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A New Wind A-Blowin' for Medical Marijuana?

[U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder](#) told reporters Wednesday that federal law-enforcement officials will no longer go after providers of marijuana that's used for medicinal purposes in the 13 states in which [medical marijuana](#) is legal unless that service is just a front for unlawful activities.

That announcement will no doubt be welcomed by those who advocate for pot's use in providing relief to people suffering from such diseases as [cancer](#), [AIDS](#) and [multiple sclerosis](#).

My state doesn't happen to be one of those that sanctions medical marijuana. But as a person with MS, I got to wondering whether pot would be worth my seeking out -- if it were legally available, that is.

Turns out the case for medical marijuana's alleviating MS symptoms [is not clear-cut](#). The National MS Society notes that, while marijuana may help reduce spasticity and control pain in people with MS, it may also have negative effects, on balance, for instance.

Moreover, the MS Society points out that it's hard to conduct a legitimate clinical trial testing marijuana's safety and efficacy because trial participants always know whether they've been given pot or placebo: People tend to notice when they've smoked something that makes them high, the society says, and that knowledge skews results.

I don't begrudge anyone their use of medical marijuana if their state says it's okay. But for my part, I'd just as soon have society shift its focus toward, say, making my mainstream MS drug more affordable. If I didn't have insurance I'd be paying more than \$30,000 a year for my daily injections.

That would sure buy a lot of pot. If buying pot were legal, that is.

By Jennifer Huget | March 20, 2009; 7:00 AM ET | [View or post comments](#)
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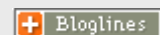
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Even at inflated black-market prices, \$30K/year would buy an astonishing amount of pot. Put it this way; it would be more than any one person could possibly smoke.

Posted by: fleeciewool | March 20, 2009 7:39 AM

Thankfully we are seeing some rational decisions regarding drug policy. Chasing after medical pot is a poor use of limited resources, and it needlessly puts well intentioned people into the criminal "justice" system. Enough already with the bush BS.

Posted by: adrienne_najjar | March 20, 2009 8:16 AM

The "Holder" rule is actually what DEA has been doing for the past few years. Actually look at the cases they have brought instead of the pothead hysteria. They are only going after the dopers that are selling pot willy-nilly out of their dope

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shops and not to "medical" patients with "medical" cards.

Posted by: [MikeL4](#) | March 20, 2009 8:43 AM

This "The Checkup" blog post on medical marijuana was promoted, on the Washington Post's March 20 on-line front page, as if it were something of news value.

Which it was, at the very top of Ms. Huget's post, with the news about the feds not prosecuting medical marijuana "providers" in 13 states.

But even the tiny news portion of the post is inadequate. By "providers" do Ms. Huget and Post editors mean prescribing physicians, dispensaries, or both?

And then Ms. Huget decides that since marijuana may not help her own private condition, there's little sense for "society"--as she calls medical marijuana activists--to make sure it is easily provided to those who want it for theirs.

Is this post by Ms. Huget a genuine news item, worthy of promotion on the Post's web front page--or is it actually an attack on medical marijuana, which threatens pharmaceutical "industry" profits?

Ever check out the retail price of one pill of Zofran, an anti-emetic commonly prescribed for chemotherapy patients? Thirty to 60 bucks apiece--a pill for which marijuana can substitute.

If marijuana were legal for medical care in all of the U.S., it could be cultivated at home by patients and/or their families for next to nothing.

For meaningful information on scientific research into the uses of marijuana in medical care, visit O'Shaughnessy's, a medical journal, at www.ccrmg.org/journal.html.

Posted by: [peartree](#) | March 20, 2009 8:48 AM

Medical marijuana is a huge scam. It just allows pot-heads to get their jollies.
HUGE SCAM!

Posted by: nosurprise2me | March 20, 2009 9:16 AM

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"Medical marijuana is a huge scam. It just allows pot-heads to get their jollies.
HUGE SCAM!"

There is a dispensary right across the street from my house. They don't require any medical diagnosis, only proof of adulthood. There is no upper limit that they will dispense. You can buy as much as you want, even a lethal amount, and they don't require that you buy it only for your own personal use, but instead encourage that you buy for friends as well. They make no bones about selling their product for any purpose other than 'getting your jollies', as the above poster puts it.

It's called a 'liquor store'.

So tell me, nosurprise2me. Even if your assertion were provably true, which it isn't, how is a medical marijuana dispensary worse than a liquor store?

Oh, by the way...they also sell cigarettes at the liquor store. They require only an ID for that.

Posted by: HarrisTheYounger | March 20, 2009 9:39 AM

I can't speak to the efficacy of marijuana in treating MS. MS has clear cut enough symptoms however, that I would think it would be easy enough to compensate for the placebo effect. Hell, if it fixes the symptoms you are trying to fix, what do you care if it's placebo or directly related to the THC?

Most importantly, wouldn't it be nice to be able to grow your medication at home, and not have to pay anything to anyone?

Posted by: spacemoose | March 20, 2009 9:51 AM

Good! Maybe now they could re-direct some resources in raiding and prosecuting companies that employ illegals.
Remember, a company that cannot pay its workers a decent living wage does not deserve to exist. Unless the owner's immediate and extended family members are

[Add by Google](#) work there for the same money.

[Marijuana Rehab Facility](#)

Posted by: [Vivis1](#) | March 20, 2009 9:52 AM

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www.AddictionRehabMalibu.com

[Stem Cell Treatment](#)

Breakthrough Treating MS & Other Diseases: Taking Patients Home

www.Medra.com/MS.html

taxes if Marijuana were decriminalized, then sign the petition:

[Vaporize Your Herb](#) marijuanalobby.org: Change we can engage in...

Why Vaporizing is Healthy, Cheaper and Much Better Tasting!

www.VaporOutlet.com

Posted by: [marijuanalobby](#) | March 20, 2009 9:58 AM

This is good judgment on the administration's part. I am a conservative at heart and do not necessarily agree with the majority of Eric Holder's decisions; but it is time that marijuana be de-criminalized. It is absurd that this benign plant matter is illegal. The war on marijuana has been a massive waste of money and has created a cottage illegal black market that robs the government of billions in possible tax revenue while at the same time costing U.S. taxpayer billions in the effort to curb an irresistible force. While today's leaders should take wisdom from previous generations; the absurdity of "reefer madness" has finally come to light. Are we somehow responsible enough to be trusted with ethyl alcohol, aspirin and a myriad of other manufactured chemicals but somehow it is OK to make it illegal to plant a seed, water it, feed it with nutrients and harvest its fruit?

Posted by: [civilrightist](#) | March 20, 2009 10:31 AM

"Medical marijuana is a huge scam. It just allows pot-heads to get their jollies. HUGE SCAM!"

And the regular pharmaceuticals aren't? It's slightly modified from it's black market counterpart and hyper-inflated for profit. The real scam is having a government telling us what we can and can't peacefully do with our minds and bodies. Your neurons are your property, your thoughts are your property. We have freedom of expression, but not the freedom to express it. Tobacco, for it's many annual deaths, goes barely touched by law, but is treated with all sorts of carcinogens before it's packaged; yet the stuff that just grows out of the ground

that doesn't kill anyone is off limits? The illegality that's based on what now is easily proven propaganda and contrived racial strife from a century ago is still in place? Welcome to the 21st century, this is absurd.

Posted by: Crucialitis | March 20, 2009 10:47 AM

Man, I dare anyone here to show me the "lethal" amount of marijuana. Geez.

By the way, where's the outrage over living across the street from an *actual* liquor store? I used to live above on in SF and it was loud.

Posted by: jstengarclark | March 20, 2009 10:59 AM

jstengarclark,

It was a parallel, he's on your side.

Posted by: Crucialitis | March 20, 2009 11:03 AM

Worth health column ever. The only saving grace is that it unintentionally, I presume, makes the opposite point from the one intended. Yes, please pay (or, rather, let your fellow insurance pool partners pay) a pharmaceutical company (basically a marketing organization with a hefty markup on someone else's research) an incredible \$30k a year rather than even consider pushing for more experimentation with a plant that would cost pennies per dose if legal. Don't like it? Too cowed to disagree with plainly irrational narcotics laws? Too unimaginative to consider that maybe Big Pharma doesn't have your best interests at heart? THEN DON'T SMOKE IT. But how about we stop throwing people in prison for growing and using a mildly narcotic plant? Is even a modicum of critical inquiry too much to expect from a self-professed health writer? Apparently so if you are the CNBC of health "journalism."

Posted by: benjaminanderson | March 20, 2009 11:57 AM

About the only way to get a lethal dose of marijuana is to get hit by the truck that is delivering it.

http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/library/mj_overdose.htm

Posted by: giff | March 20, 2009 12:11 PM

The fact that marijuana has "side effects" is no surprise. It just makes it like other drugs people use to alleviate the symptoms of MS and other diseases. And one can support the notion that the mainstream MS drug should be cheaper while also acknowledging the utility of marijuana for some MS sufferers. The goal should be that all effective treatments should be legal and affordable.

Posted by: LHG1 | March 20, 2009 12:22 PM

Excuse me, but have YOU ever tried marijuana to treat your pain, nausea?

Do you mean to suggest that you would actually accept the word of the "National MS society" over your own body's response? For your own well being?

...Its not like you're experimenting with dangerous pharmaceuticals that cause side effects and conflicts in other drugs. You know, the ones big pharma sells to your doctor with a vacation trip "seminar training" package?

...Its not like you're experimenting with narcotic pain relivers that can kill in the wrong dose. They hand those out like candy to pain sufferers of all types, and the risks are immense! Look at Rush Limbaugh - totally addicted to Oxycontin.

No. You'd simply be trying out mother nature's safe and natural pain relief, appetite bolstering, natural offering that millions of cancer, aids, and MS sufferers all over the world have turned to for successful results when the big pharma products that so many are stuck on fail.

Turn off the DVD of "Reefer Madness" and speak to patients who take marijuana under their doctor's supervision.

The info from patients is always better and more trustworthy than information from the government, or large medical associations and lobbying groups seeking money from government, and who have axes to grind.

I mean, really.

Posted by: onestring | March 20, 2009 1:18 PM

\$30,000

that comes to 12.4 grams of MMJ per day!

4x your average patient's needs...

But OMG.. a negative effect on balance!

Everything w/ MMJ out the window! We have a negative side effect!

Thank GOD you take 30k pills that have no side effects, right?

Posted by: celust | March 20, 2009 1:26 PM

Excuse me, but have YOU ever tried marijuana to treat your pain, nausea?

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No. You'd simply be trying out mother nature's offering that millions of cancer, aids, and MS sufferers all over the world have turned to for successfuil results.

Posted by: onestring | March 20, 2009 1:31 PM

re:Medical marijuana is a huge scam. It just allows pot-heads to get their jollies. HUGE SCAM!

As it stands right now, thanks to the current system, any junior high school kid can get weed...easily, because there is no controlling legal authority.Pot heads

get their jollies and always have, regardless of the suffering of cancer patients; legalize it and some control can be exercised, but tax free cheap and plentiful pot is ok too.

Posted by: bproulx45 | March 20, 2009 2:55 PM

I consider the nation's drug laws, especially when it comes to marijuana to be stupid and a waste of taxpayer money. We spend millions trying to eradicate a \$50 billion a year industry that we should be taxing.

However, the worst consequence of those laws is that they prevent drugs that are much more effective than marijuana from coming to market. There are experimental drugs that are 20,000 times more effective than THC. That translates into much smaller doses and much wider safety margins. Plus a lot of relief that people who need it cannot get.

Posted by: smf25 | March 20, 2009 3:34 PM

This new Holder policy is relatively sane and quite welcome. One can hope that at "higher" level of the issue it signals a movement away from political interference in medicine, which should bode well for MS patients and anyone else who benefits from marijuana or other non FDA-approved medicine. There are those who will continue to attempt to inflict their cruelty on medical-marijuana beneficiaries, but for now they can't count on help from the Justice Department.

Marijuana, like any other substance, produces a variety of effects in different people. Some hate it and some have had their lives saved by it. The same can be said of any number of SSRI and SNRI drugs of the last 20 years. But it has not, in itself, caused a fatality in the several thousand years of its use by humans. Pretty good track record there.

I won't count on the decriminalization of marijuana in our lifetimes. The current policy is too well entrenched and illogical to be repealed now (i.e. too many ideologues would have to admit that they were wrong). Maybe in 100 to 200 years, if the US still exists, it may be a enough of a non-issue that decriminalization will be safe enough for the political class to accept. Until then,

we'll have to put up with the utterly corrupt FDA and continue to regurgitate the "PC" lies about marijuana which were concocted in the 1930's. Such is life.

Posted by: bigbrother1 | March 20, 2009 3:44 PM

MikeL4: you don't know what you're talking about. The DEA HAS been raiding legitimate medical cannabis dispensaries acting legally under state law.

Posted by: newageblues | March 20, 2009 4:07 PM

Long overdue for sure. Real justice demands the wholesale expulsion of zealous prosecutors and local cops that have made careers railroading young people to jail on possession charges while congratulating themselves at happy hour day in and day out. But I'll take full legalization of marijuana for adults. The sooner the better.

Posted by: reflector | March 20, 2009 4:44 PM

Good move, and LONG overdue.

No, marijuana is NOT harmless, but it's side effects are so nominal as to be NEARLY harmless.

You let the alcohol-fiends have their drug, and the cigarette-fiends theirs, but point and laugh at those who like MJ?

You only prove you don't have the faintest clue what you're talking about nosurprise2me.

Legalize it, Regulate it, TAX IT.

Let the hippies pay for your Universal Health Care, they'd be happy to!

Posted by: FredEvil | March 20, 2009 5:42 PM

Both my wife and I have been through two bouts of cancer and there is no question about addressing issues like pain. I do have two points that I keep

thinking about.

1. It surely can't be that hard for a pharmaceutical company (or a government health agency) to identify those chemicals in pot that actually help with pain, etc. Put it in a pill and keep out all the other chemicals/toxins in pot itself.

2. On a business trip to Australia there was a news show dedicated to the problems health professionals are seeing with pot users. Head & neck cancers that traditionally develop when a person is in their 60s or older are showing up in abnormal numbers of pot users in their 30's. It's the large and direct relationship that was causing the concerns. The toughest to watch was the guy who lost half his tongue and was relearning to talk.

Considering the potential problems of all the chemicals in pot I'm far more supportive of extracting those chemicals needed and dumping the rest.

Posted by: KHMJr | March 20, 2009 11:35 PM

Maybe we should make alcohol illegal -- it is more harmful than pot -- We could do it with a US constitutional amendment -- yeah that's the ticket: Sorry folks but Marijuana will be legalized -- That train has left the station and will arrive, perhaps, within my lifetime -- you can not stop an idea whose time has come. For example in 2020 we celebrate the 19th Amendment's centennial. Once a good idea gets a grip it can't be stopped. Freedom is an idea that has a grip and will prevail.

Posted by: jimstaats4 | March 21, 2009 5:01 PM

As an MS patient diagnosed in 2004 at age 38, \$7K in debt over diagnosis and 2 years of Dr visits/outpatient steroid treatments, from the time of my diagnosis I learned how to manage my health using mairjuana instead of prescription meds.

For medical benefit it is best ingested/cooked w/food.

I am living proof medical marijuana works, unless I am in jail.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHpvnAmZuLc>

Posted by: RevRayGreen | March 21, 2009 7:28 PM

I am a registered Medical Marijuana Patient in the State of Colorado. I am disabled and on SSDI from childhood Polio. I will be in Colorado and New Mexico this summer to camp in the National Forests for several weeks in my RV.

In light of the Presidents new policy halting raids on medical marijuana dispensaries, I contacted the USFS Regional Offices in Albuquerque. In a series of emails with

Judith Yandoh
Southwestern Regional Office
Recreation Special Use Program
jyandoh@fs.fed.us

It was made clear that regardless of the President's Policy or States Medical Marijuana Laws for Their Citizens, the United States Forest Services Law Enforcement plans on giving tickets and making arrests throughout National Parks this summer.

IT IS STILL ILLEGAL was Ms Yandoh response.

Posted by: DenverTom | March 22, 2009 4:18 PM

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