

# TAXMAN HARSHES YOUR HIGH

## NEW TAX ON RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA WILL BENEFIT OREGON EDUCATION

BY DANI CLIFTON

Last October many Oregonians had cause for celebration; for the first time since former First Lady Nancy Reagan told us to 'Just Say No,' recreational marijuana was made legally available for purchase, tax free, from approximately 400 participating medical dispensaries across the state.

Though medical marijuana remains tax free, a 25 percent tax was implemented on all recreational sales Jan. 4 of this year, something that caught some customers off guard, and has left a few dispensaries smoldering.

Ashley Parker, a budtender for Left Coast Connection, isn't a fan of the new tax and the effect it's had on her shop. "A lot of customers don't like the new tax. It's catching a lot of people by surprise because it's pretty high. We used to have lines out the door and then the day the tax hit — we're dead. A lot of people are just going back to the black market, back to their guy."

Oregon Bud Company's budtender, Adam Vukelich, says he's gotten nothing but complaints since the implantation of the new recreational tax, though it hasn't seemed to de-

ter many customers from coming through the door. "We're one of the only dispensaries who might have implemented the tax into the price on the fourth. A lot of dispensaries ended up adding the tax to the price before the fourth so that their clientele was already familiar with it, so it wasn't a shock. Our customers who were used to having pretty much the best deal in town were kind of shocked. We are hopeful that taxes will be relieved, in time. We're just happy to have legal marijuana."

Private entrepreneur, Joel Smith, sells both medical and recreational marijuana, and for many people he is "their guy." He has an unlicensed back-door business, but neither Joel nor his business partners see themselves as drug dealers; instead, they're providing a service. Smith said, "People need to be able to get their medicine, but a lot of folks are still extremely fearful about the government coming back on them down the road. They don't want to flash their driver's license in that context so they come to people like us; they can get what they need with a good amount of anonymity."

But not everyone is so eager to

abandon the new ways for the old. Lisa Bradford, a recreational user, has purchased from private vendors for years and doesn't have an issue with the new tax on recreational wares. "I believe the tax on weed is a good thing, because 40 percent of the revenue will go to education and I am for anything that brings in funding for our schools. People are going to pay the same for black market weed so why not support our schools, bring back art, music and PE for elementary kids and up."

Nancy Reagan might be rolling over in her grave, but 40 percent of recreational marijuana tax revenue will go to the Common School Fund; 20 percent will go to mental health, alcoholism and drug services (ORS 430.380); 15 percent to state and local law enforcement respectively, and 5 percent going to the Oregon Health Authority.

Though most customers would prefer a continuance of tax-free, legal recreational marijuana, the current tax disbursement plans make it hard to argue against. Though you can't please everyone, Vukelich puts it best, "It is what it is."

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