

**COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA**

# Selling a story of property tax relief

We may have recently put another regular session of the State Legislature in the books, but we sure didn't put the issue of high property taxes behind us – which, at least for me at the moment, is the most telling consequence coming out of Albany in 2015.

In fact, let's rewind the tape because, clearly, a lot of people have to hear the message again – most of all, Governor Andrew Cuomo.

While we may have taken an important action by extending the state's 2% property tax cap until, at least, the year 2020 – and make no mistake, that is an important action for local property taxpayers across the region and state – it simply will not provide the future of property tax cuts that many of us believed we were signing on for when we first agreed to approve the cap in 2011.

The goal four years ago was to ultimately produce property tax cuts, not to just hold the line on property tax increases. We can't forget that that was the promise, particularly by the governor who has said time after time that New York State cannot survive as the tax capital of America.

The state-imposed, 2% property tax cap is in fact holding the line on tax increases. The Empire Center for Public Policy

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(empirecenter.org) has estimated that over the past three years the cap has saved taxpayers \$7.6 billion. That's significant. But it's not a tax cut. And anyone who tries to tell you that it is a tax cut is trying to sell you that proverbial bridge in Brooklyn.

So the property tax cap keeps the lid on increases. It was the right move to extend it because taxpayers are better off with it than without it. A recent statewide poll by the Siena Research Institute found that nearly three-quarters of the state's registered voters agree that it's done the job of preventing "large annual increases in their school or local taxes."

Once again, though, the goal wasn't to just prevent future tax increases, right? Don't we want to ensure a future of tax cuts in New York State?

New York State has been good at selling tax gimmicks. We've done the STAR Rebate, a tax credit, a tax freeze, a tax cap. But as I recently said to one reporter at the Capitol, "Let's just lower taxes. The biggest way we can do that is to lower

mandates on our local governments. Nobody wants to talk about that, least of all the governor."

Mandate relief remains the missing link. Or in the words of Unshackle Upstate, responding to the extension of the tax cap, "We remind lawmakers of the need to address the problem of New York's sky high property taxes by enacting meaningful mandate relief. It seems that the effort to provide real relief to local governments, school districts, businesses – and ultimately taxpayers – has stalled."

A group of Upstate NY county leaders, including Tompkins County Administrator Joe Mareane, recently pointed to an analysis earlier this year from the Pew Charitable Trusts ("Where States Get Their Money," www.pewtrusts.org) showing that New York receives more of its revenue from local funds than any other state in America. According to the report, an average state gets about two percent of its revenue from local government levies. In New York State, it's 15 percent, or more than one-seventh of the state's revenue. Translated: Local property taxpayers in New York State are under the heaviest state-imposed burden of all.

Or, as the local leaders wrote, "Simply put, New York State has shifted over one-seventh of its

costs to local governments, which must then raise property taxes to pay those bills.

Rarely has the disparity between New York and other states been so clearly presented, and the mystery of high local property taxes so effectively explained."

I agree. When Governor Cuomo pushed the tax cap as his top priority back in 2011, he promised it would be accompanied by an aggressive mandate relief effort.

There have been important mandate relief actions since then, including long-term pension reform and the takeover of the growth in local Medicaid costs, but nothing that can be considered a true transformation of the state-local partnership – or a truly meaningful change for Upstate New York's local property taxpayers.

So everyone on board the wagon of mandate relief has to keep harping on the need. The work to undo New York State's highest-in-the-nation property tax burden isn't supposed to be about limiting tax growth. The goal is property tax cuts, which simply won't happen without mandate relief.

— *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.*

**BREAKDOWN****Greece referendum: The scenarios**

Yes or no? What Greece's landmark vote might bring

On his 10-year trip home, the Greek hero Odysseus at one point had to steer his ship and crew down a narrow stretch of water menaced on opposite sides by two sea monsters, Scylla and Charybdis.

The Greek people are in similar dire straits as they prepare to vote on a future in which they face two painful prospects: the slow grind of years more of austerity cuts or the country's potentially catastrophic exit from the euro.

The question is whether their vote today can help them escape either. "Yes" to more budget cuts in exchange for a financial aid package for the country? Or reject it in the hope it will not lead the country out of the euro?

The referendum question makes no reference to Greece's future in the currency union. It is on a set of proposals that European creditors say they have withdrawn following the failure to forge a deal with Greece before an end-June deadline.

**IF THE PEOPLE SAY 'NAI'**

A "yes" vote backing the reform proposals creditors had made would likely see Greece turn immediately to talks on a new rescue package. Whether that leads to a swift deal that might allow Greece to reopen its banks and restore a semblance of normality to the life of citizens and tourists is another

question. Much would likely depend on what happens on the political front.

The government has said it will respect the verdict. Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis has said he'll resign in the event of a "yes" vote and Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has hinted as much.

If the government does not collapse, it could try to build a new coalition with other parties, Varoufakis hinted.

It's not clear, however, if that would involve new elections. That would take time and without financial assistance, Greece would surely go bankrupt.

**IF THEY SAY 'OXI'**

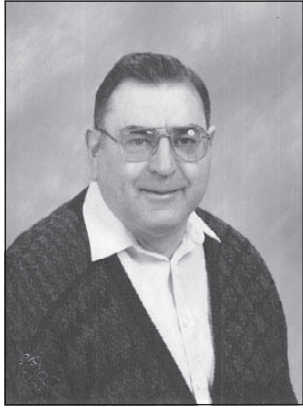
Despite the Greek government's assertion that a "no" vote will not lead to a euro exit, most people agree it would open up more uncertain outcomes, especially if the ECB calls time on the life-support measures to Greece's banks.

A number of European politicians, including Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the top euro-zone official, have said a "no" vote would jeopardize Greece's place in the euro.

Others, such as the leaders of France and Italy, appear to be holding the door ajar for further talks. Even Wolfgang Schaeuble, the tough-talking German finance minister, has said the country could stay in the euro in the event of a "no" vote.

But investors are likely to be worried in case of a "no" vote amid fears it increases the chance of a Greek exit from the euro, or Grexit. Markets will open first in Asia.

— *The Associated Press*

**OBITUARIES****Hively****Clair R. "Chuck" Hively**

Clair R. "Chuck" Hively, age 67, of Corning, passed away on Thursday, July 2, 2015 at the Community Living Center in the Bath VA Medical Center. Chuck was born on September 7, 1947 in Corning, NY, the son of the late Richard F. and Elizabeth P. (Ribble) Hively. He was a graduate of West High School, class of 1967. He then enlisted in the United States Navy serving from 1967 to 1969 during the Vietnam War. He was stationed on the Carrier U.S.S. Oriskany as an Arresting Gear Operator. After returning home, he married Cynthia M. DeNardo on October 23, 1987 in the Corning Hospital Chapel where they first met. Chuck was employed by Corning Hospital as a Respiratory Therapist, retiring in 2009 with 39 years of service. He was a lifetime member and past Fire Chief of the Caton Fire Department. In his free time, Chuck loved being outdoors – especially during hunting season.

Members of the Forever Lovers Club at Cove Haven Resort in the Poconos, he and Cynthia spent their 28 years traveling there often. He was a John Wayne enthusiast, always enjoying watching his movies. His greatest joy came from spending time with his family. He was a loving husband, father, and grandfather, and will be missed by all who knew him.

He is survived by his loving wife of 28 years, Cynthia M. Hively of Corning, NY; four children: Nichole M. (Fred) Barber of Caton, NY, Clair R. Hively, Jr. of Caton, NY, Nicholas K. DeNardo of Corning, NY, Bryan P. (Kristen) DeNardo of California, MD; grandson, Nathan A. Reisbeck of Corning, NY; sister, Voneta (Kenneth) Taft of Corning, NY; and brothers: Bradley (Sandra) Hively of Addison, NY and Richard Hively of NY. It was Chuck's wish that there be no services. Private services will be held at the convenience of the family. Burial will take place in the family plot at Elmwood Cemetery, Caton, NY. Phillips Funeral Home & Cremation Service, 17 W. Pulteney St., Corning, NY has been entrusted with the arrangements. In lieu of flowers, donations in Chuck's name may be sent to the: Corning American Legion, John P. Eaton Post, 8 Caton Rd., Corning, NY 14830. Kind words and memories may be shared at: www.PhillipsFuneralHome.com

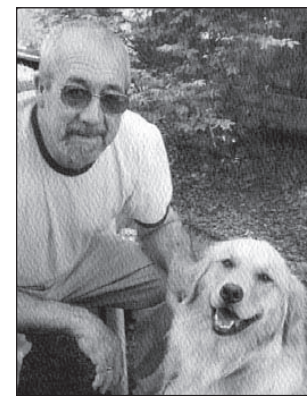
**Smith****Marion (America) Smith**

Marion (America) Smith, age 99, of Corning, died Thursday, July 2, 2015 at Robert Packer Hospital, Sayre, PA. Marion was born March 4, 1916 in Brooklyn, NY, the youngest daughter of Cosimo and Amalia (Pennisi) Cardone. She married Oliver Smith of Ithaca on September 17, 1933 at St. Michael's Church, Flushing, NY. They were married for nearly 60 years when Marion was predeceased by Oliver on August 17, 1993. She was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. During the Second World War, Marion was a secretary for the Army Air Force in Flushing, NY. When moving to Painted Post, she did secretarial

work for Corning Glass Works and The Lincoln Rochester Bank. She and Oliver later owned Smith Insurance Agency, in the Quigley Drug Store building in Painted Post. Marion was a member of All Saints Parish. She was also a charter member of The Women's Club of Immaculate Heart of Mary and was its sole survivor. She was a past Eucharistic Minister for All Saints. She was a very active member of The Corning Senior Citizen's Center and sang with The Sugar and Spice Singers. She was also a member of The Trust Group of Women and received many certificates for her volunteer work. Marion and her husband were past volunteers of Corning Hospital Gift Shop.

She is survived by two daughters, Joan (Richard) Quigley of Corning, and Lois Miller of Fort Meyers, FL; grandchildren: Thomas (Lori) Miller, Richard Miller, Anthony (Cindy) Miller, Joseph (Christine) Miller, Nicholas (Rhonda) Miller, all of Florida, David (Taryn) Quigley of Cape Cod, MA, Noreen (David) Spiehler of Canandaigua, NY, Patrick (Tina) Quigley of Canandaigua, NY, and Kathleen (Thomas) Murzynski of Buffalo, NY. Marion is also survived by eighteen great grandchildren as well as many nieces and nephews. Among them are Inge Smith of Painted Post, NY and Pam (Richard) Burton of Painted Post, NY. Marion was also predeceased by brothers Marco

and Vincent; infant, Dominic, sisters: Marie, Frances, Angela, and son-in-law, Richard Miller. There will be no calling hours. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Painted Post, NY on Tuesday, July 7th at 10:00 AM. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery in Corning. Memorial Donations may be made in her name to All Saints Parish, 222 Dodge Avenue, Corning, NY 14830. Marion's family entrusted her care to Haughey Funeral Home, Inc.

**Champlain photo****Ralph H. "Pete" Champlain Jr.**

Ralph H. "Pete" Champlain, Jr., age 82, of Painted Post passed away on Thursday, July 2, 2015 at McAuley Manor in Hornell. He was born on June

9, 1933 in Corning, the son of Ralph H. and Elvira (Greenfield) Champlain Sr. Pete married Patricia Olson on January 19, 1957 at St. Vincent De Paul Church.

Pete loved to play ball, fish, and was noted for his humor and wit. He was retired from Corning Packaging, Weyerhaeuser, and Champlain Photography. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Pat; daughter, Lisa Champlain-Novitsky of Corning; granddaughter, Miranda Novitsky; sisters-in-law, Betty Olson Bennett and Dorothy Olson (Mike) Giardino; brothers-in-law, Edward Derleth and Glen Silvernail; and many nieces and nephews. Along with his parents, Pete was predeceased by his son, Gregory Peter Champlain; sisters, Joyce Champlain Morse, Betty Champlain Silvernail, and Lousie Champlain Box; brother, Franklin Champlain; sister-in-law, Peggy Derleth; and brothers-in-law, Jack Bennett and Robert Box. It was Pete's wish that there be no services. Those wishing to, may send their condolences and donations to the Champlain family by mailing them to P.O. Box 97, Big Flats, NY 14814. Kind words and memories may also be shared at www.CarpentersFuneralHome.com

**DEATH NOTICES****Ralph H. "Pete" Champlain Jr.**

Ralph H. "Pete" Champlain Jr., 82, of Painted Post, died Thursday, July 2, 2015 at McAuley Manor, Hornell. There are no services. Arrangements are with

Carpenter's Funeral Home, Corning.

**Clarence R. "Robert" Harris**

Clarence R. "Robert" Harris, 70, of Big Flats, died Thursday, July 2, 2015 at Corning Hospital.

Calling hours are 1-4 p.m. Tuesday at the Big Flats American Legion, 45 Olcott Road South. Services will be held there at the conclusion of calling hours at 4 p.m. Tuesday. Arrangements are with Phillips Funeral Home and Cremation Service.

**IN BRIEF****Teen spits longest but loses contest**

EAU CLAIRE | A 15-year-old girl said there was nothing special about the way she spit a cherry pit Saturday. "I just took a deep breath and pushed hard," said Megan Ankrapp of Buchanan, whose pit landed at 49 feet, 14

inch — longest of the day at the 42nd annual contest in southwestern Michigan. "I was shocked," she said. Megan won the women's category but didn't participate in the overall championship round because her earlier spits were too short to qualify. The championship spit-off was claimed by Kevin Bartz of Niles with a winning distance of 48 feet, 8 inches. He was followed

by 2014 champ Brian Krause at 48 feet. "Here I was all excited to finally beat the Krause family and I look up and say, 'Wait a minute. One of the girls beat me,'" said Bartz, 48. "It's not quite as exciting." A member of the Krause family has won 26 events since farm owner Herb Teichman began the contest in 1974, partly to celebrate the region's tart cherry harvest.