

# OPINION

TOM O'MARA | 58TH DISTRICT

## Staying focused, moving forward



Tom O'Mara

There is only one way to begin this column, "Thank you."

Thank you to our doctors and nurses, emergency services personnel, first responders, pharmacists, farmers, business leaders, truckers, delivery drivers, service organizations, educators, librarians, grocery store workers, government officials at every level, and an incredible, selfless army of volunteers - throughout the public and private sectors - working around the clock to control this coronavirus threat, and provide diligent public outreach.

The strong spirit of New Yorkers is demonstrated by over 60,000 retired medical volunteers who have already answered the call.

They're needed and deserve our utmost respect for voluntarily putting themselves in harm's way. New York City's 9-1-1 calls exceed 6,000 a day and our frontline emergency responders, EMTs, firefighters and police respond.

This doesn't even begin to cover everyone, or all of the groups and organizations stepping up.

I have to trust that all of you know that we are grateful and inspired by what's taking place.

These days continue to be unimaginably demanding and disorienting. Challenging weeks remain. Consequently, we have to keep reaching out. I have said many times: One way we can stay together is by staying informed.

Please remember that on my Senate website (omara.nysenate.gov), we are maintaining a "One-Stop Webpage" to gather, in one place, key pieces out of the enormous flow of information coming from local, state, and federal agencies and organizations. My contact information is there too and we are ready to help in any way we can.

Information sharing is critical. We hope this One-Stop online location can be helpful in some small way.

I will highlight that last week the state Office of Mental Health launched a toll-free COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline (1-844-863-9314) to provide free and confidential support.

Thank you to the thousands of mental health

professionals volunteering their care, compassion, expertise, and support.

I will also remind everyone that in addition to the state's comprehensive webpage, coronavirus.health.ny.gov, a toll-free Novel Coronavirus Hotline is operating at 1-888-364-3065.

Finally, the state's new fiscal year begins on April 1.

A new state budget is needed to begin carrying us into what will be one of the historically difficult financial and economic eras New York has ever faced.

Over the next two years, we are faced with fixing what's broken. It will require all of the experience and governmental knowhow we can muster.

At this moment in time, priority No. 1 can only be getting COVID-19 under control, protecting and saving lives, and preventing further damage to communities.

Nevertheless, later this week, while working toward enactment of the new budget, we are required to take the first steps in confronting the fiscal upheaval the coronavirus is inflicting.

Here's my bottom line for now: There's a cynical belief that says that politicians never let a crisis go to waste.

I hope that Governor Cuomo and the downstate Democrat leaders now in control of our State Legislature will not give that saying new life by trying to take advantage of this crisis. We are undergoing unprecedented shutdowns -- of government, the economy, individual communities, and daily life in so many, many ways. Everyone's attention is focused and must remain focused on getting through this pandemic.

We must enact a budget this week that simply keeps this state running and meeting its obligations throughout this emergency -- no pork, no political agenda, and no policy unrelated to the budget, deficit, or coronavirus crisis.

Then, once we have weathered this storm, we can get to work assessing the damage, determining who and what needs repair, and have an open and full discussion on the best way to move forward for the entire state, upstate and downstate.

That would be common sense.

That would be responsible.

That would be fair. I hope that's the course Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders will take in the coming days.

SHAWN VARGO | EXECUTIVE EDITOR

## We're a long way from normal



Shawn Vargo

As I write this, it's Saturday, March 28, 2020. The skies are overcast and a little rain is falling - just a typical March day.

Oh, if that was only the case.

Three weeks ago, as we published Coronavirus stories from China and Italy in The Leader, we were told by many that we were part of a media conspiracy to spread panic.

There weren't any cases around Steuben County ... what was the big deal, many asked?

On March 14, my wife and I had our last beers in a bar at Junior's Log Cabin, just minutes before New York State mandated its 8 p.m. closing time.

Still, there were no cases around here. Again, what was the big deal?

Bing-bang-boom ... fast forward two weeks.

It seems like more stores are closed, than open.

People are worried about everything from toilet paper to paying their bills. As of this writing, Steuben County now has 18 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

I'm sure there are some that will continue to hold the "what's the big deal?" line, but I'm hoping that number is shrinking. For everyone's sake.

Every confirmed case includes questions regarding where the person has been.

If you had to write down a list of places you visited the previous 48 hours - how large a list would it be? How many people did you make contact with or could have made contact with something you made contact with?

How would it weigh on you?

I'm not trying to be morbid. I'm not trying to be dramatic. It's just that sometimes it takes looking at a situation from a different perspective to make a point sink in.

We still have a long way to go.

I am hopeful that federal and state mandates involving limits on essential travel helps

flatten the curve for this virus.

I am hopeful that we can begin putting our lives back to normal sooner, rather than later.

I am hopeful that we can all work together for the greater good.

I look forward to going to work at my office on a daily basis.

I look forward to my children going back to college and high school.

I look forward to sitting down to a meal somewhere other than my kitchen table.

I look forward to getting back to politics being my least favorite topic of conversation.

We're still a long way from it - but I remain hopeful.

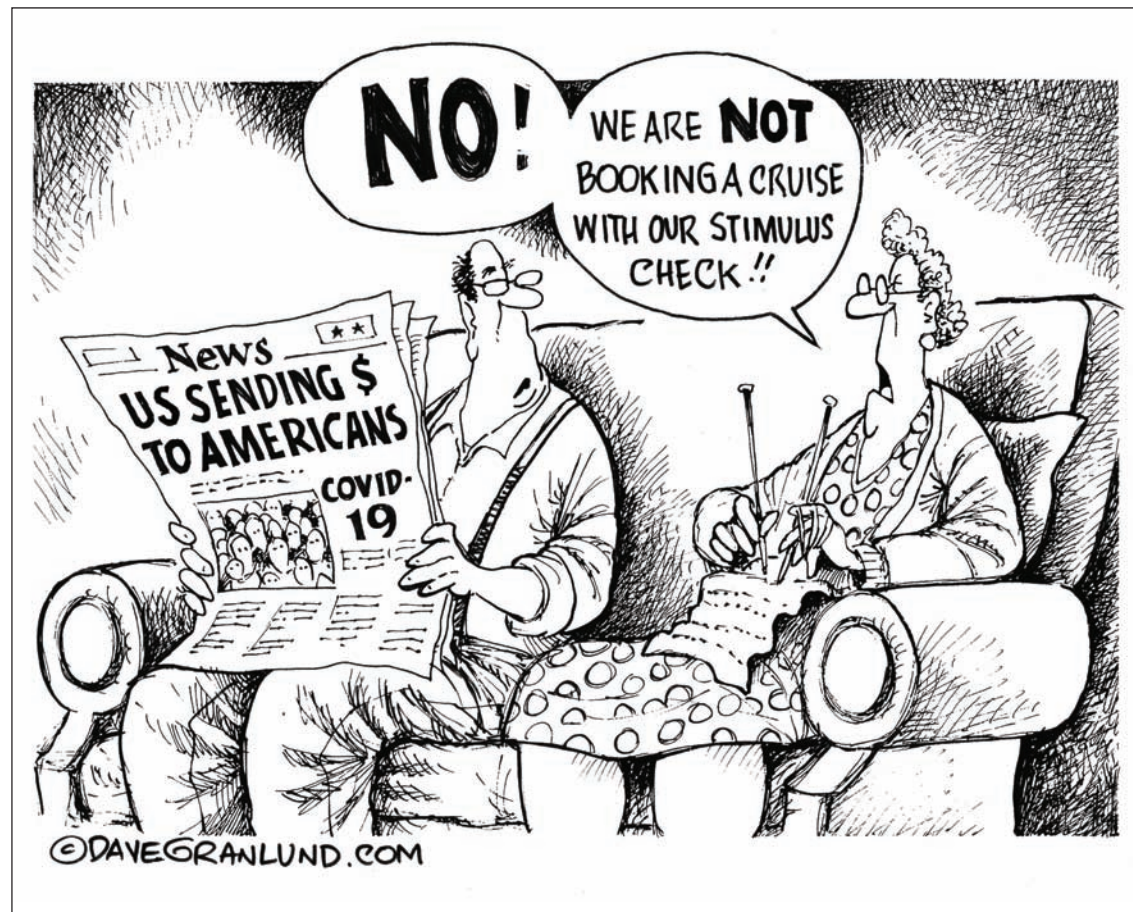
Here's hoping everyone reading this is also ready to return to normal - and doing everything necessary to get us back to that place.

There is a finish line, but we haven't heard the bell yet signaling the final lap has begun. The race continues.

Good luck and stay safe.

Shawn Vargo is the Executive Editor of The Leader. He can be emailed at svargo@the-leader.com.

### ANOTHER VIEW



### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Blood from coronavirus on Democrats' hands

To the Editor,  
I write this on Wednesday, March 25, 2020, as the U.S. Senate's relief bill awaits expected passage.

I draw your attention to the Senate "debate" two days ago, March 23, 2020, where Senate Democrats refused to even debate or discuss the amended legislation they had peppered with Green New Deal projects and other totally unrelated amendments having absolutely nothing to do with providing immediate relief to unemployed Americans; nothing to do with addressing critical Covid-19 supplies; nothing to do with small business relief; nothing to do with an economy in free fall.

I am fully aware that the legislative process has been described as "watching sausage being made," but you have shamelessly "played politics" with real peoples' lives. The coronavirus deaths in the U.S. in the last two days might be described as on you ... it might be said their blood is on your hands.

Sadly, you are the antithesis

of a true statesman elected to serve your constituents. Your behavior was an embarrassment to the Country and the State you were elected to represent.

Douglas Mitchell, Addison

#### Nursing ombudsman program blocked from in-person visits

To the Editor,  
The New York State Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is a resident-centered and resident-directed advocacy program available to anyone residing in a nursing home, adult care facility or family-type home across the state.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program sponsored by AIM Independent Living Center covers Steuben and Allegany counties. Ombudsmen advocate for residents to address quality of life and quality of care issues along with residents' rights concerns.

At this time when visitation to facilities has been restricted, we would like families and residents to know

that the Ombudsman Program must also abide by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) guidelines for no in-person visitation. With that said, our office remains fully able to accept and receive phone calls regarding any concerns or questions you may have about care. Please call AIM at (607) 962-8225, Ext. 112 and be sure to leave a message.

Our Certified Ombudsman volunteers will be ready to return to their weekly commitment once the visitation restriction has been lifted.

As you can imagine, residents are in much need of an advocacy program during this unprecedented time.

We will be scheduling our next training session when social distancing protocols are lifted, at which time we will be looking for new volunteers to become Ombudsmen and help us advocate on behalf of our long-term care residents.

Thank you.

Taryn Roloson, Ombudsman Program Coordinator, AIM Independent Living Center

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