

Therapeutic use of cannabis no myth

By Bob Newland, who publishes the magazine "HEMPhasis.net" from his home near Hermosa.

HERMOSA - "Reefer makes darkies think they're as good as white men." When Federal Bureau of Narcotics Commissioner Harry Anslinger said that in 1943, he was trying to get Congress to give his agency more money to fight the largely unknown menace, "marijuana."

Worse than that, Anslinger claimed, dark-skinned musicians smoked "marijuana," then used their altered abilities to "insert extra notes into a measure of music," thus creating the abomination known as jazz. "They also give marijuana to white women to seduce them."

Using the twin tactics of advertising that women become helpless in the hands of men who give them marijuana (misleading, at best, based on my experience) and creating a market incentive for people to grow or import and sell marijuana, Anslinger and his successors managed to increase the rate of marijuana use from about one-tenth of 1 percent of Americans to about 20 percent in just 40 years. Very few ad campaigns have ever managed a 20,000 percent increase in market penetration. They also managed to cut by more than half the average age of first consumption.

More people smoking pot for more years. A dream for suppliers.

While public expenditures of \$50 billion a year now help maintain a monopoly of the marijuana trade in the hands of outlaws, that figure is dwarfed by the untaxed profits created for those willing to take the risk of delivering the product.

One embarrassing consequence of the massive proliferation of marijuana use caused by the prohibition laws is that tens of thousands of sick, disabled and dying people have learned of the relief, comfort and healing cannabis can bring them. Their experiences render absurdly impotent the non-medical, uninformed, malicious declaration by federal and state legislatures that marijuana has "no medical use."

Medical cannabis patient Matthew Ducheneaux of Eagle Butte testified to the drug and alcohol subcommittee of the legislative Criminal Code Revision Commission in Pierre July 29. After describing how smoking cannabis marijuana safely relieves him of pain and life-threatening muscle tremors, Ducheneaux was asked, "What do you suggest we do to make marijuana available to people who need it, like you?"

"Jeez, just do it," Matthew said. After wrestling with their consciences overnight, the committee decided, in opposition to the subcommittee's chair, Rep. Tom Hennies, that it was too much trouble to try to allow sick people a medicine, safer than aspirin, that gives hope and comfort to people who live in constant pain without it.

At least four major U.S. government-sponsored studies in the 20th century concluded there is medical benefit in marijuana. Adding several dozen minor U.S. medical studies, and dozens in Europe, we have a body of research pointing to an inescapable conclusion: cannabis marijuana is of medical benefit to a wide range of patients with a wide range of medical conditions.

Then there's the inconvenient fact that the U.S. government has sent 300 rolled marijuana cigarettes a month to each of seven medical patients for over 10 years, whose doctors have all acknowledged these folks would be dead (or blind) without cannabis.

Having listened to Matthew Ducheneaux describe to the subcommittee how muscle spasms in his back "feel like somebody's hitting me in the back with an ax, and the spasms keep me from breathing, like being squeezed by an anaconda," and having witnessed Matthew gain immediate relief from such a spasm provided by marijuana, I just don't get it. What kind of society rewards a South Dakota Judge Tim Tucker or a Minnehaha County Prosecutor Dave Nelson for maintaining that white is black, and for that reason you must either suffer or become a criminal?

Rep. Hennies asked the subcommittee to recommend that people arrested for small amounts of marijuana be allowed to argue in court that they did so because they have a medical condition, and marijuana alleviates it. That's all he asked for. To be allowed to say from your wheelchair, "Your honor, I use marijuana because without it I will die."

Nelson and Tucker, both subcommittee members, said such a proposal would cause problems. "If a medical defense is allowed in marijuana cases, it is tantamount to legalizing marijuana," Tucker said. He also said it would cause a "burden" on judges.

Apparently Tucker doesn't think the 43,877 marijuana criminal charges filed over the past five years in South Dakota, or the 18,328 resultant convictions are overly burdensome. But here I am trying to fathom the thoughts of an obviously enigmatic man.

Therapeutic use of the herb, cannabis, is not a myth. The evidence is there in overwhelming abundance. There is no evidence in opposition. For thousands and thousands of people who gain relief by using it, the law is relevant only inasmuch as they must live in fear of being imprisoned and separated from the remedy that works for them. Even Judge Tucker and Prosecutor Nelson would smoke marijuana if they were in Matthew Ducheneaux's wheelchair.