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Bernie Foster
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Jerry Foster
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Christen McCurdy
News Editor

Patricia Irvin
Graphic Designer

Monica J. Foster
Seattle Office Coordinator

Susan Fried
Photographer



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cations Inc.

415 N. Killingsworth St.
P.O. Box 5455
Portland, OR 97228

Telephone (503) 285-5555
Fax: (503) 285-2900

info@theskanner.com

www.TheSkanner.com

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Opinion

THE SKANNER EDITORIAL: Consumers Need Transparency in Medication Pricing

By *Bernie Foster, Publisher*

From antibiotics and insulin to statins and steroids, medications are essential for many Americans. But prescription drug prices have been rising so fast that people who depend on them to stay alive and healthy can't afford them.

One company, Turing Pharmaceuticals, raised the price of its specialist anti-infection drug Daraprim by 5,000 percent.

The causes of this health crisis are complicated: from lack of real competition in the drug market to a secretive pricing system that means the same drug can be sold at 50 different prices. Then there is the rebate system that allows middlemen to skim profits so the people paying for the drugs don't get the benefits.

Sen. Ron Wyden didn't hold back when he spoke to pharmaceutical company bosses in Congress last week. He laid into them saying their profits are "outsized" and their "way of business is unacceptable."

We agree. Of course drug

companies should be able to take a profit. But they shouldn't be exploiting the most vulnerable people in America just because they can.

“All should have their cost of drug prices transparent, up and down, so everyone knows the costs

Sen. Wyden is working at the federal level to increase pricing transparency and to reduce costs for Medicare recipients. If his bills pass they will help but more will be needed.

There is a group of companies known as pharmacy benefit managers. They are healthcare benefit managers, drug stores, and others. All should have their cost of drug



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prices transparent, up and down, so everyone knows the costs.

Oregon lawmakers are looking at a long list of bills that aim to help solve this health crisis. They should be paying close attention to drug pricing.

There are more than a dozen ideas under consideration. One idea would allow the state Board of Pharmacy to import drugs from Canada.

Another would direct pharmacists to substitute generics

for branded drugs. A third would allow pharmacists to dispense emergency insulin. And yet another bill would allow patients who pay out of pocket to apply the cost to their deductibles.

And those are just four of the proposals.

These ideas are worth thinking through. So we urge legislators to work closely with diverse groups, and to aim for a transparent pricing system and a fair deal for consumers. What do you think?

Jobs Report Shows What 'African Americans Have to Lose' Under Trump

The latest report from the U.S. Labor Department has provided still another answer to the infamous question of "What the hell do [African Americans] have to lose?"

That question, of course, was posed by Donald Trump during his successful run for president in 2016. With racial tensions, prejudice and bigotry ever increasing and among the responses to Trump's question, another answer for Black America is jobs.

The latest jobs report from the U.S. Labor Department revealed that the unemploy-



Stacy M. Brown
NNPA
Columnist

ed a quote attributed to Stuart Varney, who said on Fox & Friends there is no better time to be an American worker and that "we have the strongest economy in the world." Trump added, "So true!" But his tweet ignored the fact that analysts expected the economy to add 180,000 new jobs.

“Three straight months of increases in the Black unemployment rate from three straight increases in unemployed workers

ment rate for Black workers moved in the wrong direction for the third consecutive month.

The report shows that unemployment increased from 6.8 percent in January to 7 percent in February.

Overall the country's unemployment rate declined to 3.8 percent in February, but only 20,000 jobs were created.

President Trump tweet-

Among the major worker groups, the unemployment rates for adult men (3.5 percent), Whites (3.3 percent), and Hispanics (4.3 percent) decreased in February.

The jobless rates for adult women (3.4 percent), teenagers (13.4 percent), Blacks (7.0 percent), and Asians (3.1 percent) did little to move the needle and analysts said the unemployment rate for His-



panics has never been this low.

"Now would be the time for the Federal Reserve to worry," said William Spriggs, a chief economist at the AFL-CIO and professor in the department of Economics at Howard University.

"Three straight months of increases in the Black unemployment rate from three straight increases in unemployed workers. They better listen to Neel Kashkari [president of the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis]," Spriggs said.

Recognizing the tension between the Federal Reserve's focus on asset prices and the real economy, Kashkari recently pointed out that, "If the U.S. economy is creating 200,000 jobs a month, month-after-month, we're not at maximum employment."

"For the three years since I've been at the Fed, we have been surprised by the labor

market. We keep thinking we're at maximum employment. And then wage growth is tepid. And the headline unemployment rate drops further. Inflation has been well under control," Kashkari said.

Spriggs said since reaching a low of 6 percent in November, the Black unemployment rate has climbed three straight months. "Given the relationship of the Black community to predatory subprime auto loans this is not good," he said.

Stacy is a veteran journalist and author of the forthcoming biography: "Aftermath: Michael Jackson's Dysfunctional Family and the Legacy of the King of Pop." He's also the author of "Blind Faith: The Miraculous Journey of Lula Hardaway," "Stevie Wonder's Mother," "Michael Jackson: The Man Behind the Mask," and "Fighting Temptation: The Damon Harris Story."