

NEWS AND OPINION

Why Not Medical Marijuana?

New Jersey is taking the lead. Will we follow?

By Brendan Skwire

Posted Aug. 9, 2009 | Comments: 13 | [Add Comment](#)

Last week I bellied up in my local dive and bumped into "Barry," a pothead and occasional dealer who lives in my neighborhood.

"Dude, can I just tell you what a moron I am?" he said, as he waved a few bucks in the air trying to get the barmaid's attention. "Really. Even when I try to do the right thing, it just gets all messed up."

"Oh Jesus. What happened this time?" I replied. You have to understand, Barry's a piece of work: the guy can't help but step on his own feet.

"Oy." He leaned back in the stool, and almost toppled over. "Well.... I was on what you might call a 'Mission of Mercy' yesterday. A good friend of mine up in Germantown has some terrifying form of cancer. It's horrible: he's lost a lot of weight from all the chemo, the radiation is literally killing him from the inside out, you know how that stuff affects people. So every once in awhile, he gives me a call to replenish his weed. Usually an ounce."

The barmaid finally walked over and dropped off a couple of beers.

"And ya know, I don't make any profit when I hook him up," Barry went on. "The guy's sick. It'd be wrong to make money off some dude that's in dire straits like that." Funny how a pot dealer can grasp that, but the CEOs at Cigna, Aetna, and the rest can't.

"So anyway, he gives me a call late last week. We've got it all worked out so no one says anything on the phone. Long story short, I ended up driving over to his place this Saturday. Now, I always put the weed in that little storage compartment where I keep the spare tire, just in case the cops pull me over. Which reminds me, **you do know what to do in that situation, right?**"

"Spare me," I said. "You sent me that video like a dozen times!"

"Yeah, my short-term memory's a joke at this point. The point is, I get to my guy's place, and guess what? *There's a freakin' block party goin' on.* Kids, moms and dads, moonbounce in the street, the whole shebang. And now I have to get this big ol' bag of weed out of the trunk and into his house without anyone seeing it."

I could already see where this was going.

"So I go to the back of the car, and I start rooting around by the spare tire like I'm looking for something. I must look sketchy as hell, but I find the bag and shove it down the front of my pants. And that's when my guy sees me. So I turn to walk over...."

"And just as I pivot, I realize that not only has the little zip-lock thing come open, but the bag is upside down, and I'm getting a crotchful of kind buds. Seriously, I shake my leg, and nuggets fall out all over the street. So now I'm frozen in place, deer-in-the-headlights, dude's waiting for me, kids are nearby..."

I started laughing.

"Dude, it's not fuckin' funny!" Barry glared at me. "First of all, it's not like I'm gonna charge the guy for weed he's not getting, so I'm taking the hit. Second of all, if a cop showed up, what the hell am I gonna do with weed all up in my balls, and buds all over the street? *It's not mine officer, it just um... um...*"



Dangerous drug, or relief for the sick?
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Medical Marijuana Advances In N.J.

By dmac
Yesterday, the New Jersey Senate voted 22-16 to pass a bill legalizing the use of medical marijuana. Yes, after hearing testimony from sick people, 16 people managed to vote against the bill. Not surprising, of course. First, some background: A lot of people in California buy their weed legally (under state law) in medical dispensaries; [...]



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Writing Wrongs

By Daniel McQuade
Did you hear about the Houston woman arrested for allegedly smoking pot during jury selection for a marijuana case? How about the teenagers (also in Texas) alleged to have dug up a corpse so they could use the skull as a bong? Or the Kentucky man caught with two "large baggies" of marijuana after cops noticed him pumping gas into an imaginary vehicle? These are recent, true stories--but they're also the prevailing images of drug users in the news media. Most people don't use illegal drugs. In 2005 the National Center for Health Statistics reported only 8.1 percent of the population had used an illegal drug within the past month. And most people who don't use illegal drugs don't know illegal drug users. They aren't aware of the local lawyer who relaxes with marijuana on weekends, the student who occasionally uses amphetamines to study, or the chipper who uses heroin recreationally. Drugs are dangerous. Drugs ruin people's lives. Drugs can kill. But that doesn't mean they always do. The truth is, most people who use drugs--both legal and illegal--do so responsibly and without any noticeable detrimental effect. Drug policy analyst Mark Kleiman of UCLA wrote last year in *The American Interest*: "Most drug use is..."



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Drug Roar

By Daniel McQuade
Search "salvia" on YouTube and you'll find a ton of videos of teenagers acting incredibly stupid. One ponytailed redhead says it feels like her mouth is going to fall off, as her friends laugh at her; a kid can't stop laughing while staring at his hands; another girl has a big smile as she says, "This is weird." The videos are purportedly of people using salvia divinorum, a psychoactive plant that's unscheduled in the United States--meaning it's currently legal without restriction in most states. Indigenous populations in Mexico have used salvia divinorum (Latin for "sage of the seers") for centuries in shamanic medicine. Salvia use has grown in popularity in recent years partly as word spread on Internet messageboards. Naturally, the law stepped in. Several states including Delaware have already placed salvia in Schedule I, the class supposedly restricted to drugs with no medical value and a high potential for abuse. A North Dakota man recently became the first person in the U.S. ever arrested for salvia possession. Media reports have jumped on the story with a nice dose of fearmongering. NBC's Bay Area-affiliate incorrectly described the drug as "potlike." An Associated Press story wondered if it was "the next marijuana." The drug isn't...



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Riiiiight.

"Third, weed *itches* and the resin gets all sticky. The ride home? NOT COMFORTABLE."

I put my head in my hand. "Barry," I said, stifling more laughter, "I'm sorry, but you ARE a moron."

But it got me thinking.

Barry may be a bit of a clown, but he's doing a good thing. Although there's some vestigial controversy, there is no doubt in my mind (or the minds of thousands of others) that marijuana has real medical benefits. It helps allay the nausea that accompanies chemo-therapy, the wasting syndrome associated with AIDS, and other illnesses. It helps relieve pressure in the eyes of people affected with glaucoma, and helps soothe chronic pain. And these facts have been recognized by [thirteen states](#), with [New Jersey a strong candidate for number 14](#).

But here in Pennsylvania, my friend Barry the Pot-Dealing Samaritan is [risking his freedom \(PDF\)](#) to provide a sick person with the medicine he needs to fight cancer. Prison time. Fines. A criminal record that would follow him for his entire life.

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Drug Roar

By Daniel McQuade

For those who want complete reform of American drug policy, this week's primary election doesn't offer much hope.

President Nixon began the modern-day war on drugs in 1969; almost 40 years later all the presidential candidates-- besides, of course, Ron Paul--enthusiastically support it. What if all the candidates for president in 2044 were to favor staying in Iraq indefinitely? Both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have far superior drug policy plans than Republican nominee John McCain, who claimed to not even know that many federal raids on state-approved medical marijuana patients have taken place. Not to mention his wife Cindy is chair of one of the nation's largest Anheuser-Busch distributors, making McCain unlikely to support any marijuana decriminalization efforts just to prevent competition. Both Democratic candidates are preferable to McCain, but neither is the reformer this nation's drug policy needs. They both favor ending the mandatory minimum sentencing disparity, which until recently treated 100 grams of powder cocaine the same as one gram of crack. (Currently it's 20:1.) Both have vowed to stop the federal DEA raids McCain didn't know about. (But in a recent interview Clinton simply said she didn't think it was a "good use of law enforcement resources"...

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COMMENTS

Comments 1 - 13 of 13

1. Amy said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 10:37AM

"Medical Marijuana law:yes. This is a no-brainer. If you've ever seen a terminally ill patient waste away (my dad was 6'1" and 135 poounds), you'd pretty much do anything to help them maintain their appetite and relax.

Pileggi - post his home address so I can find out if his family has access to emergency help like police, paramedics and firefighters, libraries, or a staffed park. This guy is a TERRORIST. An economic crisis is a Homeland Security issue (see WW II) and to play games with us is criminal. Where's a US Attorney when you need 'em?"

2. d. buskirk said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 10:38AM

"This issue is so frustrating to discuss because it defies all rational argument. Doctors can prescribe morphine but not marijuana? Even my square parents (in their 80's) have gotten on board the legalization train at this point. Makes one wonder if it is kept illegal because the prison industry needs bodies to fill their jails..."

3. brendancalling said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 11:01AM

"@amy: there are two addresses in chester county for dominic pileggi. one in chester itself, one in chadds ford. not sure which is which."

4. Izzy zaidman said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 11:35AM

"I say we just dub him Barry Weedballs and call it a day.

Another highly amusing read by BF Skwire. Of course I, and anyone with a halfway rational mind would instantly agree that medical pot ought to be allowed in general principal. Medical is medical after all right?

However I'm afraid that some sympathetic critics might say that your friend Barry is not a doctor and by a certain stretch of logic, taking the law into his own hands. Which from a legal perspective, is usually frowned upon. Those same sympathetic critics might say that he and his client ought to fight to change the law rather than breaking it.

I am not one of those critics. My truth is clear. It is patently absurd for any government, especially our Federal government to pass laws banning plants that grow naturally out of god's green earth. Countless billions on enforcement and the incarceration of non-violent offenders... Double Absurd. Weed ought to be legal PERIOD. Not just for cancer victims and Barry."

5. brendancalling said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 11:42AM

"barry weedballs makes me think of Freeball."

6. Storm Crow said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 01:28PM

"I would like to invite all of you to run a search on "Granny Storm Crow's list- July 2009". The list is a short introduction followed by hundreds of links to medical cannabis studies and articles. After you have read my list, you will be outraged that cannabis is not freely available to everyone!

And blessings on you for your compassion, Barry- weedy balls and all!"

7. vision sf said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 01:55PM

"excellent read b~ thanx for the wonderful way you make a point and entertain! as a californian i see the whole juxtaposition of fed's vs. medical going on all the time. when my cousin had stage 3 breast cancer medical marijuana helped save her. she just couldn't eat during chemo and keep

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Fresh Baked

By Daniel McQuade

In 1972 President Nixon appointed former Pennsylvania governor Raymond Philip Shafer, a Republican, to chair a commission studying marijuana usage. The commission came to a stunning conclusion: Mariju...

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anything down without it....and chemo when on for months! thanx to her prescription and her local medical marijuana club she got through it that much easier. as if anything about cancer is easy :[

props to barry for doing a good thing in a bad situation--more people should have the balls (sticky as they may be) to help out a friend in need as he does. i'm just glad he didn't get busted :] can i send him a box of those ziplocks with the easy-to-close-zipper?"

8. Phillygrl said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 03:46PM

"Hahahaha."



9. frankdawg said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 08:13PM

"Barry should buy one of those hollow canes people sometimes fill with booze. He could put the baggy in the cane & the cane in the trunk. If stopped he claims he found the cane just that morning & tossed it in his trunk to see if he could find the actual owner."



OTOH at some point the whole stupid war on some people who use some drugs has got to stop. How do we make that happen when we can't even have a civil conversation about health care?"

10. evil is evil said... on Aug 10, 2009 at 09:53PM

"Is there anyone besides me and a lot of foreigners that think that the us gov't has gone institutionally insane?"



Oh single payer is terrible, but 180 billion dollars a year for two unwinnable wars is A ok.

The congress should be strung up for trying to buy 8 airplanes, when the military has a Gulfstream or better for every single admiral or general, somewhere in the neighborhood of 500 damn private planes for their sole use.

That almost all of congress and senate are for sale to the highest bidder. There actually is a site dedicated to showing how much in bribes they took from whom that have been officially reported

. The site's numbers don't show the correct figures, remember the congressman who commandeered a plane to rescue somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000 in cold cash from his freezer during the Katrina disaster. I mean here is guy too stupid to give AIG the cash to stash in Switzerland for him.

A senator from Illinois who BOUGHT the position and is still in the Senate.

"

11. Anthony Marino said... on Aug 11, 2009 at 11:11AM

"It's obvious, no drug company wants a chemical thats easily grown and is 100% effective treating patients with just a phone call to the local dealer. So watch how you vote...the government now a days is an opportunist. Sin tax? Ciggerates, beer. Need I say more? Enjoy the weed, and dont dont let the government off that easy with all the pain and heartache they've forced upon us over the years making an harmless drug such as marijuana a crime. Grow your own, keep it away from children and help out a friend whos in need....A friend with weed, is a friend in deed."



12. Anonymous said... on Aug 12, 2009 at 08:10AM

"The pharmaceutical companies profit off of pain, sickness and death. To all who oppose legalization, which do you think the big companies are going to go with: Legalize marijuana...less medicine, less doctor visits, patients getting better, OR...keep it illegal..more medicine, medicine to deal with the side effects brought on by the medicine, many more doctor visits, patients getting sicker and sicker. To the opposers, where in that situation do you see the most money being made? There are billions of dollars at stake, only to be found in continued dependance on man-made chemicals, not in natural ways to get better."



13. j davis said... on Oct 22, 2009 at 06:12PM

"I am now in my 60's and honestly believe that the US will not legalize cannabis in my lifetime which is a real shame. Not only should it be legal for medicinal purposes but also for recreational use. I get so tired of the fake 'morality' of the US government which thinks nothing of giving an 18 year old a weapon and sending him overseas to slaughter human beings but somehow sees cannabis use as 'evil.'"



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