



Our View: No on Prop 64

August 26, 2016

Among the 17 statewide ballot measures on Californians' Nov. 8 ballots will be Proposition 64, which claims to legalize recreational marijuana use in the state.

Plenty of good reasons spring to mind to vote in favor of Prop 64, not the least of which is the new revenue stream it would bring from taxes on the drug, as well as potentially reduced costs in, or at least redirection of, law enforcement.

But there are three solid reasons that should give voters pause.

First, it's illegal.

"It is important to recognize that these state marijuana (legalization) laws do not change the fact that using marijuana continues to be an offense under federal law," says the office of National Drug Control Policy. The federal Controlled Substances Act outlaws cannabis.

True, the current administration isn't actively enforcing the law. But the next one, or the next, or the next after that could. Where, then, would be the state's new revenue stream or built-up new industry?

And where would that leave Californians in the business of selling or growing marijuana?

"Individuals are not exempt from prosecution by the federal government just because the state where they reside has legalized an activity," writes Robert A. Levy, chairman of the Cato Institute.

Approving our own right to violate the law seems to us the worst type of self-delusion. And clearly doing so could mean we're setting a trap for ourselves in the future.

Californians who believe cannabis should be legalized need to lobby federal representatives and convince them to take up the issue – publicly and with transparency. They need to consider changing the drug's ranking – or provide a good reason why not.

Americans should expect their nation's laws to be enforced – and to be enforceable. Otherwise, they don't belong on the books.

Meantime, some sobering information should give us pause when considering a “yes” vote on Proposition 64.

In Washington state, where voters have “legalized” marijuana, the number of fatal crashes involving drivers who had used marijuana doubled since that state authorized recreational use of the drug, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

“These findings serve as an eye-opening case study for what other states may experience with road safety after legalizing the drug,” the AAA study says.

California – with by far the largest population of any state and nearly double the number of vehicles on the road compared to the next closest state - would undoubtedly be hit much harder by any catastrophic impaired-driving trends than were Washington, Alaska, Oregon, Colorado or Washington, D.C., which have “legalized” recreational cannabis use.

California had 892 drug-involved fatalities in 2013 – before any legalization of the drug except for medical use, according to the DMV annual report on impaired drivers. Do we want to see that number doubled?

Lastly, according to studies, both Breathalyzers and blood tests are useless in detecting marijuana's active ingredient, THC, in a driver's system; thus, setting a tolerance level has proven impossible so far, according to a Washington Post report.

Current legal limits for marijuana and driving “are arbitrary and unsupported by science,” says the AAA Traffic Safety study.

It's no wonder the “No on Prop 64” campaign is being led largely by law enforcement interests.

We urge a “no” vote on Proposition 64. While the AAA Traffic Safety study is not conclusive, it raises a serious concern on two fronts: Will the law, if approved, be enforceable? And will it significantly increase the danger of driving in our car-dependent culture?

More study is needed in these areas.

Meantime, residents would best be served by avoiding the uncertain legality of “legalizing” an illegal drug. They should instead demand federal representatives rightly air the issue – or vote them out and put in someone who will.