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Christine Mallory, Editor

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Legal Recreational Marijuana Debate Continues in State Legislature

By Kitty Mayo

A Minnesota Senate Committee defeated a recreational marijuana bill last week, but the debate continues as support for legalization grows. A Pew Research Center study shows that 62 percent of Americans are in favor of legalization.

Given a hearing by the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee, the bill was defeated by a 6 to 3 vote.

So far ten states in the U.S., and Canada, have legalized recreational marijuana, most recently Michigan. Many more states are considering legislation to approve the use of recreational cannabis in: New York, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, New Mexico, Florida, Pennsylvania, Hawaii, Maryland, Nebraska, North Carolina and New Jersey.

A bipartisan bill with Democratic Senator Melisa Franzen as the chief author, and co-author Republican Senator Scott Jensen introduced the bill. Jensen is a medical doctor who clearly states that there are risks associated with marijuana use.

Franzen says her bill would have regulated and taxed a substance that is already used widely by the population of Minnesota.

Medical marijuana use is already approved in Minnesota, for conditions such as glaucoma and multiple sclerosis.

There are still a number of marijuana proposals being considered in the House of Representatives, and a constitutional amendment that would give voters the decision to legalize.

In a phone interview, Franzen says that she does not feel that the issue got a full hearing.

"I hoped this could start a conversation that would educate other legislators and the public, but the hearing started with someone from Colorado who was not in favor of legalization, and the process was biased from the beginning," stated Franzen.

During the proceeding an emergency room physician also stated that he had never treated anyone for a cannabis overdose, and never expected to, given the unlikelihood of cannabis having that effect.

"Our bill was thoughtful and complex, covering many aspects of public health and safety, not allowing youth access to the drug and taxation," said Franzen.

Stating that she was hoping the bill would allow for a deep exploration of the pros and cons of legalization, Franzen says that she is clear on sending the public message that just because a substance is legislated as legal does not mean that is good for you: such as alcohol and tobacco.

In discussions with the Minne-

sota Medical Association, Franzen said that there are frustrations among doctors who know that many of their patients are using marijuana, but are not sharing that with their physicians because it is not legal. She says that renders doctors unable to discuss the risks of marijuana use, such as when a pregnant patient may be inadvisably using marijuana to deal with morning sickness.

"Regulation means being able to educate the public on risks, restrict use to just people over 21, and limit to having only an ounce," stated Franzen.

Under her bill, driving while impaired on cannabis would have been made a crime, strengthening the law already in place for driving while impaired on any substance.

Concerns about the ability to test for cannabis were also raised, and Franzen says that in addition to field testing already in place, she is certain that technological advances are very near that would allow for accurate testing of cannabis levels in the field.

Advocating for specific use of dollars garnered from legal marijuana, Franzen says that those monies could help to advance the knowledge about the effects of marijuana, including research on effects and addiction, and marijuana and schizophrenia risks. She further advocates for those

tax dollars to go toward police and safety directly related to cannabis, and addiction and recovery programs.

"Many people are already using marijuana. They should be able to know what they are putting into their bodies, it's strength, and that there are no other substances it is laced with. To have a clean and safe product that is already being used is in the public interest," Franzen stated.

Silver Bay resident and attorney, Jim Manahan says that the decriminalization of marijuana is likely an eventuality for Minnesota, stating that every declared Democratic candidate for president falls solidly on the side of doing so.

"It makes no sense to send people to jail (for marijuana use) than it did for prohibition for drinking a beer. We tried it and it much increased crime. Now we've been having this war on drugs for the last two decades and it has led to many lives being ruined by convictions on their record for smoking marijuana," said Manahan.

The issue is likely to go forward after the end of the session with a task force gathering more information.

An opponent to this legislation will be featured in an upcoming article in the Northshore Journal.

Free Series on Solar Energy Systems in Cook County

By Kitty Mayo

The company REAL Solar will be presenting a number of informational meetings to residents and businesses in Cook County in the coming weeks.

Free workshops in March and April, hosted by Cook County Local Energy Project (CCLEP), will explain the ins and outs of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems for homes and businesses.

According to CCLEP solar PV prices are currently falling and a 30 percent tax credit is set to expire in 2020.

REAL Solar is a subsidiary of RREAL (Rural Renewable Energy Alliance) which is located in Backus, MN. REAL will explain how solar PV systems work, and will also outline plans for a solar "group-buy" program that is being offered through a partnership between CCLEP and REAL.

A group-buy puts several solar projects together to save on bulk purchasing and coordinating site evaluation and installation. This new program in Cook County is being coordinated with the Grand Marais Public Utilities Commission and Arrowhead Electric Cooperative, with the level of potential savings increasing with more participants.

The group has set the goal of having at least 10 to 15 projects signed up by May 15th, with plans to begin the solar installations in early Fall. Participants, homeowners or businesses who ultimately sign up for the program will pay for a site assessment of \$100.

The schedule for March workshops is:

- Saturday, March 30th from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Cook County Community

Center in Grand Marais.

- Saturday, March 30th from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm at the Cook County Community Center in Grand Marais.

- Sunday, March 31st from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm at the Hovland Town Hall in Hovland.

- Sunday, March 31st from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm at the Birch Grove Community Center, Community Room #1 in Tofte.

More workshops will be scheduled during April. All workshops in March and April are completely free to attend. The charge of \$100 dollars is only if an individual chooses to have an assessment of their property to determine the best solar system set up. A site assessment does not obligate a participant to install a solar system.

If you are interested in the project but cannot attend any of the workshops you can contact: Tony Walzer with CCLEP at (218)877-7293, or Jason Edens at RREAL at (218)209-5584.

RREAL was the installer of solar panels at the American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) in Duluth, among many community collaboration projects in Minnesota, the United States and Africa. About the AICHO project RREAL, director Jason Edens said that he believes solar energy is a potent tool for empowering individuals and the agencies that serve them.

**Kitty Mayo is a volunteer member of the board for RREAL, and is a homeowner recipient of a REAL solar furnace through an Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) program.*