

Up in Fumes

Marijuana legalization impacts not so hazy

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This session, 11 bills have been filed in Texas concerning marijuana legislation, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the coming debate will put Texas in the national spotlight. Already, the states of Colorado, Alaska, Oregon and Washington have legalized the recreational use of the substance with 19 others, including the District of Columbia, permitting limited possession or use.

As a state, Texas has been afforded the great opportunity to learn from the blunders of those who went before it. Luckily for us, a federally funded agency in Colorado has studied the situation and outlined a few big reasons why legalization is bad. First, there has been an increase in DUI drug arrests with the majority being from marijuana, rather than alcohol intoxication. Those supporting legalization will often tell you that while weed will be legal, driving under the influence will not. This is null and void when it is clear that legalization leads to more drivers getting behind the wheel high regardless of the laws in place. In fact, researchers from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health found that fatal car crashes involving marijuana have tripled in Colorado with the increased use.

Another possible stipulation to legalization is that minors will still not be able to buy or carry the drug. For Colorado, possession while under 21 years of age is illegal. This, however, hasn't prevented the dramatic 39% increase in Colorado high school students using marijuana. Additionally, drug related expulsions have increased

by 32% since 2008. These stats lend to the idea that legalization will make the drug more readily available to minors, despite laws put in place.

Proponents of legalization will argue that marijuana is a safe drug with effects comparable to alcohol. The facts say something entirely different. Marijuana is much more addictive than the drink, especially to teenagers and young adults. While alcohol can be consumed mildly for a length of time without any significant health effects and actually a few benefits, marijuana has no beneficial properties and actually has some major detriments to health according to the the National Institute on Drug Abuse. It lists an impaired immune system, impaired memory, slowed reaction times, impaired motor skills (refer to Colorado's increased marijuana DUI car crashes), and toxic properties that cause birth defects, brain damage, stroke, and heart attacks as some, not all, of the dangerous effects of pot.

Perhaps this is why the American Medical Association and the American Lung Association are among the numerous non-profits and individual doctors that oppose legalization. Plus, it's hard to argue with the 82% increase in marijuana hospitalizations seen in Colorado since 2008. Yet it's "not a dangerous drug."

From the libertarian perspective ,the government should stay out of individuals' lives and for that reason legalize marijuana, but this is not an individual rights issue. There are several collateral effects of marijuana use. With



marijuana linked to a larger crime rate among people who are high, people who do not smoke are still at risk of being killed or even injured. By exercising the "individual right" of marijuana use, a person getting high encroaches upon the rights of other citizens.

Some will argue that marijuana is a very large revenue source that is simply waiting to be tapped with taxes by the government. Legalization, they assert, would thus clear the jails of nonviolent criminals. Rather than support all the

hazardous effects that are associated with the drug through legalization, legislators should simply prosecute those caught in possession with heavy fines, not jail time. People already jailed should have bonds posted in accordance with the time served, and new fines for marijuana would be a much greater revenue source than taxes.

There is no way to keep people from doing drugs, the "War on Drugs," if anything, has taught us that. However, legalization is the lazy answer.

Put ‘Neutral’ Net in Park

FCC adds regulation, neither side gets what they want

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Does anyone know what 'net neutrality' means? Does anyone know what Mrs. Jennings means when she says, "Find the volume of a solid with base R and semi-circle cross sections perpendicular to the x-axis?" Both issues, net neutrality and calculus, are understandable. But it's doubtful that a media pundit can inform mass audiences about either issue in five minutes.

Anyway, forget calculus. On to net neutrality. First, net neutrality amounts to this: equal access for all types of content. Recently, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) decided to regulate under a stricter regime, Title II of Communications Act of 1934. This group's Internet Service Providers (ISPs) under the same set of regulations as cable and phone companies. The CTIA, a trade association that has represented the wireless industry since 1984, recently filed a lawsuit against the FCC's new rules. So did the National Cable and Telecommunications Association and the American Cable Association.

Before going further, a breakdown of the Internet's parts is useful. There are the content providers (Google, Amazon, FunnyOrDie, etc.) and the consumers. The ISP is the middleman, connecting content to consumers and consumers to content. Net neutrality supporters want to make it so that ISPs cannot charge the consumer more to access different content or charge content providers more in order to receive 'priority' access.

Net neutrality supporters want to stick up for the little guy, because net neutrality would prevent ISPs from creating two different lanes for Internet traffic, one fast and one slow. The idea is that without net neutrality, ISPs will charge content providers such as Netflix a premium in order to use the "fast lane." So, if Netflix wants to continue to push out high quality video to its users then it will have to pony up the cash to ride the Internet Autobahn. Meanwhile, everyone else who can't afford this high-speed lane will ride the "slow lane."

If this fast-slow lane model existed, net neutrality advocates say, Internet start-ups would be put at a disadvantage. They claim that large content providers could afford to pay extra for the fast-lanes while smaller businesses couldn't. But there's something amiss. Some of the largest supporters of net neutrality are also some of the largest content providers: Yahoo!, Amazon, and Twitter to name a few.

Net neutrality doesn't help Internet start-ups as much as it entrenches incumbents. Sites such as Google don't care about using Internet fast lanes to promote themselves. They are already well-known. Meanwhile, an Internet start-up could utilize a fast lane in order to promote their business. Another reason Google and its like don't care: most of these companies (including Netflix) run dedicated computer servers inside ISPs which help users get their content faster.

A non-neutral Internet could allow the more obscure companies to get a jump-start. They could pay more in order to use a "fast lane" and give users a chance to experience their content. It's no different than content providers themselves who promote their own content on their site. While Amazon allows a diverse group of independent sellers on its site, Amazon promotes its own content on its homepage. If by chance a large ISP decided to block access to certain content that competed with its own, current antitrust laws could be used to scrutinize such



action. New regulation is not needed.

And competition is the whole problem that sparked the net neutrality debate. There are a handful of ISPs in the market. About 76 percent of Americans have access to three or more facilities-based ISPs, according to FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai. Three isn't terrible, but it certainly isn't ideal. Yet, net neutrality rules will not increase competition. More regulatory hurdles will slow the progress of companies like Google Fiber which hopes to provide faster broadband connections and compete with cable.

Now, here's the kicker: every American lived without net neutrality since the Internet's inception. The FCC's rules don't really even bring about true net neutrality as they don't ban "fast lanes." They merely clutter the industry with red tape.

Take a deep breath. Even though America won't truly have net neutrality, it's no cause for worry. It may seem that ISPs have Internet access in a chokehold,

but that's far from the truth. If Comcast wanted to deny access to someone's blog, that blog is most likely hosted by WordPress. So it's not Random Guy versus Comcast. It's WordPress versus Comcast. The same is true for artists who have videos on YouTube.

These hypothetical situations may seem reminiscent of showdowns between satellite TV providers and TV networks. When DISH Network cut out AMC, the loss was short-lived as fans and the channel's management won the fight to bring back AMC and its popular shows.

So, rest easy. The Internet can survive without net neutrality (as it has for over two decades). It's not necessary to shut down business models that don't even exist. The only thing that will bring about a more 'neutral,' open internet in which consumers have choice is a more competitive market.