

THE DAILY ORANGE

Jackson: Conservatives would benefit from marijuana legalization

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Although many see the legalization of marijuana as a liberal goal, it is very much a conservative venture.

By legalizing the drug, it would decrease government spending, create jobs and shrink the size of government.

While I personally don't partake in blazegreen, I do believe that we as a party need to change our mindset on the drug.

For one, we need to stop promoting this idea that weed is a gateway drug. Even if it were, legalization wouldn't set a precedent for harder drugs. This only supports the war on drugs which wastes billions of dollars and thousands of lives in an incredibly violent war whose only victims are essentially poor people. This war on drugs makes the cartels more violent, and more profitable to boot. Legalize this drug, and you harm the cartels and save the government money.

Going into this, marijuana legalization would shrink our government, something many conservatives would enjoy. Our prison system — the largest in the world — is full of people who are in jail for minor drug offenses. In fact, a whopping 48 percent of all people in prison are in prison for drug crimes, according to a 2011 study done by the Department of Justice Statistic.

The same department discovered in 2006 that one out of eight inmates in federal prison is behind bars for marijuana. This prison system that we have is also expensive; the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, estimated in 2010 that the government would save roughly \$41.3 billion a year if drugs were legalized. This is a waste of taxpayer money — punishing a person for trying to smoke something that is healthier than alcohol or cigarettes. Legalize marijuana and save us money.

Legalizing the drug could also make us money. Weed is profitable, it makes money and creates jobs. In the same study, the Cato Institute predicted that legalization could generate as much as \$8.7 billion in revenue. On February 20, The New York Times reported that weed generates about \$100 million in new income for Colorado, a state that legalized recreational use of marijuana on Jan. 1.

While this isn't much at the surface, remember that this is a new industry and this number will only go up in the future. The New York Times also reported that weed in Colorado could become a billion dollar industry soon, which would certainly create new taxable revenue and jobs, something both the government and citizens of Colorado can enjoy.

It is too expensive to try and keep marijuana illegal. Legalization would fall under the conservative values of small government, lower taxes, entrepreneurship and job creation. We lose a billion dollars by keeping it illegal and we could make billions by legalizing it.

Weed legalization has many arguments behind it. It benefits the government as well as everyone else; it's more expensive to keep it illegal than it is to simply legalize it. Weed legalization may not be a main issue for many up-and-coming presidential nominees from the right but it is an issue that will only become more popular as the millennial generation starts to take the reins of power. Legalizing weed is a great way to lock in this future vote and create a safer, freer and potentially richer United States.