

OTHER VIEW | LOS ANGELES TIMES

Undermining FDA on tobacco

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration barely had time to start regulating cigarettes before legislation was introduced to weaken its authority.

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act was passed in 2009 with sweeping majorities in both houses; its primary goal was to reduce the terrible toll that smoking takes on Americans' health, especially by discouraging young people from taking up the habit. The law gave the FDA the authority to regulate the advertising and packaging of cigarettes, along with ingredients such as nicotine and flavorings that affect how easily the public is drawn into smoking and how addictive the habit is once started. As required in the law, for example, the FDA banned candy flavorings in cigarettes, which make the product more appealing to underage smokers and young adults.

But now that the agency is taking meaningful steps against smoking, Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., has added an amendment to the agriculture appropriations bill that would restrict the FDA's authority over cigarettes and a host of other matters.

Currently, the FDA is considering whether to ban one of the most popular and profitable ingredients – menthol – but Rehberg's amendment would keep it from taking that action. No longer would the FDA be able to consider a substance's tendency to attract smokers or make cigarettes more addictive. Rather, the FDA could only ban or limit ingredients that are found to make the cigarette physically more harmful than existing products. Menthol has not been found to do that; it does its damage by drawing people into smoking and keeping them there.

Menthol masks the flavor and irritation of cigarette smoke; menthol cigarettes are perceived by consumers as "light" or less dangerous, though they aren't. Studies have found that menthol makes it easier for young smokers to get started and harder for habitual smokers to stop. Unlike restrictions on fruit flavors, a ban on menthol could dramatically affect smoking rates – one-fourth of smokers prefer menthol brands – which is exactly why the tobacco industry is fighting any such restrictions.

In addition to the tobacco provisions, the law would limit the FDA's authority to reject new drugs as long as they had any benefit, even if they fell far short of promises or carried significant risks, and it would be unable to restrict the use of routine, preventive antibiotics in livestock, which has been identified as a significant source of drug-resistant bacteria. About 80 percent of the antibiotics in this country are used to promote growth in livestock and prevent epidemics from sweeping through herds and flocks under crowded conditions. The measure has been passed by the House Appropriations Committee.

It's unlikely that Congress would ultimately approve a measure to gut the nation's system for vetting pharmaceuticals and medical devices. But legislative compromises could weaken efforts to reduce smoking and the overuse of antibiotics in feedlots.

The provisions in Rehberg's amendment are part of the contradiction in our society's attitudes toward tobacco. Cigarettes have no health benefits, and they cost taxpayers billions of dollars each year in Medicaid expenses alone to care for smoking-related illnesses. For all the justifiable concern about obesity, smoking remains the leading cause of premature death in this country. The goal of the original legislation was to reduce the rates of sickness and death from cigarettes, and especially to protect impressionable youngsters. It would be a mistake to back away from that goal now.

LETTERS POLICY

■ Letters should be typed or neatly printed.

■ Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. No letters will be published unless verified with the author in person or by telephone.

■ Letters may be edited for space considerations.

Mail your letter to: **Fax your letter to:**
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Attn: Jbe Dunning
THE LEADER (607) 936-9939
PO BOX 1017
CORNING, NY 14830

E-mail your letter to:

jdunning@the-leader.com

The LEADER

The Leader (ISSN #10501983)
The Leader is published daily at
34 West Putteney Street,
Corning, New York 14830

by Liberty Group Corning Holdings, Inc.
Periodical postage paid
at Corning, New York 14830-0817.
USPS code | 0586-160

Postmaster:
Send address changes to
The Leader, West Putteney Street,
Corning, New York 14830
Publisher: Dennis Bruen

ON THE FRONT PAGE

Coming clocktower by artist
Larry Barone

CIRCULATION

Elmer Kuehner | Circulation director
936-4651, Ext. 320

EDITORIAL

Jbe Dunning | Managing editor
936-4651, Ext. 362
jdunning@the-leader.com

ADVERTISING

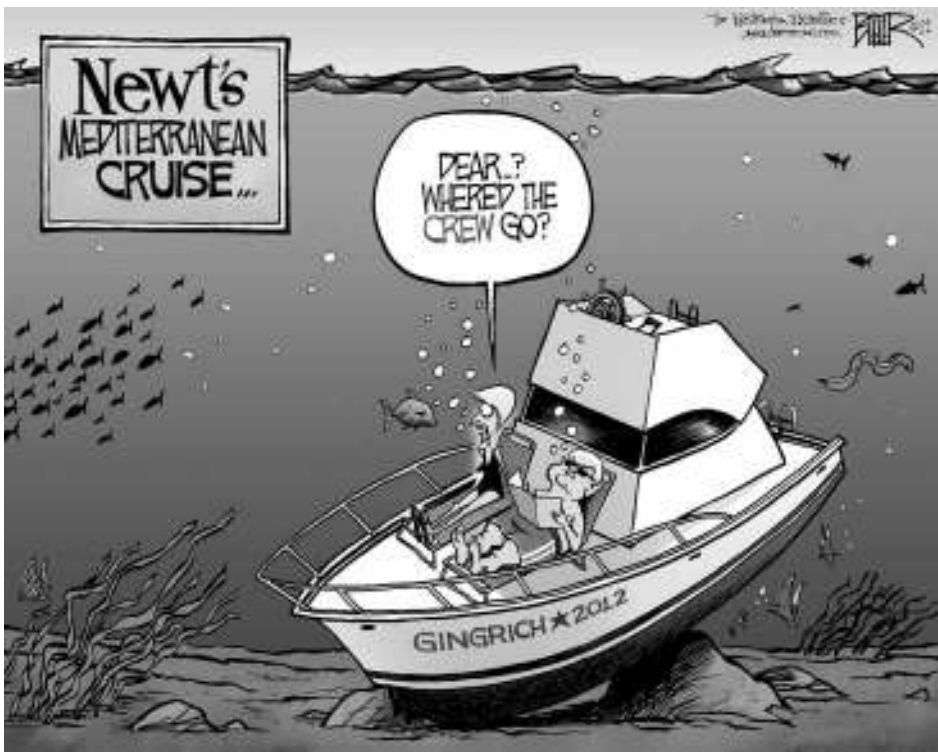
Classifieds (607) 936-4651, Ext. 651
Retail (607) 936-4651, Ext. 653
Adv fax (607) 962-0782

Kurt Bartenstein | Ad director,
936-4651, Ext. 388
kbartenstein@the-leader.com

POSTAL RATES

STUEBEN COUNTY		ELSEWHERE IN USA	
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

Where do we go from here?

We're in the homestretch of the Legislature's 2011 regular session and the horse racing analogy sums it up pretty well. So let's stick with it. Between today and the session's June 20 end date, you'll be reading and hearing about all sorts of legislative jockeying for position and, as always, plenty of pundits putting down bets on the issues that will cross the finish line.

So stay tuned while this year's end-of-session nears. It's going to produce some political theater but hopefully, and more importantly, some good government. In the eyes of many Albany watchers, this session, my first as a state senator, has already been one of the more productive in recent memory. An on-time budget. The first year-to-year spending decrease in 15 years. No new taxes. No borrowing. Medicaid redesign. Ethics reform. All positive steps for New York's taxpayers.

Despite all of it, though, there's still a long, long way to go in the effort to turn New York around. So while this year's session plays out in the coming days, it's a good time to ask, Where do we go from

here?

Early last week Gov. Cuomo again signaled the direction we're moving in. Let's first give credit where it's due. Agree or disagree, you'd be hard-pressed to argue that this governor hasn't fully used one of the singular powers of the governorship, the so-called "bully pulpit" or taking the case to the people. Because he has. It's as simple as that. He's relentlessly pushed a reform-minded agenda and seized this moment when most New Yorkers clearly want it.

During last week's roll out of an agreement on ethics reform, for example, the governor used the phrase "sunlight is the best disinfectant." In other words, the foundation of these new ethics rules is this: The more the public knows, the better government becomes. That's exactly the idea that has and will continue to drive the Albany agenda right into 2012. You can bet on it.

Another example. Under a recent Senate-approved measure, which I support, New York would join more than half the states in America which give their residents the ability to

enact and amend laws through a process known as "initiative and referendum." In short, citizens would be given a greatly enhanced ability to place issues on the ballot for a public vote.

So that's where we're headed, in my view. More and more efforts to ensure greater and greater public participation in government. It's likely to remain an enormously difficult era in government. A prolonged economic downturn means fewer and fewer resources available to sustain a government, at all levels, that's become increasingly expensive. The choices are tough and painful, which means that people want their say.

So however this next week at the Capitol plays out, it's far from done. We're going to keep at it. We're getting back to basics and more likely than not, you're going to have plenty of opportunities to keep an eye on who's doing what in Albany – and more than a few new chances to directly participate in the decision-making process. That's good news.

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

H'port voters not making much sense

It's hard to understand voters in Hammondsport.

They recently roundly rejected a proposal to buy the old Curtiss school for a community center and this week approved a proposal to fix the main campus of their school district.

THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

The \$7.7 million repair project won by a margin of 146-93. And school Superintendent Kyle Bower said that the involvement of a citizens committee in the project from its inception was an important factor in the vote.

Twenty-six citizens drew up the plan and promoted the project from start to finish showing the community that the public was involved from Day One.

If more citizens had been involved in the Curtiss school project, might it have passed?

Reader Tom Stockdale of Hammondsport suggests in an e-mail however, that long-term costs were the real reason the community center proposal sank. He noted such expenses as the cost of remodeling, the cost of heating and maintaining the structure as factors that influenced the decision.

Your idea makes sense, Tom, but not living in Hammondsport, I can't say for sure.

...

Was glad to see that the demolition of buildings at Columbia Street and Denison Parkway is finally proceeding.

Leveled were the former St. Patrick's Church rectory and three adjacent houses. The work clears the way for construction of a major addition to The Alternative School for Math and Science. A 35,000-square-foot addition to that facility will officially be launched June 15 and completion is expected in late 2012.

The new building will occupy a 1.75-acre parcel where St. Patrick's Church and elementary school once stood.

Basically all this does is replace one private school with another. But cleaning up the area in itself is a major civic improvement.

...

The city council last week authorized a \$709,160 bond issue to pay the city's share of the \$7.7 million transportation center in a downtown parking lot.

The project was not OK'd unanimously, however. Councilmen Frank Muccini and Mike Bange both voted no.

There are few downtown projects as controversial as this. What the city will get for its money is a bus stop and a taxi stand built in the middle of a large public parking lot.

Originally, the city was not going to have to pay anything; its share would have been the parking lot. But the project was repeatedly delayed and total cost mounted to \$7.7 million. So the city not only had to give up the parking lot but also pay the additional \$709,160.

There are many in the community who don't think this is worth the money and The Insider is among them.

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

OTHER VIEW | PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

Sorry for Pennsylvania's Santorum!

Pennsylvania's own Rick Santorum is running for president. No kidding. He announced it last week in Somerset County, Pa.

We can't imagine the thought process that leads a person to think he can be president when, after several months of campaigning, he has driven his poll numbers up to 2 percent,

dead-last among the circus that is the Republican presidential race. (Santorum even trails "Someone else," who registers 3 percent.)

Santorum has another problem, too. When he compared gay marriage to "man on dog" sex, the senator so raised the ire of some gays, they turned his last name into a slang word for something that we can't men-

tion in this newspaper.

Dear People of the United States:

We are sorry about this. We thought we had done our part. When Santorum ran for a third term as U.S. senator among the people who know him best, he lost by an astonishing 17 points. We don't like him; we really don't like him. We assumed he would get the message.

Contact your representatives



U.S. Rep. Tom Reed, R-Corning
1037 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 225-3161
Fax: (202) 226-6599



U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-6542
Fax: (202) 228-3027



U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.
478 Russell
Washington, D.C. 20510
Tel. (202) 224-4451
Fax (202) 228-0282