



OPINION

VIEWS FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE H-Z

OUTSIDE VIEW

Close loopholes on vaccinations

— From USA Today

Measles outbreaks continue to lacerate communities from coast to coast, and there's absolutely no reason for it. The latest involve dozens of new cases in New York and in Clark County, Washington, across the Columbia River from Portland.

These shouldn't be happening. The highly contagious disease — which can lead to pneumonia and, in uncommon cases, to encephalitis or even death — was all but eradicated in 2000.

But many parents, embracing scientifically debunked fears about vaccination health risks, have declined the inoculation of their children with the doses for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR).

It surely doesn't help when public figures who should know better spread uninformed views. Darla Shine, wife of White House Communications Director Bill Shine, tweeted last week that childhood diseases "keep you healthy & fight cancer" and that "sadly," her children had received the MMR.

Actually, her kids are safer because they've had the vaccine.

The core issue is that too many states make it too easy for parents to avoid having their children immunized. While all 50 require vaccinations, 17 states allow parents to opt out for personal reasons.

Even if their offspring get and survive the illness, they selfishly place at serious risk other children who can't be vaccinated because of legitimate medical concerns such as a compromised immune system. Those children are protected only when virtually everyone else in the community is immunized, breaking the chain of infection.

Even worse, in 2016 scientists found that a deadly measles neurological complication, which lies dormant in children for years, is more common than previously thought, arising in 1 out of 609 cases where unvaccinated babies contract the disease.

Recent outbreaks underscore the risks of allowing nonmedical exemptions.

Forty-seven states let parents opt out for religious reasons. Among them is New York, where there have been more than 70 cases of measles in New York City since October, including cases among unvaccinated children within an Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn. In Rockland County, there have been 135 cases since September.

The state of Washington allows both religious and personal exemptions. The result is that only 78 percent of children ages 6 to 18 in Clark County have received the necessary two doses of MMR. Almost all of the 62 confirmed cases of measles in that county this year involved no prior immunization.

Three states — California, Mississippi and West Virginia — allow vaccination exemptions strictly for medical reasons. Not coincidentally, their two-dose MMR rates for kindergartners are 96.9 percent, 99.4 percent and 98.4 percent, respectively.

The outbreak in Washington has prompted legislators to consider a measure sponsored by a Clark County Republican state representative that would deny MMR exemptions based on personal beliefs.

For all the sense this makes, hard-core opposition remains fierce. Even as children fell ill, hundreds of naysayers arrived at the Washington statehouse to voice opposition. When California passed an even stricter law in 2015, the sponsor — state Sen. Richard Pan — received death threats.

Despite the blowback, government requirements are the right things to do, along with public education campaigns. Exemptions to state-mandated vaccinations should be granted only for narrowly prescribed medical or religious reasons. The health of children is too important to put at risk.

Rocking Vegan Vote with Booker

Of all of the politicians who have entered the 2020 presidential race or those who are expected to do so none excite me more than Cory Booker.

And the reason for this is simple — because I have exactly no idea how his presence in the race is going to turn out. Cory Booker is like a Big Mac sandwich. Delicious — but 5 minutes after eating one you are hungry again. And you really don't want to spend much time thinking about what goes on behind the scenes to produce a Big Mac sandwich, take my word on this.

Cory — and he's the kind of guy you want to call by his first name — has an interesting life story. Educated at Stanford and Yale, he worked as a community organizer and activist before being elected as the Mayor of Newark and then on to the U.S. Senate. At this point — and failing an entrance to the race by Michelle Obama — he appears to be the most Barack-like candidate we are going to get.

And there's still a lot of love out there in Donkey Land for Barack Obama.

And Cory has followed

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a fairly liberal path in his Senate career with regard to domestic policy.

He has promoted legislation against discrimination on a routine basis and often with the co-sponsorship of some powerful Republican figures (Lindsey Graham and Mike Pence for example). He has also reached across the aisle to vote for tougher sanctions on Iran.

But he made his share of enemies as well. As part of the "Hell No" caucus whose members — Bernie Sanders, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren — also have presidential aspirations, he took a blood oath to stall the nominations of Trump's cabinet appointees. Cory was the first sitting U.S.

Senator to testify against another, Jeff Sessions, when the latter took a seat as Attorney General.

He also took a hard line against Brett Kavanaugh during Kavanaugh's hearings for confirmation to the Supreme Court.

Now it's a little too early to define his policy positions, but from what I've read they seem to mirror his stances in the Senate — the emphasis being on criminal justice reform, lower health care costs, and a nod to tougher environmental regulations.

He is also proposing to endow savings accounts for infants. Unless he's planning to lower the voting age from 18 years to 18 months, I'm not sure how that's going to help him. Kissing babies to earn votes is a time-honored photo opportunity. Buying babies sort of takes things to the next level.

But I have a hard time understanding Cory's diet principles. Cory Booker is a vegan and, you see, my daughter announced her own conversion to veganism last year, and no matter how much I've read about it and regardless of how much I've tried to understand it I

still just don't get it.

Vegetarianism I can understand. I don't practice it, but I understand it.

I'm not sure I would want to live in an alternate universe ruled by cows but as long as we are here, on this planet, pass the bacon!

But veganism is an entirely different animal. In addition to eschewing meat (and I'm not sure that "eschewing" is a good choice of word here but I just always wanted to use it in a sentence) vegans also close their mouths to eggs and dairy products.

I'm told that this is supposed to be a protest against the conditions that domestic animals are raised in.

On that basis veganism as I perceive it sort of has the trappings of a religious cult. Or maybe I'm just on edge about it because my daughter is involved.

But in a political world defined by conservatism and liberalism, veganism is sort of like libertarianism — a case of wanting to have your tofu and eat it, too, if you will.

And presidential politics is a game for carnivores. This is a fact that Cory Booker will soon have to wake up to.

Step up to help foster care kids

One day, when my oldest child was about 6, she was swinging in our backyard and concentrating so intently.

She looked lost in thought, and I asked her, "What are you thinking about?" Her swift reply was, "swinging."

It made me reflect on how simple her world was. How carefree. Children are full of wonder about the little things. We can take a lesson from that — just being present in what we are doing.

Their brows are not furrowed with worry over everyday stressors.

At least, typically. But I have also looked into the faces of many children — even this week — who were lost inside of themselves because their worlds have been jarred by pain at the hands of an adult that was supposed to love and care for them. That is often the reflection of a child in foster care.

You see, when a child has been exposed to domestic violence, food insecurity or outright physical abuse, it alters them deeply on the inside. It causes trauma that actually changes their brain chemistry. Adrenaline floods their little bodies making them live in a state of flight, fight or freeze. When I have

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a scare as an adult, the same thing is triggered — a survival response. But when a child lives in an environment where they're not sure when someone will abuse them again or when they will eat again, they get stuck in that survival state.

Simply putting them in a "safe" place or home does not automatically change their body or their thinking. They have often come to believe they need to protect themselves. They don't have the cognitive or verbal skills to express what is happening on the inside, but it comes out in behavior.

If my child breaks his arm, I take him to the doctor and get the medical attention he needs to mend his arm. When a

child enters foster care, very often their wounds are deep on the inside. We can't see those as readily.

That was the case with my brother adopted out of foster care. We loved him so dearly, but we couldn't see or understand his brokenness on the inside.

There is a falsehood that if a child is fostered or adopted young, they are spared from the same woes we can all imagine with a teen in foster care. But that just isn't true.

The first nine months are most critical for a child's development because they bond with a loving caregiver.

Their cries are met by someone picking them up, feeding them and changing them while making eye contact. But babies who don't have that nurturing environment are severely affected. In fact, if they are not cared for well in the womb, a baby's chemistry and neurology are damaged. Exposure to maternal stress, domestic violence, drugs — all affect a baby's development.

As a community, we have the opportunity to make sure that every child who is harmed gets the help they need. I have witnessed what science tells us: a harmed child's

brain can be rewired with attachment to a healthy loving adult. If your heart isn't engaged yet, here is why you should care: unhealed trauma manifests in grievous, costly ways that affect our society.

The research is very clear. Unhealed trauma can lead to substance abuse, medical issues, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, incarceration, mental health issues and suicide.

Not everyone is called to foster or adopt. But you can help. You can support birth parents who need help to right their lives.

They often have their own unhealed trauma. You can volunteer or give to an organization that is serving on the front lines. And perhaps most importantly, you can tangibly support families who open their homes.

You probably know a grandmother raising her grandkids. Ask how you can help. Wading through the pain and loss of biological parents is not an easy road; it is messy and difficult. Overcoming abandonment and rejection issues isn't solved overnight.

Let's be the neighbors who are willing to go the extra mile to help another, especially vulnerable children who cannot speak up for themselves.

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