

Marijuana Legalization Would Be 'a Health Catastrophe'

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A leading drug policy researcher, David Murray, has a must-read piece up at the Hudson Institute website, "[Comparing Marijuana and Alcohol: Seriously](#)." Murray's article is a devastating deconstruction of claims that marijuana is relatively safe, or at least safer than alcohol. And, as he points out, it thereby undermines much of the basis of the *New York Times*'s blithely irresponsible editorial endorsement of marijuana legalization.

[Read Murray's whole piece](#). Here are highlights:

It's a remarkable weekend when one finds the Grey Lady arguing for state's rights, and worrying huffily about arbitrary Presidential powers. But when it comes to smoking dope, the mind of the New York Times has fully boggled. Against careful science, sound public policy, and even liberal politics that defends the vulnerable, the venerable editors have decided that what America needs now is marijuana, and more of it. ...

Entranced by the specter of Al Capone, the Times embraces the wrong-headed idea that marijuana is less dangerous than alcohol. There are two problems with this belief: it's terribly dated. And it is contradicted by any serious consideration of the facts. ...

A central point is that virtually everything that the New York Times thinks they know about marijuana's effects is based on old anecdotes (including personal experimentation), cultural perceptions, and in some cases, even legitimate research derived from a time when marijuana was, on average, one-fifth to one-sixth as powerful as it is today. To compound the threat, the mean age for initiating marijuana use today is 18, with a substantial number of 12-15 year-olds starting every year. They are at an even greater developmental risk than the older, young adult initiates of the past. ...

Simply put, were marijuana (or cocaine) to be legal, and subject to comparable access and use patterns by subjects on a daily basis, the impact on their dangers as found in dependency and addiction rates, while unknown, would likely be staggering. ...

No one is trying to underplay the dangers to be found in alcohol consumption. It's a substance with known risks and exorbitant costs. But to argue that because alcohol is dangerous, therefore we should admit cannabis, the true risks of which we are just discovering, into the same regulatory regime of access and use, is certainly not justified by the actual research. Moreover, the pervasive reportorial neglect, ignorance, and distortion concerning marijuana are, at best, unprofessional. ...

It cannot be stressed enough: virtually every month major research findings are confirming the impact of THC as a neurotoxin with no safe dose; the cumulative literature is becoming inescapable. Marijuana use changes the brains of users, and the more and earlier they smoke, the more comprehensive and lasting the potential damage. A causal argument is not yet made, but neither is it required for prudent public policy action. There is now sufficient evidence to establish that we are putting our children – all our children, including the minority and the vulnerable — at risk by increasing access to a poison. ...

There has seldom been a more foreseeable health catastrophe.