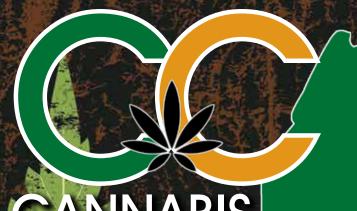
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Page 22

### **Post-Election outlook for** federal cannabis legalization uncertain

By A. J. Herrington

Although President Trump in 2018 had signaled a willingness to consider a bill that would respect states' rights on marijuana policy, no such bill ever made it to his desk. So, with the election of Joe Biden as president in November's election, cannabis activists are hopeful progress can be made on cannabis legalization at the federal level. However, with continued Republican control of the Senate a possibility, success on federal cannabis legalization could remain elusive.

Cannabis attorney Meital Manzuri of Manzuri in California told "Cannabis Connections of Maine "that the election of Biden and running mate Sen. Kamala Harris could signal a change for cannabis policy reform.

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administration in place would be a major win for the cannabis industry," Manzuri wrote in an email. "Widely supported Biden-Harris stances, such as federal decriminalization and expungement of cannabis convictions, don't seem to be on the radar of the current administration. Although not a major Biden-Harris priority, legalization at the federal level would definitely be an issue they address."

Although Biden and Harris have been vocal about their opposition to marijuana legalization efforts in the past, both have been more receptive to reform in recent years. Harris, in fact, has become a Democratic leader on the issue with her support of several bills, including New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker's Marijuana Justice Act in 2018.

"Right now in this country people are being arrested, being prosecuted, and end up spending time in jail or prison all because of their use of a drug that otherwise should be considered legal," Harris said in a statement announcing her support for Booker's bill. "Making marijuana legal at the federal level is the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do. I know this as a former prosecutor, and I know it as a senator."

As a senator, Harris has also signed on to two other important pieces of cannabis legislation, including the Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act, which would legalize cannabis at the federal level and enact provisions to address the harms caused by the failed War on Drugs. She is also the co-sponsor of a bill known as the Secure and Fair Enforcement (SAFE) Banking Act, which would give legal cannabis businesses access to common financial services. Harris confirmed her support for marijuana legalization in a 2019 op-ed she wrote for CNN.

"The fact is, marijuana laws have not been enforced in the same way for all people. Data shows that a person of color is much more likely than a white person to be arrested for marijuana possession, despite evidence that Americans use marijuana at nearly the same rate, regardless of race," Harris wrote.

During the election campaign, Harris pledged that she and Biden would make progress on cannabis reform if they were elected, saying "We will decriminalize

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marijuana, and we will expunge the records of those who have been convicted of marijuana."

Progress on reform is likely to come down to which party controls the Senate, which will not be determined until the results of a January runoff elections for Georgia's two seats. A Democratic win in both elections would shift the balance of power away from Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has been loath to allow a legalization bill to see the light of day in the

chamber. Whatever the outcome, Erik Altieri, executive director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), said in a press release that the results of state cannabis legalization initiatives should serve as a wake-up call for all policy makers.

# HERE'S THE DEAL: WHERE I STAND ON MARIJUANA LAWS I No one should be in jail for marijuana use. Decriminalize recreational marijuana use

Legalize medical marijuana.

convictions.

Allow states to legalize recreational marijuana.

and automatically expunge prior

Reschedule marijuana so researchers can study its health impacts.

"(Members of) the public have spoken loudly and clearly," Altieri said. "They favor ending the failed policies of marijuana prohibition and replacing them with a policy of legalization, regulation, taxation and public education. Elected officials — at both the state and federal level — ought to be listening."

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