



Ten Talking Points about the Cannabis Debate (October 2019)

1. **Cannabis is NOT a safe drug.**
 - a. **Cannabis is NOT a harmless drug; the part of the plant that gets you high, THC, is addictive (between 9% to 30% may develop a cannabis use disorder), and the THC potency these days is much stronger than in the past.¹**
 - b. **THC contributes to many health problems (e.g., mental illness, learning and memory impairment and impaired driving)².**
 - c. **We have enough problems already with the two legal “recreational” drugs (nicotine and alcohol); adding a third legal intoxicant is a bad idea.**

2. **Cannabis may or may not be a medicine that helps Vets (or non-Vets).**
 - a. **It is too early to say if the marijuana plant is effective medicine in treating pain or PTSD, although there are many studies underway.³**
 - b. **Current research showed insufficient evidence to draw conclusions about the benefits and harms. One study showed it was significantly associated with worse outcomes for PTSD.⁴**
 - c. **Smoking marijuana is not medicine.**
 - d. **MN has a medical marijuana program that could be improved. We do not need to commercialize it to improve this program.**

3. **Marijuana does not replace opioids for pain**
 - a. **February 1, 2019 study showed low strength evidence that marijuana alleviated neuropathic pain and that marijuana as an efficacious treatment for opioid use was even weaker.⁵**
 - b. **New study reverses finding of 2014 study and found an increase of 23% in opioid deaths⁶**

4. **The state will not benefit from sizeable tax revenues.**
 - a. **Commercialization backers rarely discuss the costs associated with widespread use of the drug on health care, mental health services, law enforcement, businesses and consumers.⁷**
 - i. **Estimated health and social costs per dollar of tax revenue**
 1. **Alcohol \$13⁸**
 2. **Tobacco \$9⁹**
 3. **Estimated marijuana \$4.5¹⁰**
 - b. **California’s pot-related tax revenue missed projections by more than 50 percent, and the former governor of Colorado has said tax revenue from pot won’t solve fiscal challenges faced by states and municipalities.**



5. **Adolescent use will likely increase because the minimum legal age will be 21.**
 - a. **The US Surgeon General just stated “No amount of marijuana use during pregnancy or adolescence is known to be safe.”¹¹**
 - b. **Recent data indicate an overall higher rate of underage cannabis use in commercial cannabis states vs non-commercial cannabis states.¹²**
 - c. **If history is informative, the rate of drug use by adolescents eventually increases if that drug becomes more accessible.¹³**
 - d. **How is the minimum legal age of 21 for alcohol working?**

6. **Cannabis users have been unjustly punished by law enforcement.**
 - a. **Commercializing cannabis has not resolved social injustice issues. African Americans are twice as likely to be arrested for marijuana in commercialization states of Colorado and Washington. Denver: cannabis stores are clustered in minority neighborhoods, similar to liquor stores in low-income areas. ¹⁴**
 - b. **Minnesota: Possession of less than 1 ½ ounces is a petty misdemeanor.**
 - c. **A very small percent of Minnesotans are incarcerated for cannabis use, and many of those had prior felony convictions.¹⁵**
 - d. **We support decriminalization not commercialization**

7. **The black market will not be eliminated.**
 - a. **The opposite is occurring in legalization states. In 2018 CA grew 15 million pounds of pot but only sold 2.5 million.¹⁶**
 - b. **The black market is expanding as they undercut the retail price.**

8. **Cannabis is not commonly used.**
 - a. **Most Minnesotans older than 25 do not use cannabis (~11% report prior year use); the majority of users are in the 18-25year-old range (~37% report prior year use).**
 - b. **These MN rates are similar to the national average.¹⁷**

9. **Legalization is not necessarily inevitable.**
 - a. **10 states in the past two years have applied the brakes to full legalization efforts (CT, FL, MN, ND, NH, NJ, NM, NY, WI, VT).**
 - b. **What does legalization mean? When poll questions are properly asked, only about one-third of Americans favor full, commercial legalization.¹⁸**

10. **Prohibition was not a failed policy.**
 - a. **Governments legislate all kinds of “prohibitions” in the name of public health and public safety and they work (e.g., indoor smoking restrictions)**
 - b. **The prohibition on alcohol decreased liver disease, domestic abuse and public drunkenness**
 - c. **We have enough problems with the two legal recreational drugs – nicotine and alcohol. We do not need another one added to the legal list.**
 - d. **Should we lift the prohibition on all illicit drugs?**



References

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- ³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28806794>
- ⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6258013/>
- ⁵ <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/26/12624>
- ⁶ <https://learnaboutsam.org>
- ⁷ <https://learnaboutsam.org/Costs>
- ⁸ <http://alcohol-psr.changelabsolutions.org/alcohol-psr-faqs/alcohol-taxes-faq/alcohol-tax-revenues-social-and-health-costs-government-expenditures/#sec3q7>
- ⁹ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/12/141210121403.htm> and https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/economics/econ_facts/index.htm
- ¹⁰ <https://learnaboutsam.org/new-report-cost-of-marijuana-legalization-far-outweighs-tax-revenues/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html>
- ¹² National Survey of Drug Use and Health. (2017). <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/nsduh/reports-detailed-tables2017-NSDUH>
- ¹³ <https://www.mjfactcheck.org/potency>
- ¹⁴ <https://learnaboutsam.org/Lessons-Learned-Social-Justice>
- ¹⁵ MN Department of Corrections Fact Sheet: *Drug Offenders in Prisons, 2018*
- ¹⁶ <https://learnaboutsam.org/Lessons-Learned-Black-Market>
- ¹⁷ National Survey of Drug Use and Health. (2017). <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/nsduh/reports-detailed-tables2017-NSDUH>
- ¹⁸ https://learnaboutsam.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ECP_SAM_National_Poll_20190218-2.pdf