



## Laguna Refuses to Go to Pot

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In 1996, California legalized medical marijuana and a majority of Laguna Beach voters supported this initiative. In 2016, 57% of California voters supported Prop. 64, which legalized recreational marijuana. I would be very surprised if a majority of Laguna's electorate did not support this measure. Yet, the City Council and the voters have seen fit to allow no medical marijuana dispensaries in town and are making use of a provision in Prop. 64 that allows individual cities to ban recreational sale as well.

Laguna is not alone in south Orange County when it comes to putting obstacles in the path of those that wish to buy a legal commodity. The "not in my backyard" attitude on this issue has taken root in several surrounding cities. I wish we would reconsider our position. My wife died an agonizing death due to cancer. Marijuana would have helped with the side effects of chemo as well as the increasing pain as she came ever closer to death's doorstep. She chose the "medical martini" over medical marijuana. But, *if* she had wanted to use marijuana to ease her burden, driving two or three minutes to a medical dispensary here in town to speak with someone face to face about her options would have been a lot more convenient and humane than driving to Santa Ana.

The arguments put forward to defeat measure KK (in 2016) are the same arguments the City Council is using to justify its banning of recreational sales. As Councilman Robert Zur Schmiede says, retail sales in our town, "Could attract loitering, criminal activity, and increased traffic."

To loiter is to "stand or wait around idly without apparent purpose." Councilman, I have loitered in the past and I will loiter in the future. Some of my greatest adventures began with me just loitering about. Great worry? I think not.

Increase in criminal activity? Many cities are using debatable data from Denver to make this claim. Denver police spokesman Sonny Jackson reports, "Crime is up, but I don't know if you can relate it to marijuana." According to the FBI Uniform Crime Report, marijuana crimes in Denver make up less than one percent of all offenses counted.

When it comes to cities most associated with marijuana use, one thinks of Amsterdam. According to the logic of our city council, there should be rampant criminal activity there. Yet, the Safe City Index in 2015 rated Amsterdam the fifth safest city in the world.

Some of you are no doubt worried that selling marijuana will lead to greater use. However, the Cato Institute, founded by one of the Koch brothers, thus no wild-eyed liberal organization, issued a report on this subject. The report says “our conclusion is that state marijuana legalizations have had minimal effects on marijuana use and related outcomes.”

In the trio of dangers listed by Zur Schmiede (loitering, crime, traffic) let us notice that health concerns go unmentioned. There is good reason for this omission. A January 2015 article in Scientific Reports states that the mortality risks associated with marijuana use are 114 times less than with alcohol. Over 100,000 people die each year from alcohol related effects. Tobacco deaths total over 480,000. Remind me. Does Laguna allow the retail sale of these products?

Attorney General Jeff Sessions, no friend of states that have legalized marijuana, says its effect “is only slightly less awful” than heroin’s. As reported in the Los Angeles Times, 13,000 people died from heroin overdoses in 2015, according to The Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Guess how many Americans died from marijuana overdose? None. Sessions has also said “...good people don’t smoke marijuana.” Here is a partial list of past and current users who might come to our town and engage in criminal activities, or even worse, loitering: Former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Martha Stewart, Morgan Freeman, David Letterman, Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Phil Jackson, Maya Angelou, and two of the past three presidents. Oh, and Snoop Dog, too.

A reminder to our City Council and their supporters on this issue, “Reefer Madness” was not a Ken Burns documentary. It is possible to have well regulated retail marijuana outlets as the law proscribes, without turning Laguna Beach into San Francisco’s “Summer of Love.”

James Utt forgot to mention that Congressman Dana Rohrabacher favors legalized medical marijuana. Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.