



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 7, 2013

## Vermont Nullifies UN-Mandated Federal Marijuana War

Despite [unconstitutional federal statutes](#) and [United Nations agreements](#) purporting to override state authority by criminalizing marijuana, Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin signed tri-partisan [legislation](#) decriminalizing possession of cannabis in the state. The new law, which was supported by top law-enforcement officials and almost two-thirds of voters, makes Vermont the 17th state to defy the UN and the U.S. government by ending criminal penalties imposed on consumers of the controversial plant.



Known as [H. 200](#), the new marijuana law falls short of the [full-legalization initiatives recently approved](#) by voters in [Colorado](#) and [Washington State](#) that nullified federal and UN prohibition regimes surrounding the substance. Nonetheless, supporters of the effort in Vermont from across the political spectrum — from lawmen, UN opponents, and conservative-leaning proponents of state nullification of unconstitutional federal statutes to liberal-oriented activists focused on marijuana and racism — celebrated the measure as a major victory.

With the new law, instead of facing criminal sanctions, which critics say waste taxpayer money and police resources, individuals who possess up to one ounce of the plant material will be hit with a \$200 civil fine akin to a traffic ticket. Anyone under age 21, meanwhile, would be forced to undergo substance abuse screening similar to how underage drinking is treated in Vermont.

Under previous state laws, possession of marijuana was considered a misdemeanor crime, with punishment potentially including up to six months in jail for a first offense and two years for a second. However, the popular new law, originally introduced by “Vermont Progressive Party” state Rep. Christopher Pearson and supported by a tri-partisan alliance of more than three dozen co-sponsors, will change all of that starting on July 1.

The measure sailed through the state Senate on May 7 by a vote of 24 to six after having been approved overwhelmingly in the state House of Representatives in April, with 98 in favor versus 44 opposed. In addition to strong support from lawmakers and the public, top state officials backed the new law as well. Both Vermont Attorney General William Sorrell and Public Safety Commissioner Keith Flynn, for example, testified in favor of the bill. Polls from early last year showed that around 63 percent of voters support the effort, too.

The governor, a Democrat, also backed the legislation, thanking legislators for sending the bill to his desk. “I applaud the legislature’s action to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana. Vermonters support sensible drug policies,” Gov. Shumlin [declared](#) after the bill was approved by state senators. “This legislation allows our courts and law enforcement to focus their limited resources more effectively to fight highly addictive opiates such as heroin and prescription drugs that are tearing apart families and communities.”

An increasingly influential group of police, judges, prosecutors, and other professionals known as [Law](#)



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[Enforcement Against Prohibition](#) (LEAP) celebrated the effort as well, though the organization says there is plenty of room for improvement. Still, the trend of state governments standing up for themselves against what LEAP sees as bad federal policies is a welcome development — and it is accelerating. LEAP speaker Lt. Commander Diane Goldstein (Ret.), a highly decorated 20-year law enforcement veteran from California, told *The New American* that the feds would eventually be forced to reconsider.

“For several years now, states have been coming around to the realization that enforcing marijuana laws is bad for their budgets, bad for those prosecuted and bad for public safety,” Goldstein explained. “Now that Colorado and Washington have legalized marijuana, other states are falling like dominoes, and every few weeks you hear of another that’s decriminalized possession, allowed medical marijuana or introduced legislation to legalize marijuana entirely. Just as happened during the prohibition of alcohol, the states are taking the lead here and one day, the federal government will wake up and realize it has no choice but to follow.”

According to Goldstein, who [recently appeared on HuffPo Live with this correspondent](#) to discuss the increasingly out-of-control U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and his lawless activities, Vermont’s decriminalization of marijuana possession means police will have more time to focus on violent crime. It will also lead to fewer arrest records for non-violent offenders guilty only of consensual “crimes,” the LEAP speaker said.

“However, it still leaves in place the criminal networks profiting from the sale of marijuana, and allows police wide discretion in charging that may still result in racially biased outcomes,” she concluded. “I applaud the Vermont legislature and Gov. Shumlin for this important first step. Now let’s use that momentum to strike a real blow for criminal justice reform by legalizing and regulating marijuana in the state.”

The signing of the Vermont law comes on the heels of a new report by the American Civil Liberties Union that found black Americans were almost four times more likely to be arrested for marijuana than whites despite comparable usage rates, LEAP noted. The study, entitled “[The War on Marijuana in Black and White: Billions of Dollars Wasted on Racially Biased Arrests](#),” also revealed almost half of all drug-related arrests in the United States were for simple possession of cannabis — over 7 million between 2001 and 2010.

“The war on marijuana has disproportionately been a war on people of color,” argued Ezekiel Edwards, director of the ACLU Criminal Law Reform Project and one of the main authors of the report. “State and local governments have aggressively enforced marijuana laws selectively against Black people and communities, needlessly ensnaring hundreds of thousands of people in the criminal justice system at tremendous human and financial cost.”

Unsurprisingly, activists for marijuana-policy reform who lobbied in favor of the legislation celebrated their latest major victory as well. “We applaud Gov. Shumlin, the state’s top law enforcement officials, and the legislature for their leadership and support of this important legislation,” said Matt Simon, a legislative analyst for the Marijuana Policy Project. “Decriminalizing marijuana possession will allow law enforcement officials to spend more time and attention addressing serious crimes and prevent people from being branded as criminals just for using a substance that most Americans agree should be legal.”

Referring to [recent polls showing that a solid majority of Americans favor the legalization](#) of the



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controversial plant, Simon also emphasized that his organization's battle was not over yet — even in Vermont. “Removing criminal penalties for marijuana possession slows the bleeding, but it will not stop until marijuana prohibition is replaced with a more sensible policy,” he said. “Marijuana is objectively less harmful than alcohol, and it is time for the state to start exploring policies that treat it that way.”

Of course, not everyone agrees that marijuana should be legal or that it is less harmful than alcohol — especially on the right. However, even among [Republicans](#) and [hardline conservatives](#), the attitude toward [unconstitutional federal statutes](#) criminalizing the plant and [UN agreements purporting to mandate an international prohibition regime](#) is becoming increasingly hostile.

Already, about half of the states have nullified U.S. rules by legalizing the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes. With Vermont, at least 17 have now removed criminal penalties on recreational use, too. Two states [have adopted full legalization](#) — though marijuana will be [taxed and regulated like alcohol](#) — and numerous others are considering similar policies. Meanwhile, the federal government has recently [come under scrutiny](#) for its own [alleged involvement](#) in the [drug trade](#).

The UN and the Obama administration are not happy about the nullification trends, with international bureaucrats [recently demanding](#) that the U.S. government unconstitutionally [require states to continue enforcing prohibition](#) regardless of the wishes of voters and legislators. Despite multiple promises not to pursue medical marijuana in states where it is legal — not to mention Obama's own admissions of previous drug use — the current administration has [waged a fierce battle beyond even former President Bush's efforts](#).

Still, across the country, state governments are nullifying federal statutes on everything from [gun control](#), [ObamaCare](#), and [marijuana prohibition](#) to [indefinite military detention of Americans](#) without trial and [UN environmental agreements like Agenda 21](#). As the federal government continues to expand in size and scope — recent surveys show two thirds of Americans [believe the feds are “out of control”](#) — the trend toward states defying lawless orders from Washington, D.C., looks set to keep accelerating.

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