

Opinion: Medicinal marijuana going up in smoke

By John Redman

When Californians passed the “Compassionate Use Act” – otherwise known as Proposition 215 – in 1996, most voters thought that it was reasonable to allow chronically ill patients to use marijuana without fear of arrest. And if those patients could not grow marijuana on their own, the initiative stipulated that patient caregivers could help to grow marijuana for their patients collectively or cooperatively for a patient’s personal use.

Those descriptive words were adverbs not nouns.

That is an important distinction that advocates disregarded. Flagrantly violating the law and common sense, for-profit “collectives” – smartly renamed “compassion centers” – spread like wildfire throughout the state.

But there are some major signs that the pot party is over.

Last week, the Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously to shut all medical marijuana stores after hearing from residents outraged by the fact that they were bombarded by shady dispensary owners and wafting marijuana smoke at all hours of the day. Immediately afterward, all four federal judicial districts in California announced that federal judges had dismissed lawsuits this year advocating for dispensaries.

Marijuana advocates have overplayed their hand. Though the medical profession has largely rejected smoked marijuana as medicine because it has not passed FDA muster, a handful of unscrupulous doctors and dispensary owners have made millions of dollars in the name of compassion off of the sick and dying. They have been trying to fit a square peg in a round

hole, and not only has it not worked – it has made many of us angry.

A recent California study found that most people use marijuana medically to help with pain, sleep and relaxation. Another study found that less than 3 percent of people using medical marijuana had a chronic disease like cancer or AIDS. The average medical marijuana card holder in California is a 32-year-old white male with a history of alcohol and marijuana use.

That is why it should not surprise anyone that U.S. Attorney Melinda Haag in San Francisco moved to shut down the biggest granddaddy offender of them all: Harborside Health Center. Harborside is the antithesis of what was intended by voters, as it takes in million of dollars in sales every year and does nothing to ensure its product is safe or effective. Rather, its owner thinks that time is better spent on television evangelizing the cure-all wonders of pot.

This is hardly what Californians voted for, and there are signs that California's love affair with marijuana is receding. Medical marijuana moguls bankrolled an unsuccessful effort to legalize marijuana outright, and it turns out that none of the five attempts to get it back on the ballot in 2012 will be successful.

The Rev. Scott Imler, who co-wrote Proposition 215 and advocates for the limited use of medical marijuana, put it best recently when he said, "We created Prop. 215 so that patients would not have to deal with black market profiteers. But today it is all about the money. Most of the dispensaries operating in California are little more than dope dealers with storefronts."

Selling joints to anyone with a pulse and \$200 cash was never the bill of goods that the voters were sold.

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