

Otter helps 25 kids, cold-shoulders 1,500 more

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

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All those children could have had the opportunity to use the oil had Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter not vetoed legislation in April that would have allowed parents of children suffering from seizure disorders like Dravet syndrome - a rare form of epilepsy that can be fatal - the legal means to treat their kids with cannabidiol.

But Otter's veto ended that discussion - at least for now. After his veto, Otter signed an executive order creating a free program that is providing 25 Idaho children with a trial run of the oil.

For the sake of hundreds of Idaho's children and their families, let's hope the trial run leads to the legalization of cannabidiol in the Gem State and an end to the inexplicable opposition to this badly needed medicine.

In defending his veto, Otter told the Legislature that while he sympathizes with families who are dealing with the devastating effects of severe seizure disorders, he still believes the outcome of using the drug is more speculative than scientific and the bill opened the door for cannabidiol to be abused.

Speculative? Perhaps Otter wasn't in the room when parents from all over the state described what it was like to watch their kids suffer up to 200 seizures a day - seizures other more powerful drugs with adverse side effects couldn't curb. Many talked about how they'd heard of other parents who had watched their children's seizures subside thanks to cannabidiol.

One parent told the legislators about his daughter, who was wracked with seizures. When he began treating her with the oil, the seizures stopped.

What's speculative about that?

Otter's focus on cannabidiol seems strange and misplaced when one considers the wanton abuse of powerful prescription drugs like Oxycodone, an opioid prescribed to treat pain, and Diazepam, which is used for severe anxiety. These are drugs far, far more potent, addictive and mind-altering than cannabidiol. Cannabidiol doesn't even contain enough THC - the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana - to get high.

Another reason Otter used to justify his veto was that he said the bill would have violated federal law. But an executive order doing the same thing on a smaller scale is OK? Please governor, explain?

While those 25 families who will be given the permission to give their kids this medicine will feel blessed, Idaho continues to ignore the hundreds of other families whose lives remain in a perpetual spiral caused by the constant and relentless seizures afflicting their children.

Idaho parent Claire Carey, whose daughter has suffered from seizures nearly all her life, said about Otter's veto: "It just made me lose all hope. The only way we are going to get access in Idaho is with a federal bill." She questions what kind of impact Otter's cannabidiol program is going to have, considering the small number of children it will treat.

It's not like Idaho would be the only state that allows legal cannabidiol. In fact, Idaho is now surrounded by states that allow medical marijuana in some form. And Wyoming and Utah have enacted legislation legalizing the use of cannabidiol for children suffering from severe seizures.

We understand the legalization of medical marijuana is a tough subject to tackle. Weed is a drug, and our government has spent a lot of money, time and effort trying to combat it.

But this case is different. Cannabidiol isn't going to be used by stoners to get high. It isn't a recreational drug. It's a life-changing medicine. And the controversy surrounding it is lost on us.