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By JAKE MILLER / CBS NEWS / March 24, 2015, 4:32 PM

Bill to legalize medical marijuana introduced in the House



A vendor weighs buds for card-carrying medical marijuana patients attending Los Angeles' first-ever cannabis farmer's market at the West Coast Collective medical marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles, California on July 4, 2014 / **FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES**

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A bipartisan effort to legalize medical marijuana at the federal level is now underway in both Houses of Congress, and its sponsors acknowledge they face an uphill climb to passage - but they believe the public is on their side.

"Polls show that at least 86 percent of Americans say medical marijuana should be available," said Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tennessee, in an interview with CBS News. "Legislators rarely lead, they generally follow. I guess it's called cultural lag...Eventually, people in Congress start catching up."

Cohen and Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, unveiled a bill on Tuesday that would reclassify marijuana as a Schedule II narcotic, recognizing some appropriate medical uses for the drug. Marijuana is legal for medical use in 23 states and the



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District of Columbia, but the federal government currently classifies pot as a Schedule I narcotic with no apparent medical utility.



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The reclassification would have a variety of effects on how the federal government enforces marijuana laws. It would allow states to set their own medical marijuana statutes free of federal interference, allow medical marijuana dispensaries to access the banking system, and allow doctors at government agencies like the Department of Veterans Affairs to prescribe medical marijuana in states where it's permitted. It could also jumpstart research into the drug's medical uses.

The bill is the House version of the Senate's Compassionate Access, Research Expansion, and Respect States (CAREERS) Act, which was introduced earlier this month by Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-New York, Cory Booker, D-New Jersey, and Rand Paul, R-Kentucky.

Supporters have framed the bill as a common-sense way to bring real relief to suffering people. Cohen cited alternative forms of the drug like cannabidiol (CBD), a marijuana derivative that has no psychoactive effects but has been shown to provide relief to children with seizures.

That treatment isn't available to people in states that prohibit medical marijuana, and "it's cruel and it's heartless," said Cohen, citing the experience of a 3-year-old Tennessee girl, Chloe Grauer, who died last year of a rare neurological disorder after she was denied access to CBD. "People are waking up to the fact that we ought to use whatever we have to help people when they're sick."



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Can medical marijuana treat neurological disorders?

The congressman reserved particularly harsh criticism for the fact that VA doctors aren't allowed to prescribe medical marijuana to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and other maladies.

"VA Doctors should not be muzzled," he said. "The idea that veterans who go to war and see life squashed out can't talk to doctors about marijuana is absurd. It's crazy."

The effort has even drawn some support from the GOP, which has traditionally taken a harder line

on drug laws. "The topic of medical and recreational marijuana has always been an issue of state' rights for me," Young, the Alaska Republican, said in a press release on Tuesday. "My position aims to reaffirm the states' rights to determine the nature of criminal activity within their own jurisdictions, which I believe is critical for states to effectively legislate within their borders."

Cohen credited the veterans' health care angle for drawing GOP attention to the issue, and he said Young, a "respected veteran legislator," may give more Republicans a "little bit of courage" and persuade them to sign on. He acknowledged that a rising strain of libertarianism in today's GOP, particularly among lawmakers from Western states, may also boost the measure's support.

In addition to Young, Cohen said, Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-California, has agreed to sponsor the measure. He also said he'd talked to two additional Republicans on Tuesday who appeared ready to join the fight.

Some Democrats, like Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, have voiced concerns about the increased potency of modern marijuana, saying they'd like to see more research into the non-psychoactive forms of the drug.



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Cohen has little patience for that particular reservation. "It's just horse manure to talk about potent versus less potent," he said. "If you make it legal, people might know the potency of what they're buying."

Despite some signs of momentum, the bill faces an tough road to passage in a GOP-controlled Congress. Asked whether House Speaker John Boehner would schedule a vote on the bill if it receives enough support, Cohen said, "I doubt it." Even moving the bill through the House Judiciary Committee, which holds jurisdiction over the issue, would be "tough," he said.

But the congressman argued that the bill's eventual success is guaranteed, given the generational shift toward more permissive attitudes on pot laws.

"One day, there will be passage," he said. "The times, they are a-changin'."

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FCKOF 27 minutes ago

they got my vote. I don't know much to say except that Cannabis (respectfully not saying MJ) is better for you than alcohol. It grows from the earth, it's medicinal, and the lawmakers of this country think they can control it.

LIKE / REPLY

STEL2112 5 hours ago

Nixon was recorded in the Oval Office on the now infamous Nixon White House tapes speaking with his Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman:

"I want a goddamn strong statement on marijuana, I mean one that just tears the a-\$-s out of them. You know, it's a funny thing, every one of the ba\$tards that are out for legalizing marijuana is Jew1sh"

It is past time to end this insanity created by one of the most corrupt presidents ever, Richard Nixon. Legalize cannabis now!

LIKE / REPLY

FCKOF 31 minutes ago

@**Stel2112** he was a definite dumb mother fucker with a stick up his ass

LIKE / REPLY

OUTLANDER60 5 hours ago

Don't believe everything you read on the interweb, but estimates are there ar 1/3 of a million people in prison on drug related charges at a cost of \$10 Billion annually. Something like 1/2 of all federal inmates are in for drug offenses. And that's cheap part; the costs to investigate, arrest, hold, try, convict and charge runs 3 times the cost of jail, bringing it to more like \$40 Billion.,

Obviously some of the convicts deserve to be in prison, but the vast majority are victims of either the system, or the drugs themselves. But many of these "Convicted Felons" are no more criminals than a few presidents, and the millions of people who use responsibly and/or medicinally.

\$40B would pay for one heck of a lot of rehab for those who truly need it, and cut WAAYYY down on the neglected addicts who sit in jail just waiting to get out and resume their habit, since the system did nothing to fix the root problem. The War on

Drugs is self destructive, being basically a war against Americans by America.

P.S. A new study from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration finds that drivers who use marijuana are at a significantly lower risk for a crash than drivers who use alcohol. And after adjusting for age, gender, race and alcohol use, drivers who tested positive for marijuana were no more likely to crash than who had not used any drugs or alcohol prior to driving.

2 LIKE / REPLY

EKLEKTOS60 6 hours ago

There is no less pot in this country than there was when I was in high school. 40+ years of the "drug War" and all we've down is waste billions of dollars, flood our legal system with non-violent offenders, and accomplish zilch. Legalize it, regulate it, and tax it. Time to grow up.

1 LIKE / REPLY

DRMADDOGS 8 hours ago

CBS news won't interview the legislators as to their acceptance of illegal campaign donations derived from Federal tax dollars.. originated in funding for the Drug War.

LIKE / REPLY

SSULLHUNTER 15 hours ago

Great idea. Once pot is legal, lets get to work on legalizing hash and opium.

1 LIKE / REPLY

This comment has been deleted

*******CBSMODERATOR******* 11 hours ago

@royh98

One more comment like that and I'll block your IP address from CBS News comments.

2 LIKE / REPLY

FCKOF 26 minutes ago

@***CBSMODERATOR***** @royh98** aw boo hoo
cbs moderator

LIKE / REPLY

SSANDYDOG 4 hours ago

@BullHunter Hash IS cannabis.

1 LIKE / REPLY

BMO810 16 hours ago

We all are here expressing what we believe to be right and some of them are, but are the right people listening or are we just debating amongst ourselves.

Legalization, what would it solve? Providing medicine for those that are really in need of relief from constant pain? Relief for the adults and children that battle through severe and often times debilitating seizures. Or to make the politicians pause to listen to the WILL of the people they represent. What would it mean for the thousands of young people that sell weed in and around their communities for a bigger dealer, that in turn ends up giving the money made in these communities to a Mexican or South American cartel. Thousands upon thousands of lives and trillions of our tax dollars needlessly wasted, because big business didn't want a plant to come between them and that dollar you try to save.

Think about the huge number of lobbyist, politicians, and the almighty industry leaders that feels threaten by you, in here, freely debating and passing around the thought of ending the prohibition of marijuana. This really goes a lot deeper than they want it.

Hell, legalize marijuana and watch crime rates drop to near record lows, alcohol related deaths decrease, tax dollars being used to help instead of incarcerate. Yeah legalize so we can move on to something else.

4 LIKE / REPLY

SLOWNEWSDAY 16 hours ago

@bmo810 Well put.

1 LIKE / REPLY

BILLSMITH57 17 hours ago

You repubs need to stop swimming upstream on this issue.

LIKE / REPLY

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