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Bi-Partisan Congressional Leaders and Former CIA Director Testify in Favor of SB 50 Before Kentucky Senate Agriculture Committee

Support for Kentucky Industrial Hemp Cultivation Program Gains Momentum at State and Federal Levels and Includes Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

FRANKFURT, KY – On February 11 at 11:00 a.m. ET, Congressional representatives Sen. Rand Paul (R—KY), Rep. John Yarmuth (D—KY), Rep. Thomas Massie (R—KY), former CIA Director James Woolsey and Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner James Comer will testify before the Kentucky Senate Agriculture Committee in support of Kentucky Senate Bill 50, which would direct the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to create a program for licensing farmers to grow industrial hemp, establish conditions and stipulations for license holders, and define procedures for communication between the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and law enforcement. If passed, SB 50 would begin the process of regulating and rebuilding the agriculture infrastructure for hemp cultivation, but would not begin licensing Kentucky farmers to grow the crop until current federal restrictions on hemp are lifted.

"Kentucky has the perfect soil and climate to be the nation's top producer of industrial hemp," Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner James Comer said. "Studies have shown that hemp could be at least the third most profitable crop in Kentucky and our farmers could capture the lion's share of the industry," continued Comer.

Grown for its versatile fiber and oilseed, which can be used to make rope, paper, building materials, bio-fuels, cosmetics, healthy food and body care products, textiles, plastic composites, and much more hemp was once a paramount crop of Kentucky cultivated in the state as recently as the 1950's, but was permanently banned in 1970 as a Schedule 1 drug under the Controlled Substances Act. The pending return of hemp to Kentucky's farmland and mills is lauded by many political, agriculture and industry leaders in the state and beyond who view SB 50 as a step toward job growth and sustained economic stability in the Commonwealth.

"I am convinced that allowing its production will be a positive development for Kentucky's farm families and economy," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, "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."

Passage of SB 50 in the Kentucky legislature also holds considerable interest to many American businesses that incorporate hemp into their products, as it would potentially allow these companies to purchase hemp from American farmers and processors, rather than rely on imports from Canada and China.

“We want to be the first U.S. brand to start using hemp from American rather than Canadian farmers, once they can grow hemp again in Kentucky,” said David Bronner, President of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps, the top-selling brand of natural soaps in North America which imports over 20 tons of organic hemp oil from Canada annually. “We are planning a new line of food products made with American-farmed hemp seed and oil, to capitalize on the booming U.S. market for nutritious foods made with hemp seeds.”

“We are very pleased to see action being taken in both the House and Senate, and in states like Kentucky, on the issue of allowing American farmers to grow this versatile, sustainable, and environmentally friendly 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 only single-issue advocacy group dedicated to re-commercializing industrial hemp. “It is imperative now that other Kentucky state Representatives and Senators co-sponsor these bills, and that President Obama and Attorney General Holder also take action to allow American farmers to grow hemp under state law. With the U.S. hemp industry valued at over \$452 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.

To date, thirty-one states have introduced pro-hemp legislation and nineteen have passed pro-hemp 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 research. Nine states have passed hemp resolutions: California, Colorado, Illinois, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia. Six states have passed hemp study bills: Arkansas, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina and Vermont. However, despite state authorization to grow hemp, farmers in these 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.

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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 this agricultural crop. More information about hemp legislation and the crop's many uses may be found at www.VoteHemp.com or 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.