My Turn: The clear case against pot legalization

By Seth Leibsohn

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My Turn: E.J. Montini’s column, “Marijuana initiative slyly spreads like weed,” must have come as quite a shock to some.

For Arizonans who have spent their lives and careers seeking positive outcomes for our children’s health, education and welfare, E.J. Montini’s Dec. 17 column, “Marijuana initiative slyly spreads like weed,” must have come as quite a shock.

In arguing for an initiative to legalize marijuana, Montini’s source came from a pro-marijuana lobbyist: broadcasting several errors of fact and logic.

The lobbyist stated that those opposed to legalizing marijuana use one tool, “fear.” Indeed there is a great deal to fear from making a dangerous drug like marijuana more available, but that fear is actually based on scientific and medical fact.

There is a reason, after all, the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Neurology and the American Society of Addiction Medicine oppose legalizing marijuana for recreational use. When it comes to making a dangerous drug more available, we would recommend listening to doctors, not lobbyists.

The New England Journal of Medicine found last year adverse effects of just short term marijuana use include “impaired short-term memory,” “impaired motor coordination,” “altered judgment” and, in high doses, “paranoia and psychosis.” Long-term use effects include “addiction” and “cognitive impairment.” All of this is especially consequential to the teen and adolescent user’s brain.

But, Montini and the lobbyist tell us, marijuana is safer than alcohol. Nobody in responsible substance abuse prevention talks this way. Just ask the New York Times’ Maureen Dowd. In her experiment she passed up her usual chardonnay for a bite or two of a marijuana candy bar. She felt as if she “had died” when she went into “a hallucinatory state for the next eight hours.”

The study quoted by the legalization lobby for its odd point that one dangerous substance is safer than another also claims cocaine and meth to be safer than alcohol. Perhaps those should be legal too? Interestingly, the Campaign to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol features supporters who do believe that. The campaign to legalize is not just about marijuana after all — not given their supporters, not given the studies they cite.
Research shows dangers from youth use of marijuana are well-documented. One should also look at the increased hospital admissions and poison control calls in marijuana legalization states where youth accidental ingestion includes such symptoms as difficulty breathing, elevated heart rate, confusion and disorientation, anxiety attacks, and loss of motor facility.

And yes, we do fear what the journal Clinical Pediatrics just found: In states with marijuana-friendly legislation, there has been a 609 percent increase in accidental childhood marijuana ingestion. Finally, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services just revealed: Colorado teen marijuana use is now 73 percent higher than the rest of the nation.

In the end, we find it odd that Montini would cite a poll from a year ago to prove his point that marijuana legalization is inevitable when this month’s ASU/Morrison Institute poll found legalization in Arizona faces “likely defeat.” Of course, the vote in Ohio last month is also more instructive than last year’s poll: legalization was defeated by nearly 30 points there. Currently, less than 10 percent of the states have legalized marijuana. This simply is not anywhere near proof that “opponents have lost,” as Mr. Montini writes.

The truth: Arizona’s youth use the legal substance alcohol at a rate 77 percent higher than they use the illegal substance marijuana. To make marijuana like alcohol, as the lobbyists’ desire, is to take a low-use and dangerous substance and turn it into another high-use and dangerous substance. It would also radically overturn decades of hard work in the substance abuse prevention, health, education, welfare, and law enforcement fields. Arizonans shouldn’t want this. Nobody should.

Seth Leibsohn is chairman of Arizonans for Responsible Drug Policy.