

Marijuana is back on the table at the N.M. Legislature

Written by By Mike Daly Contributor
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The Albuquerque Journal puts out a weekly insert on Mondays titled *Business Outlook*. This Dec. 28 edition was almost entirely about possible cannabis legalization at the upcoming N.M. legislative session. Marijuana legalization in some form seems a sure thing. But we need to pay particular attention to how this sensitive issue is addressed by our legislature.

“Legalize Today for a brighter tomorrow” is the title of five full pages of advertising by Ultra Health who label themselves New Mexico’s #1 Cannabis Company in the *28 December Business Outlook*.

The articles included, while mildly informative, are almost entirely about proper marketing of the product and how much tax the state can collect. It should be noted that Mexico just legalized possession of small quantities of marijuana and it is also legal in Canada.

I agree it should be legalized, but for the same reason I feel all drugs should be. Prohibition simply does not work. The prohibition of alcohol in the 1930s and our more recent and much longer experience with the so-called “war on drugs” demonstrates it in spades. We need to legalize to control the use and spread and take away the incentive for illegal marketing, just as we have rather successfully done with alcohol except that we do not control alcohol advertising.

The cannabis we are talking about here is a powerful drug. While stoned, users experience an emotionally stimulating environment during which otherwise dull sights, sounds, tastes and thoughts become intensely rich. These effects are very tempting. Unfortunately, there are other effects that are not so desirable. It clouds thinking. In youth it impairs brain development. Regular use creates a fog in the brain and impairs one’s ability to take in information. Other effects include disrupting motor skills and, like alcohol, reducing one’s inhibitions.

Our society has a big problem with drug and alcohol addiction and those problems are closely

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related to crime. In McKinley County, of the hundreds charged with misdemeanor offenses one former County Staff Worker estimated that about 70% of these hundreds of cases involved drug and alcohol-impaired people. And most are repeat offenders. Meanwhile our treatment center can handle about 30 people at a time and there is very little follow-up care.

Using marijuana taxes to cover the cost of regulating it and any balance used to care for those in treatment would pay larger dividends than any short-term gain from placing them into the general fund, which, of course, is what many of the legislators want to do and why Ultra Health is marketing this idea in their ads.

Norway and Sweden revised their criminal justice system to emphasize making the criminals good citizens capable of taking care of themselves and their recidivism rate went from over 70% to 20%. We could do the same thing. As for drug legalization, Portugal did this in an intelligent manner and their addicted population dropped from 100,000 to 30,000. When we think of all the crime and violence associated with the drug trade and the cost of our “war” and incarceration of addicts, doesn’t it make sense to take a broader look beyond tax advantages?

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