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OUR VIEW

What we don't know about marijuana

We will find out in November how local voters now feel about marijuana.

Next Friday will mark one year of legal recreational marijuana in Oregon, and there's still so much we don't know.

Because the drug is a controlled substance in the eyes of the federal government, serious studies of its beneficial uses and harmful effects haven't been undertaken by the FDA. And because of the patchwork of individual state regulations, and the short time since the first states voted to make pot legal, tracking its effects on public health has been spotty at best.

We do know that unlike other banned substances and alcohol, fatal marijuana overdoses are nonexistent. In Oregon, possession of 8 ounces of marijuana — enough for about 250 joints — is allowed. But it would take 1,500 pounds consumed in about 15 minutes to kill someone.

We don't yet know the full impact of legal marijuana on traffic wrecks, though we know driving while high, drunk and especially both is extremely dangerous. An American Automobile Association study found that in 2010, 40 people died in Washington wrecks in which at least one driver had THC in their system, and 85 died in 2014, a year after the drug became legal in the state. Of course, because THC notoriously stays in the bloodstream for days or even weeks, it isn't a perfect indication of a current level of intoxication.

We know that one of the biggest rallying cries against legalization — think of the children! — is

ringing hollow, at least at first blush. A survey recently released by Colorado's health department shows no increase in teen use of marijuana since the drug became legal in that state. Drug and alcohol abuse among teens remains a concern, but the legality of marijuana hasn't yet had a perceptible impact.

We know that one of the proponents' talking points — a new lucrative tax — is coming true, though it's still too early to know the long-term effect. In the first five months of 2016, Oregon has received \$14.9 million in taxes on recreational marijuana, according to the Oregon Department of Revenue. No small amount for a state desperate for any influx of cash.

We don't know, however, how local voters feel about the new state of legal marijuana. In November 2014 when Oregonians approved Measure 91 to end the ban on recreational pot, Eastern Oregon by and large voted against the measure. Following that cue, local governments have banned businesses from selling it.

Come November, voters in Pendleton, Hermiston and Milton-Freewater will decide whether to overturn those bans, and whether to add an additional tax to help local coffers. Seeing how the tone of debate has changed in the last five years, it will be interesting to see what else we learn about the drug, and the way it is viewed by the public.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Foreign guestworkers: A tale of two nations

Capital Press, June 10

For two nations that share a common border, the U.S. and Canada get along pretty well. Missing are the legal battles over trade and the incendiary political polemics over immigration that light up the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

Though fundamentally different nations, the U.S. and Canada share a good many issues — an excess of wolves and a need for foreign guestworkers among them.

Maybe the two nations can learn from each. Or better yet, maybe the U.S. can learn from Canada when it comes to wolves and guestworkers.

In Canada, gray wolves are managed as big game. With more than 55,000 wolves, Canadian wildlife managers have figured out that the end of the world is not at hand if a few wolves are removed because they chronically attack livestock.

In the U.S., a swarm of environmental groups heads for court nearly every time a wolf is killed for repeatedly attacking cattle or sheep. They wave copies of the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act as they try to stop U.S. wildlife managers from, well, managing wildlife.

Both the U.S. and Canada share something else in common. They both need more farmworkers and can't hire them domestically. They rely on foreign guestworkers, which are brought in from other nations to help harvest crops and do other labor-intensive farm work.

There the similarity ends. In Canada, the main efforts seem to focus on making the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program work. The program is administered by a nonprofit organization, called FARMS for Foreign Agricultural Resources

Management Services, meaning that most of the politics are left out.

In the U.S., the H-2A foreign guestworker program is caught up in a political firestorm that includes yelling matches over illegal immigration, building a wall on the Mexico border, union worries about maintaining a foothold in the farm workforce, federal government ineptitude and the presidential candidates, who are flailing wildly at each other.

With all of those forces in play — plus a president who doesn't seem to give a darn about bringing in foreign farmworkers — it's amazing any H-2A workers ever make it to the U.S. to help with harvest.

Perhaps the U.S. should take a page out of Canada's playbook and change its guestworker program to more closely resemble Canada's.

Canada has agreements with Mexico and several Caribbean nations to provide workers to Canadian farmers. The workers can stay in Canada for up to eight months.

That means the farmers on the FARMS board of directors have direct control and have every reason to try to improve the guestworker program.

In the U.S. the H-2A program depends on the politics of the moment, not the needs of the farmers.

The goal should not be to make political points at the expense of farmers. The goal should be to help farmers obtain enough workers to get their work done.

Though the Canadian program is not perfect — farmers there still need more foreign guestworkers — it is a far cry from the basket case that passes for the H-2A program in the U.S.

Canada's leaders seem to get it. We can only hope that one day U.S. leaders will get it, too.



OTHER VIEWS

Is Trump headed for a loss of ... ordinary Republican proportions?

The latest national polls show Donald Trump in dire shape. In the RealClearPolitics average, Trump has dropped below 40 percent — 39.1 percent, to be precise — while Mitt Romney, in the entire losing 2012 campaign, never fell below 43 percent. In a nation roughly evenly divided, the thinking goes, even an unpopular candidate should be able to muster 40 percent support, and yet Trump is falling short.



BYRON YORK
Comment

At this point four years ago, Romney trailed Barack Obama by 2.2 percentage points nationally, according to the RealClearPolitics average. Trump is 5.8 points behind Hillary Clinton. The gap has led to predictions of catastrophe in November. "The Republican Party's Coming Trumpian Disaster," read the headline of a recent George Will column in National Review Online.

But remember the lesson of 2012, which has also been the lesson of every other election: The presidency is won by winning states, and therefore the condition of the race in key states tells more about the campaign than any national poll.

"This isn't a national vote contest where you can be on cable news every day and dominate national coverage," Mitch Stewart, battleground states director for Obama in 2012, told the Associated Press recently. "This is literally going state-by-state and coming up with a plan in each."

What is notable now is that in some key states Trump is trailing Clinton not by staggering, historically disastrous margins, but by margins that look remarkably like the Obama-Romney race in 2012.

Look at the polls in Florida, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio, four states Trump will likely need to win (or at least win three) if he is to capture the White House.

Some of the most recent polling in those states has been done by the Democratic firm PPP, which has done fairly reliable work in the past. In the most recent Florida poll, from PPP, Trump leads Clinton by a single point, 45 percent to 44 percent. In the RealClearPolitics average of polls, which includes surveys going back to late April and might be less accurate than PPP, Clinton leads Trump by 1.6 percentage points.

In June 2012, the RealClearPolitics average had Obama with a minuscule 0.2 percentage point lead in Florida. On Election Day, Obama won by just under 1 point. The bottom line is that Trump appears to be roughly even with Clinton in Florida, much the way Romney was roughly even in Florida at the same time in 2012 before going on to lose by a narrow margin.

In Virginia, the newest poll, taken by PPP

in the second week of June, has Clinton ahead of Trump by 3 points, 48 percent to 45 percent. (The RealClearPolitics average, which contains some old polls, has Clinton up by 4 points.) At the same time in 2012, the average had Obama up by 3 points, and Obama went on to win by 3.9 points. So today looks pretty similar to back then.

In Pennsylvania, a PPP poll from the first week in June has Trump and Clinton tied at 44 percent. The

RealClearPolitics average isn't of much value, since after the PPP survey, the most recent poll is two months old. So if PPP is correct, the race is even.

That's much better than Romney's position in Pennsylvania in 2012. In June of that year, the RealClearPolitics average had Obama ahead of

Romney by 8 points, and Obama went on to win by 5.4 points.

So Trump today appears significantly stronger in Pennsylvania than Romney was at the same point in the 2012 race. And indeed, Pennsylvania has for months seemed the best candidate for a Trump win in a big blue state. On the other hand, Pennsylvania has often seemed within the grasp of Republicans, but the last time a GOP presidential candidate actually won was in 1988. Unless there is a big shift in the race, it's not a bad bet that Trump will end up losing, because Pennsylvania always slips away.

In Ohio, all the polls in the RealClearPolitics average are at least a month old. In the average, Clinton leads Trump by 1.4 points. At the same time in 2012, Obama led Romney by 1.8 points. That's pretty close to today. Obama went on to win Ohio by 3 points.

The bottom line is that the Clinton-Trump numbers in some critically important states are more in line with the Obama-Romney race than they are with some sort of doomsday blowout suggested by the national poll numbers. And that suggests that after all the noise and drama and weeping and gnashing of teeth, Trump could be headed for a loss that looks, not like a party-ending calamity, but an ordinary Republican defeat. Ted Cruz or Marco Rubio or Jeb Bush might have lost in much the same way.

The Electoral College numbers are what they are; Democrats have a real, long-term advantage in states that by themselves approach a winning total of 270. That could be more important than any Trump controversy, or even all of them put together.

Byron York is Chief Political Correspondent for the Washington Examiner; a Fox News contributor; author of "The Vast Left Wing Conspiracy."

Something that easily makes its way through Congress...



LETTERS POLICY

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