

Meet the Special Interests Keeping Marijuana Criminalized

In this era of political polarization, when Americans seem to agree on absolutely nothing, let me reassure you. We [overwhelmingly agree](#) that cannabis should be legal.

[1 in 5](#) Americans have (state) legal access, [1 in 2](#) have experimented with it, and more than [1 in 10](#) smoke regularly. Southern California yuppies are publicly [winning prizes](#) for growing the same plant that landed Georgia teenagers in prison.

[Half of states](#) allow at least limited use, and a few attract elite [cannabis tourism](#). Federally, the drug remains fiercely criminalized, despite irrefutable evidence of its medical value.

So what's the hold-up?

Being in the anti-marijuana business is astonishingly lucrative for [bureaucrats](#) and [campaign donors](#). Here are just a few of the heavy hitters addicted to federal prohibition:

Big Booze:

[National Beer Wholesalers Association](#)

[Anheuser-Busch InBev](#)

The makers and distributors of America's top-selling beers, wines, and liquors are already facing stiff competition from newly deregulated microbrewers and craft distilleries.

Cannabis prohibition shuts out a zero-calorie competitor with far fewer short- and long-term health risks. The industry

[donated](#) (read: invested) \$19 million to re-election campaigns in 2016, and another \$4 million to soft money groups like “Public Safety First” which specifically oppose cannabis legalization efforts.

Cannabis legalization does reduce [alcohol sales](#), and its regular use [reduces alcoholism](#) and alcohol-related deaths. Each year 37,000 deaths in the US are attributed to alcohol, compared to [zero deaths](#) from cannabis use, ever. Brewers and distillers are eager to point “public health and safety” attention in another direction.

The Boys in Blue:

[National Fraternal Order of Police](#)

[National Association of Police Organizations](#)

[American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees](#)

Local law enforcement has become highly dependent on federal and state money devoted to the War on Drugs. Civil asset forfeiture – a legacy of the 1984 drug war omnibus crime bill – allows local police departments to keep 80 percent of property seized in suspected (not proven) drug activity. Local cops regularly auction off homes and cars connected with small marijuana sales, pocketing the proceeds without convicting anyone of any crime. Drug raids “were no longer just about putting on a good show and terrorizing the counterculture. Now the raids could generate revenue for all of the police agencies involved.” ([Randy Balko, Rise Of The Warrior Cop](#)). Property stolen from innocent Americans (the Washington Post found 80 percent of victims of asset forfeiture were never even charged) has paid for military-grade equipment and SWAT teams used in still-more-terrifying drug [raids for profit](#).

National Fraternal Order of Police, National Association of Police Organizations, Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, and [literally dozens](#) of smaller interest groups

and political action committees represent the interests of law enforcement officers. Drug testing laboratories, prosecutors, drug court lawyers and judges, rehab centers, counselors, and other unionized social services also depend on marijuana arrests to keep numbers up.

For them, the nation's outdated marijuana policy means guaranteed revenue, low-risk, peaceful "offenders" to fill arrest quotas, and easy excuses to search or detain citizens.

Big Brother: The Prison Industrial Complex

[Association Of Administrative Law Judges](#)

[American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees](#)

[GEO Group, Inc.](#)

CoreCivic (formerly [Corrections Corporation of America](#))

Private prison companies and state institutions alike lobby for longer mandatory sentences; stricter enforcement; younger, healthier, and less violent prisoners. Corrections jobs are a major source of rural employment.

Prisons contract for an occupancy rate, charging taxpayers for [unmet quotas](#). More Americans are arrested for marijuana annually than for [all violent crimes combined](#). More Americans are in prison than ever before, and since 1985 at least half the increase is [drug offenders alone](#).

Increasingly, lobbyists for drug testing [centers](#) and [addiction treatment providers](#) have sought to have marijuana dependence (for which there is [limited medical evidence](#)) perceived – and insured – as a medical condition. Compulsory and court-ordered treatment for this "addiction" is a reliable source of [revenue](#) for unscrupulous operators.

What violent crime remains is largely a product of drugs

prohibition. Cash-oriented transactions between known lawbreakers (drug deals) don't make for peaceful business practices.

All smuggled goods and illegal sales share the same vulnerability to violence. Now, Budweiser and Coors might sue to resolve a contract dispute; in 1929, criminal rum runners settled scores with Molotov cocktails and Tommy guns. Violent deaths of police officers [peaked](#) during prohibition and fell rapidly after its repeal; the number of officers wouldn't approach that level again until the year Nixon declared the War on Drugs.

The violence of black markets still unnecessarily mars American neighborhoods, and unprecedented mass incarceration plagues the conscience of the Land of the Free.

Big Pharma:

[Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America \(PhRMA\)](#)

[Pfizer Inc](#)

[Eli Lilly & Co](#)

[Express Scripts](#)

[Merck & Co](#)

[AstraZeneca PLC](#)

Pharmaceutical industry products are expensive, and many have life-altering side effects. Cannabis can be grown by the patient and has far fewer and less severe side effects.

Before President Ford [shut down cannabis research](#) at universities, scientists had noticed cannabis's effectiveness in reducing seizures, relieving pain, even shrinking tumors. Specialized strains are bred to treat [depression](#), [anxiety](#), nausea, [Parkinson's](#), and dozens of other common [conditions](#) for

which patients currently take patented pills.

Despite [continued denials](#) by the federal government that marijuana has any accepted medical uses, the government's own researchers have patented a synthetic cannabinoid called Marinol. [Patent No. 6,630,507](#) credits "The United States of America as represented by the Department of Health and Human Services" and lists federal researcher as "inventors" of "cannabinoids as antioxidants and neuroprotectants." The patent reads "cannabinoids are found to have particular application as neuroprotectants, for example in limiting neurological damage following ischemic insults, such as stroke and trauma, or in the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and HIV dementia." A dozen other derived chemicals are in development to treat nerve pain, memory loss, traumatic brain injury, arthritis, hypertension, and obesity.

Since this patent was granted in 1999, The Drug Enforcement Administration has twice renewed its stance that cannabis has "[no currently accepted medical use.](#)"

Big Government:

[American Federation of Government Employees](#)

[National Active & Retired Federal Employees Assn](#)

[American Federation of Government Employees](#)

Marijuana prohibition is a [\\$20 Billion](#) annual federal jobs project. Departments and agencies will not give up power or budgets voluntarily. The DEA seized \$27 Billion in assets in 2014 through its [cannabis enforcement](#) program, in excess of its \$3 Billion annual budget. 10,000 DEA employees, 63,000 [Federal Prison System](#) employees, border guards, and thousands more "interagency" positions funded by the expansive, failed War on Drugs don't want to see their budget downsized or authority curtailed.

Similarly, the CIA, NSA, State Department, and Department of Defense also rely heavily on public acceptance of the War on Drugs as a pretense for [overriding national sovereignty](#) around the world. In their bullying of [Latin American leaders](#) and control of [opiate fields](#) in the Levant, [drug suppression](#) money is often both carrot and stick.

Liberty vs. Lobbyists

Doing battle against big government and corporate cronies like the criminals above is more satisfying than punching Nazis and more practical than protesting. The American people are fed up with prohibition and the failed War on Drugs.

Ending prohibition has something for everyone:

- Cut the [budget deficit](#)
- Prevent [opiate overdoses](#)
- [Restore respect](#) for the Bill of Rights
- Reduce police [violence against minorities](#)
- Attack income [inequality](#)
- Improve [public health](#)
- Lower [unemployment](#)
- [Reduce illegal immigration](#)
- Improve [survival](#) and reduce violence in developing countries
- Position the US as a leader of [humane policy abroad](#)

What can possibly unite an impossibly divided America? A serious push to [end prohibition](#).

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