

Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Senior Civics Columnist

Answering a Forum “Fan”...

“Steve: I am sure you have been asked, and I guess that you probably won’t answer, but surprise me. Who are you voting for in the presidential election? Then who do you think will win the presidential election? While I am at it, another iffy question. Do you think marijuana should be a legalized, TAXED crop? If you say no, why not?” – Rico

When I first began my columns in the Journal, I invited readers to submit topic ideas, or ask questions that I could develop into columns of public interest. I was also interested in *any* feedback, if only to see if my writing was having an impact, ideally by getting people to think and, more ideally, to get involved.

A few letters to the editor that commented on my columns were posted, and, sometimes, I even got to respond in a future column or letter. But, mostly, these print columns just go in one direction, and, as they are not posted online (where the forum would be a logical place for more comments and questions to appear), most of the questions I get asked on the forum have nothing to do with my columns at all, but on my comments on *other* articles and comments.

I try to answer as many as I can, as fully as I can. After all, my goal is to inform and clarify, even if the questions are irrelevant to the forum thread, as were the ones cited above (the thread followed that week’s editorial about the forum). There probably should be a free-form venue online where *any* question or subject can be brought up; most posted articles get little or no feedback, and articles or columns that *would* generate more (like mine) are often not posted. The forum *could* be more broad and robust on the one hand, and more focussed and accountable on the other, as I’ve said.

If you have been following the forum threads, you’d know that Rico and I have crossed swords numerous times on various issues and attitudes. But these questions were totally out of the blue and I, at first, hesitated to answer because, as someone pointed out, they had nothing to do with the editorial. But, as it was likely asked in sincerity, and it gives me an opportunity to make some important civic points, I answered, and have adapted it for this column.

I think I’ve stated before that I voted for Nader in ’96, ’00, and ’04. I still think he’s the only candidate saying what needs to be said on the critical issues, and who has the greatest credentials, and proof of actually saving more lives and making life better for more persons than any other modern American. (Seat belts, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, OSHA, etc.)

I’ve even considered not voting for Prez at all this year, as I believe the last two elections were stolen outright, by actions before, during, and after the voting, so I have to wonder whether our votes even matter any more, and whether the system is so corrupted and beholden to corporate powers that nobody can even be allowed to run as a major party nominee who hasn’t been cleared as not threatening the powers that *really* be. I most certainly won’t be working for any presidential candidate, or even donating; the whole process has already gone on far too long, I’m tired of it and all its pettiness, and I don’t think the results will make any real difference in what will happen in America and to most Americans. I will vote for local and state offices, even though, if we get the OCR scanners the county has opted for, I *still* can’t be sure my vote (or *yours*) will be counted right... or even counted at all.

But as New York will likely go overwhelmingly Democratic (meaning ALL Electoral College votes going to the Dem nominee), I will be able, should I so choose, to vote my conscience again for independent candidate Ralph Nader (and Matt Gonzales for VP), or Cynthia McKinney, if she gets the Green nod, though I’m no longer registered Green. So, a protest vote... or, like tens of millions, a protest “non-vote.”

As of today, I’d say the race is Obama’s to lose. Polls notwithstanding, in a head-to-head with Grumpy McCain – even after they throw the kitchen sink, the freezer, and the entire box of Ginsu knives at Barry – due to the economy, the war, Bush’s bad ratings, McCain’s age and inability to remember things or debate effectively, I think it will be a wipeout of landslide proportions. Yet whoever wins, the US will likely go on losing. The irony is that whoever takes office in January 2009 will envy Herbert Hoover for only having a GREAT Depression to deal with, rather than the Mother-of-All-Depressions coming our way!

Libertarians and I agree about the total moral, legal, political, economic, social, and *actual* failure of the so-called “War on Drugs,” which is really a “War against Certain Persons who use Certain Drugs.”

It has corrupted our justice system from top to bottom, making criminals out of recreational (or even medicinal) users. Too many prisoners incarcerated in the US are put away for such “victimless crimes” – at over 2 million, part of the largest prison population in the world, in total and per capita (at 1%). It has created multi-billion-dollar crime empires by jacking up drug prices from what would otherwise be like buying a beer, which leads to persons turning to crime to maintain an addiction. We should have understood all this from studying the era of alcohol Prohibition.

In 1998, I helped my brother in Florida run perhaps the first anti-drug-war campaign for Congress. We put up one of the most comprehensive websites on the issue, showing what all the research and stats proved... that the only sensible solution was to: decriminalize, or even legalize, soft drugs like marijuana; tax them and regulate their potency; limit availability to liquor stores or some similar controlled venue (but allow private growing for personal use), much as Amsterdam now does (a model that shows that fears of too-freely-available pot causing more use and social downfall are absurd); and to make hard drugs cheaply available from regulated sources, as needed (the actual number of such users is quite small, and studies show that more availability doesn’t cause usage to increase), so addicts don’t have to turn to crime, and gangsters can’t make fortunes.

This has basically been the platform of the Green and Libertarian parties for some time, and Nader ran on this in 2000, but it was barely reported. There’s no Constitutional grounds for any prohibition on drugs, any more than there was on alcohol... and they at least passed an amendment then, because it was understood that they had no inherent power to act without one.

Not only are we making ill persons who could benefit from medical marijuana suffer needlessly, but we are missing out on cultivation of a cash-crop that could be used for thousands of purposes (rope, plastics, fuel, medicines, protein supplements, lubricants, paper, clothing, feedstock, etc.) that would improve our economy and self-sufficiency (instead of our now importing hemp products from Canada, when our *own* farmers could be doing this), reclaim marginal acres, create much employment, generate taxes, reduce crime and prison populations, and return respect for the Constitution, the police, and the justice system.