

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Property taxes need to be top priority

To the Editor,
Had a very interesting knock on the door last night. It was Nick Weinstein. He is running for Mayor of Corning. He is running against Bill Boland.

I had a very good discussion with Mr. Weinstein. He shares my concern about property taxes and how they are very much out of control. I told him that we are blessed to have a house in Arizona and that my property taxes there are 1/20 th what the property taxes are here we will probably have to sell our house in the city because of the property taxes.

Mr. Weinstein said that property taxes are a major concern of his. I have talked to Bill Boland about this on numerous occasions. His attitude is that there is not a lot that can be done about it.

I have a suggestion for both candidates. I think the new Mayor set a goal of reducing property taxes by 50% in 10 years. The new mayor should work with the town and county officials and the school district to achieve that goal.

I will not accept that it is impossible. It may involve working with not only local officials, but the state to come up with a plan to actually reduce property taxes. Maybe even visiting Marcoupa county Az to see how they provide necessary services at such a

low tax rate.

Without setting this goal, things will just go on as usual. We will continue to lose population and it will get to the point where no one can afford to live here anymore.

I love Corning, Steuben county and the finger lakes region of New York. I have lived here all my life. I do not want to leave what I consider to be one of the most beautiful parts of the country, but if I can't afford to live here, I will have no choice.

Rick Davis
Corning

Congress needs to think like regular Americans

To the Editor,
I have worked for 50 years to get to retirement.

I have paid all that time for the benefits promised to me and people like me. Now is not the time to stab us in the back.

Congress needs to find a better way forward than these recently proposed bills.

If Congressmen had to survive on the Healthcare afforded regular Americans, you can bet that things would look a lot different.

Harold McClain
Painted Post

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

Veterans and farming can make good partners

Two important state grant programs are moving forward, one in particular to benefit New York veterans who are farmers.

We show our appreciation throughout the year for the nation's active military men and women – and our veterans – through a variety of military appreciation observances and events. These occasions are important and have been a fundamental thread in the fabric of American life. They provide opportunities to thank our active military, our veterans and, importantly, those who continue to devote their lives to the care and recognition of those who served.

Approximately 88,000 New Yorkers have served or continue to serve in Afghanistan or Iraq, for example.

We also take legislative actions.

In 2013, New York created the “Hire-A-Vet” tax credit making state businesses eligible after employing a post-9/11 veteran for one year.

Hire-A-Vet was an

important achievement, one I was proud to help sponsor. We believed it would help make a difference for returning veterans coming home to a nation and a state where it is tough to find a job.

We also established “Jobs for Heroes.” One in seven veterans is self-employed or a small business owner. New York has the fourth-highest number of veteran-owned businesses among all states. The Jobs for Heroes initiative, which I also co-sponsored and strongly supported in the Senate for several years before it became law, established a valuable set-aside program to ensure that service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses are properly considered for state service contracts. Similar programs exist in more than 40 other states.

The 2016-17 state budget, at the Senate's request as part of our ongoing “Grown in NY” strategy, also included support for an innovative proposal by Cornell University's Small Farms Program (<http://small-farms.cornell.edu/>) to help establish up to five veteran-owned small farms through a first-in-the-nation pilot program. Returning veterans or veterans seeking a career change are being encouraged to try agriculture, utilizing benefits earned

under the GI Bill to gain training and expertise to begin their own farms. In turn, these sites will be available to train additional veteran-farmers in future years.

“There are many roads toward a career in farming. Providing military veterans an opportunity to use their GI Bill benefits to become farmers is a great way to support our vets returning to New York,” said Anu Rangarajan, director of the Cornell Small Farms Program, which works in close partnership with the national Farmer Veteran Coalition (<http://www.farmvetco.org/>), a California-based organization that recently opened a New York State chapter.

Last year's budget also established a Veterans Farmer Grant Fund that will soon be offering grants of up to \$50,000 to veterans who are already farmers to assist with equipment purchases, building repairs, and other initiatives to improve production. This new fund is modeled after another Senate-initiated program, the New Farmers Grant Fund, established in 2014 to help young people pursue agricultural careers. The New Farmers Grant Fund has already invested more than \$2.4 million in the state's next generation of farmers.

Recently the Veterans Farmer Grant Fund received the final

go-ahead by Empire State Development. Eligible veterans have until January 26, 2018 to submit applications for grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$50,000. More information is available by email: nyveteransfarmfund@esd.ny.gov.

Finally, the state has also announced that the process is underway for County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, on behalf of eligible farmers, to apply for state grants through the CAFO Waste Storage and Transfer System Program. A total of \$50 million will help Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation-permitted farms offset the cost of water quality protection projects, like manure storage construction, site preparation, and various best-management practices. New York is home to more than 500 CAFO farms, mostly dairy farms with 300 or more cows, but also livestock operations.

The state Department of Agriculture and Market has the application and additional information on its website: <https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/RFPS.html>.

New York State's farmers already play a central role in conservation, land stewardship, and water quality protection. Ongoing state investments will strengthen the ability of our dairy and livestock farmers to protect critical natural resources.

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