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Control TB

On March 24, 1884, Dr. Robert Koch announced the discovery of the bacterium that causes tuberculosis. To commemorate that date World TB Day was created. You may be forgiven for not noticing the date. Daily demands consume our attention and we often don't see storm clouds gathering in the distance.

Whether noticed or not, however, those clouds are gathering. The CDC reports that of the top five U.S. metro areas for TB case rates in 2008, three are in the Bay Area: San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara; Stockton; and San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont.

Those three areas combined for 668 TB cases, of which more than 75 percent were in foreign-born individuals. While in California as a whole TB case loads are decreasing, one-third of medical districts—including Contra Costa—are reporting increasing case rates.

Treating TB here in the United States is not cheap. Treatment for TB in Maryland in 1996 cost \$13,000. Those costs are unlikely to have dropped in the past 14 years. Treating someone with TB overseas, however, can cost as little as \$20.

Congress should increase TB control funding overseas where it's cheaper to treat, and our Legislature should to increase funding to control the TB here.

Jim Driggers
Concord