Biden Loosens Up on Weed

0:01

from New York Times I'm Michael babo

0:04

this is the

0:05

[Music]

0:11

daily today in a historic decision the

0:15

Biden Administration has just

0:17

recommended loosening Federal

0:19

restrictions on marijuana that have been

0:21

on the books for

0:23

decades my colleague zolan Kano Young's

0:27

walks us through why Biden is doing this

0:30

now and how big an impact the proposed

0:33

changes could actually

0:36

[Music]

0:42

have it's Thursday May

0:50

2nd zolen in the US the federal

0:53

government has a legal approach to

0:55

marijuana and the states have a legal

0:57

approach to marijuana and it's been the

0:59

state that have led the way on reform on

1:03

legalizing both medical and increasingly

1:06

recreational use of marijuana and we've

1:08

covered all that very closely on the

1:10

show but the federal government has

1:13

basically Stood Still right yeah that's

1:17

right when you look at how the federal

1:19

government treats marijuana compared to

1:23

the states the federal government kind

1:25

of has been stuck in the past year

1:27

states have really taken the lead on

1:29

sort of relaxing their stance their

1:32

policies towards cannabis use and the

1:35

way the federal government stays stuck

1:37

in the past is essentially by

1:38

classifying marijuana as a schedule one

1:42

drug the most severe category simply

1:45

it's on the same league as heroin and

1:48

LSD the federal government basically

1:51

when it comes to schedule one substances

1:53

is saying there's no medical benefit

1:55

from these substances it's typically

1:58

come with longer sentencing strict fines

2:02

as well and also limitations on how much

2:05

research you can do into these drugs

2:07

right so in the federal system a

2:08

schedule one drug of which marijuana is

2:12

a member is basically very bad is seen

2:15

as having no redeeming qualities and

2:19

using them is to be punished period

2:22

that's right when it comes to the

2:23

federal government this is one of the

2:25

more dangerous substances facing the

2:27

nation and then the higher the schedule

2:30

you get basically you have more relaxed

2:32

policies and a more relaxed approach by

2:34

the federal government and what have

2:37

been the Practical impacts of marijuana

2:40

being on that schedule one list for so

2:45

long oh look I mean for decades there's

2:47

been a real human cost to this from the

2:50

90s to even the 2000s you saw thousands

2:54

of people that were arrested charged

2:56

convicted for something that many states

2:58

consider to be legal now mhm and it goes

3:00

beyond the criminal justice system too

3:02

having a federal conviction for drug use

3:05

on your record can impact you even when

3:08

you leave prison I've talked to people

3:10

that carry that criminal record who say

3:12

that it's impacted buying property who

3:15

say that it also impacts their

3:17

accessibility of Banks and finances so

3:20

it has impacted Americans from the

3:22

criminal justice system all the way to

3:24

the real estate market as well right all

3:27

despite growing social and political

3:29

cons especially at the state level that

3:31

marijuana is just not the same as the

3:35

rest of those schedule one drugs it's

3:37

not the same as LSD or heroin that's

3:41

correct so with all that in mind what

3:44

has the Biden Administration just done

3:47

in the past 48 hours to change that as

3:52

many people would see it stuck in the

3:53

past approach to marijuana in the

3:56

federal legal code the Biden

3:58

Administration just took a major step in

4:03

liberalizing the way the federal

4:04

government treats marijuana you know

4:07

look it's been a half century now that

4:10

we've had the federal government

4:11

treating marijuana as one of the more

4:14

dangerous drugs in this country and what

4:16

just happened on Tuesday is we

4:19

essentially had the Biden Administration

4:20

saying it's time to get with the times

4:23

technically what they just did is take a

4:26

step to removing marijuana from that

4:29

schedule one

4:31

status and say that it should maybe be

4:34

placed in schedule three so basically

4:36

removing it from the group of drugs that

4:38

we associate with being some of the most

4:40

dangerous in this country and moving it

4:43

over to a category where you're

4:45

essentially saying hey there actually is

4:47

some medical benefit to this similar to

4:50

some of the medicine such as Tylenol

4:52

Codine that you might get at a pharmacy

4:56

what exactly would be different in the

4:58

federal legal system system once

5:01

marijuana is reclassified from schedule

5:05

1 to schedule 3 obviously it's going to

5:07

mean something different but practically

5:10

what would change yeah look it's not

5:12

like as soon as this happens that

5:14

suddenly marijuana is legalized across

5:17

the country that's not it but this is an

5:20

important step you know it comes as we

5:22

have seen local prosecutors local

5:25

officials kind of moving more in the

5:27

direction of decriminalizing marijuana

5:29

and now this is another step in that

5:31

direction um the difference being it's a

5:34

step from the highest office in the

5:36

country essentially saying I want you to

5:39

exercise leniency when it comes to this

5:40

drug that's a message that will be

5:42

coming from the administration from the

5:44

top of the federal government out to

5:46

policy makers prosecutors basically

5:48

saying hey look the perception is

5:51

changing when it comes to the federal

5:53

government I want to seize on one of the

5:54

elements you just mentioned which is

5:56

that if prosecutors absorb this message

5:58

and in theory so with judges that this

6:01

could pretty quickly result in reduced

6:05

Federal sentences around marijuana

6:08

related crimes that's certainly what

6:11

drug reform Advocates and criminal

6:12

justice Advocates hope for when it comes

6:14

to this and that's why they've been

6:16

pressuring the federal government to

6:17

take action like this look to be clear

6:19

there has already been momentum in some

6:22

cities where prosecutors are no longer

6:25

imposing sort of long sentences when it

6:27

comes to crimes like this but when you

6:29

talk to Advocates they say look a

6:31

message like that coming from the

6:32

president is only likely to move other

6:36

prosecutors that have not taken that

6:38

step yet so yes they are hoping that it

6:40

continues to sort of push momentum and

6:43

relaxing the way that we punish those

6:45

who who use this substance okay where

6:48

else would we see the impact of this

6:51

right so then also in the short term you

6:53

are going to see a change in the way

6:56

medical officials can actually conduct

6:58

Research into marijuana

7:00

as which when I talk to drug reform

7:02

Advocates say is essential if you ever

7:05

to have widespread legalization across

7:07

the country just explain that sir so

7:10

given that this substance has been in

7:12

schedule one there are those who have

7:14

said we need to learn more about

7:16

marijuana and you can only do that by

7:18

researching it but the problem is there

7:20

are these strict requirements and a

7:23

really really cumbersome approval

7:25

process for medical officials when it

7:28

comes to studying a schedule one

7:30

substance so by removing it and moving

7:33

it to schedule 3 then you theoretically

7:36

could learn even more about the

7:38

potential side effects of marijuana

7:40

which those pushing for legalization

7:42

hope will help their future argument for

7:45

changing the way we treat this substance

7:48

right suddenly it becomes a lot more

7:49

conceivable that a thousand people in a

7:51

clinical trial would be taking marijuana

7:54

when it's no longer seen by the federal

7:56

government as a horrible danger that's

7:58

right as the same as something like

8:00

heroin and it's not just limited to

8:02

medical research it could also impact

8:04

the business Community I've talked to

8:07

small business owners and those that own

8:09

marijuana related businesses who say

8:12

that with this change they would

8:14

actually be eligible for tax credits

8:16

that they previously were not eligible

8:18

for because of the way the federal

8:20

government classified marijuana so

8:22

there's also money to be made here I

8:24

thought it was interesting on Tuesday

8:26

when we reported this news most of

8:28

actually the reaction in my inbox

8:30

Michael were from business heads that

8:32

were so excited about this as well as I

8:35

saw that our colleagues reported that

8:37

stocks for marijuana related companies

8:39

were soaring after this announcement too

8:42

right so you're saying the overall

8:43

impact of this reclassification change

8:46

should it happen and it sounds like it's

8:47

going to happen but it's going to take

8:48

some time is not that this is going to

8:50

change federal law around marijuana but

8:55

it will change the aura around marijuana

8:58

within the federal system and the

9:00

pressure to punish those who violate

9:02

current federal laws around marijuana do

9:04

I have that right yeah yeah you do have

9:07

that right I mean it's important to

9:08

remember that the way that prosecutors

9:10

impose punishments for those who use

9:13

this drug the way that our Criminal

9:15

Justice System approaches those who use

9:17

this all of those are according to laws

9:20

that in in the federal government's case

9:22

it was written in

9:23

1971 and Congress needs to change those

9:26

laws right Congress needs to change the

9:29

law that dictate sort of mandatory

9:31

minimums and the specific details of the

9:34

sentencing that have been imposed on

9:36

those who use marijuana for decades mhm

9:38

and while this won't immediately change

9:41

everything I just described what it

9:42

could do is sort of nudge those on the

9:46

hill in Congress who do have the power

9:48

to change the laws and send a direct

9:50

message to them that the way the US

9:53

perceives this drug it's changing it's

9:56

changing now and maybe our laws should

9:58

also reflect that change got it so in

10:03

that sense this is a bit revolutionary

10:07

this change Biden's calling for and not

10:09

all that revolutionary at the same time

10:12

because it's kind of limited in its

10:14

approach as you say it's a very big loud

10:18

nudge and my question is why is Biden

10:23

doing this now and why is this the

10:28

approach that he's taking and perhaps

10:31

not something sweeper I mean why

10:35

now we're in the midst of a presidential

10:37

election simple as that and why this way

10:42

that's because President Biden has a

10:44

very long complicated history when it

10:48

comes to criminal justice

10:55

policy we'll be right back

11:07

Z before the break you mentioned Biden's

11:10

long complicated relationship with

11:11

criminal justice and I want you to

11:14

situate this plan for declassifying

11:16

marijuana from schedule one schedule 3

11:20

within that

11:22

Journey yeah so this dates back to Joe

11:26

Biden's early days as a senator Mr

11:28

President you know let's go back to the

11:30

'90s we'll decide whether or not we will

11:33

respond to the cries and needs of the

11:35

American people who literally are living

11:37

in fear the rampant crime and drug abuse

11:42

the UN even then Senator Biden is really

11:46

you know supporting and and pushing

11:48

through tough on crime policies there

11:50

are over 3 million heroin or cocaine

11:53

addicts in the United States today and

11:55

more heroin and cocaine enters this

11:57

country today than ever before before

12:00

this all came to a head in 1994 when Joe

12:03

Biden very much became the face of a

12:06

crime Bill and look this legislation had

12:07

a lot of elements in it but also experts

12:10

have said it's the reason behind tough

12:12

punishments and sentencing for those

12:15

that committed non-violent drug crimes

12:17

as well the average heroin addict I

12:19

might point out commits 200 crimes a

12:23

year to support his

12:25

habit 200 times a year a heroin addict

12:29

so while at that time it might have been

12:32

more politically advantageous to go and

12:34

push something like the 94 crime Bill

12:37

fast forward to Joe Biden running for

12:40

president in 2020 and what was once a

12:44

kind of signature proud part of his

12:47

legislative background has now become a

12:49

political

12:50

liability and just remind us why sure so

12:53

you basically at that point have more

12:56

attention on the number of people arrest

12:59

for nonviolent crimes convicted for

13:02

low-level drug crimes as well and also

13:04

at this point in the 2020 election

13:07

Michael you do have a lot of momentum

13:10

behind reforming police departments

13:13

behind prison reform you know you have a

13:16

powerful Progressive flank of the

13:17

democratic party that is pushing for

13:20

systemic change in the way our criminal

13:23

justice system works right and often

13:26

when they ask for an example of of how

13:29

it's not supposed to work and what

13:31

actually fueled these types of

13:33

incarceration levels while it's the

13:35

legislation in Joe Biden's background

13:37

that comes up right which created a

13:40

major political headache for him in that

13:43

2020 presidential race exactly well I

13:47

have an announcement to make to the

13:49

point where he even expresses regret I

13:52

haven't always been right I know we

13:55

haven't always gotten things right but

13:57

I've always tried

13:59

and you know while still saying there

14:01

are aspects of that legislation that he

14:04

is still proud of that they did get some

14:06

things wrong particularly looking at

14:09

sort of the way that they had those

14:11

mandatory minimums for drug crimes

14:13

especially it was a big mistake when it

14:15

was made we thought we were told by the

14:17

experts that crack you never go back it

14:20

was somehow fundamentally it's not

14:23

different but it's trapped an entire

14:26

generation so by the end of the campaign

14:28

now we've got Joe Biden trying to strike

14:30

the balance not just talking about sort

14:33

of tough on crime policies but also

14:35

talking about Criminal Justice Reform

14:37

making also campaign promises when it

14:39

comes to Criminal Justice Reform that

14:41

ranges from reviewing the way the nation

14:44

sort of approaches certain drugs to

14:47

reviewing the death penalty as well and

14:50

also promising to exercise his ability

14:53

to issue clemency so you've got these

14:55

campaign promises while he's coming into

14:57

office but almost immediately mediately

14:59

you start to see certain signs that the

15:03

political sort of momentum may be

15:05

shifting away from Criminal Justice

15:07

Reform and a little bit more to pushing

15:10

Democrats like Joe Biden to sort of show

15:12

once again that tough on crime message H

15:15

such as what one early example shortly

15:18

after President Biden comes into office

15:20

it was reported that some staffers that

15:23

campaigned for him and look forward to

15:24

joining the administration actually uh

15:27

were not going to be hired and that they

15:30

were losing their jobs and that's

15:32

because of past marijuana use huh so

15:35

that was sort of an early sign that

15:38

caused some real anxiety amongst some

15:40

criminal justice Advocates that some of

15:42

the other promises he made when it came

15:44

to drug policy reform you know would

15:46

they drag their feet on it what kind of

15:48

message would they send on it and what

15:50

ended up happening on that front so what

15:53

we start to see are some small steps

15:56

towards some of these commitments I

15:58

remember early in President Biden's term

16:01

he had what was uh sort of advertised as

16:03

this sweeping pardon announcement where

16:06

he would be issuing essentially a

16:08

presidential Act of forgiveness for

16:11

thousands of people that had been

16:13

convicted for possession of marijuana

16:16

federally right it was celebrated

16:18

criminal justice Advocates are

16:20

applauding him I spent a couple days

16:22

actually digging deeper into the numbers

16:24

on that announcement and reporting a bit

16:26

more on it and I found that when you

16:29

think of the person that's in prison

16:33

serving years for marijuana charge

16:36

that's likely going to be a State

16:38

Crime also this initial announcement

16:41

impacted possession but not exactly

16:44

selling the drug all that to say there

16:47

were actually minimal people in federal

16:49

prison for a marijuana crime that he had

16:52

just issued forgiveness on so this ended

16:54

up being a largely symbolic forgiveness

16:57

rather than one that truly change

16:59

people's lives it was a step toward

17:02

changing the perception but when you

17:04

look at the broad problem of the way

17:08

that we prosecute those who use

17:11

marijuana it impacted essentially a

17:13

sliver of those people okay so given

17:17

this mixed record overall when it comes

17:21

to Biden as actual drug policy reformer

17:26

in the White House what's your

17:29

understanding of what gets him to where

17:31

we are right now to changing his mind on

17:34

this very big subject of marijuana as

17:38

not a schedule one drug but a schedule

17:40

three drug arguably the biggest move

17:43

he's made since taking office well I

17:47

think the reality on the ground when it

17:48

comes to marijuana is changing we've had

17:51

more reports that do support that

17:54

there's a medical benefit to marijuana

17:56

use also public sentiment around this

17:58

this drug has changed uh I saw a polling

18:01

that showed that in 2013 around roughly

18:03

50% of Americans supported relaxing laws

18:08

against marijuana that's jumped to 70%

18:11

recently too well you know there's more

18:13

Democrats as well as Republicans that

18:16

are also supporting relaxing our

18:18

approach to marijuana right so it's no

18:21

longer just sort of a you know talking

18:23

point of sort of the progressive flank

18:25

of the democratic party but this is

18:27

actually becoming a very

18:29

popular policy proposal across the

18:32

country and once again you have Joe

18:34

Biden trying to put his finger on the

18:36

pulse of the country and try to get

18:38

basically catch up to where most

18:40

Americans are at right and as you said

18:43

earlier it is a re-election year that's

18:47

right it's also a reelection year so

18:49

I've been reporting on this now for some

18:51

months this Administration is in a tough

18:53

spot specifically with young voters

18:56

Michael and has been searching for

18:59

different policy actions they can take

19:02

including at times without the help of

19:04

Congress to sort of energize that group

19:07

of young voters think about student loan

19:09

forgiveness I know that we've talked

19:11

about that often this is another action

19:14

that the administration can at least

19:15

take a step on a nudge to sort of give a

19:18

nod to those young voters throughout the

19:21

country and sort of energize them as we

19:23

look towards this election got it so a

19:27

reality of this decision is that it is

19:29

designed to appeal to the kind of Young

19:33

Americans who are skeptical P after poll

19:37

shows of Joe Biden who are enthusiastic

19:40

about the legalization of marijuana and

19:42

would welcome hearing that President

19:45

Biden someone not from their generation

19:48

is starting to see this issue the way

19:49

they do yeah that's right and I mean I

19:53

have to say like again this stuff isn't

19:55

easy there's a risk even to the politics

19:57

of this as well

19:59

Joe Biden in a way throughout his time

20:01

in office has come in proposing massive

20:05

policy changes sprawling legislation as

20:08

well and at times he struggled with this

20:11

slim majority in Congress to actually

20:13

Implement those policies so now you have

20:17

a major step in this process that could

20:19

energize young voters but you also have

20:21

the prospect can they actually get it

20:23

done before the election can you

20:26

actually deliver on this proposal

20:29

or are you once again setting high

20:32

expectations only to become a victim of

20:34

those high

20:36

expectations and yet if we're being

20:38

honest as high as expectations may end

20:41

up being around this it's still very

20:44

much in keeping with Biden's history of

20:49

fairly slow moving change when it comes

20:53

to Criminal Justice Reform and drug

20:56

policy as we have talked about in this

20:58

conversation a few times this is not

21:02

legalization this is something grayer in

21:06

its approach and therefore entirely in

21:10

keeping with the way Biden has

21:12

approached this kind of an issue his

21:13

entire career yeah that's right I mean

21:15

this is an institutionalist this is

21:17

somebody who is believes in sort of the

21:20

incremental progress that can come about

21:22

from working within a system even this

21:25

process of reclassification is a good

21:28

example of what we're talking about to

21:30

be clear it's going to move slowly this

21:33

is going to involve different federal

21:36

agencies seeking approval for one

21:38

another to research marijuana they're

21:40

each going to do their own reviews the

21:42

justice department will have hearings

21:45

where people will present findings on

21:46

marijuana there will be a public comment

21:48

period as well on this and as

21:50

frustrating of a pace as that might be

21:53

to those who are looking for for big

21:55

changes when it comes to drug policy in

21:57

America this is exactly the pace that

22:00

Joe Biden likes I mean this is the pace

22:02

of an institutionalist seeking to take

22:05

incremental steps while working within

22:08

the system with the hopes of coming to a

22:11

decision that could change the lives of

22:12

Americans across the country so this

22:15

pace and this process vary Joe Biden

22:19

right well given everything you've laid

22:21

out about Biden about the way he thinks

22:22

about criminal justice and drug policy

22:26

I'm curious if you think there is a

22:27

world where he ever uses the federal

22:31

government to try to legalize marijuana

22:35

a decision that in theory could flow

22:39

over time from what he has just

22:41

initiated the changing of the

22:43

classification of pod do you ever think

22:46

that he would let that happen under his

22:48

watch it's just so hard for me to

22:51

imagine you know President Biden going

22:53

up to the Lecter and centering a speech

22:56

around legalizing marijuana this is

22:58

somebody who has been sort of personally

23:01

reluctant when it comes to these reforms

23:04

around

23:07

marijuana I think what's realistic is he

23:11

is going to allow these government

23:12

agencies to go through a very lengthy

23:15

and slow process in order to sort of get

23:18

to a decision here but just given the

23:21

Joe Biden we know somebody who is still

23:23

more likely to tout his Law and Order

23:26

bonafides and support for the police

23:28

over any sort of massive Progressive

23:31

change when it comes to the criminal

23:32

justice system it's hard to believe that

23:36

you are going to see him becoming the

23:38

face of a decision to legalize

23:41

marijuana well Zen thank you very much

23:45

we appreciate it thank you

23:48

[Music]

23:56

Michael we'll be right back

24:06

here's what else you need to know to day

24:09

Arizona's Republican controlled Senate

24:11

has voted to repeal a ban on nearly all

24:14

abortions that was set to take effect

24:16

later this summer the ban was based on a

24:20

civil war AA law that the state's

24:22

Supreme Court found could be enforced

24:25

now that Row versus Wade has been

24:27

overturned

24:29

the repeal already adopted by the

24:31

Arizona house was passed with the

24:34

support of every Democratic state

24:36

senator and two Republicans who broke

24:39

ranks with their party Arizona's

24:41

Democratic governor is now expected to

24:43

sign the repal blocking the abortion ban

24:46

from ever going into effect and Mike

24:50

Johnson is not capable of that job he

24:52

has proven it over and over again on

24:55

Wednesday representative Marjorie Taylor

24:57

green of Georgia a far-right Republican

24:59

said she would demand a vote next week

25:02

to remove speaker Mike Johnson from his

25:04

job the move green said was punishment

25:08

for Johnson's decision to rely on

25:10

Democrats to pass several major pieces

25:13

of recent legislation including military

25:16

aid to Ukraine which green strongly

25:19

opposes but her plan is all but certain

25:22

to fail house Democratic leaders who are

25:25

grateful to Johnson for passing the aid

25:27

to Ukraine

25:28

have said they will vote to block the

25:31

effort to remove him their support

25:34

combined with moderate House Republicans

25:36

backing Johnson would kill Green's Plan

25:39

before it ever reaches the house floor I

25:42

think every member of Congress needs to

25:44

take that vote and let the chips fall

25:47

where they may during a news conference

25:50

in front of the capital green said she

25:52

relished the chance to force members of

25:55

both parties especially Democrats to go

25:58

on the record endorsing Johnson as

26:01

Speaker I can't wait to see Democrats go

26:04

out and support a republican speaker and

26:06

have to go home to their primaries and

26:08

have to run for Congress again having

26:10

supported a republican speaker a

26:13

Christian conservative I think that'll

26:15

play well I'm excited about

26:18

it today's episode was produced by m z

26:23

Alex Stern and Shannon Lynn it was

26:25

edited by Patricia willins contains

26:28

original music by Alicia but and Dan pal

26:32

and was engineered by Chris Wood our

26:35

theme music is by Jim brunberg and Ben

26:37

lurk of

26:44

[Music]

26:47

wonderly that's it for the daily I'm

26:50

Michael mbaro see you tomorrow

26:53

[Music]