



VIEWPOINTS: WEIGHING IN ON THE GREEN

In the wake of legalized marijuana in Colorado and Washington, other states are taking a closer look at their own laws pertaining to recreational use. The District of Columbia and Maryland have both taken up the issue, relaxing laws when it comes to the drug. Here, two takes on the latest developments.

Continued on page 2

MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005. □



SPOTLIGHT ON ... LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Searching for an occupation with a promising outlook? Then consider landscape architecture, which is expected to grow 14 percent from 2012 to 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

By Arnesa A. Howell

As a landscape architect, one can expect to plan and design spaces for all to enjoy – from designing gardens at parks and recreational sites to those of private homes, BLS stated. “Landscape architects spend much of their time in offices, creating plans and designs, preparing models and cost estimates, doing research, and attending meetings with clients and workers involved in designing or planning a project,” stated the *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition*.

Those pursuing a career in this field should expect to earn at least a bachelor's degree, with coursework in areas such as landscape design and construction. Uniquely, BLS said, the District of Columbia doesn't require individuals in this profession to be licensed. Key traits for success include effective communication, problem solving and creativity, according to the latest handbook, with salaries averaging \$64,180. As in the area of construction,

math skills and knowledge in the building and repair of houses and other structures is important, a point supported by the Occupational Information Network, which provides job-related data.

“Job opportunities will be best for landscape architects who have strong technical and communication skills and an in-depth knowledge of environmental codes and regulations,” stated BLS.

Increasing concern over environmental issues like global warming and the push for eco-friendly construction, including green rooftops that incorporate vegetation in the design, will likely “spur demand” for these types of services, BLS noted.

For more information, visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition, Landscape Architects, at: www.bls.gov/ooh/architecture-and-engineering/landscape-architects.htm. □



AS MARIJUANA LAWS READY TO ROLL OUT, QUESTIONS ROLL IN

Over the last four months, there has been significant fanfare from marijuana advocates in the District of Columbia and Maryland about the passage of legislation that would decriminalize marijuana possession. On March 31, District of Columbia Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) signed into law the “Simple Possession of Small Quantities of Marijuana Decriminalization Amendment Act of 2013,” which would decriminalize the possession of an ounce or less of marijuana in the District. Meanwhile, on April 14, Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley (D) signed into law the “Marijuana Control Act of 2014,” which would decriminalize the possession of 10 grams or less of marijuana in the state of Maryland. While it is true that both pieces of legislation will do much to improve the lives of minority youth who are disproportionately arrested for possession of small amounts of marijuana, both bills have their downside: neither gives a clear explanation of the difference between decriminalization and the legalization of marijuana.

By *Eric J. Jones*

In states such as Colorado and Washington, marijuana is now legal. There, marijuana is treated like alcohol instead of a narcotic. This means that an individual over the age of 21 has the ability to purchase limited amounts of the drug. While individuals aren’t allowed to smoke marijuana in public places such as parks, pot shops or in vehicles, they are able to purchase and possess up to 1 ounce of marijuana at any given time. As with alcohol, it is illegal for individuals under the age of 21 to possess or purchase marijuana in the state. In addition, a person is able to grow limited amounts of marijuana for personal use (the amount varies by state), as long as it is not grown for distribution. This is, however, different from the rules set in place under the new laws in the District and Maryland, which decriminalize marijuana.

In the District of Columbia, the new law, effective Jan. 1, 2015, would decriminalize possession of less than an ounce of marijuana, meaning that any individual caught with that amount would no longer be arrested and receive a criminal charge. Instead, that person would receive a civil penalty – a civil citation, a fine of \$25 and forfeiture of the marijuana. Simultaneously, it would remain a misdemeanor to be caught smoking marijuana in public, and those found doing so could face a fine of up to \$500. The exception would be the possession or smoking of medical marijuana – legal in the District – if the possessor is able to provide a prescription for the drug. In addition, because much of the land in the District is federally designated parkland, being caught by law enforcement agencies not under the auspices of the District government – such as the U.S.

Park Police or Secret Service – would still slap an individual with a criminal offense because it remains illegal to possess marijuana on federal property.

Meanwhile, in the state of Maryland, the new law goes into effect on Oct. 1 and decriminalizes possession of no more than 10 grams of marijuana. As in the District, in Maryland possession would no longer be considered a criminal offense, but instead would garner a civil penalty for the first two violations. However, unlike the District, any offense after the second in this state would continue to be a misdemeanor. Because of its proximity to the District, much of the land in that state is also under government jurisdiction and subject to patrolling by the U.S. Park Police. This again subjects individuals who are following state law to federal prosecution in the event that officers apprehend them on federal land or in the vicinity of federal land.

The problem with the much-publicized decriminalization of marijuana in these jurisdictions is that it gives individuals false hope because marijuana remains illegal. Those most affected don’t know the effective dates of the new laws and haven’t been educated on the difference between legalization and decriminalization. Let’s be clear: decriminalization simply changes the penalties for those found in possession of marijuana. Those found in possession of amounts above the decriminalization standards, or who are believed to be distributing the drug, will still face criminal charges and jail time. And there are still laws in place for the possession, consumption and distribution of marijuana in both the District and Maryland for those under the age of 21. This lack of clarity will ultimately have a negative impact on the same youth the laws are designed to protect. Young people’s lack of information and knowledge will only make them more carefree when it comes to the possession and use of marijuana. This will hurt the youth of the region in years to come, destroying the lives of many in the process. □

Eric J. Jones is the associate director of government affairs for ABC of Metro Washington and a member of the JOBS Coalition Board of Directors.



Eric J. Jones

MARIJUANA: SNEAKING IN THE BACK DOOR?

There are many hotbed issues in this 2014 election year: unemployment, education, homelessness, lack of affordable housing, mental health, gun control and the Affordable Care Act, to name a few. Throughout the District of Columbia and surrounding areas, there is one issue, however, with a potentially devastating impact on our youth and communities that has slipped under the radar: marijuana.

By Rev. Stephen E. Tucker

When it comes to the topic of marijuana, among the most controversial issues of this decade is how our legislators will deal with the legalization and/or decriminalization of the drug. An article by Fredrick Kunkle appearing in the April 2 issue of *The Washington Post* titled, “Md. pot decriminalization bill dies in House committee; task force to study issue further,” reported that legislation that would have legalized or decriminalized the use of marijuana in the state died in a committee of Maryland’s House of Delegates, only to be resurrected. Ultimately, Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley signed the marijuana decriminalization bill on April 14.

What we see here is danger “sneaking in the back door.” The cumulative negative impact of marijuana use far outweighs any nominal benefit to those needing the drug for medical use. It is a drug that does more harm than good, and our young people will be the casualties. According to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, marijuana use “poses considerable danger to the health and safety of the users themselves, their families and our communities.” As a member of the clergy for more than 30 years, I have seen up close the devastation showered upon entire families as a result of this drug. I have comforted parents and loved ones whose



sons have been shot and killed by those under the influence or in the drug wars. Just as people will kill over cocaine, crack and heroin deals, they will also kill over marijuana deals gone awry.

You say legalizing the drug would do away with this scenario? Not so. This country’s former drug czar, Gil Kerlikowske, even addressed the drug-crime connection in a 2013 speech at the Urban Institute when he said, “We have to acknowledge and come to grips with the links between crime and substance use. Drugs fuel much of the crime in the country.” Kerlikowske cited a research project that examined arrests by five participating cities or counties with local jails. That study showed that marijuana was the most commonly detected drug in these arrested males.

For those who may call the clergy out of step with the times, remember that we have witnessed the collateral damage of drugs, alcohol and gambling within the communities we live and serve. We have warned of the dangers of alcohol (tally up the alcohol-related deaths) and other drugs (look at the number of drug-related incarcerations). Now, we are here warning of the dangers of legalizing pot. Already, we have our first confirmed legalized marijuana-related death



in Colorado, a state leading the way in legal marijuana use. Widely-circulated reports noted marijuana intoxication as a contributing factor in the death of 19-year-old Levy Thamba, who fell from a hotel balcony after eating a legally purchased, marijuana-laced cookie.

Smoking tobacco and drinking are addictions that can introduce a person to smoking marijuana. From there, it can lead to heavier drinking, then to crack/cocaine use. Smoking crack can lead to heroin addiction, and eventually, overdose and death. The scenario may seem extreme to some, but it’s what I’ve witnessed repeatedly through my years in the ministry.

Marijuana use will impact addicted individuals’ employability. And perhaps, even worse, the drug will impact decision-making abilities in one’s personal life and time on the job.

Marijuana affects every user differently and

Continued on page 4

JOBS Coalition Pathways

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Sneaking In *Continued from page 3*

those effects can depend on the person, mood, personality, size and weight, amount of drug taken and whether it has been mixed with another substance. Equally important is the environment in which the drug is used. If marijuana is used in the workplace, it can affect the health and safety of the person taking it and any surrounding people, as well as adversely impact productivity. Studies have shown that weed impairs memory and alertness, issues that can be hazardous in the workplace, especially if someone is operating heavy machinery or driving a vehicle.

CEOs, company presidents, business owners and stockholders have all read the playbook on business and marijuana use. Legalization and

decriminalization will face its stiffest hurdles when it comes up against capitalism and the American economy.

So while everyone is at the front door talking about gun control, same-sex marriage, the Affordable Care Act and other issues, the marijuana issue is sneaking in the back door, dragging with it the havoc it will reap upon our youth and teens, our under-aged drinkers, our poor neighborhoods and the future of the District, the surrounding communities and our families. □

Rev. Stephen E. Tucker is the president of the JOBS Coalition and Jobs Partnership Greater Washington, and senior pastor of New Commandment Baptist Church in Bowie, Md.

JOBS COALITION MISSION STATEMENT

We will work together to develop a long-term strategy that creates an environment where aspiring District residents will have unprecedented opportunity to succeed. We strive to create a fair and open system, supported by government, industry, employers and the education and faith-based communities, which seeks to properly train today's apprentices while making an unparalleled commitment to educating students and others not yet in the workforce.

JOBS COALITION PROMISES

- Provide opportunities for District residents to secure gainful employment.
- Remove barriers that prevent meaningful employment.
- Provide educational and training opportunities for all District residents interested in pursuing careers in various industries and trades.
- Work toward the creation of a comprehensive, fair, and more open system of training and hiring the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.
- Ensure that the training and educational skills being taught are relevant to the job market of today and tomorrow.
- Engage elected and appointed officials to support legislation and maintain appropriate oversight to ensure gainful employment for District residents, including the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.

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