

# **Trump's Cannabis Charade: Schedule III for Big Pharma**

## **The Mirage of Reform: Why Cannabis Advocates Shouldn't Celebrate**

When President Trump casually mentioned that his administration was “looking at” rescheduling cannabis to Schedule III, headlines immediately flooded the news cycle. Pundits and advocates hailed it as a long-overdue step toward federal reform. Social media celebrated as though the War on Cannabis had ended overnight.

But beneath the cheerleading lies a stark reality: rescheduling cannabis to Schedule III is not liberation. It is corporate capture masquerading as progress. Far from advancing freedom or equity, Schedule III hands cannabis over to pharmaceutical monopolies while leaving consumers, patients, and small businesses trapped in a tightly controlled system.

This is not cannabis reform. This is cannabis corporate welfare.

## **Why Schedule III Protects Big Pharma, Not People**

To understand the danger of Schedule III, we must revisit what the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) actually accomplished. Enacted in 1971 under Nixon, the CSA centralized control of drugs, creating a licensing system that only pharmaceutical giants could navigate. Natural medicines that had been available for centuries suddenly became illegal unless produced and approved by government-licensed corporations.

Cannabis prohibition wasn't about safety; it was about eliminating competition. Why would patients buy expensive opioids, benzodiazepines, or sleep aids if they could grow safe and effective cannabis in their backyard? The CSA ensured that Big Pharma retained dominance by criminalizing natural alternatives.

Schedule III maintains this structure. Cannabis would remain a controlled substance, requiring DEA registration and FDA approval. Only multi-million-dollar corporations with legal teams and regulatory expertise could participate. Small businesses, craft cultivators, and patients who prefer whole-plant medicine would be excluded or marginalized.

The supposed benefits expanded research, banking access, and reduced tax burdens—would flow primarily to pharmaceutical companies developing patentable, cannabis-derived products. Meanwhile, state-licensed cannabis entrepreneurs, who have built the legal industry from scratch, would be pushed aside in favor of FDA-approved pills and oils.

## **The \$1 Million Dinner That Gave the Game Away**

Trump's cannabis comments didn't come in a town hall or policy briefing—they came at a \$1 million-per-plate fundraiser attended by cannabis executives and pharmaceutical allies. The symbolism is unmistakable: access to cannabis policy discussions is being auctioned off to the highest corporate bidder.

Trulieve CEO Kim Rivers, present at the dinner, represents one of the most powerful cannabis corporations in the country. Her company has funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars into political action committees supporting Trump. Scotts Miracle-Gro, another corporate beneficiary of federal rescheduling, has executives who boast of Trump's repeated assurances that rescheduling is imminent.

This isn't grassroots reform. It's regulatory capture, bought and paid for by corporate donors. While small dispensary owners struggle with banking restrictions and exorbitant state taxes, industry giants negotiate favorable federal rules over filet mignon and champagne.

## **The False Choice: Prohibition vs. Pharmaceutical Cannabis**

Corporate lobbyists and establishment politicians frame the debate as a binary: either continue prohibition or accept rescheduling. This is a false choice. There is a third path—complete descheduling.

Descheduling means removing cannabis from the CSA entirely, treating it like alcohol or tobacco. Adults could grow, possess, and consume cannabis without fear of federal interference. Businesses could compete freely under state regulations, not federal pharmaceutical monopolies.

But descheduling isn't on the table in Trump's conversations with donors. Why? Because it threatens the interests of the very corporations lobbying for Schedule III. Pharmaceutical firms don't want free-market cannabis—they want government-enforced monopolies, just as they've enjoyed for decades.

## **Equity Licensees and Small Businesses Left Behind**

The irony is painful. For years, cannabis reform advocates argued for legalization as a way to redress the harms of prohibition, particularly for communities of color disproportionately criminalized under the War on Drugs. States like New York, New Jersey, and Illinois enshrined "social equity" provisions in their cannabis laws, granting priority licenses to justice-involved individuals.

Schedule III undermines all of this. Instead of empowering local entrepreneurs, it elevates corporations with the resources to meet FDA and DEA requirements. Equity licensees, many of whom operate small dispensaries on thin margins, would be priced out of the market. Women, minority, and veteran-owned cannabis businesses would face extinction before they ever had the chance to thrive.

In effect, rescheduling is the state telling these entrepreneurs: "Thanks for helping us launch legalization, but now step aside for the corporations."

## **Jobs, Innovation, and Culture at Risk**

Rescheduling could also decimate the vibrant cannabis culture that has flourished in legal states. The industry currently supports more than 400,000 jobs, many in cultivation, retail, and small-scale production. Schedule III threatens to consolidate these jobs into pharmaceutical manufacturing plants and distribution networks, eliminating the diversity and creativity that make the cannabis industry unique.

The artisanal grower who cultivates small-batch cannabis strains? Irrelevant under Schedule III. The local dispensary with deep community ties? Outcompeted by FDA-approved cannabis pharmacies. The patient

who prefers full-spectrum flower over synthetic cannabinoids? Forced into the black market.

Cannabis culture—rooted in community, creativity, and resistance—would be replaced by sterile pharmaceutical products designed to maximize shareholder returns.

## **Why Descheduling is the Only Real Reform**

True cannabis reform requires complete removal from the CSA. This approach would:

- Allow adults to grow, buy, and sell cannabis under state law, just like alcohol.
- Give patients access to whole-plant medicine without prescriptions or pharmaceutical markup.
- Create a level playing field where small businesses, cooperatives, and large companies can compete fairly.
- Free up law enforcement resources to focus on real crime, not cannabis possession.
- Restore constitutional balance by leaving cannabis policy to states rather than federal bureaucrats.
- Open international markets to U.S. cannabis companies, boosting competitiveness and innovation.

Descheduling is not radical—it's consistent with both American values of liberty and with global trends in cannabis reform. Canada, Uruguay, and Germany have already moved toward full legalization. The U.S. risks falling behind if it chooses corporate capture over real freedom.

## **Trump's Trojan Horse and the Future of Cannabis**

Trump's flirtation with cannabis rescheduling is not a gift to reformers—it's a Trojan Horse. Wrapped in the language of progress, it hides a mechanism for corporate control. The \$1 million fundraisers and corporate lobbying make clear that this policy is not about justice, liberty, or health, it's about profit.

Cannabis advocates must resist the temptation to celebrate Schedule III as progress. It is, in fact, a retreat from the movement's goals. Rescheduling entrenches the very monopoly structure that prohibition created. Descheduling, by contrast, fulfills the promise of legalization: freedom, equity, and opportunity.

The cannabis movement has spent decades fighting for dignity, justice, and access. To hand over control to Big Pharma now would be a betrayal of that struggle.

The bottom line is clear: demand descheduling, not rescheduling. Anything less is not reform, it's surrender.

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