

California Gold

2010. Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36"

by
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Once again the marijuana issue is back. And just when the people of California have a good, logical, sensible idea, it quickly gets attacked by a desperate fear campaign of misinformation and perception management led by the Los Angeles Times and some old law enforcement reactionaries.

The new issues to attack the Proposition are federal law and international treaties regarding the Controlled Substance Act, as well as driving under the influence of marijuana, and employment.

First, federal law and international treaties. How can anyone not laugh at this issue? Since when did the United State concern itself with things like treaties and international law? The United States has committed aggression, war crimes, torture, kidnapping, and murder; lied to the international community to commit aggression, and Obama continues to use drones to murder civilians in Afghanistan and Pakistan, all in violation of international law. Yet now, he and the federal government are suddenly concerned about people in California using and or growing marijuana because it might violate international law? Can they even keep a straight face when they make such a claim?

So out rolls a group of former Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) directors - main actors in the War on Drugs, a war begun by Richard Nixon in the 1970s. Today, though, the DEA guys are Don Quixotes, tilting at windmills in cultural battles from the last century. Furthermore, the drug war has in reality always been a war on minorities, the poor, and the powerless. For many in law enforcement, especially at the federal level, it's an endless war that is not winnable, and yet they don't know how to bring it to an end.

Next up is Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca who appears to be the most confused person in the bunch, to the point that he seemed to be looking for excuses to be against the Proposition.

The Sheriff claims that passing the Proposition will cause traffic accidents and labor disputes with employers because employees will be getting high at work.¹ It appears that the Sheriff has not read the General Election Official Voter Information Guide.

He also claims that *he'll* violate the law if it passes and still make arrests because users would be violating federal law, though he's not a federal agent. So Baca, a chief law enforcement officer in the state of California, will violate his oath to uphold the Constitution of the State of California? To make an even bolder statement he said, "Proposition 19 is not going to pass, even if it passes."² Perhaps Sheriff Baca is hoping for promotion to higher office in the Obama administration, hence the tough talk and hanging out with the DEA Don Quixotes. The Sheriff went on to say, "[i]f you have a need for an ounce or less...then use your marijuana, but use it privately. If you want to do a joint in your house, do it. Leave the rest of us alone."³ Huh? Then why not support and pass the Proposition? Isn't that what the whole issue is all about?

Then there is the Los Angeles Times, to add their stage of perception management to the fear campaign. They choose a clown columnist, Steve Lopez, to embed himself with the Los Angeles City Attorney's office to participate in a ridiculous propaganda stunt about driving under the influence of marijuana.⁴ What is interesting about this is that it never seemed to occur to Lopez to question the stunt to begin with, let alone using the press for the "study". The City Attorney could have used police officers to do a study, or a

professional research organization, but then professional people wouldn't provide the propaganda benefit of a columnist to orchestrate a fear and misinformation campaign (wasn't it the press who also participated in the WMD propaganda to go to war in Iraq?). Maybe Lopez is a frustrated cop, because the City Attorney is pretty comfortable getting him to do dumb stunts – it was several phone calls over a period of time.⁵ But then again, Karl Rove was pretty comfortable getting news reporters to do stupid things as well.

What is the end result of this cozy relationship between the press and law enforcement? Lopez is now against Proposition 19, and he cites his reasons as federal law enforcement, people driving under the influence, and people getting high at work. Obviously Lopez did not read the Official Voter Information Guide. Perhaps his handlers won't let him read the Official Guide. Los Angeles Times management was already against the Proposition to begin with, so maybe Lopez had to come up with some bogus excuses to keep his job.

Furthermore, the traffic accident issue appears to be kind of an obsession with the cops. Maybe that's why they wanted Lopez to do the driving stunt, to really lock-in their Barney Fife experiment. Though, from the very first phone call, Lopez could have asked one very simple question to put an end to the entire embarrassing episode: Why would someone high want to drive when they could just have the food delivered?

Here are some facts about Proposition 19 from the 2010 California General Election Official Voter Information Guide:

- And this is the one that the Steve Lopez must have missed (or wasn't allowed to read): the Proposition “maintains strict criminal penalties for driving under the influence.”
- It “keeps workplaces safe, by preserving the right of employees to maintain a drug-free workplace.”
- Millions of law enforcement dollars are wasted “targeting non-violent marijuana consumers while thousands of violent crimes go unsolved.”
- Every year in California “there is \$41 billion in marijuana sales” yet the state does not get any of it.
- In 2008, the FBI stated that “over 61,000 Californians were arrested for misdemeanor marijuana possession, while 60,000 violent crimes went unsolved.”
- Former police chiefs and a Superior Court Judge agree that, “by controlling marijuana, Proposition 19 will help cut off funding to the cartels.”
- The proposition “[a]llows people 21 years old or older to possess, cultivate, or transport marijuana for personal use.”
- The savings to state and local government is in the tens of millions of dollars, and the increase in revenues from taxes and fees would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars every year.
- If the state can control and tax alcohol, it can control and tax marijuana.

The War on Drugs has been a failure. The people who led and continue to wage the war have failed. The policies have failed. It's time for the People of California to take the initiative and begin the first steps to bring the drug war to an end.

Vote Yes on Proposition 19.

Notes

1. *L.A. County Sheriff Lee Baca says deputies would enforce marijuana laws even if Prop. 19 passes*, by Robert Faturechi, Los Angeles Times, October 15, 2010.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *He's a Train Wreck behind the wheel*, by Steve Lopez, Los Angeles Times, October 20, 2010.
5. *Taking a hit in the name of science* by Steve Lopez, Los Angeles Times, October 16, 2010.