

Decriminalizing marijuana would help US

by **Johnny Harpter**
The Daily Gamecock
U-Wire Content

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 12.4 percent of federal inmates are serving for marijuana related charges. For the conservatives who are so ardent about supporting Joe-taxpayer but at the same time want to crack down on marijuana users, it seems a bit hypocritical.

Luckily, not a lot of voters go that far in the thinking process when casting their ballot.

They've been programmed to think taxes, marijuana, gay marriage and France are all evil. It isn't just conservatives who should take a closer look at the issue, however. According to the latest Gallup poll concerning how many Americans support marijuana legalization in 2005, 60 percent of Americans were in favor of continued illegalization. 77 percent of conservatives and 60 percent of moderates are against legalization while 36 percent of moderates and 54 percent of liberals in favor of legalization. Keep in mind, though, this is not decriminalization, but legalization.

Marijuana has been branded with a stigma we have yet to shake. Compared with the legal drugs available over the counter, it would boggle an outsiders mind as to why alcohol is readily available while marijuana can come with jail time, yet the U.S. is spending \$42 billion a year to crack down on this plant. Think of

all the good you could do with that much money as far as funding education, cancer research or lowering taxes.

I think the biggest mistake people on this side of the argument make is pushing for marijuana to be legal, which scares the other side off before even hearing their points.

There needs to be a collected, sincere political movement first for a decriminalization of the drugs, something with actual plans for dealing with the offenders in a way that doesn't cost Americans more money.

Instead of prison service, I would have no problem seeing marijuana users punished in a way that suits the crime. Why not have them plant

trees? These adopt-a-highway programs are nice for local groups wanting to get some free publicity and feel good about themselves, but how about making marijuana users clean up the litter on the side of the roads. The roads would be cleaner, because people like their weed, and they could clean it more often. If taxpayers are going to pay for these "criminals" anyway, they might as well see something good come out of it. Community service seems like a logical way to deal with marijuana users.

These are just a few points about how to deal with the war on marijuana. If you are serious about getting some change or want to know more, then you should really educate yourself on the issues.

All it takes is a couple Google searches and you'll pick up official government statistics and tax-spending and organizational Web sites for marijuana reform like NORML. Remember, you don't have to be a marijuana user to see the damage it does to your wallet.



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