

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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COLUMN | THOMAS J. RIDGE AND JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN

Biodefense not strong enough

By Thomas J. Ridge and Joseph I. Lieberman

The United Nations Security Council recently heard firsthand testimony from the victims of a chemical-weapons attack in Syria. A Syrian doctor spoke of his frantic efforts to treat more than 100 people who were hit by chlorine-filled bombs.

These kinds of attacks are becoming more common and will increasingly be a component of 21st-century warfare. Terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have stated that they intend to acquire biological and chemical weapons – and use them against the U.S.

Unfortunately, our nation is dangerously unprepared to prevent or respond to such attacks. Whether the actor is another country, a terrorist organization or even Mother Nature, the consequences are potentially catastrophic.

That's why we agreed to become co-chairs of a new panel on biodefense, hosted by Hudson Institute and Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies, whose members include former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, former Representative Jim Greenwood, and former Homeland Security Advisor Kenneth Wainstein.

Congress and the President must devote more attention to the threats posed by biological and chemical agents – formulating and executing a coherent and comprehensive plan to protect the American people from them.

For evidence of our national unpreparedness, look no further than the Ebola crisis last year. We knew a disease like Ebola could reach our shores. Even so, when it did, no one seemed to know who was in charge or how to respond.

Screening procedures were not in place at airports. Hospitals lacked the proper guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for donning gowns and gloves. Healthcare professionals contracted the disease because they didn't know how to protect themselves.

And there were precious few prototype vaccines and therapeutics for the illness; they'd been ignored since the early stages of their

development.

The Ebola outbreak spread because we and the rest of the world did not manage the disease properly. Imagine if America's enemies had deliberately released a similarly deadly infectious agent within our borders.

It's as if our government has forgotten what it learned from the anthrax attacks in 2001.

Our political leaders have not made biodefense a national priority.

Consider the recent decline in funding for biological and chemical readiness efforts. After peaking in the mid-2000s, grants for homeland security and public health activities related to biodefense and infectious disease have fallen.

As Dr. Julie Gerberding, former Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, explained before our Blue Ribbon Panel, the drop-off in funding wasn't "because any one individual decided it wasn't important, but because we allowed competing priorities to interfere and to attenuate what had been off to a good start."

Our political leaders must make funding for biodefense a priority before a biological or chemical attack – not after one has already occurred.

But funding alone is insufficient. The federal government must also install and maintain a leadership structure that allows for rapid decision-making as soon as we find out about a biological or chemical threat.

Congress and the President can do so by institutionalizing biodefense at the White House, naming and empowering an individual with the ability to coordinate efforts to deal with biodefense. For this to be effective, that official needs budgetary authority.

Biological and chemical threats are among the most sinister and potentially catastrophic our nation faces.

It's only a matter of time before our enemies take advantage of our vulnerabilities in biodefense and attack us. Our political leaders must give these threats the attention they deserve and do what it takes to defend the American people from them.

—Thomas J. Ridge and Joseph I. Lieberman are co-chairs of the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense (www.biodefensestudy.org).

WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Painting a picture of effective cooperation



TOM O'MARA

I realize it's not a question that gets asked every day of the week or that most of you have ever even given a second thought, but do you have any idea how many gallons of paint go unused each year in New York State?

According to the national Product Stewardship Institute (www.productstewardship.us), approximately 3.1 million gallons.

And do you know who's responsible for collecting and disposing of this unused paint, and how much this process costs? The responsibility falls mostly to local governments and, by extension, to local taxpayers (surprise, surprise) to the tune of roughly \$25 million a year.

So I think it's worthwhile to revisit a piece of legislation that received unanimous, bipartisan Senate approval earlier this year. It didn't generate a whole lot of attention – especially from the state Assembly leadership, which I'll get to in a moment – but I still believe it should have and will continue to advocate for its enactment.

It would have relieved local governments of this costly burden and, at the same time, delivered statewide fiscal, economic and environmental benefits. Unfortunately, state Assembly leaders didn't bring it to a vote in their house.

It's worth highlighting again for two overriding reasons: 1.) for the fundamental importance of the program itself, which we will continue to fight for, but also 2.) because it signals what can potentially be achieved when government and industry work together to address environmental and economic challenges like this one.

The legislation (S.4929/A.6199), which I sponsored, would establish an industry-supported "Paint Stewardship Program" to reduce this costly burden (i.e., mandate) on local governments and taxpayers who are currently responsible for collecting and

disposing of most post-consumer paint -- a cost, again, which has been estimated at \$25 million statewide. It would create some local jobs as the industry establishes the facilities that would become responsible for collecting, storing, transporting, reusing, recycling or burning for energy this post-consumer paint. And, of course, it would encourage and facilitate the environmentally sound recycling and disposal of unused paint in New York State.

So paint manufacturers would be responsible for managing the recycling and disposal of unused paint, local governments would save approximately \$25 million annually, and jobs would be created. That sure sounds like a common sense, practical move to me.

It's also telling that the measure has drawn the support of a range of environmental advocacy organizations, paint industry representatives, and municipal agencies, including the: Environmental Advocates of New York; Onondaga County Resource Recovery

Oregon has collected and recycled over 1,000,000 gallons of paint since its program was implemented in July 2010.

—Sen. Tom O'mara

Agency; Madison County Department of Solid Waste & Sanitation; American Coatings Association; New York Product Stewardship Council; Citizens Campaign for the Environment; and the National Resources Defense Council.

The legislation was also cited as a priority bill this session by the joint, bipartisan New York State Caucus of Environmental Legislators.

To repeat: All of this broad-based support helps make the broader point that the legislation is an example of how government and industry can work together to implement effective environmental policies and programs in an economically and fiscally sound fashion.

Or to say it another, more straightforward way: Working together, rather than cramming unreasonable demands down the throat of industry, would help give New York State a more business-friendly environment and actually result in better, more workable laws to achieve numerous goals in environmental conservation and, for that matter, many other areas.

Too many leaders in New York government continue to demonstrate

an unwillingness to work with business and industry on this and other issues that would benefit our state fiscally, economically and environmentally.

States that have implemented comparable paint stewardship programs are showing impressive results.

Oregon has collected and recycled over 1,000,000 gallons of paint since its program was implemented in July 2010.

California launched its program in 2012 and has over 350 new collection locations accepting paint for recycling.

Starting here, with the approval of this piece of legislation in New York State, could begin setting a standard for how stronger government-industry cooperation could help break the logjam of inaction that plagues too many other critical challenges – and, most importantly, it could help lead to other important actions down the road.

— State Sen. Tom O'Mara represents New York's 53rd Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and a portion of Tompkins County.

EDITORIAL CARTOON



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Extend ban to all forms of fracking

To The Editor | The front page article on Tuesday, July 14, 2015 with the headline "Reed: Tioga fracking proposal 'innovative'" was no less than appalling.

I have never been a fan of Tom Reed and always hope to see him lose every two years, and this article showcases the idiotic backward thinking that Tom Reed possesses. First, let's look at some facts. Fracking with propane gel instead of water was a process developed seven years ago by the Canadian firm GasFrac so right off the bat, it is hardly "good old-fashioned American innovation" as Reed pompously touts in his

enthusiastic approval of the Tioga County landowners fracking permit application.

In addition, the process still uses chemicals and sand mixed with the propane gel and still forces it hundreds of feet underground to break up the shale formations so the only real difference is using propane gel instead of water. The environmental and health threats and destabilization of the geologic formations will not change.

And does it really need to be pointed out that propane is a highly flammable substance, explosive one might say? Yes, this technique does not require water, which is something one could consider positive since water is a resource necessary for all life and

in short supply in many areas of the world.

But the real issue is this tenacious hold on maintaining the status quo of fossil fuels instead of using real innovation to develop energy sources that are renewable and sustainable.

Shame on Tom Reed and shame on the Snyder Farm Group that has filed the permit application. New York did the right thing by banning hydraulic fracturing.

Perhaps we now need to extend that ban to all forms of fracking. No, you cannot use plutonium, no you cannot use gasoline, no, you cannot use propane gel. Apparently some people need it really spelled out.

Beth Williams
Lindley

Councilman owes an apology

To The Editor | After having his proposal on prison security voted down, Frank Coccho was quoted in the Leader as saying, "They [opposing council members] don't have any respect for my opinion or my legislation. But these six morons should have respected the district attorney opinion and Sheriff Yessman."

Morons? Really? In an era where politics and civil discourse are going to hell, we must do better than this. Mr. Coccho should publicly apologize not only to the City Council, but to all the citizens of Corning for his behavior.

Harvey R. Greenberg
Dundee

The LEADER

The Leader (ISSN #10501983)
 The Leader is published daily at
 34 West Pulteney Street, Corning,
 New York 14830

by Liberty Group Corning
 Holdings, Inc. Periodical postage
 paid at Corning, N.Y. 14830-0817.
 USPS code | 0586-160

Postmaster:
 Send address changes to
 The Leader, 34 West Pulteney
 Street, Corning, New York 14830

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Classifieds 936-4651, Ext. 651
Retail 936-4651, Ext. 653

Postal rates
Steuben County
 One month \$33.50
 Three months \$100.50
 Six months \$201.00
 One year \$402.00

ELSEWHERE IN USA
 One month \$43.00
 Three months \$129.00
 Six months \$258.00
 One year \$516.00

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