Recovering Our Honour
Why Policing Must Reject the "War on Drugs"

Shibit # 42.

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Sensible Solutions to the urban Drug Problem

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Author's Note: The opinions rendered in this presentation are solely those of the author, and are not intended to represent any other individual, group, or organization.

Editor's Note: Constable Puder is under threat of discipline from his Vancouver Police Chief for participating in the Fraser Institute Forum and for making this public presentation.

INTRODUCTION

To limit the questions that one asks and the answers that one ventures to those sanctioned by officialdom is to forsake our moral and intellectual obligations to both our profession and our society --- Ethan Nadelman

My belief that the war on drugs must end arises from the damage being done to both policing and the society it serves. The tactics, weaponry, and propaganda of our 20th Century narcotic prohibition have been borrowed from a Western military model, yet in their misguided application have generated nothing other than systemic conflict that has overwhelmed our justice and health care systems. Being a frontline police officer, I am deeply troubled by any example of counterproductive law enforcement. Talented officers diligently perform what many honestly believe to be their duty, placing themselves and others in harm's way to intervene in matters of personal choice. Unwittingly, however, this merely raises the stakes in a game where criminal cartels meet the demand that our forefathers rather arbitrarily declared to be illegitimate. And while we attempt the impossible with increasingly limited resources, elected officials abdicate responsibility for legislation needed to reduce the harm to society. In a pointless civil war at the turn of the millenium, we need to, "unlearn the habits we have taught ourselves, or we shall not survive." Rather than assigning victory or defeat, Canadians must fundamentally change the strategies of several interwoven social institutions, policing being the keystone among them.

I faithfully subscribe to Sir Robert Peel's admonition to, "maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police." While strongly believing in devotion to duty, I subordinate the unique requirements of my profession to responsibilities as a human being, parent, and Canadian citizen, who has no desire to raise his children in a country torn by needless criminality. My commitment cannot be fulfilled in a military context, applying the law in a punitive manner to people unfairly labeled as amoral losers. Harsh, reactionary criminal justice has proven woefully miscast as a control mechanism for drug use. A truly comprehensive strategy is now required, including a legalized, controlled drug supply, coupling enforceable and decriminalized regulation with health, education, and economic programs. The challenge for policing is to measure traditional drug war practices against the integrity of truly ethical conduct, and where our performance is less than exemplary, take a leadership role in identifying overdue legislative change.

☐ ☐ TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Decades of drug war have led us to abandon of one of Peel's fundamental principles, "to recognize always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them." By this criterion drug enforcement has failed utterly, with no evidence more damning than agencies repeatedly inviting the media to view "trophy busts", exemplified by marijuana growing operations and imported cocaine or heroin seizures. If police enforcing criminal prohibition were the appropriate substance control mechanism, then our drug-free communities should render such events a curious rarity. Showcasing these raids as examples of success, however, only proves the failure of criminal drug policies.

Changing our approach, however, means addressing an entrenched police culture that rewards traditional performance measures, such as arrests, rather than citizen satisfaction and neighbourhood livability. Careers and reputations are too often built upon a demonstrated willingness to intervene strictly, often forcefully, without circumspection or remorse. Research long ago identified aggressive enforcement and a game-like atmosphere as features of drug policing, which make it an attractive field of endeavour. In the many agencies fielding drug squads as specialized assignments, there is no shortage of officers waiting to enlist. Today, some officers may still use this type of work to burnish their "Blue Knight" image, discarding discretion in favour of statistics and macho storytelling.

Make no mistake, drug-related arrests can be very easy, with hundreds of available, identifiable targets on city streets. Contrary to the Hollywood image, we rarely catch wealthy black marketeers living in mansions and driving expensive automobiles. Reality finds bikers and other high-level gangsters using their profits for lawyers and accountants, effectively layering themselves from the transaction process. Arrests usually involve poor, hungry people on street corners or in rooming houses and filth-strewn alleyways. Driven by various needs to obtain a drug or the money to effect its purchase, many users need simply be watched for a period of time before some criminal offence occurs, often a small drug sale or break-in to home or vehicle. This enforcement strategy flies in the face of the fact that there will always be too many users, and never enough police. Moreover, our courts now recognize most street level arrests as either consenting adults or people who have an underlying disorder, and are consequently reluctant to impose sanctions.

Progress, however, is thwarted by a system that rewards such a "cherry-picking" approach. Administrative requirements for drug arrests are simplified without the burden of witness or victim interviews and statements. Officers can get out of the office and back "on the street" that much faster, and trafficking or possession busts seldom require follow- up work assigned by Crown Counsel. Like most professional people, we promote peer approval towards a demonstrated work ethic, and what better way to build your image than with a "bad guy" in jail, and drug exhibits or some recovered property as your visible evidence of success? Furthermore, commendations and promotion are often the result of high arrest statistics. Finally, court cases can earn officers large amounts of publicly funded overtime pay, the lesson being quickly learned that maximizing arrests maximizes earning power.

Over and above rewards for the status quo, there are three major obstacles to modernizing law enforcement attitudes. Firstly, people persistently and wrongly identify drugs, rather than prohibition, as the cause of related criminal activity5. Many of my peers are unaware of the physiological effects of various controlled substances, and our insular professional culture discourages police from accessing up-to-date information. The drug war is also a turf war, resulting in medical and criminological research being regularly ignored or discredited. Some officers would be embarrassed to admit that they don't understand research findings, while others seem threatened by a potential change to their traditional way of doing business. We're continually bombarded by self-proclaimed police "drug experts", who speak to schoolchildren and make media releases on behalf of their agencies, readily contradicting scholarly analyses with smear tactics and conjecture. It's commonplace to find examples of police promoting dogma that all drugs should be treated equally, including the groundless myth that drug use inevitably results in criminal conduct. Our self-imposed ignorance causes us to blame drug symptoms, rather than prohibition money, as the impetus for most property and some violent crime.

Such willful blindness results in agencies painting themselves into a corner with wrongheaded public statements and questionable conduct. No one should then be surprised when closing ranks in denial is the standard response to an overwhelming body of empirically proven evidence; does anyone know a cop or politician who admitted they were wrong recently? Shortly after I publicly questioned Canada's illicit narcotic policies, a drug squad officer proclaimed the necessity of "dope work," as a prerequisite to understanding the issue of illicit narcotics. I observed that he was relaxing over a beer and a cigarette, however, and couldn't cite one piece of published research. Considering that tobacco and alcohol have more damaging physiological effects than marijuana⁸, certain professional measures of success appear inconsistent with natural justice. Particularly when many police confess at the application stage of their career to marijuana use as teens, we can be painfully sensitive to appearances of institutionalized hypocrisy.

Lastly, labeling drug users conveniently removes any need for introspection about using government power to remove a person's rights and freedoms. Marginalized people simply require less respect. At the end of every shift, one hears officers extolling the virtues of apprehending a "hype", "junkie", or "druggie." Since these tools for financial benefit, career advancement, and peer status are no longer valued as people, officers need not trouble themselves with ethical questions. Police are far from unique in this regard, and merely reflecting attitudes offering little sympathy for drug users. I often hear someone in social conversation opine that "junkies should be shot," and yet, having had to shoot an addicted bank robber myself, I can safely say that most people would be unable to fulfill their "final solution".

Turning sick people into monsters is useful for drug warriors, since it impedes serious consideration of enforcement alternatives. This perversion of morality enables politicians to crowd the drug war bandwagon to cultivate a "tough guy" image, yet the toughest fights they will ever face are in taxpayer-funded conferences and luncheons, far from the gutter reality of death on the streets they claim to represent. Most officers have no desire to use their policing skills as an enforcement arm of the prevailing political or bureaucratic interests. Communities are fed up with criminality, and inappropriate uses of our criminal justice system produces frustrated police, who make predictable mistakes. Abusive enforcement is symptomatic of our failure to reduce drug-related crime, yet such behaviour merely worsens a world we can't escape.

☐ AN ETHICAL STANDARD

"Me thinks she doth protest too much" -- Shakespeare, "Taming of the Shrew"

An effective method of evaluating the drug war is to examine its impact on the collective integrity of our calling. A renowned ethicist has found that, "integrity in the context of police work should amount to the sum of the virtues required to bring about the general goals of protection and service to the public." If we examine drug enforcement practices, such virtues are sadly lacking, raising uncomfortable issues of character and professionalism.

Effacement of self-interest recognizes that the "exploitability" of people must not allow them to become a means to advance our power, prestige, or profit, or a means for advancing goals of the organization other than protection and service. This virtue is an insidious casualty of the drug war, and policing is one of several professions with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Unfortunately, money provides incentive to continue old-school practices. Line officers can earn large amounts of overtime pay generated by drug arrests; when the Federal Crown office began diverting charges for simple possession arrests, I observed several officers quickly transfer to other assignments, citing reduced income as their motivator. Careerists can use what may be meaningless arrest statistics as performance measures to advance their rank and salary. At the top of this continuum, managers and spokespeople have from the inception of drug prohibition publicized gang crime and drug money, pressuring elected officials into coughing up more public cash for an expanded enforcement empire. I

In extreme cases the self-interest mentality manifests itself with classic examples of police corruption. Few agencies of any description have been immune from officers seduced by drug money, losing officers who breach their trust and succumb to the lure of easy cash. Occasionally the size and complexity of such corruption can be staggering, with agencies now mounting "sting" operations to ferret out organized crime in uniform. Although such examples are thankfully rare, the frequency seems to be distressingly on the rise, and the ingredients only too obvious: an insolvable problem, large numbers of people who are willing to pay obscene amounts and an arbitrary, ineffective law. The combined temptation for the weak-willed can be enormous. While the acts are inexcusable, they are merely symptomatic of an underlying dysfunction.

For the overwhelming majority of officers who steadfastly perform their duty, our police self-image is too often defined by the drug war, allowing some officers the conceit that warrior-saviour is the characterization of our calling. More powerful than any narcotic is the intoxicating effect on our ego when a frightened populace looks to us for salvation. Although we relish the prestige of this role, deified police officers confronting demonized drug users is a recipe for abuse. The most repugnant example is the unnecessary shooting of people, many of whom are unarmed. I'm the first to defend everyone's right to use every reasonable means to defend their safety, and spend much of my time training others to do so. Unfortunately, "man has a potentiality for violence that cannot be denied," and it's therefore inexcusable that drug war needlessly forces officers to risk using their skills and firearms. An addict robbed a bank in 1984 carrying only a replica weapon, and was killed by a bullet from the real gun I fired. Local teenager Danny Possee died in 1992 during a police raid for a small amount of marijuana, and lest anyone mistakenly believe that we actually learn from such tragedy, an unarmed Lower Mainland man was shot and killed last year, while sitting in his vehicle during a drug arrest. In war, however, both sides take casualties: I lost my friend and colleague Sgt. Larry Young a decade ago, killed by a trafficker in a cocaine raid gone wrong. Until policing expunges the politically supported fallacy that a drug war can be won, this unnecessary killing will continue.

Acknowledging when we do not know something and being humble enough to admit ignorance is the virtue of intellectual honesty. ¹⁴ At the best of times, this is terribly difficult for police officers to maintain; after all, when you're presumed to have all the answers, disguising personal opinions as fact is often irresistible. This drug war, however, is the worst of times, and I'm appalled at the frequency with which some of my colleagues defend enforcement practices with completely unsupportable commentary. Despite the plethora of self-anointed "drug experts" in policing, who seldom hesitate to publicly volunteer opinion, I've never observed a medical or pharmacological study being referenced. Considering this paucity of true expertise, subsequent law enforcement spin-doctoring reinforces the theory that truth is war's first casualty. ¹⁵ A recent example involved a senior officer basing his opposition to decriminalization with a discourse on consistent education and mixed messages to young people. Unfortunately, the track record of drug war certainly includes a willingness to be less than forthright when educating our children.

This intellectual dishonesty is painfully apparent when agencies appropriate the educator's mandate, substituting police for professional teachers. One only has to examine the abuses of the expensive and dubiously effective DARE program in the U.S. Textensive studies detail the failures of DARE and the U.S. General Accounting Office conspicuously declined to include the program in it's recent evaluation of drug education. Yet the West Vancouver Police Department is now delivering the program to local schoolchildren. I wonder if parents and local taxpayers are aware that 1998 University of Illinois research found greater drug use among students who had experienced DARE? In our information-based society we can't patronize people anymore, regardless of their age. A resurgence of marijuana use in Western societies is remarkably coincidental with electronic freedom of information on the world-wide web, and one must ask how many teenagers now simply disregard their cigarette-smoking or alcohol-drinking parents, teachers and police as dishonest hypocrites.

True justice is a virtue measured within the context of each unique situation, $\frac{21}{2}$ and in our exercise of discretion policing has had mixed results. Today I observe fewer officers arresting people for simple narcotic possession, with some perhaps recognizing that criminal process in these cases serves no one and squanders scarce taxpayer dollars. I recently observed two of my colleagues in a televised detention of an addict, $\frac{22}{2}$ who compassionately

advised the user to fix in his room rather than the alley. At the other extreme, however, officers can abuse their discretionary power, taking a zero tolerance approach and charging for less than wholesome purposes. Thousands of Canadians can attribute their criminal record to a combination of recreational drug use and a verbal altercation with the police. They may have been charged with a minor possession offence, but their real crime was "contempt of cop." On other occasions a person arrested for a serious offence will be detained while possessing some small amount of drugs, and is then additionally charged for the trivial and unrelated drug matter, which might not otherwise not be proceeded with. Neither our integrity nor the public purse can afford to continue these abuses of criminal law. People rightfully expect a degree of certainty in their justice system, and the present unreliability makes modernized statute a necessity. To effectively protect us from ourselves, policing should not be too proud to ask first.

I believe that the drug war has been most noticeably bereft, however, of the virtue of accepting alternatives, whereby we admit that mistakes have been made, and, more importantly, honestly acknowledge that law enforcement does not, and never will have all the answers. Again we need merely ask ourselves when the last time, in any context, a police representative publicly stated that they were sorry, wrong or that better choices could have been made. This unfortunate characteristic of our professional culture has been clearly identified in British Columbia, and sadly, seems to be endemic in public service throughout North America. With fiscal restraint and "fear of crime" combining to place enormous and often unrealistic expectations on police services, it's easy to be pessimistic that open-mindedness will be rediscovered anytime soon. Blaming convenient scapegoats is simply an easier, politically expedient option.

A recent, local example 25 involved a Chief Constable who criticized the entire judiciary as not being, "in touch with the community," justifying his sweeping condemnation with an example of a drug trafficker who received probation. Disagreeing with decriminalization of marijuana, he predictably opted for the tired refrain of harsher sentencing, complaining that, "there are more consequences for walking down the street with an open can of beer than there is for possession of soft drugs." In an amazing self-contradiction, this senior officer admits the effectiveness of our non-criminal Liquor Control and Licensing Act regulation, yet denies that it should be applied to a substance proven to be less harmful than alcohol. 26 In his attempt to offload responsibility for drugrelated crime, by blaming a judiciary professionally bound not to respond, this Chief has, however, identified two pressing needs: ethics training for police executives, and subscriptions to some medical research journals²⁷ With the behaviour of drug warriors substantially at odds with virtuous conduct, I fully expect my criticism of the status quo to bring howls of outrage, from those law enforcement traditionalists with related career interests. Such groups taking the position of aggrieved parties and attempting to curtail healthy debate will be, quite frankly, the best endorsement I could hope for. I'm proud of our era of problem-oriented and community-based modernization, yet the drug war still forces too many of us to behave in a contrary manner, which we would otherwise not condone. If public trust is the capital foundation upon which police service is built, then we cannot afford to squander it pursuing an archaic interpretation of morality. Our professional integrity must once again remain sacrosanct. Progressive legislation will not occur overnight, but the disastrous impact of drug war on policing is the impetus for us to demand it.

☐ ☐ THE ROAD AHEAD

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.

--John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty"

The critical change that must occur is our acknowledgement that drugs rarely cause crime, while money almost always causes crime. Before complaining about drug crime and the associated health costs or tax burden, ²⁸ people should realize that these evils are the offspring of prohibition, ²⁹ a disaster of our own creation. Our unwillingness to recognize reality is an embarrassment, prompting one distinguished police chief to lament, "it's the money, stupid!" The CBC National news recently featured Winnipeg police busting biker-supported pot-

growing operations, sandwiched between a report on a Vancouver journalist threatened by bikers, and a feature story on the Hell's Angels³¹. Yet when asked how to make progress against the drug profiteering that bankrolls this criminal organization, a spokesperson admits that it's beyond control while predictably calling for more funding³². This simply echoes the policy of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police,³² who concede that trafficking profits generate economic power for criminal organizations, yet respond by urging the Government of Canada to provide "appropriate resources," for more enforcement. By refusing to endorse a lawful drug supply which would end this black market cash cow for criminals, I hope police of all ranks and agencies realize that our intransigence allows the perception of "Support your local Hell's Angel" stickers on our patrol cars. To force policing to admit that it cannot win this drug war, voters and policymakers need to "just say no", to more of the public's money for cops, guns, and jails. For public service addiction to the taxpayer's wallet, "cold turkey" may be the only cure.

Once decriminalization finally receives it's overdue opportunity, marijuana is the obvious place to start. By responsibly allowing limited access to the relatively harmless (and in many cases, quite useful!) cannabis plant, we can redirect hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to important social issues. A government regulated marijuana distribution system would create employment, generate revenue to promote health and education, cut off funding from organized crime, and finally provide police with a credible mandate for enforcement against the few black marketeers who remained. Similar to alcohol and nicotine, cannabis could be effectively controlled at the community level by regional legislation and municipal bylaws. I'd be happy to see adults purchase marijuana from a liquor store, or consume in a licensed establishment, enforcement responsibilities then turning to legitimate public order issues such as supplying to minors and consuming in public. Fearmongering notwithstanding, there is simply no downside to allowing controlled access to this substance.

Regarding heroin and the opiates, the decriminalization trials in Switzerland have been such an overwhelming success, by crime, economic, health and public approval standards³⁶, that replication of the process must be implemented in this country, and none too soon. The British Columbia Chief Coroner's exhaustive analysis of illicit injection drugs³⁷ finds our Canadian responses hopelessly inadequate, and in need of a broad-based, multi-disciplinary approach. A large scale and carefully monitored medical trial could at last provide lawmakers with an opportunity to rationally evaluate alternative control mechanisms. When heroin finally receives the serious examination that it deserves, other substances such as cocaine and chemical drugs might then be critically studied on their own merits, rather than in the current climate of irrational fear. Which control methodology would prove least harmful to society is, of course, open to informed speculation. What we've spent billions of dollars and countless lives proving, however, is that criminal prohibition isn't it.

Progress will not be easy, and there will be no shortage of naysayers lining up to promote everything from legitimate concerns to "chicken-little" styled hysteria While people would rightfully view this presentation as critical of certain policing practices, we must remember that many groups have contributed to history's most expensive failed social experiment. Whether it's counselors dependant upon government funding, politicians with career plans, doctors with monopolistic treatment clinics or simply citizens blinded by propaganda and faith, there's plenty of blame to go around, and the concurrent incentive to deny necessary changes. Critical examination, however, invariably exposes the traditionalist's threadbare and self-serving logic.

Concerns abound regarding U.S. political pressures, ³⁸ and there is certainly recent evidence of interference with other countries' domestic drug policies. ³⁹ We might politely ask certain Americans to mind their own business, and point out their own, much more dangerous pushers, who traffic nicotine death from the tobacco fields of the Southeastern states, and export cheap weapons, "which are the industrial world's most shameful product." ⁴⁰ Most Canadians would be embarrassed to learn that our drug laws were formed in an atmosphere of religious intolerance and racism; ⁴¹ do we really want to emulate our southern neighbours, whose similar laws are succeeding where the armies of the Confederacy failed, by putting enormous numbers of black men behind bars? I resent opinions that our government should use its police to intervene in people's personal body choices, when those same voices invariably invoke the cause of freedom to champion everyone's right to own a gun.

Ending the drug war means it's time for Canadian patriotism to mean something more than an excuse to argue over a flag on a parliamentarian's desk.

I have some hope that the threshold for change has been reached, since it appears that mounting evidence is overwhelming even the most ardent drug warriors. When the World Health Organization suppresses valuable research on specious grounds, amidst unseemly rumblings of well-funded political lobbying 44, this is perhaps a last, desperate attempt to conceal one of the shattered myths upon which drug war is founded. Promoting censorship may be justifiable to people whose careers are imperiled by the truth, this is invariably both ineffectual and short-lived, with those responsible earning only contempt from those upon whom they perpetrate the act. It is my fervent desire that Canadian policing will choose the high road, placing integrity and public safety first, while shedding our traditional role of defending established interests. Musashi wrote that, "the warrior's way is the twofold way of pen and sword;" we've spent the Twentieth Century proving that we can use one, and now it is time to pick up the other.

Perhaps the best wisdom of all comes from the minds of the pure and uninitiated, whose thoughts are untainted by a lifetime of misinformation. Viewing a televised documentary on injection drug use, including disturbing images of a man killed by his father, my nine- year old son watched an interview with addicts who explained a myriad of disorders that were ruining their lives. Not once did he ask his father the cop why these criminals were not in jail. His advice to me was, "Dad, those people are sick." I hope someone other than I will listen.

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