

RESOLUTION
NORTH CAROLINA DEMOCRATIC PARTY
March 2012 Statewide Precinct Meeting

Urge the NCDP to support the Transition to a Harm Reduction Drug Policy, Based on Public Health and Science

Introduced by: Precinct _H-03 Date: March 6, 2012

WHEREAS, drug abuse and addiction affects every community and every family, with an estimated economic impact exceeding the combined societal costs of the impact of both cancer and diabetes together.

WHEREAS, an effective drug policy should aim to minimize the harms due to the presence of drugs in society and maximize the potential medical benefits.

WHEREAS, state and federal government spent over \$40 billion dollars in 2010 on the “War on Drugs”, targeting illicit drugs. This forty year effort spawned a multi-billion dollar for-profit prison and related services industry that has a major financial interest in maintaining the status quo. FURTHERMORE, in the context of a huge “war on drugs” that targets illicit drug use, we recognize that both legal and illegal drugs are subject to abuse. Abuse of legal drugs has now become epidemic.

WHEREAS, demand for drugs in America has increased since the “War on Drugs” was declared over 40 years ago, and the prohibition-penal system approach has not protected our children from this problem.

WHEREAS, the large demand for drugs in the context of prohibition has created an extremely large underground, unregulated and untaxed economy; estimates of the black market in drugs is in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually. This lucrative black market spawns violent crime and corruption as gangs battle for market share. Since Mexico cracked down on the cartels in 2006, there have been over 40,000 drug related murders in Mexico alone.

WHEREAS, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world; and this policy has an extraordinarily disparate impact on racial minorities, as African Americans receive prison sentences for drug offenses at 10 times the rate as white offenders, despite consistent evidence that they are no more likely to use or sell illicit drugs than whites.

WHEREAS our present policy is both socially and economically destructive and does not adequately control access to harmful substances as evidenced by the prevalence of addiction and incarceration, nor does it protect our children, as evidenced by continued teen drug use.

WHEREAS, humans have used marijuana as a botanical food, fiber and medicine for thousands of years, and it is well known to be safe and well tolerated. However, in 1970, mainly driven by racist and political motives, marijuana was classed as a Schedule I controlled substance, intended only for the most dangerous drugs that have no therapeutic value, are not safe for medical use, and have a high abuse potential. This federal classification impedes scientific research into marijuana's therapeutic potential;

WHEREAS, the penalties for using marijuana, even for medical use, can include incarceration and steep fines; and all users, including patients seeking relief from debilitating health conditions, live in fear of criminal prosecution. The “collateral” damage from a marijuana arrest and conviction can include job loss, loss of federal benefits, including student loans or veterans’ healthcare, or loss of child custody.

WHEREAS, the scientific evidence indicates that marijuana is far less dangerous than alcohol or tobacco. Around 50,000 people die each year from alcohol poisoning. Similarly, more than 400,000 deaths each year are attributed to tobacco smoking. By comparison, marijuana is nontoxic and cannot cause death by overdose.

WHEREAS, despite the growing evidence of the relative safety of the use of marijuana, marijuana arrests increased +1100 percent since 1980; and in 2005, 42.6% of all drug arrests were for marijuana offenses, and marijuana possession arrests accounted for 79% of the growth in drug arrests. There have been more than 11.2 million marijuana arrests in the United States since 1995, including 858,408 in 2009 – significantly more than for all violent

crimes combined. One person is arrested for marijuana every 37 seconds. About 88% of all marijuana arrests are for possession – not manufacture or distribution.

WHEREAS, in 1977, President Jimmy Carter stated, "Penalties against possession of a drug should not be more damaging to an individual than the use of the drug itself." And in 2004, Barack Obama stated. "[The War on Drugs is] an utter failure... We need to rethink how we are operating in the drug wars because currently we are not doing a good job."

WHEREAS, According to government surveys, some 25 million Americans have smoked marijuana in the past year, and more than 15 million do so regularly despite harsh laws against its use. A study released 2006 found that marijuana is now the leading cash crop in the U.S., exceeding the value of corn and wheat combined.

WHEREAS, since 1996, 16 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws allowing for medical use of cannabis, providing state protection from arrest for medical use for nearly one third of all Americans. The overwhelming majority of citizens and religious groups want medical marijuana legalized, including the most socially conservative areas of the South. FURTHERMORE, in 2011, for the first time since polling began, a majority of Americans support full legalization of marijuana.

WHEREAS, the United States Conference of Mayors in 2011 passed a Resolution to call for the end of the "War on Drugs", citing the following facts that support the notion that our penal system does not reduce harm, is not relative risk based, and has serious racial disparities in its application. FURTHERMORE, in July 2011, the NAACP passed an historic resolution called "A Call to End the War on Drugs, Allocate Funding to Investigate Substance Abuse Treatment, Education, and Opportunities in Communities of Color for A Better Tomorrow."

HENCE, WE RECOGNIZE that the current approach to the "War on Drugs" is a costly failure. It empowers criminal cartels, destroys lives, infringes on civil rights, and fails to reduce drug use or availability.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the citizens who affirm this RESOLUTION urge our elected representatives, our candidates and our platform to call for policy changes to reduce incarceration, reform U.S. drug policy, eliminate racial inequities, and expand access to substance abuse treatment, mental health services and healthcare as needed by individuals and families — goals consistent with our party's values; we need to move to a "harm reduction" model of combating the problem of drug abuse.

AND WE ARE FURTHER RESOLVED to allow for compassionate medical use of marijuana; and we call for an immediate end to the arrest and prosecution of medical marijuana patients in NC. We further call for the passage of legislation that will regulate cannabis in a workable distribution model, such as that proposed by NC HB577, the NC Medical Cannabis Act.

AND WE ARE FURTHER RESOLVED to urge the federal Administration to heed the recommendations of our major medical organizations to remove marijuana from Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act to enable more unfettered research on its therapeutic use, and to ultimately explore options to allow for access to marijuana and cannabis products under manageable tax, health care, and law enforcement policies, policies similar to those used to control alcohol.

FURTHERMORE, to that end, we support legislation like H.R. 2306, the Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act, which would remove marijuana from the federal Controlled Substances Act and limit the federal government's role in marijuana enforcement.

Affirmed by:

Date:

Note: A longer version of this Resolution with referenced citations is available through the New Hanover County Democratic Party.