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Pro Marijuana Events Face Backlash Amid Poor Legalization Report Card



The pristine clouds and a Rocky Mountain high have been emasculated by marijuana smoke and drug-induced high. The wholesome image portrayed by Colorado's tourism board is upstaged on 4/20 by pot activists.



Scenes like this were the face of Denver and Colorado amid this past weekend's 4/20 pot celebrations. What might your State's tourism image look like under legalized marijuana?

Colorado's wholesome image of fresh air and exercise, hiking and beautiful scenery gave way again this April to a haze of pot smoke while police largely ignored enforcement of the "no public consumption provisions" of the amendment that legalized marijuana in the state.

Meanwhile, a backlash from local and national groups makes headlines as they give Colorado poor marks in [first annual 4-20 Report Card](#).

Here's the coverage from the Denver Post where the article can be read as published at [this link](#):

Pro-marijuana 4/20 events face backlash from legalization skeptics

By John Ingold

The Denver Post

A national anti-marijuana group has met with Obama administration officials to encourage the federal government to reverse legalization in Colorado and Washington.

Meanwhile, on Monday, a Colorado group concerned about the impacts of legalization on children issued a statement decrying the scenes of public pot smoking in Denver on Sunday, a day marijuana enthusiasts treat as a holiday called 4/20.

Both are examples of organizations skeptical of legalization pointing to the unprecedented interest around marijuana in Denver this past week as reason to change or reverse the 16-month-old law. Scenes of open toking, cannabis commercialism and pot-fueled revelry, the groups say, run contrary to the restrained system of at-home marijuana use that voters approved in 2012.

"This is not healthy for our young people," said Gina Carbone, a spokeswoman for the group Smart Colorado. "This does not send the right message. ... We're not educating our kids to the harms of it. Instead, we're glorifying it and promoting it."

Denver City Councilman Charlie Brown likewise questioned whether the 4/20 celebrations are beneficial to Denver and said he hopes any added expense incurred by the police department as a result of the events are paid for by taxes on marijuana stores.

"It's not Denver's finest hour, let's put it that way," Brown said. "And it still comes across to me as in-your-face politics."

For the first 4/20 after history-making recreational marijuana stores opened in Colorado, Denver was [awash in marijuana-centric events](#) on Sunday — the most notable being the large pro-pot rally in Civic Center park that culminated with a mass smoke-out at 4:20 p.m. This year, Denver police issued 92 citations for public marijuana consumption over the two-day festival — far more than the five public-consumption tickets police issued at the one-day event in 2013 — and organizers told attendees that public consumption is illegal.

Tens of thousands still lit up in unison Sunday afternoon.

Miguel Lopez, the rally's organizer, said the event remains more of a protest than a festival, despite beefed-up security, new vendor booths and an expanded musical lineup that brought the rally closer to other annual events like A Taste of Colorado. Those who smoked in public did so as an expression of civil disobedience against laws they disagree with, Lopez said.

Lopez said the rally doesn't encourage youth marijuana use, but, "I thought it was a very positive message for our children about having safer choices when they become adults."

"If people thought it was so bad for the city's image, then why did we have so many tourists?" Lopez asked.

The tug-of-war over the impact of 4/20 began last week, when the national anti-legalization group Project SAM released a report card filled with data that the group said suggest a rise in marijuana-related problems in Colorado.

[The report card](#) shows an increase in marijuana-positive workplace drug tests at one lab in Colorado Springs. Another chart on the report card shows [an increase in seizures](#) by U.S. postal inspectors of marijuana being shipped out of state. The report card also noted [two recent deaths](#) in Colorado that may be linked [to marijuana edibles](#).

In a conference call with reporters on Friday, former U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, the chairman of Project SAM, said he met last week with representatives from the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy to push for the federal government to intervene in Colorado and Washington. The Justice Department has previously announced it would not block marijuana legalization in the two states as long as certain conditions were met — such as keeping marijuana away from kids and within state lines.

Indicative of [the deep divisions over legalization within the Obama administration](#), ONDCP officials have [spoken critically](#) of marijuana legalization in the past. Kennedy did not provide a direct answer when asked whether Justice Department officials attended the meeting as well.

"The president and the attorney general, now that we're getting this new information, have a better ground to say, 'Well we gave this a chance. Now we're going to change our approach here,' " he said.

In a statement issued Monday, Smart Colorado said the marijuana industry "willfully betrayed many of their key Amendment 64 supporters" by not stopping public marijuana consumption on 4/20 or doing more to keep marijuana away from kids.

"This past weekend we saw marijuana users and folks from the industry openly flouting the laws by consuming pot in public," group spokeswoman Rachel O'Bryan said in the statement.

Marijuana industry advocates distanced themselves from the rally prior to the weekend. The Marijuana Industry Group put out a news release on Friday saying it was not connected to any of the weekend's 4/20 events. The release included reminders that public marijuana consumption and giving marijuana to minors are illegal.

"We are constantly working to help the public understand what is legal and safe," said Michael Elliott, the group's executive director.

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