Amendment 64 Oral History Project Interview

Friday, October 2, 2015

Mason Tvert – Part 2 of 4

Janet Bishop, Interviewer

JANET BISHOP: OK.

MASON TVERT: Like Rick Perry, he was like, we need to abolish the various, like, five, or however many agencies. And he's like, can you name those? And I couldn't name them. Oops.

JANET BISHOP: Oops. Yes, never, never, never say oops.

INTERVIEWER 2: Ready?

JANET BISHOP: Yes, I'm ready.

MASON TVERT: Sorry, give me a final second.

JANET BISHOP: Sure. And I'll just do the preamble here. This is Janet Bishop and it is Friday, October 2, 2015.

I am continuing the second part of our interview with Mason Tvert of the Marijuana Policy Project. This is part of our Amendment 64, stories of Amendment 64, oral histories. And this is part two of my interview with Mason. We are in the offices of Vicente Sederberg. And we're about to begin.

MASON TVERT: OK. Let's get started.

JANET BISHOP: So Mason, thanks for coming and agreeing-- well, we came here. Thanks for agreeing to continue our oral history. And I listened to the first part.

It sounded great. And where it left off was late in 2005 when you had just started to gather signatures for the ballot measure in Denver to legalize possession of marijuana for adults. And you were starting to tell me about strategy for this.

And what I thought was really interesting is, and I know you've talked at length about this before, but the whole strategy of-- maybe this sort of reflects America's Puritan roots. But prior to the strategy that Steve Fox and you thought of, the push towards legalization of marijuana was more towards eradicating prohibition. And there was nothing implied about recreation, pleasure, fun, or any such thing.
And that's a whole interesting tangent to ponder. But could we pick up with the story right about November '05, and where you were?

MAISON TVERT: So we decided that we were going to be-- we'd just started SAFER-- Safer Alternatives for Enjoyable Recreation. And it was-- we had done this little project on college campuses in Colorado to start getting people talking about marijuana and thinking about the fact that it's safer than alcohol. And we decided that we should take that to the next level and try really pushing that message through a citywide ballot measure in the city of Denver.

And we set out to put a measure on the ballot that would simply make possession of marijuana legal. It was very, very simple. I mean, we made it as simple as possible. We didn't want to have any sort of have complex debate about regulation and taxes and federal-- whether the federal government will allow it and so on.

We really just wanted to have a very concise debate about whether or not it should be illegal for an adult to use marijuana. And so we proposed a very simple ballot question. The goal was really just to force the public dialogue, as was previously. We had no expectation of winning.

And we did get some guff from some folks, both within the marijuana legalization movement and others saying, well, you shouldn't do this. It's not going to win. It'll be a setback because it'll lose and it'll seem like there's no support and so on.

And we really just knew that this has to be done in order to move things forward. And if no one's talking about this, then we're not going to just see people miraculously change. And to some extent, and we'll probably get a little more into this, you could compare it to the idea behind a lot of the LGBT rights movement and coming out of the closet. And I'm in no way suggesting the two issues are on par.

But in terms of this being a matter of voters or people being fearful of the unknown or they've been told their whole lives that something's wrong and it really takes them hearing from people they know that it's not wrong, that it's OK, and that you can be supportive of it or what have you. So we put a measure on the ballot. It was not easy. So it was, at the time, me and one other guy-- my friend Evan Ackerfeld who started SAFER with me.

And the two of us collected most of the signatures. I think that we had found one person who-- one or two people that collected a significant number on a paid level. But basically, for a few months, the two of us just hung out outside of grocery stores and went around events and collected signatures for this. And it was really my first real petition drive.

JANET BISHOP: And to interrupt a second, first off, how many signatures did you collect and what was the reaction? I mean, you weren't the Girl Scouts selling Girl Scout cookies.

MAISON TVERT: That's a good question. Yeah, we needed, like, something like 4,000 or so. And I think we ended up collecting just over 10,000.
But no, it's really interesting, in fact, when we were collecting signatures, the type of response you get. Now, you get a whole lot of people that's, oh, you got any free samples? That's like the standard line.

But a large number of people who-- it wasn't necessarily, like, surprising to see that there were people who were not supportive. But what was so surprising is how many people were supportive but didn't want to sign out of fear that it would cause some sort of problem for them. And, you know, I mean we had clearly intelligent people, professional people. I'm an attorney. I can't sign that. I'll get in trouble.

And it's like, really? This is a petition for a ballot measure. There's nothing illegal about saying we should vote on this.

You could vote against it if you want. But that fear. I mean, people are fearful of when this is an illegal substance and they don't want to be associated with it. So that was-- we did see that in evolution and in reactions between then and as we will talk about getting towards Amendment 64 where you didn't have that nearly as much.

But it was certainly interesting and an opportunity to talk to a whole lot of people about this issue. And we managed to collect enough signatures and to qualify for the ballot. And at that point, it was really a matter of just taking the next few months -- at this point, it's probably August or so-- and take the next couple months to really do whatever we can to get in the news and get people talking.

JANET BISHOP: Was there a lot of discussion, pro and con, say, on the local news media outlets? Or was it just, quote unquote, one side, so to speak? Your--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, it was a mixed bag like it is today. But I will say we definitely were not taken, you know, particularly seriously. We had members of the media who really thought this was just kind of a silly thing.

I mean, there-- just, no one really thought it was possible. We also-- a lot of elected officials and folks in politics just kind of blew it off. And they'd wink and nod and maybe say they support it, but it's not going to work.

But we made a point to be very professional in everything we did. I mean, really, you know, trying to be classy but to still be very aggressive but to do things very professionally. And so we really--

JANET BISHOP: And this was with medical marijuana established and legal in Colorado.

MASON TVERT: It was legal. But at this point in time, when I got here in January, 2005, there were approximately 1,200 to 1,500 licensed medical marijuana patients. There were no dispensaries or anything like that.
I mean, compared to, say, starting around 2008, 2009, you had 100,000 medical marijuana patients and started to see these businesses opening. So we did have a medical marijuana law, but it was very, very different. And we really got a gift in the form of our first big opponent, who was Denver City Council member Charlie Brown.

And it couldn't have worked out better. He-- essentially, we got word that he had seen some of our yard signs. And we had made these yard signs that said, Make Denver Safer. Vote Yes on 100. The measure was initiated question 100. And that's all they said. And he was upset and thought that they were misleading.

And he said, oh, you're trying to make people think that you're going to be adding police and you're not using the word marijuana and you're not-- you're trying to pull the wool over the voters' eyes. And yeah, obviously-- I mean, quite frankly, when we made the signs, we didn't really think of it in any, like, nefarious way. I mean, we realized obviously the word marijuana was not on there.

But the idea was we want people to see a sign that says, make Denver safer, vote yes on this initiative that pertains to marijuana, and have to ask themselves, why would that make the city safer? Because the whole message of the campaign was, we're driving the adults toward drinking by not letting them make the safer choice to use marijuana. And so he said at a council meeting-- so he brought these signs up at a council meeting.

I get a call from reporters saying, oh, you know, he you mentioned that he saw them. He started pulling them out of the ground. I was like, really? Well, that's interesting. And that led to a news story about a council member going around pulling signs out of the ground, you know?

JANET BISHOP: Did you meet face to face with him?

MASON TVERT: Oh yeah, now I get along with him very well. You know, a long line of some opponents who I have got a lot of respect for and now know rather well. But at the time, you know, I did not know him.

And I remember the first time we really appeared on television, I came on and we were talking about these signs and so on. And, you know, this was some of my first live TV. I've done a whole of live TV now. But I'm 23 years old at this time.

JANET BISHOP: Right, you have just--

MASON TVERT: Well, I'd say not quite as mature, maybe a little more fired up. I don't know how to say it. But I distinctly recall.

There'd be him saying, the problem is that Mason doesn't respect the city council, or something-- something along those lines. I said, you're right, on live television. And definitely was not acting in a fashion that one would consider the usual for a mainstream political campaign. But--
JANET BISHOP: Now, you know I always bring up the word mentor. Was Steve Fox a bit of your mentor in this--

MASON TVERT: Oh yes.

JANET BISHOP: --case? Did he call you up and say, oh, Mason, tone it down? Or--

MASON TVERT: Well, yeah-- oh, many times. I mean, I spent more time probably talking to him than anyone in Colorado. I mean, just on the phone because he was living in Maryland. And constantly, and going over what should be said, what shouldn't be said, or what did I say that he shouldn't say again or whatever the case might be.

And the thing is, he was not necessarily upset by certain things like that. I mean, Steve was always very into being aggressive. And really just-- the goal of this campaign again was not to sneak by a win. I mean, we didn't expect to win.

So it was really a matter of being loud and getting attention and not trying to be wishy-washy, but saying-- calling these guys out, saying, what is the problem with this? Why are you so scared? And so we started-- our first initial media hit, really, other than launching the petition drive, was Charlie Brown pulling our signs out.

And then we put up a billboard. It was the first billboard of many, many billboards to come, one of my favorite earned media mediums, if you will--

JANET BISHOP: In downtown Denver.

MASON TVERT: This one was in Denver. it was right across the street from-- at the time, it was Invesco Field at Mile High, now Sports Authority Field-- to people in Colorado, Mile High Stadium. And so it was very interesting. And this was one of my first times really-- I mean, I'll admit it-- manipulating the media.

I'd never-- I mean, I was a journalism student and took PR class and had read a lot of stuff for that. And, you know, I understood it. But-- and I understand that we were trying to get news coverage when we were doing these college campaigns. But this was the first time where we really pulled one over.

JANET BISHOP: And why do you say that?

MASON TVERT: So here's how this plays out. So we had a supporter. He had a group called Change the Climate, which was a nonprofit group.

They wanted to support the initiative. They wanted to pay for a billboard. And so this idea came up. I think it must've been Steve's idea.

We really wanted to talk about domestic violence and talking about how alcohol is a major, major contributing factor domestic violence and marijuana is not. I mean, there have been reports
by some Denver review commission that found that alcohol was, like, one of the largest factors and was involved in almost every single fatal case of domestic violence. And we really just wanted people to think about this. Because a lot of people do associate alcohol use with domestic violence.

And we sincerely wanted to engage that community of advocates. We reached out to domestic violence organizations that were working on prevention education. We said, hey, we're trying to raise attention to this. Like, we're being very honest when we say we think if adults had the ability to use marijuana, that maybe fewer people would drink as much and maybe there'd be less domestic violence.

We're not saying we know for sure, but we think that-- why wouldn't that make sense-- and it makes sense to us. So, you know, I remember like one saying, oh, you know, we really appreciate you reaching out like that. You know, what you're doing makes sense.

But we're not going to get into the-- no one wants to get into the marijuana issue. There's also what we were not as aware of but now very aware of. There's also a sense among domestic violence prevention advocates that they don't want to blame the substance.

And as we-- we're really talking about alcohol's role in the domestic violence and sexual assault. That became more evident. And it was something that I'd never really-- I mean, it makes perfect sense and now I one hundred percent understand and agree that a lot of people drink. Not everyone hits their spouse or sexually assaults someone.

So we can't say that it's about alcohol. It's about the person. It's about power. It's about, you know, that.

And all we were trying to say is there are studies that show that people prone to being violent are more likely to be violent. So there was kind of that miscommunication. But we put up a billboard and it had an image of a woman on it with a bruised face or battered face.

And in the background, there's a creepy guy kind of lurking. And it said Vote Yes on 100. Make our-- it was like, reduce family and community violence. Vote Yes on 100, something along those lines.

JANET BISHOP: And what was the reaction from the domestic violence groups?

MASON TVERT: Well, so, what's interesting is how we did this. So we have the creative, you know? We have this image. It's a PDF on my computer.

And we decide, let's go ahead and give it to-- there was a reporter named Alan Gathright at the Rocky Mountain News. He'd been following this and covered the Charlie Brown shenanigans. So let's go ahead and let them know we plan on putting this up, you know?

And they'll do a story and ideally it appears in the newspaper, which results in some TV and some-- so we give it to him in advance and he does a story in the Rocky Mountain News. And
sure enough, there's a story. And there's the whole image. I mean, like, free ad, you know? Right there in the Rocky Mountain News, color. And you know, of course part of the story is trying to find people on both sides.

So he did find a group or a woman who worked for a domestic violence related organization who said that they were upset for the reasons that I just said and didn't want marijuana to be pulled into the issue. But the story blew up and tons of television news coverage. And they're all showing the image of this billboard.

It's been in the newspaper. Now I'm on-- doing live, local Fox. I was like a fixture on "Good Day, Colorado" on the local Fox affiliate for like three weeks in a row. I mean, I was probably, like, five times in the course of three weeks. And--

JANET BISHOP: So you had a script down pat? Or was it--

MAISON TVERT: I'm not really one for scripting. I mean, I shouldn't say that, but I don't-- I guess I shouldn't say that. I mean, I am, but I definitely also kind of fly by the seat of my pants a little bit.

JANET BISHOP: And where you-- jaded isn't quite the right word, but you started at a relatively young age in terms of working with the legislature in Arizona, sort of, as you said, being not combative, but you sort of honed your teeth at your college, et cetera. But was this sort of a brave new world even for you?

MAISON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: Did you someday say, wow, what's happening here?

MAISON TVERT: Yeah, I mean, doing it on television and being in the public light is definitely-- I mean, I'd be lying if I said I didn't love it. I mean, it's-- and, you know, I found that I don't know if it was just my mindset at the time. Maybe I was just really fired up because of my experience in college.

Or I don't know why. But like, yeah, I was willing to just kind of be very, very aggressive with sitting city council members and a DEA agent I appeared on with one time. And I say, you know, it's like, what do I have to lose?

And quite frankly, one of the biggest perks of my job is that I'm able to really grill or, you know, fight with law enforcement officials without any fear of being arrested. I remember my dad used to be like, oh, yeah, until they plant some cocaine on you.

It was like, think about that. Like, your concern is that the cops might give me drugs. But anyway, it's like--

JANET BISHOP: Parents are goofy sometimes.
MASON TVERT: But basically, I remember as-- I was on TV, but they kept-- so they were showing the image. This thing hasn't even gone up yet. This billboard is, again, an image on a computer screen. I mean, this is not actually up.

And there's all this news coverage. So we decided, OK, let's say that we're going to postpone it going up and think about it. So, you know, we had the initial story that it's going to happen.

Then people say, OK, like, is it going to go up? And instead, we have the company. We called the company.

We said, put up a blank white vinyl. And we show up for the [INAUDIBLE]. And we say, you know, we had no desire to offend anyone. We're sorry if the image was too graphic, but we stand by the message. But we didn't want to offend anyone. So we're giving it some thought about whether or not we're going to put it up. And of course, the news story conveys that.

But in order to convey the story, what do they have to do? They’re going to show the image again. And they've got to have the whole conversation about what's going on.

So then we decide, OK, why don't we do something that doesn't have an image? And we had just a statistic from a study.

There was a study in a medical journal or some sort of research journal-- I think it was Addictive Behaviors-- that found that men who are prone to being violent are eight times more likely to engage in domestic violence when they're drinking. And those same men were actually somewhat less likely to engage in violence if they're using marijuana. And so it was right on point for what we were trying to get across.

And so we simply had that on a billboard. I mean, it was literally just text that said alcohol use makes domestic violence 8 times more likely. Marijuana does not.

Plain-- they might have said, like, plain, simple fact or something like that just in text. And then we also has this woman who had seen all of this in the news, had gotten touch, and said, you know? This really struck a chord for me because I'm a victim of domestic violence.

Like, here's my story. And it was really unbelievable in terms of what we'd been saying. She explained I was with my husband for several years, no problems.

I mean, we used marijuana. We enjoyed it. It was not a problem.

We decided to get pregnant. And we thought at that time, the responsible thing to do was to stop using marijuana. Because they didn't want to get in trouble. I mean, obviously, not during pregnancy.

But she didn't want that-- we can't get in trouble. We don't want to lose custody of our child, what have you. And sure enough, they turned to drinking more because they're not using marijuana.
So when they're partying or when they're hanging out or socializing, they're drinking more. And it turned out, lo and behold, she had not known he was abusive when he was drunk and started to be violent. And she ended up having to get separated.

And we said, you know, please come out if you'd like to tell your story. And so she was there at the news conference. And we showed-- we unveiled this new billboard, which was just text. And of course, now the news is reporting on that and they're showing this new billboard with the text, which would never have gotten attention-- I mean, a billboard with just some black and red text on it.

But what did they have to do? Show the original image and have the whole conversation again. And this just went on.

And actually, in the meantime, I remember this had to have been-- it was like right at the beginning of October. Because right in the middle of this-- so we had announced we were waiting. We were holding off.

And then we held a news conference. It was the first day of early voting. And we did it outside of a police station because there was an early voting location.

Honestly, we didn't think of it as being, like, in your face or anything like that. I will say that we wanted to do-- we wanted the-- because we wanted the story’ about, today is the first day of early voting. We wanted it to be kind of the angle to be, and the marijuana people did something because it's on the ballot.

We wanted to be part of that news. And so we wanted to be out there in the morning. So we did an event at, like, 7 AM, which is tough to get media to.

So we offered coffee and doughnuts. Now, we hadn't thought about it. We showed up at a police station--

JANET BISHOP: --with coffee and doughnuts.

MASON TVERT: --with coffee and doughnuts.

JANET BISHOP: Did the police--

MASON TVERT: They weren’t happy.

JANET BISHOP: --think you were mocking them?

MASON TVERT: I don't know if they saw that as that being an issue. But they weren't happy that we were there. And we were within our-- I mean, this is a public space.

This is a big plaza in front of-- it's the definition of a public place where you're allowed to do this. And anyway, you know, but I remember at the time Chris Vanderveen, who's a reporter for
KUSA, which is the NBC affiliate, and is one of the few reporters who's been here the whole time for all this.

I remember him because he had covered some stuff previously. I remember him saying to me, I'll never forget, saying like, you guys know-- like, he said something to the effect of you guys know exactly what you you're doing.

Like, you guys are stringing us along. It's like, we thought you were maybe going to announce your decision and, like, you know, we're just here covering this again. And now I've been here like four times. Like, this is all just like a scam.

JANET BISHOP: A stunt.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, yeah, a stunt. A stunt-- better term. And it was like, yeah.

And it clicked with me too of, like, yeah. Like, look at what we-- this is-- all these TV news stories, prime time, all the-- in the newspapers. And we paid, like, maybe a few thousand dollars for a billboard.

JANET BISHOP: It almost reminds me of performance art in a way sort of, or radical theater--

MASON TVERT: Absolutely.

JANET BISHOP: --so to speak.

MASON TVERT: It absolutely is. And so anyway-- so that is kind of winding down. So I'm on the local Fox affiliate. I'm on "Good Day, Colorado" again.

And we're finishing the discussion about the domestic violence thing. And there's this very classic news clip. And it's me saying, you know-- the host says, well, the domestic violence community, they're concerned.

I said, well, you know. We're trying to do this. And we're sorry if anyone's offended.

But we just think that this would be beneficial. And then Mayor Hickenlooper had just come out and said he didn't support it and thought marijuana was a gateway drug and that he was against the initiative. And so the host says, well, the mayor doesn't agree with you.

And I said, and this was planned. I said, well, the mayor happens to be a drug dealer. And before I even get the next words out, this guy, Steve Saunders, he's tapping his pen when he says-- and the second I said, well, the mayor's a drug dealer, he like halts.

Like, the pen, like, stops. And he, like, [STUTTERING] a drug dealer? And like, stutters.
And yeah, you know? He's made a fortune selling alcohol and he wants to prohibit adults from using a far less harmful substance. And quite frankly, he sells a substance that does contribute to domestic violence whereas marijuana doesn't.

And he's like, well, we're going to have to stop right there. I'm sure we're going to hear from the mayor's office on that one. But, you know, this was Steve's idea.

So I'm like, me and Hickenlooper-- this was then Mayor, now Governor John Hickenlooper-- have had this tumultuous relationship in the media and whatnot. But I've been the one bearing the brunt of it, not getting invited to the events. But Stevie initiated this by saying, hey, let's call this guy out.

JANET BISHOP: And so when you-- and I seem to recall in vague memory reading or hearing that quotable quote, shall we say. When you said that, was it reported the next day in the Denver news media, or--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, it was coordinated. Because that was in the morning.

JANET BISHOP: And did they interview then Mayor Hickenlooper too?

MASON TVERT: This was-- it was all-- the whole thing was plotted out. So we said, OK, this domestic violence billboard is winding down. So you're on. Let's call him a drug dealer.

JANET BISHOP: And so you had planned this.

MASON TVERT: Oh yes. And that was in the morning on "Good Day, Colorado." And then that evening, later that evening, I was doing like a forum-- you know, this downtown Denver partnership or someone was holding an election issues forum. But I did a news story for the Fox affiliate.

And the whole thing was about us calling him a drug dealer. And I said it again. And then I believe it was the next day or maybe the day after that.

But we had planned-- we did a big stunt in front of the Denver City County building where the mayor's office is where we had a large group of people. We had this very large banner that said, what's the difference between Mayor Hickenlooper and a marijuana dealer?

The mayor sells a more dangerous drug. And it got a lot of attention, obviously. And of course, they ask the mayor's office for comment.

And Cole Finegan at the time was his Chief of Staff. And his response was, we're not taking this seriously. We're going to send them some Oreos and Doritos for their next meeting.

He made a munchies joke. Hickenlooper's got a long history of goofy munchies jokes when it should be something taken seriously. And quite frankly, I feel like his historical importance in this matter, if you will-- I mean, you're the governor-- anyway, we'll get to that.
But you're the governor of the first state ever to legalize marijuana and your comment is not, wow, people support this. This is the future. We're going-- it's a stupid munchies joke.

Anyhow, so Cole Finegan says we're going to send him Oreos and Doritos. So we come out the next day with a body bag-- I remember running around, like, going to the costume store in Cherry Creek and finding a body bag Halloween costume. Anyhow, this is October.

JANET BISHOP: Because it was October?

MASON TVERT: It's October, it's October. I do also have a costumes.com account now. But I got a body bag and we had a fake foot hanging out of it with a toe tag that said alcohol poisoning.

We've got a bunch of Wynkoop Brewing Co-- you know, that's the mayor's brewery. He was still the owners at the time. So we all these growlers, empty growlers of beer, and coasters all over this body back and a sign that said, the harms of alcohol.

And then we had a giant pile of Oreos and Doritos with a sign that said, the harms of marijuana. And harms was in quotation marks, of course. And we said, you know, this is absurd that we're talking about keeping people safe, giving them a less harmful alternative to alcohol, perhaps reducing alcohol related violence and death and so on and they're making jokes about this.

And all they can say is, look, the worst thing associated with marijuana is the munchies. And it really got-- I think that was when they first were like, oh shit. Like, this is serious. Like, these guys are willing to say whatever they feel is necessary. They're not holding back. But yeah, that was short-- this was all basically the month of October. And then that went right up to election day. And we won.

JANET BISHOP: So you won.

MASON TVERT: Who’d have thought?

JANET BISHOP: And the night of election day when you realized you were winning, was it-- were you stunned? Was it jubilation?

MASON TVERT: Well, I should, just a quick step back, I should just say, like, along this theme of being told what we were doing was wrong, which has always been a theme. And when you work in advocacy, you always have people telling you you're doing it right or you're doing it wrong. But I remember collecting signatures.

I remember this and that and talking about Hickenlooper. And we had people - were like, listen, I'm supportive-- like, Democratic political professionals and so on saying, listen. You can't talk badly about-- you're going to lose.

Like, that's going to make you even worse. Because at the time, Hickenlooper was known as the Teflon Mayor. I mean, he had huge approval ratings.
I mean, everyone loved the guy. It was this quirky guy. And they said, do not talk badly about him. You're going to get hurt by it.

And we said, you know, again, we're not worried about losing. So it turns out we won. And yeah, I mean, I remember it was-- the party was over at what was at the time Quixote's which is a bar and concert venue over in Five Points.

And yeah, the first returns came in, which are the mail in ballots and the early votes, which are typically more conservative-- like, when you're looking at those, those will be older people, more conservative people. And we were, like, neck and neck or barely losing or something, which was like, oh my gosh. Based on that, all the sudden, every news person in town was, like, flocking to this being, oh my god, this is going to pass.

JANET BISHOP: To Quixote's.

MASON TVERT: To Quixote's, which is like the hippie, Grateful Dead bar.

JANET BISHOP: Which brings up a question-- were there any established groups, organizations, that were behind 100 that publicly said, we support this measure?

MASON TVERT: That's a great question. I don't think-- I think the ACLU considered it and decided not to. We talked to various progressive groups that all said no.

JANET BISHOP: And do you have a sense of why?

MASON TVERT: The local Green and Libertarian parties, and I remember at that police station when we did that early voting thing, we had the chair of the Greens, chair of the Libertarian Party, and then a Democratic activist who was involved. She might have been part of her committee or something.

JANET BISHOP: So had have the Greens, the Libertarian Party--

MASON TVERT: You know, the mainstream.

JANET BISHOP: And that was it--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, that was-- I mean, I'm trying to think back. But I think that that was really just about it. I mean, I hate to leave someone out if I can't remember, but--

JANET BISHOP: And the reason I ask and I'm interjecting and jumping ahead--

MASON TVERT: That's a great question, yeah.

JANET BISHOP: --is when we recently printed out the list of pro and con or for and against Amendment 64, it was quite fascinating because the list of groups against was actually twice as long.
MASON TVERT: Oh yeah.

JANET BISHOP: But there were groups--

MASON TVERT: Oh yeah.

JANET BISHOP: --that supported Amendment 64 fast forwarding forward. Anyway--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, no, no, no, I'm glad you asked. Because in terms of the distinction between-- the difference that we've seen in terms of attitudes and how the progress, yeah, that's a great point. So I mean, basically, yeah.

We win and things-- you know, it's tons of news coverage. And I remember that Marc Emery called, like, somehow had my cellphone. It was-- Marc Emery is a well-known Canadian activist who ran Cannabis Culture magazine and he's very well known in Vancouver and the BC Marijuana Party as well as in politics up there.

But he ended up being extradited to the United States because he sold seeds, which in Canada, they don't punish people, for you're allowed to sell marijuana seeds. And he was selling seeds and using all the money to donate to political causes that he supported in Canada, particularly marijuana related ones and stuff. And so he was well known if anyone's paying attention to marijuana related stuff-- very well known.

And he called me. I remember. I said, wow, this is interesting. Like, people in Cana-- granted, he's looking at marijuana news. But I just remember that, so--

JANET BISHOP: Right.

MASON TVERT: But yeah, we won. And it was a massive amount of news coverage. I mean, the story was in not just all local papers-- obviously nationwide. I think it was on the front of The USA Today.

JANET BISHOP: Was this the first city-based initiative to legalize the use of marijuana for over 21 year olds?

MASON TVERT: In the world, and that's what essentially-- you know, you've got places like the Netherlands, Amsterdam, which people think of marijuana being legal. But it's not actually legal. It's tolerated.

So this is the first time that a locality had ever voted to make it legal. There'd been some localities like Seattle had passed measures designating it the lowest priority. But this actually removed the penalties under local ordinances.

And so, you know, it was an international news story. It mean, it was in Pravda. It was all over the place. And yeah, I remember.
And Alan Gathright from Rocky Mountain News, like, shadowed me the next day as I went to tons of national news appearances and whatnot and wrote this amazing story which was, like, on the front of the Rocky Mountain News that was, like, 23-year-old turns tables on drug wars. Like, the coolest thing ever for me. I was, like, oh my god. What the hell's going on, you know? But that-- yeah.

JANET BISHOP: And your parents-- what did they--

MASON TVERT: I think-- my parents were all of a sudden like, well, OK. Maybe this is-- there's something to this. But yeah, it really catapulted things forward.

And so during that campaign, we probably had an email list of maybe a couple hundred people, maybe a few hundred people or so. But we had volunteer-wise, there were maybe 30 or so people that had in some way volunteered, maybe about 15 who were like the steady, actual reliable volunteers. And that would quickly change.

So that was in November of '05. And we-- I just remember in terms of the narrative with Hickenlooper, we maintain that in the off season, if you will, the case of Weldon Angelos was occurring. This is a guy who got busted selling a few ounces of marijuana and had a gun on him.

And so he faced a federal mandatory minimum of 55 years. And his case was taking place at the federal courthouse here in Denver. And so that was going on.

And it was like in December of-- November, December of 2005. And so just for kicks, we went out there and we had a big sign that said, sell a few ounces of marijuana, 55 years in prison. Sell thousands of gallons of alcohol, become mayor of Denver. We took the opportunity, you know?

JANET BISHOP: Did-- at this point, did then Mayor Hickenlooper ever say anything personally directed to you?

MASON TVERT: To me? I'd run into him. I remember the first time I saw him.

It was at like a forum or a big event that was being held at some community center or something-- some election issues or something or other. And I walked up to him. And I had a recorder similar to the one you're using right now.

And I'd kind of learned this from hounding these congressional members and constantly asking them what they-- why do they, blah blah, blah. And I literally like held it up to his face. Like, I put it in his face and said, what's your position on the initiative that would make marijuana legal, or, do you support it?

And he's like, no, no, you know? Marijuana is a gateway drug. What-- is that recorder?

And he started kind of giving me some guff about that. Like, oh, that's really, like, unethical. I was like, I'm literally holding this recorder in your face.
And you are the mayor. Don't you think about what you're going to say when you talk to people holding recorders in your face at a public forum nonetheless? But that was the first exchange I had with him.

JANET BISHOP: Has it gotten better over the years?

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: I see-- and I'm digressing, but I see a signed certificate--

MASON TVERT: Oh, that was required by a ballot measure. So I'll get to that in a second.

JANET BISHOP: We'll get to that, but--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, so all of a sudden, we had a ton of attention and tons of people signing up and whatnot. And we decided we needed to really capitalize on this and keep things going. And so Steve had the idea of running a state initiative in Colorado and doing the same exact thing-- keeping it very simple, just removing penalties for possession of up to an ounce of marijuana by people 21 or older, not getting into the weeds with the taxes and regulated-- none of that, just making it legal.

And again, we expected it to lose. But we needed to do this. And, like, this time around, now we've got all this attention.

Now, we've got a ton of people saying don't do it, saying this is going to fail miserably. It's going in the 30s. You'll get in the 30th percent, so on. Like, it's going to set things back. And so there was some significant concern among various groups and people.

JANET BISHOP: And this was-- we're transiting into 2006.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, so we announce-- so there are a lot of discussions about this. And we announced that we intended to file an initiative, or else-- or maybe we filed it on I believe it was like December 28th of 2005. It was right before New Year's.

And it was in front of the state capital. So whereas when we launched the first thing, we did it in front of the city county building. We went across the park, did it in front of the state capitol building.

And, you know, it got a lot of attention obviously. I remember the Rocky Mountain News front page above the fold, like, state pot push or something like that. And it was-- but we knew-- other people said we're not going to be able to get the money.

We're not going to be able to get on the ballot. And at this point in time, there was some conflict between-- so Steve had left the Marijuana Policy Project by this time. And he was just doing some, like, trying to get some progressive political stuff going.
He had been doing that and advising me. But he decided that he would come on and work on this and basically become the director of SAFER. And I would become the director of this new state initiative campaign. But now we're talking about a petition drive where you need, like, 80,000 signatures valid or so. So now you're talking about collecting like 130,000 150,000 or something like that.

JANET BISHOP: And when were you aiming to have this on the ballot?

MASON TVERT: November '06.

JANET BISHOP: November '06.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, so we started the whole process. And it was not easy. I mean, throughout this entire petition drive, I mean we did not know if we're going to be able to make it.

We had to-- it was probably one of the most rag tag, cheapest petition drives for a ballot initiative in history in terms of ones that qualified. We did qualify. But outside of like some issues where you can go to churches and just have tons of people sign, this was an issue where you really have to have paid petitioners. And we managed to scrape by and we-- again, I mean, one of my friends-- so another guy named Scott Loefgren that just moved-- he's one of Evan's friends from Long Island, wasn't really doing anything out there and wanted to move and came to Colorado. I think he collected like 20,000 signatures for us.

JANET BISHOP: And where did you target gathering these signatures?

MASON TVERT: Oh, statewide.

JANET BISHOP: Just supermarkets? Door to door?

MASON TVERT: Yeah. Not door to door-- door to door is a waste of time. Generally yes, supermarkets are bread and butter.

JANET BISHOP: Obviously, you couldn't go to schools or anything, but colleges?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I mean, yeah. There's some in colleges. But a lot of those students are either from out of town or they're not-- they end up not knowing where they're registered to vote.

They use the wrong address, whatever. So-- but really, it's like grocery stores and then big events-- People's Fair, Pride Fast, large things like that. We definitely made it a point during the Democratic county or the state convention for the state Democratic Party. Gold, you know?

JANET BISHOP: Did you focus on-- because Colorado has different regions.

MASON TVERT: Oh yeah.

JANET BISHOP: So did you focus mostly on the Front Range, or did you go to the western--
MASON TVERT: No, we were everywhere. This was my first time I went out to Grand Junction—for the first time. I remember the first meeting.

It was at someone's house. And I mean, there were probably like 50 people in there. I did then have a subsequent meeting out there with, like, six—long drive. But yeah, no, I went out there a bit. Went to Colorado Springs and we were doing trainings for volunteers all over the place—absolutely.

JANET BISHOP: And since we're looking at this project also to reflect the state and the region, did you have different reactions when you canvased in, like, in the Springs as opposed to Denver as opposed to Fort Collins?

MASON TVERT: I don't know if the reactions were different so much as the distribution of reactions was different. I mean, you just had fewer people interested. But the ones who were were the same as the ones who were elsewhere.

I mean, when you're out there doing this, I mean, you can stand at the King Soopers at 9th and Corona, probably the most liberal, progressive customer base of any shopping center in America, and have a day where you stand out there for three hours and get 15 signatures. And you could have a time where you're in El Paso County where, for whatever reason, you get 50 in an hour. It's just so— it just depends.

JANET BISHOP: And so you hit the eastern plains as well.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, so we were—well, no, not the eastern plains because there's no one out there. You know, it's basically—it's playing the numbers. The more people you see and ask, the more signatures you get.

You don't see a lot of people in the eastern plains. But when you think about like—this is what we tell volunteers. Like, think about where you see a ton of people. Do you see a whole lot of people just—a lot of times, people would say, oh, you know, go to post offices, which can be good. DMVs, post offices, and that gets done a lot.

But it's like, how many people come in at the DMV versus—think about a grocery store at like 5:00 PM. Constantly people are coming in and out. So yeah—so the petition drive is going on.

And throughout that time, we also are doing earned media stunts and whatnot. I mean, we did a big SAFER Saint Patrick's Day. We started this whole thing where we would call for moratoriums on marijuana citations. And we basically—I think the first time we did it was the CU/CSU football game. And we--

JANET BISHOP: What year?

MASON TVERT: I'm trying to think if St. Patrick's Day the first moratorium we did or if it was the football game.
JANET BISHOP: So this was '06, '07--

MASON TVERT: Oh, this would have been '05 or '06.

JANET BISHOP: '06.

MASON TVERT: So basically, I'm just trying to think of if we did the CU/CSU football game in '05 during the Denver election. I just don't remember. But one of them-- basically, the point was, like, OK. It's St. Patrick's Day or it's the CU/CSU football game.

Like, we're calling for a-- and the CU/CSU football game is taking place in Denver. It was at Invesco Field. So I said, we want the Denver police to announce that they're not going to cite people for marijuana so that people aren't deterred from using it and can make the safer choice. And maybe we'll see fewer people being taken off to the drunk tank or to the hospital as a result.

And of course they're not going to do that, you know? But you can ask for it if it's kitschy and gets attention. So--

JANET BISHOP: And Saint Patrick's Day, you asked for a moratorium on--

MASON TVERT: --on marijuana citations. No, no, we said, like, stop steering people. Like, when you threaten to punish an adult for using marijuana and you say, it's OK to use alcohol, you're steering them toward using alcohol.

Like, if they're looking to socialize, relax, whatever, if this is a person wants to be in any way intoxicated, you're telling them, don't use marijuana. Use alcohol. All we're saying is, don't pick alcohol on this day.

Just give them the choice on this one day. And this was actually based on the introduction to the book that Steve and I and Paul Armentano from NORML that we co-authored. The introduction is about this very thing.

It describes this situation was-- I think it was in Portugal. God, I know it's in the book. It's been a long time.

But, you know, it was the Euro Cup soccer matches. And they were holding games-- I'm pretty sure it was Portugal. And they'd seen that, you know, this is Europe.

This is soccer. I mean, this is hooliganism, people getting drunk, all sorts of crazy stuff. And they had noticed that they were held the previous year in Amsterdam or in the Netherlands where marijuana is more acceptable.

And they seemed to notice that fewer people were drinking or drunk. And so they decided to let people know that we're not going to-- in Portugal, they said we're not going to bust people. We're going to turn a blind eye and basically sent that message to the public.
And they said that they noticed a difference. And so we were just able to tell that story and whatnot. But yeah, during--

JANET BISHOP: So you're gathering signatures. You want to be on the ballot in '06. And between gathering of signatures and getting on the ballot, did anything--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, we were just trying to get news coverage all the time. And it's like-- all kind of mixes together in terms of what was when. But--

JANET BISHOP: And then did you make the ballot in '06?

MASON TVERT: We did, yeah. So we qualified, which was amazing. We managed to qualify for the ballot.

And at that point, it was like, OK. We are going to spend this-- for comparison, I think we got onto the ballot with like 130 grand or something. Now, keep in mind, the whole Denver initiative, including two paid staff-- me and Evan-- as well as our rent and everything was like $30,000, $32,000.

JANET BISHOP: So $30,000 to get on the Denver city initiative. Now you're on the statewide ballot and it's '06. And you spend about 130--

MASON TVERT: To get there, yeah. And so for the rest of the campaign, I think we only spent like 100. Now, compare that to Amendment 64, where I think we spent about two and half million. So--

JANET BISHOP: So obviously, since Amendment 64 wasn't passed until '12, so what happened in '06? You got on the ballot.

MASON TVERT: Well, I mean, there's just-- I'm going to have to go into a few stories. Because 2006 was just-- I mean, this is the year. I mean, this was like the year where it was just really incredible.

I mean, I should say, during this time, we'd had some test cases in Denver. So that's worth noting here because that'll come up again. We had a guy who'd gotten busted and given a ticket for possessing like a gram of marijuana and had seen the news and got in touch with us, wanted to challenge it.

And so we went to court. And the city attorney dropped it. And of course, we declared victory or whatever.

But we also-- and the city just wanted to avoid it. But we were also pursuing that whole thing. This whole time, we were saying, listen.
The city chose not to do this. It was very similar to the colleges. Remember, we passed a
measure saying we want the colleges to stop having harsher penalties for marijuana than for
alcohol.

And the college administrators would say, no, we can't. Marijuana is illegal. And it was like, no,
this is your college policy.

Like, it's not required that a student get expelled from school under the law. It's a $100 fine under
the law. Just change your policy. You're allowed.

Well, the same thing here with Denver was the city has discretion for the same reason a police
officer can see you driving 10 miles over the speed limit and decide it's not worth their time to
pull you over. If they find you with a gram of marijuana-- you're not doing anything else wrong--
they could confiscate it. They could give you a verbal warning. They could do any number of
things. They don't have to cite you.

We were trying to get this process. So anyway-- but during this time, so many crazy things
happen. I mean, the opposition was ridiculous. This was when John Suthers enters the picture.

JANET BISHOP: And John Suthers--

MASON TVERT: John Suthers is the previous attorney general of Colorado, Republican, who I
have a very interesting relationship with as well and a very respectful one. He basically took over
as the-- Charlie Brown had really been leading the opposition. Hickenlooper made a comment
about being against the initiative, but he didn't really do anything whereas Charlie Brown was
very actively opposing us and constantly in the news with me and so on and debating. Now John
Suthers really took over.

JANET BISHOP: Because it was at the state level.

MASON TVERT: It was at the state level, yep. And during this time, we saw all sorts of law
enforcement coming out against this also. We couldn't possibly have the time to go through
everything.

Like, just some highlights of this time, some of the crazy things that happened. I recall there was
a point in time when there was a large-- it was just maybe three weeks before the election. And
they announced that they had the largest marijuana bust in history, in Colorado history, or
whatever.

And, you know, I mean, this was like an investigation that was going on for a very long time.
And it just so happens that, like, two weeks before the election, they're concluding it and
announcing it and holding a press conference and so on. And when you really think about it,
we're used to that.

Because we hear in the news about busts all the time. But when you really think about it, like,
why do they have to announce it? I mean, you did your job.
Why do you have to hold a press conference and show people the marijuana you found and show pictures of all the people you busted? Like, what is the purpose of that? And especially in this case, where they're really just trying to scare them.

Look at all these gang members. Look at all these people. There's a bunch of gang members and so on. But they were doing a press conference down at the DEA building, which is down in Englewood, or at least was at time. And Englewood or Centennial. I think Englewood. And generally speaking, that's like very negative news. But we wanted to try to take some of the oomph out of it. And so we went down there.

And Evan and I, we set up a-- so we have like this podium. It's a block of wood that I think is supposed to be like an end table which I got at Target. Like, it's a block of wood and then a folding table.

And you put the block of wood-- you put a tablecloth on the folding table. I think I might have picked that up another year and a half later. I was like, you know what? This would look a lot nicer with a tablecloth. Anyhow, you know, folding table, big block of wood. And there's your podium. We haul this thing all over the place. It’s right there here in the office.

JANET BISHOP: Oh, so--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, and the-- yeah, the relic right there, yeah. And we went down there. And we had a bunch of-- we got a bunch of beer from Hickenlooper's brew pub.

And then we had a bunch of Coors beer. We had started to drag Pete Coors into all this because we wanted to be bipartisan. You know, city level?

I mean, that's a nonpartisan position, so going after Hickenlooper or whatever. But now we're starting to get into statewide stuff. OK, we don't want to just be-- you know, we want to show that we're not just on one side or the other here. So we pulled Pete Coors into this. And--

JANET BISHOP: Did you get backlash from--

MASON TVERT: No. Oh, in terms of going after Hickenlooper? Yeah, of course.

Pete Coors, no one ever really said anything. But we set up-- so, you know, inside they had the DEA and Suthers and all these guys-- Mitch Morrissey, the Denver district attorney, another major, major opponent of ours. And there's some funny stuff I have to say about him too.

They were holding their news conference. And they had a big table with all of the marijuana on it. And they had a big sign with, like, the images of all the people they'd busted on it.

And so we set up directly outside, like, in the parking lot so that all-- their news conference ended. All these media come out there and our news conference starts, which is just me standing there. And I've got a bunch of boxes of Coors beer, a bunch of Wynkoop beer, and two big
wanted signs that have-- has Hickenlooper's face on one and Pete Coors on it that says, wanted for dealing a more dangerous drug than marijuana.

Reward, like, $420 or something like that. And we said, you know, we've done an investigation of our own. And we found that there are-- we looked in the Yellow Pages.

Like, we said we found that there are 1400 people in Denver alone who are selling a more harmful drug than marijuana. And, you know, here's images of two of them. And look at all of this beer we confiscated.

And, you know, so the news story ended up-- the picture in it. And I mean, at least one newspaper was like me and our set up. And the news story was, like, there's a bust.

But the second half of the new story-- so, you know, we stole part of it. And we really made it about what we wanted. But, I mean, showing up at the DEA? I mean, this is--

JANET BISHOP: Chutzpa.

MASON TVERT: My grandmother would have called it that, yes. But yeah, it was pretty wild. I've mentioned Mitch Morrissey.

I just have to tell this because this should be on the record registering, quite frankly. The day after we won in Denver, going back to last year, the year before, I was doing an in-studio interview, channel two. And it was with him.

And we were arguing and I didn't hold back. And at the end of it-- well, he tried to suggest that we were on par-- you know, he was like, just because people-- obviously, and the voters want this. Why wouldn't you follow it?

He said, well, just because voters want something doesn't make it right, like when they passed the horrific anti-gay rights measure in Colorado several years ago. He said, that doesn't make it right. I was like, OK, these are not similar things.

And anyway, the interview ends. And I turned to him. And you know, I was like, yeah. Nice to meet you. And he says, you've got diarrhea of the mouth. And honestly, that was like-- I consider, like, in my upper echelon of achievements.

Like, there's these certain things when opponents get pissed that I just get off on. Like, this is a, whatever, 50-year-old district attorney for a major US city telling a 23-year-old marijuana advocate that he has diarrhea of the mouth. I was like, really? Like, are you five years old? But anyway, needed that on the record.

JANET BISHOP: So that's in your annals of-- yes.

MASON TVERT: Well, another good one, another good thing like the-- which brings up another good example was we bought-- George W. Bush, then president, and then vice president Dick
Cheney were both come to town at some point during this campaign. And one was going to be in Colorado. It was like, Bush was going to be in Greeley to do a stump speech for, what's her name, Marilyn Musgrave, who was a member of Congress at the time running for reelection.

And he was going to be doing an event for her in Greeley. And Cheney was going to be down in Colorado Springs doing an event for Doug Lamborn, who's a congressman from down south. And we bought newspaper ads in the Greeley Tribune and the Colorado Springs Gazette.

And they were very small. They were probably maybe like 3 and 1/2 inches by 2 and 1/2 inches- nothing big. I think we paid maybe a couple hundred, few hundred dollars for them.

These are small local newspapers, smaller local newspapers. And one of them, the one that appeared in the Greeley paper, was a picture of George W. Bush. And it said, tried to fight his father while drunk-- another reason to vote yes on 44.

It was Amendment 44 this time around. And then the Cheney one said, shot his friend in the face while drinking-- another reason to vote yes. And of course we gave them to the media and they ran in the newspaper.

Now we're talking about the Denver Post running newspaper ads-- like, we'd-- literal newspaper ads for us in their newspaper as news. But the best part about all of this is I think the Cheney image became, like, the number one image on Google or Yahoo. It was like the number one Yahoo image for like a day. And--

JANET BISHOP: The Cheney image in the ad?

MASON TVERT: In the ad, yeah. The actual image of the ad itself was like the number one image on Yahoo for like a day. And they managed to get a comment from the White House, which is like crowning achievement.

And the best part is-- so it comes from Tony Snow, who's the press secretary at the time. But one of the best parts about it is that it was like, when reached on Air Force One-- so he makes the comment form Air Force One. And his comment was-- I don't know the exact na-- but he used the exact terms. He said, like, its snarky and juvenile.

And that was in the news. And I was like, OK, that's awesome. Like, the president-- like the spokesperson for the President of the United States-- I don't know that he would actually consult the president on this at all.

But just the fact that the press secretary for the president on Air Force One had to take time to respond to something we did-- it was awesome. So that was a good one. Other shenanigans-- I mean, back to Hickenlooper and Coors, we challenged-- I-- I'm sure it was Steve's idea, but challenged them to a drug duel.

JANET BISHOP: And what would a drug duel be?
MASON TVERT: Are you suggesting you don't know the typical rules of a drug duel?

JANET BISHOP: I'm sorry.

MASON TVERT: Jeez, where have you been? Yeah, basically, we said that at high noon, I'll be out in front of the courthouse, which is the Denver City County building is a courthouse. We really hammed it up. The release said this.

But it said it in a very, like-- I'm a news writer. Like, I mean, I took journalism in college. Like, I write very, like, AP style.

I mean, but it's like this ridiculous stuff. And it was like, you know, we'll be waiting at high noon in front of the courthouse. We will have a bunch of Coors beer and a bunch of Wynkoop beer. And I will have marijuana.

And we will both-- three of you will start using it and we will see which-- we will solve the question of which one's most harmful. And, you know, of course they're not going to show up. But it got, you know, news coverage.

And I remember I got some TV. And I remember specifically the Aurora Sentinel did an editorial. And in it, I believe they used the term juvenile.

JANET BISHOP: But not snarky.

MASON TVERT: Not snarky-- not this time. I think they just said juvenile. But what was so interesting is, like, the first couple, maybe first paragraph or so, was like, oh, this is stupid.

What did they think? Oh, it's so dumb. But then it goes on-- they do make a good point, and basically justifies our position.

Win-- I mean, I'll take that any day. But what was another funny part of this-- so in the meantime, I'd been debating Suthers. Suthers was everywhere.

We were constantly at the same events debating and on TV debating, side by side columns in the newspapers. Like, he was the opposition. And there was a point where I was on the radio with him.

It was a Colorado Springs radio station I remember. And these guys are trying to come up with a way to argue. We are arguing about marijuana in a way that had not really been done, at least not in this focused way of just saying, like, how can you be OK with adults drinking and not using a less harmful substance?

Like, no one had just constantly hammered on that. And then refusing to even talk about it-- like, they could bring up anything else. I'm not going to talk about anything else.
And so these guys are trying to figure out a way to respond to this. So he comes up with this idea where he says, well, alcohol is OK. Because if you have a glass of wine or something, like, you're only sub intoxicated.

Whereas if you use marijuana, you are intoxicated. And this is a line that gets used a lot still. People will say, well, you can drink without being drunk. You can't use marijuana without-- and so our response to that was like, well, saying someone's sub intoxicated is like saying a woman is sub pregnant. She may not be nine months, but she's on her way. You're intoxicated.

But when we did this drug duel thing, we had all the Coors beer and all the Hickenlooper's beer. And as I remember, I was like in the 7-Eleven buying it. And I was, like, I'm going to buy some wine coolers.

And I bought the pinkest, most bright, obvious pack of wine coolers I could. So when we did our news conference around this drug duel thing, we put the wine coolers right on the corner. So Steve might have came up with the drug duel, but I came up with this put the wine and just waiting for one of the reporters to say, well, why is that there?

You've got Coors beer. Why wine coolers? We got the wine coolers in case Attorney General Suthers chose to join us to get sub intoxicated.

The Durango Herald-- Joe Hanel was writing at the Durango Herald and was the Capitol reporter. And I remember the Herald pulled that quote out and blew it up and made it large in the story. It was awesome. Gosh, so many fun things, you know?

JANET BISHOP: So were you connected with Brian Sederberg at this point?

MASON TVERT: Brian Vicente.

JANET BISHOP: Brian Vicente--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, no, no, that's OK. So Christian I did not know yet. Brian-- so Brian meanwhile was working-- so he had an organization called Sensible Colorado. I'm sure if you talk to him, you're going to get into all this.

So while we were doing all this, we were doing the campus stuff and then Denver, he was working mostly on medical related stuff. During the Denver, the first Denver initiative, actually he ran a local initiative in Telluride, which was just a lowest priority measure. It wasn't a legalization measure, at least I'm fairly certain.

Maybe it was a-- I think it was lowest priority. I can't remember. But it failed, which was unbelievable-- Telluride. But what was interesting is like--

JANET BISHOP: And so let's stop a point. Because it is unusual since Telluride is perceived as--

MASON TVERT: Oh yeah, hippie mountain town.
JANET BISHOP: So why do you think it failed.

MASON TVERT: It barely failed. I mean, it was not by much. Excuse me.

And there's just questions of, like, there's so many seasonal residents there. I mean, to what extent does a 2005 election necessarily represent a whole lot of people? There was also-- there were some big events like the big Halloween concerts that were going on nearby.

I think-- I don't remember if it was like Vegoose, which was like a big music festival that was going on in Vegas. And so, you know, you've got a lot of people there who were traveling-- so the election was on Tuesday. This weekend before-- like, they were gone out of town.

I think it lost by dozens of votes or something, you know? I mean, granted, I think they're like maybe 1,000 votes total. It's Telluride. But it was interesting that it failed.

JANET BISHOP: So as you're doing your outreach and publicity and I'll just go back to performance art all over the state, Brian is doing some work local--

MASON TVERT: He did that. He did the Telluride thing. And that was in 2005 during that November election.

But he was mostly doing a lot of medical stuff. So he was defending people in test cases, various medical marijuana cases. He was also challenging-- working on-- like, basically, as Brian will probably tell you in a much better way, you know, he was largely responsible for opening the door for medical marijuana businesses and dispensaries.

Because he really was the one that spearheaded the lawsuit on behalf of an AIDS patient named Damien LaGoy that resulted in the five patient limit on caregivers being tossed out. And that is what opened the door.

So there'd been this arbitrary rule that the state had created that said if you are a caregiver-- we allow patients and caregivers-- you can only grow marijuana for five patients. And it was totally arbitrary-- no reason for that number. They decided it in a closed door meeting.

There was no public input. And Brian was challenging that. And the basis of it was this AIDS patient had found someone who could provide marijuana for him.

But that-- already had five patients. So this guy who was an AIDS patient living in Capitol Hill who was indigent and just didn't have any other way of getting it. And the judge threw out the five patient rule, said that-- scolded the state for it-- I mean, blasted them.

JANET BISHOP: So this is running in parallel to--

MASON TVERT: That was like in 2008.

JANET BISHOP: Oh, OK. So I'm jumping forward.
MASON TVERT: Yeah, but he was laying the groundwork for all that and doing all this medical marijuana work and organizing around all these-- that type of stuff. And he was also doing work with the Colorado Bar Association and was creating a drug policy project and looking at various types of criminal justice reforms. And so he was doing a lot of that stuff. And he was helping out. He was doing--

JANET BISHOP: Helping--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, yeah. You know, he was involved and would sometimes be like a surrogate, basically, in 2006 when there'd be-- someone needs to go speak in Boulder and I need to go to Colorado Springs or whatever.

So he was involved in all this. And yeah, so what's interesting-- so I mentioned as an aside here, Damien LaGoy was the patient that Brian represented. So he was test case number two in Denver is how we met him is that he got busted for possession. This is this poor guy, literally.

JANET BISHOP: This is the AIDS patient.

MASON TVERT: AIDS patient, yeah. Guy's-- doesn't have a job, I mean, probably weighs like 85 pounds.

JANET BISHOP: And, excuse me, test case number one was the gentleman who had a gun and--

MASON TVERT: No, no, no, no, no. That was random. The test case was this guy who got busted with a gram of marijuana and the city court threw it out.

JANET BISHOP: OK.

MASON TVERT: Denver just dropped it.

JANET BISHOP: And by test case, you mean--

MASON TVERT: Oh, I just mean someone got arrested after we passed the 2005 initiative.

JANET BISHOP: Oh, I see.

MASON TVERT: So we made marijuana quote unquote legal in Denver. Someone got issued a citation. We went to court and said, we're challenging this based on the law that passed.

JANET BISHOP: And Damien--

MASON TVERT: Was the second, I think, the second test case. He got busted, and he got in touch. And again, this was like this-- what a client, I mean, to have as this-- it's like this poor guy who got busted like a tiny, tiny, like less than a gram of marijuana given a citation of $100.
The guy is like on food stamps. Like, he has since passed unfortunately. But he ended up becoming, like, this-- like, this was his foray into marijuana related stuff.

Because we met him. His case got dropped too. The city was just avoiding this. They dropped these cases.

But Brian now knew him. And it turned out that he ended up being the patient in that case. For the caregivers.

So yeah, 2006, some other shenanigans-- I mean, we definitely went back to the billboards. Billboards are a thing. So we wanted attention. We put one up that was like a woman-- it's actually right here in my office right there at the top. It was-- we basically wanted to be like a beer ad.

So it was like a woman in a bikini. And it said, marijuana-- no hangovers, no violence, no carbs. And it got a little bit of attention, probably not an ad you'd run when you think you're going to have a chance of winning. We also-- oh, here's a couple great stories. So--

JANET BISHOP: So this feeling that you would, quote unquote, not win--

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: --you think gave you freedom.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, oh, a huge amount of freedom, absolutely. Yeah, it was great.

JANET BISHOP: But do you think you-- how do you think you would have acted if you thought would have--

MASON TVERT: The way we did in 2012. Right, you--

JANET BISHOP: OK, we won't jump ahead.

MASON TVERT: Well, no I mean, that's the exact case. And as we'll get into, like, in terms of how we handled Hickenlooper in 2012 when he came out against us, that was a big question. Would we treat it the same way we did before, or would it be different? Stay tuned for the cliffhanger.

Some of the other, like interesting stuff-- now that we're doing it at the state level, now that we passed this law in Denver, you start to get a lot of people a little worried. So we now had the drug czar coming out to Colorado holding news conferences.

JANET BISHOP: Remind me--

MASON TVERT: At the time was John Walters, who's George W Bush's drug czar, possibly one of the worst drug czars ever. And he was notorious for campaigning against these types of
measures, going to states where medical marijuana initiatives were being considered or legislation--

JANET BISHOP: Right, which brings up a point just to interject. So all this is going on in Colorado. But there are other states such as Washington that fast forward past legalization initiatives sort of.

MASON TVERT: No.

JANET BISHOP: Well, well, when Amendment 64 was passed--

MASON TVERT: Oh, Washington did it at the same time.

JANET BISHOP: Right, in Washington. But back in '06, were there-- did you get contact from other states? Were states looking?

MASON TVERT: Oh, there were medical marijuana related things going on. There were some--

JANET BISHOP: But not-- but you were going beyond medical marijuana to sort of recreational--

MASON TVERT: There were several cities in California. So Seattle passed the first lowest law enforcement priority measure, which as we'll get into, we ran in Denver in '07. But then several cities throughout California passed those measures just making adult marijuana possession the lowest priority for law enforcement.

JANET BISHOP: But this was truly unique in--

MASON TVERT: This was unique. There'd been some past legalization-- like, at the same time, in those six, Nevada, was also on the ballot. So that's a very-- I'm glad you brought that up. Because I was not engaged in that. MPP was running and supporting--

JANET BISHOP: I see, OK.

MASON TVERT: --the Nevada initiative.

JANET BISHOP: So you were--

MASON TVERT: We were playing around out here in Colorado. They're doing some boring stuff out there in Nevada.

JANET BISHOP: So-- and did MPP do the same type of [INAUDIBLE] Oreos and beer?

MASON TVERT: No, no, no, no, no-- very different. We actually have a spot in the book that Steve and I and Paul Armentano wrote that talks about the Nevada campaign and talks about
why it was flawed and that it focused entirely on these prohibition related arguments and on negative imagery.

Like, they had a TV ad that showed, you know, like an illegal drug dealer hanging out on a street corner. Like—when we talk about Amendment 64, I'll talk about how we avoided that kind of thing.

But that initiative was going on. But John Walters would go around the country and show up wherever there was any discussion about changing things. And they would do things like, oh, we're holding a forum or we're giving a grant to a school district for $15,000 or something or whatever it might be.

And so he had shown up a couple times. And we decided that we would put up a billboard that played on a drug czar ad that was running on national television. It was called Pete's Couch.

And it basically showed a kid sitting on a sofa and being kind of, like, snarky, if you will, and saying, you know, I used marijuana. I didn't die. I didn't get addicted.

I didn't drive. I didn't-- blah, blah, blah. And he says, like, you know, all I did-- and in the meantime, they show, like, his friends doing other stuff.

He's like, all I did was sit here. Safest thing in the world. And he says, safest thing in the world.

And we made a billboard that had the drug czar's face on it and a talking bubble that said, I call marijuana the safest thing in the world. But we had the good fortune-- and good fortune plays into so many of the things that we ended up doing. We just got lucky.

This billboard's literally-- like, I can't-- let's say it was scheduled to go up on Wednesday. We find out on Monday that the drug czar is coming to town and is going to be speaking on Wednesday at a school that is like literally within a mile of this billboard. I mean, I couldn't ask for better luck.

And so, you know, he comes to town trying to get in the news to just say how bad marijuana is. And half of his stories now, are, like, meanwhile. And a lot of the quotes from him instead, of being, like, marijuana is going to kill everybody, were I didn't say that.

They're taking me out of context. And so that was a fun one. We also had a whole dustup with the federal government and the drug czar's office.

This was a very, like, crazy experience for me. We found out that they were going to be holding a news conference. Deputy drug czar Scott Burns was going to be holding a news conference with a bunch of law enforcement from Colorado out in Grand Junction at a methamphetamine conference that was taking place.

There was a big conference to talk about methamphetamine and so on. And law enforcement-- it was a law enforcement based conference. It was cops and-- I registered and stuff.
JANET BISHOP: You registered to--

MASON TVERT: We follow the rules. We follow the rules.

JANET BISHOP: --to come to the conference.

MASON TVERT: I'm a concerned citizen.

JANET BISHOP: I see.

MASON TVERT: So we paid $100 bucks or whatever. And I register and, like, it was like, they announced the news conference a day or two before this, I mean, before the event is supposed to take place. So I jump in the car and head out to Grand Junction, like, overnight, basically, and stay with like our one key-- we had this one dude who was a supporter and a volunteer. And I stayed with him. He ended up--

JANET BISHOP: Your one supporter in Grand Junction.

MASON TVERT: Well, I mean, we had multiple, but the one, you know, reliable guy we really knew, and went out there and stayed with him and then went to this event. And they-- we were talking about-- this has come up a lot, the drug czar, whether it's legal for the drug czar to campaign against these types of things. Can you use government money to do this?

And it's been brought up many times. And it's called the Hatch Act. And anyway, what they typically found is that's within the drug czar's claims.

It's like my duty to prevent drug abuse and legalization will lead to drug abuse. So it's my job. Anyhow-- but we wanted to, like, call them out on, like, who's paying for-- like, is the federal government spending money for you to hold-- like, this is now-- it's one thing for him to come here and talk at a school about drugs or give a grant and say a bunch of negative stuff about marijuana and be asked about the initiative.

It's another one to hold a news conference that the deputy drug czar is going to be at where it's specific to Amendment 44. We're going to-- so I showed up. I was there.

I'm in the news conference. And they finished. They wrap up.

Suthers was there. He talks. And any questions?

No one was asking any so I figured I would. Said, like, who paid for this? Who paid for the room?

You rented this room at this hotel. This event was being promoted as the drug czar's event. And they said-- at the time, they said it was paid for by the conference and by the state-- it wasn't the federal government.
And a reporter, a young woman named Erin Rosa who used to write for Colorado Confidential, which was an online news source back in the day who is probably, in my opinion, the best journalists around during that campaign, she actually managed to track it down and found out that the White House had actually paid for the room. And they lied. And it didn't become a story.

Like, I mean, she tried-- I think she wrote about it. But, like, we couldn't get anyone to care. But anyway, I caused a ruckus in this room.

So I started questioning these guys. And then I'm like, why are you opposed to this when it's less harmful than alcohol, and I get booed. This is the first, I think time, I've ever gotten booed.

So it wasn't the last, but it was definitely the first. And it was like all these cops and, like, their wives and stuff just booing me. And I'm like the only person there on my-- I mean, it was pretty loud.

JANET BISHOP: And I would guess that your reaction would be actually to be pleased about it, but did it take you back?

MASON TVERT: It was definitely-- I mean, it was definitely like testing the comfort zone, kind of like going to the DEA. I mean, it started out with--

JANET BISHOP: Your own comfort zone?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I mean, it started out with when I was doing the stuff before SAFER, before Colorado, like, am I willing to go up and confront a congressional candidate? Am I-- you know, like, OK. A lot of people might be, like, kind of timid about that or whatever.

Am I willing to have a big sign and stand in public? Like, those are things that some people are not necessarily willing to do. And so that was, like, OK.

And it was kind of like, OK, now we're going to go hold a news conference. We're going to actually have media there. Now we're going to do it in front of the police station. Now we're going to do it in front of the DEA building. Now we're going to crash the event of the drug czar's office.

JANET BISHOP: Were you ever scared for your--

MASON TVERT: No, no, I-- no, it's just that-- it's like public speaking. It's just that type of feeling, that uncomfortable or, like, butterflies of, you know. But yeah, it was wild. And we actually had a billboard that we put up in Grand Junction.

They wouldn't let us use a marijuana leaf, which was part of the logo at the time, another difference between back then and now. MPP always has had a policy of not using marijuana leaves. It's just considered to be, like, it makes things seem less professional or it's too cultural in nature what have you.
But our logo, which is a distinction between their campaign in Nevada, ours had this logo that said Yes on 44. And it was basically the SAFER logo, which said SAFER over a marijuana leaf. But it said Yes on 44. And we put-- so they wouldn't let us have it.

So it was like the one time the logo didn't have a leaf. But it said marijuana-- it's like alcohol without the violence or the hangover. And yeah, I mean, it got a little bit of media coverage.

JANET BISHOP: And not speaking of methamphetamine, but it's interesting. And maybe this is why, as you alluded to, why there was success. Ultimately, the focus on alcohol, alcohol-- did you veer into any sort of other--

MASON TVERT: Never.

JANET BISHOP: Drugs--

MASON TVERT: No.

JANET BISHOP: You know-- no.

MASON TVERT: I'd be doing it wrong. It was always-- well, it's just--

JANET BISHOP: I know the answer.

MASON TVERT: No, I mean, the answer is here. It's interesting. When we first started this organization and this was Steve's idea, you know, it took me a while to figure it out, I mean, in terms of, like, we're focusing on alcohol.

Because I remember, like, when we were first talking about the idea of safer alternative, I was like, oh. We'll talk about tobacco and we'll talk about, like, prescription drugs, and this and that. And it was, like, no, we can't. We wouldn't want to talk-- like, number one, tobacco is smoked and there's that negative-- even though marijuana has been found to not contribute to lung cancer and emphysema, we don't want people thinking about that.

And there's just-- a lot of people don't like smoking. It's becoming less and less popular. We don't want to tie it to that. Also, smoking is not an intoxicant. Like, it's not the same.

People don't use it for the same reasons. People use marijuana generally for a lot of the same reasons they use alcohol. It's relaxing. It's something that they do and it's social.

It's a social lubricant, so to speak. It enhances an experience like a concert or something. So, you know.

And when it comes to something like prescription drugs or methamphetamine, like, those are illegal. I mean, like, if you're using prescription drugs for recreation, you're breaking the law. So it's not the same. Like, we're pointing out that alcohol is legal. Like, you should be able to do
something that is less harmful than what's legal. Like, taking prescription drugs illegally would not be on par with that, you know?

JANET BISHOP: I see.

MASON TVERT: So it was all very much about alcohol. And, you know, our society has just embraced alcohol. The whole point that you can have a mayor who owned a brew pub, that you can have Coors Field, that you could have the Coors Event Center on a college campus, and you can-- you know, it's just so ubiquitous.

JANET BISHOP: So what happens with 44?

MASON TVERT: So--

JANET BISHOP: And this is November of '06.

MASON TVERT: OK, let me go ahead and get the final couple of elections if I can. I know it's getting long, but--

JANET BISHOP: No, no, please. This is your oral history.

MASON TVERT: This is the record. So it needs to be out there. The final few things that I can really recall or that come to mind--

JANET BISHOP: With the caveat we have to go back. But go on.

MASON TVERT: I'm fully supportive of coming back for the final 2012 Amendment 64 if you are-- if you are.

JANET BISHOP: Oh, most certainly, yes.

MASON TVERT: So we did a-- we actually did a TV ad during that 2006 campaign. It didn't get attention. We had a few things that end up not getting attention.

One of them was a TV ad. And it was basically-- it was Steve's idea. It was like a really like kind of-- it was kind of, like, dark and scary.

It was like a voice over with music playing in the background. It, like, showed like a woman with her head on. And it was, like, alcoholic-- like, why are we only letting women use alcohol and not marijuana? Or something like that.

And it was basically, like, alcohol makes violence so much more likely and marijuana doesn't and alcohol is so much more harmful to people's bodies than marijuana. And then it, like, ended with, like, this little girl in a field picking a flower. And it was, like, do we want our daughters growing up in a world where alcohol is the only choice?
You know, something like that. And we ran it on cable. We had no money.

But we ran it for like a day, like, a few times and then tried to get news coverage. And I don't think they really bought it. And the other one that I remember that we didn't really get coverage on, which was also in my opinion was pretty good, Focus on the Family had come out against us.

They were very quiet in 2012, but in 2006, they were very much against us. And we got a billboard as close as we could to their headquarters in Colorado Springs right off of 25. And it said, like, alcohol contributes to, like, domestic violence, sexual assault, and, like, incest and child abuse.

And we had studies for all of these things. Like, marijuana does not. Are we really focusing on the families?

And to their credit, they must have just made it a point to not respond or not say anything. Like, our hope was that James Dobson would be on his radio show freaking out over it and it would get attention. It got maybe a TV or two-- TV story or two.

But it didn't quite make it. So yeah, not everything worked. Definitely had times where things didn't work.

JANET BISHOP: Did you have people upset over using the little girl in the ad--

MASON TVERT: No, I don't think many people even never saw that. Yeah, so during that time, I mean, we were doing-- we did some radios and get out the vote radio stuff. I mean, it was very-- like, I guess I keep coming back to the word ragtag, if that's even-- it's just such a grassroots effort, so little money.

But at this point now, going back to how many people were involved, now we had a list of a couple thousand people who were supporters and probably 100 volunteers that were actually pretty solid and helping out and so on. So yeah, I guess one of the final things, which is probably-- I mean, it was basically two weeks before the election. And it was when Governor Owens, Bill Owens at the time, came out against the initiative.

And they held this massive event-- and I actually described this to you last time-- which was really, I mean, one of the most intense moments of my entire life. We had found out that the governor would be coming out and announcing his opposition and would be standing with law enforcement. So he was with-- it was him, Suthers, all of the DA's basically, like all the sheriffs and chiefs and so on and just all of these guys. And they're all wearing their uniforms.

They're really hamming it up. So we find out this event's going to be taking place and decide that we need to try to neutralize it to an extent and so we rally people. And we found out about this on, like, literally on I think maybe a Wednesday evening and on Thursday told people we need as many people as possible to show up.
This is on a Friday at like 10 AM. And we managed-- we ended up having, like, 60 people or something show up, which, you know. You do, like, a large immigration rally or LGBT rights events, you get thousands of people.

You never-- you just don't generally get that for marijuana. But the fact-- I remember a reporter saying, like, wow. Like, you guys managed to get a lot of people here for 10 AM on a Friday.

Like, it's pretty interesting. And we have these new-- like, we were using green, which is another thing MPP was never wanting to do. But our color, we had these bright neon green t-shirts with, like, the logo for the campaign.

And we had our yard signs, which were basically identical to the Yes on 100, make Denver safer. Except they said, make Colorado safer. And we had all these people there. And so all of a sudden, it's like literally the clock strikes 10. And the doors of the Capitol of the west steps opens.

And, like, this sea of guys in uniforms comes out. And they've got the podium set up on the stairs. And, like, they all just form around. And, like, the governor and the attorney general are all there.

And we have this huge group. All our people are down on Broadway on the street or on Lincoln, whichever one is right there-- Lincoln. And so it's like, oh, they're coming.

So, like, everyone comes up there. And we instructed everyone to please listen, like, whatever. And these guys come out.

And basically, they start talking. And they had, what was his name? The Sheriff of-- gosh, where was the school shooting? It was at--

JANET BISHOP: Columbine?

MASON TVERT: No, no, no, no, this was the later one. It was whatever county that is-- Park. The Sheriff of Park County-- it was Bill something or other. I can't remember.

Anyway, actually, we saw that he was, like, going to be speaking. And I remember I told some reporters. I certainly hope they're not going to sink so low as to try to tie a school shooting to this.

Like, why did they pick this guy to speak? And sure enough, he gets up to speak and says, marijuana is so bad, blah, blah, blah. He's like, we don't even know the danger.

Like, they say that that it can't happen. Well, that's what they said about a school shooting. And he brings it up.
And, like, every reporter like looks up and like, oh my god, he did do it. And people started kind of booing him. And it was like, it ended up being mentioned in the news that he tried to bring it up and that people booed. But the crazy part is I'm, like usual, constantly texting Steve.

We're back and forth. And he's like, you should do a-- maybe you should do a chant. And I was like, I'm not necessarily big on chanting.

It's very '60s. You know, hey hey, ho ho, whatever. But he's like, you know. Do a chant and then maybe it'll be mentioned what you were chanting.

And that'll be part of the story. So it's not just these guys' quotes. It's like, the crowd was chanting, blah, blah, blah.

So I think the first one we did-- it was-- oh, like, yeah. It was like, hey hey, ho ho, you say drink, we say no. But it wasn't very good. Some people were saying smoke. I was like, no, no, no, no.

JANET BISHOP: And you made this up on the--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I was standing there, suit and tie. There's all these supporters. And they're all standing there, like, generally quiet.

And so I say, let's do this chant. And so, like, I think the Sheriff, like, finishes or one of the speakers finishes. And then-- and we did that chant. And then he's like, oh, no.

This would be better. What do we want? A safer choice. When do we want it? Now.

And we're texting. So there's no-- there's very limited discussion here. So he says, OK, you should do this.

And I was like, OK. So I instruct the crowd to start chanting while John Suthers is talking. Now, he, Steve had been thinking I would only do it in between the speakers. But it didn't really cross my mind.

So we shouted down the attorney general. I mean, John Suthers spoke for like a solid two minutes. And with big speakers at a podium, you could not hear one word he said.

And we had all these people. And they were chanting this. And it was actually-- I remember I, like, put my hands up for people to stop.

And, like, it stopped on the dime. It was like the craziest thing ever. I mean, a reporter looked at me and was, like, that was insane.

That was, like, some crazy shit. People just stopped the second you, like, held your hands up. I was like, yeah, I don't know.
JANET BISHOP: And you say it's one of the most affecting things.

MASON TVERT: Well, OK. So I mean just the adrenaline of it. I mean, you've got all these cops here, all these people doing this yelling at the big group of law enforcement and the governor and the attorney general. All these people, they're all wearing-- like, these guys are in uniforms.

All of our people are in a uniform. They've got these green shirts on. They're chanting this.

And then it ends. And Bill Owens-- we do our own kind of little press conference. Bill Owens comes down to answer some questions and says, like, oh, they're all wearing green shirts but they might as well have been brown-- like, suggesting that we're fascists, that-- like, completely ridiculous, which comparing a group of people who are protesting anything to Nazis or fa-- people who commit genocide is insane and is deserving of criticism. However, both newspapers editorialized about how wrong we were. And yeah.

JANET BISHOP: You mean the Denver Post and the Rocky Mountain News.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, yeah-- Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News. And actually-- so what he said is we should have been wearing brown shirts, which would insinuate Nazis. And I think it was the Rocky Mountain News.

It was one of the two. Like, one of the editorials-- like, big full editorial-- was like disgrace on the Capitol steps or something like that and just tearing me up and saying how juvenile they are, whatever. They might have graduated to belligerent for this.

But then it said, like, he was wrong to call them-- they quoted him. It was like, Bill Owens said they should be wearing brown shirts. And that is wrong.

Because they're not Nazis. He should have called them fascists because we were drowning them out. And it's like, in what reality is a group of citizens complaining to a bunch of government law enforcement about their hostile anti-- like, how are we the fascists, you know?

It was unbelievable. But it was, like, basically both newspapers, they basically said, like, this is the biggest disgrace that's ever-- this is a blunder. Like, oh, they screwed up-- like, the biggest political blunder.

Because now they're-- like, if they expect to win-- of course we didn't expect to win. But, like, to do that, to yell at the gov-- would be considered completely inappropriate. And they basically said, like, it was a massive campaign blunder.

It was just-- yeah, it was just a wild scene. And that was, like, two weeks before the election. And, oh, and as I talked to you about previously, one of the signs-- we had a couple signs.

And one of them hearkened back to Samantha Spady and Gordie Bailey, the two students who had died from alcohol poisoning that really were at the root of when we started SAFER and
wanted to prevent that type of stuff. And it was-- we really had a long discussion. And Steve and I were just-- we talked about having a banner with their images on it. And it said--

JANET BISHOP: At this--

MASON TVERT: At this rally in front of the Capitol with all these law enforcement that said, your messages killed them or your message killed them. Because basically, what we accused these guys of doing is constantly saying, use alcohol instead of marijuana. And we just were not sure.

We were just back and forth. Like, is this going to be too over the top? Like, we don't want to be offensive to the family. We don't want to drag them into-- but it was just, like, listen.

We believe this is the right thing to do. Like, we truly are doing this for all the right reasons. Like, we believe in this message.

Like, we are not exploiting these young people. We really feel this way. And so we did it.

And we had that banner there. And only one reporter really picked up on it, Julie Hayden from the Fox local affiliate. And she actually had me come in and do a story-- like, do an interview in the channel 7 or 13.

I don't remember where it was. Maybe it wasn't there. Anyway, I was in there.

And you know, I basically just said, like, listen. She's like, we talked to Samantha Spady's mother. She's upset by it and so on.

And we said, we feel terrible that she's upset by it. We hope that she knows that we are doing this because we want to prevent that type of thing from happening in the future and so on and so forth. And the story ended up being very good. It was really-- she gave our position on it and so on. But yeah.

JANET BISHOP: And I think you mentioned, not when we were recording, that-- remind me again. You have not ever met--

MASON TVERT: No, I haven't. No, we haven't. I'd love to.

Like, as I mentioned, we really started this organization, it was really inspired, by those two student drinking deaths. And they actually-- so Samantha Spady's parents-- why those two drinking deaths really were so public was that the parents were very, very active. And so her parents had created a video called "Death by Alcohol," which they were promoting on college campuses.

They wanted groups to show. They wanted it to be seen as much as possible, which really just encouraged students to contact authorities, not to worry about getting in trouble. Like, don't leave someone alone.
That was the overarching-- don't leave someone alone when they're drunk. Like, never-- so they made this video. And it's, like, gut wrenching.

I mean, it opens with the 911 call from the student that found her. And it's unreal. And we got a copy of it because they offer it for free to anyone who wants to show it on college campuses. And we did. I mean, I showed it.

JANET BISHOP: You showed it during that time of the campaign for 44, or--

MAISON TVERT: I showed it-- we showed it at various times. Because we also-- we, in the meantime, starting in 2006, during that state initiative, Steve had started to reach out and started talking to students. And we passed similar referendums as we did at CU and CSU at Florida State, University of Maryland, and University of Texas Austin.

And so we had started-- SAFER started doing this campus stuff. And we end up passing those-- like, working with students and passing those types of measures at, you know, 15, 16, 17 very large schools around the country. But I would go and speak at schools.

Or we'd be writing these campaigns. And part of it, we'd do screenings of it. We'd say, we're going to talk about alcohol and the harms of alcohol as well as the harms of marijuana and these policies and we're going to show this movie. And we showed it a lot. So we were very serious about it.

And you were toggling back and forth between Colorado and--

MAISON TVERT: I was focused on Colorado. Steve, in the meantime, he had started-- he had connected with students at each of those three campuses. And they passed those measures. And then, starting in really 2008, for a couple years prior to Amendment 64, I was really working with a lot of students in Arkansas, Florida, all over the-- just, Indiana, just everywhere passing these measures and getting news coverage and for-- you know.

JANET BISHOP: But these three out of state schools were the first really--

MAISON TVERT: Those were the first out of state.

JANET BISHOP: Out of state.

MAISON TVERT: Yeah. So it was Florida State, Maryland, and the University of Texas.

JANET BISHOP: So now we're at night of, I believe, November, 2006.

MAISON TVERT: Election

JANET BISHOP: Election night.

MAISON TVERT: Yeah.
JANET BISHOP: And there's Amendment 44.

MASON TVERT: 44.

JANET BISHOP: And so what happened?

MASON TVERT: We're back at Quixote's. And we lose. And, you know, it wasn't-- I remember being disappointing.

But because it wasn't disappointing, like, oh my god, how could we lose? But it was like, the last time around, we had a pleasant surprise. And this time we didn't, which, we just had no doubt that we'd lose.

Our real desire was to make sure that we got-- we wanted over 40%. That was the real thing we were like-- if it gets-- if it's 40-something, that is pretty solid for where the country and where the-- like, back in 2006. I think support nationwide was well in the mid 30s. So if we get over 40%-- in Nevada, where they spent, I think, maybe a couple million dollars or they ran a really major campaign, I think they got 44%.

I think it was 44 or 46. But we got 41. So we were fine with that.

And as we had predicted, it was not the end of the world. It was one-- on election night, when you win, when something like this wins, it's a big story. When something like this loses, well, of course.

It's expected. Like, it's never happened before. Why would it happen now?

So it's reported, but it's not as big of a deal as the other things that are going on, you know? And there's also REFI, which was the civil unions, which also failed. And so there were plenty of other elections that were being reported.

And so we like a day of quote unquote bad news, so to speak. But yeah, it was no big deal. I mean, we lost and now we have a database with thousands of supporters and all these people engaged and all.

We had generated-- we had basically projected it being hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars if it had been paid media in terms of newspaper space and TV airtime and radio space. And it really was-- in fact, we did start to get some endorsements.

You know, it was-- I think the ACLU again did not-- they did not endorse it again. But we had, again, the Greens and Libertarians. But then we had some groups like the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center.

And gosh, I'm trying to think back. I feel bad that I can't really remember. But there were like a few others. And they were relatively smaller.
But we also had newspaper endorsements. The Durango Harold endorsed the initiative. The Colorado Springs Gazette, which is now—the editorial board has changed. It is now, if not the most hostile newspapers.

But at the time, it was far more libertarian. And they endorsed the initiative. The Aurora Sentinel—so several others. Obviously, the Post and the Rocky Mountain News were against it. But they've opposed everything I've ever done in my life.

JANET BISHOP: So they opposed--

MASON TVERT: They opposed the initiative in Denver. They opposed this. They would then oppose the next city initiative.

They opposed Amendment 64. I suppose the icing on the cake is that I got the Denver Post top political thinker of the year for 2012, despite my foibles and embarrassment on the Capitol steps in 2006. But yeah, we lost.

And it was just really whatever. You know, no big deal. And I think maybe we can-- I don't know what time it is, but we could just—oh, 5:30. I mean, I could quickly go through the 2007 stuff and then we'd be able to pick up.

JANET BISHOP: That's great. I'm going to ask you this— I'm going to ask you this question again at the end of all our oral history interviews. But I'm going to ask this to you now. And you can say the same thing again—

MASON TVERT: Sure.

JANET BISHOP: --when we're done. But, well, the first question is, is there anything you know now that you wish you knew when you started? So let's just focus on '06, 44. And what was the—what were the greatest challenges facing you at that time and what was the greatest rewards? What were the greatest rewards?

MASON TVERT: Personally or professionally?

JANET BISHOP: Either or both.

MASON TVERT: I mean, there were some--

JANET BISHOP: Let's say both.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I mean, well, in terms of, like, what we— I mean, don't chant during the talking.

JANET BISHOP: You think-- do you think that was part of the deal breaker for it not--
MASON TVERT: Oh no, not even remotely. I mean, that was maybe the— if it made a
difference, it the difference between 41.1% and 41.3%. I mean, if someone thinks marijuana
should be legal, they don't say, I really think that people should not be punished for this or that
it's a waste of tax dollars.

But that was an embarrassing scene on the Capitol steps. I'm voting against it. That's not how
people think.

So yeah, and it was [INAUDIBLE]. And it was the same thing with it losing. It got 41%.

People are, like, well, it's a poison pill. It means people aren't going to support it because they're
going to think that there's no support. It's like, well, in a few years, when they vote on this again,
they're not going to say, you know what?

I used to support this. But it lost last time. So I better vote against it.

That's not how it works. So anyway, I don't think it made that big of a difference. But things we
learned— I mean, throughout that entire campaign, I mean, I definitely transit— like, 2007 was
the start of a new era in terms of my behavior on television and radio so to speak.

JANET BISHOP: In what way? You were less quote unquote snarky?

MASON TVERT: No, no, no. I was equally snarky. It was a matter of getting, like, interrupting.

It was like, there's a way to do it. And, you know, there's a time to interrupt— I mean, it is an art
that I'm hardly a master of. But there's a time when, you know, it's maybe appropriate to try to
interrupt or butt in.

But there's also a time when it's not or when you try to talk at the same time as people or, you
know, if you kind of really upset, it comes through. And it doesn't make for good radio or
television and it gives a bad image. Like, people think that it's not flattering.

And there are many times where, like, Steve would say, you really got to calm down. I
remember, like, yeah, I guess it was in ’05. But it was also when my arch nemesis probably, I'm
happy to say, the person that I think is one of the lowest people I've ever dealt with in the media,
Dan Caplis, who used to be on KHOW 6:30 with the Caplis and Silverman show was just a
horrid opponent of this and was just so obnoxious about it and just condescending and rude and
would turn off your mic and not let you talk and just completely— just horrible, horrible person. I
mean, I would not generally say this on the record about people.

But honestly, like, I just really despise that person. And I would freak— I think I called him an
ambulance chaser. He was a public-injury attorney.

I think I might have called him a prick on the air, which is not illegal. You're allowed to say that.
You know, but I would— but Steve would be texting me, like, you got to calm down.
You got to calm down and so on. That-- you know, I came-- starting in 2007, there was a very noticeable difference. I mean, I'm still aggressive, but far less like that in terms of getting too worked up and managing to be calm and so on. So that was one thing. Yeah, in terms of, like, other lessons learned, I mean, I would say that we got totally shafted on the Blue Book on our-- the Blue Book totally screwed us over.

JANET BISHOP: What is the--

MASON TVERT: The Blue Book is the voter guide for the state. And they basically said in the Blue Book in 2006 that our initiative would make it legal to give marijuana to kids. Literally-- it literally said that.

It said, if the measure passes, it will be legal for an adult 21 or older to give marijuana to a person who's between 15 and 18 years old. And the reason it said that is because what we were doing-- the way Colorado's laws are, it defines transferring less than an ounce of marijuana to another person for no remuneration as possession. And the reason that is is because if I give you-- if I pass you a joint, if I'm a friend of yours and I give you a little bit of marijuana, that shouldn't be considered selling drugs.

Like, that's-- so it's actually-- I don't want to call it reasonable, but it makes sense that there would be a lower penalty. But the way that they made that a lower penalty is it's defined as possession. So when we made possession legal, they said, well, OK.

Now it's going to be technically legal for someone who's 21 and older and legally allowed to possess marijuana to give-- because there was a law for people under 15 and then for people-- anyway, it just wasn't true, though. I mean, there are laws against contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Like, giving marijuana to someone under 18 would have been a very serious penalty. But the Blue Book, basically the state, the Legislative Council, argued, well, no.

We're only looking at, like, this in a vacuum. Like, we're not considering the fact that there are also laws that make it illegal. We're only looking at this.

And we sued. We went to court. And the judge was like, yes, I'll absolutely hear this.

And we lost because the state showed up and said, you know, we think this is a separation of powers issue. Legislature gets to create the blue book. The courts shouldn't be setting-- and we got shafted.

And there were some things we could have-- our response could have been better. I mean, we could have addressed that. We just had-- it was like, there was no good way to know that was going to come up. But also, when it came out, our arguments were really about like, oh, we're getting screwed over.

And we didn't really think about the fact that it would still be contributing to the delinquency of a minor. And anyway, but we did end up getting, like, the Rocky Mountain News, which had opposed everything we'd ever done, did an editorial saying we got screwed. And then--
JANET BISHOP: Before the election?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, yeah. And it said, like, while we don't support the initiative, these guys totally got screwed. And then we got screwed again in 2012 with Amendment 64.

And we can get into it later. But long story short, they provide arguments for and against. And, I mean, I think I have a sign-- made a big sign for a press conference. Like, the arguments against were like 600 words or 500 words. The arguments for were, like, 185 words.

And like-- and they took out all the stuff that-- because there's a big long process of, like, we provide what we think it should be. And then they revise. And we then provide--

JANET BISHOP: And this is what--

MASON TVERT: And they just basically took out everything that we considered our real arguments and gave-- it was ridiculous. And again, we had the Denver Post do a thing saying, we don't support the initiative, but these guys got screwed. Vincent Carroll, he's also been around through this whole shenanigans. You know, he was at the Rocky Mountain News and is now the Denver Post editorial editor.

But anyway, we obviously-- I don't want to say necessarily that we failed to learn a lesson. Because we tried to cover our bases in both of these things. And we really did just get kind of screwed.

JANET BISHOP: What were the rewards, both personally and professionally?

MASON TVERT: We definitely started getting far more respect, treated like we actually knew what we were doing, at least to an extent.

JANET BISHOP: After 44.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, and after Denver and then 44 and we really made this an issue that people were paying attention to and far more legitimate. I mean, there was still, like, a thought-- well, it's still not going to happen anytime soon. But I mean, at least with the media, and obviously I don't know what these guys say about me when I'm not in the room.

But I'd like to think and I've been told that they've always really appreciated us or me from the perspective of being available to them, being completely forthright with them, doing everything I can to provide them with accurate information. I mean, I recall one editor at the Denver Post maybe last year or two years ago telling me, like, well everyone in the newsroom really always talks about, like, they love your release. Like, I write a great press release.

I don't like to brag, but I write a killer press release. And so anyway, I mean, professionally, like, yeah. You got that affirmation that, you know, yeah, you're doing things right.

JANET BISHOP: And you're what, 24 at this time? 25?

JANET BISHOP: So do you want to-- any personal reward, or is the personal--

MASON TVERT: I mean, that is-- I guess I called that professional-- I was thinking of it personally. But I mean, I've always had a desire to achieve. That's all that we talked about before. Like, I wanted recognition.

I mean, I could admit wanting to accomplish something, wanting it to be recognized, wanting-- and yeah, I mean, being able to pass the initiative in Denver was certainly big. I mean, we lost in Colorado. But what was really interesting is just, I mean, I think at that time, like, the recognition that we're doing it right, that we lost but we're winning, you know?

And that crystallized for me. I mean, I really started to think about that more, like, in terms of recog-- just recognizing how communications works-- like, how people change, like how public attitudes shift and how the media works and, you know, I really-- any hesitation I had about, like, are we going to ever get anywhere, it became clear to me that we were. Even though we lost, it was, like, we're on the right track. We're doing this right. And yeah, so I don't know. But in terms of otherwise personally, I mean, I don't know.

JANET BISHOP: So you said let's talk a little about 2007, which sounds like a transitional year. And then we'll resume after '07.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, '07, up until basically 2007-- I mean, these are-- so 2007, we came back. So we lost.

We still had some people getting in touch, wanting-- the city kept dropping cases. So we still hadn't had this out in the courts yet. And now we had a couple incidents where we had college students who were-- this was our new approach-- a couple college students who'd gotten in touch.

And they got busted. And they were receiving financial aid. Now, the city would often say-- one of the things that opponents of ours will often say is it's not a big deal. The punishment isn't even that harsh.

It's just a ticket. It's not a big deal. Well, if you're receiving federal financial aid, you're no longer eligible for it. So now, it's like, this became, like-- well, this is a sympathetic case.

And so we took those to court. And finally, the court-- it did get into court. And basically, a judge said, like, yeah.

You're not going to be able to make the line of arguments we'd want to make. And it just-- technical stuff. And it just became clear that we weren't going to have a big victory in the courts and what not.
JANET BISHOP: Probably because of the tension between-- at the federal level, this was--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, this was a state-- this is mostly state and local thing. In terms of the home rule status, we wanted to make a case of Denver having the ability to do this and, you know. The courts never ruled.

Like, I mean, it's not like the courts said the city must issue citations. They just said that the city can't be prevented from issuing citations. So our line of talking point, I mean, shifted from saying they're not listening to the will of the voters to saying, like, they could stop. But they're choosing not and thumping their noses at people. So we wanted to keep the narrative going. So 2006 is over.

We decided, OK, well, there's still busting people in Denver. And the news came out that arrests had actually increased. Citations and arrests had actually increased.

JANET BISHOP: And why do you think that was? Because people were feeling freer to--

MASON TVERT: I mean, it didn't increase-- I don't think it increased a large number. It could've been. Who knows?

Maybe they're reporting-- I mean, the extent to which reporting by law enforcement, I question so much of, like, how accurate it is. I mean, a lot of it's, like, voluntary. I mean, the city has been a mess in terms of tracking crime and what not.

I mean, they've been trying to shift from a paper based system to an online system for years. I don't know if they've finally done it. But I mean, anyway, I don't know exactly what the reasoning might have been.

I don't think it had anything to do us or what have you. But it slightly increased. And we made a big stink about it.

But yeah, at that time, so it was 2007. And at this point, we decide we're going to run another local initiative, this time of lowest law enforcement priority, which is what Seattle had done and several cities in California and even a small town in Arkansas or maybe that was around the same time we did.

But basically, all it does is it designates the possession of up to an ounce of marijuana by people 21 and older the lowest law enforcement priority. And there's a question to which, like, how can you enforce that? Like, what do you do to make that actually do something?

So the way in which we tried to make it do something is we included, which this was not done in Seattle. It kind of was. Actually, it was kind of done in Seattle.

But we included a panel that would have to be created to ensure the-- to implement the measure to the greatest extent possible with the language. So the panel that we concocted was, like, a representative from law enforcement, Denver Police Department, a city council-- one of the two
at large city council members, a representative from the city attorney's office, a domestic violence advocate, two defense attorneys. And then we included the Denver district attorney just because we're like, we want to ruin your day once every two months.

And he refused, which is really fascinating when you think about it. But we'll get to that in a bit here. But we also included two people to be chosen by the proponents of the initiative, which is apparently not actually allowed. But we did it. And we--

JANET BISHOP: So this was part of the new initiative to have this panel. And you had named and identified the people on the panel.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, not by name, but just by their--

JANET BISHOP: Their titles and ranks.

MASON TVERT: And so yeah, I mean, it designated it the lowest priority and created a panel to implement that.

JANET BISHOP: And was this early '07? That you-- you just--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, well, no, it's probably more like mid '07. So I don't really recall exactly, like-- early '07, I think-- so the mayor's race-- so Hickenlooper's running for reelection was in '07. And this was-- he was basically unopposed.

There was someone running, but it was known that he was unopposed. And so he was still trying to make his appearances and whatnot. So he was doing these things-- like, these community forums, like these discussions with Denver or something.

So every-- he had like six events or something around the city, various parts of the city where he'd just be there and answer questions and he'd talk and whatnot. And so we-- it must've been in early 2007. Because that mayoral race-- that election's in May. So this was during that time he was running-- quote unquote running-- for election. And we chased him around with a chicken outfit.

JANET BISHOP: See, I was just going to say it sounds like the stunts had lessened, but no.

MASON TVERT: No, no, no, no, no-- not in the least. So we went to several of those events. And a good friend of ours, someone who started volunteering for us in 2005, the first Denver initiative, a guy by the name of Kayvan Khalatbari who now owns a marijuana business and owns some pizza places which he opened with Evan and Scott, my friends who I've referred to previously. But anyway, he was the chicken. So this is when I got my Costumes Online account.

JANET BISHOP: And the symbolism of the chicken I think I understand. But--

MASON TVERT: Well, we had the chicken-- with a sign that said, what's so-- hey, Mayor Chickenlooper. What's so scary about marijuana? Because he was still opposed to it.
And so we found out arrests were going up. It was like, why are we arresting more people? What's so scary that we need to be issuing these citations when you don't have to? So yeah, we chased him around with a chicken outfit and--

JANET BISHOP: During his campaign.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, his pseudo campaign. You know, at the specific string of events that he did.

JANET BISHOP: And what was Mayor Hickenlooper's reaction?

MASON TVERT: I have no idea. I've spoken to people who worked in the mayor's office who told me-- again, I don't know what those discussions were like. But I've been told that there was some level of respect for what we were doing.

Because again, we weren't just like-- with the exception of shouting down Suthers one time, we weren't just, like, hurling insults at these people and, like, showing up and waving ridiculous signs and doing-- like, we were really classy about all this. We were very professional about all of this. So from what I've heard, they appreciated that we were professional about all of this.

Yes, it was a chicken outfit. But did they, like, interrupt the event and make a huge ordeal or like yell at the guy or anything like that? No, it was just, he stood next to him holding a sign. He took a picture. So it goes, you know?

JANET BISHOP: Was this being picked up by the national media, or just basically--

MASON TVERT: That was only locally. So that was a local thing. But yeah, during that 2007 campaign, there wasn't a whole lot of media.

During that time, we also put up our first-- we did our first stunt surrounding sports, which became something that was done and still do. Ricky Williams, who's a running back for the Miami Dolphins, who has a long history-- he'd been tested positive for marijuana and been suspended and he basically got forced out of the NFL and it was very-- I think he won the Heisman trophy. I mean, big story.

And he was returning to football. And there was a big discussion around on about, like, who wants this guy? Like, he's now failed marijuana tests so many times.

And so we had passed the initiative in Denver. So we put up a big billboard that had what appeared to be him from the back. It was just dreadlocks and it said-- or like braids and said Williams on the back of a Broncos jersey. And it said, Ricky, come to Denver where the voters support your safer choice.

And it got a lot of attention. That was when we first broken into the sports section. And I started to think about it more. Like, OK, this is where we need to be. I mean--
JANET BISHOP: Did you hear from Ricky?

MASON TVERT: No, I have since. My copy of the book was very faintly signed by him. But I've still never met him personally.

But yeah, we just talked about how ridiculous the NFL's policy is around this and how crazy it is that these guys are literally having their livelihoods threatened just for this. This is a league that's sponsored by alcohol, you know? And yeah, that got a lot of attention.

But it was also covered by the sports page. There are a lot of people who read the sports page but no other part of the newspaper. And I started to think about that more.

And we've done several things surrounding the NFL. We put billboards up around the Super Bowl a couple years ago. We had something in Nevada surrounding a boxer who had been suspended for marijuana and fined, like $900,000 just for testing positive for marijuana. So we started to do that a lot more.

This was the first time. And we had a press conference. And we encouraged a bunch of supporters, like 25 supporters there, bring your Broncos stuff.

So everyone's wearing, like, Broncos shirts and stuff. And I remember I got an orange tie-- like, an orange tie just for the occasion. But you know, so we did that.

That got some attention around it because the election was going on. But anyway, it was relatively uneventful comparatively to the other things. But it won.

So we got 53 and 1/2 percent in 2005. In 2006, when we lost statewide, we had 55% in Denver. So now in 2007, we had 57% in Denver. So we're now seeing a trend here.

JANET BISHOP: Right, a rise. And this is for the lesser priority, least priority.

MASON TVERT: Lowest priority.

JANET BISHOP: Lowest priority.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, and so it passed. So while we were going through the process, you have to go meet with the city attorney and so on. And they give you questions.

They'll say, like, are you aware that this will do this? Or are you aware that this will be a violation of that? They can't make you change your initiative. But they can-- you know.

And it's very helpful. It's actually a great process. But they're like, you know, you guys included yourselves on this panel. Like, you get-- you're saying-- in the other cities like Seattle, it was a panel that was, like, made-- it was, like, appointed by the council.
So when you're running an initiative, you're basically functioning like the council, not like the mayor. But we wanted to screw with our mayor. So we had the council-- the panel be appointed- we required the mayor to appoint the panel.

And they're like, you can't do that. There's a separation of powers issue. You can't make the executive branch do something through this legislative process.

And we said, you know? I mean, what's going to happen if we do? And they're like-- sure enough, I and Brian Vicente, we were officially appointed by the mayor to--

JANET BISHOP: So does that explain the signed--

MASON TVERT: Yeah. Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: And do you want to explain--

MASON TVERT: So it was forced. It was forced by law. I had to have whatever, 50,000 some odd Denver voters ask him to do it.

JANET BISHOP: So do you want to explain what's on your wall?

MASON TVERT: I just got my certificate of appointment to the marijuana policy review panel and the letter that accompanied it.

JANET BISHOP: And this was in 2007 after--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, after that passed. And yeah. And basically, so that panel then, we were able to continue to do some stuff.

For example, the panel voted to call-- like, basically, the panel recommended that the city attorney's office no longer prosecute cases involving possession of up to an ounce of marijuana. And what was really interesting about this-- now, while the city did not listen-- this was just a recommendation from a panel-- the Rocky Mountain News, this was just before they went out of business. But the Rocky Mountain News, which opposed everything we'd done up to this, did an editorial saying basically, like, it was-- I can't remember what the headline was.

But it was like, enough is enough. Like, they need to heed the voters. And like, basically, it was about-- the panel's recommended this. It's been voted on. It's time for the city to do stuff. So, like, the Rocky Mountain News, like, came around, which was very, very cool right before they went under. But yeah.

JANET BISHOP: And this was still all '07.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, '07. And then into '08, like, that panel would meet every couple months or whatever, few months. And we would just grill the police and the city attorney over, like, well, what's the deal, you know whatever.
And then we also passed and we managed to convince everyone or at least enough people during this-- so the Democratic National Convention came here in 2008. And we passed a recommendation that the city have a moratorium on marijuana citations during the DNC so that people visiting knew that they didn't have to drink if they wanted to party. And so, you know-- what's funny, and it's like, before, it was just like our group saying this. Now we've got like a city panel to use as a vehicle for this type of stuff.

JANET BISHOP: And was that picked up initially?

MASON TVERT: We did a whole push around it. We got some attention. We did a whole, like, big, like folder for media that had, like, almost like a survival guide or whatever-- how to-- I don't even remember.

It had a bunch of information about what was going on. Yeah, about like-- and like what was going on and this and that-- marijuana and alcohol and so on. And yeah, it was definitely entertaining.

And around that time, we did some media stuff around Cindy McCain, who we labeled a drug dealer because her family owns a big massive Anheuser-Busch distributorship. But anyway, yeah. So basically from 2008 until 2010, for me, a lot of stuff started to be more national in scope.

We called for marijuana lounges in the airports. There had been a bunch of incidents where people were getting drunk and starting ruckus on planes. And one of them was grounded in Colorado.

So the person was going to be in court in Colorado and everything. So we said there needed to be marijuana lounges. Like, people are anxious.

Like, they only are able to go to the bar. And then they get offered drinks on the plane. Why can't there just be marijuana lounges?

And so we got a lot of attention from that. But things like that-- just continuing to get in the news, make people think about stuff. We passed a measure.

I think we passed it, but not enough students voted in Durango, at Ft. Lewis College. So we passed another one of these resolutions. So the way it works is that you have to get a majority and the election has to include a certain percentage of the student body.

But it didn't. But we won. Yeah, and during this time, he said, now we're in 2008. This is when medical marijuana really takes off. So Brian wins this lawsuit and businesses start to open.

JANET BISHOP: And going backwards, this is the lawsuit for the AIDS?

MASON TVERT: Yes, yeah, the five patient limit thing. And so all of a sudden, some people start opening medical marijuana dispensaries.
JANET BISHOP: And so before that time, there were not dispensaries?

MASON TVERT: No, none-- definitely not. I mean, there were meet up groups. Like, I mean, I remember when I got here, the only real place other than growing it yourself or having a caregiver grow it for you, there were some meet up groups. And I remember at like a Methodist Church down on, like, Grant and Fifth or something where, yeah, patients would get together and they would be able to find a caregiver or learn about how to grow or what-- I mean, there were like, 1200, 1300 of them or something. And then starting in like 2008, 2009, 2010, we got into 60,000, 80,000, 100,000. Because all of a sudden, there were these businesses opening up.

JANET BISHOP: And we do have a couple dispensary owners that we will interview too. So--

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: So OK, so it sounds like we're right about, although you alluded to '10, right about '08. Is this a good stopping point?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I mean, basically I think that the place to pick up-- you know, I was never really heavily involved in all this medical stuff. I'm the fun marijuana guy. I'm not the sick people marijuana guy.

That's not fun. You know, so that was all going on. And I was involved a little bit on some stuff. But like, it was really more Brian-- you know, Sensible Colorado. And this is when they're working the legislature trying to get the regulatory system in place.

JANET BISHOP: And this is '08.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, and Obama gets-- so Obama had gotten elected in '08. So that was, like-- so it was a very, very important string of events, you know. It was, like, the lawsuit got rid of the five patient limit.

And then Obama got elected. And he had said that he would not go after medical marijuana caregivers and patients. The five patient limit is gone. And Obama says this. You've got some gutsy people starting to open up some places. And then the first Ogden memo came out, which was from the Justice Department, that said they would not go after patients and caregivers. And that's when the floodgates opened, and tons of people started opening businesses in Colorado. And the legislature decided to pass 1284, the bill that created the first regulatory system for medical marijuana.

INTERVIEWER: This is 1284?

MASON TVERT: That was the name of the bill. That was the number of the bill.

INTERVIEWER: And this was all in '08? '09?
MASON TVERT: That ended up being '10. So, like, Obama got elected in '08, the Ogden memo might have been in '09. And then the final-- early 2010 when they passed the medical marijuana law. Yeah, I mean, I'd like to think that the work that we'd done over the five years leading up to that played a role in that.

Meanwhile, there were several states passing medical marijuana laws that included dispensary systems, like Arizona, and Rhode Island, and Washington. And they were all being resisted by the legislatures and governors. They were going to the federal government asking for an opinion from the U.S. Attorney's Office. And then the U.S. Attorney’s Office says, well, it's illegal. And then they'd say, sorry, you passed this law but we can't do it. So there was a lot of resistance.

Whereas here, these businesses were opening, and the legislature decided we better just regulate this, instead of trying to shut it down. Which is just very-- the attitudes were just shifting here. But yeah, so during that time a lot of what I was doing was not Colorado specific. I mean, we're basically, when we come back, jumping to more or less 2011.

INTERVIEWER: So you say, just before we wrap up, so from '08 to say '10, '11, you're saying what you were doing was not Colorado specific. So were you traveling to other parts of the country?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, we were working to pass measures at universities all over the country.

INTERVIEWER: And was it focused on universities?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, colleges and universities were passing these referendum questions.

INTERVIEWER: And no chicken suits?

MASON TVERT: No, no chicken suits. But there were shenanigans for sure. But yeah, no chicken suits. But basically, yeah, there was a lot of earned media stuff. We launched something called the Women's Marijuana Movement, which was really focused on getting women talking about this issue. And you know, we launched it around Mother's Day. It had, like, an e-card that you could send to your mother, saying I hope you understand why I support this, or whatever. And stuff like that. We formalized this campuses thing.

We had just passed a few of these measures in Colorado and in another state. We made it, branded it "the Safer Campuses Initiative." Started doing-- it had its own website. Really passed these in a lot of other places. We did a big thing around alcohol awareness month. And we organized students on more than 50 universities around the country to all do these events, and do all this stuff, and show the Samantha Spady video, and do all this.

We also did a big thing targeting college presidents. There was something called the Amethyst Initiative, which was sponsored by, led by a guy, named John McCardell who was the president of Middlebury College in Vermont, a little while back. And it was the first real organized effort to lower the drinking age. And it was being sponsored-- it was a sign on letter, all these college presidents and administrators that signed on to, saying we need to lower the drinking age. Or
they didn't go that far. What they said is, we need Congress to debate this and take away the federal funding for highways as tied to having a drinking age of 21. And basically they were just saying we need to address the drinking age because it's not working and it's causing all these alcohol problems. It was called the Amethyst Initiative. And so we created the Emerald Initiative, and we asked college presidents to sign onto it, and so on, and then criticize those who did not.

INTERVIEWER: Did any sign on to it?

MASON TVERT: No, I remember we had maybe a couple. We had a chancellor or like a couple of-- a smaller university. You know, a couple said we totally understand what you're doing here. Like, yes, if I were able to. I mean, which was kind of a copout. They are able to, but you know, they're like, listen, we can't do this, but it's an interesting idea, guys. So you know, and we've heard that many times. A lot. I remember in 2006, when we had absolutely no money, trying to get on the ballot, Steve was wanting to try to get Frito-Lay to publicly donate. And the idea was like, oh, look how much exposure you will get in the media if you donate, just give like $5,000.

INTERVIEWER: And you picked Frito-Lay because of the munchie connection?

MASON TVERT: I don't even remember. But, yeah, the whole idea of like a munchie company giving money to-- as a publicity stunt. Way ahead of its time. You know, and I believe that someone there, Steve reached someone there, who was like listen, this is an amazing idea, and I'd love to be able to do it. But there's just no way we can do this. We get that a lot.

So anyway, I mean, up until basically you get into the end of 2010, and in 2010 the legislature came back and was going to tinker with the medical marijuana system. And we filed an initiative for that year, statewide legalization, Brian and I. Which was, part of it was like, to say like listen, if you guys screw up this medical system we're going to run this, and we may have legal marijuana. We ended up not going forward with it. But that was the first discussion of this. And then basically the beginning of 2011 is when we started 64.

INTERVIEWER: This is a good wrapping up point for this interview.

MASON TVERT: Part two?

INTERVIEWER: This is part two, but we are going to have a part three. This is great. Thank you so much. I am curious, I may ask you in part three, about the Women's Marijuana Movement. That's sort of interesting angle. But for today, October 2, 2015, thank you so much, Mason. And I'm with Mason Tvert, of the Marijuana Policy Project. And we have had a wonderful conversation. Part two of Mason's interview for the Amendment 64, Stories of Amendment 64 Oral History Project at CSU. Thanks so much.

MASON TVERT: Thank you.