



# Stating the Case for the Legalization of Marijuana -- Barron's Calls for the END of Prohibition

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*Legalizing marijuana will hurt drug lords, help cash-strapped states, and ease burdens on police and prisons. Yet D.C. dithers.*

The movement for marijuana legalization may be headed for Wall Street.

As a long time consumer (42 years) I'm feeling a bit ambivalent over this revelation highlighted in the Barron's article. (front-page no less) I had always envisioned the marketability of marijuana on a nationwide scale. But I guess I always thought both production and retail would remain at the local level for a considerable period of time before going corporate.

*But I digress...*

It's Prohibition all over again. That Gatsby-era law gave rise to the Mafia, rampant crime, and in the end, increased drinking. As Rep. Steve Cohen (D., Tenn.) put it recently, "This is the time to remedy this prohibition."

*Wayyyyyyy past time.*

BuzzFlash.com

Barron's, the conservative financial news weekly published by Dow Jones, chose as its June 1st cover story an article that basically states the case for legalizing marijuana.

Coming from a publication that symbolizes the driving-force of Wall Street – financial data and investment prospects— the prominent placement of the story pondering marijuana legalization is a boost to those seeking to end its prohibition.

The author of the original article at Barron's, Thomas G. Donlan does setup a few arguments against legalization. But his basic message is essentially in favor of the general end to the criminalization of marijuana. Of course, Donlan sees it from a business perspective. But as many downsides as there are to Wall Street getting involved in this movement; it was probably inevitable.

*The array of benefits could outweigh the negative aspects.*

It's not just about the right to light up. With the nation's retail marijuana market estimated at about \$30 billion, legalization also would bring some important economic benefits. It could lead to sharply lower prices, striking a blow to the Mexican drug cartels and American street gangs. Pot could be produced in the U.S. for much less than Mexican pot produced illegally. By some estimates, illegality adds 50% to marijuana's prices. If both countries legalized the drug, Mexicans might grow a lot of it and sell it to American consumers, but the inexpensive legal product would not draw the attention of the ultra-violent Mexican drug traffickers any more than Mexican tomatoes do.

*Obviously, legalization would also strike a significant blow to the prison-industrial-complex here in the U.S. as well.*

The economic benefits to the states are almost incalculable. Taxes alone would be worth billions. Research and development would create jobs, spur entrepreneurialism and fully exploiting pot's medicinal value could end the physical suffering of millions of people.

Legalization also could bring some relief to cash-strapped states. Marijuana taxes would join levies on liquor, tobacco, gambling, and other pursuits that once were banned. A report prepared for the libertarian Cato Institute suggests states could raise a total of about \$3 billion from marijuana taxes, and other estimates are even higher. California alone could pull in \$1.4 billion a year, a state tax authority has projected...

Colorado may get about \$100 million a year in tax revenue, and Washington could get \$310 million [the two states just recently legalized marijuana, with the details still being worked out]...

The only loser in this whole legalization movement is the prison industry. Last year's figures are not known yet but an estimated 663,000 people were arrested for possession in 2011 alone. The figure is up a whopping 32% since 1995. A typical pot bust in New York City requires 2.5 hours of a policeman's time, according to the pro-legalization Drug Policy Center. And the average cost of an incarcerated individual per year is conservatively estimated to be in excess of 25,000 dollars per year.

One of the most disappointing aspect of this movement is the lack of support in Congress. Legalization does have at least one unlikely proponent in the House though.

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, a California Republican, last month introduced a bill to require the feds to respect state laws on marijuana. "The Herculean effort undertaken by the federal government to prevent the American people from smoking marijuana has undeniably been a colossal failure," he says. Lacking a groundswell of bipartisan support, however, Rohrabacher's bill is considered to have no chance of passage.

There is no groundswell of support in Congress, even though polling shows a continued trending upwards of the number of Americans supporting legalization. According to Barron's, "The Pew Research Center recently found that 52% of Americans support legalized possession of small quantities of marijuana."

Nevertheless, it's going to be difficult for Congress to continue to ignore this issue. Especially with front-page articles appearing in about as conservative a financial

publication as you're likely to find in the U.S.

Whether Congress realizes it or not, a good number of citizens want the problem fixed. The same Pew study that found a majority of people favoring legalization also found that 60% of Americans think the federal government should not enforce its prohibition in states that permit marijuana use. And 72% agreed with the proposition that federal enforcement of marijuana laws is not worth the cost.

Perhaps Congress will take notice of what former Microsoft executive, Jamen Shively, is currently putting together -- a company to create the first national pot brand.

Pot prohibition is a bane on society.

*It's time to end it once and for all.*