



****Please note that SAM's Chair, Patrick Kennedy, will be a guest on the second hour of MSNBC's Hardball with Chris Matthews tonight at 7pm EST****

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**President Obama:
Marijuana legalization supporters
"overstating the case." Marijuana use
is a "bad habit and a vice...not very
healthy, a bad idea, and waste of
time."**

Comparisons to alcohol, however, obscure the facts. If anything, alcohol commercialization is no blueprint for marijuana. SAM Chair, Patrick Kennedy, calls on the President to deliver clearer guidance on marijuana policy.

Today, Patrick J. Kennedy, Chairman of Smart Approaches to Marijuana, released a statement on President Obama's interview about marijuana:

We at Smart Approaches to Marijuana (Project SAM), joined by leaders of major medical associations, recognize that marijuana legalization goes against the President's own goals of effective education and health care reform. We have identified many of the same problems with marijuana legalization that President Barack Obama acknowledged when quizzed about his views of the drug by a reporter for *The New Yorker*.

Chief among them: the legalization of marijuana leads quickly to a slippery slope that could open the gates to legalization - and commercialization - of other addictive substances for recreational use. Clearly, the President knows that, for decades, several of today's largest pro-marijuana-legalization groups have been advocating for the full-scale legalization of all recreational drugs, including psychedelics and cocaine.

As the President noted, the case for marijuana legalization is overstated, and our country hasn't asked important questions about how far is too far with drug legalization. As parts of the United States plunge headlong into ill-informed drug policies rooted in opinions, political agendas and corporate greed, the President astutely notes that it is a matter of time before we're also asked to consider the legalization of a "negotiated dose of cocaine" or "a finely calibrated dose of meth." That is the nature of addiction and substance abuse. It leads to the next problem, and the next problem and the next - and many times, the damage is irreversible and irreparable.

However, we take issue with the President's comparisons between marijuana and alcohol, and we strongly encourage him - a president who has, on many occasions, championed rigorous science - to work closely with his senior drug policy advisors and scientists, who fully acknowledge the growing world body of science showing the harms of marijuana use to individuals and communities. Today's marijuana is far more potent than the marijuana the President has acknowledged using during his teens and early adulthood. The President must also stop to consider the highly concentrated - and increasingly popular - form of marijuana called "hash oil." Doses of that oil often exceed 80% THC - which is essentially a different drug than the weed of Woodstock, which ranged around 1-3% THC.

Since we are familiar with the difficulties of making changes to alcohol policy, even ones that public health experts agree are in the best interest of American society and public health, we should know better than to follow the same path by legalizing a third, addictive substance that will inevitably be commercialized and marketed to children. Two wrongs don't

make a right: just because our already legal drugs may have very dangerous impacts on society it does not mean that other drugs should follow the same path.

SAM also stands firmly with the President in his belief that the United States should reform laws that perpetuate racial and ethnic disparities and punish addiction more than treat it. Marijuana legalization is not necessary to make these reforms. We encourage President Obama to reform laws without compromising the interests of public health and safety.

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About Smart Approaches to Marijuana

Project SAM is a nonpartisan alliance of lawmakers, scientists and other concerned citizens who want to move beyond simplistic discussions of "incarceration versus legalization" when discussing marijuana use, and instead focus on practical changes in marijuana policy that neither demonizes users nor legalizes the drug. SAM supports a treatment, health-first marijuana policy.