

## [The Chairman's Corner](#)

[The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University](#)

This blog is intended to serve as interactive forum to spark a much needed dialogue among those of us in the field as well as ordinary American citizens.

Read my blog and share your thoughts and opinions, agreements and disagreements, and your ideas by posting your comments below.

### [Medical Marijuana in the New York State Legislature—Sheep's Clothing for the Wolf of Legalization](#)



Let's hear it for New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg for calling the "medical marijuana" bill before the state legislature a quintessential example of political hypocrisy. Bloomberg is one of those extraordinary politicians that call actions as he sees them. And he sees this one clearly.

The United States has the best system in the world for assessing the safety and efficacy of medicines in the Food and Drug Administration and I, like Mayor Bloomberg and New York City's top narcotics prosecutor Bridget Brennan, support government study of the use of marijuana (and its active ingredient THC) for medicinal purposes. But like them, I do not support the con game going in the dysfunctional New York State legislature.

The bill Albany is considering is legalization in drag—a loosely drafted piece of legislation that, as special narcotics prosecutor Brennan points out, would allow an unlimited number of shops to sell "medical" marijuana and does not even require a physician in good standing to meet with patients before "prescribing" pot. Indeed a small army of non-physicians can dispense this state's "medical" marijuana, including podiatrists, veterinarians and nurses. The law does not even require any checks for contaminants that could harm patients with weak immune systems like HIV victims and those undergoing chemotherapy.

The two Albany legislators pushing this bill, Senator Thomas Duane, (D-Manhattan, 29th District) and Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, (D-Manhattan, 75th District) are chairs of the Health committees in the state senate and house. They are also stealth drug pushers who, like street drug pushers who deal their stuff in dark alleys, are trying to bury their marijuana bill in the state's budget legislation. That way members can hide their vote on it and do not have to take any heat from their constituents for the marijuana shops that open up in their districts. Senator Duane and Assemblyman Gottfried won't propose their marijuana bill as a separate piece of legislation because they don't have the votes to pass it. Their colleagues in the Albany legislature should demand that this three-card Monte attempt to force them to vote to legalize marijuana should be rejected.

Legislative drug pushers Duane and Gottfried are trying to escape responsibility and blame for themselves and their colleagues for the scores of marijuana shops that will open up in neighborhoods across the city and the state. This is exactly what occurred in Los Angeles where the city council faced an onslaught of angry citizens whose neighborhoods were overrun with pot heads and just recently closed 437 of the thousand or more marijuana shops that opened up after passage of California's medical marijuana law. The LA city council acted in an effort to "achieve some order out of what has essentially been a very chaotic situation" where marijuana dispensaries were popping up all over the city, some near schools and churches, and were serving recreational marijuana users.

And the New York law is far looser than California's. As Brennan notes, the New York bill is "far too loosely drawn, and offers no safeguards to protect the health of those who use it, and the safety of the communities where marijuana dispensaries would be located."

Politically prescribing medicine, rather than scientifically prescribing it through the Food and Drug Administration, is a dangerous and cynical game. Searching for the therapeutic potential of any substance is appropriate, but approving "medicine" by political referendum is a slippery slope that plays fast and loose with the desperate cries of help from the sick.

When I was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the late 1970s, more than half the states responded to frantic pleas from cancer victims by passing bills to legalize the use of laetrile, a concoction of crushed apricot pits and cyanide, which was touted as a cancer cure. At least 50,000 cancer patients took it before our scientific analysis exposed it as completely worthless.

The plight of individuals in chronic pain and with serious diseases like cancer and multiple sclerosis should not be used by politicians to make "medical" marijuana widely available to anyone with a cough or a cut and to recreational users.

So I say, hurrah for Bloomberg and Brennan. I hope Bill O'Reilly gives them his Patriots award and slaps the two Albany legislator drug pushers with his Pinhead award.

If we do not nip this problem in the bud now it will continue to grow like a weed—making me wonder, what the next drug we'll approve by political referendum will be?



## Comments:

1. [Harry Lynch](#) writes:

Bravo, Mr. Califano, thank you for telling the truth on this issue. Medical marijuana is a Trojan horse. Liberalization of penalties for pot possession is an unreported disaster in Massachusetts, as high school student use seems to have grown dramatically since a decriminalization bill passed the legislature. This is a topic of regular conversation among high school teachers and administrators, however no one is measuring the health impact of this new law on the young.

If marijuana is to be legalized, it should be subject to regulation similar to that applied to alcoholic beverages by the municipalities, states, and federal government. And taxed, like cigarettes, at a level commensurate with its probable health consequences to our society.

In the name of empathy for those who suffer from debilitating illness, some people are pushing a long-deferred agenda, which holds nothing less than total legalization as its ultimate goal. We had better think very comprehensively as a society about the hidden costs of giving medical marijuana proponents what they are demanding, because this is not all they want.

Harry Lynch  
Boston, MA

[June 21st, 2010 at 6:00 pm](#)

2. [John Pierce](#) writes:

Are you opposed to marijuana legalization, or the manner in which New York is attempting to achieve it? I don't believe your laetrile analogy is applicable here, as we already know the use of marijuana is not useless.

[June 21st, 2010 at 8:55 pm](#)

3. [Sharon Fratepietro](#) writes:

The bottom line is that decades of harsh penalties have not and never will stop drug use and sales, particularly of marijuana, anymore than alcohol prohibition stopped alcohol. There is no perfect solution to this issue, but prohibition and criminalization make matters worse.