Sorry, MAGA Hats—Legal Weeds Means Less Illegal Imports

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It's gearing up to be a banner year for legalized weed, but that doesn't mean we can ease up on fighting prohibitionists. That means it's time for another installment of our series "Prohibition Arguments, Cannalyzed™"—in which we dissect stupid anti-cannabis arguments by using words and common sense. Here's a favorite one cited by those who sport MAGA hats.

ARGUMENT: "If you legalize cannabis, it just helps criminal gangs like MS-13 smuggle even more cannabis into the country. It's another reason we need that wall!"

Nope. Legal weed won't mean more smuggling from the Southern border. That's always been an argument based on faulty logic. Why would someone smuggle in a product—especially one of far lesser quality that hasn't been tested for pesticides, mold, or purity—into a market that now has that same tested product in abundance? Especially since cannabis is an agricultural product that is best when fresh, and, when legal, is handled with greater care than a smuggled one could 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 Debbies that were flattened between two heavy pallets.

The Cato Institute thought this sounded like a falsehood, too, and they did some analysis that determined no, cannabis legalization actually *drastically reduces* the amount of cannabis being smuggled into the US.

Some context: It used to be that our wonderful neighbors in Mexico were the main providers of cannabis to the US. **From the Cato report**: "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 US consumption." And 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. Per the Cato report, the amount of cannabis seized by border patrol declined 78 percent from 2013 to 2018. And the total amount of cannabis seized by the entire Department of Homeland Security declined almost by 2 million pounds across roughly that same time frame.

In other words, the reduction of imports is directly attributed to greater nationwide access to domestically produced cannabis. Currently, one in six of Americans live in a state with a recreational cannabis program. Soon, Michigan, Massachusetts, and Maine will implement their own recreational 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 US legalization programs began.

Now, about that "great wall" we all so desperately need: Is it going to further reduce all the cannabis which is no longer being smuggled into the US? 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 [fiscal year] 2003 to [fiscal year] 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 eliminate illegal cannabis imports, which would allow the border patrol to focus their efforts on drugs like fentanyl, methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin—drugs that anyone, regardless of political affiliation, can agree are greater threats to our citizens than cannabis.