

Transcript of Interview with Congresswoman Nancy Mace,
U.S. Representative for South Carolina's 1st Congressional District

Interview by Aaron Edelheit

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*Lightly edited for readability

Aaron: Congresswoman Nancy Mace, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview.

Congresswoman Mace: Of course, I'm super excited about this legislation and I'm excited to see you excited.

Aaron: Yeah, well, that's easy. You don't know me very well; I get excited about a lot of things.

Congresswoman Mace: That's great.

Aaron: I think my own personal opinion is that most people don't have very strong opinions when it comes to marijuana. And most people probably agree it should be legal, but because it's not a hot button issue, I don't think it's garnered the support necessary to get it to the finish line.

Congresswoman Mace: Yeah

Aaron: I wanted to ask you, do you think that cannabis or cannabis reform resonates enough as an issue to drive voters to vote? And the reason I asked that is I just wonder how many other politicians will care, if they don't think that it won't drive votes.

Congresswoman Mace: Every time a politician tells me well, they can't get on The States Reform Act or some other cannabis reform bill, or like in my home state of South Carolina, to try and get medical cannabis. And some Republicans are getting push back, but it's actually Republicans who are leading the reform effort in my home state of South Carolina. But my call to politicians is poll it. When you poll the public support and

you can poll Republicans and Democrats together, but when you poll the support for cannabis reform and you say, hey, we put states in the driver's seat, right? We let states decide what they want to do pro or against or any variation thereof, because 47 out of 50 states have some form of CBD or hemp or medical or full recreational use. You know, it's the vast majority of both conservative Republicans and Liberal Democrats. And in fact, I polled it the other day with die hard, very to the right conservative voters and the people that were strongly opposed to cannabis reform were in the single digits. And so, the vast majority of people left or right support it and they support states doing what they want. I think most people don't want the federal government to get real involved with it. They want their state to do what they want them to do, whatever that is. And so, I encourage politicians who question it, I'm just sort of like, well, go poll it. And when you poll it, you're going to be shocked at the kind of support that cannabis has.

Aaron: So, you're saying that when you polled in South Carolina, conservative Republicans, that the people against it were in the single digits?

Congresswoman Mace: Yep. And those are people who are strongly against it and those people who are strongly against it don't vote on the issue. So, if you're against cannabis ideologically, you don't vote against someone because of it. But the people who are pro cannabis, the diehard pro cannabis folks, they vote on this issue, which is why you saw Democrats in 2020 run on it. I think it's why some of them are scrambling now. It's why my bill is getting a lot of attention. I've sort of taken this issue away and my bill is not partisan. It's a bipartisan measure. It's been endorsed by NORML. It's been endorsed by Americans for Prosperity. It's been endorsed by Amazon. It's the only bill that Amazon has endorsed on the Republican side. And so, it's a totally bipartisan issue. I've done extensive polling on it in bright red South Carolina. Statewide, about 70 percent of the population supports medical. And my district, the majority of people want recreational. I live in a swing district, so we're on the coast. We tend to be a little more, I think, open minded with cannabis as opposed to the rest of the state of South Carolina's by opposite of that. But when I talked to diehard conservatives, they're totally OK with states deciding what they want to do with it. They don't want the feds to intervene. And so, when I pitched my bill, The States Reform Act to people, I say, hey, look at this polling in mostly conservative bright red South Carolina. Look where people are on this. Even my 80-year-old mother, she's like, if I ever get sick ship in the best stuff from California, you probably know where that is, right? And so, my 80-year-old dad doesn't

like it, but he uses CBD. So, I mean, you know, pretty much everybody is for it. The vast majority of folks are for reforms as long as states are leading the way, regardless of your political affiliation. And that's the beauty of cannabis. And when I pitch people in my party, I'm like, look at the polling data. Look what it does to help states that have an opioid crisis. Like we saw on President Biden's speech last week, he spent a significant amount of time talking about the opioid epidemic. And if we had more cannabis reform in more states, that opioid crisis would be, the numbers will be greatly reduced. The number of people dying from opioid addiction would be greatly reduced. We know this because there are studies, limited medical studies. There have been multiple studies now that say that cannabis use prevents and helps outcomes with COVID 19, but you can't really study it to see what value it has. Because we haven't de-scheduled it yet. Right. So, you've got to be able to do that first and in order to de-schedule it, you have to decriminalize it. So, there's this whole cascade of events that have to happen to do it right, and that's what my bill does.

Aaron: Thank you so much for mentioning the opioid. One of my favorite statistics is that the number one way to cut opioid deaths and overdoses? All you have to do is open one cannabis dispensary and overdoses and deaths drop by almost 20 percent with no other interventions.

Congresswoman Mace: It's amazing.

Aaron: It's absolutely amazing. And it kind of frustrates me that it's still classified as a Schedule one drug, with no medicinal value. But besides that, I want to get back to the politics of it, we clearly agree. There is a belief among investors, and this is why there is, you know, I was telling you before we started this call, it was kind of like shock when you came out with your bill in November. But there's a belief among investors and kind of passionate advocates for cannabis that the best hope for cannabis reform is with the Democrats and that if the Democrats lose one or both houses of Congress, that reform will go to die. I'm curious how you would respond to that belief.

Congresswoman Mace: I do believe that there's going to be a shift in the majority after 2022. I believe Republicans will be in the majority in the House, at least. It's sort of a toss-up in the Senate right now, and a lot can change between now and November. But even still knock-on wood, I get re-elected, I come back. I'm just a freshman right now. I

come back as a sophomore. I'm already in a position to lead on this issue within the Republican conference. So right now, I'm the ranking Republican on the Civil Rights Committee on a larger committee called Oversight, and we're going to have a hearing on the Civil Rights Subcommittee on my bill, The States Reform Act, this year. But when we come back and we're in the majority, I've already been offered the chairmanship of that committee. And when this goes through the process again, if it doesn't pass this year, we'll refile a bill for next session. But that will be the first place that we have a hearing will be on oversight where I'm the chairman of a committee that would host the first hearing on this bill. And so, it's important that when you have advocates leading the way on legislation that you have leaders, people that are in positions of leadership that can work to get it done and convince other members of leadership, this is a good thing. This is why. And working on the bill to make sure that it's bipartisan because the best way to pass bills up here is to do it together and build consensus. And so, my first hearing when we do it on oversight this year, it'll be a good test of where Democrats or Republicans are and what kind of amendments they want to see on the bill and working through making it a better piece of legislation.

Aaron: That's great. Are there particular when you talk to your Republican colleagues, are there particular aspects of legalization or reform that resonate more with your colleagues on the Hill? Is it job growth? Is it tax revenue? Is it state and commercial freedom? Is it kind of fighting against the illicit side?

Congresswoman Mace: It depends on who you're talking to. So, on the right, it's allowing states to take the lead on it. It's not forcing federal legalization anywhere but allows states to take lead and have control. The states would propose what's going to be legal in their state and the feds would approve it. And so having some level of federalism for Republicans, making it a state's rights bill is a really important piece to getting Republicans to sign on. On the left side of the aisle, expungement and release is really important to Democrats. This doesn't go as far as MORE or Schumer's bill on social equity, but we leave that up to the states. It shouldn't be up to the federal government, should be up to the states to decide if, when and how they do that. At the federal level on expungement and release, this would expunge and release the records of all nonviolent cannabis offenders. It's about two thousand six hundred. It saves federal government six hundred million dollars over five years. Republicans love that Democrats do, too. But it does not include, I call it, safe expungement, and safe release.

It doesn't include violent offenders. It doesn't include cartel drug members, gang members, and it doesn't include DUIs. And so, you want to be sensitive to that for folks on the right, but it includes that for folks on the left. The other thing that's really, I think resonates with people are the protections that we have in there for veterans. So, if you're a veteran anywhere in this country and you get service and medical care at the VA, your VA doctor would be able to prescribe you cannabis. And when we're talking about the suicide rate, PTSD, the lifelong health complications from guys that served in Vietnam, having exposure to Agent Orange or whatever the illness is, those sorts of things, there are specific protections in there for those individuals. And so, there's something for everybody left and right of the aisle, which is why you saw Normal endorse it. And then I have conservative groups like Americans for Prosperity endorsing it. In terms of the job part of it, that's why Amazon endorsed it. They don't want to sell weed online on Amazon Prime as much as people might like that. But what it does is it opens up the hiring pool by about 10 percent, which would be about one hundred thousand employees that don't need to be discriminated against because they use cannabis. And so, there's something for everybody large and small in this bill.

Aaron: So, talk to me about how you get so when I see other bills and I know very little about the political process, but when I see other bills, whether it's SAFE or whatever, you know MORE or Schumer's bill. They get people to become co-sponsors to sign on the bill. Talk to me how you go about what your strategy is or how you build support for your bill and when we might see some co-sponsors or what that process is like.

Congresswoman Mace: So right now, we're working on building on the Republican side of the aisle. We start off with five original Republican co-sponsors on the bill, which was the highest number of any Republican to come out with the cannabis bill and have five. Doesn't sound like a lot, but it is higher than anybody else has ever done on a cannabis piece of legislation. We're working to get MORE. So, part of it's political, right. So, for some Republicans, you'll hear, hey, I'm going to vote for it, but I don't want to co-sponsor it. Or, hey, let me get through my primary. And when I'm in the general election, I will then co-sponsor the bill. On the left side of the aisle, I've been very respectful to wait for them. They're going to do The MORE Act again. And so, I've got a line of Democrats who'd like to get on, but they want to wait until MORE passes out of the house. And I want to build consensus. I want to reach across the aisle and I'm respectful of the process that they have, that they're trying to go through to do MORE

and MORE will then die in the Senate, is my belief. Schumer will do his bill. His taxes are way too high, so that's dead-on arrival. The only man left standing, the only game in town is going to be The States Reform Act when all that is said and done. And so, when MORE passes, we will then start adding on Democrat co-sponsors. Sometimes a legislation is overweight by one side or the other. I'm not going to do that with this bill. For every Republican that I have, we're going to have one Democrat and we're going to match it one for one. I want it to be a truly bipartisan piece of legislation. I want to show a concept or a framework that says the federal excise tax is super low, so we don't guarantee an illicit or black market in states where it's legal. But then we have all these other things that we can build consensus on. The SAFE banking doesn't go far enough for some on the left. And so, you don't need SAFE banking with this bill because your business would be legal and grandfathered in and treated like alcohol. And so, I'm respecting the process of what the Democrats are trying to do now and in the next few weeks when MORE passes out of the house, we'll be right all in on our bill and we're doing one for one sponsorships on it. And so, like last week when we were up here, we had three or four Republicans come up to me asking, how do I get on? And they've got questions about certain pieces of the bill and part of it's also negotiating. So, some people want one of the reasons I have the DUIs on there because it was someone on my side of the aisle had that idea. They said, hey, I'll get on it when you amend it and do that. And so, there's some watching the sausage get made. You know, part of that is negotiating. How do we modify the bill in a way that gets more people on board but still is tenable, still workable, still passable.

Aaron: Thank you. That really helps me understand. So, if I just kind of sum up some of what I've heard. Between the primary process ending and between kind of the MORE and Schumer's bill, you know, going through their process, you expect there to be a lot of movement. There'll be a lot of a lot of movement once that gets through where you can really go out and it resonates with me that you're being respectful of both sides. And one thing that I didn't realize, I just want to make sure I understood this, that you've added an amendment to your initial bill, at least for the DUI.

Congresswoman Mace: It's part of the original bill. But there'll be some adjustments, there'll be some amendments that we do. So, for instance, where the three percent federal excise tax goes, there's lots of wiggle room in there to negotiate where some of the funding goes. So, I have community policing, I have veterans, I have marketing

money so we can make sure kids are not influenced and don't do pot under the age of 21. Those sorts are responsible things. There's money in there and funding for small businesses. The licensing fees are waived for businesses that are disadvantaged. And so, we give the SBA's sort of the ability to make that decision and make that call. So, there's lots of room to negotiate in here. I won't negotiate on taxes, though. Taxes have to remain super low, or this is not going to work. Otherwise, we're going to guarantee an illicit market. And I just read about a kid or read about someone in New York the other day who got pot off the street and not legally, and it was laced with fentanyl. I mean, those are deadly things that are happening. You don't want people exposed to that unnecessarily and die for eating a gummy, right?

Aaron: Yeah, no. And not only that, you're seeing what's happening in California and Oregon, where they've created such high regulatory barriers and taxes that you have these thriving illicit markets that are run by Mexican cartels, you know, farmers in Oregon who are afraid for their lives. So, I think the states here are finally grappling with that. They're like, wait a minute, our taxes are too high and we're actually hurting the legal market we want to thrive.

Congresswoman Mace: You want a business to earn money. I mean, it doesn't make sense to be in business if you can't earn a business, right, earn a living. And so, you want it to make sure. And there are incentives for states not to sell to those under the age of 21, with the exception of medical use. So, there's just very responsible safeguards and guardrails in there.

Aaron: Yeah. So, let's talk about some of the negative reaction that I've read. You already mentioned, you know, from the Republican side.

Congresswoman Mace: Oh yeah.

Aaron: I saw the press release from the South Carolina GOP. Your primary challenger made what I thought was a bad joke about cannabis. And I even saw the Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, make dismissive comments toward the Democrats. I'm curious, what is the current thinking in the GOP and what is your strategy to try to change whether it's the negative perception or some of the dismissive? I don't even think that there's this broad, you know, anti, to your polling, I don't think they're very

much it's just more of this dismissive like, why are you even bringing this up? I'm just curious.

Congresswoman Mace: I don't quite understand it, either. So, in the state of South Carolina, my party chairman came out against me, and I had to remind the state party that, hey, Republicans are the ones leading cannabis reform. Republicans are the ones getting medical marijuana in South Carolina. They're leading the charge. And even the state senator who's leading that charge in South Carolina, who's in my district, I represent him up here. He's Republican. He was trashed for his medical cannabis bill, which is a very conservative bill. And what I'm going to do is educate those folks, educate them on the data that's out there, educate them on polling data. I mean, look, the state of Mississippi overwhelmingly passed it at seventy eight percent of the electorate. Deep red Mississippi. And if Mississippi can do it, certainly South Carolina can. And these are people who are misinformed or misguided, and they're earning paychecks from people, like one of the people in South Carolina who is against medical cannabis now was paid by the cannabis lobby to lobby for medical cannabis just a few years ago. So, it's sort of like when you were for it two years ago, but you're not with it now because of who's signing the funding our paycheck, right? And so, in politics, it can be a dirty game. It can get ugly. There are a lot of bad actors, and it's really about exposing that and educating the public because I've done extensive polling on this issue and I would have done it anyway, but it was good to know that I'm in the right place, I'm on the right side of history. I know where everybody is on both sides of the aisle and in my particular district, the vast majority of people want adult recreational use, which is different from the rest of the state. But by and large, even statewide medical cannabis is overwhelmingly popular with Republican voters and Democrats, by the way. So, for me, it's about educating them and hey, man, when I get punched, I'm going to punch back. You know what I mean? I'm like, don't come at me unless you're ready because I got gloves and I'll take them off. You know what I'm saying? So, it's just, yeah, whatever.

Aaron: I've read about your background with the Citadel and everything else.

Congresswoman Mace: Yes, I was the first woman to graduate from the Citadel. I dropped out of school when I was 17. I was a waitress at the Waffle House. Like I've been through some shit, right? I've been through some really tough times. And I will tell you for me, one of the reasons why I'm so passionate about this issue is not just the

veteran issue, I have a family full of veterans. But when I dropped out of school when I was 17, I was sexually assaulted and it's the reason I dropped out of school because I was raped by a classmate of mine. And when my doctors put me on prescription medication for my depression, it made my depression worse. I mean, I didn't want to live anymore, and I had some really dark days. So, I stopped taking that prescription medication and I started doing marijuana, not really understanding that, I understood it cut my anxiety, I was able to sleep better at night, but not really fully understanding. I was 17 and I would not say kids go and do this. But for me, I didn't want to kill myself when I was using it, and it got me through some really tough periods of my life, and I would not be here today had I ended everything. And so, I'm extremely grateful for the experiences that I have had, to be able to be where I am today and fight like hell to try to make a difference for everybody, no matter where they come from, no matter their zip code, the color of their skin. This is an issue that affects everybody from every walk of life in a positive way, generally speaking.

Aaron: Thank you so much for sharing that and thank you for being so open about it and just sharing that because I think a lot of people would be, you know, would just not want to share that story. So, I really appreciate it. If I go back to just the bills circulating out there and we go to SAFE, one of the big arguments among cannabis reform advocates, whether they be investors or just advocates, people who want to see, you know, reform or legalization is, do you go down a path of incrementalism where you get like a SAFE or a SAFE plus bill? You notch a win and then you move on to a bigger bill like yours or something else like that where you truly reform. Or does getting that win on SAFE lower the chances for any reform? And I know you have your own bill, but I'm just curious, what are your thoughts on that, whether there should be, you know, incrementalism or, hey, let's get it done.

Congresswoman Mace: Yeah, there's an argument for both sides. And I've supported SAFE obviously, was a sponsor, voted for the bill. We're going to do SAFE banking again for like the seventh time. And so, for me, it's frustrating we can't get it done. I do think that there is some truth to get SAFE banking done and God knows we need it right. That's a huge step. But it doesn't go far enough. But my fear is if we do SAFE banking only, we're not going to touch the subject again for 20 years. And so, there are a lot of other elements to it, not just for business to be able to operate legally and bank but should be open for medical research. And to do that, you have to de-schedule it, to

de-schedule it, you have to decriminalize it. So, there's this whole cascading or domino effect of things that have to happen legally and constitutionally through statute and to the U.S. could have laws to be able to make us, allow us to study it for research. And so, I've thought about cutting up my bill. Like if we have to do that, we'll look at doing that next session. For now, I want to see get MORE done. Schumer's bill will get done. They'll die. And then I want to take a real stab at my legislation and just see where it goes. And I'm open to cutting it up and doing it part and parcel, but I want to know that we're going to do it over a period of time, whether that's five years, seven years, eight. What does that look like is that one year, three, five seven, what does that look like to get it all done? I would want some negotiation there with leadership on what we could do and over what period of time to really make a difference here because we're leaving billions of dollars on the table, operating a cash business and the level that it is dangerous. We have drug cartels as you said here in the country because we've incentivized this, there are guardrails in my bill to de-incentivize illegal markets. And my bill doesn't cover this, but this would be after that, but we've got Canadian weed stocks on our exchanges. But then our guys can't trade, have to trade on the Canadian market, right? And so, it just doesn't it doesn't make any sort of sense. And so, we've got to be able to fix these things and do it in a commonsense, pragmatic way. But both sides have to work together, and it's really difficult in D.C. right now to build consensus. But I very much am open to that. I'm a Republican in the minority. I'm conservative and I've already passed four bills this year in my first year in office. And so, I know it can be done. And it's just a matter of getting the right voices at the right table, at the right time and working together.

Aaron: That's great, and I really appreciate that. Now switching to something that literally just broke this weekend, I'm sure you saw WNBA all-star, two-time Olympic gold champion Brittney Griner is in Russian prison right now and has been there for almost a month, apparently for having some vape cartridges on her when she was competing in Russia because they actually have a thriving women's basketball league there. What do you think the U.S. should be doing? Should we be striving to secure her release? And then what just so bothers me is the Biden administration's refusal to change federal illegality potentially makes it harder to secure her release. And this is all for something that all NBA players use for anti-inflammatory or to recover from injuries and probably helps her with her injuries, though I don't know all the details. That being said, I'm just

curious of what your thoughts, what should the U.S. be doing or not be doing? What are your thoughts on her being in prison right now?

Congresswoman Mace: We should absolutely be securing her release right now, and I know that she's a constituent of Sheila Jackson-Lee. In fact, my staff and I had lunch just like two hours ago, and we're talking about what we can do and support Sheila Jackson Lee and support Griner writing letters, letters to the State Department, to the president. Whatever we can do to help secure her release or show support, she should be back home. We need to get her out of there. It's wrong that she's in jail and has been there for a month. I just found out about it over the weekend was traveling and we had a meeting about it this afternoon and we're looking at what can we do now in order to try to support and secure her release. So, it's something that we are actively looking at and working through. And we're going to be in contact with Sheila Jackson Lee's office. She and I have done a couple legislative things together, and so we're going to do what we can to support her as well in that endeavor.

Aaron: Ok. You know, just thank you just for doing that and please don't let it die as an issue because she should not be in a Russian jail.

Congresswoman Mace: No, it's on the front burner today.

Aaron: Okay. Well, that's good.

Congresswoman Mace: That was a specific meeting, just about that issue today over lunch.

Aaron: Let's say, let's say we go through and this is before midterms, but I just waved a magic wand and somehow your bill passes both houses of Congress. Do you think that President Biden would sign it?

Congresswoman Mace: That is a great question, and every investor wants to know the answer to that, and I have no idea. But I think that there's a lot of public pressure right now, right? Every time my bill is written about, Senator Warren is tweeting about it right and bitching about it. So, it's like, it gets a lot of attention. And I think that the beauty, one of the beauty or silver linings of my bill The States Reform Act is that it's putting a

lot of pressure on Democrats to do something on it and do something this session. And they're all facing tough primaries or facing tough general elections. This could be an election year where we get something done if they can get it together and get it through both chambers. And so, I think there's a potential for momentum there, and I would hope that if a bill got on his desk there would just the overwhelming pressure from both sides of the aisle, that he would have no choice but to sign it into law. I mean, that is really the only option, is exerting a lot of public pressure from every side of the aisle to ensure that it got done. And the same thing would go for any Republican president in the future. Right. Because if a Republican were to win, because it's a mixed bag, you know, a lot of folks are on for medical cannabis. But my bill goes further than it lets the states decide what they want to do with it.

Aaron: Gotcha. Last question. How can people regular people or people in the cannabis industry, whether investors or entrepreneurs or trying to build this industry up. How can we support either your bill, reform efforts, you know, beyond maybe donating? Like what else can people in the industry or as investors do?

Congresswoman Mace: Yeah, they can share it with folks in the industry. Share it like you're doing in your newsletter, share it on social media. I know Reddit is a great spot for sharing information with a lot of folks in this space in the cannabis and crypto space. They're all on Reddit. But sharing that with your email lists that on the Republican side, I'm the leading Republican on cannabis reform and giving people the highlights of what The States Reform Act does. They should also contact their member of Congress and urge them to get on board. And that means calling their office, emailing the office, showing up at the office. But not only should folks who are on your newsletter do that, every single one of them, but also, they should get their friends to do it or folks in the office should do it. If you put that kind of pressure, I know that I look at my call report every day. Whoever calls in the office, I get a list of what the subject was and what they were calling about. I look at what people are advocating for in my district, and so look up who your member of Congress is and encourage them to get on The States Reform Act and encourage others to do the same thing. Have a day where you say, hey, by 5:00 p.m. today, everybody make a phone call. By 5:00 p.m. today, everybody email your member of Congress. And you can go on to our websites, which are usually our last name dot house dot gov. So, mine is Mace like the pepper spray Mace, mace.house.gov. And so, everyone's pretty similar to that. But you can go on their

website and email us. You can call us and let your member know that you support The States Reform Act and ask them to get on. And that kind of momentum really can propel an office to reconsider. And the more folks that we get on over the next couple of months, the better it's going to be now and in the future.

Aaron: Congresswoman Nancy Mace, thank you so much for this interview. I've learned a lot, and I wish you the best of luck and thank you and I'm supporting you and hoping you succeed.

Congresswoman Mace: Thank you so much and have a great day. It was a pleasure. Thank you. Thanks. Bye.