JANET BISHOP: OK. I should be recording, but the levels look low. Do they look low to you? Look a little lower than normal.

LINDA MEYER: Let me just go up one more notch. OK, Mason can you make--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

JANET BISHOP: I think it's good--

LINDA MEYER: That's good.

JANET BISHOP: Yeah, the recordings are just-- and sometimes--

LINDA MEYER: You kind of want them to get it up here.

JANET BISHOP: Sometimes there's ambient noise. I noticed in the other, so this is good. OK. I guess we're recording.

LINDA MEYER: Yes.

JANET BISHOP: So we've had a little bit of a preamble here, but this is Janet Bishop and the date is October 23, 2015. I'm back with Mason Tvert for the third part of, actually, a very fascinating oral history, for our Stories of Amendment 64 Oral History Project, which is part of our Amendment 64 collection. I'm here, actually with Linda Meyer, our ag archivist, and Adeline the pug.

MASON TVERT: Adeline the pug.

JANET BISHOP: We will see--

MASON TVERT: Could prove to be problematic.

JANET BISHOP: We will see how long--
MASON TVERT: She's digging in someone's purse right now.

JANET BISHOP: Oh, Adeline the pug is looking for pretzels. She may head out of the interview pretty soon.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, do you want to--

JANET BISHOP: She's a darling pug. And Mason, I'm going to just leap in and stand up so Addie can come on out. Before we start with 2011, which is I think roughly where we left off, I want to ask you just a few questions about the Women's Marijuana Movement, which you alluded to at the tail end of interview number 2. I found that intriguing because it's a gender based movement that I hadn't heard about. So could you tell me a bit about that?

MASON TVERT: Sure, well back in probably 2009, I'm guessing, we launched the Women's Marijuana Movement, which was just a project of SAFER. Steve Fox and I had been talking about trying to get more women vocally talking about the issue. And in the news. And really talking about alcohol and marijuana and the fact that marijuana is less harmful. And talking about the fact that unlike alcohol, marijuana does not contribute to sexual assault and domestic violence. And really just bringing those issues up.

So we got the Women's Marijuana Movement started. Right at about the same time we were actually in the process of getting that off the ground, NORML, National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, launched a women's project as well, which was just coincidental. But it happened right around the same time and then we were able to collaborate a little bit with them from time to time.

JANET BISHOP: And was this from the viewpoint of you-- you had talked in previous interviews about the fact that you were trying to get members of assault movements to support the marijuana legalization movement, with the premise that marijuana didn't play a part in assaults, batteries, abuse.

MASON TVERT: We've long talked about marijuana being a safer alternative to alcohol, hence the organization is a safer alternative for enjoyable recreation. And a big part of that is the fact that alcohol has been very consistently shown to be a significant contributing factor to acts of violence, and especially sexual assault and domestic violence. And we have simply been trying to get people to recognize that we should not be steering adults toward drinking if they might otherwise prefer to make the safer choice to use marijuana.

So, part of that as we talked about throughout the first several years, our organization, the first billboard we put up in Denver was around domestic violence. We did a lot of work with college students and talking about this. But we wanted to really try to give women an opportunity to talk about this. Because it was not something being talked about a lot. And obviously I can talk about it as a man, but we really need women to also talk about this, because we have a lot of supporters.
People would say hey, listen I'm a young woman and I go to college parties and quite frankly, like, I would rather find myself in a room late at night with a bunch of guys who are using marijuana than a bunch of guys who are drinking. I feel a lot safer. You know that is much more compelling than me just saying that, to hear these stories. And we wanted to get those out there.

I believe it was 2009, it was Mother's Day, and it could have been 2010. I can't recall but I know it was Mother's Day when we launched the project because my mother was in town for it. But also, it was-- we did a Mother's Day card online, where you could send your mother an e-card that said Happy Mother's Day and I wanted to let you know that I support making marijuana legal, and this and that, and I hope you'll think about it, and that type of thing. We did a big news conference up at the Capitol. And we had a very large strong group of women out there, speaking about their experiences and talking about all of this.

JANET BISHOP: How many mothers or daughters use the e-card to send to their mothers?

MASON TVERT: Oh, how many ended up doing it? I don't recall. Unfortunately, this was a project that didn't end up getting enough support. This was at a time when SAFER, really-- we were operating with a minuscule budget, I mean it was one or two staff members at the most. We didn't have a lot of resources and so we did what we could. The Women's Marijuana Movement was largely a website, and then it was stuff online. And then we also organized some events.

So we did this thing around Mother's Day, and the idea of course was getting news coverage around this. And we also then, the next year, we did something around Sexual Assault Awareness Month. And had students all over, women all over the country, but also students on college campuses all over the country, doing activities on a particular day to raise awareness of this.

And I recall, specifically, a young woman at a college in Texas. I'm trying to recall. I think it was Texas Tech. It was Texas Tech or Texas A&M. But she was a volunteer at the rape hotline. The hotline for students to call when they need to talk. And she was very motivated by what we were doing. She was very compelled by this.

She said I talk to women all day long about this issue, and alcohol comes up so frequently that yeah, you know, this makes sense to me. And she did something on her campus and got some good news coverage around it, and so on. But ultimately, we tried to get it off the ground, we just never had a whole lot of resources. And then the Amendment 64 campaign came up and we tried to keep it part of that. Meanwhile, NORML had a women's effort going on, and that was great. And so, they were doing that and we shifted our focus to really just Amendment 64.

JANET BISHOP: And one last question and then we'll move onto, because we're getting to it, Amendment 64. What was the viewpoint of some of the feminist groups, or was there silence? You had said before that one of the challenges in linking legalization of marijuana to the issue of battery, assault, rape, was that many feminists, rightly so, said it's not an issue about the substance, it's an issue about the person.
MASON TVERT: Absolutely. And from the beginning we reached out to folks in that community, trying to just talk about this. And learned of that feeling and I completely agree with it. But the point we've really been trying to make is that we're not saying that alcohol makes a person hit their spouse.

We're saying that the evidence shows that among people who are likely to hit their spouse, based on whatever the other factors are, their socioeconomic background, their history, whatever. I mean, the people who are prone to violence are far more likely to act out on it, if they're drinking. And that's just according to the sciences, according to the research it's shown over and over and over again.

We had several conversations with women involved in that issue who would say we agree but we aren't really goi-- it's not our organization's issue, like we aren't going to get involved in that. And it's like if someone were to ask us to get involved on an ancillary issue related to marijuana, where we'd say we agree with you but, this is not what we're here to do. We're working on this. And so it just was never something that they were interested in going out on a limb and getting involved in. But on an individual basis, we would hear from folks all the time. But yeah, you know and it's, yeah.

JANET BISHOP: Well, thanks. You had mentioned it at the tail end of the last interview. So, this is an interesting fill-in. So now we're, I believe we're at 2011. You talked a bit about the measure 100, your efforts with Amendment 44. You had introduced in Denver, I believe in 2008, you can correct me, the lesser offense.

MASON TVERT: 2007, yeah. So that was another issue in the question 100. We had 2 I-100s.

JANET BISHOP: And I was listening again to the second part of the oral history. Some fabulous stories about performance art, as I would say. And certain events to raise awareness at the Capitol and with then govern-- Mayor Hickenlooper.

So tell me a bit about 2011. You said in a previous interview that you did a shift, sort of in terms of awareness of your media presence. And tell me about some of the things leading up to gearing up towards Amendment 64. What did you hold onto from your past efforts? What did you change? Who are the players? And why did you decide to go forth with 64 around 2011?

MASON TVERT: So, yeah. You know, another big thing that had really happened between 2009 and 2010 is really when the medical marijuana scene, if you will, really exploded in Colorado. That was right when there no longer was a limit on the number of patients a caregiver could help. People started opening businesses. Barack Obama got elected. Said he wasn't goin-- so all these businesses started opening. The legislature than established the regulations.

So, right around this time is when we started to see all these businesses opening and being regulated, and so on, and that plays a big role here. We were really working to change the way people view marijuana in terms of its effects on the consumers and on society. But now you had the second element, which was showing people that this is possible. That it is possible to have a system where this can be legal.
So people started to see these stores all over the place. They would see that localities have the ability to ban them. They would see that they weren't causing problems and that the state was controlling it. So that was a really big part of this, too. So now it's 2011 and at this point, we now are seeing polling that suggests that we could win an initiative to make marijuana legal statewide.

You know, back in 2006 when we ran the First Amendment 44, and we got a lot of guff from people who didn't think we should do it because we were going to lose. And we said, we don't care because we know we're going to lose, but we need to do this to build support. Well this time around it was, we can actually win, so that does make things a little different.

JANET BISHOP: And to interject, you had mentioned during this interim period, shall we say, you went beyond the state and you were traveling across the country to colleges and such. Were you called back in from the cold, so to speak?

MASON TVERT: No, I mean, SAFER had been doing all this work in Colorado. And the marijuana discussion in Colorado was really heavily centered on medical marijuana legislation and regulatory issues. That's just not what I do. And my colleague Brian Vicente was very, very heavily involved in all of that.

And we were doing other work, like the Women's Marijuana Movement. Which we were doing stuff in Colorado, but elsewhere. And I had co-authored a book that I was going around and talking about as well. But this was a very different campaign from the beginning. And that starts with the fact that it was a very different type of law that we proposed.

In 2006, we proposed the simplest possible law, because we didn't have any expectation that it would win. We knew that it would lose and we just wanted to have a very, very controlled discussion. We wanted the discussion to be about whether or not adults should be allowed to use marijuana. Should they be punished, or not? And so the question was very simple.

Should it be legal for an adult 21 or older to possess up to an ounce of marijuana? Period. That's it. Whereas now, we're talking about creating an entire regulatory system, or transitioning to a regulatory system where marijuana is being produced and sold by licensed businesses. And it's being tested, packaged, and labeled. This is a much bigger, more complex issue.

JANET BISHOP: So, then to clarify. So you came back into focus on Colorado when you were reintroducing legalization at the state level.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I mean I'm still based here. I wasn't gone, I wasn't out on tour or something. It was really just a matter--we had been talking about at what point we'd do an initiative. We threatened to do one in 2010, when the legislature was kind of screwing around medical marijuana regulations.

So at this point, we decided it appeared time to move forward with something that was very comprehensive.
JANET BISHOP: And then you embedded some of the things you just mentioned into this proposal for legalization?

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: In terms of complexity?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, this was a much different issue. Whereas, the other one was literally a couple sentences. This one was a number of pages. It was still relatively short compared to say, Washington State, where in 2012 they passed an initiative to legalize marijuana and regulate it. But theirs was done statutorily. They got to do theirs through a proposed statute. Whereas, ours was done through the Constitution. And there's a very real reason why we had to do it through the Constitution.

JANET BISHOP: What was that reason?

MASON TVERT: Our legislature sucks. Quite frankly, there's no other way to describe it. Other than we had no faith in our legislature whatsoever to abide by what the voters would do. We had no confidence that if the voters approve this measure, whether it was 51-49 or 85-15, we did not trust our legislature to follow what the voters wanted. And I still think that if they had had the chance, they would've messed with it and screwed it up. So basically the issue is, if you run a statutory initiative, then all you're doing is creating the statutes and the legislature can amend them. Or they can do away with them, or what have you.

Colorado doesn't have any sort of protection law. There are some states where if it's passed by initiative, the legislature can't mess with it for at least five years or forever, whatever, you know. But Colorado doesn't have a law that. And so, if we had done it through statute, then it could have been repealed within six months after it passed.

And we had been screwed over by the legislature before, with the Blue Book in 2006. And there was no-- we ended up with one or two endorsements among our state legislature. All those members, we ended up having two. So you can see that there are clearly-- whereas there were a lot of them who were opposed.

JANET BISHOP: And who were the two that endorsed?

MASON TVERT: Jonathan Singer. Who was-- he's a Boulder County democrat. And he was a new legislator, but he's also got a background in treatment, or in counseling, with children. And so on. So it was a very unique voice to have there. But he's been a champion on this issue and really been one of the leaders when it comes to post-Amendment 64 passing. And implementation and now, ironing it all out. And he's really been a leader on this. The other was Shawn Mitchell, a Republican, who he was on his way out of office at the time. That was his last term, and he's known as a pretty hardcore Libertarian, Republican.

JANET BISHOP: So, either end.
MASON TVERT: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. But the point being, we did not have support in the legislature, so we had to do this doing a constitutional amendment. To ensure that it would be done.

JANET BISHOP: And your saying, to clarify, and Washington State--

MASON TVERT: They did theirs through there, statutorily, because they had tons of legislators who were endorsing their initiative. And they did not have a lot of them that were opposed. And they hav-- these two campaigns could not been more different in a lot of ways. We had the governor, and the previous two governors, all doing ads against us. We had opposition from all, just about all, the district attorneys and the Attorney General, a ton of the sheriffs, law enforcement, members of Congress, and the state, just everyone you could imagine, stacked up against us.

Whereas in Washington, it was basically the opposite. They had a ton of those people on their side, or at least neutral. Their governor was not opposed. You know, it was very different, in a lot of ways. The way we worked out here for the time leading up to this, it reflects the difference between the states. I mean in Washington, they started at a point where people were not scared of marijuana. Enough people were not necessarily scared of marijuana.

JANET BISHOP: And you think that's a cultural thing?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, this is like a, why is there so much religion in the South but not in the North? You know, this is just a, who knows why there's more support for this or that? Why is it more liberal on the coast than elsewhere? I don't know. But ultimately, people were not necessarily as fearful of marijuana overall in states like Washington and Oregon and California. Whereas in Colorado, they were.

So there, in Washington, during their campaign, it wasn't so much about making voters comfortable with marijuana. It was about really just letting-- trying to get voters to agree that there's a better way we could handle marijuana. And so their campaign was just really focused on talking about the benefits of regulation and so on. And ours was too. But we also, leading up to it, really had all this stuff about marijuana being safer than alcohol. Really trying to just get voters comfortable with the idea of marijuana being something adults use.

JANET BISHOP: Although the paradox is, it sounds like post passage of legalization of marijuana, Colorado has a sort of better system in place.

MASON TVERT: We have a more aggressive approach. And that was reflected in the campaigns. It was reflected in the language of the initiative. We allowed for home cultivation, for example, whereas they did not. And I think that they were regretful in the end. Because they probably could-- they didn't include it because they were worried it would make them lose support.

And we said, you know it just makes sense, we need to include it. Even if polling shows that it's not as-- there's not as much support if you include it. We should include it. They also included a
provision regarding driving that created a, per se, limit for a DUI. Which really got a lot of people upset in the marijuana community up there. They also had some other potential penalties that were being created, I believe particularly for younger people.

We didn't create any new penalties. We left driving alone. We said, it's already illegal, it'll remain illegal. This is not changing anything about it. If the legislature wants to do something with it, they can. We are not touching this subject. Whereas in Washington, they specifically did create laws around driving.

So, the drafting process here was very extensive. It went on for about six months between roughly, January and June of 2011. And was primarily the drafting-- was primarily led by Steve Fox and Brian Vicente. And then perhaps, the next most involved in the drafting, in terms of really working on the document, was Tamar Todd, who's an attorney at the Drug Policy Alliance, who was also involved.

And the initiative was back and forth over-- there was constant meetings and it was shared with tons of people. Elected officials, state and local. Tons of different attorneys. People who specialize in regulatory stuff. Criminal justice defense attorneys. It was shared with folks in the medical marijuana community with the businesses that were working in medical marijuana. It was really just something that we did-- we actually put ads in some marijuana related magazines.

Like, I think, what was it called? It's no longer around, but Kush Magazine. Just saying, hey we're in the process of drafting an initiative. Here's an email address you can send your comments in. And we actually took them and they were databased. They were divided into, OK this is regarding home cultivation, this is regarding-- and we tried to look and see, what do people actually care about?

And we couldn't obviously make every single person happy, but we certainly looked at them. And it was a very lengthy process. I think in the end, we ended up with a very good law. And the difference with our law versus like Washington's is that theirs got into a lot of specifics because that's what you ultimately need. Ours couldn't do that. We can't put specifics into the Constitution on a lot of things. It's too difficult to change the Constitution.

And so a lot of what we did was create a framework for the legislature. We created a framework for the legislature to then go through and hash out all these details. We didn't say, you have to have this many pixels in the security camera. We said the legislature shall create regulations pertaining to security, stuff like that. So Washington's measure was far, far longer than ours. But there's a reason for that.

JANET BISHOP: Mason's taking a time out to text his colleague about his pug, Adeline, who's outside, and wants desperately to come back in. So, as you text--

MASON TVERT: Sorry.
JANET BISHOP: No, that's fine. I guess I-- also curious were you in a lot of correspondence with the folks in Washington who were trying to pass that legislation, or you were aware of each other but it was sort of separate universes.

MASON TVERT: They're in touch. I mean, you know, that-- this is probably a better conversation to have with Brian or Steve, who you should also talk to. I had my opinions on certain elements of the language. I wanted to make sure there was home cultivation. I didn't want to see any sort of increases in penalties.

But it was in the background, building-- working on the website for the campaign and volunteer database and all this stuff. I'm not the attorney. But we certainly know Alison [Holcomb] and the folks up in Washington and all of them. And there's definitely discussion, but I don't think that it played a significant role.

JANET BISHOP: Were there any other states, remind me, that were pushing?

MASON TVERT: Oregon.

JANET BISHOP: Oregon--

MASON TVERT: Lost.

JANET BISHOP: --lost. And it lost, yeah. And that was it, Washington, Oregon, and Colorado.

MASON TVERT: Yeah. Arkansas had a medical marijuana measure on the ballot, which lost.

JANET BISHOP: In 2012?

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: OK. So it's very colorful, your description of your activities during other measures. Very forceful, very creative in terms of the Oreos-- piles of Oreos and Doritos, the chicken suit, they body bag. What was diff-- was there anything different about this, in terms of your activities?

MASON TVERT: Well, OK, so there's various differences here. So one is that-- number one, we're talking about a much different scope of the campaign. In 2006, we ended up spending after the petition drive like $100,000. Here, it was like, 2 and 1/2 million. So you're talking about something very different.

JANET BISHOP: And how did you get that 2 and 1/2 million?

MASON TVERT: It was primarily raised through the Marijuana Policy Project, so Rob Kampia, who is the director of MPP. And then the Drug Policy Alliance probably raised the next most, so Ethan Nadelmann and the Drug Policy Alliance chipped in, as well. MPP paid for the bulk of the
whole thing. At the time, I was an MPP staff member. But my title and everything I did was the campaign in Colorado.

I mean, we had a much different sized staff. We had much different plans. It was a very different thing from the beginning. In terms of the media type stuff, we were still aggressive and we still did some creative things and things that others had not really done. But it was definitely a little less edgy. So for example, one thing that we did do early on, I remember, was there was a very large bust of some grow houses out in the suburbs somewhere.

You know, usually when that happens, you don't really want to highlight it necessarily. I mean, it's a negative story. It sounds bad. Kind of like the big bust in Denver. In 2006, when there was a large bust we went down to the DEA, and I think we talked about that. Like at that time, it was a matter of well, we've got nothing to lose, let's go down to the DEA building and cause a ruckus.

Whereas this time-- usually you'd want to avoid highlighting a major marijuana ring being busted in the suburbs. But we actually did put out a statement about it. We actually proactively tried-- say like listen, this is going to keep happening if we don't pass this type of law. So we did kind of do something similar, which maybe wouldn't have been something others would do, in terms of drawing attention to it.

But we said this is something that we're trying to prevent. And got some news covered around it. We never shied away from discussing marijuana being safer than alcohol. We put up a billboard very early on that had a woman on it who, you know, looked like a mom. She just looked like she was probably about 50 years old. She was just standing there and it said, for many reasons I prefer marijuana over alcohol. Does that make me a bad person?

JANET BISHOP: And what was the reaction to that?

MASON TVERT: It was very positive. I've actually-- I know that there's like a, some kind of sociology or some textbook, that wanted to-- we had to give permission to because they were including it in some kind of-- it's definitely made its way around. And is really iconic of this campaign was people saying, what's the problem? Why is it so scary for an adult to use a less harmful substance than alcohol? And that billboard was right above a liquor store. So it was a great image.

JANET BISHOP: Did you do this on purpose?

MASON TVERT: Well, I was looking at locations and this was one I found that was available. I didn't, like, go to them and say, find one over a liquor store. What's funny is that the one with the woman in the bikini that we did back in 2006, so that's the contrast here. In 2006, we needed to get people's attention. We have a woman in a bikini stretched out across a billboard that said, "Marijuana-- no violence, no hangovers, no carbs."

And this time, we had a woman who looked like she just walked out of the office and it said, "For many reasons, I prefer marijuana over alcohol." Maybe no violence, no hangovers no carbs.
I don't know. But does that make her a bad person? And in that other one, with the woman in the bikini, was also over-- right by a liquor store. The Great American Beer Store, down on Alameda. So, it was a very similar but slightly tweaked.

JANET BISHOP: So you were going for a broader--

MASON TVERT: We didn't need to be as edgy to get attention, because we're getting attention now. Before it was like, we are trying to shock people into thinking about this. Now we've got people thinking about this, so let's help them really think about it. Before it was like people didn't even want to think about it. So now that they are thinking about it, let's facilitate their thinking on the subject.

Another thing that I recall very early on was, Dan Hartman, I believe his name was, so one of the first-- I think he was the second head of the Marijuana Enforce-- Medical Marijuana Enforcement Division. And so he was working at the Department of Revenue and was overseeing the regulations. And he had made some comment. I can't remember if it was on the radio.

He had been out on the Western Slope and there were some localities considering banning medical marijuana in businesses. And he made some comments where he said, you know, if you want to make your community safer-- if you want to control marijuana, don't ban. Like, let us control this. And he basically just made these very reasonable statements.

Kind of like, someone at the EPA would say, if you want to-- if you're concerned about carbon emissions, like let us-- you should support us, you shouldn't ban the EPA. Of course this upset the sheriff out in Mesa County. He was a very vocal opponent of ours. And the sheriff complained to the Attorney General, did a formal request asking John Suthers, the Attorney General, if this was a violation of ethics for a Department of Revenue employee to say something to this effect.

JANET BISHOP: And what was the decision?

MASON TVERT: And Suthers came back and said, no it's not any sort of illegal thing, it's not a violation. So it was not illegal, but it was unethical. And this, coming from John Suthers, which was unbelievable. John Suthers was the lead spokesperson against our initiative in 2006. So, for him to say that if someone chimes in on this issue-- it's not even like this guy said, vote yes, vote no. All he said was, listen, if you're concerned about marijuana being all over the place, then you don't want to ban regulation because we won't be able to control it.

That's all this guy said. And he basically ended up having to-- he got reassigned. And he was, you know, he got the boot for this. But we called on John Suthers to sign a pledge to not oppose our initiative that was going to be coming out because it would be unethical. So we asked him to sign an ethics pledge, saying if, you're saying that a state official giving their opinion is wrong, all we're asking is that you follow the same guidance.

JANET BISHOP: And what was his reaction?
MASON TVERT: Nothing of course, he didn't say anything. Although he ended up staying out of it. I think it was more so because he was just sick of the issue. He generally had said as much to me. There was a big organized opposition, he didn't have to be as involved. I don't know how much we talked about Suthers before.

JANET BISHOP: You mentioned him, briefly.

MASON TVERT: Because he went from being the big opponent, the guy on every debate, in every op-ed where it was one versus the other. It was always him. And then in 2012, he really wasn't involved, at least not publicly. And that was very evident when in 2012 there was the large law enforcement press conference, which we talked about in 2006. This--

JANET BISHOP: With the doughnuts.

MASON TVERT: --huge melee. Oh no, no, no. The doughnuts was different. That was just the first day of voting. This was like, when Governor Owens called us Nazis.

JANET BISHOP: Yes, you mentioned that.

MASON TVERT: And we shouted down Suthers. Suthers was trying to talk and we were chanting. So this time around, in 2012, it was the same exact event. It was all the sheriffs and all the DA's, they're all on the capitol steps, and so on.

Suthers didn't speak, he stood on the side. And it was very noti-- at least to me, very noticeable. And he was-- he said to me, I'm just not interested in dealing with this anymore. But we had a very interesting relationship. He was always very respectful. And he would have me come to his college class. He taught a law school class.

JANET BISHOP: And so for the record, to reiterate, John Suthers was at that time, his position was?

MASON TVERT: He was the AG still, he was still the Attorney General.

JANET BISHOP: But taught courses as well.

MASON TVERT: He also taught courses at DU. For about six years or so, he would have me come in. He would always say, I disagree on this subject, I think there's good arguments on both sides. And it was a much classier, more respectful type of opponent. And there are two types of opponents in this world of marijuana legalization. There are folks like John Suthers. There are folks like, even to an extent you could say Hickenlooper, or Charlie Brown, even.

Where you get on TV and you debate. You argue at a forum or whatever. And then it ends and you shake hands. It's pleasant. You're friendly. You got different opinions. But you're human beings. Whereas, some of the folks who have then moved into this space-- they have Smart Colorado, the opposition campaign to us during '12, are people that act as if you are radioactive
scum. They hold their noses up. They pretend like you're not in the room when you're in the same room.

I've got som-- a friend who like said, oh you love John Suthers, ha ha ha. You know, like, in bed with the enemy. It's like, no, listen to this. This guy, like, this guy is a nice enough guy. Got a different opinion. You could go home-- it's like the coyote and the sheep dog in Looney Toons. You punch in and you punch out. But some of these people, like with Smart Colorado, they will treat you horri-- like, I've never treated people in my life. Anyway.

JANET BISHOP: And what-- we may be leaping ahead. But just for the record as well, for the oral history, what is Smart Colorado?

MASON TVERT: So, well basically the opposition campaign. This is another big difference. In 2006, there was opposition. There was a campaign for them with one of Bill Owens' staff members led the campaign. What was his name, Robert? God, I can't remember. Mc-something, McGill, or I can't remember what his name was. Anyhow, it was basically one guy.

This time around they hired CRL Associates. I say they-- I don't know who they is. For whatever reason, people came together and they hired a very high powered lobbying firm, a base endeavor called CRL, which is run by Maria Garcia Berry, who's often listed as one of the most quote unquote "powerful people in Denver." Very prominent firm.

And they generally don't do this type of work and I can only imagine that they did it because they were asked to by people like Michael Hancock or the governor, I don't know. But I mean, it's not like they had-- they work on development and real estate and zoning. This was very out of the usual for them.

But anyway, they ran the No Campaign, which was very well-funded. So I think they ended up, when it was all said and done, about $800,000. Compared to-- you look at Washington. I think the largest opposition group had, like, it was a group of pro-marijuana-- like, medical marijuana patients. People who were upset with how the initiative was written. They weren't against legalization, they just didn't like the driving provision and so on.

And I think they spent like $17,000, or something, if that? I can't remember. Something like that. But compared to $800,000 here. And then to put in perspective in California in 2010, that initiative-- the opposition group I think spent, like, $400,000. So this was a very substantial opposition. I mean this was, well-funded and being run by professionals.

Guy by the name of Roger Sherman, who himself, was a very nice guy. Was a cordial normal person, but had these true believers running around in his camp that were nuts. Tom Gorman from Rocky Mountain HIDTA. These folks so smart that their campaign was called-- I think it was-- was it called Smart Colorado?

I guess it must have been something like that. Because then they transitioned after they lost-- after we won-- they transitioned to then being a group that would work on trying to basically roll
everything back or repeal or really just get in the way of everything. And they're still-- they're called Smart Colorado.

JANET BISHOP: Are they still active?

MASON TVERT: Oh, Yeah. Yeah. Christine Tatum, so she's a former Denver Post writer. She's married to Christian Thurstone, who is a treatment-- he's in the treatment industry and does some research and does very big opponents of these efforts. I actually spoke at a Republican meeting. It was an event, like a local Republican district event or whatever. And they invited me to talk and invited someone from the opposition, it was Christine Tatum.

And she was so unbelievably over the top, like in terms of screaming at me. And just going off and being-- that I recall, folks within that Republican group, who were not even supportive, contacting me to say that they apo-- they were sorry that I had to deal with them. So, it's just kind of a contrast in the types of people that are involved in this. Those who are professionals and those who are just, mean, quite frankly. Mean. Anyhow.

JANET BISHOP: So we're at 2011 and you've-- you're just slightly toned down, but maybe not extraordinarily so. And there's higher stakes in the campaign, it sounds like much more money.

MASON TVERT: Mhm.

JANET BISHOP: And it sounds like, you had an inkling you would win. As opposed to-- as opposed to the last time around.

MASON TVERT: Yes. Yeah, we definitely-- the polling.

JANET BISHOP: Which probably changed the dynamic.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, yeah. It was very clear that this is winnable. That it was possible. Going back to 2011, so we draft this initiative. It's worth noting that we did encounter some issues with a relatively small group of some pro-marijuana legalization folks, who really just were upset by-- really for no good reasons.

And ended up-- the group that was trying to defeat us saying that we were sell-- doing things wrong, and we were so horrible. Ended up trying to sell t-shirts that touted legalization after we won. So, you can see where they're coming from. And honestly, they've wasted so much time and taken up so much emotional capacity. Just caused so much stress that I don't even want to do them-- to talk about them here because they--

JANET BISHOP: And when you speak about "they", just for the record, what you're talking about--

MASON TVERT: Generally, there is a handful of some folks who were quote unquote "pro-marijuana," so to speak, people. You just get these personalities involved and they would just have these ridiculous claims of how we were-- and they would bounce around from saying we
were doing this for one reason. And then you'd point out, well that's not-- oh, well no you're
doing it for this reason.

Just questioning motives and causing trouble and making things difficult. The type of people
that, they sit around and post comments on news articles about others, instead of actually getting
stuff done themselves. There is a type of person out there that needs to be against things, they
can't be for things.

JANET BISHOP: So these were pro-legalization of marijuana folks who, though, thought you
should be doing things--

MASON TVERT: It was basically because we did not-- yeah. Because it was not them, they did
not like it. And these are-- some of them were folks that had volunteered for us and nothing had
ever changed. Nothing that we were ever doing, ever changed. Our messaging never changed.
Our intentions, what we said we wanted, our goal. Nothing ever changed.

But they, when medical marijuana really blew up here and you started to-- the fight that occurred
in the legislature with regulation and caregivers and businesses and so on, really brought all sorts
of people into the fold that use this marijuana as this proxy for their own personal issues. It was
just such a waste.

I mean, again, I went-- and Patty Calhoun from Westword agreed to-- this group wanted to do a
debate about the marijuana initiative language. And I said-- a lot of folks within our group were
like, no, we shouldn't even bother, why are we even going to let these people tell us. And I was
like, no, we got to show up, like, I'm happy to go.

And they be talk-- one guy blew, like literally who's one of the debate-- there was like three or
four people blowing smoke in my face during this. At a public venue-- and again, Patty Calhoun
said, yeah, I'm sorry that you had to put up with that. And we said, listen, you guys wanted a
debate. We showed up. Now that we know what your debate entails, we're not going to do this
anymore.

But anyway. That was a pain. And we had an incident where one of these folks took a petition
from one of our petitioners and tore it up and threw it away, which is a crime. And we had to file
a complaint because we can't-- they took it from some poor person. Who I think was a volunteer,
he wasn't even a paid petitioner.

You can't do that. We need to do something about it. So it was annoying. Then there was a laws-
- I think one of them filed a lawsuit. So we had to go-- yeah, they were challenging the ballot
title, and this and that. It was really just so silly, but anyhow. We ignored it because we knew
that they were just going to prove to be irrelevant, and so it goes.

JANET BISHOP: So this was say, mid-2011.

MASON TVERT: Yeah.
JANET BISHOP: So you have conflict from within so to speak, and without.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, although the within is something that we just really, we knew from the beginning. It's like, we cannot let this be what dictates how we go forward. It's far more frustrating when you've got a pro-legalization persons fighting you, than when you've got an anti-legalization. Just because, you feel like there's no reason why this person should be against us. We are doing everything we can to make marijuana legal. This is ridiculous. But we just knew there was a marginal small group of people that were just making a bunch of noise. But the petition drive-- that took place. And it was quite a ride because while we did have money, it still wasn't easy. There are a lot of folks out there say, it's too easy on the ballot, it's not easy on the ballot.

JANET BISHOP: Were you doing the same drives you did previously, focused on grocery stores and such? Or did you broaden where you were going?

MASON TVERT: I mean we had more money, so it was-- the world of petitioning and collecting signatures, it's just really a crazy one. It's its own animal. We ended up falling short at first.

We took advantage, there's-- the way the process works is you submit your signatures and if-- they do a sample, and if the sample shows that based on the sample you would have more than 110% of what's needed, you're automatically on the ballot. And if they find that based on the sample you have less than 90%, then you're automatically out.

And if you're in the middle, they count them all. So they got-- we were in the middle-- so they counted them all and they came back and said that we were deficient by like, a few thousand signatures or something. Which we went and looked at them, and we probably could've gone to court and won because it was just ridiculous.

I mean like, there were people where their signature was like they-- all their information was correct, filled out, clear. But on the date, they put like September 9, 2011. And then they're like, whoops it's the tenth and scratched out and put 10. And they were not counting these. I was like, how can you not count them?

JANET BISHOP: Did they want an initial [INAUDIBLE]?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, yeah. That type of thing, yeah. We had no doubt that we probably could have challenged this. That would cost money and you only have a very brief peri-- window of time where you can carry your petition by collecting some more signatures. So we just had to go out there and we collected far more than enough.

So in the end, I mean, we ended up collecting 160 plus thousand sig-- and you need, like, 80 to get on the ballot or something? We ended up collecting-- actually, we might have been getting it close to 200,000-- it's insane. But we ended up qualifying. And it was interesting. It was definitely a little different, in terms of having support from some businesses.
Now these medical marijuana businesses are opening. There were a lot of businesses that were not supportive. And it was basically three categories: there were some that were supportive, some that were just staying neutral, and some that were actually against it.

JANET BISHOP: So I imagine dispensaries and other sorts of businesses were supportive.

MASON TVERT: Well, no. I mean, a third of them. And then a third were neutral and a third were against it.

JANET BISHOP: Within the dispensary--

MASON TVERT: Yes.

JANET BISHOP: --industry?

MASON TVERT: I'm only talking about medical marijuana businesses.

JANET BISHOP: Oh, OK. Why would a medical marijuana business be opposed?

MASON TVERT: Because they're greedy assholes, sometimes. Quite frankly, I'll just say it. Not all of them. And some of them who were have proven not to be in the end. But some of them had legitimate concerns but a lot-- I literally sat down with some people who said, well you know, this is going to hurt my business because then I'll have more competition.

Like, why would I want other businesses to be able to do this when I could make all the money? And I was, like-- I mean, I just couldn't believe that someone is even willing to say that, let alone think it. Like make money off of a marijuana store and then want to make it-- keep it illegal for people to use. But a lot of them were supportive. And we ended up having petitions and over 130 or 140 businesses, or something like that.

JANET BISHOP: There were that many in Denver?

MASON TVERT: No that's around the state. But some of them were opposed. And a lot of times it was because they just had no clue what they were talking about. So we would hear-- we'd see someone on the news. Because the media loves that story. That's a man bites dog story. Marijuana businesses against legalization.

So they would look for that type of thing. And then we'd see a comment in a news story where-- oh, I don't support this for whatever reason. And it would be something that was comple-- it would do this or that. And it's like, no it wouldn't. So Brian, typically being the attorney and the guy who works with marijuana businesses and helped create these-- would have to call them and explain them.

And most times, they would say, oh, I didn't realize that, and then they would end up being neutral or supportive. But it was a pain. There were some that had concerns that it would really
wake the sleeping giant with the federal government. It was just like, again, we would tell these people, listen, this is the best thing that's ever going to happen to you with the federa--.

We ended up being right. Because after we passed this, the federal government, the Department of Justice came out with a memo. Couldn't have been better for the existing medical marijuana industry. And they said, oh, if this wins, then they're going to come in and shut us all down. It was like, no, this'll make it harder for them to ever do that.

Because not only do most voters support medical marijuana, or whatever. Now you'll have it where voters are going to say, we don't want you to bust anyone. It's even more of a statement to the federal government to stay out.

JANET BISHOP: Fast forwarding and then we need to loop back. What was the memo that the federal government issued?

MASON TVERT: The Cole Memo, which came out in, I think it was, August of 2013. It basically directed US attorneys to not make these businesses a priority. And said that as long as long as these businesses are following-- are taking actions to address these certain areas of concern. And as long as the state is taking action to address these areas of concern. Things like preventing sales to minors. Preventing diversion out of state. Preventing illegal unregulated cultivation and sales. Taking action to prevent people from driving under the influence. They said as long as the state has things in place to address those, then they are OK.

And it also even went as far as to say that US attorneys shouldn't even take into account the size of a grow operation when deciding if it's a priority. In other words, saying just because it's absolutely massive and it has 100,000 plants, doesn't make it a priority for you. It only should be a priority if something is going badly, like if they're doing it wrong. So don't even worry about whether they have 10 plants or 1,000 plants. Just worry about if they're breaking the law or not in terms of state regulations, and so on. And that's very significant for them to say that.

JANET BISHOP: So looping back to, we're sort of in the last quarter of 2011. You've gotten more than enough signatures.

MASON TVERT: Mhm.

JANET BISHOP: This is on the ballot. What--

MASON TVERT: We actually ended up not qualifying until 2012. The petition drive initially ended, I think, at the end of 2011. Then they had their period of time to count them and came back. And I think then we ended up finally getting qualified for the ballot. I think it might have been February, early February, 2012.

JANET BISHOP: OK, so February 2012. So between February and November 2012, what was going-- you were laying the groundwork, you were doing more publicity, you were taking it easy. I doubt it. But what was going on in those months?
MASON TVERT: Well, this is where things were different in terms of having staff. So we brought in Betty Aldworth. She's now the director of Students for Sensible Drug Policy. But she had been involved in the medical marijuana industry and done some work for a medical marijuana testing facility, and had done some work for a medical marijuana business organization.

And she came on board as our Advocacy Director and was really overseeing the volunteer management and that type of stuff. So now at this point, we had-- Brian was working-- Basically the division of labor was I worked on things like the website and designing materials, designing signs, press releases, email alerts, stuff like that. Handouts.

When it came to-- Brian did the drafting, obviously a lot of legal stuff. Like outreach to businesses, outreach to other organizations and some coalition building type stuff, was really a lot more of what Brian was doing. And when we both did ever-- other things. But by and large, that was the general split in terms of us being the co-directors.

JANET BISHOP: And just to reiterate, Brian Vicente.

MASON TVERT: So I mean, it's really kind of the division you would-- of labor-- you would imagine when you know one person is a lawyer, and one person--

JANET BISHOP: Is a communications--

MASON TVERT: --Is a hooligan who chases guys in chicken outfits.

JANET BISHOP: --We call it communications expert.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, communications. Betty came on and we also had a couple other staff. And Brian had his law partner now, Christian Sederberg, who enters the fray, had just gotten involved in this. They had just started-- formed their partnership probably around 2011. And maybe 10 or 11? And so, Christian was now involved. Josh Kappel, who has since become a partner in their firm, but was still working there. Was working on the initiative quite a bit. So now we had a lot of people, a lot more people, working on this stuff.

This is another big difference between this and say 2006's is the level of support we were able to get from other organizations, and so on. Whereas previously, we really could not get much in the way of endorsements from organizations. We were now actually able to start getting some. So ACLU is one of the first organizations that got on board, whereas previously they had refused to in the past. But they got on board early. The NAACP got on board and was very helpful. Rosemary Harris Lytle.

JANET BISHOP: Speaking of the NAACP, just quickly, you allude to in a previous interview that you tried to steer clear of the social justice issue, in terms of winning over a majority of people to legalization of recreational marijuana. But I imagine, I'm just presuming, that the NAACP was supportive of you because of social justice.
MASON TVERT: Let's be clear here. We didn't avoid it.

JANET BISHOP: That may be the wrong use of words.

MASON TVERT: We previously focused our messaging and our efforts around getting the message out that marijuana is safer than alcohol. Because that's what people needed to hear to become more supportive of legalization. If people were understanding of the fact that marijuana prohibition is a racist policy that completely destroys communities of color and low income, then these laws would have been changed a long time ago.

Unfortunately, that message does not change the fact that most people are scared of marijuana. So, it previously, our campaign was focused on the message of marijuana being less harmful than alcohol. To build that level of comfortability among voters. Now, that we've laid all this ground work, that we've gotten people to become more comfortable with the idea of marijuana. Now is the time to say, well and these laws are racist and horrible. So put these together.

I mean, people would-- there's some people who would say, like, you know I appreciate that these laws are racist and horrible and I wish we could've stopped that, but marijuana is the devil. And so we need to be racist and horrible to keep the devil at bay. Well now, well we're just talking about marijuana, this is less harmful than alcohol. There's no excuse for these racist policies.

It's that evolution of-- and here's the thing. We had tried to get the ACLU on board. It's not that we didn't want their support previously. No one would support it. Colorado Progressive Coalition would not support it in 2006. They ended up getting on board in 2012. Progress Now, another progressive organization. And then there were some conservative ones, like the Republican Liberty Caucus.

Of course, there's libertarian and Green Parties, who had been supportive back in 2006. And then perhaps, I think one of the crowning achievements was that we got the official support of the Democratic Party in this state. Which was a-- we worked the system exactly how you are supposed to. Colorado is a caucus system. And in terms of how they set their-- create their platform, and so on.

We organized our supporters. We put the word out, hey if you're a Democrat or a Republican and you're willing to go caucus, please let us know. We created a resolution for people to take to their caucus. And basically just-- it was a fit-- supporting the initiative and regulating marijuana. And so we had tons of people go to their precinct caucuses. So sometimes it was one person like they were one of seven people. And sometimes it was one of 50 people.

And for most of them, it was their first time ever going to their caucus. So, go us. Civic engagement, getting new people in the mix. But we had a hundre-- I think we ended up having 100 and some odd of these pass, these precincts all over the state. And as a result, we then had it go to the county assemblies for all the Democrats.
We even got it in the Republicans, like the Democratic-- or excuse me, the Denver Republican Party considered it and ended up voting it down. But we had a number of county parties approve it, including most of the largest counties. Or several of them. And then it went to the state assembly. And to the state conference, where it was approved by the Democratic Party. So part of their platform officially supported the initiative.

JANET BISHOP: Were you surprised by that?

MASON TVERT: You know, when things work out how they're supposed to, sometimes it is surprising. It's weird like that. I think that it's just people are-- they don't trust the political parties in the system to work how it's supposed to. We just felt like at any given turn they're just going to shaft us. And we ended up-- they did, to some extent.

So we end up passing this, so that it's officially part of the platform. We support the initiative. So what do we do? We announce it, right? We put out a release. The Democratic Party of the State of Colorado has endorsed the initiative. And so, of course, media called the Democratic Party. What did they say? Actually, we haven't endorsed it because we only endorse things if it's approved by the Executive Committee. So this is not an endorsement. This is only official support.

JANET BISHOP: And the distinction?

MASON TVERT: Are you kidding me? There is no distinction. That's the whole point is there is no distinction. Endorsement, by definition, is official support. That is what it is. And it's just so unbelievable. Like the Democratic Party, despite the fact that this worked its way up through the entire system, Rank and file. All the way up. Overwhelming support.

And they can't just say when they're asked about it, yeah our members support this. They have to like parse wor-- oh, well, we didn't actually endorse it. It's just official support. And it's just like, are you kidding me? And so here's the point where we did something that we would not have done, which is kept ours mouth shut. At least publicly, I definitely contacted them and told them I was really pissed about it.

JANET BISHOP: You mean, off record?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, just to them. In the past, we probably would have delivered a thesaurus to them and said, I think you need this so that you can learn what words are synonymous with one another. Such as, officially support and endorse. You know, like, we would have probably been snarkier in the past.

Maybe a little more juvenile, you might say. As I've been known to be called. But we'd grown up a little bit. And at this point, we didn't want-- previously, like when we had talked about Hickenlooper and not wanting to upset Dem-- in the past, they're like, oh, we don't want to upset the Democrats. Don't attack Hickenlooper.
You'll upset Democrats, and then you'll lose. And we said, we don't care, we're going to lose anyway. We just want to get people's attention. Well this time, no, we don't want to upset Democrats. But quite frankly, I think Democrats would have been more upset by what the Executive Committee was doing than by what we were doing.

JANET BISHOP: This is a chicken egg question, not a chicken soup question. But do you think, at least in Colorado, this helped continue to bring out the youth vote?

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: In November? We do know that whatever side or whatever party you belong to, we do know that many, many people under 30 voted for Barack Obama, let's say. Chicken, egg. What helped? Who helped you in Colorado?

MASON TVERT: Unfortunately, there has not been a good amount of research done on the ability, or the effect of the marijuana initiative on turnout. But this is something that we've been trying to push for years. In 2006, we were telling Democrats like, listen, if this is on the ballot, you know, it's going to really help get younger people out there.

But it's never really been proven, so to speak. You could look at some numbers here and there that suggest it would or wouldn't. It's still tough to say. I mean, I think that it very likely does. The question is, to what extent? In Colorado where Barack Obama received 53% of the vote, or something like that. Does it-- did it make a difference? Probably not. If it was Florida in 2000? Maybe.

If we're talking about a hundred voters? OK, maybe there are 100 people. Because this started to be a narrative that was picked up by media over the last several years. It's been talking about marijuana and turning out voters. I don't think it's just a question of, OK it's on the ballot, so, now people who live here are going to vote who wouldn't have? That's part of it.

But it's like, how many out-of-state CU and CSU students are there? That changed their registration to Colorado because of this? That would have just sent in their mail ballot in California or Illinois, or wherever they're from. Now they live here. And would they have been motivated to change their registration to vote? Because it's a presidential election.

The thing that most people care about is voting for president. Not for down ticket stuff. So, they could vote for president wherever. They wouldn't have to change their registration. Maybe this motivated some younger people to do that.

Then there's also just the idea of civic engagement, in general. Like I said, there were a lot of people who went to their caucuses for this, who had never gone to their caucus before. So just the mere fact that even if it's not necessarily a lot more people turning out, people getting more involved in the process.

Because there are now these people who are volunteering or getting more involved because of this. Going to their caucus. Are they now more-- talking about it more with their friends and their
friends become more likely to vote? Maybe not because of marijuana, but just because it's that social thing. Who knows? And it's hard to say.

JANET BISHOP: What do you think?

MASON TVERT: I think it has an effect. Again, I think that it's a question of how close the race is. But it certainly could have an effect. I also think that to assume it will help a Democrat is not necessarily correct, either. Unless, if you are-- that's what would be so funny. I'd get reporters that say, Democrats will want this to be on the ballot because then more people will vote and will vote for them.

It's like, well if they're an asshole when it comes to marijuana, why is someone who's coming out to vote for marijuana, going to vote for them? There's two parts to this. They have to be good on this too, or at least not bad. Otherwise, if someone's only motivated to vote because of the marijuana issue? Are they really going to vote for someone who's bad on the marijuana issue? I don't care if they're Democrat or Republican. So that's the other part of this.

JANET BISHOP: I don't know if this is exact or just an urban legend, I think this is true. I believe in Colorado, more people voted for legalization of marijuana than voted for Barack Obama.

MASON TVERT: Absolutely true. Yeah, it absolutely is true. And it really shows how well we did-- how well we performed. I'm not in any way disparaging the Washington campaign. They did a great job and they did what they needed to do to win. They got 56%. We got 55%. What's really interesting is, I mean, we feel like we performed incredibly well when you look at this.

That is a state where there is a large democratic voter registration advantage in Washington, whereas in Colorado there is not. Colorado is typically 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 Democrat, unaffiliated Republican. Whereas up there, I think it's like upwards of 60% something Democrats. And we know there's a lot more support among Democrats than Republicans.

And we had all this opposition. We had $800,000 in the bank. So you had all-- the governors, the attorney general, all the law enforcement, everyone. They didn't have any of that opposition. And we got 55. And they have 56. And we got more votes than Obama. Up there, Obama beat marijuana. So we did pretty damn well down here, in terms of really getting a lot of people on board for this and overcoming all of that opposition.

JANET BISHOP: Interesting. So are we at-- we're at November 2012. We're at the night of the election.

MASON TVERT: Oh, wow. So we're getting--

JANET BISHOP: Shall we fast forward to there?

MASON TVERT: There's just so much, and we obviously only have limited time. You've got television ads. This is a whole new game, in terms of opposition and television ads.
JANET BISHOP: We have as much time as you need. So, television ads. Before, it was very grassroots, very street, very arts, creative theater.

MASON TVERT: It still was. We still did billboards. We still did do that. But then we brought in the paid media ad-- the element. We also did a billboard that was like, we had a coalition of parents that formed. It had a guy with his son, who looked like he was maybe 17 years old. And it said, please card my son, I can't keep marijuana out of his hands by myself, or something like that.

JANET BISHOP: This was your ad?

MASON TVERT: This was our ad, saying we want people who buy marijuana to be asked for proof of age. So we did do some of that type of stuff. We also did one with Pat Rober-- Pat Robertson was in the New York Times saying that he supported the initiatives in Colorado and Washington.

And he sa-- made us-- he talked about how it was like, alcohol and this and that. It was like, great. And so we actually up a billboard out in Grand Junction that was Pat Robertson's face. And it said like, Pat would vote yes on 64, will you?

JANET BISHOP: And Pat Robertson was supportive because he, too, thought alcohol was the--

MASON TVERT: Yeah, well he just didn't think that it made sense to allow alcohol use and to not allow marijuana. He talked about the criminal justice aspects of it. He ended up kind of rolling that back. But this was the New York Times. And it was a big story at the time. So we put a billboard out in Grand Junction, a more conservative area, that said Pat would vote yes for 64, will you?

JANET BISHOP: And what was the response?

MASON TVERT: You know, it got some attention, of course. So we still did use the humor and that type of thing. But I'm trying to think if there are any other good ones. But we really-- yeah. One of the big things that we did throughout this campaign, which is, I think, really-- I can't necessarily say groundbreaking, because it kind of is similar to what Obama did when he first got elected in 2008.

We actually looked at the Obama training manual for their volunteers and whatnot. One of the things that we focused on was encouraging people to talk to their friends and family about this. And it was a very-- we created a whole side campaign called Talk It Up Colorado.

JANET BISHOP: And do have-- did you create printed literature pamphlets?

MASON TVERT: So it was a website. Basically the whole volunteer aspect of our campaign, the whole grassroots side was called Talk It Up. And the whole thing was geared toward getting people to talk to their friends and family about this, about marijuana, about the initiative. And
particularly to talk up to the older people that they knew. Their parents, their grandparents, their aunts and uncles and so on.

And we took every opportunity we could. So we created this whole website, which had like a pre-written message, which you could edit it to send to anyone you wanted. Saying, listen I support this for these reasons. I just hope you'll think about it and here's why I support it. I hope that you'll give it some thought, whatever.

JANET BISHOP: Did you use a lot of social media? You've been mentioning the campaign of Barack Obama?

MASON TVERT: So, you know, this was all-- everything we did, we would really use this angle of sharing with people you know. So when we got an endorsement from Tom Tancredo in a column in the Colorado Springs Gazette, by this former Republican congressman. We would say, OK. We'd send something out to everyone, be like, share this with your Republican friends and family members. Your conservative friends who will be-- and say, look this is the reason why this concerns--

When the Democratic Party quote "officially supported" our initiative, we said, please tell your Democratic friends. When we had a mother who was a nurse, a pediatric nurse, do a column for us that appeared in the Denver Post. And we said please share this with your parents and share with people who have kids.

It's just always looking-- we only probably sent out maybe a handful of emails that asked for money during that entire campaign. Which is unprecedented, it has to be. I mean, people know now that if you're on the campaign email list, all you get are asks for money. We did not ask for money at all. All we ever asked was, please share this with your friends and family members.

And different ways-- we knew that people weren't going to do it every time. But we knew that maybe one or two times out of the 50 times, they would. Maybe they could-- they're like oh, you know what my asshole brother-in-law is a conservative who I've been arguing with about this. I'll share this with him. Like, that one time. And we would-- we'd have people give us their stories, their success stor-- like oh I start this conversation and it went well.

And we sent something out right before Thanksgiving. Talk about this during Thanksgiving. Bring it up. Oh, did you hear there's-- like, what have you been up to? When your family asks you what you've been doing. Say, oh I've actually volunteered for-- you know, bring it up. And just, every chance you could. It ended up really appearing to work.

And there was exit polling that showed that in Colorado, I believe it was 12 or 13% of voters said that they heard something positive about the initiative from a friend or family member. Whereas in Washington, it's only 5%. So clearly there was-- we did that. Whether that's what led to winning or not, I don't know.

But the whole idea was that you can only go so far with an ad. When's the last time you saw an ad or handed a flyer for and said, you know what, I'm going to change my mind because of this.
And it just doesn't happen. But it's when someone you know says, well I think that way. You really have to question why. Well my son thinks this-- feels strongly about this? Do I really think this? And they start to think about it.

And it kind of mimics the LGBT rights movement. And not in terms of the issue, but in terms of this is something that's been demonized for people's whole lives. They've been hearing negative things about marijuana their whole lives. And they need to hear something else from someone they care about. And it's the same thing that as they heard from friends and family.

It broke down those barriers where maybe they didn't necessarily come out and support it, but they weren't as opposed. And we then emulated that in Alaska and we were going to do it in other states and that's really become a big part of this.

JANET BISHOP: I'll ask you a little later towards the end of our interview about next steps. Speaking about parents who have played a role in these interviews. Any input from them or from your old college buddies?

MASON TVERT: My parents?

JANET BISHOP: Your parents. What was their--

MASON TVERT: Oh, they were fully supportive. Oh, absolutely. They were there for election night. As I said, they've been fully supportive and all that. In fact, so I mentioned the Pat Robertson billboard. This is like one of the worst stories ever, for me. So this was a digital billboard.

So, it was my mother's 60th birthday was coming up. Oh, God I just gave away my mom's age. I think she'll get over it. And I wanted to-- I remade all of the billboards that we did for the campaign, But with her. So for many reasons I prefer marijuana over alcohol.

JANET BISHOP: So you featured your mom?

MASON TVERT: And it was a picture of my mom that was like, in a similar pose as the woman that was in that. There's like, please card my son, with the guy with his son. And it was like a picture of me and my mom from when I was younger, with my mom with her arm around me. And then it was like, Pat Robertson would vote yes. And then it said Diane Tvert would vote yes. And I remade all of them. I mean, they really good and spot on.

JANET BISHOP: With the idea that you would post these?

MASON TVERT: Oh, yeah. And they were. They ran. The guy who was a supporter of ours on Grand Junction was supposed to go out and take photos of them and failed to do it. Like, slept in. Because I didn't want to have this be about me. So, it was like, OK for one hour they will show these images so that I can get some photos. He can send them to me. I'm going to frame it. Give it to my mother.
And I remember, I'll never, ever forget. I was, like, out in Virginia at a wedding and I called him. Be like everything go OK? And he's clearly just waking up. And I was like, you missed it. And he was mortified, I mean, this guy could not have felt worse about it. But anyway. My point being that, my parents are very supportive because I tried to weave them into this campaign.

JANET BISHOP: Do you have any of the prototypes of it?

MASON TVERT: Oh, yeah. Those? I still have them. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JANET BISHOP: So they could come to the archives?

MASON TVERT: Yeah. There you go. Maybe this is the appropriate time to talk about my dog, which was a big part of this for me. We've talked about my dog running around here right now. But her predecessor was a dog named Charlie who would be around the office a bit. And I used him in various-- I'd make little Facebook images.

Like my cover photo was like this picture of him looking as adorable as possible. And it said, like, "pwease" vote yes on 64, with like a P-W-E-A-S-E. And so he was popping up all over in these things. It was like, probably around October tenth or so. So, right before the election. And a guy who was staying with me, who was working-- he was a consultant who was helping us and working on our social networking media stuff, was staying with me.

I remember, we got home to my house and there-- and my dog was having a seizure and clearly had been for a while. And it was like the most traumatic experience for me. Like walking in on a friend overdosing on drugs. It was horrific. And I was like, literally, walking in to pick up my suit so I could go to participate in some debate, where me and Tom Tancredo were debating Ken Buck and someone out at Colorado Christian University.

And I walk in and it's like, oh my god. And I like-- rushing to the hospital. And I call Brian Vicente and I say, dude, I have this emergency. You got to go do this debate, and he did. He really helped out. It was horrible. And basically he survived, but he was like-- it was just a mess. And he was in the hospital for days. And this is all going on. This is when I realized the power of, like, a pet.

I had pets growing up. In hindsight, I guess I really didn't care. I sound like an asshole, but I really just must not have cared that much about them because they came and went. And I never really cared that much. This was my first dog, like my dog. And it was just terrible. So he came to the office and he stuck it out. He made it another couple months. So he made it through to see marijuana become legal in Colorado.

But it was like, I mean a huge ordeal-- he was taking medication like at least six times a day. And this is like the most busy time of my entire professional life, up to this point. So it was a-- but everyone was very helpful and people really helped me out. But yeah. It was a very intense moment to have that life issue occur right at the crux of this.
JANET BISHOP: Such things give us a sense of sometimes priorities duel but, and sometimes it's what's important.

MASON TVERT: Yeah.

JANET BISHOP: Definitely.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, without a doubt.

JANET BISHOP: So we're on election night 2012. Your mom and dad are in Colorado. Your dog probably has made it through.

MASON TVERT: He's made it, yeah.

JANET BISHOP: Are you up at at, I want to say Cervantes', but it's not.

MASON TVERT: No. This time we're at Casselman's. So, a larger place but, yeah. Basically we had, for the final week leading up to Election Day, been feeling pretty good about it. And we had been seeing polling that showed that we were doing well and it was coming out publicly too.

Lo and behold, we ended up winning. And it really-- the way in which we won and the way the polls really end up showing, was exactly, like, the whole strategy that we've been pushing. Which was really Steve Fox's whole argument the whole time. It worked. What had previously happened was like in California and in Nevada, a lot of these other states, you would see support would be above 50% for months.

And what would happen is in the final couple months leading up to election, that's when the opposition really starts pouring it on. That's when all they-- if they do ads, they come out. That's when-- and our opposition was doing ads. And that's when a lot of organizations come out, when they really try to scare the hell out of people.

It's really a two months of concentrated, scaring the hell out of everyone over marijuana. And in California in 2010, whereas they'd been polling constantly at 52, 54, or whatever. All of a sudden, the last two months you saw it drop down and they end up losing. They get 47. You see that over and over again when it comes to marijuana related initiatives.

And our whole plan was, to prevent that drop off, was to-- we wanted people, instead of, like, they're all thinking, yeah, marijuana should be legal. And regulating it makes sense, and so on and so forth. And then at the end, it's like marijuana is so horrifically, horrible. Everyone's like, whoa, maybe we're not ready. And they vote no.

We wanted them to say, well, but it's less harmful than alcohol. And that's what it appeared people did, and we held steady. And we just kept on, we stayed at 50. The line, when you look at the graphs, every other one drops off in like September, October. And ours just held steady, straight through. And we won.
And that election night was incredibly-- it was a pretty crazy ordeal. It was probably my busiest night, ever. Because I hate to say, like, I didn't enjoy it. I enjoyed it, obviously. But like people will say, oh did you party? I was like, no, I was so busy. Because I knew going into it, it's going to matter what we say. This is going to be everywhere.

And it's like, are we going to say, oh, legalize it, bla. Or like, I'm going to go get drunk. What is the message that's going to get out everywhere? And we wanted to have a say in it. And so I took every interview I could. In terms of like-- I had some colleagues who are like, oh, it's just one out of several TV interviews, don't bother, or whatever. I was like no, no, we've got to do it.

So, I stayed up all night. I did get to hang out a little bit. Steve Fox stayed up with me, actually. Which was very fun because he's always been doing this from afar. He's always been in Maryland. We're on the phone, and so on. But he was here-- it was like OK. He was in town for this so he made the rounds with me. We stayed up all night. Did an interview in front of the Capitol at 4:15 AM, live shot. And then going to all the different affiliates and doing all the morning shows.

JANET BISHOP: And did the national, was it a national, international presence?

MASON TVERT: Oh, yeah. What was interesting is the first day of sales, which was, would come on January 1, 2014, was far more international than this was. Because this wasn't quite as expected. Whereas, leading up to the first of sales was something that people could see coming. This, was surprising to most, but it was mostly national.

Just the amount-- I could not-- I would be on the phone doing an interview and I would hear the call waiting. During a five minute conversation, I'd hear it three times. And I'd hang up and there'd be three voicemails, and I'd try to call back one. And then-- nonstop, I mean, for days.

But it was exciting. It was great. It was a lot of fun. Fortunately, Betty and Brian were there and able to do some of these interviews, as well. We did a news conference the following day, out in front of-- we did it-- we chose to do it in front of the Denver City County Building, and not the Colorado State Capitol. Because that was where we started in '05. Was with an initiative in Denver.

JANET BISHOP: Coming full circle?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, full circle. And I got to do Real Time with Bill Maher. Which is still probably the biggest interview that I've done.

JANET BISHOP: And what year was--

MASON TVERT: That was the Friday after Election Day.

JANET BISHOP: Was that when you said if he gave you $1,000,000, you could do the same in California?
MASON TVERT: Which was actually planned. This was something where I was talking to Steve and he's like, you know what? You should, like, ask him for money. Because he had-- Bill Maher had constantly been talking about how he gave $1,000,000 to Obama. He was very proud of it, and rightfully so. I mean, give $1,000,000 to someone-- and he would talk about how he's putting his money where his mouth is with Barack Obama, or whatever.

And so Steve's like, you should say, like, if you and nine of your friends do that, we'll do this in California. And I don't know if he was fully serious or kidding. But he should know that I can work something in. And so I managed to get that out there and ask him that.

JANET BISHOP: And I actually was watching that show but I can't remember Bill Maher's reaction. I think he laughed.

MASON TVERT: Oh yeah he laughed. He said, you guys come to California and I'll support it. Yeah, we'll see.

JANET BISHOP: Was this also when Governor Hickenlooper made the comment about, don't break out the Cheetos and Goldfish yet?

MASON TVERT: So, you notice the pattern of stupid munchies jokes that our governor has made.

JANET BISHOP: We archivists are neutral. And particularly in oral histories.

MASON TVERT: If you notice what I consider a stupid pattern.

JANET BISHOP: We hope to talk to Governor Hickenlooper, too.

MASON TVERT: What a missed opportunity for this guy. Because remember back in 2005, with the Oreos and Doritos? Which was not him in his defense. That was his Chief of Staff. But to have something this big. I mean that's basically like, the first state that ever legalizes gay marriage, and he says, well don't go prancing down the aisles yet because we need to see what happens with the federal government. And he says, don't break out that the Cheetos and Goldfish yet, we need to see what happens.

For someone to minimize the occasion like that? The number of things that are coming to my mind that I'm holding back on saying because they would be inappropriate. What a jerk. Honestly, and I don't want-- he's done a good job since then in implementations.

So I'm not fully saying that he hasn't come around, because he's started to come around. But man, I'm not even as much upset at him, as I am for him. This opportunity. The world is looking at your state because you just did something that's been talked about for decades. And they ask you for your response, and to say something like that. Versus, this is a sign of where people are going or where-- like what people are thinking? And other states are thinking about this too and I'm surprised. To the number of things you could say, and to make a dumb joke like that.
And who knows, maybe he thought of it off the cuff or maybe he said 10 profound things and they only used that, I don't know. But as the governor of a state, one would like to think that you'd have-- he said what he wanted to say. And it was very disappointing. And again, I will give him credit for implementation and coming around a little bit in the following few years. But yeah. That was at that point in time that he said that.

JANET BISHOP: So, so I do have a couple questions from my cluster, which I've not really used much. But before I ask that, we do have 2013 and 2014. Probably 2013 was regrouping because this had passed.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, implementation.

JANET BISHOP: You were waiting until January 1, let's say. And I remember seeing the New York Times on, I believe it was actually January 2, 2014. The New York Times, the front page had a picture of the first person in Denver

MASON TVERT: Mhm.

JANET BISHOP: Buying a [INAUDIBLE] marijuana.

MASON TVERT: Who was Sean Azzariti. Who was-- appeared in one of our TV ads. So we kind of orchestrated that first sale. Who's to say what the first-- I mean, it was the second the clock hit 8:00 AM the sale was made.

JANET BISHOP: So that gentleman--

MASON TVERT: We organized that and he had appeared in a TV ad that we did. Talking about he's a veteran with PTSD. And just talking about how our law-- our medical marijuana law does not cover PTSD. And that that's ridiculous and the state had repeatedly had the chance to add PTSD and they kept on not doing it.

And so we did an ad saying, like, listen there are people out there who could benefit from this. And they're not trying to have fun. But like, this guy has PTSD and marijuana helps him. He can't use our medical marijuana law, so this will help him. And there are other people. People with sleeping issues or anxiety, or what have yous. So he was the first quote so-called "sale".

JANET BISHOP: Was he interviewed at all? Because I didn't--

MASON TVERT: Yeah. Oh, yeah. He was having a pretty wild time. He was having a good time. He was having a good time. I mean, he was all over the place. And still, even since then. I mean, for a good solid year, he’s was getting a lot of-- but that's jumping way ahead. In 2013, was-- that was implementation. And so this was where Hickenlooper created a task force, which--

JANET BISHOP: And is that--

MASON TVERT: No, no, no.
JANET BISHOP: No, that was previous to that.

MASON TVERT: Christian Sederberg represented the campaign on the task force. Basically it was a number of people from various areas of government and law enforcement in the community, and so on. Then there were also these subgroups, working groups, that were not task force members, but other people.

They came up with recommendations on a number of issues. There's all these different things to tackled. Recommendations to then give to the legislature because the legislature knew how to implement the initiative. So we gave the legislature the framework. You must create rules regarding all these things. Now they had to do that. And so basically this task force met several times and had these working groups, and then put together-- they approved all these recommendations which were then given to this special committee in the legislature.

Which then, took all that and came up with proposed starting point for the legislation to implement the law. And then it went through the whole legislature. And then the governor signed those bills into law and established this whole system. The administration, to its credit, did a good job. And the Brookings Institution did a big report. Very large report on the implementation process and concluded that it was done very successfully here. That it involved a diverse group of stakeholders from every-- yeah.

JANET BISHOP: Were you interviewed for that reporter, was any research done?

MASON TVERT: No. I mean, I'm trying to recall if I talked to him. It's John Hudak, and he's still writing about this issue and studying what's going on Colorado. I don't recall if I spoke to him at that time or not. But it was really-- it was not-- I was not heavily involved on implementation, other than when someone really proposed something stupid.

And then it was a matter of trying to get a bunch of attention to how stupid it was. For example, when John Morse, former state senator from Colorado Springs, proposed a repeal measure. Basically he said, well let's tie repealing this initiative to the tax on it. The way we wrote Amendment 64 was that the legislature-- it required the legislature to enact a tax.

And so now the legislature had to create the tax. And he proposed writing the tax question in a way that said, if this loses, Amendment 64 is repealed from the Constitution. Which is insane. And of course, our opponents are like, oh, we're all for it. They tried to say well you know, if there's no tax then there's not enough money to pay for the regulation.

And so we wouldn't-- and it's like, no because what you're doing is now-- opposition can just use this as a proxy to repeal the initiative. They'll just campaign against the tax. It won't even be people voting on it. It's ridiculous. And so I got very involved during that time.

When Denver-- the City Council proposed some ridiculous rules that would have said, it's a crime to use marijuana on your balcony or on your porch. Or at first when they said, if someone can see through your window, into your house, and see you using marijuana, you would be guilty
of a crime. So some pervert is like violating your privacy and peeping in your windows-- you would be in trouble for it. Unbelievably ridiculous.

So I did a news conference on my balcony. I happened to be on a first floor but it's a raised balcony. So I held a news conference with tons of beer and booze and I took a shot. And was like, all of this is perfectly acceptable. Yet, if I wanted to sit here with a vaporizer, or what have you, it would be the end of the world. And of course they dropped that. Again, stupid ideas would bring me into the fray. I held the toga party in front of-- I call it party. A toga news conference, if you will.

JANET BISHOP: And you dressed in a toga?

MASON TVERT: I did dress in a toga, which was funny. Steve and I were talking about it because Hickenlooper just still kept saying negative things in the news. Saying-- they'd say, like, how's this going? Or what do you think about? And all he would ever say is, I'm still worried that it's going to destroy-- it's going to be bad, it's going to be bad.

It's like dude, everything's going fine. Like, you don't seem to have those concerns about alcohol. Why is it that you're so concerned about this, but you've never expressed any concern, whatsoever, about teens using alcohol. Which is a far bigger problem. And it was just ridiculous. And so then the governor came out-- they put out a release announcing that they were fitting the governor's mansion with beer taps. And it would be the first.

It's like, and it'll be the first governor's mansion-- governor's residence in the country to have beer on tap. And it was like, they're proud of this. They're announcing this to the country. Whereas he had been saying, oh, I don't know. It's going to hurt Colorado's image if we have legal marijuana.

He's announcing that they're having free flowing alcohol in the governor's. So I was like, what are they doing? Turning it into a frat house? And so, thus the idea of a toga party. And so, Steve had suggested it-- it was like, oh you should like, announce it's a toga party and we'll call it Delta House or whatever. Like out of--


MASON TVERT: Animal House. We have a sign that said, Governor's Mansion-- Colorado Governor's Mansion with a big X through it. It said, Delta House in scribbled writing. He's like, you should do-- and I was like, OK. And then I remember calling him and saying-- I'm like running around trying to get this together.

Like I've got a sheet, but you know, the pins-- I'm trying to get-- and he's like, are you actually putting on the toga? He's like, I was just, saying you should just call it that. I was like, no, if we're going to call it the toga party, I'm not going to be the guy that shows up to the toga party wearing jeans. That's not the party.

JANET BISHOP: Did you hold it in front of the governor's house?
MASON TVERT: Oh, yeah. And it was funny. Security rolled up and they thought it was great. They're like, oh we know what you're doing. We just wanted to make sure everything's OK. They thought it was funny as hell. The cops were there. It was just fun. And we had done this once before, when Governor Ritter, his son had held some keg parties in the governor's mansion.

And like these photos had come out of his son doing keg stands. They were playing around with the big flags and whatnot. It was a bunch of high school or college kids getting drunk. But like, Ritter, when asked about it, was like, well, you know, young people will be young people. Kind of ho-hum.

It was like, this guy wants it to be a crime for adults to sit in their houses and use marijuana. He says we can't make it legal because of kids. And his kids are literally holding these wild drunken parties, in the governor's mansion, and he doesn't care. So we did a keg party, where we had a big keg out in front of his office. Or in front of the governor's mansion. It was kind of funny because that was, like, eight years earlier. So it was like, again, revisiting the governor's mansion.

JANET BISHOP: And this was all during 2013?

MASON TVERT: This was like '13 and '14. And now-- Governor Hickenlooper's now started to make some positive comments. Noting that things have not gone wrong. And they've been going well. And it's not as difficult as they thought it would be. That it's actually-- a lot of the predictions that were made about how horrible it would be have not proven to be true. And then his staff, in particular. He's now got an office that focuses on this issue and they've done a good job.

JANET BISHOP: And what is the name of his-- he has a director of-

MASON TVERT: Andrew Freedman is the Director of Marijuana Policy, I think.

JANET BISHOP: Which is a very interesting title to have. And I don't think all states have such a person as part of the governor's office.

MASON TVERT: But they have liquor control boards. It's like, what's a liquor-- like, I'm a member of the liquor control board. So, yeah. But everything's gone quite well.

JANET BISHOP: So, I think that leads to a few questions I have.

MASON TVERT: Sure.

JANET BISHOP: Getting into reflection a little bit. My first question is you've sai-- you've alluded to it throughout the whole interview. But if you have anything more to say, or specifically to say, about how your involvement with the legalization of marijuana impacted you and what do you hope that others could learn from you? In a more personal way-- how has it personally impacted you? How can others learn from you, or not?
MASON TVERT: I mean, it's just you grow up being told that you can do anything. Or at least-- I shouldn't say that. I was fortunate enough to grow being told I could do anything. I think that a lot of kids are, but a lot who aren't. But being told you can go and do whatever you want to do.

Go to school then find something-- and it's like, I think that I had that sense when I was young and I had that sense probably up until even when I was little. But then, like, once you get into college you start to think, OK am I going to go and be an accountant, or am I going to go--? It becomes more in this boxed in, like, which of these very specific careers am I going to work?

I definitely found something that was outside of the box. I mean, I definitely managed to do what I wanted to do and make it work. I used the education I was provided and I used what I was going to do what I was always told I'd be able to do. And so that's very fulfilling, in terms of-- yeah, I was able. I look back where, like, oh, I almost graduated from school and went to work in a city government.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. It could have been great and it could have been--. This seemed crazy back then, at that time. And it seemed like it was short-term. Like, how could I keep doing this? Or could this be sustainable? Or is this actually going to do anything? And to have it do something to sustain. That's very empowering.

JANET BISHOP: And I said I would ask you this again. This is a good time. Is there anything you know now, and after the passage of Amendment 64, that you wish you had knew-- that you knew when you started? Any other things? Or any-- what were the greatest rewards or challenges?

MASON TVERT: Nothing immediately comes to mind. Yeah, I don't know. I guess--

JANET BISHOP: Maybe because it seems like you were doing what you wanted to do, and often pleasantly surprised, or, if things went well, but not-- but challenged in a good way when things did not go well for you.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, you know--

JANET BISHOP: I'm putting words in your mouth, but--

MASON TVERT: No, no, no, but that is true. I mean, yeah. And that was something that, you know, as I've gone and spoken to-- I speak to college students and go and talk to college groups, student activists that are trying to do stuff in their communities and whatnot. And one of the things that I often would tell them is that they need to create real reasonable objectives, reasonable goals. If your goal as a college organization with, 20 members, and rotating members as kids are graduating and no real-- is to legalize marijuana, you're going to be really disappointed in your lack of progress.

But if your goal is to build public support by getting news coverage of these events, getting this stuff out there. And I guess what I'm saying is we set these reasonable goals. When we set out to
do this stuff at college campuses, and in Denver, at first, and so on, we go into it saying, we're going to win, otherwise we lost.

We went into it saying, we're going to win, and if we win, that's great. It was about the process. It wasn't just about the outcome of an election. Because losing can make it very difficult to keep going. And so if we said, oh, the only thing that matters is winning in 2006, and we're going to be devastated if we don't win, then it would have really sucked.

The whole time it was like, we know we're probably going to lose but we're going to do this in a way that will lead to a future win. So that even when we lost, it was like we won. We did everything we wanted to do. We spent $250,000. We probably had a couple million dollars’ worth of earned media coverage, had we paid for it all. We got some endorsements that we never knew were out there, that now we'll be able to go back to. We now have a list of a couple thousand supporters who, starting, we had like 200, a year earlier.

All of a sudden, we set these very reasonable objectives. And so, when you can continually accomplish your objectives, it's a lot easier to keep going. People like to win and be positively reinforced, then try the next thing, versus losing and it's like, now you lost. So, yeah, looking back, I don't know if there's, I mean, yeah.

JANET BISHOP: So, and then, the last three questions are in my cluster called the legacy of Amendment 64 on the state in society being an issue here. You've alluded to some of this, but what is the significance of Colorado being the first state in the country to legalize the recreational use of marijuana? And were there unique elements in this state that made your advocacy successful? It seems almost like you were a unique element to the state, but were there unique elements within our state?

MASON TVERT: I mean, I think that the strategy that we used in terms of the safer-- the so-called safer strategy was unique to Colorado. It was not being done anywhere else and it-- I would say, by any objective standard, really worked.

JANET BISHOP: Because going back to the very tragic deaths of the two students.

MASON TVERT: And so you could say that because of those incidents, and because of Colorado's history with alcohol, and because of the role it played with that, we chose to start this new effort in Colorado. As I had mentioned, we had also considered Wisconsin, which was another state where there wasn't a whole lot of serious legalization-funded work taking place at that time. It was really focused on medical and not really moving forward. And there was a lot of campus drinking. It could've been Wisconsin.

But the question is, would the same thing have played out? There aren't local ballot initiatives in Wisconsin, so we couldn't have done a Denver initiative. It's just entirely different. But everything, yeah, played out exactly as it was supposed to here.

But yeah, you know, you could talk about a libertarian streak in Colorado, or what have you. But yeah, I think that we set out to change the public's attitude and their perception of marijuana and
what it means to be a marijuana consumer. We wanted people to just recognize that it's really, an adult uses marijuana, most times, for the same reasons that they would drink. And we wanted people to just think of it that way. They're not doing something inherently wrong.

You don't think of someone drinking, most people don't think, that person's bad because they're drinking. If they do something bad while they're drinking, OK. That's one thing, but, just inherently by drinking, it's not doing something wrong. And we want people to think of marijuana that way, and I think that we've gotten to a point where that largely is the case. And the prediction was, if we reach that point, will we be able to make marijuana legal? And yes.

JANET BISHOP: And so that leads to the question, and you may have just answered it. What, in your opinion, has been the most significant impact of the legalization of recreational marijuana, either culturally, socially, or economically? A big question, but, for you.

MASON TVERT: What has been the biggest impact?

JANET BISHOP: And most significant.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, I mean I think it's just-- this is an issue that really reaches into all sorts of other areas, and it's something that's been viewed as taboo or bad or negative for so long. And for it to change, to come around, it's a significant indicator of progress in society.

I mean, again, I'm not equating marijuana legalization to civil rights and the civil rights movement, in terms of the issues. But in terms of the social movement, in terms of people saying, wow our society is shifting the way it thinks. Quite literally, old people are dying and younger people are growing up and they have different views on this subject.

And so I think that marijuana is one of those things where it's an eye-opener regarding the change our society's going through. It's not just a matter of any particular issue here or there, but wow, clearly people are different now than they used to be. When it comes to gay marriage, clearly most people are different now than they used to be. When it comes to racial issues, not entirely different now than it used to be, but the laws are. I mean there's still going to be a lot of people who hate marijuana and try to roll back these laws, and it'll be the same.

But it's a clear indicator that things are moving in a different direction. And yeah. And it's also, of course, regarding a substance that is-- many consume because they believe that it is-- it provides a consciousness of the world. And to have a movement taking place around a particular substance that is widely considered to be something that expands someone's consciousness or builds empathy, or whatever. That, in and of itself, is incredibly important as well.

Yeah so, I just think it's a sign of the times. And it's also, for me, being a communications person, I think it's very much an indicator of how the media really ends up playing a role in our society. Marijuana became illegal because it was in the news, and it was sensationalistic stories about how horribly harmful it was. And because of all these news articles and headlines and so on, it became illegal.
And now, it's like, when did we really start to see support grow? It was medical marijuana in the mid '90s. And what happened? The internet. That was right around the time when people started to have wide, mainstream access to the internet, in the mid '90s, late '90s. And it was like, all of a sudden.

Previously, people weren't hearing a lot of positive things about marijuana. They were only hearing about people getting busted, and about its harms, and horrible and this and that. All of the sudden, there was a debate taking place in one particular place in California, particularly, about medical marijuana. People started hearing about it in a different way, and that could get out.

People on the other side of the country could hear about it. And because of that, and because of how much more information is accessible now, it's making marijuana legal again, because people are now being exposed to the stories about marijuana that they never could be before. So just the role that it's all played in terms of how the news covers this stuff, how word of mouth-- the evolution of how our country has treated marijuana really is a good example when it comes to how the media has evolved.

JANET BISHOP: And so, lastly, so what do you think is the most important-- what do you think is most important for marijuana legislation? It's getting late in the afternoon. In the next 10 years what do you see happening?

MASON TVERT: Well, my biggest concern, when after we passed this, and then when the first day of sales was coming around, one of the number one questions I would get on the first day of sales and then in the months that follow, it's like, what are your biggest concerns? Are you worried that the system's not going to work? Are you worried about these businesses not following the rules? Are you worried about the federal government coming and shutting it down? And all I ever said was, I am worried about the optics. I am not worried about the reality.

JANET BISHOP: The optics, OK.

MASON TVERT: The reality's fine. We have stores all over the state selling alcohol. It's doable. For the last several years we've had stores selling marijuana, and it's not been a problem. So I'm not worried about the world ending or the federal government coming in or anything like the system not working. I'm confident all that will be fine, overall. I'm worried that it will be perceived as not working.

And that's been the goal. Our opponents, the people who want to keep marijuana illegal in this country, their push was always, we cannot possibly allow this to be legal otherwise it will be mayhem. So they, by nature, have to shift now to saying-- to proving that it's mayhem now that it's happened. They can't let it get by and not be mayhem because they said it would be mayhem.

So they're doing everything they can to make it seem like this is not working. And they're going to exaggerate, they're going to take things out of context. Big sensationalistic stuff about how there's an epidemic of kids who are accidentally consuming marijuana and resulting in calls to poison control. It's an epidemic. It's out of control.
Colorado made a mistake, we have to roll it back, we couldn't possibly have this. There were 140-something. Which, I'm not minimizing, that's a problem, but there were 1,400 involving cosmetics. There are more than 700 with vitamins.

JANET BISHOP: Meaning, meaning what?

MASON TVERT: Meaning that they try to make it sound like there's this massive new problem of kids who are getting into marijuana, and then, having to call poi--

JANET BISHOP: You mean ingesting?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, and having to call poison control. And they make it sound like, as a result of this law passing, look at how big of a problem it is. And it's like, well, when you look at it in context of everything else, number one being that marijuana is going to be around whether it's legal or not, so it can still happen either way. Number two being that parents are far more likely to take their kid-- call poison control because they're less worried about getting their kids taken away from them or getting in trouble. But most importantly, that this is far less of a problem than so many other major-- Like I said, something like it's 1,400 or 1,700 kids accidentally ingesting cosmetics. We don't ban cosmetics because of that. We try to make it a point to not leave cosmetics in the reach of children.

They say, oh look at traffic accidents have blah blah blah. They just do everything they can to make it sound like things are going wrong here, but they're not. If you live here, you generally recognize that nothing has really changed, other than if you want to go buy marijuana you can. Graduation rates in high schools are up. Dropout rates are down over the last five years.

Marijuana sales were taking place before. They're taking place now. It's just that they're taking place inside of stores instead of God knows where. People who were using marijuana and driving faced criminal penalties before, they face them now. It was illegal for kids before, it's illegal now.

That's my concern. That's the thing that I'm paying most attention to because it's the perception of how things go. Look at all the presidential candidates. You've got Hillary Clinton. I want to see what happens in Colorado and Washington. I'm not taking a position.

So, if it's perceived that it's going well here, or if it's perceived that it's going bad, even if it's going perfectly well. Even if it by every objective measure life is better in Colorado now than it was before, even if you can prove that it's better because of this law, if it looks like it's worse or they convince someone that it's worse, it doesn't matter.

JANET BISHOP: Speaking of presidential elections, do you give thought to, and nobody has a crystal ball, but, so far, the federal government, as you say, has not swooped in, shall we say? And there is that tension between what's legal at the state level versus the federal level. Do you stay up at night, if at all, thinking about what might happen with a new election or a new president?
MASON TVERT: No. I mean we certainly follow it. It'll be important. I wouldn't say it's like not that it doesn't matter. It matters.

No one's going to be coming into office and making this their big priority and the first thing they're going out on a limb on. Everyone can see a very distinct, upward positive trend in support for making marijuana legal. So that'd be like someone getting elected into office and saying, OK one of the first things I want to do is try to figure out how we can ban gay marriage again.

Are there going to be some people who would cheer that? Of course. But overall, people would say, that's probably not the best issue to try to go after now that you've just got elected president. Number one, marijuana's not a big priority for someone who's the president. For better or worse, it's not a priority. So ObamaCare, all these other issues, foreign policy stuff, all that stuff will be a much bigger deal.

But even in the worst case scenario, let's say Chris Christie gets elected, which ain't gonna happen. But if he did, he's the one with the worst position. And he says that he would enforce federal laws. What does that even mean? That means that at the most, what they could do is try to shut down the system of regulation here. They cannot make marijuana-- they can't enforce marijuana laws when it comes to adult possession.

The federal government's said this for decades. That they cannot punish people for possessing small amounts, growing small amounts, they can only focus on the big operations and so on. So the state does not have to keep marijuana illegal. If the federal government did everything in its power to stop what's going on in Colorado, that means that they could try to shut down the stores and the regulation. It would still be legal for adults to possess.

The DA isn't patrolling the streets. They're not shuffling hundreds of people into federal court every day for possessing a gram of marijuana. So you could still grow it, you could still possess it, and now the federal government is preventing our state from controlling it? They're preventing police from making sure it's being done right? They're preventing it from being labeled?

All these things, they would look terrible. There's just no political will for that. And even if they did go so far as to do all of that, that would be the catastrophe that produces, speeds change up. That would be the biggest kick in the pants to Congress to get its act together and change federal law. You know?

JANET BISHOP: Why?

MASON TVERT: Because all of the sudden, the latest Gallup poll showed there's 58% support for making marijuana legal nationwide. So let's say whether it's Pew, which is at 55%, Gallup 58%, what have you. Every poll that gets done, including both those, show that anywhere from 60% to 75% of people think that the federal government should not interfere in state marijuana laws.

The bill in Congress that has the most support is the Rohrabacher Respect State Marijuana Laws, the marijuana bill that has the most support is the one that would leave it to states. There's a
notion that the federal government should not be using its resources to dictate state marijuana laws, should not be coming in and doing this.

So there's already, without the administration trying to shut down everything, hanging its hat on federal law, there's already a sentiment that we need to get the federal government out of marijuana. So by doing that, there would be so many members of Congress that would be inspired to take a more strong position in support of giving this right to states. It would just be a catalyst for, OK, well this isn't going to fly. By that time, you've now got four states where marijuana is legal and regulated. By then, in that election we're likely to see, at same time that president's elected, another four or five states pass these laws.

JANET BISHOP: Who is up to bat?

MASON TVERT: Arizona, California, Maine, Massachusetts, and Nevada.

JANET BISHOP: Have you been asked, since you are Arizonan, to--

MASON TVERT: I'm working on all of those.

JANET BISHOP: You're working on all of them?

MASON TVERT: Yeah, so we're supporting those campaigns. So that's what I do all day, is work on all of those. And then you've also got Vermont and Rhode Island, which very well could pass these laws through their legislatures this coming year. I'm just not worried about a president trying to-- cause even in the worst-case scenario, that'll probably piss off so many people that it will bring about federal change faster.

JANET BISHOP: Mason, it's been amazing. Really a great session of interviews. Is there anything I've left off, or anything you want to add?

MASON TVERT: Oh. No, I would just say that, it's really been fascinating, mostly because of just how things have played out exactly as we'd hoped. And I mean that in terms of the tactics and the strategy, but also just the reality of, we knew that if people would stop and think about this, and if the laws changed that the world wouldn't end, and that it would actually be a positive step forward.

Just everything has really worked out and that's somewhat rare. But yeah, I mean it's just crazy to think of all the what ifs. What if those two college students had not died in Colorado and gotten a ton of attention to binge drinking on college campuses, which therefore, we did not decide to start this project here? Would Colorado still have done this? Maybe. Very possibly.

I certainly think that the change was inevitable, but in terms of how it happened, there are so many things that occurred that fell into place, that worked out. The fact that Brian Vicente and I co-directed this campaign that, when I finished undergraduate school and he finished law school and we both had basically a short-term, first marijuana gig ever, it happened to be in the same place at the same time. And then I moved to-- happened to come to where he was and--
JANET BISHOP: This being at home in Colorado? Yeah.

MASON TVERT: Yeah, in Colorado. I went to MPP. The Marijuana Policy Project hired me to go to Arizona for this brief period of time because they noticed I was from there. And then Brian was doing that and happened to be from Colorado and then when we decided, OK we're going to start SAFER, where are we going to do it? Oh there had happened to be these alcohol overdose deaths in Colorado. Let's go there and Brian happened to be from here. It's just like, all of these things, it's just kind of crazy.

JANET BISHOP: And two last questions. One is, you're working with states, so on a national level. Do you consult at all with people in other countries who are looking at this model?

MASON TVERT: Not really. MMP is focused exclusively on the US. So you know, I certainly know people, I meet people at conferences. I know people doing work elsewhere. And Canada, I've been to Canada and talked to, helped some folks with some work that they've done in Canada, which is on its way, it seems toward following what's going on here now, with their recent election.

JANET BISHOP: And because you're a young one, fast forward 5-10 years, do you even project, like a decade forward, where would you be? Where's your ideal?

MASON TVERT: I never, I don't, where will I be? I have no clue.

JANET BISHOP: Wither Mason.

MASON TVERT: With regard to issue, I never really like to go too far, too much further than maybe a couple, few years. But yeah, I think that 2016's going to be a very big year and based on what occurs on election day, both in terms of what happens in all these states that are voting on this, as well as, who gets elected president. Not because I think that they would allow this or stop it, but would they facilitate it and make it easier or will they maintain-- Obama has made it easier. We've seen actions taken by the administration to allow this to happen that could've not been taken. Would it have still happened? Would everything still be going on? Yes. But it wouldn't have been as smooth. So they could make it easier or harder, so that'll be, yeah--

JANET BISHOP: Thank you again, this has been great. And again, it is October 23, 2015. We're wrapping up our three-part interview with Mason Tvert, and Mason has given us some wonderful archival materials for our text-based Amendment 64 collection as well. Thanks again.

MASON TVERT: Thank you.

JANET BISHOP: Take care.