

### **A Comprehensive Vision for America's Future Drug Policy**

One of the greatest challenges which we face as a nation is the use and sale of illicit drugs. As the newly appointed Director of our National Drug Control Policy, I have outlined a comprehensive vision and strategic plan to ameliorate this pandemic. This future policy will detail a historical perspective of the origins of this crisis, along with a broad-based plan to address the issues which lead to drug use, while applying strategies to disrupt the drug trade.

Understanding that the international drug trade is a \$320 to \$400 billion-dollar annual business clearly illustrates the enormity of the problem.<sup>1</sup> The effects of drug usage have repeatedly demonstrated its universal ability to ruin the lives of the user, destroy families, and negatively impact society, while consuming vast resources from our criminal justice system. A policy which addresses drug use at its root, while providing viable solutions is what is required.

The best way to truly understand the depth of a problem is to see it first-hand as witnessed by noted sociologist, Dr. Sudir Venkatesh, when he shadowed a Chicago gang for almost ten years.<sup>2</sup> His encounters, which were the topic of a presentation by Dr. Venkatesh's assistant, Steve Levitt, detail how young black males living in the inner city have no legitimate channels for success, aside from being a drug dealer.<sup>3</sup> Even though the young people engaging in this lifestyle knew that they had a high probability of being killed, they willingly accepted the lowest job in the gang's hierarchy (foot soldier) to earn about \$3.50 per hour. Their dream was to rise to the rank

of “gang leader” where the possibility of earning \$100,000 per year existed. Although very few would get there, there was no other way for them to succeed.<sup>4</sup>

When we look at the dynamics of those living in an inner-city from the perspective of a police officer, we learn that the drug culture is all that exists. Quite often, even if individuals are not drug dealers, they may try to look as if they were because that culture is idolized.<sup>5</sup> Although the negative impacts from drug use such as physical deterioration, personal loss, and frequent arrests are readily visible, poor people living in the inner cities still gravitate towards that culture.<sup>6</sup> This indicates that we must focus on creating opportunities to change that mindset. A mechanism that allows young inner-city children and adolescents to have role models for guidance and supervision must be implemented. If a father figure is not present, then we must form mentorship programs to provide the direction needed during the formative adolescent years.

When we look at schools, we must start thinking creatively and understand that they must become places which provide more than just the basic components of education. There must be life-skill instruction so teens learn how to fill out applications for jobs, college, and scholarships. There must be after-school programs in martial arts, athletics, theater, music, writing, crafts, etc. Education must focus on that which will ignite passions in our youth while building self-esteem. When a young person is taught to believe in themselves and set goals, great results will occur.

The funding for these extra curricula and mentorship programs will come from the revenue derived from the taxation proceeds from the states that have legalized marijuana. A federal excise tax will be applied, in addition to the state taxes, and that revenue will be mandated to go towards funding for every school in our nation to develop the programs described herein. When states such as Colorado are generating revenue streams of over \$120 million dollars annually from marijuana tax, we know that funding exists for our purposes.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to enforcement, we have seen that the forty-five year “war on drugs” has done little to stop the problem. Drugs are even more plentiful now, and comparatively less expensive.<sup>8</sup>

What this indicates is that the punitive approach to deter and punish, resulting from the Harrison Act of 1914 which criminalized illegal drugs, does not work as intended.<sup>9</sup> With that, we will disrupt the drug trade by eliminating a key entity, which is the user. Since our best efforts to punish and eradicate drugs have been unsuccessful, shifting our approach to focus on the user versus the supplier makes sense. When demand stops, a supplier is of less consequence. As Moskos points out, arrests won’t solve the problem when it comes to addiction.<sup>10</sup>

My policy will also mandate immediate diversion into drug rehabilitation programs for any person arrested for drug possession. The funding for this would come from drug seizure funds and again, from federal taxes applied to the states who legalize marijuana. Washington State’s Initiative 502 specifically calls for funding from marijuana taxation to go towards, in part, substance abuse prevention, therefore similar legislation is already in place on the state level.<sup>11</sup>

There are multiple theoretical reasons why people make the choice to use drugs, and for those living in the inner-cities, it is most likely for escapism. This supports the socio-pharmacology perspective of “set and setting” in which both the mood and environment are extremely bleak, which leads towards the desire to seek an escape from that reality.<sup>12</sup> When we start creating opportunity and instilling a belief in young people, especially those living in the inner cities, that there can be a better future, they will be less likely to turn to drugs. When we focus our collective efforts on the root cause of the drug problem, we will not only be putting our resources to the best use, but we will be adding a quintessential ingredient which is missing in the lives of many drug users, and that is hope.

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<sup>1</sup> Module 2 LEPSL 500: Introduction of Legal and Illegal Drug use and Drug Policy; Fritzvold, E. Dr.

<sup>2</sup> The Freakonomics of Crack Dealing; TED – Ideas Worth Sharing Video; Levitt, Steve

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Cop in the Hood: My year Policing Baltimore's Eastern District, chapter 3 New Jack: Learning to do Drugs; Moskos, Peter

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Dose of Reality- The Effects of State Marijuana Legalizations. CATO Institute. 9/16/16 number 799; Dills, A, Goddard, S and Miron, J

<sup>8</sup> Pres. 2.1 American drug policy A Socio-Historical Analysis of Punitive Prohibition, LEPSL 500; Fritzvold, E. Dr.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Cop in the Hood: My year Policing Baltimore's Eastern District, chapter 3 New Jack: Learning to do Drugs; Moskos, Peter

<sup>11</sup> Dose of Reality- The Effects of State Marijuana Legalizations. CATO Institute. 9/16/16 number 799; Dills, A, Goddard, S and Miron, J

<sup>12</sup> Pres. 2.1 American drug policy A Socio-Historical Analysis of Punitive Prohibition, LEPSL 500; Fritzvold, E. Dr.