

Marijuana

The United States of America can no longer afford to seek out and prosecute non-violent marijuana offenders. It's time to legalize and tax the substance like alcohol and tobacco.

C o m m o n m y t h s a b o u t m a r i j u a n a

Marijuana makes its users lazy, unmotivated, and slow.

Studies show that experienced users of the drug show relatively no change in cognitive ability while under influence of the drug. SAT scores are also similar while under the influence. (1)

Only burnouts and losers smoke marijuana.

Over 83 million Americans have used the drug in their life, and 12 million are regular users (2). Marijuana users include doctors, lawyers, and the last three presidents of the United States.

Marijuana causes cancer.

Multiple studies have shown the link between marijuana and cancer is weak if existent at all. In fact, the active ingredient in marijuana is known to defend against cancer by killing aging cells before they become cancerous (3)

Most Americans are against marijuana legalization.

Recent polls have shown that Americans are closely divided on this issue. A Rasmussen poll shows that 40% say it should be legalized, while 46% disagree. 14% are not sure which course is better. (4)

Legalization of marijuana would increase overall use.

U.S. states that have decriminalized possession of marijuana have not reported an increase in the use of the substance. Those states instead saved money on prosecution and jail expenses. (5)

Marijuana is a "gateway drug"

There has been no statistical proof that using marijuana makes one more likely to use harder drugs.(6)



Marijuana legalization and the economy

"Billions of dollars from the marijuana trade goes up in smoke every year--billions that the state could get by taxing the drug." - Tom Ammiano on his bill to legalize in California.

As the federal and state governments look for every way possible to cut spending and squeeze every penny possible out of their budgets, one solution to the crisis comes to mind. Millions of dollars are currently spent on the war on drugs, prosecuting non-violent people who possess marijuana and trying to stop large organized crime units from bringing the drug into the country.

Legalization would free up that money, as well as provide a new source of tax revenue.

Just as the Great Depression was one of the main reasons why the alcohol prohibition of the 1920s was ended (7), the recent economic turmoil is



The government could save anywhere from 10 to 14 billion dollars annually (9) by legalizing, taxing, and regulating marijuana.

bringing people to the debate of whether or not the money spent on keeping marijuana illegal is worth it. Just as prohibition didn't stop people from drinking alcohol, marijuana being illegal doesn't stop people from using it. Instead, it fills up our prison beds and uses our resources for reasons that aren't beneficial to the majority of Americans. These funds should be used to educate people about safe and responsible marijuana use, not to lock them up for smoking a joint.

There's money in the green stuff.

A study released in 2006 concluded that marijuana is the number one cash crop produced in the United States of America (8). Ahead of even corn, the plant has an enormous moneymaking potential, and the ability to grow in a large variety of environments all across the United States.

"The fact that marijuana is America's No. 1 cash crop after more than three decades of governmental eradication efforts is the clearest illustration that our present marijuana laws are a complete failure. Our nation's laws guarantee that 100 percent of the proceeds from marijuana sales go to unregulated criminals rather than to legitimate businesses that pay taxes to support schools, police and roads." - Rob Kampia, Executive Director of the Marijuana Policy Project.

A 2005 analysis by Harvard professor Dr. Jeffrey Miron estimates that the legalization of marijuana would save the the government \$7.7 billion in law enforcement costs and could generate as much as \$6.2 billion annually if marijuana were taxed in the same way as alcohol or tobacco. (9) That's money that the government desperately needs right now. In addition, a marijuana industry could create thousands of jobs.

Other benefits of legalization

"Penalties against drug use should not be more damaging to an individual than the use of the drug itself. Nowhere is this more clear than in the laws against the possession of marijuana in private for personal use." - President Jimmy Carter



killed over 6,000 people since the beginning of 2008, including 1,000 or more in January and February of 2009 (10). This violence is fueled by our drug policies and officials say that it's threatening to cross the border into the United States.

Reduction of cartel and gang-related violence

The country of Mexico is currently at war with itself. Drug cartels are infiltrating high levels of government and police officers and other keepers of the peace are being killed every day to ensure drug cartels can get their product across the border. Drug lords and their soldiers are blamed for having

Placing more focus on responsible use

While information about drinking responsibly is freely available to anyone who looks for it, marijuana users don't have nearly as many resources. Legalization of marijuana could create resources for people to go to to receive unbiased information about the drug, its effects, and information

about responsible use. Much like alcohol, more programs could be developed to help people who may be suffering from an addiction, or just need help knowing how much weed is too much.

Freeing up police resources to deal with more serious crimes

600,000 people are currently in jail for marijuana offenses at a cost of \$1.2 billion per year to taxpayers (11). Almost 90 percent of these arrests are for marijuana possession only. If Police weren't arresting nonviolent marijuana smokers, they could be spending more time on people who are a threat to others. A New Mexico state-

commissioned drug policy advocacy group determined that marijuana decriminalization "will result in greater availability of resources to respond to more serious crimes without any increased risks to public safety." (12)

Increased availability of hemp fiber

Hemp is a distinct variety of the cannabis plant that contains less than one percent of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana. Popular Mechanics magazine stated it had the "potential to be manufactured into more than 25,000 environmentally friendly products." (13) Parts of the plant can be used to

make textiles, paper, rope, clothes, food, plastic, and many other products. Hemp produces a larger yield per acre than cotton, and does not require as many pesticides. Unfortunately, farmers in the US are legally forbidden to grow this plant, because it is essentially marijuana.



Rope made from hemp

An example of responsible legalization



If marijuana were made legal, it would obviously have to be given a serious amount of thought and planning before anything could actually take effect. An example of responsible limitations put on the substance could go something like this:

Licensing

Much like the medical marijuana states already have in place, marijuana legalization would require various types of licenses. Retailers would need to have one to sell cannabis, and personal users would need one to buy it and grow it. This could ensure that marijuana is coming from tax-paying businesses and that the people who consume it are also paying taxes.

Penalties

There should also be consequences for irresponsible marijuana use. Police could focus more on arresting people who are driving while stoned, which some say has similar dangers to driving while intoxicated by alcohol. Marijuana use should also have an age restriction similar to that of tobacco, and penalties for young people who do not follow that restriction.

Education and Research

With the government's relative lock down of marijuana research in the United States, it's sometimes hard to find conclusive studies. Legalization could motivate thousands of scientists to do accurate research and inform the public of the true risks, benefits, and health effects of consuming marijuana.

How to get involved

Contact your representatives

These people were elected for a reason - to represent you in the scary world of big government. California already has a legalization bill on the table, so if you live there contact your state congressperson and recommend that they vote for the bill!

Volunteer!

You can help change marijuana policy by volunteering as well. Google search for opportunities in your area and spend a day making phone calls or handing out and mailing flyers encouraging people to rethink their standpoint on the legalization issue. Much of the population is misinformed on the effects of marijuana - educate them!

Contact us

We are the Washington Marijuana Legalization Front, an organization dedicated to changing marijuana policy in Washington state and the rest of the country.

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