

Project SAM: (Smart Approaches to Marijuana) launches to promote balanced marijuana policies

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**New National Alliance,  
Project SAM: “Smart Approaches to Marijuana” Launches to  
Promote Balanced Marijuana Policies**

*Patrick Kennedy, Jr.; Journalist David Frum; Dr. Christian Thurstone; Harvard Researchers; Former Obama Drug Policy Advisor; and others announce a new national alliance to educate lawmakers and the public about the science of marijuana use for the development of responsible public policy.*

January 10, 2013 – Denver, CO – A new national alliance, Project SAM (Smart Approaches to Marijuana) is launching today in Denver, Colorado to start a new national dialogue on marijuana policy based on public health. Chaired by former Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy, Jr., Project SAM is a bipartisan alliance of lawmakers, scientists, and other concerned citizens who want to move beyond simplistic dichotomies of “incarceration versus legalization” and instead focus on practical changes in marijuana policy that neither demonizes users nor legalize drugs. Former George W. Bush Speechwriter, Newsweek/Daily Beast columnist David Frum, Harvard Professor Sharon Levy, University of Kansas public health specialist Kimber Richter, and former Obama and Bush advisor Kevin Sabet will also serve on the board of SAM. SAM focuses on a “third way” approach to marijuana, and will be working with state partners to reach the local level. The first state partnership will be Smart Colorado, chaired by Bob Doyle.

“I have devoted my life to mental health awareness and the establishment of a modern health system that recognizes the importance of preventing and treating mental illness,” remarked Patrick J. Kennedy, Jr. “I am extremely concerned about how America’s current rush toward marijuana legalization, however, could increase our health problems by allowing a permissive environment for addiction.”

Project SAM, funded through volunteers, will focus on four main goals:

- (1) To inform public policy with the science of today’s marijuana
- (2) To have a conversation about reducing the unintended consequences of current marijuana policies, such as lifelong stigma due to arrest
- (3) To prevent the establishment of “Big Marijuana” — and a 21st-Century tobacco industry that would market marijuana to children. Those are the very likely results of legalization
- (4) To promote research of marijuana’s medical properties and produce pharmacy-attainable medications

“A world of legal drugs will be a world in which the fates of the top one third of Americans and the lower two thirds will diverge even more than they already do. We have opened more and more roads to self-harm. Must we now open another?” remarked David Frum, former presidential speechwriter.

While Project SAM will work on getting information to lawmakers and the public about the perils of marijuana addiction and legalization, it will also focus on cost-effective solutions to marijuana use such as the expungement of records for those with arrests for small amounts of marijuana.

“To be against legalization is not to be anti-reform,” remarked Kevin A. Sabet, former advisor to the Obama Administration. “Marijuana arrestees should be referred to brief health interventions or treatment, if appropriate, and given opportunities to find a way out of drugs as opposed to a way into the criminal justice system.”

Project SAM will be particularly focused, however, on preventing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century tobacco industry focused on a new product line – marijuana.

“The tobacco industry is a worldwide public health disaster. We should learn from our mistakes, not repeat them with marijuana,” remarked Kimber Richter, a renowned tobacco researcher at the University of Kansas.

SAM will also focus on the impact of marijuana on children. “As a physician for kids, I know marijuana legalization would be a disastrous public health policy for them,” said Christian Thurstone, child and addictions psychiatrist and researcher, University of Colorado Denver. “The developing brain should be shielded from harm, not exposed to it.”

Finally, there will be a push to increase research into the medicinal properties of marijuana that does not involve ingesting the whole drug, as per “medical” marijuana by state referenda. “Cannabis-based drugs dispensed by pharmacists and prescribed by doctors represent an exciting area of current research,” remarked Kennedy. “But more can be done to incentivize researchers and the government to focus on this area. Our coalition looks forward to helping with that agenda.”