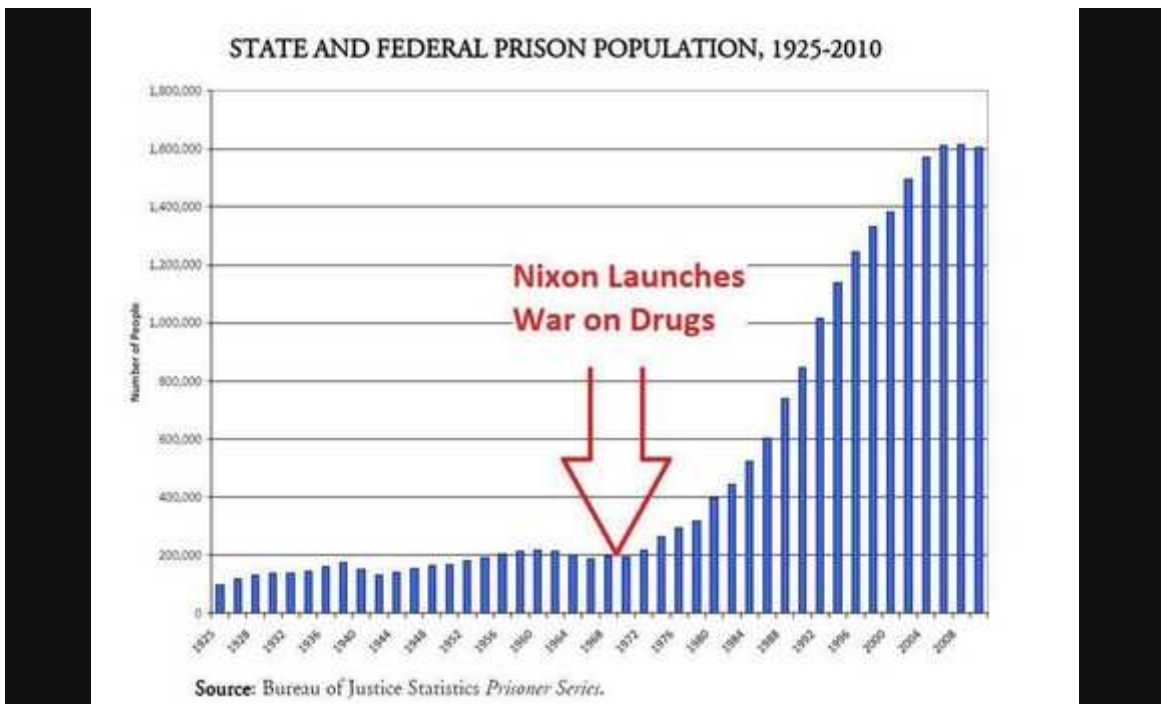


# Knox Libertarian: Relegalizing marijuana doesn't endorse marijuana

• BY: DONN KING - JANUARY 14, 2013  
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It's obvious that the "War on Drugs" has filled American prisons.

**Credits:**

Photo from Facebook group "End the War on Drugs."

Libertarians sometimes deal with a perception problem: the idea that favoring allowing people to make a [choice](#) implies a preference on that choice.

For instance, favoring relegalizing [marijuana](#) does not imply a desire to use marijuana. It simply means, at the least, trusting doctors to decide the best medicine rather than

bureaucrats, and at best, giving individuals the same right of decision they have regarding tobacco and alcohol.

A group called “End the War on Drugs” recently posted a chart on Facebook that illustrates a reason for relegalizing marijuana even if you never, ever want to use it yourself. It’s a bar chart of the state and federal prison population from 1925 to 2010. It labels the point in 1970 when President Richard Nixon launched the “War on Drugs” when was around 200,000.

You don’t have to be a statistics expert to see the steep incline from that point, culminating in over 1.6 million in prison--an 800 percent increase, whereas the total U.S. population increased during that time from a little over 200 million to a little over 300 million, a 50 percent increase.

Those favoring relegalizing marijuana make frequent comparisons to Prohibition in the United States, but there is a significant difference in the two experiences. Under the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the production, distribution and sale of alcoholic beverages became illegal, but not the *consumption* or *simple possession*.

Under federal law, simple possession or consumption of marijuana is enough to lead to jail time.

That makes it difficult to assess actual marijuana usage, since users are reluctant to go on record. But historical records demonstrate that small, portable stills (for personal use) went on sale soon after Prohibition became law, and reportedly the mayor of New York City even sent wine-making instructions to his constituents.

Per capita consumption of alcohol initially dropped until people found new sources.

“Prohibition may actually have increased drinking and intemperance by increasing the availability of alcohol,” according to a [Cato Institute report](#). “One New Jersey businessman claimed that there were 10 times more places one could get a drink during Prohibition than there had been before.”

Prohibition led to the same crime and imprisonment increase as well, according to the [Cato report](#). The number of people convicted of Prohibition violations increased 1,000 percent between 1925 and 1930, and fully half of all prisoners received in 1930 had been convicted of such violations.

None of this encourages either alcohol or drug use. However, as happened with alcohol during and after Prohibition, relegalizing marijuana would bring its use out into the open, and allow people with a drug problem to openly get treatment.

These are practical reasons that an individual opposed to marijuana use could still favor relegalizing marijuana. For libertarians, ultimately the argument is not in favor of marijuana use, but rather in favor of freedom of choice.