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Reps. Correa & Gaetz Introduce Legislation To Protect Legal State Cannabis

Washington, DC - Today, Congressmen Lou Correa (D-CA-46), Matt Gaetz (R-FL-01) and Cannabis Caucus Co-Chair Earl Blumenauer (D-OR-03) introduced the bipartisan “Sensible Enforcement Of Cannabis Act,” which will prohibit the Attorney General from prosecuting individuals using medical or recreational cannabis in states where it is authorized by law. This bill comes as a result of Attorney General Sessions’s decision to rescind the “Cole Memo” and will ensure states and their citizens are protected from federal overreach.

Rep. Correa said, “To date, eight states have legalized recreational cannabis, and twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia, representing more than half of the American population, have enacted legislation to permit the use of cannabis. Attorney General Sessions’ decision to rescind the “Cole Memo” created great uncertainty for these states and legal cannabis businesses, and put citizens in jeopardy for following their state laws.

In my state of California, voters want legal cannabis. It boosts our economy and is a strong medical tool. By 2020, revenues from cannabis sales taxes could reach \$1 billion annually for California. This bill will protect California and other states from federal overreach and ensure the will of the American voter is respected.”

Rep. Gaetz said, “In 2013, then-Deputy Attorney General James M. Cole directed all U.S. attorneys to focus their energies on dangerous drug-related crime instead of individual marijuana users. The “Cole Memo” prioritized ending the distribution of marijuana to minors, preventing drugged driving, limiting drug cartels and other serious crime. With a finite number of resources, including law enforcement officers, it was a sensible policy. Unfortunately, it was also bad governance. We are a nation of laws, not department-wide memos. We should not tell prosecutors to ‘pick and choose’ what laws to uphold. When Federal law conflicts with state laws and the will of the American people, it’s time to change the laws. Rep. Correa’s *Sensible Enforcement of Cannabis Act* does just that, codifying the provisions of the “Cole Memo” into federal law. This bill

is a tremendous step forward. It will help the men and women of law enforcement focus on fighting serious crime and will protect medical marijuana patients nationwide. I am proud to support this legislation, and hope that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will see its value and bring it to a vote soon.”

“The cycle of uncertainty must end. We need permanent protections for state marijuana laws,” said **Rep. Earl Blumenauer (OR-03)**. “I’m grateful for the leadership of Reps. Correa and Gaetz as they stand up for the American people, who overwhelmingly want the federal government to stay out of the way.”

National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) **Political Director Justin Strekal** said “The *Sensible Enforcement Of Cannabis Act* would give peace of mind to lawmakers, regulators, 149,000 workers, and the millions of patients and consumers who are dependent on the normalization of lawful marijuana markets. The most essential component in creating a stable business environment to meet consumer demand is certainty, and that is what states would have with Reps. Correa and Gaetz’s legislation to protect state-lawful programs from militant marijuana prohibitionist Attorney General Jeff Sessions.”

The “Cole Memo” was a Department of Justice memorandum drafted by the Obama Administration’s Deputy Attorney General James M. Cole in August 2013. The memo allowed each state to regulate marijuana laws as they saw fit, and directed U.S. attorneys to refrain from prosecuting individuals for cannabis-related charges unless they violated both state and federal laws.

The memo was rescinded by Attorney General Jeff Sessions in January 2018, putting otherwise-legal cannabis businesses and individual users at risk.

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