



[Contact](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Site Search](#)

[Home](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Reason Staff](#)

[Contributors](#)

[Print Archives](#)

[Cover Gallery](#)

**[Hit & Run](#)**

[Brickbats](#)

[Podcasts](#)

[RSS Feeds](#)

[Topics](#)

[About Us](#)

[Subscriber Services](#)

[Support Reason](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Reason Stuff](#)

[Events](#)

[Submissions](#)

[Reason on Facebook](#)

[Reason on Twitter](#)

[Reason on YouTube](#)

[Reason RSS](#)

**Site  
comments/questions:**

[Mike Alissi](#)

**Media Inquiries and  
Reprint Permissions:**

[Chris Mitchell](#)  
(310) 367-6109

**Editorial & Production  
Offices:**

3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd.  
Suite 400  
Los Angeles, CA 90034  
(310) 391-2245

**Get Reason E-mail  
Updates!**

Email address:

[Printer Friendly](#) [Send to a Friend](#)

## Fusion or Confusion?

*Jacob Sullum* | June 4, 2009, 10:27am

Here is what happens when conservatives try to sound like libertarians—or maybe, since **Americans for Limited Government** was founded by Cato Institute (and Reason Foundation) supporter Howard Rich and has Cato President Ed Crane on its board of directors, it's what happens when libertarians try to sound like conservatives. Either way, it's **incoherent**:

Americans for Limited Government President Bill Wilson today condemned the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions for failure to pass an amendment which would have placed medical marijuana under the same US Food and Drug Administration regulation under which Congress is considering placing tobacco.

"This vote proves out and out that Senate Democrats are not concerned about health at all. Both tobacco and marijuana are weeds, both are smoked, both are carcinogenic, and yet the Senate Committee on Health has seen fit to propose placing tobacco under FDA regulation while shielding marijuana from similar government control," said Wilson.

"Senator Tom Coburn deserves credit for exposing the smoky duplicity of the Senate Committee on Health," Wilson added.

The amendment, sponsored by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), would have required that states, should they decide to decriminalize marijuana or allow it for medical purposes, regulate it on the same grounds as tobacco.

Wilson called upon the Senate to enact the Coburn amendment on the floor of the body. "Every member of the Senate must decide if what's good for the goose is good for the gander."

According to Senator Coburn, speaking in committee, "[A]ll this amendment does is say we're going to do the same thing with marijuana that we're going to do with cigarettes—we're going to run it through the FDA and if in fact we're going to utilize it, then we ought to make sure it's safe and efficacious."

(optional) Your name:

Subscribe

[Manage your Reason e-mail list subscriptions](#)

In a 13-10 party line vote, the committee's Democrats—and lone Independent—rejected the amendment.

Voicing his disapproval of the vote, Americans for Limited Government President Bill Wilson said, "The Coburn amendment has effectively revealed the Democrats at their most hypocritical. Congress and Big Government Washington bureaucrats are moving to criminalize tobacco while simultaneously legalizing marijuana."

Wilson added, "The real aim of placing tobacco under FDA control is ultimately prohibition. It's time we call this what it is—a move towards prohibition."...

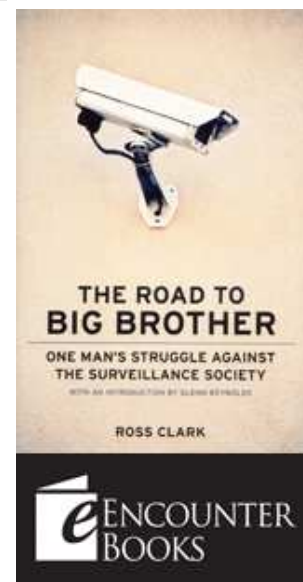
"Any student of history understands that prohibition triggers more crime and more wasted government resources," Wilson said. "Although it failed in committee, the Coburn amendment succeeded in revealing Democrats' duplicitous nature regarding tobacco regulation and ultimate prohibition."

"America does not need another era of prohibition," Wilson concluded.

From this press release I gather that prohibition is bad for tobacco but not for marijuana, that states should be free to "decriminalize marijuana or allow it for medical purposes" as long as they get permission from the FDA, and that limiting government requires expanding government. Perhaps ALG thinks this is a clever way of getting conservatives to question the war on drugs, but if so it's so clever that I can't tell what the group's position is. There's nothing wrong with joining conservatives like Coburn (ALG's "chairman emeritus") in fighting eminent domain abuse, promoting school choice, limiting spending, or resisting tax increases. But taking drug policy cues from Coburn, who is fiscally conservative but personifies the Republican Party's confused and confusing inconsistency on matters of federalism, economic freedom, and individual liberty, sends exactly the wrong message for a group that **claims** to be "sick" of "politicians [who] don't honor their own principles or platforms."

I **admired** Coburn's fiscal conservatism in a 2008 column. In a 2007 *Reason* article, Dave Weigel **asked** if Coburn is "an extreme social conservative, a libertarian hero, or both."

Help Reason celebrate its next 40 years. [Donate Now!](#)



"Compelling & Timely Reading Written For The Layman, Not Lawyers!"

- Glenn Beck, Fox News Channel

"The Best History Of The Law & Race I've Ever Read"

Justin Williams, NPR

THOMAS NELSON  
Since 1788



---

©2009 Reason Magazine. All Rights Reserved.  
Send this article to: [StumbleUpon](#) [Digg](#) [Reddit](#)  
[Fark](#) [Facebook](#)

---

[« Beating the Fee | Main | Reason Writers Around Town: Shikha... »](#)

---

## Comments to "Fusion or Confusion?":

[Add a comment](#) ↓

---

[Warren](#) | June 4, 2009, 10:40am | <#>

*Both tobacco and marijuana are weeds, both are smoked, both are carcinogenic...*

Marijuana is smoked, but where are the studies to prove that it's carcinogenic? Certainly it's much less so than cigarettes. Drug warriors like to make unfounded claims about the dangers of pot smoke, and their claims are usually accepted without question. However, when it comes to the dangers of smoking marijuana, the prohibitionists are the ones blowing smoke.

---

[Citizen Nothing](#) | June 4, 2009, 10:49am | <#>

Jesus.  
H.  
Christ.

---

[MNG](#) | June 4, 2009, 10:49am | <#>

"an extreme social conservative, a libertarian hero, or both."

More like extreme dumbass hero. This guy has claimed there is epidemic lesbianism in the Oklahoma public schools...

---

[MNG](#) | June 4, 2009, 10:52am | <#>

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=tom%20coburn>

---

[hmm](#) | June 4, 2009, 10:53am | <#>

*"America does not need another era of prohibition," Wilson concluded.*

Lil late for that comment.

---

[catMoses](#) | June 4, 2009, 10:53am | <#>

Marijuana Does Not Raise Lung Cancer Risk

---

People who smoke marijuana do not appear to be at increased risk for developing lung cancer, new research suggests.

While a clear increase in cancer risk was seen among cigarette smokers in the study, no such association was seen for regular cannabis users.

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,196678,00.html>

**Robert** | June 4, 2009, 10:54am | <#>

I suspect that if we looked at the proposed amendment and considered its legal implications, our analysis would come out very different. Why do you suppose it failed in committee? I'm going to try to get the full story.

**Citizen Nothing** | June 4, 2009, 10:54am | <#>

Fuck conservative/libertarian fusion. Libertarians are always the fuckees, and my ass hurts.

**Pro Libertate** | June 4, 2009, 11:03am | <#>

Fusion of conservatives and libertarians is twenty years away.

**Hugh Akston** | June 4, 2009, 11:10am | <#>

Even when they make sense, press releases are the lowest form of human relations.

**Warren** | June 4, 2009, 11:24am | <#>

*Fusion of conservatives and libertarians is twenty years away.*

And getting farther away every time.  
Fuck the conservative, they've done nothing but fuck us for the past fifty years, so fuck em.

**R C Dean** | June 4, 2009, 11:29am | <#>

*This guy has claimed there is epidemic lesbianism in the Oklahoma public schools*

Well, red-blooded Americans everywhere can only hope . . .

**Pro Libertate** | June 4, 2009, 11:31am | <#>

Crap. David Carradine has died.

**Current Issue Available!**



**reason**

**Get in Line! Now Stay Out!**  
What part of legal immigration don't you understand?

- **Would a President McCain obey the law?**
- **What part of legal immigration don't you understand?**
- **Cloning dogs for fun and profit**

**Purchase an online edition of this issue immediately!**

Bill Wilson | June 4, 2009, 11:45am | <#>

Mr. Sullum,

I would like to disagree with your post. I believe you did not fully read the press release. If you had, you would have noticed that the position we have taken at Americans for Limited Government was one of exposing the hypocrisy of the votes on the Coburn amendment. Simply put, voting to regulate tobacco while also voting to not regulate marijuana is a double standard. We simply tried to expose this and oppose a further expansion of government.

Sincerely,  
Bill Wilson  
President, Americans for Limited Government

---

Alan Vanneman | June 4, 2009, 11:51am | <#>

"From this press release I gather that prohibition is bad for tobacco but not for marijuana, that states should be free to "decriminalize marijuana or allow it for medical purposes" as long as they get permission from the FDA, and that limiting government requires expanding government. Perhaps ALG thinks this is a clever way of getting conservatives to question the war on drugs, but if so it's so clever that I can't tell what the group's position is."

Yeah, this press release was definitely a joint experience. The ALG's goose is smokin' IMFHO

---

Episiarch | June 4, 2009, 12:03pm | <#>

*Simply put, voting to regulate tobacco while also voting to not regulate marijuana is a double standard. We simply tried to expose this and oppose a further expansion of government.*

I don't think your approach is being perceived the way you wanted it to.

---

Citizen Nothing | June 4, 2009, 12:05pm | <#>

I think Bill Wilson needs to hire someone who can write a cogent press release. There are lots of unemployed newspaper writers out there. (Not that the two sentences have anything to do with each other.)

---

Citizen Nothing | June 4, 2009, 12:09pm | <#>

"Crap. David Carradine has died."

Put out an A.P.B. for Uma Thurman.

---

[R C Dean](#) | June 4, 2009, 12:18pm | <#>

What I couldn't tell, and am too lazy to Google, is:

Does the Coburn amendment remove marijuana from Schedule 1 (effectively decriminalizing it)? or does it leave federal criminal laws on marijuana untouched, and merely add a new obstacle (the FDA) to any attempt by the states to decriminalize it?

---

[The Angry Optimist](#) | June 4, 2009, 12:21pm | <#>

Oh, R C - come on now...what do you think? What does common sense tell you?

---

[kevrob](#) | June 4, 2009, 12:29pm | <#>

Both tobacco and marijuana are weeds...

I once read or heard that the definition of a *weed* is any plant that's in the wrong place.

Since both tobacco and MJ are cultivated, they are, at least sometimes, not weeds.

Except for, y'know, "*weed*".

Kevin

---

[Responsible Tax Payer](#) | June 4, 2009, 12:41pm | <#>

Legalize it. Treat it like alcohol plain and simple. End black market and violence.

I'm so sick of the Gateway Drug Argument. Alcohol is the ULTIMATE GATEWAY DRUG. It's probably 90% of people's first buzz. And if they like it, they want more. None of my successful friends that smoke got into heavy drugs like coke.

It's a shame that the people who get addicted and kill themselves with crack & cocaine get wrapped in the same category as an adult that want to smoke a joint on a Friday night..... What a weird world.

Once it's legal it will be exciting for the first 3 months. After that, the people who smoke now, will probably smoke the same amount. And the people who won't, simply won't. Not much will change.

And if treated like alcohol. Kids will have as much access to it as a 6 pack of beer. In otherwords, if regulated, kids can't get it.

So legalize it. And to the folks that say NO and that have never done it, what right do they have to judge it?

---

The Angry Optimist | June 4, 2009, 12:48pm | <#>

And if treated like alcohol. Kids will have as much access to it as a 6 pack of beer. In otherwords, if regulated, kids can't get it.

RTP - I'm with you, except I got my hands on alcohol all the time before the legal age. Of course, at 18 years of age, I'm not a "kid".

Other than that, right on.

---

Seamus | June 4, 2009, 1:21pm | <#>

*And if treated like alcohol. Kids will have as much access to it as a 6 pack of beer. In otherwords, if regulated, kids can't get it.*

Please explain to me the mechanism by which legalizing marijuana will make it \*harder\* for kids to get hold of it.

---

JB | June 4, 2009, 1:25pm | <#>

This was a move to show that Democrats are hypocrites.

That's not exactly news; it's pretty much the platform of their party. The easiest way to sum up Democrat philosophy is as follows: do as I say, not as I do.

---

Hazel Meade | June 4, 2009, 2:18pm | <#>

Not sure I agree with this post.

It seems to me that moving marijuana under FDA control is not a move to get conservatives to debate legalization, so much as a tactical move to prepare the ground for decriminalization.

Ron Bailey (I think) made a similar argument last month that legalizing drugs and prostitution and then taxing them would be a good source of revenue for the government. You could make the same claim that this is inconsistent with libertarianism.

But in both cases, they are kind of incrementalist moves. Regulating marijuana under the FDA would be better than banning it. Taxing drugs is better than prohibiting them.

---

R C Dean | June 4, 2009, 2:27pm | <#>

*It seems to me that moving marijuana under FDA control is not*

*a move to get conservatives to debate legalization, so much as a tactical move to prepare the ground for decriminalization.*

As a tactical move, I think it would be a severe disappointment. Going the FDA route just gives one of the more obtuse federal bureaucracies the opportunity to play roadblock.

The legalization movement, if it would just focus on the end game, should be hammering away on "Treat it just like alcohol."

---

### Comment on this article:

Name:

Email:

URL:

Remember Me

Comments:

Preview

Submit Comment