



By **MARK BRAUNSTEIN**

Three weeks ago, Connecticut joined 16 other states plus the District of Columbia and legalized the medicinal use of marijuana. So now one-third of Americans have the option to medicate with cannabis — legally. The remaining two-thirds? Many can continue medicating same as before, just illegally.

Even with Connecticut's new law, many patients may end up obtaining marijuana illegally.

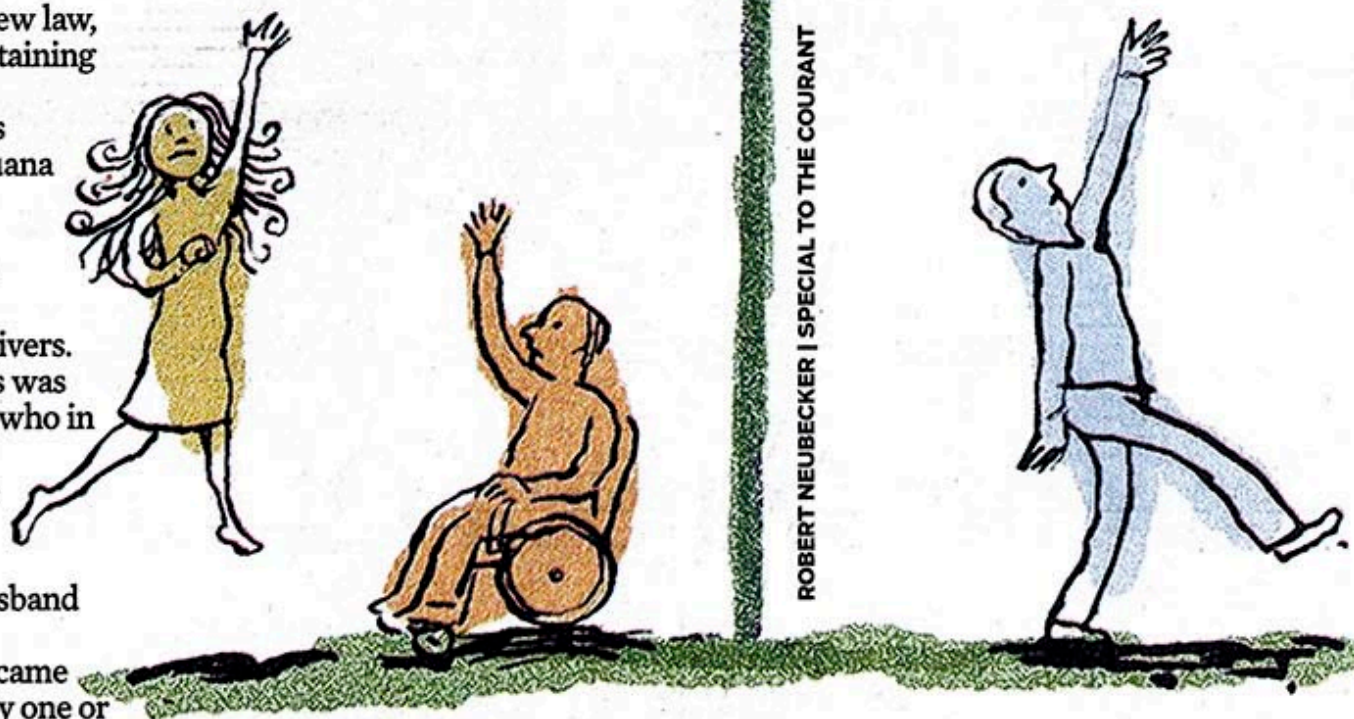
Since 1997, Connecticut has grappled with medical marijuana bills eight times. In support, sometimes only patients testified, other times patients were joined by doctors and nurses and lawyers and caregivers. Notable among the caregivers was State Rep. Penny Bacchiocchi, who in 2004 during a House debate surprised everyone when she told the harrowing story of how years earlier she had procured cannabis for her husband who was dying of cancer.

Equally harrowing stories came from the patients. At first, only one or two dared to confess their crimes. With each successive year, another and then another stepped forward. As a paraplegic since 1990, I was the only patient who testified in favor of medical marijuana at all seven public hearings from 1997 to 2011, and each time the bill failed. This spring, I concluded that I was not the only one suffering from paralysis. I theorized that if I stepped back from the ramparts, it just might pass, so this time I submitted only written testimony. Indeed, the bill passed and was signed into law.

But I am not celebrating. The new law raises many questions, and offers few good answers.

How do you qualify as a cannabis patient?

You must be certified by a licensed



MEDICAL MARIJUANA

LEGAL BUT OUT OF REACH

Patients, Suppliers Face Hurdles

physician with whom you have maintained a long-term relationship. If you are uninsured and could afford only infrequent visits to walk-in clinics, or if you long have sought advice only from alternative healthcare practitioners, or if your longtime physician is unwilling to risk extra scrutiny for certifying you, you are stuck.

What medical conditions are eligible for treatment with cannabis?

Not chronic pain, the ailment which casts the widest net and affects the most patients. While cannabis does not fully alleviate severe pain, in most cases it does reduce it to a tolerable level so that you need not resort to addictive prescription narcotics, and need not become a zombie.

Who will dispense cannabis, and how much at one time?

The state will license the pharmacies. If you live in the more sparsely populated northeastern quadrant of the state, you may need to travel many miles to a pharmacy. And you will need to commute once a month, as a month's supply is all that you can possess at one time. No car or driver's license? You just might need to continue to procure your supply locally from where you've been getting it illegally all along.

How much will cannabis cost?

The costs of all the controls and licensing and monitoring will be passed on to the consumer. Thus it likely will cost just as much as black market cannabis of average quality at \$300 an ounce whose prohibition finances a dozen middlemen, the last being your friendly neighborhood dealer.

Who will grow the cannabis?

Not you, not legally anyway. The state will license a maximum of 10 growers. Growers must pay a license fee of at least \$25,000. Nonrefundable! And renewable at least every five years! Who is going to dish out more than \$25,000 for the

medical use is legal.) Not 10 growers. Not even one.

So Connecticut will have hundreds of registered cannabis patients, but will have no cannabis for us. And we will be left to procure our cannabis exactly from where we got it all along. From our neighbors who grow it in their backyards, or our sons who get theirs from their friends, or from our friends, or from our friendly neighborhood dealers.

LEGAL

Continued from Page C1

honor of being raided by the Feds, raided just like a friendly neighborhood dealer? (There have been more than 180 raids in the last 30 months, primarily in California, Colorado and Michigan, where growing marijuana for