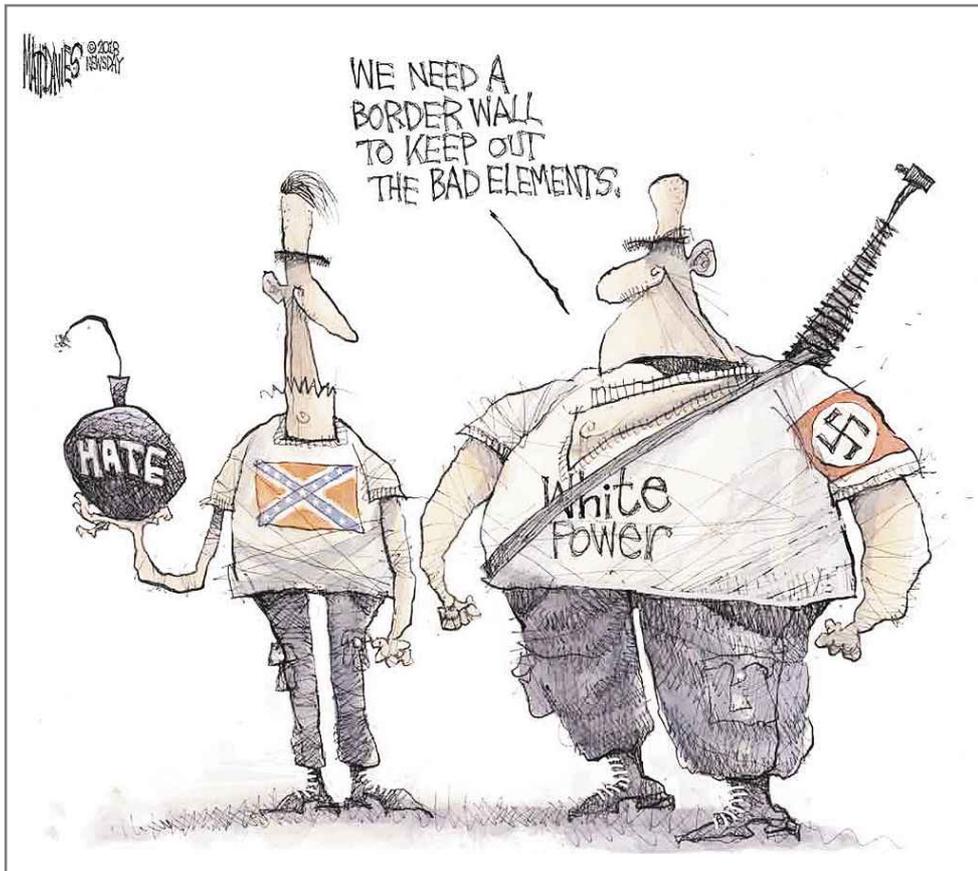


MATT DAVIES



NEWSDAY/MATT DAVIES

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BOTTOM LINES

If a blue wave does let Democrats seize the House of Representatives, protect endangered Senate seats and win key governorships, it looks likely that the party will have African-American women to thank.

— EUGENE ROBINSON, THE WASHINGTON POST

Democrats are doing exactly what they condemned, blaming President Donald Trump's divisive rhetoric for the recent spate of mail bomb attacks and the massacre at a Pittsburgh synagogue. The truth is, they ceded the moral high ground years ago. Our descent into vitriol began long before Trump — and Democrats and their allies are as culpable as the president.

— MARC A. THIESSEN, THE WASHINGTON POST

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Let New Yorkers settle the issues

OPINION

Other states trust people to decide big questions, but Albany stifles referendums



Michael Dobie

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Election Day is coming! And we have a bunch of interesting races in New York between candidates who excite or repel us. Control of the State Senate is up for grabs, and with it the possibility of single-party control.

But we're missing out on some fun that voters have in other states. We're not voting on any important issues, not directly. In some places, voters will weigh in on initiatives to fight climate change, expand Medicaid, change voting laws and legalize marijuana, among dozens of hot topics.

That's because those states have laws encouraging such ballot measures. Not New York. Here, the State Legislature puts up a bond act every now and then. Every 20 years we get to decide whether to have a constitutional convention. Some local governments have ways to get proposals on ballots for their residents, like Brookhaven Town's term-limits proposition.

But statewide, New York is the pits.

There are 26 states that allow citizens to gather petitions to place proposed laws on a statewide ballot for fellow citizens to approve or reject. Not New York. Twenty-one of those states have a combined 68 measures initiated by citizens on this year's ballots. Some states let their legislatures and various commissions or committees submit for voter approval proposals for new laws or constitutional amendments — dozens are on ballots this year alone.

In New York, long-reluctant lawmakers finally were browbeaten into putting up a constitutional amendment last year to strip pensions from officials convicted of corruption. It passed easily, with 73 percent approval. Now we're back in proposition purgatory.

New York, New York, where the Bronx is up and the people are

down, stymied by a legislature that often bottles up popular legislation and won't let the public it claims to serve actually express its collective will by putting up bills to vote on.

This isn't some new frustration. Gov. Mario Cuomo wanted to give citizens a mechanism to force lawmakers to vote on bills stuck in committee. Successor George Pataki supported letting citizens themselves use the petition process to put proposals on the ballot. Neither plan went anywhere; Each required legislative approval.

Some citizen proposals become epic. Remember Proposition 13? That's the California constitutional amendment approved in 1978 that limited property taxes and presaged the taxpayer revolt that spread across the country.

This year, New Yorkers won't have a chance to vote to:

- Legalize recreational marijuana. Voters in Michigan and North Dakota will.
- Reduce prison sentences for nonviolent drug crimes. Voters in Ohio will.
- Make redistricting less partisan. Voters in Missouri, Michigan, Colorado and Utah will.
- Require that 50 percent of the state's electricity be generated by wind or solar by 2030. Voters in Arizona and Nevada will.
- Implement a fee on carbon dioxide emissions with the money to be used to reduce global warming. Voters in Washington will.
- Limit the number of patients assigned to nurses. Voters in Massachusetts will.
- Expand Medicaid as per provisions in Obamacare. Voters in Utah, Idaho, Nebraska and Montana will.

In Florida, voters will decide whether to give themselves the sole authority to approve casinos, increase the retirement age for judges to 75, restore voting rights for some felons who complete their sentences, and increase the amount of a home's value exempted from property tax, among 13 measures.

The point isn't whether you agree or disagree with any or all of these proposals. It's that in some places you have a more direct way to participate in lawmaking and have your say on important issues.

But not in New York.

Michael Dobie is a member of Newsday's editorial board



ELECTION EXTRAS

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