

New York Daily News - <http://www.nydailynews.com>**Break addiction to senseless war on drugs**

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In the ongoing battle over the legalization of marijuana for medicinal purposes, the Food and Drug Administration has now shown that ideology can bend almost anything to its will. Last week, the FDA claimed that "no sound scientific studies" supported the medical use of the drug - flatly contradicting a 1999 review by the Institute of Medicine. That seems strange, given that the Institute is part of the National Academy of Sciences, the nation's most prestigious scientific advisory agency.

Could one group of scientists be so far off as to come up with a completely incorrect reading of the medicinal value of the drug? I doubt it - and so do many others who feel that right-wing politics have trumped science yet again.

But that, it seems to me, is the least important issue connected to the legalization of drugs. The three most important reasons to call a ceasefire in the insane "war" we've been fighting for decades are the reduction of crime, the expansion of the tax base and the contribution to the economy.

Whether or not anyone likes it, recreational drug use has become part of American social life - and it is that use, not addiction, that fuels the trade. If addicts alone were spending money on drugs, the problem could have been licked or dramatically reduced long ago.

As for the reduction of crime, we are constantly getting benumbing reports that tell us how many inner city young men drop out of school to sell drugs, naively looking for a fast way to make big money. Such young men are the drones of the business. If we ended the illicit nature of the trade, the drones would either stay in school or surprise us and find a legal line of work.

The real economic winners in the drug business these days are the high-level dealers and traders. When it comes to them, America is being played for a chump in exactly the way we were during Prohibition. That's when the Mafia gathered all the capital it needed to become a formidable national criminal organization because public demand for drinking was greater than fear of the consequences of drinking.

If we ended today's version of Prohibition and legalized drugs, we could stop the murderous drug wars and pull billions of dollars out of the shadow world. Taxes could be levied and public rehabilitation centers supported.

In that way, victory could be pulled from the jaws of a very obvious defeat. Some call this position defeatist - but it's far more realistic than craven. It's simply a matter of facing the facts of our time rather than pushing our heads under the sand - no matter how many young men are in our penal system for either the sale or the possession of drugs, no matter how many are killed in drug wars and no matter how obvious it has become that recreational drug use is here to stay.

We are still a long way from waking up to these facts. But we can wake up, and we will. After all, once upon a time, many thought slavery would go on forever and women would never get the vote.