

EDITORIAL

It's time to legalize marijuana to improve quality of life in Oregon

The state of Oregon should legalize marijuana and open up the market to a wealth of opportunities for the residents of this state. It's time for residents, the media and politicians around the state to push the envelope on the issue. It's time to bring the conversation into the mainstream.

State officials, including the attorney general's office and state treasurer should begin work on putting together a realistic plan to create legislation to legalize and regulate both marijuana and hemp. It's that simple.

Both Washington and Colorado are set to gain more than \$70 million dollars annually in tax revenue from marijuana for a range of public safety, education, housing and drug treatment measures. The move will also save the state millions of dollars in local and state government

spending on public safety measures and prison costs, while opening up hundreds of millions of dollars to a new and emerging business community. Combating organized crime and harmful agricultural practices in our state's forests is icing on the cake.

For nearly two decades elected officials have talked about and campaigned on the need for more revenue statewide and an overhaul of a burdensome and chaotic tax structure in Salem. It may be another two decades before any kind of reform is even possible.

Street Roots believes that the people of Oregon would not be opposed to a smart and effective policy, especially if it was geared towards improving the quality of life for all Oregonians.

We look to leaders around Oregon to show courage and to be bold, and to follow in the footsteps of other states and countries around the world that understand decriminalization is smart and effective policy.

There's no better time than the present.

When trying is half of the battle

The past month we have seen a media frenzy surrounding homelessness.

That's why I cringed a little bit when I read the Willamette Week's cover story on homelessness titled, "The Real World: Portland." The author interviewed ten people living on the streets and briefly profiled their lives. The story hints that Portland's plan to end homelessness is

failing and that many of the people on the streets are simply dire.

In one of the interviews the author talks to Street Roots vendor Michael Vance.

While highlighting some of Michael's challenges with mental health, addiction and living with Tourette's syndrome — the final quote the author left readers with was, "After you use and you get kicked to the curb so many times and people catch on to you and you've been fucked up for so long, you start to believe this is the way your life's gonna go now, and what's the point? What's the use in trying?"

The reality is Portland hasn't been overcome by lawlessness, our community is doing an amazing job at ending individuals and families homelessness, and the Michael Vance I know is trying.

He wakes up every single day at a shelter and makes his way to Street Roots to socialize with others and then goes out to sell the newspaper. He's been sober for more than two months. He's an avid weightlifter who works out three to four times a week. He tends to watch over people on the streets who get picked and preyed upon. He loves the Seattle Seahawks more anything in the world.

It's important to remember that a young person on the streets didn't grow up wanting to be homeless. No did he or she want to endure abusive parents, or to have been sexually assaulted and missed important milestones in early childhood development due to stress, violence and lack of economic

opportunity.

Our elders didn't wake up one day and choose to go through a nervous breakdown, lose everything they've ever had in life and become homeless by choice. It doesn't happen.

Are individuals and families experiencing trauma, addiction and mental health due to their circumstance on the streets? Is it true that some young people choose to live under a bridge, or on the run, instead of engaging in a system that has completely lost their trust? Absolutely.

Poverty is hell. It's tiring. It's traumatic. It's deadly. The idea that anyone is actually choosing to be homeless or live in poverty is nonsense. Any responsible person working on policy, or in the media should understand this. They should also understand their words and actions matter and drive public opinion.

What Portland needs more than anything right now is a groundswell of community support, smart policy, elected officials who show courage, businesses and foundations that invest wisely and a media engine that drives a solution-based conversation about ending homelessness.

"I always feel like I should be doing something more than I am," Michael told me recently. "But the damage that my mind and body has gone through is real. I'm going to continue on day-by-day, step-by-step. I may fall down. I'll have to get back up. My progress isn't going to happen at the pace I assume it should happen. It certainly isn't going to happen at the pace that someone wants it to happen. I can't be rushed. I feel like right now as long as I try to be clean and sober and to be a better person is all that matters. Instead of walking up to a dope dealer and socking him in the mouth, I'm writing poetry, I watch the Seahawks, I sell Street Roots. I'm doing the only thing I know how to do to survive and to stay sane. I'm working to find God."

I don't know about you, but it sounds to me like like Michael is trying. We can do this. Michael can do this.



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DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org.



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting guides, call 503-228-5657. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢
goes directly to the vendor who sold you the paper

25¢
goes toward printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.