

Law enforcement takes up the themes of anti-prohibition, cannabis tolerance

Contributed by Chris Conrad

Prohibition hurts police morale and public's respect for law

Norm Stamper, former chief of the Seattle Police Department, is the author of *Breaking Rank: A Top Cop's Exposé of the Dark Side of American Policing* and an opinion piece in the Oct. 16, 2005 Los Angeles Times. Stamper said he wants to set the record straight.

"Yes, I was a cop for 34 years, the last six of which I spent as chief of Seattle's police department. But no, I don't favor decriminalization. I favor legalization, and not just of pot but of all drugs".

These days it's not renegade cops who favor legalization but a swelling tide of mainstream police and retired officers who disavow the Drug War. In fact, at least two political organizations comprised of current and retired law enforcement officers have been working quietly behind the scene to educate and recruit others to publicly join the call for reform if not outright repeal of drug laws.

It should be no surprise to learn that Stamper is affiliated with one such group.

Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) takes the position espoused by Stamper, namely legalizing all drugs to lower the incidents of death, disease, and addiction in the United States by ending drug prohibition. Founding member and executive director of the international organization Jack Cole hales from across the country in Massachusetts but came to the same conclusions as Stamper. After serving in the United States Marine Corps, Cole became a policeman in 1964 and began the long odyssey to being a drug policy reformer. Like many, he waited until after retirement to voice his opposition to drug prohibition.

Boardmember Peter Christ is a retired New York police captain. During his 20-year career enforcing drug laws, he said he became convinced that "the drug war can never be won, and is doing more harm than good." After retiring from the force in 1989, Christ began speaking out publicly against the Drug War and has not stopped talking about it ever since.

Such was not the case for advisory board member of LEAP Judge Robert W. Sweet, a sitting federal court judge who found himself in the center of a firestorm as a result of speaking to his wife's club on effect of the drug laws in December, 1989.

"In that speech I expressed my view that the use of the criminal law to deal with the drug problem was expensive, ineffective and harmful, both in human terms and societal values," the now-retired Sweet recalled. The speech catapulted him to national celebrity status. Some 15 years later, his opinions remain unchanged.

"All drugs should be appropriately labeled; the criminal proscription on drug use should be ended; and drugs should be sold only to adults and only through licensed pharmacies to persons properly identified. The crime attending the current distribution of drugs would cease; \$150 billion dollars would be restored to the economy; responsibility for drug use would be pinpointed and assumed by the user; the beneficial effects of medical drugs — marijuana, for example — would be achieved, and a reliable body of statistics would be available."

Advisory boardmember Eric Sterling, also president of The Criminal Justice Policy Foundation, was Counsel to the House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary from 1979 until 1989. It was seeing the laws that were coming from Congress that convinced Sterling to publicly come out against the Drug War.

"Police officers have observed that the last 20 years of current drug policy has neither brought an end or reduction in demand for illegal drugs in our country," says Dan Solano, retired Detroit police officer and founder of Police

Officers for Drug Law Reform. PODLR is an organization of both active and non-active policemen who make a more limited call for legalizing and regulating marijuana.

"It's time to think beyond drug prohibition and adopt a more logical and sustainable drug policy-one that is less reliant on police and imprisonment-a policy with greater emphasis on regulation, prevention and treatment."

Many police admit that they have lost their appetite for busting pot smokers. Whole cities, like Seattle and Oakland, are opting out of making marijuana arrests. So when respected former police chiefs like Seattle's Stamper and San Jose's Joseph McNamara take up the theme of drug policy reform, it begins to weaken the grip of the so-called Drug War lobby.

The bastions of resistance remain the police and prison guard unions and sheriff, district attorney and narcotics officers associations. While politicians may face off even the pharmaceutical, alcohol and tobacco lobbies, all our men in blue need do is lock arms together to stop any reform. Now those special interest groups face defections and an outbreak of common sense within their ranks.

To book a LEAP speaker contact, Mike Smithson, Coordinator of Speakers Bureau <speakers@leap.cc> at 315-243-5844 or fax: 315-488-3630. To order a copy of Norm Stamper's book or other fine books on drugs and drug policy, contact Quick Distribution 510-527-7036.