

“The 4•Twenty Proposal”

by Pastor Michael T. Smith

Greetings, my name is Michael Smith, and I come before you today with an important message for all Americans, especially for those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and preach in His Name.

I'd like to begin by giving you a scenario of what my life is all about. First off, I am 46 years old, I'm a married father of two, and I live in a suburb just north of Atlanta.

I am also a Christian minister, having devoted the last 30 years of my life to Christ and His Service in one form or another. I've been a Youth Pastor, an Associate Pastor, and a Senior Pastor. Presently, I serve as pastor to other Pastors, providing covering, counseling, and encouragement to men and women in ministry across the globe.

And though some may dispute my claim after hearing this message, it is my sincere faith in the Teachings of Jesus Christ that has prompted me to speak to you on this very special day. I pray you will hear His Voice behind my clumsy words.

I am an American, a citizen of goodwill who believes firmly in the ideals upon which our country was founded. I hold to these ideals despite the immoral, inequitable, and hypocritical ways they've been misused and abused since our earliest days as our nation.

While I make no attempt to whitewash or minimize the disgusting and disheartening footnotes of our national story, I do solicit the thoughtful consideration of those citizens who, like myself, still believe in *What America Could Be*.

The founding philosophy of our nation is that all human beings are born free and divinely-imbued with a Right to self-determination, and that in the exercise of that Right, they are at liberty to band together for the purpose of self-government, to unify their energies and resources for the preservation of shared values and the pursuit of common prosperity.

Central to the health and function of our nation is our collective persuasion that whatever power a government exerts over its citizens must be derived from, administered by, and implemented on behalf of those same citizens. In short, there can be no legitimate law or authority in our nation beyond what we, the citizenry, have established for ourselves.

To carry out this vision, our founders and framers formed a “representative government,” the mechanism by which free individuals could negotiate and articulate their shared values, translate those values into laws, establish offices and agencies to uphold those values and laws, and elect officials to oversee and enforce them.

Taken together, these offices, agencies, and officials comprise *the state*, or what's commonly referred to as “the government.” Because *the state* exists solely to carry out the democratically expressed will of its citizens, no agent thereof is ever permitted to operate in his/her own interests or in the interests of *the state* itself, except as provided by the collective consent of the governed.

Contrary to popular sentiment, healthy democracies are not built upon *laws* and *law enforcement*, but upon the equitable goodwill of their freedom-minded citizens, those whose thoughtful reverence for human Rights compels them to check and challenge undue encroachment upon those Rights by *the state*.

In this Light, the laws by which citizens are governed must be morally derived, rationally implemented, and equitably enforced. Because of their human frailty, many of our framers and founders were misguided and mistaken in this endeavor, falling woefully short of God's Vision for humanity, creating years and sometimes centuries of inequity and injustice.

Whenever our nation has persisted in enacting or enforcing laws contrary to the tenets of freedom and dignity, it has fallen to citizens of goodwill to denounce those laws and demand change. For this reason, each generation of Americans has the responsibility to re-evaluate and re-consider our existing laws, to ensure that each and every statute fulfills and satisfies God's moral, rational, and equitable Standard.

This has never been, nor will it ever be, a one-time endeavor; it's an on-going and ever-unfolding enterprise by which freedom-minded individuals strive to create a more just and verdant world.

This Mandate to advance the cause of Justice within every human sphere is written clearly in the Law & the Prophets, confirmed emphatically by John the Baptizer, revealed entirely by Christ in the synoptic Gospels, and championed universally across the Apostolic record.

For a Christian to conclude otherwise is to fundamentally misread and misunderstand the fullness of Christ's Preaching and Purpose, an error that has bred blindness of the lowest order within Christ-professing men and women throughout the centuries, a sightlessness by which they've overlooked innumerable self-evident truths, often to the detriment of the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

And so, on today, Monday, April 20th, 2020, a high day for many in our nation and around the world, I exercise my rights as a citizen of goodwill and use my office as a Minister of Christ to propose and call for the full and complete *decriminalization, legalization, and regulation* of marijuana and related substances at the Federal, State, and Local levels.

And herewith, I'd humbly present my "4•Twenty Proposal," in hopes that it will serve as a high-altitude road map to lead our nation forward in this important area.

1. It's Time for Congress to Act!

1.1 Law makers at the federal level must immediately convene a multi-partisan think-tank to study various models of legalization and regulation from across our nation and around the world. While no model is perfect, this assembly of freedom-focused lawmakers should translate their findings into a cohesive, holistic, and equitable piece of legislation, and aim to put a bill before congress that can be signed into law on April 20th, 2021

1.2 These congressional efforts should be collaborative and inclusive, inviting stakeholders from the public and private sector to present views and make recommendations, but never allowing private interest to supplant public welfare.

1.3 Retail and Advertisement policies should be highly restrictive and controlled, taking great care to protect underage and vulnerable populations from improper targeting, and providing wide-ranging, substantive recourse for the punishment of violators.

1.4 While various financial and taxation models should be explored, only conservative projections should be entertained. The objective of legalization is to support individual freedom, not to empower economic

exploitation. In light of this, options for state-run and non-profit wholesale/retail operations should remain on the table throughout these deliberations.

1.5 All government revenues from the sale of marijuana and other regulated substances should be re-invested in drug education, abuse prevention, addiction recovery, and equitable enforcement of applicable laws.

2. Don't Be Distracted by the Possibilities!

2.6 Marijuana and related substances may be "good" for us, having medicinal and therapeutic benefits we've yet to tap on a large scale. Though some recent studies have shown promise, more research is still needed. At end of the day, it doesn't matter if weed proves to be "good" for us or not; legalization is still the right choice.

2.7 Marijuana and related substances may be "bad" for us, having harmful and addictive properties we're yet unaware of. This may also be true, and we may discover one day that weed is as damaging to our bodies and brains as alcohol, tobacco, refined sugar, processed foods, or even opioids. Still, legalization and regulation are less-bad than our current national course.

2.8 Homelessness may increase in connection with legalization. While there is anecdotal evidence to support this possibility, substance abuse is rarely shown to be a primary cause of indigence. Poverty within a prosperous society is driven by a broad mixture of socio-economic factors, and though drug use is a common correlative and an easy scapegoat, it's also an over-simplified answer to deeper systemic questions.

2.9 Legalization may cause crime rates to go down and property values to rise. We have no way of knowing for sure, but ultimately, this is a non-factor. Our motivation to legalize should be rooted in our firm commitment to individual freedom and our joint belief that no citizen should be fined, detained, or incarcerated for immoral, irrational, or inequitable reasons.

2.10 Legalization may bring a financial windfall to local economies. While this may or may not prove true, we must accept that living in a free society is often a messy affair, one that sometimes requires productive citizens to carry the weight of others who, for one reason or another, struggle to manage their own lives. I highly suspect any surplus revenue that flows into public coffers from legalization will rapidly go up in smoke as we endeavor care more completely for the most vulnerable in our land. It's a reasonable price to pay.

3. Prepare for Unfortunate Realities!

3.11 After legalization, more people WILL use and abuse marijuana and related substances than ever before. And that's okay. Through proper regulation, education, health care, and harm-reduction strategies, we'll eventually reduce the rates of misuse to an "acceptable" level, the lowest possible in a free society.

3.12 After legalization, reports of physical and psychological distress from the overuse of marijuana WILL also increase. Green and even longtime users may find themselves suddenly thrust into multi-year learning curve, experiencing and enjoying their newfound freedom in unfamiliar ways.

Emergency Room visits will see an uptick, complaints of anxiety and other mental disorders will rise, and cases of physical dependence will grow. But the scope and scale of these disappointing side effects will be far less than those brought on by alcohol; and it is my earnest hope that an increase in the responsible use of marijuana will trigger a marked decrease in the abuse of alcohol and other substances.

3.13 After legalization, more intoxicated drivers WILL make their way onto our public roadways, risking their lives and the lives of others irresponsibly and unnecessarily. This is an unfortunate reality, one which requires an all-hands-on-deck approach to address. Together, we must devise effective and fair-minded methods to prevent, police, and prosecute this and other crimes against the public trust, safety, and welfare.

3.14 After legalization, “the war on drugs” WILL continue, but our resources and energies will be redirected to other areas of the battle, to frontline issues like systemic inequity, predatory sales and trafficking, public health and education, and community revitalization.

3.15 The downsides of legalization WILL be felt disproportionately among poor and minority communities.

Sadly, we live in a nation where those terms can still be used interchangeably, and as I’ve contemplated the moral aspects of this issue, my primary objection to legalization has always been how it might affect many of our black, brown, and poor citizens.

In the end, I realized the very communities I’d sought to protect from the shortcomings of legalization had long been ill-affected by the burdens of criminalization. And while every citizen of goodwill should continue to press toward fully-realized dignity and equality for all Americans, we must not overlook this critical-but-imperfect next step.

4. Why We Must Legalize Anyway!

4.16 Because laws that subject citizens who responsibly consuming marijuana to criminal prosecution are *immoral*.

4.17 Because legislating and regulating marijuana and alcohol by different standards is *irrational*

4.18 Because Law Enforcement ought not be tasked with policing or enforcing unjust laws, nor should they be unduly empowered to trample upon the Rights of citizens under the pretense of those same laws.

4.19 Because there are no perfect solutions to social problems within a free society, only more just and more rational ways of dealing with them.

4.20 Because it is high time for this insanity to stop! As with the end of prohibition, it will take a generation or longer to completely weed out bad actors from the illegal drug trade and to fine tune our policies to ensure personal freedom while preserving the public good. The longer we put off our shaky start, the longer we delay a more stable future.

Before I close, I wish to offer a few thoughts to my fellow Christians.

Please know that while I share your conviction that government should be established upon a theological foundation, I’m also persuaded by Scripture the administration thereof should be secular in nature.

True religious expression cannot exist wherever it is compelled, and the New Testament offers no support for using the authority of *the state* to coerce or enforce Christ-specific convictions upon non-believers; it teaches quite the opposite, in fact.

Like you, it grieves me to consider that legalizing marijuana may bolster and buttress the distressing spiritual emptiness that's so pervasive in our society, that more people than ever might seek solace in empty substances rather than God's Love and Light.

While I hear your hearts and share your concerns, I also realize the same could be said of alcohol, money, power, sex, success, and other temporal vanities—each of which can distract and ensnare those who are spiritually vulnerable.

As a product of multi-generational alcoholism, I'm certainly not advocating for widespread use of drugs and other substances; I'm simply pushing for a more Biblical, justice-based approach to a complex problem in our fallen and broken world.

Today I'm asking you to consider the New Testament more carefully, to reflect on its broader meaning and application for non-Christians, and to see it in a purer Light than was passed down to us by our forebears.

I hope that despite your initial reservations—to which I definitely relate—you'll eventually join me in this and other Christ-honoring Missions for justice.

Finally, I call upon Americans of all faiths and no faith to champion this just cause by using your voice and your vote to advance "The 4•Twenty Proposal" at the local, state, and federal level.

You can download a copy of this proposal and a transcript of this message at MichaelAndConnie.com.

Thank you for hearing my heart today. I speak Peace on you and yours as we navigate this trying time in our nation and around the world. In Christ's Love, have a safe and happy 4/20 and a glorious rest of your week.

[End]