



November 16, 2023

## **An Open Letter to the Kratom Danger Awareness Group**

*Political extremism in America threatens the foundation of our democracy, and most Americans have had enough with the corrosive behaviors of extremists at both ends of the political spectrum. That same kind of behavior is now mirrored with extremism in full display at both ends of the kratom community. It is time for that conduct to be stopped.*

The American Kratom Association has strongly condemned the extremist views of some in the pro-kratom community, and we have openly expressed our profound disappointment with the inappropriate conduct of those who post or convey hateful and disrespectful comments, and who even have made threats against those who they do not agree with. I have personally spoken bluntly in condemning this kind of behavior, and there are many who are now fervent anti-AKA detractors because of our principled stand on these issues. I accept that.

There is no place in the policy discussions on kratom for this kind of conduct by pro-kratom advocates.

Pro-kratom advocates who claim kratom should not be subject to any regulations; that kratom is completely safe no matter what product form or super concentration of constituents in the kratom product; or that the government has no right to regulate kratom; loudly express those views.

They are wrong.

Anti-kratom advocates who claim kratom should not be allowed to be sold under any circumstances; that kratom is unsafe no matter what the product form or how low the levels of the naturally occurring alkaloids are in the product or those extract products that follow FDA guidelines; and that the government should ban kratom despite the lack of science to justify it; are equally loud voices.

They are wrong as well.

Extremists on both sides of the kratom argument are equally guilty of outrageous conduct, but there is no visible voice among the Kratom Danger Awareness group who calls for needed civility and respectful behavior. Those anti-kratom advocates believe kratom should be banned no matter what science reveals. They routinely deny science and ignore the rights of others who

disagree with them to hold a different opinion based on that science. They regularly express those views in horribly offensive fashion without any reservation.

Free speech in America guarantees everyone the right to disagree, and even to legally use the very kind of hateful, disrespectful, and vicious statements I am calling out here.

But personal, mean-spirited, and personally disrespectful statements cross the line of civil discussions, and while those who use these tactics have the freedom to say them, people of goodwill have no obligation to accept hateful and mean-spirited speech or listen to it.

It is not just the absence of calls for civil behavior, it is the affirming comments by members of the Kratom Danger Awareness group when deeply offensive statements are made about others who express views they do not agree with. I have personally been called a “murderer”, a “drug dealer”, a “liar”, and most recently, a “narcissist.” No voice is raised calling out such extremist and corrosive language, and many others in the group affirm their agreement with those attacks.

Why are such attacks made? Because those hateful commenters don’t agree with a policy position I have advocated for, or the AKA’s advocacy for appropriate regulations on kratom.

Some could argue that is what has become of all policy debates in our country, and particularly when the passions are so deeply felt in this case with the loss of a family member. While tragic circumstances have huge impacts, there is no license to have zero accountability in the words and tone we use when we disagree.

The fact that some choose to push the boundaries of conduct to just shout loudly does not justify any mob mentality of others who affirm and join in, including by their silence.

There is a clear line of civility and basic decency that was recently crossed when horribly personal attacks were made in the Kratom Danger Awareness group against Dr. Kirsten Smith, formerly with the National Institutes on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and now with Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Members of the Kratom Danger Awareness group openly mocked Dr. Smith for her presentation at a legislative hearing, disparaging her presentation style, questioning her professional credentials, and calling her a “liar.”

Extremism, hateful speech, and self-serving attacks on others have no place in the pro-kratom community. The same is true for the Kratom Danger Awareness group.

I have personally offered to host a webinar with the leaders of the Kratom Danger Awareness group to discuss areas of disagreement, applied to join the Kratom Danger Awareness group to share information to help in understanding the areas of disagreement, and offered to have a respectful dialogue multiple times, all to no avail. The truth is, there are some areas where there should be agreement between us.

The time is now for responsibility and accountability for our actions. I truly hope the leadership of the Kratom Danger Awareness group will join us in promoting civil and respectful discourse.

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