

## ***House of Representatives passes marijuana legalization bill***

*Nicholas Wu - USA Today*

*WASHINGTON – The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives passed legislation legalizing marijuana at the federal level Friday, the first time either chamber of Congress has voted on the matter.*

*The bill, the MORE Act, passed by a mostly party-line 228-164 vote. The Republican-controlled Senate is unlikely to take up the legislation.*

*The measure, sponsored by Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., would remove marijuana from the federal list of controlled substances and expunge some marijuana-related criminal records. It would still be up to states to pass their own regulations on the sale of marijuana.*

*Nadler said in a statement the legislation would help address the "mistake" of marijuana's criminalization and its "racially disparate enforcement."*

*"This long-overdue legislation would reverse the failed policy of criminalizing marijuana on the federal level and would take steps to address the heavy toll this policy has taken across the country, particularly on communities of color," he said.*

*Nadler has highlighted provisions in the MORE Act that fund community programs to benefit people previously convicted of marijuana-related offenses. He told USA TODAY in September the provisions were about "making people whole from harms suffered directly as a result of the marijuana ban," which he said disproportionately affected racial minorities.*

*Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., one of a handful of Republicans to vote for the legislation and the only Republican cosponsor of the legislation, said on the House floor the bill was necessary because current federal prohibitions on marijuana "constrains" the states.*

*"If we were measuring the success in the 'war on drugs,' it would be hard to conclude anything other than the fact that drugs have won" because Americans no longer supported harsh laws on drugs, Gaetz said.*

*Advocates see the vote as a part of a move toward "justice."*

*"With this vote, Congress is recognizing the disproportionate impact enforcement has had on our communities and calling for the unjust status quo to be disrupted," said Maritza Perez, director of the office of national affairs at the Drug Policy Alliance, a group advocating for the decriminalization of drugs.*

*An ACLU report analyzing marijuana-related arrests from 2010 to 2018 found that Black people were 3.64 times more likely than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession.*

*The bill's likely passage comes as more states have legalized marijuana and public opinions on the topic have shifted.*

*Four more states passed marijuana legalization measures in the November elections, bringing the total number of states with legal marijuana use for adults to 15. Medical marijuana is legal in 36 states.*

*President-elect Joe Biden has called for the decriminalization of marijuana and the expunging of convictions for marijuana use, though he expressed skepticism about the legalization of the drug during the Democratic presidential primary. Biden's campaign website said he supported the legalization of medical marijuana and would leave decisions on recreational use up to the states.*

*A planned vote on the legislation was shelved in October following backlash from moderate Democrats, who had expressed concern about the effort to pass the marijuana legalization bill before the election and amid the impasse on COVID-19 stimulus negotiations.*

*Rep. Conor Lamb, D-Pa., a moderate Democrat who faced a close reelection race this year, voiced a similar concern Tuesday, as Congress remains deadlocked over a stimulus bill. He wrote on Twitter that while marijuana decriminalization was important, House Democrats' focus should be on "nothing else" besides COVID-19 relief.*



*Republicans have also criticized Democrats for moving on marijuana legalization despite other major concerns before Congress.*

*House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., told reporters Thursday that Democrats were "focused on cats and cannabis instead of COVID."*

*And Senate Republicans quipped Democrats had decided to "'puff, puff, pass' on job-saving PPP and COVID relief."*

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