



| [Back \(/opinion/featuredcommentary/11974018-74/marijuana-colorado-drug\)](/opinion/featuredcommentary/11974018-74/marijuana-colorado-drug) | Text Size: **—**
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Colorado's pot full of benefits

ANTHONY DAVIES & JAMES R. HARRIGAN | Saturday, Feb. 25, 2017, 9:00 p.m.

Four years ago, Colorado legalized marijuana for recreational use. Contrary to what opponents predicted at the time, all hell did not break loose.

Legalization did not open the floodgates to rampant hard drug use. It did not result in vast swaths of the population dropping out of work and ending up on welfare.

What did it accomplish?

Tax revenues are up significantly, and the police are now free to concentrate on crimes with actual victims.

Legal marijuana sales in Colorado alone will be about \$1.3 billion for 2016 when the accounting is all said and done, which will yield about \$180 million in tax dollars for the state.

Legalization opponents everywhere now need to do some serious soul searching. For decades they have pushed for ever stronger drug laws which, they claim, are necessary to protect people from the financial, emotional and physical ravages of drug use. Drugs, they continually tell us, destroy lives. For people's own good, we need to use the ham fists of government to punish those who would visit this sort of ruin upon themselves and upon society itself.

So in the name of saving people from themselves, we have fined them, jailed them, made it harder for them to find work, broken up their families — and for what? The self-styled drug warriors will never admit it, but the truth is becoming more obvious by the minute: There is no good reason for any of this government prohibition against marijuana. As a matter of fact, it is becoming clear that the government is often more dangerous to its citizens than are drugs.

There are bad outcomes with drug use, to be sure. Sometimes. But there are bad outcomes to any number of things that we do not ban, like jogging, swimming and going outside during inclement weather, not to mention alcohol and cigarettes. It is simply not

the role of government to protect people from themselves by denying them their freedom. Freedom is messy, and it necessarily means leaving people free to live their lives as they choose as long as they bring no harm to anyone else in the process.

It should be very clear by now that people who use marijuana bring no harm to anyone, likely not even themselves. Marijuana isn't everyone's cup of tea. But millions of people find a real benefit in marijuana — from offering relief to disease symptoms to ameliorating the weight of depression, to just providing a nice feeling. And that's their business. The onus is on those who would maintain a system that punishes people over a harmless plant. They are the real threat, and it's time they were exposed for what they are: petty dictators who are more concerned with controlling the lives of others than in actually doing good.

If the drug warriors were right in their fears, Colorado would now be the post-apocalyptic hellscape that they warned us it would become. But Colorado is the same beautiful place it always has been. There are a few things to note, though.

Since marijuana legalization, it is a freer place. And the state's tax coffers are \$180 million heavier in 2016 alone. What more proof do the petty dictators need?

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