

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Nelson Holds Up 4/20 Mantle And Continues Advocacy For Legalized Marijuana

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Positive Nelson on Friday held dueling 4/20 events in St. Thomas and St. Croix, the second annual affair that seeks to promote the benefits of marijuana as well as its legalization. On St. Croix, Mr. Nelson led a small group of advocates from the Budhoe Park in Frederiksted as they marched to Rainbow Beach, where, at exactly 4:20 p.m., some were to smoke marijuana during a party, and continue to highlight the benefits of the drug.

A selfsame event was planned for St. Thomas beginning at Market Square to Evolution Bar and Grill, where a rally and party were set to last until 11:00 p.m.

Four-twenty is a code that refers to the consumption of marijuana, and by extension as a way to identify oneself with marijuana subculture or simply marijuana itself. Observances based on 4:20 include smoking marijuana around the time 4:20 p.m. and a.m. everyday, as well as smoking and celebrating marijuana on the date April 20, which has been embraced by marijuana smokers around the world as "weed day", according to the [Huffington Post](#).

On Friday, Mr. Nelson's comments mirrored his words during last year's event, but the movement has gained momentum. "What is going on? Why is this senator out here in the streets talking about legalization [of marijuana]? Well ask yourself why has 34 states talked about legalization and have actually enacted legalization," Mr. Nelson said while marching towards Rainbow Beach.

Along with U.S. states, Caribbean islands are also warming up to the idea of legalization of marijuana, with Antigua and Barbuda set to legalize the drug. The country's prime minister, Gaston Browne, recently stated that "racist" laws that banned marijuana had hurt the Rastafarian community, according to the [U.K.'s Daily Mail](#).

Mr. Nelson, who is running for governor, has been an advocate for the legalization of marijuana throughout his career as a senator. The closest the senator came to seeing his vision become law was hearings on his medicinal marijuana legislation. However, the bill was [ultimately tabled](#), and when asked earlier this year about the measure, Mr. Nelson told The Consortium that it was languishing in the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, chaired by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, a fierce opponent of any legislation pertaining to marijuana use.

But with minds changing in favor of legalization, Mr. Nelson has continued to push his agenda, and he's not the only local politician voicing support.

In a recent interview, gubernatorial candidate Albert Bryan mentioned the creation of a registry for marijuana products in the territory that would see the U.S. Virgin Islands receiving a percentage on the sale of all products registered in the territory.

"People think about smoking, but there are pills, there are edibles, there are lotions -- there's a lot of things that are being patented now using strains of cannabis," Mr. Bryan said. "And with all the different types of strains that they have, there's really no registry where those strains are at. So it'd be just like you having a McDonald's franchise, if everywhere McDonald's franchise is sold, McDonald's makes money, everywhere that registered cannabis product is sold, the Virgin Islands make money."

As the march to Rainbow Beach continued on Friday, Mr. Nelson cued the song, "[Legalize It](#)", and hollered, "Now we're talking. Wow!" His undying enthusiasm and advocacy for the legalization of the drug has been popular among Virgin Islanders for years, but lawmakers have been more hesitant to join the bandwagon, a skepticism that is rooted in part with the territory's conservative stance on marijuana, as well as the documented negative effects of its use.

A 2015 [systematic review](#) published in Journal of American Medical Association, found some pretty impressive improvements following the use of marijuana, with the complete resolution of nausea and vomiting due to chemotherapy (47 percent of those

using marijuana versus 20 percent of controls). Marijuana also increased the number of people who had resolution of pain (37 percent, up from 31 percent). And it was shown to reduce pain ratings by about half a point on a 10-point scale, and to reduce spasticity in multiple sclerosis or paraplegia in a similar manner.

There are side effects of marijuana to consider as well, including dizziness, dry mouth, nausea, fatigue, drowsiness, vomiting, disorientation, confusion, loss of balance and hallucination. There's also the potential for abuse. [Here's a more complete list](#) of the positives and negatives of the drug.

Feature Image: Positive Nelson and other advocates march during the April 20, 2017 4/20 march. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

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