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2020 ELECTIONS

Kamala Harris calls for marijuana legalization: ‘I think it gives a lot of people joy’

California Democratic Sen. Harris; call for legalizing marijuana at the federal level follows the lead of multiple others seeking the White House. | Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

By KATIE GALIOTO
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Sen. Kamala Harris called for the legalization of marijuana at a federal level in a Monday morning interview, making her the latest 2020 contender to weigh in on an issue that has become front-and-center as the presidential campaign season begins.

“Half my family’s from Jamaica,” the California Democrat said, laughing when asked to respond to those who think she’s opposed to legalizing recreational use of the drug. “Are you kidding me?”

Appearing on “The Breakfast Club,” a New York City-based radio show, Harris also said she smoked a joint in college.

“And I inhaled,” she added, joking in reference to President Bill Clinton’s comments on the campaign trail in 1992 that he smoked marijuana but “didn’t inhale it.”

When asked whether she would smoke again if the federal government were to legalize the recreational use of the drug, Harris laughed and replied**: “Listen, I think it gives a lot of people joy. And we need more joy.”**

The former San Francisco district attorney and California attorney general said legalization would have to come with some caveats, **emphasizing a need for research on the effects of marijuana on the developing brain and a means for regulating use of the drug while driving.**

Harris’ calls follow the lead of multiple others seeking the White House. Sen. Cory Booker, a New Jersey Democrat and one of Harris’ top opponents for the party’s nomination, introduced a bill in 2017 that would legalize marijuana use at a federal level and encourage states to legalize it locally through incentives. By attaching the issue to himself early on, Booker — one of the early top prospects for the Democrats in 2020 — all but forced contenders to take a stance on the legalization of marijuana.

Harris also touched on **race and mass incarceration in relation to marijuana use**, leading to broader discussions of her agenda for African-Americans. When asked, the senator said she is in favor of some form of reparations.

“We have got to recognize, back to that earlier point, people aren’t starting out on the same base in terms of their ability to succeed,” she said. “So we have got to recognize that and give people a lift up.”

As she outlined her agenda — highlighting plans for historically black colleges and universities, tax proposals to address poverty and **criminal justice reforms** — Harris defended President Barack Obama when asked about African-Americans who say the former president didn’t do enough for the black population.

“None of us can do enough. And we all know that,” Harris said. “If you are a parent raising a child, you know we can never do enough. As leaders, we can never do enough. It’s important to acknowledge that. But let’s also give people credit for what they have accomplished.”