



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
Washington, D.C. 20503

An Open Letter to America's Sheriffs
Scott Burns, Deputy Director for State and Local Affairs
White House Drug Policy Office

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Dear Sheriff:

There is a serious drug problem in this country. As the former Iron County, Utah prosecuting attorney, I know that law enforcement officers see the problem everyday. Meanwhile, this country is faced with a subtle but powerful threat to exacerbate the problem: well-financed and deceptive campaigns to normalize and ultimately legalize the use of marijuana.

This is important, because nationwide, no drug matches the threat posed by marijuana. It is a much bigger problem than most people, including some in law enforcement, realize. Out of 16 million drug users in America, about 77% use marijuana, and 60% of teenagers in treatment have a primary marijuana diagnosis.

This means that the addiction to marijuana by our youth exceeds their addiction rates for alcohol, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, ecstasy and all other illegal drugs combined. And the initiation rate for marijuana looks to be getting younger.

Drug policy "reformers" say that our anti-drug efforts, especially those of law enforcement, are doomed to fail. This is absolutely false. We may never rid this country of every crack pipe or marijuana plant. However, research proves that we have made substantial success in reducing drug use in this country before, and with your help, we are doing it again.

One of the best ways to make a difference is for local leaders – like you – to take a stand publicly and tell Americans the truth.

The **truth** is that marijuana is not harmless. As a factor in emergency room visits, marijuana has risen 176% since 1994, and now surpasses heroin. Smoking marijuana leads to changes in the brain similar to those caused by the use of cocaine and heroin, and affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination, and reaction time. One recent study involving a roadside check of reckless drivers (not impaired by alcohol) showed that 45% tested positive for marijuana.

The **truth** is that marijuana is addictive. Average THC levels rose from less than 1% in the late 1970s to more than 7% in 2001, and sinsemilla potency increased from 6% to 13%, and now reaches as high as 33%. Marijuana users have an addiction rate of about 10%, and of the 5.6 million drug users who are suffering from illegal drug dependence or abuse, 62% are dependent on or are abusing marijuana.

The **truth** is that marijuana and violence are linked. Research shows a link between frequent marijuana use and increased violent behavior, and youth who use marijuana weekly are nearly four times more likely than non-users to engage in violence.

The **truth** is that we aren't imprisoning individuals for just "smoking a joint." Overwhelmingly, we treat drug users, and especially marijuana users. Nationwide, the percentage of those in

prison for marijuana possession as their most serious offense is less than half of one percent (0.46 %), and those generally involved exceptional circumstances.

The **truth** is that marijuana is a gateway drug for many people. Not every person that uses marijuana will go on to use other drugs, but the overwhelming majority of people using other dangerous drugs – about 99% – began by smoking “a little weed.” People who used marijuana are 8 times more likely to have used cocaine, 15 times more likely to have used heroin, and 5 times more likely to develop a need for treatment of abuse or dependence on ANY drug.

The **truth** is that marijuana legalization would be a nightmare in America. After Dutch coffee shops started selling marijuana in small quantities, use of the drug nearly tripled (from 15 percent to 44 percent) among 18-20 year olds between 1984 and 1996. While our nation’s cocaine consumption has decreased by 80 percent over the past 15 years, Europe’s has increased...and the Dutch government has started to reconsider its policies.

The **truth** is that marijuana is not a medicine, and no credible research suggests that it is. There is a protocol to allow some drugs – like cocaine and methamphetamine – to be prescribed in limited cases. Our medical system is the best in the world, and it relies on proven scientific research, not opinions or anecdotes. The primary medical “benefit” of the numerous chemicals in marijuana are increased risk of cancer, lung damage, and poor pregnancy outcomes.

The role you play as a law enforcement leader is indispensable to our success in fighting the normalization of marijuana. You can target traffickers and dealers. You can intensify the detection and removal of marijuana-growing operations. You can work with your legislators to update local laws impeding marijuana arrests, prosecutions and treatment.

And more than anything, you can **tell the truth** in your communities and states about marijuana.

We have attached a more detailed sheet of some facts and figures about marijuana. Additionally, at our website – www.whitehousedrugpolicy.com – you can find more information to help you spread the truth in your communities.

Thank you to each of you for making this nation a better place to live, work, and raise families.

Sincerely,

Scott M. Burns

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