

Pat Robertson Gives Nod to Marijuana Legalization

Pat Robertson doesn't condone smoking weed, but he's giving the nod to legalizing the drug. On a recent episode of the *700 Club*, the Christian Coalition founder says legalizing marijuana is one way to get smart on crime.

"It got to be a big deal in campaigns: 'He's tough on crime,' and 'lock 'em up!'" Robertson said on the show. "That's the way these guys ran and, uh, they got elected. But, that wasn't the answer.

"We're locking up people that have taken a couple puffs of marijuana and next thing you know they've got 10 years with mandatory sentences," Robertson said. "These judges just say, they throw up their hands and say nothing we can do with these mandatory sentences. We've got to take a look at what we're considering crimes and that's one of 'em.

"I'm not exactly for the use of drugs, don't get me wrong, but I just believe that criminalizing marijuana, criminalizing the possession of a few ounces of pot, that kinda thing it's just, it's costing us a fortune and it's ruining young people. Young people go into prisons, they go in as youths and come out as hardened criminals. That's not a good thing."

During the segment, there was talk of Right on Crime, a new conservative group that also questions the wisdom of locking up young people for drug-related charges. Right on Crime's research shows that the United States arrested about million people for drug-related offenses in 2006. That's up from 581,000 in 1980. Many of them were jailed for non-violent crimes and were no immediate threat to public safety.

Right on Crime reports that incarceration can cost anywhere from \$16,000 to \$50,000 per year per offender. And there is

little evidence that drug abusers who enter prison have overcome their addiction. Right on Crime favors drug courts, specialty courts with judges who impose supervision, drug testing, treatments and sanctions on defendants instead of incarceration. Right on Crime's studies show drug courts only cost about \$2,500 to \$4,000 a year and offer help to people who want to change.

What do you think? Should the U.S. legalize marijuana? Are drug courts a better option to incarceration for young offenders?