

Trump to Decide on Cannabis Rescheduling and Reform

The Uncertain Future of U.S. Cannabis Reform Under Donald Trump's Leadership

The fate of marijuana reform in the United States hangs in the balance as former President Donald Trump assumes a central role in determining whether the cannabis rescheduling process will proceed. This decision is critical for the country's \$32 billion cannabis industry, which faces regulatory and economic challenges under federal prohibition.

Trump, who made history by endorsing marijuana reform during his 2024 campaign, has remained largely silent on the matter since taking office, leaving advocates and industry leaders guessing about his intentions. With the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and its leadership at the heart of the process, the question remains: will Trump follow through on his campaign promise, or will marijuana reform stall indefinitely?

Cannabis Reform: A Campaign Promise in Limbo

Donald Trump broke new ground in September 2024 when he became the first major-party presidential candidate to endorse adult-use cannabis legalization at the state level. He also expressed support for reclassifying marijuana from Schedule 1 to Schedule 3 under the Controlled Substances Act, a move that would recognize its medical use and ease federal restrictions.

This position was seen as a potential breakthrough for the cannabis industry, which has long sought relief from federal regulations that hinder growth, restrict research, and impose punitive tax burdens. However, since that public endorsement, Trump has avoided the issue, leaving advocates to rely on his earlier statements and campaign rhetoric for clues about his plans.

A Crucial Decision: The Role of the DEA in Rescheduling

The rescheduling process, initiated by former President Joe Biden in October 2022, has faced significant setbacks. A key turning point came in January 2025 when the DEA's chief administrative law judge, John Mulrooney II, paused hearings on whether marijuana should be moved to Schedule 3.

The delay came after two parties involved in the proceedings filed an appeal alleging bias within the DEA under its previous administrator, Anne Milgram. This move effectively transferred control of the process to Trump and his incoming DEA leadership.

The importance of this decision cannot be overstated. Rescheduling marijuana would provide the industry with critical relief, including the ability to claim standard tax deductions and access to traditional banking services. Yet, with the process now indefinitely paused, the cannabis industry faces continued uncertainty.

Trump's Nominee for Attorney General Raises Questions

The confirmation of Pam Bondi as Attorney General could play a pivotal role in shaping the future of marijuana reform. Bondi's past affiliations raise both hope and skepticism among cannabis advocates.

Bondi previously served as a lobbyist for Ballard Partners, a Washington, D.C.-based firm with connections to Trulieve Cannabis Corp., one of the largest multistate operators in the U.S. While her personal involvement in cannabis lobbying is unconfirmed, her proximity to the industry has fueled speculation that she might take a favorable stance on rescheduling.

However, critics caution that Bondi's ultimate loyalty will likely lie with Trump's agenda. Her ability to influence the DEA's decisions, particularly in selecting its next permanent leader, will be closely watched by industry insiders.

The Interim DEA Administrator: Derek Maltz and His Stance on Rescheduling

The Trump administration's choice of Derek Maltz as interim DEA administrator has sparked controversy. A former DEA special agent with decades of experience targeting international drug cartels, Maltz has publicly expressed skepticism about the marijuana rescheduling process.

His prior statements suggest he views rescheduling as prioritizing politics over public safety. This stance aligns with the DEA's historical resistance to easing federal restrictions on cannabis, further clouding the prospects for reform under his leadership.

Observers are divided on whether Maltz's appointment is a temporary placeholder or a sign of Trump's broader intentions to slow or halt the rescheduling process altogether.

Congressional Dynamics and the Role of Republican Leadership

The cannabis industry's hopes for reform are further complicated by the political dynamics in Congress. Republican leaders, who now control both chambers, have historically resisted marijuana reform efforts, including banking protections and rescheduling initiatives.

Industry advocates have worked to remind lawmakers of Trump's campaign promise to support rescheduling. However, skepticism remains about whether Congress will take meaningful action without clear direction from the White House.

The failure of marijuana banking reforms during the Biden administration has only heightened concerns. Despite bipartisan support for the SAFE Banking Act, the bill never reached the floor for a full vote, reflecting persistent obstacles to cannabis-related legislation.

Economic Stakes for the Cannabis Industry

For the cannabis industry, the stakes could not be higher. Rescheduling marijuana to Schedule 3 would address some of the most significant barriers to growth, including the inability to access traditional banking services and the limitations imposed by Section 280E of the federal tax code.

Without these changes, cannabis businesses will continue to face significant financial disadvantages, limiting their ability to compete and expand. The uncertainty surrounding federal reform also discourages investment and innovation, further stalling the industry's potential.

Public Opinion and the Push for Reform

Public support for marijuana reform remains strong, with recent polls indicating that a majority of Americans favor legalization or rescheduling. This growing consensus has placed additional pressure on policymakers to act.

Advocates argue that federal reform is not only a matter of economic opportunity but also one of social justice. Rescheduling would reduce the number of individuals facing criminal penalties for cannabis-related offenses and create opportunities for those disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs.

The Path Forward: Will Trump Deliver on Reform?

As the cannabis industry and its advocates look to the future, much depends on Trump's willingness to follow through on his campaign promise. His past statements have offered hope, but his recent silence has raised doubts about his commitment to reform.

The appointment of a permanent DEA administrator will be a critical test of Trump's intentions. If his choice reflects a willingness to embrace evidence-based policy and support rescheduling, it could signal a new era for federal marijuana regulation. However, if the administration continues to prioritize traditional law enforcement perspectives, progress on reform could remain stalled.

A Pivotal Moment for U.S. Drug Policy

The future of marijuana reform in the United States is at a crossroads. With the rescheduling process paused and Trump's leadership in question, the cannabis industry faces a period of uncertainty.

For advocates and stakeholders, the path forward requires continued engagement with policymakers and a focus on building bipartisan support for reform. Whether Trump will emerge as a champion for the industry or maintain the status quo remains to be seen, but one thing is clear: the stakes for federal marijuana policy have never been higher.

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