

GUEST EDITORIAL: FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Signs of hope in battle with opioids

A state task force is backing a proposal to expand alternative treatments such as acupuncture for certain chronic pain conditions while limiting the use of opioids, even as the proposal draws criticism from people suffering from chronic pain.

Meanwhile, an Ohio city hit hard by opioid overdoses might finally be making some progress against the crisis. The lessons learned there might be useful elsewhere.

These are just two of the many fronts in the nation's fight against opioid abuse. The battle hasn't generated much good news lately, but here's a glimmer: For the first time in years, the number of opioid deaths nationwide has begun to dip, with totals for the preceding 12 months falling slightly but steadily between December 2017 and April 2018.

Despite that good news, the death toll from opioids still is astonishing: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the epidemic killed nearly 50,000 Americans last year.

In Dayton, Ohio, however, overdose deaths have plunged, a welcome reprieve in a city where the coroner's office at one point was forced to rent refrigerated trailers because it ran out of space.

Here are some of the factors at work in Dayton, as outlined in a recent New York Times story:

- Ohio Gov. John Kasich decided to expand Medicaid in that state, giving nearly 700,000 low-income adults access to addiction and mental health treatment.
- Ohio has been ravaged by carfentanil, an exceptionally toxic fentanyl analog, which is 10,000 times more potent than morphine. But for some reason, carfentanil's presence in Dayton's drug scene started to fade in 2017.
- The use of naloxone (better known by the brand name Narcan) has expanded. If administered quickly enough, either by injection or nasal spray, this is the medication that can reverse the effects of opioid overdoses.
- Dayton has put an emphasis on providing services for addicts after treatment ends, from recovery support groups to peer-support networks.
- Law enforcement officers have forged strong connections with public health officials. The Police Department in Dayton, for example, supported plans to set up a needle exchange. And the city won a federal grant for a pilot program that distributes fentanyl test strips to test street drugs for the presence of various fentanyl analogues, like carfentanil.

To be sure, some of those Dayton initiatives are in place in Oregon: The Albany Police Department, to list just one example, has been aggressive about rolling out naloxone to its officers. And the state's Opioid Epidemic Task Force includes representatives from both law enforcement and public health agencies.

But, of course, there's much more work to be done, as witnessed by the continuing controversy over the Oregon task force's recent actions.

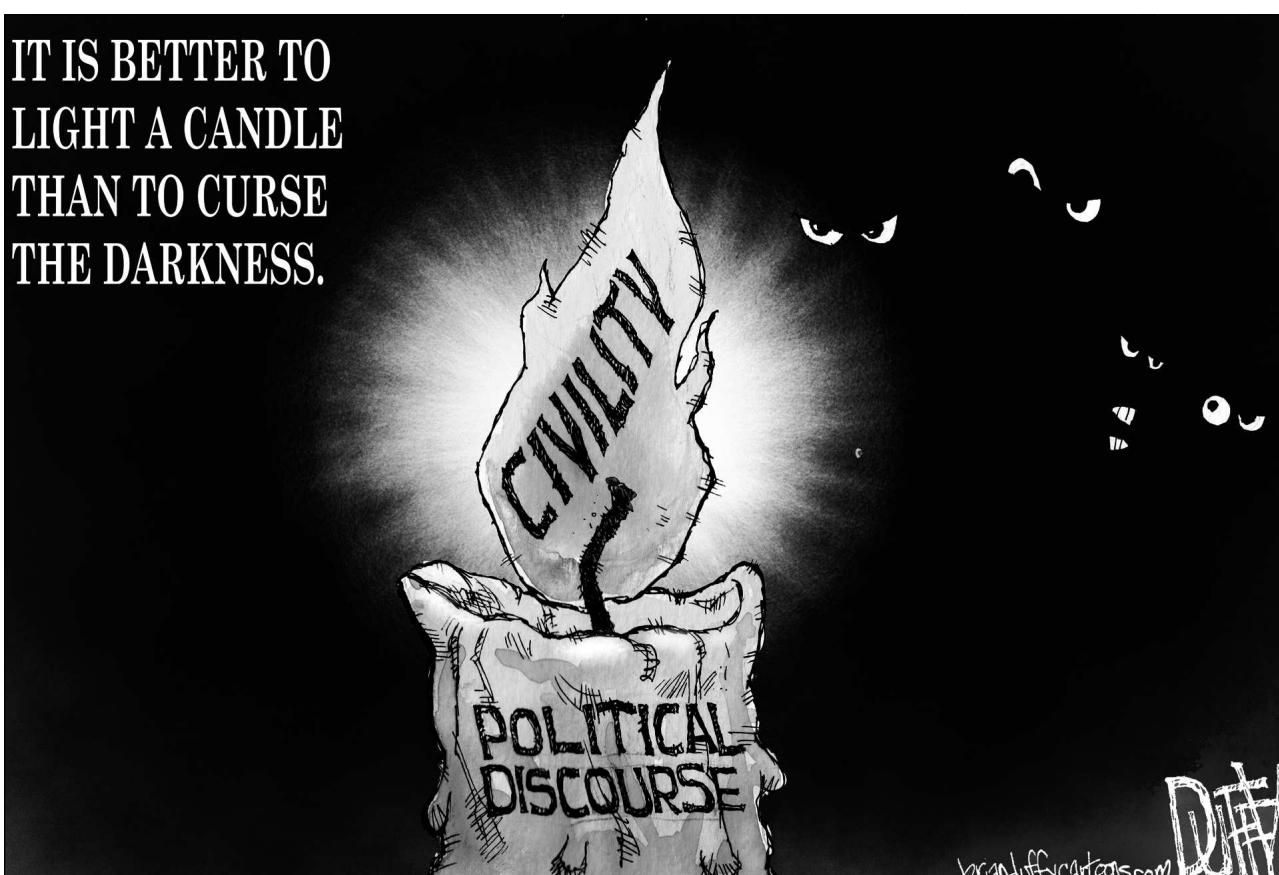
The panel last week backed a proposal to provide coverage for five chronic pain conditions currently not covered by the Oregon Health Plan, the state's Medicaid program.

The idea is to allow patients to receive services such as physical therapy and acupuncture as ways to manage chronic pain that don't involve the use of opioids. (The medical profession's over-reliance on drugs at the expense of other pain-management strategies has been a factor in the opioid crisis.)

The task force also recommended patients who are already taking opioid doses above recommended limits be required to begin tapering off. That triggered an outcry from chronic pain sufferers and their advocates, who fear overly stringent limits will leave them with one fewer weapon in their struggle against pain.

That controversy will continue to play out in Oregon, and at least one thing is for sure: We have a long way to go in this battle. Progress may be agonizingly slow — but at least it finally looks as if progress might be possible.

IT IS BETTER TO LIGHT A CANDLE THAN TO CURSE THE DARKNESS.



Three ways entrepreneurs benefit from recent economic policies

One of the best parts of my job is visiting with entrepreneurs at their places of business. To see their passion and vision firsthand is inspiring.

As regional administrator at the U.S. Small Business Administration, it causes me to constantly think, "What can we do as a federal agency to make things easier for small-business owners?"

President Donald Trump recently proclaimed November as National Entrepreneurship Month and Nov. 20 as National Entrepreneurs' Day. This proclamation celebrates the ingenuity and determination entrepreneurs have to run their business, and the Trump administration is focused on putting forward policies that empower their contributions to our strong economy.

1. Tax Relief — When I talk with small-business owners, some of their biggest challenges involve tax burdens and the need for more capital. One of the goals of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act law is to foster entrepreneurship and cre-

ate jobs, while easing the tax burden on entrepreneurs and freeing up their access to capital.

2. Fewer Regulations — The Trump administration has also removed unnecessary and burdensome regulations that have saved American families and business owners \$33 billion. For the first time in modern history, Americans have experienced an overall decrease in regulatory burdens.

3. Business-Centric Government — Americans are benefiting from the whole-of-government approach to economic growth. The SBA is collaborating more than ever with sister federal agencies. For example, rather than educate rural communities about lending programs separate from USDA, the two agencies are working together to present a comprehensive overview of federal financing programs for small business. We've also been diligently working to revamp our web-based resources and marketing materials so it's easier and faster for entrepreneurs to

My Voice

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businesses with resources to start, grow, expand or recover.

My Voice columns reflect the views of the author only. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words or as space allows. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

connect with the resources they need now in their business lifecycle.

All these efforts combined are yielding extraordinary dividends. Following the celebration of National Entrepreneurship Month, it's worth noting the contributions small-business owners make to our local and global economies.

The unemployment rate is at its lowest level in nearly half a century. Small businesses create

two out of every three new net jobs and employ half the workforce. Thanks to entrepreneurs and small business owners — who continue in the American tradition of taking risks and providing remarkable new products and services — job creation continues to grow.

Please join the SBA in celebrating our nation's entrepreneurs and innovators whose vision and drive help our nation flourish.

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