Background: Marijuana for Medical Purposes

What is the issue in Florida?
Although the ballot title and summary suggest that the amendment would allow medical marijuana in narrow, defined circumstances and only for patients with "debilitating diseases," the passage of the amendment would allow marijuana in limitless situations, such as medical marijuana being recommended for migraines, menstrual cramps or anorexia.

Florida medical marijuana amendment overview: "Use of Marijuana for Certain Medical Conditions"

- The ballot summary states that it is only for those with debilitating diseases but then states in the definition that it will be acceptable for "other conditions for which a physician believes that the medical use of marijuana would outweigh the potential risks for a patient."
    - That language would open the door to widespread use of marijuana for "medical use," as has happened in states such as California that consider migraines, anorexia, and other conditions to be a "debilitating disease" treatable by marijuana.
- There are no guidelines in the ballot language requiring guardian consent for those who are under the age of 18 and who seek to legally consume medical marijuana.
- Other than being at least 21 years of age, there are no other requirements for becoming a caregiver and receiving the approval to have medical marijuana in your possession, a loophole that could allow elons or others with questionable motives to serve as a care giver. Patients are allowed to have up to five caregivers, according to the ballot language.

Key Messages: Marijuana for Medical Purposes

The Medical Marijuana Amendment in Florida: "Use of Marijuana for Certain Medical Conditions"

1. **No physician's prescription is required:** A patient only needs a "physician certification" from a licensed Florida physician, which is not a formal prescription used at a reputable pharmacy, but rather a written recommendation that is used to buy marijuana at storefront dispensaries. Medical marijuana can be prescribed for any "serious condition." However, there is no definition of a "serious condition" that absolutely warrants marijuana.
    - In states where marijuana has been legalized for so-called medical purposes, the law has been abused, with more than 90% of those approved to use marijuana using it for common ailments like back pain, neck pain, menstrual cramps, and muscles spasms – not the debilitating diseases such as cancer, AIDS, ALS, and glaucoma that voters intended.
2. **What is a debilitating disease?** The ballot summary states that it is only for those with debilitating diseases, but notes in the definition that it will be acceptable for "other conditions for which a physician believes that the medical use of marijuana would outweigh the potential risks for a patient." As we have seen in some other states, conditions such as migraines, anorexia, and menstrual cramps have been classified as a debilitating disease that is treatable by marijuana.

3. **Parent consent not required:** The amendment allows a teenager to get a recommendation for medical marijuana without the consent of a parent. There is no quality or dosage control, meaning there is no way to prevent sales to minors, or to stop diversion to minors.
4. **The role of the caregiver:** The caregivers described in the amendment are not required to have any background checks, training or certifications. So what looks like a safeguard is really a loophole that would open the door to abuse -- allowing addicts, drug dealers, and convicted felons to become caregivers.
5. **Marijuana dispensaries, not pharmacies:** Medical marijuana is often sold by storefront dispensaries, not in medically controlled circumstances, and is not monitored by physicians. In other states, the storefront dispensaries have become magnets for crime and increase law enforcement costs. With the passage of the medical marijuana amendment in Florida, storefront dispensaries would proliferate just as pill mills did, and marijuana use would increase.

General Marijuana and Medical Marijuana:

1. **The federal government considers cannabis an illegal drug by law:**
    - Although the U.S. Attorney General's Office says it's not focusing on medical marijuana laws, that doesn't change the Controlled Substances Act.
    - As administrations change, the priorities of the Justice Department may shift again. Federal prosecutors could ignore the guidelines and root out medical marijuana users anyway.
    - The American Medical Association, National Cancer Institute, American Cancer Society, and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society have rejected smoked marijuana as medicine, and it is not acknowledged as medicine by the FDA. Research published in the *Journal of Drug Policy Analysis* shows that very few people that use medical marijuana have cancer, HIV, or other serious illnesses.
2. **Experience from Colorado, and other states, is not promising:**
    - Two independent reports released in August 2013 by the Colorado Office of the State Auditor and the City of Denver Office of the Auditor document how Colorado's system is not well regulated at all. Meanwhile, teen use has increased in the past five years, with the marijuana use rate among Colorado teens at 50% above the national average *(Summary of National Findings*).
    - While the total number of car crashes declined from 2007 to 2011 in Colorado, the number of fatal car crashes with drivers testing positive for marijuana rose sharply (*Colorado Department of Transportation*).
3. **Marijuana use will increase under legalization:** Because they are accessible and available, legal drugs are used far more than illegal drugs. According to recent surveys, alcohol is used by 52% of Americans and tobacco is used by 27% of Americans. Marijuana is used by 8% of Americans (*NSDUH, Summary of National Findings, 2012*) but will increase as more states legalize it for medical purposes.
4. **Marijuana is especially harmful to kids and adolescents:**
    - Marijuana contributes to psychosis and schizophrenia (*S. Andreasson, Cannabis and Schizophrenia: A longitudinal study of Swedish conscripts*), addiction for 1 in 6 kids who use it only once (J.C. Anthony, L.A. Warner, and R.C. Kessler, Experiential and Clinical Psychopharmacology), and it has been proven to decrease IQ among those who started smoking before age 18 (M.H. Meier, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science).
    - Teens that use marijuana are more likely than non-users to engage in delinquent and dangerous behavior.
5. **Marijuana potency is much stronger than years ago:** Studies reveal that marijuana potency has almost tripled over the past 20 years, raising serious concerns about implications for public health – especially among adolescents, for whom long-term use of marijuana may be linked with lower IQ (an average 8-point drop) later in life (*Z. Mehmedic, The Journal of Forensic Sciences*).