

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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SHAWN VARGO | FROM THE EDITOR

Giving some well-deserved shout-outs

It has been quite a busy couple of weeks here at The Leader - and that's a good thing.

Because of this, I would like to take some time to deliver a few shout-outs.

Congressman Tom Reed

Whether you like him - or don't like him - you have to give our representative from the 23rd Congressional district his due.

While some Republican leaders are choosing to eliminate town hall meetings from their schedules - Reed has not only not continued to hold his - he has even ventured into pretty hostile territory, recently.

My first shout out goes to Reed for making a stop in Ithaca - one of four town halls he held March 11.

Amo Houghton fans

I have taken a lot of heat for printing a letter to the editor that wasn't kind to Amo Houghton (or Congressman John Lewis).

I will give a shout out to those that quickly came to Amo's defense.

I will not, however, offer an apology for running a letter to the editor that clearly shows how one person sees the world. He responded to a previous letter from Amo and is entitled to his opinion - whether everyone, or no one agrees with it.

State champs

Corning became Title Town this winter sports season.

A huge shout out goes to runners Jessica Lawson and Kevin Moshier for capturing state titles in the 1,500 and 1,600 meters at



SHAWN VARGO

the indoor track and field state championships.

Corning's Derik Lisi, along with Elmira's Sam McDonald added a state crown for Section IV at the state bowling tournament.

Another Hawks team that deserves a shout-out is the boys basketball team - which won a sectional title, before being ousted from the state quarterfinals by a very big and tough Mount Vernon squad.

It was the first boys sectional title in two decades.

Corning's Kevin Kline also posted a sectional title and earned a trip to states in wrestling.

Well done, all.

James Post

Finally, a well-deserved shout out to our newest member of the newsroom.

James Post not only did a fantastic job covering the Michael Beard and Thomas Clayton murder trials for The Leader, he agreed to return as a full-time employee as The Leader's assistant editor.

I'd end this column with a shout out to the groundhog for being pretty darn accurate with his call for six more weeks of winter - but I'm kind of ticked at him for it. Oh well.

- Shawn Vargo is the executive editor and can be emailed at svargo@the-leader.com.

TOM O'MARA | 58TH DISTRICT

The 'BFair2DirectCare' campaign gains momentum

New York State legislators and Governor Andrew Cuomo are in the home-stretch of enacting a new state budget by April 1.

The 2017-2018 state budget will total approximately \$153 billion. It will address important challenges and issues from agriculture to transportation.

The new budget is going to restore vital state support for numerous farm-related programs and services. It will provide critical funding for conservation, education, health care, heroin and opioid addiction treatment and recovery, job creation, libraries, roads and bridges, and water quality.

All of the challenges and crises being addressed by this budget are worthy in their own rights. Nevertheless, there may not be a priority more important than last week's Senate-Assembly agreement to include \$45 million to compensate direct service professionals (DSPs) for their work supporting people with disabilities.

The state's budget adoption process is under way in earnest. Last week both houses of the Legislature adopted our respective versions of what we'd like to see included in the final, 2017-2018 state budget. This week we're convening public, joint budget conference committees to begin ironing out differences before entering into



TOM O'MARA

final budget negotiations with the governor. By the way, you can view these conference committees live this week on my Senate website: <http://www.omara.nysenate.gov>.

Therefore, it's extremely important that the Senate and Assembly have already agreed on direct care funding. We want to address the lack of funding Governor Cuomo proposes to help appropriately adjust salaries at not-for-profits that employ workers who provide state services for individuals with autism, serious brain injury, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other developmental disabilities.

In my view, this is an absolute priority. We cannot afford to risk the health and well-being of people with disabilities because New York State fails to invest in a stable, long-term workforce of trained and skilled direct care professionals.

Currently, many direct service professionals (DSPs) earn an average of \$10-\$13 per hour - just above the state's minimum wage. Last year, the state implemented minimum wage increases

that did not provide funding to account for the "compression factor" - the need to increase the salaries for more experienced DSPs and supervisors in order to maintain the current salary gap with minimum wage workers. Without this new funding provided to the DSP employers providing services on behalf of the state, the salary gap will compound the existing high turnover rate among those providing these critical services, and lead to significantly increased vacancies as qualified individuals seek less strenuous minimum wage work.

In early January, together with my area colleagues Assemblymen Phil Palmesano and Chris Friend, I joined representatives from the Arcs of Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties, DSPs and parents of people with disabilities for a rally at the Arnot Mall in support of the "BFair2DirectCare" campaign.

Assemblyman Palmesano said, "Direct support professionals are the heart and soul of these organizations. The work you do is truly God's work. You need to light the governor's switchboard like a Christmas tree. We are talking about the most vulnerable members of society."

Arc of Steuben Executive Director Bernie Burns added, "Our system faces a work-force crisis, the likes of which we've never seen. The system

is in chaos, perhaps even on the verge of collapsing. When it fails, who will take care of the people developmental disabilities?"

Arc of Schuyler Executive Director Jeannette Frank spoke directly to the governor when she stated, "Governor Cuomo, we know that you know that New York needs a trained and skilled workforce to provide the highly individualized help and support people with disabilities need to stay healthy and have a meaningful life. But nonprofits that hire and train staff to support people with disabilities cannot keep up with New York's minimum wage increases without a revenue adjustment from the state."

In addition, Arc of Chemung Executive Director Mike Doherty straightforwardly said, "We need to make sure we get the governor's attention... We need to continue to fight."

The fight gained positive momentum with the Senate and Assembly agreement. In the coming days, we'll enter into final negotiations with Governor Cuomo, who has not yet supported this action.

So I'll repeat now what I said back in January: Write letters to Governor Cuomo. Send emails. Make phone calls.

Call: 518-474-8390.
 Email: gov.cuomo@chamber.state.ny.us.
 Write to: The Honorable Andrew H. Cuomo, NYS State Capitol Building, Albany, 12224.

ANOTHER VIEW

Trump's plans for PBS ...



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you for supporting library

We are lucky to have the following local legislators that know the value of the library and library systems.

I want to recognize and thank them for their support. I want to thank Senator Tom O'Mara, who was the recipient of the 2016 Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award bestowed by the New York Library Association and for sponsoring NYLA Advocacy Day in Albany on March 1, 2017.

I also want to thank Assemblyman Phil Palmesano and Assemblyman Christopher Friend for their continuing support of libraries in our state.

While NYS Education Law requires Library Aid for 2017-2018 to be \$102.6M, and despite Governor Cuomo's assertion that Education funding will increase at least 4%, his Executive Budget slashes State Library Aid by 4%. Libraries are educational institutions, so increases in state funding for education should include a similar increase for libraries.

The Southeast Steuben County Library in Corning, NY, like each of the 48 libraries in the Southern Tier Library System, plays an integral role in providing educational opportunities for people from all walks of life.

Our Executive Director, Board of Trustees, and staff are dedicated to serve all the residents in our area.

I am sure you are aware that Steuben County is the second largest county in New York State and one of the most economically disadvantaged.

Last year, our library served more than 211,000 visitors and circulated more than 234,000 items.

More than 37,000 people attended library programs and nearly 3,000 took advantage of our digital literacy services including one-on-one sessions and classes.

We provided vital broadband access for more than 26,000 users on our public PCs and thousands more via Wi-Fi.

Governor Cuomo, I ask that you reconsider the budget cuts for public libraries.

If you do, you will make a difference in the lives of all citizens within our community by ensuring them a place to acquire a love for reading, learn something new, grow, do job searches and get help with resumes, participate in job fairs, and rediscover a passion for lifelong learning.

This is what libraries do - inspire and change lives. I know because I have seen it firsthand and will never forget it.

We are counting on you to do the right thing. Respectfully,

Mary Ann Thomas,
 President Southeast Steuben County Library

Taxpayers have right to know about Trump

Can we trust that Donald Trump is making decisions that benefit us, the American taxpayers, and not his own business interests or a foreign government? And can we trust that Tom Reed is willing to stand up to his party and the president to put our needs first? The answer, sadly, is no.

The American people have a right to know about Donald Trump's ties to Russia, especially in light of the evolving and extremely troubling allegations of pre-election contacts between the Trump campaign and Russia's government.

We already know that Russia interfered in our election process. What other ties exist that we don't know about?

But Tom Reed is not willing to stand up for our right to know.

On Monday, February 27, Representative Bill Pascrell put forth a resolution that would have directed the House to request 10 years of Trump's tax returns be released to the House Ways and Means Committee, of which Congressman Reed is a member.

The resolution would have allowed the Committee to review the

returns in a closed session, and vote on whether to send the information to the full House. Tom Reed voted against this measure. Reed justified his no vote by saying that forcing Donald Trump to release his tax returns would set a dangerous precedent for other citizens.

But that is simply not true. Since 1924, federal tax law has decreed that the chairman of the House Ways and Means committee, the Senate Finance Committee, or the Joint Committee on Taxation can request tax returns from Treasury to be considered in a closed meeting. So the precedent already exists, and there have been no negative repercussions for private citizens.

And Donald Trump is not a private citizen. He is the President of the United States, and he works for the American citizens. As does Tom Reed. But how can we know who they are working for without full and transparent disclosure of all of Donald Trump's business ties and obligations?

I urge all residents of the 23rd Congressional district to call Tom Reed's Corning office at 607-654-7566 and demand that Tom Reed hold Donald Trump accountable to us, the citizens he works for.

Bernadette Wesolowski
 Painted Post