

# OPINION

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### GUEST VIEW

## A life ring for upstate



MIKE MORRONGIELLO

Upstate is drowning, swamped by high taxes, crippling regulations and Albany mandates. We need a life ring to keep us afloat. The Albany government, dominated by downstate, has never helped us. Upstate needs to act, and soon we will have an opportunity to do so.

Cuomo is all show and no substance; he has done little to revive upstate. The much ballyhooed Upstate Revitalization Initiative Grant (URI) is puny. Regional Economic Development Council co-chair Harvey Stenger inadvertently said so: "...spread across the 600,000 residents of the Southern Tier, everybody would probably get a cup of coffee a day after taxes." This clearly won't revive our economy.

According to the US Census Bureau, Florida has passed New York in population, and is widening the gap. Since 2010, more people have left New York than any other state.

On Election Day 2017, New Yorkers will be asked, "Shall there be a convention to revise the Constitution and amend the same?" This question is asked of us every 20 years. Every upstater should vote "yes."

The process works like this. If a majority of New Yorkers vote yes, a convention is called. Then each of the 63 State Senate districts must select three delegates to the convention, as well as 15 statewide "at-large" delegates. The delegates gather in Albany to consider changes to the state constitution. Any changes must be approved by more than 50 percent of the delegates, then go back to the people for approval.

This is a once-in-a-generation chance to return control of upstate to upstaters. It isn't a partisan

issue. The children of both Republicans and Democrats leave New York for jobs elsewhere. Let's vote "yes" and send delegates to the convention who will put teeth in Article IX, the Home Rule provision, which gives local governments the power to make local laws but not state laws (mandates.)

State mandates are state laws imposed upon us by Albany, such as those governing how welfare and Medicaid are administered. Steuben County Executive Jack Wheeler recently said, "More than 93 percent of the tax levy pays for programs the state imposes on us, and makes us pay for... and we have no choice." Mandates are really taxes; they drive up the cost of local government by boosting your already high property taxes.

Voting "yes" can give you and your neighbors more control over your government by moving it closer to the people. Strengthening Home Rule through a constitutional convention can do that.

It's not too early to begin discussing this with our town boards, churches, service clubs, county legislators, neighbors, friends and the leaders of both political parties. It takes time to build consensus and coalitions. Let's begin to pave the way to self-government for upstate.

—Mike Morrongiello is a member of the Corning Town Republican Committee.

### POLITICS

## Next up? Details from the governor



TOM O'MARA

On Wednesday, when Governor Cuomo delivers his sixth State of the State message to the Legislature and, on the same day, unveils his proposed 2016-2017 New York state budget, we'll quickly get an even better read on the key battlegrounds for the coming year.

I wrote not long ago that one thing we can't risk in 2016 are actions that immediately jeopardize any economic footholds we've made over the past several years, or that we hope to make in the near future.

The glass still needs filling in 2016. The Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions emerged as winners in the Upstate Revitalization Initiative late last year and it's a cause for optimism moving into this New Year. But now the hard work continues, at every level of government, to keep building on these new foundations to create jobs and other economic opportunities. At the state level, in my view, that means staying focused on strengthening the overall business climate through ongoing, meaningful tax relief, regulatory reform, lower energy costs and other initiatives. That work is far from finished.

On Wednesday, will Governor Cuomo remain primarily focused on building more sustainable

local economies and a stronger, statewide business climate? Remember that the governor began his tenure in 2011 emphasizing "jobs, jobs, jobs" as the top priority for all New Yorkers, and I and many others couldn't have agreed more. Many of us also agreed when he continually emphasized that New York state could not survive as the "tax capital of the nation."

In other words, more jobs and lower taxes (and fewer regulations), across the board, began emerging as the fundamental formula for progress.

Over the past week, the governor has been rolling out some of his priorities for 2016. First out of the box was the following announcement, "Governor Cuomo unveiled the first signature proposal of his 2016 agenda - his push to restore economic justice by making New York the first state in the nation to enact a \$15 minimum wage for all workers."

If that's the governor's No. 1 priority in 2016, it's concerning. As I've stressed repeatedly, we

cannot take lightly in the upcoming debate over raising the minimum wage the risk of job losses and other financial burdens, burdens that will particularly impact small businesses and farms and schools in places like the Southern Tier. I'll be joining a number of area small business owners, restaurant owners, and other business leaders on Thursday, at Tags Restaurant in Big Flats, to help give voice to many of these local concerns.

What about mandate relief, which the New York State Association of Counties recently pinpointed as one of its top priorities in 2016? Five years ago, the governor promised that his number one goal, the local property tax cap, would be accompanied by an aggressive effort to get local governments and school districts out from under the burden of unfunded state mandates. That hasn't happened to nearly the extent that it needs to. We haven't done enough to transform the state-local partnership through meaningful mandate relief, which is the only real path to reducing the burden on local property taxpayers for the long term.

I'll also be waiting to hear if the governor will make it clear from the outset that upstate transportation, our local roads

and bridges, deserve parity with downstate mass transit. The improvement and repair of highways and bridges across this region and statewide are going unmet even though motorists keep delivering billions of dollars in taxes and fees to the state every year that are supposed to be dedicated to maintaining local roads and bridges. That has to change.

And across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, barely a day goes by when we don't read or hear about another drug-related tragedy. I hope the governor will declare a renewed, all-out effort to combat heroin, meth, bath salts and other illegal drugs destroying young lives, threatening communities and neighborhoods, and overburdening systems of criminal justice, health care and social services. It's a continually growing crisis everywhere, including right here at home and throughout many rural New York communities, and we have to take every step possible to confront this terrible cycle of addiction, violence and tragedy.

—State Sen. Tom O'Mara represents New York's 53rd Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and a portion of Tompkins County.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Upsetting, risky to walk in Corning

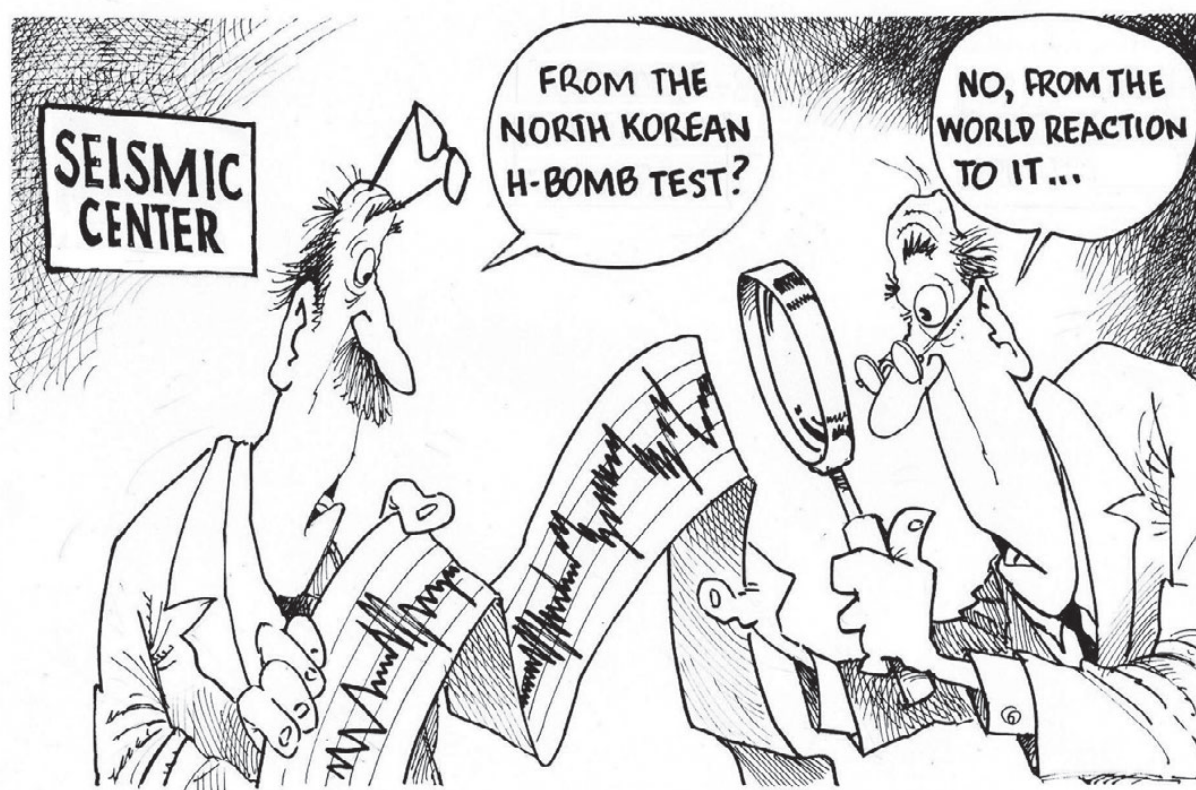
TO THE EDITOR | I walk through Corning daily to do errands or to go out for coffee or lunch. As I walk, I have had unwanted comments directed at me or said within range of my hearing. The gist of these comments is that I am faking my blindness. I am legally blind and I wear glasses to enhance the small amount of vision I have. Comments like this are upsetting to me.

In addition, I am put at risk many times when I

cross the street. I have a long cane that is marked with white and red, and I have reflective gear to make me more visible. However, frequently drivers turn in front of me instead of giving me the right of way, which is the law. I am able to see the walk lights with my telescope and so I know that I step off the curb at the correct time. Drivers planning to turn are required to let me cross first, yet they often try to make their turn in front of me.

—Christopher Harper, Corning

### ANOTHER VIEW



DAVE GRANLUND © www.davegranlund.com

### GUEST VIEW

## Build a sustainable upstate economy

The recent announcement of the Southern Tier, Finger Lakes and Central regions as winners of URI funds represents a huge opportunity for upstate New York and could not have come at a better time. New York state has also been both generous and responsive to the economic downturn in the private sector through large subsidies to retain major employers in our region.

That being said, it seems that there is a dichotomy between recent actions and lack thereof with respect to the Crestwood LPG storage proposal in Schuyler County. We have before us an opportunity to

promote large investment, create jobs and expand our tax base, but it's being stymied by the lack of action from New York state. Failure to issue a decision on the pending permit application is contrary to the recent economic development initiatives, and I fear that this sends the wrong message to businesses looking to relocate or expand in our great state.

As a County legislator, and board member of the Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development, I have a unique vantage of our region's opportunities to drive sustainable economic growth. The proposal by Crestwood, the largest taxpayer in

Schuyler and Tioga counties, to store propane in existing salt caverns in Reading is a prime example. Gas storage facilities have been an economic engine in local communities for decades. Crestwood's plan to reopen the propane storage business previously conducted at the site will build on this proven legacy to create jobs, generate property tax revenue and keep energy prices stable - at no cost to taxpayers.

While Albany continues to tout that upstate is open for business, Crestwood has waited seven years for a permit to break ground. It's time for the governor to heed his own technical staff: the

state geologist approved the project almost three years ago and DEC staff, finding no scientific reason refuting it, have endorsed the project's merits and recommended permit issuance. Rhetoric of emotionally driven special interests who politically oppose all fossil fuel projects does not help struggling families and businesses.

Leadership is the gift that upstate really needs. The governor can further help our region, without taxpayer subsidies, by approving Crestwood's LPG Storage Facility.

—Dennis A. Fagan is a Schuyler County legislator representing District VIII.

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