



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 24, 2011

Ron Paul Bill Attacks Federal Marijuana War

The "[Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act of 2011](#)," or HR 2306, would not "legalize" marijuana. If passed, the legislation would simply remove the plant from the federal list of "controlled substances." States would then be free to regulate, tax, or prohibit it without U.S. government interference.

One of the important issues the bill would remedy is an ongoing conflict between federal authorities and numerous states that have nullified U.S. statutes by decriminalizing the possession of marijuana or legalizing it for medicinal purposes.



The legal medical-marijuana industry has flourished in over a dozen states in recent years in spite of the federal prohibition. But despite [promising](#) not to squander taxpayer money pursuing the issue, the Obama administration has actually [increased federal bullying](#) of state officials and the industry as a whole.

The new legislation, said to be the first of its kind introduced in Congress, also touches on several important questions beyond whether or not marijuana should be criminalized. And it puts conservatives in Congress who support federal drug prohibition while claiming to support the Constitution in an awkward position.

As opponents of the federal drug war point out, the U.S. government does not have any authority under the [Constitution](#) to ban substances, harmful or otherwise. That's why alcohol prohibition required a constitutional amendment. So, under the Tenth Amendment, regulation of drugs necessarily falls under the purview of the states or the people.

But beyond the obvious constitutional problems with the federal war, supporters of the new legislation also argue that the policies have been an expensive failure with atrocious consequences.

"The war against marijuana causes so much hardship and accomplishes nothing," Rep. Paul [said](#) during an interview about the proposal, noting that marijuana is helpful to many cancer patients. "We knew prohibition of alcohol was very bad, so this is just getting back to a sensible position on how we handle difficult problems."

The 2012 GOP presidential candidate also said a trillion dollars had already been spent to fight the war on drugs. "And it's a catastrophe, just as prohibition of alcohol was a catastrophe," he explained. "Kids today have an easier time finding marijuana than they can alcohol."

Liberal Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts, who introduced the bill with Paul, also blasted federal policies on the substance. "Criminally prosecuting adults for making the choice to smoke marijuana is a waste of law enforcement resources and an intrusion on personal freedom," he told reporters.

"I do not advocate urging people to smoke marijuana. Neither do I urge them to drink alcoholic beverages or smoke tobacco," Frank added. "But in none of these cases do I think prohibition enforced



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by criminal sanctions is good public policy.”

Introduced on June 23, the bill has already attracted several cosponsors including Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), and Rep. Jared Polis (D-Colo.). “The human cost of the failed drug war has been enormous — egregious racial disparities, shattered families, poverty, public health crises, prohibition-related violence, and the erosion of civil liberties,” said cosponsor Rep. Lee of California, a state that has already used nullification to legalize medical marijuana. And outside of Congress, a broad coalition of supporters is also rallying around the bill.

“I don’t have to tell you how historic and important this bill has the potential to be,” said executive director Neill Franklin of [Law Enforcement Against Prohibition](#) (LEAP), an organization of current and former law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges that advocates ending drug prohibition. In a message urging people to contact their congressional representatives in support of the bill, Franklin noted that, among other benefits, the legislation would free up law enforcers to “focus on solving violent crime rather than wasting their time on nonviolent marijuana offenses.”

The Marijuana Policy Project also encouraged Americans to support the bill and urge their Representatives to do so as well. “Hundreds of billions of dollars have been wasted on marijuana prohibition over the past forty years. And for what? Usage rates don’t change. The price of marijuana doesn’t change,” the organization [said](#). “All prohibition has done is ensure that profits have remained underground while marijuana itself has been unregulated and less safe.”

But several opponents of the bill — particularly among government officials and others dependent on the federal drug war for employment — are lining up to attack it. The Office of National Drug Control Policy, for example, issued a statement blasting the proposal. “Legalization remains a nonstarter in the Obama administration,” it said, despite the fact that the President himself [publicly admitted](#) to smoking and inhaling marijuana “frequently.”

Similarly, Chairman Lamar Smith of the House Judiciary Committee said he would not even consider the proposal. Rep. Smith’s refusal to address the legislation could prevent it from coming up for a vote in the House of Representatives.

But despite opposition, pressure is building nationwide to address the problems caused by the federal war on drugs. The U.S. Conference of Mayors, for example, recently adopted a resolution unanimously [blasting](#) the war as a “failure.”

Especially troublesome, the resolution noted, is the fact that the United States imprisons more people per capita than any other nation in the world — with just five percent of the global population, American prisons house a full 25 percent of the world’s prisoners. The majority of them are in jail for non-violent drug offenses.

Earlier this month, the Global Commission on Drug Policy, consisting of prominent world leaders, [outlined](#) the failure of the global drug war and called for an end to prohibition. The worldwide anti-drug regime, including the 40-year-old “War on Drugs” in America, was originally sparked by the UN “Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs” treaty forcing governments to ban drugs.

Of course, many countries around the world have defied the UN drug treaty and approached the problem of substance abuse from other angles. Portugal and the Czech Republic, for instance, have both legalized all drugs. And [studies show](#) that the efforts have actually decreased problems such as addiction and use of drugs among minors — not to mention crime.



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As *The New American* reported earlier this year, a coalition of top officials and lawmakers in the U.K. is also [seeking to decriminalize drugs](#) and treat the problem as a public health concern instead of a criminal matter. Around the world, the trend is similar.

The Associated Press predicted that the Paul-Frank bill to end the federal war on marijuana has “no chance of passing the Republican-controlled House.” But supporters of the legislation [expect](#) that it will — at the very least — spark a much-needed public debate about the issue.



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