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To the Editor:

On November 3rd, we will be faced with several choices at the ballot box, from electing our President to voting on a new State Flag. There is a lot at stake, and one measure under consideration is Initiative 65 (I65), which would allow for the sale of "Medical Marijuana." It is being promoted as a cure-all for ailments that don't respond to traditional medicine. If only it was that simple.

Initiative 65 is a trojan horse, designed by Big Marijuana to play upon sympathies – under the guise of providing a medical alternative to pain management. In reality, the larger effect would be to open the door to a loosely regulated set of laws, leading to the liberal dispensation of an illegal drug into our communities.

If you have ever had a loved one suffering from a horrible disease, you will move heaven and earth to get them relief and will try virtually anything to ease their discomfort. I get it. We just lost our Mother to an aggressive, painful cancer. And yes, we administered many prescribed controlled substances for pain and appetite, including legal THC to help her condition, to little avail. The point is, there are medicines available by prescription for these purposes, and if (medical) marijuana is to be added to the list of options, it should be under the same requirements for prescription dispensation - as with other controlled substances. If it's medicine, treat it like any other medicine.

When the Surgeon General and Medical Associations take very public stands against this form of legalization, we should all take notice. Of equal concern are the economic impacts. Regardless of how you feel about legalization, I65 would take away the public's right to say where and how weed could be sold. Even in states where marijuana is legal, cities are given the opportunity to opt-out. In this instance, Home Rule for locals would be overrun. Communities would be severely restricted in their ability to zone where pot shops could be located.

No product enjoys constitutional protection. Legislative action – not constitutional enshrinement - is where policies of this type should be determined – where changes could be made, if needed, after initial adoption and implementation. In addition, this proposal does not provide for the collection of taxes for things such as roads, bridges, and schools - measures already in place for other goods and services - including tobacco and alcohol. These are among the many reasons why groups like the Realtors Association and the Mississippi Municipal League stand in opposition.

The measure, as it appears on the ballot, can be confusing. So, the bottom line is that there are two options to vote against the measure. Check "AGAINST BOTH," and send a message that this is not the type of change we're looking for. Then check 65A, which provides that if the initiative were to pass, our communities could have some control over what, where, and when.

Don't kid yourself. Just look at the money behind the Initiative. Big Ganja is capitalizing upon heartbreak to mask the true motive for getting behind a "compassionate care cause." I65 represents a huge profit-motive by the industry, spending millions on signatures collection and soft-sell advertising. Don't fall for it, Dude. It may be time for medical marijuana in Mississippi, but Initiative 65 is not the way to go.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Billy Hewes".

Mayor Billy Hewes, City of Gulfport
President, Mississippi Municipal League