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I. Letter from the Chair

Senators,

Welcome to SMUNC 2019! I’m Maggie, a junior studying Middle Eastern history and math (I know, it’s a weird combination), from Los Altos, California (so, pretty nearby). I’m can’t wait to get to know you all during the conference and get into some federal policy making. This is my 8th year doing MUN and second year chairing SMUNC. I’ve chaired quite a few (more than I can count) committees including Model Congress committees (debating everything from environmental protections to immigration), EU committees, traditional MUN committees, and even a Game of Thrones committee, but this will be the largest committee I’ve chaired thus far.

Even though the current Senate may be a bit slow to implement legislation, I look forward to seeing the legislation you all will be able to write in just a few days. This committee will require negotiation and compromise to address two big topics our country is currently grappling with.

Just a reminder, you must submit a position paper in order to win awards. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions about anything. My email is mgray21@stanford.edu.

Sincerely,
Maggie Gray
II. Gun Control

II. a) Introduction

The Second Amendment of the United States Constitution reads: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” This amendment protects Americans’ right to keep and use guns and to organize into militias, military forces composed of civilians. However, in recent years, it has become more controversial. Since the Constitution was written, gun technology has changed dramatically. In the 1700s, guns took about a minute to load and could only fire one bullet at a time, without much accuracy. However, today guns can be fired quickly and accurately, making them much more dangerous. There are about 393 million guns in the United States,¹ and about 40% of Americans own a gun or live in a household with a gun.²

In 2017, almost 40,000 people suffered gun deaths (about ⅔ of which were suicides)³ and

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tens of thousands more suffered non-fatal gun injuries. The US has a large number of gun deaths compared to other developed nations.

In the past few years, mass shootings have become increasingly common, with some of the deadliest shootings in US history happening in the past decade. While mass shootings do not make up a large portion of US gun deaths, they are incredibly traumatic and public events.

### The top 10 U.S. mass shootings

The mass shooting at a country-music concert in Las Vegas late Sunday is the worst-ever to happen in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Las Vegas, Nev.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Orlando, Fla.</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>VA Tech</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Sandy Hook</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Killeen, Tx.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>San Ysidro, Ca.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>UT Austin, Tx.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Edmond, Ok.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>San Bernardino, Ca.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Fort Hood, Tx.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurasia

### II. b) Current Federal Gun Legislation

After the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Congress passed the Gun Control Act of 1968 (GCA). The GCA requires that all gun manufacturers and sellers who wanted to import guns or sell guns across state lines have to have a federal license to do so. It also prohibits the sale of firearms to minors, felons, the mentally ill,

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and some other groups. In 1986, Congress passed the Firearms Owners’ Protection Act, prohibiting civilian ownership of machine guns made after 1986.\(^6\) The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993 launched the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), a background check system that checks to see if an individual is on a list of prohibited gun buyers (as defined by the GCA).\(^7\) All federally licensed gun sellers are required to conduct a NICS background check on all gun buyers (however, this does not apply to private, unlicensed sellers).

Federal gun control policy has not changed since 1994 when Congress passed the Federal Assault Weapons Ban which prohibited the manufacture and sale of assault weapons (like the AR-15) for civilian use. In 2004, the law expired, and US citizens could once again buy assault weapons.\(^8\)

II. c) Proposed Reform

The majority of gun laws are enacted by states, and so there is a lot of diversity in gun legislation by state. However, according to one study, about 57% of Americans support stricter gun control laws.\(^9\) There have been a number of proposed gun control reforms:

1. **Universal Background Checks**

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Currently, only federally licensed gun sellers are required to conduct a background check on gun buyers, while private, unlicensed gun sellers (like those who sell guns online or at gun shows) are not required to do so. As a result, it is estimated that 22% of US gun owners bought their most recent firearm without a background check. Without background checks, people with criminal backgrounds can access firearms. Many senators and activists have called for universal background check legislation, which would require all gun sellers to conduct a background check on gun buyers.

2. Semi-automatic Weapons Ban

Semi-automatic weapons are military style weapons that reload themselves, allowing for quick firing. Semi-automatic weapons, like the AR-15, have been used in several mass shootings such as the Las Vegas shooting (the deadliest in US history which killed 50 people). Many people argue that civilians have no need for semi-automatic weapons and that they are too dangerous and deadly. A semi-automatic weapons ban could be paired with a “gun buyback” program in which the government collects guns and pays the gun owners for their guns.

3. High Capacity Magazine Ban

A high capacity magazine ban would limit the number of bullets a gun can hold. High capacity magazines hold many bullets which make mass shootings more deadly. Several states, including California, have implemented high capacity magazine bans, banning magazines that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition.

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4. **Increasing Waiting Periods**

   Currently, there are no federal laws mandating waiting periods. Waiting periods make gun buyers wait a few days or weeks before purchasing a gun. Some violent gun incidents are caused by impulsive behavior, and many believe that waiting periods help decrease homicides and suicides. Waiting periods also allow time for more extensive background checks.

5. **Prevent Mentally Ill People and Those on the No-Fly List (or Watch Lists) from Buying Guns**

6. **Implement Red Flag Laws**

   Red flag laws allow law enforcement agencies to remove firearms from people considered to be a danger to themselves or others. These laws target mentally ill gun owners and allow family members or law enforcement officials to petition a judge to temporarily remove firearms from a mentally ill person.

   Others believe that guns help protect people from violence and that owning a gun is a constitutional right. There have been several proposed laws to relax gun control:

   1. **Arming Teachers**

      After school shootings such as the shootings in Parkland, Florida and Newtown, Connecticut, some government officials have suggested providing teachers with guns in order to protect their students.

   2. **Relax Concealed Carry Laws**

      Concealed carry laws allow Americans to carry guns in public in a concealed manner. Most states (but not all) require a permit to carry a concealed weapon. There
are also a number of areas where concealed carry weapons are not allowed. These areas include government facilities, schools, hospitals, and churches (just to name a few). Some have suggested relaxing concealed carry laws by allowing citizens to carry a concealed weapon without a permit anywhere they want. Supporters of relaxed concealed carry argue that allowing more guns in more places will keep people safe, as gun carriers can protect others and themselves from rogue shooters.

While the majority of Americans support stricter gun control, Americans are often divided on these proposals.

II. d) Partisan Divide

Gun issues are typically divided along party lines, with Democrats supporting stricter gun laws\(^\text{11}\) and Republicans supporting looser gun laws\(^\text{12}\). Many Republicans argue that guns are a constitutional right that keep Americans safe. A number of Americans use guns for sports like

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shooting and hunting. They argue that most gun violence is a result of violent people, who would find a way to kill even without guns. They argue that if guns are illegal, a black market will emerge that will put guns in the hands of criminals. Democrats tend to argue the opposite. They favor stricter gun legislation that restricts access to guns, especially semi-automatic weapons. They argue that guns make killing easier, deadlier, and more efficient and that stricter gun control will save lives. However, there have been some bipartisan gun measures. For example, currently, many Democrats and Republicans support red flag laws. A red flag bill has been proposed in Congress that is sponsored by both parties (and even supported by President Trump).

II. e) Questions to Consider

- How can Congress reduce American gun deaths and mass shootings?
- Is the 2nd amendment still relevant today?
- What is the most effective way to control guns, if we control them at all?
- What compromises can be made on this issue?
IIII. Legalization of Marijuana

IIII. a) Introduction

Between 2001 and 2010, more than 8.2 million people were arrested for marijuana related offenses, costing the government billions of dollars a year.\(^\text{13}\) Currently, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) classifies marijuana as a schedule I drug (defined as a drug “with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse”), on par with heroin, LSD, and ecstasy.\(^\text{14}\) However, in recent years, American public opinion on marijuana has shifted with a number of Americans supporting decriminalization or legalization of marijuana.

More than half of Americans have used marijuana at some point in their lives. 62% of Americans support legalizing marijuana for recreational use\(^\text{15}\) and 84% support legalizing marijuana for medical use.\(^\text{16}\) 33 states and DC have legalized medical marijuana use, and 11 states and DC have legalized recreational marijuana use.

government continues to prohibit the use of marijuana under federal law.

III. b) History of Marijuana Legislation

American federal regulation of marijuana began in 1937 when Congress passed the Marihuana Tax Act, which required all marijuana producers and sellers to purchase a marijuana stamp from the government. Failure to purchase a stamp when dealing with marijuana was a federal crime punishable by heavy fines and time in prison. The high price of the stamps discouraged most marijuana producers and sellers from continuing to work with marijuana, and as a result, legal marijuana production and distribution in the United States decreased. Before this law was passed, Americans could legally buy and sell cannabis, which was a common ingredient in cough syrup, in pharmacies and drug stores. In the 1930s, in part because of the popularity of marijuana among Mexican immigrants, a wave of anti-cannabis sentiment hit the nation, which caused a number of anti-cannabis movies, such as Reefer Madness, to be produced and released. During this time, people claimed that marijuana caused violence and sexual deviancy (there were even “scientific studies” that showed this to be true), which led to its eventual regulation in 1937.

In 1970, under President Nixon, Congress passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act, which officially criminalized marijuana by designating it as a Schedule I drug, alongside heroin, ecstasy, and LSD. Every year, about 600,000 people are arrested for marijuana related crimes (88% of arrests are for possession), and those arrested can face heavy fines and jail time.
California was the first state to officially legalize medical marijuana in 1996. Since then, 32 other states and DC have joined California in legalizing marijuana for medical usage. Colorado and Washington were the first two states to legalize the recreational use of marijuana in 2012. Thus far, 9 other states and DC have also legalized recreational marijuana usage. Because marijuana is still illegal under federal law, recreational and medical marijuana companies face a number of challenges. Marijuana companies have trouble importing and exporting necessary goods because of marijuana’s illegality. In addition, most banks, which are regulated by the federal government, will not work with marijuana companies for fear of being prosecuted by the federal government for breaking federal marijuana laws.

III. c) Scientific Opinion and Health Effects

While marijuana has become increasingly popular among Americans, it still has a number of detrimental health effects, especially on young users whose brains are not fully developed. Many people believe that marijuana is not addictive. However, studies have shown that about 1 in 10 marijuana users become addicted to the drug. For users who start before the age of 18, that number drops to 1 in 6.\textsuperscript{17} Marijuana use can also cause a number of mental problems, including short term problems with memory, learning, attention, coordination, and reaction times.\textsuperscript{18} For people who use marijuana as teenagers, these mental problems can be permanent. Similar to smoking cigarettes and cigars, smoking marijuana can have detrimental effects on lung health. Smoking marijuana can “harm lung tissues and cause scarring and

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
damage to small blood vessels.”19 Marijuana smoke “contains many of the same toxins, irritants, and carcinogens as tobacco smoke.”20 In addition, marijuana use has been linked to short term psychosis (not knowing what is real) and long lasting mental disorders like schizophrenia (although it is unclear if the relationship is causal).21 It is important to note that thus far there have been no reported marijuana overdoses.

III. d) Proposed Reforms

Many Americans have criticized marijuana’s criminalization since it was passed in 1970. People argue that marijuana criminalization has exacerbated the racial bias in America’s justice system, fueled gangs and cartels in the United States and other countries, and made marijuana consumption more dangerous. An ACLU report found that black Americans are 3.73 times more likely than white Americans to be arrested for marijuana possession, even though studies have shown they are equally likely to possess marijuana. Every year, Americans spend about $34 billion on marijuana, and because marijuana is illegal in most of the United States, most of this money goes to drug cartels and gangs. An FBI report found that marijuana is the top revenue generator for Mexican drug trafficking organizations, which contribute to regional violence and instability. Finally, because marijuana is not regulated in the United States, the marijuana used by Americans can be dangerous. Unregulated marijuana can be laced with dangerous other drugs (like psychedelics), unbeknownst to the buyer. In addition, in the last two decades, marijuana has become 3 times more potent as marijuana growers purposefully breed cannabis with higher THC

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
concentrations. If marijuana was regulated, the government could legislate the potency of cannabis, as the government currently does with cigarettes. As a result of these perceived problems with marijuana’s criminalization, a number of federal reforms ranging from reclassifying marijuana to full legalization have been proposed since 1970:

1. **Change Marijuana’s DEA Classification**

   Currently the DEA classifies marijuana as a Schedule I drug. “Schedule I drugs, substances, or chemicals are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.”\(^{22}\) Other Schedule I drugs include heroin, LSD, and ecstasy, whereas drugs like cocaine, methamphetamine, and oxycodone, all of which are highly addictive and dangerous, are Schedule II drugs, which means they have an accepted medical use, and therefore more accessible and subject to a different set of laws. Because marijuana is a Schedule I drug, meaning it has no accepted medical use, it is extremely difficult for researchers to study the drug and its effects. Schedule II drugs, however, are much easier to study because they are seen as having medicinal purposes. A number of scientists (including the US surgeon general)\(^ {23} \) have called for the rescheduling of marijuana, so that scientific studies can be conducted to examine its potential medical uses.

2. **Legalize Medical Marijuana**

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In 1996 California became the first state to legalize cannabis for medical usage. Since then, 32 other states and DC have also legalized medical marijuana. While it is difficult to conduct scientific studies on the effects of marijuana because the laws surrounding it, a number of scientists have studied its effects on the state level. A group of researchers at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine looked at over 10,000 scientific studies of marijuana and its effects on human health (both positive and negative). They found that marijuana has a number of potential medical uses. Marijuana can be used to treat chronic pain, chemotherapy-induced nausea, and multiple sclerosis spasticity symptoms, and may also help improve sleep for individuals with sleep apnea. However, they found that marijuana also has a number of health detriments. Marijuana usage negatively affects respiratory health, prenatal health, learning, memory, attention, and anxiety and may also lead to the development of schizophrenia (and other psychoses) and depression. Some doctors have also argued against the legalization of medical marijuana because it has not been thoroughly tested. Because marijuana is illegal on a federal level, medical marijuana has not been approved by the FDA, which has a very high bar to approve substances for medical use. Doctors argue that before medical marijuana is fully legalized, it needs to go through the same approval process as all other medicines. In addition, in states where medical marijuana is legalized, citizens have

25 Ibid.
abused medical marijuana. While marijuana has been shown to reduce some specific kinds of pain, most marijuana prescriptions are for general, non-specific “severe pain,” which marijuana may not be effective in treating.²⁷

3. Exempt State-Approved Marijuana Activity from Federal Enforcement

Marijuana laws vary greatly from state to state. In California and Colorado, it is legal under state law to use marijuana recreationally, but in states like Texas, marijuana possession is a felony. However, all states are subject to federal law, which prohibits marijuana usage. So, even in a state where marijuana is legal, the federal government can still arrest people for marijuana-related offenses, which makes participating in the marijuana market extremely risky. Some lawmakers have proposed changing federal law to allow states to make their own decisions about marijuana legalization. In June 2018, Senators Cory Gardner and Elizabeth Warren proposed the STATES Act, which would amend the Controlled Substances Act and exempt state-approved marijuana activity from federal enforcement, effectively recognizing states’ legalization of marijuana.²⁸ The STATES Act has bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate.

4. Decriminalize Marijuana Possession and Usage

Currently, it is a criminal offense to sell, grow, use, and/or possess marijuana, however, many have called for the decriminalization of marijuana use and possession.

Decriminalizing marijuana use and possession would take away any criminal penalties for mere possession of marijuana, while the sale and production of marijuana would remain criminalized. Most Americans have used or possessed marijuana at some point in their lives, and many see the use and possession of marijuana as a “victimless crime” that does not truly deserve criminal punishment. Almost 90% of all marijuana-related arrests are possession arrests which cost the government billions of dollars a year. Decriminalization of possession and usage may also help ease the racial bias against people of color in marijuana arrests. However, others argue that decriminalization of use and possession encourages the production and sale of marijuana and will ultimately encourage marijuana usage.

5. **Legalize Recreational Marijuana**

The most extreme proposed reform is to fully legalize all marijuana, including marijuana for recreational use. Supporters of legalization argue that legalization will allow the government to regulate and tax marijuana, making marijuana safer and more tightly controlled. Only those over the age of 21 would be allowed to buy legal marijuana, whereas currently, people of any age can illegally buy marijuana. Supporters of legalization say that the government does not have a right to stop people from using marijuana how they want as it does not directly affect anybody else. They see marijuana as no worse than alcohol, which is already legal. Legalization may also minimize the importance of violent drug cartels, who rely on marijuana sales to stay in business. However, not all Americans want marijuana to be

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legalized. They fear that legalization will encourage Americans and especially teens to use marijuana. Legalizing marijuana will make it much more accessible to teenagers whose brains are still developing.

Science has shown that marijuana is detrimental to developing brains.

III. e) Partisan Divide

In general, Democrats are in favor of looser marijuana legislation whereas Republicans are in favor of stricter marijuana legislation. A Pew Research study showed that about 69% of Democrats are in favor of legalization whereas only 45% of Republicans are in favor of legalization. Notably, Senator Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, is generally not in favor of legalizing marijuana and has made it difficult for marijuana reform bills to be proposed in the Senate.

III. f) Questions to Consider

- How will marijuana legislation affect drug usage and addiction in the United States?
- What health effects does marijuana have on people?

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- Will loosening marijuana legislation allow more children to access marijuana?
- What role should individual states’ legislation have in drug regulation?
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“Marijuana Arrests by the Numbers.” American Civil Liberties Union. ACLU. Accessed October 15, 2019.  


