

New poll shows wide support for NM pot legalization

Written by By Joey Peters NM Political Report
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Sixty-one percent of adults in New Mexico support legalizing and regulating recreational marijuana, according to a poll released January 28 by Research & Polling.

When coupled with restrictions on where marijuana can be produced and requirements that sales revenue go toward health and drug rehab programs, that number supporting legalization jumps to 69 percent.

Sen. Jerry Ortiz y Pino, D-Albuquerque, said the poll is evidence that the state is ready to join Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Arizona as states with legalized recreation marijuana.

“What it shows is that New Mexicans support legalization,” he said. “Not just ex-hippies in Taos, not just people who read The Nation in Santa Fe, not just [University of New Mexico] students in Albuquerque, but people in every part of this state support legalization.”

Ortiz y Pino is proposing an amendment to the state constitution that would let voters decide whether to legalize in the general election this fall. Rep. Bill McCamley, D-Las Cruces, is also carrying a separate bill to legalize marijuana through the state legislature.

Ortiz y Pino’s bill needs approval by a majority of both the state House of Representatives and Senate, but doesn’t require a signature by Gov. Susana Martinez, who opposes marijuana legalization. McCamley’s would need to pass the House and Senate, then receive Martinez’s signature.

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Still, both bills are considered longshots. Ortiz y Pino's bill sits in the Senate Rules Committee, where chair Linda Lopez, D-Albuquerque, hasn't scheduled it for a hearing yet. McCamley's bill is in the House Rules Committee, which will only pass it if Martinez puts it on the call for the session, a very unlikely prospect.

But both point to the poll as the showing the public on their side.

"Let's just do this," McCamley said. "Let's do it now."

Ortiz y Pino estimates that legalization could bring New Mexico anywhere from an additional \$20 million to \$60 million in tax revenue each year. Because Ortiz y Pino's bill is a constitutional amendment, it doesn't have specific funding mechanisms attached—those would be decided if such an amendment is approved. Still, his bill mentions that the revenue would go to law enforcement and funding Medicaid. Ortiz y Pino said he'd add an amendment to include education.

McCamley's bill marks 40 percent of the marijuana revenue to the general fund, 25 percent to alcohol and substance abuse treatment, 20 percent to city and county law enforcement agencies and 15 percent to state police.

For a legislative session where the Republican leadership and governor are focused on tough-on-crime bills, McCamley said this one should be easy.

"What we're doing with this bill, we are taking money out of the hands of drug dealers, we are taking money out of the hands of cartels," McCamley said, "and we are replacing it in the hands of legitimate business owners."

The poll marks a significant increase in support from just two years ago, when Research & Polling found 44 percent supportive of legalization and 50 percent opposed.

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Research & Polling President Brian Sanderoff noted that his previous poll only considered likely voters while the new one considered adults aged 18 and older. Sanderoff noted that support would probably drop one percentage point when considering likely voters.

The new poll surveyed 406 people across the state, with demographics meeting the state average. Research & Polling surveyed 55 percent of respondents by cell phone and 45 percent by landline. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.9 percent.

All five regions of New Mexico—the Albuquerque area, Northern New Mexico, the Las Cruces area, the northwest and the Eastern oil patch—all support legalization, with the strongest in the Las Cruces border region at 75 percent. Eastern New Mexico, widely viewed as the most conservative part of the state, still supports legalization by 58 percent.

Breaking down by partisan lines, independents are the most likely to support legalization at 82 percent. Seventy-three percent of Democrats favor legalizing while 43 percent of Republicans feel the same.

Even those who have never used marijuana favor legalization by a small majority—53 percent.

Half the population of the state admits to trying marijuana while 11 percent use often or occasionally, according to the poll.

“My guess is it's a few points higher,” Sanderoff said, mentioning that some people are less likely to admit they use or have tried marijuana because of stigma.

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