

SunSentinel OPINION

Steve Bousquet
Opinion Editor

Julie Anderson
Editor-in-Chief

SUN SENTINEL EDITORIAL

Doctors ask right questions of new surgeon general. Will senators?

Gov. Ron DeSantis went doctor shopping for a new surgeon general who thinks like him. Unfortunately, the rest of us now have to live with the consequences of another decision to recklessly play politics with human lives.

Dr. Joseph Ladapo was a California physician with outlandish views on how to manage COVID-19. One of his first acts was to impose an edict that allows parents to send kids to school even after they are exposed to the virus, as long as children have no symptoms. He considers mask mandates overrated, likens mandatory vaccinations to “a religion,” and suggests nutrition and exercise as measures against COVID-19.

In Florida, where nearly 56,000 people have died from the disease, Ladapo’s medical advice could fit on a bumper sticker, and it boils down to this: Don’t wear masks. Don’t get vaccinated. Eat your vegetables.

If DeSantis knew Ladapo at all, it might have been from the doctor’s published writings — not from peer-reviewed medical journals, but on the opinion pages of

The Wall Street Journal, where his op-eds argue that fear of COVID is worse than the virus itself. Pandemic policies “forged in fear and panic,” he wrote last September, “have wrought tremendous damage in exchange for benefits that were attainable at a much lower cost.”

The doctor’s views have touched off a furor in Florida, and rightly so. More than 100 physicians have signed a letter that directly challenges Ladapo’s criticism of mask mandates and asks several questions that he should answer.

Calling themselves the Committee to Protect Health Care, the doctors are from Boca Raton, Fort Lauderdale, Davie, Delray Beach and communities all over the state. Three doctors who signed the letter are on the faculty at the University of Florida’s College of Medicine, where Ladapo was offered a tenured professorship as part of his state employment contract that will pay him \$512,000 a year — nearly four times as much as the governor.

Among the doctors’ questions: What evidence does Ladapo have to oppose universal mask wearing? What are his

connections to America’s Frontline Doctors, which profited from selling ivermectin and Donald Trump’s favorite non-cure, hydroxychloroquine? Does Ladapo believe in natural herd immunity, which could lead to tens of thousands more deaths? Does he disagree with DeSantis on any pandemic policies? What’s his plan to lower health disparities for underserved groups?

Floridians should be grateful that these medical experts demand science-based solutions and for their willingness to speak truth to power, even if it risks political retribution from Republicans in Tallahassee. (We too asked the state Department of Health for a chance to interview Ladapo, on Sept. 23. No response.)

The point of the doctors’ letter was to get the attention of the Florida Senate, which will hold confirmation hearings on Ladapo during the 60-day session that begins on Jan. 11. Senators have the responsibility of fully vetting the governor’s choice, and he needs to be confirmed if he intends to keep his job.

The Senate Health Policy Committee,

chaired by Sen. Manny Diaz, R-Hialeah, is a logical place for a rigorous dissection of Ladapo’s ideas about public health. Three of the panel’s four Democrats are from South Florida: Senate Minority Leader Lauren Book, D-Plantation; Sen. Shevrin Jones of West Park; and Sen. Bobby Powell of West Palm Beach. The fourth Democrat, Sen. Janet Cruz, D-Tampa, is married to a physician.

Former Surgeon General Scott Rivkees quit in August after nearly two years of unparalleled obscurity, at a time when Floridians needed a forceful public health advocate, not slogans and sound bites. In a September editorial, we implored DeSantis to get it right in choosing a replacement for Rivkees. The result was Ladapo. How’s that for a second opinion?

The Sun Sentinel Editorial Board consists of Editorial Page Editor Steve Bousquet, Deputy Editorial Page Editor Dan Sweeney, and Editor-in-Chief Julie Anderson. Editorials are the opinion of the Board and written by one of its members or a designee. To contact us, email at letters@sun-sentinel.com.

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

We must use all available means to stop COVID-19, including ivermectin

Over a year-and-a-half into the pandemic, America has hit a grim milestone: COVID-19 deaths have surpassed those from the 1918 flu, once our country’s deadliest outbreak.

This news lands as a devastating gut punch, even as we mark incredible progress with effective vaccines that are protecting over 100 million Americans. It is clear that COVID-19 has become endemic, and our success will require a new strategy of employing every single safe and effective medicine to fight this disease.

One of these is human-use ivermectin. Many studies show that this orally administered generic drug, initially approved to treat parasitic infections in the 1970s, is effective in treating early COVID-19. The latest evidence comes from India. The drug was made widely available among the 241 million citizens in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, and COVID-19 infections and deaths have subsequently been effectively controlled.

After nearly a year of widespread use of ivermectin for early treatment of COVID-19-positive patients and members of their households, the latest round of surveillance testing among 226,000 residents resulted in only 11 positive cases. In early September, not a single new case had been reported among 67 of Uttar Pradesh’s 75 districts.

Data continues to mount demonstrating ivermectin’s efficacy against COVID-19. It is being deployed as part of the strategy to fight the pandemic in countries around the world, including Mexico, Peru and two large states in Argentina.

But even as the body of evidence in other countries grows, the opposition to not only using ivermectin but even discussing it in America multiplies.

To be clear, when I refer to the potential benefits of ivermectin, I am only suggesting that *human-use* ivermectin be considered. There has been talk of “horse paste” and purchasing ivermectin from farm stores. I unequivocally do not recommend humans use a medicine that is prepared and sold for use in animals.

Further, the decision to use any treatment for COVID-19 should be made after consultation with a trusted medical professional. If prescribed by a licensed and trusted medical professional, any medication should only be used specifically as prescribed.

However, the mere mention of ivermectin can get you banned from major social media platforms. Evolutionary biologist Bret Weinstein’s podcast was yanked from YouTube for discussing the drug. Federal authorities are arrayed against it. And the American Medical Association called for the “immediate end” of any use of ivermectin to treat COVID-19 patients with no research to support their stance.

Some media outlets are so eager to



By Neal
Dunn

discredit the drug they embraced an easily debunked story about ivermectin overdoses in Oklahoma.

Thousands of physicians working on the front lines of this pandemic — honest, intelligent, caring professionals working tirelessly to care for patients with COVID-19 — want the option of administering ivermectin. Yet they are widely discouraged, even demonized, by some public health professionals and even President Biden, who obliquely tarred physicians using ivermectin as “conspiracy theorists” and implied they are not “real doctors.”

Regardless of how many patients these physicians have cared for in the course of their careers, or how many people they have successfully treated with ivermectin, they face the loss of their livelihoods if they discuss it publicly.

The Federation of State Medical Boards, which represents 71 medical boards across America, for example, warned doctors that recommending ivermectin, which the organization labels “medical misinformation,” may result in the suspension of the offending physician’s medical license.

It is worth asking: Why?

This FDA-approved medicine has been used nearly 4 billion times in humans, spanning 45 years to treat numerous diseases. A standard 12-milligram dose costs 6 cents to manufacture. It is considered one of the safest medicines in history. The Japanese scientist who discovered it won the Nobel Prize for that achievement in 2015.

With growing evidence that the drug can safely treat a virus that is now the deadliest in American history, why not empower doctors and patients to use it? At the very least, it is inappropriate to shut down scientific discussion of its merits.

The federal government refuses to follow the scientific evidence and take a comprehensive approach to fighting COVID-19. States should use every tool at their disposal to ensure patient access to treatment.

I urge every governor to follow Florida’s example and uphold the sacred physician-patient relationship that gives doctors and patients the freedom to choose what’s best for them. That means encouraging residents to get vaccinated and giving them the option for treatment with monoclonal antibodies, ivermectin and a number of other repurposed medicines that are proving effective against COVID-19.

Over 700,000 Americans have lost their lives in this pandemic. That number will grow. We must use every available means to stop this virus.

What are we waiting for?

Republican Neal P. Dunn is a medical doctor and represents Florida’s Second Congressional district.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hoping for the best for first lady and governor

We can take comfort that as the first lady of Florida, Casey DeSantis will receive treatment for breast cancer with the best medicines, hospitals, doctors and science. The governor and First Lady, I am sure, will listen to the doctors, trust their opinions and be grateful for guidance that will give her the best chance of recovery.

May this experience give the governor the humility and insight he needs to embrace all medical science, not just that which helps his wife. May his faith in the medical community give him the courage to step forward and apologize for denying the science that could have mitigated the COVID crisis in Florida. May he encourage doctors and scientists to work diligently to inform policy that protects citizens from COVID, just as he expects the first lady’s medical team to work diligently to force her cancer into submission.

Leslie Fine, Fort Lauderdale

What we need in 2022

I agree wholeheartedly with your reader (Frank Goodwin, Oct. 2) who wrote that DeSantis is gloriously misinformed with his fight against scientific knowledge by hiring a surgeon general who promotes ivermectin (used to treat animals and livestock), Hydroxychloroquine, and opposes mask mandates.

I know our government is fragmented. But whether you’re a Republican or a Democrat, don’t you realize that the health of you and your family are really not this governor’s concern? He’s only interested in his agenda and copying the ex-president’s playbook because 2022 and 2024 are just around the corner. We need a responsible person in high office who cares about the people and not just about partisan politics.

Susan Feig, Boca Raton

Burying Biden’s problems

Shame on the Sun Sentinel for burying the article about U.S. Senate testimony exposing President Biden’s lies regarding the advice he received from his three top generals which led to the disastrous retreat from Afghanistan. Do the editors really think that this article (Section 2,

Page 1) is far less significant than say, the story on Page 6 about a seven-year old getting stitches for a barracuda bite or the story on Page 16 about two new Disney streaming shows?

After four years in which every single accusation and allegation about Trump was unflinchingly paraded front page and center, does papering over Biden’s deception and incompetence do anything to quell the concerns and fears of nearly half of the the country’s voting public that they are subject to the whims and biases of a fake news media?

David Epstein, Fort Lauderdale

At a loss about Israel editorial

Re: Israel needs a better political defense system, Editorial, Sept. 28

I’m at a loss to understand why the Sun Sentinel published the editorial, *Israel needs a better political defense system*.

For whom do the editors purport to speak? Not American Jews, whom the editors note have grown more critical of Israel during the Netanyahu era. Indeed, as a recent study by the Jewish Electoral Institute shows, 38% of Jews under age 40 acknowledge that “Israel is an apartheid state,” a true statement according to Human Rights Watch and the Israeli organization B’Tselem, but one the editorial insinuates is antisemitic.

Thanks to heroic work of the human rights community, the brutal nature of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the inhumane siege of Gaza are better understood than ever. Well-informed Jews understand that the facts of the Israeli occupation are what needs to change, not its overseas image. What’s the Sun-Sentinel’s excuse?

Martha Schoolman, Coral Gables

Remembering Miya Marcano

The most horrific part about the death of Miya Marcano is that she was taken from her own home. She did everything right, and now she’s gone. I extend my deepest condolences to Miya’s family, friends, and loved ones. Rest In peace, Miya.

Paul Bacon, Hallandale Beach

Notice to readers

South Florida Sun Sentinel journalists are working remotely during the pandemic. For the foreseeable future, please send your letters only by email to letters@sunsentinel.com. Letters should be no more than 150 words. They may be edited for length and clarity. They become property of the Sun Sentinel. We look forward to hearing from you.