

OPINION

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

Taxpayer friendly still a top priority

With the start of a new legislative session and the Democratic takeover of the State Senate at the beginning of 2019, one thing it means is that I will no longer be serving as the Chair of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee.

This assignment has been a highlight of my legislative service, one that I have truly valued since 2015, most of all because the past several years are widely regarded as one of New York State's most productive eras in environmental conservation. A fully funded Environmental Protection Fund. The establishment of the Water Quality Infrastructure Improvement Act and the largest investment we have ever made in water quality. Combatting invasive species and, this year, harmful algal blooms. Habitat preservation.

The list of achievements goes on and on, however I will just say that it has been a privilege to play a part in helping advance a better and stronger short- and long-term future for environmental conservation and protection regionally and statewide.

In a legislative context, my official role changes beginning in the New Year. My commitment and priorities do not.

For example, in my capacity as the Environmental Conservation Committee chair, the Senate has consistently approved, with strong bipartisan support, legislation I

sponsor to enact the "Paint Stewardship Program" and the "Solar Panel Collection Act." Each of these measures have failed to make it through the state Assembly, however I will reintroduce them again next year and continue to fight for their enactment. They remain incredibly important.

The "Solar Panel Collection Act" would establish, working together with the solar panel manufacturing industry, a solar panel recycling and disposal program to facilitate the collection and recycling of out-of-service solar panels. Manufacturers would finance the program.

As New York State continues to move aggressively forward on developing and utilizing renewable energy -- and we absolutely should -- the bases need to be covered. This includes staying ahead of the potential need to collect and properly dispose of or recycle out-of-service solar panels.

This legislation offers a commonsense, proactive, economically, and environmentally sound approach to managing photovoltaic waste and keeping it out of landfills.

Likewise, the establishment of an industry-sponsored "Paint Stewardship Program" would reduce a costly burden on local governments and local taxpayers currently responsible for collecting and disposing of most post-consumer, unused paint. The New York State Association of Counties, among other supporters, states that the legislation would create local

jobs, provide fiscal relief to local property taxpayers, and encourage the environmentally sound recycling and disposal of unused paint in New York State.

The national Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) estimates that nearly 4 million gallons of paint go unused each year in New York State -- with the costs of collecting and managing the paint's disposal mostly falling on local governments to the tune of \$25 million annually. Paint stewardship laws have been enacted in eight states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Minnesota, Oregon, Rhode Island and Vermont) and Washington D.C.

According to the PSI, these laws have already resulted in more than \$69 million in taxpayer savings, created over 200 jobs, and led to the recycling of over 17 million gallons of high quality paint.

Each of the above initiatives is an example of how government and industry can work together to implement effective environmental policies and programs.

Seeking common ground and cooperation, rather than government cramming unreasonable demands down the throat of industry, can help give New York State a more business friendly environment and actually result in better, more workable laws.

Working together will go a long ways on reaching an end-result on other important issues that would benefit our state fiscally, economically, and environmentally.

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tell Reed to support bill

To the Editor,
Many solutions are needed to deal with climate change. People have had a hand in creating it and people have already figured out many ways to fix the problem.

But actions are being impeded by politics and feelings of helplessness. A big part of the solution is laid out in the recently-introduced Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (H.R. 7173).

This bill already has the bipartisan support of seven cosponsors. Please ask Congressman Reed to add his name. In just 12 years, this policy would reportedly reduce U.S. carbon emissions to 60% of 1990 levels while adding 2 million jobs to our economy.

According to climate experts and economists, this bill would protect our health. It is revenue neutral and would not grow government. All fees collected from fossil-fuel production, minus administrative costs, would be distributed monthly to households to spend as they wish.

The Problem Solvers Caucus, a bipartisan group Congressman

Reed chairs, looks to solve serious problems. Please tell him that the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act is an opportunity for the Caucus to deal with the serious problem of climate change at the pace and scale needed.

Karen Biesanz, Corning

Taking a break

To the Editor,
For the sake of my mental health, I am taking an extended break from the United States.

It is toxic here. George Jean Nathan said "Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote." As a result we have a toxic administration which is poisoning every level of government.

We have party over people. We have gerrymandering, voter suppression and ballot tampering. We have candidates who use dirty, underhanded, possibly illegal tricks to stay in power.

We have candidates - even some seemingly decent ones - who are influenced by corporations and industries. Generous campaign donations buy special consideration.

How we treat each

other is toxic - discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism, (anti any religion but your own) homophobia, intolerance.

Anyone who looks or thinks differently is seen as inferior, immoral, evil and/or dangerous. We have obscene wealth inequality brought about by exploitation of both natural and human resources. And greed.

The environment is toxic - literally. Even those who acknowledge that humans have trashed the planet and are now subject to climate disruption are too busy buying the latest device or gadget from Amazon to do anything about it.

Even when handed a checklist of easy ways to reduce their environmental impact, all but a small handful are too apathetic to bother: we're OK, let the others take care of themselves.

I'm tired of banging my head against a wall of inertia. I plan to visit a score of countries over the next six months, volunteering here and there, while recharging my batteries. When I get back - watch out wall.

Elizabeth Whitehouse, Corning

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