

EDITORIAL

Editorial: Legalizing medical marijuana sales could boost Missouri's bottom line



By the Editorial Board Oct 30, 2017 (7)



Mike Martin of J.F. Electric works on finishing touches at HCI Alternative in Collinsville, the first medical marijuana dispensary in the Metro East. The dispensary opened nearly two years ago. Photo by Cristina M. Fletes, cfletes@post-dispatch.com

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The strongest argument for legalizing medical marijuana sales in Missouri is that anywhere from [\\$9 million to \\$66 million](#) in potential tax revenue is going up in smoke. Missouri is cash-strapped and lawmakers shouldn't turn their backs on a significant way to raise money.

Three legalization petitions being circulated across Missouri emphasize the revenue- and job-creating potential being missed. With at least 22 ballot proposals aimed at persuading voters to join the pro-pot movement next year, Missouri could become the 30th state to make good money from marijuana sales.

Of the 29 states that allow medical marijuana sales, at least seven, along with the District of Columbia, have completely decriminalized pot. The American public also supports legalization in increasingly larger numbers. A Quinnipiac University poll released in August showed that 94 percent of voters surveyed supported legal marijuana for adults with doctors' prescriptions.

A Gallup poll released last week showed that the highest percentage of respondents ever, 64 percent, favors legalizing recreational marijuana use. Of that [group](#), 51 percent of Republicans support full legalization.

New Approach Missouri, an offshoot of Show Me Cannabis, is leading legalization efforts. The group narrowly failed to get a proposal on the 2016 ballot asking voters to change the state Constitution to allow medical marijuana sales. For this election cycle it has raised at least \$369,000 and a group spokesman said it has already collected about 100,000 of the approximately 170,000 signatures needed to get it on the November 2018 ballot.

Another prominent effort, [Missourians for Patient Care](#), is taking a different approach that would require fewer signatures. Backed by former Missouri House Speaker Steve Tilley, R-Perryville, and former state Rep. Mike Colona, D-St. Louis, the effort is aimed at changing the state statute that criminalizes marijuana sales. Tilley says it's a more pragmatic approach, requiring slightly more than 100,000 signatures to get on the ballot and giving legislators more input into writing the law.

Missouri's conservative turn doesn't mean a marijuana initiative should be dismissed as a pipe dream. Voters in other conservative states, such as North Dakota, Arkansas and Florida, approved initiatives legalizing medical marijuana sales last year, and Montana voters expanded access to medical marijuana.

Legalizing sales for those suffering from cancer, epilepsy, glaucoma, post-traumatic stress disorder, intractable migraines, HIV/AIDS and terminal illnesses is compassionate and smart business.

Less than 15 miles east of St. Louis, Illinois residents with a prescription buy marijuana at a medical dispensary in Collinsville, one of 53 dispensaries that began operating in November 2015. Illinois' pot sales raised about \$3 million in sales tax revenue through May, and [state lawmakers](#) are pushing to expand legalization to increase revenue.

[Colorado](#) legalized marijuana sales earlier than most states and reportedly raised about \$200 million in tax revenue last year. The longer Missouri waits to legalize, the more money we leave on the table.

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