

# LEGALIZING MARIJUANA IS A DEATH SENTENCE

## LEGALIZING MARIJUANA IS A DEATH SENTENCE

Bill Donohue

For decades, parents, teachers, the clergy, health professionals and public officials have warned against drug use. In more recent times, some states and cities have legalized marijuana, and in a few cases they have dropped penalties for smaller amounts of other drugs. We now have evidence that those places which have relaxed restrictions have paid a big price: the results are devastating.

On April 1, 2022, the House of Representatives voted 220-204 to decriminalize marijuana. The bill now goes to the Senate. New York Senator Chuck Schumer is not satisfied to decriminalize marijuana—he wants to legalize it altogether. He said that federal legislation to do so was a “priority” for the Senate.

Polling data indicate that a majority of Americans are in favor of legalizing marijuana, though the only organized effort to do so is coming from those who expect to profit from it. Yet Schumer justified his enthusiasm by saying the legislation is needed to restore “justice for communities impacted by the War on Drugs—especially communities of color.”

The fact is there has been no groundswell of support by Asians, Hispanics or African Americans to legalize marijuana. Indeed, there is no campaign among “communities of color” to legalize any drugs.

If Schumer were right, we should be able to see a marked difference of opinion between whites and blacks on this issue. But there isn't. Between 2015 and 2021, Pew Research Center

conducted several surveys on support for marijuana legalization, and in five of them they listed support for it based on race and ethnicity. There was almost no difference between whites and blacks on this issue in the surveys taken in 2015, 2016, 2019 and 2021 (there were two in 2021).

Polls measure preferences; they do not measure demand. There is a big difference between the two. Quite frankly, there is no demand coming from blacks, or from any other sector of society, for drug legalization. Blacks, in particular, may want to rethink their position.

A Pew Research Center study released in 2022 found that blacks have been hit the hardest by drugs. "As recently as 2015, Black men were considerably less likely than both White men and American Indian or Alaska Native men to die from drug overdose. Since then, the death rate among Black men has more than tripled—rising 213%—while rates among men in every other major racial or ethnic group have increased at a slower pace."

It also found that "death rates among Black women rose 144% between 2015 and 2020, far outpacing the percentage increases among women in every other racial or ethnic group during the same period."

In the 1980s, Harlem congressman Charles Rangel supported the War on Drugs that Senator Schumer decries. He said that "a lot of the drug-related bleeding was staunches." He also made an insightful comment about why white leaders want to legalize drugs. "It seems to me that more white America is saying, let's legalize drugs because we can't deal with the problem." He was not naive in understanding who pays the biggest price for this policy.

Let's face it. There is big money involved. There is an entire industry waiting to cash in on drug legalization, and it has no plans on stopping after marijuana is legalized.

Parents were asked in a Yahoo News/Marist poll in 2017 what

behaviors they worried about the most in their children. Marijuana use topped the list, beating out concerns over drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, having sex or cheating on a test.

Parents keep an eye on these issues. It was reported in 2022 that drug overdoses now kill more than 100,000 Americans, which is more than those who die in vehicle accidents and from guns combined. It is also almost twice the number of Americans who died in the Vietnam War between 1954 and 1975.

Doctors have been telling us for decades about the harm that smoking cigarettes does to our body, especially our lungs. They have also been telling us about the serious respiratory problems caused by COVID-19. Why, then, is the campaign to legalize a substance that causes more respiratory problems being undertaken at this time? Moreover, according to one prominent physician, "One joint today is like 17 joints in the 1970s."

If the health issues attendant to marijuana use were more widely known, support for legalization would wane.

Kenneth L. Davis is the president and chief executive of the Mount Sinai Health System and Mary Jeanne Kreek is the head of the Laboratory of the Biology of Addictive Diseases at Rockefeller University. Their review of the medical literature led them to conclude that marijuana is not the harmless substance that many believe.

Marijuana has a "deleterious impact on cognitive development in adolescents, impairing executive function, processing speed, memory, attention span and concentration. The damage is measurable with an I.Q. test. Researchers who tracked subjects from childhood through age 38 found a consequential I.Q. decline over the 25-year period among adolescents who consistently used marijuana every week. In addition, studies have shown that substantial adolescent exposure to marijuana

may be a predictor of opioid use disorders.” They add that the brain is still developing in young people to age 25.

Today’s potent marijuana can make users psychotic. A 2019 study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that adolescent marijuana use was associated with significant increases in developing depression and suicidal behavior during adulthood.

Roughly a third of marijuana users become dependent on it and it has proven to be deadly for some of those who have damaged their lungs and heart. In fact, one study found that “a person’s risk of heart attack during the first hour after smoking marijuana is nearly five times his or her usual risk.” A peer-reviewed article published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal found that young people who use marijuana were twice more likely to experience a heart attack.

Pregnant women who use marijuana are causing severe behavioral problems for their children. According to Melinda Wenner Moyer, a contributing editor at Scientific American, “deficits in language comprehension, visual perception, attention and memory” are well-documented problems associated with such children. Also, some studies show that marijuana use during pregnancy is linked to “low birth weight, reduced IQ, autism, delusional thoughts and attention problems,” owing in large part to the fact that “cannabis today is nothing like the cannabis of years past.”

Those who make the case for marijuana legalization like to cite the growing acceptance of medical marijuana as a reason to change our views about this matter. But a recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that medical marijuana “is associated with higher opioid mortality” and that legalizing the substance is “associated with greater death rates” when compared to keeping it illegal.

In March, 2022, Massachusetts General Hospital released a

report that showed that medical marijuana can cause serious psychological and physical health issues and that it usually fails to improve symptoms of “pain, anxiety, and depression.” It also increases the risk of addiction to the drug, even when prescribed.

If legalizing marijuana were inconsequential, we would know it from studying what has happened in Colorado.

Between 2012, when marijuana was legalized, and 2019, marijuana-related traffic deaths increased by 151 percent, while overall state deaths increased by only 35 percent. Nationwide, between 2000 and 2018 vehicle fatalities from marijuana more than doubled from nine percent to 22 percent, meaning that the situation in Colorado is much worse. Emergency room visits for users increased 52 percent in Colorado, while marijuana-related hospitalizations increased by 148 percent.

Marijuana did not become available for recreational sales until two years after it was legalized. The New York Times did a review of what happened over the next five years. “Nearly twice as many Coloradans smoke pot as the rest of America.” The consequences were horrific.

The Times reporter spoke with Andrew Monte, an emergency and medical technology physician and researcher at the University of Colorado. Some of the heavy users he treated suffered from “severe vomiting.” Patients in the emergency room with marijuana-related cases were “five times as likely to have a mental-health issue as those with other cases.”

Children who consumed edibles came to Dr. Monte “disoriented, dehydrated or hallucinating after consuming too much marijuana.” A father of three shot his wife dead after eating edibles. Such stories are commonplace among attending physicians.

That’s not all. Violent crime since legalization increased in

Colorado by 19 percent; it increased by 3.7 percent nationwide. Property crime increased by eight percent as compared to a national *decrease* of 13.6 percent. No wonder that one study concluded that “for every dollar gained in tax revenue, Coloradans spent approximately \$4.50 to mitigate the effects of legalization.”

Coloradans like their drugs so much that they embarked on a campaign to legalize other drugs. In 2019, lawmakers made the possession of small amounts of heroin and cocaine a misdemeanor, not a felony. The Democrat-controlled legislature included fentanyl, the most dangerous of them all. Colorado prosecutors pleaded with lawmakers to exempt fentanyl—four grams is the equivalent of 13,000 deadly doses—but they refused. What happened? Opioid overdose deaths increased by 54 percent in 2020.

In 2018, King County, which encompasses Seattle, and neighboring Snohomish County, stopped charging people for small amounts of hard drugs. Meth overdoses skyrocketed, going from 18 deaths in 2008 to 197 in 2019. Heroin overdose deaths jumped from 45 to 147 and fentanyl-related deaths climbed from 9 to 106, during the same time period. Seattle radio talk-show host Jason Rantz says decriminalization made “the problems worse.” In fact, he brands it “an unmitigated disaster.” There are now calls to reverse this law.

One of the great myths about drug legalization is that it will dry up the black market. In fact, just the opposite happens. The Mexican cartels are not stupid. To make up for the loss in revenue from trafficking in marijuana, they have expanded their operations in heroin and meth.

States which have legalized pot have attracted an entire new thriving market in marijuana fields. According to Steven Malanga at the Manhattan Institute, California’s experiment in legalizing marijuana shops has led to illegal growers undercutting the price of legal weed. The black market drug

lords, he says, don't have to pay for "the cost of a license, taxes on sales, and the financial burdens of complying with state health regulations." The final tally is incontestable. "As a result," he says, "production of illegal pot is increasing."

In December, 2021, San Francisco supervisors got the message and unanimously voted to suspend the city's tax on pot through 2022, in an attempt to curb illegal marijuana sales.

No policy can stop the demand for drugs, but making it easier to access is the worst alternative. Indeed, it has proven to be a death sentence for too many Americans.