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**CONTACT:**

Lauren Stansbury 202-518-8790

[lauren@mintwood.com](mailto:lauren@mintwood.com)

Tom Murphy 207-542-4998

[tom@votehemp.com](mailto:tom@votehemp.com)

**Senators Wyden, Paul, Merkley and McConnell Introduce S. 359, a Bipartisan Senate Companion Bill to H.R. 525, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act**

***Historic Bills Promise Economic Opportunity by Removing Federal Restrictions on Industrial Hemp Farming in the United States and Allowing States to Regulate the Crop***

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Vote Hemp is pleased to announce that this week Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Rand Paul (R-KY), Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Mitch McConnell (R-KY) introduced Senate bill 359, a Senate companion bill to H.R. 525, the Industrial Hemp Farming Act of 2013, which was introduced last week in the House with a total of twenty-eight original co-sponsors. If passed, the bills would remove federal restrictions on the cultivation of industrial hemp, the non-drug oilseed and fiber varieties of *Cannabis*. The language of the bills is identical. The full text of the bills, their current status and a list of co-sponsors may be found at: <http://votehemp.com/legislation>.

“Unfortunately, there are some dumb regulations that are hurting economic growth and job creation, and the ban on growing industrial hemp is certainly among them,” said Sen. Ron Wyden. “The opportunities for American farmers and businesses are obvious here. It’s time to boost revenues for farmers and reduce the costs for the businesses around the country that use hemp.”

The Senate companion bill was introduced following an important state Senate Agriculture Committee hearing in Kentucky where legislators are currently embroiled in a heated debate, as momentum grows to bring back hemp farming and processing in the state. Efforts by Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner James Comer, who recently reinstated the Kentucky Industrial Hemp Commission, have the support of Senators Paul and McConnell. After hearing the testimony of both law enforcement and supporters, including former CIA Director James Woolsey, Sen. Paul, and Representatives John Yarmuth (D-KY) and Thomas Massie (R-KY), the Committee voted 11-0 to recommend passage of the bill by the full Senate.

“I am convinced that allowing [hemp] production will be a positive development for Kentucky’s farm families and economy,” Sen. McConnell said in a statement. “The utilization of hemp to produce everything from clothing to paper is real, and if there is a capacity to center a new domestic industry in Kentucky that will create jobs in these difficult economic times, that sounds like a good thing to me.”

H.R. 525 is the fifth time a bill has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in support of industrial hemp farming since the federal government outlawed it in this country forty-three years ago. The bill was first introduced in 2005 by Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX) in the House, and the current version already has the bipartisan support of eight Republicans and twenty-one Democrats. If passed, H.R. 525 and the Senate companion bill would remove federal restrictions on the cultivation of industrial hemp by defining it as distinct from “marihuana” and allowing its farming and processing in accordance with state law.

To date, thirty-one states have introduced pro-hemp legislation and nineteen have passed such legislation. Eight states (Colorado, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia) have defined industrial hemp as distinct and removed barriers to its production. Three states (Hawaii, Kentucky and Maryland) have passed bills creating commissions or authorizing hemp research. Nine states (California, Colorado, Illinois, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia) have passed hemp resolutions. Six states (Arkansas, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina and Vermont) have passed hemp study bills. However, despite state authorization to grow hemp, farmers in those states still risk raids by federal agents, prison time, and property and asset forfeiture if they plant the crop, due to the failure of federal policy to distinguish non-drug oilseed and fiber varieties of *Cannabis* (i.e., industrial hemp) from psychoactive drug varieties (i.e., “marihuana”).

“We are very pleased to see action being taken in both the House and Senate, as well as in many state legislatures, on the issue of allowing American farmers to once again grow this versatile, sustainable, and profitable crop. American farmers are being denied the right to grow a crop that our Founding Fathers considered essential to our nation’s well-being,” says Eric Steenstra, President of Vote Hemp, the nation’s leading single-issue advocacy group dedicated to re-commercializing industrial hemp. “It is imperative now that other Representatives and Senators co-sponsor these bills, and that President Obama and Attorney General Holder also issue waivers to allow American farmers to grow hemp under state law where legal. With the U.S. hemp industry valued at over \$500 million in annual retail sales, and growing, a change in federal policy to once again allow hemp farming would mean instant job creation, among many other economic and environmental benefits,” adds Steenstra.

U.S. companies that manufacture or sell products made with hemp include Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps, a California company that manufactures the number-one-selling natural soap in the U.S., as well as the environmentally and socially conscious clothing and lifestyle company, prAna who uses hemp in their many apparel items made for yoga and outdoor enthusiasts. There are also a growing number of top-selling hemp food manufacturers, such as Living Harvest, Manitoba Harvest, Nature’s Path, Navitas, Nutiva and Sequel Naturals. All of these companies have no choice but to make their products from hemp grown in Canada or other countries. Sustainable hemp seed, fiber and oil are also used as raw materials by major companies, such as Ford Motors, Patagonia and The Body Shop, to make a wide variety of products.

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*Vote Hemp is a national, single-issue, non-profit organization dedicated to the acceptance of and a free market for low-THC industrial hemp and to changes in current law to allow U.S. farmers to once again grow the agricultural crop. More information about hemp legislation and the crop’s many uses may be found at [www.VoteHemp.com](http://www.VoteHemp.com) or [www.TheHIA.org](http://www.TheHIA.org). Video footage of hemp farming in other countries is available upon request by contacting Ryan Fletcher at 202-641-0277 or [ryan@votehemp.com](mailto:ryan@votehemp.com).*