

Written Testimony of Todd A. Scattini (todd.scattini@harvest360.co, 913.565.0852)

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Kansas Veteran Cannabis Testimony

Thank you very much for allowing me to provide this testimony today. My name is Todd Scattini. I am a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, and I, like all of my contemporaries, am tired of burying veterans. Medical cannabis is a safe and effective option to treat the wounds of war, and I implore Kansas to move forward with the implementation of a medical cannabis program as quickly as possible. It is the right thing to do. It is what leaders should do.

I came into the Army as an enlisted man, was later accepted to the United States Military Academy at West Point. I graduated from there in 1996, commissioned as an Armor officer, served as a cavalryman, and spent the last half of my career serving in combat zones and numerous countries as a military diplomat.

In 2018, I retired from the Army that I faithfully served for 27 years on active duty in order to bring a veteran voice to the cannabis conversation and provide leadership and vision to the rapidly evolving cannabis industry.

I am a licensed Missouri Medical Cannabis Patient and a recognized leader in the emerging global cannabis industry where I serve as the founder and CEO of Harvest 360, a cannabis licensing and consulting firm.

I'm a member of AMVETS, the VFW, and the American Legion and a board member at the Veterans Patient Access Foundation and the Veterans Cannabis Project.

Today, I am honored to address you as a Veteran about cannabis and the opportunity the re-legalization of this plant presents for Veterans and their families, for Kansas, for the VA, and for the greater veteran community. Although not a Kansas Resident, I live just across the Missouri river. I spent three years at Ft. Riley as a lieutenant and my final duty station was Ft. Leavenworth where I taught at the Command and General Staff College. I have friends across the Sunflower state: civilians, veterans, and active-duty personnel. I also cannot fail to mention that this state holds a special place in my heart as the birthplace of a personal hero and fellow West Point graduate, President Dwight Eisenhower.

As you likely know, veterans and their families are currently amid a significant health crisis marked by elevated levels of suicide, mental health concerns, substance abuse issues, and addiction. Many veterans also have difficulty finding meaningful employment that feeds their passion following their service. Cannabis can help address both of these issues.

We will be judged by how we responded to the opioid crisis and the veteran suicide crisis.

Repeated studies have shown that states that have medical cannabis programs experience a 25 percent reduction in opioid overdose deaths. The longer a state has had a medical cannabis program and the greater access patients have the more pronounced this result is.

Additionally, according to the latest job report from Leafly, a leading cannabis industry outlet, cannabis is now responsible for the creation of 321,000 jobs in the United States making it one of the fastest growing industries in the country.

We all know the statistic of 22 veteran suicides per day in the U.S. For those who have served, these are more than numbers. This represents the loss of friends, the waste of a life of members of our military family, and an existential crisis for the military.

Our country is facing a wide-scale opioid epidemic that has taken countless lives; not excluded from this crisis, the veteran community has been critically impacted. When the U.S. Military deploys to the combat theater, roughly 60% of those deployed will be prescribed opioids upon return to the United States, and over half will develop a dependency/addiction. This has caused far too many vets to lose their way, and in an ever-increasing pandemic, take their own lives.

The most common medical issues veterans face after service is chronic pain, PTSD (anxiety, depression, nightmares and insomnia) and many suffer from traumatic brain injuries all of which contributes to suicidal ideation and/or completion.

Currently, to treat these issues, veterans are prescribed a long list of pharmaceutical medicines that often lead to addiction, overdose, or death while rarely addressing the root issue effectively. Since finding cannabis, I have been able to ween myself off of numerous pharmaceutical medications and I rely almost solely on cannabis as a medicine. It has been an incredible blessing in my life and it has done the same for veterans across the country.

The U.S. has been in the process of re-legalizing cannabis since my home state of California passed the Compassionate Use Act in 1996. I recognized even while serving that this was the start of a paradigm shift that would continue until this day. I feel very fortunate to be part of a massive movement working to guide this paradigm shift to address numerous societal issues.

These include major impact on Social Justice, Economics, Sustainability, but most importantly Health and Wellness. to address the wounds of war and the wounds of service with a safe, effective, and economical solution such as cannabis.

Today, we find ourselves at an Inflection Point in Human History because of COVID, divisions in our society, an ongoing and intensifying opioid crisis, and a flailing VA healthcare system.

I applaud Governor Kelly's recent ambitious proposal of using the proceeds of a medical cannabis program to fix issues with Medicaid. This is bold and creative, and it may be the first time any state has proposed fixing a Federal program with cannabis taxes, but I think it's a good idea. I would go even farther and propose we aim even higher by setting our sights on repairing the VA Healthcare system with it as well.

I believe there is an opportunity for bold, courageous change that is guided by vision and leadership. There is an opportunity NOW that could allow for the DoD to be on the forward leading edge of medical cannabis research. And, I believe Kansas and other medical cannabis states could lead this change on Federal level. The DoD has led innovation in medicine for centuries and now is no different. Because the DoD not only has Skin in the Game, but also the ideal research framework.

The VA represents the largest healthcare network in the U.S. with 150 VA Hospitals (w/ University research relationships), 1200 clinics, and 9 Million patients the vast majority of which want access to medical cannabis as an option to treat their medical issues.

Additionally, if the DoD is put in a leadership role on the exploration of how cannabis could improve patient outcomes, we would have immediate access to our global research networks that include international partners such as Canada, NATO, and Israel.

I look across the Mighty Mo at Kansas with the same hope and optimism that the brave settlers who crossed at Weston, Mo arrived at Ft. Leavenworth, linked up with cavalry units and began their journey along the Oregon Trail.

I see opportunity for Kansas, and for the VA to show bold, courageous leadership. I see the opportunity to show vision and lead the way into the future of medicine. I hope that Kansas will join Missouri and the other 35 medical cannabis states in allowing access to this lifesaving plant. And, I hope to expand the research into this plant that we are already doing at K-State to include deeper investigation and research as we begin to explore the healing capacity this plant has within it.

I see opportunity for Veterans and their families to access what is likely our oldest, safest, and most effective medicine. I also see opportunity for meaningful and rewarding employment with the development of an industry that much of the country and the rest of the world is engaged in building from the underground up.

As you begin to formulate your program, I implore you to show compassion and address issues that were created by cannabis prohibition.

Look to other states who have come before you and are heavily engaged in executing their own programs. Look to us in Missouri. Look West and South to Colorado and Oklahoma.

Seek creative ways of expediting access such as how Oregon developed relationships with California and Washington to allow inter-state transfer of cannabis.

Encourage and empower researchers. Kansas State is already conducting significant hemp research to empower new hemp farmers. The academic synergy and prowess we could apply to this plant along the I-70 corridor is limitless.

Don't do this to make money. Do this because it is the right thing to do.

Do it, because this is what compassionate leaders should do.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to address you, and I am prepared to respond to any questions you might have.