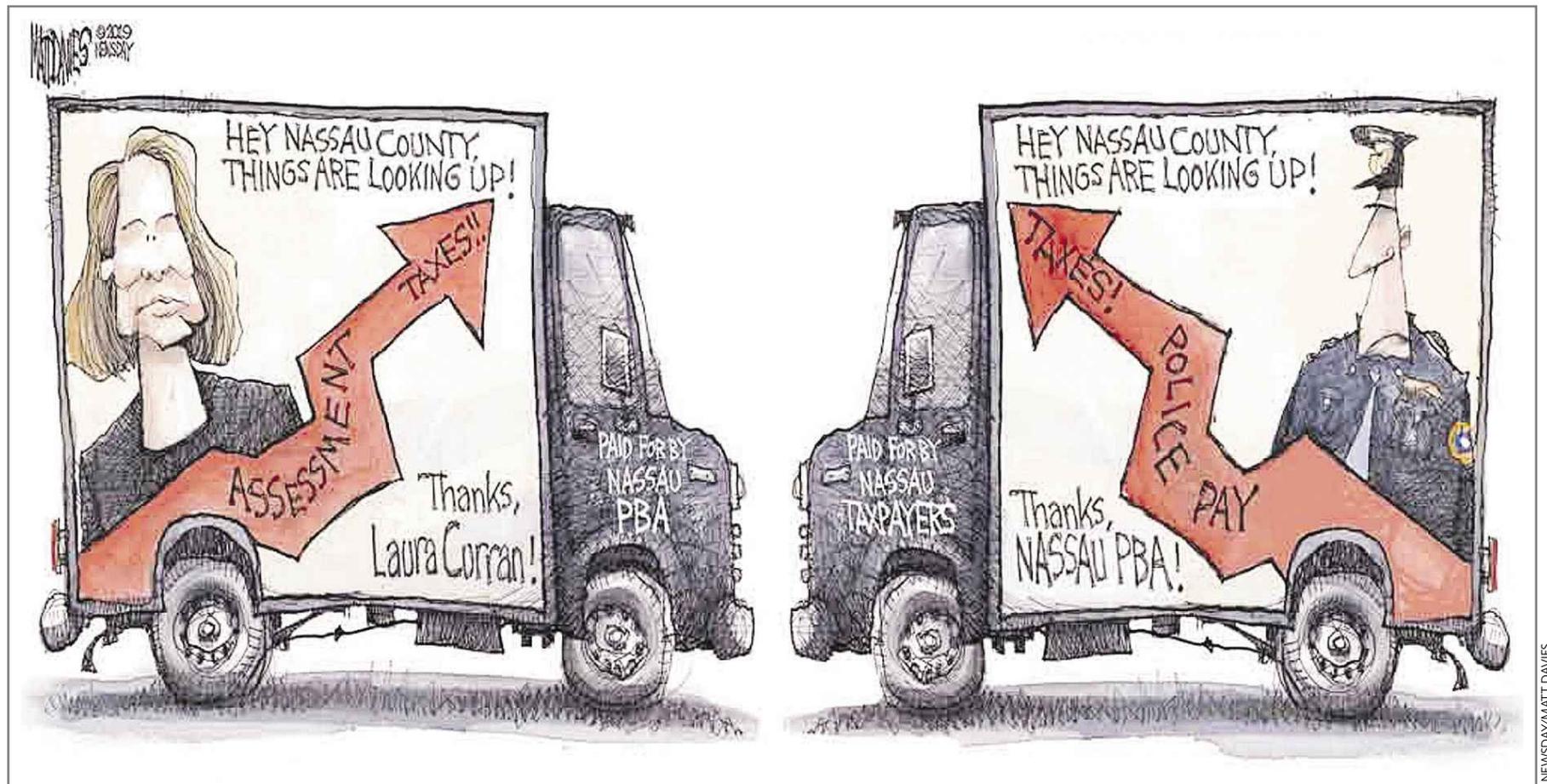


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OPINION

NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

2020 train is just getting underway

Democratic field for president already is crowded a full year before Iowa caucuses



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Now it's getting crowded. And the Dems aren't close to done.

The field for the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential nomination swelled last week, bringing the number of candidates who've declared or formed exploratory committees to 10.

The most recent is New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, also the front-runner in the style-over-substance division. Less noticed was the announcement by Marianne Williamson, New Age spiritual leader, best-selling author and Oprah guru who has more Twitter followers than any of her competitors besides Booker.

She's certainly better-known than entrepreneur Andrew Yang, whose proposal to create a new position of White House psychologist is a bipartisan winner. Or John Delaney, a former Maryland congressman who's been running since July 2017 and getting nowhere. Or Richard Ojeda, an Army veteran and former West Virginia congressional wannabe who's already dropped out.

Serious contenders not yet in the ring but capable of shaking things up include former Vice President Joe Biden; former presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders; viral meteor Beto O'Rourke, the former Texas representative; folksy Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown; accomplished governors John Hickenlooper, Steve Bullock and Jay Inslee; and steady-as-

she-goes Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who might be built for the long haul.

If you don't think that sounds like a circus, you are hereby sentenced to three months in an Iowa diner listening to every stump speech from every candidate on every visit. It's no wonder the leader in last week's Washington Post-ABC News poll of registered Democrats and Dem-leaning independents was "no preference" — the choice of 56 percent of respondents. Far behind were Biden at 9 percent and California Sen. Kamala Harris at 8.

At the moment, the race has a Wizard of Oz feel. The cast is starting its journey on a road paved with yellow bricks (by which we mean gold, as in moola), to take on a blustering fraud pulling levers in the shining city. Will there be a plucky heroine? Or a scarecrow, unimpressive at first but proving to have the goods in the end? Who's the Tin Man, all flashy ex-

terior but lacking heart? Is there a Cowardly Lion, loud at the outset but shrinking in battle?

For now, Sanders, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand are busy apologizing — Sanders for sexist behavior by his "Bernie bros" in 2016 he says he knew nothing about, Warren for her DNA test, Gillibrand for past conservative positions. Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard is sorry her candidacy is on life support, her campaign manager and consulting firm preparing to jump ship.

Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, is providing pronunciation guides for now, but voters eventually will learn about his credential mix (veteran, openly gay, turned around a medium-sized city).

Harris wowed with a great rollout before 20,000 people in Oakland, California, and a 24-hour fundraising take like Sanders' in 2015, but how far did Jeb Bush's shock-and-awe rollout get him

in the similarly crowded GOP field last time around?

Remember when a run by former Starbucks chief executive Howard Schultz was intriguing? Now flirting with an independent campaign, he flunked the common-man test by not knowing the cost of a box of Cheerios when asked by MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski. Then he flunked the common-sense test by following her answer, \$4, with, "That's a lot," oblivious to how that would sound from a man whose chain charges that and more for some cups of coffee.

Four years ago, we were still more than four months away from Donald Trump's descent down that golden escalator.

The point is, things change. A lot. We've got one year exactly until the Iowa caucuses. No one knows what's going to happen. No doubt it'll be bumpy.

Michael Dobie is a member of the editorial board.

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NEWSDAY, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2019