

POT

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My neighborhood is going to pot. Literally. On our street there is a house with no activity. The window shades remain down all the time. No one comes, no one goes, nor is anyone ever seen tending the yard. Music never emanates from the home, but a funny aroma does--fragrant, aromatic and pungent. Back when the home went up for sale I hoped a young family would move in. The neighborhood is perfect for children: a dead end cul-de-sac with scattered basket hoops and trimmed lawns. Unfortunately, in our community few young families can afford the nicer homes. Someone bought the house next door and turned it into a rental. Renting to a grower is quite profitable because it garners double or triple the usual rent.

According to an officer in the Sheriff's department, an indoor grower can produce hundreds of kilos of marijuana in the space of an average living room. These indoor marijuana outfits are quite common in Humboldt County. If someone complains, the approach taken by the drug enforcement unit is to pay a visit and ask why the place smells like pot. If the grower has a "215 card" (a doctor's prescription authorizing marijuana use), things stop there. If the grower cannot produce the card, then a search warrant can be issued and arrests made.

Think about it—the fate of these dope growers depends on a physician's authorization. How did this problem ever get thrown into the laps of California doctors? There seem to be no shortage of unscrupulous doctors who dole out the 215 cards for dubious diagnoses, and they undoubtedly earn much more than those of us who work legitimately.

Every society allows some type of mind-altering substance. Pick your poison—opium, marijuana, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine. Middle Eastern countries allow opiates, but frown on alcohol. In the western countries we have seen fit to outlaw heroin and marijuana, and to allow alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine.

A recent article in the North Coast Journal¹ detailed the economics of marijuana in Humboldt County. The author thought the remote nature of the area was the main attraction for growers, and that legalization would push marijuana cultivation southward, out of the hands of local growers and ultimately cause a huge economic loss for the area. Personally, I'd welcome that loss if it meant I could live next door to a regular family again.

The Times-Standard reported that Mendocino Supervisor John Pinches estimated that the local marijuana economy involves about 5 billion dollars annually². Sales tax at 7.5% on 5 billion dollars comes to approximately \$4,500,000. That amount of money could fund something worthwhile like health care. People smoke pot all the time around here, so law enforcement measures obviously are not working in any significant way. Eradication efforts are lukewarm and equivocal in all spheres of government: local, state and federal. Criminalizing marijuana wastes resources and sends tremendous profits into the hands of unscrupulous growers. Let's legalize marijuana, regulate it, tax the heck out of it, and use the profits to fund health care for all Californians.

1. North Coast Journal, The Town Dandy, Scott Brown 6/7/2007

2. Times-Standard 6/19/1007 "On That Funny Blue Smoke" by James Faulk