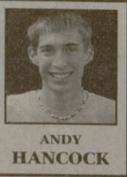


SMOKING IN ALASKA

Movement to legalize marijuana harmful to law enforcement efforts



ANDY HANCOCK

Welcome to the United States of America, the potential future of Alaska after the election Tuesday. A proposal for the general legalization of marijuana is on the ballot. If the proposition passes, it will deal a substantial blow to drug enforcement in the United States by making drug importing and consuming legal for all in Alaska.

A poll conducted by the Gallup Organization this year found that an overwhelming majority of Americans oppose the generalized legalization of marijuana, while, at the same time, the majority supports the legalization for medicinal purposes.

The Alaskan proposition could conflict with federal laws concerning the apprehension and prosecution of criminals involving marijuana. Under the proposition in Alaska, growing and consuming marijuana would be legal for anyone over the age of 18. It would also give amnesty to those with marijuana-related convictions.

The law enforcement problems that would arise would undoubtedly create another battle over states' rights. In an article appearing in *The Guardian* (London) this month, Tommy Knowles, governor of Alaska, criticizes the proposition as foolish and dangerous for a state where alcoholism and other addictions have done much harm to residents. If the proposal passes, addicts and dealers would flock to Alaska, creating a port of import and export for the drug and another battle front in the war on drugs.

This is not the beginning of the battle over marijuana in Alaska.

Before 1990, it was legal to consume and possess up to 4 ounces of the narcotic at home. In 1990, a ballot initiative to recriminalize marijuana use passed with only 8 percent of the vote. In 1998, a proposition made the drug legal for medicinal purposes.

Legitimate arguments are being made by supporters of the hemp movement. One long-time supporter of the effects of cannabis is country singer Willie Nelson. In the October issue of *Details* magazine, Nelson asserts that marijuana and exercise are part of his daily routine.

"I don't want to call it a drug — an herb is not a drug," said Nelson. "It's good for stress, which is the biggest killer on the planet."

Wanda Carp, treasurer of the Hemp2000 campaign in Alaska, was quoted in a wire story from Reuters as saying, "There's 50,000 uses and everyone tries to focus on only one of them." Hemp2000 is one of a handful of organizations in Alaska campaigning for the proposition.

While hemp can make products ranging from clothes to rope to beauty products, its most distinct feature is the effects the drug causes. If the Alaskan proposition passes, it will considerably set back the national government's war on drugs. It also could begin a states' rights battle for years to come and would allow people between the ages of 18 and 21 who cannot legally consume alcohol to get stoned. How many people will grow marijuana for the sole purpose of making useful products?

This proposition would leave the government searching for ways to fight the infiltration of marijuana into the continental United States.

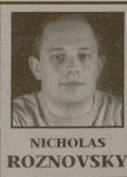
Andrew Hancock is a senior journalism major.



ADRIAN CALCANEO/THE BATTALION

Star Wars flashbacks

Reinstatement of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative wasteful, unlikely to work



NICHOLAS ROZNOVSKY

The resurgence of go-go boots and bell-bottoms a few years ago has proven that fads tend to recycle themselves. The re-emergence of John Travolta and the resurrection of Woodstock are further proof that Americans find it hard to leave the past behind. Whether it is a new appreciation for the past or mere nostalgia, every once in a while society says, "That was a great idea. Let's bring it back."

Such is the view of the U.S. government on one of the defining budgetary blunders of the 1980s, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). More commonly referred to as "Star Wars," the SDI program sought to create a networked system of ground and space-based lasers to protect the United States from a Soviet nuclear attack. First proposed by President Ronald Reagan in 1983, the program stirred up much debate in Congress before it was finally scaled back by President George Bush in 1991. Since then, the program has puttered around the Defense Department, a remnant of the Cold War looking for a purpose in the new world order.

But now, much like Travolta and Woodstock, the program is getting a second

lease on life. In the midst of a Social Security crisis, conventional military shortfalls and a concerted effort to balance the budget, the most visible symbol of the free-spending Reagan administration has been resurrected from the grave.

The problem is that the system is no more feasible now than it was 17 years ago. It is time for the U.S. government to give up on this Cold War science-fiction fantasy and move on.

SDI began its return to prominence in 1994 when Republicans included the creation of a national missile defense system in their "Contract With America." With North Korea, Iran and a number of other anti-American countries developing ballistic missile technology throughout the 1990s, the SDI program gradually regained bipartisan support in Congress. Last year, Clinton signed a congressional bill making the creation of missile defense system the official policy of the United States. The legislation specifically calls the missile defense system to be constructed in Alaska as soon as possible. Another plan under consideration would enlarge the force and necessitate a second launch facility in North Dakota.

Now that SDI is back in the spotlight, the cracks that doomed it in the '80s have begun to show up again.

Throughout the history of the SDI pro-

gram, the main argument against it has remained the same — the system is not feasible. Renamed from the start by critics as Reagan's "Buck Rodgers Ray-Gun Defense System," the SDI has many technological obstacles that have yet to be hurdled by the program's designers.

In 1988, a congressional report stated that the SDI system would likely suffer a "catastrophic failure" in its "first (and presumably) only use." Today, tests of the missile defense system have failed to instill confidence in Congress. Scientists have abandoned the 1980s idea of laser-based defense for the more conventional notion of projectiles, but the system failed two of its first three tests, including an embarrassing failure in July that cost the United States more than \$100 million.

The Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, which heads up SDI research and development, says that failures are commonplace when new weapons systems are developed, citing the development of the Atlas and Minuteman One programs as examples.

Some members of Congress, however, have their doubts.

"The problem with a national defense missile defense," said Sen. Joseph Biden, "is how to deploy it without sacrificing other interests that we value greatly."

With an estimated \$75 billion already

spent on research and development and at least \$60 billion earmarked for the construction of the system, a completed SDI system will cost Americans more than the development of the stealth bomber and the Manhattan Project combined. It is a lot to cough up for a system that has yet to work more than once.

"Can it be done?" asked Federation of American Scientists policy analyst John Pike. "Yes. Can it be done reliably? Apparently not."

Another issue that has dogged the program since the Reagan administration is the effect it would have on international relations. Although SDI supporters are quick to claim that the program applied pressure that brought down the Soviet Union, the plain truth is that internal problems, not a group of scientists designing a pipe dream in America, doomed the USSR.

Many critics say that an SDI system will cause a new arms race, this time with China, India, Pakistan and Iran taking the Soviet Union's place.

"The Red Chinese don't want to be in the situation where we can blow them up and they can't blow us up," said Pike. "They're a big country and don't want to be pushed around by America."

Russia, Great Britain, Germany and France are opposed to an American defense system, saying that the development of the

system violates the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and undermines international peace efforts. The British House of Commons Foreign Affairs committee recommended that the United States "seek other ways of reducing the threats it perceives."

Last week, America brokered a tentative deal with North Korea to abandon its long-range ballistic missile program in exchange for satellite technology. With one act of diplomacy, the United States managed to negate a threat to its security without spending one-tenth of \$1 trillion. In the end, Secretary of State Madeline Albright managed to do what hundreds of American scientists have been trying to do for nearly two decades — stop the threat of North Korean missiles striking the American coast. Apparently, America can secure peace without building a bigger gun.

Perhaps someday when Americans drive flying cars and have robot housekeepers, they can look back and say "SDI — that was a good idea. Let's try it again." Perhaps in the future it will be technologically, economically and politically feasible. Until then, it should remain in the closet with all the other fads whose time has passed.

Nicholas Roznovsky is a senior political science major.

Mail Call

Liberal arts important part of education, deserve support

In response to Jennifer Ramby's Oct. 30 column

In the fourth part of *Blurred Vision*, Jennifer Ramby stated her opposition to parts of *Vision 2020*, particularly to any attempt to strengthen the liberal arts program. She stated that "many students do not want a liberal arts education" and that "changing the basic foundations of a University alters the kinds of students it draws." She went on to argue that this could have "long term effects on what it means to be an Aggie." While it is true that the "typical Aggie" is not a liberal arts major, there are many that are. Being an engineering

major does not make a person more of an Aggie or a better Aggie, just as being a liberal arts major does not make a person less of one. Strengthening the liberal arts program here at A&M would not change the kinds of students it draws, it would merely better their education. Students come to A&M because they possess an intangible spirit and desire to be a part of the Aggie community. This makes us a diverse population, and that is something that should be embraced, not looked down upon. Liberal arts students are not atypical Aggies. They are just Aggies, and by creating a stronger program, the administration would be opening the doors to more people with that same spirit. Surely good Ags can like music and art, too.

Amanda Brown
Class of '02

