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Speaker to make case against war on drugs

BY SHERI McWHIRTER
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TRaverse CITY -- It's time to surrender in the war on drugs.

At least, that's the argument made by the next speaker at Northwestern Michigan College's International Affairs Forum series. Juan Carlos Hidalgo will critically review anti-narcotic efforts during the last four decades and make the case for ending the war on drugs and legalizing all narcotics when he speaks this week on campus.

"When people say legalization, they think drugs will be everywhere, available in vending machines at high schools. That's not the case," Hidalgo said.

He argues for a system that regulates and taxes drug sales, and in some cases may require a prescription from a doctor for certain types of narcotics.

Hidalgo is a project coordinator for Latin America at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity in Washington, D.C.

U.S. anti-drug efforts cost taxpayers between \$30 and \$50 billion a year, send hundreds of thousands to prison for relatively minor offenses and support a black market system that feeds violence and addiction, Hidalgo said.

"It's economics. When you ban something, make it illegal, it drives the price up and makes the commodity more expensive. Then you drive criminal actors into that business," he said. "Once you make it legal, you get rid of the black market."

Narcotics legalization "isn't a silver bullet," Hidalgo said. There will still be addiction problems to deal with, just as when alcohol prohibition ended, he said.

"People are more likely to seek help for addiction if they are not considered criminals," Hidalgo said.

Hidalgo will speak about what he describes as failed U.S. efforts to fight the war on drugs, as well as failed efforts throughout Latin America, particularly in Mexico.

Mexican drug violence now spills over the borders into the United States. Phoenix has become the nation's kidnapping capital and that's mostly related to drugs, Hidalgo said.

Hidalgo studied international relations at the Universidad Nacional in Costa Rica and earned a master's degree in international commerce and policy from George Mason University in Virginia.

Hidalgo will speak Thursday at 6 p.m. in the Milliken Auditorium on NMC's main campus in Traverse City. His is the second in an eight-part series of lectures sponsored by the International Affairs Forum.

Tickets cost \$10 and are available in advance or at the door. Call 995-1700 for more information or for tickets.



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Hidalgo **None/** (Click for larger image)

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