

# Opinions

## The 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 the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.



## Is the economy headed to crazytown?

The recent election suggested — and subsequent polls showed — that a public happy with the economy under Donald Trump is nevertheless very unhappy with the man himself. It took a massive amount of discontent with the president's character and conduct for voters to punish his party at a time of low unemployment, rising wages and quarterly growth exceeding 3 percent.

Now suppose the benefit of a strong economy were to be pulled out from under Trump in the months to follow. What would be Trump's selling point then? His charm and wit?

Goldman Sachs expects growth of the U.S. economy to "slow significantly" later next year, shrinking to 1.75 percent. And former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers now thinks there's a 50 percent chance the U.S. will be in recession by 2020.

"We're in crazytown," Trump's chief of staff, John Kelly, reportedly said of working with his boss. Is the economy headed there, as well? Actually, it's already arrived.

"Insane" is how former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan describes Trump's various trade wars. This foolish policy is definitely behind the astounding 94 percent drop in the sale of American soybeans to China, by far the world's biggest buyer of soybeans. To make up for losses he created by destroying the farmers' best export market, Trump has launched a bailout program. It's not nearly enough to cover the farmers' losses, but it does keep the beneficiaries somewhat distracted with paperwork.

In retaliation for Trump's tariffs, Europe raised its taxes on American peanut butter, orange juice and bourbon and plans to expand the list. Canada and Mexico are piling tariffs on U.S. pork and cheese.

In a trade war, both sides lose. "It's just the winner loses less," Greenspan said, adding, "Why we're doing it probably is very deep in the psyche of someone."

The trade wars are a factor in the stock market's anxiety attacks. "Markets have fallen and risen over the last nine months depending in part on how bloody-minded Mr. Trump seemed on trade," The Wall Street Journal wrote last month.

Not all of Trump's trade policies have been totally panned. The Journal praised the new North American Free Trade Agreement for not being a "disaster." It's only somewhat worse than what it replaced, an editorial said, and a whole lot better than the unilateral withdrawal Trump was threatening.

This trade policy — opposed by nearly every reputable economist, left, right and sideways — is a totally manufactured crisis. Only crazytown could think it up.

And even if the trade wars were to vanish, American producers wouldn't be able to simply pick up where they left off. Buyers are developing relationships with farmers from other countries, while Americans have lost their reputation for reliability. (Canadians are cleverly selling their soybeans to the Chinese at high prices and buying American soybeans at a bargain for their own use.)

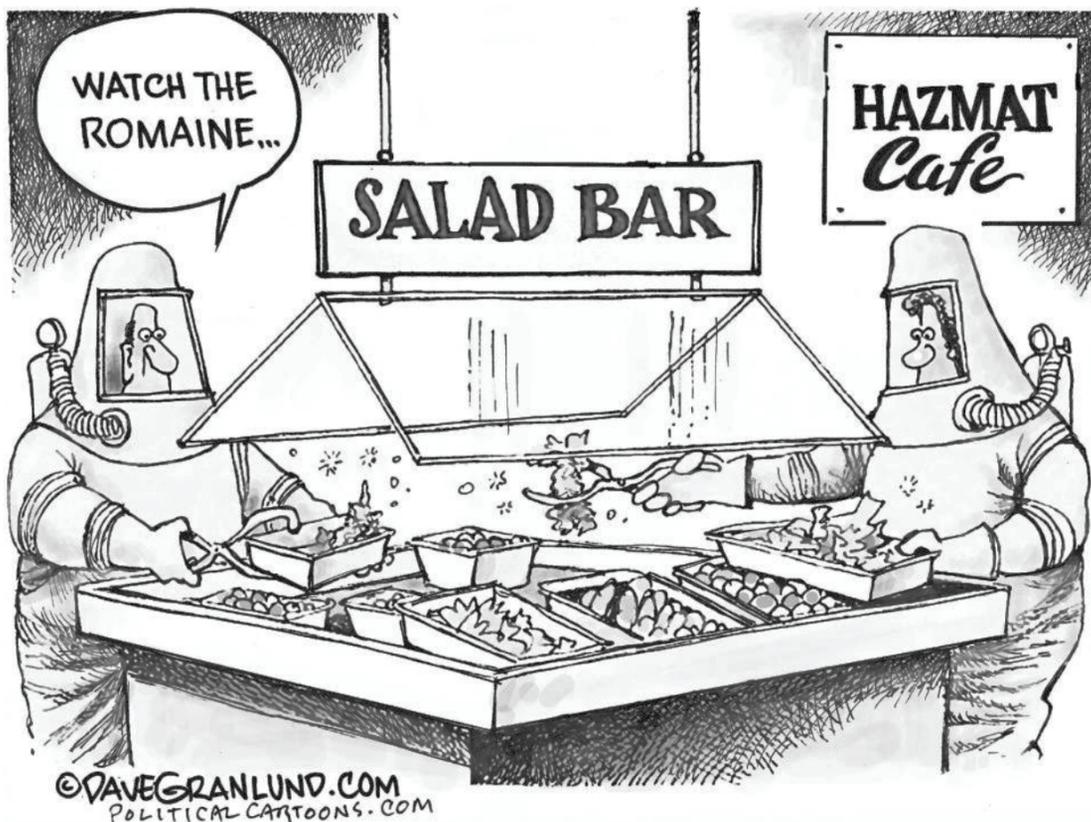
The Republican tax cuts supercharged the stock market, but at the cost of unleashing trillions in deficits for the years to come. A fiscal policy that piles on enormous debt in the middle of a strong economy is nuts. The tax cuts' power to boost stock prices is now waning.

Meanwhile, Americans still owe the money. Goldman Sachs expects the Fed to raise interest rates next month and four times next year because of inflation, with tariffs and soaring deficits partly to blame.

Rising rates have sent homebuilders' confidence into a tailspin. They come just as U.S. household debt has hit a record high, with a surge in delinquencies on student, auto and credit card debt. Uh-oh.

"Trade wars are good, and easy to win." So tweeted Trump in March. Crazytown, here we are.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Do the right thing, immunize your children

Willful ignorance and rising distrust in science in general and medicine in particular resulted in the recent chicken pox outbreak at Waldorf School in Asheville.

This blatant disregard for one's own children, let alone other parents' children, borders on child neglect. There are a small number of kids who have a medical condition that precludes them from tolerating vaccines. If these children are infected, they could experience severe medical problems. A measles outbreak could be next. According to the CDC, 1 in 20 children who contract measles will get pneumonia.

Left untreated measles can cause ear infections, brain damage and even death. The urban legend that vaccines can cause autism has been thoroughly discredited. Immunize your children!

Frank Coney, Fairview

### Dogwood board doesn't represent community needs

Serous concerns have been raised about the striking lack of diversity on the board of the Dogwood Health Trust, which will administer proceeds from the sale of the Mission Health system. The funds are to improve the health and well-being of the people and communities of Western North Carolina, but the current board members are mostly white men.

The trust ought to have at least half women on its board and an appropriate number of people of color, who experience health problems out of proportion to those of the white men now on the board. No doubt some of these men are good, dedicated people—but they don't represent the population to be served by the trust. The board makeup must be changed in order to serve the people in our area equitably.

Roberta Madden, Black Mountain

### Who should we trust — or lock up?

The CIA has said that Saudi's ruler did order the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and yet Trump say's that he was told by the crown prince that his country had nothing to do with the murder. It was the same with Putin, Russia had nothing to do with our election and again the CIA & FBI said other wise, Trump said he believed Putin because he told him face to face that Russia did not interfere with our elections. When Trumps new buddy Kim Jong-un told him he was going to destroy the missiles, Trump again, over the findings of the CIA, said that Kim told him face to face he would destroy them. it would seem that the FBI and the CIA are another "fake news" origination. Who should we trust with our national security?

Oh and by the way, should we call out "lock her up" to Ivanka Trump?

How many times did we see her when daddy was

shouting that about Hillary. We know the Trumps do not play by the same rules or laws as the rest of the world.

Michael Moore, Asheville

### Politicians should focus on big pharma

Considerable success was achieved in the mid-term elections with protests against the former practice of insurance companies to reject customers with previous health conditions. There remains, however, a medical issue that is a principal driver of inflation in the cost of medical care. That driver is the price of pharmaceuticals.

When President Bush passed his prescription drug bill in 2002, it included a prohibition against allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prices from big pharma. Given the enormous buying power available to Medicare this stipulation makes absolutely no sense and goes a long way toward explaining the extraordinary prosperity of the drug industry. Of course, this comes at high cost to consumers.

Drug company lobbyists have been magnanimous with their campaign contributions to those in congress who support their greedy tactics. Republicans tend to benefit more than Democrats from this largess. That would limit Republican enthusiasm for legislation restricting this massive industry subsidy. Yet, the fact that the electorate would be hugely rewarded by such a proposal might well produce some Republican endorsement and an enhanced majority. Whoever first undertakes to abolish this piece of inflationary connivery will win gratitude and future sympathy from the voting public.

Hal Hogstrom, Asheville

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