

# Legalize marijuana? First, keep an eye on Colorado

Editorial board, The Republic

azcentral.com | June 6, 2014

**Our View: Five months into Colorado's experiment with recreational pot, there are troubling signs.**

No one was fooled by medical marijuana.

When we legalized it in Arizona in 2010, we knew full well we were part of the national pivot away from the war on drugs — from its carnage, its bulging prisons, its bottomless expense.

Americans are relaxing our drug laws and our Amsterdam has risen in the Rocky Mountains, inviting locals and long lines of drug tourists to light up legally for no better reason than sheer enjoyment.

**PROSECUTOR:** Colorado kids paying the price for legal pot

**MORE:** Student falls to death after eating pot cookie

Denver, capital city of the first state to legalize recreational pot, is an important experiment in the limits of cultural tolerance.

Five months into that experiment, there are troubling signs.

Hospitals are reporting an increase in young people and adults overdosing on edible pot. A Denver man who consumed marijuana-laced candy lost his wits and shot his wife to death. In March, a 19-year-old African exchange student ate a marijuana cookie and fatally threw himself over a balcony.

Sheriffs in neighboring states complain of more drivers crossing into their rural towns exhibiting the drug-induced state of Colorado.

"I think, by any measure, the experience of Colorado has not been a good one unless you're in the marijuana business," Kevin A. Sabet, executive director of Smart Approaches to Marijuana, told the *New York Times*. "We've seen lives damaged. We've seen deaths directly attributed to marijuana legalization. We've seen marijuana slipping through Colorado's borders. We've seen marijuana getting into the hands of kids."

*Times* columnist Maureen Dowd went to Colorado to experience first-hand the end of prohibition. She ate a pot-infused candy bar and was incapacitated.

"I felt a scary shudder go through my body and brain," she wrote. "I barely made it from the desk to the bed, where I lay curled up in a hallucinatory state for the next eight hours."

The *Times* reported in April that even Democratic governors whose party base supports legal pot are reluctant to replicate a Rocky Mountain high.

"I think we ought to kind of watch and see how things go in Colorado," California Gov. Jerry Brown said.

There are gentle stirrings for full legalization in Arizona. Earlier this year, Ruben Gallego, Democratic state House assistant minority leader, proposed that the Legislature legalize marijuana. And in the way that Democrat proposals tend to go plop in our conservative state Capitol, so went Gallego's.

There is not enough data five months into the Colorado experiment to make sound judgments. But there is ample evidence to know that legalization does not solve the drug problem.

Enforcement and legalization, like justice and mercy, are fraught with complications. One day Arizonans will face that choice and pick their poison.

We will weigh the devastation of the drug war against the tides of sick people who would abuse their freedom to take recklessly and guilt-free. Our bad options will mirror those of an earlier generation of Americans who had to decide whether to legalize or outlaw booze.

History is arching toward decision day in Arizona. But until then — and we say this of sober mind — the governor of California makes good sense. Let's watch and see how things go in Colorado.