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### Prop 64- Legalization of Marijuana

Legalization of recreational marijuana has been one of the hottest topics in the last few state elections. Now four states- Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington- have legalized the drug, and many others have put the issue on table for this upcoming election. Considering California has a larger economy than most entire countries, the state's decision this November could be the tipping point in this ongoing debate. In essence, Proposition 64 would make recreational use and possession of Marijuana legal for adults 21 and over. It will create two new excise taxes: one on the cultivation of cannabis and one on its sale. The revenue from these taxes will be utilized for Marijuana related research and programs such as studies on its effects, youth drug education, and solving of the environmental issues caused by illegal hemp farming.

Prop 64 is one of the most controversial issues on the ballot, and has a contingent of influential supporters on both sides of the argument. The pro side is voting in favor of legalizing the drug, and has a few key points. For one, legalizing recreational cannabis will regulate a drug that is currently easily accessible on the black market. Illegal marijuana dealers today have no reason not to sell to children, and can lace the plant with toxic chemicals. A legalized cannabis industry would be held to certain quality standards and would forbid sale to children. It would also enable taxes to be levied on both cultivation and sales, pumping an estimated \$1 billion a year into the state government. Further fiscal benefits would result from reducing the law enforcement costs currently surrounding illegal marijuana. Many argue that imprisoning

someone for a relatively minor offense like possession of marijuana needlessly ruins people's lives and disproportionately targets people of color.

A "yes" vote on Prop 64 is backed by the Democratic and Green parties, six US congressmen, and Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom. It is also backed by multiple minority organizations such as the California NAACP, and numerous other groups and individuals. In addition, the affirmative was endorsed by California's two largest newspapers: the LA Times and the San Francisco Chronicle. The campaign has raised an impressive \$18.1 Million, nine times that of the opposing campaign. The top donor is former Facebook president Sean Parker, who gave \$8.6 Million to assist the campaign.

Although the opposition has only raised a respectively meager \$2 million and has a smaller support base, their argument raises questions that should not be overlooked. For one, the current wording of the proposition does not ban Marijuana advertisements from mediums such as television. Cannabis businesses will be able to advertise their products through multiple outlets that are frequented by children, which may lead to increased acceptance of the drug in society. Secondly, unlike drunk driving, law enforcement officials currently have no way to establish guidelines for driving under the influence of the marijuana, as there are no breathalyzer type devices for THC. States that have already legalized the drug for recreational use are beginning to see some consequences. Colorado has seen a spike in ER visits due to children not knowing the difference between regular sweets, such as brownies and gummy bears, and marijuana infused "edibles". In addition, Washington state has seen marijuana related traffic incidences double since the legalization was passed.

In opposition to the proposed law are the Republican and Libertarian Parties. The campaign has also garnered the support of countless law enforcement officials and organizations, including the California Association of Highway Patrolmen and the California Police Chiefs Association. Other

major opponents include the California Hospital Association, US Senator Dianne Feinstein, and Santa Rosa's own Press Democrat.

As far as the polls are concerned, the overwhelming majority predict an affirmative victory come November. Even more interesting, almost 80% of young voters between the ages of 18 and 34 are in favor of the proposition, showing that legalization is inevitable in California's future. Personally, I consider legalization of recreational marijuana to hugely beneficial both financially and in regards to regulation. However, the proposition fails to address a few key elements and would need to be reworked to win my full support. Before we legalize recreational cannabis, we need to establish a protocol for enforcing its responsible use. We also need to completely ban advertisements for the drug so as not to create lax cultural norms in regards to drug use. We should observe what does and doesn't work with the laws in place for alcohol, cigarettes, and recreational marijuana in other states, and revise Proposition 64 according to our findings.