

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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LEGALIZE IT

America should follow Canada's planned decriminalization of marijuana



TIMOTHY GILBERT

People have debated the worth of marijuana for years, and the argument is still going on. Of the many questions asked are: Should marijuana be legalized in the United States? Is marijuana addictive? How harmful is marijuana to the human body?

Recently, the debate has heated up because of America's neighbor to the north, Canada. According to Canada Online, Canada's Justice Minister Martin Cauchon has made it apparent that he will introduce legislation sometime in 2003 that will decriminalize small amounts of marijuana for personal use during the upcoming session of Parliament. This could be interpreted as a step toward legalizing marijuana, one that the United States should follow.

According to Canada's Special Senate Committee on Illegal Drugs, "Marijuana is not a gateway drug and should be treated more like tobacco or alcohol than like harder drugs." Treating these two drugs differently makes no sense.

At the close of the U.S. national anthem, it is stated that America is the "land of the free." Everyone knows that it is impossible for people to enjoy perfect and entire freedom and still have an organized society, but people should be free to make choices about their own health without the government telling them what is right and wrong.

Canada's Special Committee on Illegal Drugs states that, on average, 30,000 people are arrested each year for simple possession of marijuana.

It also states that each imprisoned individual costs \$50,000 per year. When the math is done, the costs amount to \$1.5 billion per year to imprison people arrested for possession of marijuana. Instead of wasting this money on incarcerating people possessing relatively small amounts of marijuana, the Canadian government could spend it to combat legiti-

mate crime and educate the public.

The decriminalization of marijuana does not mean that people should be able to smoke it and get behind the

wheel of a car or participate in any other activity that could injure another person. Just like with alcohol, driving and certain other activities performed while under the influence should be illegal. However, smoking marijuana shouldn't be banned just because people can possibly go out and harm others after smoking. Many people can and do harm others without marijuana being involved at all. Alcohol consumption, which was once illegal, still results in death and injury.

No one is saying that marijuana is a harmless drug that only hurts people when other factors, such as driving, are compounded with it. In fact, according to "Health and Fitness: A Guide to a Healthy Lifestyle," a book used in health classes on Texas A&M's campus, marijuana smoke "may be more damaging than cigarette smoke."

However, even with this information, California State University Northridge's college of health and human development reports that "every year, 40,000 die as a result of tobacco usage and more than 150,000 people die from alcohol related causes yet not one person has ever died from smoking marijuana." Still, tobacco and alcohol are perfectly legal to use and abuse, and marijuana is not.

If marijuana was treated like its legal counterparts, many Americans would have a lot less to worry about. The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that there have been "more than 10 million marijuana arrests in the United States since 1970," which adds up to more than 300,000 arrests per year. These are people who now have criminal records which will follow them for the rest of their lives.



All of these unnecessary arrests also make American taxpayers use their tax money for something that is obviously not achieving its goal. The Marijuana Policy Project, a lobbying organization, states that "taxpayers spend nine billion dollars annually to hunt down, arrest, try and incarcerate marijuana consumers." This money could be spent chasing legitimate criminals or terrorists.

If people really want to stop or slow the use of marijuana, then they are going about it the wrong way. All the money that is wasted on the criminal aspects of marijuana could be pumped into educating children at an early level of development about the truths of the drug. Education would allow Americans to make better decisions about what they want to do with their bodies.

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Hamas killing Road Map

Since President George W. Bush met with Middle Eastern leaders to push his Road Map to peace earlier this month, the media has been filled with tales of escalating violence in Israel, beginning with the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas,

which pulled out of the peace process and immediately began engaging in attacks against Israeli military and civilians. During the past week, Israeli helicopter raids attacked Hamas leadership targets after which Hamas "responded" by sending one of its teenage members on a suicide bus bombing.

To refer to the senseless murder of a busload of innocents as a "response" to a strategically planned military operation against its enemies would sound too much like calling the actions equitable, which they are not. In a talk with reporters last Sunday, Hamas used a different phrase for it — "self-defense."

One has to wonder how much of a threat the old people and children on that bus were to Hamas.

The United States is engaged in a type of war previously unheard of before Sept. 11. It is a war against no nation in particular, but against the forces of evil within multiple nations. These terrorist forces seek the progression of their own particular ideologies and savage hatreds through the death of innocent civilians in the country of their choosing, using any method necessary. If the United States is to fight a war without the formal declarations and boundaries of traditional warfare, it is crucial that Americans correctly separate justified bloodshed from terrorist butchery.

Members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization apparently ignore this differentiation. (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's) aim is to discredit the Palestinian government and to assassinate his real enemy, which is the Road Map," Palestinian Cabinet Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said earlier this month. His estimation of the situation is like accusing a surgeon of supporting cancer by wishing death upon the patient while he is trying to remove a tumor. This is what Sharon was trying to do through helicopter assaults against the leader of Hamas: stop terrorist actions against his country by removing the terrorist leader. Because there were extra casualties in the process doesn't mean the act itself was evil — these are only a few consequences of the new rules



MIKE WALTERS

of warfare, rewritten by terrorist groups that do not allow for neat, tidy fronts of tanks in the wilderness.

Unfortunately, if Sharon wishes to attack his terrorist enemies it must be on their terms: in a crowded street, where Hamas and other groups hide in hopes that the surrounding civilians will act as human shields, yet crying out if anyone innocent dies. Sharon was only doing what he felt was necessary to protect his people against enemies of the peace, a job refused by Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, who insisted he cannot use force against the militants who have rebuffed his truce offers.

The first of the military strikes came last Wednesday, when Israeli helicopters attempted to assassinate Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi, only succeeding in wounding him. It was hoped that his death would cripple the terrorist group, which has been responsible for more than 300 deaths in suicide bombing attacks, according to The Associated Press. After the attack, Hamas issued a statement that said its terrorist cells would be "called upon to act rapidly to transform the Zionist entity into blood and ruins." This organization makes no bones about its chief objective: the destruction of Israel. So how could one accuse Israel of acting wrongly in wishing the destruction of Hamas and its leaders?

While Israel is acting in self-defense, its enemies have taken to the street screaming for blood and vengeance. Hamas is a terrorist organization whose only purpose is the annihilation of Israel through the murder of innocent civilians, as witnessed by its recent killings. Its acts are not "self-defense," despite whatever it might claim, and they weren't even aimed at the military forces that initiated the attacks on Hamas leaders.

"We will make no concessions to terror," Sharon told his cabinet last week, according to an Israeli government official. Neither should we. As allies with Israel in the War on Terror, the United States must make sure it correctly identifies the terrorists and the victims, and places its sympathy — if not aid — with those who share our values against the common enemy of evil.

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MTV lacking values

(U-WIRE) AMES, Iowa — I have come to expect little to nothing intelligent from MTV. It's amazing how much the producers of "MTV Cribs" feel the camera needs to move around when touring celebrity refrigerators, simply to keep the miniature attention span of the viewers focused on the show. I honestly feel that my brain matter is being reduced every time I see "Spring Break Karaoke" or a very boring Carson Daly present 20 percent of the number one video on "TRL."

Now, unintelligence I can handle, but recently the channel seems intent on eliminating not only intelligence, but any ethical standards a young person may have. MTV has followed in the footsteps of the advertising, movie, and clothing industry in advocating a liberal lifestyle.

MTV has run and re-run a sad attempt at an investigative report on marijuana use in the United States and Canada. The young reporter visited bong shops, drug dealers, marijuana clubs and drug users with virtually no dialogue other than, "So how long have you been using?" After the segment ended, I wasn't left with information about the negative side of using marijuana, but I did find out I should use "psychedelic purple" weed to get rid of my migraines.

Other attempts at journalism include a recent piece about body art. It consisted of a dialogue between young people who have tattoos or alternative piercings. The discussion focused on how ridiculous parents were for not letting their kids be "individuals," those who define themselves by how odd they can look. I have a tattoo myself, but I respect the fact that parents may not approve of their children doing so. MTV, however, does not respect any ethical or personal conduct code other than the very low one which they think younger generations should have.

These are simple, yet blatant attempts to convey a message that kids should be free to do as they please, regardless of parents who hold their children to a higher standard than "Spring Break Cancun."

Virtually every show crosses the line of appropriate behavior. From the over-sexed "Spring Break" shows to "Urban Myth" shows exploring sexual issues, from "The Real World" to "The Osbournes," MTV has apparently made a serious effort to add inap-

propriateness to every program available. I'm curious if it has bothered anyone else that a channel solely aimed at youth has a show called "Undressed." A description of the show on MTV's Web site, www.mtv.com, reads, "Not getting enough action before you go to bed? Undressed will definitely be changing that!" What great programming to promote a liberal lifestyle for the most impressionable members of society.

It seems rather obvious that many liberals, especially those in the media, would simply rather be comfortable and unchallenged. It's easy to laugh about your newest anti-Bush bumper sticker, compare him to Hitler, and talk about the latest rumors regarding the secret memo that reveals Cheney's intentions to drill for oil in Central Park. It is more difficult to understand the opposite side of an issue and write an objective news story than it is to spin facts to spread a liberal ideology.

Yes, the press and the media have freedom of speech. MTV has the right to convey reckless messages that are within the law, just as they are now. I, too, have the freedom of speech, and I think that MTV has become the trashiest channel available on basic cable.

It's common to hear someone say, "Don't put your morals on me," or something to that effect. The truth is that is just something people with no standards say in order to make it sound as if having no standards should simply be okay.

Despite common criticism, it's okay to attempt to hold others to a higher standard. Having a different set of values does not mean that one can make no attempt to persuade those of a different ideology, political or otherwise, to adopt those same values. I believe it is inappropriate for MTV or other youth-targeted media entities to suggest that kids need not be held accountable to their parents' standards.

Parents should and do have the right to let their children watch whatever they feel is appropriate. I, however, think MTV has become a moral hazard to every impressionable person who could watch it. MTV will not be on in my household; my children will not watch it, and I honestly think they will be better people because of it.

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