

# ***The Tale of Two Addresses—Analysis of Data***

In January, Governor Shumlin of Vermont gave his State of the State Address and in February, Governor LePage of Maine gave his. Despite the fact that Vermont and Maine are very close to each other, an analysis of the speeches shows a very different approach to stopping the overdose epidemic sweeping through New England.

Governor LePage's address was a total of 2977 words of which 393 (or 13.20%) were about the state's drug problems. Gov. LePage focused on the enforcement side of the problem. He mentioned that he would increase funding for and add 14 new agents to the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency. He also talked about adding four special drug prosecutors and four new judges to enhanced drug courts. He also mentioned statistics about babies born addicted to drugs [927 (>7% increase) in 2013] and the number of drug induced deaths (163) in 2012.

Contrasting this was Governor Shumlin's address in January. His speech was 3,488 words of which 3,224 (92.43%) were about the heroin and opiate problem in Vermont. The only parts not about addiction directly were some introductory remarks. Gov. Shumlin started with some statistics about the heroin and opiate problems; since 2000, treatment for all opiates has increased by more than 770% and treatment for heroin has increased by more than 250% in that same period. In 2013, there were two times as many federal indictments against heroin dealers as in the previous two years and more than five times as many as in 2010. Also, there were almost two times as many heroin-overdose related deaths in 2013 as there were in 2012.

Referencing *The Hungry Heart*, a film by Bess O'Brien, Gov. Shumlin focused on the fact that the drug crisis facing Vermont is not solvable by legal means alone. The crisis needs to be "address[ed]...as a public health crisis, providing treatment and support, rather than simply doling out punishment, claiming victory, and moving onto our next conviction." To support the change in focus, Gov. Shumlin noted that while it costs \$1,120 a week to incarcerate a prisoner, it only costs \$123 to treat them at a state-funded facility.

Governor Shumlin chose to focus on four areas to help treat addiction: increasing treatment, encouraging addicted inmates to pursue treatment, tougher sentences for high volume dealers and targeted tougher enforcement, and addiction prevention.

To accomplish the first, he asked for additional funds in order to open more treatment centers and to staff current treatment centers in order to eliminate the backlog of people waiting for treatment. To help addicted inmates beat their addiction, Gov. Shumlin proposed create a rapid intervention program using contractors working with defense lawyers and prosecutors to identify people who are suitable for immediate intervention and make their deals contingent on their finishing the programs. The third goal would be increasing law enforcement efforts in conjunction with the treatment options, mainly to target high-volume drug dealers and violent offenders.

The final prong of his plan relies on education to help prevent addiction in the first place through a variety of means. Shumlin hopes to provide a grant to Bess O'Brien to take the subjects of her film to schools to talk with students about their struggles. He also discussed the need to engage health care providers and encourage them to treat the emotional/psychological side of addiction rather than just the physical symptoms. Finally, he addressed the role that schools and the education system have to play in educating youth about the dangers of addiction.

The contrast between the two approaches is striking. Gov. LePage's focus is punitively-oriented, while Gov. Shumlin acknowledges that addiction is a disease that will not be cured by putting people into prison and creating a perpetual cycle. While there is certainly a role for the criminal justice system for violent offenders and dealers, there is also a patient-oriented necessity that can only be addressed through the medical system.

#### Links:

Vermont State of the State- <http://governor.vermont.gov/newsroom-state-of-state-speech-2013>

Maine State of the State-  
[http://www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=Gov\\_Speeches&id=614018&v=article2011](http://www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=Gov_Speeches&id=614018&v=article2011)

Dr. Publicker's CNN Opinion Piece (Philip Seymour Hoffman death)-  
<http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/06/opinion/publicker-maine-heroin/index.html>

Portland Press Herald article on naloxone-  
[http://www.pressherald.com/politics/Maine\\_panel\\_votes\\_in\\_favor\\_of\\_public\\_access\\_to\\_overdose\\_drug\\_.html](http://www.pressherald.com/politics/Maine_panel_votes_in_favor_of_public_access_to_overdose_drug_.html)

Patient Advocacy Task Force and Advancing Access to Addiction Medications Initiative-  
<http://www.asam.org/advocacy/aaam>

Maine Gov. Paul LePage Looks Set To Reject Overdose Prevention For No Good Reason (Huffington Post) - [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/11/paul-lepage-drug-overdose\\_n\\_4770196.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=tw](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/11/paul-lepage-drug-overdose_n_4770196.html?utm_hp_ref=tw)

Portland Press Herald article on heroin use in Maine-  
[http://www.pressherald.com/news/Heroin\\_use\\_climbs\\_in\\_Maine\\_as\\_cheaper\\_alternative\\_to\\_prescription\\_drugs.html](http://www.pressherald.com/news/Heroin_use_climbs_in_Maine_as_cheaper_alternative_to_prescription_drugs.html)

Portland Press Herald Op-Ed on the opiate epidemic-  
[http://www.pressherald.com/opinion/Our\\_View\\_Heroin\\_just\\_one\\_part\\_of\\_Maine\\_s\\_drug\\_problem\\_.html](http://www.pressherald.com/opinion/Our_View_Heroin_just_one_part_of_Maine_s_drug_problem_.html)

Portland Press Herald article on funding for drug treatment centers-  
[http://www.pressherald.com/news/Drug\\_treatment\\_funding\\_in\\_Maine\\_is\\_falling\\_but\\_demand\\_is\\_greater\\_than\\_ever.html](http://www.pressherald.com/news/Drug_treatment_funding_in_Maine_is_falling_but_demand_is_greater_than_ever.html)

New York Times article about the impact of heroin and opiates on one Vermont town-  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/us/a-call-to-arms-on-a-vermont-heroin-epidemic.html?hp&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/us/a-call-to-arms-on-a-vermont-heroin-epidemic.html?hp&_r=0)

Opiate epidemic leads Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick to declare public health emergency-  
[http://www.masslive.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/03/opiate\\_epidemic\\_leads\\_massachu.html](http://www.masslive.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/03/opiate_epidemic_leads_massachu.html)

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