

THE GILROY DISPATCH

Legalize marijuana, yes on 19 – it makes sense

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"Prop 19 is about prioritizing our resources so we can meet the real problems that California faces, while respecting the rights of adults to make decisions free from government intrusion." - Former Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper

Like Chief Stamper, I support legalization of recreational marijuana and will vote yes on Proposition 19, which would allow Californians age 21 and older to possess up to one ounce of marijuana. Here's why:

- Marijuana prohibition is an utter, abject failure. Like alcohol prohibition before it, people still use the banned substance. In a 2006 report published in Harm Reduction Journal, Ryan S. King and Marc Mauer wrote that despite 30 years of "aggressively pursuing marijuana," usage rates remain flat at about 6 percent of the U.S. population. CNBC estimated that the U.S. marijuana market is worth between \$10 and \$40 billion annually.

- Marijuana prohibition creates a hugely profitable market that gangs exploit. Chief Stamper notes that "Marijuana sales in the United States are the source of 60 percent of Mexican drug cartels' profit, and the cartels use that money to subsidize more expensive drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, which would otherwise be more expensive due to transportation and production costs."

It's senseless to keep failed laws that help violent gangs subsidize production, transportation and marketing of deadly drugs like heroin and cocaine.

- The cost of enforcing marijuana prohibition is exorbitant. CNBC reported on the 2010 study entitled "The Budgetary Implications of Drug Prohibition" by Harvard's Jeffrey Miron: "... Legalizing marijuana would save \$13.7 billion per year in government expenditure on enforcement of prohibition."

Don't forget the cost on our overburdened courts, jails and prisons. King and Mauer estimated that in 2001 the nation spent \$1.36 billion "on the court processing of marijuana offenders." They also estimated the annual cost to incarcerate the 27,900 people imprisoned for marijuana offenses at \$600 million. This does not include probation and parole costs related to marijuana prohibition convictions.

- Marijuana is not a gateway drug. Numerous studies, including a University of New Hampshire study released this month, dispute the oft-repeated chestnut that marijuana is a "gateway drug" that leads to use of other drugs. Here's the truth, put succinctly by the Drug Policy Alliance: "Most marijuana users never use any other illegal drug. Indeed, for the large majority of people, marijuana is a terminus rather than a gateway drug."

In fact, as AlterNet's Scott Morgan wrote, there's no such thing as a gateway drug: "The term was invented by hysterical anti-drug zealots for the specific purpose of linking marijuana with harmful outcomes that couldn't otherwise be established."

- Legal marijuana can be taxed. The nonpartisan state Legislative Analyst's Office concluded that if Prop 19 passes, "state and local governments could eventually collect hundreds of millions of dollars annually in additional revenues."

- Europe's experience shows that decriminalization won't lead to increased marijuana use. Cato Institute's Glenn Greenwald studied Portugal, which decriminalized all drug use in 2001: "Decriminalization has had no adverse effect on drug usage rates in Portugal, which, in numerous categories, are now among the lowest in the EU, particularly when compared with states with stringent criminalization regimes."

John P. Morgan, M.D. and Lynn Zimmer, Ph.D. noted Holland's experience: "Despite easy availability, marijuana prevalence among 12 to 18 year olds in Holland is only 13.6 percent - well below the 38 percent use-rate for American high school seniors."

- Current laws about recreational drugs are inconsistent. If your recreational drug of choice is alcohol or tobacco, you're in luck. You can enjoy that scotch and cigar without fear. If you prefer marijuana, which is safer than tobacco and alcohol, you risk arrest and imprisonment. This kind of inconsistency leads to widespread disregard for laws and this kind of rank unfairness is un-American.

Let's restore sanity and fairness to California's drug laws and pressure our federal lawmakers to follow our example. Let's heed the lessons of alcohol prohibition: We cannot afford to enforce marijuana prohibition and it's simply madness to subsidize violent drug cartels by banning a substance that is safer than other already legal recreational drugs like alcohol and tobacco. Let's use our heads, not our guts, and legalize recreational marijuana use.

Yes on Prop 19.

"Even if one takes every reefer madness allegation of the prohibitionists at face value, marijuana prohibition has done far more harm to far more people than marijuana ever could." - William F. Buckley, Jr.



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