ASA’s Washington State Lobby Day Draws Hundreds to Capitol

More than 300 patients and advocates converged on the Washington state capitol last month for a day of citizen lobbying sponsored by the Washington State Chapter of Americans for Safe Access.

Led by ASA’s Executive Director Steph Sherer and Legislative Analyst Kari Boiter, who lives in the state and helped found the chapter, Medical Cannabis Day included workshops, a legislative briefing and an afternoon of citizen lobbying in which advocates visited scores of state elected officials to ensure that patient’s voices are at the forefront as state policymakers debate the future of medical cannabis.

The briefing for legislators and their staff featured ASA’s Sherer, Neuropathic Pain specialist Dr. Jake Felice, licensed cannabis business co-founder Oscar Velasco from Dockside, union organizer Patrick Mackay from United Food and Commercial Workers, patient caregiver Dale Rogers, and Veterans for Medical Cannabis Access organizer Patrick Seifert.

The lobby day generated considerable attention in state media outlets, and a key legislator, Senator Ann Rivers, changed to a more supportive position less than 24 hours later and now reportedly will remove restrictions on sales of dried cannabis flowers from the pending bill she sponsored.

The state’s 16-year-old medical program has been under debate since voters there approved a new, parallel system for adult access to cannabis. Regulation of medical distribution that was approved by the legislature in previous years was derailed by threats to elected officials from federal prosecutors in the US Attorney’s office.

Despite having no state mechanism for licensing, Washington’s medical cannabis businesses contributed more than $14 million to state coffers in Fiscal Year 2014, according to the state Department of Revenue.

PEDiatricians Urge REscheduling, RESEARCH, IMMEDIATE ACCESS

A professional organization representing more than 62,000 pediatricians in the US last month endorsed the use of cannabis for some seriously ill children and called on the federal government to conduct more research and change the classification of the drug to recognize its medical uses.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) said in its journal Pediatrics that cannabis should undergo FDA clinical trials but noted that “some children who may benefit from cannabinoids cannot wait for a meticulous and lengthy research process.” For that reason, “the Academy recognizes some exceptions should be made for compassionate use in children.”

The AAP also recommends that cannabis be changed from a Schedule 1 controlled substance—defined as having no currently accepted medical use in the United States—to Schedule II, where it would be classified with drugs such as oxycodone that may be used in treatment under a doctor’s supervision. That change, the AAP notes, would enable more research and development of pharmaceutical cannabinoids.
Pomo Nation is First Tribe to Cultivate Medical Cannabis

A large cultivation operation in northern California will break ground this month, the first on land belonging to a Native American tribe. The project follows a policy change by the Department of Justice that says federal authorities will not interfere with cannabis cultivation or distribution on native lands, so long as it satisfies federal enforcement concerns. The Pomo Nation in Mendocino County, part of what is known as California’s Green Triangle, has entered into an agreement with an outside investor, FoxBarry Farms, which has worked with several tribes on a variety of economic development projects. FoxBarry will develop greenhouses for the tribe and manage distribution of the medical cannabis in California. Plans include 90,000 square feet of greenhouses and 20,000 square feet of indoor cultivation, to be developed with the help of consultants from United Cannabis in Colorado. FoxBarry is reportedly developing three medical cannabis operations on different tribal lands in California.

ASA Touts Unity Conference in USA Today


The Washington, D.C. conference will highlight medical and legal experts, policymakers, as well as workshops and panels focusing on research, strategic planning, and skills building. On Tuesday, March 31, ASA will host a press conference and Congressional lobbying visits by hundreds of patient advocates.

The conference opens Saturday, March 28, with a keynote address by researcher Dr. Ethan Russo of GW Pharmaceuticals, followed by panel discussions and stakeholder breakout sessions. Sunday, March 29, will feature experts discussing medical cannabis research, the state of policy reform in the U.S., and the harmonization of regulatory approaches.

Monday, March 30, is dedicated to educational and skills building workshops and an awards dinner. Tuesday, March 31 will be a Lobby Day Training in the morning, followed by a press conference at 11am, and Congressional visits that afternoon with hundreds of conference participants advancing federal medical marijuana policy reform.

CONTEST: Medical Marijuana Week, Feb 8-15

You + a Pic = A chance To Win! Simply snap a photo of yourself with the hashtag #WellnessIsWinning, tag it with #MMJWeekUnity15 on Instagram, Twitter or upload directly on our Facebook page. Winners will be announced on February 20, 2015. Winners will be determined by the number of votes on Facebook.

How to Enter:: Upload a photo on ASA’s Facebook Page under #MMJWeekUnity15 or submit one via Twitter or Instagram by using the hashtag #MMJWeekUnity15.

Prizes include: (1) A Free trip to the 2015 National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference in Washington, D.C. including registration, hotel and travel; (2) ASA Swag Bag with ASA Vape Pen, ASA T-shirt, ASA Water Bottle & ASA Tote Bag; (3) 3. ASA T-shirt, ASA Banner Pen & ASA Water Bottle.

How to Vote: Go to ASA’s Facebook Page. Under #MMJWeekUnity15 click on ‘Vote’ and then select your favorite photo. If you submit a photo, encourage your friends and family to vote for your photo by sharing your photo contest entry on Facebook.

Israel Leads Research

Long a leading center for medical cannabis research, Israel this month is the site of an investor’s conference, CannaTech Israel. Israeli medical cannabis producers have bred a strain, dubbed “Rafael” after the healing angel, that is rich in non-psychoactive cannabinoid and CBD and low in psychoactive THC. Like Charlotte’s Web, the Israeli strain does not produce intoxication. International health officials as well as investors from Australia, the US and elsewhere are eager for the chance to export it from Israel. The medical cannabis advisor for the country’s Health Ministry says agriculture officials favor making Israeli strains available for export, but officials in other branches of the government oppose it.

Illinois Grants Scores of Cannabis Licenses

An unexpected turnabout in Illinois late last month saw Gov. Bruce Rauner issue more than 70 state permits to cultivate and distribute medical cannabis to registered patients. The move came only a week after the governor said he had halted the granting of any licenses until a legal review was complete of the application process begun under his predecessor. The change of heart came after an internal review and consultation with the state Attorney General, according to the governor’s office.

Eighteen cultivation centers were approved to begin growing cannabis; three other applicants are undergoing additional review. Distribution permits were issued for 53 companies, with five more pending further review. To gain final approval, applicants must to pay state fees, register all employees and show they have sufficient operating funds. It will still be several months before registered patients will be able to legally obtain medicine.

Many of the successful applicants in Illinois are former state officials. A manager of one of the cultivation companies, Ieso LLC, is a former director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture. Green Thumb Industries, which was awarded three cultivation licenses as well as one to operate a dispensary, has a former state representative who is a close ally of the House Speaker as a consultant and lobbyist.

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