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Vermont Home Grown
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Marijuana Legalization and the Transfer of Wealth From Local Communities

Vermont Senators

With marijuana legalization being pushed through the legislature this year, what has been obscured is the impact this current bill would have on existing local economies.

The recent Rand Report estimated annual consumption of marijuana in Vermont at up to 55,000 pounds. The report fails to define where all that marijuana comes from. While it is certain some is imported from other states, it is also a given that a large percentage of the marijuana currently consumed in Vermont is grown locally.

While proponents of the current bill often portray these local growers as part of a fiendish “black market”, in truth it is better described as a neighborhood market that has developed organically in our communities thanks to the hard work and perseverance of home growers. If anything, the availability of locally grown high quality marijuana in Vermont has stifled the real black marketeers trying to import cartel products. The Rand report estimates this economy at upwards of \$225 million a year. To put that number in perspective; Vermont’s craft beer industry is currently pegged at \$200 million and the maple syrup industry at \$50 million. So it is clear, the marijuana economy is currently very important to the welfare of many Vermonters.

It is our belief that most of the cannabis currently cultivated in Vermont is for personal use. But many small growers give, sell or barter their excess to friends and neighbors. If they make some money they spend it locally; to pay their taxes, fix their cars and maybe to buy Christmas presents for the kids.

These home growers, spread throughout the state, have created a substantial part of the estimated \$225 million market. So it is important to understand that the current legalization bill working its way through the legislature will continue to brand home growers as criminals. Worse, twenty-five percent of the tax revenue in the bill is earmarked to law enforcement in order to protect the proposed state regulated monopoly.

But even more devastating is how the current bill, as written, envisions transferring this \$225 million per year out of our most at-risk local communities and into the hands of a small number of state licensed growers. What are our public servants thinking?

On one hand they seem to be blinded by decades of lies and propaganda aimed at demonizing cannabis and those who grow it. On the other the governor and the legislature are clearly going against the needs of local communities in favor of larger scale businesses. Have they forgotten the basic fact that raising everyone’s income will generate more growth and tax revenue than by making a few rich people richer?

Certainly the lessons of history are being ignored. No matter what draconian penalties the legislature threatens its citizens with, Vermont home growers, used to decades of living a Robin Hood existence, will continue to outwit the Sheriff of Nottingham and his men. They will go on cultivating marijuana surreptitiously, for their personal, social and medical use, providing the large industrial grows of the state run monopoly with competition in quality, price and purity.

A more intelligent solution for everyone involved is a bill that, instead of threatening Vermonters, harnesses all their talent and passion. It would recognize that our land and climate are eminently suitable to growing this valuable crop that is renewable and sustainable. Instead of trying to rub out this part of the local economy with helicopters and more police, it should leverage it, substantially increasing tax revenue and lowering law enforcement costs.

The only losers under a fair and intelligent law will be the one percent of Vermonters who would most benefit from the bill currently before the legislature. Instead of being given a monopoly by the state, they should be considered equal to all other Vermonters.

The legalization of marijuana in Vermont is a once in a lifetime chance to make a powerful economic opportunity available to all; not just a few. A wise and fair bill will bring Vermont home cultivators into the light rather than relegating them to the shadows. It will leave the wealth being currently generated right where it belongs, in our local communities. It would recognize that the new businesses would be locally accountable to the community and it's youth.

We know how difficult it is to change a bill after it has passed. Our medical marijuana program was passed twelve years ago, and our veterans still can't use it for PTSD. We must get it right the first time.

Freedom loving, egalitarian Vermonters, expect you to craft a bill that keeps and creates local jobs. A bill that would include small producers, cottage and family owned businesses in this new \$225 million market. A bill that does not limit the number of any licenses. A bill that does not punish Vermonters for growing marijuana for their personal, social and medical use. A bill that allows Vermonters to develop Vermont brand artisanal products from their homes, and bring them to market, and sell directly to their costumers This would be the Vermont way.

We urge you to vote for your neighbors not against them. Do not support a monopolist bill.