



Guest opinion: 'Nightmare' of medical marijuana threatens kids

By **CHERRIE BRADY, LAURA NEEDHAM and SUSAN SMITH** | Posted: Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Montana kids are in trouble! After speaking with principals, educators, parents and kids across the state, it's clear our schools are suffering the devastating consequences of passing the medical marijuana law. Montana is now No. 2 in the nation for teen marijuana use. Our situation is serious.

One principal described it as a “nightmare.” Another said “It has crossed all boundaries, even star athletes are using it.” They are finding it impossible to tell kids it's harmful. Many kids don't even believe it is still illegal, citing storefronts and signs all over town as evidence.

Kids are coming to school stoned or not coming at all. Policing it is a joke. We were told one high school had 10 drug cases in two days. Pot stays in the system so long that when kids test positive they can say they had it last weekend instead of at lunch. It is now in candy, sodas, suckers, etc., so they can be using it in the lunchroom and no one can prove it.

Students with cards have excess marijuana to sell. Another student is supplying his peers from the unlimited medical marijuana his father has access to. It has become easier to get than alcohol. Many students have older siblings or friends with cards. This has provided easy access even for elementary kids. A sixth-grade teacher said she has kids coming to school stoned. Educators note the apathy that comes with frequent marijuana use. It impacts their attendance, academic progress and involvement in extracurricular activities. Their main focus becomes smoking pot.

Our youth are being told this drug is a natural plant and is harmless. Yet we know marijuana is the No. 1 drug for which kids are in treatment. In 2010, the number of teenage patients in emergency room visits jumped 136.4 percent at Benefis Hospital in Great Falls, which named marijuana as its major abuse substance. Studies suggest marijuana use in adolescents doubles the risk of schizophrenia in later life. The human costs are potentially huge.

Does any of this sound like what Montanans voted for? Where in the voter pamphlet did it mention marijuana penetrating our schools and putting our kids at risk? Did it mention

storefronts or signage? Where did it say we would be opening the door for students to become drug pushers? Did it mention we would get an industry that would be normalizing and legalizing marijuana?

Legislators should take a stand for our kids. This isn't a partisan issue — it is a moral issue. Because it is dangerous and not even close to what Montanans voted for, they should be insisting on repealing this law, not trying to regulate. How do you regulate a federally illegal drug industry estimated at a billion dollars in Montana?

Attempting to regulate this mess is a proven mistake. No state has been able to regulate this successfully. The headlines say it all: *The Huffington Post* — Medical Marijuana in Colorado: Judge Voids Board of Health Decision, California Supreme Court Strikes Down Medical Pot Limits; *The Colorado Independent* — Suit filed to overturn marijuana laws.

While we mess around with trying to regulate we are losing a generation of kids. Is it worth the risk?

As parents and grandparents we should be alarmed! Montana schools must come forward and fight for a repeal. While we argue about the rights of individuals to use marijuana, the rights of our kids to have a safe school environment have all but disappeared. It is the responsibility of every school to protect their students at all cost.

There is no valid excuse for staying silent while so much is at stake.

Cherrie Brady, Laura Needham and Susan Smith represent safecommunitysafekids.org, a Billings-based organization.

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