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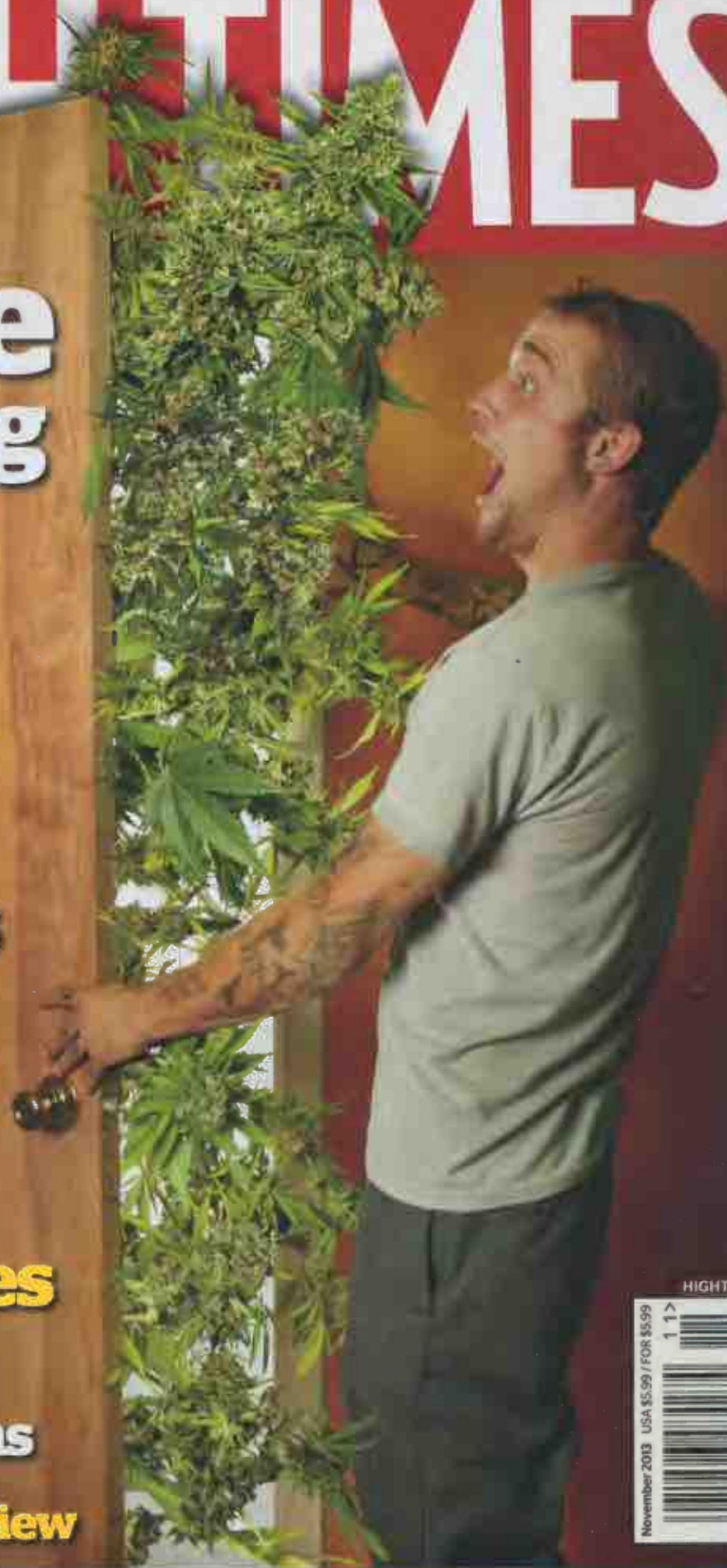
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BY JUSTIN HAMPTON
PHOTOS BY STEVE PAYNE

VICENTE FOX

THE HIGH TIMES INTERVIEW

ALARMED BY THE DRUG WAR VIOLENCE THAT HAS BEEN RAVAGING HIS COUNTRY SINCE HE LEFT OFFICE IN 2006, FORMER MEXICAN PRESIDENT VICENTE FOX HAS CREATED A COALITION THAT INCLUDES AMERICAN CANNABIS LAW REFORM ACTIVISTS TO FOCUS ON A SINGULAR GOAL: LEGALIZING POT.

IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY *REVOLUTION OF HOPE*, VICENTE FOX RECALLS A FORMATIVE MOMENT WITH MANUEL CLOUTHIER, HIS POLITICAL MENTOR IN THE CENTER-RIGHT NATIONAL ACTION PARTY (PAN), WHO URGED FOX TO RUN FOR THE MEXICAN CONGRESS UNDER THE BANNER OF PAN IN THE LATE 1980S. FEARING REPERCUSSIONS FROM ANGERING MEXICO'S DOMINANT POLITICAL MACHINE, THE INSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (PRI) WITH THIS MOVE, FOX TOLD CLOUTHIER THAT THE PRI WOULD CERTAINLY DESTROY HIM. "NOT IF WE KEEP MOVING," CLOUTHIER ASSURED HIM. "IF THE WOLVES CAN'T CATCH YOU, THEY CAN'T EAT YOU."

THIRTEEN YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE HIS ASCENT TO THE MEXICAN PRESIDENCY, AND FOX STILL CAN'T STOP MOVING. THESE DAYS, IT'S WITH MAJOR CANNABIS-INDUSTRY PLAYERS LIKE DIEGO PELLICER'S JAMEN SHIVELY AND HARBORSIDE HEALTH CENTER'S STEVE DEANGELO IN THE FIGHT TO ESTABLISH A SANER ALTERNATIVE TO THE WAR ON DRUGS. A THREE-DAY SUMMIT IN JULY AT FOX'S SAN CRISTÓBAL RANCH IN GUANAJUATO BROUGHT HIS CONTACTS FROM THE STATES TO MEET WITH JULIO FRENK, DEAN OF THE HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND A FORMER FOX CABINET MEMBER, AS WELL AS REPRESENTATIVES FROM POLAND AND PORTUGAL. FOX HAS ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD GROW CANNABIS ON HIS FAMILY FARM WHEN IT BECOMES LEGAL.

TO BE FAIR, FOX HAS NO SHORTAGE OF DETRACTORS, WHO CONSIDER HIS LATEST TRANSFORMATION AN ATTEMPT TO OBSCURE A LARGELY DISAPPOINTING REIGN AT LOS PINOS (MEXICO'S EQUIVALENT OF THE WHITE HOUSE), WHERE HE LARGELY TOED THE US LINE ON DRUG POLICY. BUT AS EVERYONE FROM FOX'S FORMER COLLEAGUES AT COCA-COLA MEXICO (WHERE HE WORKED HIS WAY UP FROM DELIVERY TRUCK DRIVER TO PRESIDENT OF THE COMPANY) TO GEORGE W. BUSH CAN ATTEST, FOX IS NOTHING IF NOT TENACIOUS. "JUST GIVE ME A PRODUCT, WHETHER DEMOCRACY OR THE STATE OF GUANAJUATO, A BOTTLE OF COKE OR A CRATE OF BROCCOLI, AND I'M READY TO SELL," FOX SAYS IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY. IN THIS INTERVIEW, HE DISCUSSES HIS LATEST ENDEAVOR—THE END OF CANNABIS PROHIBITION—AND WHY IT MATTERS SO MUCH TO HIM.

What brings you to the United States, and what have you accomplished on your visit so far?

What we have seen in the last six years in Mexico—the violence, the crime, the killings, the bloody mess that we're involved in—attracted the commitment of Centro Fox [Fox's think tank] to do something about it. Because what has been done up to now—the War on Drugs provoked by President Nixon 40 years ago—has been a total failure. The policy and the strategy followed by President [Felipe] Calderón in Mexico has also been a total failure. So with this in mind, I came looking for the best ideas, something strategic and important for Mexico. So I visited Colorado; I visited North California; I was on the bay in San Francisco. We decided to host a symposium that is going to be run at Centro Fox in Mexico, inviting delegations from the United States, delegations from Europe and Latin America, delegations from Mexico to analyze, to discuss [and share] the latest information on all of the processes that are going on worldwide.

We will host congressmen that are going to present for the first time a bill in Mexico [based on the legalization of cannabis in Washington and Colorado]—very similar. With it, I hope Mexico finally

makes progress and gets out of the trap we are in with the violence, crime, violations of human rights and violations of due process. These ideas, I am sure, will be accepted by public opinion and will influence decision makers.

How much could legalization hurt the cartels at this point? And how would you prevent a continued black market?

We have to accept that this is a first step and that it would not be the solution by itself. But certainly, being [that cannabis] averages up to 40 percent of the cartels' income, it certainly will have an impact. The money that the cartels are raising here in the United States, being the largest consumer market in the world, is over 50 billion US dollars every year. This money is brought back to Mexico to bribe government officials, to hire kids, to buy the guns and ammunition they are using in this violent war.

[We want to] shift this industry from criminals to businessmen, from no taxes being paid to a huge amount. But the most important thing that has to happen is that all that money has to be invested in education, information and prevention—and at the same time, having citizens make responsible decisions. I don't think that governments can specifically bring this about. That will come from citizens,



President Fox suggests Mexico start producing marijuana in an effort to upend the drug war.