



Former Mexican president Vicente Fox

By: VICENTE FOX

## For Mexico, legalization is freedom

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I recently had the opportunity to meet with Jim Pattison, one of Canada's most powerful and influential business people. While sitting in his office overlooking Burrard Inlet and the mountains of Vancouver, Mr. Pattison asked me a most timely and intriguing question. "President Fox, I have read recently that you are in favour of the legalization of marijuana. Is that true?"

With Justin Bieber making headlines worldwide, I believe it's a timely issue. The question essentially revolves around the issue of freedom of choice versus prohibition. How much money will be needlessly spent

prosecuting and defending a young pop star when that same amount could be used in much more productive ways for the betterment of our societies if regulated consumption of drugs was legalized?

Legalization of not just marijuana, but all drugs, is the right thing to do.

Each person should be free to decide what's best for himself or herself. We are all created equal and free. If we are created in such freedom, then we must be given the very freedom to decide our own behaviour and to act responsibly, as long as we do not detrimentally affect the rights of others.

Prohibition does not work, and this was proven even at the most sacrosanct moment: in the Garden of Eden. God prohibited Adam and Eve from eating the apple, and yet they ate the apple and created sin. How would history have changed if in this narrative, Adam and Eve were given the freedom of choice based upon the foundation of education – this apple is poisonous, this apple has worms in it, this apple is not good for your health? I believe they would not have eaten the apple.

The dramatic war on drugs in Mexico, in which tens of thousands of young Mexicans have been killed, is proof of prohibition's failure. These people were not born criminals; they did not possess criminality in their genes. And yet because of a flawed public policy, because of lack of education and disinformation, because of lack of better economic incentives and opportunities, they became victims of an insane war against an enemy we can never defeat with the current prohibitions in place.

Mexico is not a significant producer or consumer of drugs. However, because of its unique geography – between drug-producing countries to the south and a giant drug-consuming country to the north – we are caught in this permanent war. We must extricate ourselves from it.

The United States has demonstrated a total incapacity to enforce its own laws and prevent the importation and distribution of drugs within its own territory. One is only left to wonder how this has occurred – loads of drugs easily cross the border from Mexico into the United States before being trafficked and sold in every corner of the country. I simply ask, who launders the money and buys the weapons and ammunition in the United States? And who brings the proceeds back to Mexico to bribe police, public officials, even members of the army?

If we were to adopt a policy of sound regulation in conjunction with the decriminalization of drugs, then we would have the money (through fees and taxes) to operate education and regulatory initiatives – as opposed to all of the money from the drug trade being controlled by the drug cartels and the criminals who run them. And we wouldn't have to carry the immense burden of the cost of the war on drugs itself.

In this new paradigm, taking responsibility for one's own health would mean consuming drugs responsibly, the same way society establishes an expectation for responsible eating, smoking and drinking.

Public opinion in favour of legalization considerably outweighs approval of government prohibitionist policies. The trend is well established, and like many other prohibitions, this one must eventually give way to freedom of choice exercised in an educated, responsible manner.

Mexico will have to resolve the great policy trap it has been put in by the United States. But first, the United States must repeal its prohibitionist policies against drug consumption and adopt an educated, regulated marketplace.

A solid majority of people in the United States and Canada, partners with Mexico in a massive free-trade market, are in favour of legalizing marijuana not only for medical purposes, but also for responsible use. The time has come for the governments of our countries, and for governments worldwide, to act and to govern as was envisioned by the great president Abraham Lincoln: “that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth.”

When this monumental change takes place, it will provide for a better world, including our three countries.

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