

Pot osmosis

Randy Stapilus/Ridenbaugh Press

One of the less-heralded effects of this month's election was to nearly surround Idaho with states different from it in a significant policy decision:

Almost all of Idaho's border states now have legalized marijuana, in one way or another. And that's going to put more pressure on Idaho on the subject.

Washington and one-state-over Colorado legalized in 2012. Oregon and one-state-over Alaska followed in 2014. This year, you can add California and Nevada to the list. (Arizona came close.) All of those allow "recreational" marijuana sales; Montana allows medicinal sales. Don't be surprised if New Mexico follows suit in 2018.

In Wyoming, an initiative proposal this year didn't make the ballot. But polling (from the University of Wyoming's Survey and Analysis Center) has shown growing support there toward legalization, for medicinal pot at least. (It showed support for medicinal legalization at 81 percent and rising, and recreational at 41 percent and rising.) Ballot efforts are likely to continue there, and as California and Oregon showed, past failures don't preclude eventual success.

So how will Idaho, whose officials at least, have been rigorously opposed to anything resembling legalization, respond to all this?

On the near-term level, and at least officially, there's no reason to think there'll be any change soon.

Police probably will be keeping a closer watch on vehicles from out of state. The Twin Falls Times News reported that police tracking the Highway 93 stretch from Twin Falls to Jackpot, Nevada, will not be deploying any new specific monitoring force at the border, but they will be watchful for any erratic driving they see in the area. That may be the general approach in Idaho's border areas.

But what about the effects of an outright ban in one state of what is legal in another?

Might there be some tendency on the part of out of staters to avoid Idaho – even those not carrying marijuana, but simply concerned about the potential hassle factor? (Even if the risk of that actually isn't very high, a reputation for it could have a big effect.) Might it be a negative in case of people considering moving? Might it, over time, start to have an economic impact? A whole lot of travel around Idaho, after all, is generated from states which have now, in whole or part, legalized.

What subtle effects might there be about the idea of a resident of those states crossing the line into Idaho?

There may also be an osmosis effect as Idahoans see their next-door neighbors sprouting new businesses and tax revenue, and without serious negative effects. This hasn't been the subject of a lot of news stories, since we're talking here about the absence of something, but it has been informally noted among the residents. And there have been some reports from the front. A Forbes article in August, for example, said "Two consequences that pot prohibitionists attribute to marijuana legalization - more underage consumption and more traffic fatalities - so far do not seem to be materializing in Colorado, which has allowed medical use since 2001 and recreational use since the end of 2012."

Official Idaho isn't likely to take much cognizance of any of that any time soon. But Idahoans around the state likely will, and that will have an effect over time.

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