



California stands to benefit from legalizing weed

By: Jaime Carrillo - September 17, 2013

The U.S. Department of Justice ruled Aug. 29 that it would not interfere with recent laws in Washington and Colorado that would allow for the sale and taxation of recreational pot.

Now is the time for California to jump on the “legalize it” bandwagon.

The federal government infringing on states’ rights has been an issue since the Civil War. Like then, the issue on the table is pretty cut and dry – only this time the feds are backing the wrong side.

Legalizing pot is one of those arguments we’re still having for some reason or another.

Back in 2009, a recently elected President Barack Obama laughed off the prospect of legalizing, regulating and taxing pot in America during a live Youtube town hall event from the White House.

There must be something in the White House’s water that makes presidents hate pot and lose hindsight. After all, the last three U.S. presidents all smoked pot at least once in their life. I’m willing to bet it was more than once.

According to a 2013 Pew Research Center poll, 52 percent of Americans polled were in favor of outright legalizing marijuana, while 72 percent believe enforcing laws are becoming too costly. And don’t kid yourself; keeping these laws on the books is incredibly costly.

Incarcerating pot law offenders is costing U.S. taxpayers \$1 billion a year, according to the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Statistics. The following statistic ignores the amount of revenue that could be brought into the equation which a Cato Institute study estimates would generate up to \$8.7 billion in federal and state taxes a year.

In a time when local, state and even our federal government are pressed for cash, legalizing and taxing pot sounds like a godsend.

Washington is expected to raise as much as \$1.9 billion according to a Washington Fiscal Impact Statement. Colorado is already projecting a \$1.1 billion budget surplus for the fiscal year 2013, according to the June 20 estimate by the Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting.

In a state like California where the word “budget shortfall” is nearly as ubiquitous as “wine country” and “Governator,” not taxing something that is being sold anyway is a massive missed opportunity.

There’s at least one group who stands to lose if pot becomes legal in California. Last time around in 2010, California voters struck down Prop. 19, which would have allowed local county governments to allow the sale and regulation of pot.

The California Beer and Beverage Distributors donated \$10,000 to the anti-pot cause. Sounds like the California beer consortium is afraid of any sort of competition.

Like presidents and their pot habits, hindsight is always 20/20.

Prohibition didn’t work so we did away with it. Making booze illegal made distribution a highly lucrative business for criminals, it cost the federal government billions to enforce the laws, and it prevented the federal government from tapping a much needed income source, especially on the brink of a terrible economic time, in this case, the 1920s.

If the social aspects don’t finally put a nail in the coffin of pot prohibition, the untapped tax dollars to a nation in debt will.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder told Congress in March that formal guidelines for how the states will enact these new laws would be laid out soon. Still, it seems the federal government is going to have a laissez-faire approach to state pot laws for the time being.

Neill Franklin, executive director of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (a group of law enforcement men and women against the war on drugs) was one of many pro-pot advocates who applauded the recent U.S. Justice Department decision.

“The message to the people of the other 48 states, to all who value personal freedom and responsible regulation, is clear: Seize the day,” said Franklin.

I couldn’t agree more.