

Rewriting the drug laws?

Legalizing drugs allows for a more regulated, safer system



JESSICA CRUTCHER

New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson has been widely criticized for his recent statements advocating the legalization of drugs, but his ideas should not be dismissed as too extreme until the issue of drug legalization has been investigated, discussed and re-evaluated. Although Johnson has been referred to by his opponents as "goofy," "freak" and the "two-headed calf" of the Republican party, his theories are not the irrational ravings of a lunatic. Johnson does not expect a complete reform of current U.S. drug policy. He has repeatedly stated his intention is to cause people to think rationally about the long-neglected issue. The first part of Johnson's drug policy proposal argues that the enormous amount of money spent annually on the government's "War on Drugs" is ineffective, considering the problem shows no intentions of going away. According to ABC "Nightline News," the federal government spends \$17 billion annually on the drug war. But according to the 1998 National Household Survey on Drug

Abuse, 6.2 percent of the United States population were drug users (persons who had used drugs at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey).

In comparison, 6.3 percent of the population were classified as drug users in 1997. Considering the amount of money spent, this drop hardly seems significant.

On the other hand, the U.S. National Association for Public Health estimates the illicit drug trade has net profits of \$500 billion annually. The illegal drug traders are obviously the ones benefiting from the situation.

But if drugs were legalized, heavily regulated and taxed (much like cigarettes and alcohol), then at least the United States as a whole would benefit from the drug trade instead of a few clever criminals.

The regulation and taxation of illegal drugs plays a large part in the second part of Johnson's proposal. Johnson recommends that upon the legalization of drugs, the government "control, regulate, tax, educate and prevent." He is not advocating an aisle dedicated to marijuana, ecstasy and heroin at the local grocery store.

Instead, according to the *San Jose Mercury News* in California, he wants to implement "a whole new set of laws to regulate its sale, maybe giving it by prescription at a clinic, maybe by making the user take

it right there on the spot."

There are benefits to implementing Johnson's policy. According to the U.S. National Association for Public Health, the majority of new cases of HIV in the United States are due to using non-sterile hypodermic needles or having sexual contact with intravenous drug users.

If drugs were legalized and heavily regulated, the amount of new HIV cases could be reduced. Heavy regulations would mean drug users would have better access to sterile hypodermic needles, thereby cutting down on total disease transmission.

All benefits aside, there are valid concerns about drug legalization that Johnson's opponents have pointed out. "There's always going to be a black market for drugs, whether they are legal or not," Bob Weiner, aide to drug czar Barry McCaffrey, said in a *San Jose Mercury News* article.

Although he is probably correct, his statement is also true for items that can be obtained legally. There were black markets during prohibition in the '20s. Although it has not ended since then, it is not commonly used to purchase the now legal substance of alcohol.

The same theory can be applied to drug sales — if drugs are available legally, fewer people will resort to illegal

methods to obtain them.

Weiner also expressed concern that people who are not currently taking drugs would begin using drugs if they were legalized. He then hypothesized that this course of action would "quintuple the car crashes, the deaths, the problems in the workplace." But even if his worst case scenario — the quintupling of drug-related deaths — actually happened, the number would still not equal the annual number of alcohol related deaths.

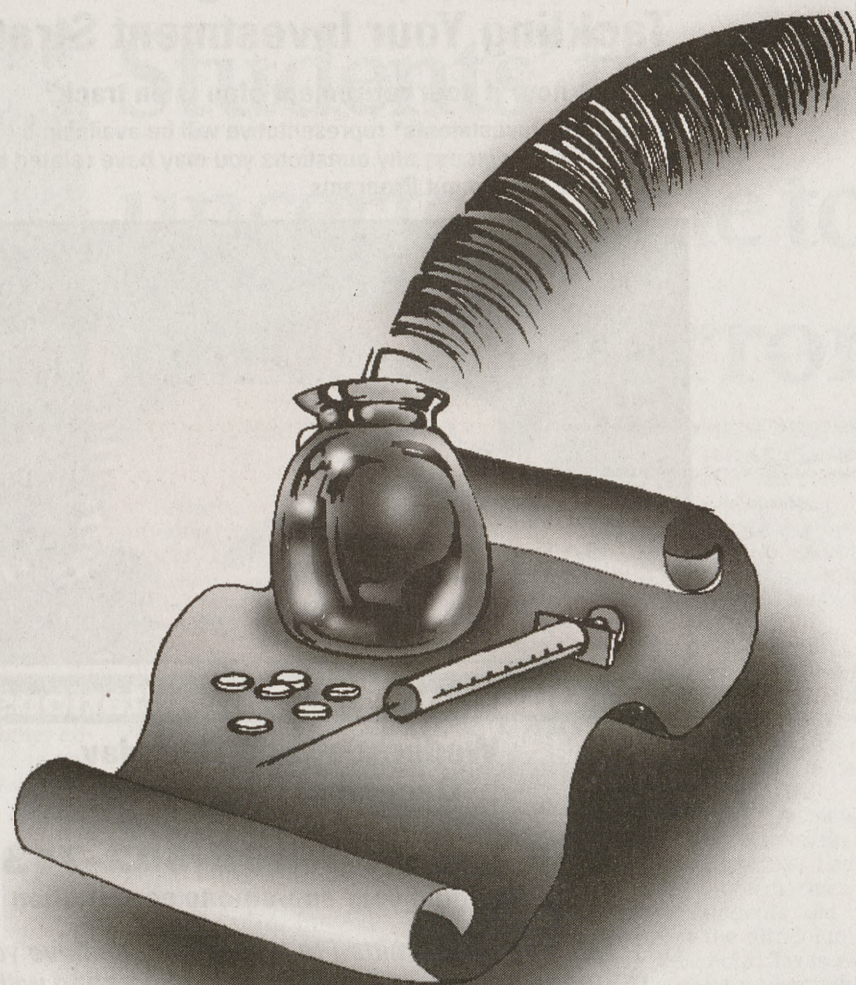
According to the Annual Medical Examiner, the number of drug-related deaths in 1995 were about 9,000. The number of annual alcohol related deaths are approximately 100,000 according to the American Medical Association.

Alcohol is legal and socially acceptable. Drugs are not. The hypocrisy of this set of values is evident.

Johnson should not be considered a radical, but a man with reasonable — albeit different — ideas. His proposals can be statistically and logically supported.

Although a complete reform of the nation's drug laws is unlikely, the gradual implementation of many of Johnson's ideas should be seriously considered.

Jessica Crutcher is a sophomore journalism major.



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

Professors now allowed lower standards

Double standards are never pretty, especially when created and condoned by the powers that be at a school supposedly dedicated to academic integrity.

Unfortunately, Texas A&M is a school where there is blatant hypocrisy in its rules and regulations. After an investigation of plagiarism charges between two A&M professors in the sociology department, the Faculty Senate and Academic Program Council voted to change the University's definition of plagiarism.

Now, to find a faculty member guilty of plagiarism, one must prove there was an intent to plagiarize.

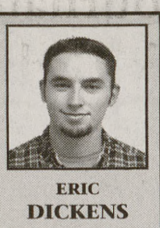
The problem lies in that this change affects only the definition of plagiarism by a faculty member, not by a student. To convict a student of plagiarism, the old rule of providing evidence of copied materials applies.

This discrepancy is a dangerous one with a bad impression of the University's ethical standards toward students and faculty members.

In an Oct. 14 article in *The Battalion*, Colin Allen, associate professor of philosophy, said with the rule change, "It seems like the University is saying, 'We don't want to hold our faculty members accountable for plagiarism.'"

A&M's contradictory plagiarism rules also work to damage the credibility of everyone at the University.

Any doubt about A&M's ethics or commitment to academic honesty cannot be allowed. Nobody wants A&M to be known as a school that is soft on plagiarists.

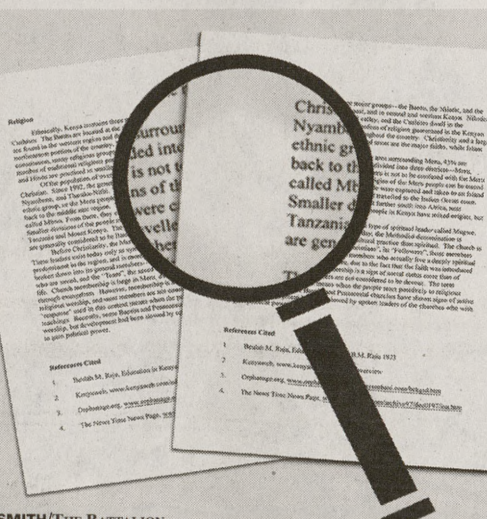


ERIC DICKENS

It ruins the reputation of the University and diminishes the accomplishments of its students and faculty members.

One would hope that the double standard created by this rule change was an accident, but in all reality, it was the goal.

Later in the same *Battalion* article, Robert Kennedy, vice president for research and associate provost for graduate studies explained that the change in the definition of faculty plagiarism will protect professors from false accusations stemming from honest mistakes.



JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

But is a rule change needed to establish this protection? Is it too old fashioned to believe that the truth will prevail and that any professor falsely accused would be exonerated, not because of a higher burden of evidence, but because of their own innocence? The University does not need to protect its

faculty members from false accusations with new rules any more than it needs to for its undergraduate students.

Every student learns how to avoid plagiarism by attributing quotes and citing sources. This lesson, obviously, should not be forgotten by professors. They are the role models and leaders of this University, and it is ridiculous to conceive that there needs to be a more lax plagiarism definition to compensate for any accidental copying that may occur.

If A&M's students cannot trust that the University is serious about the academic integrity of its professors, then that belief will bring more harm to the school than any false accusation of plagiarism ever could.

With this double standard, professors are given more leeway than students in matters of plagiarism, which is counter-intuitive. Common sense would dictate that the scope and consequences of plagiarism by undergraduates on class assignments would be less substantial than plagiarism committed by a professor and published in a national journal of academic research.

If one group is to be held to a higher standard than the other, it should be the faculty, not the students. But in truth, plagiarism by students and their professors cannot be tolerated and both should be held to the same standards. Professors know what is and is not cheating. They should not be given a more liberal interpretation of plagiarism than the students they teach. The rule change for proving faculty plagiarism is unnecessary and creates a level of protection that fosters plagiarism, rather than preventing it.

Eric Dickens is a junior English major.

Mandatory testing limits illegal drug use

Currently, the state of Michigan might be using tax dollars to fund an unemployed citizen's drug habit, and some lawmakers want this corrected. State lawmakers realized the possibility of some welfare recipients spending their cash on "getting their fix" instead of buying formula for their infants. Recently, they also decided that illicit drug use warrants a system to make sure wards of the state are "clean."



JEFF WEBB

those who test positive out of the program and onto the crime-driven streets. However, the American Civil Liberties Union says these positives do not outweigh the possible slippery slope mandatory drug testing seems to present.

According to the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, citizens are protected from unreasonable search and seizure. Some citizens are volunteering to play "devil's advocate" against the mandate by rejecting the drug testing all together.

Tanya Marchwinski, a divorced mother of three, gets by with a minimum-wage job at a convenience store along with a

that all welfare recipients and applicants be subjected to drug testing. Anyone testing positive may lose benefits unless they enroll in a state-funded drug treatment program.

While some of the citizens on welfare are protesting the new measure, stating they are being singled out simply because they are part of the lower-income class, the state of Michigan has the right to call for these drug tests. Testing will make sure state money is not going toward drug abusers who are not only breaking the law, but further damaging their ability to get off state aid, and continuing to be involved in a lifestyle of low-employment.

A 1996 federal law gave individual states the power to decide for themselves whether or not to have drug tests for all welfare recipients or simply those individuals suspected of drug use by welfare administrators. Louisiana and Florida have laws geared toward suspected drug users, but Michigan is the first to require all welfare recipients to take drug tests. The state of Michigan has taken a huge step in the right direction. The mandate treats the causes of the problems of unemployment instead of its symptoms. It is hard enough to get some welfare recipients out of the program and into a job, let alone allow drugs to compound the problem. Providing addiction treatment also works toward government's interests by reducing the number of addicts in the population, instead of forcing

States should not have double standards for their employees and their wards.

welfare stipend and food stamps. She claims the drug tests make her feel like she is being watched.

Mandatory drug tests are intrusive. These people are losing some of their privacy by submitting to the tests. However, that does not make the test a violation of the Fourth Amendment. State workers, such as postal employees in Louisiana, wait each week to hear their number called for random employee drug testing, but no unkind words are heard about those tests. There is no difference between state workers and welfare recipients; the former receive money from the state for services rendered, and the latter simply receives money because they are poverty stricken.

States should not have a double standard for their employees and wards. After all, the government simply wants proof that the people taking their money are not committing crimes. The citizens have nothing to fear as long as they obey a simple law.

Michigan has already subjected about 50 welfare recipients to drug tests, and according to a state spokesperson, the testees were all in favor of the tests. It seems the ACLU suit has been the only objection. Perhaps it is time for the ACLU to focus on actual assaults on civil liberties and worry less about ways to prevent the government from enforcing sensible laws.

Jeff Webb is a senior journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Impartiality for all is goal of state law
In response to Jessica Crutcher's Oct. 18 column.

Is violent crime the same thing as discrimination? According to Jessica Crutcher, the Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transsexual Aggrieved (GLBTA) and other homosexual rights activists, it is. However, according to federal and state law it is not. Violent crime is illegal, regardless of the victim. Those who engage in a homosexual lifestyle receive the same legal protection against violent crime as everyone else, because the law applies equally, impartially, to all. What the activists really want, though, is special protection — in other words, a law that discriminates for a certain group of people.

That is both unnecessary and unconstitutional. After Columbine and similar events, do we need to pass special violent crime legislation to protect public school children? After the Wedgwood shooting and the myriad of church burnings, do we need to pass special laws protecting Christians from violent crimes and arson? No. Instead of trying to pass more laws, we simply need to enforce existing laws.

Jon L. Gardner
TAMU Dept. of Food Service

Policy decisions product of advisors
In response to Caleb McDaniel's Oct. 21 column.

Throughout history, the presi-

dent has relied on and set U.S. policy based on the advice of foreign policy advisers. I would be much more concerned if Mr. Bush was determined to conduct foreign affairs without consulting experts. McDaniel is obviously aware of the complexities that dealing with foreign nations entails. It is nearly impossible for one person to be fully informed on all the various countries and cultures the president of the United States must deal with.

Second, men like Brent Scowcroft and Dick Cheney are hardly holdovers from the Cold War. These are the leaders who were instrumental in the transition from the Cold War. Who better to advise the President in the Post Cold War than the architects of the transition from the Cold War?

How quickly we forget how little foreign affairs experience the former Governor of Arkansas and his administration had when they took office, but given our current lack of a consistent, coherent foreign policy, maybe this isn't such a good point.

David Kandolha
Class of '89

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