

WTE column of January 7, 2016: “Time to get hemp off the list”

Dear Senator Barrasso:

Thank you for your reply to my letter. I appreciate your prompt response.

Regrettably, you failed to address my request that you co-sponsor S.134, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act of 2015/16. You replied that the bill has been referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. This does not, of course, prevent you from signing on as co-sponsor. Again, I ask that you do so—and that, as Chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, you persuade as many of your colleagues as you can to follow suit.

You mention that “the Wyoming legislature is currently considering a bill, HB 0032, which would allow the use of hemp extract under medical supervision.” The bill actually passed during the 2015 session. It became law, notwithstanding Governor Mead’s refusal to affix his signature thereto.

Representative Robert McKim patterned his bill after Utah’s Charlee’s Law; however, where Utah followed Charlee’s with agricultural-hemp legislation, Wyoming failed to do so. Moreover, HB 32 is quite restrictive. Even Wyomingites who qualify have a tough time obtaining treatment. This is why we need your help. It is paramount that, at the federal level, hemp be removed from the Controlled Substances Act.

The June 2015 National Geographic provides an extensive overview of cannabis research, from Israel to Spain, that has pinpointed many medical conditions, and the promising treatments that have commenced, abroad as well as in the US. It includes a write-up of research at University of Colorado by Professor Nolan Kane, who is growing hemp for research purposes “after years of wrangling” with federal and university officials, though his plants “carry extremely low levels of THC.”

Mr. Kane, pondering the U.S. ban on industrial hemp cultivation, comments that “Hemp produces fibers of unparalleled quality . . . it’s a tremendously high biomass crop . . . We import tons and tons of hemp each year from China and even Canada, yet . . . can’t legally grow it . . . (some) farmers in the U.S. can literally look across the Canadian border and see fields that are yielding huge profits.”

Hemp creates jobs, thousands of them. As medical doctor, surely you are aware that agricultural hemp carries no THC to speak of, and that the medicinal properties of hemp are many and varied. I ask that you act on that knowledge.

The absence of federal regulations has had unfortunate consequences. CBD oil is no less expensive than its pharmaceutical counterpart—a six-pack of 10-gram tubes can cost \$1,999—yet no assistance from insurance is available to patients whose only hope is this product. Worse, the unregulated market allows gimmicky companies to promote and sell questionable products over the internet.

A November 2015 article in the New Republic points out that, as things currently stand, any lab that analyzes CBD runs the risk of legal conflict. Consequently, according to its author, Elizabeth Bruenig, hucksters are selling substances with no medicinal value; in some cases, the products are downright harmful to consumers' health.

“In the absence of regulation and research,” writes Ms. Bruenig, “the CBD industry traffics in hard-sell marketing and a gray haze of half-truths, all the while profiting off the hopes of the desperate.”

When, in February 2015, the FDA analyzed 18 CBD products, “six contained no cannabinoids whatsoever. Another 11 contained less than 1 percent CBD . . . In states that have legalized CBD, regulations can require CBD products to contain at least 5 percent CBD, more often 10 to 15 percent.”

Judging by the author's write-up, HempMedsPx is one of these gimmicky companies. An anecdote tells of a Mr. Kenzler whose daughter got sick after ingesting a supposed CBD oil, advertised as Real Scientific Hemp Oil. “Kenzler, who lives in Oregon (where hemp and marijuana products are legally recognized), sent a sample to be analyzed to Going Green Labs in Albany, Oregon. The lab found that Real Scientific Hemp Oil contained much more THC than what HempMedsPx had advertised—3.8 percent instead of roughly 1 percent.”

HempMedsPx, whose parent company is Medical Marijuana, Inc., in Poway, California, was mightily displeased when Mr. Kenzler published the Going Green Labs analysis on his blog.

Writes Bruenig: “In an email to the New Republic, Hard, the Medical Marijuana, Inc., spokesperson, insisted that the sample of hemp oil tested by Going Green Labs had been tampered with by a competitor after Kenzler obtained it.”

Companies like HempMedsPx are asking consumers simply to trust them, she writes. “CBD oils are never subjected to systematic testing by any U.S. regulatory body. The FDA regulates all pharmaceutical labs in the country. But cannabis labs like the ones that HempMedsPx and others use are not, because cannabis is not federally recognized as a legal drug.”

Senator Barrasso, we ask that you help remedy this intolerable situation by co-sponsoring S.134.