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THE DRUG REPORT

**WITH WHITE HOUSE
AND CONGRESS
CALLING FOR
“REFORM,” DESPITE
NEW HEALTH STUDIES
SHOWING HARM, AND
OREGON REVERSAL,
IS A SLOWDOWN IN
ORDER?**

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By Robert Weiner and Gene Lambey



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ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE WEEKLY—April 15, 2024

Vice President Kamala Harris is campaigning for marijuana reform, and Senate Leader Chuck Schumer is also aboard the train. Reclassification on marijuana may be imminent. However, new studies show psychological, addictive, driving, and performance issues related to marijuana legalization's sweep — recreational in 24 states including Washington D.C., medical in 40 states. The “dangers” stories are so buried that virtually no one sees them. Only the referenda to be voted get major coverage— extremely popular with young voters.

Oregon's decriminalization of drugs from Measure 110 resulted in 43 percent increase in overdose deaths. This information changed polling support to opposition in the state to legalization now. A member from the National Press Club said, “Yeah, that



worked really well.” Decriminalization is showing increased use, with all the problems.

Vice President Kamala Harris hosted a talk at the White House on March 15 discussing marijuana reform with Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear (D-Ken), rap artist Fat Joe, and people pardoned for marijuana offenses. Harris asserted that people possessing marijuana should not go “to jail for smoking weed”, contrasting with her position as former attorney general role in California. She urges the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to reschedule marijuana.

On Feb. 28, a report with data from the American Heart Association showed 25 percent increases of heart attack and 42 percent increase of strokes in users. Abra Jeffers, policy analyst at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston asserted that cannabis has “significant cardiovascular risks”.



The CDC reported approximately 48.2 million people, or 18 percent of Americans, used it at least once in 2019. Cognitive capacities including memory, learning, and decision making slowed with regular use. Mental disorders like schizophrenia were more likely. CDC reports that people under 21 are most affected.

Dr. Gouhua Li, professor and founding director of Center for Injury Science and Prevention at Columbia University described marijuana as “different from alcohol,” affecting “the central nervous system as a depressant, a stimulant, and a hallucinogenic substance,” impairing the user.

Kathryn Gray, professor and director of maternal-fetal medicine research at University of Washington School of Medicine said on Dec.14, pregnant women are “not recommended” to use cannabis. It alters the baby’s brain development, fetal growth, increases the chance of still-births and low birth weight.



Marijuana and recreational marijuana vary significantly, not just based on states' laws, but also potency, dosage, contaminants, levels of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), CBD (cannabidiol) and accessibility.

Illinois and Michigan's Department of Public Health released a report in 2023. Drivers involved in traffic crashes who tested positive were up 48 percent in 2018. In 2020, a study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found 5.8 percent increase in injury crashes and 4.1 percent increase in fatal crashes. In Ohio's State Highway Patrol data, 1,311 marijuana-related crashes occurred in 2020.

Now there are serious movements to deregulate marijuana in banking so that pot could become the next phase of big tobacco. In Congress, the pending Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) bill decriminalizes marijuana, removing it from the list of prohibited substances. Then there's the recommendation from



HHS to DEA: relabeling cannabis from a Schedule One substance to a Schedule Three substance.

The Secure and Fair Enforcement Regulation Banking Act (SAFER) is another “reform” bill pending in Congress that would provide protection for federally regulated financial institutions serving legalized cannabis businesses. Businesses would have access to deposit accounts, insurance and other financial services. SAFER passed September 2023 in the House of Representatives. The Senate Banking Committee is moving it now.

Most Democrats and many Republicans are in denial of the impact of legal marijuana because of its popularity with young voters. However, it's time the states and their leaders adhere to the slogan, “buyers beware.”

In the U.S. market economy, cannabis has risen to almost \$40 billion in sales annually and is expected to rise to over \$70 billion by 2029. The Tax Foundation



reported 21 states with taxed recreational marijuana. Taxing cannabis products has been based on price, weight or potency of THC. Consistency is absent on a cannabis tax.

Senate Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, U.S. Senator Cory Booker and Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden introduced the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act in 2022, protecting public health, protecting public safety, prioritizing restorative and economic justice, and the bill regulates and taxes cannabis, encourages cannabis research and strengthens worker's rights. It was reintroduced late 2023 by Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) in the House.

Legislators are considering limiting marijuana to medical use, taxing all elements on marijuana, and keeping age limits at marijuana over 21.

Whatever this, or the next session of Congress decides, as well as federal agencies, let's hope that science, not

