

Wyden cosponsors bill to legalize marijuana

JONATHAN BACH
SALEM STATESMAN JOURNAL
USA TODAY NETWORK



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden has announced that he will cosponsor the Marijuana Justice Act of 2017. The bill was first introduced in August by Sen. Cory Booker. MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, is co-sponsoring a bill to decriminalize marijuana across the nation and penalize states with high arrest and incarceration rates for pot-related crimes.

The Marijuana Justice Act of 2017, first introduced in August by Sen. Cory Booker, D-New Jersey, would remove weed from the federal list of controlled substances.

The bill also would penalize states that haven't legalized marijuana and have "disproportionate" rates of arrest and incarceration for marijuana-related offenses by cutting federal funding in those states for new jails, prisons and staffing.

For the bill's purposes, disproportionate rates of arrest and incarceration are defined as:

► "The percentage of minority individuals arrested for a marijuana related offense in a state is higher than the percentage of the non-minority individual population of the state, as determined by the most recent census data"

► "The percentage of low-income individuals arrested for a marijuana offense in a state is higher than the percentage of the population of the state that are not low-income individuals, as determined by the most recent census data"

► "The percentage of minority individuals incarcerated for a marijuana related offense in a state is higher than the percentage of the non-minority individual population of the state, as determined by the most recent census data"

The bill would help Americans convicted of marijuana-related crimes retroactively expunge those offenses from their records.

In addition, it would create a "Community Reinvestment Fund" for communities hit hardest by the war on drugs. Communities would get federal money for efforts such as job training programs, public libraries, community centers and health education programs.

The bill proposes spending at least \$500 million every fiscal year from 2018 to 2040 on the reinvestment programs.

Sitting beside Wyden for a Facebook Live video Dec. 18 to announce the sponsorship, Booker said having the Oregon Democrat aboard added "a stamp of gravitas."

"We've got to get out of the war on drugs, which is really a war on people, a war on poor people, a war on a dispropor-

tionate (number) of minorities, a war on (the) mentally ill," Booker said.

Wyden said people of color around the U.S. are convicted for marijuana crimes that millions of other Americans also commit without facing the same consequences. "It's just wrong, wrong, wrong."

Odds of the bill's success, however, are low. Jim Moore, director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University, said, "I don't think it's chances are very good."

It's not just because Congress is controlled by Republicans right now, he said, but because a number of Democrats also oppose this kind of legislation.

But it does create "a national conversation," Moore said.

With many looking ahead to the 2020 presidential election, marijuana policy is poised to become a major talking point among candidates, he said.

"It could end up becoming a very interesting political plank," Moore said.

Wyden's announcement Monday comes as U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Oregon, is rushing to save federal protections for medical marijuana users as part of a congressional spending package needed to avoid a government shutdown. The Rohrabacher-Blumenauer Amendment basically stops the Justice Department from prosecuting medical marijuana users in states where voters have approved such use.

Federal lawmakers originally passed a version of the amendment in 2014, but they've had to re-approve it every time the Justice Department's spending guidelines go before Congress.

The amendment hit turbulence earlier this year when the House Rules Committee blocked a vote on it. The Senate Appropriations Committee, however, approved a version of the amendment.

"Ultimately, Congress must act to put an end to the cycle of uncertainty and permanently protect state medical marijuana programs — and adult use — from federal interference," Blumenauer said earlier this month. "The American people have spoken. It's past time that Congress catch up."

Blumenauer has also launched a political-action committee, called the Cannabis Fund, to unseat anti-marijuana lawmakers. The committee has garnered at least \$2,000, according to the Federal Election Commission.

Reach staff reporter Jonathan Bach by email at jbach@statesmanjournal.com or by phone at 503-399-6714. Follow him on Twitter @JonathanMBach and Facebook at www.facebook.com/jonathanbachjournalist/.

Pup

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Kiotis. Additionally, she's a show-dog phenomenon under the tutelage of professional dog-handler Margery Good.

Making efficient use of the interstate-highway system, there is roughly 2,885 miles between Mt. Angel and Thornton, a Philadelphia suburb, which begs the question: how did this connection come about?

"I lost my wirehaired dachshund, Teddy, over Christmas last year," Kiotis related. "Brokenhearted, I went to the AKC website to look for breeders. At the time there were three — Oregon, Pennsylvania and Georgia. Jacque was the first one to call me back. We hit it off immediately."

Keller-McCormick had the perfect solution for Kiotis' broken heart, but there were conditions involved.

"When Jacque and I connected, she was clear that she wanted her (BB) to go to a show home. I was very frank and told her that I had never shown a dog in my life," Kiotis recalled.

"She said that we could always do field activities with her, which seemed more attainable to me. When BB won 'Best Puppy' at the Rose City Classic in 2017, my family and I decided we would give it our best shot to show her."

Kiotis found Good who agreed to take on BB. The match was a perfect show fit.

"The rest is now history," Kiotis said. She salutes Keller-McCormick's breeding prowess as instrumental to Mt. Angel BB's plaudits, a list that includes a champion title at 11 months, a grand champion one at 14 months. At the National Dog Show in Philadelphia this year, she received 15 of the 25 points needed in one weekend.

American Kennel Club notes that a dog must acquire 25 points with three major wins in order to earn a "Grand Champion" title.

"BB loves the ring, being quite the ham," Kiotis said. "I think she has a nice balance being a normal pet at home with her canine siblings (smooth dachshund, German shorthaired pointer and bluetick coonhound) and traveling with her handler to the shows."

Keller-McCormick's jested that BB is making history while putting Mt. Angel on the map. Kiotis acknowledged that her canine companion's name does elicit questions at the shows.

"Many people ask where she got her name; I am sure if we were on the west coast people would be more familiar with the location, but I didn't know where (Mt. Angel) was either until BB," Kiotis said.

"When I tell people the origins of her name and how she was born during the wiener races, they always ask 'Why did you go all the way to Oregon to get a dog?'"

Kiotis' answer is short and sweet: fate. What else could it be?

"You just have to believe that," Kiotis

said.

"(When) a breeder who could have sold her to anyone would pick someone like me who had no experience at all in the world of (dog shows). And then we land one of the top professional handlers on the east coast who shows your dog, who (in turn) achieves so much success and notoriety at a young age — what are the chances?"

Perhaps even more important than the ribbons is the bit of warmth Mt. Angel took back east.

"She is such a clown. She has even made the judges laugh," Kiotis said. "Even if you are having the worst day she will make you smile. BB is smart and learns very quickly. She is also a natural born hunter, chasing chipmunks and squirrels and the other day she brought me a field mouse!"

She also chased away some heart-break along with way.

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