

# opinion



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## WHAT THE MEDIA SAY

### PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

• The stars are falling, one after another, as celebrities who have long lived in bubbles of entitlement are accused of using their power and fame to prey on others for sexual kicks, with some losing their lucrative positions as a result.

It's hard to tell exactly why all this is happening now, all at once.

Certainly, our changing culture — with its trashing of old-fashioned values, unashamed displays of selfishness and self-entitlement, and sex-saturated media — may have led some people to believe that basic decency no longer applies in human interactions.

The growing influence of women in the workplace may also be having an effect. Victims may feel strength in numbers, finding the courage to come forward against their harassers, with the sense that our society will now be sympathetic. ...

The victims' stories unspooled across social media platforms, often accompanied by the hashtag #MeToo. They have emerged in Hollywood, Washington, Silicon Valley, state houses in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and elsewhere, and other places where people of unequal status cross paths. ...

Certainly, in today's frenzied climate, unfounded accusations could be used as a weapon to beat a political opponent or obtain revenge for any number of reasons. We should resist the temptation to view everyone accused as guilty until proven innocent, and at least weigh such matters as the timing of charges and the evidence presented.

By the same token, it is essential that victims of sexual crimes and abuse of power know that they will be heard and supported. The days when such stories were dismissed out of hand are coming to an end.

— Providence, R.I., Dec. 3

### THE DENVER POST

• The argument is a specious one — the guaranteed right to free speech should prevent a Christian baker from being compelled by the government to make a wedding cake for a gay couple.

But like any deception, this one falls apart upon close examination, and we hope the U.S. Supreme Court justices see through the initial appeal of such reasoning when they hear oral arguments Tuesday in a Colorado case that has been debated for five years. ...

In 2012 Phillips refused to bake a cake for the wedding of Charlie Craig and David Mullins. The couple filed a complaint with Colorado's Civil Rights Commission and Phillips was ordered by an administrative law judge to make cakes for same-sex couples. Phillips argued his cakes were a form of speech and he could not be compelled by the government, under his First Amendment rights, to make a cake that expresses something he is religiously opposed to. ...

But on measure we find a cake, even an elaborate wedding cake, to be less an expression than it is a consumable good. Phillips wasn't being commissioned to use his artistic skills to create a 20-foot-high mural honoring gay pride.

Colorado's Anti-Discrimination Act, since 2008, has included sexual orientation in a list of protected classes. It was an important inclusion, given that the gay community historically has suffered discrimination.

Phillips' refusal to bake a cake for Craig and Mullins proves that the discrimination is real and current and that individuals are in need of such protections when looking for housing, employment or good and services.

We fear a ruling in favor of Phillips would allow those opposed to same-sex marriage to begin refusing ser-



GETTY IMAGES

The Supreme Court heard arguments Tuesday for a case involving Charlie Craig (L) and Dave Mullins (R), a gay couple who were denied having their wedding cake baked by cake artist Jack Phillips, who objected on religious grounds.

vices to gay couples. It could also open up other discrimination. ...

Such prejudices are ugly and harmful to our society and laws — whether it's the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 or one of the many state laws that have been developed across the nation — are important guarantees of the fundamentally American principle of equality.

— Denver, Dec. 4

### THE KANSAS CITY STAR

• While debating the tax plan last week, Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah let drop this doozy on the Children's Health Insurance Program for poor children: "The reason CHIP's having trouble," he said of the program, which expired in September and has yet to be renewed, "is because we don't have money anymore."

You refer, perhaps, to the money we'd be laying out to further advantage the wealthiest families in the country? Of course not, because it's only right that we should run up the deficit on their behalf.

Whereas, back to those children from low-income families, Hatch said, "I have a rough time wanting to spend billions and billions and trillions of dollars to help people who won't help themselves — won't lift a finger — and expect the federal government to do everything."

Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa made the same basic point about the moral superiority of the ultra-rich and the less admirable priorities among those not even well enough off to have a portfolio: "I think not having the estate tax," which already exempts a couple's first \$11 million from any taxation, "recognizes the people that are investing" and rewards that. "As opposed to those that are just spending every darn penny they have, whether it's on booze or women or movies." ...

The takeaway from both of these lawmakers' remarks, however, is that lower-income Americans, even children, aren't rich because they aren't good.

Only if you saw it that way would you draw up a tax plan that so overwhelmingly rewards those who need the least help.

Their comments are also a preview of coming attractions — yes, we do visit the multiplex now and again — because right after driving up the deficit with tax cuts is always the best time to claim that we have no choice but to shred the safety net for those who need the most help.

They also reflect the priorities that New York Rep. Chris Collins candidly acknowledged when he said of the tax plan, "My donors are basically saying, 'Get it done or don't ever call me again.'"

— Kansas City, Dec. 4

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Congressional tax bill negotiators: Don't make divorce more taxing

**From: Jonathan Dana, managing partner of Feldesman Tucker Leifer Fidell LLP**

Divorce is hard enough; Congress shouldn't make it more painful, especially for lower- and middle-class families, by terminating the alimony tax deduction.

If congressional tax conferees stick with the House's elimination of the alimony deduction, everyone will lose.

Under the current system, those paying alimony — higher-earning or wealthier spouses — are incentivized by the prospect of a tax deduction to give their dependent spouses more generous levels of support.

Remove that incentive and, in most cases, given the ill will that often attends divorce, any or all desire to be generous to the alimony recipient will disappear. Cancelling the deduction will hurt the weaker party most, removing a key negotiating tool and increasing the odds of more painful and costly litigation.

If Congress kills the deduction, alimony amounts will likely decrease, making it harder for the economically vulnerable spouse to become financially independent or to provide for their household. (Alimony is countable as income in mortgage applications.) When lower amounts of alimony become the norm, individuals living in oppressive relationships or facing domestic violence will likely find it harder to leave their marriages for fear of obtaining inadequate resources to support them.

Women still represent the vast majority of alimony recipients. As a result, the financial security of many women, particularly among the poor and the middle class, will be seriously threatened if this basic protection is removed.

The current alimony tax arrangement preserves money for the family as a whole and can act as a vital safety net for lower- and middle-class families that lack abundant assets to liquidate or divide. When income is passed to the dependent spouse via alimony, it gets taxed at a lower rate than if it were kept by the higher earning spouse. That is a pro-family policy worth preserving.

The House's move to terminate this deduction will make it harder to achieve divorce settlements and will likely lead to more protracted and expensive litigation, benefitting neither families, society, the judicial system, nor the national economy.

Congress should recognize the alimony tax deduction as an essential aspect of the majority of settlement negotiations and as vital to encouraging individuals to focus on securing dignified and equitable settlements for them and their children. It is clearly worth protecting.

Washington, D.C.

### Recent sexual misconduct scandals in Congress not at all surprising

**From AJ Castilla**

Yet again another immoral scandal rocks the nation's capital, reminding us all that Congress frequently places itself above laws it applies to us and that male elected officials protect their own.

After numerous prior sex scandals, allegations involving Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and others fail to shock me. The fact that Congress is always the last workplace in America where employee rights and protections are applied also does not surprise me. Nor does the fact that Congress has secret taxpayer funded slush funds for sexual harassment. I recall their check bouncing slush fund some years ago. No doubt Congress has lots more secret things going on that we do not know about.

Congress is an untrustworthy hypocritical workplace and I would never let my child or wife work there.

The time is past that Congress, as the nation's most disliked federal employees every year since I have been alive, aligns itself under the same federal employee laws that apply to their counterparts elsewhere.

Boston, Mass.

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