

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Shaleen Title

JVN: Hey, curious people, I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome to Getting Curious. Can marijuana legalization save us all? I'm very curious about marijuana legalization and where we are on marijuana legalization. This is something that affects millions of people's lives in America. There is a deep history to the, the history of legalization or decriminalization and criminalization of marijuana in this country. Um I had the opportunity to research that and write about it in my second book, *Love That Story*. Um But I want to expand, I want to talk to people who are smarter than I am or, you know, more versed in the history of marijuana legalization and where we are now. And I also kind of want to test my knowledge um with someone because there has been such a shift in public opinion on marijuana since the seventies. Now weed is either legal or decriminalized in many states, but because it's legal in some places and not legal in other places in the United States, this is creating a really messy situation on top of what was already a very messy situation. So where are we going and what's the path forward? To answer the question of can marijuana legalization save us all, we are bringing in Shaleen Title. Shaleen is an attorney and longtime drug policy activist who has been writing, passing and implementing equitable cannabis laws for over 20 years. She is a former top regulator for the state of Massachusetts where she served as commissioner of the Cannabis Control Commission from 2017 to 2020. Her primary focus is running the nonprofit think tank, Parabola Center, which is a nonpartisan think tank of legal professionals and drug policy experts coming together to protect people, not corporations. Their mission is to provide everyone with education, access and expertise to support cannabis legalization policies that put people and small businesses first before big corporations. Wait, Shaleen, how are you, are you having a good day?

SHALEEN TITLE: Oh, I'm having a great day, yes! Julia and Allison and I are having a wonderful time chatting.

JVN: And Shaleen where do we find you? Where are you talking to us from?

SHALEEN TITLE: Boston, Massachusetts.

JVN: Where you are a lawyer, you're an attorney and you're a drug policy activist. So, and you have an incredible career. Will you just tell us kind of just like what your day to day is and what you're doing right now just to like set the scene for like our listeners.

SHALEEN TITLE: Absolutely. Yeah. So I've been working on drug policy for over 20 years, but right now I'm primarily focused on writing and passing equitable marijuana laws and I try to do consulting for state governments as well. And I try to do a lot of education for people on this topic.

JVN: So what was the deal with, like weed criminalization in the first place?

SHALEEN TITLE: Well, let me just say it's really important to understand the history before we talk about the now because I think it can give us a lot of keys and secrets and ideas for how it's going to go in the future. So, thank you for asking me that first. So the deal with marijuana criminalization is that it's pretty recent. So 100 years ago, people could use marijuana in the U.S. quite freely. Um Since the 1800s, it's been used as a medical product. So like most drugs in the US, you would get them from a doctor in a pharmacy and they were usually some kind of like tonic or elixir. So you might have a tonic for a particular

condition or you might have a tonic for like hysterical women, you know, that could have had anything in it. So it was like this for a long time, up until like the turn of the century, and then you had to label what was in these tonics and then there was some regulation. Um but it was largely going fine. You could access cannabis, you could buy, um you could even buy it to smoke. They were called Indian cigarettes. Um but in 1930s, that's when we started to have a problem. And the main problem was a man named Harry Anslinger. It can be traced back to one person.

JVN: That man!

SHALEEN TITLE: That awful man. He's like basically a Disney villain.

JVN: And also it was like, it was like those silent films because they were like racializing like weed and being like racist fucks about weed. But it was that fucking guy. But I didn't...continue please. I'm so sorry.

SHALEEN TITLE: Oh so we swear on this podcast. Okay, good to know.

JVN: Oh, yeah, you can. Yeah, you can totally cuss. It's like a college podcast. You know, it's not like a high school podcast. It's like a college podcast.

SHALEEN TITLE: Okay, so let's explain this to people together since you know about it. So this fucker Harry Anslinger, he was extremely racist. He was racist by 1920s standards, which means that says something. So he was in charge of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, which was like the uh one of the predecessors to today's Drug Enforcement Administration and he had been in charge of, among other things, alcohol prohibition. So alcohol prohibition ends and he needs something to do. I imagine, you know, he can't lock people up as easily. You know, his funding might be drying up. And so marijuana gets his attention. This was also around the time that we were seeing a shift from medical use and these tonics and elixirs to a lot of recreational use. Um and that was, in many ways, tied to Mexican immigrants and the jazz scene. And so as you can imagine for a racist man, uh this kind of made his blood boil. So he became obsessed with marijuana and ended up writing um the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act and what this law did—this is very interesting, especially if you're thinking about right now and what's gonna happen next—it did not outright criminalize marijuana. It made it so that you had to pay a tax and get a special stamp. And what happened was they then never issued these stamps. And so it was criminalized in practice. And so the way that he got this law passed was not by talking about the drug in any way. It was not about marijuana at all. It's part of this history in our country where criminalizing drugs doesn't have anything at all to do with the drug, but it has to do with racism and often targeting one particular community. And so on the floor of Congress, he told this story about how this drug was making people go crazy. If you're familiar with reefer madness, this was around that time. So it was making the black jazz musicians violent. It was making white women sleep with black men. All of these myths that were designed to infuriate people and bring out racist undertones. And so it passed, it passed with maybe half an hour of discussion, very easily. And that's how we ended up with criminalization.

JVN: When does like marijuana consumption become like outright illegal, like by law, not like by practice?

SHALEEN TITLE: Right, so after 1937 we saw people arrested because they didn't have the stamp, right? So the first people I think to be arrested, it was 18 months imprisonment for

possession without the stamp. And then I think four years without the stamp for dealing. So we were working with that for many, many decades, but the War On Drugs, by name, um started in 1971...

JVN: Which was Nixon...

SHALEEN TITLE: Which was Nixon, the next villain. And we saw that actually um coming up before that, there was a change in culture where marijuana was becoming more accepted. Um and the tax stamps were being questioned, but being pretty strongly questioned. And so that was when we got the Controlled Substances Act and this outright criminalized marijuana and all of these other controlled substances that were put into categories uh called schedules which are ostensibly...

JVN: What year was that again?

SHALEEN TITLE: 1970.

JVN: And then that's when it became like so bad!

SHALEEN TITLE: Under Jimmy Carter, he actually said that marijuana should be decriminalized. Um and then with Reagan, there was this huge backlash, right? And we have to kind of be ready, you know, like anything could be coming next. But yeah, so 1970 there's this Controlled Substances Act and uh the schedules, the different categories affect how people can access these different medicines. And marijuana is put into schedule one, which means it has no accepted medical use; heroin is also on that schedule and that's where it remains today. Do you mind if—I'm only going to do this once swear—do you mind if I read a quote? This quote is so, so shocking. I feel like I have to read it verbatim. So this is from Nixon's Council who, it was decades later I think he was just kind of maybe like in this like fuck it mode.

JVN: Oh my god, I put this in my book. I think, I think, I think I included this, I think I included because it made me like, it made me like throw up when I saw it the first time. Yeah, but tell me and tell our listeners because it's so good.

SHALEEN TITLE: Okay, so warning, you may want to throw up when you hear this. This is a real quote. He said, "You want to know what this was really all about? The Nixon campaign in 1968 and the Nixon White House after that had two enemies: the anti-war left and Black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war, or Blacks. But by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."

JVN: You know what's really scary about that outside of what's already so scary about that. If you replace that with trans people and like queer organizations, like, like for now, we're seeing this playbook with trans people and queer people. Like that's how the right is treating queer people like they're lying about us night after night. They're saying that we're a threat to children. We're saying that we're like, we're just threat to the future of society. It's like being and it's like, you know, we're, we're a threat to women. We're a threat to kids. We're a threat like all that and like they're going, they already are trying to like, arrest parents of like trans kids. They're trying to like a lot of these like anti-trans laws are like stretching like a butt out

of adulthood and saying like, we can't have gender affirming care up to 26 which like proves the point that it was never about kids. Like it's about control, but...

SHALEEN TITLE: Yes, it's a playbook for oppression and control. It's the whole like, you know, don't look over here, look over there: drug users, immigrants, trans people like they're coming for you. Yeah, it's exactly the same playbook.

JVN: I just like, it's like Mississippi, Arkansas. There's all these places where like wrong place, wrong time like you're fucked and like marijuana is still used as a reason to like, cause family separation like irreparable financial harm and loss of opportunities and like incarceration and all of these things that, like, we just shouldn't be able to be used for that. And I just wish we could get there faster.

SHALEEN TITLE: The most frustrating part for me though is that, um, I think there's this looming threat, which is the tobacco industry and other wannabe monopolists that would like to take over the marijuana industry. And I think that neither the Republicans nor the Democrats are doing anything yet to prevent that.

JVN: I'm so stressed out, Shaleen! What are we gonna do? How are we gonna get it? So who else is trying to fuck it up?

SHALEEN TITLE: Um so there is an organization called CPEAR. Um And it stands for some like very innocuous name, like Coalition for Policy Education and Regulation. It doesn't even have marijuana in the name. Um and they present themselves as a marijuana policy advocacy group, but an educational group, but the members are Altria, which is basically Philip Morris, uh Molson Coors, uh Reynolds America and in General, all of these companies that have so far not gotten into the because it's still federally illegal, it's still made up of small businesses, but once it's legal, they are going to swoop in unless we stop them from doing.

JVN: So, can I just tell you this is why I do the pod. Because like I, this is how I learn. So where is weed legal in the U.S.? Where is it not legal in the U.S.? Where, I mean, just, or just like some loose examples, like, you don't have to go into all 50 states. And then what, like, what fuckery is that creating in terms of like, criminality, um, you know, prosecution, civil asset forfeiture, but also being able to store the money somewhere. Because I have read a lot of articles about how, like, a lot of stores can't store their money anywhere because banks aren't allowed to hold it federally. But are some states, have some states, made laws where, like, you can put the money in like a state or like a local bank or something or are these people just having, like, because that's not safe if you're just like keeping all your money, like downstairs in a weed shop, like you gotta put it somewhere. And not only is it not safe, it's like not making any interest, which isn't smart and rude because every other business gets to. So, yeah, all those things.

SHALEEN TITLE: Well, I want to explain the banking situation because this has got an enormous amount of press and attention, but it's a little bit more complicated. So, on the one hand, small businesses because of federal legality, uh, they find it very difficult to find banking services; they can't access loans. Um, typically you have to just get loans from your family and friends, which as you can imagine that's very difficult for equity. It makes, uh, businesses really inaccessible to people. And so it would be great if we had banking reform, we need that. At the same time, there is a push for big banks to get involved in marijuana, which I think would be a bad thing um at this point, and potentially in the future as well. And that effort is sort of hiding behind this idea that uh small businesses are keeping all of their

cash um in big vaults and boxes and this is how I learned this: so I was a regulator in Massachusetts, and I had heard that a major problem with all of this cash that was sitting around and causing robberies. And so what we did was we created a way for businesses to pay their taxes at the counters in cash. So we worked with the Department of Revenue, we set up these tax collection counters all around the state—um this was several years ago—and last year I decided to check on how much cash had been collected. Do you wanna guess?

JVN: How much?

SHALEEN TITLE: Zero! There was no cash collected. And the reason is because this is kind of a myth, actually every dispensary in Massachusetts collects uh allows the use of debit cards and they have some kind of electronic workaround. So I say all that to say, yes, there's a problem with security. There's a problem with robberies. We do need banking reform. But at the same time, we can't be tricked into letting big banks into the marijuana industry. Does that make sense?

JVN: Yeah. So, I mean, ok, so, so basically dispensaries already are paying their taxes, they're not getting robbed more than anybody else is getting robbed. And so really this isn't rocket science. We just need federal banking reform?

SHALEEN TITLE: And! Yes, and!

JVN: And?

SHALEEN TITLE: And this is really like the key to all marijuana law reform, in my opinion, is we fix the problem, but we don't just fix it with some corporate free-for-all that's gonna benefit big businesses more than small, which tends to be our default, right? So in almost every case, it involves making a change, but then also thinking about these mom and pop shops and these Black-owned businesses that have been very tenderly and with great difficulty cultivated in many different states with a lot of intention, with a lot of um struggle to get these laws passed. I'm almost, I'm getting emotional just like talking about these businesses, but we can't just let them get wiped out, you know, as soon as federal legalization comes. So for example, in this case, yes, we want banking reform and so it would include allowing businesses to access traditional banking and lending. But also in marijuana specifically, we can fix some of these other problems that we see everywhere else. And we can make sure that small businesses and minority owned businesses actually have access to lending, you know, and they're not shut out of the entire process. And we can do that through legislation.

JVN: I love that. So how, um, so, so to set this so, ok, so now a lot of states have legalized, um the people who have legalized like the dispensaries and these, these mom and pop shops who have you worked with, they found ways to like, pay their taxes to pay their dues, employ people, like they work so hard. And now this like loom of or this, this threat looms around federal legalization because we don't want these big businesses influencing so much. And it's like when you're building something, it's really important because once it's built, it's really fucking hard to undo it. And so it's like the building is really important and that's where we are right now. And that's something I think I've just been really not understanding and one of my biggest takeaways from our conversation is like, I've just been kind of really focused on legalization. Like it just need to be legalized, needs to be legalized because I want people to stop getting thrown in jail and like civil asset forfeiture. I really want it to stop being a reason for police to be able to like arrest people and hurt people in really

significant ways. But it is also true that it's like, I don't, I don't want to rush so that people don't get like long term gain from this really lucrative potential because we were just like being really one track minded toward one particular goal; like multiple things can be true at once.

SHALEEN TITLE: I'm so happy right now. You got it so clearly. Um can I tell you one thing though? I have actually something pretty optimistic to tell you. So, at my organization, Parabola Center, we've done some survey research that we'll be releasing shortly. And I was very pleasantly surprised by the results. So we asked people about these concepts of social equity, what they care about when it comes to legalization, what values they have. And I was expecting that we would hear from young liberal people of color that they really care about equity. And that, that's what happened. But we also found that this concept of equity, which we defined as using marijuana laws to try to repair some of the harm done by prohibition, was popular across the board. And we found that with data for progress polls as well, a majority of people, um and even a majority of Republicans, support policies where we take tax revenue from uh legal marijuana, and we reinvest it in those communities that were most harmed by prohibition. And so I think this actually transcends party lines in some ways because it resonates with an idea of fairness that we all have. Because if we understand that these laws were not enforced in a fair way, then we understand that something needs to be done.

JVN: Well, then what's the fucking hold up with these goddamn Republicans who don't want to get on board with like the more Democratic proposals that I feel like you kind of accomplish that?

SHALEEN TITLE: There are bipartisan bills um already for legalization. Um there are Libertarian organizations that support direct reparations, amazingly, for people who have had drug convictions. Do you know the Reason Foundation, for example? So they are a Libertarian organization. Um but they actually put out a report recently that suggested that direct reparations would be a good way to handle, you know, what we understand has been very there about the way that drug laws have been enforced. So I think we're in a phase where we're still um doing a lot of research. We're still um it's still early like we don't have a perfect legalization bill yet that would solve these problems. And I think that the best ideas could come from anywhere at this point.

JVN: These ideas of fairness, like even a lot of Republicans back those ideas on the whole. But then I still feel like they get like, I guess maybe by the whole system, I don't know, I feel like Republicans are fuckers, but maybe their hearts are nice and sometimes.

SHALEEN TITLE: Well, I mean, in Florida you can even lose your driver's license. Why, why? It just, it makes no sense that you should lose your driver's license even if you accept everything that they say about drugs. Um I think you're right to like we allow and, and often it is Republicans, we allow politicians to just espouse a concept or a platitude and we don't check the details, right. So, um, I mean, on the Democratic side, sometimes it's, it's equity and justice. I think on the Republican side it's uh you know, small businesses, competition, fairness. But if we're not reading the bills, then uh those words mean nothing.

JVN: Success stories; like in a perfect world, what's your fantasy? Like, what's your legalization fantasy for weed?

SHALEEN TITLE: So what would happen, ideally, uh at the federal level: my fantasy is three things. First, we just let all the people who are locked up for cannabis out. That is priority number one: let them out of jail, um stop this shit where, you know, you can't get public benefits if you have a conviction, you know, expunge automatically all of the records like deal with all of the criminal justice reform. And by the way, we can just do that, we don't even have to address any of the other stuff. We could just do that in a bill on its own. Priority, number two, I think would be um allowing the states to keep doing what they're doing; regulate it, um make sure that there are sensible public health and safety protections in place, but generally allow it to keep moving as it is. And then number three would be to prevent monopolies. So I've written some language that uh a, would just help prevent monopolies in general, but b, it would keep tobaccos, it would disqualify tobacco companies from holding a marijuana license because of the way that they've lied to the public. It's documented. Um, they manipulated their products for profit and they've done it once we know it, we should not allow them to do it again with marijuana.

JVN: It kind of reminds me like, how we talk about on Pretty Curious, like, beauty, doesn't it touches everything, like, it's not only is it like how we show up and how to achieve looks and like what we like and what we don't like, but it's also like economy and its misogyny and gender and its history and its race and it's like industry and it like touches all these things. It's like, not just and marijuana is kind of really similar. It's not just it's like, it's so inter-layered and it's so and there's like a lot to like untangle there. So I kind of thought what I've learned so far, it's like federal legalization, like, isn't the unicorn like the perfect fix like unless there's like, like a lot of objectives that we get into that legalization, which I don't know with the cinemas and the mansions and then like the Coach Tuberville and with our Senate and like our electorate, I'm just like stressed. Like, is there anything that you or yeah, like what, like high, low, best case, worst case legislatively or is it just, or are you kind of already said that you don't see any legislation that would fix everything. You get the question, even though that was really convoluted, just where are we right now on like federal legislation?

SHALEEN TITLE: Yeah, let me answer that, like kind of in the ideal world and then in the real world. So I think in the ideal world, if we took incremental steps in the right direction, then we could get there. So if we started with the criminal justice reform, right, and we just expunged all records and we restored the benefits of people with convictions um and we just allowed like, say possession and what we call social sharing where you're not selling it, but you're just sharing with your friends. Um that would be a really good first step. And then we could use that time to kind of collect data and design a national framework. And then the second step could be in these different states, we have pretty good programs, right, that have these mom and pop shops, these minority owned businesses. If they are able to conduct business with each other, so that's called interstate commerce, um, that would be the next step in federal laws and it would be fair, right? It wouldn't be like, it would be fair and it wouldn't allow for Amazon who has, by the way, lobbied all of the federal, uh endorsed Amazon has endorsed all of the federal legalization bills on the table. Um And the alcohol companies are working on them, the tobacco companies are working on them. It's because they want to swoop in and take over the national market. But we could stop that from happening if we only allow these small social equity businesses to transact with each other. So that those are the incremental steps that I would take. Those are the ideal things that would happen. Now, I think what's likely to happen in the real world is that we might see the Biden administration reschedule marijuana. So remember we talked earlier about the Controlled Substances Act and how marijuana is in schedule one. So it was leaked that the

Biden administration is looking at, um, changing the scheduling and it was leaked that the HHS agency recommended rescheduling it probably to three. So three is where ketamine is, uh anabolic steroids, testosterone. Um, things that you can't just go to a store and get. Um, to me that doesn't make a lot of sense to put it in schedule three, when...

JVN: Is there a four?

SHALEEN TITLE: There's a four, a five and a six or I'm sorry, there's a four and a five.

JVN: Where's alcohol and cigarettes?

SHALEEN TITLE: Yeah, that's the question. They're not on the list. They are de-scheduled entirely.

JVN: These hoes, excuse me um, marijuana should be delisted.

SHALEEN TITLE: It should be de-listed also called de-scheduled. That's exactly what we should do.

JVN: Yes, de-scheduled. Joe put it on private, not in the Yellow Pages. You can't even look her up because she's not there. Marijuana doesn't live there, anymore. You know?

SHALEEN TITLE: I do.

JVN: It's interesting that like how someone learned something first and because people learned racist shit first, especially around like weed and the consumption of weed. Is there any playbook to like combating that, when people already be like, ha have these deeply held beliefs about like racism and weed consumption?

SHALEEN TITLE: That's so insightful. Um you know what I think we can look to is the first medical marijuana laws which were passed in the '90s uh largely by the LGBTQ movement. And you know how they did it was compassion, compassion. So people had been living for, you know, decades and decades with these racist ideas that Anslinger and company had planted. But there's this woman, um my hero, Brownie Mary. Have you ever heard of her?

JVN: No.

SHALEEN TITLE: So Brownie Mary, I think her real name is Mary Jane Rathburn, um she was a nurse and she was in San Francisco. I bet you have heard of her.

JVN: Yes. Yes.

SHALEEN TITLE: And she became well known for bringing cannabis brownies uh to people in the hospital who were seriously ill. She was finding that people with AIDS, it helped with their wasting syndrome and it was helping people with cancer. And she, she would just show up every day with dozens of brownies and hand them out. And she got arrested multiple times and every time she got arrested, she would just go back and do it again and she was so bold, she was so uh firm in her belief, and so sympathetic that the city of San Francisco eventually stopped arresting her and they let her distribute her brownies. That's what led to the first California medical marijuana law. That's what led to marijuana laws around the country and now what we have. And it's really, I think all due to these, these folks in San Francisco.



JVN: Oh my God. I love that story so much. Well, um best option I think we covered like best option for weed legalization. What's the worst one?

SHALEEN TITLE: The worst is a corporate free-for-all where we either de-schedule or we pass federal legislation to legalize and we don't put in any protection from monopolies. Because what's going to happen immediately is Amazon, Uber, Philip Morris, Molson Coors, all these people who are waiting in the wings are going to swoop in and use their existing lobbying, power, resources and infrastructure to take over the industry and we're going to put all of these small shops out of business. And the worst part is we could end up with a situation where we have a patented pharmaceutical drug that's legal and everything else is still criminalized.

JVN: And it like will suck.

SHALEEN TITLE: It would suck!

JVN: Like they'll grow it and like all the strains will suck and we will have all of our like gorgeous types and like all of our yummy little like neighborhood stores with all of our like yummy stuff!

SHALEEN TITLE: That could, in fact, not only could that happen, that's kind of where we're headed with the bills that are on the table right now and that's why we need a big course correct.

JVN: God damnit. We're going to have to reach across the aisle and stuff. We're going to have to like, God damnit. These people are wearing me out.

SHALEEN TITLE: Let me tell you what Parabola Center does though.

JVN: Yes, please because that's what we need to see. We went into the dip and now we're going into the optimism. Let's go into it. Like, how can we help?

SHALEEN TITLE: So I mentioned I was a regulator in Massachusetts and I worked with many other um activists and attorneys here. Um and what we found this is true of many other states is that a lot of the policies that we ended up implementing just came from conversations like this, like the way that you and I were just bullshitting a few minutes ago, like, maybe we can do this, maybe we can do this with schools; that's really how these ideas came up. Um largely led by the, the same people of color who had been targeted by the War on Drugs. We put in all of these policies, they are in place, they're working. And what we found is we can keep doing that if we fight for it, right? I think the most important thing is that when policy makers and—and this is obviously harder in Congress than it is at the state level—but the basic principle applies: when policy makers approach something, they're going to be accosted by lobbyists. But if they also talk to activists and people who care and they have language and legislation and concrete ideas and answers to the questions from them too, I think that they're open to it and we've seen that they're open to it. So that's what Parabola Center does. It's very narrow. Um we focus on marijuana policy that would put racial equity and public health above corporate profits.

JVN: We need to get you in like a gorgeous public hearing so that you can tell everyone in case this episode doesn't go as far as we need it to.

SHALEEN TITLE: So, so two things, this is what I would tell the public is first step: get educated, second step: anybody can lobby, right? You don't have to be a lobbyist. So the

education is what we're really focused on at this point because most people don't know about this threat, right? Most people are just like, "Legalize it and everything will take care of itself." I thought that for a long time.

JVN: That's what I thought!

SHALEEN TITLE: Yeah, most people do. So, for example, we have a crash course over the summer. Um last year uh Elizabeth Warren uh spoke to us, Ben from Ben and Jerry's were there. It's a really cool time when you can just share information, you know, get everybody on the same page. We're going to do it again this year. And I think that first step of like, what do they call it, singing from the same page when you're in choir, uh just getting everybody together. Then the next step is making sure that, you know, we have a narrative that we are lobbying. Um but I think that first step is education and getting on the same page.

JVN: We got because right now we're all like, no ba ba like we're like, we're not even doing like pretty songs at all, right? Because I was like, oh, like sometimes like, it's like all fucked up like that. It was like, but what we need to be doing is like some gorgeous other song that's all from the same page. You're so right. It's like you started this interview by saying really people are on both sides of the aisle are a lot closer on this. They're sick of big money interest, they're sick of like, you know, fear mongering. They're sick of like the rich getting richer and like, no middle class, they're sick of like, people getting fucked over and like not having an opportunity, like of just unfairness, they're sick of unfairness. Um and you know, depending on who you're listening to, you might think that the system is unfair for whatever reason, but that doesn't really matter as much as like trying to figure out, well, I think it is really important that we understand why it is like that. But I also really want us to make a future where people can like succeed and thrive um and not big corporate interests in um the marijuana industry.

SHALEEN TITLE: Yeah. Uh to practice what I was just preaching a minute ago about like coming armed, you know, with, with policy, I've struggled with that with the rescheduling rumor because...

JVN: I'm mad about it.

SHALEEN TITLE: I'm mad about it. But at the same time, I think if we want to be smart and we want to be thinking long term, then we have to come with an alternative. So, uh we're part of a coalition that's called United for Decriminalization. And what we wanted to do was not, was to give Biden an alternative because my guess is the way that this leaked, you know, that there is some hope that by doing something about marijuana, right, we're going to appeal to young people and, you know, the voters who, like you said, seem to be very much on the fence...

JVN: Without scaring the ones who they're afraid of like being on the fence and that's like why they don't want to like just de, destatus it all together.

SHALEEN TITLE: And what we wanted to do was give an alternative that would be helpful. But something that Biden alone could do, you know, and isn't necessarily going all the way with the scheduling. So, um he could restore public benefits for federal employees that have um convictions. He could publicly talk about his support for legalization with monopoly protection, which is something he talks about all the time in other industries and he could, um...

JVN: Because he's very pro union!

SHALEEN TITLE: Yes! He's pro-union, he's pro-labor, he's pro-competition. Um, I think the really, the only reason he hasn't talked about that in the context of marijuana is because no one has asked him to, right.

JVN: I think that it's because of, honestly a lot of the parts that he had to play in um the three strikes your out stuff and like in the way that weed was criminalized in the first place, I think that he's kind of scared about pointing too much, too much of his voters and supporters like to that history of the '90s...

SHALEEN TITLE: And not repeating the Jimmy Carter situation because that's exactly what happened when Carter endorsed decriminalization.

JVN: Oh, because he had been part of the criminalization laws prior?

SHALEEN TITLE: I think so.

JVN: Wow.

SHALEEN TITLE: Wait, maybe I misunderstood you. I'm saying that, I mean, Carter was not like a drug warrior, like Biden was...

JVN: But he, but he was like a governor who probably like signed some shit that said like, you know, I'm against weed and then he like turned, is that not right? I wonder we just, we need to do like what happened to the Carter presidency? I need to do like an episode of the podt about that because there was a lot in those four years.

SHALEEN TITLE: Yeah, I think there's a lot to be learned right from what's happening today too. Um but yeah, just, just to your point, I think that Biden might be concerned about going so far, you know, that he alienates people or causes a backlash, which is rational.

JVN: I, I did hear it. I, I get that and I also give him so much credit and I do respect him, but I also am frustrated about a lot of things and I, I think someone said it to me like this and I think this is just so accurate: I just feel like Democrats tend to run from their base, but Republicans run towards their base like, yeah, and um I wish that we would just like get the undecided people who are disillusioned from that because I just have so many friends who would, who just would show up and who would turn out if they weren't so tired of being disillusioned by democratic policy or by Democrat policy.

SHALEEN TITLE: And just to say, I do think Biden taking those steps uh that I outlined um in terms of real marijuana reform and not just talking that would be running towards the base, right? That would be getting a lot of undecided people who might care about this issue.

JVN: Shaleen: here's the other thing I learned today, I'm obsessed with you. If I was straight, I would like just be like we, we love us, which is how I can tell, I'm so not straight because I talk like that. I can't help it. But like I'm literally so obsessed with you. Like, where do we follow you? Are you like more on X or you like explaining weed law on TikTok? Do you be talking about stuff on Instagram? Where can we follow along and is Parabola Center big on IG or TT?

SHALEEN TITLE: Uh, the obsession is mutual! Um yes so at Parabola Center on Instagram um and TikTok, we're on linkedin as well and then you can follow me Shaleen Title. I do

explain things on X quote unquote less, less so than I, they used to. But um yes, you can find me Twitter.

JVN: Shaleen Title, Esquire, Attorney at Law, Future Solver Fixer Mother of all dragons and like slayer of problematic weed laws, extraordinaire. Thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious. Um that would be your Game of Thrones title, the one I just gave. We could add in some other things too like House of Aislingerslayage. No, he can't have a title in your No, he's already had enough like space in our some other cool title. But yeah, thank you for coming on.

SHALEEN TITLE: This was awesome. Thank you for being so curious and smart.

JVN: Tell me more about that last part just like really good about like putting things together or something...

SHALEEN TITLE: And I'm just like falling more in love with you this entire podcast.

JVN: I learned so much from Shaleen y'all. I really was going around being a little frustrated with the sitch. Um really thinking that legalization was like a one stop shop towards fixing all of these ills. And actually turns out it's big banking, we have to check big banking, um Big Pharma, we gotta check like the alcohol industry. There's so many like large dark money like lobbyist uh people who stand to gain millions if not trillions of dollars from the marijuana industry. So marijuana legalization does not save us all. It uh it depends on how the legalization has passed. We need to put pressure on our elected officials to pass legalization that um supports small businesses and interstate commerce. And also when, when marijuana legalization is passed, um it needs to be passed with uh with preventions to prevent monopolies and to prevent the tobacco industry, which has a proven track record of harming public health for profits, uh concealing evidence and lying to people, you know, whether they get sick or get or die or whatever, we just know that the tobacco industry has not had public safety at its heart. Um and we shouldn't give them unfettered access into the marijuana industry. And I'd say same thing with alcohol. Um all of these mom and pop shops, what I've learned is, all of these states who have legalized marijuana and all of these small businesses have had to, they absolutely pay their taxes. They're not holding their stuff in like safes in the bottom of their businesses that make them more unsafe. They just end up having to do work arounds. They have to pay their taxes anyway and they don't get write offs because of the fact that marijuana is scheduled as a schedule one drug. So they can't even write off legitimate business practices because we don't have the banking reform in place to support marijuana legalization, um, the way that we need to for these small mom and pop shops. So, because small mom and pop shops have really um carried the brunt of getting the marijuana industry this far, we can't just like, let them be flushed down the toilet with this legalization that gets passed like with the Cinemas of the world and um in the Manchins of the world and like the big corporate politicians who are like in the pockets of big of big corporations. So it is a very complex issue. But I think Parabola y'all, if I'm taking away anything, make sure you're following the Parabola Center, make sure you're following Shaleen Title and all the work that she's doing. What an incredible guest, right? I mean, I just learned so much from her. Um and let's keep our eyes on 2024. And you know, if you feel disillusioned by the Biden administration or just by, you know, our government in general, uh maybe get involved with Parabola Center as you heard, they're, she's, they're nonpartisan, they're, they're calling bullshit on all the sides. Um so work with them and if you're passionate about marijuana reform and um helping to undo some of the uh damage that's

been done to innocent people who are using marijuana over the last 100 years, work at the Parabola Center. And thanks for listening to Getting Curious, we'll be back with more Getting Curious next time. Thanks for listening. We love you so much.

You've been listening to getting curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise and the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. And honey, there's more where that came from. You can follow us on Instagram @curiouswithjvn. We are doing the most over there and it is so much fun. You can catch us here every Wednesday and also make sure to tune in every Monday for Pretty Curious! Still can't get enough? Subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple podcasts for commercial free listening and our subscription only show, Ask JVN, where we're talking sex relationships and so much more. Our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our engineer is Nathanael McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure, Julia Melfi and Allison Weiss with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Curry and Chad Hall.