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Pot & politics: Meet the anti-prohibition warrior from Tennessee

By: Jake Ellison – May 19, 2013

With Washington state's politicians in D.C. missing in action on the marijuana front, we turn now to the representative from Tennessee, Steve Cohen, for our latest episode in people asking the Department of Justice to clarify its position ... and leave Washington and Colorado pot efforts alone.

During the big hearing last week in which U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder was grilled on the IRS looking into the tax status of conservative groups and taking AP phone records, Cohen threw marijuana into the mix (relevant part starts at 4:23):



What he said:

“One of the greatest threats to liberty has been the government taking people’s liberty for things that people are in favor of. The Pew Research Group shows that 52 percent of people do not think marijuana should be illegal. And yet there are people in jail, and your Justice Department is continuing to put people in jail, for sale, and use, on occasion, of marijuana. That’s something the American public has finally caught up with. It was a cultural lag. And it’s been an injustice for 40 years in this country, to take people’s liberty for something that was similar to

alcohol. You have continued what is allowing the Mexican cartels power, and the power to make money, ruin Mexico, hurt our country by having a prohibition in the late 20th and 21st century. We saw it didn't work in this country in the 20s. We remedied it. This is the time to remedy this Prohibition, and I would hope you would do so."

Cohen has done more than just talk, too. On April 18, he introduced legislation to create a National Commission on Federal Marijuana Policy:

"Regardless of your views on marijuana, it's important that we understand the impact of current federal policy and address the conflict with those state laws that allow for medicinal or personal use of marijuana," said Congressman Cohen in a press release. "This conflict is only going to continue to grow over the next few years and we must provide certainty to the millions of individuals and businesses that remain caught in a web of incompatible laws. A national commission would provide us with the information we need to create sensible policy going forward."

Below, Cohen explains his position to the Cato Institute:



About the video: The Department of Justice has been largely silent on how it intends to enforce federal law in states where marijuana has recently been legalized for adults. President Obama, despite pledging to stand down in states that have legalized marijuana for medical use, has continued raids on medical marijuana facilities complying with state laws. U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN) believes changes to the Controlled Substances Act will allow states greater flexibility to set their own drug laws. He proposes a "cannabis commission" to create an environment where those changes are more likely.