Reform our marijuana laws

EDITORIAL
Bruce Ramsey

Bruce Ramsey began his career as business writer for the Journal-American, a daily for the Seattle suburbs of Bellevue, Kirkland and Redmond. In 1978 he joined the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, where he worked for 16 years. As a marine writer, he covered the development of the Seattle-based Bering Sea king crab and bottomfish fleets and the conflicts over foreign factory ships in U.S. waters. He became a business writer, and in the 1980s covered the crisis in the Pacific Northwest timber industry, the boom and bust in Idaho silver mining and the failure in 1982 of Seattle-First National Bank.

In 1989 he moved to Hong Kong, where he edited political and economic stories on the booming economies of Asia for Asiaweek, a Time Inc. magazine that circulated in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore. In 1993 he returned to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, becoming that paper's senior business reporter and weekly business columnist.

In the late 1990s he moved to the Post-Intelligencer's editorial page. In 2000 he joined The Seattle Times as an editorial writer and biweekly editorial columnist until his retirement in December. He covered issues of politics, economics, law and foreign affairs.
Jonathan Martin

Jonathan Martin has been at the Seattle Times since 2002, covering an eclectic range of topics, including human services, politics, corrections system and the marijuana industry, as a news reporter before moving to the editorial board in 2013.

He began his newspaper career as a teenager, stringing sports stories for his hometown weekly, The South Pierce County Dispatch in Eatonville, Wash. He worked or interned for The (Tacoma) News Tribune, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and, for seven years, the (Spokane) Spokesman-Review before joining the Times. As a reporter, he ranged across the Pacific Northwest, writing about a homeless couple’s two-year effort to regain their daughter; a pig-farming serial killer in Vancouver, B.C.; teenage runaways in Yakima; cockfighting in the Okanogan; a fishing tragedy in the Alaskan Aleutian Islands; and allegations of election fraud all over his home state.

In 2010, he was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize for Seattle Times coverage of the shooting of four Lakewood police officers. He also co-wrote a book about the case titled, “The Other Side of Mercy,” which won the Investigative Reporters and Editors’ Tom Renner award for criminal justice reporting. He became the Times’ first marijuana beat reporter in 2011, exploring the growing, unregulated medical marijuana industry and covering a successful initiative campaign to legalize recreational use and sales.

He twice has won the nation’s top journalism prize for social services reporting as well as other regional and national awards, and was a Knight-Wallace fellow in journalism and law at the University of Michigan in 2009. He is currently a fellow with the Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism. He lives in Seattle with his wife and two young children.
DELEGATION DRAGS FEET ON MARIJUANA LEGISLATION

Published March 17, 2013

THE SEATTLE TIMES

DELEGATION DRAGS FEET ON MARIJUANA LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON votes now stand by last November's referendum to legalize and regulate marijuana. In Washington, the initiative that was approved by voters last November legalizes possession up to one ounce and creates a regulatory scheme. In Oregon, the initiative approved by voters last November legalizes personal cultivation of up to six marijuana plants per person. In Colorado, the initiative approved by voters last November legalizes personal cultivation of up to one ounce and creates a regulatory scheme.

Since then, state regulators have worked diligently to create the world's first legal marijuana market. It is a process that has been both exciting and frustrating. The process has been hampered by the lack of federal regulations and the ongoing legal challenges that have arisen.

Last week, Attorney General Eric Holder said that after four months of review, the Department of Justice would not interfere with the states' legalization initiatives. However, the Department of Justice has not yet announced how it will implement its new policy.

In Washington, the Washington State Department of Licensing has issued regulations for the legal marijuana market. In Oregon, the Oregon Department of Revenue has issued regulations for the legal marijuana market. In Colorado, the Colorado Department of Revenue has issued regulations for the legal marijuana market.

The states are now working to implement their regulations. In Washington, the Washington State Department of Licensing is working with the Washington State Liquor Control Board to create a regulatory framework. In Oregon, the Oregon Department of Revenue is working with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to create a regulatory framework. In Colorado, the Colorado Department of Revenue is working with the Colorado Marijuana Board to create a regulatory framework.

The states are now working to implement their regulations. In Washington, the Washington State Department of Licensing is working with the Washington State Liquor Control Board to create a regulatory framework. In Oregon, the Oregon Department of Revenue is working with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to create a regulatory framework. In Colorado, the Colorado Department of Revenue is working with the Colorado Marijuana Board to create a regulatory framework.

In the meantime, the debate over legalizing marijuana continues. In Washington, the debate is focused on how to regulate the market. In Oregon, the debate is focused on how to tax the market. In Colorado, the debate is focused on how to regulate and tax the market.

The states are now working to implement their regulations. In Washington, the Washington State Department of Licensing is working with the Washington State Liquor Control Board to create a regulatory framework. In Oregon, the Oregon Department of Revenue is working with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to create a regulatory framework. In Colorado, the Colorado Department of Revenue is working with the Colorado Marijuana Board to create a regulatory framework.
WASHINGTON voters acted boldly last November to begin reforming our nation’s failed policy on marijuana. It was an act of leadership, in stark contrast to the inertia that has perpetuated the failed war on drugs for the past 42 years.

Since then, state regulators have worked diligently to create the world’s first fully regulated recreational marijuana market, and Gov. Jay Inslee took the state’s case to Washington, D.C.

But the state’s most important allies in this risky political fight — its 12-member congressional delegation — have remained mostly silent.

In a round of calls to the delegation’s offices last week, marijuana policy reform seemed a distant distraction. Three of the members did not even respond to repeated emails and calls.

They appear to have missed the memo sent by 56 percent of voters in November: Washington voters want legalized marijuana.

Last week, Attorney General Eric Holder said that, after four months of review, the Department of Justice would respond “soon” to marijuana-legalization laws in Washington and Colorado.

Our two states need champions in Congress, and now. We need pressure applied to the DOJ and the White House. Silence will be interpreted as acquiescence to the status quo of marijuana prohibition.


Seven different bills are pending in Congress that would alleviate some federal-state conflicts on recreational or medical marijuana. The most direct fix is HR 499, co-sponsored by Rep. Jared Polis, D-Colo. and Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore. It would
end federal pre-emption on marijuana policy, allowing states to go their own way.

None of our delegation has signed on to it, or related bills. Instead, Colorado, California and Oregon lawmakers are leading the way. “I think some of them need a little nudge,” Blumenauer said of Washington’s delegation.

Nudge, nudge. Most of Washington’s delegation opposed Initiative 502, the legalization measure. Only McDermott, Smith and freshman Rep. Suzan DelBene, D-Medina, voiced support before the election. Others in the delegation now say they’ll help ensure I-502’s implementation.

If they’re serious, they should take action. Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell, for example, has the power from her seat on the Senate Finance Committee to push for changes in banking laws and policies that would help the marijuana industry access banking.

Circulate a letter. Press the Obama administration. Sign on to, and advocate for, legislation

Democratic Rep. Adam Smith supported I-502. He wants the DOJ to respect the law and “is looking at any avenue to ensure legal clarity when it comes to recreational marijuana use.”

Democratic Rep. Suzan DelBene supported I-502. She will use her House Judiciary seat to oversee DOJ’s response to I-502 and to work on federal marijuana law reform.

Democratic Rep. Jim McDermott supported I-502. He has not declared for HR 499, but he has supported similar legislation in the past.

Democratic Sen. Patty Murray opposed I-502 but is committed to ensuring “those acting in compliance with state law are not vulnerable to federal prosecution,” said her spokesman.

Republican Rep. Dave Reichert opposed I-502. A spokeswoman said it was premature to make decisions on removing federal pre-emption on marijuana because the bill had not reached the House floor.

Democratic Rep. Denny Heck opposed I-502 but supports reclassifying marijuana to a drug that can be prescribed.

Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell opposed I-502 but “believes the Department of Justice needs to provide Washington state with legal clarity as we enact this new law,” said a spokesman.

Democratic Rep. Derek Kilmer opposed I-502 but said “Washington should have the opportunity to move forward with implementation.”

The politics of marijuana have changed. State leaders — from Inslee to Attorney General Bob Ferguson to local and state elected officials from both parties — understand that.

When will our congressional delegation?
Published June 11, 2013

OPINION

LIBERTARIANISM'S ACHILLES' HEEL

E.I. Dianne Jr.

Unhealthy changes are taking place in Washington. It's sad. The very idea of a state that has been so solidly free is being eroded. And it's sad because, while there is a great deal of talk about the Constitution and liberty, there is little action.

I'm not talking about the sanctity of marriage. I'm not talking about the right to go to war or to be free from taxation. I'm not talking about the right to speak out or to have a free press. I'm talking about the right to do what is legal under the law.

The Constitution is a living document. It changes over time. But it is a living document that changes in a way that is consistent with the values and principles it sets out to protect.

The key here is to understand what is at stake. The Constitution is not a guarantee of a perfect society. It is a framework for creating a society that is free and just.

The state of Washington is not perfect. But it is a place where people can live their lives in freedom and in peace. And it is a place where their children can grow up and learn the values of democracy.

It is a place where individuals can be free to make their own choices. And it is a place where they can be free to live the lives they want to lead.

That is why it is important to stand up for the Constitution. Because it is the only way to ensure that Washington remains a place where people can live their lives as they choose.

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CHANGE BANKING LAW FOR MARIJUANA INDUSTRY

ALLOWING cannabis businesses to use the banking system is an urgent matter for 20 medical-marijuana states and a special concern to Washington and Colorado, whose voters have endorsed legalization for general adult use.


U.S. Reps. Denny Heck, D-Wash., and Ed Perlmutter, D-Colo., of the House Financial Services Committee are preparing a bill that would allow marijuana producers and retailers to use the banking system.

Marijuana is still listed as an illegal Schedule 1 substance under the federal Controlled Substances Act. Eventually, that must change; it conflicts with what the states are doing, what the people want and with common sense. But this might not happen for some years, and in the meantime, the conflict of law creates a problem.

Under federal law, a bank that serves a marijuana business can be charged with laundering drug money and aiding and abetting a federal crime. The entrepreneurs of cannabis have accepted this sort of risk, but bankers are refusing to serve the dispensaries.

This pushes dispensaries onto a cash basis for retail transactions, the purchase of inventory and the payment of wages. It denies them loans. And the use of cash invites the evasion of taxes and labor law.

Most of all, it makes dispensaries a target for robbery.
The rest of Washington’s congressional delegation should support Heck’s bill. The issue is not about whether to legalize marijuana. That already has been decided by the voters. The need now is to bring cannabis into a system of law, taxes and public safety.

These are businesses whose product, sold by the gram, has a retail value of $4,000 or $5,000 a pound. Legal businesses need banking services. Let the underground deal in cash.
TIME TO DE-ESCALATE THE ‘WAR ON DRUGS’

Published August 13, 2013

End Seattle’s taxi monopoly

DONORS KNOW THE NEED

Net neutrality blocks innovation

Repeal the sequester

Sequestration and the federal debt

Northwest Voices

ON THE WEB

Published August 13, 2013

Published August 13, 2013

Published August 13, 2013
ATTORNEY General Eric Holder’s speech to the American Bar Association in San Francisco was a bit like hearing from a stockbroker after trading has closed.

“Well, of course the market went down.” Well, of course the U.S. needs to rethink drug laws and enforcement.

Decades after America righteously declared a zero-tolerance policy toward all drug crimes and nonviolent crimes involving drugs, Holder and others want to stop the abuses.

Seize the belated insights whenever they come along.

Support for being “Smart on Crime,” in the AG’s words, is aimed at undoing laws that maintain “a vicious cycle of poverty, criminality and incarceration” that “traps too many Americans and weakens too many communities.”

Under the policy proposal, fewer drug offenders would face long sentences, fewer would go to federal prison and judges would have more discretion.

Substantial credit for this change of heart might truly go to the bloated, unsustainable expense of a federal prison system bursting at the seams and concentric circles of prison costs the policies impose on local jurisdictions.

These policies are on a path to end in the same way they began, with broad bipartisan support. Republican President Reagan’s “War on Drugs” took shape in a heated competition with Democratic House Speaker Tip O’Neill, D-Mass. Neither party wanted to be seen by voters as weak on drugs.

As a result, Holder described a federal prison system operating at nearly 40 percent above capacity, with nearly 219,000 inmates.

The American Civil Liberties Union viewed Holder’s policy directives to change practices for low-level, nonviolent offenders as crucial steps toward reducing harmful federal prison overcrowding.

The country has come a long
way in three decades. Changing laws and attitudes about marijuana have been in the forefront. The benchmark for change is a quote by Reagan’s drug czar Carlton Turner, who said, “marijuana leads to homosexuality, the breakdown of the immune system, and therefore to AIDS.”

Holder’s policy direction has stirred questions about the need to replace U.S. drug czar Gil Kerlikowske, formerly Seattle’s police chief, as he leaves the post for another federal job.

Holder has bipartisan support in Congress for change. Maybe something actually will happen to reform laws that have ruined lives and budgets.
FEDS NEED TO ADDRESS STATE CANNABIS LAWS

NABONEY 10 months ago the voters of Washington and Colorado independently flew to the federal court to challenge a provision of the Controlled Substance Act. Today, the U.S. Justice Department has said it will not challenge the measures. Such is the wisdom of a much-bemoaned civil war and the wisdom of the independent people who elected the voters. Because the patients of Washington and Colorado who used medical marijuana谢谢你
FEDS NEED TO ADDRESS STATE CANNABIS LAWS

Nearly 10 months ago the voters of Washington and Colorado intentionally blew a hole in the failed federal prohibition of marijuana.

We are still waiting for a response from the Obama administration. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting.

Consistently, the U.S. Justice Department has said it is still reviewing the measures. Earlier this month, Spokane’s U.S. attorney, Mike Ormsby, said that the federal response was “higher than my pay grade ... As soon as we have a decision made, it will be rolled out.”

Silence thus far has been interpreted as tacit approval. Regulators in both states have diligently spent thousands of hours to create the world’s first legal, fully regulated marijuana markets. Entrepreneurs are writing business plans, leasing warehouses and preparing for full vetting of their backgrounds and financing, all in anticipation of rules being finished in December.

Silence may be better than a full federal crackdown. Perhaps the feds are waiting until the rules are final. If so, they’ll see a closed marketplace with no access to anyone under 21, seed-to-sale tracking and safeguards against legal, Washington-grown cannabis spilling across our borders.

But continued silence carries a cost. Washington has budgeted $2.5 million to write rules for the legal market. And without a clear federal statement, the legal market’s access to mainstream banking will be constricted because current federal law
regards marijuana transactions as drug deals.


Silence prompted an innovative idea by Mark Kleiman, lead consultant for Washington’s draft marijuana regulations. Recently, he, suggested the Obama administration could sign contracts with Washington and Colorado allowing their legal markets to proceed, in exchange for cooperation in cracking down on illegal growing.

Innovative, but as circuitous as driving from Seattle to Spokane via Boise. The straightforward route is for the Obama Justice Department to speak up, stand aside and let the two states become the laboratories of marijuana-enhanced democracy.

Hopefully, Attorney General Eric Holder will say so on Sept. 10, when the Senate holds a hearing on legalization.

The Obama administration owes the 3.1 million people who voted for legalization in Washington and Colorado a response. We’re waiting.
A WELCOME GREEN LIGHT ON LEGAL MARIJUANA

Published August 30, 2013

WASHINGTON state joins effort to quickly re-home the homeless

Lamee Dickie
Associate editor

School supplies getting out of hand

Families should prepare

ON THE WEB

Northwest Voices

Letters and forum

U.S. involvement in Syria’s civil war

An internationa

On the web
The Seattle Times

EDITORIALS

The newspaper’s view

A WELCOME GREEN LIGHT ON LEGAL MARIJUANA

YEARS from now, when Congress finally ends the failed prohibition on marijuana, Aug. 29, 2013, will be a red-letter day on the timeline.

Thursday the Obama administration acknowledged Washington’s and Colorado’s voter-approved experiments with legal marijuana have merit, and will not be pre-empted.

That is more than many supporters could have hoped, because it gives Initiative 502 in Washington and Amendment 64 in Colorado a chance to succeed.

And those voter-approved measures offer a clear template for a state-by-state revolt against the absurd federal classification of marijuana as a Schedule I drug, right next to heroin and LSD.

The U.S. Justice Department memo laying out federal priorities for marijuana enforcement reads as if it were cribbed from the talking points of Initiative 502. Tight controls on underage use, drugged driving and criminal profiteering — all are key elements of I-502.

The memo appears to greenlight industrial-scale marijuana growing, so long as the product does not spill across state borders.

If done right, that economy of scale could allow legal marijuana market prices to cripple the black market. Again, a win for I-502.

As encouraging as the memo is, it is clear the federal government is not disarming, just standing down, under specific circumstances.

To keep the feds on stand-down, the state Legislature and congressional delegation have work to do. Legislators need to rein in the unregulated medical-marijuana market, the type of free-for-all that the memo singles out for federal
enforcement.

And the congressional delegation must continue to press for easing of federal banking laws, to ensure mainstream banking and credit-card processing for legal marijuana businesses. A legal but cash-only marijuana market would be a welcoming target for gangs and thieves.

Voters embraced I-502 because the status quo was ineffective, wasteful and unjust. It took the federal government 296 days to stand down and allow Washington to become a greener laboratory of democracy.