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## Many Back Medical Marijuana, But Action Unlikely

*MIKE GLOVER, Associated Press Writer*

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — After holding hearings throughout Iowa about medical uses of marijuana, pharmacy regulators will consider whether to recommend that legislators change the state's law prohibiting the drug's use or possession.

The last of four meetings was held Wednesday in Council Bluffs, and like the others it primarily drew speakers who believe marijuana should be legal for medical uses. But even those who advocate changing the law acknowledge it's unlikely lawmakers will take quick action, regardless of what members of the Board of Pharmacy recommend.

"It's my sense that this issue is likely going to be crowded out by some of the bigger issues facing the state," said state Sen. Joe Bolkcom, an Iowa City Democrat who backs medical marijuana.

The big issue facing lawmakers when they convene in January will be a budget shortfall of up to \$900 million. To cut costs, legislative leaders have reduced the length of the session by 20 days, leaving less time for other issues.

"Candidly, I don't expect this legislation to move forward in the upcoming session," Bolkcom said.

The issue initially came before the pharmacy board in 2008 when the American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa and others petitioned the board to remove marijuana from the Legislature's Schedule I classification. To be classified as Schedule I, a drug must have a high potential for abuse and no safe medical use within the U.S.

The board rejected the request, then took up the matter again in 2009 at the order of a Polk County judge. The judge issued his order in response to a petition by the ACLU, ruling that the board must review the classification and decide whether marijuana has an accepted medical use.

The board again rejected the request to reclassify marijuana but agreed to hold hearings in Des Moines, Mason City, Iowa City and Council Bluffs followed by a scientific review and recommendation to the Legislature.

Bolkcom doubts lawmakers will immediately change the law regardless of the board's recommendation, but he said the hearings have drawn attention to the issue of medical marijuana.

"They've provided an opportunity for education, not only for Iowans but for policymakers," Bolkcom said.

Among those who spoke out in support of legalizing marijuana for medical use was Lisa Jackson, of Crawfordsville, who suffers from severe fibromyalgia and uses the drug to ease her chronic pain.

"It's the only thing that's given me back my life," said Jackson, who noted she rarely got out of bed during the early stages of her disease. "Marijuana has given me the ability to get up and function."

Dr. Deborah LeBeau, a Dubuque obstetrician, said there's almost no doubt about the medical benefits of marijuana.

"Essentially, it's a medicinal plant," LeBeau said. "This plant developed a bad rap in our country in the mid-20th century. It's time we get on board with the 21st century."

Bolkcom said he's hopeful that support will build for legalizing medical marijuana in Iowa. Nationally, 14 states allow some use of marijuana for medical purposes.

"My hope is that in 2010, we could continue the process of taking input from Iowans and working to make changes in the bill that would be able to gain more support," Bolkcom said.

Jackson said she gets frustrated at the delays but will keep speaking out.

"It's almost hurtful, like they don't really care," she said. "Whenever they call on me to testify, I'll go and tell my story."

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