

OPINION

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VIEWPOINT | DR. KATHLEEN HALLINAN

Injection centers not the answer

The recent dialog regarding narcotic and heroin addiction in our area has been painful in its omission of Suboxone treatment, which is FDA approved and considered standard of care in addition to counseling and behavioral interventions. That this is not mentioned by the leadership in our local government reflects the need for urgent dialog between political leaders and the medical community. The idea of a “safe injection” location is akin to taking someone with a gun to their head and telling them they will be better off if they just point it at their leg.

They’ll still bleed but they won’t die ...this time. To perceive that the approach to this problem is to simply avoid overdose and death is to be in denial of the deep chasm of social and psychiatric issues that accompany narcotic addiction. These patients are chained to a substance with a chemical high that will destroy their career, relationships, children, and financial stability.

Funding that would be spent to provide a location to slowly destroy themselves while avoiding the specter of death, would be much better allocated to increasing Suboxone training, shortening wait times at mental health, and providing social workers at pivotal locations in the healthcare system.

When all of law enforcement, EMS, and the medical community are working to get people OFF of narcotics, we cannot afford to undermine these actions by sending a message that shooting up is fine to do as long as you do it in a “safe” place. We must have consistency in our message to young and old alike, as well as to traf-fickers coming through our community, that we will use every tool at our disposal to help our friends and neighbors conquer their addictions and regain power over their lives. We must not be a safe haven for chemicals that destroy families, destroy careers,

and destroy people. How does it benefit the young mother whose children have been taken away from her, and who has become homeless, to just give her a safe place to shoot up? This does not even touch upon those who might be tempted to try narcotics or heroin but are deterred by the risk of overdose and death. Are we making their lives better by giving them a “safe” place to be exposed and hooked for the first time? I guarantee that it will not be their last.

I would implore local leadership in the political, economic, and medical arenas to come together to allocate incentives for training in Suboxone treatment, to decrease wait times for substance abuse counselors, and to increase the availability of psychiatrists in our community for the treatment of underlying disorders that, when treated, increase the likelihood of success. We recently had the privilege of listening to a talk by Christopher Wilkins who is the founder of Loyola Recovery Foundation in Pittsford, NY. He is a member of the SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association) National Advisory Council, and shared with us innovative strategies for combating addiction. Their providers are able to utilize mobile applications to communicate with those in treatment, geofence areas that place them at higher risk, and track compliance with medication management.

We are losing young people to overdose at a rate that exceeds mortality from motor vehicle accidents. The solution lies in our ability to provide a complete infrastructure to remove cravings and heal wounds, so that these patients may have a full and productive life. It does not lie in providing a location for a living hell on earth.

—Kathleen A. Hallinan is a doctor of internal medicine in Corning.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Corning mayor: Headline inaccurate

TO THE EDITOR | The headline in the March 6 paper which read “Negri backs injection centers” is totally in error. I do not back injection centers and I never said that I backed or supported injection centers. What I did say was that I don’t know if it will work or not. I also said that it was a fresh idea that along with any other new ideas should be studied. Nothing up to now has worked to solve the drug problem in this

country. Any new idea should be explored to find out whether or not it could lead to a real solution to the drug problem. I also said, in my interview with your reporter, that nothing could be done anyway because it was illegal. I also believe that getting addicts off the streets and into a clinic where medical professionals can help them is not a bad idea. That does not mean that I back injection centers.

Rich Negri
Mayor, City of Corning

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WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O’MARA

Stay focused on the key priorities

New York is still recognized as one of the highest-taxed states in America.

It remains an unfair, unreasonable burden on individual taxpayers, families, employers, senior citizens and workers. It remains a significant drain on local economies. It remains a roadblock to any serious, sustainable, long-term economic growth and revival in so many of our job-creating sectors, including and especially manufacturing.

And it remains a risk and a threat to the long-term prospects for and survivability of farmers, small business owners and many others. So we have to stay focused on the key priorities in New York State.

We can talk about this, that and everything in between – but sooner or later in New York State the talk always returns to several fundamental priorities if there’s going to be a serious effort to grow the economy and create jobs. In no particular order, in my view, these priorities are: tax cuts, controlling government spending, regulatory reform, mandate relief, and infrastructure development.

This week the Senate and Assembly are scheduled to release what are commonly called “Budget Resolutions.” Very simply, these resolutions represent public priority statements on what each house intends to take into final negotiations on the 2016-17 state budget. Last week, the Senate Republican Majority sent out an early signal on one



TOM O’MARA

priority: tax cuts.

We’ve put forth a broad-based tax cut strategy aimed at middle class taxpayers, senior citizens, small businesses and farmers. We’ve made some important progress on this front over the past several years, but it hasn’t been as broad-based as many of us would like and we definitely can’t consider it a “mission complete.” Far from it.

So if cutting taxes is going to be a cornerstone of the new state budget – and Senate Republicans believe it should be – we’re focused on the following key targets:

1.) Middle Class Income Tax Relief. Our plan would enact a 25-percent rate reduction for middle class taxpayers to bring middle class tax rates to their lowest level in 70 years. Starting in 2018, a total of 5 million eligible taxpayers – including more than 770,000 small businesses who file under the Personal Income Tax – would begin seeing savings that, when fully implemented in 2025, would result in middle class New Yorkers paying a 25-percent lower tax rate equaling savings of \$3.5 billion in taxes each year.

2.) New income tax relief to produce savings for New York’s senior citizens and to try to help stem the exodus of

retirees from New York. The proposed tax cut would provide the first increase to the exempt amount of private pensions and retirement income since 1981, saving hundreds of thousands of seniors approximately \$275 million annually when fully phased in;

3.) New tax cuts for family farms and small businesses. Two years ago, the state budget enacted a Personal Income Tax (PIT) exemption for small businesses and small farms equal to five percent of net income in 2016 and beyond. To qualify, the business must be a sole proprietor or farm, have less than \$250,000 in net business income, and employ at least one employee.

Building on our “Grown in New York” agriculture development strategy that we’ve kept replanting over the past several years – as well as our longstanding commitment to small business – our new proposal calls for eliminating the employee qualification and raise the income eligibility threshold from \$250,000 to \$500,000 in small business and farm income. It will also increase the PIT exemption from 5 percent to 20 percent for farm income, and from 5 percent to 15 percent for net business income of small businesses;

4.) The complete elimination, this year, of the higher 18-A utility surcharge first imposed on New Yorkers in 2009, a state-imposed cost that has hit farmers,

manufacturers and senior citizens facing high energy expenses especially hard; and

5.) Further reforming the state estate tax to allow estates that include farm operations or include small business property, where the value of the farm operations or small business are a majority of the estate, to have an exclusion amount equal to the federal exclusion amount starting April 1, 2016 (currently \$5.45 million for 2016).

I’ve written repeatedly about the overriding importance of the agricultural industry and family farms to the regional economy, as well as our ongoing “Grown in New York” strategy. Just last week, the state comptroller reported that New York’s small businesses support close to 4 million jobs and generate upwards of \$950 billion in annual revenues.

In short, agriculture and small businesses are critical engines of local economies. Together with middle class taxpayers and workers – and the senior citizens who have been the backbone of our communities for so long – I believe our Senate Majority tax cut strategy is focused right. It’s a focus on common sense, compassionate, and potentially effective priorities.

—State Sen. Tom O’Mara represents New York’s 53rd Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and a portion of Tompkins County.

VIEWPOINT | ALLISON FISHER

Gas storage facility a disaster-in-waiting

For more than 40 years, Love Canal has been synonymous with environmental disaster. But before that, it was just a working-class neighborhood near Niagara Falls, N.Y. The jarring shift from happy community to disaster zone can happen in a moment.

It happened more recently to the residents of Porter Ranch, Calif. In October, a nearby natural gas storage facility suffered a massive blowout, forcing thousands of residents to abandon their homes. Both the Porter Ranch blowout and the chemical waste under Love Canal were man-made disasters that could have been prevented.

But disasters like these could happen again. Shockingly, the federal government does not regulate the more than 400 natural gas storage facilities lying beneath our communities. Once approved, these facilities are no longer subject to federal oversight. Monitoring and maintenance are left up to big corporations, many of which put profits ahead of public safety.

One such disaster-in-waiting is in the heart of the Finger Lakes region. Crestwood Midstream, a Texas company, is seeking approval to store millions of barrels of

mostly methane, propane and butane in the depleted salt caverns on the western shore of Seneca Lake.

The federal government has rubber-stamped this proposal, but New York Governor Andrew Cuomo should deny Crestwood the necessary permits. These salt caverns were not designed to store highly pressurized gases. In addition to gas leaks and explosions, cracks in the foundation could allow brine to seep into the lake, permanently contaminating the local water supply for more than 100,000 area residents.

Before the federal government greenlights another dangerous project like this, new protections must be put in place. Congress must establish strong safeguards covering the proposal, construction and operation of underground energy facilities that include frequent safety inspections for these facilities.

But even the best safeguards cannot prevent every error and accident. That’s why affected communities must have the final say over what types of oil and gas operations will be allowed in their neighborhoods.


Indeed, local opposition to the Crestwood storage facility is strong

and growing. Since 2014, hundreds of residents have been arrested for demonstrating against the facility, and 31 municipalities representing 1.2 million New York residents have passed resolutions opposing oil and gas storage on the shores of Seneca Lake. It’s not hard to see why.

Seneca Lake is the crown jewel of the Finger Lakes region. It’s

a world-class tourism destination and boasts thriving wine and organic farming industries. It’s where I climbed my first waterfall, where I got engaged, and where I and so many others call home. Let’s keep it that way.

—Allison Fisher is outreach director for Public Citizen’s Energy Program and a native of the Finger Lakes region.



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The Leader (ISSN #10501983)
The Leader is published daily at
34 West Pulteney Street, Corning,
New York 14830
by Liberty Group Corning
Holdings, Inc. Periodical postage
paid at Corning, N.Y. 14830-0817.
USPS code | 0586-160
Postmaster: Send address changes
to The Leader, 34 West Pulteney
Street, Corning, New York 14830

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Retail 936-4651, Ext 653

Postal rates

Steuben County	
One month	\$36.52
Three months	\$109.56
Six months	\$219.12
One year	\$438.24

ELSEWHERE IN USA

One month	\$46.87
Three months	\$140.61
Six months	\$281.22
One year	\$562.44

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