

THE PAGOSA POST

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Out of the Shadows.....

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In March of 2009, Attorney General Eric Holder announced on TV that President Obama was directing the DEA to take a “hands off” approach towards Medical Marijuana patients, their doctors and providers.

I almost fell off the couch upon hearing that. Just on month prior, I had obtained my Colorado Medical Marijuana card and although the marijuana was already beginning to help in my ten year struggle with Crohn’s disease, it was a taboo subject at the time in Pagosa. There was a very small clandestine networks of patients and their providers in Pagosa Springs, meeting in the shadows- although legally.

Amendment 20 (Medical Marijuana Bill) was approved by Colorado voters in 2000, guaranteeing legal access to marijuana- when used as a medicine to treat certain illnesses. There are currently 14 other states which have adopted similar laws and New York now has a similar initiative on its ballot. Marijuana usage is still against Federal law throughout the US.

Unfortunately for America’s alternative healthcare plans, George W. Bush was also elected as President in the year 2000. The policy throughout his two terms was to keep DEA pressure on Medical Marijuana dispensaries and this created a sense of fear in patients, who knew this therapy was working for them, but they still felt illicit, somehow. In the summer of 2010, President Obama sent a written directive to the Justice Department reiterating his earlier stance in a more formal way, which allowed that Medical Marijuana patients and providers who were in compliance with their State laws would not be in violation of any Federal laws.

This opened the doors for people like me to come forward and stand up for something they wholeheartedly believed in. If something returns you to a quality of life that you had given up on, you can’t ignore it.

Unless you (or a loved one) have experienced the sometimes miraculous healing effects of Medical Marijuana, I understand your possible skepticism; plus it doesn’t work for everyone. We have been programmed by the Government and the media for years to look at this herb as a purely recreational drug; while other cultures have been enjoying the curative effects of this plant

for centuries. We, as a country have to start viewing this phenomenon for what it is: an Alternative Medicine.

As adults we now have the legal capacity in Colorado to choose what to put in our bodies, marijuana or prescription drugs, or both.

Let's look at some of the economics of the situation: I'm a sixty two year old man who is extremely grateful for the care I receive through the Veterans Administration Hospital in Albuquerque. The VA follows a model no different from any other health care provider when it comes to my personal affliction, Crohn's disease, which involves chronic inflammation of the digestive tract and bowels, and can lead to death. It is termed incurable and there is a whole array of medicines and surgeries that they throw at you while they search for a cure. None of them worked very well for me, but I kept trying. One experimental drug cost the VA (us, the taxpayers) \$1800 a month and I was taking many others along with it, plus I had three failed surgeries and probably twenty expensive diagnostic procedures. After a 2007 surgery for a stage two melanoma cancer which greatly exacerbated my Crohn's issues, the head gastroenterologist at the VA recommended to the surgery team that they remove my entire colon and rectum.

Fortunately for me, I chose to seek alternative measures. Many of my doctors agree that all of the immunosuppressant drugs that I had taken over the years quite possibly caused my compromised immune system to allow the cancer to occur.

I mention these things, trying to paint a financial background as to how much taxpayer's money has been spent on just me. It's very likely that I have received at least a million dollars worth of care with my issues. Now, because of the natural relief that I am getting from Medical Marijuana (at my expense, not taxpayers' expense), I am hopefully not going to have to go through any more expensive treatments at the VA, saving us all money. Marijuana has not cured me, but I am off prescription drugs and feel much better. By avoiding the removal of my colon and rectum, with all of the expensive aftercare involved, I may have saved the taxpayer's another \$250,000, by just getting my Medical Marijuana card.

Let's contrast those costs, with the estimated \$3,000 annually that I spend on Medical Marijuana. That's not chickenfeed, but if I was on Medical Marijuana for the past ten years, instead of all the caustic drugs and surgeries that I endured, then my disease might have been contained for \$30,000 instead of the \$1,000,000+ that was spent on me.

Now magnify these savings over the whole country, for whatever percentage of the populace that can be helped by marijuana therapy and the savings are potentially in the trillions of dollars. People can literally grow their own medicine-what a concept. Insurance companies and prescription drug manufacturers are not going to be happy over the long haul.

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prescription drug manufacturers are not going to be happy over the long haul. This why I say that President Obama's health care plan is already thriving and saving taxpayer dollars in Pagosa.

Another local example who allows his name to be used is Douglas Shrock, a 45 year old accomplished graphic artist, who goes by "Shrox". He moved to Pagosa in June 2009 from another state, where he held a Medical Marijuana card because of Parkinson's disease, which he contracted in 2000.

Initially Shrox was on disability (taxpayer expense) and could not work, nor drive. The expensive drugs that he was prescribed make him violently ill and he turned to Medical Marijuana initially just to help with the nausea. To his surprise, the marijuana started to help his Parkinson's symptoms. Now it is hard to tell that Shrox has any signs of Parkinson's, when he's on his marijuana therapy. Symptoms return after about a week if he doesn't have access to the medicine.

Shrox is working here at Quest Aerospace, where is has an understanding boss. One who appreciates his skills and works with the fact that Shrox still has his disability and if he needs to go home at lunch to medicate, then he is going home to medicate – not to goof off. Pagosa needs more employers like this.

Shrox is a Quaker by faith and he struggled with his religious beliefs that one should follow the laws of the land with regards to his use of marijuana. He has chosen to take a common sense approach and use marijuana, in order to restore himself to a functioning degree of health. Unless someone has been in Shrox's shoes – or my own – with incurable diseases which are being helped with Medical Marijuana, we don't expect you to understand.

Many other Pagosans are now being helped by Medical Marijuana, yet they live in dire fear of discovery by their peers, employers, and society at large in our tight knit community. I've met combat Veterans and valued employees, who are tip-toeing around Pagosa for fear of being discovered as a Medical marijuana patient. There is something fundamentally flawed about that picture.

You can marry a giraffe today and nobody bats an eye, but mention that you use Medical Marijuana in Pagosa and you automatically become some kind of threat to the fabric of the community. It will be nice when more people and their doctors feel comfortable enough to divulge the truth about what is working for them – you'll be surprised at who some of these people are, rock solid, responsible citizens of Archuleta County.

For those patients and supporters who don't feel comfortable about revealing themselves just yet, there is the anonymity of the ballot box. Our local County elections are coming up in November and although there no referendum on the ballot regarding Medical Marijuana, this can be an opportunity to screen the candidates on this subject. Medical Marijuana has become a political

issue here, so please let's elect someone who considers the need of the hundreds of Pagosan's already being helped by Medical Marijuana.

If you are not already registered to vote, please see our add in this paper about our "Vote Pagosa 2010" registration drive. If you support Amendment 20, Green Issues AND Economic Growth for Archuleta County, get counted, be visible. Visit the Floured Apron Bakery (6:30 am – 2:00 pm) to register or call GOOD EARTH MEDS at 970-731-3202.

Personally, I have an unwavering faith in the character of this town and in our in ability to handle medical marijuana in a totally responsible way, as adults. Medical Marijuana is about getting well, not getting high.