

Amazing Grace

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Throughout the four-hour ceremony, the "Mother Emanuel" choir, hundreds strong, led roughly 6,000 people through rousing gospel standards between speakers. A banner alongside Pinckney's closed coffin declared that the killer picked the "Wrong Church! Wrong People! Wrong Day!"

Obama praised Gov. Nikki Haley for moving first by asking lawmakers to bring down the flag outside South Carolina's Statehouse. Other politicians then came out saying historic but divisive symbols no longer deserve places of honor.

"It's true a flag did not cause these murders," Obama said. "But as people from all walks of life, Republicans and Democrats, now acknowledge — including, Gov. Haley whose recent eloquence on the subject is worthy of praise — as we all have to acknowledge,

the flag has always represented more than just ancestral pride."

"Removing the flag from this state's capitol would not be an act of political correctness. It would not be an insult to the valor of Confederate soldiers. It would simply be an acknowledgment that the cause for which they fought — the cause of slavery — was wrong. The imposition of Jim Crow after the Civil War, the resistance to civil rights for all people, was wrong."

"It would be one step in an honest accounting of America's history, a modest but meaningful balm for so many unhealed wounds," he said. "It would be an expression of the amazing changes that have transformed this state and this country for the better."

Legal Marijuana Begins

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to grow their own marijuana for personal use, but the new rules limit the amount and also require it be consumed in private. While users are allowed to share or even give away marijuana, it will still be illegal to sell or buy it until licensed retail shops open up — which won't be until 2016, unless earlier sales are temporarily permitted through the state's Medical Marijuana program under the Oregon Health Division which is still being debated in the Legislature.

Oregon officials also remind drivers of the impairment caused by marijuana and warn them that driving under the influence of the drug remains illegal. It is also still illegal to take marijuana across state lines, even if it's into another state that has legalized recreational use, like Washington.

Other marijuana legalization technicalities include possession limits. Oregonians of age can have up to 8 ounces in their

homes and up to 1 ounce on their person outside of their home. Adults may also grow up to 4 marijuana plants as long as they are kept out of public view.

As legal marijuana is implemented, there's still an effort to expunge the criminal records of men and women who are serving time for marijuana-affiliated crimes in the state, or those with past criminal records that prevent them from getting housing, jobs, and sometimes even an education.

Rep. Lew Frederick, a Portland Democrat and African-American lawmaker, is pushing forward a bill that could mean people jailed for non-violent marijuana crimes would no longer be kept behind bars.

The Portland Observer also reached out to Peter Zuckerman, communications director for Vote Yes on 91, the marijuana legalization campaign that was approved by voters, for some thoughts on what impact the law will have.

For context, in 2012, more

than 12,000 people were cited or arrested for the possession of marijuana in Oregon, he said. Black people were more than twice as likely to be arrested as white people, even though they use marijuana at similar rates.

If we follow patterns trending in Washington and Colorado, the state will see a dramatic drop in marijuana-related arrests period, and this will likely mean a drop in black arrests as well, Zuckerman said.

"Legalizing marijuana was a great first step and we are celebrating that Oregon has won a better approach," said Zuckerman. "But there is more to do. Now we need to make it easier for people to expunge obsolete marijuana crimes from their records. We need to have a better avenue for people to get out of jail if they've been incarcerated because of an obsolete marijuana crime. And we need to shift money away from incarceration and toward treatment, education and harm reduction."



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