Saddles Take Sides: Should marijuana be legalized?

BY GINA HERNANDEZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

From public service announcements to the advice of parents, our minds have been infiltrated with myths about marijuana. With a reputation for being a dangerous drug, it has emerged as a taboo in our society. What about the statements that it is highly addictive and that people who do drugs are high most of the time? Show me the facts.

Marijuana is not any more harmful than it was perceived to be as declared by the National Commission on Marijuana in 1972. After thirty years of research, The British Lancet concluded that "the smoking of cannabis even long term is not harmful to health." In fact, marijuana can be beneficial to one's health. It has been shown to reduce nausea induced by cancer chemotherapy, to spark appetite in people with AIDS, and to help reduce eye pressure in persons with glaucoma. Marijuana has been legalized for medicinal purposes in nine states, one of which is California. When are other states going to follow suit?

Marijuana smokers are perceived to be high on the drug almost all of the time. The truth of the matter is that people only smoke it on occasion and less than one percent of Americans actually smoke marijuana on a daily basis or a near daily basis. There is no physical dependence to the drug and if any withdrawal symptoms appear they are very mild. If marijuana is legal, there would be less crime and the drug itself could be made safer. Much of the crime that deals with drugs exists because of the manner in which drugs are sold. If they were sold in stores or other legal commercial outlets, crime would decrease. In addition, the drug itself can be made safer through FDA regulations which can only be enforced if marijuana is made legal.

The issue of legalizing marijuana is one that is similar to the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s. The alcohol made during prohibition was very strong and, in some cases, was strong enough to cause blindness. The same goes for marijuana. Without FDA regulations, drugs can be poorly made and can cause serious damage to persons consuming these drugs. In addition, there is the idea that people, especially young children, are drawn to marijuana as people were drawn to alcohol because of its illegality. As Andrew Weil, M. D., wrote in 1993, "because drugs are so surrounded by taboos, they invite rebellious behavior."

Unfortunately, society's attempt to combat drug-taking by making marijuana illegal plays into the hands of rebellious children." By legalizing the drug, the government would have more control over it and could lessen its appeal to our country's youth.

The legalization of drugs would cause drugs to be safer, would reduce their appeal to the youth of America, and would allow easier access to them for medicinal purposes. Drugs are not as bad as we are told. Cigarettes kill approximately 400,000 Americans each year, marijuana kills no one. Even aspirin is said to kill 2,900 Americans each year and we allow that to be sold. Why not legalize marijuana, a drug that has never incurred a single fatality?

The legalization of marijuana would hurt our country and society many times more than it would help. Although the debate is always continuing, the fact is that marijuana is dangerous, would cause legal problems if it were legal, and all the while, still isn't good for you. Legalization means greater access, so why allow the population greater access to a harmful substance that would end up being more damaging than beneficial. The debate over the legalization of marijuana begins with the first step of legalizing pot for medicinal use, and even that is not seen as greatly beneficial, nor is it necessary.

Many health issues arise with marijuana use, and with the legalization of marijuana these issues would just be magnified to affect more of the population. Let's face it, a lot more people would smoke pot if it were legal, the illegal status of the substance is what keeps most people who don't smoke away from it, and the health justifications are what keep it illegal. Studies continue to show that marijuana use does affect brain function, and possibly bears long term consequences. The truth is that the stress of partying would be impaired by marijuana. Marijuana inhibits alertness, coordination, and many other skills that one calls upon when operating a car. This isn't to say that everyone that smokes pot is driving around, but with the high instance of deaths caused by drunk driving in this country, it is only fair to assume that the use of pot would contribute to more accidents. A study conducted on this topic in Memphis, TN found that 33 percent of reckless drivers who were tested were found to be under the influence of marijuana (National Institute on Drug Abuse). An increased number of pot smokers would increase the number of people who get killed by high drivers.

The legalization of marijuana would increase, especially on college campuses where partying is common and pot, like alcohol, would become a weekly desirable for good percentage of the student body. THC, the chemical in pot that actually affects the brain and causes the "high," also happens to inhibit the vomiting reflex. As many college students are aware, vomiting is a way that your body uses to cleanse itself of toxins. With the vomiting reflex inhibited, more people would be susceptible to alcohol poisoning, thus presenting an additional worry for college campuses. Research also shows that marijuana use effects the brain in the long term. Daily use of marijuana can effect parts of the brain that control memory, ability to learn, and attention (National Institute on Drug Abuse). These health concerns and dangers aside, the question still comes up about legalizing marijuana for medical purposes. That is, should doctors be authorized to write prescriptions for marijuana to ease the pain of patients? THC can ease the pain and nausea of patient, but THC is already available in pill form, and is available by prescription right now. Supporters of medical marijuana call for a prescribed amount of marijuana to be grown and consumed without interference of the law. These supporters are more interested in making a small step toward full legalization, not in easing the suffering of the victims of painful disease. Legalization of marijuana as a medicine is not necessary, for it is now possible to obtain the effects of the drug in a simple pill. Unfortunately, supporters of legalized marijuana veil their quest for the freedom to smoke under the guise of patient rights.

Marijuana legalization would not benefit society, so why do it? The fact is that marijuana is a "stepping stone" drug. That is, it leads to experimentation with harder, more dangerous drugs. This fact is challenged and outright denied by some who say that legalization would decrease use of harder drugs (www.legalize.com). The reality is that people who smoke marijuana are 104 times more likely to use cocaine and other highly addictive drugs (National Institute on Drug Abuse). Marijuana is also believed to be non-addictive, which would be great, but again the facts show this isn’t true. Where one’s body may not become as physically dependent on marijuana as other drugs, the habitual use and need for the drug can be just as severe. In 1995, 165,000 people who checked themselves into drug treatment programs did so because, as they said themselves, they were abusing marijuana and needed help to stop. Marijuana legalization would inevitably lead to greater use of harder drugs. Where opponents call marijuana "soft" (www.legalize.com) and harmless, the truth is that it opens the door to more serious addiction.

Marijuana legalization is championed by the youth of this country, harkening back to the 1960s when drug experimentation was almost a right of passage. The country as a whole, however, is not in favor of full legalization, and the same "hippie" generation that was once involved in drug experimentation is now opposed to legalization as well. Only 29% of the country would support legalization, and among the baby boomer generation, only 31% are in favor of legalization. The country, for the most part (69%), see the legalization of marijuana as just too dangerous to allow (www.gallup.com). Legalization would just bring about more problems for our country, and the risks are too great to ignore.

Navy ROTC reception held

NROTC, page 4
Captain Thomas G. Kelly, USA, a Vietnam Veteran and '50 Holy Cross alumnus, presented graduating midshipmen Martha Macleod and Markel with the Battalion Commander's award for outstanding leadership. Midshipmen 1/C Christopher E. Ferreira from WP's graduating class was also awarded with the same plaque. Fr. McFarland presented the outstanding Holy Cross graduate midshipman award to Mary K. Kennedy. Among the other awards conferred during the ceremony were those for outstanding academics, leadership, and military aptitude for midshipmen from each of the four class units. Midshipmen 1/C Killian M. Hennry, Holy Cross '09, was presented with the J. Clifton Memorial award for devotion, duty, and service of the senior class.

The Presidential Review ceremony celebrates the relationship that the three schools which participate in Worcester enjoy with the NROTC program and the Worcester community. In the history of the NROTC program at Holy Cross, over 4,000 graduates have served in the Navy and Marine Corps throughout the country. Some of those graduates were in attendance at the ceremony, and all were honored as participants of a lasting tradition of Navy service coming out of the College.

After graduation, all of the students who are involved in the NROTC program will go into service and will be stationed across the nation in the Navy and Marine Corps. The ceremony held special importance for NROTC program and for each of the colleges involved because it symbolizes the lasting bond between the Naval Service, the colleges, and the Worcester community. Sean Conran, a Holy Cross NROTC sophomore, summed up the ceremony, by commenting that "I brought together the important heads of the three colleges involved and also provided an opportunity to celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of the midshipmen who received accolades."

Compiled (and humor added) by Douglas Frisina '02

"Hells YES!"
- Owen Spear '03

"Wheeler One consensus says YES."
- Larry Brutti '04

"Listen up sucka, I pity the fool who be slickin that reefer!" - Mr. T

"Are you serious? Of COURSE it should be legalized." - Pikachu

"Dude, I thought it already was legal."
- Mario Cacciola '02

BY JIM DUCKETT
CRUSADER NEWS STAFF

CRUSADER NEWS STAFF

5

THE CRUSADER NEWS FRIDAY, APRIL 27, 2001