

Legalizing Marijuana

Pros and Cons

OLLI October 2013

DRUG

- A **drug** may have medicinal, intoxicating, performance enhancing, or other effects when taken or put into a human body and is not considered a food..
- Coffee is the most widely used psychoactive drug beverage in the world. In 1999, the average consumption of coffee was 3.5 cups per day per U.S. citizen.

Marijuana

Marijuana is the most commonly used recreational drug around the world, only behind alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco.

It is a dry, shredded green and brown mix of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves derived from the plant *Cannabis sativa* and *indica*.

Colorado Marijuana Laws

- Recreational: Legal to possess under 1 oz. age 21 and older. Legal to consume in private residence, not in public. Legal to sell, provided store has obtained permit to do so. Retail sales start early in 2014. Private non-commercial cultivation of cannabis is legal up to six plants per person.
- Medical: Legal since 11/2000. Use with written medical consent. No more than six plants, only three flowering. May get supply from dispensary.





MedicalMarijuanaStrains.co



















Weed Prices \$ Per Ounce Street

High and Medium Quality 9/2013

- CALIFORNIA 251 193
- Texas 346 232
- Colorado 239 199
- Washington 239 194
- New York 356 271
- Illinois 364 287
- Virginia 379 285
- Florida 309 220
- Canada 226 184
- Alexandria M 220 oz. 27th
- Fairfax H 60 eighth 28th
- Fairfax H 300 oz. M 28th
- Fredericksburg H 80 quarter
- Charlottesville M 200 half
- Manassas M 100 quarter
- Blacksburg H 50 eighth 28
- Reston H 50 eighth 27th

Wholesale Marijuana Prices

- Implications: Current retail street prices imply weed per pound is worth \$3,824 to \$6,064. More realistically \$3,000 to \$5,000. Medium quality roughly \$2,000 to \$3,500.
- Wholesale prices vary widely depending on quality and location. Columbia S.A. \$180 per pound, US market can vary widely depending on quality by a factor of 10. Retail prices seem to be the best indicator.

Cost of a Joint of Marijuana

- An ounce equals 28.349 grams. This will provide enough marijuana for 28 to 57 joints of 1 gram to 500 mg.
- With high quality weed ranging from \$239 (CO & WA) to \$379 (VA) an ounce, a high quality joint should cost at least \$4.19 to \$13.54. .
- Adding on 21 cents for filters and paper the per joint cost will range from \$4.40 to 13.75 assuming you roll your own. Tobacco may be used in the rolling process. Joints fully ready to smoke are often \$20.00.
- Currently one firm is advertising Colorado medical marijuana indica joints (Grand Daddy Purple) in a pack of five for \$59.95 or \$12.00 each per joint.

Get High for Free

If pot were truly legal, joints would cost only a few cents

- Legal Pot would be amazingly cheap. Growth, distribution and marketing would be entirely different.
- You have a nonperishable crop like wheat or lentils. America's farmlands are some of the most productive in the world, thanks to large scale production technology.
- For hemp, a non-drug form of sativa, production costs in Canada are now \$500 per acre. So mid-grade commercial weed (cannabis that is 80 percent of the US market) could be as low as 20 cents per pound of smokeable material or joints could cost 25 cents. Joints could be given away for advertising like small packs of pretzels or peanuts.

Get High for Free 2

- In practice recreational marijuana plants would likely be grown from transplanted clones like cherry tomatoes or asparagus. So costs would be \$5,000 to \$20,000 per acre. Costs of legal marijuana would be more like tea or tobacco or a few cents per joint.
- Radically lowering the price to say \$1.00 per joint plus imposing a 20% tax would make pot the cheapest intoxicant on the market, absolutely blowing beer and liquor out of the water.





Potential Earnings and Savings with Legalizing Marijuana

- Nationally \$26 billion federal and state taxes. Also several billion savings from prohibition and substantially lowering incarceration of users and dealers.
- Lowering incarceration results in income taxes and reductions in transfer payments to marijuana users and their families. Reductions in costs of support for disruption of families and support of an average of 1.1 children per marijuana offender. Increased stability for communities.
- Colorado taxes \$90 to \$210 million excise and sales taxes.
- Washington \$564 million taxes.
- Canada \$6.2 billion plus savings for foregoing the costs of enforcement.
- New York City estimate \$400 million plus \$31 million thru eliminating misdemeanor arrests (stop and frisk, etc.).

**IS MARIJUANA
DANGEROUS?**

Substances

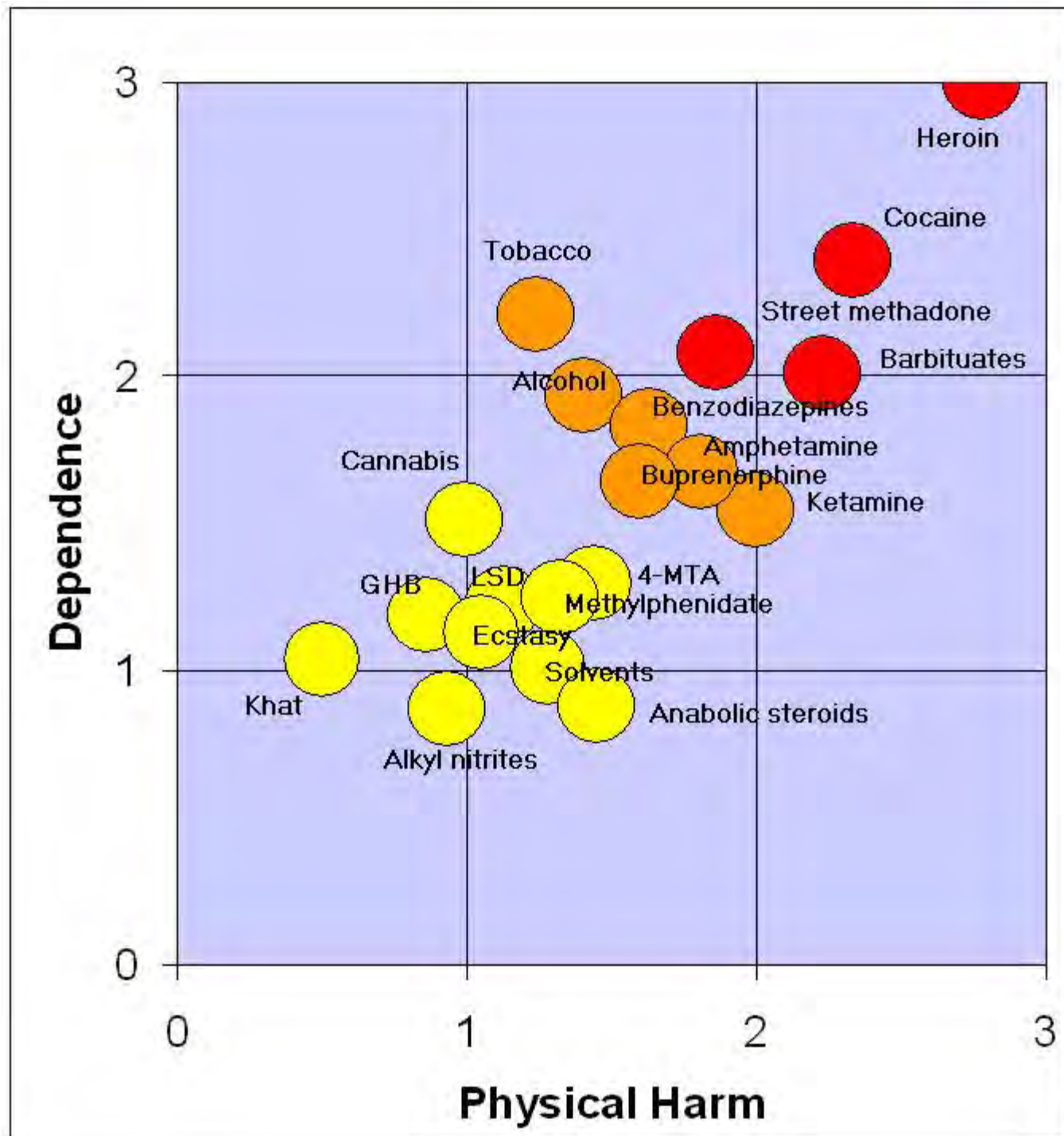
- The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) website provides information on a list of 311 drugs The Controlled Substances Act (CSA) of 1970 regulates five classes of drugs: Narcotics, depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, and antibiotic steroids but excludes alcohol and tobacco.
- Marijuana is a Schedule I Drug. A Schedule I Drug has high potential for abuse and no currently accepted medical use.

Schafer Commission

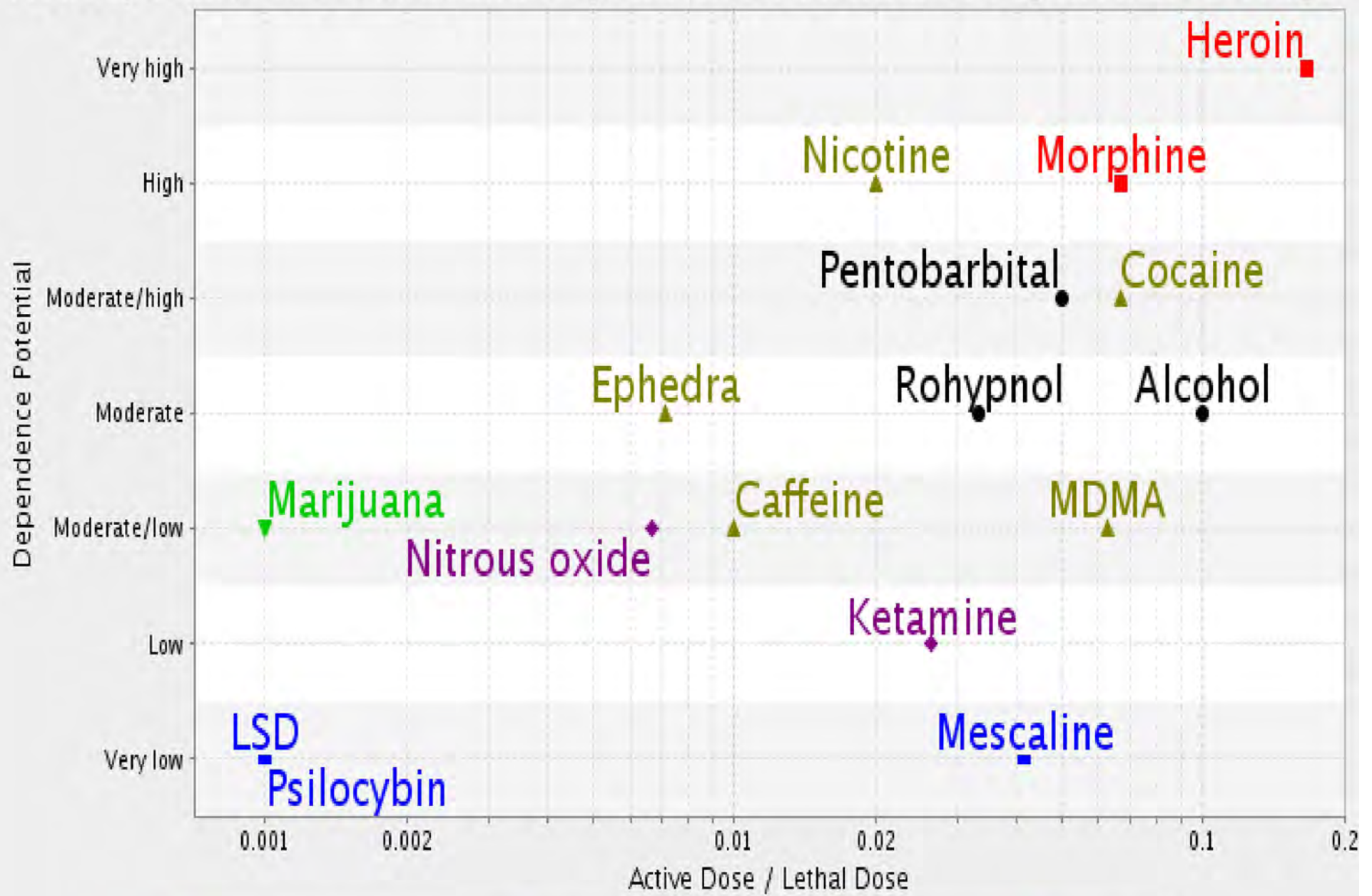
- National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse ("the Shafer Commission"), appointed by President Nixon (1970?).
- Report recommended decriminalization, ending prohibition and utilizing other methods to discourage use, 1972 and 1973, reports.
- Ultimately, nothing became of the report, as neither the Nixon Administration nor Congress took any further action. As a result, [marijuana remains a Class I substance](#) under the Controlled Substances Act.
- President Nixon needed a campaign at the time and “The War on Drugs” evolved..

Is Marijuana Dangerous?

- Development of a Rational Scale to Assess the Harm of Drugs of Potential Misuse: Article in *The Lancet* 2007 United Kingdom.
- An article by Blakemore and Nutt, et. al., presents a scale of harms based on three scales – **physical harm, dependence and social harm** – which were independently assessed by two groups of experts from the fields of chemistry, pharmacology, forensic science, psychiatry and other medical specialties 2007.
- Substances with **high physical harm** scores include **heroin, cocaine, barbiturates, ketamine, street methadone and amphetamines**.
- Substances with a **high dependence or addictiveness** include **heroin, cocaine, tobacco, street methadone, barbiturates, alcohol** and bendiazepines (benzo).



Active/Lethal Dose Ratio and Dependence Potential of Psychoactive Drugs



■ Narcotics
 ● Depressants
 ▲ Stimulants
 ◆ Anesthetics
 ■ Hallucinogens
 ▼ Cannabis

The Truth About Marijuana

- Short-term effects: sensory distortion, panic, anxiety, poor coordination of movement, lowered reaction time, after an initial “up” the user feels sleepy or depressed, increased heartbeat (and the risk of heart attack).

The Truth About Marijuana 2

- Long-term effects: Reduced resistance to common illnesses (colds, bronchitis, etc.); suppression of the immune system; growth disorders; increase of abnormally structured cells in the body; reduction of male sex hormones; rapid destruction of lung fibers and lesions (injuries) to the brain could be permanent; reduced sexual capacity; study difficulties: reduced ability to learn and retain information and apathy.

Marijuana Overview

- Cannabis is a popular recreational drug around the world, only behind [alcohol](#), [caffeine](#) and [tobacco](#). In the United States alone, it is believed that over 100 million Americans have tried Cannabis, with 25 million Americans having used it within the past year.

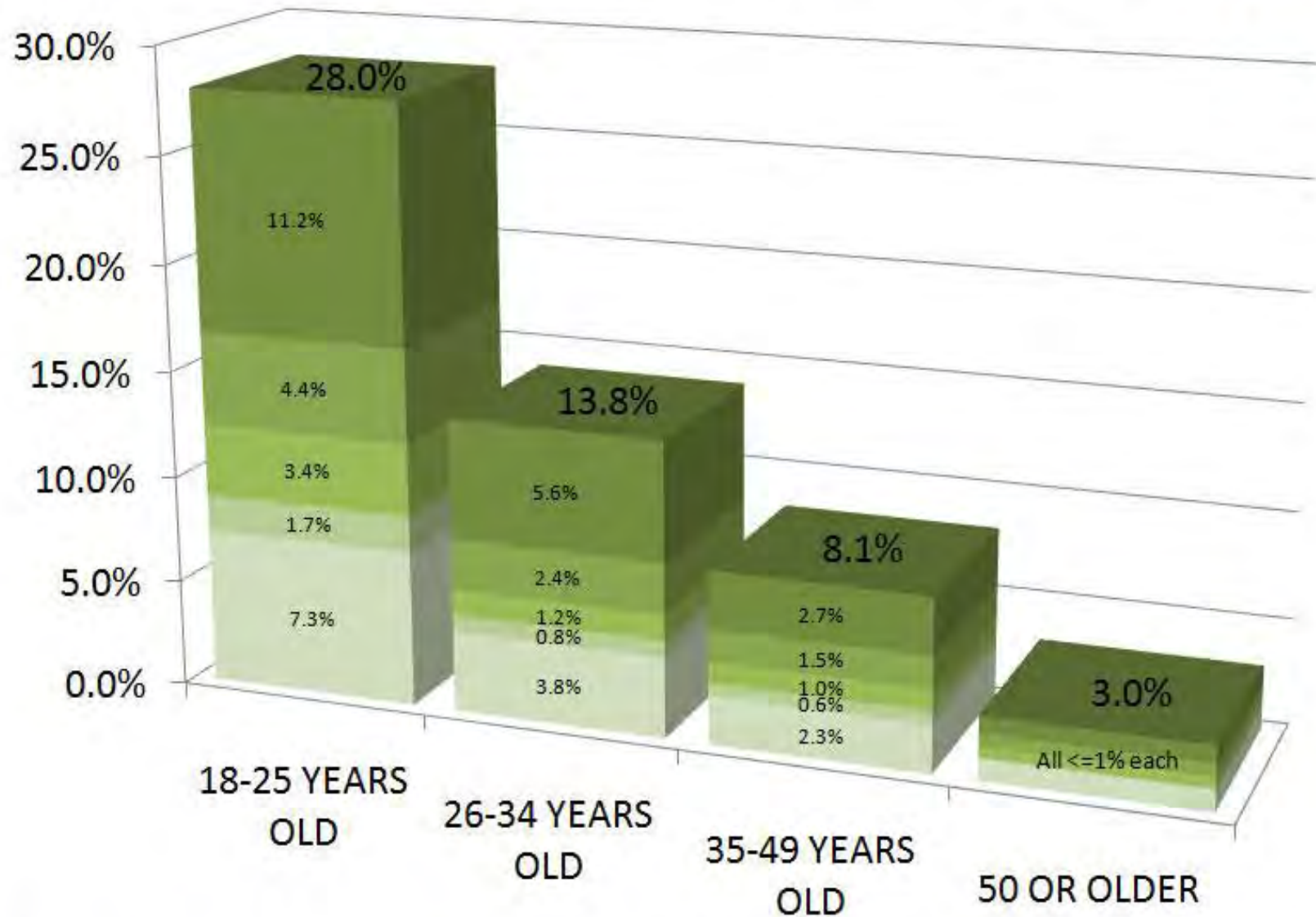
The War on Drugs

- Most parents who support the war on drugs are mainly concerned about their children becoming addicted to drugs rather than simply becoming occasional or modest drug users.
- Yet ironically the war on drugs may increase addiction rates, and it may even increase the number of addicts.

US Marijuana Use: Adults 18 and Older

- Survey results suggest 100 million adults have used marijuana. Half of those under age 50.
- Whites make up 68 percent of the population. 76 percent of those adults that have used.
- Hispanics or African-Americans 26 percent of the population. 20 percent of those adults that have used.
- Of the 26 million American adults (NSDUH) that have used marijuana this year, past studies suggest 37 percent use marijuana more than 100 times per year.
- This would imply there are an estimated 9.6 million chronic users, with almost half of these aged 18-25.

Prevalence & Frequency of Adult Marijuana Use by Age



■ RARE: 1-5 DAYS/YEAR

■ OCCASIONAL: 6-10 DAYS/YEAR

■ REGULAR: 11-25 DAYS/YEAR

■ FREQUENT: 26-100 DAYS/YEAR

■ CHRONIC: 101+ DAYS/YEAR

Marijuana

Claims about **increases in marijuana potency** are vastly overstated and not related to risk of dependence or health impacts. THC in domestically grown marijuana is less than 5%. In the 1980's was 3%. Doctors may legally prescribe Marinol, an FDA-approved pill that contains high levels of THC effective for treatment of nausea, vomiting, and wasting disease. Sativex in Canada has roughly 50% THC.

Marijuana has not been shown to cause **mental illness**. Ingestion may cause panic, anxiety, and paranoia but effects are temporary. Distress may lead to use but not the reverse.

Marijuana use has not been shown to increase risk of **cancer**.

Marijuana

Marijuana has been proven helpful for treating the symptoms of a variety of **medical conditions**.

Marijuana use rates in the Netherlands are roughly one-half those in the U.S. despite very different policies of quasi-legalization versus **prohibition**.

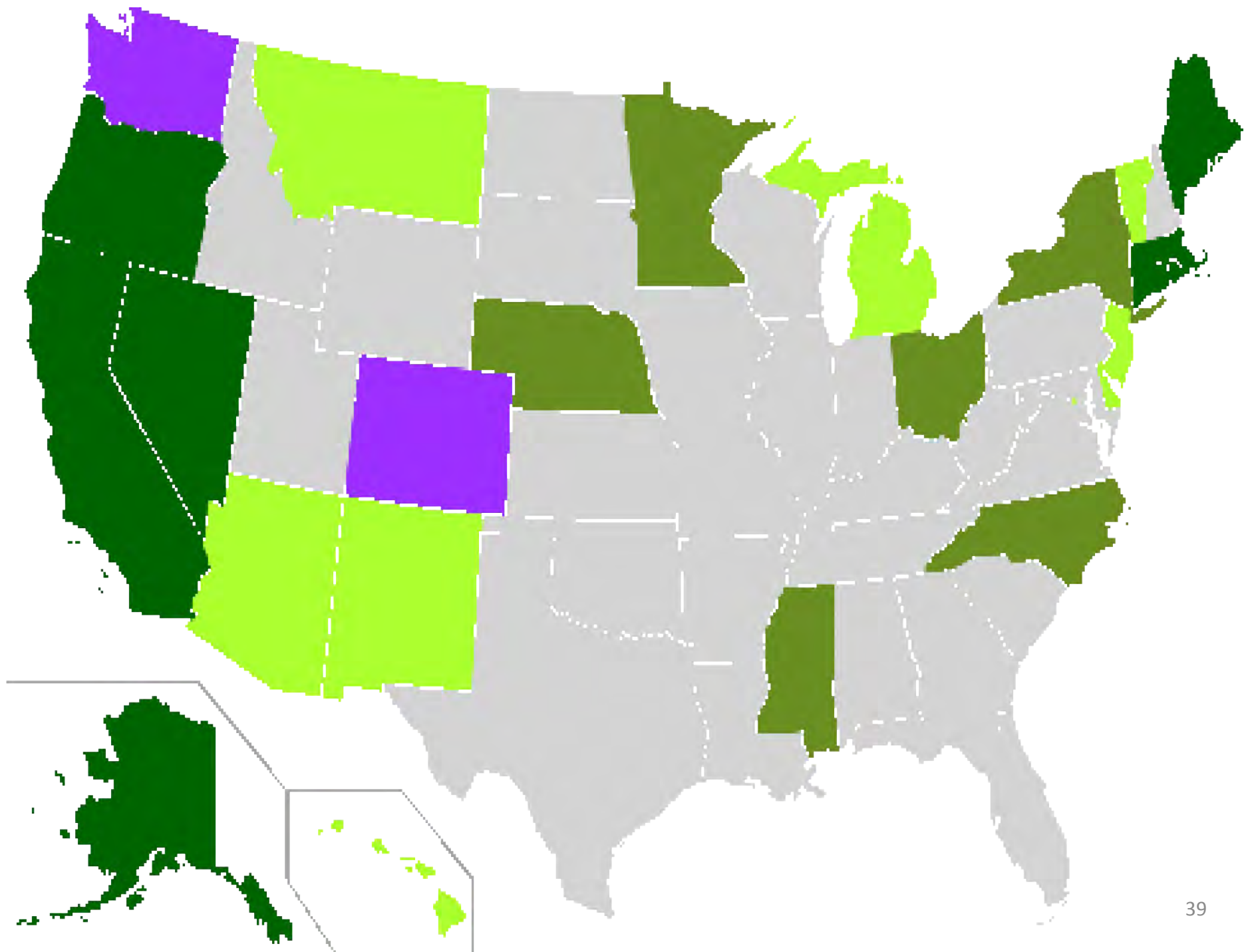
Marijuana has not been shown to cause long-term **cognitive impairment**. Short term memory yes depending on strength and amount of use., long term permanent - lack of evidence.

Marijuana

- There is no compelling evidence that marijuana contributes substantially to **traffic accidents** and fatalities.
- More than 750,000 people **are arrested** for marijuana each year, the vast majority for simple possession. This is far more than the total number of arrestees for all violent crimes combined, including murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Is Marijuana Dangerous?

- What are Americans telling us?
- Should marijuana be legalized?
- Are the residents of one half of our states irrational?
- Why are they approving medical marijuana? Why have Washington and Colorado legalized marijuana?



Telling the Truth to Teens

- As compared to most drugs, Pot is the least dangerous. Pot is less addictive than coffee.
- Beer causes the same memory loss as Pot. Marijuana enhances certain mental abilities, helps you think “outside the box”.
- Don’t take Pot before a test!
- Its your life! Be responsible! Learn how to say **no** and mean it.
- One reason Pot isn’t legal is because a lot of people are making money on it because it’s not legal. Drug abuse is a bad idea.

Who Opposes Legalizing Marijuana and Why

- The uninformed. The government, politicians afraid to act. Religion – fun is sin. Moralizers. People who do no drugs.
- The alcohol lobby. The tobacco Lobby.
- Law enforcement. Government agencies.
- Pot dealers. Wood Industry. Private prisons. Trial lawyers. Mental hospitals. Some conservatives(?), Some therapists(?).
- I'd add international cartels, domestic producers.

Drug War Argument

- Most people can use most drugs without doing much harm to themselves or anyone else. Only a tiny few of the millions world wide that have tried marijuana have gone on to have problems.
- The same is true for cocaine and hallucinogens. That a few million people have serious problems is no reason to demonize these drugs and the people that use them.

Health

- Most illegal drugs are not especially harmful (tobacco is more addictive than virtually all drugs). Most users of illegal drugs, including cocaine and heroin, take them only occasionally. They do so because they enjoy them (as they do whisky or a Marlboro light).
- Addiction – impacts on families. Legalization offers the opportunity to deal and treat addiction properly.

United States Drug Use 2011

Past month, age 12 & over

Substance	Users (Millions)	% Population*
•Drugs	22.5	8.7
•Marijuana	18.1	7.0
•Cocaine	1.4	.5
•Heroin	.3	.1
•Hallucinogens	1.0	.4
•Prescription-type	2.4	2.5
•Alcohol	133.4	51.8
•Tobacco	68.2	26.5

*Age 12 and over population

Source: Results from the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings.

Annual Causes of Death in the United States

- Source: *Journal of the American Medical Association*. March 2004
- Tobacco 435,000
- Alcohol 85,000
- Adverse reaction to **prescription drugs 32,000**
- Incidents involving firearms 31,347*
- Motor vehicle crashes 34,485 *
- **An illicit drug use, direct and indirect 17,000**
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as **Aspirin 7,600**
- **Marijuana 0**

***2009 data**

Alcohol-Related Mortality

- Alcohol-related deaths are now 1 in 25 around the world (3.8%) and close to tobacco in overall impact. Alcohol-related causes of death include accidents, violence, poisoning, mouth and throat cancer, breast cancer, suicide and many others.
- In the US, the Center for Disease Control estimates alcohol causes 25,000 deaths a year. Overall, 100,000 deaths occur each year because of alcohol consumption. Alcohol can be blamed for deaths from: 5% of circulatory system diseases, 15% of respiratory system diseases, 30% of accidents by fire and flames, 30% from accidental drowning, 30% of suicides, 40% of accidental falls, 45% of automobile accidents and 60% of homicides.

Public Health Care Cost

- (2009) “The **public health burden** of cannabis use is **modest** compared with that of alcohol, tobacco, and other illicit drugs.
- A recent Australian study estimated that cannabis use caused 0.2% of total disease burden in Australia—a country with one of the highest reported rates of cannabis use.
- Cannabis accounted for 10% of the burden attributable to all illicit drugs (including heroin, cocaine and amphetamines). It also accounted for around 10% of the proportion of disease burden attributed to alcohol (2-3%), but only 2.5% of that attributable to tobacco (7-8%).”

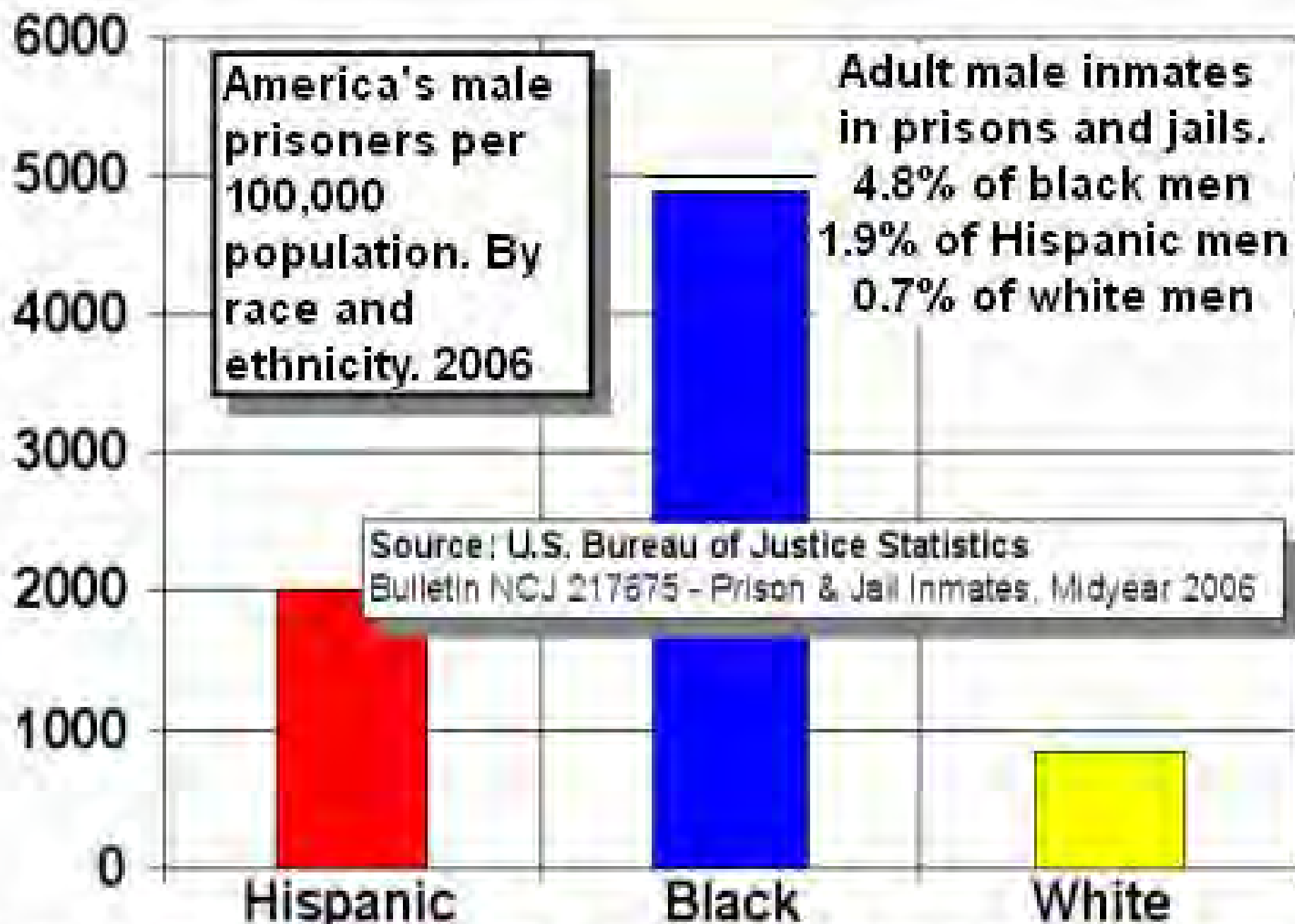
Results of the War on Drugs

- Nixon elected 1971. Expectation drug trafficking could be reduced. Cost is now over \$2.5 trillion, tallied up 45 million arrests and insurmountable damages to society. America is not now nor will ever be drug free.
- Total direct monetary cost includes spending on police, court personnel, guards and other resources spent on imprisoning and punishing those convicted is now estimated at \$40 billion per year.



Drug Issues

- High school drop out rate has remained large at 25%. Important factor for the poor and in inner-city neighborhoods is the temptation to drop out in order to profit from the drug trade.
- The number of persons incarcerated in state and federal prisons has grown from 330,000 in 1980 to about 1.6 million today. Much of this increase is directly due to the war on drugs and severe punishments for persons convicted of drug trafficking. Total prisoners and jail inmates totaled 2,239,800 at the end of 2011.

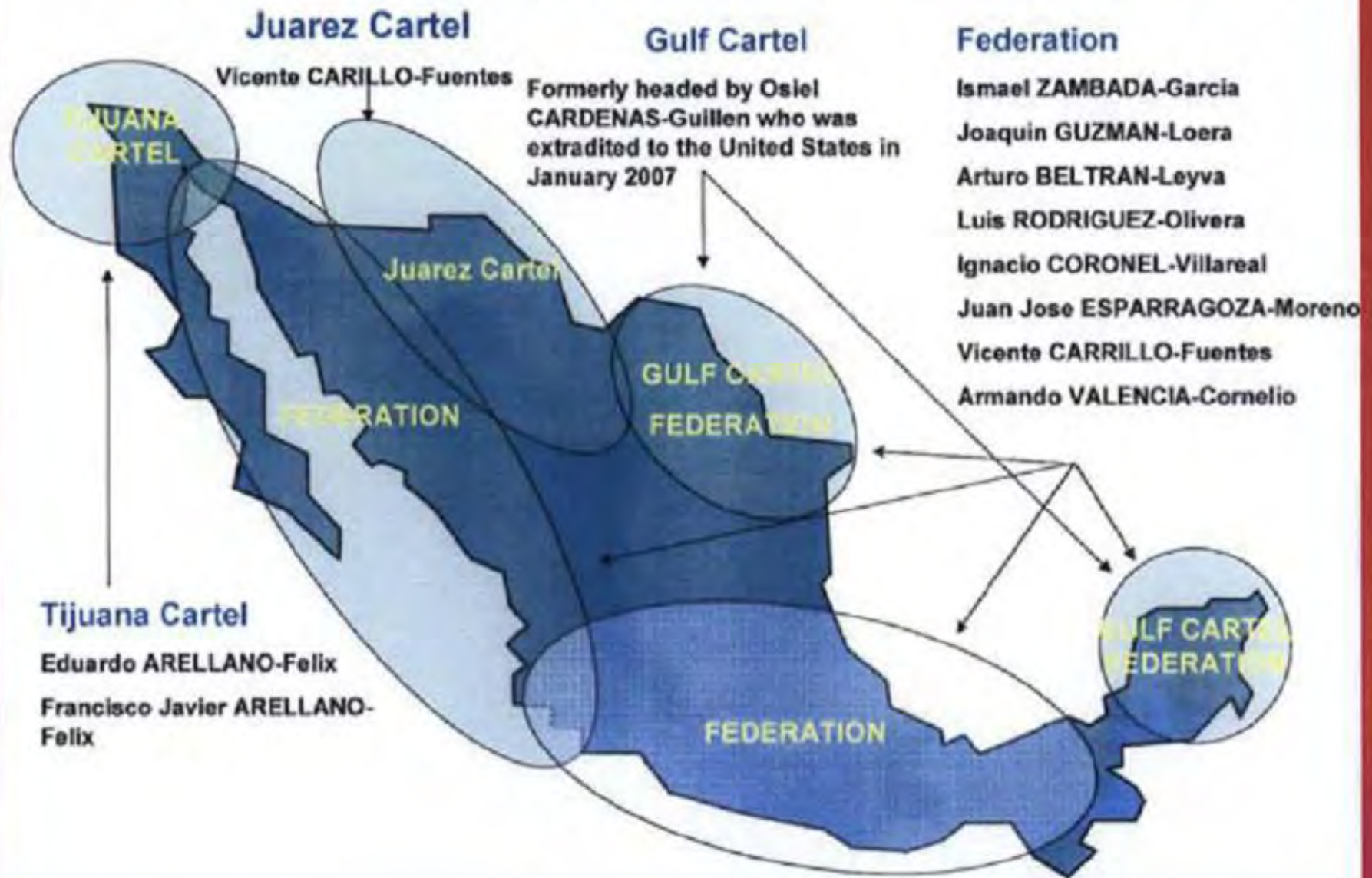


Percentages of black and white men exclude Hispanic men.

Drug Prices

- Prices of illegal drugs are pushed up whenever many drug traffickers are caught and punished harshly. Higher prices help compensate traffickers for the risks of being apprehended.
- The paradox is the harder governments push the fight especially if they target small-fry dealers the larger the profits. More aggressive war on drugs lead to higher levels of violence and corruption and the higher the costs imposed on society.

Cartels and their Areas of Influence



INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

- **The United States was a major force behind The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 and its amendment by the 1972 Protocol. The Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 added cannabis to the list of controlled drugs.**
- **The U.S and Sweden are proponents of zero tolerance policies on cannabis and other drugs which has the effect of preventing the UN from promoting harm reduction policies like needle exchange and Heroin-assisted treatment.**

Drug Policy Alliance

- Everyone has a stake in ending the war on drugs.
- Whether you are a parent concerned about protecting children from perceived drug related “harm”, a social justice advocate worried about racially disproportionate incarceration rates or a fiscally conservative taxpayer you have a concern.
- U.S. federal, state and local governments have spent hundreds of billions of dollars trying to make American “drug free”. Yet heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and other illicit drugs including marijuana are cheaper, purer and easier to get than ever before.

Impacts of Legalizing Pot

- Marijuana: not clear if there will more or less consumption. Likely some increase with lower prices. But thrill of use may wane and if access is limited to age 21 could have a reduction in use.
- Prices should fall fewer barriers to marketing and distribution. Competition and lower prices will likely reduce profits for many growers, dealers, traffickers, and international cartels.
- Reduction in the number of inmates in federal and state prisons and local jails by 20% to 40%.
- Opportunity for extensive research on use of cannabis for medical problems.
- Opportunity to expand trade and develop strong relationships with Central and South American countries.

Side Effects of the War on Drugs

- Advocates claim the war reduces drug use and addiction. However this may well lead drug users to lower priced but more dangerous alcohol as drugs become more expensive.
- It may be harder to break an addiction to an illegal drug. Addicts may be leery of going to clinics or to nonprofit “drugs anonymous” groups for help for fear they will be reported.
- The illegality of drugs stunts development of ways to help addicts. It leads them to associate more with addicts and less with those who might help them quit.

Other Considerations

- Joseph McNamara, an active member of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) describes marijuana laws as much worse than ineffective: “they waste valuable police resources .”
- These officers, judges and prosecutors support legalizing marijuana because it:
 - Stops wasting police officers on non-violent marijuana offenders and enables them to focus on preventing violent crime.
 - Cuts off funding to violent gangs and drug cartels.
 - Reduces marijuana access to children by instituting strict age-limits and public safety controls.
 - Protects the lives of police officers now at risk in the “drug war,”
 - Restores mutual respect and good relations between law enforcement and communities bearing the brunt of current marijuana laws.

Marijuana Laws Virginia

- **Possession** Any amount (first offense) misdemeanor 30 days \$500
- Any amount (subsequent offense) misdemeanor 1 year \$2,500
- **Cultivation** Any amount felony 5 - 30 years \$10,000
- **Sale** 1/2 oz. or less misdemeanor 1 year \$2,500
- 1/2 oz. to 5 lbs. felony 1 - 10 years \$2,500
- 5 lbs. to 100 kg felony 5 - 30 years \$2,500
- More than 100 kg felony 20 years MMS* \$1,000,000
- To a minor felony 10 - 50 years \$100,000
- Within 1,000 feet of a school or other specified areas felony 1 - 5 years \$100,000 Transport 5 lbs. or more into state with intent to sell felony 3 years MMS* - 40 years \$1,000,000
- *Mandatory minimum sentence.
- **Miscellaneous (paraphernalia, license suspensions, drug tax stamps, etc...)** Paraphernalia sale misdemeanor 1 year \$2,500
- Paraphernalia sale to a minor felony 1 - 5 years \$2,500
- Probation with deferred proceedings is possible for first offenders.
Any marijuana conviction results in the suspension of one's drivers license for a period of six months.

DRUGS Virginia State Police 2008 Arrests and Offenses Reported

- “Crack Cocaine” 3,646, Cocaine 2,577,
- Heroin 771,
- **Marijuana 19,911,**
- Morphine 71, Opium 28, Other Narcotic 1,139, LSD 7, PCP 45, Other Hallucinogens 58,
- Amphetamines/Methamphetamines 312,
- Other Stimulants 81, Barbiturates 23, Other Depressants 112, Other Drugs 622, Unknown Drug Type 3,508.
- Total Drug Arrests 32,929. Drug Offenses Reported 46,115.
- Age Range Under 10 one, 65 and over 91, peak age 19 = 2,530.

Reform Legalize Drugs

- Steadily eliminate the “War on Drugs” to one of taxation of drug sales and treatment of addicts along the same lines currently in place for tobacco and alcohol.
- Decriminalize possession and use of marijuana and harder drugs including cocaine and heroin.
- Utilize educational programs and counseling of youth regarding the medical aspects of drugs. Provide appropriate medical and additional support programs, community based treatment and access to approved quality controlled distributors for those that wish to use drugs. Make drugs available for medical use and treatment of pain.
- Minimize incarceration as a punishment for possession of drugs. Legalize distribution of drugs through private sector outlets under government regulation and control.

Legalizing

- **Issue- fear that more people would take drugs under a legal regime. Not clear this would be the case but a cheaper, safer product, and more widely available product might result in some increase in consumption.**
- In Portugal, where use of drugs is considered a health problem, drug use is less than half what it is in the United States. In Holland, where drugs are legal, teen drug use is half of what it is in the U.S.
- One researcher points out that roughly 30 percent of the U.S. drug market has been decriminalized in recent years and drug use has not increased in those states. Legalizing **might result in drugs being substituted for alcohol consumption.**
- **Providing honest information about health risks of different drugs and pricing them accordingly by governments can steer people toward the least harmful ones. It might encourage legitimate drug companies to improve designer drugs.**

Drug Legalization Various Views

- Legalization of drugs need not be viewed as a single giant step in which all restrictions are abruptly removed, resulting in a chaotic free market.
- With alcohol the federal government retained some oversight and a remarkable degree of discretion was given to individual states.
- Alcohol remains one of the most regulated products available, in terms of licensing, location, time, pricing, advertising and other respects. Similar liberalization—with taxation and other regulation—could be tried for other drugs....

Drugs and Politics

- Promise politicians love to make to assuage the sense of moral panic that has been the hand maiden of prohibition for a century. Intended to **reassure parents of teenagers** across the world. It is a highly irresponsible promise because it cannot be fulfilled. The war **terrorizes the parents of teenagers** that try a mild controlled substance that should be legal.
- **The war on drugs has been a disaster, creating failed states in the developing world as addiction has flourished in the rich world.**

Drug Policy

- The “least bad” policy is to legalize drugs. “Least bad” does not mean good. Many vulnerable drug-takers would suffer. But in the view of the *Economist*, more would , gain.
- Governments would tax and regulate the drug trade, and use the funds (billions) saved on law enforcement to educate and treat. Sales to minors would be banned. Different drugs would command different levels of taxation and regulation.

In Summary

- Half a million people are behind bars on drug charges – more than western Europe (with a larger population) incarcerates for all offenses. The war on drugs has become a war on families, a war on public health and a war on constitutional rights. Drug Policy Alliance.
- Public health problems like HIV and Hepatitis C are all exacerbated by zero tolerance laws that restrict access to clean needles. Children of inmates are at risk of educational failure, joblessness, addiction and delinquency.
- People suffering from cancer, AIDS and other debilitating illnesses are regularly denied access to their medicine or even arrested and prosecuted for using medical marijuana.
- We can do better.

U.S. Justice versus Europe

- Fewer criminal zones in Europe. Violent offenders, terrorists, certain sex offenders and drug dealers.
 - Very limited use of prison on property offenses.
 - Increased use of fines, probation, and community service.
 - Use of “day fine” system tailored to ability to pay and to degree of integration into society.
 - **Drug users do not find themselves in prison.**
 - Prostitution legalized in Northern Europe, procuring is not.
 - Deviancy has been defined down.
 - Special class of judges. Presupposes inmates will be released early, provide treatment toward re-socialization.
 - Continental courts have grown stronger.

Inmate Population

- It is estimated that three-fourths of the persons that are incarcerated have a history of drug/alcohol abuse.
- One out of six have mental illness.
- One-half the women have suffered sexual or physical abuse.
- Prisoners predominately come from poor/working class communities.
- Two-thirds are racial and/or ethnic minorities.