Marijuana Policy Alternatives: Lessons from Colorado

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Executive Summary

Marijuana prohibition has been a controversial issue in terms of the federal context since its inception several decades ago. Similar to alcohol prohibition, the federal government has relied on the states to support its prohibition policies, but largely with uneven measures that lack in efficiency. Although Colorado and Washington have implemented measures to legalize pot's recreational use, and 20 states have legalized its medical use, the federal government still reserves the right to prosecute cases against these programs. Modern history has shown presidential administrations ignoring testimony from well-respected academic institutions in order to continue its ineffective policies, which include significant costs to the public.

Colorado has implemented a legalization policy that attempts to address the relative failures of federal prohibition. Its program is regulated similarly to its alcohol one, where those 21 years of age and older are permitted to possess limited amounts of marijuana. Cultivation for personal use is allowed with licensing only given to those who embrace vertical integration. The policy also imposes a 25% tax on pot that is directed toward public schools and law enforcement.

Clearly, Colorado's policy matches current social trends, something that is supported by its recent political victories and a considerable majority of Americans favoring legalization. However, although the program attempts to correct the mistakes of prohibition, its own deficiencies do not make it appropriate for Michigan to follow; vertical integration and the lack of a cap on product grown per year can only pave the way for corruption. Furthermore, without a comprehensive approach from all three branches of the federal government, the declaration of one to lessen its response is not enough to establish the political feasibility of the policy's long-term prognosis.

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