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Text:

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Judge works to legalize marijuana



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There are times when our convictions take us places we never wanted to go.

With the smell of marijuana wafting into the Anaheim Convention Center during last year's Know Your Rights Expo, an unlikely speaker walks past bongos, pipes and buxom women dressed as nurses.

Nearly everyone in the crowd wears T-shirts and jeans. The "nurses" hawk bargain-basement prices for medicinal marijuana cards.

The speaker, retired Superior Court Judge Jim Gray wears a blue blazer, light slacks and a button-down shirt as he takes the stage. He is there to advocate legalizing marijuana, or as he puts it, "ending prohibition on illicit drugs."

I expect wild applause. After all, Gray once sentenced dozens to prison for selling drugs.

Instead, the retired judge is met with criticism for supporting legalization, particularly from underground marijuana growers interested in protecting their incomes. Gray's unfazed. He's suffered worse.

Judge Jim Gray's office reveals a busy man, in spite of his having retired as a judge. Gray is a leader in the fight to legalize marijuana, has written a book, is an avid speaker, and now is heading the fight for the proposition on the next ballot.

ANA VENEGAS, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
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Nearly 20 years ago, Gray stood on the steps of the Orange County Courthouse and called for an end to the war on drugs. It was a bold and brave move. Gray's family, even his father – a venerable federal judge who died shortly before his son's speech – strongly advised against taking a public stand.

But Gray decided to move forward with what he believes to be his duty. As he saw it, billions of tax dollars and tens of thousands of lives were at stake.

Now, as the 2012 election less than 18 months away, Gray smells victory.

...

Let's clear the air about one thing. Does the judge inhale?

Gray says he's never taken an illicit drug. I believe him. After asking the question different ways, I got a taste of the judge's tone with repeat offenders.

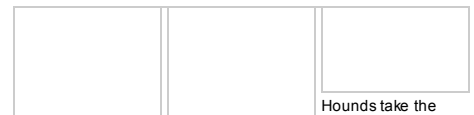
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Steely impatience.

Gray says his drug of choice is a glass of wine at dinner. Alcohol, he says, is far worse than marijuana.

But the retired judge, now a private mediator for ADR Services, softens as his dog, Devon, a golden lab, wags his tail.

Recalling his first public statements against the drug war, Gray offers, "Dad didn't want me to hurt myself."

Gray knew his public stance meant he would never receive an appointment above superior court judge, that he would be ostracized, that he might face recall, that he could receive death threats.

But, sworn to uphold the law, Gray concluded that he and thousands of other judges were sending people to prison for no good reason.

"I felt then as I do now, that drug prohibition is the biggest failed policy in the United States, second only to slavery."

...

When discussing the war on drugs, Gray has the bearing of a military man. At one point, he tells me he wrote to President Obama offering his services, stating, "I know how to give orders and I know how to take orders."

After living in a fraternity and graduating UCLA in 1966, Gray served two years in the Peace Corps in Costa Rica. Then he joined the Navy. He is careful to acknowledge that he volunteered, in part, to control his destiny during a draft.

Such frankness is typical. So is an ability to exist and even thrive in seemingly contradictory worlds.

In 1970, a month before being sent to Vietnam where he patrolled rivers, the former ROTC officer let his superiors know he was planning to march in an anti-war rally. They told him not to wear his uniform.

The warning was unnecessary. Gray would never dream of such a thing. He's a by-the-book guy.

In the Navy, Gray served in JAG Corps. He went on to become a federal prosecutor in Los Angeles and, in 1983, was appointed to the bench by Republican Gov. George Deukmejian. As a municipal judge, he was exposed to the broader legal and social problems of alcoholics. It was an awakening.

Before taking the courthouse steps in 1992, Gray read legal briefs to ensure that condemning drug laws wouldn't affect his cases. He talked to the chief superior court judge and conferred with the state judicial ethics panel (it split).

Since then, Gray says, the war on drugs has accomplished nothing. In fact, he believes we're worse off today than, say, five years ago.

At the Anaheim Convention Center last August, he spoke publicly in favor of Proposition 19, the state initiative to legalize marijuana that was defeated in November. But, typically, Gray also was blunt about the proposal's inadequacies.

Working with others, particularly Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, he is crafting an improved proposal for the 2012 November election.

...

Politics is nothing new for Gray. In 1998, he ran as a Republican for Congress. In 2004, he ran for the U.S. Senate as a Libertarian, mostly to have his point of view heard.

In his battle to end the drug war, Gray has cataloged more than 400 television and radio shows and public forums. And he's written a book, "Why Our Drug Laws Have Failed and What We Can Do About It."

But he also has other passions. First is family. He and his wife have four children, including a son, Ky, who Gray adopted as a 13-month old in Vietnam. Gray also continues his work with Peer Court, a teen diversion program he helped establish.

He's also a serious musician. In September, Vanguard University students will perform Gray's compositions, a show called "Americans All." And he just finished organizing the May 22 Heritage Music Festival to bring bluegrass and folk music to Orange County.

But his fight with drug laws is never far. If California legalizes marijuana, he believes other states will follow. He predicts that the multi-billion dollar bureaucracy that fights the drug war will implode.

If so, he says illicit drugs will be treated like alcohol. Dealers will disappear, the prison population will plummet and there will be tax dollars available for substance abuse treatment.

It may not be the future his father foresaw. But Gray moves forward with love. When Gray first became a judge, his father was the man who swore him in.

To his dying day, the aging federal judge said it was his proudest moment.

David Whiting's column appears four days a week; dwhiting@ocregister.com.

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MYCOMMENT

8:04 PM on April 17, 2011

Score: 0

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Pot users need to compare their love for pot to the evils of alcohol to show how good it is. That doesn't seem like a good method to argue with. Why not talki about positives and negative aside from alcohol? There is not hardcore, long-term research that's been done so it's kind of hard to compare it directly to alcohol anyway.



VASQUEZ1


7:18 PM on April 17, 2011

Score: 0

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We get data every holiday on the number of alcohol related accidents, deaths, and arrests. I haven't seen any data for those drivers under the influence of marijuana. Where's the data from the police reports that state if a person is DUI due to marijuana?

<http://www.ocregister.com/news/year-296766-old-truck.html>



DAVIDWHITING


5:24 PM on April 17, 2011

Score: 0

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I interviewed a manager last year who had a few puffs instead of a glass of wine.

[1 reply](#)



VEGAN4LIFE


12:03 PM on April 17, 2011

Score: 1

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To JamesDB - not all that smoke pot are "pot heads" I am in a executive level and smoke it each night. NEVER during the day or work day. Just like most who enjoy marijuana. Don't be so judgmental my little man...

[1 reply](#)



VEGAN4LIFE

12:00 PM on April 17, 2011

Score: 2

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FACT - Alcohol kills others, is addicting destroys families, you lose all control under the influence and do things you would never do when no inebriated with booze. POT - unlike alcohol, will not make you and addict, nor lose all control over any decision making that you may have. I've done both, I can tell you, I've never

Can services to illegal immigrants be cut off or curtailed?

No, court rulings require certain services, such as education, emergency medical treatment, and cash aid and other services to children who are born here.

Yes, border enforcement can be increased, workers' immigration status can be verified before hiring, and immigration status can be better verified before a person receives aid.

Undecided.

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woken up after a "weed fest" somewhere else or my face in the toilet throwing up violently like I have with drunk from booze.

It's 2011 folks, and no matter what the narrow minded people who have their glass or two of drinks each night say, WEED is here to stay and it ain't going away!

You tell me where there has been one report of the use of marijuana that someone has OD'd on it. There is ZERO cases of this ever happening. Of course, there are others that have other effects from using it. But that is very rare. And it's not life threatening. I'm done seeing these "happy hours" or at the Dodger Stadium incidents where it's been booze related.

1 reply



JAMESDB

Score: -6

Report Abuse

9:18 AM on April 17, 2011

losers, pothead losers.

5 replies



TONYSTEVENSON

Score: 5

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8:52 AM on April 17, 2011

People LEARN the lessons of Alcohol prohibitoin. All that it accomplish was the Funding and empowerment of Criminal organizations and behavior.

The same is true NOW of Cannabis prohibition. It hasn't curbed use, more people than EVER smoke it. What it has done is funded organized crime, made access for kids easier than regulated alcohol, and waste over 10 BILLION in tax dollars each year.

Way past time to end this failed "war" on pot. It makes no scence to waste our resoarces going after Non violent offenders for choosing a Safer alternative to Alcohol and Tabacco.

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