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Nolan Finley

Wave white flag in the drug war



The shocking spectacle of a respected Wayne County judge, a crackerjack prosecutor and two veteran cops standing as defendants in a courtroom confirms the war on drugs is lost.

Former Assistant Prosecutor Karen Plants is accused of wanting a conviction so badly in a narcotics case that she corrupted two Inkster officers and compromised retired Judge Mary Waterstone. All were career warriors in a hopeless conflict.

The possible slide of good guys to the wrong side of the law epitomizes the drug war's failure.

We've been fighting drugs for 35 years, and yet we haven't gained an inch of ground.

Mexico's drug-fueled lawlessness is surging over our border. More than half our prison inmates are in for drug crimes, contributing to the shameful fact that Michigan spends more on Corrections than we do on colleges.

Detroit and other big cities have been dismantled by the drug gangs.

And the number of addicts remains constant.

This is a classic military quagmire. We respond to losing by deploying more troops instead of questioning the mission's viability. In 1986, Congress escalated spending, with the goal of ending the narcotics trade in 10 years.

And now we're about to undergo another major escalation to keep the anarchy in Mexico from destabilizing parts of our country.

Why not try something new? Take away the crime, and get rid of the criminals.

The drug cartels wouldn't have a market for their contraband if we legalized drugs. They'd be

as obsolete as the Purple Gang.

Replacing illegal producers with licensed, legal distributors doesn't stop the use of drugs, but it would bring them under tighter control.

With the market in the hands of criminals, there's no way to regulate the potency of narcotics or keep them out of the hands of minors.

Teens can buy marijuana easier than they can buy beer because beer stores face stiff penalties for selling to minors. Pushers don't check IDs.

Tax dollars reaped from drug sales could be invested in treating true addicts.

It chafes our instincts to think of marijuana, cocaine and heroin stocked in bright packages on store shelves.

But we've lost the war. Fighting harder and longer won't bring victory. Even when we fight dirty we can't win -- as evidenced by the Wayne County charges.

Better to bring drugs up from the underground, control their distribution with regulation and attack demand with taxation and education -- just like we do tobacco.

If organized criminal outfits are going to run the drug trade, I'd rather they be Congress and Corporate America than an army of Mexican hoodlums.

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