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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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Marijuana & Medicine

OUR OPINION: Marijuana's potential as a medical treatment is too important to be overcome by fear

Any doctor can use cocaine for a routine nose operation or even prescribe morphine as a pain killer. But try prescribing marijuana for medical purposes and he or she may wake up to the sound of the U.S. drug czar pounding on the door.

Despite California and Arizona passing propositions that would allow doctors to prescribe marijuana for medical use, the federal government has made it clear that anyone found prescribing or using marijuana will be criminally tried and prosecuted. Under the state propositions, doctors would be allowed to prescribe marijuana for specific illnesses such as glaucoma and multiple sclerosis.

Unlike cocaine and morphine, which are "schedule two" drugs and therefore, may be used for medical reasons, marijuana is a "schedule one" drug and is illegal for all purposes. For this reason, the federal government has stepped up and said it will not allow these propositions to be enacted.

Arguments over using marijuana for medical purposes have sprung up on both sides of the issue. Supporters claim marijuana is effective in reducing the nausea of chemotherapy, relieving the pain of AIDS patients and treating glaucoma. Opponents point out that no official studies have ever proved marijuana has any medicinal uses.

As long as marijuana remains a schedule one drug, California and Arizona's propositions will not be legal. However, it seems just a tad ridiculous for the federal government to spend billions of dollars taking down doctors who prescribe marijuana to dying patients. If someone suffering from multiple sclerosis gets temporary pain relief from smoking a joint, why not let them? Our jails are already filled with murderers, burglars, rapists and hardcore drug dealers. Do we really need to add doctors who prescribe marijuana and their sick patients to that list?

The federal government has decided to



launch its own investigation into the question of whether marijuana has medical benefits headed by the drug czar himself, retired Army Gen. Barry McCaffery. While it is important that the potential medical uses of marijuana are investigated, the drug czar is far from the best choice to run the investigation. It's hard to imagine that the man in charge of the war on drugs will present the most unbiased information on marijuana.

Instead of sending in the FBI to lock up doctors while the drug czar researches the benefits of marijuana, why not seriously consider changing marijuana to a schedule two drug so it can legally be prescribed. This would not make it legal for recreational use. It would still be an illegal drug without a doctor's prescription, just like cocaine. If an independent committee

is formed to finally decide if marijuana has medical benefits, this whole fiasco could be put behind us once and for all.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, 79 percent of the American people support medical marijuana. So instead of fighting the will of the people, the government should set out to find some real answers. Only then will the people on either side of the issue be satisfied.

Right now, the main obstacle in getting some real answers on the benefits of marijuana is the government's paranoia over drugs. Even though most people agree that marijuana is no more damaging than alcohol, many people are scared to consider using it for medical reasons because it is considered to be in the same class as drugs like heroin that are far more damaging. After being called "soft" on drugs throughout the election, it is not surprising to see President Clinton take a hardline stance on this issue. But the issue at hand is medical uses for marijuana. Not legalization.

Using marijuana for medical purposes does not mean it will soon be available at your local drug store. Cocaine is used for medical purposes, but you don't see anyone worrying about legalizing coke. There is no reason to suspect these propositions to have any more impact on legalizing marijuana for non-medical purposes.

What's at stake here is the state of mind of a small portion of the population that gets some relief from the medical use of marijuana. We owe it to these people to get some real answers on the drug. And real answers require a real, unbiased analysis of the benefits of marijuana. If, in fact, it is found that marijuana can provide these people with some relief, the government should change it to a schedule two drug right away. It won't mean the first step toward legalization, but it could be the first step toward relief for many people.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

LETTERS

Integrity important

Brian Diamond's column on Jan. 7 was sheer bunk. He has a weird way of looking at "ethics and integrity" in Congress and thinks it's all "pure politics." It's all of the above. If Diamond would remember the Speaker of the House is third in line to be president in case of emergency, he may want to re-think "integrity."

I do care that Gingrich is a consummate liar and schemer who planned his Go-Pac and tax-deductible college course to make millions for his capture of the House by Republicans. He is not "naive"!

He succeeded in raising those millions to advance his freshman zealots for the 104th Congress — and to raise a lot of hell. He did not succeed quite as planned. So, now we have him as Speaker again by a minimal margin, a lot of ill-will and as damaged goods.

Brian Diamond needs to think a little more clearly on ethics in politics and why the American people are so disenchanted with dishonest politicians and have given up voting. In his eyes were Watergate and the Iran/Contra situation — all "pure politics" — and therefore excusable?

Hilde Cherry
Eugene

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Letters to the editor must be typed, double spaced and include the author's name, signature, and phone number. The identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

Letters must be limited to 250 words or less. The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length, clarity, grammar or style.

CORRECTION

In the Jan. 8 edition of the *Emerald*, four students were misidentified in the "Reader Voices" section on page 2. Senior Heidi Marshall, Junior Jesse Clark, Sophomore Ely Janis and Freshman Laura Glatze had incorrect photos above their names. The *Emerald* regrets the error.

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