

COMMENTARY | PHILIP MADDOCKS

## Placing blame

Newt Gingrich continued his discussion about himself on Thursday at a campaign event in Louisiana, saying the only things standing between him and a smooth path to the oval office are the president's unwillingness to tackle the high price of gas, the media's inability to properly frame his grand ideas, and Chevrolet's belligerent insistence on marketing an electric car.

"The thing I find most disheartening about this campaign is that the perfectly flawless message I am running on – a message that my opponents, like my second wife, can't seem to comprehend – is not getting through to the voters. And for that I can only fault somebody else," Mr. Gingrich told an audience at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston.

His supporters at the rally, enthusiastic backers of Mr. Gingrich's so-called war on comprehensibility, waved signs declaring, "Don't Believe the Liberal Gas Prices!" and "Open the Algae Refuge Preserve to Drilling," slogans that have become a fixture of Mr. Gingrich's campaign events recently.

Buoyed by the fervent crowd, an energetic Mr. Gingrich told the gathering he remained confident that in the end he and his brilliance would find a way around the media bias and lack of votes that have hobbled his otherwise faultless campaign, and he would quite possibly become the first man in history to win the presidency without winning the presidential primary.

"I encourage you to think big, to help me come up with solutions to my problems," Mr. Gingrich said. "I am here to make history and you are here to watch me do it."

The former speaker of the House said he was grateful for the show of encouragement from his audience, but he did remind them that he didn't need theirs or anyone else's vote to win the Republican nomination or the presidential race.

"That much should be obvious," he said. "Why else would I still be in the race if that wasn't the case? But that's something the elite media is unwilling to write about and my opponents in the contest don't grasp."

Mr. Gingrich made no mention about ending his opponents' campaigns, making only a slight reference to his plan to take his run all the way to the convention in August by "bringing new solutions and using new science and new technology and new management" to solve his delegate count problems.

He pointed out that he has lost all but two contests for delegates in the Republican primary, including in Alabama and Mississippi, where he expected to do well.

"If that is not proof that the elite media and my ex-wives are out to get me, then I don't know what is," an invigorated Mr. Gingrich told the crowd in Louisiana.

Then turning to the topic of Mitt Romney as the inevitable Republican nominee, Mr. Gingrich said of his GOP opponent, "If you're the front-runner and you keep coming in third, you're not much of a front-runner – unless you are me."

The struggling candidate did acknowledge that fundraising would be very difficult going forward. He highlighted his 175,000th donor, who had contributed \$2.50, a nod to Mr. Gingrich's promise that under his energy plan the price of gas would drop to that amount per gallon.

The presidential hopeful said he appreciated the gesture, and the show of confidence in his energy plan, but, in an about-face, Mr. Gingrich suggested that it might be worthwhile to give his plan a second look, that maybe the country would be better off if in the near term if the price of fuel skyrocketed to about \$10 million a gallon.

"Yes, consumers would feel it at the pump," Mr. Gingrich said, "but it would be much better for my fundraising and clearly that would be a long-term benefit to everyone."

As the audience gasped at the thought of eight-figure prices at the gas pump, Mr. Gingrich promised to buy each of them an electric Chevy Volt automobile that they would be able to destroy in a grand, anti-liberal demolition party on the White House front lawn once Mr. Gingrich is elected and lowers the price of gas.

"I owe a great debt to my expansive ideas – and to a lot of other people, come to think of it," he said. "But God and my super PAC willing, you will be able to experience that same debt for yourselves."

■ Philip Maddocks is a political satire columnist for GateHouse News Service.

## ARTIST'S VIEW

THE LEADER'S ARTIST'S VIEW  
Illustrations by  
J. J. Macdonald

MITT'S TELEPROMPTERS



COMMENTARY | SEN. TOM O'MARA

## Farm stories behind the numbers

If we're talking jobs – and the future of jobs – in New York state, then we better be talking agriculture and farming too. That gets overlooked too frequently in Albany, where year after year the corps of state legislators who understand (and represent) the challenges facing New York's farmers and agribusinesses get lost under an ever-growing shadow of big city needs and concerns.

But we better pay attention. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the number of farms in New York State fell from 36,300 in 2010 to 36,000 last year – a decrease that falls in line with a similarly declining number of farms across the United States. America had an estimated 2.2 million farms in 2011, down slightly from 2010. If numbers tell stories, and they always do, then there are fields of stories behind these statistics and most of the others provided by the NASS, which you can view yourself through the state Department of Agriculture and Markets' website ([www.agriculture.ny.gov](http://www.agriculture.ny.gov)) – in the left-hand column of the homepage click on "Divisions" and then click on "Statistics" in the drop-down box).

For me, one way to read the numbers is that, despite the enormous challenges, New York remains an agricultural state and we can't ever afford to forget it. Seven million acres of land in farming. More than \$4 billion worth of agricultural products sold annually. A Top 10 producer of milk and other dairy products, many fruits and vegetables, Christmas trees, corn for silage and more.

In short, New York boasts of a proud, a highly diverse and a productive agricultural industry, the state's largest. And then there are the individual stories behind the statewide story. Right here at home, the importance of agriculture across the legislative district I represent tells the life stories of farmers and agribusinesses in Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates counties who are state leaders in the production of a broad-based inventory of crops, livestock and other commodities.

Like most other state businesses and industries, the agricultural industry today must find ways to cope with high costs, unpredictable and volatile weather, and so many other pressures. So the importance of agriculture as a mainstay of upstate's culture and economy demands the Legislature's attention each and every session to enhance the ability of our farmers to stay competitive and to keep their land in farming. Toward this end, in recent weeks we've seen:

- the expansion of New York's "FreshConnect" program, a competitive grant initiative started last year to create new farmers' markets and support existing markets to provide fresh produce to high-needs areas, both rural and urban;
- the introduction of legislation to promote the growth of New York State's craft breweries, encourage opportunities to New York farmers to restore our state as a premier producer of hops, and further remove state-imposed regulations hindering the success of our farm wineries and distilleries; and
- the state Senate's approval of the "Buy

From the Backyard Act" to require state agencies with food contracts to buy at least 20 percent of their food from New York, locally grown sources.

Add in ongoing efforts in the arenas of property tax relief, state spending restraint and other fiscal reforms – all of which, if you ask the New York Farm Bureau, are high on the list of farm family priorities – and you get a taste of the attention agriculture's receiving at the Capitol, and rightly so. Agriculture remains one of the strongest economic foundations on which New York can build long-term, sustainable economic growth. If we can do that effectively, it's going to have a valuable ripple effect throughout our regional economies. New York government can never forget it.

State investment in the future of agriculture is significant, it's smart, and it will produce valuable economic benefits and opportunities for years to come. It's an economic development priority that will secure and retain quality livelihoods and vibrant communities, as well as strengthen the competitive position of wineries, grape growers, dairy farms, organic farms and growers, tourism, food processors and the overall economy of the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes region.

To say nothing, as the final word, of preserving a cultural anchor and a way of life that's meaningful, worthwhile and essential to the pride we can take in ourselves as the Empire State.

■ Tom O'Mara is a Republican state senator from Big Flats.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Join in for SAFE meeting

**TO THE EDITOR |** Schuyler County took one step closer to addressing the issue of suicide in our community. Suicide is a community public health problem. The loss of just one life to suicide is a tragedy that can be prevented.

On March 5, the "Let's Talk About It" coalition approved a permanent name, "SAFE," which stands for Suicide Awareness For Everyone. At the same meeting provisional officers were named: Tara Ferriteras Chair and Lisa Harer as Secretary. Subsequently, Chris Burns was appointed as liaison from Schuyler County Health Services. The Mission, Vision, Values and By Laws are next on the agenda.

SAFE represents a broad cross section of the community and includes individuals, agency representation and county department representation. Future planning goals include developing local suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention efforts, general community education, training community members, and recruiting individuals, groups and business to get involved.

Please consider getting involved, all are welcome; there is a role for everyone. The first meeting as SAFE will be held in room 120 at the Human Services complex on April 2, 2012 at noon.

**George A. Roets, RN, MS**

Schuyler County Health Services  
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