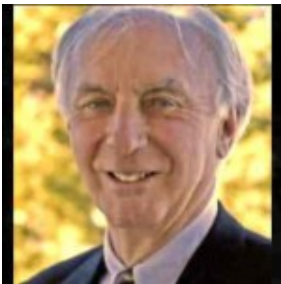


Questioning law enforcement's war on drugs

By Ted Long

This week's meeting of the Sheriff's Citizen Academy was with the drug enforcement unit of the sheriff's office. Led by two young, undercover drug officers, it was the hottest so far.

The leaders were, like all those before, very likable and willing to answer questions. While I cannot say they admitted that the war on drugs was not working, they sure seem to wonder in the way they answered that question. The problem is the policy is not their job. They are paid to follow orders and enforce the law as it exists.



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The bulk of the evening was spent sharing stories with great detail on the growing of marijuana on the hillsides of El Dorado County. We saw photos of the helicopter drops and the removal of tons of plants ripped from the landscape. We heard how the growers called "Mexican grows" lived and attempted to harvest their crop for payment of \$5,000 for the year. That they were threatened with death of their families in Mexico if they talked and how the process goes on over and over again each year.

The most difficult part for me was understanding how they could not see that it is not only not working, but the

continued enforcement is only making it worse. For example, they explained how marijuana in New York is worth about \$5,500 a pound because it is a felony there and only \$2,500 here because of the lesser penalties. Therefore shipping to the East Coast has grown greatly in the past few years.

It seemed hard to get the point across that the issue is not the danger of using drugs and that we need to stop it, or at least slow it down. We all agree it's a bad thing. The issue is what we are doing to make any difference? As I listened to many of my fellow participants I could not help but think of the prohibition discussions of the '20s. No one seems to understand that the repeal of prohibition did not end alcohol consumption; it only ended the crime associated with it. The same is true of drugs. We have created major criminal cartels by making it so profitable to grow and distribute. It is the profit that buys the guns and provides the incentives. Like any business without profit it dies.

If it were legal and therefore regulated like alcohol, the emphasis would be on the regulation, and education, issues like the obvious abuse of medical use cards could be stopped, doctors should be held responsible for issuing them to unqualified users. Dispensaries today remind me of the speakeasies of the '20s. Take the profit out, add reasonable regulation, education and tax the sales to pay for it and we may make some progress. And by the way, our jails are filled with mostly drugs users at incredible cost to taxpayers.

More people are killed and families ruined over the use of guns than drugs, yet we do little or nothing. Last week, on the same day, when the terrible bombing took place in Boston and the 8-year-old was killed, a dozen kids were killed in ghettos in New York and Los Angeles by guns. Boston in headlines; their deaths, no one noticed on page 23 of the San Francisco papers.

I say we need a better discussion of what works and what only

feeds the problem. After hearing from the experts, my view is that drug wars are going the same way as the alcohol wars and the one war that we actually are winning goes unnoticed, cigarette smoking, seems to be going well, and no one is in jail over it.

Ted Long is a South Lake Tahoe resident participating in the El Dorado County Sheriff's Citizens Academy.