FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

RELEASE: APRIL 28, 1981

TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT POT

Since the government and the schools have done such an ineffective job of telling young people the truth about marijuana, it looks like it's up to individual citizens and local action groups to get the message across. Many people are hoping that the unique community project in Carlinville, Illinois, will become a model for similar programs across the country.

Mrs. Joan Bellm raised $5,000 from concerned citizens and put on an informational program attended by more than a fifth of Carlinville's entire population. She brought in national experts such as Dr. Harold Voth of the Menninger Foundation in Topeka to tell the truth about the marijuana epidemic among school children.

Government figures show that almost one out of three young Americans age 12 to 17 has used marijuana, and 17 percent are current users. Among young Americans age 18 to 25, more than two out of three have used marijuana, and 40 percent are current users.

Marijuana is no longer merely a young-adult or a teenager problem; it is increasingly used by youngsters age 11 and 12. It is no longer just a big-city problem; it's a rural problem, too.

Part of the marijuana epidemic is an unhappy legacy of the Vietnam War. General Lewis W. Walt, USMC (Ret.), told how marijuana, in plentiful supply at a very low price, appeared overnight on the streets of Saigon. One day the American GIs there were just normal carefree guys; the next day, they were all smoking pot.

In the United States, peer pressure, rock music, and easy availability all combined to induce more and more teenagers to smoke pot and to equate it with rebellion against the authority of the older generation, or at least with growing up. The problem was tremendously compounded because some M.D.s and Ph.D.s gave their "expert" opinion that marijuana was harmless, or at least no more harmful than tobacco or alcohol.

(more)

The evidence is flooding in that pot is really very different. Among the 400 separate chemicals identified in the marijuana plant is a mind-altering chemical called delta-9-tetrahydrocannibinol or THC which is picked up by the fatty tissues of the body.

Unlike alcohol, which flushes itself out of the body in about 12 hours, 30 to 50 percent of the active ingredient in marijuana (THC) remains in the body for a week, and some of it remains as long as a month. Street marijuana today has five times more THC than the marijuana of five years ago, thanks to better cultivation of the plant.

Marijuana contains more cancer-causing hydrocarbons than tobacco. Smoking five joints a week impairs breathing more seriously than smoking six packs of cigarettes a week. Lungs show more impairment after exposure to marijuana smoke than tobacco smoke.

Male users of marijuana may suffer a reduction in their sperm count and reduced fertility. Women who use pot are more likely to have defective menstrual cycles. Animal studies indicate that marijuana may have a toxic effect on unborn infants. THC can cross the placental barrier or be carried by the mother's milk.

Nearly all psychologists agree that marijuana use by children and adolescents can severely damage the emerging personality. At the very time when a teenager is making decisions between freedom and responsibility, drug dependence is a blinding agent which distorts perception and clouds the view of the outside world at the same time that it exaggerates mental and emotional problems.

Smoking marijuana often continues to impair coordination and reaction time long after the user has ceased to feel high. Airline pilots who went through flight simulation after smoking pot, and who said they felt their performance had not suffered, actually showed signficant deterioration in their performance.

These findings are drawn from recent official studies of the National Institute on Drug Abuse and from Consumers' Research, the nation's original consumer group. They say that more than a thousand experimental projects on marijuana have confirmed the drug's harmful effects.

How long will it take for the scientific findings to catch up with the schoolchild who is victimized by the pusher? One can only hope that a massive educational program, such as the one initiated in Carlinville, will start catching on nationwide.

(end)