

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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OUR VIEW

Grins & Groans

Grin

Thank you, Tim McCracken, for doing the kind thing. "A little bird" told us how you were upset to see an elderly couple sharing soup and water at Friendly's this week and how you discretely told your waitress you wanted to buy them drinks. This small act of kindness made us smile when we heard of it and we just had to share the good feeling. Thank you for setting the example, Tim. For us and for your son, who saw what his Dad did. And a thank you to the waitress at Friendly's. That little bird also shared a note you left at Tim's table. "Don't worry about the drinks. That was one of the nicest gestures that I have seen in my two years here. Thank you so much." Really cool, Tim. Thanks for making a difference.

Groan

To the voters in the Addison school district. Voting down your school budget because you wanted to send a message to the administration and school board only hurts the kids. Well, you're getting a second

chance to get it right. The district is putting the failed \$28.7 million budget up for another vote on June 16. It includes no increase in the property tax levy. And the tax purchases - which seemed to be the main cause of outrage - will not be on the ballot. If the budget fails to pass a second time, the district heads to a contingency budget. That means no new equipment purchases and outside organizations that benefit children would need to pay to use school facilities. Not cool. We urge Addison voters to pass the budget and find other ways to air their grievances.

Grin

To Jairam Hathwar, who was this close to making it to the final round of the National Spelling Bee last week. It was your first time on the big stage as a competitor and you represented your family and hometown so well! We're proud and in awe of the hard work it took to get you so far. It won't be long before you're hoisting the championship trophy.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Make tobacco less accessible

To the Editor | Statistics show 90 percent of smokers start before the age of 18, and each year 22,500 youth become new daily smokers. This can be largely attributed to the exposure youth have to tobacco products. Youth who visit convenience stores more than twice per week are 64 percent more likely to begin smoking within the next 12 months than their peers who visit less frequently. Youth are also twice as likely as adults to recall tobacco advertising. There is approximately one licensed tobacco retailer for every 194 children in New York state, and tobacco advertising and regular displays in stores creates an impression that tobacco is easily accessible and acceptable. One way to help curb

this problem is to decrease the number of retailers. A few ways others states have done this is by removing tobacco from pharmacies. It doesn't make sense for a trusted health care partner to sell the number one cause of preventable death and disease. In New York, municipalities have worked within zoning codes as well as imposed local licensing requirements to restrict the location and number of tobacco retailers. Examples of these are the Cities of Rochester and Binghamton. Learn more at STTAC.org, TobaccoFreeNYS.org, smokefreemonroe.com, or tobaccofreebt.org.

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POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Highs and lows of a tax cap



SEN. TOM O'MARA

Recent actions by the state Senate to highlight what remains the heaviest burden of all for far too many New York taxpayers: high property taxes.

The fact is that local property taxpayers in New York are still trying to live, work and raise families under one of America's highest property tax burdens - despite some important efforts to try to get them out from under it.

Prominent among these efforts, of course, has been the state-imposed 2% property tax cap, which was enacted in 2011 and took effect the following year. A recent report by the Empire Center for Public Policy (empirecenter.org) estimates that over the past three years the cap has saved taxpayers \$7.6 billion. Since 2012 under the cap, school tax levies have risen by an average of just 2.2 percent annually. Compare that to the 30-year period prior to the tax cap's enactment, when school tax levies jumped an average of six percent a year, from \$3.5 billion to \$19.7 billion, at a time when inflation averaged 3.3 percent annually.

So the property tax cap has, in fact, helped keep a lid on property tax increases. Under the terms of the original legislation, the cap is scheduled to expire next June. The Senate wants to make it permanent, now, and we recently approved legislation to do just that for the sake of property taxpayers who, it appears, largely agree. A recent statewide poll by the Siena Research Institute found that nearly three-quarters of the state's registered voters support the property tax cap and agree that "it has accomplished what was intended - property taxpayers are not seeing large annual increases in their school or local taxes, as they had in previous years."

essentially begin putting an end to any future unfunded state mandates. It proposes a straightforward first step. It says that the state will no longer pass these costs along to counties, cities, town, villages or school districts. If the state mandates a program or a service, the state pays for it. That's one common sense beginning to reform. I've also co-sponsored legislation, together with area Assemblymen Phil Palmesano and Chris Friend, to fully eliminate the local share of the cost of Medicaid, which counties have long identified as the most devastating unfunded mandate of all.

The property tax cap in and of itself is not the answer. It's an important part of the answer, but the work to lift New York State's highest-in-the-nation property tax burden isn't supposed to end with just a limit on growth. It's supposed to end with lower property taxes across New York state. The truth is that lower property taxes can't and won't occur without mandate relief.

The tax cap without complementing mandate relief has tied the fiscal hands of local governments and school districts in detrimental ways.

Unfunded mandates hamper the ability of local school districts and local governments to provide services, thereby keeping pressure on the tax burden and preventing property tax reductions. To say nothing about how unfunded mandates hurt the business climate and make our private-sector businesses less competitive in the global economy.

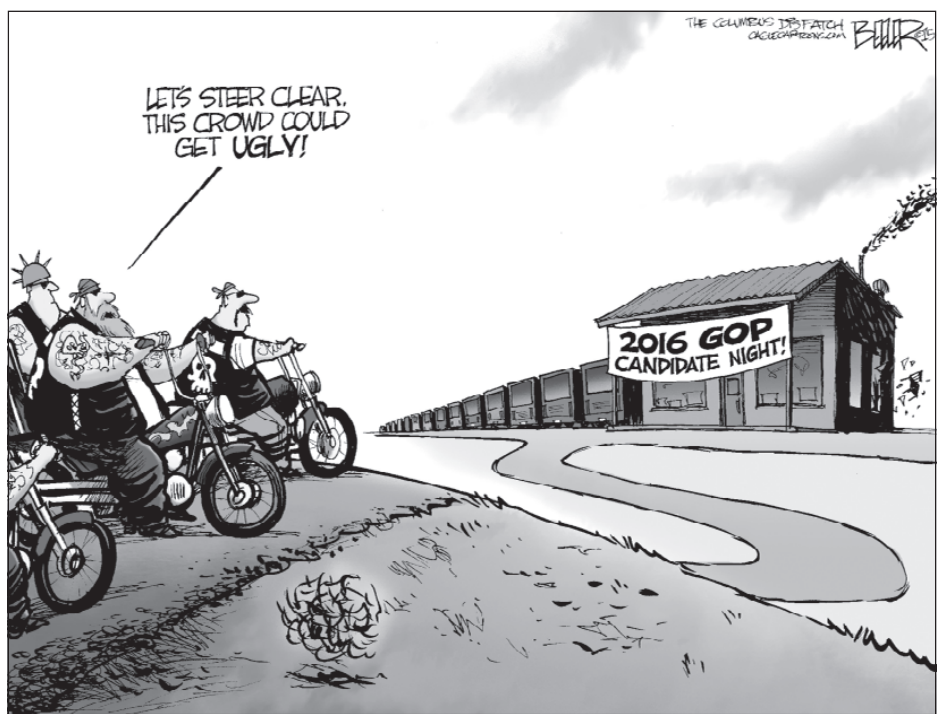
I'll say it again: the ultimate goal was supposed to be a future for New York State's local property taxpayers defined by property tax cuts. In other words, the goal was to lower property taxes, not just to restrict their annual growth.

Yes, the property tax cap must go on. Taxpayers are certainly better off with it than without it.

But the cap cannot be as effective as we intended it to be if we keep overlooking the need for mandate relief. The failure to dramatically begin undoing a decades-long state habit of passing the buck to localities has been a genuine shortcoming.

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.

EDITORIAL CARTOON



READER VIEW

Crestwood plan would forever alter way of life

"New York State's Routes 5 and 20 are steeped in history: They started as foot trails established by Native Americans thousands of years before the American Revolution. Today, New York's famous, historic east-west corridor offers a road trip with lots of high-adrenaline adventure: think hiking under waterfalls, biking, hang-gliding, hot air ballooning, and more. Foodies can enjoy farm-to-table dining options, a Cheese Trail and Sweet Treat Trail, and cooking classes at the New York Wine and Culinary Center. And, as if cheese and dessert trails weren't enough, there's a Finger Lakes Beer Trail - the region's new hot spot for brewers and distilleries that utilize local fruit and grain. Cruising through at the end of summer? Don't miss the Great New York State Fair."

We could not agree more. As owners of a multi-generational family

business that supplies so many of the farm-to-table restaurants, cafes, wineries, independent retailers and grocery stores with wholesome, transparently sourced local products, we rely heavily on preserving the Finger Lakes' clean agricultural economy that has drawn such praise. Interest, investment and advocacy for local and regional food systems have reached all-time highs. With New York State investing heavily in its agricultural economy, the USDA focusing on food hub formation in concert with groups such as the Wallace Center/Winrock International and RSF Social Finance, there is certain to be dynamic discourse and development in the ways that we procure and interact with our food supply for years to come. Texas-based Crestwood Midstream's proposal to store methane, propane and butane in the abandoned salt caverns along Seneca Lake would bring

a kind of industrialization and threat to all that we, and our father before us, have worked so hard to accomplish. Their proposal would not only impact Schuyler County, it would change the culture that all of us in the region work in concert to create. We simply cannot afford to jeopardize the rich, vibrant Finger Lakes Community that has taken generations to develop, and would take only one catastrophic accident to tear down. Barring any accident, the above-ground infrastructure required for such a facility is not compatible with the bucolic nature we have in the Finger Lakes. Further, there is science to suggest that there is communication between the caverns and the lake bottom - a drinking water resource for over 100,000 people. The lake is already exceeding EPA salinity guidelines for infants and individuals with sodium restricted diets. Permitting such

massive scale industrialization for a finite project such as Crestwood's outright disaffirms the very character that we have arduously and collectively developed, threatens our safety, and our drinking water, and is simply unacceptable. We join the hundreds of other businesses, along with the now 24 towns, counties, villages and cities throughout the region, in strongly and respectfully asking you to deny all permits for gas storage on Seneca Lake. We urge you to consider the requests coming from your constituents who have played a part in making the Finger Lakes the world-class tourist destination that it is today - not a Texas Gas Corporation.

This was submitted by the co-owners of Regional Access: Asa Redmond, Anna Redmond, Simeon Redmond, Dana Stafford, and Adrienne Stearns.

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