

# Legal pot is here to stay, Trump or no Trump - AvvoStories

Tuesday, May 16 2017, 3:17 PM

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## Legal pot is here to stay, Trump or no Trump

MARIJUANA, BUSINESS, MONEY, NEWS, POLITICS, RIGHTS

May 15, 2017

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Despite [threats](#) from the current administration to crackdown on marijuana, states that have legalized cannabis are ready to [fight](#) for it. There's a lot more at stake than just states' rights. Only a few years old, legal marijuana is already a big industry that's having a major impact in the states that have welcomed it.

### So much money

In Oregon, which only legalized recreational cannabis in 2014, the industry has already created at least 12,500 new jobs.

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in [Oregon](#), which only legalized recreational cannabis in 2014, the industry has already created at least 12,000 new jobs and generates over \$20 million in revenue each month. Washington and Colorado, the first two states to legalize the use and sale of recreational pot, have also seen a hefty bump in revenue. An October 2016 [study](#) by the Marijuana Policy Group in Colorado found that marijuana ranked second only to government programs in the generation of employment and output per dollar spent.

“We started retail sales in July of 2015. Since then, retail cannabis sales have generated roughly \$500 million in tax revenues,” says Brian Smith, communications director for the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board, the state agency that licenses marijuana retailers. “It’s very significant, and sales continue to increase as we continue to increase the number of stores.”

Where does the money go? In [Washington](#) state, some of it is funneled back into regulation and oversight, substance abuse education and prevention programs, and community health centers. But the lion’s share is divided between Medicaid and the state’s general fund—much of which goes towards the school system. In Colorado, schools are actually the primary beneficiaries of marijuana money.

California, which legalized marijuana last year, is predicted to generate a *billion* dollars in annual marijuana tax revenue, the bulk of which is earmarked for substance abuse education and treatment programs.

## What “good people” think

Attorney General Jeff Sessions infamously [said](#) “Good people don’t use marijuana,” in a Senate hearing last year, and more recently in a [speech](#) in Richmond, Virginia, added “I am astonished to hear people suggest that we can solve our heroin crisis by legalizing marijuana—so people can trade one life-wrecking dependency for another that’s only slightly less awful.” Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly called marijuana a “potentially dangerous gateway drug,” in a [speech](#) at George Washington University in April.

While such statements from the president’s cabinet could be pulled from Eisenhower-era propaganda, a frank discussion is taking place elsewhere, as [public attitudes](#) about marijuana use change. In Colorado, nearly half of [survey](#) respondents said they would consider taking pot to a dinner party instead of wine. Of course, not everyone is ready to get on board the pot train. Communities in the rural eastern parts of Washington and Oregon, for example, are resisting the change with local bans on retail marijuana outlets.

They may not hold out for long, however. “The [Washington] legislature has incentivized communities to have retail stores with a pool of 6 million dollars (going up to 12 million in the future) allocated by retail sales,” Smith says. Communities with higher retail sales receive a greater portion of the pooled money. Those without retail sales receive none of it.

## Gateway drug?

Attitudes are one thing, but they hardly matter if the facts disagree. Sessions and Kelly might do well to read a recent University of California [study](#) that found a 23% drop in hospitalizations for opioid abuse and an 11% drop in opioid overdoses after states legalized medical marijuana. Given that over 33,000 Americans [died](#) in 2016 from opioid-related overdoses—quite a bit more than the zero Americans who died from marijuana overdoses—Sessions may want to revise that “only slightly less awful” assessment.

It is too early to tell what effect legalized recreational marijuana will have on crime and public safety overall, but a University of Texas [study](#) on medical marijuana (which has a longer history of legality) found no indication of an exacerbating effect on crime rates and found a possible correlation with reduced homicide and assault rates.

Even cops have seen some benefits from legalization. A Police Foundation [publication](#) addressing practical law enforcement considerations of legalized recreational marijuana in Colorado had the following to say:

“State and law enforcement officials feared that this would lead to a huge increase in

criminal behavior. Others predicted that the elimination of arrests for marijuana would bring a huge savings for police and the justice system. To date, these predictions have not been borne out.”

## But what about the children?

On the downside of legalization, the same police publication also observed “concerning trends” in youth drug use, noting, however, that there won’t be any hard data on teen marijuana use until completion of the 2017 Oregon Healthy Teens Survey.

Washington state’s 2016 [Healthy Youth Survey](#) found that young people’s perception of the risks of marijuana use had decreased from previous studies. This result has put regulators on high alert, as preventing distribution to minors is their top enforcement priority. On the other hand, the Drug Policy Alliance [study](#) of legalization in Washington and Colorado found no effect on teen marijuana use.

Another concern: in the year following legalization, [Oregon](#) law enforcement officers noted an increase in [marijuana-impaired drivers](#). And Oregon’s Poison Control Center observed an increase in calls from people who felt sick after consuming cannabis.

## Impact on civil rights?

The Drug Policy Alliance study reported that legalization resulted in fewer drug-related arrests—a finding that offers hope for civil rights improvements. According to the [ACLU](#), blacks and whites in America use marijuana at approximately equal rates, but blacks are four times as likely to be arrested for possession. Legalizing possession could reduce the criminal justice system’s imbalanced incarceration rates.

In general, the jury is still out on exactly what the many impacts of legal weed are, and how they affect issues around state funding, safety, and civil rights. But it does seem abundantly clear that those states which have legalization policies in place are not seeing the kind of negative impact the federal government seems to take as a given, and will push back hard against any attempts to curtail their rights to regulate the drug in their own ways.

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