

**November 23, 2011**

**From: Sam Sullivan, Michael Harcourt, Larry Campbell, and Philip Owen**

**To: All B.C. MPs, MLAs, Mayors and Councillors**

**Re: Call to Action – Marijuana prohibition and its effects on violent crime, community safety, and the health and well-being of our citizens**

As former Mayors of the City of Vancouver, we are asking all elected leaders in British Columbia to speak out about the ineffectiveness and harms of cannabis prohibition.

Marijuana prohibition is – without question – a failed policy. It is creating violent, gang-related crime in our communities and fear among our citizens, and adding financial costs for all levels of government at a time when we can least afford them. Politicians cannot ignore the status quo any longer; they must develop and deliver alternative marijuana policies that avoid the social and criminal harms that stem directly from cannabis prohibition.

Among the most pressing issues is the contribution that cannabis prohibition has made to organized crime and gang violence. The Fraser Institute has estimated that B.C.'s illegal cannabis trade may be worth up to \$7 billion dollars annually. This massive illegal market drives violence in communities throughout the province. New thinking, new policies and collaboration across party lines are required to protect our communities and make them safer.

Unfortunately, research and practical experience from Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere clearly demonstrates that increasing anti-cannabis law enforcement strategies will not reduce the availability to young people. Cannabis prohibition has failed globally. While we fully recognize that marijuana is not without health-related harms, the failure of cannabis prohibition to reduce the availability of the drug to young people requires an urgent and novel response.

We agree with the Stop the Violence BC coalition and the criminologists, economists, lawyers, law enforcement and public health experts under its umbrella: we must move from a violent unregulated market to a strictly regulated cannabis market that is based on a public health framework. We believe a legally regulated market for adult cannabis use has the potential to reduce rates of cannabis use while at the same time directly addressing organized crime concerns by starving them of this cash cow. A regulated market would enable governments to improve community health and safety while at the same time raising millions in tax revenue.

The time for action is now. A recent Angus Reid poll demonstrated that 69% of British Columbians believe that chasing and arresting marijuana producers and

sellers is ineffective and that British Columbians would be better off taxing and regulating the adult use of marijuana. We fully agree.

Clearly, elected officials are out of step with their public on marijuana prohibition. It is time that elected officials enter the debate and deliver specific proposals to address the easy availability of cannabis to youth and the organized crime concerns stemming directly from cannabis prohibition.

If you agree, please step forward, join this call for change and add your influential voice to the debate. In addition, we encourage you to notify Stop the Violence BC of your endorsement so that they may profile your support and adjust their education efforts accordingly.

If you disagree, there is nevertheless an ethical and moral obligation to join the debate, because the stakes for our communities, our youth and our fellow British Columbians are so high.

Politicians of all stripes – not just at the federal level – must respond before further damage is done to our B.C. communities. We must break the silence on this issue. The status quo must change.

Signed,

Sam Sullivan, Mayor of Vancouver, 2005-2008  
Larry Campbell, Mayor of Vancouver, 2002-2005  
Philip Owen, Mayor of Vancouver, 1993-2002  
Mike Harcourt, Mayor of Vancouver, 1980-1986