

## Herald-Citizen

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# They're friends, family and neighbors

**J**unkies. Tweakers. Trash. Scum. These are terms that are embedded in the vocabulary of our culture. A lot of people use them when telling unkind anecdotes about aberrant addict behavior; when someone gets arrested as a symptom of addict behavior; or even when complaining about other symptoms of addiction and mental illness — like homelessness.

“Good. Just one less junkie on the street,” commentators say.



MEGAN REAGAN

By calling those who are suffering addiction “junkie scum,” and by nodding along when others use the term, we strip people of their individual humanity.

We are freer to disengage from our usual human empathy.

By applying terms like these, it is a communicative act of separation — separating us from them. Good from bad.

Drug addiction is one thing that does not discriminate. Rich or poor, young or old, Black or White, man or woman, good and bad people — we all know someone who has suffered.

When I hear these terms used to describe those who are suffering from addiction, I become bothered.

Growing up, raised by my grandparents because of my mother’s substance abuse issues, I was extremely resentful — especially in my teenage years and early 20s.

I was angry at my mother because of the “choices” she made. Because she wouldn’t just stop and make better decisions. I was very cold in conversations with her, and at times I would go without speaking to her for weeks to “teach her a lesson” in hope that she would change. I was less than sympathetic.

The majority of people regard drug addicts as dangerous, unpredictable and, crucially, having only themselves to blame for their predicament. And it is this latter aspect that seems key to the extreme stigma associated with drug addiction — an opinion that I subscribed to as well. While that may be true for some, there are also dangerous and unpredictable people who are not using addictive substances. In the same sense, there are people who use addictive substances who are the most kindhearted, generous and hardworking individuals you’ll ever meet.

Many people have little sympathy for those who become controlled by substances. People believe that if alcoholics and drug users really wanted to, they could just simply stop taking drugs. Such attitudes betray a lack of understanding of the nature of addiction that I have now come to understand.

There is something profound about the process of stigmatization that makes even the most hard-bitten addict vulnerable to its sting. Drug addicts are stigmatized in a host of different situations — but particularly where they are publicly exposed as users.

It can happen when users go through the door of the drug treatment agency and, importantly, when they tell their friends and relatives that that is what they are doing. Users frequently describe how they are looked down on as “the scum of the earth” and how they try to hide their drug user status at all costs, often to the extent of avoiding treatment.

This is one reason my mother didn’t tell anyone she was making an attempt to stop on her own, without any medical and professional help.

She didn’t make it on her own.

Her autopsy report shows she died from asphyxiation caused by aspiration during her withdrawal period.

A better understanding of the nature of addiction should make it harder to simply blame the “junkie” for his or her predicament. Efforts to stop the use of the word might be a useful starting point, perhaps led by ex-users. This could help people to begin to move away from automatic vilification and toward greater compassion for this highly stigmatized group. I often wonder if attitudes are different, will those suffering feel more inclined and less ashamed in their needing and receiving help?

**MEGAN REAGAN** is a reporter for the Herald-Citizen. Her email is [megan.reagan@herald-citizen.com](mailto:megan.reagan@herald-citizen.com).

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Ask leaders for more access to vaccines

World Immunization Week is April 24-30. As it is significant to me as a grandmother, I get nervous waiting until our grandson, Johnny, could be vaccinated against COVID-19. I can relate to how anxious many mothers in low-income countries are where 23 million children missed out on their regular childhood vaccinations in 2020 because of the pandemic?.

According to the World Health Organization and UNICEF, 17 million of these are considered “zero dose children” who did not receive a single dose of any vaccine including polio, measles, pneumonia, and rotavirus which are the four biggest killers of children under five. As a result, 18 countries reported outbreaks of measles, which is one of the four biggest killers of children under five.

Measles, like COVID variants, can enter the United States through infected travelers as well as through infected U.S. travelers returning from

other countries.

I am so grateful that our precious Johnny is protected against it as well as against polio, pneumonia, and rotavirus which causes diarrhea. I hope that more of God’s children can be vaccinated as soon as possible.

In addition, more than five million refugees fleeing Ukraine remind us that you never know when people will have to travel and how connected our world is. All those children leaving their homes still need routine childhood immunizations and reaching them in challenging conditions requires resources.

Preventing infectious diseases overseas protects Americans at home and abroad.,

U.S. government funding for immunization activities helps nations build strong health systems to respond to disease outbreaks in an efficient way while protecting our U.S. security.

A healthy country is a stable country. And a stable country

is a good trading partner and a good investing opportunity. Every dollar we invest in immunizations saves \$44 in healthcare costs, lost wages and productivity due to illness according to GAVI, the global Vaccine Alliance. It’s a global health best buy! And children in Tennessee will certainly benefit from expanding our vaccination efforts beyond U.S. borders.

I am so grateful that our precious Johnny is protected against all of these deadly childhood diseases. I hope that more of God’s children can be fully vaccinated as soon as possible.

Ask our U.S. Senators Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty and U.S. Representative John Rose to increase funding for global childhood vaccines. By expanding vaccine funding, we will increase access to existing vaccines and best of all, we can save a child’s life every 20 seconds.

**Diane Glasgow**  
Cookeville

## History repeats itself – unfortunately

**F**orty years ago we had a soaring inflation rate, obscene gas prices and interest rates in the teens.

Today, thanks to their incredible incompetence, bad policies and serial stupidity, the Democrats in Washington are bringing back all those problems.

It’s getting so bad, I’m actually beginning to think Jimmy Carter was not such a bad president after all.

People under 40 have no idea how bad things were in the late 1970s under Carter.

They’ve grown up knowing only 3 percent interest rates, dirt cheap gasoline and 2 percent inflation.

They don’t know how miserable things were under Carter or how miserable they can get again under Biden.

My friend who owns a local tire store in Los Angeles doesn’t need a history book to remember how awful America was in the early 1980s because he lived through it.

When I got an oil change at his place this week, he was railing about how today’s official inflation rate of 8.5% doesn’t come close to the real figure.

“Where is the thing I’m buying that’s only gone up eight and a half?” he asked.

“The tires I’m buying aren’t only up eight and a half percent. The gas and food I’m buying are not only up eight and half.”

He’s right, and you don’t have to be Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia to know it.

Earlier this week, when the



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new monthly inflation figures came out, Manchin, arguably the last sensible Democrat with an elected job in Washington, rattled off some of the real numbers.

Year over year, gasoline is up 48%. Beef is up 16%, chicken and milk up 13% and coffee and eggs up 11%.

Used car prices are up nearly 40%, and the wait to get a new one feels almost as long as it was in 1981 Moscow.

Democrats have created our economic and social problems themselves — in just 14 months — but they always try to blame them on bad or greedy other people.

They say that if the rich would just pay more in taxes — their so-called “fair share” — ordinary people will somehow be better off, as if the additional taxes the rich are forced to pay will go directly to needy people.

But the reality is, as the last 75 years have proven again and again, Democrat policies always hurt the poor and middle class the hardest, not the rich.

For example, I have a Ford F-150 pickup and with gas in California going for almost \$6 a gallon it costs me nearly \$200 for a fill up.

I can afford that, but my daughter-the-school-teacher can’t. Neither can my son, who has two young girls.

Neither can the grocery clerk or the waiter at a restaurant — but the owners of the grocery store chain or the restaurant

can.

The last good Democrat president was Bill Clinton.

He balanced the budget, gave us welfare reform and actually worked well with Republicans, but we’ll never see his like again.

Today we’re watching the usual Democrat horror story playing out with the added bonus of a president who does everything backwards.

President Biden, following the Democrat playbook, blames Vladimir Putin, the rich and gouging oil company CEOs for high gas prices — anyone but his administration, which caused them by shutting down pipelines and generally abusing America’s productive energy sector.

Given the way the Democrats are governing in D.C. now, things will never change for the better unless a miracle happens.

That’s what happened in 1980 when Ronald Reagan came to Washington and turned things around by lowering taxes, cutting government regulations and lifting the country’s spirits.

To many of us old-timers it feels like the early 1980s all over again.

And the only way the country will ever recover from the damage of the Biden Gang is to elect a Republican worthy of being president.

Thank God there will be many candidates.

**MICHAEL REAGAN** is a syndicated columnist. His email is [reagan@caglecartoons.com](mailto:reagan@caglecartoons.com).