

Iowa Senate approves use of marijuana as medicine

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With little debate and no dissenting votes, the Iowa Senate approved a bill Tuesday that allows use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

Lawmakers voted 50-0 to approve the marijuana legislation and send it to the House after striking a provision that would have permitted sick people with prescriptions to grow their own plants.

Sen. Berl Priebe, D-Algona, the chief backer of the proposal, said he was not surprised by the lack of controversy over legalization of a popular counterculture drug for use in some circumstances.

"The controls on it are very tight," said Priebe. In general, the bill treats marijuana as any prescription drug, which must be prescribed by a physician and dispensed by a pharmacist.

Priebe said legislation had been sought by Iowans for whom marijuana is useful in quelling pain and nausea from disease and from common cancer treatments, including radiation and chemotherapy.

Among those proposing the change in the law is George McMahon of Ottosen, a resident of Priebe's Senate district who suffers from a rare genetic disorder called nail patella syndrome.

McMahon is one of a small number of Americans with permission from the federal government to use marijuana to alleviate the pain from his disease.

Lawmakers say the federal government has ceased to be a reliable supplier of marijuana for medicinal purposes. Because authority for individuals to grow marijuana was struck from the bill, Priebe conceded that supply would continue to be a problem.

As passed by the Senate, the bill directs the Iowa Board of Pharmacy Examiners to look first to the federal government for a supply of marijuana. If that fails, the bill directs the board to acquire marijuana that has been seized in criminal cases from the court system for distribution to sick people.

LEGISLATIVE BILLS

PASSED IN THE SENATE

S.F. 140 — Authorizes joint projects by electric utilities. 49-0. To House.

S.F. 296 — Raises limits on reparations to crime victims. 48-0. To House.

S.F. 314 — Incorporates railroad sanitation rules in occupational safety law. 27-22. To House.

S.F. 342 — Extends provisions of domestic abuse law. 49-0. To House.

S.F. 347 — Allows a rehired law officer to invest in a retirement fund for years out of work. 49-0. To House.

S.F. 367 — Delays start of family resource centers by Iowa Department of Education. 49-0. To House.

S.F. 318 — Requires legislative approval for a permit to build a nuclear waste storage facility. 49-1. To House.

S.F. 361 — Legalizes the possession and use of marijuana for medical therapy. 50-0. To House.

S.F. 392 — Allows inmates on work release to leave Iowa for a home visit. 50-0. To House.

PASSED IN THE HOUSE

H.F. 267 — Defines resident for the purpose of obtaining hunting, fishing and trapping licenses to include non-residents younger than 21 who have a parent living in Iowa. 52-46. To Senate.

H.F. 484 — Provides for the licensure of certain facilities as psychiatric medical institutions for children and authorizes access to criminal histories of certain tribal gaming officials. 98-0. To Senate.

INTRODUCED IN THE SENATE

S.F. 400 — Exempts Iowa municipal bonds from the state income tax. By Murphy.