

# OPINION

COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA, R-BIG FLATS

## Local libraries are worth getting to know

By James Post  
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Let's add a few footnotes to last week's observance of National Library Week.

The American Library Association sponsors this annual observance to help recognize "the contributions of our nation's libraries and librarians and to promote library use and support."

Or, as Albert Einstein once said, "The only thing you absolutely need to know is the location of the library."

Fortunately, more and more New Yorkers do know the location of their local library, according to a statewide poll conducted earlier this year by the Siena College Research Institute. For example, nearly one-third of New York residents now identify the local library as their primary point of Internet access.

Other poll findings include that: 75% of respondents said they utilize the library at least monthly;

• 75% said their local library plays an important role in finding trustworthy information;

• Nearly 90% said their library plays an important role in creating educational opportunities; and

• Nearly 50% said they have pursued personal learning activities offered by their library.

Furthermore, past polling has revealed 90% of New Yorkers support increased state funding for local libraries.

On this last point, the 2018-19 state budget is a strong one for libraries.

Although Governor Andrew Cuomo proposed to cut state library funding this year, the Legislature rejected the governor's cuts and, instead, increased aid. The final budget provides \$96.6 million in state aid to libraries, including a \$34-million investment in capital and construction aid.

Jeremy Johannesen, Executive Director of the New York Library Association, said, "New York's local public libraries are core community educational resources for millions of New Yorkers. We are grateful that our partners in the legislature are seeking to address the past decade of inequitable funding."

In other words, this year's budget represents important progress. According to the State Education Department, every dollar invested in state library aid returns seven dollars in local library services.

Library construction aid, in particular, has become a fundamental source of funding to help libraries and library systems make renovations and upgrades to their facilities. A law I sponsored together with Assemblyman Phil Palmesano in 2015 (Chapter 480 of the Laws of 2015), for the first time, included "broadband services" as a category eligible for funding. Prior to the law's enactment, libraries were unable to access this funding specifically for broadband purposes. That was a serious shortcoming in the program, particularly for libraries in rural areas and smaller communities

where they are often the No. 1 point of Internet access. Libraries are the leading digital literacy educators, a role that will only become more prominent. Expanding library construction aid in this fashion has been an investment in economic growth and workforce development, overall educational quality, and it produces a substantial return by making an enduring, positive difference for many local communities.

I've long been a strong supporter of Southern Tier and Finger Lakes public libraries, and have tried to recognize their central importance to the civic, cultural and educational fabric of area communities. Two years ago, I was proud to receive the New York Library Association's "Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award."

That same year, I was also one of only seven state senators to receive the 2016 "Library Champion Award" from New Yorkers for Better Libraries, a prominent library advocacy organization.

Public libraries across New York State serve roughly 20 million patrons annually. Our region is extremely fortunate to have an outstanding network of public libraries providing access to books and so many other activities, learning materials, and civic and cultural opportunities. To borrow again from the wisdom of Albert Einstein, our regional libraries are worth getting to know.

Visit the website of the Southern Tier Library System,

OTHER VIEW | NANCY KAFFER, DETROIT FREE PRESS

## Data, privacy, Facebook, and the future that Goldilocks ate

In the future, we will change our bodies like we change our clothes. TV will be alternate reality, or at least three-dimensional. We'll have driverless cars, natch, but they'll run on rails up and down the side of giant buildings festooned with equally giant holographic images that speak to us by name. There may be a giant terrifying psychic flying bear, and possibly our bodies will be farmed by artificial intelligence in need of meat batteries.

If you can avoid the bear and the meat-battery thing, it's going to be pretty neat.

That, futurist Amy Webb of the Future Today Institute says, is the kind of future Americans like to think about: A fetishized future informed by science fiction.

The future as it unfolds around us, changing our lives daily? The growing presence of artificial intelligence that chooses what online ads to show us, who gets over the first hurdle to a bank loan, which applications for unemployment benefits are found fraudulent? Or the transformative social network and subsequent user privacy breaches that landed Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg before the U.S. Congress?

"None of us have been paying attention," said Webb, in town as the inaugural speaker for Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Future of Information speaker series. "When technology makes your life a little bit better, it's easier to ignore the ways in which technology might be worrisome a little later on ...

So technology companies, which are profit-driven, are building products and services based on our data, and we've all collectively looked the other direction."

Lawmakers' questions for Zuckerberg have been painful, at times, focusing on fiddly minutiae and ignoring the systemic questions that underlie not just the entire social-media data-collection business model, but the artificial intelligence that underpins it all.

For his part, Zuckerberg is really, really sorry about all of it, but seems to regard the most serious questions about Facebook's lack of diligence as settled.

And none of it is likely to change much of anything.

The expertise needed to craft really good policy that would lead to beneficial reform — not the false choice of crushing regulation or a free-market free-for-all — is difficult to come by, Webb said.

For decades, the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment provided lawmakers with analyses of technology, with the goal of informing both good policy and effective use of government resources. It was de-funded in 1995 by a then-Republican U.S. Congress.

So in Maryland, at least — the first state in the nation to adopt a social media advertising disclosure policy — that expertise comes from Facebook itself.

"Will Castleberry, Facebook's vice president for state policy, said the company helped draft the Maryland legislation and 'looks forward to implementing' it," the Baltimore Sun reported recently. "We believe this bill will be

a national model for the other 49 states to follow," he said in a statement."

That's fine, probably, right?

What's perplexing to me is our persistent failure to engage substantively with these questions, brewing for more than a decade as companies like Facebook, Twitter and Google rose from scrappy, disruptive underdogs to media titans.

But this transformation should shock no one.

"We have lots of stories throughout history in which creators create things and then we're shocked when the things we created don't behave in ways that we intend. That's the story of technology," Webb says.

America's comparative newness as a nation (other countries, she says, engage far more actively with these questions) may be one reason we're so focused on the present, Webb says.

And the political, social and economic divides that are so pronounced at this moment in history get in the way of collective action to address the threats to our individual privacy.

The current clamor for a reckoning, Webb says, is likely temporary.

Folks are fussed about Facebook and data breaches now. A few months ago, it was Twitter,

and the ease with which hate groups have exploited the platform to target abuse toward racial, religious and ethnic minorities. In a few months, it'll be Twitter in the news again, or Amazon.

And yet, says Webb, "I can promise you this problem is going to get worse, not better, without serious change."

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Spend my tax dollars accordingly

To The Editor:

At the Town of Tyrone meeting on Tuesday, April 10, Councilman Troy Eyer put forth a resolution for the Town to maintain two private roads (Wagner and Danilowicz). Mr. Eyer then made a motion to pass this resolution with Ed Perry seconding the motion.

A roll call vote was taken with Troy Eyer, Ed Perry and Joe Sevier voting yes on this motion and Tom Allen and Don Desrochers not voting because they

knew that this action was in violation of Article 8, Section 1, of the New York Constitution, which does not allow for the use of municipal funds in this manner.

I put forth four questions:

1) Why are the Town of Tyrone taxpayers being asked to maintain private roads with their tax dollars?

2) Since the Town has a number of private roads, why does this resolution only cover these two roads? Why not the rest? Why leave out some?

3) Since this is against the law, does this not open

up the possibility of the Council being sued for being in violation of the NYS Constitution?

4) If the Council is sued, who will pay for this lawsuit? The taxpayers?

I don't know about others but I expect my Town Councilmen to abide by the law and to spend my taxpayer dollars accordingly! Clearly, if you purchased property on a private road, you did so with the understanding that since it was private, you had the responsibility to maintain it.

Abiding by the law means maintaining the many public

roads in the Town of Tyrone that are in need of repair rather than maintaining private roads.

Kay M. Thomas  
Dundee

## Pleased with Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

To the Editor,  
I recall a spate of negative editorial letters back in December critical of Tom Reed for supporting the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Remember, at the time, NYS Democratic leaders called this legislation

"devastating" for New York. Local Democrats swallowed this line, including hook and sinker, also claiming it would actually result in a tax increase for middle class New Yorkers.

In fact, local firms have come out in favor of the new law because it benefits employees as well as the company bottom line, and we in the middle class have more money in our pockets.

The federal tax withholding from my New York pension went down more than \$140 per month solely due to the change in federal withholding rates.

This adds up to more than the \$1,600 in annual tax relief Tom Reed estimated middle class New Yorkers would get.

The wild inaccuracy of the Democratic fearmongering measured against the veracity of Reed's claims shows the difference we experience locally between petty party politics and statesmanship.

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