



## President Obama Says Marijuana Should Be Treated Like Alcohol And Cigarettes

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President Barack Obama has spoken out against marijuana prohibition in America. Unfortunately he's speaking up late in his term, when he's not likely to do anything about it. During an [exit interview with Rolling Stone](#) published yesterday, the self-described lame-duck president says that the American government should treat cannabis like alcohol and cigarettes.

"Look, I've been very clear about my belief that we should try to discourage substance abuse. And I am not somebody who believes that legalization is a panacea," he said. "But I do believe that treating this as a public-health issue, the same way we do with cigarettes or alcohol, is the much smarter way to deal with it."

But that doesn't mean he's going to spend the final weeks of his presidency rewriting America's drug laws - even though that is within his power. As [Ilya Shapiro of The Cato Institute](#) noted last February, a president can issue an executive order to remove cannabis from the Controlled Substances Act ([CSA](#)), which would effectively decriminalize it. But President Obama doesn't want to go over the heads of Congress and the DEA on this issue.

"Typically how these classifications are changed are not done by presidential edict but are done either legislatively or through the DEA," he told Rolling Stone. "As you might imagine, the DEA, whose job it is historically to enforce drug laws, is not always going to be on the cutting edge about these issues."

Nor should they be expected to take the lead, according to Paul Armentano - Deputy Director of [NORML](#).

"The DEA is a law enforcement agency," Armentano told Civilized in an earlier interview. "So the notion that this is the DEA's responsibility really neglects the fact that the DEA doesn't make law, and the DEA is not a regulatory agency either. The FDA is the governing body that deals with drug regulations and drug scheduling. And Congress is the governing body that enacts legislation with regard to illicit substances."

Armentano added that it's arguably up to Congress - not the president, not the DEA - to take the lead on fixing America's marijuana laws.

"It was Congress who established the Controlled Substances Act in 1970. It was an act of Congress that placed cannabis in Schedule I [along with heroin]. And, arguably, it will take an act of Congress to amend the federal laws regarding cannabis. It's their responsibility. When Congress passes a bad law or an inappropriate law, ultimately it's Congress whose responsibility to fix those laws."

### Obama Leaves Legal States Vulnerable

But without taking action, Obama will leave all of the legal states vulnerable to a DEA crackdown. That means growers, retailers, medical marijuana patients and everyone else involved in state-legalized medicinal or recreational industry are susceptible to prosecution. And considering that 29 states have approved medical marijuana and eight have legalized recreational cannabis use, we're talking about millions of people living in a legal gray area.

Right now, the only thing protecting those cannabis industries are temporary provisions that can be reversed or discarded by the Trump Administration. And the new regime might just do that. Trump has picked Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions, an outspoken cannabis prohibitionist, for Attorney General - a position that oversees the Department of Justice and the DEA.

Trump has also chosen anti-cannabis Congressman Tom Price (R-Georgia) as Secretary of Health and Human Services, a department that has shaped the DEA's drug policy in the past.

But the legalization movement could gain an influential ally once Trump takes office. Obama hinted that he might do more for cannabis reform once he resumes being an ordinary citizen. When asked what he would do to help the country move forward with this issue, Obama said, "Look, I am now very much in lame-duck status. And I will have the opportunity as a private citizen to describe where I think we need to go."

So Obama could shift from commander-in-chief to chief critic of cannabis policy starting in January.