

# Get Brittney Griner Back? Sure — But Release Her Counterparts in America, Too

On July 27, the Biden administration offered their Russian counterparts a deal: Release WNBA player Brittney Griner and alleged US spy Paul Whelan, in return for the US releasing Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

Griner, currently on trial, faces a ten-year sentence if convicted of possessing cannabis. She was arrested at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport on February 17 after officials allegedly found vape cartridges containing "hash oil" in her possession.

I'd personally like to see Griner released. I suspect most Americans agree with me. But the political outrage over her arrest feels quite manufactured given that hundreds of thousands of Americans get treated like Griner every year by their own governments.

Even though a super-majority of Americans support legalization of marijuana, and even though a number of states have moved in that direction on both medical and recreational use, the Center for American Progress reports that US law enforcement agencies still make more than 600,000 marijuana arrests every year. At any given time, tens of thousands of Americans languish behind bars for the very "crime" Griner stands accused of in Russia.

There's no doubt that marijuana is winning, and was always going to win, the "war on marijuana."

The only winners in that "war" have been black market drug dealers, law enforcement budgets, and opportunistic politicians.

Everyone else loses. Not just marijuana users. Non-user taxpayers have to not only foot the bill, but put up with the possibility that they and their family members and friends may, at any moment, suffer police harassment and search on suspicion of harboring the devil weed in their cars, homes, blood, or urine.

The US government cares about Brittney Griner because she's a celebrity who's been arrested by America's Enemy of the Week.

If she'd been one of us nobodies and had been arrested anywhere else in the world — including in the US itself — she'd have been just another number in the war on marijuana's ugly casualty statistics. We'd have never seen her name outside of local police blotter and court reportage.

That doesn't mean she should go to prison. She shouldn't. But neither should anyone else, anywhere, go to prison for possession of a beneficial plant.

Bring Brittney Griner home ... and send her US counterparts home, too. Release them from America's prisons, expunge their convictions, end the war on marijuana, and let them — and the rest of us — get on with our lives without further ado.