

EDITORIAL

Pause arrests for pot use

Legalization likely; disparities unfair

Under New York State law, possession of less than 2 ounces of marijuana in a public place is a Class B misdemeanor punishable by 3 months in jail. Public opinion in New York, though, is increasingly leaning toward legalizing possession, as well as the sale of marijuana for recreational use.

The trend appears inevitable, but if we don't want the time in transition to be utterly chaotic, jurisdictions should come to a common understanding on how to enforce the existing laws while the debate about changing them takes place.

New York's legalization of medical marijuana in 2014 went off without a hitch. A recent Quinnipiac poll found New Yorkers support legalization by a margin of nearly two to one. And many politicians in New York are riding along with the tide toward acceptance, arguing for full legalization soon, and decriminalization now. There is another compelling reason to act quickly on the state law while also exercising discretion on current enforcement.

An analysis of crime statistics shows a tremendous racial disparity in the prosecution and sentencing for minor marijuana charges while usage rates in the overall population show no difference. On Long Island, the rate of arrests of minorities for possession of marijuana is quadruple that of whites. The cars of minority drivers are more often stopped and searched by police than those of white people. Since their cars are more often searched, illegal drugs are more often found. In New York City, the rates are similarly skewed, even though they are generated



GETTY IMAGES / ETHAN MILLER

Polling finds support among New Yorkers for the legalization of pot.

more by searches of people on foot.

The State Legislature wraps up business in Albany next month, so it's unlikely there will be a change this year despite the growing pressure. And it's better governance policy that the issue gets debated during the campaigns for statewide office, as well as State Senate and Assembly, that will be decided in November.

Last week, the district attorneys of Manhattan and Brooklyn announced that they would no longer prosecute possession and smoking violations. Monday, Mayor Bill de Blasio instructed police to stop making arrests for smoking marijuana in public, telling them to instead issue summonses.

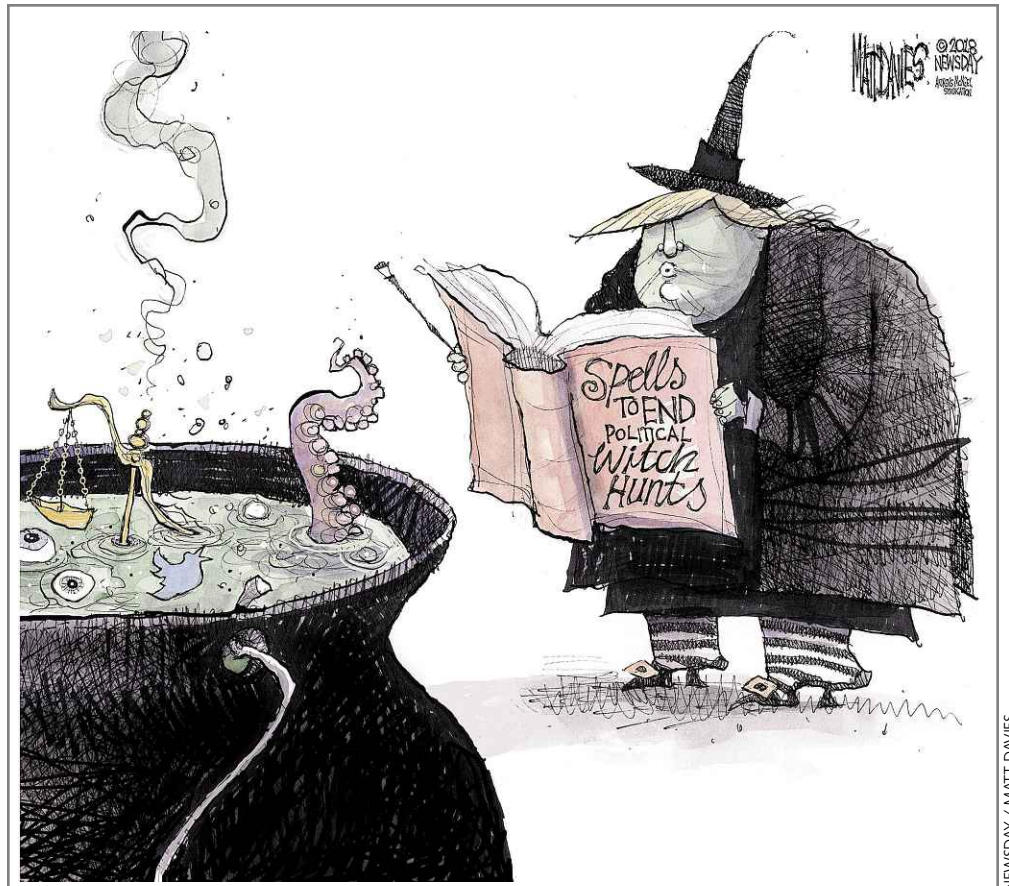
But the other three boroughs have not yet said they will follow Manhattan and Brooklyn on prosecutions. And the police commissioners of Nassau and Suffolk counties say they plan to keep arresting low-level marijuana offenders as long as the law remains unchanged.

Such uneven enforcement creates the potential for a person traveling across the metropolitan area to repeatedly cross in and out of areas where possessing a couple of joints is alternately criminal and acceptable. That makes a mockery of our laws and law enforcement.

The illegal sale of marijuana has to be prosecuted. So does driving under the influence of the drug, which should be treated the same as alcohol or other drugs. But arresting and prosecuting people for possession, an act which is expected to be legal soon, would serve little purpose even if we could enforce the laws without discriminatory results.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Disgusted over Trump aides

A small item caught my eye in the May 18, 1983, reprint of Newsday distributed to many subscribers on May 13. It is very relevant to what is happening with the Environmental Protection Agency.

On May 17, 1983, the Senate voted 97-0 to confirm the appointment of William Ruckelshaus to lead the EPA. The previous head of the EPA was forced to resign under pressure of several congressional investigations into allegations of mismanagement, political manipulation and sweetheart deals with polluters.

Scott Pruitt, the current EPA administrator, faces several investigations into allegations of ethical and other misconduct ["Environment under attack by EPA head," Letters, May 6]. Yet he still has the presidential seal of approval. I'm curious to

know what level of corruption it will take for this president to ask Pruitt to resign.

Alan Wolsky,
East Meadow

Why is anyone surprised about the comments made by White House aide Kelly Sadler that Sen. John McCain's opinion is not worth anything since he is dying anyhow?

We need only remind ourselves who is president. Candidate Donald Trump said McCain is not a hero because he got captured. He made no apology to McCain or the veterans who have served our nation, even those who were captured.

He mocked a physically disabled reporter and described how to sexually assault women. In a meeting with lawmakers, he ridiculed nations in Africa and elsewhere.

The problem in the White House is that we have a presi-

dent who has no moral compass. Do not be surprised about cruel, vulgar or shameless comments from any person in this administration. They simply follow the leader.

Paul Wenger,
Hicksville

Get rid of dams to let local rivers run

The \$2.5 million Suffolk County project to dredge aquatic plants from Canaan Lake, while understandably welcomed by nearby residents and anglers, sets a worrisome precedent for dealing with the hundreds of aging dams across Long Island ["Lake in North Patchogue drained to eliminate nonnative plants," News, May 10].

Many of our man-made lakes and ponds face similar problems, or soon will. Silt builds up over time; when sunlight reaches the bottom, plants grow. Eventually they