

# UP IN SMOKE

A WCW Project Investigation



**STOP  
TAXPAYER  
FUNDED  
ANIMAL  
EXPERIMENTS**

WHITE COAT  
**WASTE**  
PROJECT

# UP IN SMOKE

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# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Cannabis and vaping are both big business – and so are cannabis and vaping experiments using animals. *Up In Smoke*, a new report from White Coat Waste (WCW) Project, details millions of taxpayer dollars wasted on cannabis and e-cigarette animal experiments, and rampant violations of federal spending transparency law.
- Unfortunately for taxpayers, the experiments detailed in this report provide little insight into human health. For example, in one experiment, pregnant mice were confined to a chamber, where they were forced to breathe e-cigarette vapor for hours.<sup>1</sup> After giving birth, their pups underwent behavioral tests, and were then killed and their brains analyzed. However, experimenters openly acknowledged significant differences between rodent brain development and human brain development.
- Similarly, one experiment forced mice to breathe fruit, cinnamon, and vanilla custard-flavored e-cigarette vapor to study the effects of vaping on the heart; however, the authors explicitly noted that “caution should be exercised when extrapolating the findings in the mouse heart to the human heart due to the presence of many obvious differences including those related to important species differences.”<sup>2</sup>
- Beyond the waste of the experiments themselves, WCW Project documented widespread violations of longstanding federal transparency law by taxpayer-funded animal experimenters.
- Not one experiment in this report was in compliance with the Stevens Amendment, a long-standing federal policy that requires public disclosure of taxpayer monies spent.<sup>3</sup>
- Troublingly, even experiments performed at a federal facility (the San Diego VA), and publicized on the Department of Veterans Affairs website, were also noncompliant.
- Recent polling shows that a majority of taxpayers oppose cannabis experiments on animals. Similarly, a majority of Americans from across the political spectrum support withholding funds from experimenters who violate federal spending transparency law.
- Pro-taxpayer, pro-animal common-sense guardrails on wasteful NIH spending should be enacted quickly and comprehensively.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/EHP6067>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33216635/>

<sup>3</sup> Although the Stevens Amendment is not black-letter law, Congressionally-set policy has the full force of law; as such, this report uses the term ‘law’ when discussing the Stevens Amendment.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cannabis.

Marijuana. Pot. Weed. Cheeba. Dank. Ganja. Grass. Loud. Reefer. Jazz cabbage.

Whatever you may call it, cannabis is big business in the United States, generating \$25 billion in sales in 2021, with some experts predicting the cannabis industry will reach over \$40 billion by 2025. 17 states have legalized cannabis for recreational use; 38 have approved some form of medical cannabis.<sup>4,5</sup>

Some smoke it. Some eat it. Some vape it (and other substances). You know who definitely doesn't? Monkeys and mice.

Yet, the increasingly-widespread availability of cannabis and assorted vaping products (also called e-cigarettes) has led to an alarming increase in cruel, unnecessary, and wasteful taxpayer-funded animal experimentation to study their health effects.

Indeed, recreational drug experiments on animals have long been a target of ire from taxpayers and Congressional waste-watchers.

In 2010, Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) published “Summertime Blues: 100 Stimulus Projects That Give Taxpayers the Blues,” a list of 100 wasteful government spending projects. Included on the list were National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants to study the effects of cocaine on monkeys.<sup>6</sup> These experiments were widely derided in the press as an example of Washington spending run amok – but, unfortunately, the high-profile criticism of ‘junkie monkey’ experiments did little to stop Uncle Sam from squandering our tax dollars on them.<sup>7</sup>

Since then, a White Coat Waste Project investigation uncovered \$5.5 million nicotine addiction experiments on squirrel monkeys being conducted in a laboratory at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. After much criticism from Congress, media, drug reduction advocates, and even famed primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall, then-FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb ended the study and retired the surviving primates to a sanctuary.<sup>8</sup>

In 2019, WCW Project worked with Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) to expose how the NIH had shipped \$700,000 to a laboratory in the United Kingdom to hook zebrafish on nicotine and ecstasy.<sup>9</sup> Another NIH grant uncovered by WCW Project was awarded to a British university to addict monkeys to heroin and other illicit drugs.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://nypost.com/2022/02/23/us-cannabis-market-soared-in-2021-but-was-dragged-down-by-ny/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/irisdorbian/2021/06/18/legal-cannabis-market-projected-to-rack-up-43-billion-by-2025-says-new-study/?sh=fcb6aea36b49>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/GOP\\_simulus\\_index.pdf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/GOP_simulus_index.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dailysignal.com/2010/08/06/summertime-blues-for-the-taxpayer/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2018/01/30/victory-fda-shuts-down-nicotine-tests-will-retire-monkeys/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2019/11/25/sen-rand-paul-nih-wasting-700k-to-hook-zebrafish-on-nicotine-in-the-uk/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2020/02/28/victory-transit-agency-runs-wcws-nih-junkie-monkey-ads/>

In early 2022, WCW Project uncovered that the NIH’s National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) spent over \$2 million of taxpayer funds injecting beagle puppies with cocaine.<sup>11</sup> (Yes, puppies).

These are just a few high-profile examples. The NIH, which funds the overwhelming majority of street drug experiments on animals, has an annual budget of \$45 billion.<sup>12</sup> The agency estimates that at least 47% of the projects it funds involve animal testing.<sup>13</sup>

Animal abuse aside, this all amounts to tremendous waste. The NIH writes that 95% of drugs that pass animal tests fail in humans because they are ineffective or dangerous. A few years ago, a cover feature in the esteemed medical journal *BMJ* concluded: “if research conducted on animals continues to be unable to reasonably predict what can be expected in humans, the public’s continuing endorsement and funding of preclinical animal research seems misplaced.”<sup>14</sup>

Yet, despite this enormous waste and abuse, and polls showing that a growing majority of taxpayers – Republicans and Democrats alike – are opposed to paying for street drug experiments on animals, the federal government continues doling out money to get lab animals high.

One reason why this continues is because taxpayers are often left in the dark about how their money is being spent. Specifically, as we document in this report and elsewhere, NIH grant recipients continue to violate federal law requiring them to disclose the details of their federal funding, which would allow the public to judge for itself whether the price is right.

The Stevens Amendment, named for late Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), has been included in federal funding bills every year since 1989.<sup>15</sup> This taxpayer-friendly provision requires any recipient of federal grants from the Department of Health and Human Services—including the NIH—and several other agencies to disclose three crucial details in any public statement (e.g., press releases) about a grant-funded project:

- 1) The percentage of the total costs of the experiments financed with taxpayer money;
- 2) The dollar amount of taxpayer funds used in the experiments; and
- 3) The percentage and dollar amount of the experiment funded by non-government sources.

In other words, if taxpayer money was spent on a project, taxpayers have a right to know about it.

Unfortunately, despite over thirty years of bipartisan support for the Stevens Amendment, noncompliance is tremendously widespread. In 2017, WCW Project released “Ivy League Flunkers,” a report studying Ivy League press releases about NIH-funded animal experiments.<sup>16</sup> WCW Project’s report found that 100% of these documents violated the Stevens Amendment. Not even one press release followed the law! In response, six Senators wrote to the Government

<sup>11</sup> <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2022/01/30/coke-hounds-WCW-exposes-2m-nih-cocaine-tests-on-puppies-to-fulfill-deadly-fda-red-tape/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.fic.nih.gov/News/GlobalHealthMatters/Pages/nih-fogarty-budget-fiscal-year-2022.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK100123/>

<sup>14</sup> Pound P, Bracken MB. Is animal research sufficiently evidence-based to be a cornerstone of biomedical research? *The BMJ*. 2014;348:g3387

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-282>

<sup>16</sup> <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2017/04/25/new-report-ivy-league-flunks-on-spending-transparency/>

Accountability Office, requesting an investigation into the causes and extent of grant recipients' noncompliance.<sup>17</sup>

In its subsequent report on the topic, the GAO noted that most departments did not monitor grantees to ensure their compliance – and, worse still, they did not even know how to do so.<sup>18</sup>

Five years later, the situation has not improved. In this report, WCW Project exposes some of the most cruel and wasteful animal experiments involving cannabis, vaping, or both – as well as experimenters' flagrant disregard for federal spending transparency law.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.politico.com/tipsheets/morning-education/2017/05/new-congressional-push-for-student-outcomes-data-220306>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-282>

# MONKEY MUNCHIES

LOCATION: OREGON HEALTH AND SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$169,000,000+ since 2012<sup>19</sup>

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes



In this suite of experiments discovered by WCW Project (and subsequently covered by several different news outlets), male and female monkeys were given cannabis ‘edibles’ in order to assess the effects of THC on their reproductive health.<sup>20</sup>

In the first experiment, 8 female macaques were given a THC edible daily, for up to four months, to see whether THC affected their menstrual cycles.

In the second experiment, 6 male macaques were given a THC edible daily, for up to seven months, to see whether THC affected their fertility.

The NIH grant dollars supporting these experiments are staggeringly high (no pun intended):

- P51OD011092<sup>21</sup>
  - \$135,065,167 since at least 2012
  - \$13,153,537 in FY21

<sup>19</sup> In this example, and throughout this report, the cost to taxpayers is the total sum of all grants cited by the experimenters. Because of their failure to abide by the Stevens Amendment, we are not able to determine how much from each grant was spent on the specific experiment being described.

<sup>20</sup> <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2022/02/02/waste-of-the-week-edible-arrangements/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/bzcUcOPgXkaAGrCTswLAtg/project-details/10151656#history>

- K12HD000849<sup>22</sup>
  - \$34,245,033 since at least 1988
  - \$1,118,776 in FY21
- R03HD097116<sup>23</sup>
  - \$175,000 since 2019
  - \$87,500 in FY20

But, as a taxpayer, you wouldn't know how much you were paying for these experiments, even if you dug deep and searched for OHSU's press releases about them.<sup>24,25</sup>

Both press releases failed, in violation of federal law, to disclose how much taxpayer money they received. They had no qualms about preemptively asking for more money, however; both state "more research is necessary." (We suspect this means 'more research *funding* is necessary').

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<sup>22</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/n-9IIwlQ9UeWOFcU81R9Zw/project-details/10247021#history>

<sup>23</sup> [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/uFvWCRIUYUa1NGbCN\\_mT3A/project-details/10000192#history](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/uFvWCRIUYUa1NGbCN_mT3A/project-details/10000192#history)

<sup>24</sup> <https://news.ohsu.edu/2021/07/20/chronic-marijuana-use-alters-female-reproductive-system-may-impact-successful-conception>

<sup>25</sup> <https://news.ohsu.edu/2022/01/25/chronic-marijuana-use-negatively-impacts-male-reproductive-health-may-decrease-testicular-function?fbclid=IwAR0MIjhiOKyZ938yModQMzzgm1FeCvc2U0kA5NZWPPyBmr9Jx>

## FLAVOR FIESTA

LOCATION: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$3,000,000+ SINCE 2015

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes



Does vaping cause cardiovascular damage? Do different flavors of ‘e-juice’ have different effects on the heart?

Experimenters at the University of South Florida, funded by three separate grants from NIH, wanted answers.

- R01ES032099<sup>26</sup>
  - \$887,695 since 2020
  - \$448,500 in FY21
- R01HL129136<sup>27</sup>
  - \$1.9M between 2015–2019
  - \$373,750 in FY19
- R21HL138064<sup>28</sup>
  - \$411,125 between 2017–2018
  - \$186,875 in FY18

<sup>26</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/qp7jhgW6kUOoP2mdgCkh5Q/project-details/10251155#history>

<sup>27</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/cKaZMBMcGEejH2nGe5xImA/project-details/9676966#history>

<sup>28</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/LryVphsIsEG-IC292dzoeQ/project-details/9511883#history>

In this experiment, mice had tiny electrocardiograph machines implanted directly into their hearts. They were subsequently forced to inhale popular vape flavors – fruit, cinnamon, and vanilla custard – in a custom-built ‘vape chamber.’<sup>29</sup>

The experimenters’ paper notes that human embryonic kidney cells were also used in this experiment, which begs the question: why use the mice at all?

Experiments on mice rarely translate to humans. The authors of the paper even note: “caution should be exercised when extrapolating the findings in the mouse heart to the human heart due to the presence of many obvious differences including those related to important species differences.”<sup>30</sup>

What is the solution? The authors state that “further investigations are necessary” – and, undoubtedly, further grant funding, too.

But while all three of the grants funding this experiment were paid for by American taxpayers, USF barely acknowledged this fact in its press release about the experiment.<sup>31</sup> Only one grant is acknowledged, but not the other two grants mentioned in the paper (nor the amount, nor the percentage).

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<sup>29</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33216635/>

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> <https://hscweb3.hsc.usf.edu/blog/2020/12/11/flavors-added-to-vaping-devices-can-damage-the-heart/>

# FLAVORED GUTS

LOCATION: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$11,000,000+

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes

Experiments are often funded by multiple grants from different departments and agencies. White coats at University of California San Diego pulled from a huge array of NIH funding streams to study the effects of e-cigarette vapor in mice:

- R01DK107585<sup>32</sup>
  - \$2.2M since 2016
  - \$348,750 in FY20
- R01AI141630<sup>33</sup>
  - \$1.4M since 2019
  - \$487,040 in FY21
- R01HL147326<sup>34</sup>
  - \$1.5M since 2019
  - \$512,662 in FY21
- R00CA151673<sup>35</sup>
  - \$1.02M between 2011–2016
  - \$233,835 in FY16
- UG3TR002968<sup>36</sup>
  - \$946,083 since 2019
  - \$316,000 in FY21
- S10OD026929<sup>37</sup>
  - \$600,000 in FY19
- P30DK120515<sup>38</sup>
  - \$3.6M since 2019
  - \$1.18M in FY21

In this experiment, human gut lining cells, obtained from biopsies and grown in vitro, were exposed to e-cigarette liquid vapor. Mice were placed in ‘hot boxes’ – called “exposure chambers” by the experimenters – and forced to inhale vapor daily.<sup>39</sup> Then they were killed, and their colons were removed, to validate the earlier cellular findings.

While it is encouraging to see research being performed directly on human cells, it is disappointing that mice were unnecessarily used to corroborate experimenters’ results.

<sup>32</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/-qDBxC2Cp0qm4aPy-I9aCg/project-details/10003264#history>

<sup>33</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/2BIRTxJblkiqPfqH7v2n3Q/project-details/10152363#history>

<sup>34</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/mv4XNdHuuku0xg29myDsxw/project-details/10226191#history>

<sup>35</sup> [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/bivp4-wy60yc\\_87cWoOKcg/project-details/9124717#history](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/bivp4-wy60yc_87cWoOKcg/project-details/9124717#history)

<sup>36</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/nuTrqVQ0lUOuZ17gm-b93Q/project-details/10241395#history>

<sup>37</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/4rAKjEvL70CPULHX1PmwAg/project-details/9709001#history>

<sup>38</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/Ay-iDEugKkyCUHzmikReyQ/project-details/10139018#history>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.cell.com/iscience/fulltext/S2589-0042%2821%2900003-1>

Experimenters' lack of compliance with government transparency laws is also troubling. While the press release about these experiments does disclose NIH funding, no mention is made of specific amounts of federal monies received, or their percentage of the experiment's budget, both of which are required under federal law.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the copious amount of money already poured into this project, white coats are eager for more. The press release notes that "in the future, Ghosh said she and colleagues plan to look at different flavorings of e-cigarettes to determine what effects they might have on the gut." You'll probably be paying for those experiments, too.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://health.ucsd.edu/news/releases/Pages/2020-01-07-e-cigarettes-trigger-inflammation-in-the-gut.aspx>

# MINTY MOUSE

LOCATION: NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$27,000,000+

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes

(Product in the news) + (cruel new way of getting product into animal) = grant bonanza!

While this formula isn't *always* accurate, it worked like a charm for experimenters at North Carolina Central University, who received the following NIH grants to study the effect of JUUL pods on mice:

- U54CA156733<sup>41</sup>
  - \$9.6M since 2010
  - \$472,000 in FY20
- U54MD012392<sup>42</sup>
  - \$17.5M since 2017
  - \$3.09M in FY21

In this experiment, mice were anesthetized; while they were 'under,' mint JUUL pod distilled vapor was pumped directly into their mouths. After being drugged and forced to vape continuously (for up to 3 days!), some of the mice were infected with coronavirus. Then all of the mice were killed so white coats could study the effects of JUUL vapor on their lungs.<sup>43</sup>

While research into coronavirus is undoubtedly important, it doesn't seem shocking that smoking exacerbates a respiratory disease. Is anyone surprised by that?

What we *would* find surprising is if a press release actually followed federal law. Unfortunately, the press release about this JUUL experiment does not. It does not mention any grants received, nor any details about federal (meaning taxpayer) funding.<sup>44</sup> However, it does say that "we need to further investigate" – because \$30 million since 2010 is clearly not enough.

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<sup>41</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/Y9MYE6Xy6kmMI-3VguYKuw/project-details/9769511#history>

<sup>42</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/h57vZ1wWSUiYtPkOp3HHcw/project-details/10393961#history>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fphys.2021.634839/full>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.nccu.edu/news/researchers-show-vaping-may-worsen-coronavirus-infections>

## A-MAZE-ING VAPE

LOCATION: MT. HOLYOKE COLLEGE and NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$900,000+

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes

If a mother mouse vapes, will her pup be able to run through mazes?

We don't know – and neither did experimenters at Mt. Holyoke College and New York University, recipients of the following NIH grants to answer this bizarre question:

- R15HD082638<sup>45</sup>
  - \$432,669 in FY15
- R15MH119500<sup>46</sup>
  - \$453,807 in FY19

In this experiment, pregnant mice were confined to a chamber, where they were forced to breathe e-cigarette vapor for several hours every day.<sup>47</sup> Their pups would then be forced to swim, go through mazes, recognize objects, and other behavioral tests. In the end, all the pups were killed to have their organs examined.

The experimenters note, however, that the development of a mouse's brain is quite different from the development of a human brain. In particular, "brain development in rodents continues postpartum with the human equivalent of the third trimester occurring several days into the postpartum period." As expected, this fact is used to call for more experiments, with the press release noting that "Schwartzter and her team are designing new experiments to better support Food and Drug Administration policies on vaping during pregnancy."<sup>48</sup> (You'll probably be paying for those, too).

What the press release does NOT state, however, is any mention of federal funding whatsoever – a clear violation of the Stevens Amendment.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/IPBvgSKmA0-aXTToPuiVBGA/project-details/8951506#history>

<sup>46</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/DaFgHBSjZEWRpN-91jXOTw/project-details/9723298#history>

<sup>47</sup> <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/EHP6067>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/media/2020-nov/vaping-perils>

## REEFER MOUSE-NESS

LOCATION: INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
 COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$1,500,000  
 STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes

To quote middle-schoolers everywhere: “Just change it up a little bit so the teacher won’t know you copied.”

Apparently, that same principle is in place at Indiana University, where white coats performed a very similar suite of experiments to “A-maze-ing Vape,” except, instead of using e-cigarette vapor, they used cannabis products. In these experiments, pregnant mice were injected with marijuana byproducts; then, after giving birth, their offspring were forced to undergo behavioral tests, such as burying marbles and swimming.

While the experiments performed are quite similar, the NIH grant received by IU white coats was different:

- DA043982<sup>49</sup>
  - \$1,528,379 since 2017
  - \$310,657 in FY21

In its press release about this experiment, IU (perhaps surprisingly) acknowledged that the experimentation was partly funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.<sup>50</sup> Completely unsurprisingly, however, it did not mention the dollar amount, nor did it mention the percentage of the total costs funded by taxpayers – making the release *noncompliant* with the Stevens Amendment.

Despite Stevens noncompliance, this press release has the distinction of being one of the rare few that does not call for more (taxpayer-funded) research...though it does say that the “study marks the beginning of an effort to understand the effects of THC and CBD...” – an ‘effort’ you’ll probably end up funding.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/axwSXNcGzUW5zZ5Xlzx2w/project-details/10174896#history>

<sup>50</sup> <https://news.iu.edu/stories/2021/06/iub/releases/30-prenatal-thc-cbd-exposure-affect-offspring-responsiveness-prozac-fluoxetine.html>

## TUBULAR MICE, DUDE

LOCATION: WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$400,000+

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes



Does cannabis reduce stress?

Apparently, the thousands of studies on this topic were not enough for experimenters at Washington State University, who set out to answer the question – yet again – with the assistance of the following NIH grant:

- R21DA043722<sup>51</sup>
  - \$420,750 between 2017–2018
  - \$191,250 in FY18

In this experiment, mice were trained to stick their nose in a hole to get a puff of marijuana. This lasted for 30 days, during which time their reactions to stress were measured, by sticking them in a plastic tube that rendered them immobile.

Unsurprisingly, the experiment found that cannabis did indeed result in lowered stress levels for mice. Doubly unsurprisingly, the press release called for – you guessed it – more experiments, and questions that the WSU white coats “plan to answer in the future.”<sup>52</sup>

Of course, from reading the press release, you wouldn’t know that this experiment had been funded by taxpayers, either, as it makes no mention of NIH funding, grant numbers, or percentages.

<sup>51</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/1KcjXaEz-UaAvPyPwXQ7sQ/project-details/9550954#history>

<sup>52</sup> <https://news.wsu.edu/press-release/2020/12/22/cannabis-use-blunts-stress-reactivity-female-rats/>

## POT LOBSTER

LOCATION: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$24,000,000+

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes



In 2018, a bizarre story went viral on social media. A Maine restaurant owner believed that getting lobsters high on marijuana made the crustaceans more relaxed prior to being cooked and eaten. Like most viral news, it was widely reported at the time, then slowly disappeared.<sup>53</sup>

But the NIH had other plans. To see whether the restaurateur's claims had any merit, the following NIH grants subsidized 'pot lobster' experiments:

- R01DA035281<sup>54</sup>
  - \$2,134,715 between 2014–2018
  - \$433,125 in FY18
- R01DA035482<sup>55</sup>
  - \$3,055,568 between 2013–2017
  - \$551,934 in FY17
- R44DA041967<sup>56</sup>
  - \$1,088,130 between 2016–2017
  - \$489,190 in FY17

<sup>53</sup> <https://nypost.com/2018/09/18/restaurant-to-get-lobsters-high-on-marijuana-before-killing-them/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/Tv8yK91SZUiTfTBy5jcYrA/project-details/9432485#history>

<sup>55</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/2DEbeWRnF0KH1UoidAUrkA/project-details/9220817#history>

<sup>56</sup> [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/sH78\\_bUSSk-363Oea1iyxA/project-details/9247937#history](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/sH78_bUSSk-363Oea1iyxA/project-details/9247937#history)

- K12GM068524<sup>57</sup>
  - \$18,342,888 since 2003
  - \$1,579,048 in FY21

In a pun-laden press release detailing their experiments, white coats at University of California San Diego discussed their “efforts to answer that burning, boiling and baked question.”<sup>58</sup> It’s all fun and games when you’re playing with someone else’s money – and while the press release does indicate that the experiment received federal grants, it did not include the details the law requires.

Although white coats made some conclusions in their paper, they noted that “THC exposure had very minimal impact” on lobsters’ ability to recognize hot water...despite that being the ostensible purpose of the experiment. “To fully investigate behavioral outcomes,” said one of study’s authors, “you would need to do more experimentation.” Of course.

Here’s a better experiment for future generations of THC-lobsterologists: find your own funding! If there is a dire need for these studies, the private sector will be eager to fund them, right? Hm, no takers? Color us shocked.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/szJ94QWDiUGaUPovR5A8hQ/project-details/10275278#history>

<sup>58</sup> <https://health.ucsd.edu/news/releases/pages/2021-06-29-cooked-crustaceans-cannabis-and-a-budder-way.aspx>

# MONEY, HONEY

LOCATION: UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$7,000,000

STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes

Although THC has been the focus of cannabis-related research for years, another component of cannabis, CBD, has recently begun to receive closer scientific attention. Experimenters at the University of Minnesota set out to study the impacts of CBD on pregnant mice, funded by the following NIH grants:

- T32OD010993<sup>59</sup>
  - \$6,251,734 since 2003
  - \$536,586 in FY21
- R00ES022221<sup>60</sup>
  - \$908,298 between 2013–2017
  - \$236,471 in FY17

In an experiment funded by these grants, CBD was mixed with honey and given to female mice for two weeks before mating and throughout pregnancy and lactation. The newborn mice were then used in behavioral experiments, including burying marbles and running through mazes, in order to see whether the mothers' use of CBD affected the pups' physical and cognitive abilities.

As is so often the case with taxpayer-funded experiments, white coats assert that any gaps in data will be solved by – you guessed it – more experiments. The experiment's press release mentions that they “hope to expand behavioral studies,” and that “future work will be needed.”<sup>61</sup> (Of course it will).

What the experimenters do not note, however, is that you already paid for their testing. The press release about the experiment mentions nothing at all about NIH funding – not the grant number, not the dollar amount, and not the percentage. Zip; zilch; nada. What a shock.

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<sup>59</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/r8BYdDcmhEekFx4a973Z.OQ/project-details/10137341#history>

<sup>60</sup> [https://reporter.nih.gov/search/Rs7v0b9ZgkOh\\_-FZ9qYoKw/project-details/9321442#history](https://reporter.nih.gov/search/Rs7v0b9ZgkOh_-FZ9qYoKw/project-details/9321442#history)

<sup>61</sup> <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/cannabidiol-use-during-pregnancy-affects-brain-and-behavior-adulthood>

## BACTERIA VAPES

LOCATION: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO and SAN DIEGO VA  
MEDICAL CENTER

COST TO TAXPAYERS: \$2,200,000+  
STEVENS AMENDMENT VIOLATION? Yes

While the VA deserves credit for reducing its dog and cat experiments – due in large part to WCW Project campaigns – its mouse experiments continue unabated.

Experimenters at University of California San Diego and the San Diego VA worked together to allegedly study the effects of e-cigarettes on the body's ability to fight infection, with funding from the following grant:

- 5R01HL137052<sup>62</sup>
  - \$2,276,508 since 2017
  - \$387,500 in FY21

Interestingly, this grant did not come from the VA itself, nor from a veterans- or defense-related department; instead, it came from the NIH's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

In this experiment, white coats stuck 8-week-old mice in “mesh restraints,” then pumped e-cigarette vapor directly into their noses. Some of the mice were forced to develop bacterial infections, then all of the mice were killed, and their organs examined.<sup>63</sup>

After spending \$2.5 million of your money, the experimenters drew a completely unsurprising conclusion in their paper: “further studies...are needed.”<sup>64</sup>

If diseases could be cured by an infusion of taxpayer dollars, we'd be the healthiest nation of all time.

Despite the fact that the press release detailing this experiment was posted on the Department of Veterans Affairs' website, it is in flagrant violation of the Stevens Amendment: it does not disclose the grant number, the dollar amount, or the percentage.<sup>65</sup> Shouldn't federal animal experimentation, published on a federal government website, follow federal law? Apparently not.

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<sup>62</sup> <https://reporter.nih.gov/search/V5RFdvbl6EmYhuhQAu7vBw/project-details/10084914#history>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6985828/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/labs/pmc/articles/PMC6985828/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0120-E-cigarettes-damage-bodys-ability-to-fight-infection.cfm>

## RECENT POLLING SHOWS BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR REFORM

Public support for cannabis legalization has increased dramatically over the past half-century. Gallup has found that while just 12% of citizens supported marijuana legalization in 1969, a whopping 68% of Americans supported the idea in 2021.<sup>66</sup>

But while Americans are broadly supportive of cannabis legalization, they are broadly *opposed* to cannabis experiments on animals. An April 2022 national poll from Lincoln Park Strategies asked 1,000 American adults the following question:

The National Institutes of Health spends millions of tax dollars each year to fund marijuana experiments on animals. In the studies, monkeys, mice and other animals are often confined in inhalation chambers filled with smoke, or made to ingest marijuana and its active ingredients to study the effects. Some scientists note that these lab experiments on animals have questionable relevance to humans, and that research with human volunteers is more effective and efficient.

**Based only on what you know from this question, and your personal feelings about marijuana legalization notwithstanding, do you think tax dollars should be spent on marijuana experiments on animals?**

The responses were overwhelmingly negative. 58% percent of respondents **opposed** cannabis experiments on animals, either “strongly” or “somewhat,” while only 31% were in support. (10% of respondents were not sure). The results did not follow any partisan breakdown, with **65% of Republicans, 64% of Independents, and 54% of Democrats opposed. Previous national polls have found that a majority of taxpayers also oppose all street drug experiments on animals, not just for cannabis.**

Not only are the experiments we highlighted opposed by a majority of taxpayers, but we have documented rampant and widespread Stevens Amendment violations by these federal grant recipients. Not a single experiment in this report was in full compliance with federally-required spending transparency disclosures. WCW Project has a long history of detailing Stevens Amendment violations, and the topic has garnered bipartisan Congressional interest.

Recent polling also shows massive support for penalizing Stevens Amendment violators. An April 2022 national poll of 1,000 adults from Lincoln Park Strategies asked the following question:

For decades, U.S. law has required that taxpayer-funded experiments publicly disclose the details of their funding, including the source and amount of taxpayer money received. However, independent studies and government audits show that grant recipients habitually fail to disclose this information. A new analysis has found that taxpayer-funded grant recipients conducting experiments on animals regularly failed to comply with this funding

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<sup>66</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/356939/support-legal-marijuana-holds-record-high.aspx>

transparency law. Federal legislation has been introduced to withhold tax dollars from researchers if they don't properly disclose their funding.

**Based only on what you know from this question, do you support legislation to withhold taxpayer funding from researchers who violate federal law?**

The results were overwhelmingly one-sided: **65% of respondents supported withholding funding**, while just 23% were opposed. Again, the results did not break along party lines: **74% of Republicans and 68% of Democrats** supporting withholding taxpayer funds from transparency law violators.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite widespread public opposition and questionable relevance to human health, wasteful cannabis and vaping experiments on animals continue to receive significant subsidization from U.S. taxpayers.

On a similar note, taxpayer-funded animal experimenters continue to violate federal spending transparency law with impunity. The overwhelming public support for withholding funding for Stevens Amendment violators should embolden policymakers to strengthen its enforcement without the fear of being called ‘anti-science.’ The American people do not like to see their money wasted, and ensuring it is used properly – and that recipients of taxpayer dollars follow the law – has broad, bipartisan support.

Various pieces of legislation have been introduced to remedy widespread Stevens noncompliance. The *Cost Openness and Spending Transparency Act* (the *COST Act*, H.R. 1937/S. 760), introduced in the Senate by Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) and in the House of Representatives by Rep. Ralph Norman (R-SC), would permanently enshrine the Stevens Amendment in federal law, and apply it to all taxpayer-funded grantees.<sup>67</sup> It also contains a unique provision allowing the Office of Management and Budget to withhold a portion of funds from grant recipients until they are in compliance with the law. WCW Project supports the *COST Act*, and encourages lawmakers to continue seeking out opportunities to strengthen the enforcement of transparency laws.

Our recommendations:

- Audit NIH spending on recreational drug experiments on animals.
- Pass the *COST Act* to permanently enshrine the Stevens Amendment in federal law, instead of through the yearly appropriations cycle, and to expand its ‘reach’ to cover all federal agencies.
- Strengthen the enforcement of Stevens Amendment, with penalties (including loss of funding, or being rendered ineligible for future funding) for habitually noncompliant grantees.
- Require NIH to monitor its grantees for Stevens Amendment compliance.

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<sup>67</sup> <https://blog.whitecoatwaste.org/2021/03/16/cost-act-will-put-public-price-tag-on-taxpayer-funded-animal-experiments-and-defund-rogue-labs/>