Whatever Happened to the War on Drugs?

EDWARDSVILLE, IL, March 28, 2014 – Federation of American Consumers and Travelers (FACT) director Vicki Rolens noticed that The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy posted facts about opioid overdoses in February, and that U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder declared an urgent public health crisis involving heroine overdoses in March. She also noticed that the states of Washington and Colorado have legalized marijuana for recreational use and other states are considering similar legislation, while Federal laws still prohibit it. Ms. Rolens says, “It’s a good time for consumers to consider what is happening with drug abuse and to the federal government’s War on Drugs."

The War on Drugs

In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared drugs, “public enemy number one.” In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, and in 1989 President George H. W. Bush declared a “new War on Drugs.” For an account of the history, you can look at this link to the Drug Policy Alliance website: A Brief History of the Drug War | Drug Policy Alliance.

What happened? It seems that the war on drugs, begun 40 years ago, has failed to stem the tide of drug availability and abuse. The New York Times currently posts opinions as part of its “Room for Debate” forum under the headline, “Lowering the Deadly Cost of Drug Abuse.” The newspaper poses the question, “With more people seeing law enforcement's war on drugs as a failure, what are the best, or boldest, ways to deal with the problem?”

Seven knowledgeable debaters take on the topic and air opinions including:

- The war on drugs has become more futile
- Drug treatment has brought innovation and more coverage
- Dealing with people’s pain can remove incentives to drug use
- Making naloxone more available to treat opioid overdoses and fatalities
- Using legal sanctions to help get users off drugs
• In Portugal, when use of all illicit drugs were decriminalized, drug use did not rise and requests for treatment have risen
• A radical plan in Canada of supervised injection facilities has resulted in various benefits
See the links to these opinions below.

A study released on March 26, 2014, conducted by the respected science Journal *PLOS One*, looked at data from 1990 to 2006 in states that have legalized medical marijuana. The study appears to put to rest concerns that medical marijuana legalization (MML) leads to more crime. “These findings run counter to arguments suggesting the legalization of marijuana for medical purposes poses a danger to public health in terms of exposure to violent crime and property crimes,” says the report. “The central finding gleaned from the present study was that MML is not predictive of higher crime rates and may be related to reductions in rates of homicide and assault…In sum, these findings run counter to arguments suggesting the legalization of marijuana for medical purposes poses a danger to public health in terms of exposure to violent crime and property crimes.” *PLOS ONE: The Effect of Medical Marijuana Laws on Crime: Evidence from State Panel Data, 1990-2006*

**A Prominent Death from Overdose**
In February, following the death of highly acclaimed actor Philip Seymour Hoffman by heroin overdose (in combination with other drugs), The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy posted information about opioid overdoses. *5 Things to Know about Opioid Overdoses | The White House*

The five things to know are:
• More Americans are succumbing to death from prescription pain killers than from overdoses of heroin. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports an increase of roughly 20 percent in drug overdose deaths due to prescription painkillers since 2006. Such opioid painkillers include oxycodone.
• Any batch of heroin can lead to death from overdose.
• Use of heroin is not limited to any particular demographic of the population or to any geographic area. People of all ages and in all locations from rural to urban to suburban use opioids. Young adults are using more heroin.
• Most of the heroin in the U.S. comes from Colombia and Mexico.
• Every opioid overdose is reversible using a prescription drug called naloxone. The Obama Administration advocates the use of naloxone by first responders because time is of the essence in administering it effectively. Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have changed laws to increase the access to naloxone; and as a result over 10,000 overdoses have been reversed since 2001.

In March, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder called heroin overdoses, “An urgent public health crisis,” announced new efforts to reduce increases in deadly heroin overdoses,
trafficking in the drug and abuse of prescription narcotics. He also called for more law enforcement agencies to equip and train their personnel in using naloxone. Heroin overdoses pose 'urgent public health crisis': U.S. attorney general | Reuters

For more information, go to these links:
A Drug That Should Be Easier to Get - NYTimes.com
Growth in Drug Treatment Has Led to More Innovation - NYTimes.com
Deal With the Pain That Leads to the Drug Problem - NYTimes.com
Clear Legal Sanctions Can Get Users Off Drugs - NYTimes.com
The Drug War Has Only Grown More Futile - NYTimes.com
Saving Drug Abusers Lives With a Radical Plan - NYTimes.com
Decriminalizing Possession of All Illicit Drugs - NYTimes.com
Rules to Require Equal Coverage for Mental Ills - NYTimes.com
A Brief History of the Drug War | Drug Policy Alliance
Reforming Drug Policy | Drug Policy Alliance
CDC - Prescription Painkiller Overdoses Policy Impact Brief - Home and Recreational Safety - Injury Center
Heroin overdoses pose 'urgent public health crisis': U.S. attorney general | Reuters
Community-Based Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs Providing Naloxone — United States, 2010
5 Things to Know about Opioid Overdoses | The White House
Legalizing Medical Marijuana May Actually Reduce Crime, Study Says

This news release has been issued by the Federation of American Consumers and Travelers (FACT), a consumer organization formed under the not-for-profit corporation laws of the District of Columbia in 1984. FACT serves more than 1 million consumers nationwide. Additional information on FACT may be found in the Encyclopedia of Associations, and by visiting the association's Web site (www.usafact.org). Informative, unbiased news bulletins are regularly disseminated by FACT to help its members remain current on matters which might seriously impact their lives. The association does not offer support to -- and does not receive support from -- any political party or movement. In addition to publishing consumer-related reports, the association provides more than 30 benefits for its members, ranging from medical insurance and dental discounts to prescription drug savings and scholarships. FACT’s administrative office is located at 318 Hillsboro Avenue, Edwardsville, IL 62025.