

Marijuana Concerns Are No Laughing Matter

by Arrison Kirby

Last Thursday, President Obama hosted an Online Town Hall session. The forum allowed American citizens to post questions for their president, and vote them up or down depending on relevancy. Topping the list were multiple questions regarding marijuana legalization. This echoed domestic concerns voiced on Obama's Change.Gov website prior to his inauguration. And yet, at this Online Town Hall, the issue was treated as a fluke and subsequently laid to rest with a smarmy joke and a curt dismissal. "I don't know what that says about the online audience," chuckled the president. Obviously, it says that the online audience finds the issue of marijuana legalization to be important enough to take directly to the president – twice.

Arguments for the legalization of marijuana have been around for a long time. Crime would decrease with the vanishing of a marijuana black market. (That takes care of a lot of problems on the Mexican border.) The tax revenue from a regulated new commodity would be astronomical. (That takes care of a lot of problems in the American economy.) Medical use would decrease America's reliance on amphetamines, and it's safer than alcohol, as well. These arguments are all but common knowledge anymore.

Consider its legalization strictly based within its impact on domestic trade. The overhead for marijuana production is relatively low, depending on the size of the operation. It is at least comparable to growing and maintaining a small garden. So what if Americans no longer had to live in fear of legal ramifications for indulging in such a project? We would have a good that could be domestically manufactured and sold, not just on the whim of multimillionaire corporate handlers, but middle and lower classes as well. Anyone with a hundred or so dollars, a few square feet of space, and several months of time could produce an organic commodity that would yield a nearly endless stream of profit, year round. If properly regulated, the government could obtain a piece of this action, if not control the action all together.

Such ideas are already being considered and, to some degree, implemented in California. Time magazine reports that marijuana is the state's largest cash crop, bringing in around \$14 billion in annual sales. Second to this is the milk and cream industry which, according to USDA statistics, brings in only \$7.3 billion per year – just over half that of marijuana. Recognizing this trend, Democratic state assemblyman, Tom Ammiano, introduced the Marijuana Control, Regulation, and Education Act to the California legislature in February. If passed, the bill would legalize marijuana, regulate and tax its sale, and bring in an estimated \$1.3 billion per year for the state.

Marijuana is serious business that, if treated as such, could hold many benefits for America. I have to give President Obama the benefit of the doubt so early in his presidency, though. He is in the process of attempting to pass a very large, sweeping and progressive new budget. Coming across more radical than he is already sometimes accused of being is of no benefit to this very pointed and necessary objective. Under the surface of Thursday's cold shoulder, he hopefully recognizes the gravity of marijuana law reform in America and will tackle it as soon as the waters are calm enough to do so. "Make the most of the hemp seed and sow it everywhere," he may eventually proclaim – and he would be quoting another American president, George Washington.