

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Medical Marijuana Bill To Be Reintroduced To Senate, Nelson Says

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Positive Nelson, who is widely known for his efforts to see the legalization of medicinal marijuana in the U.S. Virgin Islands, recently told The Consortium that his office would soon reintroduce the measure to the Senate, although he did not say when, after previous attempts had failed to convince lawmakers.

Mr. Nelson said time has also worked in favor of the measure, as new research continues to highlight the benefits of the plant.

"With the passage of time and the release of more information, more proven research, it will make sense that this Legislature will be more prepared to pass it," he said, speaking

to this publication on May 2, following a [grand opening ceremony](#) for Sterling Optical's new facility. He said the measure is worthy of full consideration, and should not be relegated.

Governor Kenneth Mapp [recently told The Consortium](#) that he'd consider Mr. Nelson's medical marijuana measure, although he gave no assurances that it would be signed into law. "It would be something that I think would be considered. I look at all of the bills that arrive on my desk, and I will give it its merits. I will pass it through all of my commissioners and agency heads that has to do with that," the governor said. Mr. Mapp's comments on the matter were well received by Mr. Nelson, who said that the governor had spoken to him privately stating the same. "He's actually not limited his consideration to medicinal," Mr. Nelson made known, suggesting that the governor was open to recreational use as well. But he said one of the governor's concerns was having language in the measure for proper regulation before any bill could be approved.

Yet, while Virgin Islands lawmakers appear to be warming up to the idea of medicinal marijuana, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions -- a staunch opponent of marijuana legalization for years, [recently ordered a Department of Justice review](#) of an [Obama-era policy](#) under which the federal government agreed not to interfere with state laws on marijuana, as long as the states took steps to regulate their distribution and use. Mr. Session's review appears to be aimed at giving the federal government the ultimate control.

Along with reviews of other Obama-era policies, Mr. Sessions says the Justice Department's Task Force on Crime Reduction and Public Safety, which he established on February 27, includes subcommittees to "undertake a review of existing policies in the areas of charging, sentencing, and marijuana to ensure consistency with the [Justice] Department's overall strategy on reducing violent crime and with administration goals and priorities. Another subcommittee will explore our use of asset forfeiture and make recommendations on any improvements needed to legal authorities, policies, and training to most effectively attack the financial infrastructure of criminal organizations," reads a portion of the new policy.

Mr. Nelson, however, appeared unworried by Mr. Sessions, telling The Consortium that legislators here who voice concern about Mr. Sessions would only be looking for reasons to be in opposition.

"America is not going to go backwards on their policy," Mr. Nelson said. "The Jeff Sessions talk is just that, talk. What they've already seen is the billions of dollars that marijuana has made. America is a capitalistic nation as we know. Republicans are about the money. The only thing Trump is really venting about is anything that was done under the Obama Administration. But the truth of the matter is America is not going to let this president or any future president roll back on [marijuana]."

USVI residents, as well as those living abroad, responded overwhelmingly in favor of some form of marijuana legalization during an unscientific poll conducted by The Consortium, when the publication [asked followers of its Facebook platform](#) whether or not they supported the legalization of medical marijuana in territory. The post received over 500 comments, 500 shares and 3,000 reactions.

According to The New York Times, more than half of Americans now live in states that have legalized use of marijuana for medical or recreational purposes. The publication also cites [a recent Quinnipiac University poll](#) that found 59 percent of voters nationally believe that the drug should be legal and 71 percent who say the federal government should not enforce federal marijuana laws in states that legalized it. And a recent poll in Canada — [which is set to legalize the drug in July 2018](#) — found that support for legalization is even greater in that country, at 68 percent. Once legalized, Canada will join Uruguay as the only other nation to completely legalize marijuana as a consumer product.