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Sun Media Newspapers

NEWS

Friday, February 21, 2003

Pot support in full flower

New poll shows 69% back decriminalization

By BILL RODGERS, SUN OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA -- The country is going to pot.

According to an SES/Sun Media poll, 69% of Canadians favour the decriminalization of possession of small amounts of marijuana.

The survey found that Canadians who were teenagers during the "flower power" sixties were the group most likely to support easing our pot laws.

Among age groups, it showed that 76% of Canadians between the ages of 50 and 59 support decriminalization while 72% of the 40 to 49 age group agree the laws against smoking dope should be relaxed.

The poll surveyed 1000 people between Feb. 2 and Feb. 11. The poll is accurate plus or minus 3.1%, 19 times out of 20.

There was strong support for decriminalization in every region. Only 25% of those responding to the survey opposed our marijuana possession laws going up in smoke.

"The opinions of Canadians may have been influenced by numerous media stories related to the therapeutic use of marijuana for cancer patients," said SES President Nik Nanos.

Liberal, Tory and Alliance MPs say pot shouldn't be considered a harmless recreational drug even though a Senate committee last fall recommended legalizing the smoking of pot for anybody older than 16.

Doing so would make Canada one of the most cannabis-friendly nations in the world. The committee called the present criminal laws on possession of weed outdated.

At the time, the Canadian Police Association lashed out at the recommendation, calling it "a back-to-school gift for drug pushers."

Justice Minister Martin Cauchon doesn't plan to make the drug legal but favours a fine instead of a prison sentence for the possession of 30 grams of weed for personal use.

Toronto-area Grit MP (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge) Dan McTeague says there needs to be a national debate on the issue.

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"As if we have not had the lesson of the destruction that alcohol has reeked on families," he said. "Do we need another form of mind-bending products that are going to ruin people's lives?"

"It's wrong to go down that road," said Tory MP Elsie Wayne. Alliance Justice critic Chuck Cadman called decriminalization a confusing message for young people because the government is also telling them not to get involved with drugs.

"Then on the other hand we send them a message from the Parliament of Canada: 'Well, what the hell, we'll decriminalize it anyway.' It's just that young people take that kind of a message the wrong way," said Cadman.

Today, the federal government is appealing the Jan. 3 Ontario court decision that possession of small amounts of marijuana is not illegal.

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