Marijuana Legalization Essay, Research Paper

Marijuana Debate Brief

1. Introduction

How many people in this room have a hot cup of coffee in the morning or smoke a cigarette on break? How would you feel if one day the government decided to take away your right to drink that cup of coffee or smoke that cigarette because they were considered to be too harmful? There have been many studies proving the medicinal benefits of marijuana, but there are also many social and recreational benefits that are not as heavily documented. We believe there are many significant reasons for legalizing marijuana. We know that smoking marijuana has minimal health effects, especially compared to existing legal substances, such as alcohol and tobacco. We also believe that prohibition is an ineffective strategy and, if anything, is just a waste of taxpayers’ money. Keeping marijuana against the law is taking away our freedom of choice. In fact, the 4th Amendment gives us the right to smoke in the privacy of our own homes, as long as no one is harmed and there is no suspicious behavior to give reason to believe illegal activities are occurring.

2. Three Touchstone Points with Evidence:

a. Smoking Marijuana has minimal unhealthy side effects

Alcohol is a physically addictive depressant. It is the oldest most widely used and abused drug. Consumption under the age of 21 is illegal in most states, but underage use is widespread, driving under influence and public drunkenness are crimes. Excessive drinking impairs senses, speech, reflexes and coordination. Problem drinking or addiction intensifies emotional problems and causes liver and cardiovascular diseases. Some pharmaceutical treatments, but self-help therapy programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous more common. Alcoholics who do not seek treatment and fail to practice lifetime abstinence usually relapse into addictive use.

The National Institute of Drug Abuse pamphlet For Parents Only: What you Need to Know About Marijuana states, Marijuana does not directly cause mental problems. But like many other drugs, it appears to bring to the surface emotional problems and can even trigger more severe disorders.

No evidence exists that anyone has ever died of a marijuana overdose.

Marijuana law enforcement is more of a threat to the health of marijuana users than the herb itself. In 1994, at least 25 marijuana users were killed by police officers or died while in their custody as the direct result of the enforcement of marijuana laws.

Marijuana s only clear health risk is respiratory damage form smoking, and this risk is confined to long-term, heavy marijuana smokers. Claims of other biological harms like brain damage, infertility and immune system impairment are based on animal and cellular studies using doses of marijuana up to 1,000 times the psychoactive dose in humans.

b. Prohibition of marijuana has not been successful

Since marijuana prohibition started in 1937 the estimated number of marijuana users has skyrocketed from 55,000 in 1937 to 45-65 million.

Marijuana enforcement accounts for more than 10% of the total police resources nationwide.

Many officers recognize that marijuana is a benign attraction and that enforcement generates hostility from otherwise law-abiding users.

Too much money is spent each year on incarcerating non-violent and otherwise law-abiding citizens. Each year the DEA spends $1.3 billion a year fighting marijuana.

Overall, federal anti-marijuana efforts have cost taxpayers $30 billion, which has resulted in $2 billion worth of cannabis being seized and destroyed, 4 million people being arrested, and 250 thousand individuals being jailed for more than one year, but there has been no basic change in usage patterns.

Former San Jose, California, police chief Joseph McNamara compares waging war on the drugs supply to throwing sand against the tide. A growing number of his peers agree. Some 60 percent of police chiefs polled in a March 1996 nationwide survey believe that current antidrug efforts have been ineffective. Said retired chief detective Ralph Salerno after forty-two years in law enforcement, police officers and all other Americans are being lied to by political leaders. As someone who has been on the front lines of the war on drugs, I know it will never work.

c. Smoking marijuana is not a crime.

Recent medical research has suggested that genetic markers and differences in the chemical makeup of some people s brains lead them to dependence on mood-altering substances, whether alcohol or drugs.

For the vast majority of people who use pot, the use of a restricted substance is the only conscious illegal act they commit.

Marijuana is not as debilitating as alcohol or many prescription medications.

Most members of society who smoke marijuana are productive members of society, the imprisonment of these members leads to breakdown of families.

3. 5 Other Main points with Evidence:

a. Marijuana is socially accepted in the United States.

There has been an increasing amount of available media that glorifies the use of marijuana.

For example movies: Half Baked, Dazed and Confused, Homegrown.

For example music: I wanna get high by Cypress hill. etc….

b. Legalization of marijuana could reduce the number of hard drug users.

According to the book Smoke and Mirrors the legalization of marijuana would reduce the number of hard drug users from 11 to 2 million.

c. Taxpayer s money is being wasted in the war against marijuana

The criminalization of marijuana has cheapened the justice system and crowded the prisons.

d. Marijuana has never been the cause of any deaths in America

Tobacco has caused over 395,000 deaths in the U.S.; Alcohol has been directly responsible for 23,000 deaths and has caused an excess of 22,400 deaths on the highway yet marijuana is still illegal.

e. Smoking marijuana helps many people cope with health problems

Cannabis can be used as an appetite stimulant to help slow weigh loss in cancer and AIDS patients.

4. 3 Torpedo Questions

1. Aside from the partial legalization of Marijuana in Amsterdam, Germany has ordered law enforcement officers to stop arresting citizens found with small amounts of Marijuana, Italians have voted for drug use depenalization, and in Spain, marijuana is not punishable. If legalization is so bad, why are so many countries adopting more tolerant drug policies?

2. Why must all of this money be wasted on a war on drugs that can never be won? Wouldn t this money be more useful by teaching kids drug prevention?

3. People have died from smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol, How can a substance that has never been documented as killing anybody remain illegal?

5. 3 Counterpoints with Evidence

a. Using marijuana is harmful to your health

Babies born to women who have smoked marijuana during pregnancy have an increased incidence of leukemia, low birth weigh and other newborn abnormalities.

Smoking marijuana can cause respiratory disease and mental disorders including depression, paranoia, and impaired memory.

Today s marijuana is much more potent and therefore much more harmful to the growth and development of teenagers.

Marijuana is addictive, leading to use of other drugs such as cocaine and heroin, and is a major cause of accidents and injuries.

After using marijuana most people show psychomotor impairment.

b. Marijuana is a Gateway Drug

Using marijuana increases your risk to becoming addicted to harder drugs such as cocaine and heroine.

The risk of using cocaine is 104 times greater for those who have tried marijuana than for those who have never tried it.

Because it is the most widely used illicit drug, marijuana is predictably the first illicit drug most people encounter.

People who enjoy the effects of marijuana are, logically, more likely to be willing to try other mood-altering drugs than are people who are not willing to try marijuana or who dislike its effects.

Daily marijuana users are more likely than their peers to be extensive users of other substances are.

c. Marijuana use is related to crime

Between 70% and 90% of all crime is drug related.

Because marijuana is an illegal substance anything you do that is related to marijuana is considered a crime.

The black market of marijuana leads to gang association and violence to protect the illegal substance.

6. Closing Remarks

I hope this debate has made you all realize that although marijuana is a mildly intoxicating drug, it is more comparable to the legal drugs of tobacco and alcohol rather than hard drugs such as cocaine and heroine. If marijuana has been proven to be less harmful than alcohol and tobacco, than why doesn t the law recognize these facts. Since initial prohibition of Marijuana in 1937 much more research has been done, but the laws have pretty much remained the same. We have discussed the minimal health risks marijuana poses to its users, the failed drug war, and the disregard of personal choice guaranteed to us by the Bill of Rights as defense to our proposal to the legalization of marijuana. Considering all the research done we definitely need a new way to treat marijuana users, since all other measures to stop the use of this drug have failed, we need to adopt new policies whether it be total legalization, or decriminalization, something needs to change.

334