



Top Ten Reasons to End Marijuana Prohibition by Taxing and Regulating Marijuana

- 1. Prohibition is a complete failure — marijuana use is mainstream and widespread.** When the federal government first effectively prohibited marijuana in 1937, relatively few Americans had even heard of it. Today, according to 2009 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data, over 100 million Americans admit to having tried it (16.7 million in the last month), and every year, the Monitoring the Future survey finds that over 80% of high school seniors say marijuana is easy to obtain.
- 2. Prohibition is an immense waste of public resources, while marijuana taxation would bring in much-needed revenues in these tough economic times.** According to 2010 estimates by Harvard University economist Jeffrey Miron, replacing marijuana prohibition with a system of taxation and regulation would yield \$20.1 billion in government savings and increased tax revenues. Another researcher, Jon Gettman, estimates lost tax revenues caused by marijuana's prohibition at \$31 billion.
- 3. Prohibition sends an incredible number of Americans through the criminal justice system, ruining countless lives.** According to the FBI, since 1995, there have been more than 11.2 million U.S. marijuana arrests, with 858,408 in 2009 – significantly more than for all violent crimes combined. 88% of these arrests are for possession – not manufacture or distribution. According to a study of prisons in four midwestern states, one in ten male inmates will be raped while in prison, and up to 27% of female inmates may be subject to rape and sexual assault.
- 4. Under prohibition, marijuana offenders are subject to harsh collateral sanctions, even those who are not imprisoned.** Because of a marijuana conviction, offenders may be deemed ineligible to adopt a child, serve as a foster parent, participate in public housing and food assistance programs, earn a professional license, receive student loans or a driver's license, serve on a jury, possess a firearm, or vote. It is unjust that some marijuana users face these lifelong consequences, while those lucky enough not to be caught can go on to become U.S. governors, presidents, or Supreme Court justices.
- 5. The arbitrary criminalization of tens of millions of Americans who consume marijuana results in a large-scale lack of respect and rejection of the law.** For many of the 104 million Americans who have tried marijuana, it's illogical and unjust that marijuana use is illegal, while more dangerous substances, such as alcohol, are legal and regulated. The disparity in the treatment of these substances, as well as the economic and racial disparities in prosecution and sentencing, break down societal respect for the law and law enforcement.
- 6. There is no evidence that imposing criminal penalties on marijuana use reduces its use.** The National Research Council found that "perceived legal risk explains very little in the variance of individual drug use." In 2008, the World Health Organization found that in the Netherlands, where adults are allowed to purchase and possess small amounts of marijuana, both teen and adult marijuana use is significantly lower than in the U.S., where marijuana is illegal.
- 7. Prohibition makes control impossible.** Producers and sellers of marijuana are completely unregulated. Unlike licensed businesses that sell liquor or tobacco, marijuana sellers operate virtually anywhere and have no incentive not to sell to minors. Prohibition guarantees that marijuana cannot undergo quality control inspections for purity and potency, creating possible health hazards as a result of contamination by pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, molds, fungi, or bacteria, as well as the lacing of marijuana with other drugs or formaldehyde. Under taxation and regulation, producers and sellers would be licensed and zoned accordingly.
- 8. Marijuana prohibition breeds violence.** Currently, the only sellers of marijuana are criminals. As in 1920s Chicago, since disputes cannot be solved lawfully, violence is inevitable. According to a BBC report based on Mexican government data, since 2007, more than 34,000 people have been killed in Mexican drug cartel-related violence. Those purchasing marijuana illegally also may face muggings and other violence.
- 9. Prohibition is bad for the environment.** Because marijuana cultivation is illegal, unlicensed, and carries felony charges, it often takes place in environmentally damaging locations such as national parks and wilderness areas. Under taxation and regulation, marijuana sales would be relegated to regulated, licensed businesses, which would cultivate in legally zoned areas.
- 10. Marijuana is safer than alcohol.** Unlike legal substances such as water, alcohol, Tylenol, and prescription opiates, marijuana has never caused a single medically documented overdose death in recorded history. Alcohol causes over 300 overdose deaths each year, and in 2007 (the latest year for which data is available), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control reported 23,199 "alcohol-induced deaths" and no marijuana deaths. The British government's official scientific body on drug policy concluded that [legally regulated drugs] alcohol and tobacco are "significantly more harmful than marijuana." American law treats alcohol as if it were safer than marijuana, encouraging people to drink.