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### Marijuana Prohibition: An American Injustice

Marijuana prohibition is a shameful scar upon the face of our purportedly freedom loving, individualistic society. Based entirely on lies, this monolithic social burden costs us in many different ways. It abridges American freedom and contributes directly to an ever expanding private prison industrial complex. Prohibition endangers our physical health while simultaneously turning a blind eye to the enrichment of those who knowingly poison us. This failed path of marijuana criminalization is now an industry unto its self, responsible for the financial and moral bankruptcy of both governments and corporations at every level. It fails to acknowledge the history of thousands of years of responsible marijuana use. It refuses to observe scientific fact. It fails to reduce either the supply of or the demand for marijuana. It spawns criminal elements that wouldn't exist otherwise. Prohibition is a cancer.

According to the FBI Uniform Crime Report, our federal government spends almost \$10 billion enforcing marijuana laws annually. That same report says in 2008, nearly 1,000,000 Americans were arrested on marijuana charges, with almost 90 percent of those being for mere possession (Crime). That's more arrests than for murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault combined. The US is now the world's largest prison population, housing 25 percent of the world's prisoners despite only comprising 5 percent of the world's population. Our internal incarceration ratio is a staggering 754 people out of every 100,000 (Publication). Compare this to countries

like Japan where the ratio is around 40 per 100,000. Our prison population has quadrupled in just the last two decades. Adding to the deliberate expansion of this privately operated prison industrial complex are approximately 50,000 people needlessly incarcerated in federal or state institutions for the violation of marijuana laws. That number would grow astronomically higher if I were to include the people incarcerated in city and county jails across the United States.

The private prison industrial complex of which I speak should be feared by all, as it is manipulating our laws for monetary gain. No longer are citizens imprisoned by the same government who convicted them. Instead, they're shipped off to an ever increasing number of facilities operated by private corporations who have a fiduciary interest in a continually growing prison population (CorpWatch). These corporations and the prison guard unions who work for them are lobbying politicians to increase the penalties for given crimes, and politicians have a political interest in obliging as we, the people, are stuck in the middle. The evidence of this poisonous political marriage is everywhere, as prison terms are increasing routinely for nearly any crime one can commit. With increased penalties for everything from tax evasion to assault to manslaughter, it's now easier than ever to find yourself behind bars. Most regrettably, it's all topped off with a heaping helping of "three strikes" laws. The number of privately run prisons in the United States has increased from only five in 1988 to over two hundred and seventy today (CorpWatch). It represents one of America's fastest growing investment opportunities. Thus, multiple facets of our freedom are jeopardized, it can be argued, by marijuana prohibition.

Our failed prohibition experiment is plagued by an endless sea of injustices, not the least of which are the convictions that follow arrested marijuana users for the rest of their lives. In addition to the jobs they'll never get, a marijuana conviction renders qualification for student loans and grants impossible. Meanwhile, a degenerate with murder, rape, or aggravated assault convictions can secure student loans without a single setback. This is an atrocity on every conceivable level, and it's appalling to think such a blatant disparity could be endorsed by any man or woman endowed with even the slightest sense of fairness or justice.

Prohibition has been tried before, and with equally appreciable failure. During its presence on the books from 1920 to 1933, alcohol prohibition was routinely violated by an independent American public who simply wanted to have a good time on Saturday nights. Prohibition gave rise to organized crime figures like Al Capone as speakeasies and bathtub gin were the order of the day. As the demand for alcohol increased, the number of reported alcohol poisoning cases climbed by 600 percent. Violence poured into the streets as the cost of booze became artificially inflated. Prohibition unintentionally and regrettably ensured alcohol's flow was controlled by organized criminals rather than the government. The same pathetic results are seen today in marijuana prohibition. When polled, kids routinely state that they can acquire marijuana with far greater ease than alcohol (Study). If we're truly concerned about marijuana use among kids, blanket prohibition hardly seems the appropriate solution when objectively considering the facts.

The most modern incarnation of America's failed war against marijuana begins with the Nixon administration. Like any effective politician, Nixon knew his declared

“war on drugs” would require a convincing bit of propaganda. Thus, he formed the Shafer Commission. Headed by Pennsylvania governor Raymond Shafer, the commission’s purpose was to investigate marijuana and give the president a predetermined, codified reason to level the full weight of the federal government against marijuana use. However, when the commission reported marijuana users to be “essentially indistinguishable from their non-marijuana using peers by any fundamental criterion other than their marijuana use,” Nixon was enraged and ignored the very report he commissioned. The report further stated, “Neither the marijuana user nor the drug itself can be said to constitute a danger to public safety.” The commission’s recommendation was that the personal use of marijuana be decriminalized on both the state and federal levels (Marihuana).

According to the federal government, marijuana is a Schedule One narcotic. A Schedule One narcotic has “no known medical value.” Try telling that to the fearful executives within the pharmaceutical industry. They’ve lobbied legislators for decades to keep the marijuana prohibition train chugging along. Drug companies represent America’s most profitable form of enterprise, with prescription drug sales exceeding \$315 billion in 2007. Global sales surpassed \$685 billion (US). The profits enjoyed by “big pharma” become even more lucrative when the sale of “over the counter” medicine is considered. What would happen to these profits if patients were legally afforded other medicinal options? Over 200 human conditions are known to respond favorably to marijuana. They include multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, nausea, hepatitis c, cancer, aids, chronic pain, anxiety, and depression (Medical Cannabis). Pot’s well known medicinal value represents a potentially threatening shift

of consumer consciousness. What would be the value of a share of Pfizer stock if we transitioned from expensive, unnatural, poisonous, experimental pills to an organic, inexpensive, effective, and unpatented weed for which drug companies can't charge big dollars?

The pharmaceutical industry is speaking out of both sides of its mouth in the legalization debate. While it lambastes the legitimacy of pot's medicinal value, it simultaneously promotes products like Marinol. Marinol is a laboratory synthesized, chemically identical version of tetrahydrocannabinol, the "intoxicating" substance found in marijuana. Apparently the pharmaceutical industry and the FDA are approving of marijuana use so long as it's sold for an exorbitantly high price in pill form under an unimaginative brand name. If marijuana has "no known medical value," why would Solvay Pharmaceuticals go so far as to manufacture such a pill? Why would the FDA approve the substance? It would seem that in order for a substance to be legal and possess "medical value," a corporation must be enriched by its sale and a complicit politician must receive political kickbacks from said corporation in exchange for his legislative assistance. As a result, we are legally compelled to use the same dangerous prescription and OTC drugs that kill a combined total of almost 40,000 in the United States every year (Annual). Our health is undeniably jeopardized by marijuana prohibition.

While inhaling smoke of any kind is arguably harmful to the lungs, there is ample evidence to support the claim that marijuana its self is not harmful beyond the general properties of smoke. For instance, it has been claimed that marijuana kills brain cells. This bit of perpetually regurgitated misinformation is the result of a fraudulent study

conducted in 1974 called the Heath/Tulane study. In Heath/Tulane, gas masks were strapped to the faces of monkeys and the equivalent of over 60 “joints” were pumped into their lungs within the span of only 5 minutes with no supplemental oxygen. When the monkeys suffocated to death, their brains were examined and... lo and behold... found to contain dead cells. The “scientist” in charge of conducting this study could probably have also reached the same conclusion by shooting the monkeys in the head with a pistol. We’ve been warned of marijuana’s supposed tendency to cause permanent brain damage ever since this sham study was thrown together. However, a 2005 study by the University of Saskatchewan’s Department of Psychiatry indicates marijuana use might actually encourage the growth of new brain cells (Journal).

Marijuana might not kill brain cells, but it surely must cause lung cancer, right? Not according to a 2006 study by Dr. Donald Tashkin, a pulmonologist with UCLA. Prior to conducting the study, Tashkin and his team expected to find a direct link between marijuana use and lung cancer “...and that the association would be more positive with heavier use.” Tashkin remarked, "What we found instead was no association at all, and even a suggestion of some protective effect" (Kaufman). The surprising marijuana facts don't end with brain cell and cancer studies. For instance, not a single case of lung cancer or even emphysema has been directly attributed to marijuana use. No medical examiner's office has ever cited marijuana overdose as a cause of death. It is not physically addictive, and the New England Journal of Medicine says the average human would have to smoke approximately 1,500 pounds within 14 minutes to lethally overdose (NEJM). Marijuana overdose just doesn't happen.

Pot is no longer a feared “gateway drug” consumed by a miniscule cadre of social outcasts who creepily hide in the shadows. Our current president and his two predecessors admitted using pot in earlier years, as did former vice president Al Gore. Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps was revealed to be a pot smoker when cell phone pictures were publicly released showing him drawing smoke from a marijuana bong. Willie Nelson’s marijuana use is widely documented, and Peter Fonda recently revealed that he, Dennis Hopper, and Jack Nicholson were smoking the real deal during the filming of *Easy Rider*. Marijuana is used responsibly everyday by parents, grandparents, policemen, professors, students, politicians, physicians, and attorneys. Over one hundred million Americans admit having used marijuana. The plant grows naturally everywhere, and is a tightly woven part of our culture. Users of the Apple iPhone can even install an app called *Cannabis* which lets them know where the nearest legally operating marijuana dealer is located. Pot isn’t going away, and neither are its users who, but for this one blemish on their legal conscience, are entirely law abiding citizens. Let’s free them of this marijuana prohibition joke.

Marijuana should immediately be made available for sale at any participating retail outlet where it can be regulated and taxed as alcohol and tobacco are already. The adults who buy it should be allowed to do so in unlimited amounts for both medical and recreational purposes beginning at age 21. Jail should await those who operate a motor vehicle or otherwise endanger the rest of us while high. The tens of billions raised could finance schools, roads, hospitals, power plants, and other forms of infrastructure our fiscally irresponsible state governments are desperately struggling to pay for. Crime rates and enforcement costs will decrease as the marijuana black

market gives way to legitimate retail access. Our prison system will shrink, thus doubling the financial windfall. Finally, and most importantly, sick patients would no longer be medically encumbered by an unnecessary stigma based entirely on lies and profit motives. Let's protect our health, safety, and freedom by immediately ending marijuana prohibition. It's the right thing to do.

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