

'It really puzzles me to see marijuana connected with narcotics dope and all of that stuff. It is a thousand times better than whiskey. It is an assistant and a friend.'

— LOUIS ARMSTRONG

Maybe you feel you have the right to experiment with your own consciousness. Perhaps you are one to promote the legalization of all illicit substances. Or it might be the case that you identify with the late R&B singer Nate Dogg, who once sang, “Hey ey ey ey, smoke weed everyday,” based on the fact that you enjoy (as he did) the recreational use of cannabis.

That’s your own damn business and has nothing to do with the medicinal purposes of the plant. This article is not the flag-waving counterculture anti-prohibitionist hotbox you are looking to occupy. Though compelling arguments exist on behalf of marijuana and Peter Tosh’s iconic statement “Legalize it,” the year 2011 has brought to bear a new series of issues for “legal” medicinal usage of the substance.

A concentrated effort to stamp out marijuana and the medical marijuana industry under the Obama administration has been sweeping the country this entire past year. Busts yielding significant and less than significant hauls of marijuana are happening up and down the coast at an intensified rate. But more precisely, the medical marijuana industry and its proponents are being targeted on a national scale.

The effect of this has made its way from Washington, D.C., all the way to the West Coast and to Eugene. Sept. 22, Oregon State Police arrested three men and seized 300 plants from two separate residences, in a raid that was part of an ongoing investigation by the Lane County Interagency Narcotics Enforcement Team.

UP IN THE CLUB

It’s estimated that legal marijuana is a \$10 billion to \$100 billion industry in the U.S. (the exact figure is unknown). Lane County is home to more than 5,000 card-carrying medical marijuana patients. Curtis Shimmin, owner of Kannabosm says he sees a demand for services such as that provided by Kannabosm.

“There is an incredible need for safe access to marijuana,” Shimmin says, “We are the only club here that does what we do.”

For a monthly membership fee of \$20, members of Kannabosm (all of whom must be card-carrying medical marijuana patients) receive access to their medication. The club also offers educational seminars on the medicinal properties of marijuana.

Kannabosm acts as a nexus connecting licensed growers and medical marijuana patients. Growers bring their harvest to the club and give permission to Kannabosm for patients to access it. A reimbursement fee is collected for the grower to cover the cost of production, though not labor.

Another service provided is a screening of the cannabis brought to the club, so as to ensure the herb is clean — meaning not laced with chemicals or polluted with pesticides.

“The counterculture image of marijuana doesn’t help this cause at all,” Shimmin says. “The goal is to provide safe access to medical marijuana, for medical marijuana patients. That’s the battle, and obviously I’m willing to take the risk.”

That risk is nothing short of federal prosecution.

“In the eyes of the law right now, what we are doing is illegal, but there is nothing that addresses whether or not we can do what we are doing,” Shimmin explains. “The law says you can use medical marijuana if you have a card, but then where do you get it?”

Shimmin says that without his club’s service, medical

marijuana patients throughout Lane County would have no alternative but to buy weed on the black market or grow it themselves. “Ninety-nine percent of our clients are over the age of 60, and they’re not interested nor do they have the space or ability to grow for themselves,” he adds. “We have several stage-four cancer patients that practically crawl in here to get their meds.”

VAPORIZING THE INDUSTRY

More so than clubs and dispensaries, it appears that wiping out marijuana grow operations has become a top priority to the Department of Justice this year. Detectives from the Spokane Sheriff’s office on Nov. 2 conducted a raid that turned up approximately 8 pounds of harvested marijuana, 695 marijuana plants and 500 additional recently harvested marijuana trimmings.

In Oregon’s northeastern Wallowa County, police and the Oregon Army National Guard seized and destroyed more than 91,000 marijuana plants in what is considered the biggest outdoor grow operation ever discovered in the state.

Also in Oregon, Nov. 18, near milepost 281, Oregon State Police stopped a California man headed northbound on Interstate 5 and seized 4 pounds of weed and 32 pounds of THC candy. Later that same day, a Salt Lake City man was pulled over and 2 pounds of marijuana were seized from his vehicle. Both drivers were arrested and jailed.

Alongside the big busts targeting growers, strategic blows to the infrastructure of medical marijuana are being meted out by the feds, particularly in California. One of the most high-profile of the aggressive nationwide measures enacted against the medical marijuana industry was the Oct. 7 announcement by four California U.S. attorneys declaring a crackdown that involved a multitude of enforcements against medical marijuana producers, distributors and the landlords leasing property to dispensaries.

If the aggressive crackdown carries over into Oregon, including threats such as the prosecution of newspapers and other media outlets that run advertisements for medical marijuana — things could get even sticky-ickier.

There is a saying that goes “what happens in California happens in Oregon a year later,” and if there is any truth to this colloquialism, it’s reasonable to assume Oregon is next in line on the fed’s medical marijuana hit list. Federal attention to Oregon’s medical marijuana issue actually came a bit earlier than Cali’s, though the assault has yet to be as focused.

Former U.S. district attorney for Oregon Dwight Holton sent a letter June 3 this year to all of Oregon’s medical marijuana clubs urging them to “cease any distribution of marijuana in violation of federal law.” The letter, which Kannabosm owner Curtis Shimmin received just four weeks after opening his doors, stated that the Department of Justice, along with district attorneys throughout Oregon, will “enforce federal law vigorously against individuals and organizations that participate in unlawful manufacture” or “distribution of marijuana.”

Holton’s warning, though it doesn’t approach the severity of the measures being taken in California, is yet another sign of the Obama administration’s nationwide blitz on the medical marijuana industry.

HIGHER FORMS OF HEALTH CARE

Though the current national push to curtail or quash the medical marijuana industry made growers jumpy

about speaking to a reporter, a look into the caretaker’s role in the process allows for yet another side of the story to be heard.

Amber Younce, a nurse who works with advanced HIV patients at Our House of Portland, a center that provides health care, housing and other services for low-income people living with advanced HIV/AIDS, has encountered a significant number of medical marijuana patients.

Medical marijuana “has been incredibly important to AIDS patients trying to keep weight on and stay nourished,” Younce says. “Other appetite stimulants don’t work as well.”

Younce also sees medical marijuana used to counteract negative side effects of other medications taken by her patients. Well aware of the disconnect between state and federal law concerning medical marijuana, Younce addresses the recent government push. “It’s unfortunate there needs to be some new crackdown,” she says. “It’d be great if the feds and the state could actually negotiate with each other, instead of putting law-abiding citizens at risk of criminal charges.”

A negotiation of this sort would seem to be in the best interest of the feds, the states, law enforcement and the citizens, but the Obama administration has yet to address the issue head on. In fact, that the raids on growers and dispensaries have increased under Obama’s presidency (particularly in California) appears to signal an opposite trend. If you are a medical marijuana patient, it sure looks like Obama is coming for your ganja. It’s harvest season, but right now the only thing the DOJ wants you to smoke is your Thanksgiving turkey.

The Obama administration did seek to clarify the controversial “Odgen Memo,” written in 2009 by Deputy U.S. Attorney General David Odgen, which originally stated that the federal government wouldn’t mess with businesses operating in compliance with state laws regarding medical marijuana. And the new memo gives a nod to patients such as those Younce takes care of, stating that government resources will not be used to prosecute cancer patients or other terminally ill individuals who use marijuana in accordance with state law. Anyone else involved in the business of selling, growing or dispensing marijuana however, is operating in violation of the Controlled Substance Act.

Meaning, if you are a terminally ill medical marijuana patient, you can spark it up and burn one down, but good luck in the not-so-distant future grabbing your greenery from anywhere other than your friendly neighborhood dealer.

Is marijuana a hell of a drug? Apparently. Are people abusing both the substance as well as the ability to get their hands on a card? Yes. But as Younce, who administers a smorgasbord of prescription drugs in her line of work, points out: “I’m not sure why we care that people are abusing it. People abuse every prescription drug there is.”

It remains unclear exactly why this push from the federal government is occurring now, at a time when Obama’s ratings aren’t so hot. Some activists speculate the aggressive measures against the medical marijuana industry are the result of pressure from law enforcement.

Though Oregon has yet to see the same level of smack down on medical marijuana as its neighbor to the south, there is no reason to believe that the state will avoid the same federal green-sweep increase within its borders. One thing is for certain: For now, weed and trouble still go together like bong and water. **EW**

'I never understood that line. The point was to inhale. That was the point.'

— BARACK OBAMA, WHEN ASKED, “UNLIKE OTHER PRESIDENTS, DID YOU INHALE?”