Prohibition of chemical weed killers ignored by Senate committee

Baton Rouge, La. (AP) - A Senate committee has decided to take no position on a controversial proposal to prohibit the use of chemical weed killers along state highways, but sent it to the Senate floor anyway.

In a seldom used move, the Senate Natural Resources Committee voted 4-1 Wednesday to report the bill "without action" - neither favorably or unfavorably.

That move followed a 3-3 vote on a motion to give the controversial bill a favorable report. The committee heard the bill at four different meetings.

Now, the full Senate will have to decide whether to debate the measure.

"I think we could spend 85 days and still not be qualified to come up with a solution," Sen. Sammy Nunez of Chalmette commented during the long hearing Wednesday.

The bill Sen. Elwyn Nicholson of Marrero drew the opposition of state agencies, the chemical industry, the Louisiana Farm Bureau and sugar cane farmers.

Environmentalist, a group of Plaquemines Parish citrus growers and a New Orleans doctor pushed for the bill.

The Department of Agriculture worked behind the scenes to try to kill it.

"All I am asking is that we use a little common sense in the use of these chemicals and we start with highways," Nicholson told the committee.

As drafted, the bill would have prevented the use of any defoliant or herbicide on state lands or rights of way. Nicholson amended it to make the ban apply only to roadsides and medians of state highways.

Dr. Stuart I. Phillips of New Orleans said the long-term effects on humans of the chemicals used in two of the weed killers are uncertain. It is impossible to monitor the quality of the chemicals when made in quantity and there are studies showing possible toxic buildup in humans from them, he said.

Phillips said studies from around the world have indicated that two most com-