

CONGRESS PREVENTS POT INDUSTRY FROM LEVERAGING BANKING SYSTEM TO MASS-MARKET MARIJUANA; ALLOWS DOJ TO ENFORCE FEDERAL LAW WITH RESPECT TO "RECREATIONAL" MARIJUANA USE

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[WASHINGTON, DC] - The Omnibus spending bill passed early this morning in Congress did not include some key provisions pushed by Big Marijuana -- signaling a major victory for drug prevention advocates. The bill omitted four out of six provisions heavily lobbied for by legalization and industry forces.

"Despite the rhetoric, legalization is not inevitable, and it's clear this Congress doesn't have an appetite for it. Our hard work this session has paid off," said Dr. Kevin A. Sabet, a former White House drug policy advisor who now serves as President of Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM).

Provisions allowing the marijuana industry to leverage the U.S. financial and banking system -- key to mass-marketing pot like Big Tobacco mass-marketed cigarettes -- failed, as did a provision disallowing the Department of Justice from enforcing federal marijuana laws with respect to "recreational" marijuana use.

A provision allowing the Veterans' Administration to recommend marijuana to treat PTSD also failed, a major victory for science-based policy. Earlier this month, Yale University researchers found that "marijuana is not associated with improvement in PTSD and that initiating marijuana was associated with worsening outcomes in a number of measures."

The omnibus bill also includes language that prevents the District of Columbia from continuing with its legalization "experiment" -- a well-intentioned but misguided attempt to address disparities in arrests and incarcerations through legalizing drug use.

"The District of Columbia can resolve these very real and worrisome disparities through criminal law and sentencing reform without exposing District residents, especially children, to the addictive and harmful effects of marijuana," commented Dr. Sabet. "And ironically, legalized marijuana is likely to harm disadvantaged communities disproportionately -- just as liquor stores are far more prevalent in African-American neighborhoods."

Two riders did pass, as expected -- one disallowing the Department of Justice to enforce medical marijuana laws and one allowing hemp for research purposes. Both of these also passed last year.

This news come on the heels of today's national school survey release, finding declines in use of almost every drug except marijuana. One in 17 high school seniors use marijuana daily -- near a historic high.

According to statements from the American Medical Association, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Society of Addiction Medicine, and the American Psychiatric Association, marijuana use, especially among youth, should be avoided, and legalization efforts opposed.

Meanwhile, the toll of legalized marijuana continues to climb in Colorado and Washington. For example, a 2015 report indicated that the percentage of DUIs linked to marijuana use in Washington state has almost doubled since legalization, from 18.6% in 2012 to 33% in early 2015. That same report indicated that a full 85% of drivers involved in fatal accidents in Washington tested positive for recent marijuana use. Similarly, marijuana poisonings in Colorado rose 147% from legalization in 2012 to 2014, and was up 52% in Washington during that same timeframe.

"This is great news -- the powerful marijuana industry lobby that has emerged is certainly not indestructible," commented Jeffrey Zinsmeister, SAM's Executive Vice President. "Like Big Tobacco, marijuana companies put their bottom line before public health. But common sense can still prevail."

For more information about marijuana use and its effects, see <http://www.learnaboutsam.org>.