

S. 241: How Would Its Passage Impact Youth Substance Abuse Education and Prevention Efforts in Vermont?

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This issue is important regardless of what happens with S. 241

- All serious participants in this policy discussion agree that Vermont has serious problems with substance abuse in general and that underage cannabis use should be discouraged.
- Both the Senate-approved and House-amended versions of S. 241 would allocate \$350,000 to fund youth education and prevention efforts.

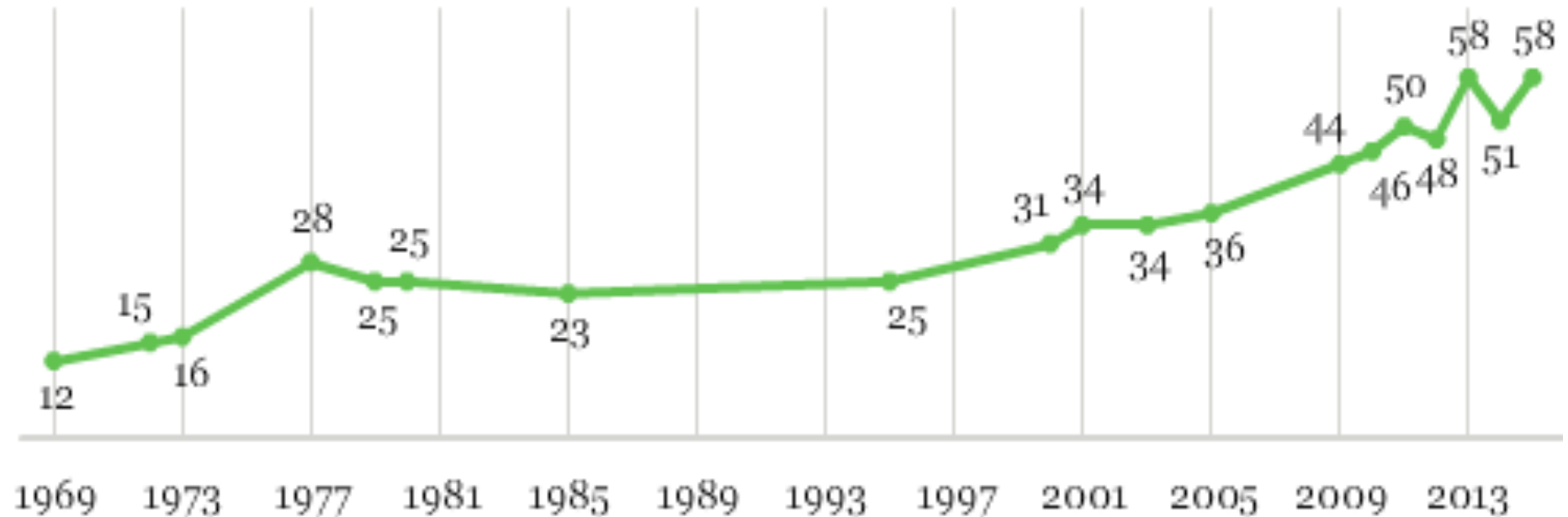
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- Vermont and other states are transitioning from an “era of prohibition” to an era in which responsible adult cannabis use is tolerated by society and under the law.
- Society has already largely made this transition, as evidenced by large shifts in public opinion. Policymakers are reacting to these shifts.

Gallup has been asking since 1969

Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal, or not?

■ % Yes, legal



Why have opinions changed?

- “We have been terribly and systematically misled for nearly 70 years in the United States, and I apologize for my own role in that.” — Dr. Sanjay Gupta

(“Why I changed my mind on weed,” Aug. 8, 2013
www.cnn.com/2013/08/08/health/gupta-changed-mind-marijuana/)

Marijuana Prohibition

Vermonters spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year buying marijuana from the illicit market

There is no regulation of marijuana production and sale, so consumers don't know what they're getting

Sellers do not check ID and may introduce consumers to more dangerous substances

The state has no revenue stream to assist with education, prevention, treatment, and enforcement

All marijuana use (except strictly limited medical use) is considered "drug abuse," and users are punished

Marijuana is only available to about 2,500 patients who suffer from a very limited set of medical conditions

Doctors are placed in the difficult position of being "gatekeepers" for legal access to marijuana

Educators and authorities must defend a hypocritical double standard regarding marijuana and alcohol

Some Vermonters believe marijuana is extremely dangerous, while others reject this and believe it is "harmless"

Marijuana Regulation

Vermonters spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year at state-regulated, taxed marijuana businesses

Marijuana is tested for potency and purity and labeled accordingly so people know what they're consuming

Only adults 21 and over may enter a marijuana retail store, which sells only marijuana and marijuana products

Targeted revenue allows state to be proactive in educating the public and protecting public health and safety

Irresponsible marijuana use is strongly discouraged, but responsible adult use is understood and accepted

Marijuana is available to adults who suffer from chronic pain, PTSD, and other serious conditions

Doctors can discuss marijuana frankly with their patients, with no pressure to certify them for state-legal access

Propaganda and fearmongering can finally take a back seat to honest education supported by evidence

Vermonters recognize that marijuana is not "harmless," but that its harms are best managed by regulation

Do you remember this old warning?

- *“There are well-known endocrine effects of marijuana. Specifically it interferes with the expression of testosterone, leading to gynecomastia (breast enlargement) and possibly testicular atrophy in males, heavy users being the most susceptible to these effects.”*

Sadly, the quote on the previous slide wasn't from the 1980's

It appeared in an op-ed published by a Vermont pediatrician in *The Times Argus* on January 20, 2016!

<http://www.timesargus.com/article/20160120/OPINION04/160129999>

What is the goal of education?

- (1) Is it to increase knowledge and understanding?
- (2) Is it to make students think or believe a certain way about a subject?

Examples of other subjects where similar conflicts between educators with differing goals may arise:

- (1) Sex Education
- (2) American History

What is the goal of drug education?

- D.A.R.E. was founded by L.A. Police Chief Daryl Gates. In 1990, he testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee and told them that he believed “casual drug users should be taken out and shot.”
- “Gates, discussing his comment to the Senate Judiciary Committee, said his harsh assessment was aimed at those ‘who blast some pot on a casual basis’ despite the illegality of the act.”

http://articles.latimes.com/1990-09-06/news/mn-983_1_casual-drug-users

“An obligation to be intolerant”

- “Each of us has an obligation to be intolerant of drug use, anytime, by anybody. We must create an atmosphere of intolerance for drug use in this country.” —Nancy Reagan, 1986
- Marijuana is “probably the most dangerous drug in the United States.”
—Ronald Reagan, 1980

Goals of 1980's drug policy

- Create “a drug-free America” (while declining to acknowledge that alcohol and tobacco are, in fact, dangerous drugs)
- Maximize fear associated with marijuana
- Teach kids to resist “peer pressure,” which was exemplified by the phrase “everybody’s doing it”
- “You don't have to be part of the crowd. Be who you are, and stand up proud. Say no. Just say no.” —song from TV ad

Even today, federal policy undermines research and reasoned discussion about marijuana policy

- The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Reauthorization Act of 1998 requires ONDCP to “ensure that no Federal funds... shall be expended for any study or contract relating to the legalization of a substance (for a medical use or any other use) listed in schedule I [of the Controlled Substances Act] and **take such actions as necessary to oppose any attempt to legalize** the use of” any Schedule I substance (emphasis added).

www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/reauthorization-act

Prohibition vs. The Information Age

- Now that young people have access to vast troves of information on the internet, they are able to fact-check.
- Information provided to youth must be credible or the messenger will quickly lose credibility.
- Regardless of whether marijuana is legalized, kids need to be prepared to live in a world where marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, and other potentially harmful substances may be available to them.

“Great risk” vs. “Harmless” is not what students are being asked in YRBS survey question #98

How much do you think **people your age** risk harming themselves (physically or in other ways) if they use marijuana regularly?

- A. No risk
- B. Slight risk
- C. Moderate risk
- D. Great risk

Details from the Rand Corp's report for the Vermont Legislature*

- Between 60,000 and 100,000 Vermonters use marijuana regularly.
- They likely consume between 33,000 and 55,000 pounds per year and spend between \$125 million and \$225 million buying marijuana from the illicit market.

*Rand Corporation. "Considering Marijuana Legalization: Insights for Vermont and Other Jurisdictions," presented January 21, 2015, to the Vermont Legislature.

www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR864.html

For more information on
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