

OPINION

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

Tablets for inmates sparks controversy, highlights concern

Under questioning at a recent legislative budget hearing, New York's corrections commissioner revealed a plan to provide each of the state's roughly 51,000 inmates with a free computer tablet.

The announcement generated global headlines, including this one in the International Business Times, "Every prisoner in New York is about get a tablet computer." It also sparked controversy.

At no cost to state taxpayers, a Florida-based firm, JPay Inc., will donate the tablets, which will be pre-loaded with educational material. Inmates will be able to purchase music, e-books, and videos from JPay, as well as receive and send e-mail. Internet access will not be permitted. According to Department

of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) officials, the tablets will also facilitate the filing of inmate grievances.

DOCCS Commissioner Anthony Annucci characterized the move as "groundbreaking." Prison officials believe tablets can help prepare inmates for eventual life outside the prison walls. Nevertheless, legitimate concerns did not receive full, public scrutiny before the decision was made. DOCCS officials clearly see the tablets as important to inmate rehabilitation. It keeps them in touch with modern technology, proponents argue, and, further, may even help ease tensions within prisons.

There's another side of the coin however. Currently, cell phones, cameras, or devices with

Internet access are prohibited in state prisons. Why an exception for tablets? Why is the state confident that tech-savvy inmates will not be able to break through firewalls or other security measures? What prevents tablets from being broken or altered in some way in order to be weaponized?

New York is not the first state to take this step. In other states, victims' rights groups have raised safety concerns. The National Organization for Victim Assistance, for example, once raised the potential for "unrestricted or unsupervised outreach where inmates can revictimize or continue to intimidate victims." A spokesman for the National Reentry Resource Center once noted that "prisons have trouble containing all sorts of things.

You're dealing with folks who probably want to break some rules."

The overriding point is that this decision was not, by any means, given the public airing it deserved. The decision was made at the top reaches of the bureaucracy, and that was that.

Regrettably, we're learning about it at a time of rising concern about violence within our correctional facilities. News reports last week revealed a series of inmate fights involving makeshift weapons that led to temporary lock downs at the Elmira Correctional Facility a few weeks ago.

Also in recent days, the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association, Inc. (NYSCOPBA) has renewed

its call for stepped-up efforts to cut down the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and other dangerous contraband into New York's prisons. NYSCOPBA points to 2017 as potentially "the most violent year inside state prisons since 2007" with inmate-on-staff assaults, inmate-on-inmate assaults, and dangerous contraband on the rise.

NYSCOPBA President Michael Powers said, "These alarming statistics reinforce NYSCOPBA's resolve to fight on behalf of our members until measures are enacted that will create a safer environment for inmates and correctional staff alike."

Correction officers have also expressed support for legislation (S7582) I currently co-sponsor to implement an aggressive,

multi-faceted "Contraband Screening Plan." This plan would include but not be limited to the random search of visitors' vehicles, the use of a controlled K-9 search at every state prison entrance, electronic imaging scanning, and enhanced staff training on up-to-date contraband screening procedures. We must take every step to protect correction officers, prison staff, inmates, and overall safety and security.

It's all well and good to focus on "groundbreaking" efforts focused on the well-being of inmates. But New York State has to keep its priorities straight.

Fundamental prison safety and security - for correction officers, prison staff, and inmates - must always be the highest responsibility.

COMMENTARY | JOSEPH J. HAURYSKI, CHAIRMAN, STEUBEN COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Please fill out BAAT internet service survey

With Gov. Andrew Cuomo's announcement last week of a new round of broadband funding, Steuben County continues to look for opportunities to improve internet connections for all our residents, even those living in outlying areas.

We regularly hear frustrations from our residents about the lack of access to internet service, especially outside our cities and villages.

However, since we launched our Broadband

Aggregation & Adoption (BAAT) Campaign with Yates County in October, we've only received 18 percent of the survey responses we need.

This survey seeks to gain data to improve internet access for Steuben residents in the near future, especially since New York State relies on outdated and incorrect coverage maps when determining which areas have access to high-speed internet. This faulty data puts our county and region at a disadvantage when

seeking state funding to expand coverage.

Filling out the BAAT survey, available at www.steubencony.org/broadband is residents' opportunity to provide information that may improve the broadband services available to you, test your current Internet speeds, and report on your interest in having more service provider options available.

If we can show enough of a need for bringing additional providers into the

area, it may increase carriers' interest in expanding services.

I urge residents to be complete the survey online, www.steubencony.org/broadband so they can run the speed test and record the speeds they actually experience at home.

However, we know many of our residents don't have adequate internet access at home and the survey is available in printed form, too.

This is a county-wide effort!

Our schools recognize the importance of decent internet services to homes across the county and have agreed to send paper surveys home with students for each household to fill out and return to the school. Parents should start looking for the surveys, if they haven't received them already.

The Southern Tier Library System (STLS) also will make paper surveys available at area libraries. Completed paper surveys can be dropped off at libraries.

Paper versions of the survey can be requested, mailed or delivered to Steuben County Office Building, Attn: Mitch Alger, Deputy County Manager, 3 E. Pulteney Square, Bath, NY 14810.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey!

The results will go a long way in helping your friends and neighbors without adequate broadband service. Both the online and paper versions of the survey are available at www.steubencony.org/broadband.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I remain a strong supporter of the FBI

To the Editor, I have just unglued myself from the Sunday paper. I read that in a recent poll the F.B.I. has hit a new low with the general public.

The F.B.I., I assume, has its own internal issues, but this plunge in public ratings is not only damaging in its own right. It helps to undercut the belief in a strong central government.

I have worked for the federal government - first on President Reagan's Grace Committee - second as a Congressman, and third as an enlisted man in WWII.

I was always proud to be part of a system that kept our country together.

But now I glance at the F.B.I. ratings at an all-time low of 38%. Anyone working for the government these days in a sensitive area, and who sticks his head up, is fair political game.

That's crazy! When I served in Congress I was once asked to visit Iraq. The men and women in uniform were outstanding. They always seemed to ask two questions - When can we come home and do you still believe in us?

This almost made me weep. Here were young men and women voluntarily risking their lives working at less than minimum wage sharing their doubts about the support back home.

Whether it is the military or the F.B.I., I am one of their strongest boosters.

They all are heroes. They stand silently on the frontline with those who are the bravest of the brave and in a phrase Help to Hinder the Hinderers of our precious democracy. Amory Houghton, Jr. Former U.S. Congressman

Trump distracting us with lie and threats

To the Editor,

They say little things mean a lot. While Trump is distracting us with his attacks on the FBI and the separation of government agencies he has been doing little things that are chipping away things that affect us every day.

Things like our park lands, issue with clean coal. In football we have misdirection plays, in poker we have the bluff, in hunting we have camouflage, and in magic we

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Sun. 2/11 3:15, 6:15
Mon. 2/12
Tues. 2/13 *Special Event
Wed. & Thurs. 6:15

LADY BIRD OSCAR NOMINEE
(Saoirse Ronan, Laurie Metcalf, Tracy Letts) Rated R (1HR 34Min)
Fri. 2/9 6:30, 9:00
Sat. 2/10 3:30, 6:30
Sun. 2/11 3:30
Tues. 2/13 *Special Event
Wed. 2/14 3:30

DARKEST HOUR OSCAR NOMINEE
(Gary Oldman, Lily James, Keeley Hazell) Rated PG-13 (1HR 55Min)
Fri. 2/9 8:45
Sat. 2/10 6:30
Sun. 2/11 3:30
Mon. 2/12 6:30
Tues. 2/13 *Special Event
Thurs. 2/15 3:30

BLACK PANTHER
(Chadwick Boseman, Michael E. Jordan, Lupita Nyong'o) Rated PG-13 (1HR 105Min)
Thurs. 2/15 7:00

ACTS OF VIOLENCE 1 DAY ONLY
(Bruce Willis, Cole Hauser, Shaan Ashmore) Rated R (1HR 18Min)
Thurs. 2/15 3:30

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The 15:17 to Paris (PG13)
[12:10, 2:25] 4:40, 7:00, 9:15
12 Strong (R) - 4:00, 6:45, 9:30
Paddington 2 (PG) - [1:30]
Hostiles (R) - 6:50, 9:40
Disney's COCO (PG) - [1:45] 4:15
Maze Runner: The Death Cure (PG13)
[1:00] 4:00, 6:50, 9:35
Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle (PG13)
[1:30] 4:10, 6:55, 9:30
The Commuter (PG13)
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