

The MORE Act: How High Should Your Hopes Be About Decriminalization?

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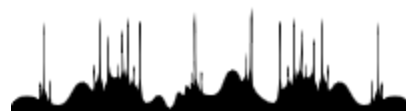
August 31, 2020

Weed So Loud

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Over the last few days you may have reacted with excitement to headlines about U.S. House of Representatives bill HR 3884. The bill, also named the Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment, and Expungement (MORE) Act, is set for a floor vote sometime in September.



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So, should you be excited?

Sort of.

The MORE Act explained

The headline of the MORE Act is the removal of weed from the Controlled Substances Act. While this doesn't inherently make it legal on the Federal level, it does quite a bit. For what it's worth, this is the path that NORML recommended for legalization.

The bill itself is actually pretty impressive.

For starters, the bill would make it possible for weed businesses to put their money in banks. This would accomplish two things at once. It would make it safer for businesses to operate and fully legitimize the income, theoretically resulting in more taxes collected.

Another highlight of the bill is that it would open up weed-related businesses to be eligible



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for SBA loans. These loans often help businesses meet financial needs in their early stages and can help level the playing field for small-time shops and farms against giant corporations.

But the true meat of the bill is in how it treats people formerly convicted of weed-related crimes. In its text, HR 3884 “establishes a process to expunge convictions and conduct sentencing review hearings related to federal cannabis offenses.”

The bill also “establishes a trust fund to support various programs and services for individuals and businesses in communities impacted by the war on drugs.” This is not nothing. Far and away the most dire consequences of the War on Drugs has been the terror and havoc it has wreaked on marginalized communities. Does it go far enough? Fuck no. Is it a start? Absolutely.

In addition the bill “prohibits the denial of federal public benefits to a person on the basis of certain cannabis-related conduct or convictions, prohibits the denial of benefits and protections under immigration laws on the basis of a cannabis-related event (e.g., conduct or a conviction).”

This is huge. Did you know that in The Land of the Free™ that you can't live in public housing if you've been convicted of a felony? In fact, you can't get any kind of federal benefits,

such as SNAP, cash assistance, or SSI. In some cases, you can even lose parental rights. This bill would eliminate that outcome for people who like weed. And that is huge.

First, the bad news

Weed is not about to be legal on the national level any time soon. Get that dream out of your head right now. Here's why.

No matter how the House votes on this bill, it's dead the moment it hits the Senate. Mitch McConnell, aka "The Grim Reaper" of the Senate, will not even look at this bill. He will pretend that it doesn't exist. Just like more than 400 other bills that have made it to his desk.



“Dear Mitch, I wrote you but you still ain’t callin...”

More than policy, McConnell refuses to give Democrats any chance at a victory. Weed legalization is a popular issue in the United States, and one of the few that has broad bipartisan support among the electorate. While in a real democracy that would signal time for lawmakers to make a change, in Vladimir Putin’s America it means it’s time to hide the evidence.

Even putting whatever conflicts of interest McConnell and other (Republican and Democratic) politicians have when it comes to weed legalization aside, bringing this bill to the floor of the Senate would be a disaster politically for the GOP. Passing the bill would be a

win for Democrats. Not passing it due to GOP objection would be political suicide, as now even a majority of Republicans favor legalizing.

But this doesn't mean there's no point in passing the MORE Act.

Why this is still a good thing

Even though this bill is destined to fail, the House passing it with a floor vote would be monumental. For many reasons.

For starters, this bill provides a blueprint for states to use in their own decriminalization efforts. It lays out plans for simply removing it from the list of controlled substances, structuring tax collection, and working towards repairing the damage done by the War on Drugs.

In addition, the House passing this bill shows that they are taking the issue seriously. It's not *everything* and it probably won't be signed into law. However, it shows that the issue has made its way to the highest levels of government. That is new and it is important.



Pictured: Getting to the highest levels

But finally, what makes voting this bill through important is what it communicates to the American people. Support for legal weed is huge and constantly growing. The only age group that does not support legalization in any form is the Silent Generation. That group is quickly

waning in terms of political relevance and power.

Voting this bill through will send a strong signal to the American people that the Democrats are doing *something*. If they can make enough noise about the bill, it might even reach Republicans who want it legalized too.

They'd be highly unlikely to switch parties. However, it's possible that they could put pressure on their representatives or at least start a conversation.

The War on Drugs has now had several generations to play out in the public sphere. It has caused nothing but destruction and has driven the militarization of police that we're seeing right now in the streets.

Legalization might seem like the ultimate—apologies in advance—pipe dream, but if the MORE Act is any indication, we could someday soon be headed for a more sensible drug policy. Perhaps even one that treats individuals like human beings.

Supastarr Deez

Supastarr Deez is a content creator, social justice enthusiast, and hunter/gatherer. When he's not writing you can find him cooking delicious meals for friends and family, searching out the finest coffee in your town, and trying to remember to breathe.



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