### What Should We Do about the Opioid Epidemic?

**Option 1: Focus on Treatment for All**
This option says that, given the rising number of deaths from opioids, we must devote considerably more resources to treatment in order to make any real headway in turning around the epidemic. Addiction is primarily a medical and behavioral problem and those are the best tools for combating the crisis.

**ACTIONS**
- Greatly expand the number of treatment centers, especially long-term facilities.
- Require that all treatment be fully covered by both private and government-funded health insurance plans.
- Release low-level offenders from prison and send them to mandatory treatment.
- Require drug companies to put more of their profits into creating less-addictive painkillers.
- What else?

**DRAWBACKS**
- More treatment centers will be located in neighborhoods around communities where they could well pose problems.
- Treatment on demand will require a huge investment of public and private money.
- Releasing low-level offenders will put them back on the streets, where they could commit crimes to support their habit.
- Requiring new research will drive up the cost of pain medicine.
- What’s the trade-off?

### Option 2: Focus on Enforcement
This option says that our highest priority must be keeping our communities safe and preventing people from becoming addicted in the first place. Strong enforcement measures are needed, including more arrests and harsher sentences for dealers, distributors, and overprescribing doctors. In the long run, a tough approach is the most compassionate.

**ACTIONS**
- Sharply increase law enforcement and sentencing for drug dealing and distributing.
- Increase mandatory drug testing for people on public assistance, students, public employees, and teachers.
- Allow police, with warrants if necessary, to go through cell phones of those arrested for drug violations to identify dealers.
- Expand use of alternative treatments for pain, such as physical therapy and meditation, to reduce the number of opioid prescriptions.
- What else?

**DRAWBACKS**
- Longer sentences will result in many more people in prisons that are already dangerously overcrowded and under-funded.
- More testing means drug users will be less likely to try to look for jobs.
- Police snooping in cell phones is an intrusion into people’s private lives.
- This would leave many patients suffering from severe pain.
- What’s the trade off?

### Option 3: Focus on Individual Choice
This option recognizes that society cannot force treatment on people. We should not continue to waste money on a failed “war on drugs,” but focus instead on reducing overdoses. Those who do not or cannot make the decision to get well should not be required to do so, and communities shouldn’t spend their limited resources trying to force treatment on people.

**ACTIONS**
- Eliminate penalties for using drugs; the police should only pursue dealers.
- Set up community-based centers where people who are addicted can inject drugs safely.
- Offer complete amnesty from prosecution for anyone who seeks treatment.
- Equip all police with naloxone, an overdose-treatment drug, and make it available cheaply and without prescription.
- What else?

**DRAWBACKS**
- By only pursuing dealers, there will be no deterrent for individual users.
- Such “safe places” could actually promote and encourage drug use.
- Too many people will live their lives addicted; their families and taxpayers will end up supporting them through disability and other public and private programs.
- Police and paramedics will be out treating overdoses when they could be chasing criminals or treating heart attacks.
- What’s the trade off?