

# OPINION

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STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

# Early returns on web survey

I post a new legislative survey on my Senate website ([www.omara.nysenate.gov](http://www.omara.nysenate.gov)) at the start of every legislative session in January and this year was no different — with the exception that this year is turning out to be one of the timeliest surveys we've ever done.

And, as a result, one of the most useful.

My "2014 Community, Jobs and Economy Survey" offers a fairly detailed questionnaire on key issues that are dominating current negotiations over a new state budget (and as we get ready to turn the calendar to March and hit the home-stretch on enacting the final 2014-15 state budget, I'm finding this local input particularly informative), but that also have drawn widespread public attention throughout these early months of the legislative session in Albany.

Needless to say, it's a matter of fortunate timing that I'm getting this valuable snapshot of what so many of you are thinking and feeling on critical issues being debated at the moment and for the foreseeable future including unfunded state mandates, the cost of Medicaid, the future of Monterey Shock, the future of the Marcellus Shale, Common Core, the NY SAFE Act, the regional fight against the spread of meth and the rise of heroin, and several others.

I've always maintained that while these annual online opinion surveys are not by-the-book scientific polls by any measure, they at the very least provide a solid indication of local views.

So I thought I'd share some highlights from the early returns. I'll also issue a reminder that the survey's still available on [omara.nysenate.gov](http://omara.nysenate.gov) for anyone who hasn't yet had the chance to participate.

On two issues that have sparked a public outcry unlike almost any other I can recall during the past decade I've served in the State Legislature — the NY SAFE Act, and Common Core — the direction of local opinion seems pretty clear. The survey asks respondents if the SAFE Act should be repealed: 71 percent say yes. On the question of support for or opposition to Common Core: 63 percent are opposed.

In response to one very straightforward question, "Do you support hydro-fracking?" the current response largely falls in line with what we're seeing in prominent statewide polls. Fifty-one percent support it, 37 percent are opposed, and the remaining 12 percent remain undecided.

On the strictly economic and fiscal reform front, 75 percent of respondents believe it's a high priority to provide local governments and school districts relief from unfunded mandates, 65 percent believe that enacting job-creating tax cuts is a top priority this year, and 65 percent also believe that reducing the



SEN. TOM O'MARA

cost of Medicaid is one of our most important priorities.

Generally speaking, the top three issues that respondents are "most concerned about" are 1.) cutting wasteful government spending, 2.) reducing state and local taxes, and 3.) unfunded state mandates.

Closer to home, nearly 70 percent of respondents are against the Cuomo administration plan to close the Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility later this year.

Interestingly, the future of Monterey was back in the news over the past week as a result of Governor Cuomo's recently announced plan to have New York State pick up the cost of providing a college education to state prison inmates, as a way to lower recidivism rates and thereby cut prison costs over the long run. It was an opportunity for me and other Monterey supporters to remind the Cuomo administration that Monterey Shock already works — and has worked for a long time — to achieve these very same goals.

I noted that the SAFE Act and Common Core are two of the most highly charged issues that I can ever recall, but the early reaction to the governor's college-for-inmates proposal has been nearly as strong. For one thing, the timing's bad. Hardworking, law-abiding students and families across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions are sacrificing and struggling to find a way to pay for college in the face of rising tuition costs and other expenses, and they're not asking for a state handout to get that education. It's just another bad move at the worst possible time for New York State taxpayers. We need to stay focused on cutting taxes, keeping state spending under control and turning around the upstate economy. Now's no time to add another questionable — and potentially very expensive — state spending commitment.

Obviously Governor Cuomo's college-for-inmates plan arrived too late to be included in the full "Community, Jobs and Economy Survey," but I've posted a quick poll on [omara.nysenate.gov](http://omara.nysenate.gov) to give you an opportunity to comment on this issue too. Polling over the first few days showed sentiment running strongly against it and, as of this writing, approximately 70 percent are opposed.

Keep the opinions coming.

*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.*

COMMENTARY | JAY AMBROSE

# Obama at war with economics



JAY AMBROSE

Whoopee. We're growing, we're growing. The annual economic rate during the final quarter of last year was 3.2 percent, way up from the year's average of 1.9 percent and enough to arouse hope about possibilities down the road.

It just could be we're headed for what some call "the 4 percent solution," but, of course, that's supposing President Obama and his friends let such fabulous growth happen.

If they do, it could mean lots of new businesses, business expansion and jobs, jobs and more jobs. It could mean better living standards, more opportunities for the young, more advances in all kinds of worthwhile undertakings. That's one reason you hope the president sits down with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and persuades him to do what's right.

The president himself finally learned to do a few things right on the free-trade front. He had balked at various agreements at one point because unions did not want to import more stuff we also make here, fearing members could be put out of work.

Dislocations do happen, but liberated trade

generates enormous benefits for all involved, creating far more wealth and employment than trade clumsily constricted. Wanting to improve on a legacy of the worst economic recovery since World War II, the president proposed moving fast on some negotiated deals and Reid stubbornly said nothing doing. He still bows to union pressure.

With friends like Reid, who needs enemies like tea party Republicans in the House? But then again, Obama can be his own worst enemy, as in doing his darnedest to curb an energy boom that could boost our economy like little we have ever seen. His administration has been playing footsie with environmentalists opposed to drilling on federal lands, and then there's the nose-thumbing of oil industry hope for the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada to Texas.

Despite three years for one study that

demonstrated the pipeline's safety in eight volumes of verifiable facts, Obama said we needed a new study of carbon emissions. We've had it, and it says there's nothing to worry about. What's next? A study on whether it's OK to cheat Americans out of prosperity when enviro-activists have quarrels with science?

On another matter, Obama did do the economy a temporary favor by his trick of rewriting laws without congressional approval under the pretense of practical reasons. He thereby further postponed Obamacare's scheme to make all kinds of new demands on businesses that would simultaneously be new forms of torture for the economy. Thank you, replied briefly saved business owners steeling themselves for what will come in 2016, and "what a guy" said fellow Democrats, understanding that this latest rescheduling is meant to help them that much more in this year's midterm elections.

The eventual hurt is nevertheless as sure as Obamacare is a disaster. The health act lavishly does some good that could have been accomplished prudently and meanwhile afflicts us with numerous economic pains. One that

lately became well-known was that taxpayer-provided Obamacare goodies for some would be a heeded incentive to quit work.

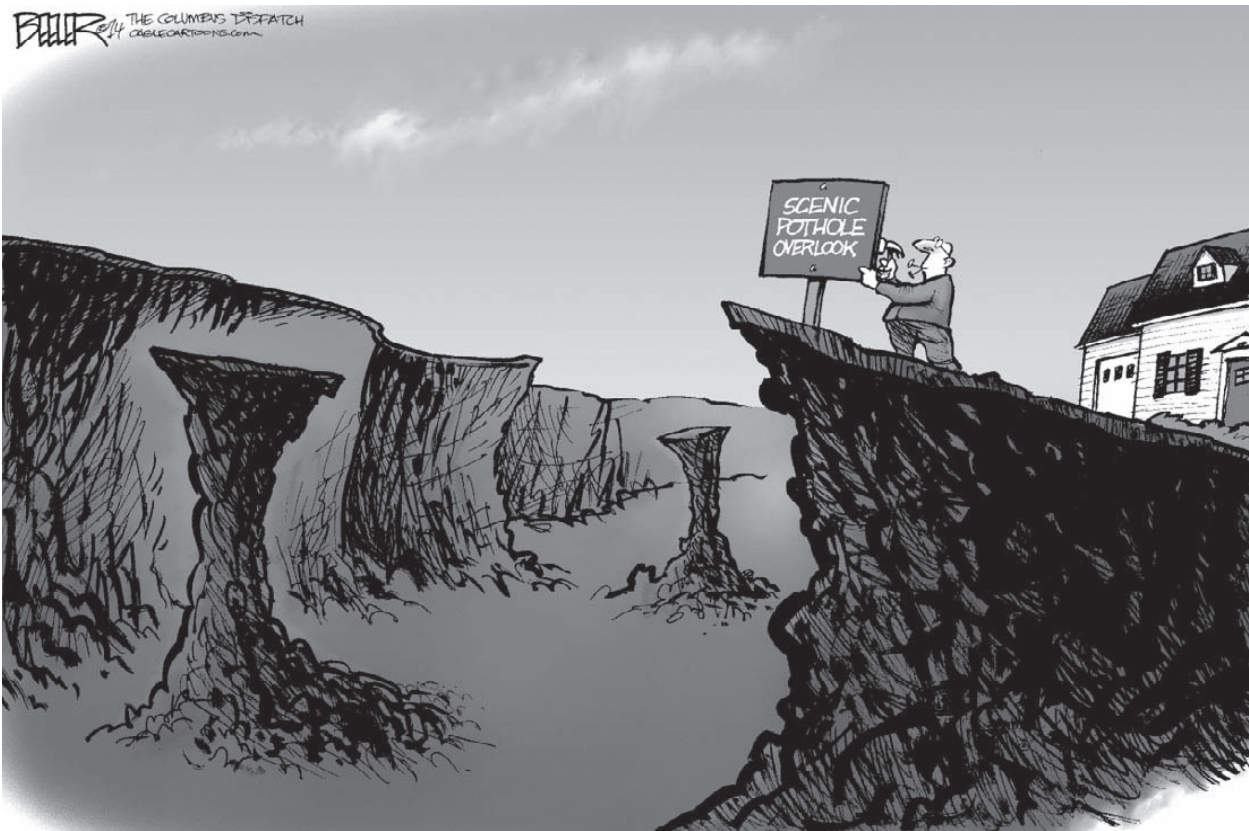
The prediction is that the labor force will get smaller, making our productivity, growth and wealth smaller even though House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi then informed us that job-shirking is a wonderful way to pursue happiness. In other words, some should commute, sweat and pay taxes so others can find their way to the hammock.

There are all kinds of other means by which a confused administration can help stave off the 4 percent solution, such as more regulatory stupidities, immigration reforms that fail to give additional preference to needed skills, taxation that makes us less competitive, refusal to restructure entitlements and prompting family breakdown with poorly devised welfare programs.

We the people must hang in there despite all of that, but at some point we need to elect more officials who actually aid the public cause.

*Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for McClatchy-Tribune.*

## ANOTHER VIEW



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Free program can help at tax time

TO THE EDITOR | At tax time, it is natural to worry about filing correctly and on time. United Way of the Southern Tier's CA\$H (Creating Assets, Savings and Hope) program can ease both of these concerns.

CA\$H is a free volunteer tax assistance program for individuals and families that made \$58,000 or less in 2013. Appointments are available at locations in Steuben, Chemung and Schuyler counties.

The CA\$H process is professional, from start to finish. When you call 211 HELPLINE to schedule an appointment, the call center's referral specialists will ask you the right questions to ensure you qualify for the program and that you are assigned to a volunteer preparer with the correct certification level. At your appointment, a trained screener reviews your paperwork to again make sure you work with the correct preparer.

To receive their IRS certification, volunteer tax preparers complete hours of training and must pass tests to demonstrate their expertise. Most CA\$H preparers have earned advanced-level certification, and many are also qualified to complete returns involving the military, cancellation of debt and health savings accounts.

Once your return is completed, a second CA\$H preparer will review each document for accuracy. This step is an added level of quality control that further ensures your returns are complete and accurate.

The CA\$H program e-files most returns, both federal and state, so you will be able to confirm quickly that your returns have been filed on time.

The success of United Way's tax-assistance program can be seen in its results. Last year, CA\$H customers received more than \$7 million in refunds. Each year CA\$H volunteers complete returns for

more than 4,000 people, the majority of whom return year after year. We thank them for placing their trust with us.

**Kristin Butler,**  
Manager of Marketing and Communications  
United Way of the Southern Tier

### USDA fails duty on meat regulation

TO THE EDITOR | The U.S. Department of Agriculture is still expanding the list of retailers carrying meat unfit for human consumption to Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, and 970 locations in California alone. About 8.7 million pounds were shipped all through 2013 by Rancho Feeding Corporation of Petaluma, Calif.

The recall comes in the wake of USDA's new "inspection" program that allows the meat industry to increase speed of processing lines and replace federal inspectors

with plant employees. According to USDA inspector general, this has resulted in partial failure to remove fecal matter, undigested food, and other contaminants that may contain deadly E. coli and listeria bacteria.

Traditionally, USDA has catered more to the interests and profitability of the meat industry than health and safety of American consumers. Consumer interests come into play only when large numbers of us get sick. Having USDA protect consumers is like asking the fox to guard the henhouse.

The Obama administration should reallocate responsibility for all food safety to the Food and Drug administration. In the meantime, each of us can assume responsibility for our own safety by switching to the rich variety of soy-based meat products offered by our favorite supermarket.

**Casey Lahosey**  
Corning