

Hello, my name is Sunil Aggarwal. I am chapter president of the Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility and an MD/PhD candidate at the University of Washington. The Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility is an organization dedicated to policies that protect public health and safety. While we are best known for our pioneering work to protect all people from the threat of nuclear war, we support all public policies designed to protect our patients and their communities.

Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility is proud to be an early signatory to the King County Bar Association's initiative calling for reconsideration of State Regulation and Control of psychoactive substances. We are honored to stand with the other organizations represented here today, as we call on the Washington State legislature to form a commission of medical and legal experts, state representatives, and concerned citizens to seriously consider the public harms caused by our current drug policies. Opening up such a discussion is a socially responsible endeavor, as it allows for frank and public discussion of how we should best allocate scarce taxpayer resources in a manner that best protects public health and safety. It also gives us the opportunity to consider how we as a society can treat ALL human beings with dignity and respect.

We have a responsibility within the medical community to address the needs of persons residing in the "shadows" of our society. We now have a historic opportunity to frankly consider how a prohibition-generated black market has led to much violence and instability in our communities. We also must consider how current policies, even if well-intentioned, may inadvertently be facilitating children's exposure to powerful and potentially harmful substances at a time when they are developing mentally and physically. Those who suffer from diseases of addiction have been, for too long, relegated to the margins of our society. They, like all patients who are sick, ought to be treated with dignity and respect—and not punished.

We may have knowledge about what goes on in the shadows and underbelly of our society, but do we acknowledge it? We must have the courage to *acknowledge* how these realities affect all of our every day lives. We must also have the courage to discuss candidly the fatal shortcomings of our current laws and explore the steps that must be taken to alleviate the harms caused by our current drug policies.

Washington tax payers spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year in service of our current drug policies...we are like the Ancient Greek mythical figure Sisyphus, pushing our heavy and expensive boulder up the hill every year, year after year, only to see the boulder roll back to the ground, while our public health and public safety problems persist and grow. Unlike Sisyphus, we are not condemned to this fate. We need to talk about changing directions.

-Sunil Aggarwal, Chapter President, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility  
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