

Marijuana Reform: The New Regime

Only two years ago, Colorado and Washington defied the will of the federal government as they voted to legalize recreational use of marijuana in their states. To date, 23 states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for medical use with many others seeking to follow suit. Municipalities have even taken steps to legalize recreational use within their own city limits, further demonstrating that there is change in the current view on marijuana laws and regulations.

Growing support against marijuana prohibition, however, has been limited to state and local government; as the federal government maintains its long-standing position against legalization of recreational cannabis. This opposition to marijuana reform has long been fueled by unsupported claims of chronic addiction, cannabis-related overdoses, physical and mental disorders, and a slew of other gateway theories that just don't hold water, especially when compared to the scientific research and studies that have been done since the '70s. These studies, which were intended to provide support to the anti-marijuana propaganda, not only failed to give any conclusive evidence that cannabis should be classified as a Schedule-1 drug, but in some cases proved that cannabis has some beneficial medical properties.

In 2009, however, Eric Holder entered the playing field as the newly appointed Attorney General for the Obama Administration. His approach to cannabis reform didn't differ much from his predecessor's in the first four years of his term. State marijuana laws were held in complete disregard, as the federal government continued to raid and disrupt legal, state-licensed medical marijuana operations that they claimed went against federal laws.

After Obama's reelection, Holder's approach was the first common sense reaction to reform that we've seen from any administration thus far. Eric Holder almost immediately came out in support of the individual states' rights to responsibly explore marijuana reform. Holder, cautiously and always reserving the right for the Department of Justice to prosecute, issued a number of statements aimed at reassuring states that the federal government would allow them to operate without impediment, as long as they adhered to very strict guidelines and regulations. The Department of Justice even issued a memorandum, briefly outlining this "trust but verify" approach and defining the eight priorities that federal law enforcement would identify as a breach of trust. In January 2014, Eric Holder even showed support for new banking regulations that would allow for cannabis-related industries to more easily do business with US banks, instead of having to rely on cash-only transactions.

The bad news however, is that on September 25, 2014, Eric Holder resigned from his position as the US Attorney General and now appears most open about his stance on marijuana reform. He stated the following in an interview with Katie Couric, released on the day of his resignation:

"The progression of people from using opioids to heroin, the spread and the destruction that heroin has perpetrated all around our country. And to see by contrast, what the impact is of marijuana use. Now it can be destructive if used in certain ways, but the question of whether or not they should be in the same category is something that we need to ask ourselves and use science as the basis for making that determination."

We must applaud this common sense approach to a progressive movement. This is someone who is in direct opposition to the notion of cannabis reform, yet is willing to let logic and science dictate the

ultimate outcome of this movement. The only question now is, what will his successor's approach to marijuana reform be and how will that person influence the next stage of the cannabis movement?