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Colorado Election: Impact
on Families and Youth**

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Invitation to Dialogue

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Colorado Election: Impact on Families and and Youth

– Cheryl Asmus

One goal of the Family and Youth Institute is to bring a balanced commentary to policy issues affecting families and youth in Colorado. This issue of the *Briefs* will discuss three amendments that were voted on in the November 2000 election.

We selected two scientists in drug and alcohol research, Fred Beauvais and Randall Swaim from the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University, to address Amendment 20: Medical Use of Marijuana. Both Randall Swaim and Fred Beauvais have been principal investigators of several National Institute of Health grants and have authored or co-authored many articles, book chapters and books addressing substance use. The Tri-Ethnic Center conducts research focusing on the epidemiology, etiology and prevention of substance abuse among youth.

Colorado State University Cooperative Extension's assistant director for 4-H youth development, Douglas Steele, was selected to address impacts facing families and youth around Amendment 22: Checks at Gun Shows. Douglas Steele is also interim program coordinator for shooting sports and natural resources. The *Briefs* editorial staff recognizes that there is some disagreement around the interpretation of the second Amendment, which states, "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free

State, the right of people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed." Some proponents of gun control interpret this language as providing only the right to join an organized militia for purposes of national defense.

Growth plans have different impacts for slow-growing rural communities and fast-growing communities. Andrew Seidl, the public policy specialist for Cooperative Extension and assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Colorado State University, contributed the article for the hotly-contested Amendment 24: Voter Approval of Growth. A full review of this amendment by Dr. Seidl is on the Web at: <http://dare.agsci.colostate.edu/extension/seidl24.pdf>. Even though the amendment was defeated, growth remains an important issue to Colorado citizens. Governor Bill Owens has announced a similar growth management plan to be considered by the legislature this year.

Though the authors of these articles do an exemplary job of remaining objective and unbiased, some issues have very little middle ground and personal opinions and beliefs are almost impossible to mask. However, we feel it is important for the Institute to bring to light some of the direct and indirect impacts legislation can have on families and youth. Ultimately, it is individuals' responsibility to become educated on the effects of policy and laws and to vote responsibly. We encourage your feedback.

– Cheryl Asmus, Ph.D., is coordinator of the Family and Youth Institute at Colorado State University.

Amendment 20: Medical Use of Marijuana (passed)

– *Randall Swaim and Fred Beauvais*

Passage of Amendment 20 has created both interest and concern among Colorado families. This amendment allows individuals with specific medical conditions and a signed statement from a physician to register with the State for permission to possess and use marijuana for medical purposes.

In January 1997, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy asked the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to undertake a scientific study of the medical use of marijuana. This study was requested in response to a number of state medical marijuana initiatives that had passed in recent years. The IOM report, released in March 1999, stated that the study team “found substantial consensus among experts in the relevant disciplines on the scientific evidence about potential medical uses of marijuana.”

Active ingredients in marijuana, cannabinoids, and more specifically THC, have been found to be effective in the treatment and management of symptoms associated with cancer, glaucoma, AIDS, multiple sclerosis and chronic pain. Marijuana may be effective for these conditions based on its ability to:

- alleviate nausea and vomiting, which often accompany anti-cancer and AIDS treatments,
- reduce inner eye pressure that occurs with glaucoma,
- stimulate appetite which can be helpful to patients with AIDS,
- reduce muscle spasms that occur with multiple sclerosis and other neurological conditions, and
- reduce chronic pain that can accompany certain medical conditions.

Some have argued that other legal medications are available for each of these conditions. However, the IOM report notes that for a num-

ber of individuals, traditional medications are not effective.

Several concerns have been raised about the potential negative outcomes of Amendment 20. First, will medical users of marijuana become addicted? There is some evidence from animal studies for the potential of marijuana dependence to develop, but addiction to marijuana in humans is rare. In comparison to other substances such as Valium, nicotine or cocaine, risk for addictive use is considerably lower and withdrawal symptoms from marijuana, if they do occur, are mild.

Second, will adoption of a state medical marijuana statute lead to increased use among the general population? The IOM study determined that there are “no convincing data to support this concern.” The report notes that if medical use of marijuana is as closely monitored as is use of medications with abuse potential such as codeine or morphine, abuse by the general population is not likely to occur.

Third, will claims for medical use of marijuana undermine anti-drug messages regarding the harm of marijuana and other illicit substances? Evidence for this claim is weakened by findings from California in 1996 following a statewide campaign that publicized the medical benefits of marijuana. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse indicated no change in attitudes of California youths about the harmfulness of marijuana, even though youth in other states evidenced a trend toward viewing marijuana as less dangerous. No evidence was found in California that the medical marijuana debate altered adolescents’ perceptions of the risk associated with marijuana use.

The findings presented here do not mean that families should cease efforts to teach their children about the harm of illicit drug use. Parents have been shown to be effective role models and influencers when it comes to their children’s attitudes and behaviors, including those to-

ward substance use. One important lesson Colorado families can teach their children is the clear distinction between medical use of any substance, including marijuana, and use of both prescribed and unprescribed substances for recreational use.

– *Randall Swaim, Ph.D., is a research scientist and Fred Beauvais, Ph.D., is a senior research scientist at the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University.*

Amendment 22: Background Checks at Gun Shows (passed)

– *Douglas L. Steele*

An overwhelming majority voted to make Colorado the first state to close the perceived gun show loophole by passing Amendment 22. Some say that this is only a moderate step in controlling gun violence, while others say it is an example of devaluing the second amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Current federal law requires gun dealers (people in the business of selling guns) to be licensed. Licensed gun dealers must request a background check from potential buyers and get approval prior to a gun sale. Other gun sellers (people who occasionally sell or exchange guns) are not required to be licensed, obtain a background check, or get approval prior to a sale. People may choose to buy guns at gun shows from either a licensed gun dealer or a non-licensed seller. Thus, the creation of the “gun show loophole.” Amendment 22 requires at least one designated licensed gun dealer to obtain background checks on behalf of non-licensed sellers at gun shows.

Proponents included the Colorado Coalition against Gun Violence, Sane Alternatives to the Firearms Epidemic (SAFE) and Americans for Gun Safety. Proponents believe that the amendment will reduce the number of guns purchased at gun shows by people who are prohibited from possessing guns, such as criminals and minors. The more stringent

record-keeping provisions will assist in prosecuting individuals who transfer guns illegally.

Opponents expressed concern about costs of implementation and the definition of gun show, which could include gun club meetings where guns are exchanged, an estate sale where 25 or more guns or sold, or a residence where three individuals trade guns. Some felt that this amendment infringes on the privacy of law-abiding buyers. Opponents included the Colorado State Shooting Association and the National Rifle Association (NRA).

The dialog on gun control will continue as Colorado and the nation struggle with issues of gun violence while respecting rights of those who enjoy hunting and shooting sports.

– Douglas L. Steele, Ph.D., is Colorado State University Cooperative Extension assistant director for 4-H Youth Development.

Amendment 24: Voter Approval of Growth (failed)

– Andrew Seidl

Growth is an increase in size. In this context, growth is an increase in population driven by relatively favorable economic conditions in Colorado. Growth does not imply an improvement in human welfare—that is development. Growth does not imply an increase in per capita consumption of natural resources, including land—that is sprawl.

Growth creates both opportunities and challenges for families and communities. Some of the benefits and costs of growth are easily quantified (e.g., miles driven, cost of community services) and some are not (e.g., cultural diversity, choice, air quality). Some are directly observed in the market place (e.g., jobs, income) and some are not (e.g., rural lifestyle, family dynamics, volunteerism).

Colorado is the fifth fastest growing state in the country. Six of the 10 fastest growing counties in the

United States are in Colorado. Strong local economic conditions and our abundant and unique natural resource base drive Colorado's remarkable population growth. *Money* magazine ranked Denver the fifth best city for doing business in 2000. Population growth in Colorado is driven by increases in high tech service jobs, second homes, telecommuters, and retirees.

Population growth can be associated with improvements in family and community welfare. Such improvements may include:

- greater cultural and demographic diversity,
- more and better employment opportunities,
- higher average income and wealth,
- better and more variety of public services (e.g., parks, schools, libraries, recreational facilities, roads, sewers, telecommunications, transportation, fire and police protection),
- better and more variety of private services (e.g., retail establishments, health care, religious and social organizations), and
- lower average tax burden.

Population growth can also be associated with a deterioration of a number of measures of family and community welfare and the natural resource base, including water, air and land. For example, population growth may result in more people driving on local roads, traffic congestion, accidents, road repair expenses and air pollution. If each person also drives more miles, or these measures increase by more than the rate of population increase, sprawling growth is likely the cause.

Sprawling growth can also directly influence human relationships at different levels. More time spent driving implies fewer hours for other pursuits including work, recreation, sleep, time with family, and volunteer activities. Children may spend more time in day care facilities, affecting family relationships. Parents may invest less time nurturing relationships with their neighbors and

community. People working in one community and living in another are less likely to volunteer as soccer coaches, library assistants, and mentors where they live. Engaged, vibrant communities are created and nurtured through the investment of time, skill, energy and money by their residents. Bedroom communities are less likely to contain features of healthy communities.

With informed growth, the good aspects can be maximized and the bad aspects minimized.

Growth that simply pays for itself should be considered neutral to new and current residents alike. Growth that more than compensates for itself should be encouraged, and growth that does not should be discouraged. That is, the tax burden each resident bears for providing a given level of services should not increase with population growth. When growth implies increases in the average affluence of residents, it could be hoped that the tax burden per resident would decrease for a given level of services or that more services could be provided for the same tax burden.

However, the level of taxes and services are not the only, or perhaps even the most important, implications of growth affecting families and communities affected by growth. In order to plan for informed growth, families must take into account the full costs and benefits of change in their communities. Increases in choice and opportunity must be weighed against increases in resource use, air pollution and time spent in automobiles. Community planning that accounts for such costs and benefits will embrace public values for natural amenities and human services and respect private property rights and values.

– Andrew Seidl, Ph.D., is assistant professor and Cooperative Extension economist in public policy in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Colorado State University.

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Invitation to dialogue

What issues and concerns would you like to see addressed?

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Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Family and Youth Institute staff.

**Coming next:
Gender Equity**