

Sunday, July 29, 2007

**Don't politicize medical marijuana.**

Multiple sclerosis patient obtains critical relief from marijuana. Walter Cronkite speaks plainly about the excessive costs of the drug wars. In a recent question and answer session, an audience member asked Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani about his views on medical marijuana. Predictably and sadly, Mr. Giuliani panned the idea, and proceeded to say how he was very experienced prosecuting marijuana, and how dangerous it is to have a medicine that is smoked. I doubt Mr. Giuliani is alone in this view among presidential candidates, and many other politicians join him. The time is beyond ripe to educate and persuade all political candidates, government officials, and everyone else to listen to sick people who benefit from medical marijuana, to listen to scientists' and researchers' findings on medical marijuana, to enable scientists and researchers to continue their research work (for instance, by permitting ongoing research with volunteers using sufficient supplies of marijuana that is legally distributed and of sufficient quality and potency), and to consider the source of the scientific studies and findings. While doctors continue administering and prescribing highly addictive and often dangerous drugs with harmful side effects -- including morphine, codeine, and a slew of other drugs -- politicians continue playing politics with marijuana, which is particularly benign by comparison, but which is very beneficial to sick people for such afflictions as multiple sclerosis, nausea and loss of appetite caused by chemotherapy, blindness caused by glaucoma, sleep apnea, orthopedic pain, and the list goes on. Unlike the rampant supply of synthetic medicines that lines pharmaceutical companies' pockets, marijuana (which can be homegrown with quality results, and, therefore, takes profits away from pharmaceutical companies) is natural, and should not be dismissed so quickly. Marijuana's medicinal benefits go beyond THC to its numerous other cannabinoids (see here and here). Why should sick people be at the mercy of scientists reinventing the medicinal wheel if mother nature already provides so many medicinal benefits with marijuana? Many anti-medical marijuana crusaders make a disingenuous argument about the absence of marijuana safety and effectiveness studies that would pass FDA muster. Harvard emeritus medical professor Lester Grinspoon retorts that such an assertion fails to acknowledge that millions of dollars are required to qualify a drug for approval by the FDA, which is the same FDA that is controlled by the anti-medical marijuana White House. Such money will not be available unless the government is willing to provide it; pharmaceutical companies certainly will not want to provide the money, in that marijuana needs no patent and will compete against pharmaceutical companies' products. Dr. Grinspoon points to the powerful anecdotal evidence about marijuana's effectiveness, and discusses the day when such groundbreaking medicines as penicillin were proven through anecdotal evidence. Mr. Giuliani expressed concerns about marijuana being smoked. In that regard, marijuana is also very effective when consumed in non-smoked form, including delicious hashish brownies and hashish cookies. This eliminates problems of secondhand smoke and having others put up with the funky smell of burning marijuana. In any event, in May 2006, a UCLA researcher found no lung cancer risk from smoking marijuana. Furthermore, a benefit of smoked marijuana is that the patient feels the immediate effects of the smoked medical marijuana and is thereby able to regulate how much is inhaled at any one time, once relief is felt. I have written repeatedly about medical marijuana, including here, here here, and here. Let the people, politicians, and government officials know the truth about medical marijuana. Jon Katz. ADDENDUM : Despite a recent claim of a connection between marijuana and psychosis, NORML policy analyst Paul Armentano says "if there were such a connection, we would have seen the negative effects they were warning about if they were significant." "Where is the explosion in cannabis-related mental illness? ... The paper says, 'You are right, we haven't seen it. Maybe it is a delayed reaction.'"

Posted by Jon Katz in Drugs at 00:00