



## SYMPOSIUM ON LEGALIZATION OF DRUGS

### Introduction

In 1982 then-President Ronald Reagan declared that the United States was embarking on a program to eradicate drug use.<sup>1</sup> He termed the program the "War on Drugs," suggesting that it was a battle of immense proportion. In the ten years since the War began, Americans have seen both drug use and drug-associated violence increase. In the opinion of many commentators, the War on Drugs has failed.

Because of this failure, the commentators offer a variety of solutions to end the drug problem; one of the more radical being the legalization of illicit drugs. Proponents of legalization advance several arguments in support of their position. On a practical level, the proponents argue that legalization will remove the violence associated with drug dealing because the increased supply will lower profitability. On a philosophical level, the proponents of legalization promote a Lockean theory that governments

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<sup>1</sup> See *Legalization of Illicit Drugs: Impact and Feasibility, Part I: Hearing Before the House Select Comm. on Narcotics Abuse & Control*, 100th Cong., 2d Sess. 411-12 (1988) (testimony of Prof. Steven Wisotsky). Reagan was actually not the first president to declare war on drugs; Richard Nixon earlier declared war on drugs in 1971. *Id.*

should not have the right to dictate what substances an individual can or cannot ingest.

Critics of legalization counter with several arguments of their own. First, many critics point to the health and societal effects of legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco. The critics argue that legalization of illicit drugs will cause similar problems on a larger scale. Second, the critics dispute many of the proponents' claims. For example, the critics argue that legalization will not eliminate drug-related crime; lower prices for drugs does not mean that drug users will stop stealing in order to get money to buy drugs.

The authors in this Symposium set forth many of these arguments. They do so from diverse perspectives, bringing to bear the views of an economist, a doctor, an attorney, and a policy analyst. This diversity of perspectives allows the Symposium to fully illuminate the issues involved in the legalization debate and thus promote further discussion on the topic.

*The Editors*