

America is 'Going to Pot'



Rob Pue

This message may “date” me a little bit, but I wonder how many of you remember this: do you remember, back in the 1970s, watching the evening news when the local grocery store broke into the programming with a horse race? Yeah, I said a HORSE RACE.

It was called “*Let’s Go to the Races*” and it was about a minute-long clip of a horse race, and it was sponsored by the local grocery store. Here’s how it all worked... to encourage the viewers of the evening news to shop at their store, the local grocery would hand out free horse race tickets with every purchase. Then, each evening, during the local news broadcast, they would play a short clip of a horse race. If the number of “your” horse on your free ticket matched the winning horse in the race, you would win a big prize... anywhere from \$2 to \$500.

This wasn’t considered “gambling,” (something that was still “unseemly” to most people in those days) because, after all, the tickets were “free,” with every purchase at the local grocery store – and everybody has to buy groceries, so most every home would get at least one race ticket a week. The store benefited because, as people saw the excitement of the horse races on TV during the evening news each night, they were enticed to shop at THAT particular store – they had to buy groceries anyway, so why not have a chance at that \$500? The TV news station benefited because they knew that all those

grocery store shoppers were going to be SURE to tune in for "Let's Go to the Races" every night, so they would be watching THEIR channel's news broadcast, instead of one of the other TWO that were available in those days.

I'm not sure how long "Let's Go to the Races" continued. But I don't know anybody who ever won anything on it, and eventually it faded away... But was this just a mere advertising gimmick, or was it something a little more than that? You see, it wasn't long after that the citizens of our state voted for a constitutional amendment legalizing a state-run lottery and pari-mutual betting.

Soon we had dog-racing tracks throughout our state. That didn't catch on real well with folks, and the dog tracks went broke. But today you can go to any convenience store and find dozens of different ways to play the lottery – from scratch-off tickets (costing anywhere from \$1 to \$25 apiece) to any number of different "pick-your-own-numbers" lottery tickets.

And then it was only a few years later that the state negotiated with the Indian tribes, allowing them to build 22 casinos across Wisconsin. These casinos have continued to expand, as they rake in over \$1 billion a year. Most now feature luxury hotels attached to them, as well as bars and restaurants. It's estimated that casinos in Wisconsin make a net profit of 48%, while returning a mere 2% to the state.

By the way, that was one of the "perks" we were promised when casino gambling and the state lottery were legalized here – we were promised huge relief on our property tax bills. But the "lottery tax credit" represents just a few scant dollars for most homeowners – not even enough to go out and buy one of those more expensive lottery TICKETS! So much for THAT. SERIOUSLY, it really is no more than just a couple of dollars.

According to the website CitizensAgainstGambling.com, approximately 333,000 Wisconsin residents have a gambling

problem. The average debt of callers to the "Problem Gamblers' Hotline" is nearly \$47,000. The website also cites that 65% of compulsive gamblers commit crimes to finance their gambling and that 90% of pathological gamblers gambled with their paychecks or family savings. More than 60% borrow money from friends and family to avoid credit problems and 20% borrowed from "loan sharks." Women, children and older adults are among the highest risk for gambling addiction.

Knowing this, it's pretty sickening to see the casino buses pulling up regularly at retirement homes and assisted living centers – clearly, they're preying on the senior citizens who live there... lonely widows eager to get out and socialize with their friends, while also hoping for a big win. Most return home on the casino bus with nothing left.

Nowadays, most people think nothing of this. Just another normal part of life. In all, 48 states now permit some form of live gambling. Hawaii and Utah are the only two that don't. To make matters worse, ONLINE poker and casino games are now available to players in EVERY state.

I can't help but think back to how it all began – with a simple "advertising gimmick" promoted by something as innocent as your local grocery store. You see, "*Let's Go to the Races*" softened us up. If that had not been such a popular and "fun" thing for people – even just ordinary, everyday folks who would NEVER think of "gambling," then I doubt we would be seeing gambling as such a huge industry in our state today. Not to mention the rest of the country where gambling has ALSO increased.

We used to be a nation of innovation, creativity and industry. We used to MAKE things, PRODUCE things – things of value – here in America. Now one of our top industries is gambling, which produces nothing but profit for those who operate the games, promising huge jackpots, but handing out mere pennies instead... and leaving in its wake a lot of broke

and broken people, homes and families. It's very sad where this has all gone.

Fast forward to today. Recently, as I was out traveling on my distribution route for our newspaper, I couldn't help but notice that many of our smaller cities are in recession – tons of empty commercial buildings. Factories closed down. Businesses for sale or “going out of business” or already closed completely. Shopping malls are all but completely vacant. And yet the businesses that ARE in operation all have “Help Wanted” signs out. As I speak with business owners, they can't find the help they need. They all say the same thing: “Nobody wants to work anymore.”

Another thing I noticed is the HUGE increase in tattoo parlors, “vaping” shops, adult bookstores... and the latest craze seems to be stores that sell “CBD” products. Even stores that have nothing whatsoever to do with health or “wellness” products are now selling “CBD” as a sideline, to help bring in extra cash flow.

The one thing all THESE stores seem to have in common is the notable picture of the marijuana leaf. On just about every street you'll come across at least a couple of stores that sell CBD products and they all have that picture of the marijuana leaf. Is it just me, or are we now being indoctrinated with the imagery of the marijuana leaf, with stores everywhere selling CBD products – as a way to just get us “used” to the idea of pot – for “medicinal” purposes, of course!

Now to be clear, CBD is NOT marijuana. It is Cannabidiol; the second most active ingredient in cannabis. CBD is derived from the hemp plant – a “cousin” of the marijuana plant. It does not get a person “high” and has no intoxicating affects. The products are available in oils, creams, lotions, capsules, drinks and even in “gummy candy” form, and CBD is said to be beneficial for a myriad of health issues.

However, the ONLY real scientific studies on CBD that show any positive effects at all are for childhood epilepsy. Under a doctor's supervision, some studies have shown that CBD can help these children in some cases. But the marketers of CBD are making all kinds of outrageous claims for these products, saying they'll do everything from easing chronic pain, to helping with insomnia and anxiety and even curing cancer – but none of these claims have any scientific backing.

What's more, CBD products are very poorly regulated, so poorly, in fact, that some products may contain little if ANY CBD oil at all – and some have even been found to contain small amounts of THC – the ingredient in marijuana that gets you “high.”

But all this is really beside the point I'm trying to get across here. I believe what we're seeing now, with the huge increase in all the marijuana leaf imagery and what can only be described as a CBD “craze,” is a push for all-out legalization of recreational pot, nationwide. Of course, it will happen incrementally, but I don't think it's going to take long. Maybe at first it will just be made legal for “medicinal purposes.” But we know, just like all the other stuff we've seen come down the pike, this is only a stepping stone to the real goal, which is fully legalized recreational marijuana.

Eleven states have already legalized it completely. The rest of the country isn't far behind. Several others have made it legal for medical purposes only and other states have very loose, unenforced laws regarding the use of marijuana. Only in 8 states is it still fully illegal.

So I believe what we're seeing now is marijuana put on the fast-track toward being fully legalized, for any purpose at any time, anywhere; and in those states where it's still illegal to possess or use, the CBD industry is at its peak. It seems people can't get stoned fast enough. And while they

KNOW they're not going to get "high" off CBD... well, they can TRY...

But how has that worked in states where it's already been legalized for recreational use? Well, first of all, let's look at who the big WINNERS are in this: once again, like with gambling, it's the almighty State. In Colorado, for example, in 2018, legal pot sales were more than \$1.2 BILLION, with the state getting \$270 million in taxes. (Compare that to the mere \$45 million they received from all alcohol sales). Now, if you think legalizing pot in all 50 states is ever going to reduce our income or property taxes, take a look at how that worked out with the lottery.

What's more, even though there are age limits on legal recreational pot, it's still MUCH more accessible to kids in states where it's now been legalized. This is a problem because studies have shown that until somewhere in their mid-20s, a young person's brain is still in the developmental stages. Ingesting marijuana on a regular basis during these crucial formative years causes irreparable harm to the young mind – resulting in cases of life-long depression, anxiety and even schizophrenia later in life. Not to mention the younger a person begins using this drug, the more likely they are to become addicted.

In many areas where pot has been legalized, we're seeing "tent cities" pop up now – communities of homeless people. Some flock to these states and towns from other parts of the country simply BECAUSE they can purchase pot legally there. So they hang out with others in these "tent cities," and the tent cities grow. But others, having become hooked on the drug, have now become homeless – except for their "tent."

Marijuana-related traffic deaths rose 62% following the legalization of marijuana in Colorado. Not to mention the loss of productivity... when you're hooked on pot, you don't want to do much of anything, especially work. It's also a

“gateway” drug. Young people, in particular, having tried and enjoyed marijuana, will be much more likely to move on to cocaine, heroin and meth. And 68% of those who use marijuana report using it DAILY. Now many will say they can stop anytime they want... but DAILY use? Does that not sound like an addiction to you?

In my opinion, the last thing our country needs is another drug. The pharmaceutical industry has been reaping billions every year pushing a prescription drug for every possible purpose – MOST of which, I dare say, are totally unnecessary, and MOST of which have worse side effects than the malady they claim to cure. We also have a problem in this country with other illicit drugs. Should we make cocaine, heroin and meth legal too? Where will that get us? You legalize something, you get more of it. It’s a pretty basic concept.

So I’m just wondering – is it just me? Or do you think, also, that we have a problem in America with addiction? We have gambling addiction, porn addiction, alcohol addiction, prescription drug addiction, illegal drug addiction ... do we really need ONE MORE THING to victimize our children – and our most vulnerable adults with?

I just ask you to be aware and BEWARE: when you see those pot-leaf pictures on the video stores, the convenience stores, the drug stores and coffee shops, understand it’s just a process of NORMALIZING the image for you... getting you used to the idea. Soon, they’ll take the next step toward full legalization, as they have in other places. We don’t need more drugs. Most of us are already comfortably numb in our apathy and ignorance. Instead, let’s remember 1 Peter 5:8, *“Be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* Don’t let that be you.

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