

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

State aid distribution unfair

TO THE EDITOR | The Yates County Chamber of Commerce is embarking on a grassroots campaign to address the inequities of the New York system of awarding state aid to the various school districts. In the current economic climate, all school districts face budgeting challenges. In view of this situation, school districts find that the state aid portion of the budget takes on a much greater significance. Simply increasing taxes does not address the problem. Now is the time to review the inherent unfairness of the current state aid distribution formula.

Consider the following:

- Long Island school districts are allocated 33 percent of the entire aid package right up front, with the remainder then distributed to the rest of the entire state system. Current distribution of aid is inequitable and money continues to be sent to districts that don't actually need it.
- The Ramapo Central School district in Suffolk County offers the following: fitness center, spinning rooms, pool, amphitheater, planetarium, auditorium and gym. Some of these features could arguably be seen as extravagant. Districts that can afford these types of extravagant features should not receive increases in state-aid when districts that have basic programs receive decreases in state aid.
- The Manhasset Public School of Long Island provides their students a choice of five languages: Spanish, French, Italian, Latin and English. They also have access to Rosetta Stone where they can additionally study Greek, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Korean, Arabic, German, Hebrew, Irish Gaelic, Japanese, Polish, Dutch, Hindi, Persian Farsi, Swedish, Vietnamese, Turkish and Tagalog. In Yates County schools, the maximum choice that you may have is three: English, Spanish and French. Therefore, our kids cannot get an education that is equitable when compared to more wealthy districts.

• A recent valedictorian from a local school was denied admission into a State University College because her high school's curriculum was not "robust" enough.

Now is the time to address these gross inequities. The underprivileged children of rural upstate districts should not have to compete against their privileged peers from affluent downstate districts, which have well connected lobbyists protecting their interests.

The NYS Department of Education mission statement is "To raise the knowledge, skill, and opportunity of all the people of New York. Our vision is to provide leadership for a system that yields the best educated people in the world." This is not being accomplished due to the activities of the elected leadership within State government. The NYS Legislature and governor should work with greater vigor to reach equities in terms of the delivery of state aid so that all students will have a quality and meaningful education.

We urge you to contact your elected official regarding this issue. Contact the Yates County Chamber of Commerce (315) 536-3111 for a list of officials and a copy of a form letter that you can modify for your use.

Michael Linehan

President and CEO
Yates County Chamber of Commerce

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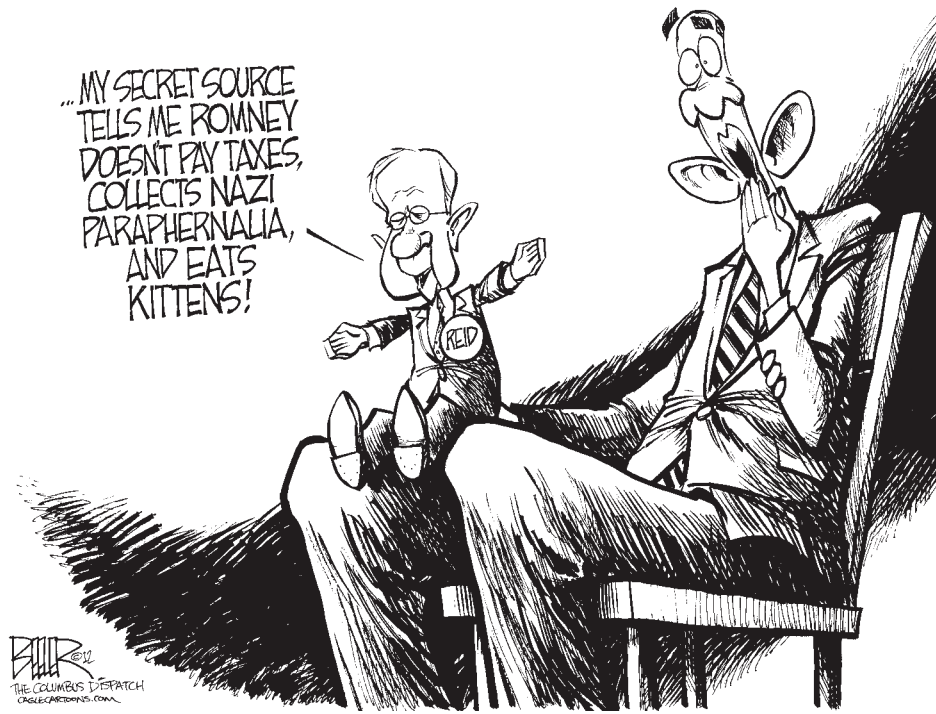
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ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

We know how to carry on

Many of the headlines since the late afternoon of July 26th, when a severe storm and tornado touched down and wreaked havoc in Lindley, South Corning and Elmira, have said it best: "Neighbors helping neighbors on Elmira's Eastside." "The power of community." "Region sets out on long road to recovery."

Helping. Community. Recovery. These are just a few of the key words to keep in mind when a disaster like this takes place.

Of course we're no strangers to natural disasters in this region.

Indeed, we were powerfully reminded of this fact recently on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Hurricane Agnes in June 1972. Now we're reminded that one constant between then and now has been this one: we pull together in these times of dire need.

So first and foremost I'll take this opportunity, on behalf of all of this region's residents, to say "thank you" again to all those who have

responded in so many different and important ways. We simply never know when a disaster may strike, so we have been reassured and our faith reaffirmed by countless examples of caring and commitment over the past few weeks in the aftermath of this latest disaster.

There are a thousand stories of decency, generosity and fortitude that will go unreported – a thousand, quiet good deeds that go untold but which collectively stand as a powerful force of recovery. I'm unable to single out each and every one here, of course, but I'm hopeful that highlighting a few will speak for all of the acts of heroism.

First, we must raise a heartfelt salute to all of the local police officers, firefighters and other emergency responders for their immediate, courageous and capable first response and dedication to a successful recovery plan. We're reminded that our communities are truly fortunate to have these men and women constantly on guard and standing ready to protect our lives and property, safety and security. Their spirit may have been captured best by Ithaca Fire Department Lieutenant Tom Basher, who said of Ithaca firefighters coming so swiftly to the aid of their brethren in Elmira on July 26th, "Those guys needed our help, and we had the ability to do it. If the same thing happened

here, those guys would be coming here to do the same."

In fact, emergency responders from across the region mobilized.

Mutual aid from 42 area fire departments arrived in an unbelievable demonstration of shared concern and cooperation, and service and support that, to give just one example, provided a door-to-door canvassing of the impacted neighborhoods to ensure immediate aid for anyone injured – and, amazingly, there was not one fatality or serious injury.

What comes to mind most quickly in assessing a disaster like this one is, again, the overwhelming response from so many segments of the local and statewide response community.

NYSEG, state Department of Transportation (DOT) and other surrounding county and town work crews immediately set to work removing trees and other debris, repairing roads and power lines. By the end of the first day all county roads had been reopened. By the end of the weekend NYSEG and mutual aid crews from utilities across the Northeast had restored power to 95% of the customers who had lost it. There were 98,000 NYSEG customers statewide who lost power in the storm. Thirty-six percent or 24,495 of these customers were located in the Elmira division – where there were 436 wires (totaling 21 miles) down. Ninety-one broken poles and 21 transformers were replaced. Power to the remaining 5 percent of customers was restored by early Tuesday morning, just four days after the storm struck. And NYSEG distributed more than 82,000 pounds of dry ice and 3,000 cases of bottled water in Elmira.

Of course, our local emergency response leaders proved more than up to this enormous task. Chemung County Fire and Emergency Services Director Mike Smith and Steuben County Office of Emergency Services Director Mike Sprague – and their capable staffs – earn an A+ for coordinating such an effective response, setting up a command post and staging area, reopening county roads, responding to 9-1-1 calls, inspecting damaged homes, and otherwise getting our communities on the road to recovery.

At the state level, of course, the administration of Governor Andrew Cuomo, in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee last

summer, have put in place a finely tuned and skilled team of emergency responders and an emergency response activation strategy and protocol that's second to none, I believe, in the nation. State emergency management leaders were immediately in contact and have remained on the scene locally to provide constant communication, direction and support.

Following last summer's disasters across upstate New York, Governor Cuomo said, "All levels of government are working together to help New York recover and we will not stop until the job is done." That's certainly remained the case here.

Equally impressive has been the response from local volunteers working through the Red Cross, Salvation Army and other local businesses and community groups who fanned out to open shelters, provide thousands of meals, and offer comfort in so many, many ways. These volunteers make the difference.

Clearly the recovery and rebuilding effort will demand the attention of federal, state and local leaders for months to come. Government plays a vital role in these responses. The damage assessments will be ongoing. The hard work of putting communities and neighborhoods back together will be intensive. Already, Watkins Glen International and NASCAR have pledged a donation of trees from Stillman's Greenhouse in Montour Falls that will be planted throughout the city of Elmira to help replace the many lost. The timing of this reminder of the willingness of the people of the Southern Tier and all New Yorkers to pull together has been poignant – arriving as it has shortly after the 40th anniversary of the devastation wrought across our region by Hurricane Agnes. So many of us can remember that event like it happened yesterday.

This same resolve is being demonstrated again, at this very moment, in the ongoing storm and tornado recovery. We're grateful to the volunteers, the local businesses and workers, and the government officials who will carry out that mission.

The bottom line is that we will carry on. That's the message being delivered time and time again since this latest natural disaster touched down.

■ **Sen. Tom O'Mara is a Republican from Big Flats.**

OTHER VIEW | LOS ANGELES TIMES

Beefing up Web security

The first line of defense against cybercriminals is to have the companies and individuals who connect to the Internet hew to industry standards for minimizing risks. Many of them have so far failed to do so, however, enabling hackers to steal trade secrets, knock sites offline and vacuum up credit card numbers. Sadly, a new Senate bill aimed at improving cybersecurity wouldn't address those security gaps as forcefully as its sponsors originally proposed. But at least it's better than the alternative that passed the House.

At issue is what role, if any, the federal government should play in improving private industry's practices. Business groups have urged Congress to let government and the private sector share more information about hacking threats and defenses. That's necessary, but not sufficient. And if it's done the wrong way, as in the House-passed cybersecurity bill, information "sharing" can become a pretext for government surveillance and privacy violations.

The Senate bill is more sensitive to privacy concerns than the House's. Just as important as information sharing, however, is persuading corporate networks and sites to follow the tech industry's best cybersecurity practices. The Senate bill's sponsors originally proposed to require operators of critical infrastructure – e.g., power grids, water plants and payment processing networks – to meet federal security standards, using the techniques of their choice. But when business groups and their Senate allies howled about regulation, the sponsors dropped the mandate in favor of a voluntary program that merely encourages companies to adhere to cybersecurity standards.

Companies already have plenty of incentive to protect their networks from hackers, yet too many fail to do so. It's conceivable that providing even more incentives could do the trick, but the ones in the current version of the Senate bill range from weak to nonsensical – such as threatening to withhold information about cybersecurity threats from companies that don't comply.

The best motivator may be to require companies to disclose publicly when they've been hacked, which would bring more market forces to bear on companies that didn't keep up with the constant demands of cybersecurity. Business groups oppose even that step, however, and the bill merely tells regulators to consider it. Unable to mandate better compliance with security standards, lawmakers evidently can't even provide companies more compelling reasons to do so voluntarily.

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