

PRESS REPUBLICAN

Editorial: Medicinal use of marijuana

Press Republican

January 7, 2014

If you look at it rationally, rather than emotionally, there is little to object to in news that Gov. Cuomo is about to make New York the 21st state to approve the use of medical marijuana.

If it delivers the comfort to seriously ill patients that proponents claim, it is truly the humane thing to do.

Cuomo is expected Wednesday to announce in his State of the State message that he will issue an executive order allowing certain patients to use marijuana to ease their pain or other discomfort. It is typically prescribed for patients with chronic pain, nausea resulting during cancer chemotherapy, glaucoma and other conditions.

Marijuana in 2104 is not looked upon the same way it was in, say, 1960 — or even in 2000. A recent Gallop Poll showed for the first time that a majority of Americans — 58 percent — favor allowing marijuana to be used for even recreational purposes. All age groups up to 64 prefer that bans be removed.

Last year, voters the states of Washington and Colorado approved ballot initiatives legalizing the sale of marijuana for recreational purposes.

They are instituting regulations to control it. It is being treated in the same fashion as the sale of alcohol. For example, nobody under the age of 21 can buy it, it's still illegal to consume it in public, and getting caught driving under the influence of cannabis will still result in a charge of driving under the influence.

It's still currently not possible for anyone without a medical card to buy cannabis in Washington, but regulations are expected to go fully into effect by this spring.

We are not endorsing the legalization of recreational marijuana in New York state. Law-enforcement experts in our area have expressed concern with the concept, while proponents have argued that controlled, legal sales could actually decrease crime.

There was a time in America when cannabis use was legal in federal law and all states. But by 1936, it was legal nowhere.

But another factor is at play in the national debate about marijuana: money.

A Cato Institute study estimates that by taxing marijuana in all states, \$8.7 billion in revenue could be realized by federal and state governments. In addition, the costs associated with prosecuting cases associated with pot would be saved, as well as costs of incarceration.

The financial gain is proving to be an undeniable incentive for some states to decriminalize marijuana. And it makes it likely that New York will eventually formally debate its recreational use.

In the meantime, though, allowing it for medicinal purposes is simply the compassionate thing to do.