

## Drug War Follies - Skunk Magazine Issue #16

Yeah, sometimes it sucks. Two ballot measures, one in Colorado and one in Nevada, had a shot at shredding a bit of the wretched fabric of the Drug War last November 7, and neither made it out of the box. In Colorado, Mason Tvert's SAFER campaign would have made it legal for adults to possess and use—as in the cops can't even confiscate it—an ounce or less of ganja in that state. In Nevada, the ballot measure called simply Question 7, would have done the same but would additionally have forced the state to regulate and tax the good weed as well. Both measures garnered just over 40 percent of the vote. The one we were really hoping for was Nevada. To have seen the havoc played out as the state government tried to figure out how to open pot stores—which the US federal boys would have had to close down—would have made for some interesting fireworks. Unfortunately, it didn't so that's something we're not yet going to see.

The truth is that people got what they wanted and the people in those states didn't want pot legalized for adults. Either that or pot smokers were too damned busy sucking on their bongos to go vote. Or, of course, it could be that so many pot smokers have felonies on their records that take away their right to vote that it's rigged the system. I love that one. Criminalize millions with felonies, then take away their right to vote and you never have to consider those voices again. Who made that rule up?

Which leads to this: How on earth can we put kids in the military at 18 and send them off to war in foreign lands but not let them have a beer when they come home because the drinking age is 21? Or jail them when they buy a dime bag. The concept is mind-boggling. How about we raise the age for joining the military to 21, or 26, or 60. How about only people who have raised kids to adulthood and retired from their jobs can go to war?

Cause nobody would go, that's why. The kids still see the John Wayne/Vin Diesel glory in blowing people to bits, and they believe the rhetoric about the army making you a man, and they love the advertising. And I'm sure there is a camaraderie thing going on too. But the reality of war—and I was never in the military but was in a couple of places where it was going on around me—is not the advertising. It's people getting shot and blown up and screaming and running away from people trying to kill them and there is no Hollywood pyrotechnics to any of it. It's just fear and pain and agony.

One of the good things to come out of the recent elections in the US was that the architect of our current wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, Donald Rumsfeld, got the boot. Bush may be dumb but when he saw the wholesale slaughter of the Republican Congress, even he realized it was a referendum on Iraq. Unfortunately, Rumsfeld won't really go away. He'll retreat for a few months, collect himself, then return as a powerbroker in the private sector, either as a lobbyist, a consultant or a CEO for a corporation that does big business with the US government. And he'll still have the power to influence the government. Which stinks. Like he did. Good riddance, Rumsy. Your arrogance was only matched by your cruel disregard for other people's lives.

But Rumsfeld's departure, and even the change over in Congress from Republican to Democrat, probably won't make much difference in Iraq. The problem is that no one seems to have a strategy for leaving the place. Do we just pull the US and international troops out tomorrow? If we did the place, with its ancient tribal and modern political rifts, would turn into hell on earth for millions who'd face abrupt and horrible slaughter. Do we divide Iraq into three states, each sovereign? Maybe good on paper to have Kurds, Shiites and Sunni's all running their own countries, but they'd probably all be slaughtered by the Iranians, Egyptians and others in a heartbeat. So Rumsfeld's gone but his war carries on. And worst of all, I don't have a solution either.

Speaking of people who won't go away, Jose Daniel Ortega Saavedra, was just reelected to the presidency of Nicaragua. His first term lasted from 1985-1990. Ortega, you'll remember, was a leader of the Sandanista National Liberation Front (FSLN) that wrested control of Nicaragua from the US-backed, impossibly corrupt Somoza regime in 1979. Ortega ruled with four others until presidential elections were held in 1985.

The Ortega-led, socialist Nicaragua—it received considerable aid from Heavens's Forbid!!! Cuba!—put such fear into the heart of then-US President Ronald Reagan that Oliver North was given orders to do whatever it took to dismantle the Sandanista government. North, who took his orders seriously, began selling weapons—illegally—to Iran, and using the money they brought to fund the right wing Contra revolution that sought to overthrow the Ortega government. When those funds proved insufficient, North began letting the Contra's move cocaine, often with the use of US CIA manpower and airplanes. And the next thing you knew there was that Crack Epidemic that tore whole cities apart.

But Ortega's return has to have Bush in a tizzy. Though he claims to have mellowed over the years—probably because he's acquired unimaginable wealth—and is no longer a feisty young communist, his election puts another socialist into the Latin American game. With Castro in Cuba, Chavez in Venezuela, Lula in Brazil and Morales in Bolivia already in place and terrifying the folks at the White House, the addition of Ortega only solidifies the trend. Whether he will empower the poor classes and indigenous, as Chavez and Morales have done, remains to be seen. But I would have liked to have seen the look on Dick Cheney's face when the vote count came in on that one.

----- Been a while since we had one of these: In early November, Harold F. Cassell, the sheriff of Henry County, Virginia, and a dozen of his former and current deputies were charged with helping to run a drug-trafficking ring that dealt in coke, crack, steroids, ketamine and even pot.

In all, 20 people have been indicted on charges that include racketeering conspiracy, narcotics distribution, weapons charges and obstruction of justice. The scheme, according to the indictments, was simple: local Drug Squad or sheriff's deputies would make a bust. The drugs, and weapons if they were found, as well as money, would be put into the evidence room at the police station. The dealers would go to trial or take pleas and wind up in prison, and then phony 'destruction of evidence' logs would be written, making it appear as if the drugs were destroyed. In reality the evidence would be stolen by the sheriff's deputies, with the apparent okay of Sheriff Cassell, and sold to several local dealers who

were protected by the Sheriff's department.

According to the indictment the scheme has been going on since 1998. The indictment also suggests that there was money laundering, the illegal seizure of lawnmowers and automobile equipment, and use of inside information to warn each other of possible problems with other authorities. No official quantity of drugs was noted—other than that it included multi-kilos of cocaine, ounces of crack and hundreds of pounds of pot—but you can bet it was significant if 20 people sucked on that teat for seven years.

If there is any more justice in the afterlife than there is here on earth there has got to be a special place for paid-informers, snitches and dirty cops. These bums were putting people in jail as drug dealers, then selling the stashes they confiscated. Does it get any worse? It would all be funny if people weren't dying and the prisons weren't full.

## About the Author

Source: <http://petergormanarchive.com>