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ASSEMBLY APPROVES LENO-DEVORE BILL TO PERMIT FARMING OF INDUSTRIAL HEMP

U.S. consumers spend \$270 million each year on hemp products, increasing by \$26 million annually

SACRAMENTO —Assembly Bill 1147 authored by Assemblyman Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) and Assemblyman Chuck DeVore (R-Irvine) would permit California farmers to grow industrial hemp for the sale of seed, oil and fiber to manufacturers. Sponsored by Vote Hemp, the bill was passed by the Assembly today in a bipartisan vote of 44 to 32.

“California farmers are missing out on a multimillion dollar market that already exists in California,” said Assemblyman Mark Leno. “Hundreds of hemp products are made right here in California, but manufacturers are forced to import hemp seed, oil and fiber from other countries. This measure will put California at the top of a \$270 million industry that’s growing by \$26 million each year.”

AB 1147 would permit California farmers to grow industrial hemp, a variety of cannabis that grows up to 16 feet tall, resembles bamboo, and has no psychoactive properties. By legally sanctioning hemp cultivation within state lines, this bill provides California hemp farmers with the security that state law can provide. During the floor debate Assemblyman Chuck DeVore stressed the bill’s minimal impact on law enforcement.

“Any cannabis plant, whether marijuana or hemp, not growing as an agricultural field crop or in a research setting is still contraband under the terms of AB 1147. It has been crafted to relieve law enforcement of the burden of having to discern hemp from marijuana in clandestine groves or in common drug busts,” said Mr. DeVore.

Hemp is one of the strongest natural fibers known and is grown and processed throughout the world for paper, fuel, clothing, building materials, canvas, rope, beauty care products, food, automobile parts and many other commercial uses. The seed has many nutritional benefits because it contains essential amino acids, including omega-3 commonly found in fish, and is an alternative source of protein. Hemp also has strong environmental benefits. It’s a source for paper that could enable us to save our trees for higher end uses such as lumber. Hemp can be used as a raw material for ethanol fuel with no net addition to greenhouse gases. It requires little or no agricultural chemicals, smothers weeds, and improves soil conditions making it an excellent rotational crop of particular interest to organic farmers and other weeding intensive crops such as strawberries.

“We are one step closer to cultivating hemp in the United States, where it can be processed locally and benefit local farmers,” said David Bronner of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps. The Escondido based company is the number one producer of natural soaps in the world with sales near \$20 million annually. Mr. Bronner says his company has spent \$800,000 in the last five years importing hemp oil from Canada. “Once this bill is enacted, it will create a more efficient market leading to better prices for the consumer, and provide an opportunity to expand the market for the nutritious hemp seed,” he said.

For years, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has scheduled live cannabis plants as a controlled substance despite the fact that hemp has no psychoactive effects. Hemp has less than three tenths of one percent THC while marijuana contains five to twenty-five percent THC. In 2004, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the DEA did not have the authority to regulate industrial hemp under the 1970 Controlled Substances Act. The DEA decided not to appeal that decision and the Court’s ruling now stands as U.S. law on the issue.