

Grins and groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans from news of the week.

OUR OPINION | Groan to a double standard. Grin to the death of winter.

Groan

A Corning East High teacher was put on administrative leave when it was discovered the teacher may have had an improper relationship with a student.

Because the teacher was an attractive woman and her alleged victim was a male, however, many people are taking this far too lightly.

Some are congratulating the “lucky” young man.

Would the same people be so cavalier about the alleged abuse if the genders were reversed? If an attractive male teacher seduced a female student, how long would it be before an angry mob formed, ready to lynch the guy?

Maybe the reason we protect our daughter’s virtue and celebrate our sons’ shedding that same virtue boils down to basic biology.

Girls get pregnant and therefore must be protected.

Whatever the reason, the law defines the age of consent in New York as 17-years old. There’s no exceptions for gender.

As a society we have to stop acting like it’s okay to send our sons out into the world to seek their sexual fortunes, while our daughters remain locked in their towers.

Grin

The signs of spring are increasing every day. The tulips and crocuses are starting to peek through the ground. Robin sightings are becoming more numerous. Spring training baseball is on television. Now, thanks to Daylight Savings Time, the sun doesn’t go down until 7:15 p.m.

Even when snow does fall, the sun is strong enough to melt it in fairly quick order.

Can the opening of area ice cream stands be too far behind?

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Muccini should care what business owners say

TO THE EDITOR | At the Corning City Council meeting this past Monday, a number of business owners from the Gaffer District were in attendance to voice our support for the proposed transportation center as well as the walking bridge and trail top levee project.

Before beginning discussion on the transportation center agenda item, Deputy Mayor Lee Welles asked City Council members to remember the comments from the business owners of the Gaffer District offered during the visitor comment section. Councilman Frank Muccini responded with, “Oh, I don’t care what they say ...,” which stunned those of us that had spoken or were in attendance.

More than 200 businesses are in our Gaffer District. On behalf of those businesses, we respectfully remind City Council and especially Councilman Muccini that more than 50 percent of the city’s sales tax revenue and property tax revenue is generated by our businesses. In light of this, we would certainly hope that our work to keep our businesses strong and healthy would warrant being listened to by all City Council representatives – not just the ones assigned to our district.

Rick Maxa
Corning

LETTERS POLICY

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ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

Jobs, jobs, jobs?

A flurry of state and federal reports came down like the rain over the past week. Altogether they’ve highlighted, once again, that while most of the action so far surrounding this year’s state budget has been centered on streamlining, redesigning, and restructuring – in other words, reducing the size and cost of – government, the state economy still needs serious attention. And the sooner, the better.

Recent reports highlighted:

- the latest unemployment figures from the state Labor Department showing across-the-board job losses in Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties at the beginning of 2011;

- that the lack of population growth in upstate New York counties remains glaring, according to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau. While the latest data show more than half of the state’s 62 counties with population losses or sluggish growth at best, the 34 counties that lost population are upstate. Why? According to one prominent analyst from the well-respected Rockefeller Institute of Government, “The basic connection is a strong economy and healthy job growth to keep residents.”

- on the heels of this Census data, figures from the New York Field Office of the U.S. Dep-

artment of Agriculture (USDA) revealed a decline in the number of New York farms. Overall, the state lost 300 farms from 2009 to last year. But one of the most alarming findings from the latest USDA summary is this one: from 2002 to 2007, New York lost 23 percent of its dairy farms. The losses were less during the same five-year period for the Finger Lakes region, 15 percent, but that’s very troubling in a region with an overall economy so reliant on agriculture and tourism.

The question again is: Why? In addition to the impact of global, national and statewide economic downturns, the head of the New York Farm Bureau, Dean Norton, also pointed to “New York’s unfriendly business climate.”

So as this year’s state budget negotiations heat up over the next several weeks, we must stay focused on the economy. There’s an undeniable need to put in place more responsible fiscal practices across government and to construct a foundation for long-term fiscal responsibility. But we cannot lose sight of the most critical responsibility of all: to zero in on beginning to turn around the state’s overall business climate with an emphasis on sustained, private-sector job growth.

The state Senate kicked off this year’s session by approving the “Job Creation and Taxpayer

Protection Act,” a comprehensive strategy to encourage overall economic growth and focus on the creation of upstate jobs. Our plan would make it harder for legislators to approve any future state tax increases, permanently cap future state spending (since reining in out-of-control state spending is critical to starting us on a better path), and impose a moratorium on job-killing state regulations.

One of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s favorite mantras at the start of his administration has been, “Jobs, jobs, jobs.” His proposed state budget contains a series of economic development proposals, some of them, like bolstering tax incentives targeted to job creation, in line with the Senate – but we must do even more to make New York State even more competitive.

So there are plans on the negotiating table – but they can’t work if that’s where they stay. The next several weeks will go a long way toward determining the state’s future in many ways – maybe none more important than the future of the state economy. We have to get it right. Albany has to take a new approach to economic growth. You can read more on my website, www.omara.ny.senate.gov.

■ State Sen. Tom O'Mara represents the 53rd Senate District.

COMMENTARY | DANIEL AKST

Can U.S. learn from Portugal?

Imagine a country so fed up with its ineffective crime-and-punishment approach to drug abuse that it decriminalizes the possession of small amounts of narcotics for personal use.

At the same time, it launches a concerted effort to provide treatment for addicts instead of just throwing them in prison. Surely such a naive land would see a sharp increase in drug use, and perhaps a generation of youth blighted by easy access to mind-altering substances. But in Portugal, which is just such a country, that’s not what happened.

Drug use does seem to have gone up, but this increase may well be illusory – and rather harmless. What’s not illusory, on the other hand, is the sharp reduction in the ills associated with drug abuse. Nine years into its courageous experiment with sanity as a national drug policy, Portugal is indisputably better off. And it’s getting some well-earned attention for its efforts.

Policy-makers in this country ought to pay especially close attention,

given the colossal futility of our own endless “war on drugs” – for never has a cure been so much more catastrophic than the disease it was intended to remedy.

With 2.3 million inmates, America now has the largest prison population in the world – and the highest per capita rate of incarceration as well.

Our absurd drug laws play a big part in this: a quarter of U.S. inmates are nonviolent drug offenders. Incarceration is expensive – in New York, it costs about \$45,000 per inmate annually, not counting pensions and other benefits for prison staff. We can no longer afford to lock up so many of our fellow citizens, and so now there is pressure all over America to cut the number of inmates.

This makes the Portuguese experience particularly noteworthy at the moment. A study in the British Journal of Criminology by Caitlin E. Hughes and Alex Stevens lays it all out. The bad news is that, as you might expect, the price of drugs in Portugal has fallen since the reforms, and there has been some increase in

drug use among adults. But neighboring Spain, which didn’t change its laws, also saw an increase in drug use. And the finding in Portugal may simply reflect users’ greater willingness to admit their indulgence to pollsters since the law’s relaxation.

Even if the increase is real, it doesn’t much matter, because the harms associated with drug abuse are so much diminished. Before decriminalization, for example, Portugal had the highest rate of drug-related AIDS in the European Union. But in the years since, the infection rate has plunged thanks to syringe programs, methadone and outreach efforts. Overdose deaths are down, and more addicts are in treatment. As to prisons: Since the new law, arrests for crimes related to drugs have fallen by almost two-thirds. Prisons fell from 119 percent of capacity to 102 percent. And the proportion of inmates incarcerated for drug-related crimes was halved.

■ Daniel Akst is a columnist for *Newsday*.

King wrongly criticized for hearings

It’s too bad that when a guy tries to do a good deed for his country, do-gooders unload on his head.

That’s what’s happened to Peter King, a congressman from New York City

who has held hearings aimed at determining how radical Muslims recruit American citizens for their own purposes.

The howls were instantaneous. King was accused of religious bigotry because he focused on only one religion.

Who else should he have focused on?

When was the last time the Seventh Day Adventists tried to bomb the center of a major American city? Have radical Mormons set car bombs designed to explode in crowded areas?

Sorry, gang, but I missed those offenses.

Yes, we have domestic hate groups that periodically raise their heads. A man tied to a white supremacist outfit was arrested last week on charges he left a sophisticated bomb along the route of a Martin Luther King parade in Spokane, Washington.

Was he a terrorist? You can bet your time bomb he was. But religion had nothing to do with his transgression.

I’m very sorry, and I mean that, that the people who most seem to want to destroy us claim to be motivated by religious fervor.

Over the centuries, religion has accounted for our most horrendous wars, massacres and other outrages.

Nothing can justify these actions. Although the perpetrators are self-assured that God was on their side.

Too bad, believers, because you missed the point. God had nothing to do with planning massacres. It was pure and simple human hate.

Unfortunately that type of hate is still with us and it’s not restricted to Muslim countries.

There it seems to have developed into a way of life that believes the only path to paradise comes from waging a holy war against any non-believer. In that part of the world, it’s called jihad.

While most Muslims are law-abiding, peace-loving people, there is a malignant minority devoted to the destruction of everybody else.

Do they recruit in America? Of course they do, and there are plenty of cases on record to show the success of their efforts.

Native-born terrorists are easier to hide than imports and the jihadists know it.

So King, by trying to spotlight these recruitment efforts, is actually arming his own country against promised violence. For this he deserves praise, not condemnation.

Along the way, his opponents have raised the red herring issue that King, an Irish American, has been sympathetic to the Irish Republican Army.

Right on, Peter – this Irish American has done exactly the same thing.

But whatever outrages it may have committed in trying to free its homeland from British dictatorship, the IRA has never fired a single shot at the United States.

■ Bob Rolfe, a retired *Leader* reporter/editor, can be reached by writing *The Leader*, PO Box 1017, Corning, NY 14830 or theinsider1@aol.com. He is also periodic co-host of the “Coleman & Co.” public affairs TV program which airs at 10:30 a.m. Sundays on WETM-TV and is repeated at 10 p.m. on WETM-2.