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## Don't Fall For Pot-Smoking Con

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April 30 2004

At the beginning of the last century, America was mired in near medicinal anarchy. Fly-by-night swindlers traveled from town to town hawking miracle medicines that claimed cures for everything from baldness to life-threatening diseases. Although the tonics rarely cured what their proponents claimed, consumers often did report feeling better after taking them.

If these people felt better, then these tonics were no doubt good, effective medicines, right? Not exactly. In reality, people felt better because these "medicines" most often contained large amounts of alcohol, opium or other feel-good agents. This chaotic medicinal marketplace, where legitimate medicine competed with unproven and often dangerous snake oils, compelled Congress to create the Food and Drug Administration to verify and regulate the effectiveness and safety of all medicines. More than making people feel better, the FDA was established to ensure that medicines helped people get better.

Unfortunately, Connecticut is the latest stop on a traveling medicine show being conducted by the snake-oil proponents of our age: the marijuana legalization lobby. Funded by millions of dollars from a handful of billionaires who want to legalize all drugs, marijuana lobbyists have been deployed to Hartford. They are cynically abusing Americans' natural compassion for the sick by garnering support for a far different agenda. These modern-day snake-oil proponents cite testimonials - not science - that smoking marijuana helps patients suffering from AIDS, cancer and other painful diseases "feel better."

Most of us know a loved one who has suffered from chronic illness. We wouldn't want to deny them any relief. So why is it important that Connecticut legislators reject this proposal? The reasons go to the very foundation of our medical system, which relies on science, not easily manipulated public opinion, to determine what medicines are safe and effective. Endorsing marijuana smoking turns our medical system on its head, allowing pressure-group politics rather than medical judgment to determine what is safe and effective, and sends a dangerous message about marijuana to children.

The FDA's process for approving medicine has contributed to the United States having the world's finest medical system. In the century that the FDA has been regulating medicines, it has shown a willingness to approve potentially harmful and addictive substances if it can be proved that the benefits outweigh the risks. The numerous medicinal derivatives of the opium poppy and the coca plant clearly demonstrate this principle.

But smoked marijuana has never passed this test. There is no compelling scientific evidence that smoking marijuana relieves the myriad ailments that its proponents claim. Moreover, the medical community prescribes drugs that are safer and easier to administer and that have been scientifically

proved to be far more effective in treating the ailments that marijuana proponents claim are relieved by smoking marijuana.

In addition, many Americans are unaware that in 1985 the FDA approved Marinol, a pill that contains marijuana's active ingredient and that leaves marijuana legalizers in the awkward and exposed position of trying to explain why smoking a crude weed is superior to a pill or other nonsmoking delivery systems currently in development. In light of these scientifically proven medicinal alternatives, the idea of telling suffering patients that the best we can do for them is to encourage them to inhale the hot smoke of a burning weed seems medieval.

Connecticut lawmakers face an important decision. At a time when teen marijuana use is finally on the decline nationally (down 11 percent since 2001), lawmakers must ask themselves if endorsing marijuana as medicine is going to have a positive effect on Connecticut teens, including the estimated 19,000 12- to 17-year-olds in the state who decide to use marijuana for the first time each year. And is this outcome for thousands of Connecticut children acceptable in order to placate a handful of questionable marijuana proponents that claim they know some people who "feel better" when they smoke marijuana?

Let's hope the Connecticut legislature doesn't miss the simple answers in all of the marijuana lobby's pro-drug rhetorical smoke.

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