

There are ~~some~~ things that are legal, but not particularly smart: things like gambling and smoking cigarettes. If you want to ruin your finances go gamble; if you want to ruin your health and at an astonishing 4-5\$ per pack—go smoke. I'd rather not tell you what I think about those who run such industries. Perhaps what they do speaks for itself.

But ~~when~~ there are ~~some~~ things that people want to do and those things are against the law, the price goes up considerably.

Things like hiring a hit man are pretty pricey, I hear, because it's a high risk game; if you get caught, you could get sent to ~~in~~ the gas chamber. And there is marijuana cultivation. This job is highly lucrative: not because it takes a lot of training or skill, but because it is illegal. So, while I think smoking marijuana is about as smart as smoking tobacco or gambling, ~~it~~ ^{growing the stuff} makes money precisely because every time CAMP or the Sheriff makes a bust, they get the growers thrown into jail, the marijuana thrown onto the fire, and the price goes up—^{up} thus making it all the more lucrative for those growers who have not been caught. The criminalization of marijuana is working about as well as prohibition ^{worked}.

It is an exercise in economic futility: ignoring the raw effects of supply and demand.

Now, I would like to see demand for pot plummet; and I think it would if the word gets out that it has become a less than healthy drug: Growing pot harms the environment and smoking pot harms the mind. Today, THC levels are higher than ever and so recent studies show that chronic use leads to sharp increases in addiction, mental illness and lack of mental acuity. Then, there is the rampant thuggery between growers and dealers. But absent a sharp drop in demand, the current practices are not going to work. Almost anyone who wants to smoke marijuana can find the stuff, and almost anybody who wants to make a quick buck can grow the stuff.

What to do? I suggest we legalize it. As much as I hate to admit it, we've lost the war on marijuana proliferation, and so I would say a better approach would be to legalize it and then do what government does so exceedingly well: tax the hell out of it. That would keep wholesale prices low and it would probably put many of the local growers into a tailspin. Why? They could not compete with larger farmers who would cultivate the stuff by the acre or section: thus bringing wholesale prices down, down, down... Many growers would stop farming marijuana, because it would become a lot like farming lettuce or tomatoes: hard work, slim profits. Legalization would also help the coffers of our local government who get no taxes ~~whatsoever~~ from the current marijuana industry because it is mostly cash under the table.

I think it is time for a serious dialogue on the merits of legalizing the growing and sale of marijuana. I think we should call local, state and federal ^{level} independents, Republicans, Democrats and Libertarians alike to take a close look at legalizing, then regulating, a drug that we are trying with utter futility to suppress. If legalized we could let the scientists and doctors study it out in the open and if people want to use it: fine, it's your mind; it's your body ~~at risk~~, just keep it away from the youngsters or the penalty would be stiff.

I'd like to know what you think...

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment