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Ex-drug czar sticks to his guns on pot

By [Sharon Salyer](#), Herald Writer

BOTHELL — Voter approval of a California referendum to legalize marijuana “would have been a disaster,” the nation’s former drug czar, [Barry McCaffrey](#), said Tuesday.

McCaffrey, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy from 1996 to 2001, made his comments during a visit to [Canyon Park Treatment Solutions](#).

He serves on the board of the center’s parent organization, CRC Health Group, and makes regular visits to its clinics.

When asked about the California proposal to legalize marijuana, rejected by voters in that state’s November general election, he said it came at a time when the push is on to normalize the use of drugs.

“It all sounds kind of cute,” McCaffrey said. “Then we look at the relationship between marijuana use and alcohol use.”

Teens who are binge drinkers and use marijuana are at high risk for ending up in a drug treatment center, he said.

There are a limited number of health problems for which marijuana can provide relief, such as the severe weight loss from AIDS. Multiple sclerosis patients might also benefit, he said. Some patients report the drug helping them regain some muscle control.

“If there’s a shred of scientific evidence that smoked marijuana was helpful ... we ought to do it,” he said. “Most of it is sheer nonsense.”

As part of his visit, McCaffrey met with the center’s staff and several of its patients.

McCaffrey said it isn’t hard to spot people who are trapped by addictions, yet “the hundreds of thousands of people have been escaped addictions are invisible.”

Although none of the patients gave their names, they did tell him a little of their stories.

A 51-year-old woman said she became addicted after becoming ill and being prescribed pain medications.

The methadone treatment program “has been a lifesaver, for me and a couple of family members,” she said.

“You’ve gotten your life back, haven’t you?” McCaffrey asked.

A 21-year-old man told McCaffrey, “I was in school, played sports and hung out with the wrong crowd.” He later explained that he had used heroin and Oxycontin.

The drug treatment program “saved my life,” he said.

“Thank God for that,” McCaffrey responded.

“Good luck to all of you,” McCaffrey said as the session wrapped up. “How about five years from now, I get a report on how you’re doing?”

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About Canyon Park Treatment Solutions

Bothell's Canyon Park Treatment Solutions, an outpatient drug treatment center, serves 385 patients, 80 percent of whom are from Snohomish County.

It treats patients with drug problems that include being addicted to heroin and pharmaceutical drugs, such as the painkiller Oxycontin.

Patients abusing prescription drugs are generally 18 to 25 years old; those using heroin generally are in their 30s to 50s.

Source: Canyon Park Treatment Solutions

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