

# OPINION

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### OUR VIEW

## No groans, only grins

### Grin

To Sriram Hathwar, the calm, cool and collected National Spelling Bee co-champion. It was his last chance to claim that elusive trophy, but you wouldn't have known it. The Painted Post native, a seasoned Bee veteran at 14, was poised throughout the grueling competition. He even managed a joke after misspelling a word in the finals. Smiling, Sriram politely asked "pronouncer" Dr. Jacques Bailly to give him a word he could spell. He got one – and few more – on his way to a tie with Ansun Sujoe, a 13-year-old from Texas. Finally, that trophy was his, and Sriram didn't mind sharing it one bit. "The competition was with the dictionary, not each other," Sriram said. Congratulations, Speller No. 154. You not only won, but you did so with graciousness and humility. The measure of a true champion.

so we were a little disappointed to hear there wouldn't be one this year in Corning. However, the decision to hold a community event in its place was a good one. Hundreds of residents came out on a beautiful day to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice before enjoying the free celebration that followed. We hope this is the beginning of a new tradition. Kudos to the many organizations that worked to make this a success.

### Grin

To the Arts Center of Yates County, which is doing all it can to help its neighbors still recovering from the flash floods that devastated the region in May. On June 8, the Keuka Triathlon will be held at Keuka College, and the Arts Center, a local partner, receives money for each volunteer it recruits for the event. This year, the center will donate that money to flood relief. Volunteers are still needed in a variety of jobs. This is a great way to help out if you don't have money to give. To volunteer, call the Arts Center at (315) 536-8226.

### Grin

To the inaugural Memorial Day celebration at Denison Park. Everyone loves a parade,

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Reed's Part D contradiction

TO THE EDITOR: It was puzzling to see our congressman Tom Reed promote himself as a defender of Medicare Part D in a recent mailing when he has repeatedly voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA), aka Obamacare. One of the first provisions of the ACA to take effect was closing the doughnut hole, a gap in prescription drug coverage in Medicare. This is the part of Medicare Part D where you had prescription coverage until the total of your copays plus what Medicare paid for your drugs exceeded \$2,840. Then you had no drug coverage at all until you had paid \$4,550 yourself. Then coverage resumed. You either had to have the money to pay for

your drugs or go without. Beginning in 2011 Medicare has paid 50 percent of the cost of brand-name prescription drugs when you were in the donut hole. The coverage continues to increase gradually until you will only pay 25 percent by 2020. If Reed had his way we would go backwards into the Bush era and seniors would lose big time in Medicare. I am especially sensitive to this issue because in 2009 I had to pay \$3,000 out of pocket when I was in the doughnut hole. Why any senior would support Reed is beyond my comprehension. I have argued with him before about Obamacare. He does not see the problem or refuses to see it. He wants to take us backwards.

**Peggy Soule**  
 Penn Yan

#### First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

### POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

## Getting serious about heroin

Regardless of social status, geographic location, age or personal wealth, this epidemic has touched the lives of people in every corner of the State.



SEN. TOM O'MARA

That's just one conclusion coming out of the New York State Senate Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction's just-released report, "Solutions to New York's Heroin Epidemic," but it's a critically on-target conclusion. No community, no family, no individual life is immune from this threat.

Urban or rural, rich or poor, young or older, we've certainly learned that heroin addiction knows no boundaries. The rise of illegal drugs and drug trafficking — especially meth and heroin — represents one of the most urgent challenges facing the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions. It threatens to overwhelm individual lives, as well as local systems of health care, social services, and law enforcement.

It's a risk we can't ignore, and we're not. The Senate created its joint, bipartisan Task Force earlier this year to examine, in depth, the growing heroin crisis across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide. After holding 18 public forums covering virtually every corner of New York since early April, including one in Elmira in mid-May, listening to more than 50 hours of testimony, and hearing from over 200 expert panelists, the Task

Force has released a comprehensive report detailing the hearings and proposing a set of legislative proposals for action. We heard testimony from regional law enforcement officers and leaders, drug addiction counselors, treatment providers, educators, social services and mental health professionals, and other experts — as well as recovering addicts and family members— about the range of complex challenges posed by heroin including addiction prevention and treatment options, drug-related crimes, and other community and public safety impacts.

For example, we learned that heroin-related calls to the Upstate Poison Center surged by more than 400% between 2009 and 2013, including 23 heroin-related overdose calls in the Southern Tier last year. Common threads emerged and made it clear that this crisis demands a three-pronged response: 1.) law enforcement, 2.) public awareness and education, and 3.) prevention and treatment. So that's what we're proposing in our legislative strategy: stricter criminal penalties, especially for traffickers;

the creation of an aggressive, statewide "Heroin and Prescription Opioid Pain Medication Addiction Awareness and Education Program"; heightened prevention initiatives and programs; and new models for treatment, including key insurance reforms. You can find the report (which is in the process of being amended to include more detailed information on the Elmira hearing and the Task Force's other, more recent forums) and a comprehensive summary of legislation on my Senate website, [omara.nysenate.gov](http://omara.nysenate.gov) (click on Task Force icon in the left-hand column of the home page). The need for a number of the final proposals was reinforced at the Elmira forum, including one measure highlighted by supporters of the Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility that's slated for closure by the Cuomo administration later this summer, which would direct the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and the state Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) to study the feasibility of converting closed correctional facilities to provide treatment for substance use disorders.

I'll conclude with two key points. First, we appreciate the local, grass-roots input. As the report states: "As New York State government maintains its focus

on preventing opioid abuse and overdoses, increasing the availability and efficacy of addiction treatment, and enhancing the tools provided to law enforcement to keep heroin off the streets, the Task Force would like to thank the family members, law enforcement personnel, local officials, educators, addiction recovery specialists, and recovering addicts who are on the ground, battling drug addiction on a daily basis."

That's point No. 1: the people on the front lines battling this crisis deserve our collective gratitude, and respect.

Point No. 2 is this: we need to act. This urgency to respond was noted by a representative of the Ithaca Police Department, who said, "Heroin is much more devastating than other drugs simply because when you go from recreational use to addiction to destruction, that cycle rears its ugly head much faster and with much more intensity than other drugs."

The Senate will move forward in the remaining weeks of this legislative session, and we'll be doing whatever we can to encourage the bipartisan support that's going to be needed to enact new laws.

*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.*

### ANOTHER VIEW



"WHO'S TO SAY THEY WON'T LEARN TO LOVE US IF WE STICK AROUND TWO MORE YEARS!"

### READER VIEW | JOHN C. JOHNSTON

## Reed bad for N.Y., bad for America

I just attended another Tom Reed Town Hall meeting at the town of Catlin on May 17. There were only five of us in attendance, so the exchange was really informal and we all had our voices heard. My main focus was on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) and funding for these programs for the future. Here are the facts about Social Security: ■ Social Security is not going broke. The SS Trust Fund currently has

a \$2.8 trillion surplus. If we made no changes at all, SS could pay all benefits through 2033. ■ SS is not an "entitlement" program. It is an earned guaranteed social insurance program; paid by your wages and matched by your employer(s) contribution. ■ All contributions you made will be recouped within 3 years of drawing the benefits. ■ Actuarial changes are all we need to secure SS for the future; as we've done all along.

Tom agreed with all the facts above but disagreed about future funding such as raising the cap for FICA contributions from the current \$113,700 of earnings to \$450,000; with no gift credit beyond that. Republicans are adamantly opposed to raising any taxes on the wealthy. Virtually all of them signed a pledge by Grover Norquist to this effect. Do you really think Tom Reed is looking out for you? I then asked Tom if he supports the Paul Ryan budget. He says he does;

which means he thinks Social Security should actually be privatized, Medicare should be a voucher program, major increases in defense spending, elimination of the Food Stamp (SNAP) program, reduced funding for the Veterans Administration (VA benefits and medical treatment), tax cuts for millionaires, elimination of the minimum wage, no unemployment extensions, and repealing the Affordable Care Act

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