

Colorado weed czar: Revenue up in smoke

By Bob McGovern

BostonHerald.com | June 12, 2015

Legalizing and taxing marijuana won't fill potholes or boost the Bay State's schools — in fact, most of the revenue generated from legal pot sales will be used to regulate the industry, according to Colorado's weed czar.

“You do not legalize for taxation. It is a myth. You are not going to pave streets. You are not going to be able to pay teachers,” Andrew Freedman, director of Marijuana Coordination for Colorado, said on Boston Herald Radio yesterday. “The big red herring is the whole thing that the tax revenue will solve a bunch of crises. But it won't.”

Freedman, who is tasked with keeping tabs on the regulation of Colorado's retail and medical marijuana markets, said the tax dollars brought in largely go toward the “cost of legalization.”

Rep. David Rogers (D-Belmont), who in March introduced a bill that would make marijuana legal for adults in Massachusetts, when asked about Freedman's cautionary admonition on revenue, offered no specifics but said, “It has the potential to generate revenue, and it will raise some revenue.” But he added that legalization and potential revenues are “two different topics.”

“There are questions about how much revenue would be generated, and of course all of that is based on where you set the rate and other factors,” Rogers said. “In many respects, the debate over revenue is separate from the debate over legalization. In other words, I think legalization stands on its own merits.”

Rogers said the failed war on drugs, which “has been tried for many decades,” is the main reason why the legalization argument stands on its own. Freedman acknowledged that argument as well, and said it is the “strongest I've seen so far.”

But Freedman said Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper had wanted to wait and see how legalization panned out in other states first.

“He didn't want to be the guinea pig,” Freedman said. “He has gone out and said, ‘Listen, you can watch us be a guinea pig for as long as you want and learn from our mistakes.’ He said if he was a governor for another state ... he would wait as long as possible to wait and see the impacts come in for Colorado.”

Rogers said, “I think four states have already taken the step — and the District of Columbia — and that's significant. I think we have to be candid with voters and say that if we go the route of legalization, there probably will be short-term adjustments, problems and challenges that need to be addressed.”

Freedman said the best way to go about legalization is to give it to lawmakers instead of a voter initiative, which could be on the ballot in Massachusetts next year.

“They should write this law transparently in front of the people,” Freedman said. “It is that important that it requires its own special process.”