

How Will Federal Disapproval Affect Proposition 19?

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The growing likelihood of the passage of Proposition 19, the proposal to legalize marijuana in California has spurred conflict on multiple levels. There's the issue of fiscal prudence versus social prudence, decriminalization versus legalization and of course the outcry from the Mexican government raging against the mixed message sent by inconsistent U.S. drug policies. Conflicting sentiments practically define the movement to legalize marijuana and that's now truer than ever as President Obama vows to enforce Federal Drug regulations in California, despite state laws that would declare marijuana in quantities of as much as one ounce legal for recreational use.

U.S. Attorney Gen. Eric Holder has vowed to "vigorously enforce" federal marijuana laws in California regardless of how the state votes on Nov. 2, furthering the uncertainty in already murky terrain.

"Let me state clearly," Holder wrote in a letter to the former DEA administrators, "that the Department of Justice strongly opposes Proposition 19. If passed, this legislation will greatly complicate federal drug enforcement efforts to the detriment of our citizens."

Holder's statement is in direct opposition with the fiscal and political goals of Proposition 19, which has gotten as far as it has on the basis that the controlled distribution of marijuana might help balance an ailing budget in California.

A study from the Cato Institute, a think tank dedicated to considering liberty and freedom in political policy, estimated an approximate savings of \$41.3 billion, currently devoted to combating illegal drug use. If the Federal government elects to move forward in taking legal action against marijuana users and distributors in California, not only would that savings be lost, but spending would likely increase to control the heightened usage the bill would encourage.

Moreover, the much needed tax revenue from the sale of marijuana, calculated to be as much as \$46.7 billion would disappear under the threat that admitted involvement would lead to Federal persecution via the federal Controlled Substance Act.

Holder does not address the dire state of California's budget in his address, instead focusing on maintaining a consistency in drug enforcement across state lines that has been arguably absent since 1996 when California legalized the use of Medical Marijuana.

Given the lack of clarity surrounding the issue, it's difficult to determine how proponents of the bill will react if Proposition 19 passes. Equally hazy is how the Federal government will realistically enforce drug laws with the intent of national consistency in a state where possession of the substance, with Federal allowances, has already been decriminalized to an infraction.