

Opinion: Eric Holder's drug war deception

By Steve Kubby

While some are celebrating the recent remarks by attorney general Eric Holder at the American Bar Association convention in San Francisco, a more sober analysis is deeply disturbing.

It's been eight months since Holder promised a decision on the federal response to Colorado and Washington legalizing weed. Instead of an answer, Holder offers us Drug War Lite. No let up in DEA raids, no mass release of nonviolent pot prisoners, no relief for medical marijuana growers or dispensaries, no end to arrests and prosecutions, but lighter sentences for some.

Holder even publicly acknowledged and praised U.S. attorney for Northern California, Melinda Haag, just prior to his remarks about the unintended consequences of the drug war, suggesting that the war against medical marijuana will continue unabated.



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Haag has been an outspoken opponent of medical marijuana and has personally targeted some of the best run dispensaries in her jurisdiction, such as Harborside, Berkeley Patients' Group and Richard Lee's Blue Sky. Meanwhile, the Obama administration is only in its fifth year and yet it has

conducted a record 170 DEA raids, resulting in 61 Federal indictments. Compare that to George W. Bush's eight-year legacy of 40 DEA raids, resulting in one federal indictment.

"How dare the attorney general come to San Francisco and talk about drug policy and completely fail to address medical cannabis," Steve DeAngelo, proprietor of what's been billed as "the world's largest pot shop," told the *Huffington Post*. "Of all the reforms that should be made, certainly the first should be to get medicine into the hands of people who are suffering.

"Given that the entire country has been waiting for the administration to clarify their position on Colorado and Washington, I think the attorney general's comments this morning were just a side-stepping of the central issue," DeAngelo said.

Holder also observed that "too many people of color have been arrested." Under the Obama administration, a larger percentage of people of color have been arrested than in Apartheid South Africa. How many more? According to the Prison Policy Initiative, incarceration rates of Apartheid South Africa, at its racist worst, are no contest. Under the Obama administration, the current incarceration rate is five times greater for people of color than at anytime in South Africa.

According to legal scholar Michelle Alexander, more African Americans are under correctional control today than were enslaved in 1850. Alexander's book, "The New Jim Crow", offers a devastating account of a legal system doing its job perfectly well. We have simply replaced one caste system (Jim Crow) for another one (imprisonment, parole, detention) that keeps the majority of minorities in a permanent state of disenfranchisement. Nothing in Eric Holder's speech offers any real fix to the our current Jim Crow justice system.

Frankly, it's embarrassing how major reform organizations are

celebrating this phony "victory." Until this Jim Crow justice system is scrapped and until cannabis is removed as a controlled substance, any talk about legal reform is just more of the same old lies and government deception.

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