

Opinion: What Sessions doesn't understand about medical marijuana

By C. Michael White

On Jan. 4, Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded the Cole memo, a 2013 document that limits federal enforcement of marijuana laws.

This opens the door for a crackdown in the nine states with legal recreational marijuana.

The Cole memo is one of two documents that prevent the U.S. Justice Department from treating marijuana as a Schedule I drug, defined as a substance with no accepted medical treatment and high potential for abuse. The other is the 2014 Rohrabacher–Farr amendment. This legislation bars the Department of Justice from spending any funds to keep states from implementing their own laws about “the use, distribution, possession or cultivation of medical marijuana.”

The amendment's language needs to be reinserted into law each year – and it's currently set to expire on Jan. 18. That would leave patients in the 29 states with legal medical marijuana without their treatments and at risk of prosecution.

I have researched a number of drugs of abuse and natural products for safety and effectiveness. Just because a drug has abuse potential doesn't mean it's always bad and just because it's natural doesn't mean it's always safe. While I'm no fan of legalizing recreational marijuana use, I believe there has to be special dispensation for patients with a legitimate medical need.

Medical marijuana works

There are approximately 1.2 million users of medical marijuana in these 29 states. Some of the most common ailments include pain or muscle spasms, nausea and vomiting, cancer, PTSD, seizures and glaucoma.

The body has a system of receptors that can be stimulated by the chemicals in marijuana, called cannabinoids. In animal studies, cannabinoids have been used to treat symptoms like harmful weight loss, vomiting, seizures and fluid pressure in the eyes.

There isn't much human research on medical marijuana, thanks to the product's illegal status and a lack of federal research funding. Large trials are nearly impossible to conduct, since products are often adulterated and the concentrations of cannabinoids vary from plant to plant.

Even so, human trials from around the world and pockets of the U.S. offer modestly strong evidence of marijuana's benefits in a number of disorders, such as intractable nausea and vomiting, chronic pain and severe muscle spasms and epilepsy.

For example, a study published in May looked at the effects of cannabidiol – an active marijuana compound that does not cause euphoric high or hallucination – on children with Dravet syndrome, a rare genetic disorder characterized by frequent, severe drug-resistant seizures. Those who took cannabidiol cut their median number of convulsive seizures per month in half, from 12 to six. These findings may be applicable to other people with hard-to-treat seizures.

I bring up this example because it uses the highest quality study design. Also, seizures are not subjective symptoms like pain or nausea that critics may be skeptical of.

When patients become criminals

Different types of THC-infused confections on display at a pot dispensary in Eugene, Ore. AP Photo/Ryan Kang

In my home state of Connecticut, medical marijuana is legal. Doctors are required to certify that potential medical marijuana users have a disease for which there is adequate medical evidence for marijuana's benefit. The patient then visits a licensed dispensary facility, where a pharmacist helps to select the type of product that would work best.

In such a dispensary, pharmacists know the exact amount of the active chemicals that each product contains. Unlike illegal marijuana, their products aren't contaminated with heavy metals, bacteria, fungi, herbicides or pesticides.

What if patients can no longer access these products? They will either have to go without and lose the benefits of their treatment, leading to moderately intense marijuana withdrawal symptoms, such as insomnia, chills, shakiness and stomach pain.

Or, they might try to switch to the black market, where products may be inconsistent and prosecution is possible. In so doing, they would be supporting organized crime and exposing themselves to additional dangers. I especially worry about children with epilepsy who might have to use illegal marijuana that gives them a high due to the tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) rather than a legal version with little to no THC.

A balanced approach

Since 2014, the Rohrabacher-Farr amendment has been routinely included in the appropriations language with support from both parties. But in the past year, things have broken down. So far, the amendment has survived through resolutions to extend government spending, but it's unclear whether it will appear in the new federal budget.

Sessions has already written to members of Congress asking them not to support this amendment, saying it inhibits the department's authority. A new subcommittee at the Department

of Justice plans to assess the legalized use of marijuana.

Legal recreational marijuana comes with potential benefits and drawbacks to society, and I'm not sure yet that we know what the impact will be over the long term. But the research on medical marijuana is clear: Marijuana has legitimate medical uses. It should not be a Schedule I drug and should not be denied to patients. There's virtually no upside to banning a potentially effective therapy for patients with diseases like cancer, multiple sclerosis and epilepsy.

C. Michael White is a professor and head of the department of pharmacy practice at the University of Connecticut.

Majority of National Park Service board resigns

By Scott Neuman and Colin Dwyer, NPR

Nearly all of the seats on the U.S. National Park Service advisory board are vacant following a mass resignation Monday night, with ex-members citing Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's unwillingness to meet with them.

Former Alaska Gov. Tony Knowles said that he and eight other members of the panel handed in their resignations. In a separate letter Wednesday, another board member, Carolyn Hessler Radelet, also quit.

The advisory board, which normally has up to 12 members and describes itself as comprising "citizen advisors chartered by Congress to help the National Park Service," has been an institution since 1935.

Read the whole story

Flu forces delay in opening of STHS play

The opening of “Thoroughly Modern Millie” at South Tahoe High School has been delayed.

More than a dozen student actors are out sick with the flu.

The play was to open Jan. 19. School officials hope the play will be able to performed on Saturday.

Tickets sold for Friday’s performance may be exchanged for another date.

Scientists seek to unlock mysteries of Sierra snow droughts

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

What’s the difference between one snow drought and the next?

More than most people realize.

And those differences have implications for everything from skiing conditions to water supply in the western United

States.

That's according to a paper by two Nevada researchers in the journal Earth Interactions.

The researchers took a deep dive into the history of Sierra Nevada snow from 1951 until 2017 to understand the forces that shape the region's snowpack.

Read the whole story

Free movie night at The Loft on Friday

The North American premiere of the award-winning Italian film "Aeffetto Domino" ("Domino Effect") will be shown at The Loft in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 19 – for free.

The movie's writer, director, and star, Fabio Massa, will be at the premiere, with Q&A and meet and greet after the screening. Fabio was awarded best actor for his role in this film at the annual GioCineFest in Italy.

The movie is about life and its transformation. It's a story of Lorenzo: sad news about his state of health will change his existence, causing a domino effect on his life and on the lives of people he loves.

Doors will open at 8pm for a pre-premiere party in the lounge. Theater doors will open at 8:45pm, with the premiere starting at 9pm. There will be an open forum Q&A with the film's writer, director, and star Massa. There will be post-premiere party in the lounge.

Free tickets and reserved seating in the theater are available **online**.

STHS student posts threat on social media

By Kathryn Reed

A South Tahoe High School sophomore posted pictures of himself with guns and threatening song lyrics that prompted police officers to search his home in Meyers.

The threats showed up on Snapchat on Jan. 15. And while they disappear quickly, it is possible to take screenshots of messages.

Students when they received the message on Monday contacted a staff member at school – even though this was a holiday – and that person then called the police department. Other students on Tuesday shared the screenshots with Andy Eissenger, the school resource officer.

Officers went to the student's house Monday night and found two BB guns, but no other weapons. One was a 1911 style handgun, and the other an AR-15 style assault rifle.

"The threat was from the song lyrics," Lt. Shannon Laney told *Lake Tahoe News*.

"One afternoon he brought his gun to lunch; An started capin off mfkrs one bye one," are the lyrics in the song "Fake I.D." by Speed Gang.

"We determined it was not an actual threat to the school and

turned it over to the school district,” Laney said.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District Superintendent Jim Tarwater and South Tahoe High School Principal Carline Sinkler did not return calls.

However, spokeswoman Shannon Chandler told *Lake Tahoe News* the student is no longer at the school. The type of help he is receiving and disciplinary action have not been released.

“I’m not able to say what type of help he is getting,” Chandler said.

She said the principal on Tuesday sent an email to parents letting them know about the incident, and that the district on Jan. 18 followed up with a phone call.

The motive behind the student’s actions has not been released. Because of his age his name is not being used.

At Tuesday’s school board meeting nothing about the incident was mentioned.

Caltrans now a huge fan of roundabouts

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

In the tiny town of Plymouth, gateway to Amador County’s growing wine tourism area, road crews recently ripped out the four-way stop on a busy section of Highway 49 to replace it with a traffic approach that literally will have drivers going in circles.

Plopped in the middle of the intersection where Main Street crosses the highway, the big oval forces drivers to slow to 15 mph but doesn't require them to stop. Instead, traffic from four directions merges and flows in a choreographed, counterclockwise direction.

Roundabouts have suddenly become one of the state's trendiest traffic calming devices. After shying away from them for years, the state Department of Transportation is on a roundabout building spree, constructing 37, most in the last few years, with 100 more on the drawing boards.

Read the whole story

Keith Urban, Dave Matthews coming to Tahoe

It's time to start thinking about summer concerts at Lake Tahoe.

Here is the lineup so far for the Harveys Outdoor Summer Concert Series:

- Keith Urban, July 21-22, 7pm – tickets from \$59.50-\$139.50. Kelsea Ballerini will be opening.
- Charlie Puth, Aug. 18, 7pm – tickets \$39.50-\$69.50. Hailee Steinfeld opening.
- Dave Matthews Band, Sept. 7, 7:30pm – tickets \$95. This is a general admission show.

Expect controlled burns in Tahoe basin

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, which includes local, state and federal agencies, will continue prescribed fire operations this week in multiple locations around Lake Tahoe, weather permitting. Smoke may be present.

A map with project locations and details is available **online**. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

When weather and conditions allow, prescribed fire operations are conducted to reduce overgrown vegetation, which decreases the severity of future wildland fires, protects communities, reduces the risk of insect and disease outbreaks in our forests, recycles nutrients that increases soil productivity and improves wildlife habitat.

LTN subscriber wins latest book club book

Lake Tahoe News **subscriber** Davey Paiva is the lucky recipient of the next book being read for the LTN Book Club.

LTN started a book club this year as a way to get people reading and ideally participating in a discussion online via the comments.

Here is a **link** to the first book that was reviewed/discussed.

Susan Wood's review of "What Unites Us" by Dan Rather and Elliot Kirschner will be published Feb. 1. That is the book Paiva will be reading.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*