

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL PAST AND PRESENT AOTEAROA LEGALISE CANNABIS
PARTY MEMBERS FROM PARTY PRESIDENT ABE GRAY

WHY I'M LEAVING THE ALCP AND JOINING THE OPPORTUNITIES PARTY AND WHY
YOU SHOULD DO THE SAME

The Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party has existed for over 20 years and contested every election and by-election since MMP. The principle of the Party is sound, under MMP any party that gets over 5% is able to wield its influence in Coalition negotiations and demand certain bottom lines.

In theory, the Cannabis Party could make cannabis legalisation a post-election demand if they were to get 5%, just like Peter Dunne made no cannabis legalisation an election demand last time he got over 5% back in 2002. Unfortunately, the Cannabis party have never reached 5%, and it's unlikely they ever will.

I have not always been a die-hard Cannabis Party supporter and I am conflicted about my vote being 'wasted' as a 'protest vote'. I used to be a very enthusiastic member of the New Zealand Green Party but I was disgusted by the way they backed away from the Cannabis issue even though it was the right thing. Now they have come back to their 'grass-roots', but for those of us who had to endure the last 10 years of silence on the issue it is too little too late.

The only reason the Cannabis Party has existed in those years, and the only reason that I would give any of my energy to it, is that no other party had the guts to stand up for what was right and tell the truth about cannabis. They were all too concerned about the public image of their own party and not about the wellbeing of the people of New Zealand. I'd always said if ever a mainstream party were to take up an appropriate cannabis policy (and actually campaign on it), or if a new party were to come along that actually had a chance of getting into Parliament and made cannabis law reform a central issue of their policy programme (along with other policies I support), that I would leave the ALCP and devote my energies to the party with the best policy that actually had a chance of being elected.

I have waited for this to happen for the last 5 elections and unfortunately it hasn't ... until now. Call me ahead of my time, but the things I have been saying about cannabis for over a decade have now all of a sudden become very fashionable, even the subject of jokey banter between Richard Branson and John Key!

And now as we get closer to the election many parties are beginning to jump on the bandwagon and signal rhetorically that they would be willing to 'do something' about the cannabis issue. I'm wary of this, as I've seen this before and the rhetoric is seldom matched by action. But this time around The Opportunities Party really stands out to me for having a policy that is not only based on evidence and public health best practice, but also has the guts to see the policy through to its logical conclusion instead of just waffling around the edges without really 'doing' anything. And they have matched their policy prowess with thoughtful and forceful campaigning on the issue in the media.

The TOP cannabis policy in my opinion is the best possible policy you could have. It ties together decades of research and public health discussions, arriving at a framework that is

unquestionably best practise. This is exactly the cannabis policy I would have written if I had the resources of a well-funded policy think tank at my disposal, and every serious cannabis law reform advocate I know feels the same. The fact that TOP arrived at this exact policy through an evidence based process and without the input of the pro-cannabis lobby only further vindicates law reform advocates and speaks volumes for the robustness of TOP's evidence based policy approach.

That's why I am leaving the Cannabis Party and joining TOP and will be giving my Party Vote to TOP at this election. And I encourage any current or former Cannabis Party members/voters to do the same.

For the first time in memory we actually have a party prepared to stand up for us, and make cannabis legalisation a high priority, a party that actually has a chance of getting into parliament.

Better still, they also have a whole bunch of other great policies that are similarly bold and put the wellbeing of New Zealanders ahead of political appearances. Besides even if for some reason they don't get in, they will still do much better than the 0.5% ALCP usually gets, and by adding our 0.5% to TOP's result we will send an even stronger message and put the career politicians on notice that cannabis legalisation is a high priority for NZ voters.

If you want to join me visit www.top.org.nz to sign up.

Sincerely
Your departing President
Abe Gray