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Letter of the day (July 31): Drugs

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In his July 24 column ("[Drug war is a failure, so let's experiment](#)"), Jason Lewis quotes me as saying that "in the grand scheme, it [the 'war on drugs'] has not been successful."

I have long believed that we cannot simply arrest our way out of our drug problem. The "war on drugs" rhetoric represents an overly simplistic approach to a complex public health and public safety problem.

However, it is just as simplistic -- and just as misguided -- to think that decriminalization is the solution to America's drug problem. Lewis refers to the Global Commission on Drug Policy, an advocacy group that recently called for the decriminalization of all illegal drugs.

While it is tempting to think that decriminalization offers a simple solution, the facts tell us otherwise.

A recent report by the Department of Justice's National Drug Intelligence Center about the economic impact of illicit drug use indicates that the annual cost of illicit drug use on health care and productivity alone amount to more than \$80 billion.

Making illicit drugs legal -- and therefore more accessible -- would not reduce any of these costs to our society. Lewis presents his readers with a false choice: Either accept the old "war on drugs" approach or embrace decriminalization.

The president's national strategy on drugs treats the problem with the seriousness it deserves, addressing a complex issue through a balanced public health and public safety approach.

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<http://www.startribune.com/opinion/letters/126430628.html>

The Ukiah DAILY JOURNAL

Drug war' long past

Ukiah Daily Journal Staff

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To the Editor:

In "Hamburg Criticizes Operation Full Court Press" (August, 2), several local officials state that the "war on drugs has failed" and that (drug) "legalization is the only answer."

The "war on drugs" metaphor is a leftover relic from the 1970s that fails to accurately describe the complexity of our nation's drug problem and our nation's current approach to drug control. It naively implies that there will be a day when drugs will be eliminated through the exclusive use of law enforcement resources and one day "victory" will be declared. Our approach to the nation's drug problem is focused on protecting public health as well as public safety. As part of this effort, all of us have a responsibility to continue to educate every new generation of young people that drug use is not part of a healthy lifestyle.

I am a former police officer and I join my law enforcement colleagues in saying that we will never arrest our way out of the drug problem. That is why today, the federal government spends more on drug education and treatment (\$10.4 billion) than on law enforcement in the U.S. (\$9.2 billion). The facts show we've made tremendous progress. Since 1979, the number of Americans using drugs has plummeted by roughly 50 percent, and since 1989, we've diverted about 1.5 million non-violent drug offenders into drug treatment instead of prison.

Efforts to disrupt the illegal marijuana market are not born out of any culture-war or drug-war mentality, but out of what the science tells us about the drug's effects. Scientific studies show marijuana potency has tripled in the past 20 years and teens are using the drug at earlier ages. Research also shows that the earlier a person begins to use drugs, the more likely they are to develop a more serious abuse and addiction problem later in life. This fact reflects the harmful, long-lasting effects drugs can have on the developing brain. Drug legalization would be disastrous public health policy because it would increase availability and increase the use of a substance that we know to be harmful.

Operations like Full Court Press are just one important part of reducing drug use and its consequences in America. I commend all the agencies involved in working to reduce marijuana cultivation on public lands. Their work along with the work of drug education and treatment providers in Northern California and across the nation - are essential to dismantling criminal organizations, protecting public lands, and making our communities healthier.

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