

# OPINION

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

Last April, convicted cop killer Herman Bell, who was serving a 25-to-life sentence for the killings of two New York City police officers in 1971, walked free. In a 2-to-1 decision, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's state Parole Board set him free. The widow of one of the officers Bell murdered that day nearly four decades ago said, "There are no words to describe our outrage and disappointment in Gov. Cuomo."

Recently, the governor's Parole Board set free Judith Clark. In 1981 Ms. Clark, a self-proclaimed radical domestic terrorist and member of the infamous Weather Underground, was convicted of felony murder

for her role in a Rockland County robbery that led to the murder of two police officers and a Brink's security guard. The son of one of the officers killed that day in 1981 said of Ms. Clark's release, "We're outraged and sickened by this whole decision. Judith Clark is a murderer, plain and simple. She deserves nothing but to spend the rest of her life behind bars."

A former police detective wounded in that botched robbery in 1981 opposed Ms. Clark's parole. In words that echo the feelings of many family members and loved ones whose lives have been shattered by violent crime, he said, "Doesn't what happened to the people who lost loved

ones and were wounded matter?"

There is currently a piece of legislation gaining traction in the Democrat-controlled Legislature, sponsored by Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Brad Hoylman of Manhattan, that would make New York prison inmates automatically eligible for parole once they reach the age of 55, even if they are serving a sentence of life without parole.

What in the name of justice is going on? Gov. Cuomo's Parole Board is releasing cop killers. Democratic leaders are pushing legislation to grant parole hearings to convicts sentenced to life without parole.

It is a dangerous and disturbing habit of

favoring cop killers and other violent criminals over crime victims and their families and loved ones. It's alarming to district attorneys, law enforcement officers and criminal justice experts, and we need to stand up, speak out and work against it.

Last week, I joined Senate Republican colleagues to do just that. We called for the enactment of a "Victims' Justice Agenda" to help offset these ongoing actions by the state Parole Board and the state's Democratic legislative leaders.

The action we seek represents a comprehensive package of legislation to reform the parole system to keep violent criminals behind bars without parole and ease the parole

process for suffering victims, families and the public. It includes legislation to:

- require the unanimous consent of the Parole Board to grant an inmate release;
- enact the "Domestic Violence Protection Act" requiring the registration of violent felony offenders;
- increase, from 24 to 60 months, the time between parole hearings for violent felony offenders; and
- require Parole Board members to review all relevant victim impact statements prior to conducting a parole hearing.

The state Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA) shares our strong belief in the need to "fix the broken" system of

parole in this state. PBA President Patrick Lynch has said, "The current parole process contains gigantic loopholes that allow murderous monsters like Herman Bell to game the system by concocting a phony story tailor-made for the new parole guidelines, which don't place enough weight on the nature of the crime. To make matters worse, the courts seem to believe that politically-appointed parole board members have unbridled discretion to release criminals onto our streets and are completely immune from challenge by anyone, even when they disregard the law or the board's own procedures. That must change."

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Editor's Note:** Anyone writing Letters to the Editor in support of a school board candidate must submit them by 4 p.m. May 10 for publication in the May 12 edition. Our policy is to not run any election-related letters the Sunday prior to the vote - which in this case, is May 21. Thank you.

**Shawn Vargo, Executive Editor**

**A letter to Congressman Reed**

To the Editor, I was disheartened and disappointed over the release of your email entitled "Weaponizing the tax code."

To answer your first question "...what would stop Members of Congress from targeting future political foes or even their neighbors down the street?" - I think it's obvious that the current controversy has to do with the release of returns for persons seeking the Office of the President, not just someone's neighbor!

This isn't a new issue. It was clear that candidate Trump refused to release his tax returns from the very beginning of his run for office.

**Why?**

The tradition in living memory has been that presidential and, for that matter, other congressional candidates would release their tax returns.

In the specific case of President Trump, I think there are serious questions regarding the emoluments clause and whether he is profiting from his real estate businesses while sitting as President.

By the way, the statement you used in your email that this is a weaponization of the tax code is very misleading. The relevant law is embedded in Section 6103 of the code that permits the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee to request any tax return, provided he ensures the privacy of the return. So that when you suggest that Americans should fear being targeted by a Member of Congress for partisan reasons, I think it is you that have "Missed it."

I do agree with your statement that Congress should get serious about increasing transparency surrounding financial interests of people running for office. As part of that effort, why not make it mandatory that a certain number of tax returns be

released?

Perhaps you should turn your attention to that idea. Yours sincerely,

**David G. Grossman, PhD Corning**

**I notice tobacco advertising**

To the Editor, Have you noticed that the older we get, the less we may notice in our surroundings? We tend to have so much going on in our lives.

Have you noticed that kids pick up on everything? Kids are very inquisitive and take it all in, including advertising for tobacco and e-cigarettes.

The next time you go to the convenience store, gas station, or pharmacy, stop and take a look at the tobacco advertising. How much of the in-store advertising is at eye level of our kids? Is the advertising brightly colored?

There are rows and rows of cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, and e-cigarettes. Maybe you have never noticed them, but our kids certainly have.

Tobacco companies deliberately advertise this way to put their products in front of our kids.

Young people are almost twice as likely as adults to recall tobacco advertising, and it makes them more likely to smoke. In-store advertising near schools and in low-income neighborhoods is particularly effective.

The bottom line is, tobacco marketing is literally in the face of those most vulnerable to it.

Think about how much money the tobacco companies are spending to put their products in front of our kids. Billions of dollars!

Take a few minutes and look up the facts. Don't look the other way. Take action and get tobacco out of sight.

**Alexis Bartsch Community Member Elmira**

**Supporting Amey Rusak**

To the Editor, I am honored to support Amey Rusak in the Bath CSD School Board election on May 21st. Mrs. Rusak has proven to be an extremely well-qualified member of the Board in her first term and has done a lot for our community's youth.

Mrs. Rusak works well with the current board and has been a part of several successes during her tenure: advocacy for students in poverty, participation in the district's strategic planning process, a fair and thoughtful new contract for teaching assistants, and improvement of our facilities through the capital project, notably the improved athletic fields.

Mrs. Rusak has demonstrated to our community that she is completely and tirelessly devoted to bettering the lives of people in need not only through her work, but also by the many unpaid hours she has spent as a school board member and the extra time she has put in running programs to improve the quality of life for lower income families.

At ProAction Mrs. Rusak is responsible for a \$2.5 million budget dedicated to assisting local people in need, and she has also trained over 3,000 local people in dealing with poverty and trauma. Her work requires integrity, transparency, fiscal responsibility, and exceptional kindness. Both New York State and Steuben County have recognized her contributions with an Excellence in Leadership award and a Champion for Youth award, respectively.

Undeniably, Mrs. Rusak is highly qualified and exceptionally well-suited to meet the challenges faced by the Bath CSD Board of Education, serving the needs of both

children and taxpayers. We are incredibly fortunate to have a person of her caliber willing to run for a second term. Please consider voting for Amey Rusak on May 21.

**Kristina Snavelly Bath resident, teacher, and parent of four Bath school district graduates**

**Pass the Equality Act**

To the Editor, The Equality Act is coming up for a vote in the House of Representatives at the end of May 2019.

This bill should be passed as an affirmation for all Americans who utter the words in our Pledge of Allegiance: "...with liberty and justice for all."

The reality is there are many Americans today for whom this statement is simply not true because their lives do not find comfort or assurance in these words.

There are still too many people in America who regularly face blatant acts of discrimination in their personal and professional lives. Specifically, the Equality Act would address people who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Equality Act would explicitly include protections for LGBTQ people across all areas of life including, housing, credit, education, public space and services, federally funded programs and jury service.

Citizens of the 23rd Congressional District are invited to call or write to Representative Tom Reed to support the Equality Act - H.R. 5 - which would truly provide liberty and justice for every American.

underlying fiscal condition of the country to see if we have cause for concern.

In 2007 Wall Street was booming, until the downturn began in September, which became known as the Great Recession of 2008.

A recent NY Times article (4/23/19, Business) named "Insolvency Looms for Social Safety Net" talks about the precarious and threatening condition of safety net programs - Medicare and Social Security - upon which so many of our elderly and disabled depend.

It says that Medicare's hospital insurance fund is expected to be depleted in just seven years. Social Security's reserve fund is projected to be depleted in 16 years.

Considering how many baby boomers are in or near retirement and totally dependent on these for their future financial well-being, this is terrible news.

Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006, warned us repeatedly back in the 1990's about this.

So, Republicans knew this was coming for decades. Why did they pass those Trump tax cuts in 2017, which will pump up our national debt, just as Medicare insolvency looms?

Kevin Brady, Republican head of the tax writing committee in December 2017, eagerly rushed through those tax cuts and in the April 23 Times' article says "Today's reports remind us of a fact we have known for far too long: Medicare is going broke and Social Security is not solvent."

Tom Reed, (NY-23, R), another Trump tax cuts writer on that committee, has been appointed the "go-to-problem solver" on Social Security.

I, for one, am worried about this. Maybe Congressman Reed should suggest "repealing and replacing the tax cuts" instead of celebrating this passing stock market rally.

**Dorothy Pomponio Groton**

INFORMATION STAFF BOX

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<b>The Leader Staff:</b>	
<b>Publisher</b> Rick Emanuel   Group Publisher 936-4651, Ext. 303	<b>Classifieds</b> 936-4651, Ext 651 <b>Retail</b> 936-4651, Ext 653
<b>Editorial</b> Shawn Vargo   Executive Editor 936-4651, Ext. 361 svargo@the-leader.com	
<b>Circulation</b> Nichole Harrison Customer Service Manager 936-4651, Ext. 314	
<b>Advertising</b> Heather Falkey   Ad Director 936-4651, Ext. 347 hfalkey@the-leader.com	
<b>Business Office</b> Becky Post   Administration 936-4651, Ext. 306 bpost@the-leader.com	

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**Gary McCaslin Corning**

**Social Security, Medicare more important than tax cuts**

To the Editor, The stock market is momentarily roaring and Wall Street is happy. But those markets usually boom and bust, so we need to look at the

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