence of a meaningful reduction in drug use.

The snake oil salesmen of 100 years ago made their living with "miracle cures" that they knew did not work. Their bottles often contained high volumes of alcohol or morphine, resulting in only temporary relief and long-term addiction. Today, the War on Drugs has proven almost as effective as snake oil -- no cure, no real relief, but American politicians are still hooked -- and the American taxpayers are still on the hook.

Another difference: private sector con men are punished for their fraud. When the government is exposed as a snake oil salesman, it just keeps coming back for taxpayer money, at the point of a gun if necessary. But the taxpayers are waking up and demanding a new and more cost-effective strategy. One day soon, the government con will end.

For more information on the War on Drugs, please consult Marijuana Policy Project, Drug Policy Alliance, NORML, and Students for Sensible Drug Policy.

Founded in 1976, TUA is one of the largest taxpayer organizations in America.

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