

Bob Troyer: Marijuana potency must be capped for a safe and healthy Colorado



Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post

Marijuana plants grow in the vegetative room of a cultivation facility on Jan. 14, 2020 in Denver.

By **BOB TROYER** | Guest Commentary

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As the 2021 legislative session kicks off, the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate face a new emerging health crisis.

Elected state officials are now on notice from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Data shows that the high potency of the marijuana industry's best-selling products increases the risk of addiction, suicide, psychosis, depression, and anxiety.



At the same time, COVID-19 has made elected officials and voters acutely aware of what happens if we don't "follow the science," rely on truth to make law, and unite behind data-driven, rational decision-making. The undeniable public health harms of high potency marijuana concentrate, and the Democrats' promise to rely on truth and science, create a perfect opportunity for those in charge to cement their leadership.

If they squander the opportunity, voters should hold them to account in 2022. Voters remember what happened when industry-captive politicians put their heads in the sand when tobacco, opioids, and vaping tore through town.

To be clear, I am a Democrat. I understand the Democrats' initial support for marijuana.

But almost 10 years into the commercialization of cannabis, we are no longer talking about the same marijuana. The majority of the products now sold by the industry are solvent-extracted, processed concentrates of the chemical in the marijuana plant that gets you high (THC). When commercialization started, its products typically contained less than 10% THC. Concentrates now average about 70% THC, and many concentrates have THC levels up to 99%.

These concentrates are not plant material rolled in a joint. They are produced by soaking marijuana buds in chloroform, butane, and propane. Those chemicals extract and concentrate the THC from the plant into what's called "wax" or "shatter." With a crack pipe and a butane torch, users vaporize and inhale that THC-rich shatter. Or, as a change of pace, at a Colorado dispensary a user can just buy a 70% THC anal or vaginal suppository and insert that. These concentrates are what cause harm, and right now there are zero limits on their potency. Zero.

So what? Well, studies published in the internationally renowned medical journal *The Lancet Psychiatry* conclude that using products with 15% THC or higher triples the risk of psychosis, and daily use of such products quintuples that risk. In fact, 56 scientific studies have confirmed high potency THC's connection to psychosis. In addition, a study published in *The Journal of American Medicine* in 2020 concluded that high potency THC "was associated with significant increases" in addiction and mental health disorders (like depression and anxiety). High potency THC is addictive. In 2017 *The Journal of Psychiatric Research* published a study concluding that THC addiction is "significantly associated with suicide" (especially for teens and veterans). This is the science that drove a Washington state legislator and public health professional to conclude THC concentrates have created "one of the largest emerging health crises of our time."

Data from Colorado's own public health agency confirms the science. Colorado public health data starkly reveals that as THC-concentrate use has risen so have Colorado's addiction, psychosis, depression, anxiety, and hospitalization numbers. We Democrats must act on this science and data or we are no better than climate-deniers. We should choose to respond to concentrate potency as the state of Washington health department recommends: "Have science serve its purpose: guide informed policy debates to advance health and well-being."

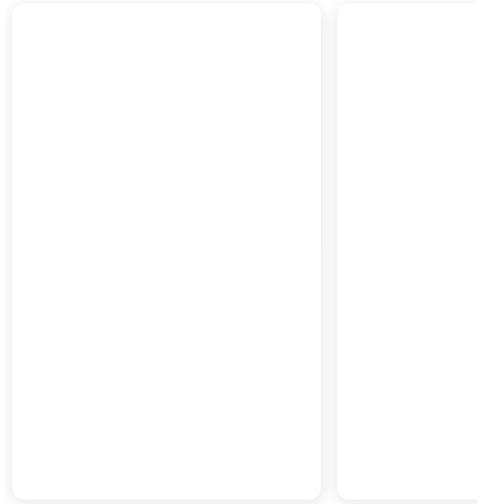
I do understand that Democrats perceive the marijuana industry to wield great power. I understand that their perception inspires caution, even fear. We have taken on powerful interests before. Seems to me the voters earned our trust in November. Now Democrats must act on that trust. I don't know what the right potency cap is, but science can guide us. Elected Democrats need to stand up and look at the settled science and set a safe cap on concentrates. Vermont has done it, and the state of Washington is on the same path. Now is the time for Colorado's Democratic majority to step up and join them.

Bob Troyer was the United States Attorney for Colorado from 2016-2018 and was the Special Master appointed to conduct the recent investigation of the history of Catholic clergy child sex abuse in Colorado.



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