

Editorial

Pot legalization could revive stale economy

In January, 2014 we urged state lawmakers to exercise caution and move slowly as they considered legislation to legalize marijuana.

Voters in Colorado had approved legalization the year before, and recreational marijuana sales began on Jan. 1. Lawmakers in New Mexico were eager to cash in on the windfall that had already started, but we urged a wait-and-see approach.

"Our neighbors to the north are engaged in a unique social and legal experiment that New Mexico and other states should pay close attention to," we said at the time. We had not doubt as to the potential tax revenue available, but had concerns about things like the impact on traffic safety, workplace production and a potential increase in the use of other drugs.

"It's probably better if New Mexico gives the Colorado experiment some time to play out so we can learn from its mistakes," we said then.

More than two years later, we are convinced that the potential benefits to legalization outweigh the concerns.

The impact on traffic safety is still unclear. The Colorado State Patrol began measuring marijuana-related traffic citations in 2014, but does not have a large enough sample size to draw conclusions, according to the Denver Post. Traffic fatalities overall decreased in 2014, the first year when marijuana was legal.

There's no question that the law has created new challenges for employers. While there is little in terms of hard data, several employers have reported increased problems with drug use on the job.

But for all of those challenges, legalization has been a boon for the Colorado economy. By December of 2014, Colorado reported adding 10,000 new jobs as a result of the marijuana

industry. Colorado had the fastest growing economy in the nation that year, and things have not slowed down since.

Marijuana sales increased from \$699 million in 2014 to \$996 million in 2015, giving Colorado an additional \$135 million for the year in tax and licensing revenue.

No wonder lawmakers in New Mexico are looking for a piece of that pie. While Colorado's economy is booming, ours is still in the ditch. The unemployment rate in Colorado is 3.4 percent. Our rate is nearly double that at 6.2 percent.

Even worse, state revenue has been on a downward slide for the past two years, causing deep cuts throughout state government. Our ability to adequately fund critical areas like education and health care is now in doubt.

The New Mexico Cannabis Expo the past two days at Hotel Encanto has focused on both the state's current medical marijuana program, as well as the potential economic opportunities through legalization.

We don't believe marijuana legalization would be a cure to all our ills. And, we do recognize that it would bring new challenges for law enforcement and business.

But for all of those challenges, the Colorado experiment has demonstrated that the potential economic benefits are substantial. And, that is a compelling argument at a time when our economy is in desperate need of a boost.

Rep. Bill McCamley, D-Las Cruces, has been a leader of the legalization effort in the state Legislature. Those efforts have hit a stone wall thus far. But as more lawmakers look at Colorado and compare their economy to ours, that wall is starting to crack.

We encourage McCamley and others to keep trying.

Cartoonist's take

THIRD YEAR IN A ROW...



www.bobdiven.com

BOB DIVEN/FOR THE SUN-NEWS

Commentary

Wilderness designation preserves important lands

KEN MIYAGISHIMA, NORA BARRAZA, DIANA TRUJILLO AND JAVIER PEREA

GUEST COLUMNISTS

When President Obama designated the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in May 2014, our community celebrated the permanent protection of our stunning Southwestern natural and cultural landscape. Now, nearly two years later, the designation is paying off.

Visitation to the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument has increased by 30 percent and we have seen new outdoor recreation and tourism businesses open up around Doña Ana County. Thanks in large part to the national monument, Las Cruces was recently included in Lonely Planet's "Top 10 Places to Visit," and featured in a full-page article in the Los Angeles Times Travel Section. The American Rock Art Research Association conference just came to Las Cruces to see the monument and filled over 1,000 room nights in area hotels over Memorial Day.

Some of the most special parts about southern New Mexico's newest attraction are the stunning wilderness-quality lands within the national monument. These include Aden Lava Flow, where exposed geology and unique wildlife combine to form an amazing place to view lava flows, Broad Canyon and its countless archeological sites, and the awe-inspiring Organ Mountains wilderness study areas. The Potrillo Mountains wilderness support one of the healthiest wildlife populations in New Mexico due to its

large wildland habitat, and the Robledo Mountains sheltered both Billy the Kid and Geronimo.

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks contains approximately 306 bird species and 78 mammal species, including golden eagles, mule deer, javelina, cougar, ring-tail cat, and quail. Greater protection of the wilderness-quality lands within the national monument will strengthen protections for these most sensitive and historically important landscapes within our new national monument.

But only Congress can designate wilderness, and that is why we are so pleased that Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich introduced a bill to protect these special places as wilderness. The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act will ensure the protection that started over 30 years ago when many of these areas were first recommended for the highest level of protection.

The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument was supported by Hispanic leaders, veterans, Native Americans, sportsmen, small business owners, faith leaders, conservationists, and local elected officials like us. This broad and diverse coalition has also long supported the community's vision for wilderness.

Designating wilderness will further safeguard our important natural treasures and continue to boost our local economies further through tourism and outdoor recreation jobs. Already, outdoor recreation generates \$6.1 billion in consumer spending in New Mexico and is

responsible for 68,000 jobs across the Land of Enchantment annually.

Wilderness would enhance and continue to allow all recreation activities such as hiking, camping, climbing, wildlife viewing, hunting, riding horseback riding, and more.

Public safety also remains our top priority. That's why we appreciate Udall and Heinrich working with the Border Patrol and law enforcement agencies to ensure that all of their necessary activities will continue. Our senators have worked closely with law enforcement and Border Patrol since legislation was first introduced in 2009. This important collaboration has continued with the national monument designation, and is reflected within the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Conservation Act.

Mesilla, Las Cruces, Anthony, and Sunland Park have always been amazing southwestern towns. But the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument put a special star on the map, and we are starting see great results from it. Not a day goes by that we are not thankful for our protected natural and cultural lands.

We want to thank Sens. Udall and Heinrich for working with us, our communities, and all interested stakeholders in preserving our most wild areas within the national monument. Just as we thank them today, future generations will do so tomorrow.

Ken Miyagishima is mayor of Las Cruces, Nora Barraza is mayor of Mesilla, Diana Trujillo is mayor of Anthony and Javier Perea is mayor of Sunland Park.

Cartoonist's take

'LONE WOLF' ATTACKS...



STEVE GREEN/CREATORS SYNDICATE

Commentary

Strange lawsuit raises questions about county candidate



PETER GOODMAN

A young man with a trailer full of hay rams his truck into a metal barrier protecting the gas pumps at a Las Cruces Pic Quik. Doing very little damage.

Pic Quik reports the incident to the police. The young man sues Pic Quik for \$10,000, claiming the manager ran out, tried to batter him, and chased him off the property. He also sues for defamation, saying Pic Quik lied in telling police he left without providing contact information.

Unfortunately for the young man, Pic Quik's four video cameras tell another story. Video shows that after striking the metal bar, he gets out to look at the damage, then gets back into

the truck. An employee approaches and stands near the truck's passenger-side window for about four seconds before the young man drives away. No one chases him around or tries to batter him. The video doesn't show any exchange of information.

Why should this crazy tale make an ocotillo seed's worth of difference? Maybe because the young man and plaintiff recently won the Republican primary for Doña Ana County Commissioner in District 4. His name is William Jarod Webb.

Not surprisingly, Pic Quik moved to toss the case out on summary judgment. (Meaning there ain't enough to the case to justify wasting public resources on a trial.) Webb reiterated he'd given his contact information, but also argued that he'd been in a hurry. Judge Mary Rosner

held a hearing in which Pic Quik was ably represented by Raul Carrillo. Mr. Webb didn't show up. He lost. Later he indicated an intention to seek reconsideration. He did not file a timely motion, but said Friday he still intends to do so.

Based on the Pic Quik incident in January, and the resulting lawsuit, you might worry that maybe this guy shouldn't be out on the street by himself - let alone helping run the county you live in.

But Webb's an interesting guy. He speaks several foreign languages and has a bachelor's degree from Baylor. He appears to have gotten a master's in business administration from the (in)famous University of Phoenix, attended Capital Law School for a semester, then started a master's of divinity at Liberty Theological Seminary, a Jerry

Falwell creation that other chaplain schools tend to disparage.

You'd guess maybe Webb hasn't figured out what he wants to do. But he told the Sun-News, "I've been planning to enter politics since I was 16, when I started writing presidents and world leaders." He also told the Sun-News he had no idea who the county manager was.

When I spoke with Mr. Webb this week, he didn't want to talk much about the Pic Quik case. He did say he hadn't done enough damage to anything to worry about and didn't know "why they're making such a big deal out of this." It's true, he did little damage to the barrier; but his bogus lawsuit cost Pic Quik whatever Mr. Carrillo charges per hour. (Webb also didn't want to talk much about Donald Trump, beyond saying he supported the party's candidate.)

He's working hard on an economic development plan he'll share with us when it's finished, and said jobs are the key issue here. He particularly wants to streamline permit and rezoning processes because "county red tape" doesn't help draw businesses that could create jobs.

He also said that building so many new residences without jobs for residents would lead to a housing glut. Another important issue, to a member of a farming family, is improving irrigation canals, either with a pipeline or by covering them to limit evaporation.

I'll be interested to see how Webb's campaign progresses.

Doña Ana County resident Peter Goodman writes, shoots pictures, and sometimes practices law. Further information may be on his blog at www.sole-dadcanon.blogspot.com.