Legalization Of Marijuana 6 Essay, Research Paper

Legalization of Marijuana

Marijuana is a substance that has become very much a part of American culture. Nearly sixty-five million Americans have used it either occasionally or regularly. The use of marijuana hit mainstream America thirty years ago, and it has been accepted by a large segment of society ever since (Rosenthal 16). The debate on whether the mind-altering substance should be legalized remains a very hot topic today. National polls show that more than seventy percent of the American public supports the legalization of marijuana (Randall 25). However, only two states, California and Arizona, have legalized the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes only (Randall 33). Just last month, voters in Mendocino County, California, passed a proposition that legalized the cultivation of twenty-five full-grown marijuana plants for personal use. Marijuana should be legalized for medicinal, as well as for recreational use all across the country, not just in specified areas.

If public demand for the legalization marijuana is so high, then why does it remain illegal? There are several reasons why marijuana remains illegal. Mainly it is a political issue that special interest groups have been able to crush before any real legislation can be passed. The most powerful of these groups are the combined law enforcement-judiciary-penal systems. This particular group sees the elimination of marijuana-related laws as a threat to their jobs. Over one fifth of all arrests in the United States are marijuana-related. Also, one tenth of the total number of prisoners held in federal prisons are incarcerated because of marijuana-related crimes, i.e. cultivating, using, selling, or trafficking (Rosenthal 2). The government would save billions of dollars a year by eliminating marijuana laws (Rosenthal 3). Another interest group that is against the legalization of marijuana includes the scientists whose marijuana research is funded by the government. If marijuana were legalized, they would lose millions of dollars in research grants intended to prove the detrimental effects of the substance. The only findings that are ever published are those of the scientists that the government employs. This is done so that the government can control the information the American public has access to. Basically the government uses propaganda, something that all governments have used for centuries, i.e. Hitler and the Nazi Party. Kind of scary isn’t it?

Finally, the last two unrelated, but very influential groups, are the liquor lobby and the pharmaceutical companies. Their spending is usually very secretive and not highly publicized. For the liquor industry, the legalization of a competing product would cut deeply into their profits. Anyone with a plot of land can easily cultivate marijuana plants for a lot less money than the cost of alcohol. Right now alcohol has a monopoly on the legal drug market, as there is not a competing product on the market that is legal. Alcohol producers are some of the biggest supporters of anti-marijuana laws. Pharmaceutical companies on the other hand, want the legalization of marijuana for medicinal purposes only, because they know the benefits of the substance and its profit-making capabilities. If marijuana were to be legal only for medicinal purposes, the pharmaceutical companies would have almost complete control of it.

It is obvious that the current policy on marijuana is not working very efficiently. Because of all the opposition to legalize marijuana, the government spends billions of dollars a year to stop its use, which causes the opening of an extensive black market for the substance. In effect, the government is not solving the marijuana problem; instead it just creates a worse one in its place. Marijuana is currently classified as a Schedule I drug in the Controlled Substance Act. This particular act established the criteria for determining which substances should be controlled, the mechanisms for reducing the availability of controlled substances, and a structure of penalties for illegal distribution and possession of controlled drugs (Roffman 4). The criteria for Schedule I substances are: high potential for abuse, not currently accepted for use in medical treatment, and not been proven safe for use under medical supervision. Marijuana should no longer be classified as a Schedule I drug because it does not fit any of the criteria. Only people that have addictive personalities become addicted to marijuana. This is because marijuana is mentally addictive, not physically addictive (Nahas 36). Also, marijuana has been legalized for medical use in two states. Research done in Holland has proven it safe when used under medical supervision as well.

The medicinal uses and effects of the hemp plant Cannabis Sativa have been known since ancient times (Abel 38). A Chinese pharmacopoeia compiled nearly two thousand years ago recommended it for treating a number of disorders, and it was used in India before the 10th century AD (Cohen 86). Besides California and Arizona, no other states in the U.S. have approved uses of marijuana for medicinal purposes. Clinical research has shown that THC (1-delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), the main drug in marijuana, is effective in reducing the nausea that cancer patients experience when they are treated with chemotherapy. Marijuana also stimulates the appetite of cancer patients who lose the desire to eat. In asthma patients, several studies have shown that THC acts as a bronchi-dilator and prevents bronchial constriction (Rosenthal 68). When treating epileptic patients, marijuana can prevent both Grande Mal and other less major epileptic seizures. Marijuana also limits the muscle pain and spasticity caused by multiple sclerosis and it relieves tremors and unsteady gait. Lastly, marijuana has been shown to be able to reduce the pressure behind the eyes of glaucoma patients (Rosenthal 69).

A major advocate for the legalization of marijuana is the Drug Policy Foundation (DPF). It is an independent, non-profit organization with over 23,000 supporters that publicize alternatives to current drug strategies. The current annual budget for DPF is just over $3 million. DPF believes that the current policy on drugs is not working. The members feel that the current policy erodes individual rights, is too expensive, creates a new class of criminals, and ignores the medicinal qualities of some drugs. The major objectives of DPF are to decriminalize the use of marijuana, and to allow doctors across the nation to prescribe the use of marijuana in select situations (Potter 27). DPF is mainly concerned with making marijuana, if legalized, available to adults in a regulated market, similar to U.S. alcohol laws. DPF hosts an annual conference open to the public, the media, and government officials. DPF leaders hope that this annual seminar will open the eyes of many government officials who are blind to the current drug situation. Although the majority of the American public, almost 70 percent, supports the legalization of marijuana, there are people and organizations that are against it.

Drug Watch International (DWI) is a volunteer, non-profit information network and advocacy organization. The organization promotes the creation of healthy, drug-free cultures in the world. Needless to say, the members are against the legalization of marijuana, for any reason. It has about 13,000 members in fifteen countries around the world, with a budget of $1.3 million annually. The organization upholds a comprehensive approach to drug issues involving prevention, education, and harsher treatment for drug offenders (Rosenthal 46). DWI is one of the leading organizations opposing the decriminalization of marijuana. DWI supports harsh legal penalties that hold users and dealers of narcotics accountable for their actions. Leaders of DWI suggest that the minimum penalty for all drug offenders should be raised to a five-year prison sentence (Rosenthal 81).

DWI refuses to acknowledge the great medical advantages of marijuana. Many heated discussions have been had between DWI and DPF. Clearly it has been shown that marijuana has many advantageous medicinal qualities and it must be legalized. The American public knows that it should be legalized. However, special interest groups are blocking the necessary legislation. In reality, marijuana will most likely never be legalized, but that does mean that it should not be. Millions of Americans will continue to use this substance whether it becomes legal or not.

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