

My Turn: 3 lies the pro-marijuana side is pushing about Prop. 205

By William Bennett

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Regulate marijuana like alcohol? Don't believe claims that it will improve safety, stop the illicit market or help schools.

In all my years promoting education reform and working to reduce drug use, I cannot think of a worse idea than the hoax that marijuana legalization proponents have put forward in Arizona. They want Arizonans to “regulate marijuana like alcohol,” saying it will dry up the illicit market, recoup money for the state and fund education.

The very notion that we need more drugs and drug use to improve education should give everyone pause. Beyond that, not one of the proponent’s promises will come true.

Proposition 205 does not regulate marijuana like alcohol. From underage sales to the use of fake IDs, serious and current penalties for alcohol would be reduced to small fines for marijuana. This sends the wrong message to youth and those who would sell to them. Alcohol has a per se illegal-driving limit. Prop. 205 removes that for marijuana, making marijuana-impaired driving harder to prosecute.

The proposition’s proponents tell us marijuana is safer than alcohol. This is an unsustainable claim.

Marijuana is like alcohol? Nope

Prop. 205 is sponsored by an organization calling itself the Marijuana Policy Project, which has a “Consume Responsibility” website. It instructs: “Edible marijuana products and some other infused products remain in your system several hours longer (than smoked marijuana), so you should not operate a vehicle for the rest of the day after consuming them.”

Nobody has ever had to advise anything like that with a glass of wine or beer. Today’s high-potency marijuana and pot edibles simply cannot be compared to alcohol as it is regularly consumed.

Colorado is learning this the hard way. Aside from problems with adult overdose, accidental marijuana ingestions by children spiked 150 percent, leading the state to ban certain forms of those pot-infused candies.

Arizona, with its Voter Protection Act, would never be able to do that. If Prop. 205 passes, an increasingly potent drug — far more potent than the marijuana of the past several decades — would be permanently legal for growth, sales and use. There would be no turning back.

Legalization would dent the black market? Nope

Reduce the black market? In Colorado, it is alive and well. Every week, huge marijuana grows and stashes are seized in Colorado as cartels and other illicit growers “hide in plain sight.”

Where there is increased demand, there will be increased illicit sales and growth. And demand is high in Colorado: College-age use is 62 percent higher than the national average; adult use is over 100 percent higher than the national average; and teen use is 74 percent higher.

Schools would be helped? Not even

Revenue for schools? The Arizona Joint Legislative Budget Committee says education could take in \$30 million three years after Prop. 205 passes.

So, Arizona may see a drop in the bucket. But it is a mere drop: The revenue, if it actually gets to the schools, will be less than 0.6 percent of what the state spends on education — not enough to buy a single textbook for every Arizona student. And any increase in revenue, according to the JLBC, would require an 86 percent increase in marijuana sales: more use and consumption.

Now consider the price. The costs of more treatment, increased dropouts, suspensions, expulsions, lower education outcomes and greater roadside and workplace accidents would far outweigh any marijuana revenue.

In Washington and Colorado, for instance, traffic fatalities due to marijuana impairment increased dramatically. Oregon legalized marijuana two years ago and saw a 163 percent increase in marijuana-impaired-driving arrests in its first six months. Why would Arizona be different?

The expanded use, growth and distribution of marijuana is a terrible idea for Arizona children and adults. And it would be permanent. As for education? I can do no better than quote a Denver school superintendent: “The only thing that the legalization of marijuana has brought to our schools has been marijuana.”

You don’t need this in Arizona. No one does.

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