

McKibbin's Scribbles: Seeing the greys in the pot haze

By Mike McKibbin | The Citizen Telegram | Sept. 20, 2013

Back a few decades or so, I had a girlfriend tell me that I tended to see things in black or white, no greys. While I strongly disagreed with her that I was too closed-minded back then, now that I'm older, I'm starting to think she may have had a point.

I seem to see more and more greys, especially when it comes to some of the more important social issues of the day, the longer I live. Case in point, our recently rejected recreation center sales tax. I truly had a very hard time arriving at a decision about what was best for Rifle, its businesses and citizens. And truth be told, there is still a part of me that wonders if my vote against the tax will prove to be the right thing.

Now I find myself going back and forth on the next big issue before our new city council: What to do about recreational marijuana businesses that want to open in the city.

I'm writing this on Wednesday morning, and Wednesday night, city council was to meet in a one-hour workshop to start discussing this matter. Among the information the council was to consider included some recent history from City Attorney Jim Neu and a recommendation from Police Chief John Dyer. Both bring up the many important, complicated issues the council should consider: the fact Rifle has five medical marijuana businesses and two medical marijuana growing operations that will be the first to seek permits to open recreational marijuana businesses, if the city council decides to go in that direction; the fact that Rifle voters, by a slim margin of nine votes, did not favor Amendment 64; and studies that show the negative affects of marijuana use, among other information.

Dyer recommends the city not allow these businesses to operate in Rifle, which would seem to follow the will of Rifle voters. I was among those who voted against Amendment 64, mostly because I thought the state had done a poor job of regulating the medical marijuana businesses that proliferated up to that point.

Two things about this issue keep coming to mind, though. It bothers me that elected leaders in each community and county can go against the wishes of their constituents and take an opposite stance on recreational marijuana businesses. That would be like Rifle City Council allowing the businesses to operate in the city. I don't think that would set too well with some of the voters I know.

But if you look at the bigger picture, most voters in Colorado favored recreational marijuana use, since the amendment passed. Shouldn't that be the case statewide, instead of a hodge podge of towns and counties where it's legal to operate a marijuana business in some, but not others? Maybe, maybe not.

More greys.

The second thing is the worry that Rifle will lose as many as seven more existing businesses at a time when any and every small business – and every job they create – is crucial to our local economy. I'm not sure we want to shut the doors of any business, or keep new ones from opening in the city.

But are these the types of businesses Rifle wants? Again, by nine votes, it seems Rifle voters said no. So, am I seeing this as a black or white issue, as my old girlfriend might argue?

More importantly, will our city council members see it that way? Or will they see the grey issues, agree with points on both sides and try to work through the conflicts? Probably a little of both among each of the seven council members.

I just hope they look closely at all issues involved and make a decision that's best for Rifle, not one they personally favor. That's what we elect them to do, right?

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