

Morning Cannabis

POLITICOPRO

NEWSLETTER

Trump's weed platform vs. past administration record

BY: NATALIE FERTIG, PAUL DEMKO | 09/11/2024 05:45 AM EDT

QUICK FIX

— **President Donald Trump's newly released cannabis policy platform (via Truth Social) is very pro-weed**, but his administration's record could only be described as weird.

— **Tennessee hemp companies filed a lawsuit seeking to block new emergency rules** that impose tougher requirements on retailers and manufacturers.

— **Massachusetts' top cannabis regulator was fired by the state treasurer for alleged "gross misconduct."** Shannon O'Brien plans to appeal her termination to the state Supreme Court.

IT'S WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 11. A new poll shows that Florida's marijuana legalization ballot initiative has support to pass, with 63.6 percent. [The initiative needs 60 percent to pass](#). Send tips and story ideas to: Natalie at nfertig@politico.com, Paul at pdemko@politico.com and Mona at mzhang@politico.com. And follow Pro: [@POLITICOPro](https://twitter.com/POLITICOPro).

2024 CAMPAIGN TRAIL

TRUMP BACKS WEED — President Donald Trump announced [on Sunday night](#) he is supporting a range of pro-cannabis policy measures, including the Biden administration's move to loosen federal restrictions on marijuana and steps to let people out of prison for marijuana-related offenses. He's also backing Florida's recreational legalization referendum and long-stalled federal legislation that would make it easier for cannabis companies to access banking services.

"I believe it is time to end needless arrests and incarcerations of adults for small amounts of marijuana for personal use," Trump wrote in a Truth Social post. "As President, we

will continue to focus on research to unlock the medical uses of marijuana to a Schedule 3 drug, and work with Congress to pass common sense laws.”

But while Trump’s newly articulated positions match some of his past rhetoric, [the actions his administration took on drug policy were mixed](#). Under his presidency, Trump backed some cannabis policy changes and signed a bipartisan criminal justice overhaul into law — yet his Justice Department took an adversarial approach to the marijuana industry.

Trump’s appointees had a great deal of power over their agency’s handling of cannabis policy. Attorneys General Jeff Sessions and Bill Barr took a combative approach. Sessions repealed the Cole Memo, Obama-era guidance that protected the recreational cannabis industry from DOJ interference, and Barr became [the subject of a whistleblower investigation](#) over his role in investigating cannabis businesses.

It’s something that pro-cannabis lawmakers hope Trump keeps in mind if he wins in November.

“I would hope that people [Trump is] appointing are more enlightened to his thoughts on the subject,” Rep. [Dave Joyce](#) (R-Ohio), a co-chair of the Congressional Cannabis Caucus, told Natalie on Tuesday. “I think we should lay out a program that is in sync with some of the things that he said, and hopefully he will then not only get behind it, but get his members of his administration to get behind it as well.”

HEMP WATCH

TENNESSEE HEMP COMPANIES SEEK TO BLOCK REGULATIONS — Hemp companies are suing the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, seeking to halt implementation of new emergency rules placing new requirements on the industry.

Background: As a result of [legislation enacted last year](#), the agriculture department issued proposed hemp regulations in December 2023 that sparked a huge outcry from the industry and elicited more than 19,000 comments. Then in late June, the agency issued the emergency regulations, indicating that they would be temporary while it worked through the permanent rules.

Some of those regulations took effect on July 1, including packaging and testing requirements. But a requirement that hemp retailers and manufacturers must be licensed by the state doesn’t take effect until Oct. 1, and some other provisions aren’t expected to be implemented until next year.

The argument: The lawsuit filed by the Tennessee Growers Coalition and two hemp companies alleges that the agriculture department violated state law by issuing the emergency regulations when there was no actual emergency to justify doing so.

“The Department had 14 months to promulgate rules to create the hemp licensing program, and it provided no explanation for why it had it failed to timely process and file

the rules to do so through the normal rulemaking process in the prior 14 months,” [the complaint](#) states.

What they want: The plaintiffs are seeking a temporary injunction or restraining order blocking the state from enforcing the emergency regulations.

The response: A spokesperson for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture said it does not comment on pending litigation.

STATE OF MARIJUANA

MASSACHUSETTS WEED CZAR OUSTED — Massachusetts’ top cannabis regulator, Shannon O’Brien, was fired Monday, roughly a year after she was suspended for alleged misconduct.

State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg said in a statement that she made the decision to permanently remove O’Brien after more than twenty hours of meetings and reviewing hundreds of pages of documents.

“The Chair committed gross misconduct and demonstrated she is unable to discharge the powers and duties of a CCC commissioner,” Goldberg said in the statement.

No immediate successor was named.

Background: Goldberg suspended O’Brien from her post last September amid allegations that the cannabis regulator made a series of [racially and culturally insensitive](#) remarks — accusations that O’Brien has denied.

O’Brien is a trailblazing political figure in Massachusetts. She spent about a decade in the state Legislature and then became the first woman elected state treasurer.

O’Brien’s response: In a statement, Max Stern, O’Brien’s attorney, pilloried the move and derided the state’s troubled cannabis agency.

“The decision by Treasurer Goldberg to remove Shannon O’Brien as Chair of the CCC whitewashes the unequivocal evidence that would lead any reasonable and fair fact-finder to conclude that there are no grounds for removal and would immediately reinstate her to steer the rudderless the CCC shipwreck,” he said.

What’s next: O’Brien is planning an appeal of Goldberg’s decision to the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, according to the law firm representing her.

INDUSTRY INTEL

VANGST SCOOPS UP TEMP STAFFING FIRM — Cannabis staffing company Vangst is [acquiring GreenForce](#), a temporary staffing firm with operations in Oregon and Arizona. No financial details of the transaction were announced.

Key context: The deal will help solidify Vangst's position as the dominant player in helping cannabis companies hire workers. The personnel firm says it currently works with over 1,800 weed companies and has more than 150,000 workers registered on its platform.

GreenForce founder and CEO Ryan Rosenfeld will join Vangst as its chief business officer, effective immediately.

It's Vangst's second acquisition this year: In April, the company announced that it was [purchasing CannabizTemp](#).

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

U.S. Hemp Roundtable has elected **Aaron Nosbisch** as executive vice president and **Art Massolo** as vice president of e-commerce. The hires are intended to expand the trade group's reach into the "rapidly growing hemp beverage market," according to a press release. Nosbisch is founder of beverage company BRĒZ and Massolo is VP of business development at hemp company Cycling Frog.

POT-POURRI

— **The Lower Sioux Indian Community in Minnesota opened a facility to turn hemp into hempcrete.** The tribe hopes it will help address housing shortages for its citizens. [[MPR News](#)]

— **The marijuana ballot measure is also receiving support from Florida Young Republicans,** who endorsed it. [[USA TODAY NETWORK-Florida](#)]

— **Ohio homeowners legally growing marijuana under the state's home grow law were still visited by law enforcement during a flyover in August.** Now, they say the state needs to do more to clarify home grow law. [[Dayton Daily News](#)]

AUTHORS



Natalie Fertig
nfertig@politico.com | @natsfert



Paul Demko
pdemko@politico.com | @pauldemko



Ashley Koo

Account Manager

akoo@politico.com
