

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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COLUMN | LANE FILLER

Take guesswork out of policework

If one thing could improve the tenor of the debate over events in Ferguson, Mo., it would be having some idea of what actually happened. So yeah, I support body cameras for cops.

President Barack Obama has proposed federal funding for 50,000 cameras. It's a start. The units are generally about three inches long, clip to uniforms, and transmit video for storage via the Internet, usually while recharging.

In Rialto, California, population 102,000, body cameras were rolled out in 2012. In the following 12 months, complaints against officers declined 88 percent and use-of-force incidents by officers decreased almost 60 percent.

Maybe cops behaved better. Maybe civilians behaved better. Maybe the fact that the recording existed prevented baseless complaints. I don't much care why the improvement happened. I just think police-civilian interaction improves when it's recorded.

Michael Brown, black and 18, was repeatedly and fatally shot by police Officer Darren Wilson, white and 28, in August. And we know that shortly before being shot by Wilson, Brown stole cigars and shoved a store clerk. Everything else, though, is open to debate because the many witnesses disagree. They disagree with each other, and in many cases their testimony disagrees with itself, having changed over time.

The fiercest arguing is created by a lack of information combined with prejudices on both sides, which are not quite the same as deep hatreds. The difference is important.

You can have a bias against cops, but see a video of an enraged and scary man charging a police officer and say, "While I have no love for the man in blue, I'd have shot that guy a bunch of times, too. He was coming strong, with scary and murderous intent."

You also can have a bias against young black men but see a video of a white cop repeatedly shooting an unarmed young black man whose arms were up in a gesture of surrender and say, "While I have no

love for a thug who steals cigars or messes with clerks, no way did the cop need to keep shooting at him. The kid should probably be in jail, but he shouldn't be dead."

I believe we are a nation of people who often have certain prejudices. We tend to side with people who look like us, live like us, talk like us, earn like us and are as old as us. I don't believe we are a people consumed by fierce hatreds. There are a few infected with such poison, but not many.

No information will sway those few true haters. The cop haters will always believe the cops are wrong, and the black haters will always believe blacks are wrong, but mostly nobody cares what such people think ... because we know they don't really think at all.

To me, cop cams aren't controversial. The mayor of Boston says his officers don't need them, calling the idea "a distraction." Earlier this year, a police union in Miami fought a plan to use the cameras, arguing they would "distract officers from their duties, and hamper their ability to act and react in dangerous situations." Some argue the cameras invade privacy, but the American Civil Liberties Union is now in favor.

Officers have no right to privacy on duty. And the civilians they come in contact with, mostly in public, don't either.

Equipping 700,000 officers in the United States with body cameras could be done for around \$1 billion, and federal funding isn't necessarily needed. Police departments usually have forfeiture funds. This is a perfect example of how best to deploy such money.

Doing so would limit confrontations between officers and civilians, which means fewer insurance payouts for departments. Even when those confrontations are not prevented, the cameras can give us information, which is more useful than bias in deciding who is right and who is wrong.

Lane Filler is a member of the Newsday editorial board. He wrote this for Newsday.

POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Many fiscal decisions in new year

Last week I wrote about a "new" financial decision facing New York, specifically the one-time settlement surplus of more than \$5 billion that we'll decide how to best allocate in our next fiscal year. That's not to say, however, that we're not facing many other, ongoing fiscal choices and challenges. The state comptroller, for example, recently projected a deficit of around \$2 billion for next year. These one-time settlement funds would be imprudently used to close such a recurring gap.

Let's especially not overlook short- and long-term changes underway in one of the state's largest-of-all financial obligations – Medicaid. How large?

Overall, Medicaid expenditures are fast approaching the \$60-billion-a-year mark. It's our second-largest state operating expense, a massive fiscal responsibility that, according to recent Health Department data, resulted in a Medicaid claim being processed every 8.8 seconds last year. And it's a financial obligation that's about to grow even larger. Obamacare has added approximately 450,000 new Medicaid enrollees over the past two years.

Now, according to numerous analysts, President Obama's new executive order on immigration will add even more to New York's Medicaid rolls, most likely significantly.

On the high-end, the figures are alarming. A recent study by the Migration



SEN. TOM O'MARA

Policy Institute (<http://migrationpolicy.org>) has estimated that in New York roughly 200,000 adults and 100,000 children will be eligible for legal status under Obama's executive order and, therefore, entitled to Medicaid in our state. Earlier this year, the state's Medicaid director testified that Medicaid costs for each adult are \$7,900, and \$1,500 for every child.

So let's calculate the potential high-end cost of the President's order to give legal status to millions of illegal immigrants. Remember that the Migration Policy Institute estimates 200,000 adults and 100,000 children will become legal in New York. The state's Medicaid director said Medicaid costs are \$7,900 per adult and \$1,500 per child. If every single one of them qualified for Medicaid, that's an added cost to state taxpayers of approximately \$2 billion.

But even at the low-end, perhaps a more likely scenario anticipating that not every single adult and child will qualify, conservative estimates still put the additional costs at up to \$500 million. That is a very significant impact to the entire budget and don't forget the added bureaucracy that always accompanies

enrollment increases.

Noting these potentially huge additional costs for state taxpayers, the state Senate Republican Majority Leader recently urged New York's federal representatives to renew a longstanding fight for New York State to receive a greater (and we believe more fair) share of federal Medicaid dollars.

Set aside, for now, the hot-button political issue of immigration. The fiscal reality of the President's new immigration order is simply going to have enormous fiscal consequences for New York's taxpayers. They may be somewhat limited in the short run, but not over the long haul as the impact of the immigration order increasingly takes effect.

Next January when the governor releases his proposed 2015-16 state budget, we'll be closely watching the Cuomo administration's projection for the new Medicaid enrollment figure – keeping in mind at the same time that an Office for New Americans established by Governor Cuomo in early 2013 will remain, in the words of one fiscal watchdog, "committed to maximizing the number of illegal immigrants in New York who can come out of the shadows and sign up" for Medicaid. In fact a November 28th New York Times article indicated the Office's intention to do just that, noting that in response to the immigration actions the Office "plans to expand services at the opportunity centers and increase

operating hours for an information hotline."

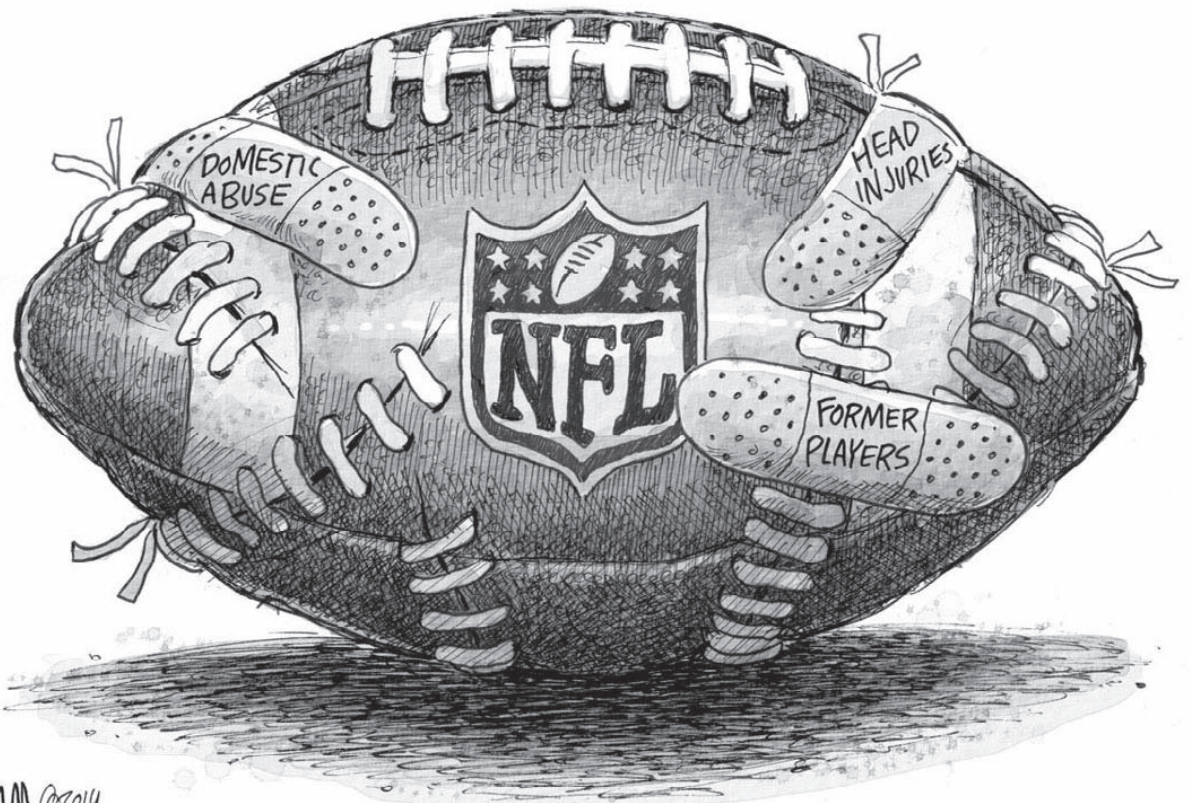
And we can never forget that the Medicaid system remains plagued by abuse, fraud and waste – a theme I repeatedly harp on. In late November, the state attorney general announced the indictment of three Brooklyn pharmacies for defrauding Medicaid of over \$5 million. With the state's current Medicaid Inspector General headed out the door at the end of the year, that office will be in flux at a time we simply can't afford to backtrack on any ongoing efforts to combat waste. So we'll also need to carefully monitor this transition.

Finally, maybe most importantly, a comprehensive Medicaid reform initiative remains underway that could profoundly change the system and which demands close watching too.

So there's a lot going on and, as always, Medicaid decisions have to be carefully monitored. It's certainly a prime case study of how decisions at one level of government impact every other level of government and, ultimately, every taxpayer. But it also highlights the complexity of these decisions and the importance of making them with an eye on what they're likely to lead to in future years.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



ADAM ZVOUS ©2014 CAGLE CARTOONS.COM THE BUFFALO NEWS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Police aren't the problem in Mo.

TO THE EDITOR | An unarmed, doped up, 6'2", 260 pound, thieving, 18-year-old adult, departing from his crime scene, attacked a police officer, attempted to steal his gun, and was shot dead. Why doesn't someone in the media say that out loud twice a day? This is not racial, it is criminal. The problem is not on the police, it is on the streets they are forced to patrol.

The burning and looting in Ferguson is indeed aligned with "protesters" cause, because "their" cause is that blacks don't have to obey American law or submit to the American judicial system. It is distressing that our media and White House are playing along with "their" anarchy

and terrorism. They ask the police to use restraint and continually imply that this is a police problem. Forcing that there be a proportionate number of blacks in police pullovers or black policemen on the streets, is as stupid as forcing that there be a proportionate number of white faces in our prisons. These disproportions are indicative of the systemic problem, but no media has the guts to say that problem out loud.

The minorities are the majorities in jails and prisons. Find the cause of that. It is not police or judges. More blacks commit crimes than whites; that is the problem that needs to be addressed. There are symptoms, and there are causes. Stop protesting and only reporting the symptoms. Expect blacks to be the disproportionate on police rolls and blotters if they are the majorities in

our prisons. Police are doing their jobs excellently and need better protection from these protesters and the civil suits of malcontents. Deal with the real racial problems for once, and give each police officer an overwhelming thank you.

Rev. Edward G. Rice
Hammondsport

Precedence set on body cameras

TO THE EDITOR | The massive public reaction to the tragic deaths of three black teens at the hand of white police officers has led to a national call for use of body cameras to record and prevent any future mistreatment of suspects.

There is ample precedent. Animal protection activists have used body cameras to document egregious atrocities and safety violations by

workers in the meat, dairy, and egg industries. The resulting videos have led to a number of corrective actions, as well as felony convictions, meat recalls, and even a \$500 million civil settlement.

How ironic then that agribusiness interests in seven states (Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, and Utah) have now enacted "ag-gag" laws imposing severe penalties for using body cameras in their agricultural facilities. The language is typically drafted by the anti-consumer American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

Let's hope that other vested interests do not impose similar restrictions on the use of body cameras by law enforcement officers.

Stig Carter,
Bath

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