

Nov 2009 – Jan 2010
INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Make Sydney MSIC Permanent	1
Stop Press	3
Stepping Stones Loses Funding	3
'Boundary Setting Information Night	3
Insights Out	4
Boundary Setting – Part 1	5
Involuntary Treatment Program	8
A Guide To Coping	9
Recent Development In Harm Reduction	10
Norm Stamper And The War On Drugs	11
Time to Decriminalise Drugs	12
YDS & FDS Websites	13
Child-Parent Trust Needed To Combat Drugs	14
Why Drug Scare Campaigns Don't Work	15
Taxes The Answer To Alcohol Abuse	16
Untested Implants A Faulty Treatment	18
Illicit Drug Use Stable Except For Ice	20
Give Heroin To Dying	21
Drugs In The Workplace	22
Police Seize More Cocaine, Heroin	23
Prevention, Not Detention, In Drug Fight	24
Sniffer Dogs At Concerts	25
Events Diary	26
Parents Must Set Boundaries	27
News From Overseas	28
Study Backs Heroin To Treat Addiction	38
Waging War On Drugs Is Utterly Mad	39
Decriminalising Drugs ... State Tax Revenues	41
Memorial Corner	44
You Listened And You Care ... You Know	46
Letter To The FDS Editor	47
Better World: Legalise Drugs	47
Don's Reviews	49
Need Help	51
Family Support Meetings	52

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Make Sydney MSIC Permanent

Ann Symonds

David Marr's observations and insights are always worth reading. Writing about Barry O'Farrell in 'Out of the Ordinary' (*SMH* 29-30 August 2009) was an offering of Marr's usual standard, but his revelation that O'Farrell 'is determined to shut the Kings Cross safe injecting room even though he says: 'It's done a good job saving lives' ' raises serious questions about the value of research and evidence in formulating public policy.

And it makes us as mad as hell.

Ever since I was sent by a Coalition State Government in 1990 to examine and report on policies and programs about illicit drugs in Europe and the USA, I have been convinced that health and social policies are better for users and the community than police and prisons.

This belief was strengthened after the Wood Royal Commission suggested in May 1997 that the State consider 'the establishment or trial of safe injecting rooms.'

Premier Carr established a Joint Select Committee in June 1997 to consider Justice Wood's proposal, arising from the evidence he had taken during the Royal Commission.

Norm Stamper And The War On Drugs

Evan Thomas

Norm Stamper PhD is a tall distinguished looking gentleman, quite unlike your stereotypical Hollywood cop. And he has a somewhat more subtle sense of humour, too. Norm was police chief in San Diego, California for 28 years and for six years in Seattle, Washington, and is in Australia at the invitation of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation. Amongst many other meetings he addressed a sell-out audience at the Sydney Opera House on 4 October.

Dr Stamper is a leader of LEAP [Law Enforcement against Prohibition] in the US and author of *Breaking Rank – A Top Cop Expose of the Dark Side of American Policing*. In 1967 as a young officer he had to forcibly enter a private house and arrest a sixteen-year-old boy for possession of cannabis. As he drove him to the police station he reflected on how he was ruining the boy's life, and how his time would be much better spent on more serious police work: this event he describes as his epiphany, which has stayed with him all his life.

In the US Norm, as the spokesman for LEAP, attempts to change the mind-set of influential people towards decriminalising drug use and viewing drug usage as a normal part of life; the money thus saved from the futile policing and customs efforts could then be directed towards the treatment of drug abuse.

A trillion US dollars have been spent trying to eliminate drug use with little positive benefits and huge negative effects both in the US, neighbouring countries and because of US influence, worldwide. Australia spends an estimated A\$4.7 billion annually.

The so called War on Drugs in the US began with Richard Nixon in 1971. He was casting about for a slogan to go with a policy during an election campaign, but literally had no idea how to proceed after he won the election. Since that time the most common reason for arresting young Americans has been for non-violent drug offences. Millions have been jailed, with often devastating effects on themselves and their families. Norm says this has driven a wedge between police and otherwise law abiding Americans.

'Police need a partnership with the community', he said. 'Now there's a widespread sense the police are there to do things to people rather than for people. He said the war had encouraged bad behaviour by police, ranging from illegal searches to involvement in the drug trade, further undermining public trust in law enforcement.'

'US conduct of the War on Drugs overseas had harmed the police there too. In Mexico it has led to massive corruption and thousands of killings by members of drug cartels. Many of the victims are police officers, who are often tortured and beheaded.

Essentially, honest police in Mexico have a choice: they can co-operate with the cartels or they can die. *This is a direct result of the prohibition model and the US drug war.*

Norm thinks drugs should be decriminalised and regulated in a similar manner to alcohol. He believes that at no stage since 1971 has it even looked as if the war on drugs had been won. 'Every once in a while someone in government has claimed progress, but they've been wrong. The immutable

law of supply and demand will continue to work its magic for ever. Purity and prices will fluctuate, people's behaviour will fluctuate, but there has never been any point in the drug war when we've come close to winning. It's unwinnable, and it's immoral.'

Footnote: Recently published Australian statistics show that popular illicit drugs are either easy or very easy to obtain in our major cities. And prices have been similar too. Surprised? Don't be; it's been that way for many years.

Time To Decriminalise Drugs

Norm Stamper, *Courier Mail* (15/10/09)

Of all the noteworthy reasons offered for putting an end to the 'War on Drugs', the one that surely gets the least play is this: people like their drugs and don't appreciate the Government telling them they can't have them.

Only a tiny fraction of drug-policy reformers trot that one out at conferences or in opinion pieces. Even some doctrinaire libertarians choke on the sentiment. We have to draw the line somewhere, they say. What message does adult drug use send our youth?

An important question, to be sure. But we might want to ask ourselves what message we're already transmitting to young, impressionable minds.

We've told our kids that cannabis is a 'gateway' drug. Smoke it and you'll surely wind up face down in a urine-

soaked alley, a needle sticking out of the collapsed vein in your arm.

We've told them, by the very act of repealing alcohol prohibition in the United States 76 years ago, that booze is safer than pot. We've told them that those who use drugs are criminals, and those who become addicted are 'junkies' or 'dope fiends'. We've told them to 'just say no', surely inoculating them and their friends against any foreseeable drug use.

The problem is that so much of what we've told our children is a lie. And they know it.

Are drugs dangerous to kids?

You bet they are, starting with the certifiably authentic 'gateway' drug of nicotine.

Mind and mood-altering drugs can cause serious damage to adolescents' normal development. So can lies.

Misleading young people subtracts from our credibility. It diminishes our authority, and makes it difficult to convey legitimate concerns about drug use.

A growing number of reformers are challenging the duplicity of drug war proponents – even as we work just as hard as they to keep dangerous drugs, including alcohol, out of the lives of our kids.

I'm a member of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (www.leap.cc), an organisation of 13,000 present and former criminal justice practitioners and allies. We've concluded that the drug war, prosecuted with bogus claims and shrill propaganda, has made the world much less safe for all, especially our youth.

Our agenda? End the drug war; replace prohibition with a regulatory model; reverse the 7:1 ratio of funding for enforcement over prevention and treatment, thereby reducing death, disease, crime, and addiction; and support solid educational programs that help all people, young and old, make

informed judgments about what they choose to put into their bodies.

Defenders of the status quo believe that ending prohibition would cause hordes of drug-free people to line up to smoke crack or shoot smack.

An October 2007 Zogby poll of voter-age Americans debunks that myth. More than 99 per cent of non-users answered 'no' when asked if they would try hard drugs 'such as heroin or cocaine' if such were made legal (0.6 per cent said yes, 0.4 per cent weren't sure).

What would happen if the government no longer ordered adults not to use drugs?

My guess is that a small number of the uninitiated would experiment with cannabis (100 million Americans have already tried it at least once), and that overall drug use would drop – the result of a shift in public policy that puts our money on prevention and treatment.

Dr Norm Stamper was a police officer in the United States for 34 years, including six years as Seattle's police chief. He is visiting Australia with support from the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation.

Youth Drug Support www.yds.org.au

Family Drug Support www.fds.org.au

For up-to-date information on drug support and activities