Amendment 64 Oral History Project Interview

September 16, 2015

Mason Tvert – Part 1 of 4

Janet Bishop, Interviewer

JANET BISHOP: OK, this is Janet Bishop, and it is September 16, 2015. I'm in Denver, Colorado at the Law Offices of Vincente Sederberg.

MASON TVERT: You do know-- sorry to interrupt just as we start. Vicente, there's no M.

JANET BISHOP: Oh. No, I didn't.

MASON TVERT: So that's kind of a big one.

JANET BISHOP: I'm in the--

MASON TVERT: That's a pet peeve of theirs. That one in the history books would probably be kind of annoying. I almost wanted to let it go just so that history for the end of time is wrong. But anyway--

JANET BISHOP: This is Janet Bishop and already I've started my Oral History with Mason Tvert at Vicente-- Vicente--

MASON TVERT: Vicente. Yeah. Brian Vicente, he's upstairs at--

JANET BISHOP: OK. --Sederberg, and this is a great start to our Oral History. Mason, thank you so much for agreeing to sit down with us. And this will probably be a two-parter we anticipate.

So this is part one of interview one of our stories of Amendment 64 Oral History Project, which is part of our larger Amendment 64 collection that we've started at Colorado State University.

So Mason, we talked a bit about what oral history is and how it differs a little bit from journalistic interviewing. So we'll just jump into flashing to the past.

In the cluster that I say you're describing yourself, your family, and the community you lived in, for that purpose, could you state your full name for me, and where you were born, and if you feel like it, your date of birth as well?
MASON TVERT: Sure. My name is Mason Graham Tvert. I was born January 31, 1982 in Phoenix, Arizona. My parents' names are Steven and Diane Tvert.

JANET BISHOP: OK. Do you have any siblings?

MASON TVERT: Yes. I have a sister. Her name is Jordan-- now Jordan Ragland, but she's a little bit older than me.

JANET BISHOP: Great. So you were born in Arizona. What are some of the memories you have of your parents, grandparents, or other family members, and the memories of the community you grew up in?

MASON TVERT: Well, I grew up in Scottsdale, Arizona, which is an upper-class, upper-middle class area. I definitely was very fortunate. My parents were able to provide quite a bit for me, so I definitely consider myself fortunate/privileged, depending on how one would consider it.

You know, generally it was a Jewish family. So you get all the things that go along with that, which ranges from things like arguing and that type of thing, to empathy, quite frankly.

So I feel like a lot of who I am is really based on that culture. And then that idea of empathy and-

JANET BISHOP: Social justice.

MASON TVERT: --really recognizing-- yeah-- that collective or collective mindset. Yeah, I mean my grandparents lived in Ohio. My grandfather still lives there, but all of my grandparents for most of my life lived in Ohio, so it was really a matter of going to visit them.

JANET BISHOP: And one question about your community-- and just an aside, I grew up in Pittsburgh, and most of my friends were Jewish growing up. Was there a large Jewish community?

MASON TVERT: I mean there may have been. I was brought up-- I went to Temple up until I got bar mitzvahed and maybe for a little bit after that.

I think probably sometime in early high school is when my family-- I stopped going, and I was never particularly religious. I always appreciated the cultural aspect of the religion, but I've never really been one for spirituality, quite frankly.

But yeah, it's interesting. I would say that those values and those quirks, if you will, of that culture or that type of family really plays a large role in who I am and what I do. I argue with people for a living about something that I think will help people. So it really kind of all ties together. So I can't complain.

JANET BISHOP: Thank you.
So another thing about your community and your early life, do you have any role models that you remember or mentors, or some people, their family or their grandmother or grandfather were their mentors, really. Who really did you look up to when you were young?

MASON TVERT: Obviously my parents. I have no doubt in my mind that I'm a product of my parents physically, mentally, psychologically, in all aspects. So I have no doubt that they are my primary role models.

But outside of them, it's kind of hard to say. I honestly don't really-- like no one specifically comes to mind. I don't have a particular hero. I went through my sports phase. Ryne Sandberg of the Chicago Cubs when I was a little kid and so on.

There were certain individuals along the way who were there as I was going through different periods in my life, different phases, if you will, of when I got into music, I knew these certain people who were older than me who really kind of introduced me to a lot of things, like a lot of music, a lot of stuff. So I would consider them mentors in that sense.

But in terms of was I trying to emulate them?

JANET BISHOP: Um-hmm.

MASON TVERT: No. It was a pretty shallow base form of being a role model. But in terms of role models, I wish I had something better to say. It's a lot easier to get into when I get into mentors, which I see is your next question.

So I would say that generally my mentors have-- I probably picked up my first mentor in college, which I'm assuming a lot of people probably do with professors. I went to the University of Richmond in Virginia, which is a relatively small school-- a small private college. And I think that I could not be happier with the decision that I made.

And I think that one of the primary things about it was the relationship that you're able to have with a professor. My parents went to Ohio State. They would sit in a room with 300 kids and watch a video. Maybe they'd see a professor.

I mean I would go and literally hang out. I actually wanted to go and spend a half an hour hanging out with some professors who were more than happy to hang out and have the time to do that.

And so there were a couple. I was a political science major, journalism minor. So there were a couple within each of those areas that really had a significant influence on me.

JANET BISHOP: Did you know you were going to be a lawyer or wished to be.

MASON TVERT: I'm not a lawyer.

JANET BISHOP: You're not a lawyer.
MASON TVERT: No.

JANET BISHOP: OK, we'll get to that.

MASON TVERT: I'm a [INAUDIBLE] spokesperson.

JANET BISHOP: OK. We'll get to that later on the oral history interview.

MASON TVERT: No, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I mean I don't know if we're getting into that or if you want to continue.

JANET BISHOP: No, that's fine. So leading backwards though, how did you decide to pick the college you picked? Was it based on-- your parents went to Ohio State so you were going--

MASON TVERT: Well, I was in Arizona, so if they had their way, they probably would have preferred I went to University of Arizona, probably. I was very fortunate. My parents put me through school and I can guarantee that it would have been a lot cheaper if I'd have gone to the University of Arizona. And I certainly considered it.

But I was looking at schools, and ultimately, it came down to two that I was considering. I mean three, if you count University of Arizona, which I just wanted to go away. I mean I wanted to be somewhere new, totally different. So I just wasn't interested in being in Arizona.

One of the other choices was Boston University. And the other was University of Richmond. And those two schools are polar opposites. I mean Boston University's in the middle of the city. It is concrete. It is… a lot of the students are commuting. It is not a traditional college campus.

Richmond is a traditional college campus. It has big trees. It is like out of a movie-- big brick buildings, very old. And I'm sure that I probably at the time I felt like subconsciously made the decision based on my level of comfort.

I grew up in the suburbs. I grew up in a relatively homogeneous population, and the idea of living in a city probably was kind of scary to me versus being in a campus with kids who are generally coming from a similar background as I was.

So I probably felt some level of comfort in that, I assume. At the time I probably wouldn't have admitted that, but I feel like that's what it was. Yeah, so that was really the big difference.

JANET BISHOP: So you're at Richmond. How did you pick your area of concentration, and also what were your extracurricular interests there, and that's leading up to where you are now?

MASON TVERT: Sure. Are you suggesting that I got into drugs in college?

JANET BISHOP: Oh, no.

MASON TVERT: Well, you would be correct in suggesting that.
It's interesting. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I have a very distinct memory of being in sixth grade. This is kind of weird that I remember this.

But for what it's worth, in terms of if you're a sixth grade teacher and you are doing little activities, one that stood out for a student when they're 33 years old. It was to write your resume for when you're an adult, the end of your career, basically. I remember trying to think, OK, what's the best school?

Like Mom, what's the best school? OK, what's the best job? Doctor, surgeon. And to me at that time growing up, that seems like the best job. OK. Really successful, lots of money, whatever. So I remember it was Johns Hopkins, doctor, so on.

And I got to school. I definitely already knew that science was not going to be for me or math. But I felt like I was probably going to get into business, which my dad has been in the business world for a long time, and most of my friends were going to the business school. And that seemed like, well, in order to be successful that's what I would do.

But my first year of school, we had to take general requirements and whatnot. I didn't do all that great. I also pledged the fraternity, which didn't help. But I also didn't take any political science or journalism classes.

But I did take a business class over the summer. And just like something about… I didn't have an interest in it. And then I started taking-- I remember taking a couple of political science classes, and I remember the professors that taught those classes.

And I remember the first journalism class, first and second. And I remember having an interest in that-- being very, very interested.

Something I grappled with was am I going to make a living? That's definitely a family thing of like how do you judge success. And I've always been motivated by achievement. So I felt like I was uncomfortable, I wasn't sure, but I could tell that I liked it better.

So in terms of political science, quite frankly, there was arguing. I remember it. I remember Civil Rights, Civil Liberties class. I remember a government class. I remember doing a mock congress and being able to just argue openly with other students.

JANET BISHOP: And that honed your skill for later.

MASON TVERT: And not only that, this is a particularly conservative university. So it was arguing with a lot of people. I'm a very progressive person, and this is a particularly conservative student body. So that was very, very helpful, and very enjoyable.

And then, of course, my professors would never say where they necessarily stand on things, but you get a sense. And I think that they generally liked me because number one, I'm willing to argue and say what I think. But number two, I was willing to make the progressive case and not just let things slide by.
JANET BISHOP: So I take it-- and this is going backwards, and then we'll move to where we are now-- that your family was fairly progressive too, and you were raised in a progressive atmosphere.

MASON TVERT: Yes. Particularly socially progressive, and perhaps a little fiscally conservative. So I feel like my privilege, and I fully recognize the concept of privilege, of White privilege, of all of it.

I have no doubt that influenced what I want to do. I'm still motivated by achievement, by accomplishing things and feeling like I'm successful. But I've also just not been incredibly motivated by making money, much to probably about my parents' chagrin. And they certainly just want the best for me, and they've been incredibly supportive. They're fully behind everything I'm doing.

JANET BISHOP: And I'm going to ask you later on about that, too, in a little more detail.

So it sounds like you honed your skills at Richmond, a conservative place where you-- But it felt good to fight, in the good fights, let's say.

MASON TVERT: Yeah. I started getting into those social issues, but I was also interested in government. I don't want to go out of order here.

JANET BISHOP: No, that's OK. You're good.

MASON TVERT: So I started doing political science, and I got an internship in the Phoenix City Council Office. My parents had previously known a guy by the name of Phil Gordon who, at the time when they were friends with him, was just some guy and he became the Mayor of Phoenix.

So through that, managed to get an internship there. So there's your privilege. But through that I managed to get an internship there, and I really enjoyed that. I worked for the same city council member for a couple years.

JANET BISHOP: This was while you were in college.

MASON TVERT: I was in college. This is for two summers, the summer of my sophomore year and my junior year. So it was really my sophomore was probably when I started taking political science classes. And then that summer I went and worked for Phoenix City Council.

So this is just an aside, but I remember taking the first drug test that I've taken for an employee--employee drug test. It came up too diluted. I had to take it a second time. I won't go into further detail. But I passed.

And yeah, very interestingly, it was very direct. In a City Council Office you're dealing with-- I mean you're not dealing with people who have their opinions about abortion or about-- you're dealing with people who want their trash picked up.
You're dealing with people who want speed bumps, and who are upset that there are prostitutes around the corner. You're dealing with people's day-to-day stuff.

And I found that that was interesting. And the Councilman I worked for, his office, he ran a great system in which you—like we had responded to everybody. And that was what I did. And I wrote, and then it was writing to convince these people that we were doing what we could.

And over the course of those couple of summers I was given more duties. And he let me write a speech for him that he gave at a high school or middle school graduation or something. But quite frankly, I don't know if he ended up using it. But I found it great that he asked me to do it.

But also I remember the one thing was I basically represented him on task forces. District had the highest rate of child drownings in the country.

JANET BISHOP: And why was that?

MASON TVERT: It's actually very interesting. I ended up writing a paper on this for college.

It's because Arizona is a very unique place where number one, everyone there owns a swimming pool, because when it was built, it was built with swimming pools at every house. And the people that were able to afford moving to Arizona and able to relocate there and pursue their interests and so on, had means.

So every house had a swimming pool, and all the people could afford not only to have a swimming pool, but to take care of a swimming pool.

Well, over the course of time, those people then move out to the suburbs and you start to have people owning these homes who cannot afford to take care of a swimming pool. And also keep in mind that swimming pools were built without fences around them and without locks on the gates and all this stuff. And people couldn't afford to put those things on there.

So this guy's got this district that's in a part of town that's a little socioeconomically depressed, if you will. Anyway, long story short, I mean the point being that, yeah— I mean considered, I don't want to use the word epidemic, but it's a major issue when you get a lot of kids drowning.

And I represented him on this task force, and we would use discretionary funding to buy locks, and to buy fences. And then it just came down to like we will just drain swimming pools, and then they're destroyed. And I would sit there and talk to these swimming pool companies and they'd say, well, if we drain it it's going to be destroyed. And I said, I don't care.

And it was just like fascinating. And that number one, I was like this is kind of like a government working on a literal life and death issue that I get to work on. But also just tying together how all these things have played a role in what's happened in Phoenix and all that.

So anyway--
JANET BISHOP: But it's a pretty amazing experience for being a sophomore in college--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, a junior--

JANET BISHOP: --or junior in college.

MASON TVERT: --in college at that point. Yeah, totally. And also my junior year, I had an internship for the Attorney General's office in Arizona, and it was for the Press Secretary. And it was a pretty limited experience. I mean I was only there one day a week only for the course of maybe a couple months.

But I wrote some press releases, and I wrote press releases that were put out under the Attorney General's name with quotes that I wrote. So that was fascinating.

And then I also, my junior year spent a semester-- at our college I was fortunate enough they had a program, I was the aid for a State Senator in Virginia. And so I wrote floor speeches for her, I wrote press releases, I did all this stuff. It was fascinating.

So I learned local government, state government, gained those experiences. And then I still had this lingering feeling I've gotta make money. And so my thought was, OK, I'll go into city management because city council-- that's part-time. You're not really making money. But city management, OK. You're going to actually-- I'm so glad I didn't go through with it.

JANET BISHOP: And what dissuaded you from-- so your junior year over. You're a senior at Richmond.

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: And you have to decide your future. So what sea change went on senior year.

MASON TVERT: So my senior year I was trying to decide what I was going to do after I graduated. And I had been talking to the City Council Office where I worked, and they wanted to find me a job there. And they did.

And I was actually offered a job working for a City Council member who was a new guy. And they were like, we know you don't want to be working in the council and being a council aide or whatever. But this guy's new. He's totally politically motivated. He's really savvy, like hitch your wagon to his star. He wants to move up. You won't be here long.

And it turns out it ended up being Greg Stanton who's now the Mayor of Phoenix. So I have no regrets, but it's kind of interesting that yeah, they got that one right. He's definitely moving on up.

But I like developed an ulcer. It was like, OK, well now there's this opportunity, but I ultimately decided-- I mean I was so stressed out over do I take this or not that I was like, well, obviously I don't want to, otherwise I would have just taken it, right?
So yeah, I turned it down, and I just didn't have a job. I graduated, and it took me a couple months until I end up getting a job, which I don't know if that gets into the next thing.

JANET BISHOP: Yes.

MASON TVERT: But there's some other good-- yeah, you mentioned extra careers. I can get into other things. I just don't want to go on and on.

JANET BISHOP: No, no, please. This is very interesting.

So OK, so you're a senior now and you've decided city management may not be the right thing for you. And you're, as many seniors are-- I ran off to Italy with my then boyfriend, future ex-husband. But you, as a senior, what did you do next?

MASON TVERT: I ran off to see a string of Grateful Dead and Phish shows. Well, I mean music's a very big thing for me. So in terms of extracurricular activities, so to speak, that's definitely number one for me.

JANET BISHOP: How did you-- was it funded?

MASON TVERT: Was it fund-- was my drug fueled excursion to watch live concerts funded? I have no doubt that I probably got some money for my graduation. Working at my job--

JANET BISHOP: So you take your money for--

MASON TVERT: --with the City Council, my job at the City Council, I was paid for-- yeah, I mean I'm just trying to really think back, but my parents definitely supported me quite a bit. But yeah, there's also some interesting things here that tie into all this.

I remember my first legitimate act of activism. I remember it distinctly. I remember it was like--it might have been my junior year or senior year. I don't remember the exact time. It was junior or senior.

I remember that the traveling anti-reproductive rights crowd rolled through. They come through the universities and they set up 100 crosses on the lawn of the library to represent so on and so forth. And that's always been an issue I've cared strongly about.

But I remember just being pissed about it. And I won't get into the merits of the subject. But for some reason I remember just saying, where is the other side? This is-- you know. And I made signs and put them up.

And I remember a female professor stopping me, who I didn't know, but she was clearly a professor. I'd recognize her. I'd see her. And thanking me, and I was like, uh, that's interesting. So that was--

JANET BISHOP: And what year in college were you?
MASON TVERT: It had to be my junior or senior year. So I guess the point being that I was not an activist in school. Like I go and talk to a lot of college students now in my current role and whatnot.

And one of the first things they'd always say is the fact that you are here is impressive to me. And a lot of times these are student groups who they're Students for Sensible Drug Policy or NORML-- these student groups that are really interested in drug policy to varying degrees of actually doing stuff versus being more social in nature.

But still, I didn't do anything. I didn't do that. So I'm always fascinated by that. I didn't start my activism career really until I graduated.

JANET BISHOP: Were your friends in college any activists?

MASON TVERT: No. There were certainly a couple that were more involved in things than others involved in campus things.

But in terms of activism or really being interested in social issues, I don't remember. Actually, I feel like I just lied. My senior year of high school I definitely collected some signatures for Ralph Nader. So I think that that was my first, I guess you could say.

But I was probably more motivated by, like, I'm starting to reject the political system. Whereas this was like a matter of I am truly passionate about this subject. I'm going to take this on.

Now meanwhile in college, this is where we make our bridge into the world of marijuana.

JANET BISHOP: OK.

MASON TVERT: Well, can I take a step back even?

JANET BISHOP: Yes, you may.

MASON TVERT: This is where we make our bridge into the--

JANET BISHOP: This is your world.

MASON TVERT: --world of alcohol. And my world of marijuana is very much a world of alcohol, and we'll probably get into that. But all the work that we've done has been based around marijuana and alcohol, and highlighting how marijuana's safer than alcohol and so on.

So when I was a senior in high school, I went to a country music festival in the spring of my senior year. And drank to the point where I was taken by an ambulance to the emergency room. Totally ridiculous. Utter lack of judgment. Completely stupid.
But I remember I woke up in the hospital in Mesa, Arizona, and I remember looking up and the clock said 10 o'clock, and I remember thinking oh, my gosh, I've been here for a couple of hours. Like this is crazy.

 Asked the nurse what's the deal. And they're like well, we called your parents. We looked in your wallet, which I found strange, because I was 18 at this time. But whatever. It's like, OK, well, I guess I'll sit here and wait for that to come.

 Well, I'm sitting there, I'm sitting there, like an hour and a half goes by. I'm like OK, I don't know what's going on. So I decide I'm going to call my mom to say where you at. So I call my mom on her cell phone, and she was like, hello! Like very pleased to hear from you. And it's like, hi, um. I don't want to say anything like where are you?

 And she's like, I'm playing golf. Where are you? I was like, nowhere. I'll talk to you later. I was like, why are you playing golf? It's 10 o'clock at night. Apparently it was the next day. I did not realize this because inside a hospital there's no windows, so I didn't even know.

 Point being how dangerous is drinking, right?

 JANET BISHOP: So they hadn't called your parents?

 MASON TVERT: No, apparently they had not. They told me they had. So they didn't. So I got a cab and I took it back to this country music festival. And I had to tell my parents-- ambulance, hospital overnight. I couldn't afford that. I had to tell my parents about it. And obviously they're disappointed, lack of judgment, so on.

 What's really interesting is it was like, OK, what do I do? And the hospital's like, well, we can call you a cab. And that was that.

 Now, I'm an 18-year-old who just consumed enough of a drug to almost kill me to the point that I was taken by an ambulance to an emergency room overnight, and there's no one interested, like no law enforcement wanting to ask where did I procure enough of this substance to kill me. No interest. That's just how it is. Who cares.

 JANET BISHOP: And what year was this?

 MASON TVERT: This is 2000. This is the year I graduated. It was right before, maybe a month or two before I graduated high school. And at the time I didn’t really think about it; thinking, it felt like, wow, I'm lucky I didn't get in trouble. But looking back on it, it's like how could I not have gotten in trouble. That's insane. How is that?

 Because now what's really crazy is when I compare that to my experience in college. So I go to college and I started dabbling in marijuana, or maybe continue to dabble in marijuana at that point in time. But at the very end of my freshman year, I get subpoenaed by a multi-jurisdictional grand jury.
JANET BISHOP: This is freshman year in college.

MASON TVERT: This is my freshman year of college. And this is the final week--

[PHONE RINGING]

Sorry. I'm trying to turn this off. I'm sorry.

JANET BISHOP: So Mason got a call and he's trying to turn it off. This is Janet Bishop.

MASON TVERT: So basically, the end of my freshman year of college, and it's during finals, and so everyone's stressed out. And I wasn't doing all that great because I pledged a fraternity and I wasn't taking any classes I actually cared about and all that jazz. I'm also drinking a ton. I was at parties sanctioned by the school where they would have a police officer there to make sure that you were drinking properly.

And this police officer's standing out there. They know that you're having a party which you've registered with the school, and you've got six kegs that you've bought, and we're only allowed to use certain products because we receive free CO2 for the kegerator if we use Miller products. Totally when they talk about the culture of drinking, like this is the culture of drinking, like the culture of alcohol in college campuses.

Anyhow, so I used marijuana in college. So I get something in the mail that says I've got to call a number, like I've been subpoenaed by this grand jury based on suspicions surrounding marijuana. I call the police. I don't remember the exact order of things.

I remember calling and the police saying, OK, yeah, you are suspected of knowing things about marijuana. You've been subpoenaed to testify in this. It's surrounding marijuana on campus and so on. And you've got to appear, and it's going to be at some date in the middle of July or something.

And I was like, well, sorry, guys. I've got to go back to Arizona so I won't be able to join you at your hearing, but have a good one. And they're like, no, no, no. That's not how this works. You show up or you're in contempt and you will go to jail.

JANET BISHOP: Was the subpoena related to selling drugs?

MASON TVERT: I was never accused of anything in particular. What I suspect is the case is, and I'm almost certain is this is just how drug task forces work. I mean they probably busted someone-- and there always were rumors on campus of like, oh, did somebody get busted? Is someone a narc?

But they probably busted someone for something. And be aware, who do you know uses marijuana, and someone said, oh, these are the people I know. And then they haul in all of those people and they ask them the same questions.
And they just work their way until-- and where do you start? Do you try to find people who are just randomly downtown on street corners, or do you just call the college student and scare the shit out of them and say, you're going to be in trouble if you don't tell us this or that.

Are there rules regarding profanity?

JANET BISHOP: No. I mean this is your oral history. So you posit that someone you knew gave your name.

MASON TVERT: They called me and said, you're suspected of something involving marijuana. Someone said-- I mean why is this? It's not like they had an undercover person buy marijuana from me, otherwise I'd be arrested.

Someone said. So the way that a drug task force and the grand jury works is grand jury subpoena people, and you have to come, and you have to answer questions. And in a grand jury situation you can't plead the Fifth. So if they say, did you have a conversation with this person in which something or other. And you said, I'm not going to answer the question because I feel like that would be incriminating. That's considered contempt, or at least this is what I was told.

Because I called an attorney who wanted to be paid, and I didn't want to tell my parents about this. So I couldn't pay him, so whatever. But I was told, yeah, you can't plead the Fifth, or maybe I was told that by the police. I don't remember.

But basically there was me and like 20 other guys. And you know, these are the guys that one would think would get called if there's going to be questions asked about marijuana on campus.

So I remember it was during finals week. It was clearly done intentionally to make it miserable. I mean I remember them saying, well, OK, if you want to come in and talk to us, maybe the prosecutor won't need you to come and testify at the hearing.

So at the time it didn't click to me that they're like if you want to come and basically spill the beans. Like I just didn't really even think about it. They're like yeah, come talk to us and we'll decide if you need to show up. Like I didn't read between the lines. In hindsight it's like tell us what we want to know and then you won't need to-- you know.

So I remember I was like, well, when can I come down there? 6:00 AM. It was like, seriously? I remember saying, well, I've got a final tomorrow at 10:00. Well, you have to do it by 6:00 AM.

So I have to walk across campus before a final freaking out about this. I went in without an attorney, and I know that some guys who did go in with an attorney, they showed up and they said, show up at the hearing. Like if you've got an attorney here, we don't want to talk to you. Those were a couple guys who had had some previous indiscretions. So they felt the need to bring an attorney.

I basically showed up. I remember Buddy Norton. I know him exactly. I sat down with them and they just basically grilled me for an hour or so just asking, do you use marijuana? Of course I do.
Where do you use it? In my dorm room, at people's houses, at concerts, what have you. Where do you get it? Parking lot at concerts. Quite frankly, I thought it was a brilliant answer.

People have it. I think I told them, honestly, it's very difficult to find around here. You guys are doing a fabulous job. This was Richmond, Virginia. It's not flush with marijuana. I find it where I can. And who do you use it with? I was like, I think you know the other 20 guys. I think they're in the waiting room right now.

And just like how much does it cost? What's the quality like? Just it was this shake down just gathering information. Then they said, OK, we'll let you know what's up. And I remember I took my final. I then called and they said, yeah, you don't need to show up. And that was it.

JANET BISHOP: And your parents never knew about this.

MASON TVERT: They didn't know about this until I think I started doing the work I do and I told this story and it appeared. This has appeared in newspaper or magazine articles and stuff now.

But I actually went back. So when I was a journalism student-- I was basically a journalism major. The only thing, I was missing one class because I couldn't take it, it didn't fit or whatever.

JANET BISHOP: So your political science complemented your journalism.

MASON TVERT: Journalism, yeah. Well, I'd say I use my journalism stuff just as much, if not more, in terms of dealing with the media and writing press releases and whatnot. But I remember for my feature writing class, I wrote about that incident. And I went and interviewed Officer Buddy Norton.

And I remember he agreed to meet me, and I remember going there and he was like-- I was at this point, it was my senior year of college and I'm using far more marijuana than when I was a freshman. And I'm also on the Dean's List every semester now that I'm actually doing classes I care about. So I was a great student in college.

And I remember him saying, well, are you still mixed up with that stuff? And I was like, no, of course not. And he's like, how are you doing in school? I was like, I'm actually doing really well. And he's like, see, I told you if you gave that up you'd do a lot. I was like, you're such a schmuck, like seriously.

But yeah, but I was like--

JANET BISHOP: Is Buddy Norton still around?

MASON TVERT: I don't know. Anyhow, but the point being that when I was in high school and drank enough to the point where I almost died, no one ever thought to ask where I got it or expressed any interest in punishing whoever gave it to me.
And when I went to college and I was sitting around in my dorm room using marijuana, causing no harm to myself or to others, never remotely having any sort of medical problem or emergency room visit, I've got a multi-jurisdictional drug task force and grand jury spending countless resources. And this is like the campus police, local police, state police, up to the DA. It's multi-jurisdictional.

This is every level of our government wanting to know where I get marijuana. No one wanted to know where I got alcohol. That's unbelievable. And I didn't make that connection at the time. I'm sure I did subconsciously of recognizing the hypocrisy.

Because after that incident my freshman year of getting called in and everything that I was totally-- that was what pissed me off. I mean it's like I got into this.

I would say, if you're going to say that I'm partially or in large part responsible for legalized marijuana in Colorado, it is thanks to Officer Buddy Norton. Like take that. All this has been like take that, Officer Norton. This is your fault. I could have been off working on all sorts of things.

But like I said, I was into music and whatnot, conscious. I think marijuana spans so many areas of our society and political issues and whatnot. But anyway, that's how I got in to this, and that's what made me care about it.

JANET BISHOP: So freshman year of college, you took your finals, you met with Buddy Norton later on. But Buddy Norton has stayed with you to this day.

So transitioning back to-- and I assume then during your summers you would go back to Arizona, come back. And it was pretty much--

MASON TVERT: Totally as stereotypical of a college experience as you could probably imagine. And internships in the summer, college. Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: Hanging out.

MASON TVERT: Fraternity, yeah.

JANET BISHOP: So you got into your fraternity.

MASON TVERT: I was in a fraternity, yeah.

JANET BISHOP: And using marijuana as college students do all over the country.

MASON TVERT: Sure.

JANET BISHOP: And so we're back to the senior year.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, what am I going to do?
JANET BISHOP: And Phish--

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: And the Grateful Dead.

MASON TVERT: OK. Perfect. Perfect segue, yes.

JANET BISHOP: So looking back there. So you graduated. Did you get any pressure from your parents as to--

MASON TVERT: No, they were really good. I mean obviously they were trying to make sure I didn't slip through the cracks and do nothing. I'm sure any parent would-- or maybe I take that for granted. Maybe not every parent would. But with, oh, are you applying to things?

But I was applying to a bunch of different jobs. So I applied to some are grassroots campaigns, which is just like a massive company that does-- they'll collect signatures or raise money. Like whenever you see that person on the street who's like, hello, can I stop you to ask you if you want to give money to Greenpeace or whatever. That doesn't--

JANET BISHOP: Canvassing.

They pay like $22,000 a year. I remember them saying, oh, we want to just give you a higher up position running a few people or whatever. But it was still not much and I was like ah, this is going to be miserable. I didn't take it.

I applied for a few jobs that I didn't get. I applied at Planned Parenthood in DC. I didn't get that. I applied and actually did an interview for this government watchdog.

In Virginia, one of the adjunct professors worked for the government. Basically a hardcore think tank within the Virginia government that was really-- we're talking about research analysis, methodology. Things that I don't do.

I do not want to have concrete answers because I can't always know them. I want to argue one way or another. And so that didn't work out.

I applied for this fellowship with the governor who at the time was Mark Warner in Virginia. And I will never forget this. And I think that this played a large part in my thinking politically.

I remember one of the questions that I was asked during the interview. They said, what's an issue you care about? I remember saying reproductive rights. I remember them saying, so you are an elected official, and there's this bill on that, and you know that your district, like the people you represent want you to do the opposite of what you want to do. What do you do?

And my answer was well, I've got to represent the people. That's what you do as an elected official. And they didn't say, wrong answer or anything like that. But in hindsight, my whole life
I've thought about it. That was the wrong answer. I should have said, I do what I think is right because that's what leaders do. That is what I would have done.

JANET BISHOP: And you think that was a deal-breaker?

MASON TVERT: I don't know. Because Mark Warner, I've always, you know... Mark Warner is a pretty cool dude, in terms of leadership and being a good progressive guy generally speaking. I really felt like that was probably the real answer. Not that there was necessarily even a right or wrong. Who knows, maybe I also did something stupid like I had my fly undone the whole time or something.

But anyway, I've just always thought about that. But in terms of the way I think about government and politicians and so on, in terms of oh, do we do what people want us to do, or is the idea that you get elected because people believe you will do what you think is right?

JANET BISHOP: Great. Very different side of the coin.

MASON TVERT: So I basically don't get several jobs. And then I'm trying to get-- I've been applying to some stuff in the marijuana world.

I'm sure I applied to something in the Drug Policy Alliance. I applied for a job at the Marijuana Policy Project as a legislative analyst, which now I know that I was never qualified for that job because I worked with all the legislature analysts. That's the organization I work for now.

JANET BISHOP: Repeat that again. So you work--

MASON TVERT: I work for the Marijuana Policy Project, which is the nation's largest marijuana policy organization in terms of budget and staff size, in terms of working exclusively on marijuana policy.

JANET BISHOP: And where is this?

MASON TVERT: And MPP actually was the largest backer of the initiative, of Amendment 64. It's based in DC. Excuse me. It's based in DC.

And so I was living, just staying with friends in Virginia, and I applied for this job at MPP. And I was following up. I was a good applicant and I was following up like, oh, I'm just following up.

And I remember it and they called me back. And the woman who worked there at the time, she was like we are giving this to someone else, but we see you're from Arizona. And we have something going on there right now. It's only for two weeks. We can guarantee it for two weeks, but it's a campaign.

And this was during the primary election 2004. I graduated in May, so this is now, roughly, August. And I was like, well, are you going to fly me out there? Yes. Are you going to fly me
back out east? Because at the time I thought I wanted to live in Virginia or DC after college. Crazy.

JANET BISHOP: And you were 21, 22 then.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I'm 22. Yeah, I'm 22. So they basically say, OK, well then come in. What's really interesting is the fact that I grew up in Arizona.

So my parents moved from Ohio to Arizona and had me a couple years later. And I'm pretty sure I got into the University of Richmond because I'm from Arizona. Because a lot of students there, in terms of their applications and their test scores, probably better than mine.

But colleges value diversity of all sorts, including geographic. And I was the only student from Arizona in the entire school until I think my senior year when someone else showed up. So they want to say we have students from every state.

So I have no doubt that that played a role. So the reason I mention that is that I got into the marijuana world because they said we see you're from Arizona and we happen to have something going on there. And so they're like, can you come up to DC and do an interview? And I said, sure. I show up up there, suit and tie, like [INAUDIBLE].

And it's this woman. Her name was Steph Vogel, and she was the Grants Manager at MPP at the time. And then a guy by the name of Steve Fox who was their Director of Government Relations. And they basically just gave me a standard interview.

But I remember during the interview, I remember Steve saying, so, you graduated in May and it's like August or whatever. He's like what have you been doing?

And I was like, well, I've been going to a bunch of Dead and Phish shows and selling T-shirts in the parking lot. So you asked me how I was funding this, I kind of left that out. But I was selling some T-shirts.

So I had made some shirts, which incidentally-- you know, had a marijuana leaf on them. So I remember it was the Grateful Dead staring you in the face with a marijuana leaf on them, and said "Let It Grow--" it's the name of a Grateful Dead song. And I was selling them at a bunch of shows.

And I was like, well, that's what I've been doing the last couple months or last month. And his response-- because I had to think, should I say that, or should I say I've been diligently volunteering in hopes of finding a full-time position?

His response was like, really? So you made them? Did you design them? How did you print them? He was very compelled by the fact that I was doing this, which as the conversation goes on, you'll see why this is also intriguing.
Anyhow, it ended up going well, and I remember he said later on that he thought I was a Republican when I showed up because I was wearing a suit. But they decided to give me a job, so they sent me out to Arizona.

Basically, the gig was to harass a member of Congress during his campaign to highlight the fact that he was opposed to allowing medical marijuana patients to use marijuana.

I mean I guess the way we would phrase it is, for his desire to arrest and prosecute sick and dying people. And to basically just follow him around, so signs all over-- you know, Trent Franks is heartless. Basically just, yeah, getting that word during his primary. And that was for a couple weeks.

And what's really interesting--

JANET BISHOP: And this legislature thing was Trent Franks.

MASON TVERT: Trent Franks. He still is a member of Congress, Republican from Arizona, hardcore conservative. So that was during the primary.

And when I got out there, the guy from MPP who was their field director who was leading everything there was a guy by the name of Aaron Houston. And he was actually from Colorado, but he was running things.

And then the kind of second in command, if you will, or the person that was kind of coordinating volunteers was the guy by the name of Brian Vicente, who had just graduated from law school in Colorado. He had gone to DU. And he was an MPP Fellow, and he had been sent to Arizona to work on the same thing.

So I think he graduated law school in 2004-- same time I graduated from undergraduate. And so he was there and I met him. Anyway, that went on for like two and a half weeks or what have you, and it ended.

And Steve then hired me-- MPP-- but Steve must have thought I was worthwhile. Hired me to go up to Flagstaff and run that same type of campaign for the next couple months during the general election.

And that was against Rick Renzi who is I think now in federal prison. Numerous charges of fraud. But changed his vote on medical marijuana right before he left.

JANET BISHOP: So there was some good.

MASON TVERT: Yeah. But I went up there-- so what's interesting is in terms of how these campaigns in Colorado were run. When I first moved here and getting this movement started in terms of legalization, it was very aggressive.
And I kind of learned that being willing-- in 2005 when Hickenlooper-- I went up to him and put a recorder in his face and was like, what's your position on the legalization initiative?

And I remember him like, well, it's a gateway drug. And is that a recorder? And then getting mad at me when it was the first time I ever met him, and it became a long tumultuous relationship.

But the idea of going up to the mayor and sticking a recorder in his face, and they're pounding people around or doing like stuff like this.

JANET BISHOP: You cut your teeth.

MASON TVERT: I kind of cut my teeth doing these grassroots voter education campaigns.

So in Flagstaff I also ran that campaign, so I was coordinating [INAUDIBLE], I was trying to recruit students to volunteer. I was doing everything-- keeping the databases. Like I said, I was kind of like-- you can't write-- I mean this is like it all fits together so perfectly. It's really unbelievable.

And at that time-- that was the first time, so my parents volunteered for me. They came-- I remember I would do a press spot or pacing and held signs in the corner.

JANET BISHOP: So your parents volunteered for you in terms of--

MASON TVERT: That campaign.

JANET BISHOP: --that campaign.

MASON TVERT: Yeah. So they were really skeptical of this whole thing at the time.

JANET BISHOP: Did they have signs advocating for medical marijuana?

MASON TVERT: Oh yeah. I believe they said, "Do not vote for ruthless Rick Renzi." [LAUGH] So that was my--

JANET BISHOP: Was it out of love for you, or out of--

MASON TVERT: They believe. And they've definitely always been in agreement when it comes to the issue. But it was definitely a matter of me. They would not have been doing this otherwise.

And so during that whole period of doing that job, I wasn't getting paid very much or anything. But they were like how long could this actually go on? Are you going to find a real job? Like this is like, seriously? This isn't going to go anywhere. And what are you really doing here?

But anyway, so that ended in Flagstaff with the general election. And I cashed in my ticket back out East and stayed with friends again, and harassed Steve Fox until he would--
I remember I went to a Students for Sensible Drug Policy Conference at University of Maryland. It was like trying to talk to every paid drug policy related person in the building trying to figure out-- And he was like, would you ever live in Colorado?

And it was between Colorado and Wisconsin, because he had had this idea of a new way to go about trying to legalize marijuana. And I didn't know what this idea was at the time, and he had no idea about my background with alcohol and marijuana. But he was like it's this concept of really focusing on marijuana being safer than alcohol and really changing the attitude around marijuana.

And Colorado is a big alcohol state and there had just been the death of Samantha Spady and Gordie Bailey. Those are really, really important in our whole story.

JANET BISHOP: So how did Steve Fox know about Sam Spady's death, because--

MAISON TVERT: Because he'd been following this the whole time. He had seen the stories--

JANET BISHOP: This is '05.

MAISON TVERT: --about these deaths. This is '04. This is like November. The election had just ended. And Samantha Spady and Gordie Baily were both in the fall of '04.

JANET BISHOP: And a backstory just quickly-- occasionally, interviewers interrupt. But I moved to Colorado in 2005 after interviewing at Colorado State University. And I think as I was getting on the shuttle going back to DIA to go back to Seattle, there was a newspaper article about Samantha Spady, and my first thought was, oh, I wonder if this is a big drinking place.

So roughly around '04, '05, Colorado was on the map I guess?

MAISON TVERT: So it was at that time-- so it's very interesting. The events that occurred that really led to all this is really fascinating. So for the viewers at home who aren't aware, Samantha Spady was a young woman at Colorado State who died from an alcohol overdose.

And in her case, it was the day of the CU/CSU football game. She drank all day long, and then was drinking at night and went to lay down and no one stayed with her, and she died in an apartment room or a dorm room or something at CSU.

And then meanwhile, there was the case of Gordie Bailey who was at the University of Colorado, and was pledging a fraternity, and he died during a hazing drinking ritual, what have you.

And I don't know which one happened first. They were both in the fall of '04, and they both got a ton of attention because in both cases I think the parents played a big role.
Obviously parents, when a child dies, they're always going to play a big role. But in both of these cases they were very much like we are going to do something about this. So they were very vocal. They wanted it known this happened. They didn't want it to happen to other people.

So I mean it was the front page. Man, I had it on my bulletin board up until maybe a year ago. The front page of USA Today was Samantha Spady's face.

And they were both these really good-looking young white kids with everything in front of them. And they seemed to have everything going for them. And somehow, just in the course of one day drank themselves to death. And like how can this happen? What's going on?

And it really launched the binge drinking issue. And when you look at A Matter of Degree, which is what has since come out of that.

There was a big-- the CDC, and government got really involved, and they did a big investigation into the culture of drinking and came out with recommendations. It was all really right around this because this was one of the stories of the quote, unquote "binge drinking" epidemic really started getting attention.

And Samantha Spady's parents were really pushing this from the angle of people should know not to leave someone alone. They should know to call for help. And they made a DVD that's the whole story. And the whole thing is about showing it at colleges so that kids know what to do.

I actually have a copy because they basically say if you're going to show this to colleges, we'll send you one for free. I've got one. I've shown it at probably a dozen colleges multiple times. And I'm not trying to exploit it. We truly--

But Steve had seen-- I mean this was a big national story that there's this binge drinking situation. And these cases were both in Colorado and Steve had seen this.

And he had been, for a while, thinking about this whole marijuana, alcohol thing, both in terms of strategically, but also in terms of just morally, ethically. And thinking what a shitty system where we are basically conditioning young people to think it's OK to drink, but not OK to use marijuana, which is far less harmful. If these students had been using marijuana, they would not have died, but they would have gotten in more trouble than if they were drinking.

And when you look at my story, like exactly. He didn't even know this at the time. So he had also been looking at some survey data used at MPP, and he had been noticing that there was about two-thirds or so of people in the country seemed to think that marijuana was safer than alcohol. Or excuse me. I'm sorry.

Two-thirds of people-- or I'm sorry. One-third of Americans seemed to recognize marijuana was safer than alcohol. One-third seemed to think they were equally harmful. And about one-third thought that marijuana was actually more harmful than alcohol.
But what he thought was really interesting that was within that group of people that thought it was safer than alcohol, something like 80% thought it should be legal. And within the rest of the people, it was like only 20% thought it should be legal.

So he was thinking of this as, well, maybe if we just increased the percentage of people that recognize marijuana is less harmful than alcohol, by nature that will increase the percentage of people that think it should be legal.

So all the legalization efforts—so medical marijuana had happened. It was like '96 and this was now 2005. And between '96 and 2005, there have been some state initiatives and state efforts to make marijuana legal for adult use.

And all of those campaigns, and all the efforts were really entirely focused around the harms of prohibition. Get marijuana off the street. Keep it away from kids. Take it away from cartels. Tax it. Control it. Prohibition's bad.

And they also wrote this notion that marijuana's bad, but prohibition's worse. And he was thinking, well, that's not doing it. That's not moving the ball forward. There was no increase in support. It had leveled off after medical marijuana. And so he was intent on trying this.

And I believe he convinced Rob Kampia who's now my current boss at MPP, who founded the Marijuana Policy Project. He convinced him to agree to fund a small pilot project in which I would move to Colorado. And we were talking about Colorado and Wisconsin, because Wisconsin has also been plagued by college student drinking deaths and booze and so on. And we chose Colorado.

JANET BISHOP: Just because?

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: You chose Colorado because of the two students at CU and CSU?

MASON TVERT: And that was a very large part of this.

JANET BISHOP: What were the other parts of it?

MASON TVERT: Well, just the drinking—well, so that, and then some logistical aspects. I mean there was not really—Colorado had a medical marijuana law, but there was no organized effort in terms of legalization. There was maybe a couple tiny groups, but they weren't funded, they weren't really— they were meeting up and maybe doing—

Versus, say, like in Washington. There are certain states—there's only a couple organizations that really have the resources to engage in professional activism and this type of thing.

JANET BISHOP: And Wisconsin had no—
MASON TVERT: They didn't have anything going on either.

JANET BISHOP: Nothing going on.

MASON TVERT: Well, I shouldn't say that. They did because they didn't have a medical marijuana law. They still don't. So there was some effort around medical marijuana there, but they don't have an initiative process, and there wasn't really a lot being-- that was all still the kind of focus.

But Colorado had a medical marijuana law, so people had reached that point where they recognized, yes, this makes sense. It's not necessarily as bad as we have been led to believe. But there wasn't anyone investing in moving the ball forward further.

JANET BISHOP: Did you have any vision of Colorado? I mean some people think of… John Denver runs through their head, or mountains, and you thought, yay, I want to go there, or no, what is this [INAUDIBLE].

MASON TVERT: I pictured more snow. I think that it's not a secret necessarily, but I think it's almost like one of the best kept secrets that Colorado weather is actually unbelievable.

I think that there are a lot of people who think of, oh, Colorado? I couldn't live there. It's too cold. They think it's like Minnesota or something. Well, OK, maybe for a two day period, and then it's like 60. But it's pretty nice here. And there are seasons and blah-blah-blah, so on.

But I think I probably felt like, man, am I going to live where there's snow all the time? But there's not snow all the time.

JANET BISHOP: So you hadn't been to Colorado before?

MASON TVERT: No, other than I had done camp here. I did a backpacking program when I was in middle school and high school. So I've been to Durango, Southern Colorado, backpacking for about five years every summer.

JANET BISHOP: So it wasn't--

MASON TVERT: But I had never been to Denver or anything. So yeah, it was basically, OK, go do this in Colorado. And the project was to go to CU and CSU, so I moved to Boulder. For the first six months I lived here, it was a six month mini grant.

JANET BISHOP: And what month in '05 was this?

MASON TVERT: This is January. Well, we decided, we started plotting this out in December of '04. And then I moved here in mid-January of '05. Yeah, I moved to Boulder, lived relatively across the street from the school. We had like a furnished place. It was supposed to be me and--

JANET BISHOP: Did you live on the hill?
MASON TVERT: No. Nah, I didn't. I lived on 30th and Colorado. It was supposed to be me and a young woman, and part of it-- so the idea was we were going to go to CU and CSU, and we were going to run student referenda question.

Basically, they would say that these were non-binding referendums. And they said that the students do not think the penalties, the University's penalties, for marijuana use or marijuana possession should be any greater than those for alcohol.

And it was very simple. It's not talking about the law. We're talking about the University's policy. So there's nothing that requires the University to expel students for marijuana, but only give them community service for alcohol. That's their choice.

But the idea was not-- we had no expectation of changing the campus' policy. We knew that that was not going to happen. But we just wanted to really force a public dialogue.

And so the idea was to run these campaigns because they'd be unique, because this was such a hot topic of binge drinking on college campuses. And the idea was why not just let them use marijuana?

If we are literally saying kids are dying or there's sexual assault-- I mean hundreds of thousands of sexual assaults every year where alcohol is involved. There are hundreds and thousands of injuries all just on college campuses.

And the idea is like if alcohol's so dangerous, why on earth are we instructing students to drink responsibly but don't use marijuana. And we had coined the phrase, party responsibly.

And our hope was that the media would find this intriguing. Like, well, it's an interesting take on this. And that it would get news coverage, and thus, force people to think and talk and so on, and possibly start changing the way people think about this.

And the whole idea was geared around getting news coverage. And also branding this, really sticking to this message. So this is where the T-shirt thing comes in where we made T-shirts that said "Party Organically," or a cannabis can of beer with a check-mark next to cannabis.

JANET BISHOP: Do you have any of those as the activist?

MASON TVERT: They're probably really dirty, but I'm sure I'd be able to find something. But--

JANET BISHOP: Excuse me. Did you have any interaction with administration at CU?

MASON TVERT: No.

JANET BISHOP: So you were talking to student groups, or just the media?

MASON TVERT: I was kind of a ringer in terms of showing up and doing campus activism as a professional. Not that I was a fully seasoned professional, but it's not like a student group was
trying to put a measure on the ballot. It was two people working full-time focused on this whole thing.

So the idea was, originally for me and a young woman to do it, because a big part of this was always we're going to talk about sexual assault and the role alcohol plays.

And that's a side subject of itself. And we've had dust-ups with that, with domestic violence and sexual assault because there's a lot of folks within those communities of prevention and so on that do not like to attribute it to alcohol use.

Which I fully agree with, because then you're basically giving a pass to the man or the woman, like you're blaming it on alcohol when it's not alcohol. A lot of people drink and don't get violent so we can't blame al--

And all we've always tried to say is that it doesn't cause violence. It makes violence more likely among people who might be violent. And if you take alcohol away from those potentially violent people and let them use marijuana, they would not act on that violence. And there is research that shows this.

The idea is so maybe a woman could bring this stuff up and talk about that type of thing. She backed out, so I called up a buddy of mine who had gone to college with me my freshman year and then had transferred, but we had stayed in touch and remained friends.

And I was like, what are you doing? And he wasn't doing anything, so he moved out here with me. And he worked with me and worked for this-- at the time, the organization that we started was called SAFER. It's A Safer Alternative for Enjoyable Recreation.

So the concept was Steve's, the name was mine, which he resisted at first. And I was like it doesn't say for alternative for enjoyable recreational. At the time, no one wanted to use the word recreation, enjoyable. This was all no-nos.

The Marijuana Policy Project was very conservative. He was like, we do not marijuana leaves. We do not use the color green. We do not say any other word other than marijuana. No weed, pot, blah-blah.

And the message generally for every organization, more or less, at least DPA, MPP that was working on this [INAUDIBLE] was you wouldn't say that it's OK to use marijuana or that marijuana's good. You would just want to focus on prohibition being bad.

You're not promoting use. You are only trying to end prohibition. And this felt like-- so MPP wanted distance. They didn't want to do this-- like that was the whole thing. Steve wanted to do this. MPP would not do this.

JANET BISHOP: So Steve Fox wasn't associated with MPP.

MASON TVERT: He was. He was the Director of Government Relations there.
JANET BISHOP: So when he sent you off to Colorado to do this pilot, was he still with MPP?

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: Even though MPP, the organization, was not necessarily keen on the pilot?

MASON TVERT: Because MPP provided funding for me to start SAFER. So that it would not be MPP. It would be a different organization and MPP would be funding it.

And even that I think, if you asked around, I think that you would have to say when it first started, they did not necessarily want it to be tied to them.

But their whole thing-- Steve was going to members of Congress and trying to say, listen, this isn't about people wanting to get high. This is about medical marijuana. This is about prohibition. But what--

JANET BISHOP: So also-- and I'm interrupting you.

MASON TVERT: No, go ahead.

JANET BISHOP: --also a social justice aspect to the argument that--

MASON TVERT: Of course.

JANET BISHOP: --people have made about incarceration rates, and--

MASON TVERT: Of course. Unfortunately, those arguments are the least effective when it comes to actually changing marijuana laws.

JANET BISHOP: Right. That doesn't sound like--

MASON TVERT: Which I'm not saying is right. It's actually horrible, but it unfortunately does not compel people to do much, at least in terms of elected officials and whatnot. Going to Congress and saying this is going to benefit people of low income and communities of color, you don't win.

JANET BISHOP: So you're at Boulder, and with SAFER.

MASON TVERT: Yup.

JANET BISHOP: And you're causing a media buzz, or trying to cause a media buzz.

MASON TVERT: Yup.

JANET BISHOP: And working with student groups on campus.
MASON TVERT: No.

JANET BISHOP: No, not at all.

MASON TVERT: We really didn't have student groups. There were no student groups. We just were a group--

JANET BISHOP: You were a group of two.

MASON TVERT: Usually we would go between CU and CSU and we would just hang out on campus, hand out flyers, put up posters, sit at a table, collect people's names.

We recruited one student at each school and paid them a stipend of like $200 a month or something like that to basically work with us, which to some extent was like we need a student who's going to get a table, who's going to be the student sponsor on the resolution.

But they also volunteered and they were involved. So we had a student involved. And we got some volunteers and whatnot. But the idea was we showed up, we announced we were going to do these referendums, get some news coverage. The process is what we wanted. We used this initial process, which would go on to be a template for everything else we would do.

We then would get attention when we start the signature drive. And then we would get attention when we would turn in the signatures. And then we would do some media stunts. And then we would get attention. Then we won, and we won both of those.

But the idea was just constantly be getting these news stories about, you know, college students are saying we could reduce camp drinking by allowing marijuana use. And it worked and we started getting a lot of coverage throughout both Boulder and Ft. Collins local media, but also The Post and the Rocky Mountain News, and also some national stuff. And really getting a lot of attention to it.

Basically, at that point, that ended at the end of the school year, April, of May of 2004. And at that time--

JANET BISHOP: 2004 or 2005?

MASON TVERT: I'm sorry, '05. Yes, '05.

And then at that point in time, we were like, OK, this was successful. It seemed to be going well. What are we going to do? And it was decided that we would run a ballot measure in Denver to legalize possession of marijuana for adults.

JANET BISHOP: And it was focused on a ballot measure in Denver.
MASON TVERT: It was doing the exact same thing, but at the level of a city. So all it did-- it was very simple. It's simply made possession of up to an ounce legal for adults 21 and older. And it was the most easily worded measure possible.

I mean the law said, it shall be unlawful for any person to possess up to an ounce of marijuana, and the penalty and so on. All we did was say we want to add the words, "under the age of 21." Therefore, the law would just say it'll be unlawful for anyone under 21, and omit everybody else.

And so very simple. And now this was not something being done really, because the legalization campaigns like MPP was doing in Nevada, they were about regulation and taxes and so on. The idea of just making marijuana legal without actually controlling it was like, well, we won't be taken seriously if we do that. That's not a real solution.

And we had no expectation of winning. And that was the other thing. So we got, quite frankly, shit on by a lot of people who thought we were doing it wrong. That thought like you don't run a ballot initiative that's going to lose because it'll set things back. And it'll look bad and they'll suggest there's no support and so on and so forth.

And we said, we don't care. We just want to get media coverage, because we just want people to have to think about this and talk about this. And you can have a person go in front of the city building and wave a sign and yell that marijuana should be legal. That doesn't really get you anywhere.

But if you've got something on the ballot, the media's got to pay attention. It's like their job. I mean they have to let people know about it.

So MPP funded that, and me and this other dude, Evan, collected most of the signatures ourselves. I think we paid for a very few, other than the fact that we were paid. But all day, every day collecting signatures for a month and a half or whatever. And got on the ballot in Denver in '05 and we got a bunch of attention.

So now we're getting into the story of-- but this could go on forever. So you need to tell me what you want to do.

JANET BISHOP: We're at about 3:30 Mountain Time, 3:39. So we set up a stage. Ballot measure in Denver.

MASON TVERT: We're now in the big time.

JANET BISHOP: We're now in the big time, '05. Would you like to go to part two some other time?

MASON TVERT: I guess. It might be a good natural stopping point.

JANET BISHOP: OK.
MASON TVERT: But yeah, that's how we got to Colorado. That's basically the leading up to getting here and getting started and deciding this made sense.

JANET BISHOP: And getting it on the ballot with the idea for the election in '06?

MASON TVERT: This is '05.

JANET BISHOP: '05.

MASON TVERT: This is still '05.

JANET BISHOP: But was there a ballot referendum in '05?

MASON TVERT: Yeah. This is a Denver city initiative. And so we--

JANET BISHOP: November.

MASON TVERT: We passed these campus measures in April, and then we started basically collecting signatures in May or June. We got on the ballot in roughly, I imagine probably August or so.

Then that's when we encounter the villain-- I shouldn't say that because he's starting to come around-- but then Mayor, now Governor John Hickenlooper who's been the nemesis. And has been like Roger and Me for the last 10 years.

JANET BISHOP: Well, this a good logical break. So we are doing the first interview of our Stories of Amendment 64 Oral History Project. I'm with Mason Tvert.

It is, again, September 16, 2015. And we are going to resume somewhere in late '05, early '06 to hear more of the story towards the legalization of the recreational use of marijuana in Colorado.

Thank you, Mason, so much.

MASON TVERT: Absolutely. Thank you.

JANET BISHOP: And I look forward to our next conversation.

MASON TVERT: Absolutely.

JANET BISHOP: Thank you.