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### Cut in Pot Penalties Backed by Harris Solons

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# Agree On Penalty Reduction\*

BY GAYLE McNUTT  
Chronicle Political Editor

Harris County's Texas House delegation overwhelmingly agrees that the penalties for marijuana possession should be reduced, but opposes its legalization.

Only one of the 19 state representatives, at a televised caucus Thursday night said he favors legalized marijuana use, and then with restrictions.

Rep.-elect Ron Waters of District 79 said he favors "decriminalization" of marijuana possession laws and removing all penalties for private use by persons 18 and older.

However, he would keep restrictions on sales and on use by minors, he said.

The only strong reservation against lowering first-offense marijuana possession from a felony to a misdemeanor was voiced by Rep.-elect Ray Barnhart of District 100.

Waters, 23, a Democrat, said he plans to represent the youth and that to them Texas' "harsh" marijuana laws are a symbol of hypocrisy.

Scientific studies show that marijuana is not as harmful physically as alcohol and tobacco, he said.

Barnhart, a Republican, said his opinion against lowering the first-offense marijuana possession penalty is not firm, but he believes that young people would interpret any reduction as a sanction of marijuana use.

Marijuana was the liveliest issue at the legislative caucus, televised on the University of Houston's public station Ch. 8.

The meeting was held primarily to acquaint viewers with the delegation and the issues they consider most important before the 63rd Legislature, which convenes Tuesday.

Only five of the county's 24 House members were absent, either being ill or out of town.

During the discussion and the subsequent session on viewers' questions, Waters proved consistently the most liberal of the representatives.

Besides his permissive view toward marijuana use, he said

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he favors removal of legal restrictions on abortions, legalization of pari-mutuel betting and removing all criminal penalties for sexual or other acts by consenting adults in private.

Barnhart proved the most outspoken conservative. Only he stated flatly that he favors retaining the death penalty.

A recent Supreme Court ruling held the present Texas death penalty law unconstitutional.

The Harris County delegation, chaired by Rep. R. C. (Nick) Nichols, Democrat of District 98, expressed an overall strong interest in legislation dealing with government reform, juvenile delinquency and education.

## Juvenile Code

Rep.-elect Craig A. Washington, Democrat of District 86, said he plans to introduce a new state juvenile code that will bring "a hodge-podge, patchwork of laws" dealing with juvenile delinquency together. Washington said the code would provide help, not

just punishment, to troubled youth.

Rep.-elect Senfronia Thompson, District 89 Democrat, said working for a better system to combat juvenile delinquency will be one of her major goals.

Rep.-elect Ed N. Watson, Democrat of District 17, said he will sponsor a group automobile insurance program and will join with Nichols in sponsoring changes in the Workmen's Compensation Act that would allow an employe to select his own doctor.

Rep.-elect Joe Pentony, District 80 Democrat, said he will seek election law changes, including a presidential preference primary election in Texas. He said he will push to limit campaign spending by a candidate to 10 cents per qualified voter within the political boundary in which he seeks office.

## Seeks More Courts

Rep.-elect Woody Denson, Democrat of District 81, listed legislative reform and increasing the number of criminal courts in Harris County among his major goals.

Another strong advocate of reform was Rep.-elect John

Whitmire, District 82 Democrat, who said he will also work for stronger consumer protection laws, including a three-day cancellation right for persons buying from door-to-door salesmen.

Rep.-elect Ben T. Reyes, Democrat of District 87, said he will seek submission to voters of a constitutional amendment granting full adult status to 18-year-olds.

## Other Views

Rep.-elect Mickey Leland, District 88 Democrat, and Rep.-elect Anthony Hall, Democrat of District 85, will push for removing racial inequities and increasing funding for predominantly black educational institutions such as Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern University.

Rep.-elect R. E. (Gene) Green, Democrat of District 95, said he will introduce legislation to assure that all meetings by government bodies, including legislative committees, are open to the public.

"I think it's time state government has nothing to hide," Green said.

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