

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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End the Opioid Crisis

I have a different view of the opioid epidemic than most people. And I have a different sort of solution for the problem.

First of all, legalize recreational use of drugs and end all the crime and violence associated with illegal drug manufacture and sales. The public radio news program, On the Media, recently did a show on the origins of the War on Drugs from the beginning of the 20th century. It was based on lies and misinformation fed to an unknowing public. We would be a better country if we had never had drugs made illegal in the first place.

Secondly, make treatment freely available for anyone who is addicted to opioids and who wants to quit using drugs. For those who don't want to quit and do not opt for treatment when it is offered to them, put them on a "do not resuscitate" list. When they are found unresponsive from a drug overdose, do not give them Narcan - the drug that would revive them. Let them expire without interference.

We should help those who want to be free of addiction to opioids but we should let those who want to play Russian Roulette with their lives face the consequences of their choices. People engage in life-risking behaviors every day. If they opt to continue to lead a life which revolves around getting high instead of becoming a productive member of society, the sooner they kill themselves the better off the rest of us will be. I'm sure that those who have a loved one who has an addiction will be shocked and outraged at this viewpoint.

I feel the same way about career criminals who consider coming to prison as part of the cost of doing business and continue their illegal activities after serving time in prison. If they don't want to become productive, law-abiding citizens, then they should be kept in prison until they are too old to commit any more crimes.

There is one thing that can be said for most immigrants regardless of whether they entered the country legally or not: they came here to work hard and achieve the American Dream. You will see very few Mexicans or any other nationality in our prisons because they can see and appreciate the opportunities America has to offer.

Many Americans grow up with an entitlement mentality. They think that the world owes them the American Dream without having to work for it. I had the same mindset when I was growing up because nobody told me I was expected to work to get what I wanted. I suppose my parents' generation took it for granted but I didn't. I didn't think I had to work. I deserved to be rich and successful simply because I was an American. That's why children of immigrants who are born in the U.S. do not generally excel in the same manner that their parents did - they adopt our entitlement mentality.

I believe many of those who end up enslaved to opioids choose that path because they come to believe that they'll never have a chance at the American Dream. They can't see a way to get themselves there so they give up and escape to the euphoria that can be found in a pill or powder.

We have a great country which has the potential to be even greater, it just needs a little fine-tuning. We need to teach our children at a young age what all the immigrants already know: The American Dream can be yours . . . if you are willing to work for it.