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# The Rebel Yell

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## Opinion

### Keeping America hooked on drugs

#### Alliance between big drug companies and U.S. government helps Americans stay doped up

By [Sharief Ali](#), Opinion Editor

Published on [February 14, 2008](#)

Have you noticed a change in television advertisements over the last decade? The change wasn't too subtle when it happened, but perhaps today, it is hard to notice because we've become so used to it. The change I'm talking about is the type of advertisements television networks run. There are still endless commercials for cars, appliances and alcoholic beverages, but one addition to the gambit which has taken television by storm is drug advertisements.

These drugs are silent killers, and do not receive the attention they should from the media. Prescription drugs are killing people by the tens of thousands every single year. The latest celebrity casualty was young movie star, Heath Ledger, who overdosed on prescription sleeping pills. Death from prescription drugs is nothing new, but the amount of drugs being prescribed in America has increased at an alarming rate.

It is ridiculous how many people are on prescription drugs these days. There is a pill for everything. There are even pills for pills. Our society is locked up in a cuckoo's nest; we have pharmaceutical sales representatives visiting our doctors constantly, trying to push their pills in hopes of increasing sales, and ultimately increasing profits.

Let's compare prescription drugs to perhaps the most widely used illegal street drug, marijuana. The government won't legalize marijuana because it says it is bad, and that it is a gateway drug. I say the government doesn't want the competition.

How many people have overdosed on marijuana? Zero. The government knows that if marijuana is legalized, people will not buy overpriced harmful pills at the current rate. Some harmful side effects of prescription drugs are internal bleeding, blood clots, increased blood pressure and of course, death, in addition to many others. The side effects of marijuana are hunger, which may lead to consumption of unhealthy junk food, and laughing for no reason.

The government hates laughter.

By no means am I endorsing the use of marijuana, but I do see a great deal of hypocrisy in prohibiting a drug that is much less harmful than many legal substances that are out there. Prescription drugs have taken over the lives of Americans. People are indoctrinated to believe that lifestyle drugs, as well as other drugs, are life-saving drugs. Everyday on television, viewers are bombarded with advertisements for allergy medicine, painkillers, medicines for attention problems and hyper-activity, cold medicines; the list goes on and on. There is a medication for every single "problem" people may have.

For example, I was shocked while watching a recent television ad where a child on a playground sneezed, then ran to his mother crying out to her. The mother then reached into her purse and pulled out a cold packet which she administered to the young boy, who suddenly became happy and ran back to continue playing.

The message I received was that whenever I sneeze once, I should be taking some kind of medicine. The television has brainwashed Americans into thinking that in order to live longer, we must take drugs. We are supposed to believe that our immune systems are insufficient in fighting illness alone, and that natural medicines are nothing more than witchcraft. If we want to maintain our health, we must talk to our doctors about prescribing many drugs. Of all these advertisements for prescription drugs on television, how many tell us to just eat healthy and exercise? Not many.

So one must ask, what is driving all of this madness? The answer is simple and obvious - big pharmaceutical drug companies.

Pharmaceutical companies own the government. This is why America cannot have socialized healthcare; because huge drug companies will lose too much money. So the drug companies give millions upon millions of dollars to government officials to make sure that they can continue to make billions of dollars in profit. This is an inherent flaw in our unbounded form of capitalism. Ethics are disregarded for the sake of profit.

Profit drives everything in our society. This is evident everywhere, but nowhere is it more evident than in the healthcare sector of America. Americans are forced to pay for healthcare themselves, but the interesting thing is that the U.S. government spends more money per capita on healthcare than any other nation in the world. Yet we lag far behind many other countries in quality of health.

Unhealthy Americans equal necessary healthcare treatment later in life, which in turn equals high insurance premiums resulting in billions of dollars in profit for

big pharmaceuticals. All drug companies want a piece of the pie, so they create some drug that is similar to the generic with a negligible ingredient.

The bottom line is that there is an unholy alliance between the big drug companies, special interest groups and the government, whose interests lie not in taking care of Americans, but in maintaining large profit margins for drug companies. This alliance always portray themselves as benevolent entities, which care for the welfare of American people, and most importantly, "our children".

But what is evident, is the 200 percent increase in prescription drug abuse between 1993 and 2005 by teenagers in the United States. Access to prescription drugs are becoming much easier for teenagers because the means by which adults gain access to these drugs have increased.

Any government's priority should be to protect its citizens. But the government's top priority is not to its citizens; rather it is to major corporations and special interests. In order to better our lives and the lives of those we care about, we must think critically about the environment and society in which we live.

We elect government officials to represent us. Yet, forty-six million Americans are currently uninsured, and have no access to healthcare. At the same time, the poorer one is, the more difficult it is to maintain a healthy diet. The only diet the poor have access to, are fast food diets which will ultimately create more health problems, to which they will have little or no means to seek treatment.

Most people see drugs as a detriment to society, and rightfully so. But many Americans fail to associate prescription drugs with addiction, as they do with illegal drugs. The growing problem of addiction to prescription drugs should be at the forefront of every American's mind. The government should be held responsible for this problem, since it allows drug companies to try and turn this entire country into a country of drug addicts. It is time to wake up and see what truly drives the motives and actions of our government - profit.

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You're completely right. Did you see the new commercial that advertises some kind of arthritis pain medication (who can remember the name of all of them?), and includes a grocery list of side effects that actually includes DEATH? I'm sorry, but I hope people would still choose life over pain medication. The point you made about marijuana was a good one, too. It relieves asthma symptoms, induces hunger and decreases wasting in cancer patients, and relieves symptoms of glaucoma (sp?)--and all without killing you! So it's illegal why?

**Kelly** February 14, 2008 @ 4:07 AM

You're all over the place in this article. What are you advocating? Drug companies are the same as any other company. They are making a product and want people to buy it. It's that simple. If you're advocating regulation of pharmaceutical advertising, I would completely agree, but never once did you mention that. There's a lot of complaint in here, but no offer of a solution. Did you research how other countries regulate advertising by pharmaceutical companies? Canada perhaps? You also make a lot of claims but fail to support them. Though I agree with you about all this, you should support your claims. Why not provide some concrete examples of how the government's policies are influenced by drug companies?

**Michelle** February 14, 2008 @ 9:29 AM

Michelle, to deny the fact corruption with pharm. industry is just plain naive or in my words "dult". Just yesterday, there was a well written article in NY TIMES on how pharm. companys own half (50%) of the so called "pie" in the health care industry, along with insurance companys (45%), then physicians aprox. 5%. Michelle, if they are like any other company...why am I forced to get all medications through them?? Unable to go to Canada, England, Japan etc.... I mean after all Bush gave tax cuts and rewarded companys for going abroad for competitive quality goods and pricing. Doesn't seem very capitalistic/free enterprise to me. Seems more like a will driven monopoly headed by unethical lobbyist who are claiming, that along with your health, we're going to screw you over financially as well! By the way, New England Journal of Medicine October issue of 2007 shows that Amercians are not out living any one else in the world! Actually, I think there number 15 on the list, but look it up to be exact. Pretty bad for the richest country in the world with the best drugs! I always say the proof is in the pudding! I am a physician and is continuously being courted by pharm. companies with extravagant promises of some drug, priced out of this world (not to mention seduced by a steak dinner at Ruths Chris with all the ego rubbing one could ask for in order to make their drug more palatable.) No one denies the fact that without money, you cannot pursue cutting edge research into the drug market. My concern is, when does the capitalist market draw the line with competitive sales bull sh\*%, and actual concern with people health (... and guess what, unfortunately in America thats tied in with your finances, being the only country in the world who's health is not considered important by the government which means to protect and serve them) Michelle...need more proof...spend a day with me at the hospital, and I'll introduce you to the bill to end all other bills...THE HOSPITAL BILL Then we can go from there. Sharief tackled a giant with this article. Even though in your opinion it may not get into logistics, he is putting exposure on it, and advocating the healthcare consumer/patient/human being! Seems to me at least Sharief is willing to begin the journey unlike the people eating those nice steak dinners and drinking expensive red wine in Washington who have been there for 8-9yrs. plus! --DR.Z

**DR.Z** February 14, 2008 @ 11:16 AM

Michelle, I think it's pretty clear what Sharief is advocating: we shouldn't be taking so many prescription drugs or be persuaded to do so by pharmaceutical companies. Also, this is an op-ed, not a research paper; it doesn't exactly require concrete examples or some sort of a plan to change things. Good job, Sharief!

**Marisa** February 15, 2008 @ 12:20 AM

Well said sheriff, you are right pray to god you don't get sick, but if you do in the future you better move to Canada, other wise you became a Experimental rat, for this company's they don't see the difference between humans and animals, they only interested in their investment by the time somebody dies they made billions, even if they get sued it wont heard them much, the health care in this country is a joke, for example if you are sick they will not give you a medication that can cure you stead they will maintain you with drugs till you die. The question is what your government is doing to protect you from these killers.

I agree with the general idea that the drug companies are allowed to run wild and poison the American people due to advertising and the "bribing" of physicians. Of course, Washington is in on it too. There are countless examples. Ever hear of a lady called Hillary Clinton? But what we tend to overlook is that we also need to hold physicians responsible for advocating the use of so many drugs. Don't forget that the pharm. sales reps. real job is to pamper physicians with gifts and vacations so that they will recommend/prescribe their drugs. Physicians, especially heads of medicine at hospitals across America, don't care enough about people to resist, and herein lies one of the biggest problems. Yes, the advertising is part of it, but you still can't legally purchase what is advertised without a doctor's prescription. I disagree with Michelle who is taking a sophmoric Macroeconomic view of the situation. Although I would not resort to namecalling, saying that drug companies are the same as any other company reveals your complete ignorance of the situation. So, what is needed is education. Please enroll yourself in some economics courses and try to read up on relevant news articles pertaining to prescription drugs and politics. Traditional Rules of Supply and Demand only work in a Free Market Economy, not one as highly socialized, regulated, predatory and corrupt as prescription drugs. The partnership between Big Pharm and Big Gov is nothing short of fascism. If you don't believe me, look up the definition of the word Fascism. Furthermore, no remaining presidential hopeful has a solution for the "overmedication" of America, they just propose to fill us with more drugs. Both Clinton's and Obama's proposed health care plans will only serve to make the problem worse. Not to mention, either would be the greatest step toward Socialism this country has ever seen.

Thor's Hammer February 15, 2008 @ 8:29 AM

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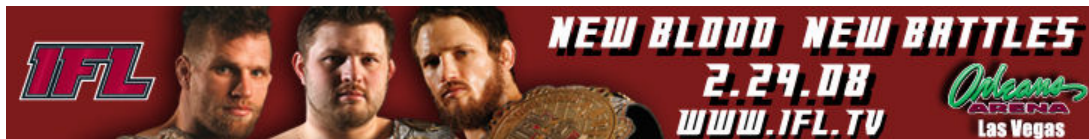
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