

## Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? The Liberals? wrongheaded marijuana strategy

Last week, a Federal Court judge in British Columbia struck down federal regulations restricting the rights of medical marijuana patients to grow their own cannabis.

The Liberal government has six months to come up with new rules.

I was disappointed by this ruling by the Federal Court. Our previous Conservative government introduced the Marijuana for Medical Purposes Regulations to balance granting access for legitimate medical purposes with preventing marijuana from falling into the hands of youth.

Marijuana is an illegal drug, and it is illegal for a reason. It has lasting and serious health effects for youth. As stated by the Canadian Pediatric Association, the evidence is clear that when youth smoke marijuana, they have increased risks of mental health issues, including psychosis and schizophrenia.

The Conservative Party remains opposed to the legalization of marijuana. Legalization would have significant negative impacts on public health, as well as family and community safety. We simply cannot trust the Liberals to keep our streets and communities safe. Having a former police chief like Bill Blair now in charge of the Prime Minister Trudeau's legalization strategy does not make legalizing marijuana any less misguided. This appointment is more concerned about spin and optics than health and safety. In fact, the Liberals' new marijuana czar stated in the House of Commons that our kids needed protecting from the ?ravages of marijuana,? yet legalization will only make the substance more accessible to children. (House of Commons Debates, Dec. 11, 2015, pg. 301)

The Anti-Drug Strategy put in place by the Conservative government is working. The use of marijuana by youth aged 15 to 24 has dropped by 43 per cent since 2004 from a staggering 61 to 34.8 per cent in 2012.

There are significant questions regarding legalization that no Liberal has attempted to address, such as how will legalization policy deal with retailing of marijuana in forms such as cookies and candies, which make the drug more attractive and accessible to youth? What will legalization mean for public health? The Canadian Medical Association has warned that marijuana smoke can cause serious mental ailments, especially in youth under the age of 25.

This is in addition to the physical harm that smoking the drug causes to organs in the body. How will legalization policy deal with drug-impaired driving? In regions where marijuana is legal, a higher number of impaired drivers are involved in fatal motor vehicle accidents. The Liberals have no plan to deal with motorists who choose to drive or operate heavy machinery while under the influence of marijuana.

It is clear the Liberal government is intent on making marijuana widely available to the general public, despite the harmful effects on health and the criminality associated with this drug. This is a dangerous direction to take and one which is opposed by many residents in Dufferin-Caledon.

I call on the government to appeal this decision in order to protect Canada's youth.

