

Legalizing pot a bad idea

By Mike Pickford

When word started to come out a year or so ago that the federal government was considering legalizing marijuana, I was one of, I'm sure, thousands and thousands of people who refused to believe the hype.

'Nope, no way, no siree.' That was pretty much what went through my head the first time I heard it might be a possibility. For me, there was absolutely no way the government, the body tasked with protecting and looking out for our best interests, would seemingly complete a monumental U-turn and give the thumbs up to a product I was told time and time and time again would ruin my life if I ever dared go near it.

Thankfully, I was scared straight enough that I never really did pick up on the habit that has almost become second nature for many from my generation, and indeed for many before. It is, therefore, a little concerning to me that there may not be anyone around to offer the same advice to generations in the future.

Let's get one thing straight. Despite all the supposed 'scientific facts' that hipster marijuana enthusiasts like to point towards as proof that smoking up can actually benefit one's health, it's complete rubbish. Smoking marijuana, just like smoking cigarettes, has catastrophic impacts on the human body. From my time living in the UK, I watched as several young, previously healthy kids transformed their life, and not for the better, because they thought it would be a good idea to try something different. Something cool.

And that's part of the problem. It has somehow become 'cool' to smoke pot. Especially for the younger generation. It's a problem that is at least somewhat contained now due to the fact that it is illegal and not easily obtainable. If we were to open the doors, legalize it and pretty much tell people to 'come on down', the problems that will be created are unfathomable. You will see an increase in crime. You will see an increase in public intoxication. You will see an increase in impaired driving.

I can somewhat see things from the government's side. So many people are smoking pot these days that it isn't really seen as a big deal. Police don't arrest or convict individuals carrying small amounts of marijuana around with them anymore. They haven't for years. It's slowly become socially acceptable, which is why the government is thinking along the lines of 'yeah, we might as well monetize it.'

And sure, the additional money the government would see through marijuana sales would likely help to improve almost every service in the country. The feds would be able to spend more money on infrastructure, on the healthcare sector, on education. You only have to look towards the state of Colorado to see the benefits it can bring. But at what cost?

When the government turns around and says this is okay, there is going to be a massive spike in the number of people who give it a try, similar to alcohol following the end of prohibition.

There will be many who try it simply because all their friends are doing it, and they don't have the excuse of 'it's illegal' to hide behind any more. For those of us that absolutely detest smoking and have no interest at all in purchasing, smoking, or doing anything at all with marijuana? Well, I guess we had better get used to enjoying that lovely aroma. Because it's going to be everywhere.

It has been a while since I've felt the need to rant, but this is something I feel especially passionate about. I've seen first-hand what marijuana can do to friends, to family members. Sure, it's not as bad or as destructive as the likes of cocaine and heroin, but it's definitely a gateway to more negative things.

Those who need it for medicinal reasons already have access to it. Those that choose to do it, sure, continue. But don't open this up and expose thousands of others to something they likely wouldn't engage in if it remained illegal.

I think the government needs to be more responsible in this case. Legalizing marijuana sends the exact wrong message to the public and sets an incredibly bad example to the leaders of tomorrow.

The short-sightedness of this decision is as laughable as it is infuriating. As the days count down towards almost certain legalization, I'm hoping our prime minister has something of an epiphany, or a bad trip, and realizes just how bad a decision this really is. But contrary to what I will likely have to do anywhere I go in the future, I'm not holding my breath.