

Kick the Addiction, Save Money

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The political case for the War on Drugs has always been intuitive. “Drugs are bad” has trumped practical concerns. But the actual, *responsible* case for the political crusade has depended upon some concept of “social cost.”

Now that marijuana is being legalized state by state, the case against the greater War on Drugs is being taken seriously — enough to rethink *all* varieties of costs. Indeed, many now see the opioid



Somewhat surprisingly, even the *budgetary* effects of legalization have proven a bit tricky.

So it is welcome to read Harvard economist Jeffrey Miron’s study of marijuana legalization as it has occurred in the states of Washington, Oregon, and Colorado. He compares results of legalization with the predictions he had made eight years ago, in a previous Cato Institute study. It turns out that while tax revenues are far greater than expected, law enforcement costs have *not* gone down.

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On a federal level, though, we might expect greater savings. How? We could shut down *whole bureaus*.

Yet, achieving such savings would require progress on Washington’s biggest addiction: spending.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.

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epidemic as being driven, in part, *by* the War on Drugs, and not just as an excuse for a stronger crackdown.

Nevertheless, coming to some accounting — especially “social cost” accounting — remains difficult. This is especially true so long as its effects on freedom and the rule of law do not get figured in.

Studies cited:

Jeffrey Miron, “The Budgetary Effects of Ending Drug Prohibition,” *Cato Tax & Budget Bulletin*, Number 83, July 23, 2018.

Jeffrey A. Miron and Katherine Waldo, “The Budgetary Impact of Ending Drug Prohibition,” Cato Institute white paper, September 27, 2010.