

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Nelson's Medical Marijuana Bill Takes Center Stage At Senate On June 27

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Positive Nelson's long-awaited Medical Marijuana bill will be heard in the Committee on Health, Hospital and Human Services, chaired by Senator Kurt Violet, on June 27, a press release Mr. Nelson's office issued Thursday has made known.

The measure, now Bill No. 31-0348, seeks to add a new Chapter 30 to Title 19 of Virgin Islands Code, relative to allowing the medical use of cannabis; to regulate medical cannabis provisioning centers and other related entities; to provide for the powers and duties of The Office of Cannabis Regulation to allow for the promulgation of rules and regulations of the medical cannabis industry; to provide immunity for persons and entities

engaging in activities in compliance with this Act; and amending provisions of the Controlled Substances Act,” according to the measure’s language. The full bill can seen [here](#).

Mr. Nelson will host a press conference on Tuesday where he will be discussing the bill, as well as some of his other initiatives.

Mr. Nelson officially introduced the measure during a press conference in May, 2015, following an expedition to Washington State and Colorado, where the senator and his delegation met with government officials, leaders in the field of medical marijuana, and other advocates.

Mr. Nelson, along with members of the expedition, including St. Thomas Sen. Tregenza Roach, Dr. Manuel Da Motta, D.O., and others, spoke about their experience, making known that they were now stronger advocates of the drug than before the trip.

“This trip took me on a spiritual expedition,” Mr. Nelson said, “I’m having a spiritual experience, people, and it’s beautiful. Mr. Nelson that said before embarking on the journey, he thought he was liberal in his thinking, “but I’ve experienced it at another level. I mean, it’s changing and it’s causing me to recalibrate my position on some issues.” The expedition, he added, was useful in helping draft a better bill — taking the good parts of what has worked on the U.S. mainland, while steering clear from what has not.

At one point during his talk, Mr. Nelson held up a small canister containing a liquid form of medical marijuana.

“Should somebody be locked up for this?” Mr. Nelson asked. “This is cannabis oil, this isn’t smoking weed. This is cannabis oil that’s been proven to work — made from a plant.”

Mr. Nelson said the oil was made by pressing marijuana leaves, and he repeatedly asked why should someone be locked up for marijuana oil, when “it’s not something you smoke,” but rather a liquid applied underneath the tongue.

“Having seen upfront what this does, how can we not?” he asked.

Mr. Roach, who was only able to make the Colorado leg of the expedition, called the trip a meaningful opportunity, and said he embarked on the experience not as an advocate for medical marijuana nor the full legalization of the drug, but because the people of the territory [voted in favor](#) of creating a medical marijuana industry here.

“I do not believe people should ever be afraid of learning,” Mr. Roach said. “Because when I came back, I was even more convinced about the medicinal benefits and the value of medicinal marijuana as an industry.”

Using statistics, Mr. Roach said 23 states had already legalized medical marijuana; and five, including the District of Columbia, had legalized the drug.

“So, literally, this is not going to turn back,” Mr. Roach said.

Mr. Roach did, however, point out some federal restrictions that must be looked at when crafting the local legislation.

For example, U.S. banks are not allowed to take monies made from the medical marijuana industry because they are members of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (F.D.I.C.). Under federal law, marijuana is treated like every other controlled substance such as cocaine and heroine, according to [Americans for Safe Access](#), an organization created to advance legal medical marijuana.

When asked about the potential problem of having thousands of dollars being stored in the homes of business owners in the territory because the banks are forbidden from accepting money from the industry, Mr. Nelson said people with money usually find ways to make things happen.

The senator also encouraged the community to continue being strong advocates of the local movement and applauded those who [picketed](#) Governor Kenneth Mapp at the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center last year.

On the expedition, the delegation met with a total of 17 private and governmental agencies, 16 facilities ranging from dispensaries/pharmacies, store fronts, farms, testing labs, extraction labs, and companies that create the machines for the medical marijuana industry.

The group also sat in on a lecture on [terpenes](#), given by Dr. Ethan Russo, and attended at least 3 seminars with topics ranging from "The Future of Legal Cannabis in America", to "The Emerging Edibles Industry".

Feature Image: Sen. Nelson holds up a small canister containing a liquid form of medicinal marijuana during a May 2015 press conference held at the Curriculum Center located west of the St. Croix Central High School.