**Headline:** Republican Reefer Reactionaries: Meet America’s Worst 8 Governors on Marijuana Reform

By Phillip Smith

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**[Article Body:]**

The nation’s most venerable marijuana legalization group, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), has just issued its [2020 Gubernatorial Scorecard](https://norml.org/us-governors/) grading the nation’s governors on their level of support for ending marijuana prohibition. Thanks to NORML, we can now identify those chief executives whose stances on cannabis remain mired in the last century.

But before we get to that rogues’ gallery of governors, it’s worth mentioning the good news in the scorecard. Based on the governors’ voting records and comments on marijuana policy, NORML bestowed “A” grades on nine governors—all Democrats—while 11 more Democrats and one Republican earned a “B.” That means governors in nearly half the states are working hard to enact or maintain marijuana reform legislation, and that’s a long way from where we were only a few years ago.

Getting marijuana reforms, whether it’s medical marijuana or adult legalization, through state legislatures is a tough, grinding slog, and the position of the governor can make or break a bill. Although, as governors such as Democrats Phil Murphy of New Jersey and Andrew Cuomo of New York found out in 2019, even the governor’s support can’t guarantee that a measure gets passed.

As NORML executive director [Erik Altieri noted](https://blog.norml.org/2020/01/29/norml-releases-2020-gubernatorial-scorecard/) in releasing the report, “Most legislative activity specific to marijuana policy takes place at the state level and America’s governors are our nation’s most powerful state-elected officials. These 50 lawmakers play a key role in whether or not marijuana policy reform advances at the state level so it is vitally important that reformers are aware of where they stand on the issue.”

Here are the ones who stand farthest to the right. All eight of these Republican governors earned a big fat “F” from NORML.

**Idaho Gov. Brad Little:** While he neither enacted nor vetoed marijuana-related legislation in 2019, he has opposed any loosening of pot prohibition, including even industrial hemp and medical marijuana. His position is best summed up in his own words [from April 2019](https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/little-if-idahoans-want-legal-marijuana-they-elected-wrong-guy/article_f13c3be4-bd74-58e9-8a6c-92d01ba4f2da.html): If Idahoans wanted to legalize marijuana, “they elected the wrong guy as governor.”

**Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb:** With marijuana bills unable to get anywhere in the GOP-dominated legislature, Holcomb has not had to sign or veto any measures, but he has historically opposed even medical marijuana, not to mention adult legalization. Now, he’s [using federal pot prohibition as a shield](https://fox59.com/2019/02/27/gov-holcomb-wont-support-marijuana-legalization-until-federal-law-changes-admits-he-smoked-in-college/) for his recalcitrance, saying that he will continue to oppose any marijuana reforms as long as the federal ban remains. He [also said in January 2019](https://www.insurancejournal.com/news/midwest/2019/01/04/513488.htm) that, “Right now, it’s a crime. I’m just simply not willing to look the other way,” even though it’s within his power to legalize it—and even though he is apparently willing to look the other way on [his own self-admitted college toking](https://fox59.com/2019/02/27/gov-holcomb-wont-support-marijuana-legalization-until-federal-law-changes-admits-he-smoked-in-college/).

**Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts:** Nebraska was once on the cutting edge of marijuana law reform, decriminalizing it back in the 1970s, but that’s apparently been long forgotten by the state’s GOP political establishment, including Gov. Ricketts. While governor, he authored [a position paper](https://governor.nebraska.gov/press/understanding-marijuana%E2%80%99s-dangers) arguing the discredited position that marijuana is a gateway drug, that its use can lead to suicide, and that medical marijuana is simply a stalking horse for legalization. He was at it again in January, releasing “[An Honest Look at Marijuana](https://governor.nebraska.gov/press/honest-look-marijuana),” which ends thusly: “As Governor, I have a duty to promote public safety. I want Nebraskans to be informed of the dangers of marijuana and to know where I stand on the issue. I firmly oppose legislative legalization and will veto any legislation that attempts to make marijuana use lawful in the Cornhusker State.”

**Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine:** DeWine has long been a reefer recalcitrant and spoken consistently about his opposition to recreational marijuana legalization. Even though neighboring Michigan has flipped and neighboring Pennsylvania could this year, he still sides with his fellow prohibitionist GOP governor in neighboring Indiana. “It would really be a mistake for Ohio, by legislation, to say that marijuana for adults is just okay,” [he said in January](https://www.statenews.org/post/gov-dewine-doesnt-think-ohio-should-legalize-marijuana-even-if-nearby-states-have).

**South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster:** As a longtime opponent of recreational marijuana legalization, McMaster has also opposed medical marijuana when pressed. In [October 2018](https://www.postandcourier.com/politics/we-gave-sc-governor-candidates-questions-here-s-where-they/article_f1c9d7d6-ce3c-11e8-8e5b-5fb0725a8c4f.html), when asked about supporting medical marijuana, he said, “No. Law enforcement officials have made it clear that we are not in a position to appropriately regulate medical marijuana.”

**South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem:** South Dakota is the only state where it’s a criminal offense to test positive for marijuana, but Noem is fine with that. She’s another GOP gateway theory adherent, [claiming in November 2019](https://dakotawarcollege.com/governor-kristi-noem-comes-out-against-marijuana-related-ballot-measures/) that marijuana is “the gateway drug to getting people more addicted, getting into stronger drugs, then they end up committing crimes, and it just opens the door to bad habits and behaviors that aren’t going to be beneficial.” She also vetoed an industrial hemp bill in her heavily agricultural state because, well, it’s just a sneaky attempt to legalize weed: “There is no question in my mind that normalizing hemp, like legalizing medical marijuana, is part of a larger strategy to undermine enforcement of the drug laws and make legalized marijuana inevitable,” [she said in March 2019](https://apnews.com/6634924c8a6d48a08b3bb14e23992047). And of course, [she opposes](https://kelo.com/news/articles/2019/nov/07/gov-noem-opposes-both-marijuana-initiated-measures/955261/) both the medical marijuana and adult legalization initiatives on the ballot there this year.

**Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee:** The state passed an extremely limited CBD possession law in 2014, and the [only interest](https://www.wmcactionnews5.com/2019/03/09/governor-lee-doubles-down-his-stance-against-marijuana-decriminalization/) he has in any further marijuana reforms is expanding on that. He hasn’t gotten behind broader medical marijuana, and he’s even against decriminalization, not to mention legalization. “I have said before and still believe that we should not decriminalize marijuana… I think that’s not good for our state,” [he said in March 2019](https://www.wmcactionnews5.com/2019/03/09/governor-lee-doubles-down-his-stance-against-marijuana-decriminalization/).

**Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon:** Gordon is a foe of adult legalization and a skeptic on medical marijuana. “I am not in favor of legalizing marijuana,” [he said as a gubernatorial candidate in 2018](https://www.wyomingnewsnow.tv/content/news/Governor-Candidates-Talk-Marijuana-490853791.html). “There is maybe some discussion that can be had about medical marijuana, but I am not… [particularly] in favor of doing that until we’ve had a very full conversation about what that means. So I am not in favor really of legalizing that. My understanding is that there are some alternatives that are prescription based. So the dosage is known, the purity is known, and we’re taking risks for our patients.” He didn’t say anything last year to indicate his position has become more enlightened.