

OPINION

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READER VIEW

Rebuilding the Republican Party

In the aftermath of Steve Austin's near fatal crash on the Six Million Dollar Man, Oscar Goldman says: "We can rebuild him. We have the technology. We can make him better than he was. Better, stronger, faster." For the Republican Party, its moment has similarly arrived.

Having registered as a Republican when I was first able to vote in 1970, I reluctantly left the party in 2002 when I sensed it morphing into something I did not understand. Ronald Reagan, for whom I voted twice and who is revered as a Republican saint, would share my puzzlement.

Things seemed to have come to a head four years ago when a decent, competent, former governor of Massachusetts – my governor before I moved here – abandoned everything he stood for in order to win the nomination for president. Tactical errors such as the "47 percent" aside, wooing evangelicals and Tea Party Republicans made it too hard for him to bridge back to the center, and a hardened stance on immigration alienated those who did not take kindly to the notion of self-deporting.

Presiding over the 2012 postmortem, GOP chairperson Reince Priebus blamed Mitt Romney's defeat on a failure to communicate the Party's message. But the problem was never communication; it was the message. Since those heady days, the planned reach out to Hispanics has been drowned by the din of sealing the borders. Opposition to abortion has exposed both sexism and ignorance about basic matters of anatomy. Painting all of Islam with one

brush stroke has resulted in a canvas that screams intolerance. And then there is racism. Yes, the "R" word.

To be clear: the Republican Party is not racist. In fact, surveys among white Republicans and white Democrats do not show significant differences in attitudes toward minorities, which is to say we all need work. However, the Party has been all too willing to stoke fires that, among other things, enabled a white man to assault a black protester at a Trump rally and others to exclaim publicly how well he moved for someone his age. It is not sufficient for Republican leaders to issue high-minded statements that cost nothing when few of them are willing to say they refuse to support a demagogue for president. If the line can't be drawn here, does it even exist?

Though now registered Democrat, it gives me little joy. I would prefer a choice other than Hillary, and we need a strong Republican Party to protect Democrats against their own excesses. We need entitlement reform, we need tax reform, and we need to get on with business. On many issues of substance there is little difference between centrist Republicans and centrist Democrats. However, as presently constituted, the Republican Party is incapable of playing its role. It is mired in hatred and wedded to too many of its own who could care less about governing. It is time to sweep house, from the attic to the basement.

—Harvey R. Greenberg is a Dundee resident.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Elected leaders and ridiculous ideas

TO THE EDITOR | First we had the mayor of Ithaca, the bastion of Liberalism in our area, calling for injection centers for heroin addicts. Now our Corning City mayor has jumped on the bandwagon calling this ridiculous proposal a fresh idea.

Colorado recently decriminalized marijuana resulting in deadbeats from all over the country swarming into the state increasing the welfare

roles and causing a myriad problems for law enforcement and taxpayers. Our elected leaders would better concern themselves with promoting tourism, business, commerce and industry rather than illegal activities.

I wonder how our mayor would feel about the prospect of opening an injection center in his neighborhood?

Thomas Greven, Corning

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WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Listening to the front lines on heroin

Steuben County District Attorney Brooks Baker was on point recently when he said, after meeting with the county's top patrolmen, "We held this meeting for two reasons. One is the tremendous increase we have seen in overdoses and overdose deaths in Steuben County. The other is to go right after drug sellers at every level including charging people who supply the drugs that lead to overdoses with homicide... We want to send a message to everyone that we are going to come after the (drug) sellers, no matter what."

It's a message that needs to be sent as a key part of any comprehensive strategy to try to stay ahead of this ever-growing crisis.

I have no problem throwing the book at the heroin dealers devastating the lives of addicts and, at the same time, the lives of their families and communities. In fact I'm currently sponsoring the legislation (S4163) that DA Baker calls for to allow a drug dealer to be charged with homicide, a class A-1 felony carrying a penalty of 15-25 years in prison, if a person dies of an overdose of heroin or other opiate-controlled substance sold by that dealer. It's part of a package of legislation I sponsor to give law enforcement and prosecutors stronger deterrence tools, including one (S608) targeting the "heroin pipelines" existing throughout New York State, including regionally where local law enforcement agencies just last week highlighted again



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that much of the heroin trafficking invading area communities originates out of the city of Rochester.

The overriding point is this: Awareness and education, prevention and treatment are fundamental responses. But so are tough laws and law enforcement. I agree that we can't arrest our way out of this crisis, but we shouldn't hesitate to throw the book at the pushers and suppliers of this deadly drug.

The discussion is underway at every level, from the kitchen table to the Oval Office. Deaths from heroin overdoses across the nation escalated 175 percent between 2010 and 2014, and the numbers just keep climbing.

On February 23rd in Penn Yan, I sponsored a meeting of the Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, on which I serve as a member.

Established in 2014, the task force has held upwards of 30 local forums statewide to receive testimony from regional law enforcement officers, first responders and district attorneys, drug addiction counselors and treatment providers, recovering addicts and family members, social services and health professionals, educators and other experts

about the range of complex challenges posed by heroin including addiction prevention and treatment options, drug-related crimes, and other community and public health and safety impacts.

At our forum in Penn Yan, Yates County Sheriff Ronald Spike echoed Steuben County DA Baker when he said, "Law enforcement has a very important role to play in this multi-faceted community crime and health problem. The sellers of heroin belong in jail, and those addicted do not, they need affordable treatment."

We'll said, particularly in light of the courageous and powerful stories we also heard from addicts and family members at our Penn Yan forum (which, by the way, you can read more about and watch in its entirety on my Senate website, www.omara.nysenate.gov). It is a crime and a health problem.

I noted earlier that I'm sponsoring a package of tougher laws. Last week, I joined my Senate Majority colleagues to unveil our state budget priorities for 2016-17, which includes a total of \$167 million to continue to enhance the state's heroin and opioid addiction prevention, treatment, recovery, and education services. These budget priorities directly reflect local input from our Heroin Task Force forums, including recently in Yates County.

I'll stress it again: it's important to hear directly from those on the front lines locally who can help

us target the necessary responses and to keep strengthening the state-local partnership that's critical to putting in place the most up to date and effective combination of law enforcement, awareness and education, and treatment and prevention. Some of the Senate's specific budget proposals include additional funding for transitional housing for those in recovery, including inpatient treatment and additional services; raising the total number of "Recovery Community Centers" across the state from six to 20; school prevention efforts; and doubling, from 10 to 20, the number of "Family Support Navigators" across the state who assist New Yorkers and their families with navigating insurance and treatment systems.

Overall, the approach we're pursuing reflects what we're hearing locally on heroin: it is a crime – and a health – crisis.

For local assistance and information, as well as to connect with local recovery and treatment services, remember the region's 2-1-1 HELPLINE (Dial 2-1-1 or 1-800-346-2211, or visit <http://www.211helpline.org/>). For overdose or other emergencies, call 9-1-1

—State Sen. Tom O'Mara represents New York's 53rd Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and a portion of Tompkins County.

GUEST VIEW | JACK BENJAMIN

Gas storage important to Schuyler County

As a property owner in Schuyler County and for over 40 years a career in community planning and economic development, I have followed the Crestwood project with great interest. While I have been reluctant to publicly comment on this project, I now feel compelled to do so as I fear that the extreme misguided opposition to this project is in itself putting our community at risk.

I have watched this project for several years and have taken the time to look at both sides of the discussion. What I have found, unfortunately, is the fear factor has taken over any fact decisive based making. The fact is that there are 2 unrelated gas activities on the Crestwood property; (1) the existing natural gas storage operation which is a FERC regulated activity occurring since 1996 and (2) the proposed propane and butane (LPG) storage facility which is under review by NYSDEC. It's also a fact that it is difficult to maintain and or create sustainable living wage jobs in upstate NY. According to published sources, NYS has the worst business climate in the United States. The Governor is trying to correct this problem, but it will take time. Taking the approach that current alternative energy sources (primarily wind and solar) will provide us with the energy to live and work is an overly simplistic and unrealistic view of addressing our future energy needs. Every expert in environmental research



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and energy business development understands it will be a combination of alternative energy sources and primarily natural gas/or propane to give this country the best and most sustainable living and work environment.

Deciphering what is true and what is not is a difficult task. Thanks to the growth of the various forms of communications with residents and businesses, fringe views have gone mainstream and the truth (facts) is whatever you prefer to believe. If you say it loud enough or long enough people will believe it. This communication tool is very evident in the discussion around the proposed Crestwood Storage Facility. Facts continue to be manipulated to justify actions taken by activists that believe sustainable and vibrant communities can exist without business and industrial expansion and development. The fact is, protecting the environment is always the longterm objective. Cost effective energy availability in all forms drives the economy. To expect a community to be sustainable without enhancing its energy sources and reserves creates a false sense of security. Energy is a fundamental requirement in protecting and enabling residents,

businesses, and industrial employers to maintain their community presence. Schuyler County needs companies willing to invest for the long term. Retention of living wage jobs such as provided by US Salt and Crestwood provide the underpinning for residents to buy homes, pay taxes, provide educational opportunities for their children and support programs to assist less fortunate community families. Residents and businesses know from experience that you can have propane storage, a healthy environment and tourism all at the same time. Facts eventually provide the basis for decision making. Listed are a number of facts that lead to a constructive conclusion:

1. The regulatory agencies (NYSDEC staff) have determined that the Crestwood Storage Facility is designed to have no significant impact on the community environment. In addition, various aspects of the proposed LPG storage project have been approved by the Army Corps of Engineers and EPA.
2. The NYS Geologist has concluded that the proposed use of the salt caverns have demonstrated a long standing operational record as a gas storage facility without any geologic evidence of incompatibility.
3. Project operations will generate an annual economic impact of 17 jobs, \$685,000 in employee compensation, \$507,000 in indirect sales in Schuyler County and additional

\$616,725 in property taxes.

4. Construction will generate a one time impact of 58 jobs, \$2.3 million in employee earnings and \$18 million in economic sales.

5. Crestwood is the second largest property tax payer in Schuyler County: \$36.9 million assessment, \$900,144 in property tax today (4.23% of the total tax burden), the additional investment will create \$617,000 in additional taxes for a potential total of \$1,517,140.

6. Crestwood Storage Facility proposal will store approximately 50% less gas than was previously stored in the 1980's.

7. There will be no visual impact of the proposed project from the lake or area highways.

8. According to NYSDEC, the lake for the past 45 years has had declining chloride levels despite years of propane and natural gas storage and record levels of salt production during this period.


9. The real issue that affects the future of Seneca Lake is the sediment runoff and public waste that is discharged into the lake. A more concentrated effort to reduce pollutants into the lake should be a community priority.

10. Crestwood has invested over \$260 million in it's Schuyler County operation over the past 5 years.

11. No gas storage is proposed under Seneca Lake.

12. New York households have paid more than \$130

SEE BENJAMIN, A6



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