

America's Drug Hypocrisy

OPINION



Laura Daniel

Efforts by the Oregon House to criminalize marijuana reflect society's ignorance toward the effects of both legal and illegal drugs

There is something special about illicit drugs. As Lester Grinspoon noted in his 1991 book, "If they don't always make the user behave irrationally, they certainly cause many nonusers to behave that way." Unfortunately, the irrational not only pervade the federal government; they have now shown themselves as members of the Oregon House of Representatives.

The bill passed on April 29 by the Oregon House, which recriminalizes possession of even small amounts of pot, is just another demonstration of politicians' uncanny ability to justify wasting time and money with false information.

In the April 30 issue of *The Register-Guard*, Rep. John Minnis said the THC levels of today's pot is up to 20 percent, where just twenty years ago, the THC content of marijuana was merely 2 percent. This fact is just not true. The average THC content of marijuana today is up to 4-5 percent according to William A McKim's book *Drugs and Behavior*, four times less than Minnis claims.

Why do people feel they must go to such great lengths (lying) in order to recriminalize marijuana? What is it about pot that has so many people acting so irrationally? Why doesn't anyone notice that the effects of certain legalized drugs are far more

severe than the effects of marijuana?

Alcohol is the most socially acceptable recreational drug in America, yet the dangers of chronic consumption and high doses far outweigh the dangers of marijuana. When consumed in large amounts, alcohol is extremely hard on the body, causing dehydration, nausea, vomiting, aggression, hangovers and possible death by overdose.

When consumed on a regular basis over a long period of time, alcohol destroys important organs including the liver and the brain. Alcohol has also been connected with cancer of the mouth, throat and liver.

Marijuana, on the other hand, has relatively mild effects on the body. Prolonged usage can cause sleep pattern disturbance and respiratory problems such as asthma and lung cancer — problems which should not be taken lightly. However, not one single case of marijuana overdose has been documented.

For some reason, alcohol is America's drug of choice. But America is so anti-drug that most citizens won't even admit that alcohol itself is a drug. Instead of overdose, we use the word alcohol poisoning. Instead of being addicted to alcohol, one suffers from alcoholism.

Why are the dangers of alcohol passed over when marijuana is so

stigmatized that people are afraid that if medically beneficial properties are found, people will want to utilize it?

Could it be that the alcohol companies lobby politicians to keep a contending drug off the market? Could it be that the government is afraid of the people doing what they want, especially if it means taking drugs that might open their eyes to the limits government imposes on our freedoms?

What is the problem with marijuana? Used in moderation, marijuana means recreation. Why is this bad? Because marijuana is a "gateway drug?" Though my experience is not all-encompassing, I have never met a person who used marijuana who had not first experimented with alcohol.

Understanding the risks of any action is important when deciding what to do. Being aware of the risks of marijuana and alcohol is important when choosing whether or not to experiment with drugs.

But once informed, every adult should have the right to choose to get high or drunk or not to do anything at all. The war on drugs (except alcohol and tobacco) is nothing more than a war against people. It's a silly, irrational waste of time and billions of dollars.

Oregon's latest attempt at anti-drug

legislation will fill the jails, stain the records of many harmless people and cost nearly \$1 million every two years for defense attorneys alone. Why fight against the people instead of educating the people so they can make informed choices?

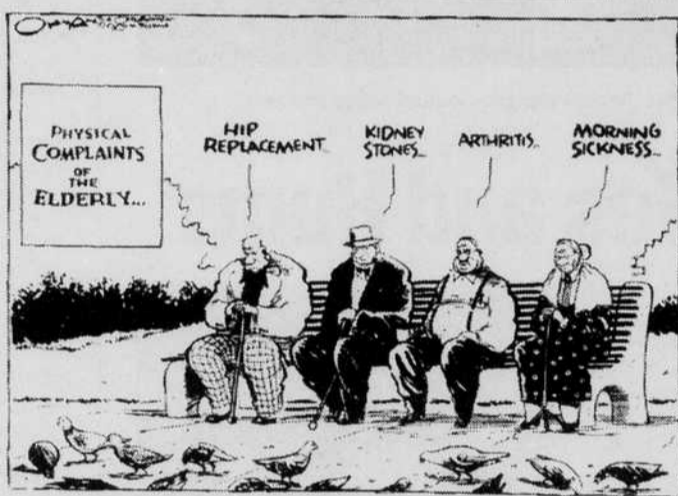
The hypocrisy of the U.S. drug policy is astounding. I find it difficult to believe that Americans are so blind. The Constitution promises separation of church and state, yet Catholics are granted the freedom to drink wine. But Rastafarians cannot perform the sacramental smoking of marijuana, nor can Native Americans use hallucinogenic drugs such as peyote and mushrooms.

So is the United States committed to true freedom or only the freedom of those who practice white European culture? By continuing this biased drug war, the government is only wasting time and money.

A victor will never come out of the drug war. Consuming marijuana does not infringe on anyone's rights, but keeping pot illegal, especially from patients who might benefit from it, and recriminalizing it does.

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The Drawing Board



LETTERS

No faith

It seems so often during our national elections that we must choose between candidates that no one really wants to see elected. I hear so many people complaining about having to choose the lesser of two evils that it's really no wonder that voter turnout is so pathetic. People no longer have any faith in our government. This is understandable, since it seems our government no longer really represents us.

The problem with politics is that a person must become a politician to become involved with them, and a person doesn't become a politician through any measure of intellect or compassion, but rather through wealth and the ability to appeal to the lowest common denominator.

In our current political system, everything comes down to who can get their message out the most. Often it doesn't even matter what that message is. More and more it seems as though campaigns are consisting entirely of attacking other candidates.

There are many different ways that candidates get their messages out, but they all have one thing in common: They all require

some amount of money. In general, the more money a candidate is willing to spend, the more visible the message will be. A successful campaign can be expensive. Nationwide, there was over \$6 billion spent in the 1996 elections.

The real question is where politicians come up with this kind of money. Sadly, they can't effectively raise enough money to be competitive from small contributions that regular citizens would be able to afford.

Instead, they must seek out large contributions from wealthy individuals and corporations. Unfortunately, this makes our elected officials indebted to these private interests, and often the concerns of this gross minority are vastly different from the regular public.

There are no easy answers to this problem. In order to solve it, there must be some publicly funded medium available to all candidates. While I doubt there are many people who would be willing to pay for this, the question remains: What is it worth to have a government that actually represents its citizens?

Brian Rowe
Undeclared

Frustrated thoughts

I am usually too overwhelmed by frustration to write in reaction to the opinion pieces in the *Emerald*, but Amanda Erickson's slam on Lane Transit District (April 30, *ODE*) was so ludicrous I had to respond.

She calls the free bus passes for students an instance of "corruption." I am baffled.

Corruption means that someone is exercising an illegal or unethical influence over the decision-making process. After reading her paragraph on LTD several times, I fail to see where she even makes a claim that this is occurring, let alone substantiate it.

She claims, "LTD makes bucks on people that never use its system." So does the highway department, to a far, far greater degree than LTD. I do not own a car, but my tuition money goes to support University-area parking for people who do.

"Corporate influence is lurking in the ASUO; after all, OSPIRG wins the incidental fee lottery every year just by showing up." Are you implying that money should go to groups that don't show up? The fact that vocal groups with lots of committed students

get the goods isn't corruption; it's the way things are supposed to work.

"One individual felt that all students should be required to pay the bus fee...because it helped out all students. Communism is alive." All right, I'll ask Ms. Erickson the question they should've asked Joe McCarthy: Please define what you mean by the word "communism" before throwing it around with such abandon. Is it the formation of a Soviet-style totalitarian state? I see no connection between LTD and such an unlikely trend.

Finally, by encouraging use of the bus rather than personal cars, the free bus passes do benefit all students. The air is a little cleaner and the streets are a little less traffic-ridden.

With this program, the University is making a positive, socially responsible move toward improving the quality of life in Eugene. I find it depressing and frightening that anyone would consider this a "ludicrous cause." That is all.

Erica Stephan
Environmental Studies