

OPINION

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Send a Message to End the War on Cannabis

Oregon's Wyden and Blumenauer are on board

BY JUSTIN STREKAL

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., has introduced legislation in the Senate, S. 420 — The Marijuana Revenue and Regulation Act — to permit states to establish their own marijuana regulatory policies free from federal interference. In addition to removing marijuana from the United States Controlled Substances Act, this legislation also removes enforcement power from the US Drug Enforcement Administration in matters concerning marijuana possession, production, and sales — thus permitting state governments to regulate these activities as they see fit.

Senate Bill 420 is another sign that the growing public support for ending our failed war on cannabis consumers nationwide is continuing to translate

into political support amongst federal officials.

If we are truly going to move our nation towards sensible marijuana policies, the removal of marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act is paramount. Annually, 650,000 Americans are arrested for nothing more than the possession of small amounts of marijuana and now is the time for Congress to once and for all end put an end to the national embarrassment that is cannabis prohibition.

With marijuana legalization being supported by a supermajority of Americans while Congress' approval rating hovers around 20 percent, ending our country's disastrous prohibition against marijuana would not just be good policy, but good politics.

Upon introduction, Sen. Wyden said, "The federal prohibition of marijuana is wrong, plain and simple. Too many lives have been wasted, and too many economic opportunities have been missed. It's time Congress make the

changes Oregonians and Americans across the country are demanding."

U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, the Portland Democrat who will carry the House companion legislation, said "Oregon has been and continues to be a leader in commonsense marijuana policies and the federal government must catch up. The American people have elected the most pro-cannabis Congress in American history and significant pieces of legislation are being introduced. The House is doing its work and with the help of Senator Wyden's leadership in the Senate, we will break through."

Thirty-three states, Washington, D.C. and the U.S. territories of Guam and Puerto Rico have enacted legislation specific to the physician-authorized use of cannabis. Moreover, an estimated 73 million Americans now reside in the 10 states where anyone over the age of 21 may possess cannabis legally. An additional 15 states have passed laws specific to the possession of cannabidiol

(CBD) oil for therapeutic purposes.

Sixty-eight percent of registered voters "support the legalization of marijuana," according to 2018 national polling data compiled by the Center for American Progress. The percentage is the highest level of support for legalization ever reported in a nationwide, scientific poll.

Majorities of Democrats (77 percent), Independents (62 percent), and Republicans (57 percent) back legalization. The results of a 2017 nationwide Gallup poll similarly found majority support among all three groups.

For far too long, our Congress has been intransigent regarding marijuana prohibition. Now is the time for lawmakers to come together and hash out a way forward to end the failed and cruel policy of criminalization.

Add your voice to the growing chorus demanding reform; send a message to your lawmakers in support of S 420!

Justin Strekal is the political director for NORML.

During Black History Month We Celebrate the Legacies

Freedom begins with freedom for the most marginalized

BY TRACEY L. ROGERS

When I visited the African American Civil War Museum in Washington, D.C., a volunteer docent asked the following question: "Who freed the slaves after the Civil War?"

There were about 10 of us in the group. Some looked around wondering if it was a trick question, while others blurted out, "Abraham Lincoln!" After some time, the docent finally offered his response: "Enlisted slaves freed themselves, with the help of Union soldiers."

I had a powerful reaction to this response, because history tells a different story of Lincoln as the "Great Emancipator."

The truth is, President Lincoln knew the Union army would be unsuccessful in its Civil War campaign without more able bodies to defeat the Confederate army.

When he issued his Emancipation Proclamation, he didn't merely announce the end of slavery in rebel territories. Lincoln also asked blacks to en-

list in the Union army, inviting "people so declared to be free" to be "received into the armed service of the United States." Lincoln knew he needed troops, but he also knew he couldn't make such a request without freeing the slaves.

My ancestors didn't go to war to help the Union army, or to prevent the South from seceding. Nor did they fight alongside Union soldiers because of a shared cause for a coun-

try undivided. My ancestors fought in the Civil War because freedom was the reward after centuries of enslavement.

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This was a contentious debate even for the founding fathers. During the Revolutionary War campaign for freedom from the British monarch, leaders of the new nation were viewed as hypocrites abroad for enslaving Africans.

Matched only by America's treat-

a too-short 28-day memorialization highlighting the contributions of black Americans — I invite you to consider how their contributions benefited the greater good of society despite malicious attacks on our freedom.

Harriett Tubman literally brought slaves to freedom via the Underground Railroad. She was also a political activist and armed scout for the Union Army during the Civil War.

Sojourner Truth, meanwhile, was an early advocate for women's rights alongside Susan B. Anthony. Her work paved the way for future leaders like Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement that's done so much to raise awareness about pervasive sexual assault in our society.

If you want life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, just look to black Americans at the helm of freedom and justice movements throughout the nation.

Barack Obama said, "Our freedom depends on you being free too." Freedom for all begins with freedom for those marginalized. The black community has been denied basic freedoms for centuries, which is why we inherently understand what it means to truly be free.

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Blacks knew what was at stake. This wasn't about politics, nor was it about patriotism. This was about freedom — freedom for themselves, their grandchildren, their great grandchildren — and freedom for me, a distant descendant. There was no other way around it. Sadly, war was their only hope.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once

ment of indigenous people, slavery is by far the darkest period of U.S. history. Even after the Civil War, blacks in America endured another century of Jim Crow while fighting for civil rights. Even today, the struggle for black lives continues, as racist systems and politicians continue to erode our democracy.

America wouldn't be America if not for the wealth generated by blacks forced into domestic slavery. So as we celebrate Black History Month —

