

US House moves to end raids on medical marijuana

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Reflecting growing public support for easing marijuana laws, the House of Representatives voted Friday to bar federal authorities from raiding medical marijuana facilities or growers in states that have legalized its use.

Several Republicans, citing the need to curb federal overreach, joined Democrats to pass an amendment that applies to the more than half the US states which allow the possession or use of [medical marijuana](#).

"Despite the overwhelming shift in public opinion, the federal government continues its hard line of oppression against medical marijuana," the bill's chief sponsor, House Republican Dana Rohrabacher, told colleagues late Thursday, citing recent polls that show 61 percent of Republicans and 80 percent of Democrats favor legalizing cannabis for medical purposes.

His amendment passed as part of a massive 2015 spending bill for the Justice and Commerce Departments. It would need to pass the Senate and gain President Barack Obama's signature before it becomes law, a potentially tall hurdle given the bill's restrictions on Drug Enforcement Administration action.

Rohrabacher, whose state of California legalized medical marijuana in 1996, has long-pressed for cutting down on the costly raids that DEA agents have conducted on legal pot growers.

The bill halts use of federal funds in 33 states to prevent them "from implementing their own state laws that authorize the use, distribution, possession, or cultivation of medical marijuana."

Groups like Americans for Safe Access hailed the vote as a "game-changer" that will help patients.

"No longer will we have to look over our shoulder and worry when the next raid or indictment will prevent us from safely and legally accessing our medicine," said ASA executive director Steph Sherer.

But critics warned passage would merely encourage more use of an addictive drug, and complicate efforts by the DEA to crack down on illicit dealers.

"It's the camel's nose under the tent," argued House Republican Andy Harris, warning that dispensing raw unprocessed cannabis to patients was "not modern medicine.

Harris noted how other addictive drugs were not being promoted for their medicinal benefits like marijuana was, citing the example of nicotine, which has been proven helpful in treating epilepsy.

"Why don't we have therapeutic tobacco?" he asked. "Nobody writes a prescription and says 'Smoke a couple of cigarettes and cure your epilepsy.' But that's what we are being asked to do."

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