

Grins and groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans from news of the week.
OUR OPINION | Groan to Congress, a questionable transportation center. Grin to a long-awaited deal.

Groan

Each and every member of Congress can go straight to hell. Not only do none of them deserve re-election, but they all deserve to get really painful inner ear infections so they can't go swimming for the rest of the summer. Maybe that will teach them to play politics with the country's economy.

Grin

Thank you to the NFL owners and players. It's good to see that sometimes two sides with opposing views can compromise for the greater good. Our country may go into default. We might pay more for our credit card debts and home mortgages, but it's good to know our fantasy football seasons are safe.

Groan

Inflation has done a number on the transportation center that's going to be built in downtown Corning. The project was estimated at \$4 million in 2003. That number, however, has almost doubled. The new price of \$7.7 million, also comes with a local share of \$709,000. The original project did not include any money from the city. Unfortunately the city is stuck with the project. Backing out now would mean the city is on the hook for the \$1.3 million in federal and state funds already spent. The new transportation center may stand for decades as the city's "Bridge to Nowhere" - a project of questionable value that cost twice as much as originally projected. At least Frank Coccho's velvet ropes didn't come with a multi-million dollar price tag.

OTHER VIEW | LEADER HERALD

Nuclear safety?

Action to prevent a nuclear power plant disaster such as that in Japan is needed immediately, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Gregory Jaczko said last week. Jaczko is right - on that subject. But what about other concerns involving the NRC? An NRC task force spent three months devising recommendations to improve safety at U.S. nuclear power plants. Specifically, safeguards against earthquake and flood damage are contained in the panel's report. Jaczko said the full NRC should devote no more than 90 days to deciding how to proceed with the recommendations. On that, he is correct. But even if the suggestions are implemented, Americans can have little confidence the NRC will administer them properly. That is because of a report earlier this year that NRC officials altered their own rules many times, allowing nuclear power plant operators to bend and sometimes break regulations intended to avoid catastrophes. Then there was the report that Jaczko was not candid in discussing another critical program with his fellow NRC commissioners. It involved President Barack Obama's plan to stop work on a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nev. Some commissioners expressed surprise on hearing the program was being scrapped, saying Jaczko had not kept them in the loop on it. The disaster at a Japanese nuclear power plant, resulting from a massive earthquake and tsunami, indeed should worry Americans. NRC action to guard against similar catastrophes here is important. But so is knowing whether the NRC can be relied upon to enforce its own rules. As we have suggested previously, Congress should investigate the agency - and its chairman.

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ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

Time to stand out

Here we go. And the timing couldn't be better, arriving as it does on the heels of:

- Last week's reports of more local job losses and rising unemployment rates.

- A new analysis from the Council of State Taxation (COST), www.cost.org, showing New York with the worst property tax system in America.

So when New York's 10 regional economic development councils, groups that will largely determine the immediate future of state economic development assistance, began to be unveiled early last week, here's what I said, "We'll all be working closely together to do anything and everything possible to ensure that our region stands out in this competition for the state resources that can help create jobs and other economic opportunities for our employers, and our region's workers and their families."

That's right, rising out of all the dire economic news dominating the daily headlines comes this chance for regional leaders across New York, including ours, to stand up and do something positive. These new councils, established as part of this year's state budget, were being announced one by one across the

state by Governor Andrew Cuomo beginning last Tuesday.

According to the governor, they "represent a fundamental change in the state's approach to economic development, empowering specific areas ... to better support job creation and send a clear message that New York is once again open for business."

In short, it's up to us and in my view, that's really good news. Because we've done it before. I fully expect that a region-wide team of business, community and economic development leaders will once again help the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions succeed in this new state-level competition for economic development resources. They will develop local strategies that will compete for upwards of \$1 billion in state economic development assistance.

The councils will also offer up concrete solutions to New York's overburdened business climate to make it more competitive. The Legislature must act on these recommendations and get out of the way of business growth in New York. The success of our state economy truly rides on making New York more competitive with surrounding states. A billion dollars in incentives is a nice short-term assist, but won't solve

long-term needs.

Most of the counties in my 53rd Senate District - Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Tompkins - fall under the Southern Tier Regional Council. The district's remaining county, Yates, is part of the Finger Lakes Regional Council. Find more detailed information on the following "Open for Business" website: (<http://www.governor.ny.gov/regional-economic-development-councils>).

The site includes a Regional Council Guidebook providing more detailed information on the overall effort, as well as a place to submit suggestions online.

One of our region's strongest assets has always been a first-class corps of economic development experts who, year in and year out, have consistently done outstanding work to help Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates counties join the fierce competition for jobs and other economic opportunities. But the economic climate has never been tougher and now we have to raise the bar even higher to help our region stand out in this new state-level competition to build a better business climate.

I'm confident we will. We must.

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

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Still waiting for recovery

The recent layoff of 40 workers at the Philips Lighting plant just adds to the area's woes.

Unemployment in Steuben County has been coming down but it is still so high that we can prove that the recession is still a long way from departed. The most recent available figures show that joblessness in Steuben County is an even 9 percent - up from 8.8.

Although Steuben's unemployment is the highest in the immediate area, the regional picture is no brighter. In neighboring Chemung County the rate rose from 7.4 percent to 7.9 percent in the same period, while in Schuyler the rate stayed unchanged at 7.5.

A state Labor Department analyst said this area is mired in the same economic slump afflicting the rest of the country.

"The numbers are pointing to a shrinking labor force, rather than broad, robust growth," he said.

So don't be surprised when your neighbors ask you "What recovery?"

There's none to report in this region.

While our region keeps losing jobs, Texas leads the nation in job growth.

This has led to an unusual radio and billboard advertising campaign by the city of Vernon, Calif.

A typical ad features a breathless announcer shouting over a wailing siren "Texas Governor Rick Perry is urging Vernon's 1,800 employers to move their 55,000 plus jobs from California to Texas."

So far the governor has not complained about ads that portray him as a job thief. Indeed he probably finds the campaign an affirmative happening.

While most states have lost jobs by the thousands in the past decade, Texas has gained one million - more than almost every other state combined.

Perry talks of his state's job growth wherever he goes as he weighs a possible run for the presidency.

There are many political observers who claim that Perry, who has not yet declared himself a candidate, is the ultimate favorite to win the Republican nomination next year.

The California campaign which portrays him as a pirate might as well have been paid for by his own supporters.

Representative David Wu of Oregon has said he will quit as soon as his vote isn't needed to help resolve the debt crisis.

No stranger to scandal, Wu faced 2004 campaign charges when he assaulted a former girlfriend when they were both students at Stanford University in the 1970s.

Now he is accused of having an unwanted sexual encounter with an eighteen-year-old girl.

The matter has been referred to an ethics committee.

Note to reader Harvey Greenberg: Can't answer your question, sir, because I played no part in *The Leader's* decision to publish transcripts of text messages between a former East High teacher and a student.

You'll have to ask some official of the newspaper. I have not been employed there since February 2, 2002. I am but a lowly contractor.

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