

OPINION

Indefensible and Foolish Neglect

We pray and stand
for childrenBY MARIAN WRIGHT
EDELMAN

Children did not ask to be born, did not choose their parents, state, zip code, race, or income level. I share the belief of all great faiths that every child is sacred. I believe in America's promise, yet to be fulfilled, that every child and person has a right to a fair and level playing field on which to survive and thrive.

That millions of our children lack the most basic protections of health care, nutrition, housing, safety, early childhood development supports, education which prepares them for college or career and productive work, and stable family support, threatens our national, economic and military security now and in the future.

While our nation is in a dither about an



impending fiscal cliff created by political grandstanding and gridlock which threatens economic recovery, it needs to turn with equal urgency to another threatening deficit our human capital deficit that is eroding the foundation of our nation's house today and tomorrow.

The greatest threat to our national security comes from no enemy without but from our indefensible and foolish neglect of our children today. Each day in America five children are killed by abuse or neglect; five children or teens commit suicide; 80 babies die before their first birthdays; 949 babies are born at low birthweight; 1,204 babies are born to teen mothers; 1,240 public school students are corporally punished; 2,058 children are confirmed as abused or neglected; 2,163 babies are born without health insurance; 2,573 babies are born into poverty; and 18,493 public school students are suspended.

These facts of child neglect will be the seeds of our nation's undoing if we do not

act with urgency and exercise common, fiscal and moral sense in our budget and investment choices. If the foundation of your national house is crumbling, you don't say you can't afford to repair it.

So as we give thanks for all the blessings we have, let's also commit to pray and stand for children who need our voice.

We pray and stand for children blessed by parents who care and for children without a parent or anyone who cares at all.

We pray and stand for children filled with joy and hope and for children whose days and nights are joyless.

We pray and stand for children with hope and for children without hope whose spirits have been dimmed and dashed.

We pray and stand for children high on play and study and laughter and for children high on pot, glue, cocaine, and ecstasy.

We pray and stand for our children for whom we pray every day and for children

who have no one to pray them along life's way.

We pray and stand for children poised by circumstance to soar and conquer life's challenges and for children bogged down by hunger and homelessness and violence and miseducation and trying so hard to survive.

We pray and stand for children who love to read and for children who can't read at all, for children who learn with excitement and for children told by adults they cannot achieve. We pray and stand for children who we expect and help to do well and for children whom no one believes in or helps succeed.

In this time of Thanksgiving, we pray as parents, grandparents, teachers, preachers, political and community leaders that we will be a help and not a hindrance to children we call our own and to all the children God created who are part of our family too.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Voters Opt for a Smarter Drug Policy

Washington and Colorado's new approach

BY AUSTIN ROBLES

After four decades and billions of dollars in spending, the U.S.-led "War on Drugs" has failed.

Initially, this war's architects aimed to curb drug use at home and stem production abroad. Their strategy has achieved few gains on either end. Today, an increasing number of states and foreign countries are demanding a new approach to drug policy.

Voters in Colorado and Washington, for example, both passed November ballot initiatives that would regulate the sale of marijuana. Mexico recently decriminalized the personal possession of some drugs, and many other Latin American presidents are calling on the United Nations and other international bodies to reexamine prohibitionist drug policy after



decades of violence and little progress.

Why this backlash against the current prohibition strategy? Because it failed to reduce the addiction or the violence associated with the drug trade.

Treating drug use as a criminal act rather than a health problem has harmed society. It has led to racist enforcement patterns and landed unprecedented numbers of nonviolent drug offenders in prison, costing taxpayers billions of dollars.

In Latin America, it has led to displacement, forced migration, increased criminal profit margins, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives.

Prohibition isn't cost-effective either. A 1994 study found that domestic enforcement costs four times as much as treatment to reduce the amount of drug users, seven times as much as treatment to reduce the amount of drugs consumed, and 15 times as much as

reducing drug-related violence in communities.

Unfortunately, the drug policy debate favors law and order "toughness" over cost-effective, treatment-based methods. Politicians favor stricter laws, but research repeatedly shows that there is little correlation between "tough" laws and decreased drug use or availability.

According to a 2012 RAND Corporation study, the number of people incarcerated for drug-law violations grew tenfold between 1980 and 2010, yet drug prices decreased. These "tougher" laws have resulted in 500,000 drug offenders in prison — a disproportionately Latino and African-American population — soaring expenses, and little investment in public health programs to treat the root problem.

Even in the face of failed strategies, many fear that "legalization" would eliminate all restrictions on drug use. In fact, a reasonable alternative would be to regulate some or all drugs just as we already do with the most commonly abused sub-

stances: tobacco and alcohol.

Polling and voting data show growing support for this alternative. A majority of U.S. citizens believe that marijuana should be legal. More Coloradans voted for regulating marijuana than for reelecting Barack Obama — 54.8 percent versus 51 percent.

Washington's voters joined Colorado in passing a measure regulating the sale of marijuana and several other states have passed laws regulating the sale of medical marijuana. Because these measures are in violation of federal prohibition laws, drug policy reform advocates are waiting to see whether the Obama administration will block them.

It's time to end the failed Drug War and explore alternatives more effective than prohibition. Hopefully, someday soon Congress and the White House will heed the message from voters in Colorado and Washington State.

Austin Robles works in Colombia for Witness for Peace.

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