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## House panel revives bill on medical marijuana

By **MARK BRUNSWICK**, Star Tribune

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A bill that would allow some patients in Minnesota to use medical marijuana was resurrected on Wednesday.

The bill, which passed the House Ways and Means Committee easily, would not legalize marijuana. But it would allow patients who qualify to possess up to 2.5 ounces of marijuana and to receive similar amounts on a regular basis from groups set up to dispense the drug.

The measure passed the Minnesota Senate last year but did not receive a House vote.

The effort to have medical marijuana approved in Minnesota has been more than 10 years in the making and most recently has seen growing support among Republicans who previously might have been expected to oppose to it.

Rep. Chris DeLaForest, R-Andover, is a co-sponsor of the House bill and predicted bipartisan support for its passage.

"To me, this is the ultimate conservative issue," DeLaForest said. "It's about keeping the government out of the doctor-patient relationship."

The vote occurred without debate, but the bill can be expected to generate controversy when it comes to the House floor, which is expected within the next few weeks.

The measure requires patients to have a card issued by the Minnesota Department of Health. Nonprofits can be established to grow and distribute the medical marijuana with up to 12 plants per patient.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty has sympathized with objections to the proposal from law-enforcement groups, and spokesman Brian McClung reiterated on Wednesday that he would veto a bill if it does not contain provisions that are palatable to the law-enforcement community.

The state measure would be in conflict with federal law, which makes the possession of marijuana illegal. Doctors would recommend medical marijuana to patients but would not actually prescribe it under the bill. Twelve other states have medical-marijuana laws. Similar bills are now under consideration in Illinois and New York, and an initiative is expected to appear on Michigan's November ballot.

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