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Marijuana: It's not just for fun

Sarah Steimer

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Medical marijuana is becoming more accepted in the United States - and may be coming to a state near you. On Oct. 19, the U.S. Justice Department wrote in a memo that prosecuting people who sell or use medical marijuana within state laws was no longer at the top of its priority list. The department said it wants to use its resources as effectively as possible, and chasing after those involved with the drug does not follow those guidelines. The memo went to federal prosecutors in the 14 states that allow the use of medical marijuana. Ohio is not one of those 14 states, but it may be on its way.

A medical marijuana bill is to be introduced at the beginning of 2010, sponsored by state Representative Ken Yuko, said Cher Neuffer, treasurer of the North Ohio chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

Neuffer said a medical marijuana bill has been introduced twice so far without much luck, but she noted, "How many times did it take to pass the gambling laws?" The answer: three.

Kate Lyman, Yuko's legislative aide, said right now they're using the bill State Senator Tom Roberts introduced - Senate Bill 343 - in 2008 as the basis for the new bill.

"We're tweaking it right now," Lyman said. "We're working with interested parties to make it stronger."

Ohio's close neighbor, Michigan, is a newcomer to the medical marijuana scene. Neuffer said the reason this fellow Midwestern state was able to do so was because the state used an initiative, meaning the citizens voted on the issue. It costs a lot of money to do this, Neuffer explained. She said the campaign and signature-gathering to gain enough support to put medical marijuana on the ballot is costly.

If they could, though, the issue would have a good chance of passing. A 2009 University of Cincinnati poll found 73 percent of Ohioans generally favor the concept of medical marijuana. Instead, Ohio lawmakers will decide.

"Our constituents need to contact their representatives and tell them that's what they want," Neuffer said. The bill has a chance of passing in the Democratic-majority Ohio House of Representatives, she said, but not in the Republican Senate.

Chris Wallis, president of Kent State Students for a Sensible Drug Policy, said he thinks the U.S. Justice Department's decision is a "step in the right direction" for getting other states to reconsider their positions on medical marijuana.

"I think what really will push that through (in Ohio) is Pennsylvania getting medical marijuana to pass," Wallis said, speaking of one of Ohio's other border states. "Michigan has it. The states will see the effects."

Wallis said he had a friend with a stomach condition who was waiting to move to Michigan to legally medicate himself with cannabis. In this state his friend is considered a criminal. In Michigan, he would be a patient.

Another reason the bill may struggle, though, is because of Ohio's already relatively lenient marijuana laws, Neuffer said. It's difficult to get support when those currently using cannabis - for whatever purpose - aren't struggling with the authorities. Because of this and the obstacles the bill will likely face if it makes it to the Senate, Neuffer is a bit pessimistic.

"We don't think it's gonna pass this year," she said. "But we'll get some hearings and we'll publicize it. We'll get more interest. And maybe then, in the 2011-2012 sessions, that's when I think it'll happen. Not that we won't keep trying this time."

Whether this Ohio bill will pass in the next few years, or ever, remains up for debate. The issue continues to get attention across the country.

"I really would like to see it happen," Wallis said - then added, ironically, "The seeds are there, they just need a little water."

Contact public affairs reporter Sarah Steimer at ssteimer@kent.edu

The following symptoms and conditions are just some the U.S. Government Accountability Office noted in November 2002 as allowable conditions for state medical marijuana use:

Poll

Do you plan on donating food or clothing for Christmas?

Absolutely, it's the least I could do during the holidays.

I'd like to if I found somewhere to donate to.

I don't know. If I have time, I will.

No, I won't be donating.

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Source: medicalmarijuana.procon.org.

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prointhegame

posted 12/10/09 @ 1:23 AM EST

brb buying stock in frito lay

personally i don't see the medical value in pot and don't like it either, all it does to me is cause extreme paranoia, but it should be legal, even if under the guise of medicine. (Continued...)

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prointhegame

posted 12/10/09 @ 1:56 AM EST

only thing it's ever done for me is make me super paranoid, but still i think it should be legal, even if under the guise of medicine.

it's non-addictive and nontoxic. (Continued...)

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taylor

posted 12/10/09 @ 4:00 AM EST

1. Smoking a joint does not make wacky wed medicinal. Neither the MS Society or American Cancer society advocates its use. The November 21, 2009 LA Times Editorial "The AMA's Reversal on Marijuana" specifically notes: For all the debate over whether marijuana has medicinal value, arguments that the drug has significant palliative properties or that it has none suffer from the same flaw: There's little scientific proof either way. (Continued...)

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Flash78

posted 12/10/09 @ 1:54 PM EST

I support medical marijuana. In addition, I support the unlimited, untaxed, unregulated "self cultivation" of Marijuana on a personal basis.

Cultivation legalization would (1) destroy the Mexican Drug Cartels; (2) allow access to free medicine by the sick and the poor, and (3) will immediately stop any further home invasions by law enforcement. (Continued...)

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TimmyG

Flash78

posted 12/10/09 @ 2:03 PM EST

I support medical marijuana. In addition, I support the unlimited, untaxed, unregulated "self cultivation" of marijuana as a personal freedom and right. (Continued...)

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Storm Crow

posted 12/10/09 @ 2:20 PM EST

"There's little scientific proof either way"? I invite all of you to run a search on "Granny Storm Crow's list- July 2009" and read the scientific proof- all 120 pages of LINKS to studies on the medical use of cannabis that I have gathered. (Continued...)

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Brian

posted 12/10/09 @ 3:40 PM EST

The name of the organization that is mentioned is "Kent State Students for Sensible Drug Policy", not "Kent State Students for A Sensible Drug Policy". (Continued...)

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anonymous

posted 12/10/09 @ 7:29 PM EST

Get Crohn's disease and then smoke marijuana, I guarantee you'll see the medicinal value in it after having that horrible disease. I have Crohn's disease and marijuana is a life saver for me. (Continued...)

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TimmyG

Flash78

posted 12/11/09 @ 12:36 AM EST

Sally, thanks for the input on the marijuana vs hemp. Here is the lowdown on them both:

Hemp and marijuana are varieties of the Cannabis sativa plant. (Continued...)

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Anim Poster

posted 12/11/09 @ 5:22 PM EST

"We are a great nation with one of the highest standards of living ever known. We are proud of an extraordinary Constitution that protects us from the tyranny that has torn apart lesser nations. (Continued...)

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