

Grassley hoping to keep medical marijuana illegal

By MIKE LILLIS 11/4/09 2:15 PM

WASHINGTON — On Thursday, the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee will consider legislation designed to overhaul the nation's criminal justice system by creating a commission to examine that system and make reform recommendations to Congress. The bill, sponsored by Sens. Jim Webb (D-Va.) and Arlen Specter (D-Pa.), is designed to confront the problem of the nation's incarceration rates, which are far and away the highest in the developed world.

One focus of the commission's review, sponsors say, will necessarily be the sentencing policies surrounding the decades-old "war on drugs," which critics argue has packed the nation's prisons needlessly with non-violent offenders.

Some Republicans, however, are wary of taking any steps toward a legalization of drugs. And they're lining up with amendments to prevent that from happening. U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), for example, has been weighing a provision that would prevent the newly formed commission from even studying the effects that drug legalization would have on the criminal justice system.

"The point is, for them to do what we tell them to do," Grassley said Wednesday of the commission. "And one of the things that I was anticipating telling them not to do is to recommend or study the legalization of drugs."

Asked by a reporter if his amendment would "have even stopped the discussion of legalized marijuana for medical purposes," Grassley responded, "Yes, the extent to which it would be decriminalization, the answer is yes."

The Webb-Specter bill has 34 co-sponsors, including Judiciary Committee Republicans Orrin Hatch (Utah) and Lindsey Graham (S.C.).

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