Newsday
"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

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EDITORIAL

Cuomo ready for federal fight

But questions underlie his new budget

If budgets are statements of values, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo clearly values the fight he is waging against a federal tax bill he views as both onerous and directed at states like New York.

Cuomo opened and closed his annual budget address Tuesday by citing the reduced deductibility of state and local taxes, along with large health care cuts, as the biggest drivers in constructing his 2018-19 budget. The numbers, indeed, are big. The uncertainty they create is real.

When you put it all together — tenuous economic times, an election year and an increasingly restive State Legislature — it's hard to know how realistic Cuomo's $168 billion spending plan is.

It's loaded with good proposals, and others not quite so good. Some pitches were notable for their absence. Primary among them was the meat on the bones of Cuomo's plan to restructure New York's tax code to shield residents from the loss of some federal tax deductions. His two main ideas — to shift from an income tax paid by workers to a payroll tax paid by employers, and to let municipalities set up charitable funds to which taxpayers would make deductible donations in lieu of taxes — are intriguing. But Cuomo said some details will be revealed Wednesday. Similarly, a plan to reduce traffic in New York City while raising revenue for public transit is due later this week, though Cuomo did say it would use cashless tolling to charge drivers who enter a certain zone in Manhattan. In determining the mix of hours, fees and kinds of vehicles charged, Cuomo should prioritize the needs of the city.

AP / HANS PENNINK

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo delivers his budget proposal Tuesday in Albany.

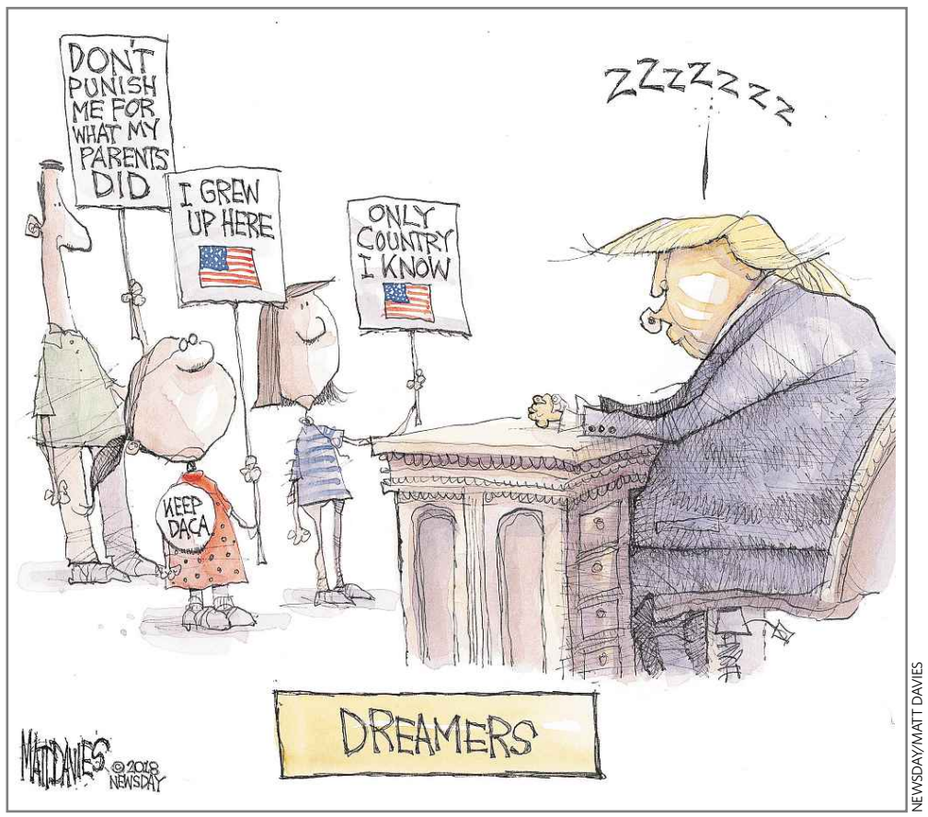
His support for a 2.5 percent budget increase for the judicial branch in exchange for judges certifying that their courtrooms are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to reduce backlogs would force more accountability in a branch of government that has little. And while we always have objected to his practice of stuffing policy items into the budget, it's good to know that by including them in his budget Cuomo will fight for criminal justice, voting, ethics and sexual harassment reforms.

Some of his $1 billion in revenue-raising ideas are worth pursuing, like charging a surcharge on opioids. His requirement that taxes on internet sales be uniformly collected also would help counties get 50 percent of the revenue. Whether his proposals are enough to offset a $4 billion deficit and $2 billion loss from federal health care cuts remains to be seen. Cuomo's plan to fund a study on the impacts of legalizing recreational marijuana could eventually result in more dollars; legalization has been a revenue boost in states that have done that.

While his proposed smaller-than-anticipated 3 percent increase in state aid for education will spark a food fight, we hope it's part of a larger conversation about how New York funds K-12 education. But his plan to reduce the state's already insufficient contribution to community colleges by $18 million (2.4 percent) clearly is not wise.

Cuomo finished by telling lawmakers they'll fight together for New York's future, hoping to turn their frequently fractious relationship into an alliance against their federal foe. It's just one more uncertainty in a year overflowing with doubt. — *The editorial board*

MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

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LETTERS

Sen. Feinstein shone a light on the truth

Kudos to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who upheld her oath to do the right thing for our country by presenting the truth in the face of many lies ["Democrats warn of meddling by Russia," News, Jan. 11].

She released the transcript of the Senate Judiciary Committee's closed-door interview with Fusion GPS, the firm behind the disputed dossier of allegations about Donald Trump's ties to Russia during the presidential campaign.

Feinstein saw what had to be done and did it, even though she was criticized by Republican senators on the committee and others for shining a bright light on the truth.

If the others could only remember why they were sent to Congress. No one elected to Congress should put his or her party before the country.

Dorothy Piscitelli, Riverhead

Winfrey needs experience first

As a liberal Democrat, I do not want Oprah Winfrey to be the 2020 Democratic presidential candidate ["Oprah for president?," News, Jan. 9].

It's not because she is an African-American woman. She is a bright, articulate, passionate spokeswoman for democracy, but she doesn't have the government experience needed for the office.

She has run a successful corporation and is extremely popular as an entertainer, but these are not the vital competencies required for the most important political office in the world. A successful president must have the knowledge and organizing skills necessary to understand the complexity of the political system.

The 2020 position for which Winfrey is ideally suited is as the vice-presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket. Her charisma would appeal to most Americans. If elected, she would gain the valuable experience needed in the future to become the first woman of color to be president.

Bob Hoffman, Jericho

Add explanation to von Braun sculpture

I agree with the compromise New York City is making to place explanatory plaques next to monuments of controversial historical figures ["Panel: Monuments need signs," News, Jan. 12].

The federal government