

10/25/03

Dear Congressperson Murray,

The other day, I heard comedic actor Tommy Chong's wife on the radio¹ as she related her husband's dealings with justice department's prosecutors during a recent arrest and trial.

That same day, a picture in the USA Today caught my eye². The picture was of a woman tending shop in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. Behind her was a display wall of similar glassware for which Chong was arrested for selling.

The USA Today article didn't mention the glass waterpipes - saying only that the shop selling incense, candles, etc. Rather, the story was about the economic lifestyle changes that millions of workers made after the "dot-bomb" in April of 2000 and went on to relate stories of laid off management workers making due with retail service jobs.

This juxtaposition seems strange to me. On one hand, an aged man was imprisoned for 9 months at a tax payer cost of about \$25,000/year³. On the other hand, a national newspaper publishes an article lauding the working spirit of people opening selling the same product.

Indeed with unemployment at 6.1%⁴ in September, and many skilled "white collar" workers facing un (or under) employment, new entrepreneurial business startups should be encouraged by the government. Certainly not squashed to

¹ KZOK 102.5 approx. 8:30am 10/22/03

² Stephanie Armour , USA TODAY - Laid-off take survival jobs to pay the bills -10/22/2003

³ Keith Stroub, Esq. – Letter "Free Tommy Chong" - NORML.org

⁴ Armour

make a political statement trying to advance a failing cultural war from 3000 miles away.

I won't get into the cultural politics of the "war on drugs" at this point but rather the economics behind the John Ashcroft 's campaigns (Operation "Pipedreams," & "Headhunter"), which resulted in 55 indictments in several states.⁵

Chong's company contributed tax dollars to the economy⁶ and sold product which is sold without prosecution in most every state. Shipping nationwide and internationally, the company was an example of success in the new global economy afforded by the Internet and other technological advances in marketing and fulfillment. Incidentally, Chong has no criminal record,⁷ and certainly cannot be considered a physical threat to anyone at 65 year old.

22 other legitimate companies and individuals making glass pipes have been convicted under this operation totaling up a large tab for the Justice department before even looking at the individual economic losses incurred by the "criminals". Not only is the government paying for his prosecution and incarceration, the government coffers are losing out on additional tax revenue.

Estimates put forth that legalization would save the taxpayers around \$8 - \$16 billion, not counting the economic benefits of hemp agriculture and other spin-off industries.⁸ I think the opportunity costs of prosecuting these tax paying businesspeople further increases the true economic cost.

I feel society would be better served by spending these funds on other programs such as higher education and medical insurance for students and self-employed

⁵ Duncan Campbell, The Guardian - Nine Months In Jail Is Bad Trip For 'Bong' Seller Tommy Chong – 9/20/03

⁶ Campbell

⁷ Stroub

⁸ Dale Gieringer, Ph.D. - Economics of Cannabis Legalization (1994) Detailed Analysis of the Benefits of Ending Cannabis Prohibition - 06/94

entrepreneurs who in turn create more jobs which are sorely needed .

I also think the Justice department sets a disturbing precedent by ordering the "illegal" products over the Internet to ensure the product crossed state lines. Their aim was to inflate charges to but the actions complicates using shipping goods within the USA when states are coerced into cooperation in the drug warriors expensive initiatives.

All for now,

Daveo

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