

# OPINION

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Open letter to Tom Reed, Congressional Republicans

To the Editor,  
How does one begin to describe the enormity of the damage that you have just inflicted on the vast majority of the American people? Mean, immoral, self-serving, reckless, corrupt, disgusting, are just a few of the words that come to mind. But the one that really applies is stupid. Not one Republican (as far as I know) has even bothered to deny that this is a handout to campaign donors. You are all so scared of losing your seats in the next election that you have gone along with the travesty so that you can still count on contributions for your re-election campaign. Who do you think is going to vote for you? Two out of three Americans do not approve of this bill. That is an understatement. It would be fair to say that two out of three Americans hate this bill. And we are angry enough to get out and vote. Gerrymandering, voter suppression and bribery will only get you so far. 33% support is not enough to get you re-elected, no matter how much money your (now very grateful) donors pour into your campaigns.

The 12 representatives who voted against this monstrous bill may get re-elected, but the rest of you have collectively shot yourselves in the foot. You have shown yourselves to be lacking in empathy for anyone who is not a Republican, venal, and just plain nasty. You have shown yourselves, in fact, to be the epitome of all that is wrong with America. You have shown yourselves to be the reason why I was, for more than 30 years, so reluctant to become a citizen.

Shame on each and everyone of you!  
**Elizabeth Whitehouse, Corning**

### A Dickens of a tax reform

To the Editor,  
Congressman Reed: Who is Tiny Tim? You Republicans have delivered an ungodly gift of money to your donors and to the comfortably rich, while at the same time essentially putting 13 million dependent on health care at serious risk of death. Oh yes, Program CHIP, for 9 million children is "out of money," according to Charlatan Hatch, leaving them to God's mercy.

Who is Charles Dickens, Mr. Reed? Why do you think his "Christmas Carol" resonates across time?

The basic message is that greed and selfishness are evil; compassion and care are good.

Your Republican agenda, characterized by your heartless tax reform scam is in the finest tradition of Ebenezer Scrooge.

It is doubly mean-spirited, given that this is a holy time for many of us.

There will be a reckoning. Perhaps November 2018 will be memorable for you, Mr. Reed.

**Bill Gilmore, Lansing**

### What is integrity?

To the Editor,  
How far has society fallen that an insignificant, imperfect, cranky, crackpot like me has felt compelled to be the spokesperson for integrity?

What is integrity? One definition is; the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, moral uprightness. Integrity; an absolute humans will never fully achieve.

Understanding, striving for integrity will make the world a better place, aiding the sick, hungry and weak.

Lists of dictionary synonyms are more building blocks of integrity's structure; honesty, honor, good character, principles, ethics, decency, fairness, sincerity, truthfulness, trustworthiness.

Character, quality of character (good, bad, indifferent?) twists definitions contrived to blur the absolute standard integrity implies! Bill Clinton was often said to have character. I never once heard him called a man of integrity.

Integrity is diminished, banished to mythology, even exiled from society. The "Education Industry" trivializes integrity, depriving it from institutions evidenced in journalism, government, even science.

Character and ethics education, public school and college courses diminish integrity creating institutions lacking integrity? Example teaches best! Behaviors of educators will imprint integrity or dishonesty and corruption.

Fear of accountability exalts cloudy character, integrity sacrificed for politics and personal agendas. Many segments of society wish to allow leeway for corruption!  
**Gerald J. Furnkranz, Millport**

## COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA, R-BIG FLATS

### First for the New Year: What's your opinion?

What's your opinion? Governor Andrew Cuomo delivers his annual State of the State message to the Legislature on Wednesday, and we get right to work. It's traditionally a day when attention is quickly refocused on the challenges facing cities, towns, and villages across New York. This refocusing could not be more important in 2018. New York faces a projected multi-billion dollar state budget deficit – a fiscal challenge that will overshadow every other decision we make.

Advocacy groups have been busy setting the stage for the New Year by staking out public policy positions, advancing legislative priorities, and even recommending specific legislation. From agriculture to workforce development, there's an advocacy agenda for nearly every issue confronting the Legislature. For example, Unshackle Upstate recently delivered its annual roadmap. In releasing his organization's "2018 Advocacy Agenda," Unshackle Upstate Executive Director Greg Biryła acknowledged the state's

looming budget deficit and stressed the following, "New York faces serious fiscal challenges in 2018 and beyond, but the last thing Upstate's economy, its employees or its residents can endure are any additions to our already suffocating tax climate."

"No new taxes?" will be one prominent question asked beginning this week, and rightly so in my view. What about spending cuts? Mandate relief? Tax cuts? Funding priorities? Special interest groups should not be the only ones weighing in. The first question to ask all New Yorkers is this: What's your opinion? Which is exactly what I am asking to encourage the residents of the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions to share your opinions, concerns, and suggestions for 2018 in New York State government.

Every year I hear from thousands of constituents who take the time through an e-mail, a letter, a phone call, a community meeting, on the street, or in some other way to share their ideas and their views on the issues of the day. As you can imagine, these thoughts aren't always delivered wrapped up

in a friendly ribbon and bow. Nor should they be. The input – negative or positive, constructive or not – is what matters. It helps provide the insight and understanding every legislator must have in order to try to effectively represent his or her legislative district.

As I do annually, later this week I will post an online "Community and Legislative Survey" on my Senate website, [www.omara.nysenate.gov](http://www.omara.nysenate.gov). The goal is to encourage local input on a range of specific challenges facing the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, such as private-sector job creation, government reform, education, mandate relief, public safety, health care, and transportation, among others.

For example, as I noted above, one of the overriding decisions in 2018 will be how to address the budget deficit. Less spending? If so, less spending on what programs and services? What about rebuilding local roads and bridges? Expanding broadband access to underserved or unserved regions, especially in rural, Upstate New York? The need for job growth? The need for

less government regulation? Mandate relief? Education? Health care?

It's a long, long list, as well as a list with no quick-fix solutions. Consequently, it's important to have a full public airing of what we're facing and this is one way to encourage it.

I have been offering these online legislative surveys since beginning my tenure in the Senate in 2011. They are not scientific polls in any traditional sense, but they do offer meaningful and useful snapshots of what's on the minds of area residents paying attention to New York State government and willing to give some thought to the choices being debated in Albany.

In addition to answering a series of detailed questions, most respondents also take the chance to share more extensive, detailed comments. Again, I cannot say enough about the value of this local input as the Legislature begins working in earnest toward solutions in 2018. It's timely, it's informative, and I truly appreciate the participation.

What's your opinion? Happy New Year.

## COMMENTARY | NOAH BERLATSKY, LOS ANGELES TIMES

### The age of naive cynicism

All politicians are venal and corrupt, so supporting one over the other is pointless.

The media always lie; never believe anything you hear on the news.

Putin has infiltrated social media so thoroughly that if someone disagrees with you online, it's probably a Russian bot.

Trump and congressional Republicans are willing to pass unpopular legislation because they are planning a coup. (There will be no elections in 2020.)

The game is rigged, the plots are laid, and there's nothing that people like you and me can do except lean back and nod sagely as the black helicopters land.

If you spend any time online – or offline, for that matter – you've heard arguments like this. They are the result of a force more insidious than pessimism. It's naive cynicism: a wide-eyed, credulous, often gleeful embrace of despair, an eagerness to believe the worst.

At its most extreme, naive cynicism leads to conspiracy theories. Lyndon Johnson had to be involved in the plot to kill JFK; the American government arranged for 9/11; the Jews control world finance.

In short, the truth is much worse than you could ever imagine.

But naive cynicism can also be more subtle. The discussion around President Trump's tweets is a good example.

Serious commentators argue that Trump uses Twitter as a clever distraction. When he slut-shames a sitting senator or attacks a grieving war widow, the argument goes, he's really just trying to distract the public from his agenda of repealing healthcare or raising taxes. Where most people conclude that Trump is a cruel, belligerent, self-pitying bully who lashes out with little reason and less self-control, naive cynics believe he is playing a devious game.

In C.S. Lewis' 1943 novel "That Hideous Strength," the main character, a young ambitious academic named Mark, joins the forces of darkness because he wants to know the score, and because he doesn't want to feel left out. Evil catches Mark not through promises of power or sadistic excess. Instead, it tempts him with a "warm and almost drugged atmosphere of vague, yet heavily important confidence." It feels good to know

more than everyone else. It's a rush to see behind the curtain, even if – or especially if – the truth is unpleasant.

Naive cynicism paves the road to hell with apathy. If you believe the game is rigged and that nothing will ever change, you're unlikely to vote, much less canvass or donate or engage in activism.

Worse, a conviction that moral action doesn't matter, coupled with a grim determination not to appear the fool, can cause people to embrace outright amorality.

For instance, some Democratic partisans defended Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) on the grounds that Republicans didn't care enough about sexual harassment. Others did so on the grounds that the allegations were fake. Still others defended Franken because jettisoning him would appear weak. All these excuses were rooted in a fear of being bamboozled.

Naive cynicism can serve as a talisman against looking foolish. Put your faith in faithlessness, and you will never be laughed at again.

Of course, the philosophy is so appealing at the moment in part because the world really is in terrible shape. Powerful people really are trying to hurt you. Vast, evil conspiracies


do exist. The Republican Party really did push through a tax cut for the wealthy at the expense of the middle class on behalf of a few donors. A system of sanctioned harassment and abuse really has been exposed from Hollywood to Congress. There are plenty of concrete reasons to despair for our country.

But we shouldn't confuse despair with wisdom. Sustained, coordinated organizing prevented the Republicans from doing their worst to Obamacare. Roy Moore, a bigot and accused child abuser, was defeated in deeply red Alabama – a virtual political miracle. Brave women and sustained media investigations have together managed to put a dent in the impunity enjoyed by some powerful men.

Naive cynicism would tell you that Harvey Weinstein and Roy Moore would never be held accountable in any way, but they both were.

People can change the world for the better – not always, but sometimes. Naive cynics close their eyes to this possibility. They accept defeat so that they can pat themselves on the back for being right when they are defeated.

That doesn't make them wise. It makes them rubes.



# STAFF BOX

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