

OPINION

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COLUMN | ROBERT BLANCATO

Plan to import cheap drugs risky

Presidential front-runner Donald Trump recently unveiled a proposal that would authorize Americans to buy prescription drugs imported from countries like Canada. The measure sounds appealing - who wouldn't want cheaper medicines from our neighbor's safe pharmacies?

Unfortunately, there's a reason this proposal sounds too good to be true: it is.

While seemingly sensible, drug importation is a terrible idea that will put Americans at risk of harm from impure, unsafe, and counterfeit copies of prescription drugs. If he actually follows through on the proposal, Trump will be showcasing the art of the bad deal ... for American patients.

He talks about how he wants to "remove barriers to entry into free markets," including "allowing consumers access to imported, safe and dependable drugs from overseas."

What he doesn't say is that the United States has a safety regimen that is second to none and that depends on its being essentially a closed system. The FDA goes to tremendous lengths to ensure the safety and effectiveness of drugs sold here, including a requirement that they be manufactured only at plants that register with the agency, maintain strict manufacturing safeguards, and undergo regular inspections.

Breaking open this closed system invites abuse and increases risks because there would be no good way for consumers "to know whether drugs sold outside the U.S. meet FDA standards," according to one agency document.

Backers of allowing drug imports say that those sold in Canada and other industrial countries are often the same product, but because of price controls imposed in those countries, they can be bought for far less than in the United States.

But as the FDA put it, supposedly 'Canadian' drugs "may be coming from some

other country and simply passing through Canada." In fact, one FDA operation found that 87 percent of drugs promoted as being of Canadian origin actually came from 27 different countries around the world. Many of those countries have abysmal quality controls. And Canadian officials don't inspect drugs that are shipped into Canada and then sold internationally.

Even with all the current restrictions on drug imports, the FDA already faces a serious problem with counterfeiters and scam artists who sell drugs online. Policing such sales would become exponentially more difficult if the government starts telling consumers that it's okay to buy drugs from abroad.

Those who support drug importation no doubt sincerely want to help patients. How will they feel when patients with treatable cancers start dying because they received counterfeit chemotherapy drugs? Or when patients have severe, even deadly, reactions from shoddily manufactured or improperly labeled treatments?

Drug importation will particularly harm poor seniors - precisely because their tight, fixed-income budgets will pressure them to turn to cheaper but potentially dangerous foreign imports.

Blocking drugs imported from other countries isn't about free markets or competition. Most drugs sold in the U.S. already compete against generic versions, or other drugs designed to treat the same illness. And for all the hoopla about a few high-priced breakthrough drugs, pharmaceuticals account for less than 10 percent of national health spending.

Whatever limited, short-term savings might be gained from importing cheaper drugs would be vastly outweighed by the harm from breaking down the world's best system for ensuring the safety and effectiveness of prescription drugs sold in America.

COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Spreading the word about Lyme disease

May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month because, according to the Lyme Disease Research Foundation, Lyme "is the most commonly reported tick-borne infection in the United States."

One local headline recently stated the warning plainly and simply: "WATCHOUT: Ticks, other bugs will be plentiful in 2016." Southern Tier and Finger Lakes health professionals, pointing to the unusually mild winter we've just experienced, are issuing urgent warnings about tick-borne diseases, particularly Lyme disease. According to Yates County Public Health, "The incidence of Lyme disease in Western New York is on the rise. In 2015, Yates County had 24 cases."

Early last year, in an interview with the *The Leader*, Chemung County Environmental Health Services Director Tom Kump warned about the prevalence of ticks, "It's not just a problem if you're hiking in the wilderness.

Ticks can just as easily be found in your own backyard. Any time you're going to be in direct contact with vegetation, it's a concern. And even if you're not going to be in contact, if you have pets that are outside, they can pick them up and bring them into the home."

Lyme is a debilitating disease that needs to be taken seriously by everyone who enjoys the outdoors, even if that means doing yard work or gardening.

Those afflicted by Lyme disease can endure years of



SEN. TOM O'MARA

frustration, to say the least, seeking effective diagnosis and treatment. Approximately 300,000 Americans are diagnosed with Lyme disease annually, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/index.html>). CDC statistics show that there were more than 3,700 confirmed or probable cases of Lyme disease reported in New York state alone in 2014 - a number that's expected to keep rising each year as disease-laden ticks spread to more and more communities.

There was a time when Lyme disease was considered mostly a "downstate" concern. No longer. Over the past several years it's been a rapidly growing public health challenge throughout upstate New York and has drawn heightened warnings from public health officials.

In response, the Senate in 2013 established a Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases, on which I serve as a member. The task force continually reviews research, consults with experts, conducts public hearings and works to develop legislation and other recommendations which we hope can ultimately be incorporated into a New York State Action

Plan on Lyme and Tick-borne Diseases (TBDs). That's our overriding goal: to put in place a statewide plan that will serve as a comprehensive roadmap for improving research, education, diagnosis and treatment.

The initial report from the Senate task force, based upon statistics from the state Department of Health (DOH), identified Chemung, Schuyler and other regional counties as having experienced dramatic increases in cases of Lyme disease.

So while it often doesn't receive the attention it warrants, legislation and other initiatives developed by the Lyme Disease Task Force remain part of an ongoing legislative effort that we hope will continue to encourage and guide the development of state-level strategies to address the rising concern. The new state budget, for example, includes \$600,000 to strengthen

New York's education, prevention and research efforts. I'm also currently co-sponsoring legislation in the Senate to:

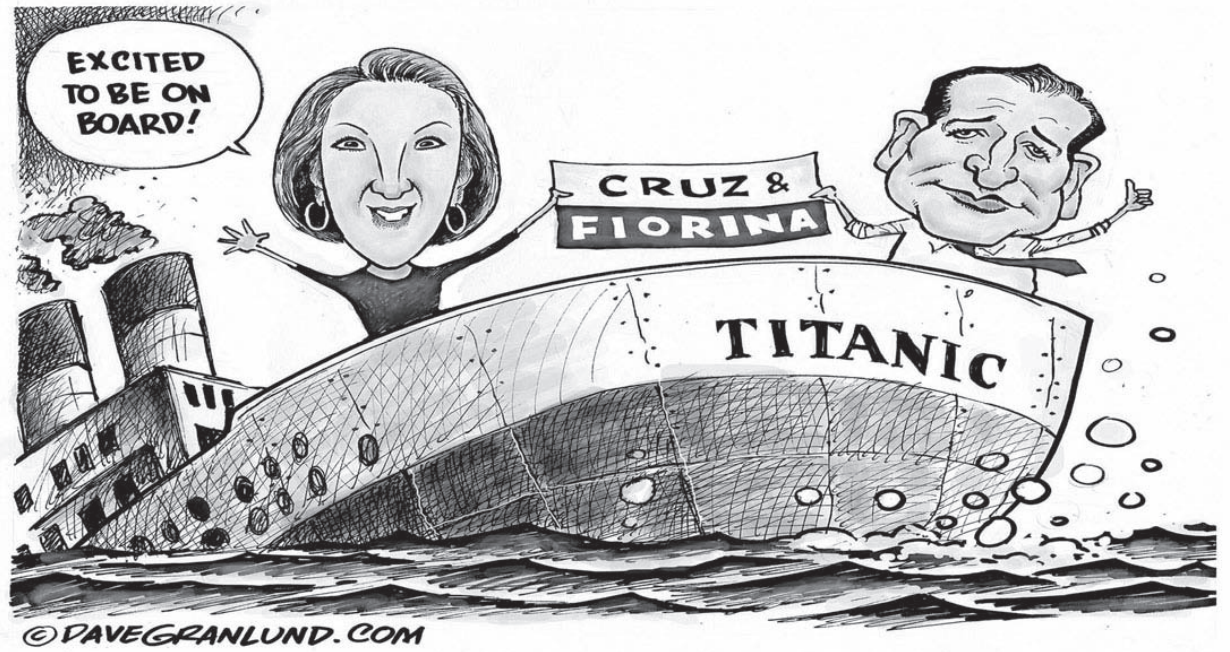
- * require the state Department of Health to design, develop and disseminate an aggressive, comprehensive and statewide public awareness, education and prevention campaign to reduce the public's exposure to Lyme and other tick-borne infectious diseases - recognizing the effectiveness and importance of early education and prevention in preventing the spread of these diseases (\$5803);

and * complement the statewide DOH awareness campaign by requiring the development of age-appropriate instructional materials and tools that will be made available to schools and libraries to help reach school-age children with the awareness and prevention message. Supporters of the legislation (\$5804) cite an increasing demand from school and libraries for instructional materials geared toward children.

Toward this end, the task force has recently developed a new pamphlet, "Know the Facts About Lyme Disease and other Tick-Borne Illnesses," which helps complement every other effort to combat the spread of Lyme disease by spreading information about past, current and future disease trends; safety and prevention recommendations; and diagnosis and treatment strategies. To request a copy, email omara@nysenate.gov.

As stated in the executive summary of the task force's report, "The geographic spread of Lyme and Tick-Borne diseases demand a comprehensive response by the State to encourage detection and prevention initiatives, and facilitate diagnostic and treatment advancements. While the impact of Lyme disease is widespread, a large number of the cases remain unreported. This lack of reporting is a cause of concern given that Lyme disease remains the most prevalent Tick-Borne disease in New York State."

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MTA funding brings jobs to S. Tier

TO THE EDITOR | We want to thank our Southern Tier state legislators who supported the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) capital improvement funding included in the final state budget, including our local Senator Tom O'Mara. As direct stakeholders in lifting our region's economy, we applaud the bipartisan support for MTA funding.

The modernization and maintenance of New York's mass transit system can generate critical manufacturing contracts for Alstom, which in turn helps preserve and create good local jobs for a high-quality, high-skilled local work force at Alstom's Hornell factory, as well as hundreds of New York state small businesses and minority and women business enterprises that supply these larger manufacturers.

Southern Tier legislators who support the MTA capital program understand the contributions and importance of rail manufacturing to our regional economy: hundreds of good-paying skilled manufacturing jobs for local workers that support local families, local communities and local economies.

We are pleased to say our local legislators who supported the MTA capital program: Great job on behalf of your local communities, local workers and local economies. Keep it up!
John Rees
 Director of Human Resources, Alstom Transportation Inc., and Dean Smith, president, IAMAW Local Lodge 2741

Immanence, democracy and the commons

TO THE EDITOR | Democracy and the commons have many positive

benefits, but they also have a strong theoretical foundation. Democracy and the commons are immanent structures. Immanence is defined as a bottom-up organization with internal rules of operation. In contrast, transcendence is defined as a top down organization with rules imposed from an external source. Immanent structures allow an equality of power that fosters self-determination, while transcendent structures allow an inequality of power that fosters hierarchy.

When democracy and the commons are put into practice as cooperatives and participatory budgeting, individuals are able to control the structure they are in rather than the structure controlling them. They are able to prevent appropriation and alienation. Immanence is the founding principle of democracy and the commons, and is the primary reason why it

works and why it can be a positive tool for humanity. The practical expression of cooperatives and participatory budgeting proposes a plan of action, but the theoretical background of democracy and the commons gives it a complete and positive explanation.

Theory and practice need each other as we can see with the importance of immanence in democracy and the commons. We need a discussion about immanence in order to show the importance of cooperatives and participatory budgeting for our community. Please take a look at two drafts for proposals for startup loans for cooperatives and a participatory budgeting process at www.corning-commonwealth.wikidot.com and let the Corning City Council know you support these immanent structures.

Darin Robbins
 Corning

EDITOR'S NOTE

Ed. note | Last Sunday's guest column - 'Still Traveling' - was written by Mike Morrongiello, a member of the Town of Corning Republican Committee. His tagline was omitted from the column.

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