

Speaker 1 ([00:00:09](#)):

[inaudible]

Speaker 2 ([00:00:09](#)):

Welcome to the higher enlightenment podcast brought to you by higher yields cannabis consulting,

Speaker 1 ([00:00:17](#)):

Or 15 years of boom is produced. That is so overwhelming. So forceful in its impact, it becomes [inaudible]

Speaker 2 ([00:00:48](#)):

Hello and welcome to the higher enlightenment podcast brought to you by higher yields cannabis consulting, your seed to scale cannabis business solutions team, and the creators of the innovative cannabis consulting business solutions system, higher enlightenment. My name is Adam and I am part of the creative design team here at higher yields. And I'm here to introduce and get a little background on the higher enlightenment podcast. So what are these podcasts about? The higher enlightenment podcast was created to discuss everything cannabis, whether it be cannabis, industry news, cannabis, industry, insider insights, advice, and tips to establish your own successful cannabis business and cannabis pop culture. In general, we'll also be discussing cannabis news from around the globe. Today's episode features Eric range from minorities, for medical marijuana and higher yield. We'll be discussing minorities and social equity in the cannabis industry. The second half of the episode features a round table discussion Mercedes woods, Keith Shrigley, ADI and John Bowlby says all from higher yields.

Speaker 1 ([00:02:06](#)):

I appreciate your choosing our theater and to make this experience more enjoyable for everyone. We hope you'll refrain from talking during the show. Thank you,

Speaker 2 ([00:02:21](#)):

Eric. What do you do and how did you get there?

Speaker 3 ([00:02:25](#)):

That's a great question. Um, you know, most people always ask, well, you know, what is it that you do? And I find it easier to answer the question of what is it I don't do, uh, because I do a lot and, you know, I stay pretty busy, but, uh, I started in the space back in 2015, uh, with my art company art for 20, using that as an education platform, uh, really, and truly to challenge the stereotypes about cannabis users using fine art as a backdrop. Um, you know, and as I was developing that company and promoting our show, I recognize that minorities weren't a part of the, uh, the larger landscape in cannabis. And, uh, you know, initially it wasn't something that I was heavily focused on. Um, but you know, very quickly it became something that, uh, I recognize I had, um, both a platform to do it as well as, uh, you know, personally an obligation, uh, to do it.

Speaker 3 ([00:03:23](#)):

And so it took for, um, if I say it, there had to be one turning point for me. Uh, it was at an MJ biz conference that was in Orlando, Florida. Uh, this was going on the second year of me, uh, promoting our annual art show. And, uh, so I attended the conference and as I was leaving out one day, um, you know,

someone came up to me and he happened to be a keynote speaker. He was a doctor, uh, presenting at the conference, know about medical cannabis. And, uh, he came up to me and he put his hand on my shoulder and he was like a black guy with dreads. Where are the rest of you guys at, uh, and you know, it, he meant very well by it. And, you know, we had a good little laugh about it and it gained one of my biggest supporters made all kinds of introductions for me and so on.

Speaker 3 ([00:04:10](#)):

Um, but his point was that, uh, minority communities have been decimated because of the war on drugs, why weren't more of us, uh, seeking to participate in this industry. And so, uh, it was something that I hadn't put a whole lot of thought to at the time. Um, I didn't know that, you know, minorities were being arrested at higher rates and, um, you know, I, I certainly wanted to see my more minorities participate. Um, but it wasn't the mission of the art company. You know, we, we had a different focus and so, um, we decided to use the platform to create an event called the black market brunch. Uh, and we brought in, uh, growers from Oregon. We brought in attorneys, folks who really, uh, th the folks who wrote Florida's, uh, amendment to, uh, to expand our medical marijuana program. Uh, we just brought it in as many people as we could, and we marketed, uh, to minority communities, minority professionals, uh, and we wanted to bring them in, allow them to, um, learn about what was happening in our state and around the country, uh, in hopes that somebody would hear something, uh, that would lead to them getting into the industry.

Speaker 3 ([00:05:22](#)):

So that's how I kinda got started, uh, in this space. And as I was promoting that black market brunch, uh, on Facebook, someone said, Hey, you should really connect with this group minorities for medical marijuana. Uh, they're based in Florida as well. And you guys seem to have similar goals. Uh, and so that was when I connected with Roz McCarthy, the founder of minorities for medical marijuana, and, uh, you know, we, we hooked up and, you know, started collaborating. And she, uh, she actually, uh, you know, invited me to be the board chair for the organization. And so, uh, and I had invited her to, uh, what was at the time, her first speaking engagement in the cannabis space, uh, cannabis space was at the black market brunch, uh, during the art for 20, uh, exhibition. So, uh, that's how I got started. Just, uh, you know, focusing on diversity issues in the space, focusing on, uh, creating opportunities for those individuals and communities that had a really bore the brunt of the war on drugs. And so from there, you know, it has been a lot of, uh, you know, uh, valleys and peaks that we've gone through. Uh, but you know, that's how it all began. And that's what leads us to where we are today.

Speaker 4 ([00:06:35](#)):

Great. Um, how can people help minorities for medical marijuana?

Speaker 3 ([00:06:41](#)):

Um, you don't get involved? Uh, the cannabis industry is, is, is the industry that I think was born out of advocacy. Uh, so you know, some of the earliest folks who were able to obtain licenses and so on, uh, out in California under their, uh, initial medical program, uh, those were some of the early advocates who were advocating the medicinal benefits of the plant. And, uh, you know, so every step that we've taken as an industry since then has really been brought on because of strong advocacy, uh, folks on the ground, uh, and at the grassroots, uh, in many different States helping to move the needle forward. And so as an organization, that's what we're doing. You know, we're, we're fighting to help change the laws

to, uh, create spaces for minorities. Uh, we're fighting to educate, uh, minorities in the community, uh, educate, you know, educating and a, both on the medicinal benefits, as well as the economic benefits.

Speaker 3 ([00:07:36](#)):

So, uh, you know, getting involved with that organization, uh, donating, you can go to our website and donate, of course, uh, you can become a member. You know, we have, I think one of the cheapest, uh, you know, memberships out there for associations a hundred dollars a year, um, really, and truly helps you, uh, as a professional, if you're interested in getting in the industry, learning a little bit more about that, and kind of cutting through some of the red tape of the education. Um, but you know, more importantly, it goes to help us do the work that we do, uh, you know, throughout the community. So those are a couple of ways. And then if you are a cannabis business already in the space, we do have corporate partnerships as well, uh, that go a little bit deeper and really, truly helped to, uh, support our, our annual budget and to help us to, you know, achieve longterm sustainability as an organization. Um, you know, because we believe, uh, 15, 20 years from now, uh, someone's going to need to be at the table fighting on behalf of, uh, you know, diversity and, and, uh, the folks who, you know, come from communities that really, um, you know, took it on the head, if you will, from the war on drugs.

Speaker 4 ([00:08:48](#)):

Um, where, where is that website? Could you give us the address?

Speaker 3 ([00:08:52](#)):

Absolutely. Website is, uh, M the four M M united.org. So Infor, M M united.org. Uh, and of course you can find this on all of the social media platforms, uh, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and, you know, just a simple Google search of minorities for medical marijuana, uh, or even emperor mm. Uh, in those platforms, you should be able to find us.

Speaker 4 ([00:09:18](#)):

Okay. Could you explain a diversity matters memberships? Uh, can anyone join? Are there certain criteria that,

Speaker 3 ([00:09:26](#)):

Yeah, we are, we are, you know, we, we, we strive to be a diverse organization. Um, you know, we certainly are very clear about, um, as an organization having initiatives and, uh, a, you know, a priority on, uh, black and Brown communities. Um, but you know, we, we have current members, uh, part of our board, part of our leadership team who are not black, uh, you know, at all. Uh, so, you know, we don't restrict membership in that way. Um, you know, have anyone can join the organization and become a member. Um, and certainly if you are specifically interested in some of my, you know, our programs that target, uh, you know, the minority community and minority entrepreneurs and so on, um, you know, we'd love to be able to speak with you and talk, you know, how we can work together and build off of, you know, synergies to, to really support our programs.

Speaker 4 ([00:10:22](#)):

Okay. Um, you also have some national programs. Could you explain some of them? Yes.

Speaker 3 ([00:10:29](#)):

So we, we, you know, as an organization, we believe in approaching the subject of cannabis from a holistic standpoint, you know, we started as an organization that focused primarily on the medical marijuana, uh, industries part, because we recognize that, uh, nationally, uh, there are healthcare disparities in, in black and Brown communities. Um, and I think that's being highlighted during this COVID-19 crisis. Um, but we, you know, being at the table for those discussions, uh, folks oftentimes will call on us to weigh in, on other, other discussions as it pertains to, um, you know, recreational adult use as it pertains to him. And so, uh, we've expanded our, um, programming to include other subject areas. Um, but you know, we focus, excuse me. Uh, we have programs like our, uh, uh, uh, health as well, uh, webinars where we do a monthly webinar. Uh, we have a medical director, uh, Dr. Joseph risotto, our associate medical director, Dr. Jerome Newton, um, and our director of clinical research, uh, Dr. Monica Tane, uh, the three of them get together on a monthly basis. And they do a webinar, you know, designed specifically for healthcare professionals. And again, while we market and we,

Speaker 5 ([00:11:54](#)):

We encourage, uh, black and Brown physicians to, you know, come and learn more about the plant and how, um, everything from how to dose it, um, or how to infuse it into your practice. Um, those are, excuse me, those are the focus of the discussion that they have, but then we also have programs like our, so the land, um, and urban farmer, uh, herb environment, uh, we, we pretty much are focusing on black and Brown farmers who want to get into the hemp industry. So, you know, we have for the last probably year and a half, two years held a monthly webinar, uh, just on the topic of hemp. And we brought in hemp growers and processors, uh, hemp brokers, uh, product manufacturers, really just kind of explaining every aspect of the hemp industry to, um, you know, black and Brown farmers and, and folks who wouldn't get in on the hemp side so that they can understand where the access points are, where some of the challenges are, uh, and how they can prepare themselves.

Speaker 5 ([00:13:02](#)):

So, um, our programming really, and truly is all about kind of helping folks take that first step, uh, and, and plant a firm foundation for themselves. Um, we have our cannabis business licensing bootcamp, uh, where we've helped, uh, individuals in Missouri, Illinois, and even, uh, we got one coming up this month, uh, for Massachusetts where we're helping folks, uh, really understand the application process for, uh, you know, getting a license, whether it be for a dispensary, a craft grow, uh, or as it pertains to Massachusetts, uh, their social equity, transportation license. Uh, so we walk folks through everything. Uh, we bring in, um, you know, we bring in attorneys, we bring in accountants, we bring in, uh, folks who understand the business model, um, and just helping, you know, kind of cut through some of the red tape. And again, you, you won't walk away from there, you know, having a complete, you know, business plan, but it is a working type, uh, boot camp, uh, to where you walk away from there, having really answered some of the questions that you need to answer, uh, to determine if it's worth going after a license or whether you maybe need to pivot and partner with someone, uh, or whether you have all the pieces you need.

Speaker 5 ([00:14:25](#)):

So, um, yeah, those are some of our programs, but we've also done things like community farms. Uh, again, we work with a lot of legislators around the country and we like to go into their districts, uh, after sessions and educate their districts about, you know, how to obtain medical cannabis, uh, legally, uh, or recreational how to have safe access, uh, essentially. Um, so know, again, we, we approach it from a holistic standpoint. Uh, we're working on doing some things where research, uh, focused very clearly on,

uh, you know, health conditions and diseases that we see higher, you know, more highly prevalent in communities of color. So, uh, that, that's kind of like our programming in a nutshell.

Speaker 6 ([00:15:12](#)):

Sounds great. You have a veterans program too.

Speaker 5 ([00:15:17](#)):

Um, we're very fortunate to have, I think, two of the biggest, uh, veteran rock stars in the country, uh, as a part of our, uh, you know, our organization, Jose Bellin, uh, is a as a veteran, he is, uh, you know, become pretty popular now. Uh, he's a part of the, uh, federal lawsuit, um, to deschedule cannabis, uh, with Marvin Washington and cannabis culturalists association. Um, so he he's been going around now. He sits on our board, uh, any, uh, you know, really, and truly helps us to understand what the needs of the veteran community are and how we can better serve them. We also have Leo Bridgewater, who's a rockstar in New Jersey and even outside of the state. Um, you know, in fact there are PTs bill when they added PTSD to the, uh, conditions there, he was the primary person behind it. In fact, I believe he was named in the actual bill, um, you know, for that. And so he serves as our national director of veteran outreach. Uh, and every month he does a, um, like a moment of silence, if you will, uh, you know, for the 22 veterans who we lose every day to veteran suicide and so on. So excuse me, um, you know, we, we, you know, see my veterans as minorities. We know there are certainly minority, uh, demographics, uh, represented in, in the veteran community. And so we look to serve them as best we can as well.

Speaker 6 ([00:16:47](#)):

That's great. Um, could you explain a little bit more about the, uh, learning series webinars that you have and what exactly that is and how people,

Speaker 5 ([00:17:00](#)):

No, those are primarily for our, uh, membership. Um, although, you know, from time to time, we have opened those up to the general public. Um, but we cover again, um, you know, usually in a little bit more in depth, uh, standpoint for our members, some of the, uh, aspects of the industry, but then also just general, uh, you know, good business practices, if you will. Um, you know, for instance, we've done webinars on how to leverage LinkedIn, uh, you know, to build your standing in the cannabis space, to, uh, networking, uh, to make, uh, to create opportunities for yourself. Uh, we've had webinars on, uh, you know, the tax side of things. So to ADE, uh, we've had webinars on, uh, recently, uh, you know, after the COVID-19 crisis done a webinar for our members on how to, uh, apply for PPE and, you know, take advantage of the different, uh, uh, relief programs that are out there for small businesses and so on. So, you know, th this is, uh, again, one of our attempts to help our businesses, not just, you know, get onboarded in the cannabis space, but really, and truly create longterm suspense sustainability for themselves, uh, as a business, uh, whether it be in cannabis or not.

Speaker 4 ([00:18:21](#)):

Okay. Um, many of our listeners just became aware of Juneteenth, um, due to recent events. And, um, many lot of people don't know what that is or was, um, before, uh, recently, um, could you give us a short history lesson on that?

Speaker 5 ([00:18:41](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. So the crux of it is this, uh, everybody is very familiar with the emancipation proclamation and, uh, you know, president Abraham Lincoln signed that into law, I believe. Uh, and again, I apologize, I don't have all of the dates right in front of me. I should know this, but, uh, it was in January of the year, uh, where he signed it and it wasn't until June of the following year that the order was completely implemented. So, um, as you know, many times in politics, um, uh, a law can become a, uh, you know, a bill can be written into law and, uh, and it takes time for the implementation and rollout of that. Whereas many slaves, the slaves were, uh, free almost immediately or in the severity shortly after the signing of the emancipation proclamation. It wasn't until June 10th, June 19th of the following year, uh, after the signing of that, uh, proclamation that the Berry lastly slaves were free, and that was down in Texas and it took for general to actually go there in person to deliver the news and the message that slaves were now at this point free.

Speaker 5 ([00:20:01](#)):

So in the African-American community, uh, we typically don't celebrate, you know, ju uh, January 2nd, uh, when the emancipation proclamation was actually signed, uh, we celebrate June 19th when all of the slaves were, uh, eventually freed. So that is really been a, uh, a community, uh, celebration and, and, you know, across the country, different communities celebrate that differently. Um, you know, after the, uh, murders of George Floyd and, uh, Briana Taylor and others, um, this year, I think it really took a center stage, um, you know, to, you know, most Americans learning about what it was, uh, and, you know, getting involved in different

Speaker 3 ([00:20:48](#)):

Celebrations. And so, um, I think as an African-American, I'm certainly proud to see that others are, uh, you know, becoming more educated about June 19 or, uh, affectionately called Juneteenth. Um, but, you know, we, we hope that, uh, again, that this is more than just a moment. We hope that, you know, for everybody who celebrated this year or, uh, you know, companies who, you know, decided to make it a company holiday, uh, we'll continue that tradition next year. And the year after a year after, uh, you know, we hope that this isn't just a, you know, a photo op if you will, uh, that looks good for the time, but then kind of dissipates over time. So you had a recent event centered around that. Absolutely. Uh, with minorities, for medical marijuana, we partnered with, uh, minority cannabis business association MTBA and, uh, we held an event, uh, just last week, uh, entitled more than a moment.

Speaker 3 ([00:21:47](#)):

Um, we, we we've recognized that at no other time in our history has compensation really reached this boiling point that we're seeing right now. So we're very thankful for that. We see it as an opportunity, uh, to really lay the groundwork for, uh, a cultural shift and change, uh, across the country, not just in, uh, you know, cultural issues, but in industry and business as well. And, you know, speaking on behalf of the cannabis industry, excuse me, we believe that cannabis industry should be a leader in that. And so, you know, our event was focused on how do we, uh, communicate to the cannabis industry, what it is we want to see, uh, we get, you know, since everything has kind of, uh, really taken a national center stage, if you will, um, you know, both minorities for medical, marijuana and minority cannabis business association, uh, were probably the two prominent, uh, minority non-profits in the cannabis space.

Speaker 3 ([00:22:49](#)):

Uh, and that's not to take away from any of the other organizations who, you know, are doing great work. Um, but we've been called on quite a bit. You know, my phone rings daily or emails come through

daily and folks want to know how they can help, how they can get involved, uh, how we can partner together on different opportunities. And, um, many times those are, uh, take it from this kind of one-off approach, uh, where, you know, the moment is hot right now, so let's do something together. Um, but you know, then down the road, there's no real structure in place for how this moves beyond just this current moment. And so we wanted to take the time to talk about that, to, uh, you know, recognize and give tribute to, uh, the, the individuals who have lost their lives due to, um, you know, both the, the, uh, police brutality, as well as just the overall, um, racial divide that we're, we're seeing, uh, reach a boiling point in our country.

Speaker 3 ([00:23:52](#)):

And, and at the same time, uh, not just dwell on, uh, the, the, the symptoms or diagnosing if you will, but really, uh, being prescriptive and, and trying to, uh, talk about how do we move forward. And so we laid out a list of different, uh, things that we want to see from cannabis media, um, you know, companies from cannabis, uh, multi-state operators from cannabis conferences, uh, you know, from cannabis business associations, you know, what is it that, uh, you could do to signal to us as, as minorities in this space that you get it, and that this is more than just a moment, and that you're looking to really set up a, a sound infrastructure, uh, for this to be a part of, you know, your identity moving forward and not just something that, uh, you know, is a fly by night, uh, kind of a deal. So,

Speaker 4 ([00:24:50](#)):

Um, so your, so your next event is the, uh, Massachusetts cannabis business licensing bootcamp on July 25th. And could you tell us a little bit about that and now people might be able to take part?

Speaker 3 ([00:25:03](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Um, this came about because, um, well, we we've been doing our cannabis license and bootcamps. We did about, I think, three to four last year, and those were focused primarily on, uh, cannabis grow operations and dispensaries, um, as Illinois open up their application process, as well as Missouri, uh, in New Jersey as well. So, uh, those were focused on that side of the industry. Uh, but as you know, recently, or we may not know, um, the state of Massachusetts actually just opened up, uh, their licensing for, um, social equity, transportation licenses, uh, in the state. So, uh, they have a pretty robust, uh, social equity program there in Massachusetts that they're still working to implement and work out some kinks. Um, but they, they are being very deliberate about creating opportunities for individuals who were previously incarcerated because of a cannabis conviction or, you know, people who come from those same communities as well.

Speaker 3 ([00:26:07](#)):

So, um, they, the old application opened up on May 28th, I believe. Uh, and for the next two years, uh, there is the application is only open to social equity applicants. And so, um, you know, we want to make sure that we do whatever we can as an organization to see as many, uh, companies, uh, apply for that license. And to, to get that license side, I think is a real opportunity for, uh, these businesses to get, you know, to gain market share, to, to really get themselves, uh, planted on the front foundation before the rest

Speaker 5 ([00:26:44](#)):

Of the industry or the market opens up. And, uh, you know, that's what we mean when we talk about social equity. Um, you know, I, I know for some, they may say it's unfair,

Speaker 3 ([00:26:55](#)):

But when

Speaker 5 ([00:26:55](#)):

We talk about equity, we're not talking about equality. We're talking about being very deliberate about, uh, creating a, uh, you know, priority

Speaker 3 ([00:27:05](#)):

For the communities who really, and truly,

Speaker 5 ([00:27:09](#)):

Um, you know, like I've said before on the brunt of prohibition and the war on drugs. And so, uh, this isn't about making it fair for everybody. This is very specifically about, uh, trying to right. Some of the wrongs of the past, and we can't do all of it with just one program or one aspect of the program. Um, but it does give us, uh, you know, an opportunity to begin to correct some of those, those wrongs.

Speaker 3 ([00:27:36](#)):

Um, H how successful do you think social equity programs have been, uh, so far and where do you see that going? Um, that's a tough one, you know, um,

Speaker 5 ([00:27:51](#)):

Well, I'll be Frank, you know, they haven't been as successful as I think we, uh, that everyone would have hoped, you know, whether it'd be the individuals who, uh, actually created the program, uh, were the individuals who it has, uh, you know, tried to target and, you know, in its efforts, um, it hasn't been successful. And, you know, I think there are a number of reasons why that is. I think one of the biggest reasons is because many times groups like minorities for medical marijuana or MTBA, uh, are not, we're a second thought, uh, when it comes to involving us on crafting those types of programs. Uh, and so rather than really getting stakeholders involved from the front end, uh, many times these programs are created without us, uh, in order to target us. And so, uh, that's been one of the, uh, issues. Um, another issue is that the programs have been well-intentioned, but not well implemented.

Speaker 5 ([00:28:51](#)):

And, uh, you know, many times, uh, you know, I'll give you a case in point while this isn't a social equity program in Florida, uh, we were successful in getting written into law diversity language, which requires our license holders to have a diversity plan and address diversity in their equity, their staffing, their contracting, uh, but you know, where Mr. Martin was, there was no, um, agency oversight given to the diversity language, meaning the health department, which oversees the medical marijuana program has no authority to enforce the diversity language. They can only accept and review the plans, but if a company doesn't adhere to their plan, uh, there's really no recourse for that. And so, um, you know, that, that's just a glowing example of how, uh, many programs are designed to where without the proper oversight, without the proper infrastructure in place. Um, you know, you missed the Mark, uh, as well as when you look at, you know, again, going back to the, the license, the cannabis license and boot camps that we do.

Speaker 5 ([00:29:58](#)):

Um, some of the social equity programs have these type of, uh, training programs involved, some of them don't. Um, and, but it, we have to include in social equity, um, the understanding and the idea and the infrastructure for training and retooling individuals who've been incarcerated to run businesses. I mean, you just think about, uh, what it, you know, what life is like after you've been incarcerated, whether it be for cannabis or any other offense, when you come out, you know, obtaining employment is difficult, uh, and let alone attain meaningful employment. Uh, and, you know, God forbid, uh, you, you were lucky enough to find employment that allowed you to be in a managerial role or an operational executive, uh, role, uh, you know, so the skill sets, uh, many times are not there. And so we have to do what we can to, to help build those skillsets, uh, in the communities we're looking to target.

Speaker 5 ([00:30:59](#)):

Um, and then, you know, the other part of it is we also, and this is a, this'll be the final point I make about social equity is we have to expand the program. We have to expand our understanding of what social equity is. Um, and I like to get people to begin with thinking about how pervasive, uh, the war on drugs was, how pervasive prohibition policies really work for communities of color. Um, it wasn't just that marijuana was outlawed. Uh, it was in addition to that, if it, you know, where we saw mandatory minimums and, you know, three strikes you're out and stop and frisk policies, all of these are re you know, uh, the types of policies that were implemented at the state and local level in order to carry out the war on drugs, you know? And so those things have to be mitigated.

Speaker 5 ([00:31:54](#)):

Uh, so you have to look at decriminalization, you have to look at expungement, um, but it goes deeper than, than that. You know, if you had a marijuana conviction, you couldn't get access to public housing. So, uh, you know, many folks were able, so from a housing standpoint, we have to look at how we, you know, addressing what the war on drugs did from a housing standpoint, from an employment standpoint, from a community infrastructure standpoint, excuse me, um, schools, you know, how did the war on drugs impact our schools when you have kids going to school? Uh, and one parent is in jail and the mother is, you know, on minimum wage, how does that impact the success of vet school and what do we do, uh, you know, and what part of that is blamed on the war on drugs? So, you know, I advocate for us looking at a much more holistic standpoint, looking at how, when we're setting up social equity programs, how can we create programs that address some of these issues, uh, you know, taking tax dollars to earmark, to, you know, rebuilding, failing schools and, uh, rebuilding a community infrastructure, uh, helping them to bring back the tax base to those communities.

Speaker 5 ([00:33:13](#)):

So, uh, these are things that I think have to be done, uh, in order for us to see, you know, much greater success when it comes to social equity.

Speaker 6 ([00:33:23](#)):

Have you ever seen any improvements at all or has it gotten worse or, um, improve?

Speaker 5 ([00:33:32](#)):

I, I do think is improving and I think it will improve. Um, I'm one of those people who are, um, I guess, a forever optimist. Um, so I don't, I don't naturally look at failure as a bad thing. Um, I look at it as a learning opportunity. So, uh, when we look at the programs that are out there that are not doing well, that gives us an opportunity to, uh, to evaluate them, to assess them and to look at what we do

differently moving forward. So, um, you know, I, I'm very optimistic and I think States are doing that. I think we are seeing, uh, you know, legislation and language, excuse me, that is evolving, that is changing. And, uh, you know, as that happens, uh, and, and as we put in place the proper oversight, um, in infrastructure to make these programs successful, uh, undoubtedly I think we'll see greatest success and, uh, you know, minorities for medical marijuana. Uh, we're going to be at the table regardless, fighting to make sure that they have.

Speaker 6 ([00:34:34](#)):

So what, what role should cannabis companies play in social equity?

Speaker 5 ([00:34:40](#)):

Absolutely. Um, first and foremost, recognizing that you are existing in an industry that has, uh, very clearly destroyed certain communities. Um, and also recognizing that because we are such a new industry, uh, we have an opportunity and it is a choice, um, that we have to make as to what type of industry we want to be. Um, you know, I love to highlight groups like truly, who is one of our corporate partners where minorities have medical marijuana, but, um, they get it, you know, Kim rivers, the CEO of truly, um, it's a part of who she is as a core. And, and I think, uh, whether our organization existed or not, she would be a good steward of the industry and would be looking for ways to, uh, enhance the communities that they exist in. Um, and so, you know, she laid some really good, uh, and, you know, truly is the most profitable company in the U S right now.

Speaker 5 ([00:35:43](#)):

Uh, and some of the things that she did, I think really, and truly are a model for other cannabis companies first and foremost, when she looked for a headquarters, uh, she looked for building out the infrastructure of her company from, uh, uh, manufacturing and, uh, you know, a growth space. And so on. She deliberately identified a minority, a majority minority community, and, and was very deliberate in, uh, locating in that community so that she could, uh, impact them and change their lives, uh, from a community standpoint, uh, even if they weren't, you know, owning in the industry, she's the largest employer there in that community now. Um, and that means tremendous amount, uh, for those individuals there, uh, she contributes to the tax base obviously by being located there. So those are things that I think large-scale companies can certainly look into. Um, but you know, other companies, you know, I have encouraged them take a look at your board, take a look, look at your leadership teams.

Speaker 5 ([00:36:43](#)):

Are they reflective of diversity? Um, or, or is there a room for you to add someone to your team who is from our diverse, uh, background, and that doesn't necessarily mean that you need to add them specifically for diversity and inclusion, uh, uh, you know, issues, uh, minorities have a tremendous amount of value that they can bring to this industry, uh, from everything, from product development to, uh, engineering, to doctors, lawyers, uh, and so there's no need to only pigeonhole, uh, minority experts and professionals into, uh, diversity roles. Uh, you can certainly include them in many other areas that can bring, bring value to your company. Um, I think for every cannabis company look at your community engagement, how are you engaging with the communities you exist in whether they're minority or not, but then having a very deliberate program to engage, um, minority communities as well, um, and using that as a way to give back or to add value to that community.

Speaker 5 ([00:37:45](#)):

Uh, and you know, those are, to me, a couple of low hanging fruit, um, you know, working with groups like minorities for my, uh, medical marijuana to identify talent for your pipeline for, for your, your, your, uh, the roles that you need to fill in your organization. Um, and that's not to say that you'll just hire minorities just because, uh, we want you to increase the number of minorities in your applicant pool. That way we can, you know, you can see where clearly, you know, we want you to hire the best people. Uh, we just have to believe that minorities can be a part of that, you know, that group, uh, cream of the crop, if you will. So, um, those are all things you can do. And then also, I think every cannabis company should have a social equity initiative period. Um, you know, you should be looking in some way, uh, to have some initiative, to give back to individuals and communities who really, and truly, uh, were, uh, you know, they were the ones who were, uh, over police, who, you know, all of those different social ills that I've mentioned a few minutes, a few minutes ago, they're the ones who are currently and historically have lived these truths.

Speaker 5 ([00:38:56](#)):

And so, um, I think every cannabis company can do something, uh, whether that'd be, you know, a sliding fee scale for their products, uh, whether that be hosting and sponsoring, uh, events, uh, you know, community level events like health fairs, uh, you know, doing things like that, I think really, and truly add value to the community while at the same time, uh, giving you an opportunity to engage with that community, uh, to, you know, maybe one day they become your customers and so on. So I think that's something that every cannabis company can do

Speaker 1 ([00:39:34](#)):

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Speaker 5 ([00:40:48](#)):

Yeah, it sounds like, um, even from a economic viewpoint, um, it, it sounds like, um, diversity can actually help on a bottom line economically, you know, instead of being excluding certain people, it's not really good for business. Absolutely. Um, you know, w when I talk about social equity, I, I, I know most people think of it as, you know, almost, you know, the old corporate social responsibility, and certainly that is a part of it. Um, but one of the things that we as an organization have been doing over the past couple of years is, uh, reframing the conversation, executives and boards. We get it. Uh, we are not anti-capitalist, uh, we've recognized that people, you know, uh, enter into this industry in order to make money and, and, you know, businesses operate, you know, to, uh, satisfy their shareholders and their bottom line. And, you know, we don't see those as necessarily bad things, but what we are are challenging companies to do is to move beyond this model of, uh, the, the business model of, you know, here are my expenses and here are my costs.

Speaker 5 ([00:42:07](#)):

And what is my, you know, in my initial investment for what is my return on investment, and only looking at the dollars and on the bottom line, we believe that every company could, uh, move beyond that and look at well, what is the social impact that we're having with our company? And that is something that can be measured. Um, that is something that, uh, you know, again, to your shareholders can be become valuable, and it's not just looking at your bottom line. So, um, I think moving in that model, uh, is helpful. I think there's also ways to do that and make money. Um, I think, you know, communities of color are very loyal to those companies who add value to their community who are not just there to do business. Um, but they're, they're there to do good. And, um, I think that is something that is certainly a part of, uh, the discussion.

Speaker 5 ([00:43:05](#)):

And so, you know, there's ways to make money, uh, doing social equity. I used to work for an environmental engineering firm and the owner of the company always said that, you know, wherever we have the greatest need is where we also have the greatest opportunity. And so, you know, looking at ways to really infuse that into, uh, our thinking as, uh, as companies, uh, is going to be key to it. And, and, you know, I'll give a very clear cut example of that when I worked for the environmental engineering firm, you know, my role was created as a community engagement director. Uh, and very specifically what I would do is whenever we would receive a contract, um, or even before that, when we rebid for a contract, we would always include a value add. So we say to the city or the County, we're applying to, if you give us this contract, we will do this.

Speaker 5 ([00:44:00](#)):

We will go into that community. We will identify 20, you know, minority, uh, young youth individuals who didn't go to college, maybe have been arrested, we'll put them through a training program and we'll help them, and we'll give them a certification, uh, you know, whether it be OSHA or what else, and we'll give them some on the, on the job experience, we'll take them out into the field, but them get their hands on and we'll help them to identify job opportunities in this space. And we'll do that just for you giving us the contract. And so that became a value add. And one of the things that allowed us to win contracts while at the same time, um, you know, giving us an opportunity to do good, uh, in those communities. So again, we added value to the community and to the city while at the same time, uh, we were making money. So, uh, that that's a good way to look at it. Okay. We also have a question from Mercedes woods, um, um, who has a question relating to that Mercedes?

Speaker 7 ([00:45:03](#)):

Hi. So my question is, um, a lot of, obviously there are large cannabis businesses out there now and, and bigger corporations, but there's a lot of still small businesses as well. And a lot of those, um, from experience as being a manager at a smaller dispensary, um, you kind of get a lot on your plate, um, when it comes to, you know, doing inventory, managing your team, helping buttoned, and also doing the hiring and vetting and things like that. And for me personally, I did, um, hire a lot of, uh, minorities just because my degree is in sociology. And I was aware of that and wanted to make sure that, you know, I made that impact for that company. Um, but what would be your suggestion for maybe people who don't have that background and have a lot on their plate and how do we make, make some of these smaller shops, um, and managers who are doing a lot more aware of this situation as well?

Speaker 5 ([00:46:04](#)):

Absolutely. Um, and we get that, uh, standing up in operation, uh, and even once it's stood up to, to manage that operation, uh, is no small feat. We completely understand that there's a lot more hand, this is why we encourage people, even during the application phase, really build this into your model so that it doesn't become a secondary thought and that it, you know, it's much easier to implement these things on the front end to, you know, then to come back on the backend and look at ways to do that. But, you know, again, for those companies who already exist or already in that space, uh, one of the things I would recommend is hire a consultant, you know, when it comes to these particular things. And those are ways that you can certainly, uh, connect with, uh, you know, experts without having to take on the full burden of, you know, trying to navigate through this, trying to understand it, you know, uh, here at higher yields, one of the things, uh, you know, I've been brought on to do as a consultant with the company is to help to develop this, uh, you know, for companies.

Speaker 5 ([00:47:14](#)):

And so that, you know, higher yields, we helped a lot of companies from a variety of different, uh, consultant standpoint. And so this is one of the areas that I think we can also be helpful in. So, you know, providing companies with the assistance of developing an internal structure, um, you know, and framework for themselves, uh, so that they have diversity at the top of mind, uh, that they are looking at ways to give back to communities. Um, you know, so hiring consultant is a great way of doing that. Um, but then, you know, if you are unable to do that, you know, look at the low-hanging fruit, we are not asking people to try to save the world. Uh, you know, we're asking people to look at your, your sphere of influence your sphere of privilege and see what is it that you could be doing.

Speaker 5 ([00:48:05](#)):

And for some organizations that may just be as simple as saying, you know, what all I can do at this time is become a corporate partner of minorities for medical marijuana, and that's fine. And then, you know, through our work, you guys are doing good. So that's what another way of doing it. Um, and then, you know, there's also taking, you know, say for instance, if you're a dispensary, you know, looking at how you can engage with minority companies, so maybe take a percentage of your shelf space, you know, and dedicate to them. And again, that's still no easy feat because you have to identify the minority brands. You have to vet them, you have to, you know, still do inventory and the whole night. Um, but I, again, I think consultants can be very useful in that. Um, and if you're in a really good place, um, I would say hire someone specifically for that, you know, hire a person who can come in, uh, you know, to your team and specifically focus on, uh, those types of things, your supplier diversity, uh, your, you know, uh, contracts that you do with, um, you know, minority brands and so on.

Speaker 5 ([00:49:13](#)):

So those are all, I think some ways that I think can be helpful. Um, but again, you know, reaching out to groups like minorities for medical marijuana, uh MTBA and again, there's others. Um, those that can help cut through some of the red tape.

Speaker 7 ([00:49:30](#)):

Awesome. Thank you. Yeah. I definitely have some ideas, you know, just off of your response of how to get some of these smaller companies more involved in just reaching out to them personally and giving them the information of, of your organization. Um, and, you know, seeing if there's anything that we can do to help them, or, um, if they have any.

Speaker 5 ([00:49:55](#)):

And, and, and let me say this as well. Uh, Mercedes, I think this is, uh, another key part that I, I should have mentioned as well, mentorship, if you are, you know, my, my, uh, when I worked for the environmental engineering firm, we had a very interesting system. And again, uh, it's, it takes some serious, uh, uh, series, um, interest in the subject. And, uh, you know, it's not something for the faint of heart, let me put it that way. Um, he had a system where he required all of his workers to spend 80% of their time on company business, and then another 20%, uh, you know, donating time or volunteering or working with, uh, you know, different groups, you know, diverse groups and as a way of giving back. So, you know, whereas they didn't designate any specific budget, you know, to the company itself doing something, they empowered the workers to be able to do something on an individual basis as well.

Speaker 5 ([00:50:56](#)):

Um, and then he, as the CEO, um, dedicated period, a portion of his time to take these smaller businesses and just mentoring those individuals, you know, uh, once a month going out for lunch and, you know, uh, answering questions and helping to just help that business get off on the right foot. Those are the things that I think CEOs and corporate executives of these companies, uh, can do, you know, create a, uh, you know, a time each month where you can just give back to a smaller business who was trying to navigate through this, you know, what does it look like to negotiate a partnership deal, excuse me, what does it look like to, um, you know, uh, handle or set up a good system? What are some of the tools you use for inventory management? Those are all things that minorities, uh, you know, are looking for that type of assistance or somebody they can just call up or text and say, Hey, listen, I'm really struggling with this idea or this issue, you know, do you have any advice for me? Those things go so far that, again, it doesn't cost you anything, but your time. And again, time is valuable. I get that part, but, uh, those are things that I think are low-hanging fruit that folks can do.

Speaker 8 ([00:52:09](#)):

I have a question, um, as we know with, uh, you know, the viral pandemic going on, um, the racial pandemic, um, declared by the CDC, both of them, um, you know, the cold culmination of culture, Wars, crashing economy sounding really positive here, but, uh, you know, orange and bad times right now, and eventually we're going to come out of it. And it seems like a lot of these municipalities and States and the country itself maybe leaning pretty heavily on a cannabis industry, um, to help recover economic recovery there. Um, the question I had is they are going to be expanding, um, already existing cannabis programs, as well as creating new ones in some of the States that have nothing. So naturally that's going to play into, um, expanding social equity programs. And I've seen States like New Jersey and some other States, um, people are demanding that social equity be expanded, um, both in a, an a, um, uh, I guess, a new ma uh, numerical way, and also, um, in fixing and, and making these programs a little better. Um, do any know anything about that if you were to look into the future a little bit?

Speaker 5 ([00:53:39](#)):

Yeah. W w w we're having a lot of discussions on, again, what we think that should look like. Um, there are a couple now more than ever, there are more research sources and conversations out there about what social equity is, how to approach it, what we think works, what doesn't work so far. Um, in fact, I just contributed a, um, a section to a book, um, entitled understanding social equity, uh, where the, uh, the, the initial organizer, he, uh, probably corralled about 15, uh, thought leaders on the subject of social equity and allow each of them to address it, um, you know, in this book. And so you have a variety of different viewpoints and ideas and, and, uh, you know, comments, questions, all of those things that

have been presented in that book. And so, um, I think States have now greater resources than they did before.

Speaker 5 ([00:54:36](#)):

Um, I do think that, um, as we look at expanding social equity, I think one of those ways we also have to look at a very quickly is, you know, in, in States where we have medical programs, see social equity is primarily been tied to, uh, the, um, the adult use recreational, uh, side of the business, not so much on the medical side, you are seeing in some States like Florida, where initially we, we did have one set aside license for the medical program, uh, that was to go to a black farmer, which to date still has not been awarded. Um, and then you have others who have kind of given you a few extra points on the application for, uh, you know, the, uh, for social equity, if you will. But, you know, for the most part, it has been absent from the medical side of, uh, of the industry.

Speaker 5 ([00:55:32](#)):

And I think there's real opportunity for us there, um, to meet a need again, like I said, uh, where we have the greatest need. We also have the greatest opportunity. COVID-19 really, I think, uh, you know, highlighted for a lot of people, uh, the healthcare disparities that exist in black and Brown communities African-Americans are so much more higher prevalent, or has has a higher prevalency of, uh, getting COVID-19, uh, and obviously less access to, uh, healthcare and quality healthcare to be able to deal with it. And so death rates have been higher in African-American community, Hispanic communities. Um, while at the same time, you have the cannabis industry that has deemed medical marijuana, businesses, essential. Uh, and many of them don't exist in communities of color, and many of them are unaffordable for communities of color. So I think there's a real opportunity there on the medical side to issue licenses, to, or micro-business licenses, to minorities for this very specific purpose of medical marijuana, to service and serve communities of color, um, very deliberately, um, meaning, uh, you know, giving licenses to, for instance, in Illinois, you have tons of people, um, you know, uh, I'm sorry, Missouri, tons of people who applied for a license and didn't get one, uh, and, you know, they have done everything I need to do from a, uh, uh, and then part of the reason they didn't get one because it was competitive.

Speaker 5 ([00:57:03](#)):

So there was only certain number of licenses given out that doesn't mean that the application wasn't a, uh, it wasn't satisfactory. It just didn't beat out those other organizations. So I think there's tremendous room to give licenses to companies who are ready to go, uh, ready to become operational, to go into communities of colors and, uh, you know, really establish a medical program that is aimed at, uh, really closing that healthcare disparity that we see, or, you know, exists across the entire healthcare spectrum. Uh, but we're seeing, uh, very much, uh, play out in the cannabis, uh, medical side of things as well. So there are tons of ways to expand the program. I do think we'll see, uh, lots of expansion. A lot of States are looking to try new things. Uh, and, and again, I hope that will begin to expand even further, um, you know, into the, uh, you know, other aspects of, uh, how we fake some of the war on drugs or the Hills called by caused by the war.

Speaker 8 ([00:58:07](#)):

I am actually a, uh, a felon. I went to prison for cultivating marijuana, which in the state of Pennsylvania is only one charge, uh, manufacturing with intent to deliver distribute. And, uh, I saw both sides of that, you know, going to prison. Wasn't fun. I did see the privilege. I got both in the courtroom. I was looking at a mandatory minimum of three to seven years, and I got 110 days. And basically, um, the judge told

me since I was hard working owned a business basically was telling me since I was white, you know, that I was lucky. I was only going to get the 110 days. And the gentleman behind me was a young African-American man. And he got caught with a couple of joints and a cigarette pack, and he got more time than I did. And, uh, it's kind of stuck with me. Um, it's made me feel really bad. So that was about a little over a decade ago. And I was just wondering, I have feelings about, like, even it's trying to

Speaker 6 ([00:59:22](#)):

Do the right thing, why are there still going to be some people on marijuana offenses in jail? Um, why do you think that is? Why do you think States won't just go all the way and do the right thing? Um, yeah. Uh, let me say this, I think, uh, the, the example you just highlighted about, uh, the privilege that you were afforded, um, is

Speaker 5 ([00:59:49](#)):

A lot of people in the cannabis space, you know, and myself included, uh, traditionally believed that social equity programs aren't designed specifically for you, but for the individual who came behind you, uh, who didn't receive that privilege. Um, but that's not to say that we're against folks like yourself, uh, you know, being able to participate in this industry and use social equity as a way of, uh, you know, kind of, uh, getting your feet wet or, you know, developing a firm foundation. But I think the spirit of what social equity is about is that that guy who came behind you and, um, oversees a much longer sentence. Um, because again, this was, you know, this is, this is still policy, if you will. Um, you know, albeit, uh, in the judicial system, the policy is to, uh, enact harsher sentences on black and Brown people, uh, regardless of the offense.

Speaker 5 ([01:00:48](#)):

And regardless of if, you know, others are creating the same offense, uh, and you know, having an opportunity to, to, uh, have a lighter sentence. And so, you know, I, I say that to, uh, also lead into part of the reason why States are reluctant to just, uh, outright, you know, expunge records for people who have, you know, non-violent misdemeanor, uh, cannabis, possession, uh, charges is because, you know, the prison industrial complex is a, is a huge, um, huge industry. I mean, you know, most people, you know, when we think about lobbyist, uh, we think about the NRA or, you know, folks who are on either side of, uh, abortion and so on who spent, or the tobacco industry, people, you know, organizations who spend millions of dollars to lobby. Um, but the prison industry spends millions of dollars, uh, to lobby as well. And so, you know, laws and rules have been written very deliberately to create that very system that played out right before your eyes, uh, where minorities are locked up and given longer sentences because men, um, the prison system is able to capitalize, uh, on that worker.

Speaker 5 ([01:02:11](#)):

Um, you know, and, and it becomes free labor. Most people are not aware that, you know, slavery does still exist in our, if you are incarcerated that, you know, that, that is very clear where when we abolished slavery, it also reads that unless, and this is paraphrasing, not exact language, um, you know, except for in a case where someone has been, uh, you know, incarcerated. So once you have been convicted of a crime, you are incarcerated, you can legally become a slave and you have systems in place that, uh, you know, private businesses are able to take advantage of, uh, you know, these workers to create products, not even just, you know, building, you know, Rose, you know, most people think about, you know, the chain gains, you know, building roads and railroads and that type of stuff. But you now have companies

who, you know, hire prison, labor, and sweat shops to create clothing, to create technology, to create products.

Speaker 5 ([01:03:16](#)):

And he's, uh, workers are giving a, given a wage that is, you know, just deplorable and then they're turned around and they're given this wage so that they can then turn around and pay for services like phone services. So to make a phone call home, uh, prison prices are higher than if you were to make a collect call to, you know, to another country. Uh, and so the money that they make or that they earn, quote unquote, uh, you know, through this prison, labor, uh, is turned around and, and really, uh, taken away from them and high priced, uh, you know, services that they have to pay for. Um, you know, they get, uh, you know, you have big companies, uh, in the food industry that serve as prisons that turn around and provide prisons with, you know, the worst of their food, you know, supply, uh, they have the worst of, you know, they, they take what they wouldn't serve, sell to, uh, say a university that hired them, uh, to, to run their cafeteria. And they sell that to the prisons and that's what prisoners are forced to eat. So it is big, big, big, big business, uh, on the prison side and to just do away with that. Um, most States and legislators and governors will have a very, uh, hard fight on their hand, uh, to make that happen. Um, you know, and, and, and so there, there's a lot of reasons why people won't do the right thing. Um, but you know, it all goes back to, um, you know, some form of ways that it's impacting.

Speaker 9 ([01:04:59](#)):

Yeah. We have another question from Mercedes. Um, so it's just kind of goes to what you were just talking about, about, you know, companies using prison, labor, basically, um, for their products. I've seen some lists provided of some of these companies that do do that. How do we make this more information more readily available? I mean, obviously to the world is kind of a big task, um, but just to start here in our own industry, I mean, I know companies use these products in the cannabis industry and how do we kind of make a stance as an industry to stop using these products where we can, and, um, promote better, you know, better products that aren't, aren't using this prison labor and kind of make a stance and put some pressure on these companies themselves to stop to stop using prison labors or a whole industry is gonna not use them anymore.

Speaker 5 ([01:05:56](#)):

Absolutely. I think that is a very worthy cause. And I think, again, that's another one of the ways that cannabis companies can be a part of this social equity discussion. Um, again, you know, companies that have, you know, strong marketing teams and develop a marketing, uh, you know, campaigns specifically around that, you know, and using it as a way to say, you know, that the cannabis industry, uh, in prohibition led to these types of situations, uh, and as an industry, we are going to stand up for communities who bore the brunt of this. And I think that's a great way of having that discussion. Um, and, but it, it really takes us calling, you know, calling it to attention, uh, again, minority companies or minority nonprofits and advocates. You know, we've talked about this stuff for, for years now, uh, and really what we need, um, are, you know, entrenched allies who are willing to, to step up and, you know, uh, put that out there as well.

Speaker 5 ([01:07:01](#)):

Um, you know, as a nonprofit in the space minorities for medical marijuana, um, I would go as far as to say that, you know, we'd have a difficult time taking on the prison industry alone, you know, we, uh, the resources that they can bring to bear, uh, or, you know, far outweigh what we can bring to bear. And so

certainly we can speak up and call them to task for it. But, uh, you know, we were calling, we have a call to action and it's a call in versus a call out. Uh, and so, you know, for the cannabis industry, we want, we want people to come in and say, you know, listen, uh, let's work together on this, you know, uh, minorities for medical marijuana. And, uh, my company let's work together to call out these companies that have taken advantage of prison, labor, um, you know, because we don't believe that that's right. So

Speaker 8 ([01:07:56](#)):

I was wondering if you could, uh, explain the Latin X program you have at, um, minorities for medical marijuana.

Speaker 5 ([01:08:06](#)):

Um, so Latin X is, is a term that, you know, it pretty much derived in the community of Latin folks, uh, in particular in millennials, younger generation of Latin, um, uh, citizens who really, they, they tackle a host of different issues that pertain to, uh, you know, that are more prevalent in, uh, the Latin communities, you know, as it pertains to immigration, um, also healthcare, um, and so on. So there's not, it is not, uh, you know, a centralized movement, if you will. Um, you'll find Latin X groups across the CLO, you know, across the country that are, you know, doing very much, excuse me, what we're doing, um, with minorities, for medical marijuana, and just really seeking to be at the table and have, uh, our voices heard when it comes to issues that impact our communities. And so, um, you know, as an organization, we believe in all of diversity and, uh, so our Latin X program, which we actually are having to revamp, uh, just a little bit, we lost our national director.

Speaker 5 ([01:09:14](#)):

Uh, and again, this is one of those things that is unfortunate, but it's a reality in our space. Uh, many minorities who get into this space in particular, on the advocacy side, um, you know, we depend on folks, you know, to make donations. We depend on, uh, corporate partnerships and so on. And when that doesn't happen at the pace that we needed, we ended up having to go back into the working class, you know, uh, working and not spending all of our time and attention on these issues and being at the table because we have families to feed. Uh, and, and so, uh, that's something that, you know, unfortunately, uh, our organization, hasn't been immune to where we've lost good people, good advocates, because they simply had to, uh, you know, kinda, uh, take some, take a step back and reevaluate and refocus without having really any real opportunities in the cannabis space for them.

Speaker 5 ([01:10:09](#)):

Um, you know, that will allow them to feed their families. You know, they have to make some hard decisions. And so, uh, how a program, you know, we, we're still looking to, uh, kind of come back at that, but it was all about outreaching to the Latin community, uh, as it pertains to, um, cannabis issues that impacted the Latin community. So again, from an employment standpoint, from contracts, getting Latin companies, uh, business owners involved, uh, with contracts, uh, making sure that the Latin community is aware of the medical efficacy of the plant, um, because again, healthcare disparities existed in their communities as well. So, uh, it's really just a, uh, an extension of what we already do, uh, into the lab,

Speaker 10 ([01:10:54](#)):

The community.

Speaker 11 ([01:11:00](#)):

So question for your, uh, what, what is your pain on opportunity zones and things like that for the community? I have my own opinion on it, but I want to hear your opinion this on the, I love

Speaker 5 ([01:11:14](#)):

Opportunity zones, uh, when they're done with the, with the right intentions. Let me, let me say it that way. Uh, one of the things with, uh, you know, we've seen already with opportunity zones, uh, is people who were already gonna make an investment in an area for say, a high rise building, or, you know, a big corporate building, uh, they're taking advantage of the opportunity zone, uh, you know, credits when they don't really need them. And they, they, you know, really, truly we're gonna make that investment regardless of the opportunity zone or not. Um, for, for the very specifically for the cannabis space, you know, this is what I've encouraged companies to do, uh, when they're looking at where to locate again, you know, going back to what I said about Kim rivers and truly very deliberately, you know, uh, existing in communities that qualify as opportunity zones, uh, from that standpoint, um, you know, obviously from a company standpoint, it makes good business sense because you get to take advantage of the tax breaks that are associated there, uh, which I think are phenomenal.

Speaker 5 ([01:12:27](#)):

Um, but then at least from a community standpoint, that community gets so much more from a, they get a partner in the community in terms of jobs. If you're very deliberate about that, like I said, truly this now the largest employer, uh, in Gaston County where they exist, and if they didn't just import their workers, you know, they were very deliberate in identifying workers on the ground and bringing them in, offering them higher wages, offering them training, uh, those types of things. So I think opportunity zones are a great way. And I, I think from a legislative standpoint, I'd love to see States and even local communities require, uh, companies that come into their area and take advantage of opportunity zones to have, you know, uh, certain percentages, uh, a requirement of hiring certain percentages from the local population, uh, or from communities that, you know, could benefit the most.

Speaker 5 ([01:13:26](#)):

So those are the things that we already do when it comes to, um, you know, a city and County levels. When you have a, um, what do you call it? A minority business, uh, um, initiatives, uh, where they award contracts, a certain percentage of the city contractors go to minority contractors and so on, these are the types of approach. Again, this isn't, you know, we're not reinventing the wheel. These are things that are already done in other industries that makes sense for the cannabis industry. And I think, uh, you know, for communities, uh, and, and city councils and so on, who are considering bringing in large-scale cannabis companies, these are ways that the community can make sure that it gets a win out of having that company locate there. So, uh, I'm, I'm a huge advocate for opportunity zones if they're done with the right intentions.

Speaker 11 ([01:14:20](#)):

Yeah. I agree with you a hundred percent on that. I, I see opportunities and zones being abused quite a bit because of the real estate sector, not only the cannabis sector, but the, just the real estate world, you know, like you're saying, these are huge development companies coming in that don't need those opportunities. That's somebody else should be taken advantage of. Do you feel that they should put more restrictions on these opportunity zones making, like you were saying, you know, like contracts, government contracts, you need to have 45, 40, 30, 8% minority uncovers. I think at Denver

international airport is what they're required. Do you think that they should put more of a restriction on that?

Speaker 5 ([01:14:56](#)):

Absolutely. Absolutely. Um, I mean, when you are, anytime you're looking to revitalize a community, which, you know, is one of the reasons for the opportunity. So you have to make sure that that community, um, that we aren't just extracting resources from that community, but we are pouring resources into that community. And so, um, I absolutely believe that that is, uh, you know, vital. In fact, I'm, I'm talking to, uh, one of my clients about, um, the community they want to exist in. And that's what we're looking to do is go directly to, um, the, the city council. And even though it may cost the company more explained to the city council, here's how you can get a win, you know, for this opportunity zone. Uh, and I, I do think, you know, putting restrictions on a requirement to hire a certain number of people, uh, or, or restrictions on, you know, a certain portion of your contracts or subcontracts going to, excuse me, minority contractors and businesses, those are all, uh, smart things to do.

Speaker 5 ([01:16:10](#)):

And many times when, uh, they exist, there's already, uh, disparity studies that have been done that, you know, recognize the need for these types of, um, you know, set asides and, and special programs. Um, you know, that's on the legal side where folks, you know, communities have to be very careful and making sure that they demonstrated the need for the special program. Um, but you know, again, I, I put a lot of, I challenged companies themselves to just be good stewards of the industry. You know, I think both government and business has a responsibility, uh, to do that. And so I, I think, uh, businesses are also thinking, you know, about that, you know, we shouldn't have to require you by law to do the right thing. You know, you, you should want to do that. And, uh, you know, again, I think we've already discussed a little bit how it's not just a, uh, it's not a loss leader. It doesn't just mean that you're spending money. Um, you can do this in a way and still make money and it can be a part of your model. Um, and so that's what I'm hoping, you know, cannabis businesses will do it. I, I, I, of course hope that legislators will, uh, be very deliberate and creative and making sure that these communities also, uh, are able to benefit.

Speaker 11 ([01:17:28](#)):

And speaking of location, have you, have you ever dealt with like setbacks and things like that with property

Speaker 5 ([01:17:34](#)):

Directly, I'm familiar with them, um, but not myself directly.

Speaker 11 ([01:17:39](#)):

Okay. Cause what I was going to ask was, do you feel that they're sort of biased in the empty, uh, communities that we are low, the opportunity zones because of the way they are set up, if there's seven there, this is my opinion. They're not set up to for communities of color. Uh, you have a lot of daycare facilities, you have working class families that are going to work, and there's a lot more things where the setbacks aren't set properly. I don't think, but I was just wondering if you had any opinion on that.

Speaker 5 ([01:18:07](#)):

Yeah. I mean the reality of it, I think what you said is, is, is very key. I mean, opportunity zones only become really, uh, beneficial to an investor when you have, you know, a hundred K plus to invest, right. Uh, which we know very clearly most minority businesses that exist in opportunity zones. Uh, don't have that, which is partly why that community is an opportunity zone to begin with. Um, but then that's where again, I think it's important that investors look at, you know, helping businesses in those communities to expand, um, to, to look at, you know, for the cannabis space. I think from a social equity standpoint, this is a great opportunity if you're a cannabis investor and you're saying, okay, how can I one, uh, having an investment that, you know, has a decent return on, um, you know, from a financial standpoint, but also has that social impact.

Speaker 5 ([01:19:01](#)):

Um, and then also has, um, a way for me to mitigate the risk of my investment, right? Uh, because again, you know, investors want to make money. They don't want to lose money. And I think in the opportunity zone can accomplish all three of those, uh, because the way that it's set up, it becomes, uh, you know, uh, tax deferral vehicle for you. Uh, and, and so investing in a minority business, you know, again, I, in the process of right now, uh, you know, I have a company that I just started, we received three, uh, hemp licenses here in the state of Florida. We want to bid out, build out a facility. I would love for an investor to say, you know, Hey, you know, I'll put in the money to build the facility so that I can get that, you know, tax break. Uh, and then, you know, we lease out the building to you for a number of years and give you an opportunity to purchase the building down the road.

Speaker 5 ([01:19:55](#)):

Those are ways that again, I think are very smart and, uh, you know, good ways to partner and solves a problem from a minority standpoint, you know, myself included for as, uh, I guess as visible as I am in this space, you know, raising money is not easy and I don't think it's easy for anybody, but, you know, minorities have a particularly rough go at it. And, uh, but I think again, opportunity zones really, and truly provide, uh, you know, a way for businesses to take advantage of that. And at the same time support, uh, a minority business and make money and, you know, uh, protect their investment.

Speaker 8 ([01:20:35](#)):

Yep. Thank you. Appreciate your information. When I first heard about social equity is before I was in the cannabis industry, but when I first heard about it in the cannabis industry, um, I learned it from a technical aspect. I feel like there are two different aspects to social equity. There's the technical part that exists that you put into a license application. And that, that to me is a different arena than the reform and the advocacy and, um, the more social side of social equity, um, would you agree? And, um, you know, there's two different schools there and I feel like there's two different skillsets.

Speaker 5 ([01:21:27](#)):

Well, I think, um, we have to remember that, uh, even what you've seen in, um, applications, the technical side of it was born out of the advocacy side of things that really, and truly, um, we're, you know, we're developed from, you know, folks who from initially from a social aspect, you know, so, um, who wanted to participate in the industry, but saw that there were no opportunities. And I think, uh, you know, like I mentioned before, we have to broaden our understanding of social equity. And I think part of the reason why some of the programs have missed the mark is because they have too prevalently, um, too heavily focused on licensing, meaning just getting a license, but not recognizing that there are tons of, um, you know, most of the social ills that I highlighted from, you know, uh, the,

the housing issue, the employment issue, all of those things, STEM from a policy, you know, in terms of, uh, um, you know, prohibition and the war on drugs and so on.

Speaker 5 ([01:22:41](#)):

Uh, and so, yeah, I think from a technical standpoint, application process is very technical. So that's why you primarily only heard of it from the technical aspect. But, uh, again, I, as we expand beyond that and look at, you know, all of the ways, like for instance, there should need to be an application process for, uh, companies to work with minority business owners. You know, a minority business owner may be a cleaning service. And right now during COVID-19 you need someone who can provide a very thorough cleaning service on a regular basis. That type of contract is huge for a company and that person may or may not have ever been arrested for cannabis. That's just a minority business, but from a social equity standpoint, recognizing that that person may have come from a community that was over police because of war on drugs, it all ends up tying in together.

Speaker 5 ([01:23:36](#)):

So it's all woven together. Um, I think right now, again, there's, uh, uh, more focus on the application. So you see a lot with the technical side, but I think as we expand even more, you'll still see that technical side as we talk about applying for the different components that require licensing. Um, but there are going to be other aspects that don't require licensing, uh, that won't maybe mention social equity, uh, in, in the technical application or something like that. Uh, you know, like opportunity zones have nothing to do with social equity in the cannabis space, but it should very much be a part of social equity policy. Uh, if that makes sense. So, um, I think there's going to be a lot more that we see, uh, beyond the technical side and then, you know, from a social side, uh, you know, we, we see that as well, and we need to create safe spaces and environments for people to consume cannabis. We need to, uh, you know, consider affordability. We need to consider the consumer and the site, uh, in, in this whole process as well.

Speaker 8 ([01:24:40](#)):

It's kind of always the same thing with our, um, legislation. Um, it always seems like the people who aren't, who don't live in the communities who don't go to prison who have gobs of money or gobs of money backing them are making the laws, which I think is really some people they're missing the point. It's, it's literally systematic racism. It's, it's, it's the same system we've been fighting against. I feel like it's showing up in the cannabis industry.

Speaker 5 ([01:25:15](#)):

Yeah. And not just in the legislation. That's also, I mean, you have cannabis companies out there, nonprofits that are popping up now to try to address social equity and other diversity issues who have no standing or background or even connection to the communities, they are quote, unquote seeking to serve. And, you know, unfortunately what we have seen, and this is what we, again, we hope to see things begin to change in a tide to turn, um, my group minorities for medical marijuana. MTBA again, probably the two most recognizable minority nonprofits in the space fighting for social equity and, uh, uh, diversity issues. You know, you would think that given everything that's going on, uh, hope with the rest racial pandemic that our phones would be blowing and people are, you know, money is just being thrown our way. Instead, what we see are, uh, you know, other non-profits who, uh, you know, the big companies are saying, Hey, listen, we just donated 10,000 or 250,000 to this group to do what they're doing.

Speaker 5 ([01:26:22](#)):

And what they're doing is very worthy causes, you know, like expungements, like, you know, accelerators and so on, but it's completely overlooking groups like us. Who've been on the ground with, you know, shoestring budgets doing the actual work, uh, who have built strong relationships and community ties in these communities. Um, and so the same thing happens at the legislative level where you have these cannabis companies who are well capitalized, they put a lot of money, it's a lobby. And so of course they want to do, uh, you know, the w the right thing. And I won't say that it's, uh, ill intention, you know, I think many of them are well-meaning, but again, they have no real standing or background or connection to the community, um, to be able to really know what the needs are and how to address those needs. And so then you see legislation that is, um, well intentioned, but not well implemented or not completely, uh, addressing the problem.

Speaker 5 ([01:27:23](#)):

And so, um, you know, I, I definitely want to see that change. Um, you know, and I, I would love for groups, um, who have an interest in working in this space. You know, if you're a company that has lots of money and you contribute lots of money to, um, you know, social, or I'm sorry to cannabis lobbying, you know, spend a little money to support groups like, uh, drug policy Alliance, and, um, you know, uh, our group minorities for medical marijuana who, you know, we hold lobby days. We, we, you know, regularly interact with, uh, you know, elected officials, so support our efforts in doing that, um, as well. So, yeah, I hope that that will change.

Speaker 8 ([01:28:08](#)):

I have one last question for you. Um, a lot of people might not be aware of the marijuana project policy, um, or who their, um, executive director is. It's a, it's a man named Steve Hawkins. Um, I assume you're familiar with him.

Speaker 5 ([01:28:26](#)):

Yeah. I've never met him in person, but yeah, I'm familiar with marijuana policy, project MPP, um, and, and some of their work. And they've been a huge resource for us in terms of, uh, with, with our limited resources, um, you know, we tap into, you know, what they put out in terms of information to help us, you know, stay abreast of what's happening in different States. Um, but, you know, we we'd love to see them do even more when it comes to social equity as well. So yeah, they put out a lot of good information and again, like I said, we've used them and continue to use them, uh, to help us, uh, you know, look at everything that's going on in the space, even though we, again are, um, typically folks focused on issues of diversity or social equity, um, you know, is important to understand the entire landscape of what's going on and, and, uh, the industry in any particular state.

Speaker 5 ([01:29:25](#)):

And so, uh, they certainly have been helpful in us understanding, you know, what the climate is in that state, what, you know, our, the, the, uh, you know, key topics that everybody's talking about and how do we, you know, uh, work to advance what we, uh, you know, some of our priorities as well. Thank you very much. And we hope to have you back. Absolutely. Thanks for having me. I think it was awesome. And, uh, I enjoy talking about these subjects. So anytime, you know, I'm invited onto a platform to talk about it. I appreciate, and thank you guys for what you do as well. Great, good luck with everything you're doing.

Speaker 2 ([01:30:05](#)):

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Speaker 5 ([01:31:16](#)):

Scene one, Apple, take two.