

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Liberal government foolishly pushing ahead with legalization of marijuana

All signs indicate the current Liberal government will soon be barreling forward on its promise to legalize marijuana. More specifically, it's believed the government will introduce legislation to legalize marijuana by April 20, with the intention of it being fully legal by Canada Day 2018. It's most unfortunate the Liberal government is foolishly pushing ahead with such legislation when it will only serve to create more uncertainty and leave concerns relating to the health and safety of Canadians unaddressed. The health and safety of Canadians should always be a priority for any government. Governments should always seriously review and consider facts and evidence presented by credible organizations and associations when developing legislation. The issue of marijuana legalization is no different. The Canadian Pediatric Association has stated the evidence is clear that when youth smoke marijuana, they have increased risks of mental health issues, including psychosis and schizophrenia. The Canadian Medical Association has maintained that even occasional pot smoking can cause serious negative psychological effects on brain development up to age 25 and went on to recommend a legal minimum age of 21 years. This is in contrast to the Marijuana Task Force which called for the national age for legalized recreational pot smoking to be set at 18 years. We, the Conservative Official Opposition, believe the current Liberal government should listen to and respect the expert advice provided by the medical community. The report presented by the Marijuana Task Force contains serious shortcomings and concerns with respect to both public safety and the protection of young people. One such concern was that the Task Force acknowledged the police do not have the necessary tools to keep our streets safe from increased drug-impaired driving and significant resources are required to equip them to deal with it. However, despite the evidence provided by the medical community and shortcomings contained in the Task Force's own report, the current Liberal government is surging ahead to introduce legislation to legalize marijuana. This shows the Prime Minister's priority is pandering for political gain, which will cause more uncertainty than there already exists. The current government's actions in its introduction and handling of this legislation are obvious ? to gain political points with marijuana users. It is most unfortunate that instead of making the health and safety of Canadians a priority, the Prime Minister has created an arbitrary timeline of proposing legislation by April 20 to create a show out of this file.

Based on the Liberal government's mismanagement of the marijuana file to date, we can only expect the legislation will continue to create uncertainty, lack key protections for young Canadians, and leave key questions about drug-impaired driving unanswered. There has already been a serious increase in the operation of illegal marijuana dispensaries due to the grey area the Liberal government has created. We also know that the technology to test for impaired driving is not available yet and we need to ensure that law enforcement agencies have the resources they need.

Canadians can count on the Conservative Official Opposition to be their voice in continuing to raise their very serious and relevant concerns, as the current Liberal government moves forward to legalize marijuana. Public health and safety, especially of young Canadians, will remain a priority for us.

