



Pete White: L.A. protest urges end to war on drugs

By Pete White

Posted: 11/03/2011 12:00:00 AM PDT

On Thursday, Nov. 3, 2011, Los Angeles will be the site of the largest-ever mass protest against the war on drugs. Hundreds of people from around the country will gather in MacArthur Park at the No More Drug War rally and concert to mark the 40th anniversary of the drug war and demand an end to the criminalization of drug users and to call for health-centered policies instead.

When President Nixon declared drugs "Public Enemy No. 1" back in 1971, even he couldn't possibly have imagined the lengths to which this country would go, the resources it would waste and the lives it would destroy all in the name of the impossible goal of eradicating drug use.

It's long past time we acknowledge: Prohibition has failed -- again.

The U.S. is home to about 5 percent of the world's population but nearly 25 percent of the world's prisoners. The U.S. incarcerates more people for drug offenses than Western Europe incarcerates for all offenses. Meanwhile, the criminalization of drug use (and laws foolishly limiting access to sterile syringes) has fueled the HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C epidemics.

Drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in this country for people ages 35-54. For these results, the U.S. has invested \$1 trillion -- and \$50 billion more every year the drug war continues.

If the war on drugs were waged equally against

all Americans, it would have been over long ago. It continues because those who enforce the war on drugs

largely ignore drug use by the wealthy, powerful and white.

Instead, they target groups they wish to keep powerless: people living in poverty and especially African-Americans and other people of color living in poverty.

From the vantage point of L.A.'s Skid Row, the war on drugs is the ultimate hypocrisy. It is being waged here, not on Pennsylvania Avenue or Wall Street. Residents of Skid Row and other places like it are policed at wartime levels and regularly persecuted under laws that call for lengthy terms of incarceration for nothing more than holding, ingesting or sharing an illicit substance. Meanwhile, politicians all the way up to President Obama openly joke about their own experiences with drugs -- not just marijuana anymore, but cocaine. And no one doubts that cocaine and other drugs flow freely amongst Wall Street bankers and traders.

Just as the Depression forced a rethinking of alcohol prohibition, we must force politicians to acknowledge that we cannot afford to continue this costly and destructive failed war. It is



HEARTLAND QUALITY
OMAHA STEAKS
SINCE 1917

SAVE
up to **64%**

Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts

Special Code: 45069ZWN

To order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71
or call 1-877-605-0496

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™



unconscionable to allow any further cuts to education, while we continue to arrest and lock up thousands every year for petty drug offenses.

Driven by massive prison overcrowding and budget shortfalls, California is undergoing the most dramatic change to its criminal justice system in decades that should see many fewer people incarcerated for drug offenses. Gov. Jerry Brown's plan, which took effect last month will send fewer people to prison by keeping them at the county level -- either in jail or on probation. None of these actions, however, will change the laws or reduce the spending that leads to these petty drug arrests.

Today the international drug policy reform movement will reassert our call for an end to criminalizing, harassing and stigmatizing drug users. And we will recommit to the fight to end this failed war on drugs in order to put in place a health-centered approach to drugs that helps individuals and supports communities.

Pete White is founder and co-director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network.



FREE
Home Security System!

\$850 Value!
Call Today, Protect Tomorrow!

1-888-472-8414

* With \$99 Customer Installation charge and purchase of alarm monitoring services.

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™