

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# Reefer sanity coming to Miami Beach?

BY JEFF BORG

THROUGH THE WONDER OF NETFLIX, I just saw *Reefer Madness*, a hilarious bit of fantasy. The 1936 propaganda film presented parents with lurid scenes of kids who smoke a little weed, then descend into lunatic laughter, dangerous hallucinations, insanity, and violence. Although risible, *Reefer Madness* was no comedy. It helped launch seven-plus decades of persecution of marijuana users. On November 5, however, Miami Beach voters can support some reefer sanity by voting yes in a straw poll.

The 1937 Marijuana Tax Act began



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the legal regulation of marijuana. A 1938 article in *Scientific American*, headlined “Marihuana {as it was then spelled} More Dangerous Than Heroin or Cocaine,” typified the media position. In 1971, Richard Nixon declared his contentious War on Drugs.

Former Miamian Dr. Carl Hart, now a researcher at Columbia University, just published *High Price, A Neuroscientist's Journey of Self-Discovery That Challenges Everything You Know About Drugs and Society*. Hart did not recycle assumptions. He tested drugs, including cocaine and meth, with humans.

“Not one of them crawled on the floor, picking up random white particles and trying to smoke them. Not one was ranting or raving. No one was begging for more, either — and absolutely none of the cocaine users I studied ever became violent,” revealed Hart. “I was getting similar results with methamphetamine users. They, too, defied stereotypes.”

Today, marijuana is studied as medicine. Cathy Jordan, Florida's most well-known pot patient, suffers from Lou Gehrig's disease. “This is keeping me alive,” Jordan told *The Tampa Bay Times* in June. She claims marijuana slows her disease, which destroys nerve cells and leads to paralysis and death. For Jordan, pot eases muscle stiffening, drooling, and lung congestion.

It treats other ailments as well, but patients live in fear of draconian laws. The FBI reported that last year police nationwide executed 1.5 million drug arrests, including 750,000 for marijuana possession.

In September, Neill Franklin wrote, “These numbers represent a tremendous loss of human potential.” Franklin is a former cop and the current director of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, an association of police, prosecutors, and judges who speak against the drug war. LEAP contends that drug prohibition, not drug use, is the bigger problem. Prohibition makes any substance more valuable and assigns its trade to criminal

gangs. Huge profits without regulations guarantee bribery, theft, and murder. Imprisoning people for using merely destroys families and undermines respect for the law.

Based on 2010 data, a 2013 ACLU study asserted that African-Americans in Florida are 4.2 times as likely as whites to be arrested for marijuana possession, although they use at similar rates.

A 2008 LEAP study prepared by a Harvard economist contended that legalizing drugs in the United States would save taxpayers \$44 billion per year on enforcement (\$30 billion state and local, \$14 billion federal), and it could yield \$33 billion in new tax revenue (\$7 billion from marijuana, \$22 billion from cocaine and heroin, \$3 billion from others).

RECENTLY, ERIC STEVENS, a friend of our chapter, helped collect more than 8,000 signatures requesting that Miami Beach urge state and federal governments to decriminalize medical marijuana. On November 5, Beach voters can weigh in by voting yes in the straw poll.

“It will show the will of the voters,” says Stevens, who wants an ordinance that directs police not to arrest for simple possession. After this election, “City commissioners will have all the evidence and backing they need.”

Now Stevens collects signatures for a state constitutional amendment on medical marijuana. To get on the 2014 ballot, organizers need 683,149 verified signatures by February 1. Then 60 percent of voters must approve.

In a February 2013 poll, 70 percent of Florida voters — a majority of Republicans and overwhelming majorities of Democrats and independents — said they supported a medical-marijuana amendment. In August, 73 percent of Florida voters agreed, and 59 percent said weed should be taxed and regulated like alcohol.

The ACLU has called on states to legalize, license, and regulate marijuana for adults.

