

## **WTE of Nov. 26, 2014. Editor's headline: "War on Weed will never be worth it"**

Here's something I'll bet you didn't know: the federal government has grown marijuana in "experimental" plots for many years. Not only that, it supplies the stuff gratis to a handful of patients for medical treatment. Thanks to ailing Robert C. Randall's efforts four decades ago, the Food and Drug Administration established a program whereby desperately ill patients, if they are persistent and very lucky, may have access to government-grown cannabis.

Which begs the question: what of the thousands who need the treatment but get harassed, or thrown in the slammer on criminal charges, by another tentacle of that same government, the Drug Enforcement Administration?

"A friend of ours whose husband is terminally ill sees a specialist in Colorado and [the physician] wants to prescribe cannabis but [the patient] cannot accept it," wrote a Cheyenne reader in response to my hemp column. "With cannabis shops just 30 miles away, it's time Wyoming . . . decriminalized [the weed]."

In 1973, Robert Randall, a Washington, D.C., college professor stricken with glaucoma, was told he'd be completely blind in both eyes by age thirty. One evening he smoked a joint and discovered that the tri-color halos—glaucoma's telltale symptoms—at nearby streetlights had disappeared. Thus began a program of self-medication plus regular checkups with his eye doctor, who confirmed that cannabis significantly reduced intraocular pressure. The professor started growing his own supply, but upon returning from a vacation he found his home ransacked, his garden uprooted, a search warrant on his table, and a note from the D.C. police to turn himself in. On learning of a government-sponsored study that provided solid evidence of marijuana's efficacy in treating glaucoma, Randall went on the offensive, not only to help his own condition but also to extend help to others. Until his death in 2001, Randall smoked ten joints a day, courtesy of Uncle Sam. He never went blind.

"Medical evidence suggests that the prohibition [of marijuana] is not well founded," wrote Judge James A. Washington in his acquittal of Randall, adding that reports from the Shafer Commission and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare concluded, "there is no scientific evidence of any harm attendant upon the use of marijuana. According to the most recent HEW study, research has failed to establish any substantial physical or mental impairment caused by marijuana."

While smoking pot may be as damaging to the lungs as smoking cigarettes, cannabis can be ingested as tea or cookies. At Denver's recent Indo-Expo, "Green is the new gold," some 150 exhibitors displayed anything from advice to hemp textiles to edible marijuana. Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) presented the seminar, "A Retired Sergeant, a Lawyer, and a Former Judge Tell You Why We Should End The War On Drugs." In another seminar, "Making the Case to the Public and Politicians that Legalization is a Success," two lawyers urged the cannabis movement to clarify "to the rest of the world" that legalization is working.

How did we ever get to where Americans think of marijuana as “the most violence-causing drug in the history of mankind?” The Nixon-begot War on Drugs originated the falsehood, though already in 1972 the government knew better.

In 1969 the Supreme Court in unanimous decision nixed the Marijuana Tax Act of 1939, thereby provoking the ire of the White House. A year later, President Nixon cajoled Congress into ratifying the Controlled Substances Act. Marijuana, along with heroin and LSD, became a Schedule I narcotic of “maximum danger,” while cocaine and methamphetamines ranked as the lesser Schedule II substances.

Congress questioned the hasty scheduling of marijuana. Dr. Leo Hollister, Veterans Administration’s expert on psychoactive drugs, decried the lumping together of “drugs that are not equivalent in pharmaceutical effect or in their degree of danger,” warning the House and Ways Committee that the new law would become “a laughingstock.” Nixon agreed to a National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse that would make long-term policy recommendations.

The President stacked the commission with drug-war hawks; its chair was Republican former Pennsylvania Governor Raymond Shafer. Despite Nixon’s delusional rants, the Shafer Commission solicited input from scientists, doctors, law enforcement; it conducted no less than fifty research projects. Its final report, “Marijuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding,” reaffirmed earlier findings of the Indian Hemp Commission, the Panama Canal Study, the La Guardia Commission, and the Wootton Report. At 1,184 pages, it was the most comprehensive review of cannabis, ever. Fear of the weed was unfounded, the commission determined; for marijuana users, getting arrested did far greater damage than any harm from using it.

Nixon, who hated pot, rejected the Shafer report without reading it. Two years later he resigned in disgrace; still, his drug war has expanded under every White House, Democrat and Republican. Nixon’s DEA has become the most powerful, costly, state-law-breaking, and wasteful superagency ever assembled. While the federal government spends some \$41 billion annually on the war on marijuana (including lost tax revenue), this year alone Colorado will gross an estimated \$68 million in cannabis taxes.

An even more sinister drug-wars chapter occurred under the Reagan presidency, to be covered in this space another time.