

From the Personal to the Political: Why Psychedelic Therapy is a Bipartisan Issue

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SGT(R) Jonathan M Lubecky
image: Kyra Wiener

For me, this is personal. I fight this battle so a son can have his father at his graduation, so a daughter can be walked down the aisle, so a wife can watch her husband bounce his grandchild on his knee, rather than a ten-year-old being handed a folded flag “on behalf of a grateful nation,” as my son almost was.

IF YOU HAD TOLD ME ten years ago that I would be attending the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) to extol the virtues of psychedelic therapy, I would have thought you were crazy. Yet that is exactly what I did from February 21–24, 2018. It was far more successful than I could have imagined.

I know that the idea and reality of news organizations such as Breitbart covering psychedelic research concerns some supporters of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), which was clear from a few comments MAPS received on the very positive Breitbart article about MDMA-assisted psychotherapy research it shared a few months ago. However, in order to effectively change public opinion, we need to be speaking to the *whole* public, which means that we also need bipartisan support and bipartisan news coverage of the critical research MAPS is conducting. The reality of the situation is that at this time, Republicans control the White House, the Senate, and the House of Representatives. It is imperative that the research be expanded, which also means those on the political right must understand what MAPS is, and even more importantly, what MAPS is not.

We all know how important the research MAPS conducts is to those who are suffering. For me, it is personal. I once had severe posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from my service in Iraq, with multiple suicide attempts. I found MAPS at a critical time, and my relationship with MAPS has been transformative.

I was a participant in the MDMA trial in 2014. More recently, I started doing interviews in the media to spread the word. However, while the mainstream media and left-leaning media were open to the idea of covering psychedelic research, the conservative media was not. Thanks to polarization and tribalism, especially on social media, a large segment of the American population was not hearing about the research. So, MAPS launched a concerted effort to get more conservative media outlets to cover the research. The first opening was when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared MDMA-assisted psychotherapy a Breakthrough Therapy, and almost every media outlet did a story on it. Even Breitbart ran an article, in part because the reporter actually knew me personally and I had told him how it helped me. This was the first event that broke news of MAPS’s research into the conservative world.

Two other major events occurred that made my outreach at CPAC far more successful than originally anticipated. The first was the Mercer Family Foundation’s donation of \$1 million to MAPS, signaling true bipartisan support for the work that MAPS conducts. The second, sadly, was the school shooting in Parkland, Florida. CPAC is very supportive of the 2nd Amendment, so due to the shooting, mental health and ways to treat the mentally ill were constant topics throughout the conference. These two events opened the doors to numerous conservative media personalities and programs reporting on MAPS at CPAC.



Jonathan Lubecky was Veterans Coalition National Co-Chair for Rand Paul's 2016 presidential campaign (above); and currently advocates for MAPS research alongside Ismail Ali, MAPS' Policy & Advocacy Counsel (right).



Matt Boyle of Breitbart Radio interviewed me about ending the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) monopoly on marijuana for research, and about the MDMA treatment, as well as several local conservative talk radio programs. Patriot Radio on SiriusXM now has a few shows that are interested in covering MAPS more regularly, looking at all their research, not just at PTSD. This will allow MAPS to spread the word to a wider audience; and right now, this audience is listening. Truly, the list of those listening at CPAC was astounding: I discussed MAPS and psychedelic research with Sean Hannity, Andrew Wilkow, Breitbart, Nigel Farage (UK MP), Matt Schlapp (President of the American Conservative Union, which organizes CPAC), Sheriff David Clarke, Grover Norquist, and others.

The expansion and continuation of MAPS critical research endeavors deserves support, irrespective of party affiliation. Reducing suffering is not a Republican or Democrat issue, it is an American issue. We have the science to convince them of the value of psychedelic research; however, we also need to convince their constituents in their home states or districts. That base has preconceived notions concerning drugs in general, and concerning psychedelics in particular. The way to change their mind is to talk to them, with accurate information reported through the media outlets they trust. No Democrat will ever convince Jeff Sessions or Donald Trump to end the NIDA monopoly or support MAPS' work, but their bases can, and so can

Republican politicians. Obtaining bipartisan media coverage is a critical component of accomplishing this task.

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For these reasons, I am happy to announce that MAPS has hired me to be their Veterans & Governmental Affairs Liaison. I will continue to attempt to bridge the divide and inform veterans, elected officials, and others of the truly groundbreaking research that MAPS is sponsoring. Rick Doblin, Michael Mithoefer, and Annie Mithoefer saved my life, not because they hoped I would help, but because I needed saving. I now have the perfect job: I get to help my brothers- and sisters-in-arms, work in politics, and ensure that those who are suffering get the treatment they need. 🙏

Sgt(R) Jonathan Lubecky served 4 years in the US Marines Corps and 8 years in the US Army. He was deployed to Iraq from 2005 to 2006 and returned home with severe PTSD, as well as a brain injury. Lubecky participated in MAPS' Phase 2 study of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for PTSD and experienced a 50% reduction in his symptoms. He is now working as a political consultant. He can be reached at jonathan@maps.org.