

# OPINION

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### OTHER VIEW | ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

# What is GOP waiting for?

“Secure the border” has become the new “Drill, baby, drill.”

For Republicans who want to live in a fact-free world and are afraid to rile the furthest right members of their party by daring to support comprehensive immigration legislation, focusing on border security is, well, a security blanket.

That’s why Republicans facing re-election in 2016, such as Missouri’s Sen. Roy Blunt, are going back to the old canard that there is no good time to talk about fixing the broken immigration system until the border is first secure.

Never mind that the border is more secure than at any time in its history.

Never mind that Congress has increased border agents, and fences and technology, and in the process has reduced border crossings from Mexico to the United States in several states.

And never mind that President Barack Obama has been more aggressive than his predecessors when it comes to deporting undocumented immigrants.

Just as facts didn’t impress the drill, baby drill-team while the U.S. was drilling for more domestic oil than at any time in its history, facts don’t deter opponents of immigration reform.

Oh, and one more “never mind”: Never mind that building the sort of border fence that some Republican members of Congress are fixated on (hello, Mr. Blunt) would be so expensive that the deficit would skyrocket.

Which brings us to the state of debate over that Senate bill pushed by the bipartisan Gang of Eight. It ultimately would create a path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented workers already in the U.S. and improve the broken immigration system so that American companies can attract some of the foreign workers they need.

The nonpartisan

Congressional Budget Office just released a financial analysis of the Gang of Eight’s comprehensive immigration bill. The gang includes Sen. Dick Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, and Sen. Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican.

The legislation reduces the deficit. By a lot.

The CBO estimates that even considering the costs in the bill for, yes, increased border security, it would reduce the deficit by \$175 billion between 2014 and 2023.

Remember when reducing the deficit was the GOP’s holy grail? You only need to remember back to March.

At some point the Senate and House must realize that the numbers in the immigration bill add up to economic growth.

When about 8 million people in the country who aren’t paying taxes start paying taxes, federal revenue increases dramatically. Also, the CBO estimates the bill will lead to a population increase of about 10 million permanent residents by 2023. That’s 10 million people paying taxes, buying goods and services, feeding the economy.

The business community has long pushed for a fix to the broken immigration system because the businesses need both quality workers and new customers.

On Wednesday, the Senate wisely defeated an amendment to the immigration legislation from Blunt that would have required the Department of Homeland Security to have 100 percent monitoring capability along the Mexican border before the rest of the legislation would go into effect.

That’s not a serious idea. It ignores the increased security already provided along the border.

It’s time for Republicans to get off the fence, literally and figuratively, and do something serious to help the U.S. economy and improve the lives for millions of people living in America yearning to be free.

do they heat their homes with?

I know they mean well. I do. They’re cool. They’re trendy. But they drank the KoolAid. They’ve fallen for the lies of the merchants of fear. The EPA – Obama’s EPA – hasn’t found one instance of water contamination due to fracking. But still the anti-frackers cry “Death! Destruction! Catastrophe!” – classic fear tactics.

Saturday’s rallying cry was “Whose lake? Our lake!” Well, it’s my lake, too. As a Seneca Lake landowner, I want to see a vibrant regional economy with abundant clean energy and plenty of jobs. The 11 percent unemployment rate here is obscene.

**Jo Barlow**  
Corning

### POLITICS | SEN. TOM O’MARA

# Grown in New York taking root

It may not be getting the widespread public attention I believe it deserves, but New York’s about to take one of the biggest steps we’ve ever taken toward delivering long-awaited and badly needed property tax relief for state farmers.

That’s because both houses of the Legislature have unanimously approved legislation to place a 2 percent cap on annual agricultural land assessment increases. Now it goes to Gov. Andrew Cuomo to be signed into law.

To me, it’s big news – as much for what it does as for what it signals for the future. The action came just a few days after a celebration I attended in my Senate district, in the town of Howard, Steuben County, to recognize the 200th anniversary of Howard Flats Farm – the longest continuously owned family farm in New York state, now working on its sixth generation. We need more celebrations like these in New York, and this legislation points us in the right direction on achieving that goal.

For starters, let’s focus on what it does. I’ll turn to Dean Norton, president of the New York Farm Bureau, the state’s most prominent farm-family advocate, to deliver the first reaction, “The passage of the 2 percent cap on agricultural assessments is welcome news

on farms all across New York. Not one farm has been immune to the skyrocketing property taxes that make it more difficult to provide local food and products to their communities. (This legislation) will go a long way to keep New York families on their farms.”

In other words, this is a pretty solid move for New York state’s agricultural industry. The legislation was a cornerstone of a plan called “Grown in New York,” a comprehensive economic development strategy for New York state agriculture that I co-sponsored and unveiled with my Senate Republican colleagues earlier this year. The reason was clear: property tax increases have been crushing our family farms and driving too many of them out of business for too long. New York farmers have labored under the second highest property tax burden in America. It’s been unfair.

Specifically, state farmers have seen rising land values drive up property taxes on farmland over the past several years, essentially doubling since 2006. The two-percent cap on ag assessment increases – which has been a top priority for the Farm Bureau – was prompted by alarming increases in farmers’ property taxes statewide. Currently, according to Farm Credit East, New York farmers

pay \$38.41 per acre in property taxes – the second-highest rate in the country that, on average, accounts for 15 percent of a farm’s net income and puts state farmers at a clear competitive disadvantage.

So it’s about time we took this action. We’re hopeful that it will make a difference for our next generation of family farmers to help them grow, prosper and stay competitive.

But many of us have been beating the drum about high property taxes for years. So this action is important on another level too. The approval of this key plank of the Senate’s “Grown in New York” strategy just may be signaling a shift in the Albany mindset. It received unanimous, overwhelming bipartisan support in the Senate and Assembly. The Senate has long championed and acted on property tax relief initiatives like this one, but not so much in a state Assembly dominated by a New York City-based, urban-oriented leadership.

Major opinion shifts rarely happen overnight in the Legislature.

Victories on most key issues – like this one – take years of laying the groundwork. Supporters keep rolling up their sleeves, session after session, and getting back to work on making the case and securing enough bipartisan support

to make action inevitable.

That’s certainly been the case on property tax relief. So will this success on long-overdue and badly needed farm property tax relief open the door to the approval of other parts of our “Grown in New York” agenda?

Only time will tell, but you can bet that it’s a given us a great shot o hope. You can bet that we’ll keep pushing other provisions of “Grown in New York,” which we first put forward in March, and stay focused on tax cuts, regulatory reform, market expansion and a series of other economic growth initiatives that have been high priorities for the state’s farmers and so many upstate, rural communities.

In other words, we’ll just keep getting back to work on it. We need to keep taking actions that keep our farmers competitive for the long haul.

We can’t risk New York State’s farmers being taxed, regulated and priced out of business. The “Grown in New York” plan is a common sense blueprint to keep New York a proud and strong agricultural state – as we always have been, and should always remain.

*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



### READER VIEW | ELIZABETH WHITEHOUSE

# Find a better way than fracking

In response to Bill Weber’s letter of 6/9/13, yes, Mr. Weber, I am a Luddite, but no, my facts are not incorrect (facts – by definition – are not, although interpretation can vary widely). The original Luddites had a point: technology takes away jobs, think robots instead of assembly line workers, automated telephones instead of friendly operators, etc.

As a 21st century Luddite, I am not anti-technology as such, but I tend to agree with Michael Crichton’s view (as expressed in Jurassic Park): “your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could that they didn’t stop to think if they should.” And look where that got them!

The principle applies to the likes of Monsanto and their genetic engineering, and it applies to fracking. And we are talking about the technology here, not

the product.

Traditional vertical drilling has served us well without significant damage to the environment either physically or visually. I have not seen a lease for one of those wells, but absent unhappy landowners, I assume that the leases were fair. Leases in order to crack are not.

Fracking is not a “prudent use of minerals and energy taken from our Earth” and the corporations behind it are far from decent.

Drillers with a standard lease in hand are able to:

- Use as much of the leased land as they want
- Use – free – any water not for domestic use, including ponds, creeks and newly dug wells.
- Store gas underground, regardless of the source.
- Exercise eminent domain for pipelines and access roads.
- Frack all land in a

given unit as long as 60% of the land has been leased.

■ Sell your lease to the highest bidder, here, in Europe or in China.

■ Fail to issue a release at the end of the lease period.

■ Target the Amish and offer very low royalties because they know they will not be taken to court.

Added to which, insurance companies and mortgage companies view properties with leases as high risk and either do not cover/lend, or do so at much higher rates.

Make of that what you will.

Since 2008, the oil and gas industry has spent well over \$100,000,000 per year on lobbying for exemptions and lax regulations, which will allow them to foist their imperfect technology on an increasingly unwilling world.

Two unassailable facts remain: burning fossil fuels is exacerbating the

problem of climate change, and, fracking uses and renders unusable enormous quantities of water. These issues are addressed in two thought-provoking documentaries: Bill McKibben’s “Do the Math” which demonstrates the urgent and vital need to wean ourselves off fossil fuels and Jessica Yu’s “Last Call at the Oasis”, a film with none other than Erin Brockovitch.

Watch them with an open mind, and you, too, will realize that relying on natural gas as a fuel is unsustainable and using the dirty, destructive technology to extract gas by fracking is insane. Remember, when this country was founded, steam power and electricity were figments of someone’s imagination. Let’s rather put technology and inventiveness to work to find a better way.

*Elizabeth Whitehouse is a Corning resident.*