



Oregon Initiative Is A Blueprint For National Marijuana Legalization

November, 5th, 2014

It is not unusual to disregard an individual state's particular rash of ballot measures, initiatives, or propositions, especially if they are not detrimental to one demographic or another. However, there was one measure on the ballot in Oregon that provides a brilliant blueprint for the entire nation to follow to regulate and legalize the use, cultivation, and distribution of marijuana. Regardless what one thinks about marijuana use, whether for recreational purposes or for its many medicinal applications, the time has come to seriously consider putting an end to its criminalization nationwide.

Oregon's [Measure 91](#) was brilliantly conceived and sets out an economic growth curve for legal marijuana legalization and regulation of all forms of cannabis (including hemp) that should appeal to everyone from casual recreational users, families, law enforcement, and home cultivators. There are several reasons why Measure 91 is "the new benchmark" for legalization and regulation of marijuana, and none are as important to Oregonians as the economic benefits. First, and maybe foremost, is the revenue stream; both in tax revenue and an immediate \$71 million savings (annually) in law enforcement savings typically spent on cannabis enforcement. According to a 2012 study by a Harvard economist and Cato Institute fellow, Jeffrey Miron, Oregon will bring in at least \$100 million annually in tax revenue.

Other economists claim Miron's estimate is woefully conservative, and does not account for ancillary revenue from "from garden stores, farm equipment retailers and local tourism jobs" according to Alex Rogers of the International Cannabis Business Conference (ICBC). The really smart move of Measure 91's creators is that they deftly assuaged opposition from law enforcement by both eliminating black market crime activity, prison impaction, and gives the state, county, and local law enforcement agencies a very healthy share of the tax revenue generated by cannabis sales.

One of the primary reasons law enforcement opposes marijuana legalization is that keeping it illegal is a major source of funding for a variety of activities. For example, last year when Attorney General Eric Holder announced the Justice Department would allow Washington state and Colorado to implement new state laws legalizing recreational marijuana use by adults, state and federal law enforcement groups went ballistic. Various organizations representing the nation's sheriffs, narcotics officers, and police chiefs assailed Holder mercilessly and expressed their "*extreme disappointment*" in a harsh letter.

The [letter](#) was rife with typical lies, misinformation, and fear mongering about marijuana including an absurd claim that “*liberalizing marijuana laws will lead to an increase in violent crimes, addiction, and cause suicidal thoughts.*” Instead of acknowledging that legalization eliminates crime, including drug cartel activity, they warned Holder that “*The decision will undoubtedly have grave unintended consequences, including a reversal of the declining crime rates that we as law enforcement practitioners have spent more than a decade maintaining.*” Their phony concern did little to conceal their only regard was losing huge assets they seize during drug raids as well as the very substantial federal grants they received for conducting the bizarre war on weed. With Measure 91, the criminal element is not only eliminated, it makes up for law enforcement’s revenue loss when they cannot prosecuting a worthless war on recreational and medical marijuana use.

The way Measure 91 is set up, out of all tax revenue and off the top, Oregon state police receive 15 percent, city police departments get 10 percent, and county police (sheriffs) get 10 percent. The state’s agencies that deal with mental health and substance abuse resulting from the real drugs like heroin, methamphetamines, and prescription drug abuse issues will get 25 percent of the tax revenue. The remaining 40 percent goes to the state’s education system from Oregon’s Common School Fund.

The way the Measure’s organizers allotted the legalization’s tax revenue garnered avid support from former Oregon U.S. Attorney Kris Olsen, former Oregon state Supreme Court Justice William Riggs, Methodist Minister David Bean, Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer, and the state’s former director of mental health services and addiction Richard Harris to name but a few advocates. Nearly all regional media, as well as the New York Times, supported the initiative and it is all down to crafting a law that pleases the greatest number of Oregonians; especially the state’s law enforcement agencies.

The Oregon mental health expert who supported the measure, Richard Harris, praised it primarily because included in the health aspect of the initiative is mandated education, prevention, and treatment for people with serious substance abuse problems. Not only will those addicted get the treatment they need, it will keep them out of the prison system and save the state more money.

The Measure will allow adults to possess up to eight ounces of processed cannabis and let them legally cultivate up to four plants to maturity. Commercial marijuana producers will be taxed at \$35 per ounce of flowers (smokable weed), and even worthless leaves and immature plants will be taxed; although at a different rate. Commercial enterprises support the measure universally even facing the prospect of being taxed because as the spokesman for the ICBC said, “*If you’re in the cannabis and hemp industry, you will fail if you’re only about the money with no ethics. We’re at the point in the cannabis industry’s evolution where even your competitor’s growth is good for you.*” Obviously the industry is concerned about making a profit, but unlike the corporate business model so entrenched in American capitalism, social responsibility and ethics means supporting social programs by paying taxes.

It is long past time to legalize, regulate, and tax marijuana from a practical standpoint to both eliminate the criminal element and bring in substantial revenue to fund law enforcement and

programs to address the real drug-related plagues facing America such as the epidemic of [alcoholism](#) and prescription drug abuse. Alcohol is the third leading cause of [preventable deaths](#) in America affecting all demographics and costing taxpayers dearly. As of 2012, [15-million Americans](#) suffered from alcohol dependency, and it kills 85,000 Americans every year; that does not include the 16,000 drunken driving fatalities. Alcohol is also implicated in diseases such as anemia, cancer, cardiovascular disease, cirrhosis, dementia, depression, seizures, gout, high blood pressure, and nerve disease, but it is legal because it is a source of tax revenue and highly profitable for corporations.

There are detrimental effects of marijuana, but interfering with attention, judgment, and balance while under its influence, pales in comparison to alcohol's damage. There are plenty of well-documented medical and health benefits from cannabis such as migraine relief, [slows Alzheimer's](#) disease, [stops some cancer](#) from spreading, [prevents blindness](#) from glaucoma, [controls epileptic](#) seizures and calms Tourette's syndrome, treats [depression](#), and [many](#) others.

Weed is not a miracle drug by any means, although there are likely a million Americans who may argue otherwise, but its time being designated as a dangerous drug has to end. Oregon's Measure 91 may not be the ideal solution for regulating and legalizing marijuana for recreational use and distribution, but thus far it is the only initiative that satisfies law enforcement's funding issues, eliminates the black market criminal element, brings in revenue for states, and keeps otherwise law-abiding citizens out of prison for smoking a joint. Something that itself is criminal and abusive.