

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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OUR VIEW

New names for new era

What's in a name? Everything, especially when East finally meets West.

Corning-Painted Post school district officials surely realized that when they decided to give the public a say in the names of the combined East and West high school and combined CFA and Northside Blodgett.

That's a smart move. Having a voice in the decision will give each resident a sense of ownership of the new facilities and pride in a district finally united.

We hope divisions that remained even after sports teams were unified will be but a memory when the doors to the new high school and middle school open in the fall of 2014.

Getting everyone involved with the \$97 million facilities project is a great place to start, especially for taxpayers who do not have children in the district.

Most students and their parents have long welcomed the mergers, and the current inconveniences of the project's construction have only heightened their excitement. Students can see progress being made as they walk the halls each day.

However, it would be easy for anyone without school-aged children to feel a little left out of the process.

But now everyone in the community – especially alumni – can participate by voting on three sets of names:

■ Corning-Painted Post High School and Corning-Painted Post Middle School. This option reflects the name the district is commonly referred to.

■ Corning High School and Painted Post Middle School. This option would designate the schools by their location.

■ Corning High School and Corning Middle School. This option is based on the official title of the district, the Corning City School District, and the official name of the district's sports teams: The Corning Hawks.

A voter unhappy with any of these selections can write in their own suggestion.

To weigh in, visit <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/bldgnam> until May 6.

We urge all residents to show their school – and community – spirit.

And remember, if you don't vote, you can't complain if you don't like the names that are chosen.

OTHER VIEW | L.A. TIMES

Legal help for disabled detainees

Last week, the Obama administration announced a new policy to provide legal help to mentally disabled immigrants awaiting deportation trials in federal detention centers. A day later, a federal judge in Los Angeles reached the same conclusion, ruling that the Department of Homeland Security is required to provide free legal assistance to immigrants in detention if they are not capable of representing themselves because of mental illness.

Both decisions are welcome and could help bring more fairness to the system. Currently, only criminal defendants are entitled to court-appointed lawyers; deportation trials are civil cases.

Yet the new policy will be meaningful only if all detention centers in the country provide adequate screenings that can identify immigrants who are mentally incompetent. And the Department of Homeland Security has an uneven track record when it comes to implementing such reforms because it operates only a fraction - 10 out of 250 - of the immigration jails scattered across the country. In fact, 60 percent of the 34,000 immigrants detained on any given day are housed in local jails or privately run facilities that contract with the U.S. government but that at times ignore the

rules. Operators of many of those private detention centers and local jails have often resisted adopting even minimal reforms, arguing that they are too costly or too cumbersome.

No doubt critics of the policy will argue that providing lawyers to immigrants, even those who are legal permanent residents, is too expensive. But so too is the current detention process. It costs an average of \$122 a day to detain an immigrant. And those who are mentally disabled can sometimes languish in detention.

Consider the case of Jose Antonio Franco, a mentally disabled man who faced deportation because he threw a rock during a fight. An immigration judge suspended his case rather than allow him to represent himself. He spent nearly five years in a Southern California detention center, and was released only after civil rights groups took on his case.

The administration deserves praise for its promise to provide mentally incompetent immigrants with the due process they deserve. Now it needs to muster the strength to see that the promise is fulfilled. And while it's at it, the administration should throw its support behind the Senate's immigration reform bill, which would guarantee similar legal protections for children awaiting deportation trials.

POLITICS | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

This and that around government

To say the least lately, it's been a whirlwind of days nationally and around the globe — including right here in New York State. So like I do every now and then, it's a good week to share some quick news and notes out of New York government:

■ They say timing is everything, and that's as true in politics and government as it is in sports, business or just about anywhere else in life. And the timing couldn't have been truer last Tuesday when, on the very day the Senate was scheduled to take up legislation I sponsor to further outlaw the operation of meth labs statewide, police and firefighters in the city of Elmira made yet another meth lab bust.

Reports that local first responders were on the scene of a meth lab discovery came to my attention early that afternoon. By the time the Senate voted later that evening, I was able to stand on the floor of the Senate to speak in favor of the legislation, let my colleagues know that yet another meth lab cleanup operation was underway in Elmira, and urge their support to deliver a strong message that we're not about to sit back and tolerate meth labs endangering our neighborhoods, putting responders and citizens at risk, or overburdening local systems of health care, criminal justice and social services. The bill was overwhelmingly approved with



TOM O'MARA

strong bipartisan support. Now it goes to the Assembly. We'll see, but one thing for certain is that this epidemic of meth labs is becoming more and more disturbing. Read about my legislation, watch my comments in the Senate

Chamber and learn more on omara.nysenate.gov.

■ Staying with the "timing is everything" line of thought, there's a strong push underway in Albany to go statewide with a system of taxpayer-financed campaigns. In simple terms, candidates for public office, from the office of governor on down, would be able to access public taxpayer dollars to run their campaigns. Governor Andrew Cuomo, state Assembly leaders and other leading legislators and advocates have made it a high priority this year. At the moment, only the Senate Republican Conference is saying, Let's hold on a second. Estimates show that a statewide system of taxpayer-financed campaigns could cost state taxpayers upwards of \$220 million per election cycle. As chair of the Senate

Elections Committee – and with that above figure squarely in mind -- I think it's important to be as deliberate as possible

in examining the potential benefits but also the pitfalls of a statewide system of taxpayer-financed campaigns. Taxpayers at least deserve a full public airing of such a dramatic and complex change. And we think there's one good place to start taking a closer look: New York City, where the experience of public campaign financing is well documented, though not exactly stellar. In fact, prominent election experts have labeled it abused and corrupt. We'll be hearing from some of these critics at a public forum in Albany soon.

■ It's been a tough run across the region's economy over the past few years, so it's little wonder that news late last week that Corning Incorporated's diesel facility in Erwin will be expanding was met with more than a few sighs of relief and rounds of applause. The economic body blows around the region have been hard to take, so any counterpunches we can land earn a cheer. This one's especially good, and it's no surprise that it's coming from a top-flight, local economic fighter like Corning Inc.;

■ Speaking of positive economic news, the Cuomo administration recently noted that New York is now the nation's leading yogurt producer – yet another feather in the cap of our remarkable agricultural sector. It's an especially good development for dairy farmers, since the administration is finally following through on some promised regulatory reforms that will

create more economic opportunities for the industry and, as one farmer leader stated, show that New York "can have a healthy environment, local food production and a strong economy." The state's also increasing support for Cornell University's PRO-DAIRY program.

■ On the same week that the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) released its annual report on the 2012 hunting season showing Steuben County leading the state in deer taken, and Yates County leading the state in both deer and bucks taken per square mile, a list of hunting-and-fishing facts also came across my desk from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 2011. Hunting and fishing is big business in New York State, to the tune of more than \$8 billion in annual economic activity.

New York was second in the nation in total angler spending on fishing-related items, and fourth in the nation in spending by hunters.

It was a timely reminder that the traditions carried on by our sportsmen and sportswomen are truly anchors of upstate New York's way of life – making irreplaceable contributions to the economy and the culture, and leading the way on conservation.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Don't believe all that you read

TO THE EDITOR | Dear Ms. Wilson:

First, a response to your claim: the myth that Pres. Obama's vacation schedule somehow demonstrates his lack of concern for the country has been debunked over and over, but it seems to be one of many rumors that will not die. Nancy Reagan once said "Presidents don't get vacations – they just get a change of scenery. The job goes with you."

While conducting a routine Google search for "Obama vacation days", I noted that several media outlets known for their anti-Obama bias shrieked about Obama's "lavish and frequent vacations" (among these the blog of the humiliated right-wing pitbull Andrew Breitbart, and the Fox News website.)

By contrast, outlets such as "The Week" and "Fact-Check.org" noted that George W. Bush took far more vacation days than Pres. Obama. I refer you and others to an article

by Paul Brandus in "The Week", in which he deconstructs the five most popular myths about Obama's "failings" as President.

The point of my letter is not to argue over whether Obama or Bush or John Quincy Adams took more vacation days, who spent more money on his Secret Service detail, or in fact whether Obama is an effective President; my point is remind you that our right to free speech does not give us the right to make up our own facts to support our own preconceived notions,

or to repeat questionable facts without probing their veracity.

Ms. Wilson, I would hope that your parents, teachers, and the editor of this newspaper might, by their example, teach you to not believe everything you read simply because you hope or suspect it might be true. I would also hope that you remember what we call the spreading of uncorroborated facts: rumor.

Carl Johengen
Bath