

ANDY FREDERICK

Drug cure partial legalization

In the frantic and desperate search for a solution to our nation's drug problem, most people seem to lose the ability to reason sensibly.

Just look at virtually the only two proposed solutions: an all-out war, which supposedly is going on right now, or legalization. Some choice.

Most people find only those solutions because they see drugs as a single problem that should be given in to or fought to the death.

But drugs are really based on two problems: the dealers (and producers and smugglers) and the users.

Dealers sell drugs because they are profitable. The addictive powers of drugs keep demand high, while the war on drugs keeps supply low. Despite the possibility of being caught and sent to prison, the rewards more than make up for the risk.

Users enjoy getting high, and once they're addicted, they must keep using drugs to avoid the agony of withdrawal.

Two problems require two solutions. But right now we only have the war. The opposition wants to scrap that solution in favor of another single solution.

But neither will work because neither recognizes that there are two drug problems, not one. We must deal with both separately if we are to be successful.

Let's start with the dealers.

Under current policy, a small number of dealers are found, prosecuted and, if there is enough evidence, put into overcrowded prisons where they will serve very short terms. Dealers who aren't arrested merely are driven from corner to corner by frustrated citizens.

We also attack drug dealers by intercepting a whopping 15 percent of drug shipments, thus lowering the supply and making dealing an even more profitable business.

The result is rich drug dealers who will do anything to protect their businesses. Gang wars are waged daily in our streets against other dealers and police. Frequently, children get caught in the crossfire.

We are not dealing well with users, either. Many of us don't acknowl-



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edge their existence. We tend to forget that we are not unwilling victims of drugs. It is not merely us decent folk against the evil drug dealers.

We think that if we can just prevent drugs from coming into this country, we can end our drug problem. But the only reason drugs exist is because people use them. As long as there is a demand, drugs will continue to be supplied.

The drug users who are caught are arrested and put in jail. There, they learn how to be really keen criminals. Their low esteem, which was probably one of the reasons they started using drugs in the first place, sinks even lower. And enough drugs manage to find their way into prisons that the users can still satisfy their habit. Some solution.

Complete legalization of drugs is not the answer, either. Dealers would be free to sell all the drugs they wanted and users to use all the drugs they wanted. In exchange for less crime, our hospitals and morgues would be flooded with crack babies and users who've overdosed and people who've been hurt or killed by drivers on drugs. Nothing really could be done about drug abusers until they committed crimes.

So the war isn't working and legalization wouldn't work, but handling each problem separately probably would.

Dealers deal drugs because they

are profitable. Dealers are willing to kill to protect their business because it's profitable. And it's impossible to stop the flow of drugs into our country. So, we need to find some way to take the profit out of drug dealing.

Here, the legalization people have the answer. We need to make it totally legal to make, ship, own, sell and buy drugs. After all, when you get right down to it, absolutely no one suffers if I hand \$10 to a drug dealer and he hands me some drugs.

The only time anyone is hurt is when the dealer tries to protect his business or when the user gets high or commits a crime to support a habit. Just as car dealers are not put in prison for selling cars to alcoholics who later get drunk and kill four people on the way home from a bar, dealers should not be put in prison for selling drugs.

The result would be that drugs would come flooding into our country — initially. But then there would be so great a supply that the price of drugs would drop like a stone.

Drug dealing would become about as profitable as selling newspapers. Gangs would no longer wage war to protect their drug businesses — they wouldn't be worth protecting. And drugs would be cheap enough that users wouldn't need to steal to support their habits.

So what would we do to prevent everyone from becoming drug users?

Easy. Continue to make drug use illegal. One of the biggest arguments against complete legalization of drugs is that many people who don't use them now because they're illegal would turn to them the second drugs became legal.

Keeping drug use illegal would prevent it from becoming socially acceptable. So even if the supply of drugs increased, the stigma of drug use as a crime would deter just as many potential users as are deterred today.

The rest of the solution is just composed of little safeguards. There are problems that would need to be worked out. It wouldn't be easy. But it is necessary. We're losing the war.

Frederick is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

JAMES ZANK

Nuclear power not worth cost

Arguments about nuclear power crop up in the oddest places. Magazine advertisements by the U.S. Council of Energy Awareness depicted cute cartoon animals with signs thanking humans for nuclear power, which does not release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

The ad suggested that nuclear power is better than conventional energy sources. But who wants to trust the intellectual capacity of Bambi in choices about energy use?

Nuclear power will not alleviate our dependence on foreign oil entirely. We need to find multiple alternatives.

Two-thirds of U.S. oil consumption is for transportation, and nuclear power now doesn't provide any application for this use. In a few years, if electric vehicles became a conventional mode of transportation, it might have an indirect effect, but not now.

Detractors of alternative energy sources say they are not feasible because they aren't yet cost-effective and that the technology to support them isn't fully developed.

If this sort of argument had been used in the past, we might never have seen the introduction of electricity. Moreover, there are functioning wind farms on the West Coast that provide electricity at a fraction of the cost that nuclear plants and coal-burning plants do.

Fields of solar collectors in the Southwest already are providing energy. Solar power has the unique potential advantage of allowing individual households to provide their own energy. But laws and regulatory restrictions, supported by the large power companies, make this nearly impossible in practice.

Wind and solar energy could be ready for mass use if they had been given the same fiscal assistance that



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the nuclear industry has been given.

Improved conservation, efficiency, research and development programs for alternative energy and increased domestic production of oil were implemented after the 1973 oil embargo to try to avert an energy crisis. They led to a slight drop in oil imports by the early 1980s.

Then came the monster called the Reagan administration. Under President Reagan, the United States abandoned its goal of reduced dependence, thus cutting research programs that could have provided us with more energy alternatives. By the end of the decade, the United States was again dependent on foreign sources for almost half of its oil.

Another major concern in dealing with nuclear power is safety. Despite the assurances of the industry, significant questions concerning danger to the population around nuclear power plants are not resolved.

Nuclear power plants are designed to operate for 40 years, but many plants are forced to close before their licenses expire. Instruments malfunction,

and pipes become thin and crack after they are exposed to higher levels of radiation, humidity and temperature than expected.

In case of major nuclear accidents, plants are designed with containment structures that are supposed to prevent the release of radioactivity. Unfortunately, such containment measures are not foolproof.

The accident of the reactor at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania and other near-misses of U.S. reactors all make the parody of the nuclear industry in "The Simpsons" all too plausible.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has estimated a 45 percent chance that a meltdown will occur at a U.S. reactor in the next 20 years.

Supporters of nuclear power also argue, without good reason, that it is cost-effective.

The typical nuclear plant costs from \$2 billion to \$5 billion. The average output of these plants is about 60 percent of design capacity, because of frequent shutdowns for repairs and maintenance. For the purposes of contrast, coal-burning plants run at about 80 percent of design capacity.

The General Accounting Office has estimated that beyond the loss of human lives, the cost of a nuclear accident would range from \$67 million at a small rural power plant to \$15.5 billion at a plant in an urban environment.

This says nothing of the cost of disposing of spent fuel rods and other radioactive waste.

We need to examine many more possibilities before we continue to invest money, time and resources in any form of energy.

Zank is a junior art and English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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