

I have a self-described Yankee libertarian streak and believe, generally speaking, the less government intrusion in our private lives, the better. That is one reason I can appreciate the discussion around ending the prohibition of marijuana.

There remain, however, too many unanswered questions -- and Vermont has suffered several major financial and public policy setbacks in the last five years because legislation has been passed without complete due diligence. It's not enough to support an idea in concept -- the Legislature has an obligation to make sure things are done right and done well. It is far too important to get this right than to rush this through without a full understanding of the time-tested ramifications experienced by other states.

For example, in my opinion, the bill does not adequately address:

1. How law enforcement will measure impairment for highway safety.
2. How can we assure parents that the regulatory framework will, in fact, decrease access to marijuana for children?
3. How we will prevent the need for multimillion dollar expansions of our current smoking cessation programs; and
4. How we will measure and reduce impacts on overall public health.

In my opinion, this bill is as much about the money as it is about ending a failed prohibition, and this major policy shift should not be about money and commercialization. I therefore do not support this proposal at this time. There is still much more work to do to be sure we've answered every question and prevented predictable consequences. To date, four other states have legalized marijuana by referendum, with Vermont being the first to do so by the Legislature, and we are in the position to review the positive and negative effects on their states before we act. As the Governor of Colorado said in December of 2015, his advice to states looking to legalize marijuana is: "I'd wait a year or two and just see." I would offer that we take his advice because, at the end of the day, what's the hurry?