

EDITORIALS

An inept plan to fight addiction

New York does not levy sales tax on either over-the-counter or prescription medication, and it shouldn't. The people who most need such drugs are often the ones least able to afford them.

But a bill imposing such a tax and signed last year by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo did try to take that into account. The law said the \$100 million to be raised annually from manufacturers of opioids could not be passed on to consumers. But in December, a federal district court judge in Manhattan said the state law could unconstitutionally shift the burden of the cost to out-of-state consumers.

The law likely wasn't going to be nearly as helpful in funding addiction treatment and prevention programs as many hoped. It designated only \$20 million of that \$100 million to address drug addiction, with no plan for deploying it. The rest would have gone to the general fund.

Cuomo is trying it again, with a new bill in this year's budget, and it's worse. This time the tax can be passed on to the consumer, making the law more likely to survive a legal challenge but worse for New Yorkers.

The state has done a good job of cracking down on a number of painkiller prescriptions for people who shouldn't have them because of its I-STOP oversight system. As dangerous and powerful as opioids are, most people getting them legally need them and shouldn't have to pay a surcharge on top of their out-of-pocket costs. And since users only pay a fraction of a drug's costs, the higher tax on manufacturers means insurance premiums for all New Yorkers would climb.

Drug companies that were complicit in fueling opioid addiction must be made to pay to address that problem. But New York already is seeking that remedy in the courts. Increasing costs for all New Yorkers will only make the high cost of health care even worse. — *The editorial board*

MTA must ride herd on crucial safety program

The effort to install critically important safety technology on the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad has met with an unacceptable litany of problems, failures and delays.

That's primarily because contractors have made significant mistakes, haven't fully staffed the \$1 billion project, and don't seem to grasp the urgency to get it done. But the problem also illustrates the pressing need for overhauling the Metropolitan Transportation Authority — including how the authority oversees and manages its contracts.

The latest issue: the companies responsible for the installation of positive train control technology, known as PTC and designed partly to stop trains from colliding, recently had to recall 4,000 scanner antennas that had been installed on train cars. The devices wouldn't operate correctly because they were not tested on a properly calibrated machine. During an MTA hearing last week, officials from the contractors admitted only one technician was responsible for both setting up the equipment and testing it, leaving no room for anyone to find errors. So much for quality control.

The contractors — Bombardier Transportation and Siemens Rail Automation — share blame for the trouble. Meanwhile, MTA officials have stepped up how assiduously they've handled the project over the last year or so, but even that's not enough. The error has gotten the MTA's attention but their promises to strictly monitor the PTC work better be backed up by diligent oversight. And let it be a lesson, with so many capital projects in the works: Accountability for contractors and MTA management should be defined, and clearer standards and penalties for mistakes must be established.

It's time to recalibrate.

— *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



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LETTERS

Penalty box for these Islanders' fans

I wish to apologize to hockey player John Tavares and his family on behalf of New York Islanders fans who went along with the vulgar display of ingratitude for his nine years of devotion to both community and team ["We don't need you!," Sports, March 1].

If Thursday night's game had been a fight, Islanders fans who threw figurative haymakers would deserve to be suspended for 10 games. The NHL Network did us a favor by not running the sound of the game's lowlights.

We should be embarrassed as a community for the poor treatment accorded Tavares, a leader who was only doing right by himself and his family by moving on from the Islanders to the Toronto Maple Leafs. It was team management that failed us. The Is-

landers should have traded Tavares when he didn't sign at the trade deadline.

Wouldn't it be great if fans turn out on April 1, Tavares' next Coliseum game, to show we regret the behavior exhibited on Thursday?

Keith Grubman,
Bellmore

Dire need to reform criminal justice rules

I read with dismay about prosecutors' efforts to derail pending criminal justice reforms, including discovery ["Criminal justice revamp," News, Feb. 24].

As an attorney who has practiced criminal defense for nearly 45 years, I have seen the devastating impact New York's antiquated criminal discovery laws have on the fairness of the criminal justice system. In civil cases involving money, attorneys receive detailed information about the

opponent's case to help them give informed advice to clients. However, in criminal cases, when a conviction can result in decades of imprisonment, critical information such as witness statements necessary for preparation of a defense is provided only immediately before trial. This lack of information hampers attorney efforts to investigate, and innocent clients are often wrongfully convicted because the defense attorney has been blindfolded by New York's lack of disclosure.

Prosecutors say turning over discovery materials within 15 days of an arraignment is unrealistic. Perhaps it is inconvenient, but many other jurisdictions have modified discovery laws to promote fairness and require the sharing of information within a comparable period. Inconvenience should not be an excuse for denying access to information to attorneys