

Once again the pro-marijuana advocates are blowing smoke.

Anchorage Daily News May 3, 2005

Despite hard evidence to the contrary, they want Alaskans to believe that marijuana use is not bad for individuals, particularly for children, and people who suffer from mental disorders and alcohol abuse. That marijuana use is not harmful to society. That marijuana is not a gateway drug. That marijuana users can easily cope with the 10-time increase in potency by smoking less / fewer joints.

Balderdash! These people are just plain wrong, which is why I applaud the Governor for his efforts to settle this issue once and for all. I congratulate the Alaska legislators who continue to stand up for a drug-free state. I say thank God for the strong majority of Alaska voters who JUST SAY NO to further legalizing this dangerous drug.

Alaskans have spoken with consistency three times over the past 15 years. Alaskans voted 54 percent to 46 percent in 1990 to recriminalize marijuana after the Alaska Supreme Court ruled that residents had a constitutional right to possess a small amount of pot in the privacy of their homes. Alaskans turned down an effort to decriminalize marijuana in 2000 by a vote of 41 percent to 59 percent. And last fall, Alaskans rejected an initiative to legalize marijuana by a vote of 44.25 percent to 55.75 percent, despite a million-dollar campaign by the pro-initiative group.

The Governor's legislation, House Bill 96, is right in step with the majority of Alaskans and rights a wrong that dates back to 1975 when the Alaska Supreme Court ruled that Alaskans' constitutional right of privacy protects the personal possession and use of marijuana in the home. The courts refined and revisited this decision several times over three decades but never updated the basic facts. The most recent ruling came in 2004 when the high court again reaffirmed the 1975 decision and allowed for possession of up to 4 ounces of marijuana. Four ounces equals about 360 very potent marijuana cigarettes, an amount most Alaskans would consider more a "miss-use" than a personal use.

HB 96 includes findings that allow the courts to consider new and up-to-date research and information when rendering the next decision on marijuana.

I think I'm like most folks who assumed the courts use new information each time a case is heard. Not so. The major court rulings on this issue are all based on decades-old information even though the pot of the Flower Child era bears little resemblance to the maryjane you can buy today. In fact, marijuana grown in Alaska has reached potency levels of more than 10 percent THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) versus the 1 percent level it was in the 1960s. THC is the primary psychoactive ingredient in marijuana.

Marijuana is Alaska's drug of choice, which is why we must get it under control. Almost one-fifth of all Alaskans between the ages of 18 and 25 say they've used marijuana the past month. Almost half of all high school students in Alaska say they used marijuana at least once, and one-third of all men arrested in Anchorage in 2003 tested positive for marijuana, as did 27 percent of women.



In the workplace, it's a disaster waiting to happen. Marijuana users have 55 percent more industrial accidents than non-users and 85 percent more injuries.

It is these statistics that keep me lobbying for effective marijuana control. I'm the president of WorkSafe, Inc. an Alaska drug testing company. I am doing this as a good citizen, not a good business man because the current situation is money in the bank. As long as there is the perception that it is legal for Alaska workers to use marijuana, companies will have no choice but to test their employees for drugs.

Marijuana affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction times - all critical skills in the workplace and the reasons legislators and Governor Murkowski need to stay the course and pass this legislation. A safer workplace is as important to the future of Alaska as creating jobs.

Matt Fagnani is President of WorkSafe, Inc., and past chair of Alaskans Against the Legalization of Marijuana and Hemp.

WorkSafe 563-8378

Sources

- *AK Dept of Justice Center UAA 10/2003*
- *2002 SAMHSA National Survey on Drug Use and Health*
- *ONDCP Office of National Drug Control Policy*