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Begin forwarded message:

From: James Baker <jwconsult@comcast.net>
Date: March 31, 2016 at 10:15:28 AM EDT
To: "mgrad@leg.state.vt.us" <mgrad@leg.state.vt.us>
Cc: "dsweaney@leg.state.vt.us" <dsweaney@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: **Legalization-Jim Baker**

Maxine/Donna- Hello

I trust all is well. It has been a while since I have weighed in on issues facing the State of Vermont, but I feel compelled to reach out to both of you on the current conversation about legalization. I am forwarding my comments to you in hopes that you pass them onto your committee members. I am also contacting you because of my deep respect for you and the work you have done over the years. Your leadership has always represented the best of what the legislative process is suppose be about, which is representing the best interest of the citizens of Vermont. This brings me to my first point.

I understand the political process and how that process can be messy at times, but in this case the process to moving to legalization has been one of the most messy processes I have seen. The last thing that is being considered are the facts. We now have the Governor that is openly talking about smoking a "fatty" when "his" bill on legalization is passed. What in the hell is the message we are sending? This process has taken legacy setting atmosphere where the voices of professionals are drowned out by narratives that are based on absolute untruths.

This conversation started several years ago with the messaging from heavy lobbying that marijuana is no more dangerous than alcohol, that the jails were being filled with those arrested for possession of marijuana and that countless hours are being wasted in the criminal justice system. We now know that that narrative is and was false. This is the problem I have with this debate, it is not following the science or the advice of professionals. This was never more apparent than when Senator Benning stood on the Senate floor and invoked the name of Paul Lawrence, the disgraced police officer from the 1970s as if that was the norm in today's world. That narrative was from forty years ago with the intention of making the appearances that the false planting of drugs was the current norm. The latest example is the testimony of Sec. Of Transportation that was totally scripted by the administration. In essence he stated he would be curious if legalization will increase drug impaired driving. Too many people

have worked too long and too hard on highway safety issues to run an experiment to see if more people will be killed or maimed on our highways. I remember the days in Vermont when we were killing 100 + on our highways. I remember the death notifications and the destroyed lives.

I could cite countless other examples of just how messy this process has been . Let me focus on two areas this conversation should be focused on, because this is a public health and public safety issue.

Let me address the issue of highway safety. How ironic is it that this conversation started with the burden on policing and the criminal justice system that to get the bill out of the Senate it was agreed to add State Troopers and train more officers in the area of DRE and ARIDE. In my current role in DC I have oversight of the nation wide DRE program. I want to emphasize to you that DRE is not the sole answer to be able to deal with the almost certain reality that there will be increased in marijuana impaired driving. DRE is simply, but very expensive, screening process. The training is expensive, time consuming and requires recertification every two years (very expensive). It is not an evidentiary test. In fact there is no standard for testing for marijuana in the system for the purposes of determining impairment. The impact of legalization on highway safety in Colorado and Washington is not fully understood, although early indications are there is an increase in impaired driving. Why not slow this down until we have the science to address impaired driving. We are not there and I believe the state is not prepared to financially support a robust enforcement effort.

My last point is about kids. Both of you know from your background what the scene on the ground is like for kids who are coming to schools everyday with severe emotional issues. We are struggling to keep services for kids now. I saw this first hand in Rutland. As much as the narrative of the legalization proponents is that marijuana is no more dangerous than alcohol, there has been very clear testimony from professionals that clearly disputes that narrative. It is hard to believe that there will not be increase in teen use. We do know that the younger one starts using marijuana and the longer they use marijuana that there is an effect on the brain. At the same time we are raising the smoking age we are talking about legalizing marijuana. It puzzles reasonable people how these mixed public health policies are coming from the elected leaders.

In closing, I want to be clear that I recognize that marijuana is being used by some estimates by 80,000 +/- residences in Vermont. But is not often said is that there are 500,000 +/- citizens who do not use marijuana.

I urge you and your committees to slow this process down. There is too much at risk from public safety and public health issues to rush to legalization. Finally, the question I am left with is what is the problem we are trying to solve by legalization?

I would be more than happy to discuss with you the other false narratives, such as legalization will take away the black market.

Thank you for taking the time to read this message and thanks for your support over the years.

All the best,
Jim Baker

Sent from my iPad