

You're fat, dude, and it's not funny

Ahhh Sunday.

You're in your man cave, sitting in your recliner, feet up, remote in hand. On the big-screen your Bills are looking for another win in an already surprising season. Yes, life is good.

On the coffee table nearby are the football-watching staples – chips, salsa, pizza, wings, hot sauce and Tums. You know, man food.

To wash it all down, you head to the mini fridge and grab an iced, cold Diet Coke.

Diet Coke? What the ...? How did that get in there?

Any fool knows that a drink with the word “diet” in the name has no business being in a man's refrigerator. Diet sodas are for women.

You're a man! You don't need to watch your weight. Your are proud of your gut and don't mind the gentle ribbing you get from your friends. Your gut makes you cool – like Homer Simpson and Larry the Cable Guy.

Wait ... did someone say ribs?
But seriously. While we may be playing to the stereotype, men and women aren't viewed equally when it comes to obesity and weight loss. For proof, all we have to do is turn on the television.

Check out the commercials. When is the last time you saw a man hawking yogurt and Special K? Watch popular shows such as “Family Guy” and “The Simpsons.” What do you see? Big guy, skinny wife. Funny, isn't it?

Not really. Because we have a problem in this country. A big, fat problem.

According to a report from ABC News, two-thirds (more than 190 million) of Americans are overweight or obese. The Centers for Disease Control reported that in 2010, not one state had a prevalence of obesity less than 20 percent; New York was at 23.9 percent. One in 10 people in the U.S. has diabetes, and obesity is the underlying cause.

Unfortunately, it's not cool for a man to count calories, even if you want to lose a few pounds and get healthy so you can live longer and enjoy the grandkids. It's a Michael Bay world, folks, and our action heroes don't eat salad.

The folks at Dr. Pepper say they understand this. They believe – and perhaps rightly so – that men won't buy diet soda simply because the word “diet” is in the title. That's why they've created a new, low-calorie soda called Dr. Pepper Ten, and packaged it in a “manly” bottle. Same great taste, just 10 calories. “Ten” is just for men, like the hair club, and it's not a diet soda. Dr. Pepper already has one of those.

Watch the commercials for “Ten.” They have lasers! Snakes! And dudes fighting!

Weight Watchers has caught on as well and recently introduced a program just for guys. You still have to count points, but you're counting points on a steak, potatoes and other “manly food”. Their website includes stories such as Bar Fight: Nachos vs. Wings and a pizza cheat sheet.

Are the folks at Dr. Pepper on to something? Will guys flock to Weight Watchers? Which will win, nachos or wings?

We don't know, but we applaud the companies for trying. Yes, they're just trying to make money by attracting an elusive demographic. However, their products could also make it easier – and cooler – for guys to lose weight.

We're not going to endorse a diet plan, that's up to your doctor. You may not be able to afford Weight Watchers, but your doctor can guide you to a diet plan that doesn't compromise your manhood.

We don't care what program you get with, guys. It's time to get moving and bust that gut. With the ever-increasing manly choices out there, you are running out of excuses.

Did someone say running?

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ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Smart investing

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was recently asked by a reporter at a Capitol press conference whether county governments (and, therefore, local property taxpayers) could be relieved of having to pay for Medicaid by having the state pick up the local share.

There are many rallying cries springing up around the state and the nation at the moment, but that question pinpointed the one that local leaders across our region and throughout New York have identified as priority No. 1 during the 2012 session of the State Legislature: a state takeover of local Medicaid costs.

The governor answered this way, “Do we have money to subsidize them (local governments)? No.” In very clear terms, he delivered an outright rejection of the idea. Ongoing state budget deficits prevent the thought from even being considered, the governor said.

So let me be equally clear in return: Gov. Cuomo's wrong on this one. A state takeover of counties' Medicaid costs cannot be considered a subsidy – these costs are an unfunded state mandate.

It's the first time that I've had any truly strong disagreement with the governor's otherwise aggressive agenda of economic and fiscal reform. But that's not what's important here. In the end, what matters most is that we keep this year's reform momentum moving full speed ahead. Which means, in my view, that the governor's recent comments can't be the end of the discussion over a possible Medicaid takeover.

Obviously I'm joined in this assessment by county leaders. The Chemung,

Schuyler and Steuben county legislatures have already approved resolutions calling for a state takeover, for example. That's not surprising. The cost of Medicaid represents the single-largest state-mandated expense counties face – and beginning in 2012, they have to somehow deal with it under a new state-imposed cap on property tax levy increases. It's unrealistic for the state to keep believing that local governments can find a way to handle escalating local Medicaid costs. It was reported late last week that we're approaching the 5 million mark in New York – that is 5 million New Yorkers enrolled in Medicaid. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the state's Medicaid rolls grew by nearly 75 percent over the past decade.

New York can't afford not to initiate a state takeover. It's the reason why I recently joined a bipartisan group of state legislators co-sponsoring legislation (S.5889/A.8644) that would begin an eight-year phase-in of a complete state takeover of local Medicaid costs and save county taxpayers approximately \$180 million next year. Gov. Cuomo persuasively built the case for enacting the property tax cap by promising that it would be accompanied by meaningful mandate relief. The only way to get serious about mandate relief is to get counties out from under the mandate of Medicaid costs. Now there's a persuasive case to be made for the state to do just that – establish a system of Medicaid where county governments never again have to raise property taxes in order to meet rising Medicaid costs.

State Health Department officials reported Oct. 5 that the Medicaid redesign reforms we initi-

ated as part of this year's state budget have already yielded nearly \$600 million in savings. Further, in testimony

before the Legislature's fiscal committees earlier this year, the former head of the state Office of Medicaid Inspector General (OMIG) noted that the office, in 2009, delivered upwards of \$1 billion in savings. There's no reason to believe that this office, which the Legislature created several years ago to combat the notorious abuse, fraud, and waste that has long plagued Medicaid, won't continue to generate at least hundreds of millions of dollars in additional savings. Shouldn't state leaders consider reinvesting these savings into making the Medicaid system less of a burden on local property taxpayers? Isn't long-term property tax relief a goal that's widely recognized as a key, maybe the singular key, to New York's economic future?

No, we can't just dismiss the idea of a Medicaid takeover. Instead, we need to find a way to get it done. Local property taxpayers remain at risk under a mountain of unfunded state mandates, and the heaviest unfunded mandate of all is Medicaid. We need to reinvent the system. The most effective way to do that is to make it the state's responsibility. If it's the state's responsibility, the state will have no choice but to act on the cost containment and efficiency reforms to make it possible. It's the clearest path, and it needs to be part of the ongoing Medicaid reform debate.

■ **Tom O'Mara is a state senator from Big Flats. He can be reached by calling his Bath office at 776-3201 or in Albany at (518) 455-2091.**

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Who should we admire?

TO THE EDITOR | Mr. Vitale, in his Oct. 11 letter to the editor expressed his admiration for Texas oil billionaire T. Boone Pickens after hearing him challenge Ithaca to benefit from gas fracking as Williamsport has been blessed over the past few years from the gas industry's presence in Pennsylvania. He concluded his letter saying New Yorkers should listen to T. Boone Pickens instead of Anthony Ingraffea, a Cornell professor of geology who has spoken against hydraulic fracturing across this region.

Before jumping on the T. Boone Pickens bandwagon, we should all add the word “environment” to his name and “google” the phrase. What we immediately see is a collection of articles describing Mr. Pickens efforts to have Congress pass the “New Alternative Transportation to Give Americans Solutions Act,” better known as the NAT GAS Act, which would provides tax incentives to encourage the use of natural gas as a transportation fuel. And when the articles says he is working hard to have Congress pass the NAT GAS Act, it means he is spending a lot of money to help Congress see how this Act will benefit America.

T. Boone Pickens is certainly the driving force behind the NAT GAS Act but let's not be naïve. If it passes, might Mr. Pickens make another billion or so to add to his portfolio? Most certainly. Does he care in the least for the clear waters and natural beauty of New York's Finger Lakes? I doubt if he's ever even been here. Has he sat down with anyone and received a straight answer regarding the chemicals added to the one million gallons of water needed every time a well is fracked and what will happen to the water once it comes back to the surface? I'd bet he has not. Mr. Pickens is a shrewd businessman and his god is the bottom line.

In contrast, when Dr. Anthony Ingraffea was invited to talk at a forum on hydraulic fracturing last May at West High School in Painted Post, he refused the modest honorarium offered and rebuffed efforts to compensate him for his travel. Tony Ingraffea has never accepted any pay for any of his presentations. He has always said he simply wants people to know the truth and doesn't want money to cloud the issue.

Now tell me ... in which man would you like the place the future of our children?

Gary McCaslin
Corning



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