



Perspective: Thanks to Save Our Society from Drugs (S.O.S.) for sharing the following with IBH. California is capturing national media coverage as the state debates legalizing, regulating and taxing marijuana. A legislative bill and three potential ballot initiatives propose different strategies for the state to profit from legal marijuana. Promotion of those measures relies on a dubious study which suggests potential revenue gains but neglects to identify societal costs associated with legal marijuana. In a response to a supportive article in the *Sacramento Bee*, Police Chief Scott C. Kirkland addresses what the study neglected. Although his response was written to address issues in California his points are relevant to other states considering similar measures that would legalize marijuana. IBH is convinced that the costs of such a move to legalize marijuana or any other currently illegal drug vastly outweigh any potential benefits. No state can afford to legalize marijuana – or any other dangerous illicit drug. The social costs – and financial costs – would be astounding.

On August 6, 2009, the *Sacramento Bee* published an editorial by F. Aaron Smith entitled, "Legalized pot is more than a tax bonanza." I would like the opportunity to present the other side.

My name is Scott C. Kirkland and I am currently the Police Chief in El Cerrito. I am on the Board of Directors for the California Police Chiefs Association as well as the California Peace Officers' Association. Moreover, I am currently the Chair Person of the California Police Chiefs Medical Marijuana Task Force. The task force is comprised of representatives from the California Peace Officers' Association, California Police Chiefs Association, California State Sheriff Association, California District Attorneys' Association, California Narcotics Association, and other interested parties.

The purpose of this article is to write specifically about the financial aspect of the issue. I would be more than happy to contribute other articles that discuss the Assembly Bill specifically, the substance itself, or any other aspect of this issue should you so desire.

The advocates on this issue have once again selected a very well crafted message to the public. In essence, they are saying that the State of California should legalize and tax marijuana and that this action would allow the State to remain solvent. The argument would then be that with a solvent State, police officers, firefighters, and teachers will not be laid off. Mr. Smith states that there would be \$1.4 billion in new tax revenue available to solve the state budget crises. But, let us examine those numbers and see if the State of California could afford such a gamble.

Yes, the Board of Equalization did identify a potential revenue stream from the sale of marijuana but are those numbers accurate? In their bill analysis, the sole report that is cited as the basis of their revenue projections is entitled, *Marijuana Production in the United States (2006)*. The report was written by Jon Gettman, who served as President for the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. He writes the "Cannabis Column" for the HighTimes.com. Mr. Gettman owns DrugScience.com which

he cites six times in his report. Upon reading the report and comparing the report to various law enforcement data that is published, his estimates of marijuana crops are more than twice as high.

I believe it is and was irresponsible for the individuals that wrote the bill analysis not to have known who the author of the report was and to have questioned his credibility. In this day of Internet usage I have become in the habit of doing a "Google" search on authors upon reading their work. It is important to me to know where the author is coming from and it should be important for those who complete a bill analysis. It took me ten minutes to glean information about Mr. Gettman. I believe it is important for all who delve into this emotional issue to fully research it and failure to do so results in a slanted and inaccurate analysis.

Since the Bill Analysis is utilizing a study that shows double the estimates of any other law enforcement data, the Board of Equalization's initial projections are simply wrong. I believe it is this type of financial forecasting that has caused the State of California so much trouble today.

In May of 2009, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University released a report entitled, "Shoveling Up II: The Impact of Substance Abuse on Federal, State and Local Budgets." This one hundred and seventy-six (176) page report documents for the first time the costs of the two legal substances that are abused today (Alcohol and Tobacco). The costs are substantial!

In 2005, the State of California spent \$19.9 billion dollars on substance abuse and addiction or \$545.09 per capita (population of 36.5 million). Once again I am talking specifically about Alcohol and Tobacco. But, the State of California collected \$1.4 billion dollars of tax revenue or \$38.69 per capita on the sale of Alcohol and Tobacco products. Yes, the costs far exceeded the revenue!

I believe it is also worth mentioning that as of June 19, 2009, California's Carcinogen Identification Committee of the Office of Environmental Health and Assessment Science Advisory Board issued a ruling that listed marijuana smoke as causing cancer. This is just another reason why the financial analysis of the bill does not make economic sense. From a public health stand point, why would we, residents of California, want to legalize a crude substance that is known to cause cancer when the costs of substance abuse of the psychoactive drug will far outweigh the amount of monies the state receives? Are we that short sighted? How is the State of California going to find the monies to pay for the costs of abuse, treatment, and damage to youth? These are all unanswered questions that must be addressed in order for there to be a fair and impartial analysis that voters rely on when they go to the polls.

Scott C. Kirkland

To read the *Sacramento Bee* article, visit: www.sacbee.com/opinion/story/2086684.html.
For more information on Save Our Society, visit: www.saveoursociety.org.