

# Comment & opinion

## Getting your groove back

Have you ever been in a place where you feel like you belong?

Maybe it's with family, or fellow sports fans, or other veterans at the American Legion or VFW, or even with a group of friends doing something you love to do — fishing, hunting or some other activity.

For people with chronic illnesses, that doesn't happen very often. For children with chronic illnesses, that sense of belonging is never really there.

The U.S. Pain Foundation and its Pediatric Pain Warriors organization has changed that.

Over the weekend, my sister and I took my daughter, Emily, to the Pediatric Take Control of Your Pain Retreat at the Great Wolf Lodge in Gurnee, Illinois.

Walking into the lobby of that enormous resort, I could feel the stress starting to slip away. When we checked in to the lodge, they gave us each a set of wolf ears to wear. At first I felt a bit silly, but I realized people already stare at us, as Emily walks with a cane and I often have to wear a breathing mask.

So we put on the ears.

And we found our tribe.

Walking down the hallway toward the U.S. Pain Foundation's check-in table, I felt the tears starting to flow.

We were home.

There were hugs and everyone talked at once. And there was laughter. So much joyful laughter.

Emily found her fellow pain warriors, and they gravitated together to talk about things children and young adults don't usually discuss — what prescriptions have they taken, what is the latest surgery or procedure, who is in what therapy and is it working. And they laughed.

These serious, somber children whose lives have been hijacked by severe, unrelenting pain were giggling and making jokes. They admired each others' canes and assistive devices.

Throughout the weekend, they played, they swam, they talked, they laughed. They tried out kinesiology tape. When they got overwhelmed, they visited the art room — a room set aside with games or coloring activities to give overstimulated children a break.

Parents were given the chance

to hear experts in many fields offer advice, tips and answer questions on topics that people "outside the life" of chronic illness likely never consider. Andrea Dalzell, a registered nurse, talked about becoming a nurse when everyone told her it was impossible. She uses a wheelchair.

Dr. Pradeep Chopra, an expert in pain management with a special interest in complex chronic pain conditions, spoke to the parents about the conditions from which their children suffer. His presentation was the most moving and meaningful to me for one specific reason — here is a Harvard educated physician telling us we're not crazy for fighting to find what is wrong with our children and treat it. His message is so important at its root: "I believe you. Now let's face this together."

Words can't describe the amazing experience that these retreats are for families like mine.

Chronic medical conditions tend to bring on a type of loneliness that can't be easily described. As a parent, I've heard innumerable "tips" from well-meaning folks, like "eat more vegetables" and questions like "why can't Emily just stop thinking about it and be happy?"

Indeed. Why can't we? Oh yes, that's right. It's chronic, which means it never goes away. Never.

Stop talking about it all the time, people say. Well, we can't really talk about the last party we went to or the last vacation we took, because those aren't a part of our lives.

This is our life. This is what we know.

When we go to a pediatric pain retreat, and find other families who get it, it's like a validation that we matter to someone. We have a place in the world. We have a huge extended family.

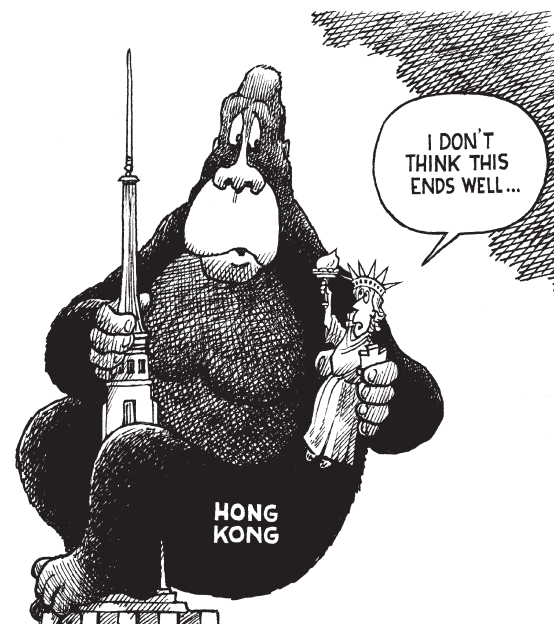
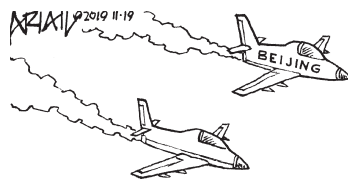
My advice for people who live a "normal" life is this: Find your tribe. Find where you belong. Into everyone's life, some rain must fall. It's up to us whether we find a bridge to hide under until the rain stops, or if we get out there and dance in the rain.

Thanks to the Pediatric Pain Warriors, and the Blaisdell Foundation for helping us with the cost of getting to the retreat, we got our groove back.

*(Marcie Schellhammer is the Era's assistant managing editor. She can be reached at marcie@bradfordera.com)*



Marcie Schellhammer



## Think fiscal responsibility

By NICHOLAS L. WADDY  
Special to the Olean Times Herald

As Democratic presidential candidates stumble over one another in a headlong rush towards socialism and fiscal insanity — promising trillions in new spending on everything from child care, health care and higher education for all, to "the Green New Deal," to slavery reparations — President Trump faces a critical choice.

He could try to match the Democrats and promise more expansive government programs; he could instead offer to put more money in Americans' pockets through tax cuts; or he could do neither and stress the theme of fiscal responsibility, holding the line on new spending and tax cuts in favor of reducing the federal deficit.

Although the last choice is the least exciting, especially in an election year when people expect to be offered a cornucopia of "free stuff," it is the right choice for America, especially given the fiscal challenges we face. This year our deficit will exceed \$1 trillion for the first time since the Great Recession. Now is not the time, therefore, to be spending wildly or to be slashing government revenues via tax cuts. Now is the time to tighten our belts and return government finances to long-term sustainability, especially given the fact that the aging of the U.S. population means that massive spending obligations are coming soon.

To date, Trump's philosophy on federal spending has been ambiguous. On one hand, he touts fiscal responsibility and a commitment to reducing federal deficits. On the other hand, Trump has cut taxes and simultaneously presided over a massive increase in spending. Often, he boasts about his administration's "investments" in Republican priorities like immigration enforcement and defense. Arguably, Trump is playing the Democrats' own game, parroting their view that a politician's virtuosity and even his humanity can be measured by his willingness to spend other people's money.

Lately, there is some evidence that Trump's advisers want to double down on this high spending/low taxation strategy for currying favor with voters. Although the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act already lowered middle class taxes — albeit modestly — now the Trump administration is considering further reductions to the marginal tax rates that apply to the middle class. The idea seems to be to establish a 15% rate that will kick in for those who may now be paying 22-24%.

No one likes income taxes or the IRS, but the American people ought to be skeptical of such proposals. Already,

our deficit has inched up to almost 5% of GDP, a level that economists believe to be unsustainable. Trump's previous tax cuts were close to revenue neutral, but cuts on the scale now being proposed could be far more serious. Keep in mind the broader context: Social Security, Medicare, and Obamacare spending is all forecast to surge in the coming years. So far, inflation and interest rates have remained low, and the U.S. has been able to service its huge national debt with relative ease. If we were to depart totally from the path of fiscal responsibility, however, as Trump's advisers suggest, we have to wonder whether the wheels could come off of not just federal finances, but the overall U.S. economy. In that case, a negative feedback loop could lead to a severe recession, or even a depression.

Trump should also consider the political optics of advocating for further tax cuts in an election year in which the eventual Democratic candidate will be promising the American people a laundry list of new entitlements, as well as tax breaks. Does Trump really want to compete with the Democrats for the job of Benefactor-in-Chief, or would he be better off drawing a sharp contrast with free-spending liberals?

The Democratic candidate will be offering a vision of unprecedented growth in governmental power, unbridled hostility to job creators and almost limitless federal spending. Presumably, it would be easy to argue in response that Democratic promises are empty and/or reckless. If Trump is making irresponsible claims and promises of his own, though, about either spending or taxation, his appeal as the economic voice of reason could be blunted. A socialist could then enter the White House by the back door.

My advice, President Trump, is to be honest with the American people. Tell them that, at this point in our history, huge new spending commitments are neither affordable nor prudent. In addition, given the future expenses that are already locked in, especially for Social Security and Medicare, it's clear that further tax cuts would be irresponsible.

If Trump makes this his economic message going into 2020, he can frame the election as one of realism versus socialist fanaticism.

That sounds to me like an election that Trump can win. In fact, it sounds like an election in which only a fool would vote against him.

*(Dr. Nicholas L. Waddy is an associate professor of history at SUNY Alfred and blogs at www.waddysright.com.)*

## Fast-forward impeachment inquiry

By ERIC ZORN  
Tribune News Service

The first day of public testimony in the impeachment hearings in Washington Wednesday lasted about 5 1/2 hours, which is more time than even most of us political geeks wanted to devote to watching it. The solution — other than watching summaries and highlights at the end of the day — is to click into YouTube's playback control options and enjoy the proceedings in double time.

Yes, everyone talks very fast, but because the technology correspondingly lowers the pitch you don't get the chipmunk effect and voices remain normal. And you'll find that your brain can take it all in just fine so there's no reason to miss a single word.

How to do it: Type "impeachment hearings livestream youtube" into your search bar and choose one to watch. If the hearings for the day are already underway, move the slider across the bottom of the image to the left until you're rewound to opening statements. If you want to watch live, just click the pause icon on the lower left. Then look for the playback speed control — on desktops and laptops it's hidden behind the "settings" icon that looks

like a gear wheel; on mobile devices you need to tap on the image and then on icon that looks like three dots stacked vertically.

Choose the "playback speed" option, which YouTube began rolling out five years ago. It allows users to slow videos down to 25% of normal speed, a boon to musicians trying to figure out tunes, or juice it to 200%, my recommendation for political chat. Go do something else for a while, then come back to your device and watch until you catch up to live action, at which point, obviously, playback reverts to standard speed, click pause again and go about your other business until it's time to catch up again.

No politician is going to complain that you didn't experience the full length of their dramatic pauses.

Artists, however, are not particularly happy about viewers having this option, as Netflix has been hearing since announcing in late October that it's testing a feature that will allow viewers to watch comedies, dramas and action shows at up to 1.5 times normal speed. The option is "frequently requested by our members," said Keela Robison the company's vice president for product innovation.

"No, Netflix, no," tweeted filmmaker Judd Apatow, one of many creative types who are aghast at the prospect. "Don't make me have to call every director and show creator on Earth to fight you on this. Save me the time. I will win but it will take a ton of time. Don't (mess) with our timing. We give you nice things. Leave them as they were intended to be seen."

I've tried watching some conventional TV shows and movie clips at accelerated speed and don't care for it much, actually. Even with pitch control, the movement of the actors is distractingly herky-jerky.

But I want the choice. If I want to try to consume, say, Apatow's 2015 comedy "Trainwreck" in 80 minutes instead of its approximately two-hour running time, well, that should be up to me if I'm paying to watch it. I feel capable of being the judge of whether absorbing all the nuances of Apatow's artistic rhythms is worth my time.

"Save me the time" yourself, Apatow.

*(Eric Zorn is an op-ed columnist for the Chicago Tribune.)*

## Kids shouldn't suffer for politics

Kids need homes.

A kid doesn't necessarily need a smartphone or a new game system or a puppy, though those might all be on a wish list. But there are basics, like a roof and a door and clothes and food that are non-negotiable. There are things like love and support that are critical but hard to quantify.

All of that goes together in one simple item. Kids need homes.

And so it is tragic that three organizations are out of the business of finding homes for kids who need them. The Catholic Charities agencies of Greensburg, along with Erie and Philadelphia, say they have been forced to close adoption and foster care services due to a state anti-discrimination policy. The agencies don't work with same-sex couples and the new policy specifically notes sexual orientation and gender identity as protected.

The dioceses sought religious exemption and were denied. They say the policy is hostile to faith-based groups.

The state stopped making referrals to the three agencies on July 1, 2018. That was after they did not sign the contracts with the new policy that follow a 2016 executive order from Gov. Tom Wolf. Instead, they substituted modified contracts that the state rejected. Another 78 agencies — 21 faith-based — did sign the contracts.

We should not demand that church-

es change their religious beliefs. They aren't wrong to argue that they shouldn't have to bend when they have a First Amendment right not to do so.

But other Catholic providers did sign, including Catholic Charities in Harrisburg. They are finding a way to thread the needle of their faith while stitching together new families. Why can't that happen for families served by the Greensburg diocese in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties?

Maybe it all points to an outdated model from a time before state agencies protected children. Maybe it is unfair to everyone including the churches to expect them to do the Lord's work by the state's rules.

But there has to be a way to keep an agency that has helped build 167 families in the state and 158 outside it in just four years, and countless before that.

The rights of adopting parents can't be compromised and the rights of the church can't be compromised. Regardless of who is adopting and who is — or isn't — facilitating, there remains one reality that has to be prioritized.

Kids need homes. So whether it's the state or the church or another agency that steps forward, the kids can't get lost in the politics.

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