

The marijuana lament

Today is the first day of the legalization of so-called 'recreational marijuana' use in New Mexico, and it's a sad day for those of us who fail to see how adding yet one more problem to our already burgeoning list of statewide challenges is a net positive. First, let me take issue with the term, 'recreational' in conjunction with the use of a substance that impairs one's ability to function rather than heightening it. To me, *recreation* involves the purposeful melding of mind and body to form a harmonious pact to engage in activities that will help us function on a conscious level.

Marijuana, while not a narcotic as such, acts as both a stimulant and depressant (like driving with one foot on the brake and the other on the accelerator). It lingers in body organs longer than alcohol, and smoking it can injure mucosal tissue and may even present more carcinogenic potential damage than tobacco. Research has indicated that marijuana intoxication definitely hinders attention, long-term memory storage and the psychomotor skills necessary to safely and successfully operate a vehicle like a car or a plane. Marijuana has even been shown to trigger psychotic episodes in certain vulnerable individuals. Using it has produced psychological and in some instances physiological dependence on it. As a psychoactive drug it alters mental functioning and, while not yet proven conclusively by research, it is possible that habitual use of the drug can produce irreversible damage to the brain. You'll pardon me for saying so, but using marijuana sounds more like escapism and has little or nothing to do with recreational pursuits like early morning bass fishing or engaging in a beachside volleyball game.

But its lawful (state-authorized, not Federally-approved) use will now give a green light to all those who cannot cope with or wish to ignore the uncomfortable reality of our problems like the Coronavirus, escalating crime and other social ills. 'Checking out' and handing off the chore of solving those problems to those of us who choose to remain sober and engaged is typical of where our country as a whole is headed. As a nation we seem to be stepping back from owning up to our personal responsibility for our own lives and are content in shifting the burden of fixing things to 'the other guy.' That's not anywhere close to 'recreation' in my book, nor is it healthy. It's more like abdication born of cowardice.

It must be said at this point that my objection to this new legalization of another escapist substance is not a wholly moral argument. I'm not against the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes. What I do oppose is the commercialization of a substance that can have deleterious effects on vulnerable groups of people. I worry about its use by those with mental, emotional or social disorders, by people with addictive personalities and by children. I worry about those who feel immune from its effects who then decide to get behind the wheel of a car or those who possess firearms. I worry about its long-term effect on productivity in the workplace and on users' ability to make the right choices in certain critical situations. Incidentally, I have the same concerns about the negative effects of alcohol and all the dependency problems our families and society at large have had to face because of it.

I suppose that the Progressive pro-marijuana supporters in New Mexico will be busy lighting up their newly-legalized drug and celebrating their victory in conjunction with our nation's birthday which is just a few short days away, but I will not. The matches in my home will only be used to light candles on America's cake - to serve as a reminder that freedom burns brightest when we remember that it comes with a price and that price is personal responsibility... not the retreat from it.

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