

OPINION

TOM O'MARA | 58TH DISTRICT

Meth warnings need strong response



Tom O'Mara

My bottom line: The byproducts of meth-related activity are addiction, broken families, crime and violence, including tragic deaths. This crime increasingly burdens local systems of health care, criminal justice and social services.

At a recent meeting of the city of Hornell Board of Safety, Police Chief Ted Murray said, "Methamphetamine has just taken off. It has just exploded as far as the drug of choice out there."

Chief Murray provided an overview of the police department's drug arrest statistics and especially noted that arrests for meth-related crimes jumped from just 17 in 2018 to 78 in 2019, which accounted for 44 percent of the city's drug arrests.

That's a striking number. Across the region, we would be wise to heed the clear warning. Indeed, over the past several years there have been steady reports of meth lab discoveries and other meth-related arrests and incidents not just in Hornell but throughout Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler, Yates and Tompkins counties.

A USA Today Network report just over a year ago went as far as to state that "the use of meth is still a scourge (throughout the Southern Tier) – and a growing one." According to that article, arrests for the sale, possession or manufacture of meth accounted for 58 local stories published in 2018.

Consequently, I continue to sponsor legislation to combat the resurgence of methamphetamine-related crimes locally and statewide by significantly increasing the criminal penalties for manufacturing, selling and possessing, with the intent to sell, the illegal and highly addictive drug.

One piece of legislation targets 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. One specific provision establishes the felony crime of manufacturing meth in the presence of a child under the age of 16.

Additional measures would significantly increase the criminal penalties for the possession, with the intent to sell, and/or sale of

the drug, and enhance the ability of local police and district attorneys to track and prosecute crimes.

I also sponsor legislation targeting one of the worst dangers associated with clandestine meth labs: explosions and fires. This specific proposal 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.

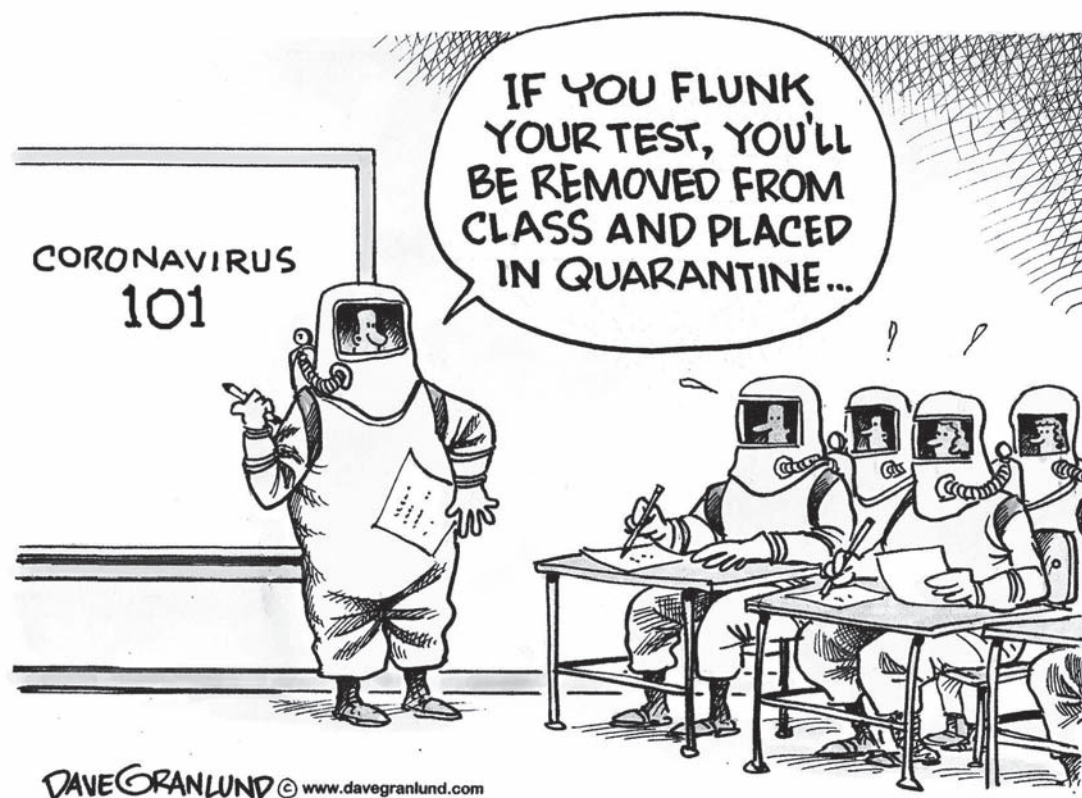
There have been increasing incidents of meth lab explosions and fires in recent years in Corning, Elmira, Elmira Heights, Hornell and other areas. Currently, the crime of arson only covers intentional acts. Since explosions and fires involving meth labs are deemed unintentional "accidents," cookers cannot 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 are exposed to hazardous and toxic residues. They threaten the safety of police officers, firefighters and all first responders, and the public at large.

My bottom line: The byproducts of meth-related activity are addiction, broken families, crime and violence, including tragic deaths. This crime increasingly burdens local systems of health care, criminal justice and social services.

Awareness and education, prevention and treatment are fundamental responses. Tough laws are too. Our laws need to be as strong as they can be to help deter and punish the irresponsible meth cookers and sellers who continue to have no regard for the health and safety of the rest of us.

ANOTHER VIEW



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nixon wants a retrial

To the Editor,
We have heard the essence of Trump's defense from Alan Dershowitz: "The President can do whatever he wants as long as he is doing it in the best interest of the country and the American people. Even if he gets caught in the process, our President hasn't done anything wrong. Nothing actually happened that could be called impeachable because the defense money was delivered to Ukraine, Zelensky got his meeting and all is well."

Now imagine Richard Nixon in heaven. Upon waking from a celestial nap, he hears the news of Trump's dismissal and his first words are: "Wait a minute. I want a retrial. I never imagined such a creative defense. Please remember: 'I am not a crook.'"

Nixon continues, "Yes there was a Watergate break-in and the burglars had money in their pockets from the Committee to Re-Elect the President, but the plan was foiled and nothing really happened. In addition, every effort to discover dirt about the Democrats to help my re-election was all done in the best interest of the American people."

As we come back to reality, we recognize this as a preposterous scenario. However, the Dershowitz defense now protects the President more than the Constitution.

In addition, with a unified Republican Congress, it is unlikely the two parties will ever be able to work together again. Any possible collaboration is met with a barrage of presidential tweets that demean, ridicule and reveal a President whose communication skills simply mirror those of a schoolyard bully.

We can do better America ~

we must elect a new President and a Congress who will restore our land to one that is ruled by the Constitution and not by a power-hungry dictator.

Gary McCaslin
Corning

Republicans scare dickens out of me

To the Editor,
I fear the Republican Party members of the US House of Representatives and the US Senate. They are my "nemesis."

They are much more "conservative" than are our conservative-Republican citizens who they are supposed to represent.

While research indicates that 63% of Americans who identify themselves as Republicans do 'not' want Social Security benefits to be cut, my estimate is that 95%-99% of Republicans in the House and Senate 'do' want to cut Social Security benefits.

My research and studies tell me that about 75% of them (and perhaps more than this) would 'love' to abolish Social Security as well as every other federal government social program that helps people, but will never admit it to the public because they know that most Republican citizens do not believe in that.

Do you know how many tens and tens of millions of our fellow Americans would be devastated if all of these programs were abolished? It scares the dickens out of me.

If you doubt my belief that most Republican members of the House and Senate are secretly cold-hearted "Survival-of-the-Fittest" Social Darwinists, then please read the award-winning book "Dark Money" by 12-time award-winning author and

journalist Jane Mayer, and then tell me what you think.

Stewart Epstein
Rochester

Stop supporting zoonotic diseases

To the Editor,
50 million Chinese locked down. 15 countries affected. Three confirmed cases in the U.S..

These dramatic headlines announce one more pandemic caused by our abuse of animals.

Indeed, 61% of the 1,415 pathogens known to infect humans originate with animals. These so-called zoonotic diseases, claiming millions of human lives, include Asian flu, Hong Kong flu, West Nile flu, bird flu, swine flu, dengue fever, Ebola, HIV, SARS, and yellow fever. The pandemic "Spanish" flu of 1918 may have killed as many as 50 million people worldwide.

Western factory farms and Asian street markets are virtual breeding grounds for infectious diseases. Sick, crowded, highly stressed animals in close contact with raw flesh, feces, and urine provide ideal incubation media for viruses. As these microbes reach humans, they mutate to defeat the new host's immune system, then propagate on contact.

Each of us can help end these deadly pandemics by replacing animal products in our diet with vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. These foods don't carry flu viruses, or government warning labels, are touted by every major health advocacy organization, and were the recommended fare in the Garden of Eden. The internet offers ample recipes and transition hints.

Harry Ehrlinger
Avoca

OTHER VIEW | THE AUBURN CITIZEN

Take pot legalization out of state budget

It's only a matter of time. All one has to do is look around the country and see the growing number of states to legalize recreational use of marijuana. A day will certainly come when that list includes New York.

As we've said in the past, though, New York lawmakers and the governor must make sure they implement legalization in the most responsible manner possible. To that end, we give Gov. Andrew Cuomo credit for including a comprehensive legalization plan in his state budget proposal this year.

But we also have a problem

with the governor's approach: It shouldn't be lumped in with the massive pile of legislation that becomes the state budget.

Every year there's a give-and-take between the executive and legislative branches over what measures should be part of the budget and what are taken up separately. There's technical arguments that both sides can make, and that's true for recreational marijuana.

For us, the issue comes down to the need for extra public scrutiny. With all of the social and criminal implications that go along with pot use, New York's legalization

bill needs plenty of serious open debate and a straightforward vote. When measures get buried into the budget, that type of process often never happens. Instead, it becomes a bargaining chip. And it's often voted on in the middle of the night with little or no discussion.

We don't expect the governor to remove his proposal from the executive budget. He probably thinks this is the only way to get something done. But lawmakers need to remember their duty to be a check on this governor, and insist that recreational marijuana use in New York state be addressed on its own.

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