

VIEWPOINT

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Think twice before enacting new laws

To the editor:

As a resident of Haywood County and a member of the Libertarian Party, I read with interest the story in *The Enterprise Mountaineer* (Oct. 22) about hemp as a cash crop and its prohibition by federal law. One wonders how we can think of ourselves as free in principle when an activity such as hemp cultivation, totally innocent of itself, makes one a criminal.

Being for de-criminalizing other non-violent activities, such as personal use of marijuana, I look at the argument that since hemp has no properties that make it desirable as a drug it should be legal as begging the question. Why direct the government to harass citizens for personal, private lifestyle choices at all? And I see the absurdity of hemp's prohibition as a logical unintended consequence of laws that exist in a time that has ignored the Constitution and the concept of limited government as guaranteed in the 9th and 10th articles of the Bill of Rights, a guarantee that was clear in 1919 when the 18th amendment was deemed necessary for prohibition of alcohol. In fact, the wisdom of requiring amendments is that some criminal laws, even if popular, should be more difficult to enact than through a simple majority. A better test for supporting a law than asking for a show of hands or opinions would be to ask if the activity would motivate citizens enough to take action against their neighbors in civil court where it could be shown to have created damages that would be worthy of litigating. Even then, if there are actionable damages from exercising that option, perhaps no criminal law is needed to discourage it.

Let us put those resources enforcing victimless crime laws into protecting us from real damages to this country. Now that the country faces real enemies, maybe we can stop the paranoia over diverse cultural and lifestyle choices and see fellow citizens for what they are instead of scapegoating them for all of the ills of society.

**James A. Webb
Clyde**