



Texas: It's Time for a New Approach to Cannabis

Taxing and regulating cannabis will create thousands of new jobs and bring in millions in taxes. Colorado, a state with a smaller population than Texas, brought in more than \$240 million in adult-use cannabis tax revenue in fiscal year 2018. The cannabis industry will also create thousands of good jobs for Texans; Colorado has issued over 40,000 active licenses to individuals to work directly in the cannabis industry.

Arresting, citing, and prosecuting cannabis offenders sends an incredible number of people through the criminal justice system. Despite usage rates being roughly the same between white and black people, there is still a huge racial disparity in cannabis arrests in Texas. The collateral consequences of a criminal conviction can have life-altering effects. By legalizing and regulating cannabis with robust measures to expunge records, the number of lives derailed will be greatly reduced, and those harmed by prohibition in the past can move on with their lives.

Prohibition breeds violence. As with alcohol prohibition in the 1920s, since drug-related disputes can't be solved lawfully, violence is inevitable. As a result, cannabis users and sellers face dangers due to prohibition. As a border state, Texas knows firsthand the violence that comes from the drug trade.

Regulation keeps cannabis sales away from schools. Unlike licensed businesses selling liquor or tobacco, sellers of cannabis are pushed underground and operate virtually anywhere. More than 40% of high schoolers know a peer who sells cannabis in school, while less than 1% have a peer who sells alcohol. Regulating cannabis would move sales into safe, licensed retail stores where workers check ID, instead of schools. According to the most comprehensive surveys, no state has seen an overall increase in teen marijuana use outside of the confidence interval since adult-use laws passed. Meanwhile, two nationwide surveys show a modest decrease in teen use since states began legalizing cannabis for adults.

Public education works to address public health concerns. As a result of strict regulations on cigarette sales and advertising, plus a robust public education campaign, cigarette smoking by teens has declined by 84% since 1997. A portion of tax revenues generated from taxing cannabis can be used to fund public education and law enforcement training to combat driving under the influence.

Prohibition makes control impossible. Prohibition deprives workers and the environment of the legal protections they are entitled to. It also guarantees cannabis won't undergo quality control testing, resulting in possible contamination by hazardous pesticides, bacteria, or the lacing of cannabis with other drugs. Regulated retailers will sell only products that have been lab-tested and labeled for potency.

Regulation can free up resources so police can focus on more serious crimes and also help improve police/ community relationships. A Department of Justice study found that trusting relationships with the local community was one of the most important factors in whether police were effective in solving violent crimes. As Washington, D.C.'s former police chief put it: "All these

[marijuana] arrests do is make people hate us.”

Cannabis is safer than alcohol. The Institute of Medicine has found cannabis to be far less addictive than alcohol or tobacco. Unlike alcohol, cannabis has never caused a fatal overdose and is not associated with violent crime and domestic violence. Adults should be able to make the safer choice.