

OPINION

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**Mail:** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, THE LEADER  
PO BOX 1017  
CORNING, NY 14830  
**Fax:** 607-936-9939  
**Email:** sdupree@the-leader.com

Online at [www.the-leader.com/opinions](http://www.the-leader.com/opinions)

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34 W. Pulteney St., Corning, NY 14830  
[www.the-leader.com](http://www.the-leader.com)

Fred Benson ..... Publisher  
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Derrick Ek ..... Assistant Editor

OTHER VIEW | BALTIMORE SUN

Obama talks tough on taxes, cliff

Anyone who wondered whether a vote for President Barack Obama meant something should have been reassured by his performance in last week's news conference. In the central issue that faces the country right now, whether the resolution to the so-called fiscal cliff will involve higher taxes on the wealthy, he could not have been more clear. Republicans who think they can blackmail the president into backing down on that question, as he did two years ago, had better think again.

Mr. Obama outlined several reasons why he was willing to accept an extension of all the Bush tax cuts, including those for the wealthy, at the end of 2010. The economy was particularly weak then, he said, and the extension was packaged with a number of other, crucial proposals, like an extension of unemployment insurance benefits. What he did not mention was perhaps the key difference between 2012 and 2010: Then, he had just stood up at a post-election news conference and admitted to taking a "shellacking"; this time, he was just re-elected decisively, while Republicans lost seats in both the House and Senate. As Mr. Obama noted, exit polls showed that substantially more people believe in higher taxes for the rich than voted for the incumbent president.

That's why he could be confident in outlining just two options for how we proceed: Either the nation goes over the fiscal cliff, taxes go up on everyone and the economy suffers; or Congress agrees in the next six weeks to legislation that keeps the Bush tax cuts in place for the middle class but not the rich. Republicans would be wise to take the latter approach. They lost the fight over taxes on the wealthy at the ballot box, and seeking to evade that fact by holding the middle class hostage is not going to further endear them to the American people. There are plenty of other fronts on which to make their voices heard.

Higher taxes on the wealthy will not single-handedly solve the nation's fiscal problems, but that's no reason to reject them. As a matter of simple fairness, it would be wrong to demand sacrifices from those who cannot easily afford them – as we almost inevitably will be forced to do – without first asking those who have plenty to contribute more.

And it is by no means all

that the president is proposing that we should do. His opening bid in negotiations for a grand bargain on deficit reduction includes about twice as much new revenue as the failed deal he discussed with Republican leaders in the summer of 2011. That includes higher taxes on corporations as well. But the president also indicated that he is willing to accept cuts to entitlement programs and discretionary spending as part of a deficit reduction deal. Elections have consequences, and Republicans need to accept that the ground has shifted under their feet in the last 18 months.

Although talk of the fiscal cliff and taxes dominated the news conference, the moment that is likely to be most frequently repeated on television is the president's response to a threat by Republican Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham that they would block any attempt Mr. Obama made to nominate United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice to the post of secretary of state because they believe she answered questions about the attack on our consulate in Benghazi, Libya, dishonestly. Mr. Obama, showing unusual fierceness, saying that if the Republican senators "want to go after someone, they should go after me."

On the substance, though, he still largely dodged questions about the Benghazi attack, both in terms of what went wrong with the security at the consulate and of the administration's shifting descriptions of the nature of the attack.

Likewise, although he offered some assurance that the sex scandal surrounding David Petraeus' resignation from the CIA – which has now expanded to include the commander of American forces in Afghanistan – did not involve any breaches of national security, the president dodged questions about whether he and the American people should have known about the FBI investigation into the matter before last week's election.

And sadly, this may be the last good opportunity the news media (and by extension, the American people) have to directly press him on those issues. Mr. Obama's news conferences have been infrequent, indeed; the last was eight months ago. If he was serious when he said he is looking for ways to improve upon his performance from the first term, this would be a good place to start.

First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Season of giving: Venison Donation Coalition



O'MARA

Southern Zone until December 9th.

(A brief side note: the beginning of deer season represents one of the most important economic cycles of the year. Deer hunting is a mainstay of the regional and statewide recreational economy, by some estimates accounting for \$2 billion of economic activity and 28,000 jobs statewide.

Steuben County, for example, remains one of the Northeast's premiere deer hunting destinations. In early October, this year's hugely successful Southern Tier Outdoor Show offered further testimony to the importance of outdoor activities to the regional economy.)

But back to the Venison Donation Coalition. It's a foundation supported by sportsmen's organizations, of course, but also by corporations, local farm bureaus, government agencies, civic and religious groups, and individual citizens.

I'm glad for this chance to call attention to its meaningful work. In government, particularly in an era like the current one

defined by limited resources to address seemingly infinite demands, we're always searching for ways to encourage individual citizens to contribute to the overall quality of our communities.

It was 19 years ago when an area "Hunters for the Hungry" program was prepared to donate 400 pounds of venison for distribution to the needy and discovered that state law prevented them from doing so. As a result,

"Hunters for the Hungry" programs operating throughout New York at that time were being told they couldn't donate over 10,000 pounds of venison to food banks and other organizations providing meals to the unemployed, shut-ins, senior citizens and other needy citizens. It just didn't make any sense. So the Legislature quickly acted to establish a program to address the appropriate health concerns and allow the donations to be made.

The venison donation program that resulted is now a broad-based partnership that includes a range of area supporters. It's facilitated the donation of venison to food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and additional not-for-profit organizations and charities that feed the poor.

The response of hunters has been overwhelming. Today the Venison

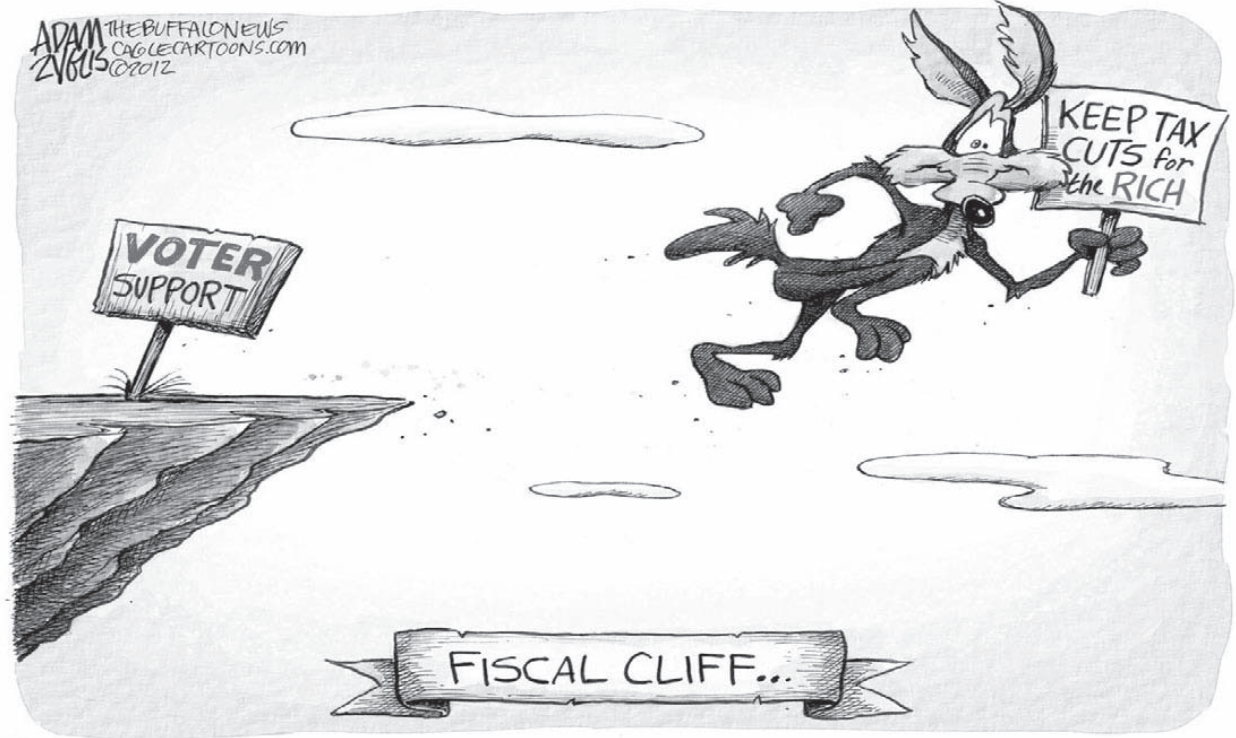
Donation Coalition operates in most of the state's 62 counties. Countless citizens have enjoyed nutritious meals as a result.

It is, very simply, an admirable effort. While it may not readily come to mind as a community development mainstay, it surely is. You can't underestimate the spirit of commitment and giving it encourages. We will continue to develop infrastructure, promote tourism, improve schools, protect citizens, and do anything and everything possible to enhance our economic standing, but along with these fundamental responsibilities is a responsibility to the quality of life for everyone. That's what's important, appropriate and meaningful about the ongoing work of the Venison Donation Coalition.

And we all can help. As the Coalition notes on its website ("Feed 4 People for Just a Buck"), the donation of just \$1 can help provide four meals. For every dollar donated, in fact, the Coalition puts 95 cents toward processing donated venison. For more information, visit the Venison Donation Coalition online at [www.venisondonation.com](http://www.venisondonation.com), or call 866-862-DEER (3337).

*Tom O'Mara is a Republican state senator from Big Flats.*

ANOTHER VIEW



OTHER VIEW | TACOMA NEWS-TRIBUNE

A giant blunder: the Petraeus affair

Powerful man, beguiling woman: The combination has been sabotaging national interests since the days of Troy. Should David Petraeus' affair with groupie-biographer Paula Broadwell have forced his resignation? Sadly, yes.

It's not a matter of Puritanism, which – take note, sophisticates – hardly saturates American culture these days. Although betrayal of marriage vows and a wife of 37 years reflects poorly on Petraeus as a husband, it's the least of the reasons this distinguished soldier had to step down as the nation's chief intelligence officer.

Far more important is the fundamental lack of judgment and caution Petraeus displayed in getting

himself entangled with Broadwell.

As a West Point graduate, Reserve lieutenant colonel and all-around American superwoman, she hardly seems a treacherous Bond girl. Still, Petraeus let his guard down, an inexcusable lapse in a CIA chief.

He potentially exposed himself to blackmail, and he opened a clandestine door into his affairs that might have been exploited by someone close to Broadwell. An intelligence official bent on carrying on outside his marriage should at least keep a few alert colleagues in the loop.

Indulging in loose-lipped communications on a common email account was a foolish performance

all by itself.

A president must have absolute confidence in his CIA director's personal integrity and judgment. Petraeus' actions forfeited that trust.

This scandal keeps on getting spookier. The timing – just after the presidential election – is more than weird. There's also the apparently political leakage of the dirt through an FBI back channel: An agent reportedly tipped off House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., on Oct. 27. The call was arranged by Rep. Dave Reichert, a Republican from Washington state.

The seamy business then spilled onto the top NATO commander in Afghanistan, Marine Gen. John R. Allen. He's been ensnared

in an investigation of his connection with a Florida woman who in turn is connected to Petraeus and the ubiquitous Broadwell.

So far, Allen is a sideshow. The real damage lies in the loss of Petraeus. He served the United States brilliantly in Iraq and Afghanistan, and he might have done the same in the CIA. His blunder has deprived the nation of an invaluable strategic visionary at a moment when his vision is sorely needed at the top.

It's a shame that this scandal will always dog America's memories of Petraeus. Leaders shouldn't be defined by the dumbest thing they ever did. But when it's dumb enough to be unforgettable, its place in history is assured.