

James E. Stoll: The time is now to save Wisconsin's hemp industry

Posted on Wednesday, Feb 11, 2026

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

Wisconsin's thriving hemp industry faces an existential threat.

When the President signed the bill to reopen the federal government last November, the federal definition of hemp was rewritten to effectively criminalize almost all of the widely used hemp-derived cannabinoid ("HDC") products upon which Wisconsin consumers rely. That change will take effect in November of this year. When it does, that will be the end of Wisconsin's hemp industry.

Unless the Wisconsin Legislature takes steps to ensure that doesn't happen.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Thanks to the leadership of Senator Patrick Testin (R - Stevens Point) and Representative Tony Kurtz (R - Wonewoc), the Wisconsin Legislature has an opportunity to ensure that Wisconsin's growing hemp industry remains intact and able to keep serving our state's consumers. But they can't do it alone.

And because it's an election year, both the Assembly and the Senate are not expected to be in session beyond March. **The time to act is now.**

Our state Assembly Representatives and Senators - upon whom we rely as advocates for Wisconsin small business and responsible, common sense lawmaking - cannot allow our hemp industry to die **or** to fall into the regulatory structure established decades ago for the alcohol industry (aka the three tier system). Now is **not** the time for party politics or special interests. Hundreds of Wisconsin farmers (470 according to the USDA), manufacturers, and retailers (and their estimated

\$700 million in total production and 3,500 employees) across the state are counting on their legislators – regardless of party affiliation – to do the right thing: **vote for the common sense hemp regulation** in Wisconsin being proposed by Senator Patrick Testin and Representative Tony Kurtz (Senate Bill 682).

As a doctor who has researched and used the hemp plant to help people, it would be a betrayal of Wisconsin's consumers to take the only form of legal cannabis in Wisconsin and allow it to end or hand it over to an industry with no history, understanding, or support of the plant.

Hemp-derived cannabinoid products contain THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) and cannabidiol (CBD). CBD is a medicine produced by hemp, and is used by millions of people to treat symptoms of osteoarthritis and anxiety. Grown regeneratively, harvested properly, and processed responsibly, there are no impurities or contaminants in the product.

The 2018 Farm Bill prohibited THC from representing more than 0.3% of the final product. Wisconsin's hemp industry has seen significant growth based on these limitations and more importantly, on consumer demands for these products.

This medicine works through a strong anti-inflammatory effect without the side effects experienced from over-the-counter medicines like ibuprofen and naproxen. HDCs also balance the internal endocannabinoid system to improve sleep and reduce anxiety. Use over months to years is safe. HDCs are not a gateway drug to addictions.

THC (weed, ganja, etc.) is a mind-altering drug. The addition of this substance to HDC based drinks is gaining popularity in states, including Wisconsin, especially where legal use is permitted. The popularity of this mixture is evidenced by the increasing sales.

Curiously, the term "intoxicating beverages" has been used to describe these mixtures. Unlike alcohol, MINIMAL criminal or violent behavior, vehicular deaths, and gun violence have been reported. No reports of users "munching themselves to death" have been made.

HDC is a medicine. Alcohol is not. Properly grown, manufactured, and dispensed product relieves pain, suffering, and anxiety safely. Its legal growth in Wisconsin since 2018 is the most compelling evidence of this fact.

The distribution of HDC and THC products in Wisconsin is facilitated by knowledgeable parties advising on dosing and use. The producer must have testing standards in place to ensure accurate doses and prevent residual pesticide or extraction chemicals. This cannot be done in the same distribution process as alcohol. My last experience in a liquor store had to tear the clerk away from the football game on TV.

You cannot support legalizing marijuana and oppose Senate Bill 682.

Multiple bills have been presented for consideration in the Wisconsin legislature. Regulation is required. The industry is requesting it. Included in the bills being considered, we see special interests that are primarily monetary, not therapeutic or safety-based. The positive effects of HDC have been exhibited since it became legally available. Maintain this access through legislation focused on purity, production, and safety for desperate patients.

Contact your legislator as soon as possible to deliver this message.

Dr. James E. Stoll is a Milwaukee orthopedic surgeon practicing since 1984. He's worked at the Medical College of Wisconsin, the Large Group Practice at Aurora, and in private practice at Columbia Hospital.