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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 656

Offered January 20, 1997

Establishing a joint subcommittee to study the economic benefits of, and barriers to, the production of industrial hemp in Virginia.

Patrons—Van Yahres, Clement, Davies, Griffith, Thomas and Wardrup

Referred to Committee on Agriculture

WHEREAS, although industrial hemp is derived from the *Cannabis sativa* plant, it is distinctive from its better known relative, in that it contains less than one percent of the chemical responsible for its psychoactive properties; and

WHEREAS, industrial hemp is very similar to jute and flax; and

WHEREAS, its three principal raw materials—fiber, hurds, and seeds—are used to produce textiles, ropes, cellulose plastics, resin, particle board, paper products, and oil; and

WHEREAS, faltering state agricultural economies have created pressure to investigate alternatives; and

WHEREAS, the 1996 Farm Bill will reduce government subsidies over the next seven years, pushing farmers to examine alternative cash crops; and

WHEREAS, increased foreign competition in established markets, such as tobacco, as well as innovative work with industrial hemp by Canada and the European community, has prompted increased interest; and

WHEREAS, scarce fiber supplies for the textile paper industries have caused rising prices, creating heightened interest in a plentiful domestic source for alternative fibers;

WHEREAS, the histories of the United States and Virginia are replete with examples of the utility of and dependence on industrial hemp; and

WHEREAS, in Colonial Virginia the cultivation of hemp was mandatory; and

WHEREAS, the first drafts of the Declaration of Independence were written on hemp; and

WHEREAS, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson owned hemp plantations and promoted its benefits; and

WHEREAS, many farmers paid their taxes in bails of hemp; and

WHEREAS, during World War II the "Hemp for Victory" program sought to encourage farmers to resume growing the plant for the war effort, which resulted in 36,000 acres being planted in seed hemp in 1942; and

WHEREAS, recently the industry has experienced a revitalization, with worldwide hemp sales of \$5 million in 1993 and increasing to \$75 million in 1995; and

WHEREAS, the growing of industrial hemp in the United States is allowed only by federal permit, and currently three states have permits pending to grow industrial hemp in their states; and

WHEREAS, according to the October 1996 issue of *Governing*, the American Farm Bureau Federation, representing 4.6 million farmers, passed a unanimous resolution urging research into "the viability and economic potential" of hemp; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That a joint subcommittee be established to study the economic benefits of, and barriers to, the production of industrial hemp in Virginia. The joint subcommittee shall be composed of six members, as follows: four members of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House, and two members of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections.

The direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$3,600.

The Division of Legislative Services shall provide staff support for the study. Technical assistance shall be provided by staff of the Agricultural Experiment Stations. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the joint subcommittee, upon request.

The joint subcommittee shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1998 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for the conduct of the study.