

Time for California to End The Unwinnable Marijuana War

Can More Arrests Ever Stop Marijuana?

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Since the founding of the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1973, 15 million Americans have been arrested for marijuana.

That is more people than live in California's 25 largest cities – millions more than live in Ohio, Pennsylvania or Illinois.

The DEA has led an aggressive national law enforcement effort that results in [a marijuana arrest every 38 seconds](#), propelling the U.S. to become [the biggest incarcerator on the planet](#), housing one out of four of the world's prisoners. Despite mass arrests, incarceration and the tearing apart of millions of families, the war rages on with no end in sight.

Since the DEA's founding, approximately 90% of youth have described [marijuana as easy to get](#) in annual federal surveys. It is easier for young Americans to buy marijuana than it is to buy alcohol or prescription drugs which are legally regulated and controlled.

Is there any reason to think that millions more arrests – with costs running into the billions – will win the marijuana war?

Last week every former U.S. DEA head came out against Proposition 19 which would end possession arrests and allow local jurisdictions in California to make marijuana legal. No surprise that drug enforcement bureaucrats want to defend their marijuana enforcement budgets. They even oppose medical marijuana for people suffering and dying. But, more important for the voter, this is an opportunity to look at the big picture. Voters should ask themselves:

Has the marijuana war, with more than 800,000 arrests each year, worked?

Will more arrests stop marijuana?

If not, isn't it time to consider alternatives that could better control marijuana?

Thankfully, the DEA is not the only law enforcement voice. Recently the [National Black Police Association came out in support of Prop. 19](#), following a slew of [endorsements](#) from unions, faith leaders and the NAACP. On Monday, simultaneous [press conferences will be held](#) at Oakland City Hall and in West Hollywood Park to announce a letter of endorsement signed by dozens of law enforcers across California.

Joseph McNamara, former police chief in San Jose, CA and Kansas City, MO, an active member of [Law Enforcement Against Prohibition](#), describes the marijuana laws as much worse than ineffective: “they waste valuable police resources and also create a lucrative black market that funds cartels and criminal gangs with billions of tax-free dollars.” Federal researchers find [marijuana to be safer than many legal drugs](#), so why waste precious law enforcement resources on it?

These officers, judges and prosecutors support Proposition 19 because it:

- Stops wasting police on non-violent marijuana offenders and enables them to focus on preventing violent crime,
- Cuts off funding to violent gangs and drug cartels,
- Reduces marijuana access to children by instituting strict age-limits and public safety controls,
- Protects the lives of police officers now at risk in the “drug war,” and
- Restores mutual respect and good relations between law enforcement and communities bearing the brunt of the current marijuana laws.

These police views are shared by the [California Legislative Analyst which says Prop 19 would enable California to put our police priorities where they belong](#) saying it “could result in savings to the state and local governments by reducing the number of marijuana offenders incarcerated in state prisons and county jails, as well as the number placed under county probation or state parole supervision. These savings could reach several tens of millions of dollars annually. The county jail savings would be offset to the extent that jail beds no longer needed for marijuana offenders were used for other criminals who are now being released early because of a lack of jail space.”

[Proposition 19 is a cautious reform](#) that keeps in mind public safety. It empowers local jurisdictions to decide whether to bring adult use of marijuana within the law and how to regulate it. It maintains strict criminal penalties for driving under the influence, increases the penalty for providing marijuana to a minor, expressly prohibits consumption in public, forbids smoking while minors are present, and bans possession on school grounds.

In addition to being good policy that sets common sense police priorities and regulates marijuana so it is more difficult for children to get, it will [generate \\$1.4 billion in tax revenue each year](#) according to California’s tax collector, the Board of Equalization.

California voters should thank the federal drug enforcement bureaucrats for showing that – despite their best efforts over nearly four decades – the marijuana war cannot be won and it is time for voters to do what politicians refuse to do: tax and control marijuana.

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