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Marijuana

Medical marijuana could be legalized in more than half of U.S. states by 2014, advocate says

By Michael Roberts Tue., Jul. 19 2011 at 10:44 AM

Categories: Marijuana

Could the broader approval of medical marijuana lead to legalization of marijuana for recreational use? That's one theory put forward by cannabis activists like Morgan Fox, communications manager for the [Marijuana Policy Project](#). Fox believes more than half of U.S. states could legalize MMJ by 2014 -- and he says the success of the Colorado model is a big reason why.



MPP may be based in Washington, D.C., but it's very involved in marijuana issues here. For instance, it's one of the organizations backing the [Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol Act of 2012](#), which is aiming for next year's ballot. But MPP staffers are also closely watching medical marijuana-related initiatives likely to be considered by voters elsewhere in 2012.

"Just this year alone, there are something like twelve different states considering medical marijuana regulation," he notes. "One has already added it" -- Delaware, where [legislation was passed](#) in May -- "and there may be another by the end of the year. And we'll be working with people in three or four states next year, particularly in Ohio and North Dakota."



Morgan Fox, right, with MPP's Kurt Gardinier and Mike Meno.

From there, the sky's the limit. As noted in this [ProCon.org post](#), states with pending medical marijuana legislation as of May include Ohio plus Alabama, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. If medical marijuana is approved in each of them, they'd join sixteen states that have already legalized MMJ to form a de facto majority in the U.S. And Fox thinks it can happen.

"Politicians are notoriously behind the public on this issue," he maintains. "Medical marijuana already enjoys 70 percent support nationwide, and in some places, it's more like 80 percent."

These numbers have clearly gotten the attention of elected reps across the country, Fox believes: "After the failure of Prop. 19," the California recreational-use legalization proposal that fell short in 2010, "these states began looking at medical marijuana states, and they realized that they were able to institute these policies without the sky falling."

Fox says Colorado is a case in point, due largely to legislation signed into law last year that set an industry structure in place a decade after voters approved Amendment 20, which legalized MMJ in Colorado.

"I think regulation is the hallmark of a really successful medical marijuana program," Fox

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stresses. "Without any sort of governing bodies or criteria to make sure patients and people in the industry are operating completely within state law, the system can become chaotic. But in Colorado, you have legislators willing to work with people, and cities are getting a lot of tax money and additional revenue from these establishments. That's why Colorado is really a shining example of what can happen when people aren't afraid to embrace this industry."

Could the momentum be slowed by [Justice Department warnings about possible raids of large-scale medical marijuana operations](#)? Fox concedes that "it could dissuade some of them -- but it really shouldn't. If you look at the track record of the Department of Justice under the Obama administration, there have been some raids, but for the most part, they've respected state laws, especially in states where there are clear regulations" -- like Colorado. "So I'd suggest states go ahead and set up regulations for their industry, which should protect patients and the industry, too."

He adds that going after the medical marijuana biz in a place like Colorado "would be an overkill move by the Department of Justice" that's very unlikely to happen, "especially in a year before an election."

Would the approval of medical marijuana by more than half of U.S. states create momentum for the rescheduling of cannabis on a federal level and perhaps decriminalization or legalization regarding recreational use? Possibly, Fox argues.

"Politicians understand a clear legal majority," he says. "And in the Senate, there would be majority representation of constituencies that have legal medical marijuana and supported it. And that would definitely be of assistance for getting laws passed on a federal level once it got to the Senate."

If something like that happens, Colorado's grand medical marijuana experiment could be a big reason why.

More from our Marijuana archive: "[Marijuana critic William Breathes's sublime & ridiculous global media blitz \(AUDIO, VIDEO\)](#).

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