

# Tancredo right about drugs

By **JOHN TOMASIC** 9/28/10 9:33 AM

In debate with his mainstream party rivals Saturday in Colorado Springs, American Constitution Party candidate **Tom Tancredo said if he were elected governor he would legalize marijuana**. "If you can show me where we can get people off drugs by continuing down this same path, then show me," he said. He called on Colorado to "legalize it, regulate it, tax it," because the war on drugs has cost the country and the state billions we don't have to spend anymore in enforcement and court costs and incarceration and the problem of use and addiction continue. Democratic candidate John Hickenlooper and Republican Dan Maes disagreed with Tancredo. A new **Cato Institute study on drug policy in Portugal** may bolster the Tancredo line on drugs.

Portugal was plagued by drug problems and decided five years ago to decriminalize all drugs so that now possession of small amounts of any drug there is not a criminal offense. The result: Portugal's drug problems have improved in every measured way.

From London's Daily Telegraph

If you are found possessing [drugs], you can be put before a panel of a psychologist, social worker and legal adviser, who will decide appropriate treatment. You are free to refuse that treatment, and a jail sentence is not an option. Drug trafficking is still illegal and punishable by jail.

I'll just go through the figures... Drug use among 13- to 15-year-olds fell from 14.1 per cent in 2001 to 10.6 per cent in 2006. Among 16- to 18-year-olds it has dropped from 27.6 per cent to 21.6 per cent. This, incidentally, has come after years of steadily increasing drug use among the young; between 1995 and 2001, use in the 16-to-18 bracket leapt up from 14.1 per cent to its 2001 high. This drop has come against a background of increasing drug use across the rest of the EU.

[...]

Further, HIV infections among drug users fell, drug-related deaths fell, there was a decrease in trafficking, and a huge amount of money was saved by offering treatment instead of prison sentences.

I know that correlation does not equal causation, but until 2001, Portugal had some of the worst drug problems in Europe. The turnaround since decriminalisation has been dramatic, and expert opinion attributes it to the change in policy; a study by the World Health Organisation and another published in the British Medical Journal found similar things.

In Colorado, pot possession under an ounce is a petty offense punishable by a \$100 fine. **Voters have repeatedly passed laws to ease law enforcement against pot possession** in Denver. City voters passed an initiative legalizing possession in 2005 but law enforcement ignored the initiative and followed state law instead. Two years later, Denver passed an initiative to make pot possession the "lowest law enforcement priority." Arrests however continued to climb.

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