

Grins and groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans from news of the week.

OUR OPINION | Grin to a possible Corning Classic return, a semi-honest lawmaker. Groan to an indifference to taxes.

Grin

Former LPGA Corning Classic official Jack Benjamin confirmed this week that the tournament could return to Corning in the future.

When the tournament announced it would not return in 2010 after 31 years at the Corning Country Club, it left a golf-ball sized hole in our hearts and our wallets.

Organizers of GlassFest have tried to fill the void the Corning Classic left behind, but the two are so different, it's unfair to even compare them.

After all, how do you compare Natalie Gulbis to a glass-themed festival?

No, Memorial Day weekend won't be complete until the smell of sausages wafts across the concourse of the Corning Country Club and the familiar "Quiet Please" paddles are taken out of mothballs.

Groan

If any more evidence was needed the whole Tea Party movement was all sound and fury, look no further than the latest school budget vote for the Corning-Painted Post school district.

Apparently 82 percent of the felt so strongly about the almost 5 percent tax increase proposed by the district that they came out and soundly defeated the proposed 2011-12 budget, sending a stinging retort to district officials.

Oh, no, wait. More than 82 percent of district residents were either so apathetic or ill-informed about where the largest chunk of their property taxes were going, they didn't vote at all.

That's what you call a real grass-roots movement, as in rooted in place.

Grin

Finally, a Republican lawmaker is being honest about the need to increase taxes, even if he did it in a roundabout way.

U.S. Rep. Tom Reed acknowledged that, in order to address the country's deficit, the current tax code would need to be reformed.

As part of that reform, some individuals and companies would necessarily have to pay higher taxes as loopholes and exemptions are eliminated.

Most people already know that real deficit reduction will need to be done through a combination of cutting costs, reducing programs and services and increasing taxes.

Getting a politician to admit it, however, can prove to be a challenge.

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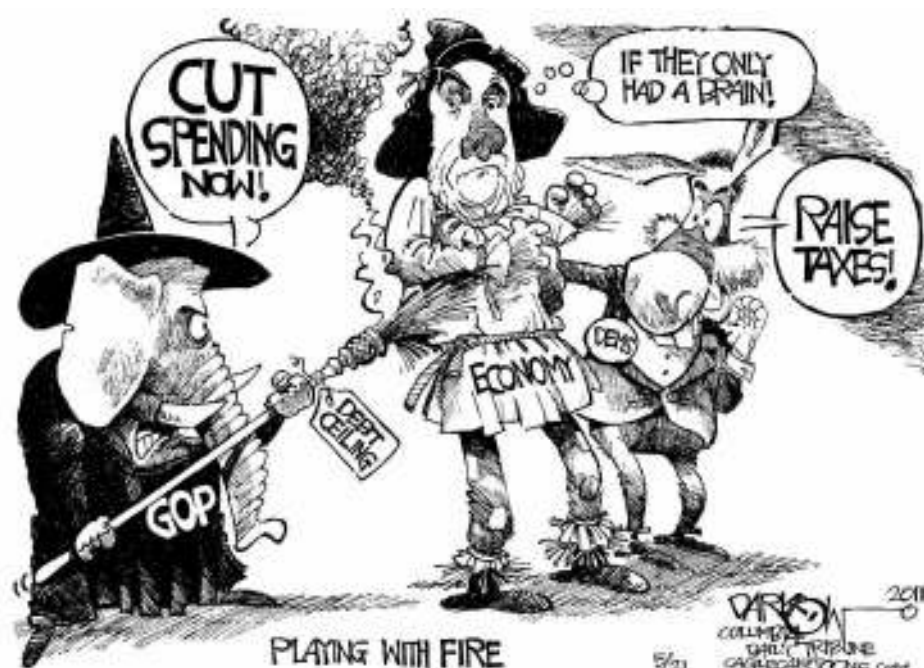
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The LEADER The Leader (ISSN #10501983) The Leader is published daily at 34 West Pulteney Street, Corning, New York 14830 by Liberty Group Corning Holdings, Inc. Periodical postage paid at Corning, New York 14830-0817. USPS code 0586-160 Postmaster: Send address changes to The Leader, West Pulteney Street, Corning, New York 14830 Publisher: Dennis Bruen ON THE FRONT PAGE Corning clocktower by artist Larry Barone		CIRCULATION Elmer Kuehner Circulation director 936-4651, Ext. 320 EDITORIAL Joe Dunning Managing editor 936-4651, Ext. 362 jdunning@the-leader.com ADVERTISING Classifieds (607) 936-4651, Ext. 651 Retail (607) 936-4651, Ext. 653 Adv fax (607) 962-0782 Kurt Bartenstein Ad director, 936-4651, Ext. 388 kbartenstein@the-leader.com
POSTAL RATES		
STEBEN COUNTY	ELSEWHERE IN USA	
One month \$26	One month \$33.50	
Three months \$78	Three months \$100.50	
Six months \$156	Six months \$201	
One year \$288	One year \$372	

ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

Meth making a comeback?

It's not a very encouraging way to mark this year's calendar, but we ignore doing it at our own risk – no matter how unsettling it might be. What I'm getting at is that you could go to the search engine of a local newspaper right now, type in the word "methamphetamine," and watch the results fill up the screen.

We could give a meth-bust-of-the-month award around here, and it's enough to make the alarms go off. From a mid-January meth lab arrest in Corning to the Southern Tier's largest-ever clandestine lab discovery just last week in Schuyler County, the local news has delivered a pretty steady supply of meth-related crime reports.

It begs the question: Is meth making a comeback? Many local law enforcement officers say yes. And the reasons are varied. It's getting easier and easier to manufacture the stuff. Tough economic times spark a rise in overall criminal behavior, and making and selling meth can be outrageously profitable. Crime crackdowns in large cities like Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse drive more and more criminals, including drug dealers, toward smaller cities, towns and villages.

"Meth is a huge problem right now," Steuben County Sheriff's Deputy Noel Terwilliger told a local reporter not long ago. Recall that it was just six years ago, in early 2005 at the start of my first term in the Legislature, when a state report identified our region as a potential meth hotbed. That

report was dropped on the region's doorstep just over a year after the killings of two Bradford County sheriff's deputies – Michael A. VanKuren and Christopher M. Burgert – during a meth-related arrest. It all fueled the already-growing fears locally over meth's proliferation and it helped spur a successful bipartisan effort by state legislators and then-Governor George Pataki that produced New York's first comprehensive anti-meth strategy. The 2005 law put in place tough new criminal penalties to outlaw clandestine labs; promoted greater community awareness and education; and tried to address the environmental hazards associated with meth labs.

It was one of New York's landmark anti-drug laws and it's been successful, but it's becoming clearer by the day that we can't sit back against meth or any other highly addictive drug and illegal drug trafficking. So the effort begins again. It may require new laws. Right now, for example, legislation has been introduced to establish a new registry as a way to monitor the whereabouts of anyone ever convicted of a meth-related crime. Another measure would require New York to join other states that have systems for tracking sales of the over-the-counter cold medicines used in meth manufacturing. I am working with local law enforcement and district attorneys toward this end.

But first, we must reignite local awareness and education – an

admirable effort already under way this year by many local law enforcement agencies. One of the reasons we were so successful six years ago was because it literally became a crusade among law officers, district attorneys, legislators, editorial writers, first responders, educators and concerned citizens to help defend our communities. A steady drumbeat of public awareness is still effective. Some of this year's arrests came about because watchful citizens didn't hesitate to alert local law enforcement to suspicious activity.

Remember what we learned the first time around. That once a culture of meth invades a region, it can sink deep roots. Once it takes hold, it spins out of control. The drug's proliferation promises equally escalating costs to local systems of health care and social services, more violent crime, higher numbers of drug-endangered children, more and more hazardous waste sites dotting the landscapes of our communities, and increasing risks for local law enforcement officers and first responders.

That's all still true. Those familiar with meth's devastation remain quick to share this advice: do everything within your power to drive meth manufacturers and dealers out of your communities. It starts with understanding that we can't underestimate the danger.

■ **State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents the 53rd Senate District.**

OTHER VIEW | L.A. TIMES

Hiding behind 'state secrets privilege'

In a perfunctory order, the Supreme Court on Monday denied a day in court to five alleged victims of one of the grossest abuses of the war on terror: "extraordinary rendition." That's the euphemism for transferring suspects abroad for interrogation and, it's alleged, torture. Besides denying the five any form of redress for their grievances, the court's action endorses the federal government's overuse of the so-called state secrets privilege to short-circuit the judicial process. That makes the court's action doubly shameful.

The plaintiffs sued a San Jose-based airline services company accused of assisting the CIA in transporting them to foreign countries. But the government – first the George

W. Bush administration, then the Obama administration – intervened to block the trial, claiming that if it went forward it would jeopardize state secrets. A closely divided U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals agreed, holding that it would not be acceptable even if the judge considered state secrets claims on a document-by-document basis.

The overuse of the state secrets privilege is the most dismaying of the Bush administration policies to be reaffirmed by the Obama administration. This case exemplified an all-or-nothing approach that will prevent scrutiny not just of rendition but of other alleged excesses in the war on terror. Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. has promised that the Justice Department will

be more discriminating in asserting the state secrets privilege, but the basic policy remains.

The human cost of an abstraction such as the doctrine of state secrets can be profound. One of the plaintiffs said that while he was imprisoned in Egypt, electrodes were attached to his earlobes, nipples and genitals. A second, held in Morocco, said he was beaten, denied food and threatened with castration. A third said his Moroccan captors broke his bones and cut him with a scalpel.

If these outrages occurred, justice must be done – and in court.

At its best, the Supreme Court has vindicated individual rights that have been ignored by the government. In this case it fell shockingly short of discharging its duty.

What's going on in H'port district?

I cannot understand the voters in the Hammondspport Central School District.

If I were offered a centrally located former middle school for just \$300,000 and could convert it into a civic center, the world would seem pretty beautiful.

That obviously is not the opinion of the residents of that school district.

A proposal to sell the building and make that conversion was stomped last week in a 633-221 crusher.

It took a public petition to even get the sale on last week's ballot. And a decision by Steuben County Judge Joseph Latham to keep it there in the wake of yet more legal challenges.

Removing the proposition from the ballot would disenfranchise voters, the judge decreed. And I heartily agree.

The same day they were trampling on the sale idea, however, voters handily passed an \$11.9 million school budget for 2011-12 and elect-

THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

presents a problem for the school district that might persist for years to come.

Opponents and proponents of the sale could theoretically petition similar proposals on and off ballots repeatedly, leaving the district in a perpetual state of disarray.

The Town of Urbana had planned a slow conversion of the property that would take five to eight years to complete.

So one could hardly claim that anybody was rushing anything.

Do residents really not want a community center? Or is this a symptom of some other political folderol?

I don't know the answer but there are those in Hammondspport that do and they had better get busy fixing this situation before it gets totally out of hand.

●●●
Pennsylvania regulators came down on Chesapeake Energy Corp. last week, imposing a \$1.1 million fine for natural gas drilling violations.

That was the biggest fine the state has imposed since drilling began in the Marcellus Shale.

Opponents of the operator say the penalty is nowhere near sufficient since Chesapeake burned a \$1.7 billion profit last year. Chesapeake also rewarded its chief executive, Aubrey K. McClendon, two years ago with a bonus of \$75 million.

Residents of the area affected by Chesapeake's recent well failure say they don't think all the health problems have yet surfaced. They fear chemicals spilled into the ground and into the Susquehanna River may also pollute the aquifer.

Chesapeake is the largest operator currently working in the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania. It uses a controversial gas-extraction technique called hydraulic fracturing which has raised grave concern of potential river and ground water pollution.

The Department of Environmental Protection is still discussing potential action against Chesapeake for another incident in April.

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