

Man who got life for marijuana charge goes free

A man sentenced to life in prison without parole on a marijuana-related charge was freed yesterday from a Missouri prison after being behind bars for two decades - a period in which the nation's attitudes towards pot have steadily softened.

Family, friends, supporters, and reporters flocked to meet Jeff Mizanskey as he stepped out of the Jefferson City Correctional Center into a sunny morning, wearing a new pair of white tennis shoes and a shirt that read 'I'm Jeff & I'm free'. "I spent a third of my life in prison," said Mizanskey, now 62, who was greeted by his infant great-granddaughter. "It's a shame." After a breakfast of steak and eggs with family, Mizanskey said he planned to spend his post-prison life seeking a job and advocating for the legalisation of marijuana. He criticised sentencing for some drug-related crimes as unfair and described his time behind bars as "hell". YEARS OF LOBBYING His release followed years of lobbying by relatives, lawmakers and others, who argued that the sentence was too stiff and that marijuana should not be forbidden. Mizanskey was sentenced in 1996 - the same year California became the first state to legalise marijuana for medical purposes. Medical marijuana is now legal in 23 states, and recreational marijuana has been legalised in Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington state, and Washington, DC. "The reason he's getting out is because the public clearly has changed its opinion about marijuana, and it's just one of many ways in which that has been reflected in recent years," said Mizanskey's attorney, Dan Viets.