

THE SUN

The folly of marijuana legalization

The legalization of drugs will have harmful effects on society, and a discussion that fails to acknowledge this is ridiculous

December 12, 2013

By Gregory Kline

Since Del. Heather Mizeur, a candidate for governor, announced a plan to legalize marijuana in Maryland, there has been a great deal of discussion of the issue. The Baltimore Sun called for a more measured approach that avoided the risk of "rushing to embrace a sweeping but untested new policy that could create as many problems as it solves." In an op-ed in The Sun, Walter Olson, a fellow at the Cato Institute, derided conservative opposition to Ms. Mizeur's drug legalization proposal and regurgitated many of the arguments that have been made by legalization advocates for decades.

What has been missing from the discussion, however, has been an honest analysis of both the impacts of broad legalization and the true intent of its advocates. Such a discussion would, no doubt, quickly chill any public momentum toward marijuana legalization.

Delegate Mizeur's proposal is the next step in a well established playbook that drug legalization advocates have been employing in states throughout the country.

First comes a focus on marijuana, a drug that legalization advocates claim is harmless, and a proposal to decriminalize it for only those with serious medical conditions. The second play is a call for the full legalization of "medical marijuana," often with provisions wide open to fraud and abuse. And finally, as we have seen in Washington and Colorado, advocates seek full pot legalization, making wild claims of new revenue and greater resources for other police priorities, among other benefits and no acknowledgment of the downsides.

This creeping approach to legalization of marijuana is always bolstered by arguments that also support legalization of all drugs. It is pretty obvious where the drug legalization advocates next target is and what their ultimate goal will be: full legalization of all drugs. Of course, few advocates would dare say such a thing openly, but the direction of their logic is straightforward and undeniable.

Mr. Olson argued that the coming debate would include the question of "What business is it of the government what citizens do behind closed doors?"

The question Mr. Olson raises is the quintessential argument behind legalization of all drugs, not just marijuana. It embodies the excesses of the Libertarian philosophy, sacrificing all practical consideration for purity of ideology.

A corollary of the "behind closed doors" rationale of drug legalization is the constant refrain of the "failed war on drugs." While the prisons are allegedly full with those incarcerated for using and selling marijuana, they are also full of users and dealers of every manner of drug, as well as murders, rapists and thieves.

Have we lost the War on Murder as well? If so, should we simply declare our surrender and legalize it? Why is that concept any less absurd than the legalization of drugs because drug use has not stopped?

We then come to the argument that does differentiate pot advocates from those favoring full drug legalization, the contention that marijuana is a harmless drug that many celebrities and captains of industry have indulged in. Only in the warped mind would a vice become a virtue when committed by the "successful."

Many legalization advocates point to the prosecution of young offenders, their lives ruined not by their conscious choice to engage in illegality but by the oppressive state seeking to stamp out a harmless vice. They lament their children's bright futures threatened by what they insist is the inevitability of illicit drug use. Of course, this argument pushes the envelope of the free-condom, lack of personal responsibility, entitlement culture in which too many young people are raised. Drug legalization will not prevent the penchant for teen self-destruction, and its justification on such a basis speaks far more about a generation of parents than their children.

In 2005, the DEA issued a publication entitled "Marijuana: The Myths Are Killing Us." One by one, the myths of marijuana's harmlessness were deconstructed. Among the details documented in the report were: smoked marijuana is a health danger without any medicinal value; decriminalization and legalization efforts in other countries have led to increased usage among teens; and use of marijuana has a demonstrable harmful impact on nonusers.

The simple, undeniable reality is that the legalization of drugs will have harmful effects on society and a discussion that fails to acknowledge this is folly.

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