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The Seattle Medium

A Message From The People... To The People

\$.25

VOLUME 46, NUMBER 27

NOW IN OUR 46TH YEAR

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 2015

After Year Of Legal Pot Sales, State And Local Taxes Top \$70 Million

By Gene Johnson
Associated Press

(AP) - Washington launched its second-in-the-nation legal marijuana market with just a handful of stores selling high-priced pot to long lines of customers. A year later, the state has about 160 shops open, tax revenues have soared past expectations and sales top \$1.4 million per day.

And who knows - the industry might even start making some money.

Washington pot farmers, processors and retailers have complained all year that heavy state and federal tax burdens, along with competition from an unregulated medical marijuana market, have made it difficult for them to do business.

But at least some relief is here: This month, two new laws take effect, one to regulate and tax medical marijuana, and one to cut Washington's three-level excise tax on pot to a single, 37-percent tax.

Despite some industry gripes and those tweaks to Washington's legal pot law, which voters passed in 2012 to legalize marijuana for adults over 21, officials and legalization backers say the state's slow and deliberate effort to regulate marijuana has been a success.

A year after stores opened on July 8, 2014, here's a look at the state of legal weed here.

THE TAXES

Washington's racked up more than \$250 million in marijuana sales in the past year — roughly \$62 million of which constitute marijuana excise taxes. That's beyond the state's original forecast of \$36 million. And when state and local sales and other taxes are included, the total payday for the state and local governments tops \$70 million.

That's real money, if only a drop in Washington's \$38 billion two-year budget. Colorado's recreational sales began Jan. 1, 2014, and brought in taxes of \$44 million in the first year.

The tax revenue could continue to keep climbing.

And as other states watch Washington and Colorado, the only other state with legal marijuana sales, bring in more money, they're ever more seriously considering following suit, as Oregon and Alaska have already.

"Nobody's counting on the revenue from cannabis sales to save us, but it has an impact," David Zuckerman, a Vermont state senator and legalization advocate, said during a recent visit to Seattle. "The more important thing is that

the sky didn't fall in Colorado. The tidal wave hasn't hit Seattle. They're showing us that this can be done."

... AND THE TAXES

The flip side has been the burden of the taxes on pot businesses, with marijuana taxed 25 percent each time it moves from the growers to the processors to the retailers. That's been especially tough on retailers, who must pay federal income tax on the marijuana tax they turn over to the state.

James Lathrop, who owns Seattle's first legal marijuana shop, Cannabis City, says through the end of 2014, his estimated federal tax liability was \$510,000, on top of the \$778,000 he owed the state on \$3.1 million in sales.

"I'm basically doing this for free," Lathrop says. "Nobody's gone out of business, but I'm not driving a new truck either."

It hasn't been much easier on the growers.

"Looking back now, it's amazing we could be so successful and unsuccessful at the same time," says Jeremy Moberg, a long-time black-market grower who went legal and now runs CannaSol Farms in north-central Washington. "We're the No. 9 grower in the state, and my bank account just seems to stagnate."

The new tax rate should help. The law makes clear that the 37 percent tax is the responsibility of the customer, not the retailer. That means stores won't have to claim that money as income on their federal filings.

ISN'T LEGAL WEED EXPENSIVE IN WASHINGTON?

With few growers harvesting by the time the first stores opened, the average price of a gram of legal marijuana spiked to nearly \$30 last summer — about three times the cost in medical marijuana shops. But prices have been dropping as more weed gets harvested. In fact, Washington has harvested 13.5 tons of marijuana flower intended to be sold as bud, but stores have only sold about 10 tons.

Some of the excess can be turned into marijuana extracts, such as oil, but the harvest has helped drive down the prices to an average of about \$11.50 per gram.

Nevertheless, Lathrop says that in addition to tourists eager to visit the city's historic first legal pot shop, his clientele primarily consists of customers in the 25-and-older range.

"It's a more of an adult demographic, but that's OK," he says. "They have

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Election Of Black Leader Helps Redeem Episcopal Church

By George E. Curry
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — The recent election of Bishop Michael Curry as the 27th presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church — the first African American to hold the denomination's highest office — to succeed the church's first female presiding bishop is expected to help atone for the church's failure to take a more active role opposing slavery and Jim Crow laws.

Curry, bishop of the North Carolina Diocese since 2000, was easily elected presiding bishop of the 2.5 million congregation on June 27 at St. Mark's Cathedral in Salt Lake City, capturing 121 of 174 votes in a four-person race. Prior to moving to North Carolina, Curry served 12 years as rector of St. James Church in Baltimore.

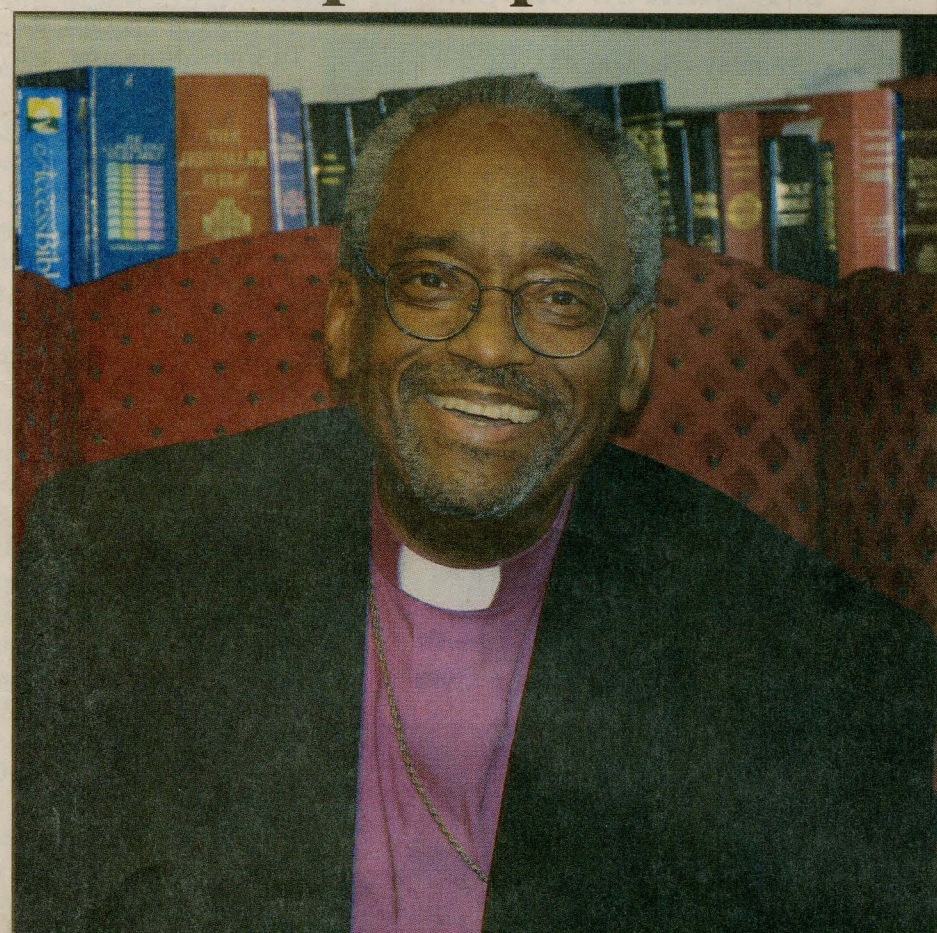
Recalling the election of Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori nine years ago as the church's first female presiding bishop, Curry said: "It was an experience of the Holy Spirit, for real ... And today I had that same feeling. And I think that's a sign of our church growing more deeply in the spirit of God and the movement of God's spirit in our world." He explained, "... My election is a reflection of that same thing. That's exciting. That's a combination of God and us working together and that is a church willing to grow and being all that God dreams for it to be."

With roots in the Church of England, the U.S. Episcopal Church is a branch of the 80 million-member Anglican Communion. Like many denominations, the church is facing declining membership, down 18 percent over the past decade.

"In this day and this time, the church can no longer wait for the congregation to come to it," he said. "The church must go where the congregation is and share the gospel."

In sharing the gospel, the church continues trying to shed part of its past.

According to a report by the Episcopal Anti-Racism Commission, published in March, "Even though the southern dioceses seceded from The Episcopal Church during the Civil War, the northern dioceses did not acknowledge any formal separation, nor did they confront the so-called 'conflict of conscience' that



Bishop Michael Curry is first Black to lead The Episcopal Church. Photo by Episcopal News Service.

led to the erection of The Episcopal Church in the Confederate States.

"North and South reunited in a gentleman's agreement not to address the racial issues that had split other denominations. While black parishes in the northern dioceses thrived on internal resources, despite what one observer called 'the arrogance of white liberals,' Southern patrimony, made it virtually impossible for Episcopalians...to recognize those formerly in bondage, indeed those who they had previously owned, as equal citizens under the law."

In the mid-60s, the church made a special effort to diversify its leadership.

"Executive Council membership was expanded to include four minority representatives, two of which were to be nominated by the Union of Black Clergy and Laity (UBCL)," the report stated. "The Church's ability to see racism in its own behavior and institutional practices could only have occurred because governance changes ensured the presence of new diverse voices. Nonetheless, change in the programmatic management at the Church's headquarters was slow to recognize institutional racism."

The report recalled, "The Church first took action on addressing institutional racism in the 1980s. A 1982 Church-wide Conference on Racism drew delegates from 50 dioceses including bishops and deputies to push for

change in the councils of the Church through training and education programs. In response General Convention for the first time requested every diocese and congregation to establish committees on racism. (1982-A062). Convention also endorsed Council's 1981 Affirmative Action policy (1982-A152). In 1986 Presiding Bishop Browning stated to Executive Council that, 'no greater challenge faces the Church than that of racism,' and committed the Episcopal Church to set an example of an organization confronting institutional racism."

Since then, the church has conducted anti-racism training, racism audits and undertaken other action to make the church more diverse.

Judging by his past, the new presiding bishop is likely to accelerate those efforts.

Curry earned a reputation of taking the gospel beyond the church walls and participating in the Moral Monday crusades to challenge North Carolina lawmakers on such issues as voting rights and income inequality.

The leader of the Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina, NAACP President Rev. William J. Barber, II, said in a statement: "We humbly add our congratulations to our prophetic friend, the new Presiding Bishop of nearly 2 million Episcopalians across America. His landslide election by the predominantly white

Episcopal church is particularly striking in the wake of the assassinations of nine African Methodist Episcopalians in Charleston less than two weeks before."

The new leader was highly praised by convention delegates interviewed by the Episcopal News Service.

Tennessee resident Michael Moore said, "I'm a cradle Episcopalian, fourth generation Episcopalian, and I think he will do a lot to bring people back together again. Through him we can send a message to the world and to my daughter, who's become cynical about the church. He can bring us all together, not just Black people who've left, but he can also give White people hope... There's so much divide in the world, we need someone like him to bring us together."

Rev. Stephanie Spellers, chaplain to the House of Bishops, said, "I can't stop crying. This is not even about Michael Curry. ... This is a victory for Jesus. ... I could just feel the Spirit just pouring out, and it's not going to be ever the same again."

Jane Cosby, an Executive Council member from Philadelphia, said: "... The fact that he got it on the first ballot and the fact that I've lived long enough to see a Black president of the United States and now a Black presiding bishop in The Episcopal Church, I've got nothing else to wish for. If I die to tonight it will be OK."

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