

## LEAPING FORWARD FOR FREEDOM:

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### *Retired police detective rides high in the saddle to end the drug war*

Not high as in buzzed, rather as someone taking the high road whether he's on a horse or not. Howard J. Wooldridge reminds me of Yul Brenner in the classic *The Magnificent Seven* (based on the even more classic *Seven Samurai*) leading a valiant effort of honored warriors to liberate a community from an entrenched pack of bandits.

In 1997, after taking an early retirement from police work in Michigan and moving to Texas, Howard became a bilingual drug-reform activist seeking the end to "the war on freedom" represented by the War on Drugs (WOD).

Five years ago he shared in the founding of LEAP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition), the premier organization of peace officers articulating the practical case for drug legalization in a conventional regulatory framework. To popularize his cause, Howard struck out on a cross-country trek in 2003 and again in 2005, with his trusty horse Misty.

He now serves as LEAP's education specialist in the US Congress. He still travels for LEAP. My freedom-people contingent was pleased to catch up with his presentation on Michigan State University 's campus, courtesy of the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures.

*Instructors Suzanne Webb and Dundee Lackey included The Howard Talk as part of their students' first-year writing curricula (WRA 115 and WRA 110, respectively).*

Howard, tall and lean with boots and a Stetson—definitely a sendover from central casting—launches his presentation forthrightly. He exudes this childlike quality of "square cool," a cop who cares. Mincing no words:

**"The bottom line is after 35 years, 35 million arrests, a trillion dollars in tax expenditures, tens of thousands of turf-war killings and bystander tragedies, drugs are now cheaper, stronger, and easier to buy than ever. 'The net effect of a drug bust is the taxpayer builds another prison...' not to mention building obscene financial portfolios for gangsters and terrorists."**

This MSU college-age crowd is lapping it up, even laughing at the corny jokes and aphorisms. Howard lays it down, cites the facts behind *The Problem*, delivers the straightforward solution, sprinkled liberally with quotations from the ages and the sages:

*If you're going to start talking the truth, keep one foot in the saddle of your fastest horse. — Chinese proverb*

*In war, truth is the first casualty. — Aeschylus*

Some facts qua healing the truth wounds:

- WOD costs to US governments this year will be \$70 billion
- 75% of felony crime is drug related
- Drug trade internationally is \$400 billion per year
- 720,000 drug-related arrests last year, mainly for marijuana
- \$44 billion for prisons annually, 80% inmates drug-related
- A police state looms with 324,000 cops, mostly focused on drug-related offenses; corruption is rampant; they have a license to steal: prosecutors in many communities receive 10% of all civil forfeitures (!!!!)

Michigan and Ohio with their budgetary problems are the canary in the mineshaft. Michigan has roughly a \$1 billion deficit with a \$2 billion budget for corrections; if only half the corrections budget applies to "people who sold Willie Nelson a joint," we solve the budget problem by liberation.

Regulating and taxing a medical and recreational marijuana trade in Michigan would bring \$200 million in state revenues. What do we want: schools or prisons?

He hasn't even touched upon the opportunities in agricultural hemp, a point I bring up in the Q&A— Michigan State as a land grant college will certainly be in the forefront of agricultural research into the detailed prospects for the coming trillion-dollar hemp economy.

All in all, a great event, a lot of positive input from the young adults and from the college kids, too. :) As a cause-oriented child of the 60s, I'd like to see more enthusiasm and passion in today's Youth of America, but tonight's a LEAP forward on that front as well. We're not getting the attention of a Barack Obama cheerleading speech or of a court inquest into who impregnated Anna Nicole Smith... yet. But the day is young.

Howard Wooldridge is the real deal. Like so many of his allies in the LEAP organization, he lays his badge of courage on the line for Constitutional Liberty. He's the truest of patriots:

*In times of change, the Patriot is a scarce man; brave, hated and scorned. When his cause succeeds, however, the timid join him, for then it costs nothing to be a Patriot. — Mark Twain*

Patriot, and I hope the nexus of a cultural breakthrough. For Howard is as natural a candidate for libertarian celebrity as I believe we'll ever see. If you have the opportunity soon, don't miss him at a classroom or VFW hall near you. As we approach the end of the WOD and freedom people storm the media Bastille, his chats will become standing room only.