

Heroes to Zeroes

By *moderator*

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Perhaps a touch naive, perhaps the eternal optimist, but I was surprised to read The Weekender's hero-rated/zero-rated column of April 29-30.

Disturbingly, it heaped praise on Jack Shevel, former CEO of one of three hospital groups primarily responsible for the soaring costs of private medical care in excess of the inflation rate.

At the same time, it voiced disapproval of Xavier Carim, SA's chief trade negotiator, who played a leading role in protecting the public interest in the free trade negotiations between the US and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU).

I can live with poor judgment. But what I find disconcerting are baseless assertions disguised as analysis.

Take the claim that "Shevel's name has been blackened by some who are critical of his clash with government over the medicine pricing issue". Shevel is portrayed as the victim of an overzealous state, but if the state is to be criticised for the manner in which it has dealt with Shevel and others in the hospital industry, it is for its reluctance to hold them to account.

Of more concern is the claim that "the big losers, if SACU does not get the last-minute concessions it wants - including the exclusion of intellectual property rights - will be the countries of southern Africa, not the US".

Not happy with the compromise reached by the World Trade Organisation in 2001 that agreements on trade and intellectual property (TRIPS) should, "promote access to medicines for all," the US has sought to use trade negotiations to secure TRIPs-plus provisions in domestic laws. Until Carim called its bluff, the US was able to bully country after country into trading away the health of their people.

As a frequent critic of state policy, I am horrified when government is unjustifiably attacked for doing the right thing. Carim and his team don't deserve your scorn. Shevel, under whose watch Netcare has helped push affordable health care further out of reach, does.

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