

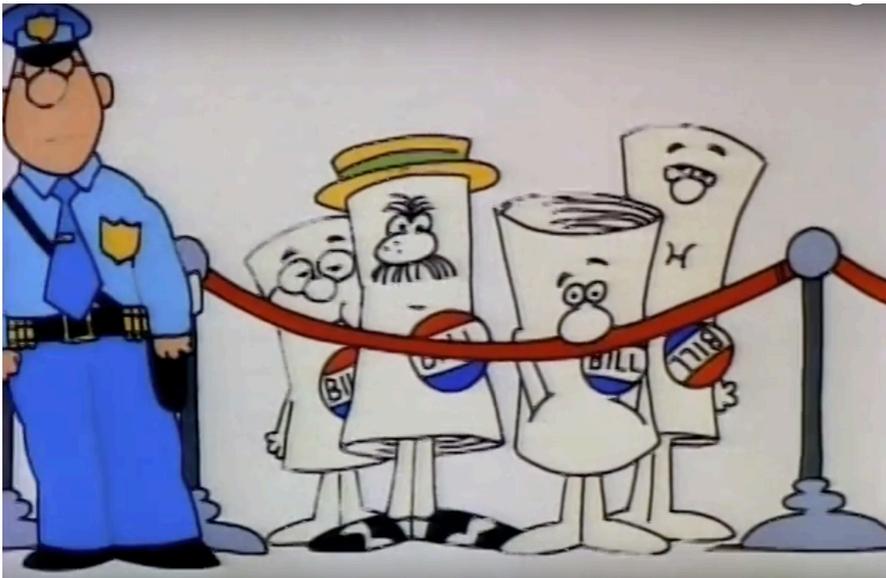
EXTRACT



The life of a marijuana reform bill

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March 13, 2017: 9:09 AM CT



(Schoolhouse Rock! screengrab: Disney Educational Productions/YouTube)

The 115th United States Congress convened less than four months ago, and already, House lawmakers have introduced four marijuana reform bills. Among the proposed measures, the Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act of 2017, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Thomas Garrett (R-VA), would remove cannabis from the federal government's list of controlled substances.

So what's the likelihood that such a proposal would go on to become law? Statistically speaking, it's low. Real low.

Only three out of 77 marijuana-related bills introduced by House lawmakers in the 114th Congress (2015-2016) became law, and just five of 121 marijuana-related House bills introduced in the 113th Congress (2013-2014) became law.

What happened to the roughly 96 percent of all marijuana-related bills introduced in the House of Representatives since 2013 that didn't become law?

The answer to that question is perhaps best described by a singing cartoon bill in the classic "Schoolhouse Rock" iingle. "I'm iust a bill":

"I'm stuck in committee, and I'll sit here and wait while a few key congressman sit and debate whether they think I should be a law. ... I hope they decide to report on me favorably, otherwise I may die... die in committee."

According to USHistory.org, approximately 90 percent of all federal bills die in committee or subcommittee. Only a tiny percentage of House bills are sent for a full floor vote.



House committees

After a House bill is introduced, the Speaker of the House – currently Rep. Paul Ryan – assigns it to a specific House committee for review, research and revisions. There are 19 standing House committees, each comprised of U.S. Representatives considered to be experts on topics like agriculture, education, the judiciary and so forth. Often, committees will refer bills to a subcommittee for closer examination before deciding whether or not to put it up for a full House vote.

Many marijuana-related House bills, including the Ending Federal Marijuana Prohibition Act of 2017, are routed through the House Judiciary Committee and Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security and Investigations.

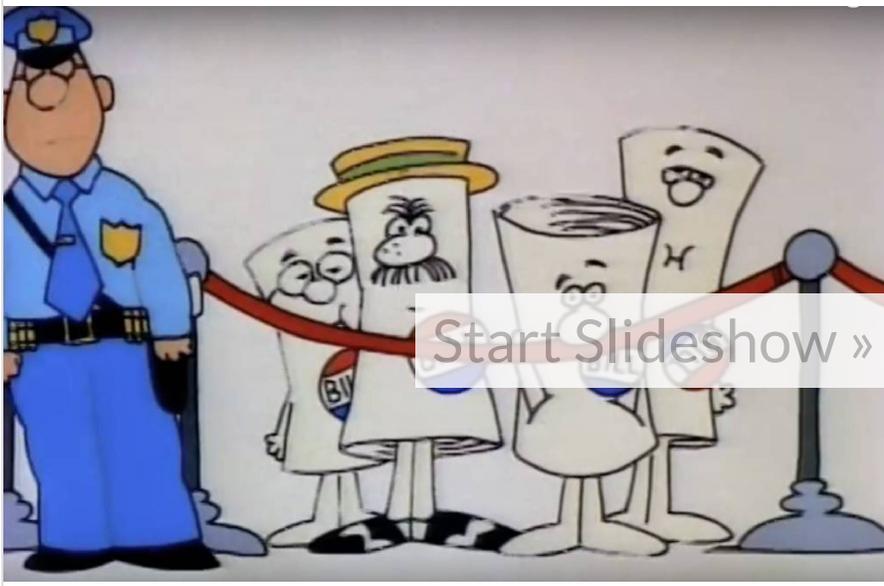
Because so many marijuana bills are routed through these two bodies, these committee and subcommittee members exert a lot of influence over the fate of federal marijuana policy in this country. They're essentially the gatekeepers for House marijuana reform initiatives.

And thus far, they've pretty much kept that gate shut. Few progressive marijuana House bills referred to the House Judiciary Committee or Subcommittee on Terrorism, Crime, Homeland Security and Investigations have been passed along for a full House vote. They largely died in committee.

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