

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

## Prop. 205: Like alcohol, end marijuana prohibition

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When tackling today's major issues we can learn a lot from history. For example, when Congress was debating marijuana prohibition in 1937, Dr. William C. Woodward, President of the American Medical Association, argued strenuously against it. Dr. Walter Musto, Assistant Surgeon General told Congress marijuana "does not produce dependence...it probably belongs in the same category as alcohol." Sadly, as is often the case, Congress was more susceptible to political rather than economic and scientific considerations, so marijuana prohibition was enacted.

But Dr. Musto was wrong. Marijuana does not belong "in the same category as alcohol." Marijuana doesn't cause cirrhosis. Alcohol does. Marijuana doesn't cause cardiomyopathy, dementia, or pancreatitis. Alcohol does. Marijuana doesn't cause cancer of the stomach or esophagus. Alcohol does. Ingesting too much alcohol at one time can induce a coma and cause cessation of breathing and death. There is no known overdose level of marijuana. True, some studies show marijuana can cause harmful effects on the young, developing brain. But the same has been known for years about alcohol's effects on the young developing brain.

If Dr. Musto knew in 1937 what we know today, he probably would have said marijuana is "safer than alcohol."

History also teaches us that prohibition never, ever works. Prohibition turns otherwise law-abiding people into criminals, undermining respect for the law and our institutions. It turns thuggish black market profiteers into billionaires who prey on our young and settle intramural disputes through violence.

We saw this in spades when the United States enacted alcohol prohibition in 1920. It led to the rise of organized crime, mob violence, and an epidemic of underground alcohol use. Realizing the error of its ways, our nation repealed alcohol prohibition in 1933.

Nearly 80 years and hundreds of billions of dollars in law enforcement expenditures after Congress replaced alcohol prohibition with marijuana prohibition, nearly half of Americans say they have used marijuana. The Mexican drug cartel rakes in billions of dollars on the sale of smuggled marijuana to Americans. It is the drug cartel's cash crop.

Today it is easier for a teen or adolescent to obtain marijuana than it is to get a 6-pack of beer. That's because licensed alcohol dealers enforce under-21 laws. (Young people must resort to fake IDs or proxy buyers, making it much more difficult.) Millions of young people are being arrested and having their futures destroyed as our jails fill up with young people found guilty of victimless crimes. This disproportionately impacts poor people in inner cities—often people of color—who lack the resources needed for a good legal defense.

Possession of any amount of marijuana is a felony in Arizona, and approximately 150,000 adults have been arrested for it here since 2005.

Prop. 205, which would legalize marijuana for adults over 21 and regulate it like alcohol, draws upon the lessons of history. If it passes, it will deal a blow to the solar plexus of the Mexican drug cartel. It should lead to a reduction in teen marijuana use because it will become as hard for them to obtain pot as alcohol. And they won't be interacting with underworld drug dealers who are all too eager to introduce them to harder, more dangerous drugs.

But, the best thing about Prop. 205 is that it will increase personal freedom by ending the prosecution and ruination of the lives of thousands of Arizonans who are being arrested for committing a victimless crime.

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