Research paper on the case for marijuana legalization

Literature, Russian Literature

The legalization of marijuana has been a very controversial case for decades, with strong arguments on either side. For most of the 20th century and beyond, it has been illegal in the United States and other countries, turning its sale and usage into a vast underground market that has gone untapped by any professional outlet. Some say that it is a harmful, addictive drug that leads to health detriments down the line for those who use it. However, there are others who claim that it is perfectly safe, not addictive, and could be an incredible source of income for a legitimate economy. The legalization of marijuana has the potential to create an incredible revenue stream of a highly demanded product that is safe to use. In this argumentative essay, the pros and cons of marijuana legalization will be explored and discussed. First, marijuana has not been shown or verified to have any detrimental effects on the human body. Also, marijuana has a substantial history of medical and clinical applications for people with certain conditions. Medical marijuana is often used as an anesthetic in a large number of countries all around the world (Koch, 2006). Glaucoma is another condition in which medical marijuana is distributed to patients, as it helps alleviate the symptoms and increase comfort in the person suffering, including lowering eye pressure (Southall, 2010). Fifteen states, as well as the District of Columbia, currently allow medical marijuana to be sold and prescribed to its citizens to this day (New York Times, 2011). Ostensibly, medical marijuana's purpose is to relieve pain, nausea, and loss of appetite in those patients who have debilitating conditions, such as cancer or AIDS. However, there has been no true scientific evidence to prove that marijuana truly relieves these symptoms or whether it provides a placebo effect (Bensinger & Dixie, 2002).

Marijuana, if legalized, could bring in substantial tax revenue for state and federal governments, a blessing in today's economically charged climate. If the recently downturned Proposition 19 had passed in California, nearly $1. 4 billion in tax revenue would have been earned by the state (New York Times, 2011). This could have been used for prison and law enforcement budget enhancements, which is very important in a time when many police departments are understaffed, and prisons are overcrowded. There is a substantial demand for marijuana, mostly due to its illegal nature; the tapping of this untouched market is rife with possibility, as the demand would remain, but government could tax the purchase of marijuana purchasing, particularly for medical purposes. However, it would take a substantial amount of effort to create a feasible system for marijuana regulation. As marijuana is already closely tied to the existing criminal and gang culture, it would be impossible to remove its distribution from instances of crime (Bensinger & Dixie, 2002). As illegal distribution of marijuana would continue unabated regardless of its legal status, legalizing it would not prevent instances of drug-related crime.

The legalization of marijuana would also lessen the burden of an increasingly taxed and exhausted criminal justice system. Currently, the prison system is extremely flawed, creating a cycle of repeat offenders due to a prison culture that demands that people become tougher than they may have been before in order to survive, no matter what offense got them in prison in the first place (Nadelmann, 2004). Prisons are also overcrowded due to unnecessarily tough sentences on subjectively minor crimes such as pot possession, in order for judges and political officials to seem " tough on crime."

These convicted felons, who are guilty of nothing more than seeking out the use of marijuana and may not have been involved in other criminal affairs, are then introduced into the prison system. Threats of violence and rape are common in many federal prisons, and as a result inmates have to resort to violent measures in order to make it through in one piece. This turns ordinarily innocent people into violent criminals through the prison system itself, leaving them wholly incapable of dealing with the outside world by the time they get out. Their ability to get jobs, most importantly, would be affected due to their status as an ex-convict (Nadelmann, 2004). The legalization of marijuana would also allow those who would otherwise not enter a life of crime to avoid it altogether; this frees them up to be productive members of society, and it saves the taxpayer money for preventing another prisoner that must be housed in already overcrowded prisons. The prison system is also structured in such a way that rehabilitation and reintegration into society is extremely difficult. This can happen to even those who are only guilty of marijuana possession; the prison experience is often tied to a life of violence behind bars, which is carried back into civilian life, making them far less suitable for integration into society than they were before. This could help budget deficits immensely; Berkeley's major, Tom Bates, requested a tax increase on marijuana dispensaries that would add a substantial amount of revenue to the city budget, closing a $16. 2 million gap in funding that is in desperate need of filling (Palmeri and Marois, 2010). Other cities are experiencing similar benefits by taxing its medical marijuana; Denver generates approximately $2 million a year from marijuana taxes on its 256 dispensaries, and California is seeking to increase

taxes in order to have the same results in its large medical marijuana market.

There are many opponents to marijuana legalization, their reasoning being primarily health-based. First, they claim that marijuana is addictive, and that it can also act as a gateway drug to harder drugs, such as cocaine or heroin. It is implied that marijuana usage blocks neurons and replaces neurotransmitter chemicals, potentially causing permanent brain damage (Koch, 2006). Also, opponents state that marijuana use is not medically sound, and that there are no real measurable results found in people who take it to address medical conditions (Dixie and Bensinger, 2010). Another opponent believes that the case for medical marijuana is merely a smokescreen for allowing recreational use to run rampant, and to make an easier case for the total legalization of the drug. They claim that gang use and crime would increase as a result of the legalization of marijuana, and that youth would abuse it to a debilitating degree (Nadelmann, 2004). As the years progress, it is argued that there has been a substantial change in the addictive nature of marijuana; higher levels of THC in current marijuana product is making the substance much more likely to cause dependence. This makes it even more dangerous to legalize the drug, if these statistics are true.

There are even concerns among many pro-marijuana advocates that legalization would drive up prices, despite their desires for greater legitimacy for cannabis – the loss of romanticism related to pot smoking might make the number of people who smoke decrease if it is legalized (Palmeri and Marois, 2010). The amount of money that could be received from taxing

marijuana usage is difficult to track, and would not be worth the social and economic costs of legalizing marijuana, according to critics. Also, the positive health effects that marijuana provides people from a medical context (anesthesia and the like) are not substantial enough to make a huge difference in the lives of patients, it is argued; all of these perspectives make for a particularly difficult transition from marijuana being an illegal drug to a legal one.

These opinions could not be further from the truth. Experiments performed on the use of marijuana have found only positive results, and in some cases has helped people immensely with a variety of symptoms, including nausea from cancer treatments (Koch, 2006). Also, the demand for marijuana is much greater than anticipated by many; nearly 46% of people in a 2010 Gallup poll stated that they would like marijuana to be legal. In a sample of 20 respondents, when asked about their opinion on marijuana legalization, 40% said they would prefer legalization, while 60% desired varying degrees of restriction in its legality. According to this study, males are far more likely to pull for marijuana legalization than women, regardless of actual experience with the drug.

With this substantial support for this product becoming legal, it is difficult to believe that a relatively safe product would not be provided to the demanding customer. The possibilities for marketing and distribution are immense, and have the potential to create incredible revenue streams for the state government, not to mention dispensaries and businesses who are allowed to sell it. What's more, in the chance that marijuana were to cause adverse side effects, government regulation of medical marijuana via its

legalization would substantially increase quality control to the point where a patient can rely on the cannabis they get from their dispensary far more than any illegal dealer. Also, people who are prescribed medical marijuana in a legal state can be given protections against being fired from companies which have no-drug policies (Southall, 2010). This would also diminish crime levels across the board, as people would be much more willing to go through legal channels to get their marijuana, as opposed to those who would otherwise not turn to a life of crime doing so because they just want to be able to smoke marijuana. It could become a bumper crop, with many researchers looking at a large drug tourism boom for any states that legalize marijuana, turning it into a larger-than-life industry that cannot be ignored. The sheer amount of money a state could benefit from in the event of marijuana legalization is staggering. However, this would also dramatically increase crime rates, as more legal marijuana becoming available would allow more sources for criminal marijuana activity to occur. What's more, there is the possibility that the criminal drug trade would simply move on to harder drugs, and spend more resources to create a higher illicit drug trade in drugs like cocaine and heroin.

In order to fully legalize marijuana for medicinal purposes, a number of steps have to be taken. First, legislators must be contacted and informed of the benefits to marijuana legalization for the state, on both a health and fiscal level. Secondly, the overall attitude regarding marijuana must be altered – in order to be accepted on a substantial level, it must cease to be considered the dangerous drug of myth, but a resource to use in times of pain and discomfort. In the case of people with terminal cancers and other conditions,

it would help them have a way to relieve their discomfort that does not cause detrimental side effects. Its legalization would also remove legal gray areas where a state would have legal marijuana, but the federal government would still prosecute against those who possessed it, regardless of state law permitting it.

The debate regarding marijuana legalization is an impassioned and multifaceted one; both sides carry their own unique points, which are backed by logic and some degree of research. However, when the evidence is examined fully, and the advantages and disadvantages are weighed, the clear frontrunner is the case for legalization of marijuana. Any perceived negative health effects are so inconsequential as to be unimportant, and the sheer amount of revenue that could be earned from taxed, legal marijuana is sufficient to allow its legalization. Also, the positive health effects that marijuana provides people from a medical context (anesthesia and the like) are far too widespread to be ignored. With this in mind, legalizing medical marijuana would be a prudent, profitable and prescient choice.

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