



Episode 1,110: Medical Marijuana, the Drug War, and the Way Forward

Guest: Josh Wilcoxson

WOODS: Tell everybody exactly what your connection to this world of cannabis and medicinal stuff and just the whole issue, how does this involve you?

WILCOXSON: Sure. So probably two and a half years ago – I have a background as a financial analyst and I've gotten to do some cool projects, and I just got on this interview circuit for some of the large cannabis companies. And so I got to meet some of the angel investors and a lot of their different businesses, and what I kind of realized after a while was I was meeting some really interesting people, but I thought I could do better just starting my own brand of cannabis and cannabis concentrates and cannabis derivatives. So just over a year ago, we moved out to Oregon, bought an amazing farm with a fantastic grower, and started first in the medical program, and then we were kind of trying to get into that recreational program here in Oregon.

And I never wanted to deal with the medical side. I didn't want to be around sick people or people pretending to be sick or whatever it was. I didn't know a whole lot about it. But in the last 14 months or so, my eyes have been opened so wide. I have met so many people that this substance has been absolutely transformational for that I have to sort of get involved more with that and help spread the word and then help people in other states on the CBD side, the industrial hemp side. So that's what we're doing now.

WOODS: Ah, that's very interesting stuff. All right, so these days it seems like virtually everybody favors legalization. It's amazing how quickly that happened. It was a trickle and then now it's just overwhelming, people are in favor of it. You get the Jeff Sessions types who aren't, but that's not going to last. We can see where this is going. Anybody with eyes to see can see where this is going. But what should legalization look like? Because I tend to think that the Bernie people never truly want to fully legalize anything. There always have to be caveats and exceptions and regulations and interference and so on and so forth. So, "What should it look like?" is probably the easiest libertarian question in the world to ask, but I ask it anyway.

WILCOXSON: Well, that's the thing, Tom. Right now this issue, like you said, has overwhelming support. There is no better opportunity for the liberty movement to take the lead on an important issue. We were on the sidelines with the gay marriage issue, with the equal rights for the orientation, and look where that got us. That got us 63 new genders and a new whole wave of fighting back against imaginary oppression. If you look at the legalization movement now, the guy who's getting all the momentum is Cory Booker, and he's from New Jersey. He voted to not allow us to bring in cheap drugs from Canada, of course, because New

Jersey's owned by big pharma, and he's the one pushing the bill through now. And it's not just a bill about legalizing at the federal level. It has his whole social justice rider attached to it.

And so my point is I hear people say, let's legalize it and then we can tax it. And I just kind of groan and I say, haven't weed people paid enough already? What could they possibly still owe you at this point? I mean, there are people who've been in jail for 40 years for counting money for their friend who's a grower. What else do you want from us? The families that have been ripped apart, let that just belong to the people.

Now, in the meantime, real quickly if I may, arguing about the end state is where I think we fall apart a lot of times as a movement, so what I would like for us to see is sort of punt the end state for now and just get together with the left, get together with the right — there are a lot of people on the right who support this as well — and just focus on what we agree on and just get it legalized, just get everyone out of jail. And then we'll talk about what it's going to look like, how much we're going to tax it or whatever. But hopefully in the meantime, that lets us sort of sell a little bit of freedom.

WOODS: I know what you're getting at with the gay marriage example, but I'm not sure the parallel is quite perfect because there you're dealing with a question of the state's in charge of marriage, so then how should they administer it? Well, that's a little murkier than the state has prohibited this substance and is throwing you in jail. Now, that's pretty clear what the libertarian answer is: stop doing that.

So okay, I agree that for now, yeah, let's just work with anybody who's making sense on this, but what about people who say that the medical marijuana question is really just a gateway to outright legalization and that when people talk about medical marijuana, what they really mean is a system where they can easily get it for recreational purposes and everybody just winks at each other knowing that that's what it's really all about? Is there anything to that?

WILCOXSON: Well, there probably is some to that, because I think there is sort of an integration effect. Once we get on that pathway towards partial legalization, people see the benefits and the other barriers fall, so maybe strategically that is the way. But I'll tell you right now, and the FDA doesn't want me saying this, but medical purposes for cannabis, that is as real as the sun and the moon. That is as real as it gets.

We were able to give some CBDs to a five-year-old girl who has Crohn's disease. The doctors were going to cut her guts out, Tom, and her father staying up all night trying to grow these plants to help her. And she uses the CBDs and she's fine. There's nothing wrong. She has no swelling. She's perfectly fine. She's a normal little girl. We have a patient who works in retail, and it's commission-based sales retail, and she suffers from extreme anxiety and has trouble functioning at work. She uses a couple of the strains that we were able to grow, and she's number one in her store every single month. This is putting people's lives together.

And I'll tell you the moment that it actually all clicked for me. I was in the middle of nowhere in Oregon, filling up with gas, and I saw a man walking kind of funny. And he started having a conversation about opiates, and I just kind of mentioned, "Yeah, I get people off opiates." And we started talking, he realized what I did, and he looked me dead in the eye, and he said, "Josh, when my job put me on disability, I wanted to kill myself. And if it wasn't for cannabis, I would have killed myself already. And thank you so much for what you do." And we shared a hug, two strangers in the middle of the night in the middle of a parking lot. And that's when I

realized, my goodness, 63% of all gun deaths are suicides. We have veteran suicides on average once an hour or so. How many of these could we stop with cannabis?

So personally, my body reacts to it extremely well. Both the CBD and THC sides are very good for me for different reasons, so I believe firmly there is a very serious medical use, very important, and lots more people should be getting it who aren't, and that includes people on opiates.

WOODS: Now, I have known some people for whom it hasn't had the hoped-for results, but on the other hand, I know plenty of people for whom it has worked. So my view is, well, just let people try it, obviously. That's obviously the most humane approach, particularly with people who suffer from chronic pain, and we've got that in our family. And I could not believe — I think the worst thing Jeff Sessions has said and done, and this is entirely prejudiced based on my own personal life, is his casual remark that if you're suffering from chronic pain, you should just take some Tylenol and suck it up. I mean, that's just unbelievable. That's unbelievable. Some Tylenol? Do you have any idea what it's like to live with chronic pain?

Now, this of course gets us beyond medical marijuana because he wants to make it difficult for people to get all kinds of pain medications, and my view has been the fact that some people might abuse something is not a reason to keep that thing away from people who need it. If people abuse something, that's on them. But why should it ruin somebody else's life? So anyway, I know that's not quite our topic, but man, that just burns me up. Just give people the option.

WILCOXSON: Well, how do you abuse the CBD side? You can't. It doesn't —

WOODS: And that — right, in that case, you can't even abuse it, right. But I'm talking about his opiate thing. He's saying that we've got this terrible crisis, an epidemic, and therefore, we have to — as always happens when the government wages a crusade against something, we have to infringe on the liberties of other people who will just have to do without so that we can go get people we don't like. But that's not my business. Somebody else has got to help those people. I have people who need this stuff.

WILCOXSON: Yeah, that attitude is just unbelievable, and he is so dangerous, and my ears have chronic pain from listening to him.

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah, there you go.

WILCOXSON: It just drives me nuts. He is so wrong. He is bad for this country and he's dangerous. He's the worst thing that Trump ever did.

WOODS: And yet we keep hearing that he's in the dog house there, but he's always in the dog house for something kind of dumb. Like, he should be in the dog house for this, right?

WILCOXSON: I know, yeah.

WOODS: For wanting to punish Americans, that should be the thing.

WILCOXSON: I mean, if Trump wants to get rid of someone, he just gets rid of them, and he invents their excuse later and then it changes five times, so why not hang it on him for this? I mean, this is the actual thing he's really screwed up, exactly.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, totally. All right, so tell me a bit about, when you wrote to me about this, let's get some more detail about the bureaucracy in the state of Oregon – one of the five states I've never visited – "Created then slammed shut the medical market. This causes a flood of cannabis leaving the state beginning last summer and a current crackdown." Tell me what that all means.

WILCOXSON: Yeah, so for one thing, you've got to get to Oregon. It's dead gorgeous here.

WOODS: I've heard, yeah.

WILCOXSON: It's amazing. I had no idea. I've had an amazing year, Tom. But so it's been legal on the medical side in Oregon for about 13 years now, and then 3 years ago, they made it legal on the recreational side, and they tasked their state liquor board, the OLCC, with administrating it. So they got all into a scribble. They severely underestimated the interest. I mean, Oregon is ground zero for growing cannabis and they somehow drastically forgot about that and underestimated the interest that there would be. So they didn't hire enough people, they didn't train enough people. So they pulled everyone over from the liquor side during 2016 to administrate and process these cannabis applications. And then in 2017, they put everyone back on liquor, and all of a sudden, now it takes nine months to a year or longer to actually get your recreational license.

Now, meanwhile, the retailers, the shops have virtually all gone through this process and they have all gone from the medical side to the recreational side. So in the summer, 40,000 of us pulled down these huge crops and the legal medical market slammed shut in our faces because they'd pulled everyone over to the recreational side. So then people were doing what you'd expect them to do, and so they're trying to make something happen and then it just started flooding all over the place. And they've realized it and they've seized some ungodly weight of cannabis from Oregon. And now they just have the whole state on lockdown. All the ports of exit, they're shutting it all down. And it's just a freaking renewed drug war out here and it's insane.

But you know, I understand why it happened, but I mean, these organizations, the medical and the recreational organizations, the two different ones are changing their rules on a weekly basis. They're saying, okay, now you have to kill all your extra plants. You can only have a very small plant count. So we kill all the plants, and then the next week they say, never mind, you can have them again. It's just no one knows what they're doing. The rules are changing every week. It's complete chaos, and it's rolling the dice with a lot of people's lives.

WOODS: I wonder what the explanation for that could be. Of course, there's a part of me that wonders: is the chaos deliberate just to try to – if they can't clamp down completely, they can make your life extremely difficult. I don't know. Why else would they behave this way? I mean, here I am trying to find a rational explanation for government activity. I guess I should know better.

WILCOXSON: Well, we all know about a famous historical figure who used that exact technique, who raised two different organizations, two different bureaucracies and had them go to war with each other, and then he acted as the arbiter. We remember that gentleman, and he caused a lot of trouble in the '40s. But sometimes, a lot of times, government looks like it is in a conspiracy, and it's really just incompetent. And these guys are just incompetent.

I mean, my case manager, I don't want to say his name on here, but he drives me nuts. He doesn't give me an update for a month and a half, and then I ask him, "Hey, what's going on?" and he writes this huge, long page about, "Don't contact me because I have 60 different cases to work on." I mean, he's complaining about having the contact load of a sophomore in college who's in a social club and he can't manage it, and then he writes like a whole – spends an hour and a half writing about it to me when really he could be updating everybody every other day if he wanted to. It takes five minutes to write an email to 60 people, "Hey, real quick, here's what's going on." So this is a competence issue.

And they don't know what to do. They are running the model like the DMV in Virginia. It's just this huge revenue operation, and they don't even hire the people to actually fulfill the work. So you call them and you just get a busy signal all day. That's what Oregon's like. There's no way to get in touch with anybody. They're raising \$150-200 million in taxes, and they can't hire more than a couple people. They have operating margins that would make GE blush. I mean, they are so brutal on their costs, it's just unbelievable. There's no service, they're not doing anything, but they're taking in so much money. So maybe that part is a bit by design, but I have to chalk it up to incompetence.

WOODS: Yeah, that's certainly possible. All right, more incompetence and evil after we thank our sponsor.

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Tell us about what's going on in Nashville. You're having a 4/20 party. And by the way, for the squares like me, tell people the significance of 4/20.

WILCOXSON: Well, 4/20 is just sort of a – you know, I don't even know the origin of it, but it's sort of a number that's associated with cannabis. But what you'll typically see is April 20th, 4/20 every year they'll have big sort of demonstrations. It's like our pride party, so to speak, our pride parade. And this year we are sponsoring the party in Nashville, and it's going to be on the 19th and the 20th. And we've rented out one of the largest music venues in Nashville, Music Works. We have an indoor stage and an outdoor stage and about 15 psych rock bands. We're going to talk about CBD-rich hemp, and we're going to talk about how to end this drug war. But basically, if you like cannabis and you don't like reggae, it's pretty much your only option that we know about for a music festival around 4/20. So we'll be livestreaming it, and if anyone wants to come, we'd love to have you there. And otherwise, we'd love to see you watch some of these bands. So we're still finalizing the lineup, but it's going to be good.

WOODS: All right, that sounds interesting. How would they get the details about it?

WILCOXSON: They're still working on the social media for that, but if you search Facebook for the New Moon Festival, it will be up there. That's what it's called, the New Moon Festival.

WOODS: Okay, got it, got it. So what is the proper path that should be followed between where we are now and where we want to be?

WILCOXSON: We need to build bridges, for one. A lot of our arguments with the left are on things that we're never going to agree on. We're never going to agree on guns. We're never going to agree on taxation, is taxation theft. But they're ready to end the drug war, and they get it. And you know, people on the right do too. I was doing some outreach for the Libertarian Party a couple summers ago, and I spoke with a very fundamentalist Christian organization in the South, and they're starting to realize that – they understand the importance of the nuclear family and they realize the effect of breaking up the nuclear family on the children and on society, and they're starting to realize that when you put the data away for 25 years, it starts to drain on mom and the kids a little bit. So they're open to that now. They can have those conversations. So I think we can build wide support.

Now, how we actually motivate people for the type of action I think we need, I don't know yet. But what I want to see people do – and this will teach you – this is an important job skill, by the way. Let's approach this like professional marketers approach digital marketing. And each one of us has our own personality. We have our own friend group. We have our own sort of segment, our own character type that we can appeal to. And I would love to see all of us go out and figure out who that is for us, what kind of people we can bring on board to this movement, to this crusade, and then just start to replicate it, because we each have our own little segment we can reach. The people who listen to you are a little different than the people who listen to me, but we all have a role to play in this.

And the feeling of accomplishment we'll have once we actually win this together as a broad coalition of the people, I mean, it's really exciting stuff. We can really build on that. The personal level of accomplishment as well as the societal level of the people coming together and saying we all want this, the government doesn't, but we're going to get it. I can't think of anything more exciting for social activism in general.

WOODS: What can you tell about the cannabis brand you started last year?

WILCOXSON: So again, I didn't want anything to do with the sick people. I didn't want to make sick people well. I wanted people having the best time of their life to be using our product. And it's Vidl, it's called Vidl, but it's spelled V-I-D-L, so it's sort of spelled phonetically. It's not an online experience. It's not an at-home experience. It's a social experience with your best friends, having the best time of your life. If you are a cannabis person, like I am and have been – and which, by the way, there is no shame in using cannabis. There is nothing wrong with it. There is no reason for you to hang your head low. You're not part of that BS stereotype they've been putting out for years. Hold your head up high. You're fine.

But that's sort of part of our message, but we want to be in the social places where people are having the best time of their life. We have an amazing strain called Jericho Haze, which is our leader, which people absolutely love. And it doesn't make you tired and sleepy; it makes you want to go out and party. It makes you want to go out to the music show and be creative and laugh with your friends. And so that's where we want Oregon to be.

WOODS: So what's the – you have a website?

WILCOXSON: Most of this business is really heavy on Instagram, kind of seems to be the thing, and we have – our genetics are in Washington as well, Washington State, but we're based in Oregon, so our Instagram is kind of just around those two states as well.

But also what I'm launching, what I did understand the importance of the medical side and getting the CBD side to everybody is a new idea called the Vidl Hemp Collective, and it's at Vidl.club. And the idea here is it's almost a co-op model. What we'd like for us to do – the best processing lab, the best processing organization in Oregon who takes the raw flower and makes it into the concentrates that people can then use in vape pens, we got to be really tight with them, and they'll build us a lab for not a lot of money at all, and then we can use that lab to process these CBDs, these hemp extracts, and send them all over the 50 states.

And so what I'm trying to do is get some people together to buy a little bit of capacity, either for themselves to get this substance over time, or even cheaper, to be able to donate it to people who just need it and can't afford it and who might be on these street drugs or just living in pain and unable to help. Because when I got rid of my pain, I was up and around again. I tried to play soccer two summers ago, and I couldn't even walk for two weeks. I was over 300 pounds, I was swollen, and using these CBDs and the flowers and the extracts, I lost 70 pounds last year and got in the best shape of my life. I played college ice hockey, and I'm in better shape now at 38 and I'm never sore at all, no swelling, no soreness. And if it works that well – I don't know what the typical effect is, FDA, sorry, because you won't let us try it. But there are so many people that this can help everywhere, and this would be such an easy, inexpensive way to get a high-quality supply of this substance to all of the people who need it. So that's what Vidl Club is about.

I don't want it to have the traditional shareholder model because I don't want it to have those pressures. I want to be able to take the proceeds, use 10% of them to end the drug war; use 10% of them to research and implement hempcrete, building buildings for people out of hemp and lime, which is another amazing technology on the horizon; and then maybe use more to help veterans or to actually be able to pursue with a social business some of these causes that are so important. I think that with our expertise in that space that we have and that we can develop and the partners that we have, we can make a better push at that than these sort of largescale, expensive trials or some of the bigger companies can. So that's where my focus is right now.

WOODS: How do you navigate this problem of the different laws in different states and then the ambiguity of the federal role and the extent to which they're actually going to get involved or just sit and observe? Because I think it's legally very murky, so are you really willing to ship products anywhere?

WILCOXSON: Yeah, so there are I believe a couple locales that have specifically outlawed the hemp extracts. Now, I'll kind of break down where it is now. So the difference between hemp and what they call marijuana – which, I don't use that word because it's racist – is that hemp less than .3% THC. So as long as this plant has less than .3% THC and as long as it comes from a state-sponsored agricultural industrial hemp program, it is legal in 50 states and it is legal federally. That's part of the 2014 Farm Bill. Now, the wrinkle on that is that CBD itself, cannabidiol, has just entered clinical trials, so the FDA says you can't sell CBD as a dietary supplement anymore. So whole hemp or CBD-rich hemp and with the other chemicals and substances involved that create this entourage effect, that whole hemp extract can still be a dietary supplement. It's a food. But just CBD the FDA says no, that's in clinical trials now so it

can't be. So it is a lot of navigation. It's every bureaucrat with three letters on his badge trying to make himself feel important. And right now, the FDA's kind of been causing some trouble for people.

Now, at the local level, ignorance has been causing a lot of trouble. In Tennessee they had a problem where this bumpkin police force came through and shut down 23 perfectly legal stores for selling these hemp extracts, and they took all their stuff. And they didn't come in like you or I would, "Hi, I'd like to have a word with the proprietor and make sure everything's okay. Do you have a few minutes? When can we talk?"

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah.

WILCOXSON: They came in like Visigoths. I mean, they came in like barbarians, and they scared everybody and they looked like a SWAT team. They looked like a bunch of terrorists to me. It's hard to tell the difference. And they took everything, and then their bumpkin sheriff got on TV and said, "Yeah, they're doing it to get high." And the crowd said, "No, they're not." And so that's been reversed. They had to give all those people back. And they punched a little too hard, and we're counterpunching back, and we're going to make sure them and every other single local bumpkin, barely-literate law enforcement person knows what this stuff is and that it is legal, and so they stopped doing it. And so they overreached there, and I think it's counterpunch time.

So there is a huge education piece up and down the block. I mean, I met one guy – I meet people every day almost who this stuff helps. But one gentleman, my Uber driver's wife has this horrible nerve condition, and he's afraid to even get online and Google "medical marijuana." He's afraid that they're watching him and they're going to do something terrible to him. So just getting the word out that this is okay and it is in fact legal is part of the challenge, and that's part of what we're addressing in Nashville and what we're addressing right now.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, it's all interesting and I'm glad you're doing what you're doing. The website people should check out is Vidl.club. Of course I will link to it at TomWoods.com/1110. Any parting words or anything else you want to link us to?

WILCOXSON: Yeah, I don't know about any other links, but I just want to ask you guys one more time, if you want to be serious about activism, if you want to make a name for yourself as an early-20-year-old, spin some people up and let's all get together and end this war on drugs, end this cannabis prohibition. Let all these good people, regular people out of jail. I mean, my goodness, the human cost. How can any of us live with that? This is the number one way – no matter what issue you think is important. If you think gun violence is important, if you think health care in America is important, cannabis is the number-one way to take a big chunk out of both of those. So can we all come together, can we stop arguing about the LP and just dumb stuff, and let's get a victory here? Let's win this right now. Let's come together and do that, and that's my plea to you all, and then go about and argue about the trivial stuff. But right now, we have important work to do. Let's all pull together. If you want to connect with me – and then if any of your listeners have any questions about the cannabis industry, my life has been like a freaking videogame for the past year. It's been like a comic book. It's been amazing. I had to learn how to shoot. I had to learn all kinds of crazy stuff. But if they want to kind of talk about that in the comments section, I'd be happy to keep track of it and add any little insight that I can there.

WOODS: All right, that's great. Okay, well, excellent. Well, Josh, I really appreciate your time. I appreciate what you're doing. It's important. Sometimes I kind of neglect this issue because I feel like it's so obvious to us already. It's trickier to argue some other things, because at this point, it's becoming kind of popular to favor decriminalization or legalization, so because it's kind of popular, I kind of — it's sort of like Barack Obama. There were so many people who didn't like him, I thought, well, I don't really need to add my voice to that. Everybody already knows Barack Obama's no good or Trump or Bush or whatever. I don't talk about the presidents very much because I feel like, well, it's kind of obvious already. But sometimes, the obvious things, we need to rally ourselves on those things, and I'm glad you came on here and did that. Thanks.

WILCOXSON: Thank you, Tom. I feel like an eight-year-old who's just finished a police ride-along with Batman. You're a hero of mine. I love everything you're doing, and keep it up.

WOODS: [laughing] Okay, thank you very much.