

Commentary

November 7, 2014

Addressing the Results of Marijuana Ballot Initiatives in the November, 2014 US Elections

The marijuana legalization tidal wave continues to roll across the United States with many groups advocating for a variety of more permissive marijuana laws. The goal of these policies is the commercialization and regulation of marijuana similar to the models of alcohol and tobacco. The tremendous funding of these political initiatives comes from the pro-drug lobby, made up of groups that seek to legalize all drugs of abuse, beginning with marijuana.

In the November, 2014 election, advocates for marijuana legalization made progress in passing ballot initiatives to legalize marijuana in the states of Alaska and Oregon and in the District of Columbia. These victories were not landslides. It is encouraging that the public in these areas were divided because it means that there remains opposition to marijuana legalization, despite the immense amount of money pouring into states to pass these initiatives.

Over the past decade, the pro-drug lobby has lost far more of these initiatives than it has won but the media picks up only those that succeed, with the implication that these initiatives are easily sweeping the country. The pro-drug lobby is utterly undeterred by its many losses. It returns to each election cycle with more money, better strategies and more target states for the legalization of both “medical” marijuana and recreational marijuana.

The recent creation of Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM) and the tireless work of its remarkably skilled co-founders Kevin Sabet, Ph.D. and former Congressman Patrick Kennedy has provided steady, on-the-ground, national leadership in the resistance to the pro-drug lobby’s campaign of mounting ever more effective counterattacks.

The ensuing disastrous consequences of marijuana legalization in Colorado, while still largely ignored by the media, as well as the similar disaster of “medical” marijuana in states with broadly open access and dispensaries like California and Colorado, have the potential to wake up the sleeping American majority. A new Gallop poll shows that support for marijuana legalization in the US has declined 12 percent from 2013 to 2014.^{1 2} This change provides evidence that marijuana legalization is not inevitable.

A swing away from this disastrous policy may already be underway. We are seeing a backlash to marijuana legalization. In this election, five cities in Colorado banned marijuana dispensaries and the “medical” marijuana initiative in the state of Florida did not pass. I remain optimistic about the eventual outcome of this political struggle for the future of American drug policy.

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¹ Sabet, K. (2014, November 7). Support for marijuana legalization plummets 12% in 2014 v 2013. Smart Approaches to Marijuana. Available: <http://learnaboutsam.org/support-marijuana-legalization-plummets-12-2014-v-2013/>

² Saad, L. (2014, November 6). Majority continues to support pot legalization in U.S. Gallop. Available: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/179195/majority-continues-support-pot-legalization.aspx>