

# Push back against pot hoax

MIRANDA DEVINE



Barnaby Joyce is right to push back against the hoax of the marijuana normalisation industry. Medical marijuana is just the gateway drug to recreational weed. Every emotional trick in the book was used to get it legalised in 2016. But still the activists are pushing for more.

And Barnaby is canny enough to smell a rat. In his hometown of Tamworth last Thursday night, the former Nationals leader went along to the screening of a documentary about medical cannabis, *High as Mike*.

He was invited by activist Lucy Haslam, whose son Dan died of cancer in 2015 at age 25. A former nurse, she speaks eloquently about her son's suffering, and was the main driver of legalisation three years ago.

But the documentary is something else. "It halted the cancer against all expectations," says one interviewee.

"Thank you, Mother Flower, I'm not dying," says another.

Are you kidding? That's grossly irresponsible. While there is some evidence that cannabis can help alleviate nausea, chronic pain and childhood epilepsy, it is a giant leap to suggest it offers a cure for cancer.

Having sat through the documentary, Joyce concluded it was holding out false hope of a "miracle elixir" and was honest enough to say so.

He stood up in the aisle of the movie theatre and called out Haslam and the panel during the Q&A session.

"I don't like someone saying there is some grand elixir," he says in a video posted online by Cannabis Club Australia. "I do not want to offer someone a hope that I cannot back up. I don't want to say to someone you're going to live from cervical cancer or you're going



Illustration: Don Lindsay

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to live from Crohn's disease or you're going to live from breast cancer. That's the worst thing you can do to someone."

It's hard to think of a crueler hoax.

People started arguing with Joyce but he stood his ground. "I was there when my brother died, just like when Dan died, it kills you," he said. "It tears you apart. . . I don't like someone saying there is some grand elixir that's not the truth."

"If you want to pull a few cones, knock yourself out. God

knows I did when I was at uni. "But that does not mean for one second that we can put it up as some grand elixir or put it up as this hope that somehow my brother Timothy would be alive if this happened."

"I get furious with that because . . . unless you can prove it I don't want to hear it." No one could refute what he said.

One of Haslam's co-panellists who said he worked for the University of Sydney's Lambert Initiative, a cannabis research foundation funded by a rich family, said: "We are working on a number of different trials to ascertain the factual veracity of these assertions and, yeah, we are working on that."

"It's not necessarily the statement in the film that's definitive. Medical cannabis is an embryonic area showing incredible promise."

In other words, there is no evidence that cannabis cures cancer.

Among those berating Joyce that night was a man who once

visited a friend in Colorado, where cannabis has been legalised: "Wouldn't it be great to have some kind of place to go and purchase what you need without all these rules and regulations? Surely, Barnaby you can go back to Canberra and start this journey."

Whoops. Mr Colorado didn't get the memo.

"We're not talking about recreational drug use here," Haslam says at another point. "This is a totally separate thing."

Except it's not. The trajectory is clear. Wherever medical cannabis is legalised, recreational cannabis is not far behind because it normalises the social view of cannabis.

Colorado is a case in point. Twelve years after the medicinal version, recreational weed was legal.

In the US, 33 States have legalised marijuana for medical use, and 11 have moved on to recreational use.

A further 21 have decriminalised recreational

pot, or are about to. Now you can't walk through the streets of Manhattan without smelling pot.

This headlong rush to embrace the demon weed flies in the face of mounting evidence of harm.

We've known for more than a decade of the link between marijuana and psychosis, depression and schizophrenia. A 2011 study in the *British Medical Journal* found teenagers who smoked marijuana were twice as likely to develop psychosis as those who didn't.

Another *BMJ* study estimated that "13 per cent of cases of schizophrenia could be averted if all cannabis use were prevented".

The *Lancet* found marijuana use increased the risk of psychosis about 40 per cent.

To make matters worse, the marijuana sold at legal dispensaries in the US today is five times more potent than the pot of the 1970s and '80s, according to a new book by *New York Times* reporter Alex Berenson: *Tell Your Children: The Truth about Marijuana, Violence and Mental Health*. Berenson reports that the first four States to legalise marijuana, Alaska, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, have had "sharp increases" in violent crime since 2014.

Then there are the traffic accidents.

In Colorado, the number of drivers involved in fatal crashes who tested positive for marijuana more than doubled in the three years after legalisation, from 10 per cent to 20 per cent, the *Denver Post* reported.

There was a 40 per cent increase in the number of all drivers involved in fatal crashes and the number of drivers who tested positive for marijuana use jumped 145 per cent, with increasing levels of potency detected.

Australia should heed the lessons from the US and ignore the propaganda from the pied pipers of pot.

Miranda Devine is a senior columnist for the *Daily Telegraph*

## Stop and think before posting about work – or face fallout

GARY MARTIN

Cast your mind back to pre-social media days when the only platform available to bemoan unfair treatment in the workplace was an informal get-together with supportive colleagues around the water cooler.

If you did get caught or were overheard you would likely attract only raised eyebrows, the silent treatment or – at worst – a tongue-lashing of reasonable intensity.

Fast forward to the birth of Facebook in 2004, with other platforms following shortly thereafter, and for more than a decade now social media has delivered a smorgasbord of opportunities for workers who

wish to bag their colleagues, bosses and even organisations.

Those opportunities came to a grinding halt this month when the High Court upheld a decision of the Australian Public Service to terminate an employee for sending thousands of anonymous tweets critical of her employer – most sent from a private device and outside of work hours.

The termination follows a series of infamous sackings for social media gaffes, which have demonstrated that an employee's online behaviour can be more disastrous than hammering dynamite.

Take the public relations executive who tweeted just before boarding an aircraft: "Going to Africa. Hope I don't

get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white."

Her tweet, which went viral, resulted in her losing her job moments after her plane landed in Africa.

Or the new child daycare centre employee who posted on Facebook after the first day of work: "I just really hate being around a lot of kids."

The employee was not asked back for day two.

Closer to home, Israel Folau and Rugby Australia, which sacked him because of his social media posting, will face off in the Federal Court in February.

What is clear is there is a good chance you will face the chop if you use social media to stymie the reputation of your company, embarrass your

employer or even undermine your very own capacity to do the job for which you are paid.

What is less clear is the fate of employees who engage in more subtle or less direct behaviours via social media.

Take the worker who displays disdain for their boss by de-friending them on Facebook, or liking a customer complaint on Twitter, or providing a glowing recommendation on LinkedIn for an ex-colleague who was forced to quit the company "under a cloud", or uploading a photo of an alcohol-fuelled and out-of-control work function to Instagram.

And let's not forget employees who don't post themselves but "like" or share or re-tweet another user's

sexist, racist or homophobic content.

Or even those workers who join but don't participate in social media interest groups that might be considered offensive.

Chances are that even these types of behaviours will increasingly put jobs at risk.

Every worker needs to accept the new reality that their personal and professional lives will merge online.

Using your smarts and surveying your own common sense before committing to posting, commenting, sharing or liking anything online might just save your job.

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