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## The war on marijuana has failed; follow Colorado's example



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By Antony Davies & James R. Harrigan  
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After 43 years one thing should be perfectly clear — the war on drugs is a war on the American people. Today, a half-million people sit in federal and state prisons on drug charges. That number is equal to the populations of Pittsburgh and Akron combined.

Over the past 35 years, local, state and federal governments have made more than 20 million arrests for marijuana possession. That's the equivalent of arresting every man, woman and child in Pennsylvania — twice.

If we were to release everyone from prison except those held for drug infractions, our incarceration rate would still be more than twice as high as Germany's. We lock up more than twice as many people, per capita, on drug offenses alone than Germany imprisons on all charges combined.

It is almost as if the government decided that the most effective way to prevent people from ruining their lives was to lock them up, thereby ruining their lives.

Thankfully the states have shown an increasing willingness to rethink marijuana policy. By October, 17 states and Washington, D.C., will have either legalized or decriminalized recreational marijuana use. The



genie is clearly out of the bottle. Instead of trying to save people from themselves, the states are actually starting to leave their people alone.

At the forefront of this movement is Colorado, the first state to fully legalize recreational marijuana use. Despite dire predictions of societal meltdown, the people of Colorado decided to amend their constitution to allow adults to make their own decisions. They opted for freedom over fear-mongering because they were convinced that they knew better than their elected representatives.

And life has gone on mostly as it had prior to marijuana legalization. But here's the funny part: The things that have changed seem to have changed for the better. It is too early to draw definitive conclusions but the first six months of marijuana legalization look promising. State revenues are up considerably. Most estimates indicate that the state will collect \$40 million in marijuana taxes. But this is the smaller part of the story. The bigger part? Contrary to predictions of a society torn asunder, crime is down in almost every category since legalization.

In the first four months of marijuana legalization, violent crime and property crime in Denver, Colorado's most populous city and the home of most of the state's marijuana dispensaries, is down by 10.6 percent. There have been fewer than half as many homicides and auto theft is down by more than a third.

Our government never really declared war on drugs. It declared war on Americans who use drugs. After 43 years and tens of millions of ruined lives, one thing is clear: This war on Americans has caused far more harm than marijuana itself ever did or could.

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