

Cannabis legalization was rushed

EDITORIAL

The federal government's decision to legalize marijuana was without a doubt in my mind rushed.

This is not to say I disapprove of cannabis consumption. I see cannabis acceptable if used in moderation. I don't mind if residents smoke a blunt on the sidewalk or conduct hits from the bong in their parked car.

I'm all for legal cannabis. It allows consumers to obtain a safe product while the government can tax it heavily and redistribute those funds into infrastructure projects for roads, hospitals and schools. It's a better than buying the drug from the sketchy man in the alleyway and safer knowing that it won't be possibly laced with other dangerous narcotics like cocaine, methamphetamine or heroin. The problem I have with cannabis is how it is being enforced and distributed.

I was in the prairies when the government announced its intent to legalize the substance. When I interviewed provincial and municipal leaders, they all seemed perplexed on how the drug will be presented in the public.

I covered a council meeting in Alberta where a council debate went on for three hours. The mayor and council discussed specific land use, business license, smoking and minimum property bylaws looking at key words with a fine-tooth comb prior to introducing and implementing further amendments.

The councillors also wanted to hear from residents through surveys on where shops should be placed.

This was all because they wanted to do a private retail system where interested prospects can apply for a municipal and provincial license to operate a cannabis store.

In the prairies, alcohol is sold in retail stores and not through a government affiliate, like an LCBO.

The city I was covering was taking the lead in the region on cannabis enforcement while other surrounding municipalities wouldn't answer any questions wanting to wait how it would play it with their neighbours.

In Ontario, it was to be managed differently. Under the former Liberal regime, consumers would have to attend an Ontario Cannabis Stores (OCS) for their product. Until then, pot was to be sold in the LCBO. However, now that provincial governments have switched over with the Progressive Conservatives in charge, they've flipped the script.

The PCs, like those in the prairies want private vendors to sell the product and get rid of the idea of an OCS store.

The provincial also government provided rules on how it would be regulated.

Cannabis users can smoke and vape cannabis in private residences, sidewalks, parks, designated guest rooms in hotels and motels, residential vehicles and boats that are parked or anchored and in scientific research and testing facilities. They controlled how it would be consumed leaving out the work for municipalities.

Town of Caledon council however decided they wanted to ban smoking cannabis in parks amending the parks by law whereas cities like Markham have banned its consumption in the public.

The government also wants to hear from municipalities on whether their councils want to have a retail store in their community.

This begs the question of how should cannabis be regulated. Should we see it as alcohol or should we it like tobacco? Should municipal governments prohibit it's use in certain areas or is a public ban justified?

The federal government lifted prohibition on the drug but hasn't given any clear directive on how it should be managed. Each province and municipality were left to find a balance between making it widely available to cash in on the product yet safe from vulnerable people.

For some, this may be a good idea. It allows voters and governments to discuss what works best for consumers to enjoy pot legally, pushing out the black market while ensuring children and seniors are safe. For others, it may create a huge headache on how it should be enforced, which specific by laws need to be amended. Perhaps the federal government should have provided a standard of rules and regulations across the board for every municipality in each province. It would have made everything less time consuming.