

Marijuana Law Reform No Longer a Political Liability, It's a Political Opportunity

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Voting ended late last week on the President-Elect's website Change.gov. As was the case in December, questions from the general public pertaining to marijuana and drug policy reform proved to be extremely popular.

Of the more than 76,000 questions posed to Obama by the public, the fourth most popular question overall called on the incoming administration to cease arresting and prosecuting adults who use cannabis. And in the sub-category "National Security," the most popular question posed by the public pertained to amending U.S. drug policies as a way to try and halt the ongoing violence surround illicit drug trafficking in Mexico and other nations.

But you wouldn't know it by listening to the administration's latest video response (posted online here) < as neither issue received even a passing mention from incoming White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs. (The Obama administration's woefully inadequate response to last month's top-rated marijuana law reform question — "Will you consider legalizing marijuana so that the government can regulate it, tax it, put age limits on it, and create millions of new jobs and create a multi-billion dollar industry right here in the U.S?" — appears at the bottom of the Change.gov page, "Open for Questions Round 2.")

Is it at all surprising to see that the Obama team has decided to hide their collective heads in the sand when it comes to the issue of reevaluating America's ineffective and antiquated marijuana policies? Not at all. But by doing so, the President-Elect and Congress are missing the bigger picture.

The overwhelming popularity of the marijuana reform issue — as manifested on Change.gov, Change.org (which is conducting its own online poll of the top issues facing America; the legalization of marijuana tops the list), and even here on the Hill (where my most recent blog posts have each garnered several hundreds of readers' comments, almost all of them supportive) — illustrate two important points.

One: there is a significant, vocal, and identifiable segment of our society that wants to see an end to America's archaic and overly punitive marijuana laws. Two: the American public is ready and willing to engage in a serious and objective political debate regarding the merits of legalizing the use of cannabis by adults.

Rather than rebuff the public's calls for drug policy reform, the new administration ought to be embracing it. After all, many of the same voters that put Obama in the White House also voted by wide margins in November to liberalize marijuana laws in two states — Michigan and Massachusetts — and in nearly a dozen municipalities.

In short, marijuana law reform should no longer be viewed by legislators a political liability. For the incoming administration and for Congress, it is a political opportunity. The public is ready for change; in fact, they are demanding it. Are their representatives listening?

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