

DIGITAL JOURNAL

Pat Robertson says U.S. should legalize marijuana

By [JohnThomas Didymus](#)
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The call for legalizing marijuana has found what seems an unlikely supporter: TV evangelist Pat Robertson, founder of Christian Broadcasting Network, CBN, and one of the leading religious conservative leaders in the U.S.

In an interview with [The New York Times](#) on Wednesday, Robertson, 81, said: "I really believe we should treat marijuana the way we treat beverage alcohol. I've never used marijuana and I don't intend to, but it's just one of those things that I think: this war on drugs just hasn't succeeded."

[USA Today](#) quotes Robertson, saying: It's (war on drugs) completely out of control. Prisons are being overcrowded with juvenile offenders having to do with drugs. And the penalties, the maximums, some of them could get 10 years for possession of a joint of marijuana. It makes no sense at all."

Robertson, according to *USA Today*, said his position was informed by his conviction that the U.S. has over the years, "gone overboard on this concept of being tough on crime." He said: "I believe in working with the hearts of people, and not locking them up."

This is not the first time Robertson has spoken in support of legalizing marijuana in the U.S. According to [International Business Times](#), he made similar comments last week on his *700 Club* program, and earlier in 2010. [IB Times](#) also reports this is not the first time either that an influential conservative would endorse legalization of marijuana in the U.S. The late founder of the National Review William F. Buckley Jr., Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman; conservative broadcaster Glenn Beck; African-American economist Thomas Sowell, and former Secretary of State George Shultz, all advocated for legalization of marijuana. The Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institutes are two major conservative think tanks that also support legalization of marijuana.

Other conservative groups have opposed Robertson's position. [Focus on the Family](#), a Christian group that usually aligns with Robertson, said that it opposes legalization of marijuana for medical and recreational use. [The New York Times](#) reports, however, that Robertson stressed he was not encouraging people to use narcotics but that he simply did not see any significant difference between smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol. He said: "If people can go into a liquor store and buy a bottle of alcohol and drink it at home legally, then why do we say that the use of this other substance is somehow criminal?"

[USA Today](#) reports Colorado and Washington voters will decide on legalization of marijuana in November. Robertson said he supports ballot measures to legalize marijuana but he would not be campaigning in support. According to *The New York Times*, he said: "I am not a crusader."

USA Today comments that Robertson's support is a boost to the campaign to legalize marijuana, and *The New York Times* says his statement was welcomed by some other religious leaders, especially those in the African-American communities who have been arguing that blacks are unfairly targeted in cases of marijuana possession. Robertson's remarks were also hailed by pro-legalization groups as potentially important endorsement in the campaign to end legal prohibition of marijuana. Neil Franklin, executive director of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, a group of former and serving law enforcement officials who oppose the drug war, enthused about Robertson's endorsement: "I love him, man, I really do. He's singing my song."

[Christianity Today](#) comments Robertson is unlikely to find support among evangelicals. According to *Christianity Today*, a Pew Research Center survey in March 2010 found that while 41 percent of Americans said marijuana should be legalized and about 75 percent of Americans supported its use for medical reasons, only 25 percent of white evangelicals said marijuana should be made legal and only 64 percent approved of medical marijuana.

Robertson admits that his support for legalization of marijuana had led to criticisms from those who think he has "forsaken the straight and narrow path," but the evangelist said: "I just want to be on the right side. And I think on this one, I'm on the right side."

Robertson's stance would appear to be in conflict with his history of advocating a tough stance on drug crimes. [Christianity Today](#) reports he took a hardline stance on enforcement of drug laws when he ran for Republican presidential nomination in 1988, and said at the Republican National Convention that the U.S. should be "a city set on a hill...where the plague of drugs is no more and those who would destroy and debase our children with illegal drugs are given life sentences in prison with no chance for parole."

However, in what appears a shift from this extreme hardline position on drug law enforcement, *USA Today* reports he recently said "over-incarceration" in the U.S. is due to what he described as the "liberal mindset to have an all-encompassing government."

Many liberals would, however, find such comment from an arch-conservative inappropriate given that most of the tough drug law enforcement laws were promoted in the past mostly by conservatives with liberals taking the opposing position. *USA Today*, for instance, sites the case of Billy Atwell of the [Chuck Colson Center for the Christian Worldview](#), who opposed a 2010 California move to treat marijuana like alcohol. Atwell, according to *USA Today*, said: "There is no legitimate moral or pragmatic reason to legalize a drug that destroys the lives of those addicted to it and that fuels crime and corruption."