
Grassley on drugs

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“We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people.” ~John F. Kennedy

Two weeks ago, the United Kingdom’s chief drug adviser, Professor David Nutt, was “sacked” by home secretary, Alan Johnson, for criticizing government drug policy and saying – among other things – that marijuana is less harmful to individuals and society than alcohol and tobacco.

“The whole process of determining drug classification has become quite complex and highly politicized,” said Professor Nutt, chairman of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs at a lecture in July. Indeed!

On this side of the Atlantic, U.S. senators are deliberating over a bill introduced by Sen. Jim Webb, titled The National Criminal Justice Commission Act of 2009. The bill would set up a commission to conduct a comprehensive review of the U.S. criminal justice system and make findings “To improve public safety, cost-effectiveness, overall prison administration and fairness in the implementation of the nation’s criminal justice system.”

When working to fix our broken criminal justice system (which has an incarceration rate five times the world average), Webb said, “nothing should be off the table.”

Well, not in Sen. Chuck Grassley’s book. Last week, Grassley introduced an amendment to Webb’s bill that would censor members of the Commission from even discussing “The decriminalization of any offense under the Controlled Substances Act or the legalization of any controlled substance listed under the Controlled Substances Act.”

When Jason Clayworth, writer for the Des Moines Register, asked if the amendment would also halt discussion on medical marijuana, Grassley had this to say: “Yes, the extent to which it would be decriminalization, the answer is yes.”

At the urging of fellow senators, Grassley eventually pulled the amendment. Nevertheless, his stance on our failing war on drugs was sent loud and clear: let’s not talk about it.

Now, I can’t say that legalizing or decriminalizing drugs will solve our nation’s drug problem; however, I can say with absolute certainty that censoring expert advice won’t help anything. It will only serve to further inundate our citizenry with lies built upon political propaganda. Let me provide an example: In 1937, Harry Anslinger, Commissioner for the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, introduced the Marijuana Tax Stamp Act. He testified before Congress saying, “marijuana is the most violence-causing drug in the history of mankind.” Congress passed the bill despite opposition from the American Medical Association. Eleven years later in a 180-degree turnaround, Anslinger spoke before a strongly anti-Communist Congress claiming that marijuana rendered its users not violent at all, but so peaceful – and pacifistic – that the Communists could and would use marijuana to weaken our American fighting men’s will to fight.

With more than 750,000 Americans arrested last year for possessing this pacifist-rendering drug, I’m not a bit surprised that the number of incarcerated drug offenders has increased 1,200 percent since 1980. During that time, state spending on corrections rose six times faster than spending on higher education.

In light of these staggering statistics, I urge lawmakers to keep an open mind when reforming our decayed criminal justice system – with nothing left off the table.

On a lighter note, I want to applaud the Iowa Board of Pharmacy for holding public hearings to examine the scientific and anecdotal evidence regarding the medical use of marijuana. Also deserving of applause are the state and federal drug czars, who said they favor science over politics in the Iowa debate on medical marijuana.

Maybe the drugs czars can teach Grassley a thing or two – that is, if he will clean the waxy political rhetoric out of his ears.

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