

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

MARIJUANA MISINFORMATION

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 11, 2002

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of the House a recent editorial by John P. Walters, the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Writing in the San Francisco Chronicle on September 1, 2002, Director Walters commented on the widespread campaign of misinformation being waged on the issue of medical marijuana by those who favor drug legalization. Far from being a harmless drug with potential medicinal use, John Walters argues that the marijuana available to teenagers today is far stronger than that consumed by the Woodstock generation.

But rather than presenting a united front against the dangers of this drug, the debate over medicinal use is only sowing confusion among parents and adolescents alike. Meanwhile, emergency room admissions and treatment enrollments involving teenagers for marijuana use is rising sharply. In recent years, drug overdoses have overtaken homicides as the leading causes of death among teenagers.

Regrettably, many in the media have bought into the "compassionate" argument that severely ill people need the option of smoking marijuana to alleviate their symptoms. While running counter to common sense, this argument has been strong enough to support ballot initiatives in several States.

Adolescent use of marijuana is a serious problem with widespread ramifications. There needs to be more voices like Director Walters entering the debate to counteract the misguided, harmful, and misleading arguments being fostered and presented by groups preying on people's compassion as a way to open the door for wholesale drug legalization.

For review by my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, I request that Director Walter's editorial be inserted in full at this point in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:

[From the San Francisco Chronicle, Sept. 1, 2002]

MARIJUANA TODAY—SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

(By John P. Walters)

The public debate over marijuana has been plagued by difficulties, not the least of which is a lack of accurate information. Any policy debate that draws activists promoting their cause is likely to suffer from confusion. But the debate over marijuana has been further muddled by careless or gullible media reports. Too often, journalists are fed misleading advocacy information that they swallow whole.

For instance, one columnist recently charged that worry about the increased potency of today's marijuana is wildly overstated. In fact, he calls such claims "whoppers," because the active ingredient THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) "has only doubled to 4.2 percent from about 2 percent from 1980 to 1997."

No wonder the public has trouble getting a clear picture. His source for this information is the Marijuana Policy Project, a group of marijuana legalizers relying on a study that covers just those years. Unfortunately, the columnist did not check his facts with the Drug Enforcement Administration, which monitors scientific studies of marijuana.

What does the DEA analysis show? In 1974, the average THC content of marijuana was less than 1 percent. But by 1999, potency averaged 7 percent. Further, unlike the old "ditchweed" and bulk marijuana of the past, there are now far more powerful products to entice youth. The THC of today's sinsemilla averages 14 percent and ranges as high as 30 percent.

Even stronger stuff is on the way. The point is that the potency of available marijuana has not merely "doubled," but increased as much as 30 times.

Some advocates argued that this increased potency is actually good news, because kids will simply use less. But the data don't support that interpretation. The number of tons of marijuana sold in America is increasing, not decreasing. The number of people seeking medical treatment for marijuana abuse is increasing rapidly, not decreasing. In fact, the number of adolescent marijuana admissions increased 260 percent between 1992 and 1999.

The stakes in this debate are high, especially for young people. So widespread is marijuana in today's schools that nearly half of all high school seniors report having tried it by graduation, while a smaller but still alarming number report using it every month—even everyday. This is a drug that, after all, produces withdrawal symptoms, is associated with learning and memory disturbances and produces behavioral problems for those who become dependent.

It's time to face facts: Today's marijuana is a more dangerous drug than the pot of the Woodstock era. It creates tolerance (you need increasing doses to achieve the same effect), and at high doses it induces paranoia or even violence.

The haze of misinformation grows even thicker when it comes to the issue of "medical" marijuana. On the face of it, the idea that desperately sick people could be helped by smoking an intoxicating weed seems unlikely, even medieval. It is, in fact, absurd.

Smoking marijuana, even if it weren't psychotropic, hardly seems healthy. The threat of lung damage, not to mention exposure to carcinogens and more toxins than those found in tobacco smoke, increases with every "hit." But no less than the New York Times editorialized recently in support of medical marijuana. Amazingly, the paper termed it "life-saving" and claimed it represented "mainstream medical opinion."

Who have they been listening to? Perhaps the source was the same Marijuana Policy Project, which paid for a full-page ad in the Times on March 6, 2000. The MPP claimed scientific support for medical marijuana from the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, whose Institute of Medicine, MPP claimed, "urged the federal government to give seriously ill people immediate access to medical marijuana on a case-by-case basis."

But nowhere in the IOM report can you find this "urging." Quite the contrary: the IOM throws cold water on smoked-marijuana enthusiasts, stating clearly, "Marijuana is not a modern medicine."

Does the IOM regard marijuana as a helpful "medicine" for the afflicted? Not at all. "In no way," the researchers continued, "do we wish to suggest that patients should, under any circumstances, medicate themselves with marijuana." In fact, they state that any experimental subjects must be notified that they are using "a harmful drug delivery system," adding that short-term experiments might be conducted only after the "documented failure of all approved medicines" and only under strict medical supervision.

But while the IOM wishes to study the ingredients in marijuana, the purpose of these clinical trials (now being conducted through the University of California at San Diego) is not to investigate the potential medical benefit of smoking the stuff. As the researchers put it, their purpose "would not be to develop marijuana as a licensed drug."

These facts place us far away from efforts to justify the distribution of marijuana cigarettes through cannabis buyers clubs. Real and lasting damage can follow "experimentation" with marijuana, as reflected in the fact that marijuana abuse is today the major reason for young people to seek drug treatment.

Yet, listening to some in the media you are still likely to hear that marijuana "isn't such a big deal," and that even the National Academy of Sciences endorses it "for medicinal purposes." Now you know better.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO AMANDA DAVIO AND ST. MARTHA CATHOLIC SCHOOL

HON. MIKE ROGERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 11, 2002

Mr. ROGERS of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor Amanda Davio and her classmates at St. Martha Catholic School in Okemos, Michigan, for their special efforts to thank the thousands of volunteers and emergency workers who responded to the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon here in Washington, D.C.

Last year, soon after those tragic attacks, I asked children throughout Michigan's 8th Congressional District to write letters and cards to the military men and women who were preparing for the war against terrorism. St. Martha students responded to that request along with hundreds of other students. Several of the schools, like St. Martha and Amanda Davio's kindergarten class, also sent along letters and cards for the workers at the attack sites.

These were forwarded to the Red Cross and eventually Amanda's card made it into the hands of New York City Police Officer Steve Tarricone. Officer Tarricone contacted the school, eventually traveled there to meet the students, especially Amanda, whose greeting has inspired him at a time when his spirits were very low.

Since then, the Davio family has visited New York and the two families have become

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