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Opinion: Psychoactive 'hemp' is harming our youth – Congress must act

In 2018, Congress legalized industrial hemp with bipartisan enthusiasm. The intent was clear: to unleash the potential of nonintoxicating hemp to benefit agriculture, health, and manufacturing and create jobs. "Rope, not dope," was how many in Congress described the opportunity at the time.

Elected officials across the nation were surprised to discover that an unintended consequence of that legislation was the emergence of "intoxicating hemp" products. This exploited loophole is flooding our communities with toxic, highly potent THC in all kinds of forms, including child-friendly sodas and candies, deceptively marketed and sold as "hemp" or "CBD."

Lab-produced and possibly as or more dangerous than today's ultra-potent dispensary THC, these products are widely marketed to children and teenagers at gas stations, vape shops, and online. Many are sold with no minimum age requirement or checks, no potency caps on the finished product, no safety standards, and no testing or warnings on toxic ingredients.

Is this what Congress intended?

The urgency to act is immediate and bipartisan. In a letter to Congress last year, 21 attorneys general, from both sides of the political aisle, called for urgent congressional action. They reported that "intoxicating hemp products" pose a perilous threat to children and our nation's young people. Federal inaction has forced many states to step in. Measures taken include:

- **Arkansas** banned some hemp intoxicants in 2023. However, like other states, the ban faced legal challenges and was only recently upheld by the courts.
- **California** enacted emergency rules to ban intoxicating hemp with a permanent ban pending.
- **Alaska** prohibited hemp intoxicants unless sold in a licensed 21 and up marijuana dispensary.
- **Florida** intensified its crackdown on products aimed at minors and mimicking children's treats.
- **Texas** Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick led a broadly supported effort to pass a ban that last-minute was vetoed by Gov. Greg Abbott (R-TX), who cited legal concerns and promised future protections.

- Minnesota cracked down on abuses and enacted a lower-potency, age-gated edible regulatory structure for those 21 and up.
- Virginia and Colorado, among others, banned specific consumables and capped the total allowable THC per package and/or serving size for others.
- Lawmakers in Pennsylvania convened law enforcement, health experts, harmed families, and legitimate hemp producers to discuss the dangers these lab-produced products pose.

Still, enforcement for states remains challenging. These products have been linked to psychosis, worsening health conditions, ER visits, poisonings, and even death. Meanwhile, consumers of all ages continue to be misled by unproven health claims and the promise that these products can be “safer” than ultra-potent THC sold elsewhere.

Because these cheap, lab-made products require little hemp farming, they also threaten the existing growth and future of legitimate, nonintoxicating hemp, which holds enormous promise for biofuels, construction, textiles, paper, and functional foods.

The path forward is clear. Congress must decisively act to:

- Protect our next generation from harmful psychoactive drugs masquerading as something they are not
- Relieve families and communities from the devastating burdens and outcomes these deceptive products cause
- Prevent legitimate hemp producers from being driven out of business by deceptive practices

The good news is that Congress is moving in the right direction, and consensus is building. The House Appropriations Committee made a crucial move by affirming that intoxicating hemp consumables fall outside the legal definition of hemp. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) has voiced his concerns, including the negative impacts on children. Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry John Boozman (R-AR) has also indicated it is essential to protect children and maintain a truly beneficial and nonintoxicating hemp market.

[One Chance to Grow Up](#) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Denver that promotes the interest of children in marijuana policy.

The Washington Examiner :

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/beltway-confidential/3467605/psychoactive-hemp-harming-youth/>

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