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Time to reach 21st century

Stephen Goldstein | Columnist
 August 15, 2008

By Stephen L. Goldstein

In spite of the fact that Florida is on the ultra-regressive side of every social issue — abortion, same sex-marriage, adoption by gays and lesbians, for example — I won't stop trying to enlighten our indigenous nincompoops.

We all have a vested interest in moving into the 21st century.

That said, it's high time for our Legislature to legalize the use of marijuana for medical purposes.



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4. Three different U.S. government-funded studies have shown that marijuana may have medical value.

5. Some of the symptoms and conditions that marijuana may mitigate: Alzheimer's, anorexia, AIDS, arthritis, cachexia, cancer, Crohn's, epilepsy, glaucoma, HIV, migraine, multiple sclerosis, nausea, pain, spasticity, and wasting syndrome.

6. As reported in the journal *Brain*, researchers at London's Institute of Neurology reported that "cannabis may . . . slow down the neurodegenerative processes that ultimately lead to chronic disability in multiple sclerosis and probably other diseases."

7. In 1997, *Consumer Reports* magazine concluded that "for patients with advanced AIDS and terminal cancer, the apparent benefits some derive from smoking marijuana outweigh any substantiated or even suspected risks."

8. Groups ranging from the American Cancer Society to Kaiser Permanente support

Twelve states have already done so. Two states have passed laws favorable to medical marijuana, though short of legalizing it.

The pros and cons in the medical marijuana debate are laid out at www.procon.org, a highly informative web site.

Here are some of the facts and opinions you'll find there that, I believe, should make any rational human being support legalization — even a Floridian:

1. Marijuana was used as medicine in the U.S. until 1937.
2. In the opinion of Lester Grinspoon, M.D., Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, marijuana "is extraordinarily safe — safer than most medicines prescribed every day. If marijuana were a new discovery rather than a well-known substance carrying cultural and political baggage, it would be hailed as a wonder drug."
3. Since 1975, more than 70 percent of Americans have "said" that medical marijuana should be legalized.

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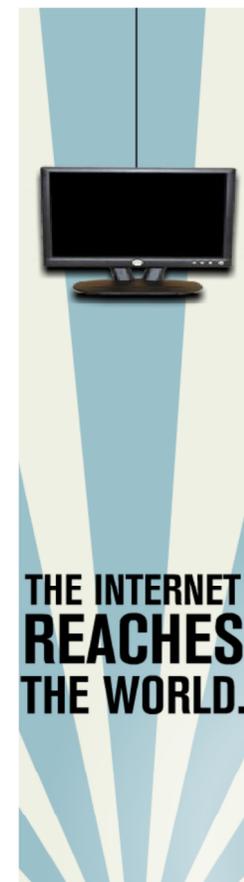
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access to or research on medical marijuana, as does the New England Journal of Medicine.

9. Perhaps, U.S. Senior District Judge John L. Kane, Jr. (Colorado) made the best case in a 2002 op-ed, when he wrote "that tobacco is legal and, at 430,000 deaths per year, is the leading cause of substance-abuse deaths; that alcohol is legal and 11,600 die from it each year; that adverse reactions to legal prescription drugs cause 32,000 fatalities a year . . . that 7,600 people die each year from taking anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin. . . . [But] the total number of deaths caused by marijuana is zero."

After getting the dope on pot, we look like dopes for continuing to criminalize something that helps sick people.

For once, can't Florida do the right thing?

Stephen L. Goldstein duels the issues with retired Editorial Page Editor Kingsley Guy on alternate Fridays. E-mail him at trendsman@aol.com.

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