

April 5, 2019

From:
Owen Johnson

To:
Senator Prozanski;
Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: Support for SB 420

Chair Prozanski and members of the committee,

I write to you today in support of SB 420 due to its common-sense approach in attempting to right the injustice perpetuated by the war on drugs and cannabis in particular.

The war on cannabis is historically a war on minorities and those critical of presidential administrations. From its inception under Harry Anslinger's Federal Bureau of Narcotics in the 1930s, the criminalization of marijuana has been unjustly applied in greater proportion against minorities. It is easily inferred from Anslinger's quotes throughout his reign as drug czar that this war is founded in racist attempts to oppress others and has nothing to do with the substance itself. Quotes like, "reefer makes darkies think they're as good as white men" or "there are 100,000 total marijuana smokers in the U.S., and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos, and entertainers. Their Satanic music, Jazz and Swing result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers and any others."

Later, under the Nixon administration, the war on drugs and minorities was further reinforced through the Controlled Substance Act. John Ehrlichman, Nixon's domestic-policy advisor, has even admitted to the fact that the drug war had nothing to do with drugs and everything to do with the repression of opposition and the oppression of minorities:

...the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people... We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.

With the mountains of evidence society has today which points to the failures and unjust nature of the war on cannabis, I feel it is high time to right these historical wrongs. Oregon, along with several other states, has recently come to this understanding by passing sensible legislation to legalize and regulate the sale and use of cannabis; it only makes sense to expunge non-violent offenders whose only crime was to peacefully enjoy life in a nation addicted to a drug war.

I appreciate your time and consideration on this matter and hope that you will continue the recent trend of moral obligation.

Very respectfully,
Owen Johnson