



Patrick Kennedy is the Wrong Choice for Reform

For millions of Americans, the incoming administration offers hope that the harmful and racially-disproportionate war on cannabis — which has damaged so many lives and wasted so much money — could be nearing an end. The Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force Recommendations, published on July 7, 2020, made numerous recommendations to that end.

Reformers certainly agree. While we have made tremendous progress over the past 25 years toward ending cannabis prohibition, our nation continues to arrest more than half a million people each year for the mere offense of possessing a plant the vast majority of Americans want legalized. Part of the reason for these continued arrests is the example set by the federal government in keeping cannabis illegal. Indeed, it is long past time for federal reform, and we have seen the 116th Congress take tremendous steps toward this goal.

With this hope for a new direction on the horizon, we were shocked to hear that Biden transition team members are entertaining Patrick Kennedy’s self-promotional lobbying effort to be nominated as the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) — a role commonly referred to as the “drug czar.” While Kennedy is a strong voice for mental health, he is the wrong person for this position. His appointment would send exactly the wrong message: that the war on millions of cannabis consumers is alive and well and will continue for another four years.

Mr. Kennedy is a co-founder of Project Smart Approaches to Marijuana (Project SAM), along with Kevin Sabet. Together, they have spent years traveling around the country, urging elected officials and voters to reject efforts to end the racist war on cannabis users. In the wake of the first successful legalization ballot measures in Colorado and Washington in 2012, Mr. Kennedy decried the “mad rush” to legalization and worked to persuade President

Obama to oppose reform. As we work to end the war on cannabis, the last thing we need is Mr. Kennedy in the White House cheerleading for the continuation of prohibition.

Presidential appointments matter. They embody the mission of the administration in their respective areas. This is therefore the moment when we will learn how serious President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris really are when they say they support reforming federal cannabis laws and respecting the rights of states to enact their own cannabis laws. We, along with voters from across the nation, from red South Dakota to blue New Jersey, certainly hope their commitment is real. Rather than taking us backward, President-elect Biden should send a clear message that the failed drug war policies of the past are coming to an end by nominating an ONDCP Director who shares that vision.

Cannabis Trade Federation
Global Alliance for Cannabis Commerce
Marijuana Policy Project
Minority Cannabis Business Association
National Cannabis Industry Association
National Cannabis Roundtable