

CANNABIS FOR ALL WOMANKIND

MJ

LIFESTYLE

MADE in
the CITY

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MEET JERVONNE SINGLETARY

ASST. VICE PRESIDENT, LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
NYC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP (NYCEDC)
INTERVIEW BY ELIZABETH CONWAY & JENNIFER SKOG

OBSESSED WITH POLITICS AND CURRENTS EVENTS FROM A YOUNG AGE, THERE'S NO DOUBT JERVONNE SINGLETARY, ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS FOR THE NYC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP (NYCEDC) IS EXACTLY WHERE SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE. IN A CITY OF ALMOST 9 MILLION PEOPLE, BEING PART OF THE CHANGE IN CANNABIS POLICY IS NO EASY FEAT. ESPECIALLY WHEN SHE'S SURROUNDED BY THE AGED YET STILL VERY PREVALENT "REEFER MADNESS" MENTALITY MOST ELECTED OFFICIALS STILL OPERATE UNDER.

IN HER WORK WITH THE EDCNYC, IT IS HER PERSONAL MISSION TO RESTORE THE COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE BEEN DESTROYED BY CRIMINALIZATION AT A SIGNIFICANTLY DISPROPORTIONATE RATE. THIS WOMAN IS BRAVE, INTELLIGENT AND HAS SOMETHING TO SAY, SO LET'S LISTEN UP.



WHAT WERE YOU LIKE AS A YOUNG GIRL? WHAT DID YOU DREAM OF BECOMING?

I was super inquisitive and argumentative. I was obsessed with politics and current events even as a little girl. I always wanted to be an agent of change in the world. I saw myself as a force for good. At first, I wanted to be a police officer like my father, then an attorney and I think I settled on a Marine sometime around high school. I'm glad none of those worked out.

HOW DID YOUR CANNABIS JOURNEY BEGIN?


I've worked in New York City politics since 2008. My first experience with cannabis came when I was serving as Chief of Staff to a NYS Assemblymember, and we worked on decriminalization legislation. Many are unaware, but New York State decriminalized the possession of $\frac{1}{8}$ an ounce of cannabis back in the '70s, but due to a technicality and the expansion of stop and frisk policing a lot of minority youth were getting arrested for public possession. In 2013, we worked on "in plain view" legislation which would allow people to carry and have in plain view of law enforcement the $\frac{1}{8}$ of an ounce to correct the discrepancy and make personal possession punishable by a fine only. While the bill didn't pass during my tenure at the Assembly, the legislature included this in its comprehensive cannabis decriminalization bill that passed this year.

In 2016, my company hosted competition for proposals that

would create good jobs for New Yorkers. I submitted the idea of expanding the State's medical program to adult use cannabis. This was around 2016 after Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska had legalized and California had just passed Prop 64. These states were experiencing benefits like increased tax revenue, job creation, and a decrease in opioid addiction and violent crimes. I began to see the economic and social justice benefits of legalization and what it could mean for a state like New York. I knew that it was only a matter of time before the political climate would inevitably begin to shift.

WHAT YOUR ROLE IS AS ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT OF NYCEDC?

I analyze legislative policy and assist with city, state and federal official coordination for the organization.

A woman with dark hair in braids, wearing a black leather jacket over a white t-shirt with a graphic, black pants, and pink sneakers, is walking towards the camera on a street. The street is painted with a vibrant rainbow. The surrounding buildings are covered in colorful graffiti and murals. In the background, other people can be seen walking. A large, semi-transparent white box containing text is positioned in the upper right corner of the image.

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ART / MEGAN WILSON, END APARTHEID, CLARION ALLEY MURAL PROJECT, SAN FRANCISCO

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ART / MEGAN WILSON, END APARTHEID, CLARION ALLEY MURAL PROJECT, SAN FRANCISCO

WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

VERTICAL INTEGRATION

FULL INCORPORATION OF THE LEGACY MARKET

FEDERAL PROHIBITION

TAXES—HOW WILL WE USE THEM?

HOW MUCH WILL WE RECEIVE?

WHAT LED YOU TO PURSUE A CAREER WITH NYCEDC?

Economic Development advances and strengthens communities and helps them realize their full potential—I wanted to be a part of that change.

WHAT IS IT LIKE WORKING ON CANNABIS POLICY FOR A CITY LIKE NEW YORK?

It's truly a balancing act. When I worked on the Mayor's Marijuana Task Force, I realized that there are so many valid opinions that need to be thoroughly considered. Everyone who I've encountered while having conversations about the plant has had such a unique perspective and added so much nuance to the discussion. New York City is unlike any other city in the world, its nearly 9 million people, we have concerns that most other jurisdictions couldn't conceive of, and we aren't a quiet bunch. So, to work on such a transformative yet controversial policy like cannabis legalization, you have to take all of these views concerns and positions into consideration, especially if you want the plan to be successful.

WHAT WERE YOUR BIGGEST SURPRISES WHEN YOU STARTED TO INTEGRATE CANNABIS POLICY WITH OTHER PUBLIC POLICY?

It parallels to other industries and businesses. By working in economic development, I have the privilege of examining multiple industries and it was surprising to see how many of those sectors could successfully intersect with the cannabis industry.

I was also surprised by the background of so many who are now working in or looking to get into the space. Some of the people leading the industry today, don't necessarily have a background in cannabis but they simply applied their preexisting skills. And the multidisciplinary collaboration shows in the type of innovations that are coming to market.

It kind of mirrors the plant— all the diversity of the environment is infused in the plant to make new variations and species. And what you are seeing now is all this diversity infusing itself in the cannabis space.

HOW DO YOU THINK ABOUT CANNABIS AS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOL WHEN THERE IS SO MUCH UNKNOWN ABOUT THE MARKET SIZE?

At the time I began advancing legalization in 2016, conservative estimates pegged the market at \$7 billion nationally. If New York State saw even a tenth of that market we'd be a major player. Now estimates have increased to over \$25 billion for the US and continue to trend higher as more states legalize.

Also, while we may not know the exact size of the legal market, we know the population size, nearly nine million, couple that with the fact that New York already consumes a tremendous amount of illicit market product, nearly 77 metric tons by some estimates. It's not hard to make a pretty informed calculation that the legal New York State cannabis market will be huge.

WHAT ROLE DOES GOVERNMENT PLAY IN ENSURING THE CANNABIS INDUSTRY FOCUSES ON SOCIAL EQUITY?

The government plays a primary role as far as I am concerned. For 90 years cannabis was criminalized, and the impacts of that criminalization were borne on communities of color at a disproportionate rate. Cannabis prohibition remains one of this country's most flawed policies.

So yes, if governments have now come to this awakening about the benefits of cannabis then they must restore the communities that they destroyed. And we must be intentional about it, equity in cannabis policy can't be an afterthought. We must develop policies that create opportunities for people.

HOW IS THE CITY PREPARING FOR LEGALIZATION, AND IF LEGALIZED, WHAT WOULD THE INITIAL STAGES OF LEGALIZATION LOOK LIKE FROM AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE?

Right now, it's more wait and see. The New York State legislature was ultimately unable to agree on cannabis legalization before the end of its calendared session, much to the chagrin of the advocates and the industry. The bills sponsors Senator Krueger and Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes have indicated that this is only a delay and not the end of the road, so I have full confidence that a regulated market will ultimately come to NYS.

In the meantime, some amazing groups are doing the groundwork with marginalized communities and women to get them prepared for the business opportunities that will come with legalization. Recently, I attended an event at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Brooklyn sponsored by Women Grow and others. The event covered all of the aspects of cannabis, but one of the better-attended workshops was the one on ancillary business opportunities. So, people are getting themselves ready, not waiting on government, which is impressive and exactly what should happen.

In terms of economic development planning, we're in the process of identifying business interventions that have worked in other industries to determine if they can be applied to cannabis. We are looking at the best practices of the cities and states that have legalized before us to see what would work in NYC. We are thinking through the opportunities to retrain our workforce so they can access the coming jobs.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT SOCIAL EQUITY AND POTENTIAL TAX INCENTIVES, APPLICATION ASSISTANCE, LOANS ETC. TO ENSURE SOCIAL EQUITY, HOW DOES THE CITY ALSO GET THE REVENUE IT WILL NEED TO FUND EDUCATION, PREVENTION, OVERSIGHT, AND A CANNABIS REGULATORY BODY?

Conservative estimates say that we'll clear just shy of \$300 million in tax revenue. That's enough money to reinvest in communities that have been harmed by unjust enforcement and set up a sufficient regulatory system.

With \$300 million we can do transformative work supporting entrepreneurs, creating workforce development program, invest in public health and education, and invest in communities.



ARE THERE OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER THAN JUST TAX DOLLARS IN THE COFFERS?

Absolutely! Public health, legal equity, patient access, responsible use, shared economic prosperity.

This isn't all about taxes and revenue. It's about correcting historical wrongs; it's about realizing the benefits for people of all walks of life.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE INDUSTRY SHOULD BE TALKING TO GOVERNMENT ABOUT?

Reefer Madness concerns. In my opinion, many elected officials are still operating under old school assumptions of cannabis—gateway drug, lazy stoner, violent and seedy drug dealers. And the industry needs to continue to work to dispel those misconceptions and change the “face” of cannabis from unproductive stoner to employed professional.

They should also be talking about the commitments they are willing to make in the form of grants, technical assistance, incubator space, and workforce training. They need to prove to government that they will be good partners as legalization advances.



ART / DEAD EYES, UNTITLED, CLARION ALLEY MURALS PROJECT, SAN FRANCISCO

ARE THERE THINGS NEW YORK CAN TEACH OTHER MAJOR CITIES (LOS ANGELES, CHICAGO, MIAMI, HOUSTON, PHOENIX) ABOUT HOW TO IMPLEMENT RESPONSIBLE CANNABIS SALES AND USE?

Every locality is different, and it really depends on the aims of that municipality. It's crucial to carefully set up your adult use regulatory and tax framework. The equation is not all about maximum taxes in year one. It will take at least five years for the market to stabilize and we need to be cognizant of that. So be patient on the tax side, and don't set the taxes too high because that only fuels the unlicensed product market.

On the regulatory side, I caution against too many rule changes as the ecosystem is maturing. While the opaqueness of packaging may be an afterthought for policy and rule makers, changing those requirements midstream could have disastrous consequences for a small entrepreneur who's in the middle of production. As any state sets up its system it needs to think of the impact of even small rule changes and build in sufficient time for businesses to come into compliance.

I'd also say that if they are earnest about equity, invest in it at the onset, identify the source and set up the loans and grants before the first license is issued to ensure that the equity applicants can compete with the well-financed medical and multi-state organizations.

Make sure you aren't creating unnecessary hoops as well. Realize that your municipality probably already had some sort of cannabis infrastructure and work to incorporate those folks into the regulated industry early. They were the pioneers.

SMOKING CANNABIS IS SUCH A MAJOR PART OF CANNABIS "CULTURE". HOW DO YOU THINK NEW YORK CITY WILL HANDLE THAT?

Consumption methods are changing, people are consuming less flower and moving towards vape, edibles, and other consumables, in line with the overall wellness movement. So, I really expect the New York City market to trend the same way.

But people still love to light up a joint, and New York has some of the strictest no-smoking laws in the country for very good reasons. However, some of those will need to be amended to allow for on-site consumption lounges. With the lounges, we'll need to be very thoughtful about things like ventilation, filtration, hours of operation, and product offerings beyond cannabis.

I think it will be a real balancing act.

DESCRIBE YOURSELF
IN THREE WORDS.



FREE-SPIRITED

REBEL

RESILIENT



WHAT COULD THE INDUSTRY BE DOING BETTER IN YOUR OPINION, RIGHT NOW FROM A PUBLIC POLICY PERSPECTIVE?

It depends on how you define the industry. If by it you mean the advocates, they've been really clear on what they want and how to achieve it.

If you are talking about business interest in the industry, I think they need to engage more. The industry needs to be more explicit about the financial commitments they will make, they need to be explicit about who they are going to hire and what their plans are to ensure diversity.

New York State will literally be starting from scratch and we have a lot to learn when it comes to cultivation, distribution, and manufacturing so the industry has a significant role to play there as well.

WHAT WILL BE THE MOST DIFFICULT THING IN LEGALIZING CANNABIS IN NEW YORK (AFTER WE PASS THE LEGISLATION)?

Setting up the infrastructure. Unlike California, New York didn't have a robust medical market with an established supply chain. We have limited cultivation farms, those that we do, have a part of a vertically integrated registered organization. So, we'll need to dedicate a lot of time to setting up cultivation facilities and distribution networks.

IF YOU HAD A CRYSTAL BALL, WHAT DOES CANNABIS USE IN 5 YEARS LOOK LIKE FOR NEW YORK CITY?

I think consumables will be huge, and edibles will continue to evolve beyond candy and other confections. You'll see cannabis integrated into beverages because it's a social form of consumption that we're more familiar with.

I think you'll see venues and businesses move to incorporate cannabis into their operations, think cannabis yoga, cannabis spas, salons.

WHO DO YOU CONSIDER A HERO OF YOURS?

I have so many, but I look up to trailblazers in the industry like Charlo Greene who started a cannabis movement in Alaska, Minority Cannabis Business Association Vice Chairwoman Shanita Penny, Women Grow Chief Executive Officer Dr. Chanda Macias and Executive Vice President Gia Moron. Other trailblazing women like Rihanna, Josephine Baker, Shirley Chisholm, Bessie Coleman, Madam C.J. Walker, and principled individuals like Muhammad Ali and Colin Kaepernick.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?

Malcolm X

Rosa Parks

Huey Newton

Nat Turner—I was a little revolutionary as a kid, I studied a lot of black history.

HOW IS CANNABIS INVOLVED IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?

Every morning as soon as I wake up, I check the latest in legalization news—there was one point when it seemed like every day a different state or country was considering legalization, so I like to keep abreast of that. I like to read those proposals and do a little back of the envelope analysis to see if anything could be useful in NYC.

Then I check my ticker—I closely follow the performance of a few companies from medical to manufacturers, packaging, etc. to get a sense of how the entire market is doing and how shareholders and customers are responding to individual companies. I like to stay informed on what deals these companies have signed and how they are doing with revenue projections, this helps me to identify trends and growth opportunities.

Then I check my general cannabis news sites for any information I may have missed.

My workday involves meetings and conversations with the universe—advocates, industry professionals, elected officials.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN OPEN ABOUT CONSUMPTION AND ADVOCACY?

Consumption no—I believe it's a personal matter. Advocacy absolutely! I can't advocate in a vacuum; people need to hear the message.

HOW DO YOU STAY CONNECTED IN THE CANNABIS SPACE?

Event attendance—NYC has a very robust albeit underground scene. I like to check out different events and meet entrepreneurs. As we continue to advance legalization there are weekly business networking events that I like to attend.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE FROM THE INDUSTRY?

Outside of a real commitment to equity and gender diversity, I want to see a commitment to environmentally sustainable practices in all stages of production but especially in product packaging. I'd love to see the industry move away from plastics in as much as possible.

ANY ADVICE FOR WOMEN LOOKING TO GET INVOLVED?

Do it! Start where you are and go for it. 🌿

