

**Wyoming Tribune Eagle column of February 6, 2016: “Drug abuse should not be in the hands of criminal justice system.” Casper Star Tribune of same date, “Drug prohibition doesn’t reduce use, abuse”**

Before he retired and moved to Utah with his family, Dave Doddridge worked in the criminal service division of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) for 21 years. Once settled in Utah, he joined Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP).

“I put people in jail who shouldn’t be there,” he said in recent telephone interview. “Breaking up families because of petty offenses like carrying a few ounces of marijuana. I’m trying to rectify that.”

Mr. Doddridge remains loyal to the LAPD, which he says is disciplined and well-trained. He did acknowledge serving under Daryl Gates, the notorious chief of police whose tactics became the focus of a commission chaired by Warren Christopher. Known as the Christopher Commission, the group was charged with investigating LAPD after the beating of Rodney King by LAPD cops in 1991, which was captured on video.

The Commission found that, at the expense of problem-solving, LAPD put emphasis on force. Many of the field officers who gave new cops their first experiences on the street were themselves blemished by misconduct and excessive use of force. Citizens complaints—2,152 were filed against LAPD cops between 1986 and 1990 alone—were handled by the accused officer’s supervisors instead of Internal Affairs. Mostly the officers were cleared of wrongdoing.

Among other things, the Christopher Commission recommended that Gates be removed as chief of police. Gates announced his intent to resign, but the following year, when riots broke out over the trial that acquitted the Rodney King beaters, Gates was still in office. Fatalities in the wake of the riots numbered 53, and over 2,000 people were injured. Property damage amounted to more than a million.

Since then, SWAT teams across America have mushroomed, most of them spending their time breaking down doors in drug raids. Often these raids are conducted on the thinnest of evidence or the words of less-than-trustworthy informers.

Mr. Doddridge estimates having participated in about fifty such raids. “We’d arrive in the dead of night in riot gear and with a battering ram,” he said. “We’d shout at the inhabitants to open the door. If they didn’t respond within thirty seconds—and they never responded in time—we’d break down the door.”

I asked if they ever targeted the wrong house.

“It happened,” he said, though amending with “rarely.” Still, even if it was two out of fifty, it would have been too many.

Imagine yourself in deep sleep. One night, through no fault of your own, you are confronted with a hostile warrior force who break down your door, trash your furniture, shoot your dog then track its blood all over the house, having forced you and your children to lie on the ground at gunpoint. When the cops leave empty-handed, having found no evidence of malfeasance, you are left with a ruined house, a ruined family, ruined lives. No restitution for damages caused—law enforcement activity is always exonerated on grounds of necessity. Your homeowners insurance goes through the roof.

This is why concerned citizens like Mr. Doddridge join LEAP, which sprang into action in 2002. Not just current and former police officers make up LEAP membership; judges, government agents, and law-enforcement administrators who oppose the war on drugs are likewise active.

LEAP shows international members also.

“We believe that drug prohibition is the true cause of much of the social and personal damage that has been attributed to drug use,” reads its introductory Statement of Purpose. Because prohibition makes these drugs valuable, criminals gain a monopoly over their supply. Driven by huge profits, gang members bribe and kill each other, along with law enforcers and children who get in the way. “Their trade is unregulated and they are, therefore, beyond our control,” states LEAP.

History has shown that drug prohibition reduces neither use nor abuse. When a drug dealer is arrested, his absence diminishes neither the supply nor the demand for drugs. The arrest merely creates a job opening for any drug entrepreneur willing to take the risk. “Prohibition costs taxpayers tens of billions of dollars every year, yet 40 years and some 40 million arrests later, drugs are . . . more widely used than at the beginning of this futile crusade.”

By eliminating prohibition of all drugs for adults and establishing alcohol-type regulations and standards for distribution and use, law enforcement could spend its time solving crimes of violence like rape, aggravated assault, child abuse, and murder. LEAP believes that “sending parents to prison for non-violent personal drug use destroys families. . . in a regulated and controlled environment, drugs will be safer for adult use and less accessible to our children.”

At last, a sensible solution: Place drug abuse into the hands of medical professionals instead of the criminal justice system, just as we do for alcohol abuse and gambling addictions.