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DISEASES ON THE RISE BUT IMMIGRANTS AREN'T TO BLAME

Gov. Paul LePage again has blamed a rise in several infectious diseases on immigrants to Maine, especially those seeking asylum. There is no evidence to back up this claim, just as there wasn't when he said the same thing last year.

At one of his town hall meetings in Augusta last week, the governor said immigrants were to blame for an increase in tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis in part of Maine. He made the same baseless point during his State of the State speech in 2015 and in the run-up to his re-election in 2014, when he blamed "illegals."

Here's what we do know: Cases of HIV and hepatitis are on the rise in Maine, and new cases of tuberculosis range between nine and 19 per year over the last decade but have dropped for the last three years.

According to the most recent detailed data from the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, there were 58 new cases of HIV in Maine in 2014. That is the highest number of new cases of the disease since 2010. These data, along with the data on the CDC website about other infectious diseases, are not broken down by where the infected people were born.

New cases of hepatitis C, both acute and chronic, have increased substantially. In 2014, there were 1,425 new cases of chronic hepatitis C in Maine, up from 1,142 in 2010. There were 31 new cases of acute hepatitis in 2014 compared with none in 2005. Data for the first four months of 2016 show the upward trend continuing.

Injecting illicit drugs is a major risk factor for hepatitis C infections. Maine, of course, is in the midst of a devastating heroin epidemic. According to a Dartmouth Medical School paper, "within only six months to a year after beginning intravenous drug use, 50 to 80 percent of drug users test positive for the hepatitis C antibody."

Indeed, intravenous drug users account for 50 percent of all new cases of the disease, the paper said.

One way to reduce hepatitis infections among drug users is to support needle-exchange programs to ensure they have access to clean needles. This should be coupled with treatment — medication-assisted treatment is the most effective — to work to end the user's drug abuse.

LePage, however, vetoed a bill that directed the CDC to fund needle-exchange programs because the \$75,000 in funding was removed from the legislation. Lawmakers overrode the veto, but they haven't restored the funding.

The truly alarming increase is in pertussis, also known as whooping cough, which can be life-threatening to infants. Cases of pertussis have increased five-fold in the last decade. There is a vaccine available for this disease, but too few parents get their children immunized.

After ranking fourth in the country for the percentage of vaccine opt-outs in the country, Maine reversed the trend during the 2014-2015 school year. The percentage of kindergarten-age children in Maine who did not receive all the required vaccinations because their parents objected dropped from 5.5 percent in 2013-2014 to 4.4 percent in 2014-2015. That rate, however, is still among the highest in the country and well above the national average of 1.7 percent.

Tick-borne illnesses, including Lyme disease, also are increasing rapidly. Cases of anaplasmosis have increased nearly 40-fold since 2005.

There is a lot to be alarmed about in the CDC infectious disease reports, and the governor is right to be concerned about rising infection rates. But falsely placing the blame on those seeking asylum in the U.S. won't solve the problem. It serves only to alienate those whom Maine should instead be welcoming.

OTHER VOICES

NET NEUTRALITY WIN FOR CONSUMERS

A federal appeals court struck a crucial blow for the freedom of the internet Tuesday with its 2-1 ruling in support of net neutrality, guaranteeing unfettered access to the web.

What a relief, not only for consumers but also for the future of Silicon Valley.

Massive broadband providers such as Verizon and AT&T hoped to be able to maximize their profits by charging content providers for faster internet speeds and greater reliability, costs that would inevitably get passed along to consumers. But the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit recognized the unacceptable consequences:

As President Barack Obama eloquently put it last November, the open internet "has been one of the most significant democratizing influences the world has ever known. We must not allow internet service providers to restrict the best access or to pick winners and losers in the online marketplace for services and ideas."

The tech community must never lose sight of the fact that while companies such as Google and Apple are the envy of the world, it is the hundreds of entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses that are essential for the next wave of innovation.

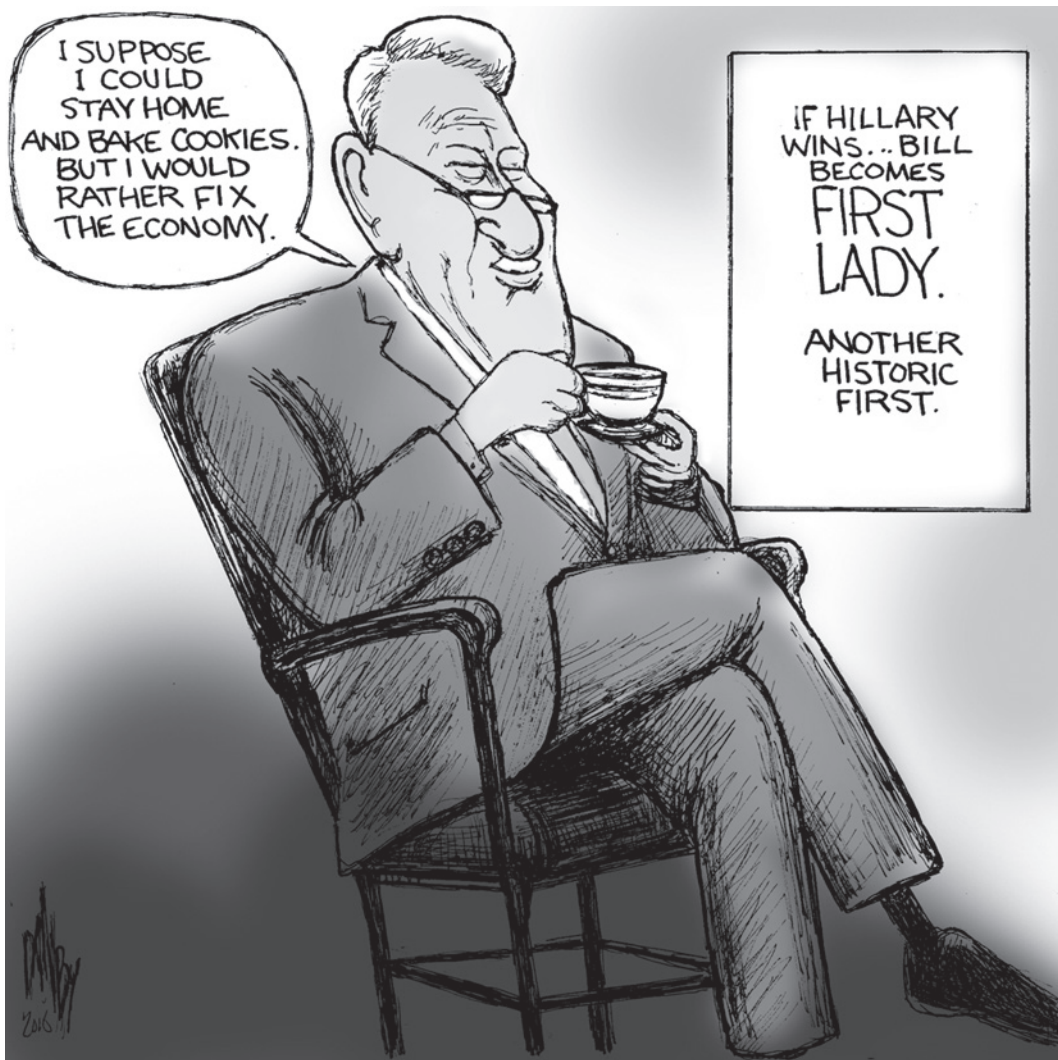
The appeals court ruling stems from the Federal Communications Commission's 2015 decision

that broadband access should be treated as a utility, such as telephone service, meaning it should be equally accessible by all. Broadband providers had hoped to create an industry with little or no government regulation and few protections for consumers. If Netflix and its customers want access to the fastest, highest quality pipeline available, they argue, go for it, but be prepared to pay a big premium. That may be fine for an established company such as Netflix, but it isn't for the hundreds of companies with quality new products trying to get their products before consumers.

The appeals court ruling also upholds a more obscure, but vital aspect of the FCC regulations. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler inserted a regulation ensuring that the privacy of consumer data gathered by broadband companies would be honored. The FCC has yet to announce how that rule will be implemented. Consumers should keep a close watch on that process.

Expect broadband providers to challenge those rules and appeal Tuesday's ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court for a final verdict, which likely won't be heard until after November's election. It's just one more reason for voters to pay close attention to the candidates' position on tech issues and how they would go about picking future Supreme Court justices.

San Jose Mercury News (June 14)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump legitimizes hate

The tragedy in Orlando, Florida, reminds us there is much hatred and many haters in the United States. Sadly, presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump has given legitimacy to this hatred and these haters.

His racist statements about Mexicans, his plan to bar Muslims from entering the country and his offers to pay the legal bills of those who attack his hecklers gives people permission to proclaim evil sentiments and to act on those sentiments, such as the man who punched a protester who was being escorted out of a rally.

A Trump presidency would threaten our nation as we know it.
Alan Ginsberg
Corea

Monument, please

I attended the congressional field hearing on June 1 to speak in favor of the national monument proposal because I did not want the agenda of a few congressmen and our governor to overshadow the needs and dreams of a region I call home. I asked Rep. Bruce Poliquin if he had ever been offered a gift so unbelievable, so unexpected, so undeserved that it blew his mind. I have only received a gift like this twice, with the birth of my children and grandchildren. This national monument rises to that level, except it's a gift to the entire Katahdin region, Maine and the nation.

Forty-eight people spoke in favor of the monument, only 12 against. Hopefully, Poliquin was keeping track. At one point, the chairman of the Pattern selectmen, a fellow supporter, asked us to stand so the congressman could see how many in the room want him to be on the right side of history. To his credit, Poliquin did turn in his seat and took a long, hard look at the overwhelming majority who stood, cheered and want his help to accept the gift he has been working to prevent us from receiving.

Now that he has seen our local voices elevated in unison, he and Sen. Angus King need to ask our president to designate the monument today.

Alice Morgan
Millinocket

Presidential primary

A national presidential primary is needed. How can this be accomplished?

Those who wish to run for our office would not be permitted to declare their intentions until April 1 during an election year. The national primary election would take place the first Tuesday in August.

The ballot would have the candidates listed by party. Early voting would be an option. All citizens of voting age would be eligible to vote in the primary.

The political parties would hold their conventions to confirm the candidate and develop their platform for the upcoming election season. The presidential campaign would run from Labor Day weekend to the second Tuesday in November.

Americans are perfectly capable of deciding their choice for president without enduring two years of campaigning. Under the new system, we could limit the big-money influence of the super PACs in the election outcome. Streamlining the primary process through the elimination of individual state primaries and caucuses would certainly help clear up the rules and confusion about the process.

Finally, every voter counts. The needed change in the selection of presidential candidates would give the voters an opportunity to help preserve and strengthen the democratic voting elements of our precious democracy.

Robert Chaplin
Bar Harbor

WRITE TO US

Letters must be 250 words or fewer and include a full name, town of residence and daytime phone number. OpEds may be 700 words. Letters may be edited or rejected for clarity, taste, libel and space. If a letter or OpEd is published, submissions by the same writer will not be considered for 60 days.

Letters may be sent to letters@bangordailynews.com. **OpEds** may be sent to OpEd@bangordailynews.com or P.O. Box 1329, Bangor, ME 04402-1329.

Transgender kindness

Unkindness and misunderstanding toward transgender humans is disturbingly inhumane. Children with gender identity disorder must be accepted, protected and nurtured in school and society. Parents, family members, teachers, peers and the medical community must help provide transgender inclusion in all aspects of life. A mean-spirited society and religious dogma make the transgender process more difficult.

Transgender people are our children, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors, co-workers and friends. Transgender people are victims of bullies and hate-crime perpetrators for attempting to fit into society in their unique way. Transphobic people must evolve to love all children and teach inclusive val-

ues, lessening phobias, offering psychological support and causing less bigotry and hate crime toward transgender people of all ages.

Jackie Freitas
Friendship

Fulford backs LGBT

Belfast's first gay pride parade on Saturday, June 11, was at least 300 strong, maybe 400. Colorful, spirited, joyful and ordinary people from all walks of life gathered together to support the LGBT community. Jonathan Fulford, a candidate for the state Senate, and his contingent was at least 30 strong, maybe 40.

We came together to say LGBT rights and recognition are important, that we love and value our neighbors no matter what their sexual preferences or identity may be. Good people are good people; it's that simple.

We marched that beautiful day with innocence. It was all about celebrating freedom to be who you want to be. More than that, we were there to honor the struggle all LGBT people are engaged in just to live their lives peacefully.

Our innocence was shattered with the news of the mass shooting in Orlando, Florida. It was a bloody, horrible reminder that there is hatred just below the surface sometimes, and it shook us to the bone.

For Fulford to stand proud and strong with a community that is a target of hate and violent repression is something to think about. I want readers to know that every one of us who support his candidacy will always stand strong with the LGBT community: You are us, we are you. Together we will defend you, your safety and rights, we will be there for you. And so will Fulford, if elected to the Senate.

Nancy Galland
Stockton Springs

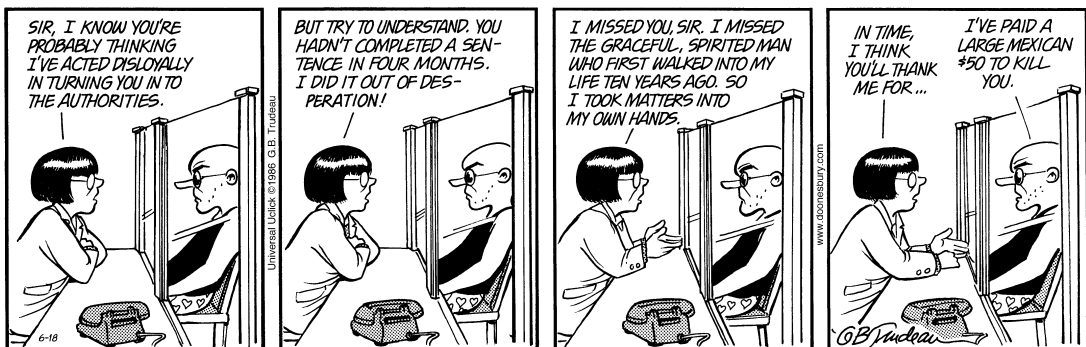
Parent a Maine artist

Neal Parent, like his mentor, Jane Day, is a Maine treasure. His images of Maine are spectacular. Not since Kosti Ruohomaa has a photographer had the ability to capture so clearly these moments in time. Pictures that tell a story far beyond just a photograph.

He is a living example of an artist with a camera, whose work stands equal with the great photographers of the past: Joseph Stieglitz and Ansel Adams. We are so fortunate to have him here in Maine, though I wish he were still in my hometown of Camden. Thanks, BDN, for the article on a well-deserving subject.

Ed Socker
Camden

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU