

Grins and groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans from news of the week.

OUR OPINION | Grin to the Corning-Painted Post school board. Groan to an overexposed trial.

Grin

It didn't take long for the Corning-Painted Post school board to realize a new tax isn't a good idea.

As a way of generating new revenue for the cash-strapped school district, officials explored the viability of a utility tax on electricity, natural gas and many other heating fuels, and telephone service.

It didn't even require a vote for the board to reject the idea.

This isn't to say a utility tax is forever dead. It's on the shelf, according to board president Dale Wexell.

Facing another year of cost cutting, decreased state aid and increasing costs from salaries and benefits, the board may be tempted in the spring to take the utility tax off the shelf.

That may be a huge mistake. A tax is a tax is a tax. Whether it's levied on property or on a phone bill, the bottom line is less money in residents' wallets.

A time may come when the school board absolutely must raise taxes or risk not delivering the education district residents have come to expect.

Then, and only then, should the school board dust off the utility tax for another look.

Groan

The verdict came in last week in the Casey Anthony trial and the verdict is ... the mainstream media has its priorities screwed up.

Yes, the murder of Caylee Anthony was horrible. And yes, the details of the case were compelling at times.

But we're talking about one woman who allegedly murdered one little girl.

From how many more important things did the Casey Anthony trial divert attention?

And who's to blame for the deluge of Casey Anthony coverage? The media would say they are only providing what the public wants.

Some in the public, on the other hand, would argue that the public craves coverage of the Casey Anthony trial only because they have no choice.

Their addiction comes from being force-fed.

Whichever side is right in this chicken/egg debate, it's fairly certain time watching coverage of Casey Anthony could have been better spent doing something else.

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One month \$26	One month \$33.50	
Three months \$78	Three months \$100.50	
Six months \$156	Six months \$201	
One year \$288	One year \$372	

ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

Protecting hunters' rights

Summertime and the fishing is easy, the old thought goes. But will that always be the case in New York state? Some of us want to make sure that this idea remains a part of New York's thinking for generations to come. And we believe it will if a legislative proposal that began making its way through the Legislature several weeks ago ever becomes the law of the land. Let me explain.

Every five years the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service conducts what's known as the "National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation." This survey proves invaluable to state fish and wildlife agencies, conservation groups, and many other federal, state and private organizations who utilize it for a range of purposes including wildlife management. The last of these surveys, in 2006, revealed striking facts about the nationwide economic impact of wildlife-based recreation. It found, for example, that 87.5 million U.S. residents fished, hunted or engaged in other wildlife-related recreation. Further, the Fish & Wildlife Service reported that these residents "spent over \$122 billion pursuing their recreational activities, contributing to millions of jobs in industries and businesses that support wildlife recreation."

\$122 billion. That's just a little less than this year's entire New York state budget. Eye opening, right? Hunting, fishing and trapping are deeply rooted in New York's (and our region's) culture, experience and tradition. But did you know it was such a boon to the bottom line? It's big business, in other words. New York's 1.2 million sportsmen

and sportswomen, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, generate nearly \$2 billion worth of statewide economic activity and directly create 28,000 jobs.

So with the goal of forever preserving these long-held traditions for future generations (to say nothing of capturing the upstate economic impact), the state Senate approved legislation in the waning days of this year's session, which I proudly co-sponsored, that for the first time in state history would provide Constitutional protection to the right to hunt, fish and trap in New York.

Some might still wonder: Is that really necessary? I can only tell you that over the short time that I've served in the state Assembly and now this year, my first, in the Senate, I've seen a steady and determined effort on the part of a bloc of mostly downstate legislators to erode our Second Amendment rights. Add to this that New York has become increasingly urbanized (and suburbanized) over the past generation, rural areas have become increasingly marginalized politically, and there's been an alarming loss of open space and wild areas in some regions – and it's no real stretch of the imagination to consider our sporting traditions at risk.

Thus, this proposed Constitutional amendment. It's our belief that setting the state's statutory rights to hunt, fish and trap within the firmer stone of the Constitution will allow the people of New York to declare these rights to engage in outdoor pastimes and pursuits, and more adequately protect them from any adversarial or unfavorable Legislature in the future.

New York's hunters and

anglers, joined by thousands upon thousands of our brethren from across the nation who travel here for New York's unique outdoor experiences, annually spend millions of dollars on goods and services provided by local businesses in communities across the upstate region – sporting licenses, bait and tackle, hotels and motels, restaurants, lodges and camps, groceries and hardware, vehicles, boats, fuel, guide services and the list goes on. These expenditures support jobs, generate sales and income taxes, and strengthen the tourism industry.

So it's a simple but powerful idea: a state Constitutional amendment protecting New York's long-standing outdoor traditions.

On a related note, I was grateful to join forces with area Assemblymen Chris Friend and Phil Palmesano to gain this session's approval of legislation, which now needs only Governor Cuomo's signature to become law, to permanently authorize rifle hunting in Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Yates counties. New York authorized rifle hunting for deer and bear in Chemung, Steuben and Yates counties in 2008 on a three-year trial basis, until October 2011. A local rifle hunting season was established in Schuyler County in 2009, also until this October.

We've had a safe and successful experience with rifle hunting locally. It's proven beneficial to local counties, and it should be made a permanent part of the region's economic and recreational landscape.

■ **State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents the 53rd Senate District.**

Bange got off too easy

Corning Councilman Mike Bange is the luckiest guy in town.

Mayor Rich Negri let him off the proverbial hook last week when he accepted his apology for having insulted welfare recipients.

Rich is a nice guy – too nice for that job.

Bange's transgression far exceeded that which could be expunged by simply saying "I'm sorry."

This sad episode began at a committee meeting

June 22 when Bange asked, "Can we tell all the welfare people we're building a brick factory and they all have to work there in 115 degree temperatures until they move away?"

Negri said that a formal apology was acceptable because this was Bange's first violation of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Sorry, Your Honor, but that's not true. He made similarly insulting remarks earlier this year during a council meeting at the Senior Citizens Center.

There are council members, including Deputy Mayor Lee Wells, who think that an apology was sufficient.

There are also those who don't believe it.

"Council members are not allowed to make belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive or disparaging comments," said Councilman Hilda Lando.

Councilman Betty Coccho pointed out that in the past council members have been censured for similar violations.

Both women are correct. Bange should have had more public humiliation than would accompany a mere apology.

If ever he shoots off his mouth in similar fashion, the majority of the council should come down on him with boots of lead.

Last weekend's Phish concert at Watkins Glen International was as great a success as anyone could have hoped.

Police had very few problems and made a mere 34 arrests out of a crowd that exceeded 40,000.

Schuyler County Sheriff Bill Yessman said as the crowds were leaving on Monday, people waved at his patrol car and said, "Thank you." He even got emails from Phish phans thanking his department for the way they handled the event.

Police officers "don't hear too many thank yous," Yessman said.

Stores in Watkins Glen reported booming business from the event and WGI officials made it clear they would welcome the jam band back at any time.

This one-time music critic was unable to attend but *The Leader's* Derrick Ek says the music was all that could have been expected and then some.

There were those who feared the worst based on distant memories of the 1973 Summer Jam concert that drew more than 700,000 people to the track and paralyzed traffic for 30 miles around.

In this case there was no such possibility as ticket sales could not have exceeded more than 60,000 and to have fallen a bit short of that goal made the event that much easier to handle.

Phish has held similar festivals at remote locations in the past. But the band appears to have found a location which is not only used to handling large crowds but can accommodate them with ease.

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