

AMERICAN OPINION

Is the US taking such attacks seriously?

We're barely a month out from the Colonial Pipeline hacking, perpetrated by the Russian-speaking hacking group DarkSide, which left thousands of Americans without gas, preventing many from accessing food or medicine. Not long after that was the attack on JBS, the world's largest meat supplier, which shut down multiple processing plants, perpetrated by Russian cybercriminal group REvil.

Two weeks ago, REvil hacked Kaseya, a U.S.-based software company, which affected 800 to 1,500 businesses. One of these businesses, Coop, a Swedish grocer, will take weeks to recover after the hacking shut down 800 of its physical storefronts. Coop paid \$70 million to appease the criminals. The ripples also affected Leonardtown, Md., as city administrators lost all access to their systems.

How has President Joe Biden addressed the problem? After the Colonial Pipeline attack, he declared an executive order, calling for collaboration between the public and private sectors to iron out digital defense issues — and we learned the hard way that it will take more than that to deal with this crisis. Then, Biden addressed the issue at a summit with Putin. The attacks have continued.

Most recently, Biden called Putin and "reiterated that the United States will take any necessary action to defend its people and its critical infrastructure in the face of this continuing challenge." When asked at a press conference if there would be consequences, Biden responded, "Yes."

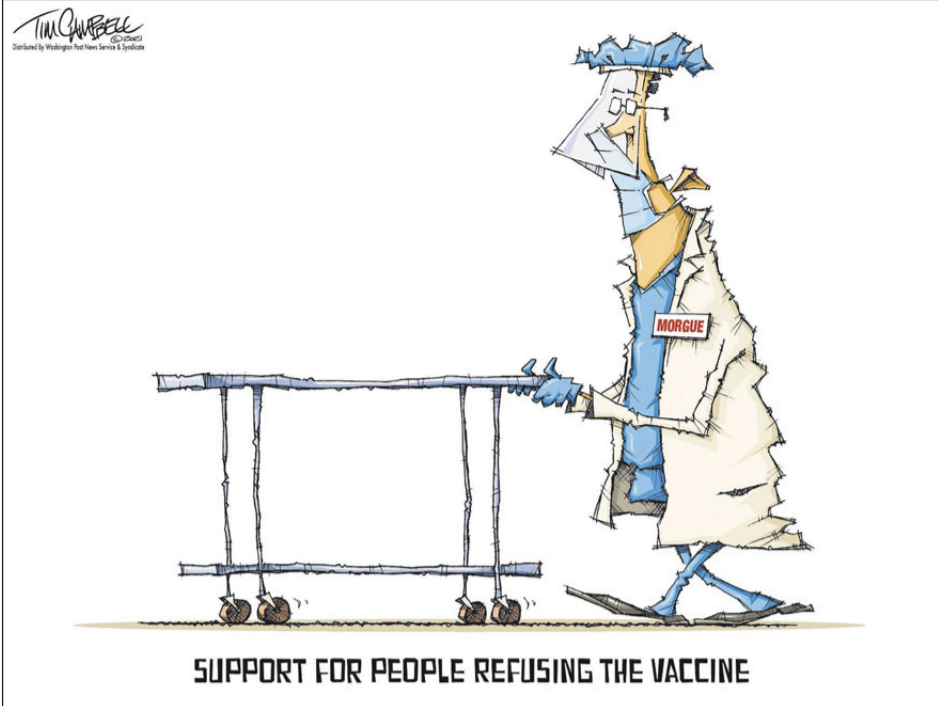
We needed to set some clear boundaries — some definite consequences that would get Vladimir Putin's attention — and, from what little we know, it looks like we might have succeeded in that. Once Biden called out Putin on the issue one-on-one, hacking giant REvil disappeared. Hacking collectives have an agenda. The cybersecurity company Cybereason reports that the ransomware these hackers are installing first scans a computer's installed languages for Russian, Ukrainian, Syrian Arabic and others that are native to Russian-allied countries. If the computer has one installed, the ransomware stops dead in its tracks.

In mid-June, cybersecurity became a principal topic of the summit between Biden and Putin. In a press conference, Biden said that he gave a list to Putin listing "16 specific entities; 16 defined as critical infrastructure under U.S. policy" which are "off-limits to attack." He followed this comment saying, "Of course, the principle is one thing. It has to be backed up by practice. Responsible countries need to take action against criminals who conduct ransomware activities on their territory."

We would add that responsible countries also take firm action when their citizens are endangered. We remember Biden saying in February, "I made it clear to President Putin, in a manner very different from my predecessor, that the days of the United States rolling over in the face of Russia's aggressive actions — interfering with our elections, cyberattacks, poisoning its citizens — are over."

While the process of shutting down REvil is still in the dark, this looks like a good example of Biden backing up his words. We provided consequences: either Putin wrangles the hackers harbored in Russia's borders or the U.S. takes swift, decisive actions to protect American assets. We hope that this signals a future of cooperation with Russia on the issue of cybercrime, as well as standing firm against Russia when their inaction results in American losses.

This American Opinion editorial is the opinion of the editorial board of the Baltimore Sun.



Legal weed is inevitable

By John M. Crisp
Tribune News Service

Consider this premise: For good or ill, the full legalization of marijuana in the United States for recreational purposes is inevitable.

How did we reach the point of inevitability? Gradually then suddenly. Colorado was the first state to allow recreational marijuana sales, beginning on Jan. 1, 2014. Officials anticipated annual sales of \$200 million and tax revenue of \$70 million. By 2017, sales had reached \$1.5 billion and Colorado's Department of Revenue reported tax income of \$250 million from pot sales.

Other states took note of the revenue, as well as the public will, and began to get on board. At present 18 states and Washington, D.C., have legalized recreational weed. In 2020 national sales reached \$20 billion.

And last week Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer joined Sens. Cory Booker and Ron Wyden in proposing legislation — the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act — that will decriminalize marijuana at the federal level. Some of the revenue produced by the act will be funneled back into the communities that have been most negatively affected by the so-called war on drugs.

So the present trend is clear, and the outlook suggests inevitability, as well. According to a recent Gallup poll, nearly 70 percent of all Americans support legalization. In the 18-29 age group, the level of support reaches nearly 80 percent.

Weed legalization finds less support among Republicans, but even there the figure hovers around 50 percent. Further, legalization embodies two elements that are attractive to two strains of Republicans: the ones that are fond of user tax revenue and the ones who profess libertarianism.

In short, it appears that Americans want pot to be legal, and it behooves both parties to take notice as they consider their political futures.

Of course, the inevitability of marijuana legalization does not mean that it's a wise or healthy move. But at least it would resolve two thorny paradoxes that we've tolerated for decades:

The first is the pesky fact that marijuana is still illegal in most states, while alcohol and tobacco — at least as dangerous and probably more so — are not, a contradiction

that seems impossible to rationalize.

The second paradox is the inconsistent consequences that we apply to marijuana offenders. A person of color can spend years in prison for dabbling in marijuana; celebrities such as Willie Nelson, Cheech and Chong, Woody Harrelson and Bill Maher have made pot smoking part of their public brand with no significant consequences. Weed legalization would resolve this glaring inequity.

So there's considerable logic to support the legalization of marijuana. Still, it's not a step we should take lightly. Indeed, I have misgivings.

I never consider this subject without thinking of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. In addition to his massive "War and Peace" and other grand novels, Tolstoy wrote a short essay in 1890 entitled "Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?"

To Tolstoy, "stupefaction" was any condition that interfered with the rigorous application of a person's conscience. His answer was total abstinence from all stupefactors, especially wine, beer, spirits, narcotics and tobacco. And he wasn't fond of other distractions from a focused moral purpose, such as "amusements" and "games."

With our culture already awash in stupefactors, including an abundance of drugs, legal and illegal, as well as our all-consuming, addictive distractions of social media, video games, food, video and sports, Tolstoy might wonder why we want to legalize one more. It's a good question.

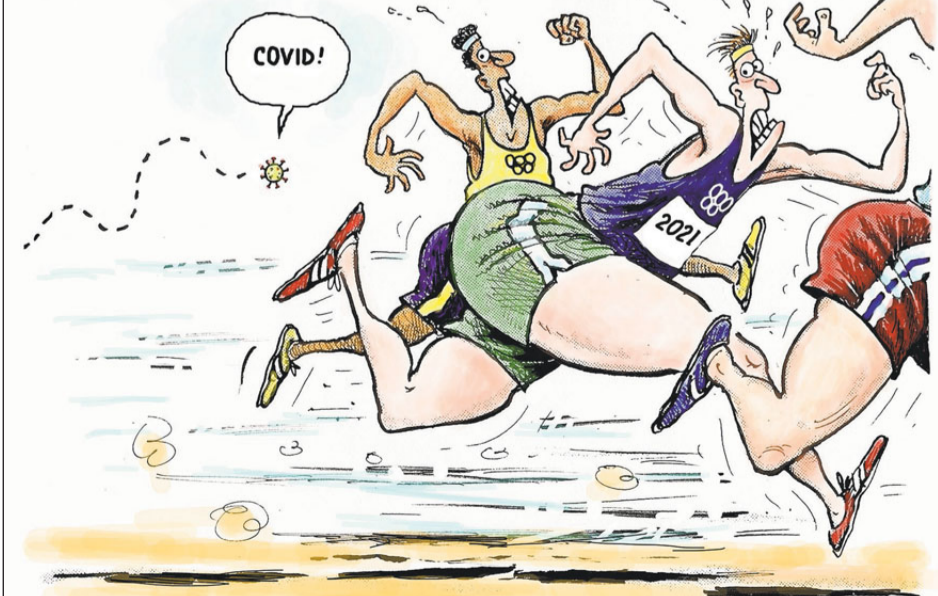
On the other hand, few of humankind's discoveries have caused more misery, ill health, disruption and violence than alcohol. Still, would we want to live all the time under the sober dictates of the severe, abstemious conscience that reigns in Tolstoy's ideal world? Well, that's another good question.

But both questions are moot. Americans don't have much appetite for self-denying prohibitions, and we are unlikely to continue to deny ourselves the pleasures and perils of pot. Since legalization is probably inevitable, the answer is moderation.

Unfortunately, moderation isn't our strong suit, either. Still, if alcohol, anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers haven't destroyed our country, marijuana is unlikely to do so, either.

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Olympic sprinters...



Mental distress fuels crime and extreme politics

Antisocial behavior has reached pandemic levels. Disruptive airline passengers are punching flight attendants. Thugs are attacking Asians, gays and other minority groups. Criminals have grown more brazen in bringing violence to the streets and into American politics as seen in the savage invasion of the Capitol on Jan. 6. Mental illness clearly underlies a lot of these disturbing trends, with the cracks



FROMA HARROP
National commentator

widening during the COVID-19 scourge. The pandemic deprived many of community, personal interaction and, for those on the edge of psychic breakdown, the in-person mental health services they relied on or need.

America's system for supporting good mental health has never been strong to begin with. The 2008 Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act did help expand coverage, but getting insurance to pay for treatment of serious psychiatric problems remains problematic.

And the need has risen. Last year, a third of American adults displayed symptoms of clinical anxiety or depression, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That was up from 11% in previous years.

Many of the Capitol insurrectionists had a history of mental illness and related social dysfunction. We made fun of several.

Eric Munchel of Nashville, Tennessee, who brought restraints police use on hands, legs and arms to the Capitol, was dubbed the "zip-tie guy." Actually, Munchel had been charged with assaulting a man and woman in 2013. Recently fired from his job at a bar, he entered the Capitol costumed in paramilitary gear, his mother at his side.

Sean McHugh of Auburn, California, who attacked Capitol police with chemical spray, had accused the officers of "protecting pedophiles." McHugh, it turns out, had done jail time for statutory rape of a 14-year-old girl.

When you look at some of the creeps who had been attacking Asians, you find something more than the usual racial animus. For example, the homeless man seen viscerously stomping on a 65-year-old woman of Filipino origin in New York is Black. He was on parole for having killed his mother in front of his 5-year-old sister.

You see madness in the faces of airline passengers throwing tantrums over demands that they wear masks. Videos show the protesters, usually women, making noisy and self-righteous stands for their right to break the rules. No matter how normally these disrupters dress, they radiate the look of the unhinged.

The mission here isn't to solve the dearth of psychiatric services for those barely hanging on. Others can better do that. Rather, it's to note that fragile psyches often lie beneath the growth of appalling behavior. And a society in the grips of anxiety ties is going to suffer more of it.

We now have an evil mix of social isolation and extremist rhetoric that some use to confer an air of respectability to their delusions. The social services that keep the mentally unbalanced in check need to be strengthened — and soon.

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