

Under U.S. Pressure, Mexico President Seeks Review of Drug Law

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MEXICO CITY, May 3 — After intense pressure from the [United States](#), President Vicente Fox has asked Congress to reconsider a law it passed last week that would decriminalize the possession of small amounts of drugs as part of a larger effort to crack down on street-level dealing.

In a statement issued late Wednesday, Mr. Fox said the law should be changed "to make it absolutely clear that in our country the possession of drugs and their consumption are and continue to be crimes."

Officials from the State Department and the White House's drug control office met with the Mexican ambassador in Washington Monday and expressed grave reservations about the law, saying it would draw tourists to [Mexico](#) who want to take drugs and would lead to more consumption, said Tom Riley, a spokesman for the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Later in the day, Mexico's chief of the Federal Police, Eduardo Medina Mora, tried to clarify the law's intent, saying its main purpose was to enlist help from the state and local police forces. Until now, selling drugs has been solely a federal offense, and the agents charged with investigating traffickers are stretched thin, he said.

Mr. Medina Mora, the main architect of the first measure, which Mr. Fox sent to Congress in January, said it was true the law would make it a misdemeanor to possess small quantities of illegal drugs, but he added that people caught with those drugs would still have to go before a judge and would face a range of penalties. "Mexico is not, has not been and will not be a refuge for anyone who wants to consume drugs," Mr. Medina Mora said.

The current law has a provision allowing people arrested on charges of possessing drugs to argue they are addicts and that the drugs were for personal use. The new law sets an upper limit on how much of each drug one could possess and still claim to be using it to support a habit,

Mr. Medina Mora said, and stiffens penalties for people possessing larger amounts of drugs.

But the law drew a firestorm of criticism from American officials on the border and among American drug enforcement officials in Mexico, who argue any move toward decriminalization would encourage drug tourism. Some municipal officials on the border have worried that cities like Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez would become the Mexican equivalent of Amsterdam, where marijuana is legal in some bars. Mayor Jerry Sanders of San Diego, a former police chief, called the bill "appallingly reckless and incredibly dangerous."

Judith Bryan, a spokeswoman for the American Embassy here, said the officials in Washington had urged Mexico "to review the legislation and to avoid the perception that drug use would be tolerated in Mexico and to prevent drug tourism."

It is unusual for American officials to try to influence internal Mexican legislation.

Mr. Fox made it clear late Wednesday he would not sign the bill in its current form, but would send it back to Congress with proposed amendments.