

Vermont governor vetoes marijuana legalization bill: “We must get this right”

Scott said he is sending the bill back with suggestions for another path forward and suggested that changes could be made to the bill in a special session this summer

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By The Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. — Republican Gov. Phil Scott said Wednesday that he planned to veto a bill making Vermont the ninth state to legalize recreational marijuana but indicated that he was willing to work with the legislature on a compromise.

Scott said he is sending the bill back with suggestions for another path forward and suggested that changes could be made to the bill in a special session this summer.

“We must get this right,” Scott said. “I think we need to move a little bit slower.”

The governor has said he’s not philosophically opposed to marijuana legalization but has concerns about public safety, children’s health and impaired drivers.

Under the legislation, small amounts of marijuana would have been legal to possess and grow for anyone over age 21.

Eight other states, plus the District of Columbia, have legalized recreational marijuana. Vermont would have been the first state to legalize marijuana by vote of a state legislative body. The other states and D.C. legalized marijuana after public referendums.

Studies by the Vermont Department of Health have found that Vermont has among the highest prevalence of marijuana use in the country and the second-highest use among people ages 12 to 25.

Proponents of marijuana legalization have said passage by the Democrat-majority legislature shows the inevitable expansion of marijuana legalization and the recognition by officials that it’s better to regulate and tax the industry than to keep it underground.

Vermont’s legislature passed the measure six months after residents in Massachusetts and Maine voted to legalize the recreational use of marijuana. Both states are now developing mechanisms to regulate and tax the sale of marijuana. The New Hampshire Legislature is considering a bill to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana.

Nearly 20 states have bills pending that would legalize adult-use marijuana, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The other eight states that have legalized marijuana have done so via citizen referendums, but Vermont does not have a legal mechanism to carry out such referendums.

Will be updated.