Position Paper, Advocates vs Critics Arguments on Legalizing Marijuana at Federal Level

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Abstract

Supporters and critics make numerous claims about federal-level marijuana legalization. Advocates suggest that legalization reduces crime, raises tax revenue, lowers criminal justice expenditures, improves public health, increases traffic safety, and stimulates the economy. Racially disparate marijuana enforcement practices are pervasive and have been for a long time and legalizing marijuana would aid in redressing the imbalance. Critics argue that legalization spurs marijuana and other drug or alcohol use, increases crime, is eco-unfriendly, diminishes traffic safety, harms public health, and lowers teen educational achievement.

Keywords: Legalization, federal, racial, disparate, marijuana, public health, child safety, eco-unfriendly, harms, teen, traffic

Advocate's Argument

Legalizing recreational marijuana results in helpful regulation of a safe drug, without increasing potential negative consequences. People who purchase marijuana on the street have no way of knowing whether it has been exposed to pesticides, mildew, fungus, or other dangerous materials. Once marijuana is legalized, the government can impose rules and lab testing to make sure that marijuana is safe. For instance, Washington law mandates consumer protections such as quality control, THC concentration labeling, and health warnings. With marijuana being legalized, the government could impose age restrictions on purchasers and licenses and oversee the whole marijuana supply chain, including farmers, distributors, retailers, and testing facilities. Just two years after adult use of marijuana became legal in Colorado, youths between the ages of 12 and 17 reported a nearly 12% decrease in use, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Additionally, states that authorized medical marijuana had an average reduction in road fatalities of 11%. Professor of Economics Benjamin Hansen of the University of Oregon in Eugene examined road fatalities following the legalization of medical marijuana and came to the conclusion that "public safety doesn't decline with more availability to marijuana, rather it increases." In actuality, marijuana is less dangerous than previously legal substances like alcohol and tobacco. It is well known that using tobacco and alcohol can damage the liver and cause cancer. The CDC estimates that 88,000 people die in the United States each year as a result of excessive alcohol use, with six people dying every day from alcohol poisoning. There are no known instances of marijuana overdose deaths.

Legalizing recreational marijuana would end the costly, and frequently racist, enforcement of marijuana laws and debilitate the illegal marijuana market. The annual cost of arrests for marijuana possession in the United States ranges from $1.19 billion to $6.03 billion.

These expenses cover such as law enforcement, court, legal, and correctional charges. According to Harvard economist Jeffrey Miron, the annual savings from legalizing marijuana would range from $7.7 billion to $13.7 billion. Police personnel should concentrate on serious offenses like rape, assault, and homicide instead of making marijuana arrests. Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) co-founder and former Michigan police investigator Howard Wooldridge remarked, "Marijuana prohibition is a terrible waste of excellent police time. A black person in the United States is 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession on average than a white person, despite the fact that both groups use the drug at roughly the same rates. Black individuals are 8.3 times more likely than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession in Iowa, the state with the biggest inequality. Convictions for marijuana possession can affect a person's eligibility for public housing, financial help for education, loans, and employment. Racially disparate marijuana enforcement practices are pervasive and have been for a long time, according to Margaret Dooley-Sammuli, director of criminal justice and drug policy at the ACLU of California. Legalizing marijuana would aid in redressing the imbalance. Data from the U.S. Border Patrol reveals that marijuana seizures have dropped by millions of pounds and are at their lowest levels in more than a decade, showing that the demand for marijuana brought in illegally from Mexico is declining due to legal domestic production. " Finally, research indicates that because of greater security and more people passing through the region, medicinal marijuana stores reduced crime in the neighborhoods around them.

Legalizing recreational marijuana boosts the economy by creating new tax revenue and jobs. While forecasts from 2017 indicated that the adult-use and medicinal marijuana markets in the United States may generate more than $24 billion in sales by 2025, the business actually generated $24.6 billion in sales in 2021, outpacing the markets for milk, orange juice, and energy

drinks. Cannabis generates three times as much tax money in Colorado as alcohol does. 2016, the legal marijuana market contributed $7.2 billion to the economy and collected millions of dollars in federal taxes. Legalizing marijuana generates jobs in addition to tax income. According to the Leafly Jobs Report, the legal marijuana business had produced 428,059 new jobs in the United States as of January 2022, including 107,000 in 2021 alone. The cannabis business in the US "is predicted to provide approximately 300,000 employment by 2020 and increase to $24 billion by 2025," according to U.S. Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR). Additionally, all tax money collected in states where marijuana use is legal goes toward housing initiatives, anti-bullying campaigns, youth mentorship, and public school grants in addition to paying the police, drug rehab centers, mental health clinics, and housing programs.

Most Americans agree recreational marijuana should be legal. According to Gallup, "the change in public perceptions over the past 50 years has matched the liberalization of public sentiments about gay rights and the campaign for same-sex marriage." Historically, Democrats (73%) have been more inclined to support legalization, although 45% of Republicans today support it as a whole. However, the legalization of recreational use is supported by 62% of younger Republicans (18 to 29).

Critic’s Argument

Legalizing recreational marijuana comes with serious societal costs. Societal expenses of marijuana usage include paying for additional emergency room visits, medical care, and addiction treatment for the uninsured; more victims of drugged driving accidents; and workplace accidents. Legalizing marijuana will add another dangerous chemical to our society, one whose costs outweigh its income. After Colorado's first retail marijuana outlets opened, hospitalizations and emergency room (ER) visits connected to marijuana increased by 200% and nearly 30%,

respectively. As a result, after legalization, the number of incidents of poison control marijuana exposure for children under the age of nine in Colorado more than doubled. According to a survey published in the Journal of Drug Issues, 68% of marijuana users in the US now report using the drug daily or nearly daily, up significantly from 2002. After Colorado legalized marijuana, the number of fatal traffic accidents involving marijuana increased by 62%. According to the Highway Loss Data Institute, collision claims jumped 6% in Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington compared to jurisdictions where marijuana is not legal, indicating that these states have a higher crash risk than other states. The year following Colorado's legalization, the number of workplace incidents involving employees under the influence of marijuana rose from 6% to 20%. The vice head of the Labor and Employment Group at the law firm Ice Miller, Paul L. Bittner, stated, "Employers' biggest worry is potential responsibility if there is an accident and someone is maimed or killed." In addition to productivity loss, this is a major liability risk.

Legalizing recreational marijuana dramatically increases the growth of plants, which is bad for the environment. Water pollution and diversion are caused by the increased water demand, which could harm the ecosystem. Cannabis plants, meanwhile, have the capacity to both absorb and store heavy metals. Additionally, growing marijuana destroys habitats, diverts rivers, and causes deforestation. In the summer, taking water directly from rivers and streams to grow marijuana limits the amount of water available for agriculture and endangers wildlife species, according to Rosamond Naylor, Senior Fellow at the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not approved any pesticides for use on the plant because marijuana is still illegal at the federal level. Some growers have used "banned pesticides and blood thinners/rat poisons against crop-eating mammals" and

have failed to properly dispose of chemicals and debris as a result of the absence of direction. In addition to placing a significant load on an already fragile electrical grid, the energy required for marijuana cultivation emits greenhouse gases equivalent to that produced annually by 3.3 million cars.

Legalizing recreational marijuana creates a “Big Marijuana” industry while boosting illegal marijuana sales and use. Big Marijuana is already employing strategies akin to those used by Big Tobacco, which promoted cigarettes with kid-friendly advertisements featuring the Joe Camel cartoon figure. Every state where marijuana is legal has a greater rate of 12- to 17-year-old users than the rest of the country. Furthermore, because rates charged by state-licensed dealers can be easily undercut by cartels, the development of a commercialized, legal industry has also increased the chances for the criminal market. The legalization of marijuana in Colorado corresponded with a dramatic surge in marijuana-related charges brought under the state's Organized Crime Control Act, signaling an increase in organized crime.

Health experts do not believe recreational marijuana should be legal. According to research, smoking one joint of marijuana is just as bad for your lungs as smoking five cigarettes. In comparison to tobacco, marijuana may include three times as much tar and five times as much carbon monoxide. In the hours following cannabis use, there is an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes. Additionally, vaping is risky and "likely increases ingestion of toxic ammonia, known to cause neurobehavioral impairment." Inhaling ammonia when vaping can cause lung inflammation, effects on the nervous system, and asthma attacks. The American Medical Association, the American Society of Addiction Medicine, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the American Academy of Pediatrics are a few of the public health organizations that are opposed to legalizing marijuana for recreational use.

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