

# ELEVATOR ARGUMENTS

## FOR DRUG POLICY REFORM

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### *Concise, targeted, and compelling conversations*

So you've been studying hard and you're starting to amass an incredible amount of data supporting drug policy reform. You're ready to make a difference.

And then opportunity presents itself. Somebody actually asks you a question about drugs... just as you get on the elevator. But here's the problem — he's getting off at the 12th floor and you're going to 14. What do you do?

You never get unlimited time to present a case out in the real world. Whether you're on an elevator, or talking to the press, or just chatting with friends, usually you have 30 seconds to grab their attention — not nearly enough time to fully educate someone. So the challenge is to find an appealing, concise message that will make them want to know more.

### Start with the Facts

There's plenty of solid information out there, so get the facts and use them. If you need a source for compelling items, watch the video at Law Enforcement Against Prohibition ([www.leap.cc](http://www.leap.cc)), visit [www.drugwarfacts.org](http://www.drugwarfacts.org), [www.drugwarstats.com](http://www.drugwarstats.com), or contact me at [drugwarrant.com](mailto:drugwarrant.com).

### Use Sound Bites to Grab Attention

Startling statistics and catchy phrases work. Remember that half the battle is getting their attention. Examples:

- *The U.S. has 5% of the world's population but 25% of the world's prison population.*
- *Meth labs are a by-product of drug prohibition, just like moonshine stills were a by-product of alcohol prohibition.*
- *The best way to deal with heroin is to have the government give it away for free (and then talk about heroin maintenance programs and reduced crime).*
- *Drugs are so dangerous, they need to be legalized (lead-in to regulation working better than prohibition).*

### Don't Get Derailed

If your conversation gets bogged down in anecdotal arguments, then you need to bring it back to policy.

- Audience: *"I've seen addicts on the street — they're a huge drain on society."* You: *"The real issue is every study proves treatment is more cost-effective than enforcement, yet we continue to concentrate efforts in the wrong direction."*
- Audience: *"I heard about some very young kids smoking pot."* You: *"The real issue is that we're giving criminals the power to set the age limit for marijuana use."*

### Target Your Audience

Going on at length about the biofuel potential of hemp isn't going to help you in a conversation with an oil company executive.

Everybody has different issues of concern and you'll be much more successful if you begin with something relevant to their interests.

Fortunately for your talking points (although unfortunately for the world), the drug war impacts every aspect of life and society. Come up with your own targeted approaches, but here are a few examples and suggestions just to get the ball rolling...

**Parent:** Ending the drug war is the best way to keep your kids safe from drug overdoses and violent crime, and cut down on the violence in the streets.



*Note: Gaining time by pushing all the buttons is not recommended.*

**Student:** States are reducing their expenditures on higher education while increasing expenditures on prisons.

**Educator:** We should learn from the historical example of alcohol prohibition.

**Environmentalist:** The horrible damage that the drug war does (to the rain forests, to farms in Latin America, etc.) [Start there before moving on to the potential benefits of hemp.]

**Racial Justice:** 100:1 crack/powder sentencing disparity... 70% of illicit drug users are white; 80% of those in prison for drug felonies are non-white... The incarceration rate of black males in South Africa under apartheid in 1993 was 851 per 100,000 while in the U.S. under drug prohibition in 2004, it was 4,919.

**Women's issues:** The disproportionate impact the drug war and mandatory minimums has had on the incarceration of women in recent decades... 65% of women in federal prison were convicted of drug law violations.

**Economy:** We spend \$50-60 billion per year on the drug war, and all that does is make drug trafficking more profitable by increasing the black market value.

**Traditional conservative principles:** Wasted tax dollars, big, bloated government, government interference trumping personal responsibility.

**International policy:** The drug war is a distraction from the war on terror, and can actually serve to help finance terrorism by increasing black-market profits. Our eradication efforts in Latin America and Afghanistan are driving whole populations into the arms of criminals.

**Lost someone to drugs:** We need to stop putting criminals in charge of the distribution, safety and purity of drugs, and make it easier for people who make mistakes to get help. We could save a lot of lives in the future through harm reduction.

### Practice, Practice, Practice

The more often you actually use your short, concise answers, the easier it gets (and it helps to solidify the information in your head).

Practice with your friends. Have them pose as people with a wide range of interests and see how quickly you can respond in a way that will fit their specific issues. You can also get good practice in keeping your message short and sweet by writing Letters to the Editor about the drug war (Go to [MAPinc.org](http://MAPinc.org) for examples, guidance, and places to send letters.)