

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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THE INSIDER | BOB ROLFE

Health care facility sale a shame

It's too bad Steuben County decided to sell its health care facility.

There are advantages, of course, the most important of which is the chance to do away with an annual deficit of \$2 million to \$3 million.

That's the equivalent of a 6-9 percent tax hike for property owners.

The county was right to avoid that option.

But why did Steuben find itself in this situation?

It seems to come down to the fact that the state promised to pay millions and then reneged.

The facility has been sold to an outfit called Centers for Specialty Care Group LLC.

They beat out five other bidders for the property. The same outfit also owns Founders Pavilion.

Union officials opposed the sale and had many supporters among the legislators.

County Administrator Mark Alger thinks the sale will eventually prove beneficial by insuring the future of the facility.

That, the county cannot do.

It is unfortunate that this situation was forced on Steuben, but since it was, the county seems to have had no other option.

We will still have a county nursing facility but it will not be ours.

So Steuben is out of the nursing home business, apparently forever.

■■■■
In the wake of the mass murder in Connecticut a number of politicians have switched previous positions and say they now favor tougher gun control.

That list includes President Obama, New York Michael Bloomberg and Joe Scarborough.



BOB ROLFE

This does not include our own Tom Reed.

Gun control is not the answer, Reed said.

He would prefer to identify potential shooters in advance and neutralize them before they become a threat to society.

How Tom would do this is a bit iffy.

Do warnings appear out of the air indicating when someone might be planning an attack?

Or do we get a text message?

Tom doesn't say how these revelations will be imparted but he is sure of one thing: Gun control ain't the answer.

We need to "broaden the debate," Reed says.

He believes that the Second Amendment is part and parcel of America and that any limitation on it would attack the basis of the nation itself.

That's a stupid idea proposed by a stupid individual. But that should not surprise anybody familiar with the congressman.

■■■■
The traditional holiday column will run on Christmas Day but there will be a special column on Dec. 27.

Please check it out for a very special announcement.

Bob Rolfe, a retired Leader reporter/editor, can be reached by writing The Leader, PO Box 1017, Corning, NY 14830 or theinsider1@aol.com.

OTHER VIEW | GERALD MCKINSTRY

Give them time to grieve

Standing next to friends holding a sign that read "Peace for All, Pray for Newtown," Dan Fisher extended his two fingers in that universal symbol.

"Everybody is hurting," he said late Sunday, standing a few feet from a memorial at the entrance of Newtown High School, the site of the vigil where President Barack Obama spoke. "We need to heal. That's all we have to do."

The funerals began Monday — 6-year-olds Noah Pozner and Jack Pinto were laid to rest — and Fisher and so many others here fear their town is being defined by this horrific event.

They appreciate the outpouring of support — they need it to start the healing process. Prayers, notes and vigils go a long way, he said.

But the constant chatter about gun control, mental health, video games and the other complex political and social issues that are headlining the 24-hour news cycle and pundit class can wait.

They haven't even buried their dead. I understand the need to seize periods of

crisis, but the people in this town deserve a moment to grieve — and so much more.

Many fear that if leaders don't act now, they never will. We've had so many innocent people killed and have failed to do anything about our gun laws.

Maybe it's because so many children were brutally killed — 20 first-graders in all. Or because we're just fed up with so much senseless violence.

"The tenderest of us have been hit so hard," Jane Philbrick of nearby Redding, Conn., said at one of the memorials in town.

The president called on the nation to act and vowed to use his powers as president to engage the country. "Surely, we can do better than this."

We can do better than this, as individuals and a nation.

We can't ignore the tough questions, political debates and complexities of this national conversation, but we must first allow ourselves to grieve.

Gerald McKinstry is a member of the Newsday editorial board.

COMMENTARY | TOM O'MARA

Diversity is key to NY agriculture

Many farmers will tell you that the name of the game in agriculture today is "diversity." That's not usually the first word most of us think of when we think of farming. But it's a sign of the times. It's exactly the reason why we increasingly hear about priorities like agritourism, new technologies, food production, co-operatives and marketing as part of the strategy to keep New York agriculture strong.

It also signals that while farming's challenges remain great, there's also optimism to be found in the fact that new opportunities for growth and sustainability keep arising.

Take, for example, a recent report from the federal Department of Agriculture showing that winter farmers markets increased 52 percent across America during the past year. New York State's 196 winter markets are the second most in the nation, behind California's 284. In this column not long ago, I noted that you can find out more about regional markets, including winter markets in Corning and Ithaca, on www.ilovethefingerlakes.com. And keep in mind that New York state is home to more than 850 Christmas tree farms. Visit the Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York at www.christmas-treesny.org to find one near you.

This increase in winter markets is reflective of a broader and hopeful trend: Ever-growing consumer



TOM O'MARA

demand for locally grown, fresh food year-round coupled with the ability of farmers today to offer year-round products.

Of course, it's important to keep in mind that diversity has become a buzzword in agriculture as the challenges facing today's farmers have deepened — high costs, low prices, increased competition, reduced export markets, severe weather, shrinking profits and so many others. To say nothing of the myriad governmental and political challenges that farmers are forced to contend with, including high taxes, overregulation and, maybe most of all for many farmers at the moment, the uncertainty surrounding the renewal of the federal Farm Bill.

The state's largest farm advocacy organization, the New York Farm Bureau, recently held its annual meeting in Albany. Farmers and other agricultural representatives from around the state gathered to set their political table for 2013, as well as to celebrate the past year's successes. And there were plenty. New York's farmers donated more than 5 million pounds of food to regional food banks in 2012. There were actions this year to encourage the burgeoning craft brewing industry, expand the

"FreshConnect" program and ease onerous regulations. Gov. Andrew Cuomo convened two highly successful legislative summits — the first on Greek-style yogurt, and the second on wine, beer and spirits — that highlighted new and promising economic opportunities for dairy farmers, hops growers and others. The state Wine and Grape Foundation just reported that it was a very good year for the industry, and we know that the organic farming community, including right here at home, is alive and well.

And how about this welcome trend, as noted by our Rural Resources Commission in a recent edition of Rural Futures: According to a recent federal study of agriculture-related undergraduate programs at 67 universities nationwide, from 2009 to 2011, the number of women enrolled in college-level agriculture education outpaced men. One upstate New York newspaper called this development a "new picture of the modern farm" and hailed the growing number of women being counted among the nation's farmers.

"With the number of family farms declining, this is good news," the Plattsburgh Press Republican wrote. "Sometimes, the children of farmers aren't interested in entering this strenuous and stressful occupation. If only males are considered to take over farms, it knocks out half the population. As with other careers, opening

more opportunities for women can bring new perspective and enthusiasm to the field."

So diversity in New York agriculture keeps bringing attention to a variety of often little-noticed good news and, equally important, helps highlight the key, ongoing and deep-rooted challenges still needing attention.

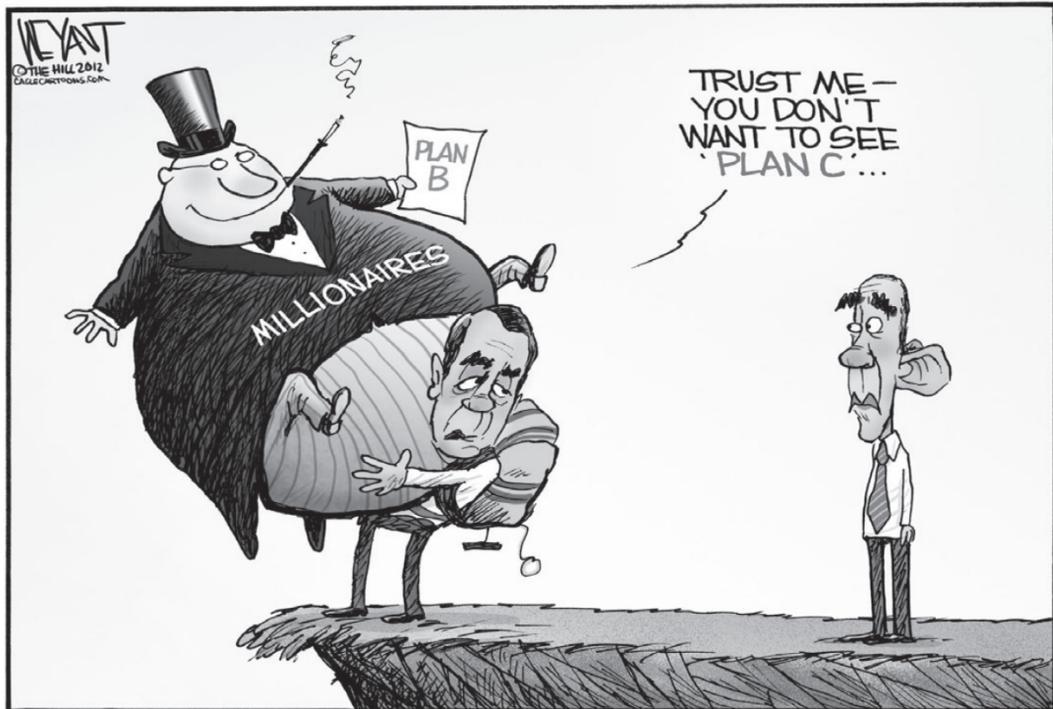
It bears repeating as we move closer to the start of a new legislative session in January: The importance of agriculture as a mainstay of upstate's culture and economy demands the Legislature's focus. I, for one, look forward to the new year to keep trumpeting strategies and actions that can enhance the ability of New York's farmers to stay competitive.

New York must remain a prominent agricultural state. We have to protect one of our strongest economic foundations, one on which the state can build long-term, sustainable economic growth. State investment in the future of agriculture is smart. It helps produce valuable economic benefits for years to come. It helps secure quality livelihoods, vibrant communities and, overall, stronger local economies across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions.

In the face of countless challenges in the new year ahead, New York government can never forget the importance of agriculture.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 53rd Senate District.

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reed wrong on gun control

To the editor | I was disappointed to read in Tuesday's edition of The Leader that our congressman, U.S. Rep. Tom Reed, sidestep the conversation around gun control. This time, congressman, you are wrong — 26 times dead wrong.

We need courageous members of Congress to step up, cast aside blindly following a political party point of view or a vindictive special interest group warning of dire consequences to reelection, and stand up for the people they represent.

Congressman Reed, have you that courage?

There is no place in our society for easy access to guns of mass destruction. We saw the latest result last

week in Newtown, Conn., and before that in a movie theater in Colorado, and on and on. What purpose do these semi-automatic handguns or assault weapons play in today's society?

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." I support the Second Amendment. Restricting access to weapons of mass destruction and devastation is not an infringement on our personal liberties. Rather, it helps guarantee our liberties by reducing the need for further security restrictions in schools, churches, theaters and on main street of our communities.

The fear mongers among us will tell us that any

restriction of any weapon is an attack on personal liberty. Really? What purpose does a semi-automatic handgun, capable of discharging 50 or 60 shots per minute, serve in society? I see only mass destruction.

Passing federal laws to restrict access to these types of weapons makes good sense. It does not interfere with those who believe they need a handgun or "recreational" rifle for personal protection or for the time-honored sport of hunting. I was once a hunter and owned such guns. I never thought it might be better to use a semi-automatic in the woods ... but now that I think about it, why wait to dress the slain deer at a butcher ... just fire off rapid rounds and immediately turn the kill into ground venison. Simple.

You are correct,

Congressman Reed, we also need to improve our ability to identify and treat those individuals with mental disorders that may be at the heart of many of these attacks, but don't ignore the elephant in the room regarding restrictions on certain types of weapons.

It takes courage to step up and acknowledge that sometimes you need to do what is right — pass legislation that provides greater safeguards from preventing individuals from securing such weapons. This is not limiting our right to bear arms. It is not infringing on personal liberties.

It is just good sense. Congressman Reed, have you that courage and that good sense?

Dan Collins
Painted Post