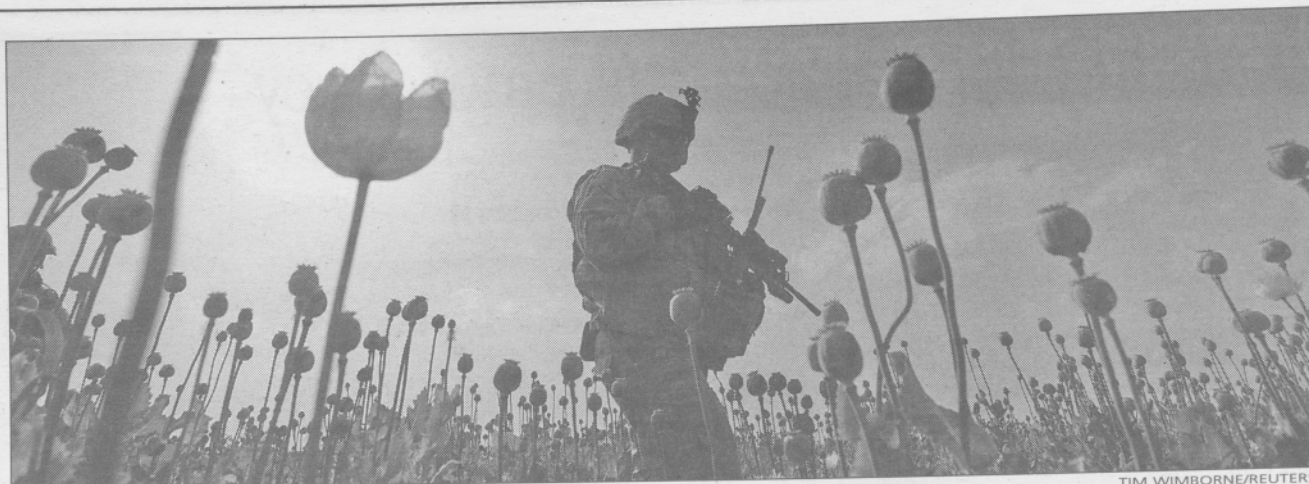




TIM WIMBORNE/REUTERS

A U.S. Army soldier walks through a poppy field during an operation in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, in 2010. The U.S. has "made some haphazard efforts to eradicate poppy, and the Taliban has stepped up to protect farmers," says Inge Fryklund, an expert on Afghan government.

ENFORCER TURNED ADVERSARY

How a former criminal prosecutor became one of Oregon's fiercest drug-legalization advocates

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

As a Chicago prosecutor in the 1980s, Inge Fryklund witnessed drug prohibition play out in the American courtroom. Decades later, as an adviser to U.S. military deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan, she learned how the poppy trade in Afghanistan was complicating U.S. counterterrorism efforts and fueling the insurgency.

Her experiences led her to become one of Oregon's fiercest drug prohibition adversaries — and she's not the only person who's worked in law enforcement to come out in favor of across-the-board legalization.

After returning from an assignment in Afghanistan in 2013, she joined a group called Law Enforcement Against Prohibition and now sits on its board of directors.

LEAP was founded in 2002 by five police officers in Medford, Mass., who, after a lifetime of police work, concluded the war on drugs was causing more harm than good.

Today, LEAP has more than 150,000 members in 127 countries.

"Almost all of us are former law enforcement," Fryklund said. "Former prosecutors, judges, police, probation officers who have seen the war on drugs close up and personal and have concluded that the downsides simply outweigh any positive benefits."

The group is not in favor of drugs but advocates for a system of legalization and regulation that it believes will end drug-related violence, reduce crime rates, keep children safer, reduce addiction and use tax dollars more efficiently.

When Fryklund's not advising U.S. troops overseas as one of the world's foremost experts on Afghan governmental systems, she's advocating for drug legalization in the U.S. Her commentary appears in various online publications such as The Huffington Post, and she travels the state, giving lectures and testifying in favor of legalization. During the campaign for Oregon's Measure 91, she played an integral



PHOTO COURTESY OF INGE FRYKLUND

Inge Fryklund sits on a U.S. tank in Bamian, Afghanistan. Fryklund says that in photos from Ferguson, Mo., police appear more geared up than troops fighting in Afghanistan because the feds give surplus military equipment to local law enforcement authorized to fight the war on drugs.

role and was a featured panelist in a televised debate at Portland State University's Lincoln Hall in October.

Fryklund spoke with Street Roots earlier this month from her home in Bend about illegal poppy production in Afghanistan, the militarization of U.S. police and the disproportionate cycling of minority groups through the U.S. justice system.

Emily Green: Tell me about how you first got involved in the war on drugs. What was your perspective on illegal drug use at that time?

Inge Fryklund: This goes back to around 1984 when I became an assistant state's attorney, which is another term for district attorney, in the office of Cook County (Chicago). I worked night bond

court a lot, and during that time, my thinking was, "Drugs are bad. These people were using drugs, so — so much for them."

When you're in a high-volume courtroom, you keep moving things along as fast as possible. But there were things I noticed that sank in over time. One of them was that the population of people coming through the bond courts, most of them on minor drug cases, was disproportionately black — some Hispanic, almost no white. The statistics are that the profile of drug use across races is very similar. But here, it looked as though the criminal justice system was coming down a lot heavier on the minority population. Second, I saw an awful lot of repeat customers coming through the bond courts. People get arrested, they bond out, serve a few days, back on the streets, and then they show up again next week, or they're in on some minor theft charge. So there was this continual churning. Also, when I would look at the rap sheets, you might get a couple of pages of arrests and some convictions, much of it drug related, and I knew that these people were never going to get a job in the legitimate economy, having that on their records. So part of what we were accomplishing through all of these arrests and convictions was cycling people back into the drug economy; that was really the only career path open to them. And this settled in my memory over time: "Why are we doing this? We're doing the same thing. They're doing the same thing. Nothing changes."

A year or so after that assignment, I was assigned to spend the summer in the domestic violence court. We could have closed the court if it hadn't been for alcohol. That's what was driving most of the family violence. There was very little nexus between drug use and domestic violence.

Chicago's the poster child for what happens when something illegal is in high demand: prohibition of alcohol in the Al

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