

## COMMENTARY

## Invest in New York's future: Invest in public transit

By Bill Carpenter

Even casual followers of state politics this election season know that the New York City subway is in crisis, and every candidate has an idea about how to fix it.

This makes both political and logical sense: Public transit is the lifeblood of the nation's and

state's largest city and our economic center. When the trains don't run on time, New York City doesn't run on time.

The same is true upstate. When the buses don't run on time, neither do Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany and cities that are served by transit operators of all sizes.

This isn't an upstate vs. down-

state narrative. Rather, as an election season full of political rhetoric nears its end, candidates for state office — and those who will send them to Albany — must seriously consider what the plan for action on all transit needs will be, not just those in one region or another.

This should not be a difficult exercise. Transit operators statewide have reimagined themselves to take on a larger role in tackling the kitchen-table issues at the center of

political campaigns (jobs and the economy). Leveraging that work is an easy win.

Eighty-seven percent of transit trips involve a direct economic impact on the local economy. Transit connects people to jobs, health care, shopping, education, recreation — activities that involve either making money or spending money. That's why growing high-tech, manufacturing, distribution and biotechnology companies all want to be located alongside

good transit infrastructure and innovative service.

A recent national survey by the Mineta Transportation Institute found 80 percent of respondents agree that public transit is important to communities because of the connections it provides to jobs, schools and medical facilities, and because of its potential to drive the economy.

The numbers tell the story of that potential: For every \$1 Please see **CARPENTER A9** ▶

▶ *Bill Carpenter is the chief executive officer of the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority and president of the New York Public Transit Association.*

## PERSPECTIVE

## EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

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## America's dangerous despair

There's always a pile of bodies at these massacre sites. Whether it's at a synagogue, church, nightclub or school, there's always an assault weapon, or



DAVID BROOKS

and who one day decided to try to make a blood-drenched leap from insignificance to infamy.

There's always a guy like Pittsburgh synagogue attacker Robert Bowers, who, according to The New York Times' reporting, was friendless in high school and a solitary ghost as an adult, who spent his evenings sitting in his car smoking, listening to the radio, and living, as one acquaintance put it, "in his own little world."

Guys like that are drawn to extremist ideologies, which explain their disappointments and give them a sense that they are connected to something. Guys like that convince themselves that by massacring the innocents they are serving as a warrior in some righteous cause.

These mass killings are about many things — guns, demagoguery, etc. — but they are also about social isolation and the spreading derangement of the American mind.

Killing rampages are just one manifestation of the fact that millions of Americans find themselves isolated and alone. But there are other manifestations of this isolation, which involve far more carnage.

The suicide epidemic is a manifestation. The suicide rate is dropping across Europe. But it has risen 30 percent in the United States this century. The suicide rate for Americans between 10 and 17 rose more than 70 percent between 2006 and 2016 — surely one of the most shocking trends in America today.

Every year nearly 45,000 Americans respond to isolation and despair by ending their lives. Every year an additional 60,000 die of drug addiction. Nearly twice as many people die each year of these two maladies as were killed in the entire Vietnam War.

The rising levels of depression and mental health issues are yet another manifestation. People used to say that depression and other mental health challenges were primarily about chemical imbalances in the brain.

But as Johann Hari argues in his book "Lost Connections," these mental health issues are at least as much about problems in one's life as one's neurochemistry. They are at least as much about protracted loneliness, loss of meaningful work, feeling pressured and stressed in the absence of community.

"Protracted loneliness causes you to shut down any social, and to be more suspicious of any social contact," Hari writes. "You become hypervigilant. You start to be more likely to take offense where none was intended, and to be afraid of strangers. You start to be afraid of the very thing you need most."

This sounds like a pretty good summary of American politics in 2018.

I keep coming back to this topic

Please see **BROOKS A9** ▶



Photo illustration by Jeff Boyer / Times Union

## EDITORIALS

## Comptroller: DiNapoli

Many voters probably think of the state comptroller as an elected accountant for the state. It's a far more consequential and influential post than that.

The comptroller is, arguably, the one truly independent person in state government who can keep an eye on whether taxpayers' money is being misused. And with the office comes sole trusteeship of the nation's third-largest retirement system, with more than 1 million members and assets of over \$207 billion.

Tom DiNapoli, a Democrat, has held the post since 2007, when the four-term assemblyman was chosen by the state Legislature to fill a vacancy left by the resignation of scandal-plagued Alan Hevesi. Mr. DiNapoli, reelected by voters in 2010 and 2014, has served in an

exemplary fashion, and without a whiff of scandal. He deserves another term.

Under Mr. DiNapoli, the pension fund weathered the Great Recession, and as of 2017 stood as the third best-funded in the nation. The office churns out a steady flow of audits, identifying billions of dollars in overpayments, bad practices, and other waste in state and local governments and school districts — \$3 billion in Medicaid alone.

He also imposed new ethical standards in his own office, ending the sorts of pay-to-play practices that brought down Mr. Hevesi.

Challenging Mr. DiNapoli are Jonathan Trichter, running on the Republican line, and Mark Dunlea, the Green Party's nominee and a longtime anti-poverty activist whose major focus has been divestiture by the pension fund of fossil fuel assets. Mr. Trichter, an investment banker, argues he could run the pension fund better, and be a more independent check on a

Democratic administration should Gov. Andrew Cuomo be reelected. He faults Mr. DiNapoli for paying underperforming hedge funds billions to manage portions of the pension fund, noting they lag behind simple index funds. Mr. DiNapoli says the hedge funds provide diversity.

Trichter and Dunlea both also say Mr. DiNapoli is too nice a guy for a watchdog role.

Anyone who doubts Mr. DiNapoli's watchdog chops need only look at his frequent clashes with the governor over audits. He has also balanced progressive values with a fiscally responsible approach, generally eschewing financially questionable divestment and instead using his power as a major investor to push for corporate responsibility, transparency and diversity.

Mr. DiNapoli has been an honest, competent comptroller. His challengers have not made a persuasive case for voters not to re-elect him.

## Attorney general: James

The New York attorney general has long been known as "the people's lawyer," fighting injustice on many fronts, taking on battles over corporate and financial corruption, worker exploitation, environmental pollution, and consumer rights.

Letitia James, the New York City public advocate, is the candidate in the race best suited to do the job New Yorkers expect.

Ms. James, a Democrat, has been an energetic link between New York City's more than 8 million people and their government. Through 14 years of public service, she has been a city council member, a public defender, a state As-

sembly staffer, and an assistant attorney general, before her current citywide elected role. We did not endorse her in the Democratic primary, but she stands out on the general election ticket for both her breadth of public service and her understanding of the accountability that demands.

The Republican nominee, Keith Wofford, is a successful bankruptcy lawyer whose central argument is that the attorney general's office has been too hard on businesses. Given the billions of dollars in settlements New York has recovered from reckless financial firms that nearly wrecked the global economy, and tens of millions from consumers, it's hard to share his sympathies. We're also concerned that he says the state needs to be more selective in taking on the Trump administration's environmental,

financial, and civil rights offenses. That hesitancy leaves us questioning whether he would vigorously challenge the administration's excesses.

The Green Party candidate, Michael Sussman, also a Harvard grad, worked for a time in the U.S. Justice Department, has a long track record as a civil rights lawyer, and is an experienced litigator. He has added substance to the race, but he lacks Ms. James' experience in responding to the concerns of constituents.

Ms. James' presence on a ticket headed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo has prompted her opponents to question whether she would be a true watchdog throughout the administration. But she has throughout her public career shown her willingness to take on the powerful. She is the candidate most likely to carry on the office's tradition as lawyer for the people.



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**LETTERS**  
**All elected offices need term limits**

The campaigns that are going on, especially on the television, the newspapers and the lawn signs, are repetitious. We are bombarded by promises that if this candidate is elected he or she would do this and that. Then it turns out to be lies.

In my opinion, there should be term limits for everyone in the political field. If the president of the United States has term limits, then so should every other political post right on down to the local town officials. They get into office and then they make themselves so comfortable and they stay on and on and on.

Term limits should be on the floor of the Legislature and the voters should make the decision. Everyone should Google "longest serving senator"; everyone will be shocked. There was one senator who served 51 years, five months and 26 days. That is 45 years too long. Term limits would change the political arena.

**Ralph Commisso**  
*Albany*

**In sport of fencing, there's room for all**

As a member of the fencing community, I was delighted to see Azra Haqqie's question-and-answer piece on Ibtihaj Muhammad ("Winning while wearing a hijab," Oct. 6). My fencers have faced her on the fencing strip, and she is always a formidable opponent. I have the utmost respect for her both on and off the strip. However, I do not believe Muhammad did justice to those who preceded her.

I cannot say whether there were other Muslim women but do know of some black women who were successful sabre fencers who were fencing before her. Carolyn Wright and Essane and Lowey Diedro are the ones who come immediately to mind.

I was also disappointed to see that fencing was described by Muhammad in terms of a negative environment. Although I never saw any incidents of discrimination toward her, that certainly doesn't mean none existed. To think anyone caused her to feel unwelcome is disheartening.

However, she also described fencing as an expensive sport. Muhammad may have been forced to pay high fees in the city, but there are many clubs all over the country that have reasonable rates and that encourage boys and girls of all colors and faiths.

I would hate to think that this item dissuades future women of color to take up the sword. I hope to see future coverage of the sport that provides greater context and elaborates on the opportunities the sport provides.

**Carolyn Washburn**  
*Troy*

**Trump lacks the character of a leader**

Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, said: "With malice toward none;

with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right. ..." Words to live by for all of us — especially for a president, whose influence is part and parcel of the success or failure of his/her presidency and along with it the country and its position in the world.

President Trump, whose recent tweet (among many filled with malice) called a female accuser "horseface," has brought the president's character to a new low.

Some of his supporters say, "It's only words." However, throughout history, men have died for words, and words have changed its course.

The brilliant political writer Aaron Sorkin wrote in Michael Douglas' speech in "The American President": "I've been here three years and three days, and I can tell you without hesitation: Being president of this country is entirely about character." Qualities of honesty, courage, or the like. Integrity.

Whatever real or implied successes President Trump has laid claim to, we must ask ourselves: Was it worth the sacrifice of these qualities in our country's leader?

I would wish for President Trump that he would ponder Lincoln's words, paying special attention to the ending.

For in the final analysis, we are all God's children.  
**Bob Hendrick**  
*Colonie*

**Ethical Republicans must disavow Trump**

Extortionist Donald Trump threatens Mexico and other Central American countries with a cutoff of all aid previously thought to be in America's best interest unless they carry out his inhumane policies toward people fleeing poverty, oppression and gang violence. Gangster-like actions in

which the boss dispatches goons to punish those who don't obey his edicts should not be supported by American citizens regardless of party. It is long past time for honorable Republicans to achieve a critical mass that gives them the backbone to disavow their tyrannical leader.

**William P. McMillen**  
*Delmar*

**President's enablers will be held to account**

The presidency has gone far beyond a source of embarrassment for our country. The leader of our country is outright dangerous to the welfare of every American — Democrat, Republican, Independent and unaffiliated.

He incites hate at his rallies. He shows disrespect for women (over half of our population) and cruelly insults any male who dares to disagree with him. He has no interest in saving our planet — which is so far our only hope of survival. He is a man who lacks compassion for the poor and the oppressed. He demands unequivocal loyalty from those around him, including all bodies of government — including the Department of Justice, the FBI, and Congress — and is reaching out for influence over the Supreme Court. The president is a man who admires and is most comfortable with dictators and he has put our allies on notice.

He is who he is and is beyond redemption. However, his enablers must be accountable.

Hear this, members of Congress, the Supreme Court and voters: You need to check this movement toward destruction of our government, our society and our planet. Open your eyes now; perhaps it is not too late.

**Diana Penn Locker**  
*Castleton*

**BROOKS**

▼ CONTINUED FROM A8

because the chief struggle of the day is sociological and psychological, not ideological or economic. The substrate layer of American society — the network of relationships and connection and trust that everything else relies upon — is failing. And the results are as bloody as any war.

Maybe it's time we began to see this as a war. On the one side are those forces that sow division, discord and isolation. On the other side there are all those forces in society that nurture attachment, connection and solidarity. It's as if we're witnessing this vast showdown between the rippers and weavers.

And here's the hard part of the war: It's not between one group of good people and another group of bad people. The war runs down the middle of every heart. Most of us are part of the problem we complain about.

Most of us bought into a radical indi-

vidualism that, as Tocqueville predicted, cuts each secluded self off from other secluded selves. Most of us buy into a workaholic ethos that leaves us with little time for community. Most of us live in insular media and social bubbles that provide us with Pravda-like affirmations of our own moral superiority. Most of us hew to a code of privacy that leads us to not know our neighbors.

The good news is that most of us are part of the solution as well. Most of us admire and want to be the teacher who reaches out to the lonely boy. Most of us mentor and serve people unlike ourselves. Most of us are part of the chosen families that Americans are constructing to replace the decimated biological ones.

It's easier to destroy trust than to build it, so the rippers have an advantage. But there are many more weavers, people who yearn to live in loving relationships and trusting communities. The weavers just need what any side in a war needs: training so we know how to wage it, strategies so we know how to win it and a call to arms so we know why we're in it.

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**The good news is that most of us are part of the solution as well.**

**CARPENTER**

▼ CONTINUED FROM A8

invested in transit, \$4 is generated in economic returns.

What's more, transit supports our most important government investments. Transit provides those who rely on affordable and supportive housing with options for reaching work and transitioning from poverty to prosperity. Transit provides students with safe, reliable transportation to and from primary and secondary schools and college campuses. Transit provides those who need affordable access to health care with options for visiting a doctor, picking up a prescription and, ultimately, living healthier lives.

Investments in transit mean the buses run on time, ensuring these options for mobility are available on a consistent schedule. Investments in transit mean our systems can purchase more fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly vehicles, ensuring these options for mobility fall in line with commitments to reduce emissions. And investments in transit mean that operators can increase their

fleets to meet rising demand, ensuring that more options for mobility are available to all New Yorkers.

But public transit is going through a transformation and is more than just riding the bus.

New technologies and mobility options have created a new reality for public transit systems. We are embracing the role of mobility manager and are concerned with a rider's total trip. That means providing new options for getting around within a community and on paths off of the bus route, from ride-hailing to bike-sharing to micro-transit.

Transit systems are ready to make investments in their communities to further expand their offerings, better serve existing customers and complement programs that serve millions of New Yorkers. But we need serious investments of both time and capital from Albany. Another year of funding that does not keep up with operating cost increases will have ripple effects far beyond the bus stop.

We most certainly should rebuild the subways. But reimagining how to build better transit across New York is a true investment in our future.

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