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Econ 407-01

11/3/22

Debate Assignment #3

The War on Drugs has been waged in the United States for more than 5 decades after it was declared by President Nixon in the early 1970s. The War on Drugs refers to the global campaign of drug prohibition led by the US federal government. Although support for the policy was high when first enacted, The War on Drugs has become increasingly more unpopular among the American people over time. Although drugs can have negative effects on individuals and society, there are multiple favorable arguments why The War on Drugs should end with all drugs being decriminalized or even in some cases legalized.

Legalization of drugs would be beneficial to government budgets. A study by the CATO Institute estimates that drug legalization reduces local, state, and federal government expenditure annually by $41.3 billion (Miron and Waldock). This reduction of government deficits would be due to eliminating the expenditure of enforcing the prohibition of drugs which includes costs through things like arrests, prosecutions, and incarceration. Legalization could also raise tax revenue for government if drugs were taxed. If all drugs were legalized in the US and taxed at similar rates to tobacco and alcohol, $46.7 billion would be raised annually in tax revenue (Miron and Waldock). The funds raised by government through deficit reduction and tax revenue could be used to invest in other policies. The investment of these funds into other policies if done correctly could be beneficial to the economy making the legalization and taxation of drugs desirable.

Because multiple countries and state governments around the world have decriminalized drugs, the benefits of drug decriminalization can be well examined. One of the countries with lots of data on the affects of this policy is Portugal. After Portugal decriminalized drugs, from the year 2000 to the year 2006 drug related deaths decreased overall 7% per year (Kundrod). One of the greatest costs of the use of drugs in society is the loss of human life that results from drug use. The loss of human life has economic consequences ranging from loss of potential able body workers to costs inflicted on friends and family which can take place as a decline in mental and emotional health which in some form will have negative impacts on the economy. The data here suggests that decriminalization is worthwhile in pursuing because it can lead to fewer drug related deaths.

Substance use disorders also have a negative impact on the economy. In Canada for example, nationwide substance use disorders cost the overall Canadian healthcare system $11.1 billion (Abidi). One of the problems of dealing with a drug epidemic through prohibition is that this approach aims to reduce supply. However, if demand still exists for these illicit substances, then people potentially turn to unregulated illegal markets. On the other hand, a decriminalized approach, could lead to a decrease in demand because you are trying to give people struggling with addiction the help they need rather than incarcerating them (Abidi). If drug demand is reduced through a drug decriminalization policy implemented nationwide in Canada, then there would be less of a cost due to substance use disorders on their nationwide healthcare system; this approach and its effects could be applied to other countries as well such as the United States.

Problematic drug use can no doubt have a negative effect on society. However, the policy we put in place to address issues stemming from societal drug addiction should ideally be the one best suited to alleviate the issues surrounding the problem. The decriminalization of drugs has shown through the various data available that it can be a more effective policy route than drug prohibition to solve the issues stemming from the drug epidemic.

References

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