

The Virgin Islands Consortium

With Hostility In Senate Towards Medicinal Marijuana Diminished, Nelson's Yearslong Fight Gets New Lease On Life

Business / **Published On October 13, 2018 10:25 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **October 13, 2018**



With a number of gubernatorial candidates supporting a medicinal marijuana industry in the territory, using the growing trend as part of their proposals to boost the territory's economy and sustain the Government Employees' Retirement System, Senator Positive Nelson's bill to legalize such an industry in the USVI, which was briefly placed as an item on Friday's session agenda to be voted on following a special order motion by Mr. Nelson, has received less hostility than in the past.

On Friday, the bill was removed from the agenda after a motion from Mr. Violet to instead send it to the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture. But it was no longer an item left to languish in the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, which is chaired by a senator who staunchly opposes the implementation of a medicinal marijuana industry in the USVI: outgoing lawmaker Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly.

Following Mr. Violet's motion, who contended that the measure needed further debate, Mr. Nelson amended his motion so that the bill could be sent to the Agriculture and Economic Development Committee.

The motion passed with flying colors: Senators Novelle Francis, Alicia Hansen, Tregenza Roach, Myron Jackson, Jean Forde, Dwayne DeGraff, Janelle Sarauw, Sammuell Sanes, Kurt Violet and Bryan Smith voted in favor.

Standing in sole opposition was Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, who during past hearings has painted the measure as a get-rich ploy for certain interests who care little about the drug's effects on society.

"The key opposition, unreasonably — and I did send correspondence asking the president to let it be heard by the Committee of the Whole in fairness to the people who voted on it — but Senator O'Reilly, one person... I don't believe that she's going to give it an ear with a hearing, and if so it won't be a fair hearing because she has demonstrated publicly over and over and over her bias against medicinal cannabis, no matter what medical journal or scientific research is in front of her," Mr. Nelson told The Consortium in December 2017 at The Palms at Pelican Cove, where he announced his bid for governor. (Mr. Nelson bowed out of the race twice, [first after failing to find a running mate](#), and later [after defects of his candidacy](#) mired his efforts.)

Mr. Nelson has made the marijuana issue a hallmark of his legacy in the Senate, and it appears that time for its passage in the Legislature is ripe. But the senator has only a few more months in office, most of which will be lame-duck days once the Nov. 6 general elections results are in. The question remains, then, does Mr. Nelson have the political capital to muster the measure through and onto Governor Kenneth Mapp's desk. Mr. Mapp has shown support for a medicinal marijuana industry in the USVI, although [he didn't confirm](#) whether he would approve or veto a measure sent to his desk.

Meanwhile on the mainland, 30 states have legalized marijuana for medical purposes. According to VOX, some allow medicinal marijuana dispensaries and home cultivation. Others only allow home cultivation. And a few allow dispensaries but not home cultivation.

From [VOX](#):

There's a growing body of research supporting marijuana's use for medical purposes. Some studies and anecdotal evidence suggest marijuana can be used for various medical problems, including pain, nausea and loss of appetite, Parkinson's disease, inflammatory bowel disease, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), epilepsy, and multiple sclerosis.

But a review of the evidence published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found little evidence for marijuana's ability to treat health conditions outside

chronic pain and muscle stiffness from multiple sclerosis.

Several studies show legalizing medical marijuana dispensaries can lead to fewer opioid painkiller deaths, making medical marijuana one potential way to help fight the opioid epidemic. The rationale for this is simple: Studies show medical marijuana can effectively treat chronic pain, which opioids are commonly used for. But unlike opioids, medical marijuana cannot cause deadly overdoses. So medical marijuana could supplant some opioid use and save some lives.

Medical marijuana legalization also has a lot of popular support: A 2010 Pew Research Center survey found that 73 percent of American voters back medical marijuana, including 80 percent of Democrats, 76 percent of independents, and 61 percent of Republicans.

But the federal government doesn't recognize marijuana's medical potential, largely because the studies have been small so far, and there have been no large-scale clinical trials proving pot's medicinal value.

[View the original embedded media](#)