

Marijuana Legalization Will Reduce Crime, Free Up Police Resources

What do Alaska, Alabama, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia have in common? Their biggest cash crop—generating far more revenue than wine in the Napa Valley, tobacco in North Carolina, or pineapples in Hawaii—is marijuana. When a product gains that kind of economic foothold it's time to take stock.

Not only is cannabis the biggest cash crop in those 12 states, it's in the top three in 30 states, the top five in 39. In fact, marijuana is the greatest revenue producer of all agricultural products grown in the U.S. With production values of roughly \$36 billion annually, the cultivation of marijuana is permanently entrenched within and integrally connected to the U.S. economy.

And it's illegal.

Irony And Ineffectiveness

Which guarantees obscene, untaxed profits and full employment for demonstrably evil and greedy people; criminal records attached to the lives of tens of millions of Americans; fractured families; inflated risks for cops; widespread discrimination against young, poor, and black and brown people; exploitation and despoilment of thousands of acres of national park lands; open-air drug markets and deflated property values; public corruption; a brutal and bloody war raging in Mexico, now spilling over into the U.S.; abridgement of our civil liberties; and the squandering of tens of billions of taxpayer dollars.

And for what? Pot is more readily available at lower prices and higher levels of potency than ever before. Throughout my 34-year career in law enforcement, I bore witness to these and other unanticipated consequences of the drug war, none more wrenching than the sudden, violent deaths of fellow police officers or innocent citizens caught in the crosshairs of traffickers bent on protecting or expanding their markets and profits.

Prohibition, as we learned with alcohol in the 1920s, not only does not work, but gives rise to staggering rates of death, disease, crime and addiction. In fact, it guarantees them.

I don't mean to be unkind, but marijuana prohibitionists are beginning to embarrass themselves. Their intentions are laudable; their main argument takes a distinctly moral slant: What message would relaxation of marijuana laws send our children? Don't kids have it tough enough today without being subjected to the legitimization of yet another mind-altering drug?

Social Consequences

What these prohibitionists fail to grasp, however, is that the current ban on adult use does not

shield kids from pot. On the contrary, it produces precisely the opposite effect. It's easier for a 14-year-old to score a nickel or dime bag of illegal pot than a six-pack of Bud or a pint of Southern Comfort. Unlike government-regulated liquor stores, drug dealers do not card kids; their only interest is the hand-to-hand sale behind the high school gym. And, of course, the cultivation of long-term, loyal customers.

No responsible adult encourages or condones adolescent drug use, much less furnishes pot to a kid. While the evidence of marijuana's relative safety is substantial (there has never been a single overdose death attributed to the drug), adolescence is a critical time of brain development and emotional maturation. There is good cause to promote, and fund, sound measures against the harmful developmental consequences of teenage drug use—including, it must be stressed, the much riskier drug, alcohol.

We're undermining our kids' health, and subverting the will of freedom-valuing adults, by leaving the commerce of this multibillion-dollar industry in the monopolized hands of ruthless drug cartels and street traffickers. Where's the morality in that?

Across the country, local communities are recognizing this ugly reality. California voters will be given a chance in November to make their state the first to "regulate, control, and tax cannabis." Not only will the new law (56 percent of Californians support it) strike a blow for drug-law sanity, it will net the economically teetering state, according to the Board of Equalization, an estimated \$1.3 billion in new revenue.

Law Enforcement Impact

It will also free that state's police officers to concentrate on crimes that inflict the deepest fear, pain and loss: burglaries, robberies, sexual assaults, domestic violence, stalking, child abuse, workplace and school shootings, drunk driving.

It's a myth that cops, supposedly reflecting the will of an increasingly enlightened society, are no longer enforcing pot laws, or doing so only half-heartedly. In fact, adult arrest rates for marijuana offenses have gone through the roof, with new records being set several times in the recent past. Last year, police arrested 847,864 persons for marijuana violations, almost 90 percent of them for possession only.

With 100 million Americans having used pot at least once—including the president, his two immediate predecessors, the mayor of New York and countless other luminaries from all walks of life—and with an estimated 25 million regular users, marijuana consumption is a deeply ingrained pattern of American culture.

It's high time we recognize the institutionalized hypocrisy of our marijuana laws and repeal this deadly, costly prohibition.