

## Some say crowd was largest ever for 46th annual event

### Hash Bash draws at least 10,000 amid push to legalize

Ann Arbor News, The (MI) (Published as Ann Arbor News (MI)) - April 3, 2017

- Author/Byline: Ryan Stanton ryanstanton@mlive.com
- Section: News
- Page: A1
- Readability: >12 grade level (Lexile: 1370)

ANN ARBOR — The message at the 46th annual Hash Bash rally in Ann Arbor was clear: “Free the weed!”

Efforts are underway to put the question of legalizing marijuana in Michigan on the statewide ballot in 2018, and speakers ranging from local politicians to longtime cannabis activists lined up to voice support.

The message was embraced by thousands of pot enthusiasts who filled the University of Michigan’s Central Campus Diag on a sunny Saturday afternoon, many of them lighting up joints and filling the area with smoke.

Some who have come to Hash Bash for years said it was the largest crowd they could remember at the annual event. U-M campus police estimated the crowd at more than 10,000.

There were some late changes to the speakers lineup. Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero and former Detroit Red Wings player Darren McCarty said they couldn’t make it, and state Sen. Coleman Young II didn’t show, either.

But the crowd still heard from several speakers, including former NFL player Eugene Monroe, state Rep. Yousef Rabhi, D-Ann Arbor, and Ann Arbor City Council Members Jack Eaton and Jason Frenzel, former Hash Bash organizer Adam Brook and poet John Sinclair, whose imprisonment for marijuana possession decades ago (and subsequent release after the Michigan Supreme Court overturned his sentence) led to the first Hash Bash in 1972.

‘WE’RE ALL RESIDENTS OF TRUMPVILLE’

“We still have the task of freeing the weed from the police bureaucracy, the courts, the governor and all these idiots,” Sinclair said Saturday.

“Now that we’re all residents of Trumpville, it’s going to be even harder. We’ll be lucky to be able to stand up in public a year from now if Trump’s still there. This is not what they’re looking for in the great America they’re talking about.”

Former state Rep. Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor, who is working as the political director for the newly formed Michigan Coalition to Regulate Marijuana like Alcohol, briefly took the stage Saturday.

The coalition has released draft language for a ballot proposal it hopes to put before voters in November 2018 to legalize marijuana for people 21 and older and tax it at the wholesale level, in addition to state sales tax, and give people convicted of non-violent marijuana crimes a path to clear their records.

Rabhi, who recently took over Irwin’s seat in the state House, said it was an honor to be part of this year’s Hash Bash.

“You know, some communities have a chicken broil, some communities have a tulip festival. In Ann Arbor, we have Hash Bash,” he said.

WAR ON DRUGS CALLED A FAILURE

Rabhi said the war on drugs has been a failure and has cost many millions of taxpayer dollars spent locking up the wrong people, hindering their ability to get jobs after they have been criminally convicted.

He said it’s a race war against people of color and is being used to target minority communities.

“And that is unacceptable,” he said, speaking in support of a ballot initiative to legalize marijuana in Michigan.

“I’m here with you today because the reality is, whether you like it or not, people are using marijuana, and so the prohibition, it doesn’t work. And so what we need to be doing is looking at ways to decriminalize and legalize, so that we can ensure that everybody is using marijuana safely. It is about safe usage.”

Rabhi said legalizing marijuana for recreational purposes and taxing it would bring in new state revenue for schools, roads and other infrastructure.

## POSITIVE POLICY

Eaton, a Democrat who represents Ann Arbor's 4th Ward on the City Council, said the city decriminalized marijuana in the 1970s and hasn't seen more crime because of it. He called it a positive public policy.

"We're going to continue in Ann Arbor to insist that people be free to use marijuana without serious consequence. We're going to continue in Ann Arbor to fight to make sure that marijuana is legalized in all of Michigan," he said.

Diane Brown, a spokeswoman for U-M's Division of Public Safety and Security, said campus police arrested one person for possession of marijuana at Hash Bash, confiscated marijuana from four or five others, and issued two traffic citations, while one person was taken to U-M's emergency department for excessive drug intake.

Lissa Satori, a grassroots organizer who recently moved to Michigan from Ohio and is coordinating the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana like Alcohol, said signature collection for the group's ballot initiative will begin in May.

She said they've got the money to do it and they're pulling the trigger.

"We're going to turn this state into the craft state for cannabis and create places for people who are currently caregivers in the medical system and for everyday small businesses in Michigan to be able to flourish in this market," she said.

Satori said about 20,000 people are arrested for marijuana in Michigan every year, and the initiative, if successful, could put an end to that.

Multiple speakers at the rally alluded to divisions within the Michigan marijuana legalization movement and encouraged unification.

There have been disagreements over draft ballot language, and organizers of a group known as MI Legalize, which was behind a previous legalization effort that fell short in 2016 because of invalidated petition signatures, have plans for a 2018 ballot initiative.

Chuck Ream, a retired kindergarten teacher and longtime marijuana activist in Ann Arbor, said he helped put together MI Legalize, but now he's "totally on board" with the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana like Alcohol, "because I'm sure they can win legalization, and they are good people."

Ream said he hopes the two groups unify.

He said cannabis policy will continue to evolve as voters see there is nothing to fear and much to gain.

### 'BACKYARD MARIJUANA'

"After legalization, we will keep on pushing until we someday have free, legal, backyard marijuana. We have worked, we have waited. We have suffered for too long to screw this up now," he said.

"We have seen our people arrested and fined and jailed, their property confiscated, their children taken away, their student loans prevented, their housing denied, their driver's licenses taken away, promising lives wrecked," Ream continued.

"We will have legalization in 2018. The only question is whether we are united or divided. We could fairly easily sail to victory in 2018 under the umbrella of the Coalition to Regulate Marijuana like Alcohol."

Ream told those in the crowd it's their sacred duty to win.

"We will bring our healing, miracle plant to this desperate planet. And I say power — power to the great ganja plant and to all of her children and disciples. Right on," he said, raising his fist.

Eaton told the crowd it's important to vote in local, state and national elections to make sure the right people are elected.

He suggested Trump's administration, with Jeff Sessions as the new U.S. attorney general, isn't going to be friendly to the cause of marijuana legalization, which Sessions opposes.

The White House has said it expects law enforcement agents to enforce federal marijuana laws when they come into conflict with states where recreational use of marijuana is permitted.

"In Washington, we have a new attorney general, and he can come to Michigan and get a list of everybody who's registered as a medical marijuana user and your address," Eaton said.

"So, I'm here to tell you that it's not just local elections; it's not just referendums. It's every (expletive) election, you have to vote."

Eaton said Michigan has to deliver the vote in national elections so that in Washington “our voices are heard and we don't end up with these Nazis coming out to knock on our door and drag us away for medical marijuana.”

‘QUALITY PRODUCT’ Frenzel, a Democrat who

represents Ann Arbor’s 1st Ward on the City Council, said he has friends who use medical marijuana to treat their ailments and to reduce their use of harder drugs and have a higher quality of life.

“My goal is to make sure that our laws here continue to support the dozen dispensaries we have in town and the tens of thousands of visitors that we have to our city, and to make sure that those folks who come to visit those dispensaries are safe and have quality product that meets their medical needs,” he said.

“It is critically important to our industry and to our people.”

On a personal note, Frenzel said a couple of his family members attended the first Hash Bash 45 years ago, and he remembers when the fine for marijuana possession in Ann Arbor was \$5 when he was in high school.

NATIONAL EFFORT Irwin read aloud a letter from U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Oregon, whom Irwin called one of the strongest advocates in Congress for marijuana legalization.

“Times are crazier than ever in Congress, but one thing that is becoming less controversial every year is cannabis,” Irwin said, reading the congressman’s statement to mark the occasion of Hash Bash.

“We recently launched a united front for reform with the bipartisan Congressional Cannabis Caucus and we are gaining momentum. There is also unprecedented interest and civic engagement. I encourage you to embrace this energy to get more people involved in your fight to legalize and regulate marijuana in Michigan, and I pledge to continue my work in Congress to remove the federal barriers standing in our way.

“I look forward to being your partner in ending the failed war on drugs once and for all, and I hope to join you in Michigan in the near future.”

• Caption: Preston Carter smokes a blunt and a joint Saturday at the University of Michigan during the 46th annual Hash Bash. Matt Weigand, MLive.com Kirk Reid, also known as Captain Kirk, lets two people roll joints Saturday by his walking joint rolling stand on Monroe Street for the Monroe Street Fair after the 46th annual Hash Bash. The street fair featured vendors, music and speakers and is the largest pro-marijuana festival east of the Mississippi. Matt Weigand, MLive.com

• Dateline: ANN ARBOR

• Record: 1638B4E12ADCEA1D

• Copyright: Copyright, 2017, The Ann Arbor News. All Rights Reserved.