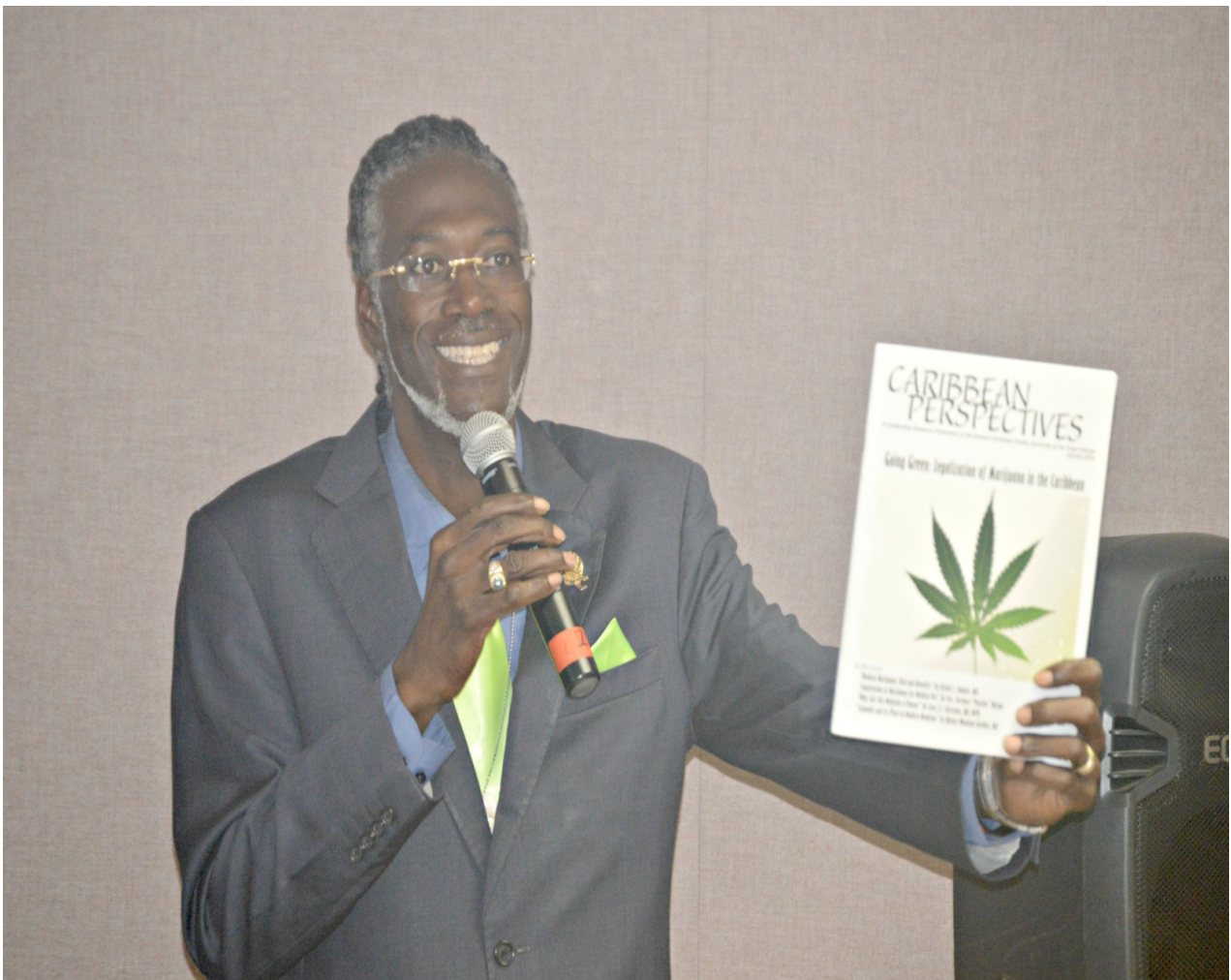


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Marijuana Is Reclaiming Its Position In Society After Being 'Hijacked,' Nelson Says

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Positive Nelson has often contended that he's been sidelined as a tunnel-visioned senator only focused on marijuana initiatives. But Mr. Nelson said it is the media that wants to talk about marijuana, and agreed during a press conference he held at the Curriculum Center near Central High School on Tuesday that the marijuana issue was one of the biggest topics not only in the Virgin Islands, but across the U.S. and world.

At yesterday's event, the senator opened his talk with his medical cannabis bill that's set to take center stage in the territory's Legislature.

"First on the agenda is the long-awaited, heavily discussed, highly contentious people's initiative. Bill No. 31-0348, the Virgin Islands Cannabis Care Act is finally on the agenda," Mr. Nelson began. "Cannabis, I feel, has been falsely arrested, demonized and is now trying to clear its name from a conspiracy targeted since the 1930s."

Mr. Nelson said marijuana was retaining its rightful place in society as made evident by the many states that have embraced either some form of legalization for medical use, or recreational purposes. He also mentioned credited journals that have highlighted the benefits of using marijuana.

The longstanding senator went through certain parts of his bill's language word-for-word. It includes calls for allowing up to 8 ounces of cannabis for patients; and patients who hold registry identification cards can grow up to 16 plants at their homes. Pressed on regulation, Mr. Nelson said the bill is using a proven model that has been employed by other states, and admitted that there could be loopholes. But he said patients should not suffer because some may choose to use the drug illicitly -- something that is already occurring, he said.

"Right now we have honest people, grandma, grand parents, who are going about all kinds of uncanny and unscrupulous ways to acquire medicine. Why put them through that? I'm concerned about my children having sex, will we make it illegal?"

"I would like for us to talk about regulation, since there's a cannabis control board that's being established [through the cannabis legislation], I would like it to become the Alcohol, Tobacco and Cannabis Control Board. Right now alcohol is being too freely sold in our community. I am with you with wanting to have protection for our young and individuals who we feel shouldn't be involved in these types of activities," Mr. Nelson said.

There will be two hearings: Friday at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall here, and on Monday at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall in St. Thomas.

Mr. Nelson spoke of his other projects as well, honing in on his Infrastructure Reconstruction Plan, which calls for an investment of \$250 million in phase one, including an agriculture depot program, and an apprenticeship education and employment program, among other projects.

The bill has similarities to that of Governor Kenneth Mapp's [recently submitted](#) capital projects measure. Mr. Nelson said he has preemption rights and could stall the governor's bill because of the many similarities. And he revealed that senators gathered over the weekend to discuss the initiatives in his measure as they prepare to dissect the governor's proposal.

Mr. Nelson's bill includes \$100 million in retroactive pay to government employees. It also calls for the construction of a new power facility on the south shore of this island, and senator Nelson suggested that reporters should look into W.A.P.A.'s propane project, which has yet to come online after multiple promises and delays.

In 2014, the territory voted through a referendum [in favor of a medical marijuana industry](#), but Mr. Nelson's bill is expected to face strong opposition once the hearings commence, based on past hearings that [became contentious](#), like the hemp industry measure.

