

OPINION

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GUEST VIEW | CHRISTINE M. FLOWERS

Making our enemies seem friendly

A few weeks ago, Rolling Stone had the execrable taste to put the Boston Marathon Bomber on the cover, making him look just like a Semitic version of Justin Bieber. Since I have very little respect for a magazine that essentially ambushed Gen. Stanley McChrystal, proselytizes for stoners and portrays Sarah Palin as a slut, I wasn't really surprised. Disgusted maybe, but not surprised.

It didn't occur to me that there was something sinister about the incident, until this past Wednesday when I checked out the front page of the New York Times and found a sympathetic story about Bradley Manning. The authors went to a great deal of trouble to "humanize" the man who released thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks founder (and international coward) Julian Assange, whose last name is so exquisitely fitting.

Here is how they began: "Feeling outcast and alone in Iraq, Bradley Manning, then a 22-year-old Army private, turned to the Internet for solace in early 2010, wanting to share with the world what he saw as the unconscionable horrors of war, an act that resulted in what military prosecutors called one of the greatest betrayals in the nation's history."

If you did not know that you were reading a news report, you could seriously believe from the flowery language ("solace?" Really?) that this was either a majority opinion written by Justice Anthony Kennedy or the latest installment in the "Twilight" series. This obvious and awkwardly-written attempt to curry sympathy for a man who jeopardized the lives of countless military personnel would have been laughable had it not represented a disturbing trend in the national media: the willingness to empathize with criminals.

Rolling Stone runs a feature on the degeneration of a cool, dope-smoking young wrestler who was as Americanized as your average Chechnyan emigre into a zombie-like follower of radical Islam and turns it into a cautionary tale. We are somehow supposed to weep for this poor boy who was given every damn thing that our immigration system provides including a shot at U.S. citizenship and say "how could we have made a difference in his life?"

This reflexive soul-searching, this shifting of the blame from the perpetrator to the bystanders and - much worse - victims is obscene.

But we do it all the time.

Sometimes we do it when our cities explode in gunfire and we need a scapegoat. We don't blame the guy holding the gun. We blame the guy who made the gun, or the one who sold the gun, or the one who passed the law making it easier to get the gun, or the one who didn't provide a free breakfast for the shooter. I've pretty much gotten used to that particular reaction.

What I haven't gotten used to is the idea that no matter how heinous a crime or how despicable a person, we reflexively refuse to acknowledge that some people have no justification for what they've done. They are just evil.

Bradley Manning is not necessarily evil, although I'm fairly certain he was in the celestial lunchroom when God was handing out consciences. He comes off as a whiny, self-centered little toad who was conflicted about his sexuality, angered by the Army's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, offended that he was actually treated like a lower-level enlistee as opposed to an officer and desperately in search of friends.

Under other circumstances, you could feel sorry for someone who felt marginalized. Under these circumstances, you can only shake your head and wonder how in the world he ever made it through boot camp.

Bradley Manning was not convicted of the most serious charge against him, aiding the enemy. Not being an expert in military law, I can't say whether the judge's determination was overly generous or justified by the facts of the case.

Still, he was convicted of leaking classified information, including information that could have put both military and foreign service employees living abroad in great danger. The young gay man who resented the military for forcing him to hide his sexuality might very well have exposed other gay soldiers to extreme danger in countries where not having marriage equality is the least of your problems.

But we're supposed to feel sorry for him. We're also supposed to have a soft spot in our hearts for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev because he was torn between a family that clung to antiquated customs, a homicidal brother, and an American society that apparently didn't do enough to make him feel welcome.

Give me a break. Let's save our sympathy for the innocent.

Christine M. Flowers is a lawyer and columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News.

STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

The cost of downsizing

According to the state Division of the Budget, New York State faces budget deficits of \$2 billion in state fiscal year 2014-15, and \$2.9 billion in each of the following two years.

Keep in mind that these projected budget gaps exist despite the fiscal discipline of the past three years, when Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the Legislature have held state spending growth to under 2 percent annually for the first time in a long, long time, and other actions have been ongoing to downsize, consolidate and inject long-overdue fiscal sense into many state government operations, as well as to rein in the cost of numerous programs and services.

These projections make two overriding points. First, they beg a question: What kind of a mess were New York's finances in in the years just prior to the beginning of the fiscal reform we initiated since 2011? That's a long story but, in short, it wasn't pretty and many of us said so at the time.

But we need to keep the budget projections in mind for the other point: Even with all we've accomplished in the arena of fiscal responsibility over the past three years, we're clearly not out of the woods. A recent state comptroller's report warned that other factors, such as slower-than-expected economic growth, could bump these budget gaps to "\$6 billion or more."

I share all of this primarily as the set-up to questioning some of the Cuomo administration's recent actions, particularly the announced shutdown of inpatient services at the Elmira Psychiatric Center (Elmira PC) and the planned closing of the Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility next year.

In general these actions are touted by the administration as moves that are cost effective and that make fiscal sense for New York State in the long run.

As I've said repeatedly

over the past few years, I'm more often than not all-in when it comes to smarter and smaller government.

But I'm far from convinced that's the case with the Elmira PC or Monterey. I'm not alone in raising questions about each of the Cuomo administration strategies under way to transform New York's systems of corrections and mental health.

So working together with local leaders, we're going to see if we can make the case that we should find more effective ways to achieve the short- and long-term goals we share.

An online Join The Fight! petition I began a few weeks ago in support of the Elmira Psychiatric Center keeps gaining steam and has now drawn nearly 2,000 supporters. It's one important way to give voice to our concerns. We'll be undertaking a similar effort on behalf of the Monterey Shock Incarceration facility.

I found it a particularly troubling case of bad timing last week when it was reported that the Cuomo administration is hiring nearly two dozen new top-level administrators in the state Department of Corrections and Community



TOM O'MARA

Supervision. They are hiring 22 "assistant deputy superintendents," at salaries of up to nearly \$85,000 annually.

So I joined the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association in opposition to the need for this "new bureaucracy," especially at the same time the state is shutting down upstate correctional facilities.

It seems hard to justify closing Monterey and other correctional facilities on one hand while hiring an expensive new layer of bureaucracy with the other.

So too many of the Cuomo administration's recent actions don't appear well thought out and unfairly target our region and other struggling upstate communities. The administration has the authority to act unilaterally in some instances. It's the governor's bureaucracy to run as he sees fit. But those of us who represent the communities,

the workers, the patients and the families being impacted have a right to ask why, to inquire how (and what's next), to paint a different picture and to urge the Cuomo administration to reconsider.

It appears hard to improve upon the Elmira PC's record of fiscal effectiveness and operational success. Same goes for Monterey.

Several concerns need raising:

■ It's one thing to provide assurances in a news release, but quite another to have a specific transition plan in place for any displaced employees and their families. What's the plan?

■ How do we offset the economic impact of these losses for the affected upstate communities?

■ Are the far-reaching and significant changes taking place in correctional services and mental health the right moves for the right reasons?

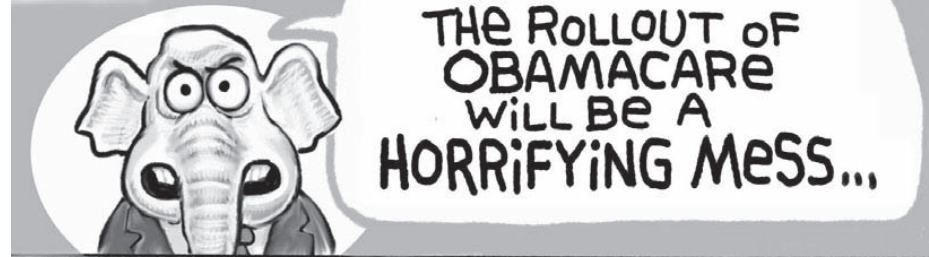
The work of getting answers to these concerns - and many others - is underway. I'll do my best to keep you posted.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

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GUEST VIEW | MIKE MORRONGIELLO

Say no to Albany's destructive policies

Governor Cuomo declares he is finally going to focus on improving the upstate economy, saying, "There has been no upstate focus ... downstate dominates the legislature, because that's where the people are." We know, Governor; we're the tail attached to that Great Dane, New York City. Whenever they twitch, we are wagged.

Upstate has been in steep decline for many years with high unemployment and young people fleeing to other states to find jobs, leaving an aging and increasingly poor population behind.

Cuomo could approve gas drilling to jump-start the economy, but his base (upstate and downstate) is against it. Meanwhile, the ultra-liberal Illinois House voted 108 to 9 to approve hydrofracking. Democrat Governor Pat Quinn said,

"Passage of hydrofracking legislation ... brings good news for jobs, economic development and environmental protection in Illinois." Hydrofracking will add \$9.5 billion to the Illinois economy.

Even the rabidly liberal California legislature won't ban hydrofracking. Hyper-green Democrat Governor Jerry Brown said hydrofracking "could be a fabulous economic opportunity." California could gain 2.8 million jobs and \$24.6 billion new tax revenue.

President Obama is also pro-fracking, saying that advances in drilling have "helped to drive our carbon pollution to its lowest levels in nearly 20 years." He has pledged to "keep working with the industry to make drilling safer and cleaner."

Cuomo's delays on fracking are a political con. He knows fracking will boost our economy, but he's

scared of his environmental base; so he dithers, hoping to placate both sides.

Instead of the economic boost of hydrofracking, Cuomo announced more Regional Economic Development Council grants, which have already cost \$1.5 billion. Cuomo claims they helped in "creating or helping to maintain" (whatever maintain means) 75,000 jobs statewide - an insignificant number which hasn't improved the upstate economy.

Don't expect actual help from Cuomo or other downstate politicians. They want us weak so we're no threat to them. Besides, what's in it for them if our economy improves? If Cuomo allows gas drilling he will build a constituency not beholden to downstate Democrats and their pals here, and that could be a threat.

New York is the most

regulated state in the union. Landowners' property rights are trampled. Gun owners continue to be a political target. We're crippled by oppressive taxes and regulations. It might seem hopeless. But we can begin to take our government back by electing local candidates willing to confront upstate anti-frackers and their downstate allies.

Article IX of the New York State Constitution, the Home Rule provision, which gives local governments the power to act on "property, affairs, or governments," should be enforced. This idea can appeal to discerning Democrats, independents and Republicans. Let's use it to say no to Albany's destructive policies.

Mike Morrongiello is a member of the Corning Town Republican Committee.

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