

IOWA NEWS

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TWO SMOKE IT LEGALLY

Iowans protest with marijuana at Iowa Capitol

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The only two Iowans who may smoke marijuana legally did so on the Capitol lawn Saturday, as about 50 people watched, wishing they could join in.

The two smokers, Barbara Douglass and George McMahon, may use marijuana for medical purposes. They and others in the crowd called for the easing of restrictions on marijuana, especially for sick people.

"We're the miracle cures," said McMahon, who uses the drug to stop pain from a genetic defect. "But there are others, like Ladd here, who the government has literally told to die."

McMahon of Ottosen and Douglass of Storm Lake are the only two Iowans who have the federal government's permission to smoke marijuana. Their friend, Ladd Huffman of Calumet, applied at the same time as Douglass for permission to use marijuana to help fight multiple sclerosis. Douglass got permission, but the government changed the rules before Huffman was allowed.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has given 28 patients nationally the go-ahead to smoke marijuana. But in March, the government said it would not let any more people get the drug legally.

Those at the Capitol on Saturday — including many members of the Grassroots Party — want the Iowa Legislature to allow people with certain illnesses to possess marijuana.

Advocates say marijuana lessens nausea and weight loss in AIDS victims and cancer patients receiving radiation treatment, and it has been found to ease eye pressure for glaucoma victims and control spasms for multiple sclerosis sufferers.

Douglass smokes marijuana to ease leg spasms caused by multiple sclerosis. But Huffman must take drugs with side effects, such as stomach pain, he said.

The government hypocritically allows doctors to prescribe hard drugs that have side effects, but won't legalize the relatively safe marijuana, activists said.

"The government can't show that anyone has been killed from marijuana, but people are killed from legalized drugs such as alcohol every minute," said Sharon Place, an Oregon hospice worker who said she was placed on probation for treating AIDS patients with marijuana.