



Y2K: The Cannabis Edition

by Elizabeth Sindelar-Loy
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The unknown is incredibly scary when we believe the thing we fear could greatly impact our lives negatively. Remember Y2K? Way too many people thought ringing in 2000 would send us straight into the Stone Age or society would fall to anarchy. With the passing of recreational cannabis becoming effective January 1, the mood of Southern Illinois feels eerily similar to twenty years ago.

Irrational fears are pitting Metro-East communities against each other with this “My town is better than yours nonsense”. A great divide is forming between towns passing ordinances and those opting out. When the reality is, whether your town allows a dispensary or not, a person can still drive to a neighboring town, purchase cannabis and bring it back into the town you say is morally superior. Ultimately, choosing whether or not to have a dispensary will not mitigate the perceived issues people think cannabis creates. Instead, it will only take away much-needed tax revenue from local governments to put towards education, prevention and law enforcement. Money each one of our communities could desperately use when federal dollars for social services are reduced.

News headlines in our area are written to stigmatize the upcoming legalization but we must not forget that alcohol is still the most socially acceptable, widely-abused substance in the United States. Hence, unlike other substance use dependencies, alcoholism is often left untreated leading to devastating repercussions. Therefore, communities really need to understand that whether a dispensary is in your town, statistically the deadliest substance plaguing mankind already is well established and will continue to be consumed in far greater quantities.

You are only splitting hairs if you condemn someone who chooses to partake in cannabis while you consume alcohol. Both substances can be addicting, both change mental faculties of the person using them and both can be used as societal crutches for deeper mental health problems. If you want to declare a moral high ground, cannabis would win by a landslide. Cannabis has the greatest potential to save lives while alcohol statistically ends life daily. But honestly, it’s not about which potentially addictive substance is more superior.

The reality is, we need to stop perpetuating stigma and look at the vastly bigger picture that’s awaiting us. Whether we agree with it or not, our politicians are choosing to be on the side they believe will make the state the most money. Therefore, it’s only a matter of time before the federal government decriminalizes it. Shockingly, humans are driven by greed and cannabis is the next cash cow. Which is why, instead of continuing to prove

which community is superior, we need to unite. It's imperative for our communities to work on solutions that combat the consequences of our lawmakers' decisions.

We may not be able to stop legalization but we can each commit individually to not allowing cannabis to take the same path as alcohol has in our communities. This is achievable with proven tool kits called education and prevention that are available at no cost from a variety of organizations in our area. If you do decide to use cannabis come January 1, use it responsibly. Younger eyes will be watching and listening to everything we do. And above all, remember, the unknown only has to be feared if we don't prepare for it.

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