

The top donors who helped get the Minnesota marriage amendment on the 2012 ballot

By Andy Birkey | 07.05.11



The Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board ruled last Thursday that major corporate donors related to the constitutional ban on same-sex marriage must be disclosed. But Minnesota's strong disclosure laws already reveal many prominent movers and shakers behind the seven-year battle the Minnesota Family Council has waged to [More...](#)

Legislation in Michigan Senate would allow discrimination in counseling

By Todd A. Heywood | 07.05.11



Two Michigan state Senators have proposed legislation which would allow counseling students to decline to counsel some clients because doing so would violate their "sincerely held religious belief or moral conviction."

The legislation is a response to the ongoing case of former Eastern Michigan University student Julea Ward.

20 years in, Colorado Springs Pride Fest still faces local opposition

By Beatrice Santa-Wood | 07.05.11



The Colorado Springs Pride Festival is coming of age in its 21st year of celebrating the local GLBT community, yet it still faces opposition from those within local government.

Earlier this year, then-mayor Lionel Rivera refused to issue a proclamation or any support of the festival, and was quoted as [More...](#)

Dept. of Justice presses further on states rights and medical marijuana

By Scot Kersgaard | 07.05.11



A memo written this week by U.S. Deputy Attorney General James Cole removes any doubt about how the federal government views medical marijuana, and it ain't pretty if you're someone who thinks following the law of the state is good enough.

While the DOJ continues to say they won't go [More...](#)



Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Govt. entity that controls access to research-grade marijuana in U.S. not open to possible medical benefits, critics allege

By Kyle Daly | 06.30.11 | 3:36 pm

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The American Independent has [long reported](#) on inconsistencies in federal acknowledgment of marijuana's medical benefits. These came to a head in March, when an [update](#) to the [National Cancer Institute's](#) (NCI) treatment database went into detail about the treatment potential of marijuana as prescribed for cancer patients.

In a [series of occasionally frantic NCI emails](#), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) emerged as the boogeyman of medical marijuana advocates like database contributor Dr. Donald Abrams. To Abrams' chagrin, several of NIDA's requests to remove aspects of the entry were granted, and the current version of the marijuana entry that appears on NCI's site is missing several key elements from the original that NIDA had taken issue with. How, it must be asked, did one agency come to hold such sway over government conversations on medical marijuana?

The answer to that question stretches back to 1961, when the UN drafted the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, an international treaty meant to control the flow of illicit drugs across borders and within member countries. Speaking for the institute, NIDA's deputy press officer Sheri Grabus explains that the convention "required each nation to designate a single official source of marijuana for medicinal research." In the U.S., NIDA ended up with that responsibility, and it's been the gatekeeper for legal government and private research on marijuana ever since.

Because marijuana is a Schedule I drug, any researcher looking to study marijuana has to get prior approval from the DEA. But it's NIDA that ultimately decides who gets to do marijuana research and for what purposes.

NIDA is also the sole pipeline for researchers to the nation's only legal marijuana grow farm. Since 1975, Dr. Mahmoud Elsohly has been a research professor at the University of Mississippi; for more than 30 years, he's held the contract to supply marijuana for all research in the U.S.

Simplifying research by making one agency responsible for approval and one man responsible for growing the materials isn't necessarily controversial. What worries both advocates and researchers is a perceived anti-medical marijuana agenda within NIDA.

"It's an incredibly expensive and bureaucratic process, which deters science on so many levels," says Allen St. Pierre, executive director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). St. Pierre contends further that with few exceptions, NIDA only allows access to marijuana if a researcher is looking to show the drug's adverse effects.

While Abrams declined to comment to The American Independent, his emails put him firmly on the side against NIDA. "I am not happy that NIDA has been able to impose their agenda on us," he wrote in March. "I am considering resigning from the Board if we allow politics to trump science!" Abrams' testy history with NIDA goes back to 1996, when the agency only allowed him access to Elsohly's marijuana after he agreed to [change the focus of a marijuana study](#) [PDF] from examining the drug's benefits to AIDS patients to looking instead at its adverse effects.

For its part, NIDA admits that most research on the adverse effects of marijuana gets the agency's support but claims it's not by design. "In fact, for the past several years very few proposals have been submitted to the NIH for testing the medicinal effects of smoked marijuana," NIDA tells TAI. "Rather, the more promising approach for research has been on cannabinoids."

This diplomatic answer happens to confirm the [notion](#) that the government may give the pharmaceutical industry a legal pass to develop marijuana-based drugs, quashing state-legal dispensaries that sell whole-plant cannabis. But it's also in line with the contention among abuse specialists that their [biggest problem](#) with medical marijuana presently is that people smoke it. As more entities in the federal government make it clear that they recognize the medicinal benefits of the drug, the last big hurdle to fall before medical marijuana has a chance at federal recognition is its delivery system. The question that remains is whether Big Pharma's going to get there first. And with the first non-synthetic cannabinoid derived from whole-plant marijuana [winding down testing](#), all signs point to that being a matter of when, not if.

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