



Prohibition Arguments Cannalyzed: On Mexico Smuggling

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Happy 2019, everyone! Let's kick off the New Year with another installment of our series "Prohibition Arguments, Cannalyzed," in which we examine arguments used by those who are anti-cannabis. This week, a favorite often cited by those who sport MAGA hats.

Argument: "If you legalize cannabis, it just helps the criminal gangs like MIA smuggle even more cannabis into the country. It's another reason we need that wall!"

Perhaps you mean the criminal gang *MS-13*, and not the petite English performer *MIA* whose biggest crime was flipping off the audience at the Super Bowl in 2012.

But, no, that's incorrect, and always has been an argument based on faulty logic. Why would someone smuggle in a product, especially one of far lesser quality that has had zero testing of pesticides, molds and purity into a market that now has that same tested product in abundance? Especially since cannabis is an agricultural product that's better when fresh, and handled with greater care than a smuggled one would ever be? That's akin to passing up freshly baked scones from your neighborhood bakery because you have a guy who can get you potentially moldy eight-month-old Little Debbie's, flattened between two weighted pallets.

The Cato Institute, a public policy research institute, thought this sounded like a falsehood, because it is, and did some analysis which determined that no, cannabis legalization actually *drastically reduces* the amount of cannabis being smuggled into the U.S.

For context for any youngsters reading, our wonderful neighbors in Mexico were once the main provider of cannabis to the U.S. From a policy analysis by David Bier, published in December by the Cato Institute: "The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime estimated that drug smugglers imported two-thirds of all marijuana consumed in the United States. A 2010 study estimated that Mexican marijuana alone accounted for 40 to 67 percent of all U.S. consumption." Our cannabis consumption rates are some of the highest in the world. In 2016, nearly 36 million of us partook, and the cannabis market was valued at just over \$56 billion.

Since 2014, when states began implementing recreational cannabis programs, imports have fallen rapidly and in great numbers. How much so? Per the Cato report, "Following the full legalization of marijuana sales in six states beginning with Colorado and Washington in fiscal year (FY) 2014, the rate of seizures (of cannabis) by Border Patrol declined 78 percent, from 114 pounds per agent in FY 2013 to 25 pounds per agent in FY 2018. Total marijuana seizures by all

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agencies declined by nearly 2 million pounds from FY 2013 to FY 2017."

Greater nationwide access to domestically produced cannabis can be linked to the reduction of imports. Currently, one in six of us live in states with a recreational cannabis program. Soon, Michigan, Massachusetts and Maine will implement their rec programs, bringing that number to nearly one in four.

All of this isn't helping the bottom line of producers of Mexican cannabis, with prices falling between 50 and 70 percent after U.S. legalization programs began.

Now, about that "great wall" we all so "desperately need," which is going to further reduce all the cannabis which is no longer being smuggled into the U.S.? Actually, no. That's not real. Again, from the Cato report:

"Given these trends, a border wall or more Border Patrol agents to stop drugs between ports of entry makes little sense. From FY 2003 to FY 2009, Border Patrol doubled its workforce and constructed hundreds of miles of fences, yet this increased enforcement did not reduce marijuana smuggling. Each agent annually seized virtually the same quantity of marijuana through 2013, indicating roughly the same overall inflow of the illegal substance. State marijuana legalization starting in 2014 did more to reduce marijuana smuggling than the doubling of Border Patrol agents or the construction of hundreds of miles of border fencing did from 2003 to 2009."

Establishing nationwide legalized recreational cannabis programs would, in theory, eliminate illegal cannabis imports, which would allow the border patrol to focus its efforts on drugs like fentanyl, methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin—all drugs that anyone, regardless of political affiliation, can agree are a greater threat to our citizens than cannabis.