

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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Mail: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, THE LEADER
 PO BOX 1017
 CORNING, NY 14830
Fax: 607-936-9939
Email: sdupree@the-leader.com

Online at www.the-leader.com/opinions

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Get rid of conflicts of interest at IDA

When you are in a hole, quit digging! When what we have been doing over and over again gets us the same unwanted results, maybe it is time to try something new! Quit looking for somebody to blame, and try some new directions, even if the new ideas come from people we love to hate.

On Pi Day, in the article "Audit finds faults in IDA" it was indicated that half of the IDA's board members also serve on the board of STEG. George Miner is executive director of the IDA and president of STEG. "Perceived" conflicts of interest? You think maybe? Worse than that, no new thoughts in the last quarter of a century mandated by petty single-minded political policies. The same "good-ol-boys-club" has been making the same old decisions by wearing ear plugs whenever new ideas are suggested not only in Chemung, but also Steuben, and Schuyler Counties. We wonder why the dinosaurs couldn't get out of the way of a meteor? I wonder what species will be looking at our fossils and questioning what happened?

Three major public buildings, a hospital, a college dormitory, and a high school in the last 3 years, and not one of them with Lead-Platinum design. A public mourning by our congressman over the loss of "fracking" without one thought of infrastructure for renewable energy and the living wage jobs that come with it. A "welding course" celebrated without the other course work, land-planning, or economic support done to support renovating the thousands of older homes and business buildings for energy efficiency with decreased cost, decreased green-house gases, and a slower climate disruption process that our political leaders love to deny is happening. Just this alone would stimulate our economy since it is supported by NYSERDA. If our local banks and credit unions would work together on this and think more than 6

months ahead, this would be a shovel to help dig us out of the hole.

Letting Crestwood endanger the lake and the communities surrounding the lake, but not considering a method of producing a waste-water treatment system that would not only help to cleanse the water, but bring tourists from all over the world to see it. They would enjoy the wines, the waterfalls, the bird-watching in the marsh, and the new fuel-cell automobiles on the track as well as John Todd's water cleansing design. By all means, let's not think out of the box, but whine that the governor is to blame for all our problems. The governor is no prince, but he certainly he is not to blame for the economic woes brought on by the dull thinking of the leadership in this area. The only difference between a rut and a grave are the dimensions, and it is time to get out of our rut before it turns into a grave. We have some serious work to do, but first let's remove the ear plugs, the blinders, and quit sniffing the fossil fuels. They are bad for the grey matter.

Ruth S. Young
 Horseheads

Big thanks to students training dog

Hats off to the students of Avoca Central School and teacher Connie Terry for undertaking the training of Wiggins, a four-month-old Labrador retriever (Leader, 3/16).

Wiggins, from the Guiding Eyes for the Blind, is in training to become a guide dog for a blind or visually impaired person, an autism service dog or a released pet.

I cannot state clearly enough how much it warmed my heart to read of Connie Terry's commitment to this puppy and that of Avoca's students as well.

Again, good luck, Avoca, with this marvelous adventure destined to further serve mankind.

Rosalie Niemczyk
 Bath

COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

Rainbow trout, maple syrup and the EPF

The signs of a new season are everywhere.

Early last week, state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) biologists were wading in a number of area creeks weighing and measuring rainbow trout as part of the annual samplings that help monitor fish populations in Finger Lakes tributaries. It's one of the annual and much-anticipated preludes to the opening of trout season on April 1st.

"The fish are in real good shape, really fat... The biggest one was just under 9 pounds. Fishing should be really good for the opener," one biologist said, in what can only be music to the ears of all anglers.

And the sap was also running over the weekend across the state, including at a Maple Weekend celebration at the lodge at Cornell University's Arnot Teaching and Research Forest in Schuyler County (for details, visit <http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/arnot/>). New York State Maple Weekend (www.nysmaple.com) is one of the nation's - and the spring's - renowned agri-tourism showcases.

So from healthy rainbow trout to delicious, locally produced maple syrup, we've slowly but surely welcomed a new season over the past week following a long, hard winter.

That's equally true at the Capitol, where budget adoption season is well underway. The Legislature's budget conference committees have started meeting to settle Senate and Assembly differences, and the Legislature and the governor are fast



TOM O'MARA

approaching do-or-die time for having a new state budget in place by the April 1 start of New York's new fiscal year.

As part of the effort to move forward on the 2015-2016 state budget - and specifically in my post as the new chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee - I was recently invited to address the representatives of more than 100 environmental, conservation, recreational and community organizations in Albany. Collectively the group represented a broad, statewide partnership that includes a number of locally based groups such as the Chemung Valley Audubon Society and Finger Lakes Land Trust. They were in town urging Governor Andrew Cuomo and state legislative leaders to include a stronger state commitment to conservation funding in the new state budget, in particular through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).

The state's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) was enacted in 1993. It has been a key source of state aid assisting local communities in undertaking a range of projects from drinking water quality to wetlands protection, from community parks enhancement to recycling programs, and from farmland conservation to controlling

invasive species. You can read more about the fund at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/92815.html>, including a comprehensive 2013 report issued on the occasion of the fund's 20th Anniversary. To say the least, it's an impressive record of government investment that has benefitted a broad-based segment of New York's citizens and communities like very few programs ever have. Studies have shown, for example, that for every dollar of EPF funds invested in land and water protection, the state and localities get back seven dollars in economic benefits. That's a pretty solid investment by any measure.

So it was an appropriate occasion, I felt, to echo one of New York's favorite sons - former state assemblyman, governor, Vice President and President Theodore "T.R." Roosevelt, Jr., who's widely admired and recognized as the most conservation-minded President in American history. Roosevelt's conservation legacy is inspirational. Roughly 230 million acres of public land were protected during Roosevelt's presidency. Numerous other landmark achievements under Roosevelt included the establishment of 150 National Forests, 51 federal bird reservations, four national game preserves and the United States Forest Service.

In my remarks I said, "I truly believe that everyone in this room shares a critical piece of common ground, and it's a common ground that's a vital starting point for our future success. President Theodore Roosevelt

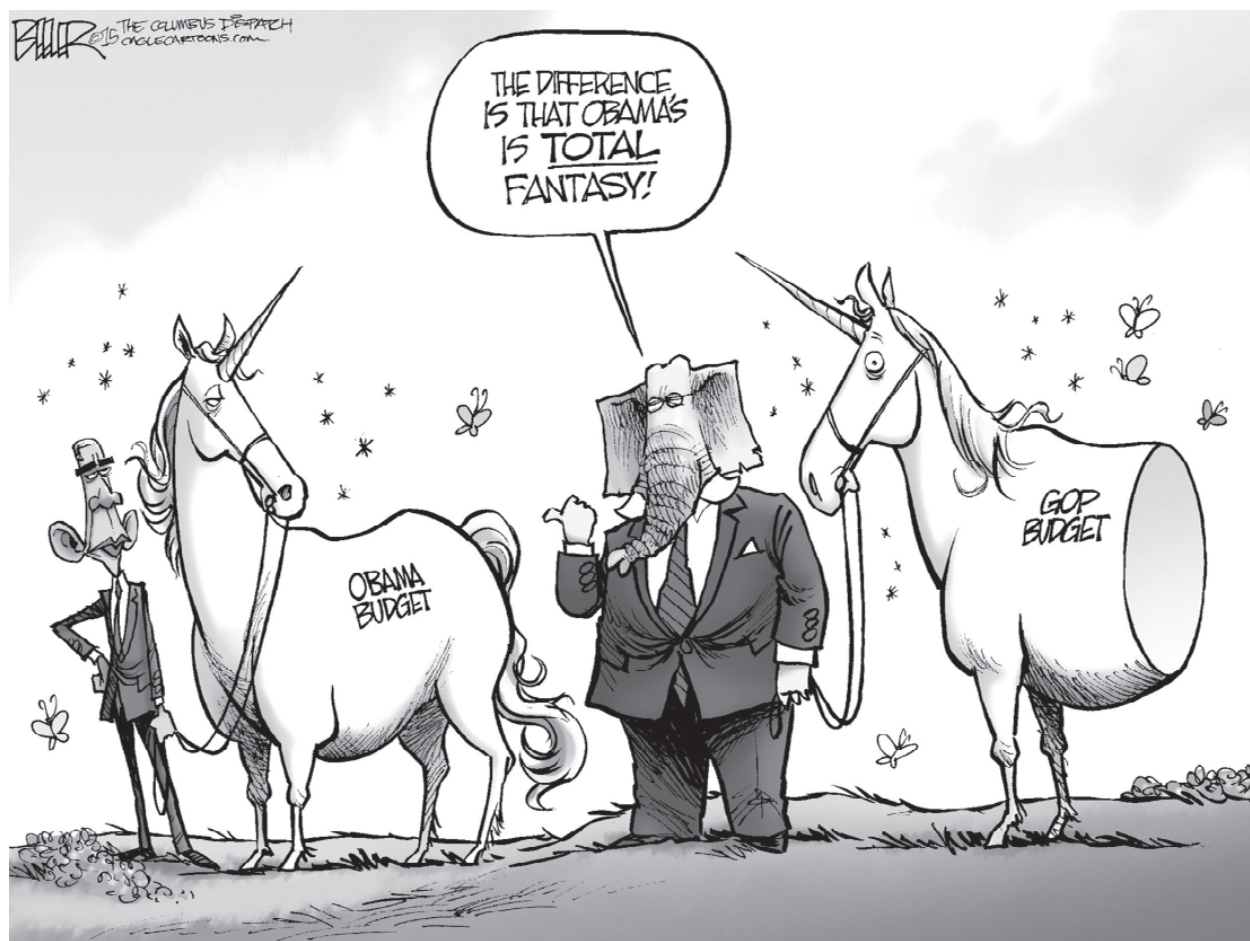
expressed it as 'the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.' We will have differences and face controversies. But we have a responsibility to stewardship and conservation. We have a responsibility to do our best to address the challenges, to work through them, and consider and negotiate them in a balanced, deliberate, fair, serious and sensible way. I hope we will."

In the end I expressed my support for the long-term goal of fully restoring the EPF to a pre-2007 level when the state started to divert, raid and reduce the fund for other purposes including closing the massive budget gaps New York faced at the start of the most recent recession. I stressed the fund's environmental and economic importance to New York's future - noting that its restoration would constitute a legacy of which we all could be proud. A week or so later a Senate Budget Resolution - a document that essentially makes a public, on-the-record statement of budget priorities - included, as conservation advocates had been hoping, \$200 million for the EPF.

It was yet another signal, from where I stand, of a welcome new season, and we'll watch closely where it goes from here.

-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



WHAT FOLKS ARE SAYING

We received several responses to recent posts on our Facebook page. Here are a few:

C-PP schedules a 'snow day' for April 6

Donna M. Bowers: "As a parent I feel like we should get a vote in this since I would much rather them get out a day earlier in June!"

Samantha Van Zile: "When I saw the note today sent home w my child I was disgusted. These kids seem like they have more days off then they have in school."

You would think they would use the day to make up work that they missed with the 2 hour delays... And I agree w all of what the others here say.. We should be able to vote how the days should be used. Even so, they are allotted days not days they have to use... Sigh. Education is so important and I just dnt get it..."

Laurelyn Simons: "Getting out earlier in June is not an option due to state exams. All districts in the entire state have to go until the same date."

Dustin James: "If you take the idea of 'we should get a vote' to its natural conclusion, we would be voting on every minute administrative decision the district makes. Consider that, in light of the fact that very few people bother to vote in the elections we already hold."

Judge rules a pipeline can be built across properties without the owners' consent

Brandon Thompson: "So much for 'owning' your own property"

Farm Bureau against minimum wage hike

Steve Keck: "Raising the minimum wage, I mean wage has a positive effect for a few for a short time, then is bad for everyone! It has never worked and it never will!!! The only thing it truly increases is the tax dollars per person that the government receives and are able to abuse and misspend."

Steve Teets: "Or the top of the corporate world getting millions in annual bonuses."

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Publisher
 Rick Emanuel | Group Publisher
 936-4651, Ext. 303

Editorial
 Stella DuPree | Managing Editor
 936-4651, Ext. 361
 sdupree@the-leader.com

Circulation
 Corinne Mulligan
 Customer Service/ Sales Manager
 936-4651, Ext. 328

Advertising
 Adam Mingos | Ad Director
 936-4651, Ext. 388
 amingos@the-leader.com

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