

MP says Tory government has no plans to legalize marijuana: Anti-Drug Strategy aims to make communities safer and healthier

THE DELTA OPTIMIST
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Editor:

Re: Mayors come up with way to increase taxes, reduce crime, Community Comment, Dec. 2

Ian Robertson asks if I support making marijuana as readily accessible in our community as tobacco or alcohol.

I don't and our government does not intend to decriminalize or legalize marijuana.

The government of Canada continues its efforts under the National Anti-Drug Strategy, which focuses on prevention and access to treatment for those with drug dependencies, while at the same time getting tough on drug dealers and producers who threaten the safety of our youth and communities. It is made up of three action plans:

- . The Prevention Action Plan, which aims to prevent illicit drug use;
- . The Treatment Action Plan, which aims to treat those with drug dependencies; and
- . The Enforcement Action Plan, which aims to combat the production and distribution of illicit drugs.

The federal government is working closely with all levels of government and agencies to ensure our strategy helps to make Canada's communities safer and healthier.

In addition, as part of the National Anti-Drug Strategy, our government implemented a nationwide awareness campaign to educate and dissuade young people from using drugs.

As a further measure, the House of Commons has just passed the Safe Streets and Communities Act to crack down on serious drug crimes by establishing mandatory minimum penalties for serious drug offences when they are carried out for organized crime purposes, or if they involve the use or threat of violence, or target youth.

Gangs and criminal organizations pose a serious threat to the safety of our children, neighbourhoods and property. The production and trafficking in illicit drugs is the most significant source of money for gangs and organized crime.

Surrey fire chief Len Garis advised the House of Commons Justice Committee that his firefighters were attending about 1.3 fires per month that were caused by marijuana grow-ops. That's 13 to 16 a year.

Grow-ops, he said, are 24 times more likely to catch fire than a home without one. He also advised that 85 per cent of the marijuana that is grown in B.C. is connected with organized crime.

Our government believes criminals who commit serious drug crimes should get sentences that reflect the severity of their crimes. We want to protect our youth from gangs that seek out young people, get them addicted to drugs and use them to commit crimes.

Police and firefighters often recount stories of homes used for grow-ops and meth labs catching fire and exploding. This constitutes a significant threat to their safety and the safety of the community.

Drug lords do not build strong communities. Our message to them is clear: if convicted, they will pay with jail time.

Few, if any, neighbourhoods in the Lower Mainland have escaped the scourge of marijuana grow-ops and the associated asset damage, criminal activity and violence. A 2008 Department of Justice study estimated the cost of crime in Canada, for that year alone, at just under \$100 billion; over 80 per cent of this cost is borne by victims.

Canadians can count on us to continue standing up for law-abiding citizens.

Kerry-Lynne Findlay MP, Delta-Richmond East