

Opinion: How State House dysfunction has stymied marijuana legalization



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It was supposed to be a win-win for all involved, a cause for a celebratory confetti shower. With public support exceeding 60%, the Legislature and the Murphy administration were to join hands and drag New Jersey into 21st century enlightenment by permitting adults to possess small amounts of marijuana for personal use without fear of the long arm of the law clamping down.

The future promised the creation of a new industry, entrepreneurs eager to invest, millions of dollars in tax revenue generated, and erasing the racially disproportionate rate of arrests and incarceration for possession.

Visions of a public bill-signing ceremony with congratulations and smiles all around, not to mention the distribution of souvenir pens, were about to become reality.

And it was all politically risk-free. Voters had granted landslide approval of an amendment to the Constitution to grant legal status to purchasing and the promise that users would soon be able to kick back, relax and "re up a joint.

Instead, the effort to establish rules and regulations and administer the program has deteriorated into an ongoing embarrassment, a public display of misunderstanding, miscommunication and disagreements indicative of a dysfunctional government.

The latest obstacle

For 2 1/2 months, disputes ov

The insights and instincts of the politically skilled are crucial to reconcile the irreconcilable, overcome the seemingly impossible, nudge the immovable and turn loss into gain.

A governor's office can be an exceedingly insular environment where sober perspective is often replaced by a magnified sense of self-importance. Occupying space at or near the levers of power can be intoxicating, especially for those who've not experienced anything quite like it before.

It is crucial that a few political graybeards be sprinkled throughout the top staff to explain the pitfalls of an inflated ego in interactions with legislators who, after all, hold the fate of the governor's agenda.

To be sure, legislators can be difficult, obstinate and unyielding at times, but responding with condescension and projecting an air of smug superiority are not very endearing qualities calculated to smooth over differences and achieve consensus.

The intricacies of policy development and scholarly debate are certainly valuable in efforts to build broad public support outside government, but it is the application of practical politics at its most fundamental that carries the policy over the finish line and into reality.

Purists may be offended by it, but realists understand it. The entire episode toward marijuana legalization would have benefited from the involvement of a few realists.

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