

Pot poll and legislature could pave the way for medical marijuana

BY MAX FREUND | DECEMBER 08, 2010 7:10 AM



A new Hawkeye Poll shows the majority of Iowans are in favor of medical marijuana, and proposed legislation could make that a possibility.

The poll — administered by UI professors and students — found 62 percent of Iowans are in favor of legalizing medical marijuana, which is in line with the results from other states.

This finding comes on the heels of the Iowa Board of Pharmacy's unanimous decision to draw up legislation for the Iowa Legislature to consider when it reconvenes in January that would change the designation of marijuana from a Schedule 1 to a Schedule 2 drug.

Schedule 1 drugs, such as LSD, are deemed as having no medical purposes, but changing the classification to Schedule 2 — the classification of many narcotics and amphetamines — recognizes the drug has some medical qualities.

The board spent more than two years gathering information from patients and doctors regarding the drug, and it decided marijuana fits better in Schedule 2, said Lloyd Jessen, the board's executive director.

The approach differs from 14 states that have legalized marijuana for medical purposes without changing its classification, said Carl Olsen, an activist for medical marijuana.

But reclassifying the substance paves the way for a stronger eventual legalization bill, he said.

Olsen said the board should have proposed reclassifying the drug at a lower schedule because he said the members deemed marijuana as less likely to be abused than others in Schedule 2.

Olsen also cited THC, the key mind-altering ingredient in marijuana, is slated as a Schedule 3.

"Everything else in there is just vegetable material," Olsen said. "If you are going to go out in your garden and smoke a broccoli plant, you are probably going to get the same lung damage from smoking marijuana."

While Olsen said he was pleased legislation has been introduced, he is worried lawmakers who are wary of medical marijuana will vote against the bill to change the designation, even though designating pot as a Schedule 2 drug does not provide patients access to the drug.

But some legislators are not convinced the two issues are separate.

"It is pretty clear that if the state is going to pursue a policy to allow people who suffer chronic pain access to medicinal cannabis, we are going to have to reschedule marijuana as has been proposed," said Sen. Joe Bolcom, D-Iowa City.

And Jacoby told the Daily Iowan Editorial Board earlier this month that "the bill has no chance this year," even saying he doesn't expect it to get out of subcommittee.

The piece of legislation doesn't directly address legalizing marijuana, but Kevin Leicht, a University of Iowa sociology professor who helped administer the recent poll, said participants views of legalization could influence lawmakers.

"I think the Iowa report is a bit more surprising and brings more attention to the Legislature because Iowans are viewed as very traditional people," Leicht said.

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