

New reformed pot policies better late than never

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While working on Wed, Nov. 4, I received three very interesting text messages within minutes of each other. "Breckenridge, Colorado has legalized marijuana," typed my mother. My

father sent me a similar message, and my younger brother, a freshman in college, also declared his approval via text.

After reading my family's messages, I whipped out my handy-dandy iPhone and searched CNN's headlines. Frustratingly enough, I had trouble finding the story before I had to return to all those pesky tables expecting to order lunch.

Before I continue, I should emphasize that my family's Thanksgivings do not revolve around bong, pipes or blunts. As my parents grow older and wiser, they are getting more liberal, and are more accepting of my nonconformist ways. Plus, I went to the University of Colorado at Boulder my freshman year, so Colorado news especially appeals to me.

Anyway, I found it very odd that the Breckenridge decriminalization didn't earn more prominent placement among the daily headlines. But Breckenridge only did what Denver did four years ago. According to "Summit Daily News," adults 21 and older may legally possess up to an ounce of marijuana and related paraphernalia, effective Jan. 1. Also reported by the "Summit Daily News," over 70 percent of Breckenridge voters approved this initiative, roughly the same percentage of Breckenridge voters who voted in favor of Colorado's ultimately unsuccessful Amendment 44 in 2006, which would have similarly decriminalized marijuana statewide.

Perhaps more notably, Maine legalized medical marijuana dispensaries while banning same-sex marriages, according to the Associated Press. To be blunt, the back-and-forth flip-flopping of laws and amendments concerning gay marriage is tired. Let's just legalize it already and save money on all that unnecessary legislation.

Back to the bud, 14 states currently have active medical marijuana programs, and 13 states have some form of decriminalization legislation, according to NORML.org, a marijuana law reform organization's website. I personally think these numbers are fairly high, especially considering marijuana reform is becoming a popular topic in light of the economic benefits of its legalization.

The obvious upside of legalization and even just decriminalization is that the overcrowded, underemployed, tired and overwhelmed court and jail systems would spend less time and money on petty offenses like possession and paraphernalia. As President Obama told Rolling Stone, "I would start with nonviolent, first-time drug offenders. The notion that we are imposing felonies on them or sending them to prison, where they are getting advanced degrees in criminality, instead of thinking about ways like drug courts that can get them back on track in their lives—it's expensive, it's counterproductive, and it doesn't make sense." In fact, these small possession charges cost the American taxpayers up to \$10 billion annually. Think of marijuana as another mini-bailout for the American economy.

Another economic stimulus gift from Mother Nature is the quality and usefulness of hemp, which is made from marijuana plants. According to NORML.org, hemp was used to make some of the first fabrics, George Washington went to battle in hemp clothing and the first drafts of the Declaration of Independence was written on hemp paper. Queen Elizabeth I fined large landowners for not growing cannabis, and in 1925, the U.S. government issued a report that deems marijuana relatively harmless and suggested no criminal punishments were necessary. Henry Ford once illegally grew marijuana in a search to replace fuel usage. Growing marijuana could even revive dying rural farms and lend a hand to the green, organic movement. Oh, and did I mention all those economic benefits?

Of course, not everyone agrees that marijuana is a relatively safe, tame substance when used responsibly, but since I do, I don't see why the government shouldn't just legalize it and make some money. Open government dispensaries, sell growing permits and levy a heavy tax on it. Keep regulations to ensure it is being produced, sold and used safely and responsibly.

I understand the concerns and trepidations people may have about marijuana reform, but I think it could be managed in a way that supplies aid to the federal government and prevents irresponsible use. So cheers to Breckenridge for decriminalizing marijuana, cheers to Maine for taking another step for medical marijuana and jeers to Maine for banning gay marriage.

Palin is merely a passenger

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Watching her match vests with Barbara Walters and opening up to Oprah Winfrey, our nation's chief therapist, it is hard to feel pity for Sarah Palin. While her ascension from Alaskan governor to

national political celebrity is usually painted, from varying sources, as one either filled with guts or glory, what most seem to miss is the key value her rise has enjoyed: luck. While she would likely refute this (because I am stating it in some form of media), Sarah Palin has been immensely lucky. Most politicians would dream of the day when networks and daytime stars were fighting for an interview, let alone a week-long series glorifying her fight for truth against rumors, be they true or not. The reasons why she has earned this moment in our spotlight are hidden beneath both the vitriol and praise she is subjected to on a daily basis.

Let us set one fact on the table: Politicians love to be on television. Anyone with a family member that has made it onto the evening news and watched them record said appearance can relate. The majority of federal politicians never see cameras that are not marked with the C-SPAN logo, and state politicians have even less fame. Being on camera is not just special to them for the same narcissistic reasons it is special to regular folks like you and I, but it also gets their face out into the ether. Once upon a time, most people voted for candidates without having a clue what they looked like. Now, however, face recognition is nearly as important as name recognition.

It is in this exposure-hungry world that Sarah Palin found herself a little over a year ago. In a state with only one television network, she had only one station of cameras interested in the grueling life of a governor. Being the governor of Alaska, however, also comes with its own rules of isolation. Unless there are birds covered in Exxon oil to take pictures of the national press outlets are



Photo courtesy of AP.com

not concerned with a state that has roughly the same population as Dauphin County. This blackout had taken its toll on Palin by 2008, about a year into her first term, and was evident if one looked at her press booklet. Appearing on national television less than Ed Rendell, a man not noted for his shyness, it would appear her geographical distance did more damage than her personality or career ever could.

Without trudging through the water treatment plant the 2008 campaign has become in my memory, one very important detail has been missing from the reminiscing: for a while, Sarah Palin was winning the race for the White House. Sure, some credit should be given to her running-mate (what was his name?). But for those two weeks between the Republican National Convention and the day the stock market soiled itself Sarah Palin appeared, at once, enigmatic and charismatic. With a prolonged look at Palin it seems likely that many people wanted her to be these things. Both the institution of the Republican Party and its full membership were stuck with a candidate that was experienced, independent, and drastically boring; especially when placed next to Barack Obama, His Will Be Done On Earth.

This wave of high hopes has carried Sarah Palin well into the her current term as an Obsession, yours and mine. The GOP is still without a hero, being carried through on the spray-tanned back of Representative John Boehner and guided by the effeminate Southern tones of Lindsay Graham and Eric Cantor. The actual head of the GOP, Chairman Michael Steele, has become the drunken czar; too obsessed with mystical plans and self-fame to notice the mutiny carried out by sad-clown Glenn Beck and his lightning-rod group of Libertarian Leninists.

So it is merely by timing that Sarah Palin is still on your television screen and demurely on your Newsweek cover. She is, in media terms, a traffic driver; dragging along her messiah-hungry followers to every screen in their house, intriguing curious well-wishers and those, like myself, too fascinated to turn away. It is impossible to say how much longer she will be forced into our national conscience, but one thing is certain: she looks great in running shorts.