

# OPINION

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Iran nuclear deal not 'Obama's Treaty'

**TO THE EDITOR** | I would like to comment on Tom Greven's letter about "Obama's Treaty" in a recent edition of The Leader. This characterization betrays the writer's strong political bias.

The Iran Nuclear Agreement is no more "Obama's Treaty" than "Putin's Treaty." There were seven major countries involved in the negotiations, including Iran. Put in these terms, Mr. Obama certainly cannot claim credit for the whole deal, nor does he want to.

This "Treaty," actually an "Agreement," lays out very concrete ways to prevent the development of a nuclear weapon. See "The Iran Nuclear Deal – a Simple Guide" online in the NY Times.

As FDR so aptly stated, during earlier, perilous times, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." FDR was telling the American people that their fear was making things worse.

Mr. Greven alludes to Israel's fear of being annihilated. Even Presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee stated on July 23 that the pending agreement "will take the Israelis and march them to the door of the oven." What foolish, provocative and irresponsible rhetoric – just second-rate fear-mongering. Shame on you Mr. Huckabee.

Let's speak frankly here – there is an elephant in the room. Israel, unlike Iran, has never signed on to the 1968 Non Proliferation Treaty, so they cannot violate it. But it almost certainly broke a treaty banning nuclear tests, as well as countless national and international laws restricting the traffic in nuclear materials and technology. The list of nations that secretly sold Israel the material and expertise to make nuclear warheads, or who turned a blind eye to its theft, include today's staunchest campaigners against proliferation: the U.S., France, Germany, Britain and even Norway. Read more at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/15/truth-israels-secret-nuclear-arsenal>

Netanyahu is the world's most vocal opponent to the Iran accord, bent on satisfying his constituents and maintaining a firm grip on domestic political power. But he may also seek to deflect attention away from Israel. They could be the next country to come under international scrutiny. We shouldn't be naïve about this.

Mr. Greven mentions the laughable prospect of Israeli bombers heading for Iran – pure bluster and certainly a disastrous strategy for Israel. But here is the reality check. What country in its right mind – Israel, the U.S. or Iran – would ever consider using a nuclear weapon against another nation in this day and age? That is the closest thing to national suicide that one could imagine. Why don't people choose to see this issue for what it is and advance, not retreat?

**Stephen Harris**  
Painted Post

### Thanks to DOT for cutting grass

**TO THE EDITOR** | I would like to thank the Town of Corning Highway Department and the New York State Department of Transportation for removing a serious highway hazard. I live on Davis Road and for several weeks making a left turn onto Caton Road was dangerous because the tall grass on a bank obscured the view of cars headed toward Caton. You had to drive out nearly into Caton Road to see if there was anything coming at you. If not you had to make your turn very quickly as the tall grass could still hide an oncoming vehicle. I was almost hit a couple of times.

I called the Corning Highway Department and left a message about my concern and asked if there was some way to have the property owner cut the grass. The Highway Department called the NYS DOT as it was in their jurisdiction and within hours they came and cut the tall grass.

I just wanted to thank both agencies for their prompt action. I now feel much safer making a turn at the bottom of Davis Road. I am sure my neighbors thank you as well.

**Herb MacDonell**  
Corning

## First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

## WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

# The cost of Medicaid only points up

I don't know how many of you saw the numbers recently, but they sure caught my attention. If you're a taxpayer, they should catch yours too.

According to the latest enrollment figures, nearly one-third of New York's 19.7 million residents are now enrolled in Medicaid. Yes, you read that right. Approximately 6.3 million New Yorkers are now Medicaid recipients.

The expense? This year Medicaid will cost roughly \$63.5 billion, or fast-approaching one-half of New York's entire state budget. Five years ago, the cost was \$52.1 billion. Ten years ago, around \$42 billion.

Think about that: one-half of the state budget goes to Medicaid. So set aside half for Medicaid and then distribute the remaining half to cover roads and bridges, education (which accounts for \$23.5 billion or a little over 17% of this year's total and a number, keep in mind, that does not factor in the share funded by your local school property tax), crime and correction, environmental conservation, and so on.

And here's the kicker from one recent news report, "Enrollment is projected to rise to almost 6.5 million in 2019 at a state cost of \$24.9 billion." The cost of Medicaid is divided between the federal, state and local governments. This year's state share is \$22.5 billion.

The numbers are mind boggling – it's an enormous



**TOM O'MARA**

expense and it's a system, as noted earlier, impacting the lives of a third of all New Yorkers. The trend in Medicaid spending is sharply in focus: higher and higher, more and more. It's an incredibly complex system that raises all kinds of challenges, concerns and warnings. For now, I'll keep the spotlight on one area of overriding importance, in my view: oversight.

With so much at stake for patients, taxpayers, and every level of government already challenged to balance so many other different needs, how can we continue to tolerate the ongoing, periodic reports from the state attorney general, comptroller, Medicaid Inspector General and local agencies about ongoing cases of Medicaid fraud and waste that cost state and local taxpayers billions of dollars?

I've stressed it for years, but the fundamental question keeps going unanswered, Why can't we stop it in the first place?

We're engaged in a far-reaching, sensible effort to redesign the system to make it more effective for those patients who undeniably need it, as well as to control costs. Because of the

federal Affordable Care Act, an enormous amount of resources is going to enroll uninsured New Yorkers in Medicaid – an effort that has added more than one million residents to the rolls over the past year alone. Are we devoting any similarly aggressive efforts to anti-fraud initiatives?

I'm not talking about the after-the-fact recouping of losses. These post-fraud efforts are all well and good, and important, but keep in mind that they also come at some expense to taxpayers. No, I'm talking about tightening the system right from the start.

State and local property taxpayers deserve a "zero tolerance" policy on Medicaid abuse and the loss of billions of dollars. That's right, billions. In fact, the state attorney general recently touted that his Medicaid Fraud Control Bureau has recovered more than \$1 billion since 2011. That figure in and of itself hints at how much is being lost, as well as at how much the investigations to recoup losses cost.

I wrote earlier this year about the state being in the process of awarding a \$500-million contract to Xerox to construct New York's next Medicaid management system. The effectiveness, integrity and quality of this new management system is vitally important to taxpayers. One news report reminded all of us that New York "has a long history of delays and cost overruns with its prior

Medicaid management system."

Last time around the state paid Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) roughly \$1 billion to build the current system, which became operational in 2005. The CSC-built system was supposed to cost \$357 million. It ended up costing three times that much. It was completed three years late. CSC and another Xerox competitor for the new Medicaid management contract, Hewlett-Packard, have protested and questioned Xerox's ability to do the job. Xerox, of

course, begs to differ. The point is that none of it has inspired confidence that New York is on the verge of putting an end to Medicaid fraud. We'll see.

What's clear is that when considering any new management system, there remains a vast, unmet need to focus on putting a stop, from the get-go, to the scams and rip-offs that have plagued New York's taxpayers for decades.

It bears repeating: Huge amounts of upstate taxpayer dollars go to support billions of dollars of Medicaid spending statewide, especially in New York City, and we deserve better than to keep footing the bill for the losses.

— *State Sen. Tom O'Mara represents New York's 53rd Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and a portion of Tompkins County.*

## ANOTHER VIEW



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Camp Good Days will miss Father Joe

**TO THE EDITOR** | It is with a heavy heart and much sadness, yet wonderful memories, that I write this post today. The children of Camp Good Days, St. John Fisher College, the Basilian Fathers, and I, personally, lost someone very special with the passing of Father Joe Lanzalaco.

I had the pleasure of meeting Father Joe and knowing him since he came to St. John Fisher College in 2001, where I coached the kickers on the Football Team. He was someone, who, as the Director of Campus Ministry, became very close with all of the athletic programs, and Football in particular. Father Joe would come to as many games as he could, even if it meant driving separately to

our away games.

Fr. Joe would always lead the team in a pre-game prayer and truly had a way of connecting with the players, and I would lead the post-game prayer. Fr. Joe and I had an inside joke that we made a good duo, and that we wouldn't change our routine as long as the team was doing well.

The place I, along with the St. John Fisher College community, will miss him the most, will be at the Annual Teddi Dance for Love, which is the longest-standing tradition at Fisher. Father Joe would lead all the participants in a very special "blessing of the feet" prior to the Dance for Love.

Fr. Joe was an Advisor to the President's Counsel during the tenure of Dr. Katherine Keough, Dr. Donald Bain, and I'm sure new President Dr. Gerry

Rooney was looking forward to his guidance during his span of Presidency. Fr. Joe leaves a big void that will be difficult to replace.

Fr. Joe would always take time to meet the Honorary Coaches and Honorary Cheerleaders during The Courage Bowl. One of my favorite memories of Fr. Joe was during Courage Bowl VII, when a photographer caught him celebrating a touchdown for Fisher on the sidelines with one of our Honorary Coaches. His energy and spirit is something that I will miss on the sidelines. He will also be sorely missed at the Courage Bowl Community Luncheon, where he was a staple in our program agenda. He would lead the Honorary Coaches, Cheerleaders, and attendees in an Invocation.

Fr. Joe believed so thoroughly in the mission of

Camp Good Days and was dedicated to improving the quality of life for children and families dealing with cancer. It is too hard to actually believe that he is gone. There are too many memories and stories to share in this forum, but for those of us who had Fr. Joe in our lives, we now have him in our hearts, along with all of those memories and stories. He will be missed more than he would have ever thought possible, by so many whose lives he touched, in one way or another. For those of us who were fortunate enough to have known him, been friends with him, and worked with him, we will forever be better people for his personality, his strong dedication, and his support.

**Gary Mervis**  
Chairman and founder

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