

**ORTHO DEFEND WHAT'S YOURS.™** Treat bed bugs with tools and tips from **Ortho®**

ROLL OVER TO LEARN HOW WE CAN HELP YOU

**TRY REASON FREE**

Climate Cracku CLASS

[reason.org](#) | [reason.com](#) | [reason.tv](#) | [donate](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [Share](#) | [About](#) | [Staff](#) | [Archives](#) | [Topics](#) | [Poll](#) | [Feeds](#) | [Events](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Donate](#)

	<a href="#">Romney Edges Perry in New Reason-Rupe Poll; (8.25)</a>		<a href="#">Battle for the California Desert: Why is the Government Driving... (8.24)</a>		<a href="#">Jay Beeber Defeats LA's Red Light Cameras (8.23)</a>
---	--	---	---	---	--

Search

*Mike Riggs* | August 29, 2011

Shortly after the May GOP debate in South Carolina, former Bush official Michael Gerson wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* attacking Rep. Ron Paul and other drug-legalization advocates for "mocking" addicts and declaring decriminalization in D.C. (where drugs are actually still totally illegal) a failure. I [blogged](#) Gerson's column when it was published, but David Boaz has written a response [in the forthcoming issue of \*The Freeman\*](#) that's probably more convincing to the dwindling number of people who believe as Gerson does:

[Gerson's] May 27 column quoted this very passage and concluded, "[I]t is absurd and outrageous to treat [prisoners] like animals while hoping they return to us as responsible citizens."

Gerson contrasted the "arrogance" of Paul's libertarian approach to the approach of "a Republican presidential candidate [who] visited a rural drug treatment center outside Des Moines. Moved by the stories of recovering young addicts, Texas Gov. George W. Bush talked of his own struggles with alcohol. 'I'm on a walk. And it's a never-ending walk as far as I'm concerned... I want you to know that your life's walk is shared by a lot of other people, even some who wear suits.'"

Gerson seems to have missed the point of his anecdote. Neither Bush nor the teenagers in a Christian rehab center were sent to jail. They overcame their substance problems through faith and personal responsibility. But Gerson and Bush support the drug laws under which more than 1.5 million people a year are arrested and some 500,000 people are currently in jail.

Our last three presidents have all acknowledged they used illegal drugs in their youth. Yet they don't seem to think — nor does Gerson suggest — that their lives would have been made better by arrest, conviction, and incarceration. If libertarianism is a second-rate value, where does hypocrisy rank?

What Gerson correctly observes is communities wracked by crime, corruption, social breakdown, and widespread drug use. But that is a result of the failure of prohibition, not decriminalization. This is an old story. The murder rate rose with the start of alcohol Prohibition, remained high during Prohibition, and then declined for 11 consecutive years when Prohibition ended. And corruption of law enforcement became notorious.

Drug prohibition itself creates high levels of crime. Addicts commit crimes to pay for a habit that would be easily affordable if it were legal. Police sources have estimated that as much as half the property crime in some major cities is committed by drug users. More dramatically, because drugs are illegal, participants in the drug trade cannot go to court to settle disputes, whether between buyer and seller or between rival sellers. When black-market contracts are breached, the result is often some form of violent sanction.

When Gerson writes that "responsible, self-governing citizens ... are cultivated in institutions

**Chromebooks for Business**

**\$28/laptop per month**

[contact sales](#)

36 months purchase for US enterprise customers only. Terms & conditions apply.

[Reason-Rupe Poll Finds 24 Percent of Americans are Economically Conservative and Socially Liberal, 28 Percent Liberal, 28 Percent Conservative, and 20 Percent Communitarian \(8.29\)](#)

[Romney Edges Perry in New Reason-Rupe Poll; Obama's Approval Rating at 47% and Congress' at Just 14%; Nearly 75% of Voters Open to 3rd-Party Candidate \(8.25\)](#)

[Americans Are Not Convinced of Washington's Top Down Economics \(8.16\)](#)

[Americans Are Favorable Toward a Balanced Budget Amendment \(8.8\)](#)

[Few Happy with Debt Ceiling Compromise \(8.4\)](#)

Most Popular Stories

[Viewed](#) | [Commented](#) | [Emailed](#)

[New at Reason: Greg Beato on the Myth of the Lazy Video Gamer \(2.24\)](#)

[To Boldly Go Where No Hotel Has Gone Before \(11.3\)](#)

[Almost Everything We're Taught Is Wrong \(8.25\)](#)

[A Laughing Matter \(8.26\)](#)

[Fetal Sex Determination Testing -- Should It Be Banned? \(8.11\)](#)

— families, religious communities and decent, orderly neighborhoods,” he should reflect on what happens to poor communities under prohibition. Drug prohibition has created a criminal subculture in our inner cities. The immense profits to be had from a black-market business make drug dealing the most lucrative endeavor for many people, especially those who care least about getting on the wrong side of the law. Drug dealers become the most visibly successful people in inner-city communities, the ones with money and clothes and cars. Social order is turned upside down when the most successful people in a community are criminals. The drug war makes peace and prosperity virtually impossible in inner cities.

[More here.](#) Insofar

---

Reason needs your support. [Please donate today!](#)

---

Like

4 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

1

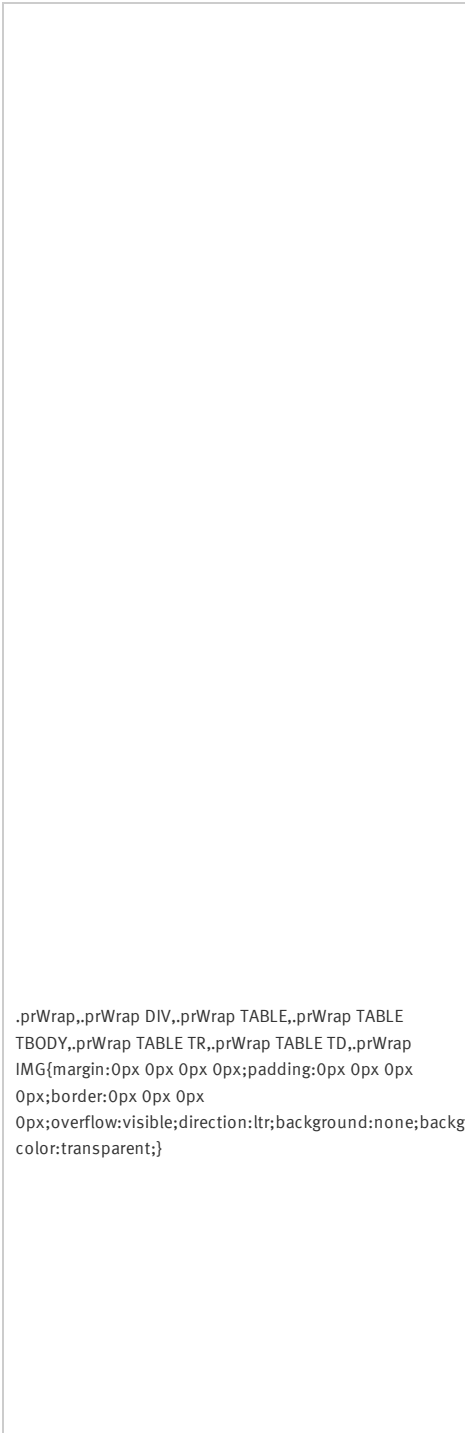
9

---

**Try** Reason's award-winning print edition today! Your first issue is FREE if you are not completely satisfied.

---

[← Reason.tv: A Conversation with Author Veroni](#) | [Main](#) | [How Health Care Reform Affects the](#) →



```
.prWrap,.prWrap DIV,.prWrap TABLE,.prWrap TABLE  
TBODY,.prWrap TABLE TR,.prWrap TABLE TD,.prWrap  
IMG{margin:0px 0px 0px 0px;padding:0px 0px 0px  
0px;border:0px 0px 0px  
0px;overflow:visible;direction:ltr;background:none;background-  
color:transparent;}
```

ADVERTISEMENTS

**Take Reason with you wherever you go.**



**Download the FREE Reason iPhone app!**

**LPAC 2011**

**THE LIBERTY POLITICAL ACTION CONFERENCE**

RENO, NEVADA  
SEPTEMBER 15 -17, 2011



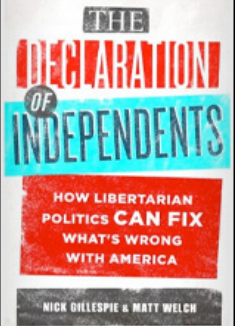
**REGISTER TODAY**

ADGRPID:124250|SERVTYPE:1

[See all 40 comments](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

“The authors gleefully tear into the Republican and Democratic parties”

“Think of it as a political alarm clock”



For reviews, events, and to buy the book visit

[declaration2011.com](http://declaration2011.com)

**RIGHT SHIRTS  
DONE RIGHT**



[THOESHIRTS.COM](http://THOESHIRTS.COM)



[THOESHIRTS.COM](http://THOESHIRTS.COM)  
Ads by Google

STUDENTS  
FOR LIBERTY

CHARITY  
POKER  
TOURNAMENT

*Thursday, Sept 8, 2011  
St. Regis Hotel, NYC*

Try your luck against some  
of the top names in the  
liberty movement!

Including:

John Aglialoro  
Arthur Dantchik  
Ken & Frayda Levy  
Dr. Tom Palmer  
Jeff Yass

REGISTER



---

Submit

---

(310) 367-6109

Editorial & Production Offices:  
3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd.  
Suite 400  
Los Angeles, CA 90034  
(310) 391-2245

---

[| About](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Contact](#)

Copyright 2011, Reason Magazine

