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MAINE'S OPIATE CRISIS UNFOUNDED PRAISE DOESN'T SAVE LIVES

MAINE is on track once again this year to set a record for the number of drug overdose deaths.

Recently released data show that Maine in 2012 had the second-highest rate of infants born exposed to substances in utero and that Maine's rate of drug overdose deaths climbed at the third-highest clip nationally between 2013 and 2014.

While talk of addiction has dominated political debate, policymakers haven't made needed investments to increase treatment capacity. In fact, the state is spending less on treatment today than it did at the start of the decade.

Gov. Paul LePage vetoed a bill in April to make the life-saving overdose antidote naloxone more widely available to people with addictions and their families, saying that naloxone — which can be administered to immediately reverse the effects of an opiate overdose — “does not truly save lives; it merely extends them until the next overdose.”

LePage declared in June, “I’ve been trying to close down methadone clinics since I’ve been governor.” His administration this summer proposed impossibly onerous requirements on treatment clinics that could force some to close. And he’s been staunchly opposed to a primarily federally-funded Medicaid expansion that would make treatment accessible to many low-income people with addictions.

This, apparently, is the picture of a state “making progress” when it comes to addressing the opioid addiction epidemic. That’s the conclusion of the National Safety Council, which recently awarded the “making progress” distinction to Maine and four other states. Every other state was either “lagging behind” or “failing.”

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services issued a celebratory news release Monday to mark the occasion.

Indeed, the reason the National Safety Council boosted Maine's ranking was the spring passage of LePage-supported legislation that limits opioid prescriptions and enhances monitoring of such prescriptions. Four of five heroin users say their addiction started with prescription opioid pain medications.

But, if LePage had his way on other policies championed by the National Safety Council, Maine would certainly be no standout.

One indicator the council used to

judge states' progress was whether naloxone was available without a prescription. That's precisely the policy change LePage vetoed in April. Thanks to the Maine Legislature's veto override, naloxone is on track to be more readily available to those who need it.

So, it's odd to see the LePage administration touting Maine's high ranking in a report that champions the increased naloxone access LePage attempted to thwart.

It also is odd to see a report laud Maine for the availability of medication-assisted addiction treatment. The National Safety Council rightly recognizes the key role medication-assisted treatment — namely, methadone and Suboxone — plays in addressing addiction. In its June report, the council also rightly states that “caps on the length and duration of [medication-assisted treatment] should be eliminated.”

Yet Maine — thanks to a change LePage signed into law in 2012 — is the only state with a limit on the length of time its Medicaid program will fund methadone treatment. It's one of 10 states with a similar limit for Suboxone.

To top it off, Maine's Medicaid program reimburses methadone clinics at one of the lowest rates in the nation — \$60 per patient per week, when research from the National Institute on Drug Abuse has shown that methadone maintenance therapy, delivered properly, should cost \$143 per patient each week. Lawmakers earlier this year declined to fund a bill to raise the rate.

The only reason Maine was among three states the National Safety Council lauded for the availability of medication-assisted treatment? The capacity of Maine doctors to prescribe Suboxone.

A 2015 study in the American Journal of Public Health found Maine was one of three states where doctors, under federal rules, could theoretically prescribe Suboxone to at least 100 percent of patients who required addiction treatment.

But the reality is much more complicated. Far from every doctor permitted to prescribe Suboxone is prescribing the anti-addiction medication, much less to the maximum number of patients allowed, and Suboxone isn't the right treatment for everyone suffering from an addiction.

Maine is falling well short of adequately addressing its addiction epidemic. It certainly doesn't deserve national plaudits for its anti-addiction policies.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Embarrassing Maine

Gov. Paul LePage thinks government should be run like a business. If it were, he would have been fired long ago as an embarrassment to his company.

David P. Frasz
Dover-Foxcroft

Federal control a loss

All Mainers, especially those euphoric souls who view the new Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument akin to a divine gift to humankind, should seriously ponder the negative impacts federal control of land has on local people as highlighted in an Aug. 26 BDN article about marine harvesters in conflict with Acadia National Park over access to intertidal zones and an Aug. 27 BDN article about a family fighting for access to their summer home. The BDN should be applauded for publishing these alongside all those expressing jubilation for our new national monument.

These impacts should concern all. Unfortunately, many will trivialize these conflicts unaware or overlooking the fact that Maine's forestland owners continue to honor a unique tradition documented in Henry David Thoreau's “The Maine Woods.” Since at least 1846, the monument land has been open to the public for a broad range of unregulated recreational activities. Not until Roxanne Quimby bought the land were roads blocked, camp leases canceled, snowmobile trails closed and activities restricted. These restrictions are embedded in the rules that will govern access and use within most of the national monument.

Humankind has not gained anything by this change in status of these lands. We all have lost free access and utilization across these lands that have existed for more than 170 years.

I am saddened by this loss. I wonder what Thoreau might have thought on his last trip to the Maine woods down the East Branch of the Penobscot in 1857 had he encountered the restrictions within this national monument.

Carl Hamilton
Old Town

Time to resign

Gov. Paul LePage's outrageous voicemail to Rep. Drew Gattine requires some action. It is time to speak out. Action after questionable action have caused me to question his adequacy for the highest elected position our state. This one astounds me and makes me feel ashamed of Maine and embar-

rassed for him. Mainers are the only ones who can do something about this situation.

As an educator, I spent years helping to teach student to speak out against bullying and to help protect the one being bullied. To do otherwise is to quietly accept and condone the bullying behavior. So, how do we teach children this is unacceptable when mature adults let it go and ignore it?

It's time for our elected representatives and senators to speak up and do something about the situation. To do less is to quietly accept and condone the governor's behavior.

Mainers must do their part to let the Legislature know this is not acceptable behavior. It is time for LePage to resign or be removed from office.

Janet W. Varnum
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.

Wary of big government

In a May 8 BDN OpEd, attorney Stephen Smith correctly pointed out that Question 3 — the background check for gun transfers for law-abiding citizens — is not at all about safety but instead about control. Socialists who want to take away individual freedom and give government control over every aspect of people's life and everything they own, including their firearms, used out-of-state money to hire an out-of-state consultant to put this proposal on the ballot to harass Maine sportsmen. It will not affect criminals because criminals don't follow laws.

Big government control of people's lives is something of which all freedom loving Americans should be wary. History shows that both major parties have contributed to the ever increasing size and intrusion of the government. Fortunately, this year, we have an opportunity to say enough is enough by voting for Gary Johnson for president. As a Libertarian, he believes in less government and more freedom.

Vote for Johnson and against Question 3.
Flossie Obie
Monmouth

Ranked-choice voting

As voters, we tend to assume that whoever is elected represents the majority of citizens. After all, they won. We assume that as voters, our voices are always heard and not overpowered by the limitations of the system. Yet, that is not always the case. Our current system of voting in Maine has failed to represent the will of the majority on numerous occasions, which is why I support ranked-choice voting.

Unfortunately, the truth is that the Maine people have not been adequately represented by our current system. In nine of the last 11 races for governor, the winner received less than a majority of the vote. In some cases, candidates have won with as little as 35 percent of the vote.

Ranked-choice voting offers a solution as voters are given the power to rank candidates running for an office in order of their preference. This allows voters the freedom to express their voice without fear of splitting the vote. Moreover, this forces the candidates to interact with all constituents, not just the handful they need to win. In this way, Mainers can ensure their voices are being heard as a majority consensus is reached.

This system has already proved successful in Portland and only needs the chance to prove successful across the state. Support this movement by voting yes on Question 5 on the ballot this November.

Samantha Schildroth
Saco

Denounce LePage

It is time for political leaders of both parties to step up in a very public way to protect the integrity of not only the Maine House and Senate but now the entire state. The level of humiliation of our state is experiencing because of the voicemail the governor left a Democratic legislator is beyond comprehension. A line of civility and professional integrity has been crossed by the governor and now our state again suffers. As citizens, we do not deserve this. Further, we cannot tolerate this.

The governor and his actions need to be publicly denounced by both parties with either a call for his resignation or at a minimum urging him to go through extensive mental health evaluations and counseling. I am in no way qualified to offer a professional opinion of his mental and emotional state; however, his erratic and unhinged behavior, past and present, clearly indicates there is something seriously wrong.

Paul Krohne
Belfast

OTHER VOICES

RULING IS UNJUST AND UNNECESSARY

THE European Commission's decision to impose a tax bill of 13 billion euros (\$14.5 billion) on Apple is unjust and unnecessary. And the harm is not confined to a single company: The ruling has cast a cloud of uncertainty over Europe's corporate-tax rules, potentially affecting all multinational investors.

EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager says Ireland violated state-aid rules, which prohibit the selective support of particular companies. She may well be right. If so, the offenders are Ireland's tax authorities, not Apple, which believed it was in compliance with the relevant national law.

The ruling will be appealed, and the grounds appear to be strong. A decision that looks back to taxes due 10 years before the Commission even opened its probe seems quite a stretch. Tax agreements between national governments and individual companies aren't uncommon. If they can be reviewed after such a long delay, and with such huge financial consequences, multinational companies cannot know where they stand

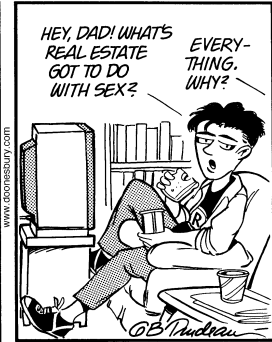
tax-wise.

Meanwhile, in any event, the issue has moved on. Ireland is phasing out its controversial “double Irish” tax structure. And all the advanced economies have agreed to new standards of corporate taxation that will include country-by-country reporting by multinationals and other measures to end tax-dodging practices. Ireland retains its 12.5 percent corporate tax rate, and doubtless intends to keep its place as a tax haven for multinationals.

Perhaps responding to the U.S. government's ferocious complaints about Apple's treatment, Vestager invited other governments to examine the ruling to see whether Apple's supposed tax debt was due to them rather than Ireland. Supposing the state-aid rules were indeed broken, that would at least come closer to punishing the principal offender, Ireland's government. On the other hand, it would compound the commission's basic sin — that of rendering the EU's corporate-tax regime even more of an unfathomable mess than it was to begin with.

Bloomberg View (Aug. 31)

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU