

Message

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afraid that, with the federal government saying they won't take action against these states that have legalized it, they have opened Pandora's box. The proponents of legalization see that as a crack in the door, and they're going to push as hard as they can in other states now to try to get this through."

Yankton County Sheriff Jim Vlahakis said he also opposes legalization.

He draws on a letter that the National Sheriffs' Association wrote to Holder last August after he announced the Justice Department's stance on legalization in Colorado and Washington.

"Marijuana use has had devastating effects in our communities with over 8,000 drugged driving deaths a year, many of which involved marijuana use," the letter states. "Data from Colorado demonstrate the consequences of relaxed marijuana policies that lead to increased use: fatalities involving drivers testing positive for marijuana increased 114 percent between 2006 and 2011. Youth admissions into emergency rooms for marijuana-related incidents has also seen an increase in Colorado. From 2005-2008, the national average for ER admissions for marijuana-related incidents was 18 percent, while in Colorado it was 25 percent. From 2009-2011, the national average increased to 19.6 percent, while in Colorado it rose to 28 percent. Additionally, the Department of Health and Human Services issued a report showing that for drug-related emergency room visits among youth aged 12-17, the leading drug involved in the incident was marijuana."

The Sheriffs' Association links marijuana, as well as many other drugs, with violent crime.

"As recently as May of 2013, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) released a report showing that marijuana is the most common drug found in someone's system among those individuals arrested for criminal activity," the letter states.

Vlahakis said those statistics reflect the reality in Yankton County.

He illustrates them by pointing to the 24/7 program, which includes people who have been placed in it by court order as a result of arrests for various crimes, such as assault and burglary. Once placed in the program, participants are tested regularly or drug or alcohol use.

In 2011, there were 215 violations in the 24/7 program for THC, or marijuana, and 15 violations for THC along with another controlled substance, such as methamphetamine. During 2012, the program had 165 THC violations and 27 for THC and another substance. In 2013, those figures were 215 and 28, respectively.

"Where you have a combination of drugs found in their system like THC and methamphetamine, I would be willing to bet that the person's drug usage originally started with marijuana and moved to methamphetamine at some point," Vlahakis said. "Marijuana is a gateway drug for teenagers. I don't believe for a moment that most younger people start their drug usage with methamphetamine. They start with marijuana and move up. As the National Sheriffs' Association has said: 'The fact is that relaxed marijuana policies lead to clear and foreseeable consequences for communities and families that no policy maker should want to be a part of' — and I agree."

Leidholt planned to speak with a Colorado sheriffs' conference this week about an assortment of issues, including the change in marijuana laws. He hasn't yet talked much with Washington state and Colorado law enforcement officials to see how they are adapting.

"This will be my first real exposure to a group of them to see what they are planning on and what types of problems they're anticipating," Leidholt said. "We've already seen some problems just because of the medical marijuana. I anticipate their problems will become exponentially greater."

Leidholt said he hasn't yet adapted his anti-marijuana message for kids to reflect the new reality of legalization.

"I think that's something we need to look at," he stated. "All we can do is keep sending the message out there and make it clear that, from our experience in law enforcement, we've seen more problems associated with (marijuana use) than benefits. That's absolutely certain."

At YSD, Kindle said officials will continue to uphold the district's policies and be proactive by teaching students about the dangers of drugs and providing resources to both parents and students. The school district also will involve law enforcement when the need arises, he said.

"We share a common goal with our parents and community members, which is providing for the health, safety and

well-being of our students who attend the Yankton School District," Kindle said.

The exact outcomes of marijuana legalization have been a point of debate among researchers.

Mark Kleiman is a public-policy analyst at UCLA who has focused on drug policy research for more than 25 years. He was hired by the Washington State Liquor Control Board to lead a team of consultants advising state officials as they develop regulations for the sale of marijuana. Kleiman acknowledged to Seattle's *The Stranger* last year that the experiment of legalization could go badly, and in a worst-case scenario result in more heavy drinking, a massive increase in marijuana use by minors and/or carnage on highways.

"The (Washington State Liquor Control Board) could set up the most sensible regulatory scheme possible within the constraints of the law and we could still get a bad result," he said. "What if it turns out that cannabis and alcohol are complements, that making cannabis available increases the consumption of alcohol and increases heavy drinking by adults? If that is the case, it's very hard for me to see all the other gains are worth it."

The success, or lack thereof, of marijuana legalization will be judged by outcomes, Kleiman told *The Stranger*.

"The promised outcomes of cannabis legalization are reduced criminal enterprise, reduced arrests, reduced incarceration, reduced enforcement expenditures, availability of product in safer and known forms, personal liberty gains to consumers and potential consumers," he said.

Research on the subject suggests that the worst-case scenario will not likely come to pass.

A paper titled, "The Legalization of Recreational Marijuana: How Likely Is the Worst-Case Scenario?," by D. Mark Anderson and Daniel I. Rees was published last October in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. The authors explore the issue of legalization by using Kleiman's worst-case scenario as a focus point.

They find that the evidence indicates that marijuana and alcohol are not complementary but instead are often used as substitutes for each other.

"(The data) suggest that, as marijuana becomes more available, young adults in Colorado and Washington will respond by drinking less, not more," Anderson and Rees wrote. "If non-medical marijuana states legalize the use of recreational marijuana, they should also

experience reductions in drinking with the accompanying public-health benefits."

While driving under the influence of alcohol or marijuana is dangerous, studies have found there could be less risk associated with marijuana use.

"Reducing traffic injuries and fatalities is potentially one of the most important public-health benefits from legalizing the use of recreational marijuana," Anderson and Rees wrote. "Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the principal psychoactive component of marijuana, impairs driving-related functions, but there is evidence that drivers under the influence of THC compensate for these impairments. For instance, they tend to drive slower and take fewer risks. In contrast, drivers under the influence of alcohol tend to drive faster and take more risks. While driving under the influence of marijuana is associated with a two-fold increase in the risk of being involved in a collision, driving with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 or greater is associated with a 4- to 27-fold increase in this same risk."

"Driving under the combined influence of alcohol and marijuana is especially dangerous," they continued. "Therefore, if young adults viewed alcohol and marijuana as complements, legalizing the recreational use of marijuana could seriously jeopardize roadway safety. Fortunately, as noted above, studies based on clearly defined natural experiments suggest that young adults, a group responsible for a disproportionate share of traffic accidents and fatalities, typically substitute marijuana in place of alcohol."

On the subject of crime, Anderson and Rees also pointed to the possibility of favorable outcomes.

"There is evidence of a link between alcohol abuse and violent crime, including domestic violence," they wrote. "Therefore, if the legalization of recreational marijuana leads to reduced alcohol consumption, we expect violent crime to fall. It is also possible that nonviolent crime will fall as policing resources are freed up and reallocated. (Researchers) found that nondrug crime went down after Lambeth, a borough of

London, temporarily suspended arrests for marijuana possession."

The authors concluded that Kleiman's worst-case scenario is possible, but not likely.

"Based on existing empirical evidence, we expect that the legalization of recreational marijuana in Colorado and Washington will lead to increased marijuana consumption coupled with decreased alcohol consumption," they wrote. "As a consequence, these states will experience a reduction in the social harms resulting from alcohol use. While it is more than likely that marijuana produced by state-sanctioned growers will end up in the hands of minors, we predict that overall youth consumption will remain stable. On net, we predict the public-health benefits of legalization to be positive."

Ultimately, people will have to decide for themselves about how they stand on the impact of marijuana legalization.

With multiple arguments on both sides of the issue, YSD Drug and Alcohol Counselor Tiffany Kashas told the *Press & Dakotan* that she encourages everyone to gather their own information from a variety of credible sources. Kashas said the issue of marijuana legalization often arises during her programming at the schools.

"After discussion and talking about potential views on both sides from myself, the teachers in the room and students, I always suggest that people do their own research via research articles — not just anything or anywhere on the Internet — and look for research information, not opinions as this can skew your own opinion, on both sides objectively and make an informed decision for themselves on what they believe," she said.

Press & Dakotan reporter Derek Bartos contributed to this report.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

Lincoln-Based District's Plan Draws Mixed Reaction

VALPARAISO, Neb. (AP) — Proposed groundwater allocations have drawn criticism from some farmers and praise from other water users in a Lincoln-based natural resources district.

The plan for the Dwight-Valparaiso-Brainard area was aired at a hearing Thursday in Valparaiso, the *Lincoln Journal Star* said. The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District wants to stabilize the supply of groundwater in that area, which covers a district section of about 150 square miles. The district oversees nearly 1,600 square miles in southeast Nebraska.

A moratorium on new irrigation development in the area is scheduled to run out March 18.

The district wants to allocate 7 inches an acre each year to irrigators who use center pivots in 2014. Irrigators who use gravity-flow pipe would get 10 inches an acre.

At Thursday's hearing, Greg Bouc, the water plant operator for Valparaiso, praised the district for trying to make the changes. In the past 30 years he has not seen the water table drop so

much as it has in the past year, he said.

"The biggest enemy in this room is not the irrigators or municipalities, it's the drought," Bouc said.

U.S. Drought Mitigation Center records say the area remains abnormally dry, which is an improvement from the severe drought reported much of last year and 2012.

Farmer Casey Potter said the district's restrictions "are a direct challenge to the way we and others have managed their farms for years." And farmer Gary Hellerich said the allocation figures weren't realistic. He proposed a three-year allocation of 30 inches that he said would give farmers more flexibility in dry and wet years and help conserve water.

Hellerich presented district officials with signatures from more than 60 irrigators in the area who endorsed the three-year, 30-inches proposal.

Testimony from the hearing will be given to a board subcommittee for consideration. A final decision is expected to be made by the district board at its Feb. 19 meeting.

Shooting Charges Dropped

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Prosecutors say they've dropped murder and assault charges filed against a man after a shooting on the pedestrian bridge that connects Omaha with Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine said Friday that witnesses were evasive or otherwise uncooperative with investigators and prosecutors, so the case against 24-year-old Terrece Cox became impossible to prosecute. Cox's trial was

scheduled to begin on Monday. He has maintained his innocence throughout the investigation.

Cox was charged with second-degree murder and other charges after the May 29 shooting death of 26-year-old Shamari Richards on the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge. The other people were wounded.

Billy Kellogg was charged with being an accessory to a felony. It's unclear whether his charges will be dropped as well.



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