

Congress ends federal ban on medical marijuana

By Evan Halper, Los Angeles Times

Tucked deep inside the 1,603-page federal spending measure is a provision that effectively ends the federal government's prohibition on medical marijuana and signals a major shift in drug policy.

The bill's passage over the weekend marks the first time Congress has approved nationally significant legislation backed by legalization advocates. It brings almost to a close two decades of tension between the states and Washington over medical use of marijuana.

Under the provision, states where medical pot is legal would no longer need to worry about federal drug agents raiding retail operations. Agents would be prohibited from doing so.

The Obama administration has largely followed that rule since last year as a matter of policy. But the measure approved as part of the spending bill, which President Obama plans to sign this week, will codify it as a matter of law.

Pot advocates had lobbied Congress to embrace the administration's policy, which they warned was vulnerable to revision under a less tolerant future administration.

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