

Kamala Harris's Views on Cannabis as Nomination Nears

Kamala Harris Expected to Be First Major Party Presidential Candidate Supporting Cannabis Legalization

In a historic shift for U.S. politics, Vice President Kamala Harris is now expected to secure the Democratic nomination for the upcoming presidential election, following President Joe Biden's announcement that he will not seek re-election. Harris's support for marijuana legalization marks a significant departure from her predecessor's stance and positions her as the most marijuana-friendly major party presidential candidate in U.S. history.

Kamala Harris's Evolving Stance on Cannabis

Harris's position on cannabis has undergone a substantial evolution over the years. During her tenure as a prosecutor and as California's state attorney general, she oversaw cannabis-related cases and even campaigned against a marijuana legalization ballot initiative. At one point, she openly dismissed the idea of legalization, laughing off a reporter's question about potential policy changes.

Embracing Legalization

However, Harris's stance has shifted dramatically. As Vice President, she has framed marijuana legalization as a critical criminal justice issue, highlighting the failures of prohibition and its disproportionate impact on minority communities. In a closed-door meeting with marijuana pardon recipients in March 2024, Harris reiterated her call for the complete end to federal cannabis prohibition.

Legislation and Policy Actions

During her time in the Biden-Harris administration, Harris has been a vocal advocate for cannabis reform. She has praised the administration's efforts to issue mass pardons for federal cannabis possession offenses and has supported the scheduling review initiated by President Biden, which led to the Justice Department recommending reclassifying cannabis from Schedule I to Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA).

In March 2024, Harris hosted a roundtable event at the White House with pardon recipients to promote the clemency action. She has also called on the Drug Enforcement Administration to expedite the rescheduling process and reaffirmed her belief that "we need to legalize marijuana."

Challenges and Criticisms

Despite these efforts, the administration has faced criticism for excluding certain groups, such as immigrants and those charged with selling marijuana, from the presidential pardons. Moreover, there are still an estimated 2,800 people in federal prison for marijuana convictions beyond simple possession. Advocates argue that these exclusions and ongoing prosecutions highlight the need for broader reform.

Senate Contributions

Before her vice presidency, Harris was an active supporter of cannabis reform in the Senate. She sponsored the Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment, and Expungement (MORE) Act, which aimed to federally legalize cannabis and promote social equity. The bill sought to expunge marijuana convictions and regulate cannabis at the federal level.

Harris first publicly supported legalization in 2018, co-sponsoring the Marijuana Justice Act with Senator Cory Booker. This legislation proposed removing cannabis from the list of federally banned substances and penalizing states with disproportionately enforced marijuana laws.

Implications for the Presidential Campaign

If Harris secures the Democratic nomination, she will be the most marijuana-friendly major party presidential candidate in U.S. history. Her support for legalization represents a significant shift in federal cannabis policy and could mobilize voters who favor cannabis reform.

Voter Support and Public Opinion

Recent polls indicate strong public support for cannabis reform. Three in five Texans, including a plurality of Republicans, support legalizing marijuana, according to a recent survey. Another poll found that nearly three in four Texas voters support decriminalizing marijuana, with more than half in favor of broader legalization.

Future of Federal Cannabis Policy

Harris's nomination could signal a new era for federal cannabis policy, with potential implications for state-level reforms and national drug policy. Her advocacy for cannabis legalization and criminal justice reform aligns with the growing movement to end prohibition and address the historical injustices of the War on Drugs.

Vice President Kamala Harris's anticipated nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate marks a historic moment for cannabis policy in the United States. Her evolution from a prosecutor opposed to legalization to a leading advocate for cannabis reform underscores the shifting landscape of public opinion and political priorities. As the most marijuana-friendly major party presidential candidate, Harris's nomination could pave the way for significant changes in federal cannabis policy and criminal justice reform.

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