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think about all the other small ways this has played out to create these huge disparities. Once folks are released from prison, if they have a felony conviction on their record, in many states they can't vote, they can't access public assistance, so it's creating an entire caste system, a second class of citizens, that Michelle Alexander rightly framed as being as harmful to the black community as the Jim Crow laws. (Alexander is the author of the 2010 New York Times best-seller, "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.")

**E.G.:** *Is Oregon considered a drug-reform leader, or are we lagging behind in some ways?*

**E.F.:** We are seen as a trailblazer on marijuana reforms, however as far as the other elements of drug policy reform, we're not seen as a pioneer, and rightly so. There's still a lot of room for improvement. One step we could take is defelonizing possession of all drugs.

On the same day that we passed Measure 91 here in Oregon, our neighbors to the south, California, passed Proposition 47, which changed most low-level, non-violent offenses, including drug possession, from felonies to misdemeanors, and it was retroactive so it had a huge impact.

Just last week, the Maine Legislature passed a bill changing most drug possession charges from felonies to misdemeanors. I think that's a huge step that the Oregon Legislature could take to move us further down this road. (In Oregon, it is a felony to possess many controlled substances, including heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and methadone.)

Another piece is Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, which was pioneered in Seattle a few years back. This is diverting individuals who commit low-level drug offenses to harm reduction-based case management instead of jail, and both Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Albany, New York, are implementing this, and I think that's a perfect next step for Portland, but it would be phenomenal to see the entire state do it. (Earlier this month it was announced a

similar program, Homeless Engagement Alternatives Resources and Treatment, or HEART, is in the works for Multnomah County.)

The most inspirational example is in New York, where the mayor of Ithaca released the Ithaca Plan, which is a radical departure from the United States' traditional punitive approach to drug policy, and instead focuses on public health, economic development and harm reduction. It is expanding access to medication-assisted treatment, increasing youth employment programs and opening the nation's first supervised injection facility.

If Portland wanted to become a pioneer and really take a hard look at health-based approaches to some of the struggles that our community experiences, these are some of the things we should do.

**E.G.:** *When you were fundraising for Measure 91, did you get the feeling that a lot of the financial backers and people who were invested in the legalization of recreational marijuana were interested in that next step of decriminalizing other drugs? Or were most people more interested in being able to smoke their weed?*

**E.F.:** Most of my conversations with donors to Measure 91, the biggest donors, were about these broader criminal justice reforms. But as far as having a well-funded movement or campaign to decriminalize all drugs – no, I don't know that I see that happening.

That is the interesting thing about raising money to legalize adult use of marijuana, particularly from folks who hoped to profit off of legal marijuana, and it's a conversation I have every single time I make an ask of someone who has a marijuana business. "Let's be clear about what's happening here: You're profiting off of marijuana when there are people all over this country who are still being arrested and incarcerated for this

drug. We have an obligation – you have an obligation – as someone who is making money in this industry, to help legalize it."

When I was raising money for the marriage equality movement, it reminded me of the conversations we would have with couples who wanted the right to marry, and remind them that once they got the right to marry, there was so much more work to be

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done to ensure the protection and the equality of the LGBT community. I see such similar things in this drug reform movement, that if someone really cares about one piece of rolling back the drug war, that we help them connect the dots to their motivations.

Frankly, what happened in Oregon, the investment those folks made in changing the laws here, we're not seeing as much in other states.

It's rare, because it is a human rights and social justice issue, that all of a sudden we are creating the foundation for what is expected to be anywhere from a \$20 billion to \$40 billion industry in 2020. And I believe it's (the industry's) obligation to invest in rolling back these laws. If they're going to benefit from it, they should certainly bear the burden of financing it, and I am so grateful to the generosity of the folks in Oregon that donated, and I know it was difficult for many of them, who are running essentially start-up businesses who weren't making too much profit at that point.

We've got a few more months before the election this year when potentially 10 states will be voting on marijuana, both medical and (recreational) adult use, but I have seen no other state do as much or be as generous from the industry toward legalizing, and it's disappointing.

**E.G.:** *If we decriminalize other drugs, won't more people use them?*

**E.F.:** So we have actually found that is not the case.

Regulation and decriminalization are two

different things. With Measure 91 and with marijuana, it's very clear that marijuana is a substance that would not cause harm to public health and safety, were it to be legally regulated and sold. As far as decriminalizing possession of all drugs, that's a different approach entirely.

We are advocating that simple possession of a drug should not carry with it such stringent penalties.

Criminalizing drugs has obviously not been a deterrent to people using them. What the criminalization of drugs does is, rather than reducing the demand, it creates this system in which the supply must be held in an illicit market. The cartels must secure their product through intimidation and violence.


On a more individual level, folks who use drugs, when they're criminalized, don't have the resources in many situations to use them safely. And there's these public health consequences from that. But you have seen other countries that decriminalize drug use, like Portugal and (other) European countries (where) we have not seen an increase in the use of drugs. Instead we've seen positive public health outcomes, reduction of drug-related disease and illness, and reduction of violence.

**E.G.:** *How might the decriminalization of drugs change our approach to addiction?*

**E.F.:** Much of what has fueled the drug war is stigma and "othering" of people who use drugs. I believe the compassion that would be required to decriminalize drugs would go a long way toward advancing saner drug policies.

The roots of this failed war on drugs are based in racism and misguided approaches to controlling certain segments of society, and as we take these steps forward, as we challenge society to question the foundations of their ideas around drugs and drug use, I believe the resulting public health and safety benefits will be enormous. There's just no question that the last few decades of drug policy have been a complete and utter failure, and I believe society is ready to start rolling that back.

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