

Marijuana, a Gift or Curse

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One of the most controversial topics in American politics to date, is all due to a small plant that just so happens to be the key to solving many issues. This plant, marijuana, would provide a multitude of benefits for the American population and the government as a whole if it were to be legalized. Legalization can not only provide benefits for the people in a medical standpoint, but also the government through a new source of funds for the economy. Since the majority of Americans support the legalization of marijuana, Congress, who represents the people, should reflect these values in our government and the legalization should be done already. However, the pressures put on Congress by powerful people such as Jeff Sessions, the Attorney General, play a leading factor as to why such actions have failed to take place. The Attorney General is the highest ranking law enforcement officer in the country, other than the President, which means he has a major influence on all lawmakers. An issue to consider is that law enforcement is using too much time and resources on the war on drugs, especially against minor marijuana law violations. Legalization would have an positive impact on the entire nation as a whole.

The amount of medical benefits proposed by the use of marijuana heavily outweigh any of the repercussions that come from its use. Before scavenging into the many benefits that come from marijuana's use, first clarification on the different types of the plant must come to light. A large population of Americans don't know the ins and outs of the many different types of marijuana, better known as strains. There are thousands of strains throughout the world and they all have different chemical makeups that impact their effects on the human body. There are three major classifications for marijuana, this includes indica, sativa, and hybrid. Indica strains are usually said to be physically sedating and provide for a more euphoric high. Sativa strains are

thought to provide a more uplifting high with less of a euphoric experience. Then, finally, we come to hybrids which are said to be somewhere in between indicas and sativas, some having more aspects towards one over the other depending on a variety of factors. Many people who use marijuana recreationally go by these traits, but recent research suggests that categorizing marijuana in this way isn't all that accurate. In fact, marijuana researchers Ethan Russo and Jeffrey Raber suggest that people shouldn't pick the cannabis they use by the strain, rather by the cannabinoids that are in it. Cannabinoids are different chemicals within marijuana and there are over 100 different types. The big two that must be discussed are THC and CBD. THC, 9-tetrahydrocannabinol, is the chemical compound in marijuana that causes one to get high and provides for the euphoric experiences related to marijuana. CBD, cannabidiol, is a chemical compound that provides many medical benefits and relief without the high that THC gives. Studies show that THC does provide medical benefits such as relief of pain and nausea also helping to fight off depression, anxiety, and insomnia. Even though THC has medical benefits it is a hard to sell product to people on the edge of whether or not marijuana should be legal because the high it gives the consumer, which can sometimes leave the user useless in accomplishing big tasks. On the other side of the spectrum we have CBD which has been tested and found to be non-intoxicating plus it has a plethora of medical benefits such as alleviating pain, anxiety, and inflammation. Marijuana use that is CBD only strains without the THC involved has been a hit among not only the medical community but also the public because of its non intoxicating effects. Currently the federal government has not legalized medical or recreational use of marijuana, all the work has been done by the State Legislations. According to CNN, the District of Columbia and 9 states have legalized marijuana for medical and

recreational use. There are 21 states that have legalized medical use for marijuana, and there are 16 states that have legalized only CBD use. This has been an uphill battle for all the states involved in this movement especially with the federal government against them.

A recent study came out that can make an increase in support for legalizing marijuana in the United States. According to Peter Grinspoon, MD, a contributing editor to a piece of work on the Harvard Health Blog, a study on the use of marijuana with 120 children from ages 2 to 18 that all had Dravet Syndrome, a rare form of Epilepsy was discussed heavily. Individuals that have Dravet Syndrome have a low life expectancy with a mortality rate of 10-15%. Most individuals die when they are children to young adults. In this study the individuals were given an oral cannabidiol along with their usual medication, the strain of the cannabidiol was called Charlotte's Web. On average the recipients went from having 12 seizures a month to 6, which is a huge decrease, especially when considering that every seizure can be the one that ends the patient's life. There were also 3 children that experienced no seizures after taking the cannabidiol. This breakthrough can lead to a major change in the medical community, possibly turning into a cure one day for Dravet Syndrome, which is absolutely huge.

As discussed earlier cannabidiol otherwise known as CBD has little to no intoxicating properties. This is why it can be a very effective medication for children especially of young age that shouldn't be exposed to the intoxicating effects of THC. This is part of the reasoning behind the majority of states to at least have CBD legal medical marijuana. Not only does marijuana prevail in treating some very serious illnesses, but also less life threatening medical conditions. Marijuana has been proven to help pain control, not severe pain but it does well at controlling chronic and nerve pain. Nerve pain alone does not have many treatment options for pain control

that do not provide sedating effects, so CBD dominant strains of marijuana can once again prove to be an asset in treating nerve pain. This is one reason it is appealing to mass crowds of people, it is safer than opioids and you cannot overdose on it, unlike opiates. Marijuana also proves to be a good alternative to NSAIDs such as Advil and Aleve for those that may have allergies or other medical complications that prevent them from taking them. According to the Clinical Psychology Review marijuana in this light has helped fight against alcohol and opioid addictions. If the people can avoid using opioids in the first place it'll make a large impact on reducing the chances of getting hooked, especially if there is an alternative that is not only easier to get, but also safer.

With the legalization of marijuana, a huge decrease in arrests would also occur. The United States immense war on drugs has lasted for far too long, especially wasting valuable resources on the likes of marijuana. Currently the United States spends \$50 billion annually on the war on drugs. This money could be put towards so many more beneficial things such as getting rid of the mass amount of debt the country is in or investing it into programs for the people. According to the Drug Policy Alliance, out of 1,572,579 drug related arrests, 653,249 were marijuana law violations in 2016. Out of the 653,249 marijuana law violations, 574,641 were for possession, not even sale or use. When the math is done, that equates to 41.539% of drug related arrests being that of marijuana and 87.966% of those arrests were for possession alone, a big number for a small crime. If marijuana was legal these arrests wouldn't have happened and the crime rate in America would drop in a major way. According to the FBI there was an estimated 10.7 million crimes in the United States in 2016 excluding traffic violations. This equates to marijuana being the root cause of 6.105% of the arrests in the United States in

2016 alone, not a crazy high number, but it's a lot of time and money that was used to arrest these people. Which could've been put to better use. A study conducted by the National Institute on drug abuse concluded that out of the people polled 44% of people over the age of 12 have used marijuana, and 52% of people age 18 to 25 have used it in their life. Out of that group of adults 33% had used in the past 12 months. This means that, in theory, if law enforcement was to arrest everyone who had ever used marijuana, the prison system would collapse and overflow. It would burden the people with increased taxes to support a massive prison system. Which leads to the topic of the incarceration of inmates.

The NAACP states that a National Survey on Drug Abuse and Health in 2015 found that African Americans and Whites use the same drugs at similar rates, yet the rates of imprisonment for African Americans in drug violation cases is six times higher than that of Whites. This unproportional treatment of the African American population is easily overlooked and something must be done about the current system. One way to solve it would be legalizing marijuana. The legalization wouldn't completely fix the issue, but it would buffer it due to fewer violations of the law. Many Americans would likely agree to have fewer inmates in our prisons, since the United States has the biggest prison industry in the world with an estimated worth of \$37 billion as of 2006, and that was 12 years ago. America also has the most inmates in the world in not only percentages, but raw numbers. This calls for many expenses, and where does that money come from one may ask, it comes from the people. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office of California the average cost for an incarcerated inmate is nearly \$71,000 annually. That cost isn't just an average Joe's pocket change, that money can be put to some good use. If there was no inmates who committed marijuana law violations, potentially millions of dollars could be

saved. The vast majority of Americans when asked if they want lower tax rates will say yes, now this is the way to do it, the public wants to legalize.

A majority of Americans want to legalize marijuana, yet there is no sight of the legalization process close to being done at the federal level. The State Governments currently better represent the people on the opinion of what to do about marijuana and its legalization. Congress, both the House and the Senate are supposed to represent the people of the United States, yet this isn't true as of right now. According to the most recent poll on the topic of the legalization of recreational marijuana done by Gallup Polls, 67% of Americans support legalization. Of these people 72% were Democrats, 51% Republicans, and 67% Independents. A separate poll composed by Quinnipiac University in August 2017 concluded that 94% of Americans support medical marijuana. Of those polled in favor of medical use 95% Democrats, 90% Republicans, and 96% Independents. A conclusion that makes the most logical sense in why Congress currently does not represent the people accurately on this issue is due to leadership and precedents.

The current Attorney General Jeff Sessions is on the opposition of the legalization of marijuana. The Attorney General is the highest ranking official of the law other than the President, so his position has a lot of weight. In January CNN reported that Jeff Sessions announced the rollback of Obama-era guidelines which prevented the federal government from enforcing anti marijuana laws in pro marijuana states. The biggest of such rollbacks is the change with the Cole memo. The Cole memo is the reference term to the memorandum that former attorney general James M. Cole drafted. The memorandum was made because recreational use of marijuana was just legalized in Colorado, the Department of Justice published it and sent it out to

all United States attorneys. It highlighted that law enforcement and prosecutors alike should all target a certain set of priorities when it came to State Legal Cannabis. In a way it was telling everyone to stay out of the issue unless it was a situation that broke more than just the State Legislature's laws. With the memo being rescinded, many states with legal recreational marijuana began to fire back at the federal government. If the federal government begins to crack down on state legal, but under the Federal Controlled Substances Act, illegal marijuana. A showdown between the states and the federal government may arise. Especially between the state of California, the richest of the states, and the federal government due to the timing in which Jeff Sessions has done this, just after the recreational legalization in California. All of this goes against the strong public opinion that supports the marijuana industry and the many advantages that can come from it.

The legalization of recreational marijuana in all states would create a dramatic effect on the economy of the United States. Just the small number of states that have already legalized recreational marijuana have seen great results in boosts to the economy. According to CNN in 2017 alone there was nearly \$9 billion in sales, and that's in only 9 states. The number of sales could easily, in a tremendous fashion, jump with the addition of 41 more states to that list. There are currently 9,397 active licenses for marijuana businesses, along with roughly 121,000 employees. With this big of an industry the economy can get a fuel line for funds and the government can receive some great dividends from it. The taxation of the sale of marijuana as the states are currently doing can be used to funnel money into education, infrastructure, or even lowering the national debt. All of which would be very achievable as there was \$1 billion and \$1.4 billion in taxes during 2016 and 2017 respectively pulled from the tax on marijuana alone.

With the addition to California, the money that will be gained in 2018 should be much higher than the previous. In 2016 the Legislative Analyst's Office of California published Proposition 64, which analyzed the effects that legal marijuana would have in California's economy.

According to the proposal, they estimated that the recreational sale of marijuana for the people in the state of California would produce funds from anywhere between large hundred millions of dollars to over \$1 billion annually. This wouldn't be initially though, instead it has the potential to reach such heights and the proposal outlined the state's plan to use some funds to supply environmental programs, youth programs, and law enforcement. The introduction of the legal recreational marijuana industry to the entirety of the United States would bring about big changes noticeable to all.

According to USA Today in 2015, the year after legalization in Colorado, the taxes made from the previous year was roughly \$63 million. Most of which is being put into the State of Colorado's general tax fund. There is also a 15% tax on the sale of marijuana from the growers to the retailers. The money gained from this taxation is being put into a fund to help school construction. Much of the other tax money was being put into drug awareness programs and research to help understand the drug's effect on the state and people's health. Ever since marijuana has been legalized in Colorado it has been under a microscope for politicians and activists alike. To analyze it to see if they too should legalize. With the recent news of legalization being very close to complete in Canada after its senate approved a piece of legislation last week and the projected \$4 billion industry to come from it, according to CNN, lawmakers may begin to rethink their stands on such policies after watching how it effects

Canada. The legalization of marijuana will greatly impact the economy in many positive ways especially once it is introduced to all of the United States.

Marijuana would provide a multitude of benefits for the American population and the government as a whole if it were to be legalized. With new findings coming to light everyday on the impacts of the use of marijuana in both a medical and recreational setting, benefiting the people of the United States in various ways, especially for the health of people with the likes of Dravet Syndrome. It's various benefits on the economy have the potential to seriously impart long term boosts through the use of taxation. The resources that can be saved by law enforcement and the justice system can be turned in the direction of fighting more serious threats to the people's safety, instead of the constant war on drugs as been practiced for so long. These benefits are recognized by the people of the United States, proven to be true through various polls in recent years. The times are changing and the federal government has a duty to step back and look at the big picture that the state legislatures have begun to grasp. Marijuana has proven itself to the people of the United States to be a key for addressing a large array of issues. While many will never support complete legalization or even partial, all must recognize this; marijuana provides the potential to change american life as we know it, for the better, so all can achieve Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

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