

April 26, 2012

Hon. Christy Clark
Premier
West Annex, Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC
V8V 1X4

Mr. Adrian Dix
Leader of the Opposition
Room 201, Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC
V8V 1X4

John Cummins
Leader
BC Conservative Party
PO Box 30065
North Vancouver, BC
V7H 2Y8

Re: Discussion required on marijuana policy

Dear Premier Clark, Mr. Dix and Mr. Cummins:

As mayors of BC municipalities, we are fully aware of the harms stemming from the province's large illegal marijuana industry. Our communities have been deeply affected by the consequences of marijuana prohibition including large-scale grow-ops, increased organized crime and ongoing gang violence. Increasing law enforcement costs also significantly impact municipal budgets.

We see a seemingly endless stream of anti-marijuana law enforcement initiatives in our communities, yet marijuana remains widely and easily available to our youth. Based on the evidence before us, we know that laws that aim to control the marijuana industry are ineffective and, like alcohol prohibition in the US in the 1920s, have led to violent unintended consequences.

The case against current marijuana laws is compelling. Despite major taxpayer investments in law enforcement activities, the marijuana market has not been suppressed. Furthermore, the province's massive illegal marijuana trade drives organized crime in BC and throughout the Pacific Northwest. The Organized Crime Agency of BC estimates that organized crime groups control 85% of BC's marijuana trade, which the Fraser Institute estimates is worth up to \$7 billion annually. U.S. federal prosecutors have identified BC-based drug gangs that control the marijuana trade as "the dominant organized crime threat in the Northwest."

Even though anti-marijuana law enforcement is active and growing, marijuana potency is increasing while price is decreasing. Rates of use remain high. Youth report easier access to marijuana than to tobacco while organized crime reaps massive marijuana-related profits. Given

these facts, we conclude that a more effective, evidence-based approach to controlling marijuana is urgently needed.

As BC mayors, we support the Stop the Violence BC campaign. It is time to tax and strictly regulate marijuana under a public health framework; regulating marijuana would allow the government to rationally address the health concerns of marijuana, raise government tax revenue and eliminate the huge profits from the marijuana industry that flow directly to organized crime. According to public health experts, strict regulation of the marijuana market may also reduce marijuana use. In fact, the success in reducing rates of tobacco use has been achieved through public health regulation, not prohibition.

We are also concerned about the policing and related law enforcement costs that will be placed upon municipalities due to proposed federal mandatory minimum sentencing legislation related to marijuana. Such prescribed and inflexible policies have proven costly and ineffective in the US. We ask you to instead consider how a public health framework that calls for strict marijuana regulation and taxation can help address the intractable problems of gangs and gang violence in BC.

Stop the Violence BC is not alone in its call for a regulated, public health approach to adult marijuana use. The Fraser Institute and the Health Officers Council of BC, among others, have made similar recommendations and your BC public is onside. According to a recent Angus Reid poll, only 12% of British Columbians support the current approach of marijuana prohibition, with the vast majority supporting taxation and regulation.

We recognize and fully understand public dissatisfaction with today's marijuana laws. Therefore, we will be recommending that the Union of BC Municipalities support a motion in favour of taxation and regulation of marijuana. We also encourage politicians to speak their conscience, even if their views go beyond the silence coming from the political parties themselves.

Given the ongoing gang activity, widespread availability of marijuana and high costs associated with enforcement, leaders at all levels of government must take responsibility for marijuana policy. We are asking you as provincial leaders to take a new approach to marijuana regulation. Our communities, our youth and our public finances will benefit from an evidence-based, public health approach to marijuana.

Signed,

James Baker
Mayor of Lake Country

Chris Pieper
Mayor of Armstrong

Gregor Robertson
Mayor of Vancouver

Howie Cyr
Mayor of Enderby

Darrell Mussatto
Mayor of North Vancouver City

Robert Sawatzky
Mayor of Vernon

Derrick Corrigan
Mayor of Burnaby

John Ranns
Mayor of the District of Metchosin

cc: MPs, MLAs and city councils in British Columbia

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