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## Pharmacy board rips pot activist's record

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State regulators bashed a prominent pro-marijuana activist Tuesday during the same meeting in which they promised to give fair hearings on the issue of medical marijuana.

The Iowa Board of Pharmacy went into great detail about the criminal record of Carl Olsen of Des Moines, who leads Iowans for Medical Marijuana.

"Olsen has a long history of marijuana possession and use - which history has nothing to do with medical treatment," the board said in a ruling it unanimously approved.

The ruling denied Olsen's request that it reclassify marijuana as a medication that could be used with a prescription. Three of the ruling's 13 pages are devoted to Olsen's history.

The document says the activist was arrested several times in the 1970s and '80s on marijuana-related charges. In one case, it said, he was stopped for driving slowly and erratically on Interstate Highway 80. "In the trunk of Olsen's automobile were plastic bags of marijuana and a whole pile of money," the document says.

It notes that Olsen successfully appealed a conviction in that case. But it says the Iowa Supreme Court rejected his claims that "he was a priest in the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, and that a sacrament of the church is smoking marijuana all day."

In another case, the document says, Olsen and about a dozen other people were arrested in Maine in 1980 after they were seen using rubber boats to bring ashore about 40,000 pounds of marijuana from a larger boat. The board said Olsen was convicted in that case, despite another claim that his religious freedom was being violated.

Olsen, 57, shrugged Tuesday when asked about the document's claims. "It's all true. What can I say?" he said.

Olsen said he spent about two years in prison in the 1980s and hasn't used marijuana since 1990. "I was tired of the persecution," he said, adding that he still believes he has a religious right to use the drug.

Olsen said the pharmacy board apparently was raising his history as a way to discredit his views. He said he stepped up as a leader in the medical-marijuana movement because many patients who need the drug are too ill to be activists.