



KING COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
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Seattle, WA 98104

John Urquhart
Sheriff

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

“Conflicts between State and Federal Marijuana Laws”

September 10, 2013

Questions for the Record from Ranking Member Charles E. Grassley

John Urquhart, Sheriff, King County, Washington

1. You suggested that your support for Washington’s Initiative 502, which legalized recreational amounts of marijuana, is in part linked to high incarceration rates. What do the two have to do with each other? To what extent are simple possessors of the amounts of marijuana legalized by Initiative 502, who do not have any other criminal history or conduct, incarcerated in Washington? Do you support the legalization of any other drugs that are illegal under federal law?

John Urquhart – *I do not support the legalization of any other drugs that are illegal under federal law. I am not aware of any data available to answer your question to what extent possessors of marijuana are incarcerated in Washington. But I know that a criminal conviction can have just as detrimental effect to a person’s future as being incarcerated. A criminal conviction has the potential to follow someone around for life. Students convicted of drug offenses, including marijuana, have their federal financial aid eligibility negatively impacted. Criminal convictions may be required on job or housing applications. And of course, criminal convictions can lead to incarceration that negatively impacts an individual’s ability to become a productive member of society in the future. The citizens of Washington State have made it clear that they do not want those who possess small amounts of marijuana to be convicted or incarcerated, and I will abide by their wishes.*

2. You testified that you will instruct your officers to enforce the law under Initiative 502, including writing tickets for smoking marijuana in public. However, according to press reports, during Seattle’s three-day Hempfest in August 2013, many attendees openly smoked and sold marijuana in public and on public property. Attendees also were given snack foods by police officers with stickers that read: “We thought you might be hungry.” Are these press reports accurate? How many tickets for smoking marijuana in public were issued by Seattle police to those attending Hempfest?

John Urquhart – *The King County Sheriff's Office and the Seattle Police Department are two separate entities, therefore I do not have figures regarding the number of tickets that SPD issued to attendees of Hempfest. I am aware of press reports describing the outreach efforts of SPD to educate citizens on changes to laws that may have an impact on them, and have been given no reason to question their veracity.*

The Sheriff's Office presence in the city of Seattle is primarily in the form of our Metro and Sound Transit Police. I have instructed my deputies that they will enforce the law under Initiative 502, which includes writing tickets for smoking marijuana in public, and I expect that law to be enforced. The law also prohibits street deals for marijuana. In November of 2013, my deputies and SPD conducted an undercover investigation in downtown Seattle that resulted in the arrest of 30 drug dealers and gang members for selling crack cocaine, powder cocaine, pills, and marijuana.