

In The Neighborhood Column June:

I read with interest both John Suther's column and Aaron Sanchez's column on the problems of drug use in Colorado and the United States. The "War on Drugs" is one that has been fought longer than almost any other. It is an unwinnable war and I think it is time that we look at some other approach - instead of throwing billions of dollars at this problem and sacrificing untold lives.

Both Mr. Sanchez and Mr. Suther mention the insatiable demand for drugs in this country which fuels the problem for us and the rest of the world. It has become an incurable disease and therein lies what I believe would be a more workable solution to alleviate the problem. Instead of battling to rid the drug problem, we should treat this scourge like a disease that can't be cured, but managed.

I believe in legalizing drugs. I know this is controversial, and seems counter to current efforts, but by legalizing drugs we could control the economics of the situation, and that would at least control much of the drug trade, making it much less profitable and black markets would disappear.

Legalizing drugs would allow us to channel the billions of dollars spent now on law enforcement in other ways; on drug education, on rehabilitation and fixing our economy. Current illegal drugs could be sold much like regular drugs and alcohol, controlled by the FDA. Regulated pricing and accessibility to drugs would take away the criminal element to this problem, reducing drug cartels. I believe that addiction could be better controlled as well because by decriminalizing the problem, addicts could more safely seek help, without the fear of criminal prosecution. Drug companies could make enormous profits making safer illegal drugs that could then be used in research for finding cures for many diseases. These profits might also in turn bring down the cost of other life saving drugs needed by so many to stay alive.

We are already wrangling with the idea of making marijuana legal and are dancing around this issue with all of the medical marijuana legislation. The easiest way around all of this debate, would be to just

legalize marijuana. It is a far less dangerous drug than alcohol. I don't believe there has ever been an incidence of marijuana poisoning like alcohol poisoning from imbibing too much. If marijuana was legal, then hemp, a near identical plant to marijuana would also be allowed. Hemp was a promising crop at the beginning of the last century. Hemp can be used to produce a much higher grade of ethanol than corn. Its uses include textiles, and rope and creams and lotions among others. It could be a major crop for Colorado, another plus for our economy.

The argument against legalizing drugs comes down to a major fear of creating more addicts. That is a possible risk, yet we don't worry about that question when it comes to alcohol or tobacco. I think that a population that is bent on taking drugs will do so, whether it is legal or not, and those not interested in drugs will not. Commentator Hugh Downs on his last show 20/20 addressed this point on legalizing drugs as one of the biggest mistakes America has made and that from his perspective a lot of the problems we have today stem from America's short sightedness in not legalizing drugs. I agree. The war on drugs will never be won. Surely we could do no worse by legalizing drugs. Much could be gained by legalization and maybe someday courageous legislators will head us in that direction.

Beverly Wallace, a Greeley native has never smoked any substance in her life, and has never understood anyone's attraction to drugs. Now chocolate, chocolate is a different story.