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Prohibition: A parallel to modern war on drugs Originally published September 30, 2011 at 4:00 pm | Updated September 30, 2011 at 6:01 pm

PICK-POCKET PROOF Former Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper reflects on the

violent U.S. experiment with Prohibition, as depicted in Ken Burns' new PBS documentary. He argues there is a compelling parallel between the damage done by the 18th Amendment and the current U.S. war on drugs.

KEN Burns' new documentary on alcohol prohibition,

By Norm Stamper

A

premiering on PBS Sunday, reportedly begins with a Mark Twain quote: "It is the prohibition that makes anything precious." As a retired police officer who worked to enforce

today's prohibition — the "war on drugs" — I think it's a lesson we would do well to remember.

respect for authority.

It was the prohibition of alcohol that made it so valuable to criminals, providing the taxfree dollars that turned neighborhood street gangs into national

crime syndicates headed by the likes of Al Capone and Charles

("Lucky") Luciano. Prohibition did little to curb liquor consumption, particularly among young people. Moreover, as otherwise law-abiding citizens were suddenly deemed criminals, the resulting hypocrisy significantly undermined

Today, drug use, especially by adolescents, is shockingly widespread, and law enforcement's job has been made that much harder. In cities across the country, young people, poor people and people of color have come to view us as the enemy.

Our drug laws have given rise to a new generation of

gangsters with names like Sinaloa, Los Zetas and La

that Capone and his ilk could only have dreamed of.

Familia. These evil and greedy cartels are raking in profits

Like the bootleggers of old, today's international cartels reap untold billions of dollars from the drug war, and they aren't afraid to kill to protect profits or expand markets. After alcohol prohibition took effect, the homicide rate skyrocketed by 78 percent. Nearly a century later, 4,323 U.S. homicides between 2005 and 2009 have been directly traced to the illegal drug trade — more than the number of

Americans killed on 9/11 or in combat in Iraq. Even this figure pales in comparison to the 40,000 murders in Mexico since 2006 that are directly related to the illegal drug market. It would be difficult for anyone who lived under alcohol prohibition to imagine today's drug warrelated violence. Whereas the St. Valentine's Day massacre of seven alcohol-trafficking gangsters in Chicago made international headlines in 1929, today's drug cartels regularly kidnap and murder police and other government officials, roll severed heads into nightclubs and hang mutilated bodies from bridges — complete with threatening messages carved into the flesh. The violence is so frequent that each grisly incident is but a blip on the radar.

Just as in the 1920s, this violence stems from disputes over territory. Instead of bringing whiskey from Canada, organized criminals deliver illegal drugs from Mexico via a sophisticated network whose tentacles extend from our southwestern border to more than 1,000 American cities. Previews show that Burns' documentary vividly depicts the lavish lifestyles of Prohibition-era gangsters, the more successful of whom banked staggering profits for their time.

about \$75 to produce a pound of marijuana, which then sells **Shop Your Way At Petco** for about \$6,000, depending on quality. Mexico alone Get your pet's essentials on your produces more than 5,000 metric tons yearly, according to schedule with Petco.

ending to this one: At long last, Americans of all political stripes realized that the Prohibition experiment was a complete failure. Support for it collapsed, and repeal finally came with the 21st Amendment in 1933. The repeal allowed the creation of thousands of new jobs in a reinvigorated alcohol industry, with

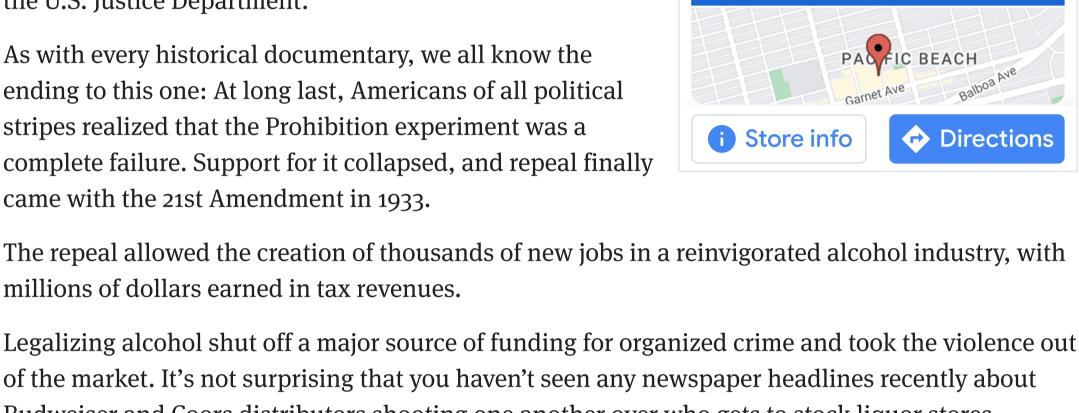
Enforcement Against Prohibition (www.CopsSayLegalizeDrugs.com).

Yet today's drug cartels are even more profitable. It costs

As with every historical documentary, we all know the

millions of dollars earned in tax revenues.

the U.S. Justice Department.



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Budweiser and Coors distributors shooting one another over who gets to stock liquor stores. It took just 13 years for the country to come to its senses. But our drug laws have been on the

books for decades. Nevertheless, I believe we are closer than ever to undoing some of the damage

through current initiatives to legalize marijuana. With so many parallels to the past in evidence, Burns' latest work should touch off a long-overdue discussion about ending our current experiment with the war on drugs.

Norm Stamper, a 34-year police veteran who retired as Seattle's chief of police, is a speaker for Law

Norm Stamper

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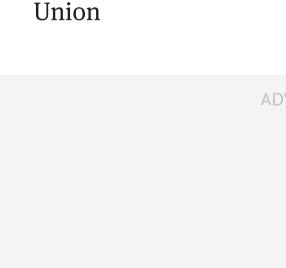
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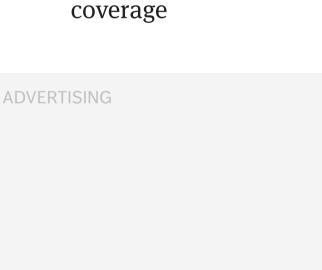
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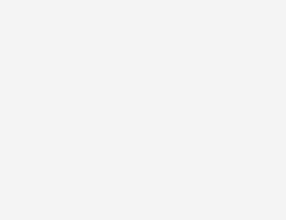
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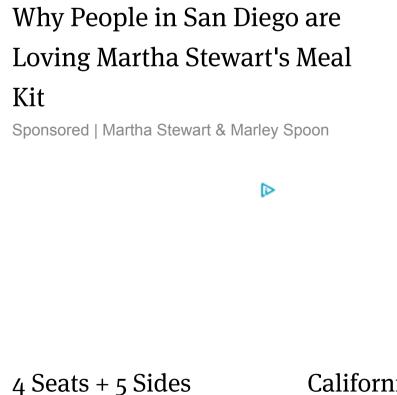
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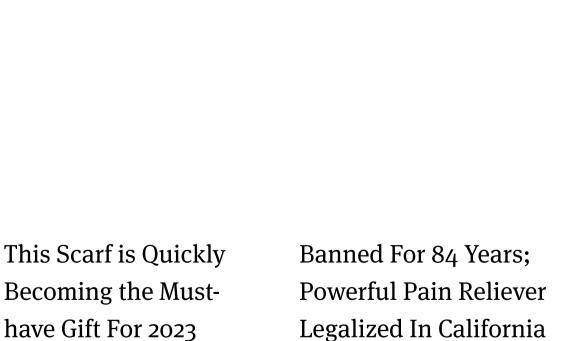
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