

EDITORIAL

Vaccine reform needs gov's push

Albany bill would end religious exemption

What will it take for elected officials across the state — including Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo himself — to understand the severe repercussions of allowing people to flout the requirement that school-age children must be vaccinated?

Clearly, an outbreak of more than 600 measles cases statewide hasn't been enough. One yeshiva in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, has been linked to more than 40 cases.

Hundreds of passengers on a cruise ship docked in St. Lucia were quarantined because a crew member was diagnosed with the measles. The ship's doctor needed 100 doses of vaccine for the ship's passengers, which apparently is owned by the Church of Scientology. The church hasn't taken an official position on vaccination, although some celebrity members have been vocal vaccine opponents.

Ending this national outbreak won't be easy, although officials in New York City and Rockland County — the two epicenters — are trying by using the limited tools they have. It is critical, and about time, that the state acts to prevent a new outbreak of measles or of another preventable contagious disease.

That's where legislation to eliminate what is known as the religious exemption to vaccination comes in to play. Bills sponsored by State Sen. Brad Hoylman and Assemb. Jeffrey Dinowitz would leave New York with only a medical exemption to vaccination — so that only physically compromised children could avoid immunization and still attend school. The law would take affect immediately, though there would be some sort of a grace period for students to be vaccinated. Once most of the population has received shots, then, medical experts say, herd immunity would protect the few who are vulnerable, and outbreaks would not occur.

Often, however, the religious exemption isn't used for religious reasons. No major religion opposes vaccination. What's really happening is that many parents buy into false claims spread on social media that vaccinations can cause injury or autism, and use the religious exemption as a cover.

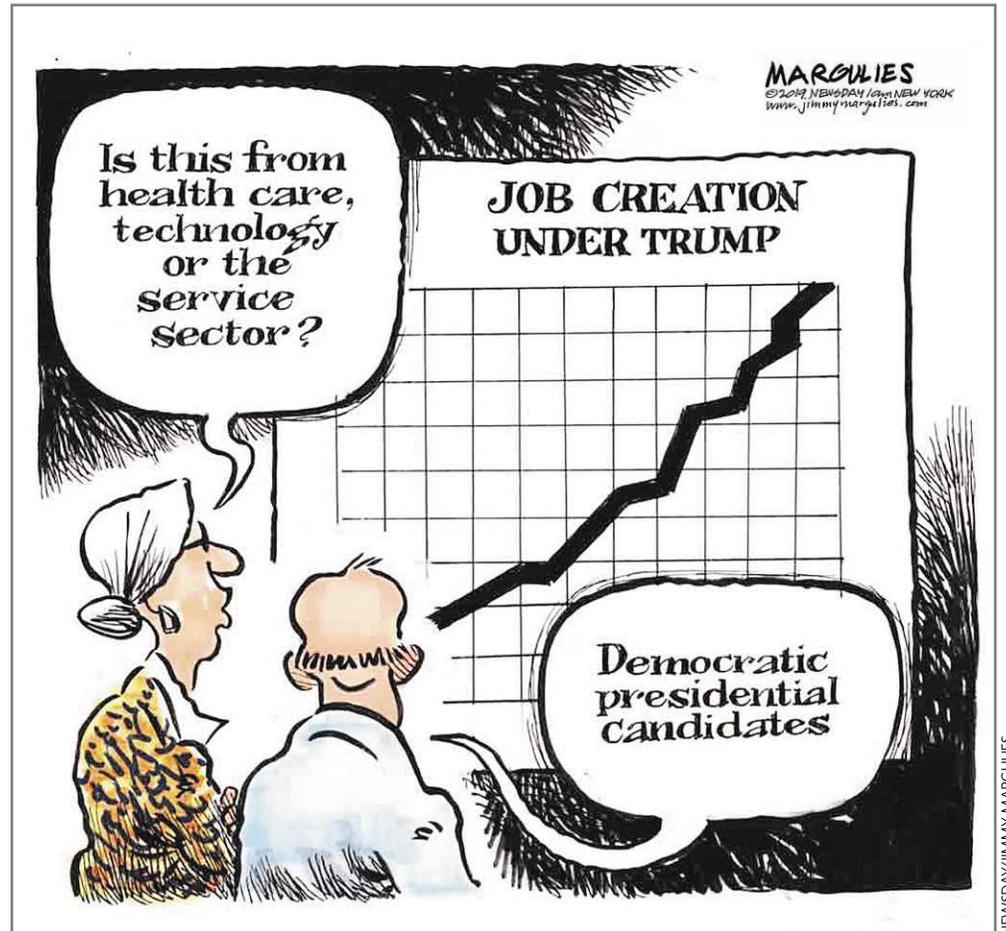
It's important to understand the science. Studies as recently as this year found that the measles vaccine doesn't increase a child's risk of developing autism. And a separate study by neurologist Dr. Samuel Berkovic found that children who experienced seizures after vaccination all shared the same gene mutations for epilepsy. Vaccination may have precipitated the seizures, but those seizures were inevitable and just as easily could have occurred when a child got a cold. The cause of the epilepsy, Berkovic found, was genetic, even though it appeared to the untrained eye that vaccines were to blame.

The State Senate seems poised to vote to end the religious exemption. The State Assembly must do the same. A carefully drafted law can survive constitutional concerns that religious expression is being impaired. Disappointingly, Cuomo's position has been unclear. He must lead this effort. Doing anything else would be reckless and irresponsible and put the state's most vulnerable children at risk.

— *The editorial board*



A sign warns of measles in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on April 25.



■ Matt Davies is off. See his cartoons at newsday.com/matt

LETTERS

Saddened by deaths at Carolina college

I was sickened and saddened to read about yet another senseless school assassination of two promising young students at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte ["Cops: Student saved lives tackling gunman," News, May 2]. It seems not a week goes by when we don't hear of these horrendous shootings at schools and at workplaces.

When will this insanity end? I am afraid never. What happened to the days when the most you had to worry about at college were your grades? Politicians will take advantage of this situation and cry out for gun control and justice, but how do you battle insanity?

My heart bleeds for the families of Riley Howell and Ellis R. Parlier, who were killed, and the four who were wounded. Howell, who

tackled the shooting suspect, was a true hero. I know his family will hear those words many times, yet it does not ease their pain. I hope the full weight of the law comes down on the suspect.

*Donna Skjeveland,
Holbrook*

Where is federal fiscal restraint?

Thanks to columnist William F. B. O'Reilly for recognizing what I think most citizens would consider runaway spending ["Our reckless spending spree," Opinion, May 3].

Plans for infrastructure spending of \$2 trillion on top of promises of free college, free health care, the Green New Deal, increases in Social Security and Medicare? There has to be a limit.

Any chance we can bring back Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich and a Republican Con-

gress to put us back on a more responsible financial path the way they did in the 1990s?

*John McKeown,
Massapequa Park*

55-percenters still will pay too much

I am among the 55 percent of Nassau County residents whose assessed values have decreased ["Bill would phase in new assessments," News, May 1].

That means I have been paying far too much for far too long. A phase-in of my reduction will mean that I will continue to pay too much for that period. How will we 55-percenters be compensated for that? Theoretically, if I grieve every year during the phase-in, I should be successful. Will you suspend grievances for the 55-percenters? It's time to make this right. Just do it.

*Kevin Lowry,
Oceanside*