

# State must rein in health care costs

But two provisions being debated in budget talks would harm New Yorkers

BY SAUL ANUZIS  
Guest essay

This won't come as a surprise to many, but one of the biggest issues facing the Americans my group serves is the rising cost of health care. And while state and federal lawmakers work to unravel the complicated and often opaque costs behind what patients pay, this problem can't be solved by focusing on singular parts of the health care universe. There are several drivers of cost, and each needs examination.

That is why it is disturbing that a state like New York is taking aim at one facet of the health care industry, while seemingly giving another a pass — a move that could impact all New York patients, but especially older New Yorkers living with chronic diseases.

Two provisions up for debate in the 2023 budget would not only do little to help patients pay less for

medications, they could also stifle the very industry that gives Americans living with chronic illnesses a shot at a better future.

The Prescription Drug Price and Supply Chain Transparency Act of 2023 in the budgets proposed by Gov. Kathy Hochul and the State Senate would impose stiff regulations on the biopharmaceutical industry, to the point that future innovations could be put at risk.

How? The proposal includes overreaching requirements for pharmaceutical manufacturers to report on even the slightest change to the price of a medication, impeding access to that medication for patients until the paperwork is deemed sufficient by the state Department of Financial Services. With all due respect to hardworking DFS employees, I wouldn't want my cancer treatment or a new medication to treat my grandchild's autoimmune disease delayed because of unnecessary red



tape. Similar proposals in other states have landed in federal court.

New York has not been shy about keeping tabs on pharmaceutical pricing — beyond what the federal government requires. In 2020, the state passed legislation that gave DFS power to investigate prescription drug price jumps.

Additionally, proposals to regulate patent settlement agreements will do the opposite of their intent — getting cheaper treatments to patients in a timelier manner. Inserting New York into areas clearly governed by the federal govern-

ment, specifically the Federal Trade Commission, will slow down access to generics and biosimilars, drugs based on an original patented medication that can be produced at a lower cost once a patent expires. This is wildly unnecessary and a perfect example of unnecessary governmental creep.

While these proposals may seem misguided, where is the scrutiny on the insurance industry's pharmacy benefit managers or PBMs? Patient and health care groups for years have been playing a game of whack-a-mole to pass legislation to push back against the

latest PBM schemes. PBMs are known for finding ways to pad their bottom line — like keeping pharmacists from telling consumers they could pay less for a drug by not using their insurance, or refusing to apply third-party copay assistance to a patient's total out-of-pocket costs. New York lawmakers have rightly worked to fix these wrongs, but PBMs can't be left out of a discussion on prescription drug costs.

Clearly, impeding scientific research and access to the latest innovative treatments is not the goal of Gov. Kathy Hochul or the State Senate. However, it's not hard to see how quickly that could be the result. For patients across New York — especially the seniors my organization serves — leaders in Albany must quickly scrap these budget provisions and protect the health and well-being of patients across the state.

■ **THIS GUEST ESSAY** reflects the views of Saul Anuzis, president of 60 Plus Association, the American Association of Senior Citizens, a nonprofit advocacy group based in Alexandria, Virginia.



# We need honest talk on climate law costs

New Yorkers support fighting climate change but don't want to pay dearly

BY DANIEL ORTEGA  
Guest essay

True debate no longer exists in the halls of government, whether it be in Washington or Albany. Most issues today are presented as black or white, right or left. But some policy issues are more nuanced, especially when it comes to the operation of our complex energy grid. Our elected leaders need to give careful consideration to how their decisions will impact the lives of their constituents.

That is certainly the case when it comes to New York's headfirst charge into implementing its aggressive climate laws. New polling shows most New Yorkers want Gov. Kathy Hochul and legislative leaders

to carefully consider how much it's all going to cost them, even as they generally support efforts to fight climate change. Albany needs to listen to them.

New Yorkers for Affordable Energy recently released statewide polling conducted by the Siena College Research Institute. The results were not ambiguous. They showed pretty clearly that New Yorkers generally want to combat climate change, but had serious concerns about the cost of doing so. The survey also found that a sizable majority of New Yorkers both use — and want to continue using — natural gas.

For many questions, this wasn't a 51-49 majority within the margin of error. For example, more than 3 out of 4 New Yorkers said that climate

change was a serious problem, 74% supported efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and another 74% said they would be willing to personally change aspects of their life to reduce those emissions.

But New Yorkers also showed they are deeply concerned about their own pocketbooks, with 96% of respondents saying the cost of living was a serious concern — about as close to unanimous as you get in polling. It didn't stop there, with 87% of residents saying they are concerned about the cost of moving away from natural gas, propane or oil for home heating, and another 79% saying that heat pumps are too costly.

While Gov. Hochul and Albany lawmakers are quickly moving to ban new natural gas appliances — like stoves — and the use of fossil fuels in

new construction, New Yorkers consistently responded that they think natural gas should play a role in the state's climate efforts. More than 80% of poll respondents said they use natural gas to heat their homes, 80% said a mix of energy efficiency and natural gas can be used to lower building emissions, and another 80% agreed that switching buildings to all-electric will result in power outages.

Unfortunately, Albany isn't listening to this huge majority of New Yorkers and the nuanced position they're taking. Instead, lawmakers seem willing to appease a very small and noisy movement of environmental advocacy groups pushing for public policies that will be prohibitively expensive but have no meaningful impact on the climate. And those groups are desperate to avoid talking about cost, because they know

how expensive all of this will be.

So what does this all mean? As Association for a Better Long Island executive director Kyle Strober said, "While the aspirational goal of a carbon free energy future is an admirable objective, ignoring the realities of how people heat their homes, prepare their food, and leverage natural gas to drive the economy has the potential to put our state at risk."

I agree, and hope Albany listens to the majority of constituents who want to help the environment but also want a reliable and resilient grid without skyrocketing costs.

■ **THIS GUEST ESSAY** reflects the views of Daniel Ortega, executive director of New Yorkers for Affordable Energy.

