

Texas Workforce Editorial

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Just Say No -- Again

AUSTIN – A Message from Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Chairman Tom Pauken:

Washington sophisticates had great fun ridiculing Nancy Reagan’s “simplistic” Just Say No campaign. *Washington Monthly* called it “Just Say Nonsense.” Instead of “oversimplifying” a “complex problem,” we should encourage “responsible use” of illegal drugs, the magazine editorialized, as if there could be responsible use of marijuana, cocaine, heroin or methamphetamines.

But, it was surely not a coincidence that drug abuse declined during the Reagan years. Dr. Herbert Kleber, interviewed on PBS’s *Frontline*, told the truth: “To diminish drug use, you need to de-glamorize and de-normalize drug use” in the manner of the Just Say No campaign, which “had a good effect in terms of decreasing initiation and use.” From 1980 to 1991, marijuana use among high school seniors decreased from 33 percent to 12 percent, “an enormous decrease,” according to Dr. Kleber, and “1985-1986 turns out to be the high point of the cocaine epidemic.” Tragically, marijuana use increased rapidly again between 1992 and 1997, he added.

The Texas Department of State Health Services reports a similar pattern in Texas. Success in combating marijuana use among secondary school students in the 1980s was wiped out in the 1990s.

Now the New York Times brings word in a June 9 article that, as a result of the legalization of so-called medical marijuana, “the sticky, sweet aroma of cannabis fills” the streets of Mendocino County and other places in California, and “marijuana as a medicine has become an accepted part of life in many communities,” providing “legal cover for large-scale marijuana growers.” So many people are growing marijuana in residential neighborhoods that housing shortages have resulted in some parts of the state.

It is time to “de-glamorize” and “de-normalize” drugs again.

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Pauken Opinion

The American public seriously should be concerned the U.S., with less than 5 percent of the world's population, consumes more than 50 percent of the world's illegal drugs. Marijuana often is the "gateway drug" into the illegal drug culture.

According to the United States Department of Labor (DOL), workplace drug abuse is a major problem. "The vast majority of drug users are employed, and when they arrive for work, they don't leave their problems at the door," according to the department. Three-quarters of drug abusers are employed. That means that nationally, 12.9 million drug abusers brought their problems to work in 2005 and 13.4 million in 2006, posing significant occupational hazards. The DOL statistics for 2006 reveal an alarming 8.8 percent of full-time workers were "drug abusers."

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is committed to helping Texas businesses and their employees protect themselves from the danger posed by workplace drug abuse. TWC provides employers with advice on achieving drug-free workplaces, including a model drug-free workplace policy. Under Texas and federal laws, there is almost no limitation at all on the right of private employers to adopt drug and alcohol testing policies for their workers.

Everyone should understand that employees who are fired for violation of employer drug-free workplace policies are *not* eligible for unemployment benefits. Employees terminated for illegal drug use or other misconduct are not entitled to receive those benefits so long as employers follow appropriate company procedures and give employees warnings about the consequences of illegal drug use.

The most important thing is to de-glamorize and de-normalize drugs. Dr. Kleber said it, and Nancy Reagan did it. Her "Just Say No" campaign worked the first time, and we need another one like it today.

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Tom Pauken is the chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission. He was appointed by President Reagan to serve as director of ACTION, an independent federal agency, which implemented the Just Say No to Drugs campaign.

Media Contact: Ann Hatchitt

Phone: 512-463-8556

The Texas Workforce Commission is a state agency dedicated to helping Texas employers, workers and communities prosper economically. For details on TWC and the programs it offers in unison with its network of local workforce development boards call (512) 463-8556 or visit www.texasworkforce.org.