

OPINION

COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA, R-BIG FLATS

The resurgence of meth

It's time to look ahead to the beginning of the 2019 session of the State Legislature, which gets underway in early January.

Consequently, over the next several weeks, I'll use this column to highlight several of the priority issues that I intend to keep addressing in the New Year, and that I believe are critical to the short- and long-term future of the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes.

With that in mind, the following statement on the Chemung County Drug Enforcement Unit speaks volumes, "Methamphetamine will most likely be the drug problem of the future unless law enforcement is given the tools needed to stop its growth."

We should heed the clear warning. Indeed, there have been increasingly steady reports of meth lab discoveries and other meth-related arrests and incidents across the region over the past few months, including in Corning, Hornell, Horseheads, and, most recently, in Elmira Heights where a suspected meth lab fire was under investigation by the Elmira Heights Police Department. A recent USA Today Network report out of Binghamton noted that "the use of meth is still a scourge (throughout the Southern Tier) – and a growing one." According to the article, arrests for the sale, possession, or manufacture of meth have accounted for 58 local stories published so far in 2018.

In 2019, in addition to my work as a member of the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, I will also reintroduce legislation to combat the resurgence of methamphetamine-related crimes locally and across New York State by significantly increasing the criminal penalties for manufacturing, selling, and possessing the illegal and highly addictive drug.

One piece of legislation will target meth labs by increasing the criminal penalties for the possession of meth manufacturing material and the

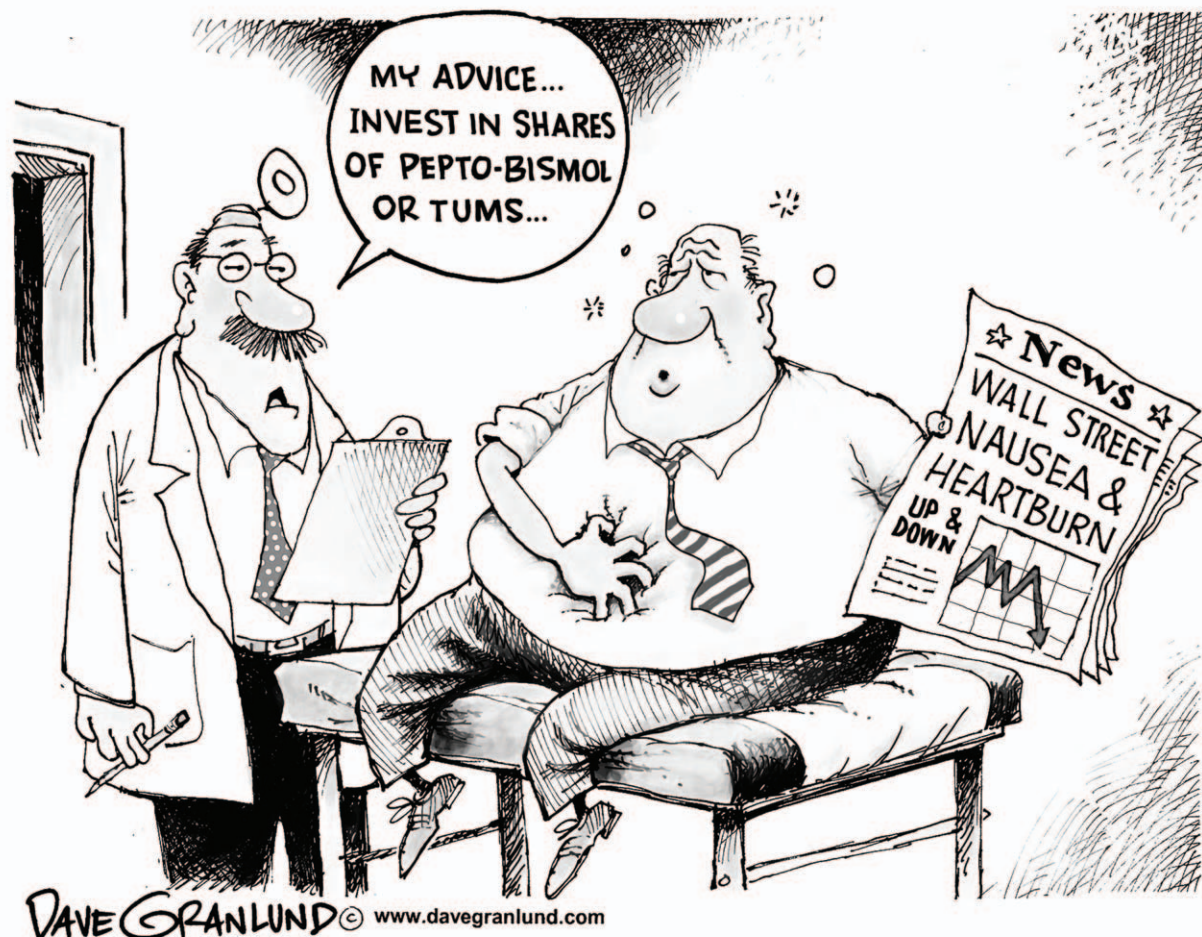
unlawful manufacture of meth, implementing a series of increasingly severe felony offenses. Additional measures will seek to significantly increase the criminal penalties for the possession and/or sale of the drug, and enhance the ability of local police and district attorneys to track and prosecute violations of restrictions on over-the-counter sales of cold medications that are key ingredients used in cooking meth.

Earlier this year, for the first time, I introduced legislation targeting one of the worst dangers associated with clandestine meth labs: explosions and fires. This proposal, which will also be reintroduced in 2019, calls for adding the crime of first-degree arson, a Class A-1 felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison, to the list of charges that could be levelled against a meth cooker who causes a fire or an explosion that damages property or injures another person. There have been increasing incidents of meth lab explosions and fires in recent years in Corning, Elmira, Elmira Heights, Hornell, and other areas. The crime of arson currently only covers intentional acts. Since explosions and fires involving meth labs are considered unintentional "accidents," cookers cannot be charged under New York's arson statutes. I believe they should be.

Explosions and fires caused by meth labs have caused death, injuries, and extensive property damage across the region. Meth labs pose unacceptable risks to our neighborhoods, as well as roadsides and wooded areas where children and others can be exposed to hazardous and toxic residues. They threaten the safety of police officers, firefighters, and all first responders, and the public at large.

Here's my bottom line: New York State laws need to be as tough and as thorough as they can possibly be to try to deter and punish the irresponsible meth cookers and sellers who have no regard for the health and safety of the rest of us.

ANOTHER VIEW



Letters to the Editor

Social Security taxation unfair

To the Editor, Mr. Reed, I implore you to take up this matter when you return to Washington. . . raising the taxable earnings threshold on Social Security (SS) benefits.

Thanks to Congress passing and President Reagan signing into law the 1983 Amendments to the Social Security Act, up to one-half of the value of the SS benefit was made potentially taxable income. Then beginning in 1984, a portion of SS benefits became subject to federal income taxes.

Earning thresholds were set at \$25,000 for individuals and \$32,000 for a married couple filing a joint return, meaning SS benefits became taxable once adjusted gross annual incomes exceeded these amounts.

"In 1993, as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, the SS taxation provision was modified to add a secondary set of thresholds and

a higher taxable percentage for beneficiaries who exceeded the secondary thresholds," according to Research Note #12 at www.ssa.gov/history/taxationofbenefits.html.

These revised amounts were, and remain to be (for far too long), \$34,000 for individuals and \$44,000 for couples. The inflation rate from 1984 to 1993 was 39%, thus \$25,000 inflated to \$34,769 and \$32,000 inflated to \$44,504. Is it perhaps coincidental that the dollar amount of the 1993 threshold adjustment matches the inflation rate from 1984 (a 9-year timeframe)?

The inflation rate is 75% over the 25 years since 1993. That means the current threshold of \$34,000 becomes \$59,502 and \$44,000 becomes \$77,003 in today's dollars. These should be the current thresholds. (You can verify my calculations at www.usinflationcalculator.com.)

So, Mr. Reed, I challenge you to go back to Washington with a focused

goal of working with your colleagues on both sides of the aisle to establish a House bill that will get taxable SS thresholds updated to today's dollar valuation, thereby helping out your retired constituents and other retirees around the country when it comes to tax time.

Your feedback in the media on your progress will be greatly appreciated!

Tom Doud, Corning

Seeking peace and good will

To the Editor, I have been a volunteer for just over a year for our Corning animal rights organization, Tanner's P.A.W.S., which has been a great addition to Market Street and the Gaffer District. While walking rescued dogs almost daily, I have enjoyed the positive interaction with both local folks and visitors. So many smile and are drawn to these dogs, who are ambassadors for the bond we feel with pets and those

who care for them. This is a positive reflection of our community. There are so many supporters of this all volunteer organization which does professional, dedicated compassionate care for those in need. Most rescues come from high kill shelters and puppy mills. The founder has diligently provided information and education about the sources of maltreatment of these animals coming from miserable conditions. For her personal sacrifices she has taken on the offensive treatment of some who dwell on perceived conflicts as surpassing the merciful outreach to these abused animals. Several hundred have been saved and found homes with love and care. May this season of peace and goodwill bring fairness and kindness to us all, setting aside divisions which contradict the spirit and goals of helping those in need. The voice for the voiceless remains one of reverence for all beings.

Daryl Denning, Corning

COMMENTARY | AMITRAJEET A. BATASYAL, ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Could a recession be just around the corner?

The U.S. economy is growing at the fastest pace in five years, American companies are earning record profits and unemployment is at the lowest level

in almost half a century. So why are Wall Street and some economists suddenly worried about a recession?

Financial markets in particular have been

signaling that trouble is brewing. The Standard & Poor's 500, which tracks the biggest U.S. companies, has plunged about 6 percent since Dec. 4 because of worries about trade and slowing global

growth. And a key bond metric that has presaged every recession since 1960 is warning another may be on the way.

As an economist who teaches and conducts research in international trade and finance, I see three credible concerns driving the worries.

Trouble in trade land

One major issue is the ongoing trade war between the U.S. and China.

The U.S. has imposed tariffs on about US\$250 billion of Chinese imports – almost half of all trade with the country – in what I consider a misguided effort to get Beijing to buy more American goods and grant greater market access to U.S. companies. U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to apply duties to all imports if his demands aren't met.

In turn, China has put tariffs on \$60 billion of American goods. This is bad for the U.S. economy because

See BATASYAL, A5

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