

Letter: Time to put the adults in charge of marijuana

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Today in Oregon, kids are buying readily available marijuana from unknown, unregulated sources. The supply chain may go all the way back to some Mexican cartel, and it's guaranteed that all the profits will go to criminals. No one knows the potency or purity of the substance being sold, or how much pesticide contamination there might be. People undoubtedly are driving while high — as they do with alcohol — but unlike with labeled beer or wine, consumers have no way of knowing what potency they have ingested before getting behind the wheel.

Clearly, marijuana is a problematic substance — like alcohol, cigarettes and prescription drugs — with positives and negatives. Prohibition has not addressed these negatives, let alone solved them. As Albert Einstein said, insanity “is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

With our current enforcement-based system, the responsible adults in the community have abdicated their responsibility to control marijuana, a substance that is both widely available and in demand. We have left all decisions about source, distribution, sale, potency and purity up to criminals. Instead of proactively working to prevent or reduce problems with the distribution and sale of marijuana, we have been reactive, getting involved only after the sales to kids have already occurred when police make arrests for drug offenses. We spend our tax dollars on police, prosecution and prisons. Convictions in turn lead to broken families and reduced employability, cycling defendants back into the drug economy. We all bear the resulting social costs.

How to change the equation so that responsible adults and elected representatives can regulate and control marijuana?

Something that is illegal cannot be managed. Has any public official ever said, “We need to do a better job of managing armed robbery?” It sounds silly. Only if something is legal is it possible for the community to manage and control it.

During the prohibition of alcohol (1920-1933), drinking didn't stop and there were tremendous downsides to relying on the criminal justice system to control alcohol. Supply was in the hands of criminals, and any dealer prosecuted was simply replaced by another. Remember Al Capone? And gangs fighting over turf? There was no quality control, and hundreds of people died of drinking adulterated alcohol.

The day Prohibition was repealed, state alcohol control commissions could regulate purity, require labeling, license distributors and sellers, and enact and enforce penalties for selling to minors. Beer distributors with contract disputes filed cases in court instead of shooting each other. When was the last time Bud Light and Coors Light engaged in a shootout over store shelf space?

We see the role of alcohol regulation at every one of Oregon's liquor stores, wineries and microbreweries. Every beer is labeled in terms of alcohol by volume (ABV).

Consumers know exactly what they are getting. No seller wants to risk losing his license by selling to minors.

It is time to take on board the lessons of the prohibition of alcohol. Take decisions about potency, purity, distribution and sale out of the hands of criminals and put these decisions in the hands of responsible adults. Let's use Oregon's regulatory powers to manage marijuana proactively.

Measure 91 establishes that regulatory framework. Vote Yes on 91.

— *Inge Fryklund is a speaker for Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP). She lives in Bend.*