

A Smarter Approach

THE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF LEGALIZING MARIJUANA

I'm a graduate of the University of Oregon, I've been a community organizer here in Eugene for years, and I help run a small local business. I wear a lot of hats around here. But no matter what hat I have on, regulating, legalizing and taxing marijuana looks like a clear winner. That's why I'm voting "yes" on Measure 91.

As a recent graduate, I understand the critical role education plays in development, both personal and

economic. And like all Oregonians, I know that our education system is woefully underfunded. This new approach to marijuana has 40 percent of the tax revenue collected going specifically for education funding. Further, it will do a better job of keeping marijuana out of the hands of kids by moving its sale off of playgrounds and streets, and into regulated, licensed, audited stores that can only sell it to adults over 21.

As an outdoors enthusiast, I don't want to see more of our national forests damaged by illegal marijuana grows, a consequence of prohibition. It's harming salmon habitat by illegally tapping protected water sources, and unregulated pesticide runoff enters the water table — harming local flora. Measure 91 creates a regulatory framework for growers to operate legally, keeping our forests safe.

As an advocate for social justice, I'm appalled that in Lane County you're 3.5 times more likely to get a charge for marijuana possession if you're a black or brown person. I believe it is imperative that we immediately

replace the current failed policy of prohibition — which disproportionately targets and harms communities of color — with a smarter approach.

As a local businessman, I think regulation gives our region a chance to gain national recognition (and tourism, and tourist dollars) for an industry that's been operating here in the shadows for decades.

We're talking hundreds if not thousands of living-wage jobs here in Lane County — jobs that are currently off the books, that aren't taxed and can get folks arrested. We need to stop making criminals out of people who are just trying to put food on their family's table.

And as a Eugenean, I think it's time. Colorado and Washington beat us to it, but we've learned important lessons from their policies, and Measure 91 is a hybrid that could be the model for the rest of the nation. It's the right time to end prohibition, and this is the right plan for Oregon to do it.

Kevin Cronin of Eugene is regional field director of the Democratic Party of Oregon and co-executive director of Grassroots Eugene.

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