

The Common Sense Approach to Marijuana Reform

It was November 18 in Providence, and I decided to forgo my regular Tuesday night routine of realigning my fantasy football teams for the following week in favor of making my way to Brown University for a forum on the regulation and taxation of marijuana. Jared Moffat of Regulate RI was set to moderate a discussion on the impact of cannabis prohibition and how society could better be served by taking a more common sense approach to this topic, as opposed to the current War on Drugs. As an avid supporter of such reform, I chose to sit in on this event and catch up on the current developments. You can view the two panel discussions in their entirety at <http://dai.ly/x2appe1> and I suggest that anyone interested in learning some of the talking points in favor of an end to prohibition view them.

Panel one consisted of Jim Vincent, president of the Providence Branch of the NAACP; Dr. David C. Lewis, founder of Brown University's Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies; Elizabeth Comery, former Providence police officer and member of LEAP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition); and Mason Tvert, Director of Communications at Marijuana Policy Project and co-director of the 2012 campaign to legalize cannabis in Colorado. This diverse panel of experts opened the night by focusing on the history of marijuana prohibition, the influence of racism on drug policy, the social impact that such prohibition has had on our society, and how current drug policy has led to a misguided and ineffective approach by current law enforcement agencies.

The second panel, which focused on more specific aspects of the Regulation and Taxation Bill presented in RI, introduced Michelle McKenzie, senior project director at The Miriam Hospital and director of the Preventing Overdose and Naloxone Intervention (PONI) Program; Pat Oglesby, former Chief Tax Counsel to the US Senate Finance Committee; and Senator Josh Miller (Democrat - RI District 28, Cranston, Warwick), sponsor of the current regulation and taxation bill in Li'l Rhody. Mason Tvert also returned to present some of his insight and dispel the fears of "fire and brimstone" that opponents to legalization predicted such legislation would leave on the Rocky Mountain state.

Both panels were quite informative. Most important, however, is that these discussions focused on every opposition argument to marijuana reform. From the dangers of cannabis use to the idea that marijuana reform will lead to an increase in adolescent use, each advocate laid waste to the propaganda that has reinforced such rhetoric throughout the past century of marijuana prohibition. What's more, these were all well-respected professionals (some of whom don't support drug use at all) and not of the "hippie" counterculture that society so often associates with the marijuana movement.

As much as I have learned over the past two years of running 13Folds.com, writing for *Motif*, and acting as an advocate for the cannabis movement, I can truly say that this was an eye-opening event. I have come to a new understanding about how deeply the roots of racism and corporate corruption play into the government's current stance on marijuana policies. I have been armed with resources and statistics to show how biased the enforcement of prohibition policies are toward minorities and lower income communities. I have also seen proof in the current models, presented by Colorado and Washington state, that the fears of reform have not come to fruition. The only logical form of recourse now is to right the mistakes of our past and take a new approach to drug policy in this country.