

Laughable, but not so funny

By Steve Mooneyham

Correspondent

I laugh every time I see the ad, not for the levity but for the irony. You will remember some years back when the push was made to legalize gambling in Mississippi, but the state Constitution prohibited gambling. So, the proponents of gambling did a neat little work around and called it “gaming.” Consequently, we do not have “gambling” in Mississippi, but we do have “gaming” (wink, wink). The thing that’s funny (ironic) to me is why, then, do ads for “gaming” have a mandated disclaimer in fine print at the bottom of the sign or at the end of the commercial that says, “If you have a gambling problem, call such-and-such number?” Why, we don’t have gambling in Mississippi, so how can one have a gambling problem? (Sarcasm intended!)



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Well, now we have those who are calling for the legalization of “medical marijuana.” On your ballot Nov. 3 will be two initiatives, 65 and 65A. Confused? Just wait until you read the wording! Both would legalize “medical marijuana” but – get this – both would also place such legalization in our state Constitution.

Initiative 65, the original effort, for which signatures were collected from around the state, is interesting. Here’s how:

– If it passes, it will take years and years to change it in

any way – if that’s even possible. Because Initiative 65 would be written into the state Constitution, our elected legislators will be powerless to amend or update it.

– It mandates that oversight be given to the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH). Also, it mandates that this agency set rules and collect and keep the fees without oversight from the Legislature. Initiative 65 mandates that *NOT. ONE. CENT.* of the proceeds collected are to go to the state’s General Fund. There will be nothing for schools, roads, bridges, nor any other public need in Mississippi. The obvious and unanswered question is, “Why?”

– Initiative 65 stipulates that no “dispensary” (pot shop) can be set up within 500 feet of a preexisting school, church, or licensed daycare center. Five hundred feet! That sounds like a long way! It’s not. Let me put it this way: that is approximately the distance between the northernmost and southernmost entrance gates of Vaught-Hemingway Stadium at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Davis Wade Stadium at Mississippi State University in Starkville, and M. M. Roberts Stadium at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. It is also about the distance I hit a six iron from 166 yards. The proximity of the pot shops to schools, churches, and daycare centers is bad enough but check out the next item:

– Your local zoning board cannot... *CAN NOT* ... prevent a dispensary from opening right across the street from your house. The constitutional amendment that would be created by Initiative 65 removes all local control over the pot shops.

– Even if Initiative 65 should pass, it is still a federal crime to possess marijuana, so here are some questions for consideration: Did you know this constitutional amendment would require a statewide tracking database of users? Will federal law enforcement agencies be able to monitor that database and arrest you for violating federal law?

The competing Initiative 65A basically states that the Legislature will make rules and regulations – but legalization will still be placed into the state's Constitution.

Many have noted how confusing this is: vote for this one and not for that one or vice versa. Don't be confused or let your emotions be played upon by those who call for "medical marijuana" legalization and hide behind hurting people to make their case. Look behind the curtain and see who is really pulling the levers.

Among those who are urging Mississippians to vote against the initiatives are former Governor Phil Bryant, current Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson (an ordained Mississippi Baptist minister), law enforcement agencies across the state, the leadership of the University of Mississippi Medical Center, and even the Mississippi State Department of Health – the very agency that would be saddled with this bad law and mandated to oversee this problem if it passes.

Make no mistake: this is not about "medical," but it is about "marijuana." The best answer is just to vote NO on both initiatives. It's bad law. It's bad for Mississippi. It's just not funny.

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