

May 3, 2011

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about Hemp History Week. To celebrate the American heritage of growing industrial hemp, the Hemp Industries Association, Vote Hemp, American manufacturers, and allied companies and organizations have declared May 2 to May 8, 2011 to be Hemp History Week. Throughout the week, people will recognize America's legacy of industrial hemp farming and call for reinstating respect for farmers' basic right to grow industrial hemp.

Industrial hemp was legally grown throughout our country for many years. In fact, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson grew industrial hemp and used it to make cloth. During World War II, the federal government encouraged American farmers to grow hemp to help the war effort.

Despite industrial hemp farming being an important part of American history, the federal government has banned cultivation of this crop. In every other industrialized country, industrial hemp, defined to contain less than 0.3 percent THC--the psychoactive chemical found in marijuana, may be legally grown. Nobody can be psychologically affected by consuming industrial hemp. Unfortunately, because of a federal policy that does not distinguish between growing industrial hemp and growing marijuana, all industrial hemp must be imported. The result is high prices, outsourced jobs, and lost opportunities for American manufacturing.

Reintroducing industrial hemp farming in the United States would bring jobs to communities struggling in today's economy, provide American farmers with another crop alternative, and encourage the development of hemp processing factories near American hemp farming.

Industrial hemp is used in many products. For example, industrial hemp is used in protein supplements, non-dairy milk, and frozen desserts. Hemp flour is in breads, crackers, chips, dips, and dressings. Hemp seeds may be eaten plain or added to prepared foods. Additionally, hemp oil is used in a number of cosmetic and body care products, and hemp fiber is used in cloths. Industrial hemp is also present in bio-composite materials used in buildings and automobiles.

I first introduced the Industrial Hemp Farming Act six years ago to end the federal government's ban on American farmers growing industrial hemp. Since then, the industrial hemp industry has grown much larger. Despite its American history, industrial hemp is the only crop that we can buy and sell but not farm in the United States. The federal government should change the law to allow American farmers to grow this profitable crop as American farmers have through most of our nation's history. I plan to reintroduce the Industrial Hemp Farming Act next week. Please cosponsor the Industrial Hemp Farming Act and join me in celebrating Hemp History Week.