Dupont Summit 2013

:: Pressing Issues, Economic Realities

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The Policy Studies Organization

Speaker
Dan Riffle – *Marijuana Policy Project*

"The Case for Taxing and Regulating Marijuana like Alcohol"

Part I: The harms associated with marijuana prohibition

- **Misplaced priorities**: Arresting and prosecuting roughly 750,000 people every year for marijuana, the vast majority for simple possession, requires a great deal criminal justice system resources that could otherwise be devoted to violent crime.
- **Collateral consequences**: An arrest record has implications for education, employment, and obtaining government assistance that haunt offenders for life.
- **Racial impact**: Even though black and white Americans use marijuana at similar rates, blacks are 3-8 times more likely to be arrested for possession.
- **Cost**: It's estimated that we spend $8.7 billion dollars enforcing marijuana prohibition every year, with virtually no impact on marijuana use or availability.
- **Empowering criminals**: Prohibition means that criminals, not regulated businesses, control the market, and profits go to cartels, not tax-paying, law-abiding businesses.
- **Endangering health and safety**: More than 20,000 people die every year from alcohol abuse, but has never reported a death attributable to marijuana. And marijuana is not associated with violence or reckless behavior. So why are we driving people to drink?

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"The Case for Taxing and Regulating Marijuana like Alcohol"

Part II: The benefits of taxing and regulating marijuana

- **Tax revenue**: Extrapolating official, nonpartisan estimates of the impact of Colorado and Washington's recently enacted laws nationwide, taxing and regulating marijuana would yield $8-22 billion dollars.
- **Market control**: Rather than having marijuana sold by criminals, it would be sold by tax-paying, law-abiding businesses required to check ID's and obey other regulations or lose their license.
- **Regulated products**: Instead of smoking green leaves from a plastic bag, consumers would be purchasing a regulated, labeled, tested product. Smoking could be de-emphasized as alternatives like vaporizers and edible products become mainstream.

Part III: The state of reform

- **Public opinion**: For the first time, polls show most American support making marijuana legal. Majorities across all age groups and ideologies also support medical marijuana and oppose efforts to enforce federal law in states where it's legal.
- **State policies:** Medical marijuana is legal in 20 states, 17 have alternatives to incarceration for possession of small amounts, and Colorado and Washington have removed all penalties for adult marijuana use.
- **Federal policies:** Eight bills would address conflicts between state and federal law to some extent, from a full repeal of federal law to provisions relating to taxation and access to banking services.

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Biography

As Deputy Director of Federal Policies, **Dan Riffle** executes MPP's lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. Prior to his promotion to this position, Dan served for 3.5 years as a Legislative Analyst in the State Policies department.

Dan joined MPP in October 2009. Shortly thereafter, following MPP's successful campaign to remove the so-called Barr Amendment, Dan led MPP's efforts in the D.C. Council and Department of Health, authoring the numerically scored competitive bidding process used to award licenses to cultivation centers and dispensaries. In 2011, Dan was instrumental in expanding Vermont's medical marijuana law to include state-regulated dispensaries and led the lobbying effort to provide patients with debilitating medical conditions in Maryland with an affirmative defense against charges of marijuana possession. In 2013 he shepherded medical marijuana legislation through the Illinois legislature, making it the second largest medical marijuana state and capping off a 10-year lobbying effort by MPP, as well as expanding Maryland's legal protections to caregivers and establishing a statewide medical marijuana research program.

Prior to joining MPP, Dan practiced law as an assistant prosecutor in Vinton County, Ohio. He also worked in the office of former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, the Ohio EPA, and Columbus Legal Aid Society. He is a graduate of the Ohio State University and received his J.D. from Capital University Law School, where he served on the Law Review and National Moot Court Team and received numerous scholarships, including one for his service in the chambers of U.S. District Court Judge Algernon Marbley. He lives with his wife Jessica on Capitol Hill.