

It's time for new solutions to drug use

April 1, 2013

It's no secret that when it comes to the "war on drugs" first declared by Richard Nixon 42 years ago, the good guys are losing.

It's no secret nationwide, and it's no secret here.

"The proliferation of illegal drugs upstate is "truly deplorable," Delaware County Sheriff Thomas E. Mills said in a media statement a couple of weeks ago.

"Unfortunately, our rural communities have been exploited by dealers from urban areas looking for a place to carry out their business," Mills wrote. "These individuals have taken advantage of our limited law enforcement resources and set up shop, not just here, but everywhere in the upstate region."

True, as far as it goes. There's no question that drug dealers from New York City, Long Island and elsewhere infest our area with their poison. We'd dearly love to blame our local drug problem on these evil people, to find fault with anyone but ourselves.

"Men at some time are masters of their fates:

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,

But in ourselves."

With apologies to Shakespeare, the fault for our drug situation is indeed in ourselves. If there were not a ready market here for their vile wares, the dealers wouldn't be making the three- or four-hour trips to peddle their cocaine and heroin.

Law enforcement is working hard, but there's only so much the cops can do. Arresting dealers is like the carnival game Whac-A-Mole. Smack one down, and another pops up.

"... I guarantee you that the demand is still there, and where there's demand, somebody is going to take that person's place," Otsego County Sheriff Richard Devlin Jr. said.

"We do our part and combat (drugs) and make arrests and put it through the court system, and inevitably, someone picks up where the last one left off," Oneonta Police Chief Dennis Naylor said.

With limited resources and no indication that the illegal drug-using population is going to decrease demand any time soon, it's time to question why we arrest people for buying marijuana.

“I personally don’t believe in (legalizing marijuana), but everything has to be looked at,” Devlin said. “Marijuana is not really the big issue. It’s the harder drugs.”

Harvard economics professor Jeffrey Miron, a pro-legalization scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute, was quoted in Politico about possible tax revenues available from legal marijuana sales.

He estimated that nationwide, it would garner \$6.4 billion in new tax revenue — \$4.3 billion for the federal government, and \$2.1 billion for the states.

We must certainly do a better job of educating our citizens, particularly the young, about the dangers of drugs, but legalization should be on the table, too.