

# OPINION

## BLOOMBERG VIEW

### The State Dept. desperately needs a leader

It's hard to say whether the dysfunctional state of American diplomacy is more the result of the president's mistrust of his secretary of state, or the secretary of state's mismanagement of his department. The U.S. and the world may be about to find out.

If Donald Trump replaces Rex Tillerson with someone he trusts more — the president is reportedly considering CIA director Mike Pompeo — then the State Department may have more leeway to use the instruments of soft power that U.S. diplomacy needs to succeed. But restoring the department's influence in Washington, and strengthening Washington's in the world, will require a leader more adept than Tillerson.

To be fair to Tillerson, having Trump as your boss is not easy. The president's incendiary tweets have routinely contradicted stated policy.

Trump's outsourcing of policy to family members has left Tillerson fumbling for purchase in the Middle East and elsewhere. Trump's initial distrust of the nation's diplomatic establishment was fanned by acts of public resistance by its rank-and-file. And the department's high vacancy rate is partly attributable to Tillerson's admirable resistance to naming White House loyalists.

But Tillerson can count himself among his own worst enemies. His gung-ho prosecution of the administration's ill-considered 30 percent budget cut to his department has alienated employees and his supporters in Congress. So has his ill-defined plan for reorganization.

If Tillerson is indeed heading out the door, whoever takes his place needs to lead the department, not decimate it. Diplomacy is essential not only to finding out what's going on beyond U.S. borders, but to communicating and advancing U.S. policy around the globe. It should always be the first resort for resolving disputes.

And with all due respect to the president, whether it's negotiating trade agreements or springing Americans from overseas jails, he's not the only one who matters. He may be America's chief executive, but he can't be everywhere at once. That's why he needs to nominate his ambassadors for places such as South Korea, Egypt and Honduras — to name just three trouble spots without even a nominee (there are 43 others). That's why he needs a fully staffed, well-run State Department.

It may well be that Trump's grace period for any Tillerson successor will be similarly short. The president deserves to have a secretary of state he trusts.

The Senate, in turn, has the right to judge the nominee's qualifications. By now, however, one thing should be painfully clear to the White House and Congress alike: The interests of the country are not served by a State Department that is demoralized and in disarray.

## TOM O'MARA | 58TH DISTRICT

### Remember: Shop small and buy local

We hear it all the time: small businesses are the backbone of the economy and local job creation.

It's true, and so there is no better time than now — the holiday shopping season — to remember the following: Shop Small.

Buy Local. Consumers increasingly go online to do their holiday gift buying, there's no denying it. However, the further we move into the holiday season the more shoppers still turn to "brick-and-mortar retail." Which, of course, is good for local businesses. Fortunately, there's still a shop down the street or around the corner that turns out to be the best destination of all to find that perfect (and meaningful) gift.

Here's hoping we all do our best to support small businesses on Market Street, Main Street, Water Street, the Commons, or wherever they happen to be found in your own community.

It's all about consumer choice. The head of the federal Small Business Administration (SBA) has defined the idea of

shopping small this way: "Small businesses are the fabric of our communities. By shopping small...we can support the men and women who are building these amazing small businesses. It's a chance to say thank you to the small business owners who do so much for our communities."

Small business owners -- in many instances, small business families -- play fundamental roles in local job creation and preservation, to say nothing of economic opportunity and hope here at home and, collectively, across the state and nation.

The SBA notes that over the past 20 years small businesses have been responsible for creating two out of every three net new jobs nationally. More than one-half of all of America's working men and women, according to federal statistics, own or are employed by a small business.

It's always worth recalling these words from the head of the National Federation of Independent Business/NY, "It's about the entrepreneurs and families who have put everything into stores

that offer what the chains and e-commerce companies don't — something different, something special, from handcrafted gifts to genuinely friendly service...When you shop at a small business, you're supporting your hometown, your neighborhood and your neighbors.."

You would be hard-pressed to say it any better.

Indeed, these weeks before Christmas include the heaviest shopping days of all. A National Retail Federation survey found that as of mid-December, the average consumer had only completed less than half of his or her holiday buying.

So when we head out the door in the busy days ahead to finish up this year's holiday shopping, there's nothing keeping us from setting aside at least one stop along the way to support a local small business somewhere across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions.

The job you help save by shopping local and buying "Made in the U.S.A." may ultimately be your own.

I look forward to seeing

some of you out there, including at one of our local tree farms to give a boost to this vital, locally grown industry. The Empire State is one of America's largest producers of locally grown and cut Christmas trees.

It's an \$8-million statewide industry.

Consequently, I'll close with a reminder for everyone who has not yet put up a holiday tree. The website of the Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York (CTFANY) makes it convenient to find a nearby farm, <http://www.christmas-treesny.org/>.

CTFANY Executive Director Mary Jeanne Packer recently said, "Christmas tree farming is a year-round job and our growers truly appreciate the recognition that this time of year brings to their efforts throughout the season to plant, maintain, and trim these beautiful trees. Christmas tree farms provide many environmental benefits including adding oxygen to the air, improving soil and water quality, and providing habitat for wildlife."



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Extreme arrogant liberal speaks out

To the Editor,  
I am writing to express my outrage at discovering that Representative Tom Reed called me and other constituents "extreme arrogant liberals" on his Facebook page after a peaceful rally was held outside his office to oppose the tax bill that is being debated.

The ultra-rich and corporations, Mr. Reed's main source of campaign money, are the only ones who will benefit from this tax bill. The bottom line is this: Tom Reed is supporting this tax bill because it is what his fat cat donors want. He doesn't care about our opinions. The corporations, the lobbyists, and the rich want this bill and Tom Reed wants their money.

I know that Mr. Reed thinks that calling me an "extreme arrogant liberal" is an insult. If caring about working people and not wanting their taxes to increase so the ultra-rich and corporations can put even more money in the bank then call me an "extreme arrogant liberal". If caring that Mr. Reed refuses to break ranks with Donald Trump even though his behavior becomes more

erratic, unhinged, and dangerous on a daily basis then call me an "extreme arrogant liberal". And if caring about being a decent human being makes me an "extreme arrogant liberal", I am fine with that too.

**Janice Vitale, LCSW**  
Bath

### Nursing home residents need raises

To the Editor,  
I am writing to inform the public that New York State residents living in nursing homes across the state receive a monthly personal needs stipend of fifty dollars (\$50) from our monthly social security and retirement income. The fifty dollars (\$50) is to go towards hair care for men and women, clothing, shoes, TV, cell phone and any other personal needs items.

In 1981-1982 the fifty dollar (\$50) allowance was established and has never been increased in 35 years. In that period of time the cost of living has increased by 275%. My question to you is "would you like to go 35 years without an increase in your income?"

There are approximately seventy thousand (70,000) people living in nursing homes.

We are residents who have lived, worked diligently our entire lives, raised families and supported the great state of New York. Please give us the quality of life we deserve in our latter years.

I have been a resident of the Chemung County Nursing Facility for almost eight years and have seen residents who are not able to go the hairdresser, cannot afford to buy personal care items, clothes, and other necessities.

Please search your heart and contact your elected New York representatives and encourage them to make a difference in these residents quality of life.

Your love and caring is greatly appreciated. Happy Holiday season to all of you.

**Ann Kennedy**  
Chemung County Nursing Facility

### Reed to be commended for ITC

To the Editor,  
Tax reform presents a fresh opportunity to directly address the nation's public policy priorities. That is why it was very encouraging to see key provisions of U.S. Representative Tom Reed's legislation, H.R. 1090, the Technologies for Energy Securities Act, included

as part of the recently passed House tax reform bill.

The legislation would restore the Investment Tax Credit (ITC) for numerous clean energy sources, which would put them on a level playing field with traditional energy resources like oil and gas.

Innovative energy projects like fiber-optic solar energy, small wind energy, and geothermal heat pumps, among others, are often capital intensive but deliver significant economic and local energy production benefits over the long term. The tax credit is important because it could motivate investors to back such efforts in New York state and across the country. These projects would help to secure America's energy future and serve to create jobs and drive economic growth in your region.

Representative Reed should be commended for his leadership on the ITC and his overall commitment to an "all of the above" approach to meeting the nation's growing energy demand. Hopefully other legislators will follow his example.

Sincerely,  
**Heather Reams**  
Managing Director, Citizens for Responsible Energy Solutions Forum  
Washington, DC

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