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LOCAL NEWS

U.S. envoy in fight against Islamic State quits after Syria pullout

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A top U.S. envoy leading a global coalition fighting Islamic State has quit over President Donald Trump's decision this week to pull U.S. troops out of Syria, a source familiar with the matter said on Saturday.

Brett McGurk, U.S. special presidential envoy for the global coalition to defeat Islamic State, submitted his resignation effective Dec. 31 to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday, a State Department official said.

In an abrupt policy shift, Trump announced on Wednesday that Washington would withdraw the roughly 2,000 U.S. troops in Syria, upending a pillar of American policy in the Middle East and alarming U.S. allies.

The decision was followed on Thursday by the surprise departure of U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, who in a resignation letter to Trump laid bare the growing divide between the two over shaping foreign policy.

McGurk, who was slated to leave his post in February 2019, objected to Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, a person familiar with the matter said, and added that Mattis' departure had a "significant impact" on McGurk's resignation.

McGurk was appointed by former President Barack Obama in October 2015 and has been instrumental in shaping Washington's policy in northern Syria, particularly its backing of Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militia that have been fighting Islamic State with U.S. support for three years.

The U.S. allied forces have won significant victories against the Sunni jihadi group in northern Syria, retaking key cities such as Raqqa, once deemed the capital of Islamic State's self-declared caliphate. But McGurk, along with other U.S. government agencies, believed the fight against the militant group was hardly over.

"It would be reckless if we were just to say, well, the physical caliphate is defeated, so we can just leave now," McGurk told reporters in a Dec. 11 briefing at the State Department. "Even as the end of the physical caliphate is clearly now coming into sight, the end of ISIS will be a much more long-term initiative," he said.

"Nobody is declaring a mission accomplished."

By contrast, Trump has claimed victory against Islamic State and considers the mission in Syria over given the group's territorial losses.

Trump's declaration of triumph has alarmed key NATO allies such as France and Germany, who said change of course on Syria risks damaging the fight against Islamic State, which has now been squeezed to a sliver of Syrian territory.

U.S. officials have warned that taking back the group's territory would not be the same as defeating it.

Using high school Spanish and Google Translate, Ericka Henry, 27, and her husband Blake, 30, hosted two Guatemalan families at their two-bedroom home in Phoenix suburb Mesa.

U.S. top court rejects Trump asylum restrictions

"We have more than enough, more than we need, so we try to help people as much as we can," said Blake, a pastor at Central Christian.

The church's initiative is growing, with members of other congregations asking to host families. But reactions to the program have not all been positive.

When the Apostols spoke on a radio show in Phoenix, the capital of a state that backed Trump in 2016, posts on social media said they were endangering their children, breaking the law and helping criminals by letting asylum seekers into their home. Others came to their support, however.

"These folks that are housing asylees are, in some ways, I think very brave, because they are swimming against the tide of public opinion and trends in their own religious community," said Janelle Wong, professor of American Studies at Maryland University and author of "Immigrants, Evangelicals and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change."

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Editor's Choice

Pictures of the Year: Caravans: the new face of migration

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COMMUNITY

Chinese Man Is the Reason America Grants Birthright Citizenship

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

In 1895, in his early 20s, Wong Kim Ark returned to the United States, the place of his birth.

He'd grown up in San Francisco, the son of Chinese immigrants, and was a cook by trade. His parents had returned to their own homeland in 1890, and he'd gone with them — but in the time since he'd established a transnational lifestyle.

He'd started a family in China, but repeatedly made trips back to the US to work. In fact, he'd just met his first child, conceived on an earlier trip, and gotten his wife pregnant with a second.

Such arrangements were not uncommon for Chinese-American men, as the Chinese population in the US was overwhelmingly male.

The US was in the grips of intense anti-Chinese sentiment, and Chinese immigration had been cut off in 1882. But since he'd been born in the US, he was able to return by showing the documents required by local customs officials, including testimony from white people that he was a US citizen.

Or at least that's how it had worked for him before. In 1895, it was different.

San Francisco, California, circa 1895.

Wong was denied entry by a stridently anti-Chinese customs collector, on the grounds that he was not in fact a US citizen, owing to his parents' status as Chinese immigrants at the time of his birth. Then he was held on ships for months as he fought the case — with legal help from the "Six Companies," a Chinese-American organization that had made a point of standing up for Chinese civil rights in thousands of court cases.

Eventually it was decided, on the basis of an earlier appeals-court precedent, that his US birth made him a citizen. But the US attorney general decided to push the issue further, and his case ended up at the Supreme Court.

That court's ultimate decision is back

Wong Kim Ark. (Courtesy Records of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service)

in the spotlight now. In an interview released early this week, President Trump announced a plan to take on "birthright citizenship" via executive order.

This is the rule under which just about everyone born in the USA — including the children of illegal immigrants — is automatically granted citizenship, and the rule that Wong helped make US law.

It's important to understand the situation Wong was born into. Between 1860 and 1880, the Chinese-American population tripled, topping 100,000 by the end of that period and concentrated largely in California. In 1868 a treaty explicitly welcomed these migrants — though they were not eligible for naturalization. And while Chinese-Americans made up small percentage of the overall American population, the tide shifted after repeated economic recessions, fueling a racist backlash.

President Trump announced a plan to take on "birthright citizenship" via executive order.

In theory, Wong's case posed a rather narrow question: Whether he was covered by the 14th Amendment clause granting citizenship to "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof."

Today, most courts would carefully parse those words, check dictionaries as needed, consult legal texts to see if the phrase was a term of art, and perhaps read up on the legislative history as well, to see what the people who actually wrote the words intended to convey.

Back then, however, the Supreme Court took a different path. In a 6–2 ruling, it touched on the text and history of the actual amendment only lightly and decided to cement the definition of citizenship we'd inherited from English common law, where everyone born in the country is treated as a natural subject. The same rule had applied to whites in the US since the country's founding, the Court said, and the amendment had extended the rule to everyone else.

This is how Wong got his citizenship. And it's why birthright citizenship presents such an enormous hurdle for those that oppose it.

Opponents of birthright citizenship today aren't trying to prevent legal immigrants from re-entering the country if they visit their homelands, though, or to exclude entire racial groups.

Rather, they primarily fear — quite sensibly — that immediately granting citizenship to the children of people who came here illegally serves as a magnet, or at least a reward, for crossing our borders without authorization.

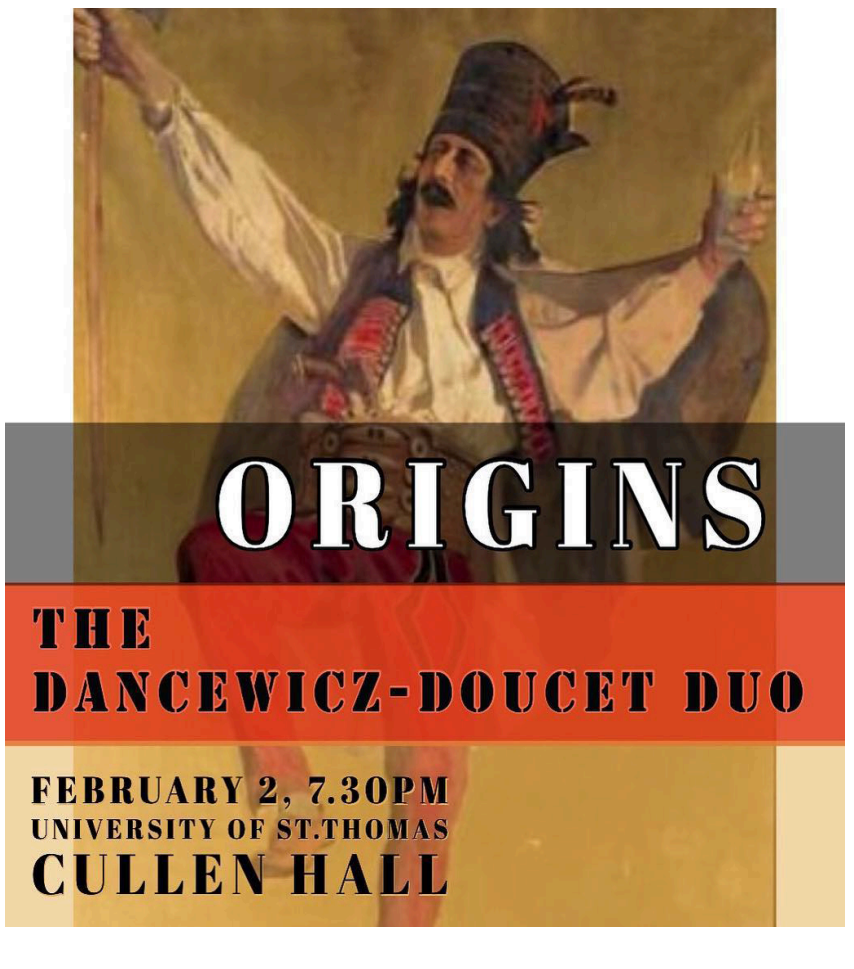
'Birthright' Babies Outnumber Births in 16 States.

Today's immigration critics are also correct to point out that the 14th Amendment wasn't written with illegal immigration in mind, as there were no immigration restrictions yet in 1868 when it was adopted. One imagines that if illegal immigration had been an issue at the time, the amendment would read quite differently, in a way that clearly gives Congress the ability to deny citizenship in cases where people broke the law to get it.

So, what does all of this actually mean for Trump's planned order? If Congress passed a new law ending birthright citizenship, the courts would immediately hear challenges rooted in the 14th Amendment, with Wong Kim Ark a key precedent.

Today's Supreme Court could certainly reconsider the issue and consult a wealth of evidence that the 1898 Court mostly ignored, including the debates surrounding the 14th Amendment. But there is strong evidence from those debates that the amendment was, in fact, meant to confer citizenship on virtually everyone born here, with just a handful of exceptions (such as the kids of foreign ambassadors). There are respected legal scholars who disagree — advancing a theory that "jurisdiction" requires allegiance to and the consent of the US — but a challenge to birthright citizenship would require all five conservative justices to read the historical evidence in a very specific way and break with decades upon decades' worth of precedent and standard practice.

Wong Kim Ark eventually returned to China for good. His legacy will remain a part of America for far, far longer. (Courtesy newyorkpost.com)



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Southern News Group

THE SOUTHERN CHINESE DAILY NEWS LLC.
11122 Bellaire Blvd, Houston, TX 77072
TEL : (281) 498-4310
FAX : (281)498-2728
E-mail : ad@scdaily.com

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President Donald Trump signed the 2018 Farm Bill Thursday afternoon, signaling the official nationwide legalization of industrial hemp—a moment long-awaited by the cannabis industry.

Earlier this year, U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell inserted language from his Hemp Farming Act of 2018 into the Farm Bill to federally legalize the cultivation and sale of industrial hemp, which is defined as cannabis that contains less than 0.3-percent THC. Congress passed the $867-billion agricultural legislation Dec. 12, effectively removing hemp from the list of controlled substances and allowing states to regulate its production, commerce and research with approval from the USDA.

"The 2018 Farm Bill is an 807-page document. Hemp is discussed only a few times throughout this document; however, the impact on the industry is epic," said Dr. Jenelle Kim, co-founder and lead formulator at JBK Wellness Labs. "Ultimately, the Farm Bill will end the era of hemp prohibition and would deem that hemp is an agricultural commodity and is removed from the Controlled Substances Act where it is no longer mistaken as a controlled substance, like marijuana."

"Business can be a great agent of social change."

-Patrick Rea, CEO and co-founder of Canopy Boulder

The Drug Enforcement Administration will no longer be able to interfere with the interstate commerce of hemp products, Kim added, which will open the doors for banks, merchant services, credit card companies, e-commerce sites and advertising platforms to do business with hemp companies.

"The Farm Bill is a monumental first step for the hemp industry and a big win for U.S. agriculture," said Jonathan Vaught, CEO and co-founder of Colorado-based biotech company Front Range Biosciences. "It allows farmers to legally grow hemp throughout the country, fueling job growth domestically and keeping the United States competitive in the global market. Allowing hemp production sets the stage for this fledgling industry to flourish as raw materials from hemp—oils, grain and fiber—can be used in a wide array of products like dietary supplements, super foods, clinically-approved drugs and fiber as a building material. The Farm Bill is also a major win for the cannabis industry as it further demonstrates the utility of cannabis as a crop."

The cannabis industry now looks ahead to increased investment, research, cultivation and sales in a hemp market that Brightfield Group estimates will reach $22 billion by 2022.

"Business can be a great agent of social change," said Patrick Rea, CEO and co-founder of Canopy Boulder, a seed-stage business accelerator and venture fund for the cannabis industry. "This is an example of a highly in-demand market that needed the government to engage in order to unlock its potential. Time will tell how administrative agencies like the USDA and FDA will regulate hemp products, but we can expect heightened business and investor interest in the space."

The President Signed The Legislation Into Law Dec. 20, Accelerating The Hemp Industry's Growth

President Trump Signs 2018 Farm Bill, Legalizing Hemp

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Related

Health Canada Releases Draft Regulations for Cannabis Edibles, Creams

For edibles, Health Canada is limiting the edible to 10 milligrams of THC per package.

Health Canada has released draft regulations for cannabis edibles and extracts, which include strict limits on dosage and ingredients.

For edibles, Health Canada is proposing plain child-resistant packaging, restricting the ingredients that can be used and limiting the edible to 10 milligrams of THC per package, which is largely considered the typical amount for a single dose.

Additionally, regular food and edible cannabis products must not be produced in the same facility.

Cannabis extracts would face similar regulations, with restrictions on certain flavours that would appeal to youth and limiting a single capsule to 10 milligrams of THC. The packaging must also be void of any positive health claims.

Topical cannabis creams could also face child-resistant packaging regulations and restrictions on certain ingredients. These products would be limited to 1,000 milligrams of THC per package.

"The draft regulations are designed to better protect the health and safety of Canadians through strict regulatory controls and to enable the legal industry to displace the illegal market," Health Canada wrote in a news release.

With the draft regulations, Health Canada has begun a 60-day consultation period in which Canadians can submit their input online. There will also be roundtable discussions held across the country and webinars to explain the regulations.

These types of cannabis products will be legal for sale by Oct. 17, 2019.

Google Searches Reveal Increased Interest in Hemp Following Farm Bill Passage

Traditional agriculture strongholds, like Tennessee, Kentucky and Iowa, saw interest surging in recent weeks.

Throughout 2018, hemp legalization has remained a steady backdrop in the Farm Bill debate. U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell added his Hemp Farming Act into the $867-billion agricultural overhaul back in June; since then, the hemp revolution has been on the tip of farmers' tongues from Kentucky to California.

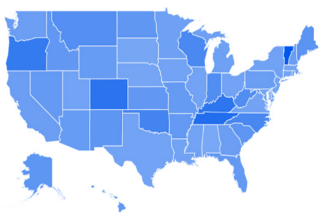
Along the way, interest in what will happen after passage of the Farm Bill has only grown. When Congress approved the legislation on Dec. 12, the country collectively looked ahead to a time when the hemp-derived CBD market will flourish—to the tune of $22 billion by 2022, according to recent Brightfield Group projections.

Wanting to get a sense of how that interest is playing out in the U.S., we turned to Google.

Melena Guganus published a report on CBD-related search trends for Remedy Review. She found that Oklahoma, Kentucky and Indiana led the country in digital queries for CBD-related terms. Those traditionally conservative states each have an agricultural legacy; all three developed hemp cultivation "pilot programs" under the auspices of the 2014 Farm Bill, which allowed states to oversee hemp programs for industrial and commercial purposes.

Now that President Trump has signed the 2018 Farm Bill into law, thus legalizing hemp in the U.S., we wanted to get a sense of how farmers and the general public were looking into the matter.

Here are the top 10 states that have shown an interest in "hemp," according to Google; all 10 of these states' legislatures enacted a hemp cultivation pilot program in 2016 (except Wisconsin, which approved its program in 2017).



1. Vermont
2. Tennessee
3. Kentucky
4. Colorado
5. Wisconsin
6. Oregon
7. Montana
8. North Carolina
9. Maine
10. Hawaii

Search counts surged in mid-December, as the full bill hit the floor of the U.S. Congress and quickly received approval votes.

For the search term "hemp farm bill," the data points change a bit. Several of these states have not yet entered the hemp market at all, signaling a growing interest from players still on the sidelines.

1. Hawaii
2. South Dakota (no hemp pilot program currently)
3. Iowa (no hemp pilot program currently)
4. Colorado
5. Washington D.C. (no hemp pilot program currently)
6. Mississippi (no hemp pilot program currently)
7. Nebraska
8. Oregon
9. Alabama
10. Michigan

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, states will continue to be the primary regulators for hemp production and distribution—although not without the direct approval of the USDA. With lower barriers to entry, the remaining 10 states that have not yet developed a pilot program may be more likely to broach the market. The plant will be taken off the federal list of controlled substances, after all, and sales will become legal across the country. (The definition of the hemp plant remaining inextricably tied to that 0.3-percent THC limit, imposed by previous policy and case law.) Hemp cultivators and researchers will now be able to apply for federal grants and specific crop insurance policies, opening the door to greater access to capital.

"With the Farm Bill of 2018 …, the restrictions around growing industrial hemp could be lifted by the end of the year," Ari Sherman, president of Evo Hemp, told Cannabis Business Times upon passage of the bill. "This bill will also help clarify that resin products derived from hemp, like cannabinoids, will be legal on a federal level. Many people will benefit from this bill, including farmers, manufactures, retailers and consumers. Small family farmers will be able to make a sufficient amount of income off a small amount of land. This bill will open up advertising opportunities for hemp product manufactures. Retailers will be given more freedom in the variety of hemp products that they carry. Last, consumers will be given access to all domestically grown hemp-based products." (Courtesy https://www.cannabisbusinesstimes.com/)