

## **Editorial: Yes to Medical Marijuana**

April 12, 2007  
The Dispatch

Lawmakers in Springfield are poised to consider a compassionate measure that would protect the rights of Illinoisans who are seriously ill.

We fervently hope they will follow the members of the Illinois Senate Public Health Committee, who last month took into account the suffering of others and sent to the full Senate SB650, which would protect from arrest seriously ill patients who use medical marijuana with a doctor's recommendation.

Panel members did so after hearing and reading stirring testimony from doctors, medical professionals and their suffering patients. Their stories show why more than a dozen medical marijuana bills are pending in legislatures throughout our nation. SB650, sponsored by Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago, drew a number of health care professionals and patients to testify before the Senate panel last month. Those who argue against medical marijuana's value would do well to consider the words of one, a nurse and multiple sclerosis patient, Gretchen Steele of Coulterville. She told senators:

"I can tell you from firsthand experience that marijuana works better to control the spasticity, neuropathic pain, and tremors than do any of the myriad prescription medications that I currently take. The fact that it is perfectly legal for my doctors to prescribe morphine, OxyCodone, diazepam, hydrocodone, and other drugs that are not only highly addictive but have many unpleasant side effects, yet it remains illegal to recommend marijuana, is beyond reasoning."

Indeed it is. Last week, television talk show host Montel Williams, himself a multiple sclerosis sufferer, also weighed in on the misguided logic of banning marijuana while encouraging use of more powerful and addictive drugs.

In a piece published in the St. Louis Post Dispatch April 3, he wrote:

"If you see me on television, I look healthy. What you don't see is the mind-numbing pain searing through my legs like hot poker. My doctors wrote me prescriptions for some of the strongest painkillers available. I took Percocet, Vicodin and Oxycontin on a regular basis, knowingly risking overdose just trying to make the pain bearable. But these powerful, expensive drugs brought me no relief. I couldn't sleep, I was agitated, my legs kicked involuntarily in bed and the pain was so bad I found myself crying in the middle of the night.

"All these heavy-duty narcotics made me nearly incoherent. I couldn't take them when I had to work, because they turned me into a zombie. Worse, these drugs are highly

addictive, and one thing I knew was that I didn't want to become a junkie." Someone suggested he try marijuana. "To my amazement, it worked after the legal drugs had failed," he said. "Three puffs and within minutes the excruciating pain in my legs subsided. I had my first restful sleep in months." And gone was the fear of addiction.

The drug has proven equally effective for those suffering from a huge range of illnesses including cancer, HIV/AIDS, diabetes and glaucoma. Why shouldn't they have access to a drug which can help them when others don't? "Sick people shouldn't be treated as criminals," Mr. Williams writes. No they shouldn't. Lawmakers can do something about it by passing the medical marijuana law without delay.