

OPINION

COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA, R-BIG FLATS

Getting back to unfinished work

The appropriate way to open this column is by applauding last week's success for the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) in the state's seventh-annual local economic development competition.

These new initiatives mark, once again, the beginning of vital job growth projects regionally. In fact, the diligence of so many local leaders -- including Southern Tier REDC Co-Chair Tom Tranter of Corning Incorporated -- has stood out since 2011. Council members have worked side by side, step by step, to develop and implement short- and long-term strategies for a stronger economic future. It remains up to every leader, at every level, to put these incredible resources to effective use.

The 2018 session of the State Legislature gets underway on January 3 with Governor Andrew

Cuomo's eighth State of the State address. The governor will address the Legislature in person this year, which he did not do last year when he snubbed the Legislature and broke a time-honored tradition. Let's hope this bodes well for better, more cooperative relations.

The state government fiscal outlook is not so rosy. The state faces a budget deficit which will leave the governor and Legislature hard choices, to say the least, especially at a time when the need for resources remains so urgent in so many areas including health care, infrastructure, and education.

The coming year, in other words, calls for identifying and holding fast to fundamental priorities.

First, in my view, New York State still has not fully tackled the nuts-and-bolts challenges of high property taxes, overregulation, job loss, and overall economic decline across

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far too many upstate New York communities and regions.

Staying on the jobs front. We have to remain focused on manufacturing as the backbone of economic revitalization. Corning Incorporated's recent "Valor Glass" announcement is a bright spot heading into the New Year, together with last week's regional council awards to local manufacturers including SEPAC in Elmira, Beecher Emission Solution Technologies in Big Flats, Golden Age Cheese Company in Painted Post, Lucky Hare Brewing in Schuyler County, and Southern Tier Hemp Processing in Binghamton to help expand production and create solid manufacturing jobs across the Southern Tier and Finger

Lakes region.

Furthermore, I believe it's important to stress that regulatory and tax reforms over the past few years have sparked astounding growth in many agriculture- and tourism-related sectors. The latest figures show that the Craft New York Act, which in 2014 implemented a range of tax and regulatory reforms, has resulted in the opening of 35 cideries, 60 wineries and farm wineries, 67 craft distillers, and 178 craft breweries. These 340 new businesses include 260 farm-based producers utilizing locally sourced ingredients. The number of craft beverage producers has increased in every region, with the Finger Lakes leading the way and the Southern Tier not far behind. New York

State now ranks in the top five nationally for the number of craft beverage producers in every category: fourth for both the total number of wineries and breweries, second for the number of craft distillers, and first for the number of hard cider producers. It has meant thousands of new jobs and more than a \$3-billion overall economic impact.

This growth is important to highlight because it delivers a message: Tax and regulatory reform actions work. I remain hopeful that continued proof of their ongoing success in the agricultural sectors just highlighted will encourage the expansion of similar actions to other potential job-growth sectors of the economy.

What about high property taxes? Despite the governor's promises to the contrary at the very beginning of his administration, we simply have not done nearly enough to transform the state-local partnership through

meaningful mandate relief, which is the only real path to reducing (not just controlling the growth of) the burden on local property taxpayers for the long term.

Lastly, but far from least -- in truth, most importantly of all -- on a societal, community-based level we continue to face a public health crisis surrounding heroin and opioids, meth, and other illegal drugs destroying lives, threatening communities and neighborhoods, and overburdening systems of criminal justice, health care, and social services.

It has been said many times by many different people in many different places, but it's always worth repeating: It will continue to take every community institution to confront this terrible cycle of addiction, violence, and tragedy -- and that will include the ongoing work of the Senate Task Force on Heroin on which I serve as a member.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Good people to the rescue when car won't start

To the Editor,
On Wed. Dec. 6, 2017, my wife and I made our yearly trip to the Arnot Mall to engage in our annual Christmas Shopping.

After we finished one round of shopping, we went to our car in hopes of continuing elsewhere. To our disappointment, our

car simply would not start.

We knew our battery was down so we decided to go to Mooney's to have lunch and figure out our next move. We sat at the bar as there didn't seem to be any free tables for two.

I mentioned to the bartender about our problem and he said "no problem, we can help you."

He was visiting with a young gentleman at the other end of the bar so he

said to us, the guy down there will help me and we will get your car going.

It turned out the young man was the owner of Mooney's.

The second gentleman took our car keys and got the car running and brought it right to the front door of the restaurant. The were life savers for us at the moment.

And they say there are no good people, well these two gentlemen from Mooney's saved the day.

Make sure you visit Mooney's. Besides being Angels in disguise, they serve fantastic food and great service.

Merry Christmas to Mooney's Restaurant and staff.

Fran and Sue McKinney
Bath

Underage drinking, a problem in Schuyler County

Dear Editor,
I am worried about our underage drinking problem in Schuyler County. I learned a lot about underage drinking at a Lead and Seed training I recently attended.

According to the most current Schuyler County data 47.7% of 7th through 12th grade students report using alcohol at some point in their life and 15% report using it in the past 30 days. Most kids who drink alcohol begin doing it in 7th and 8th grade. That is way too young and totally illegal. Not to mention kids who begin drinking alcohol before they are 15 are 5 times more likely to have alcohol problems as an adult.

The Schuyler County Coalition on Underage Drinking and Drugs (SCCUDD) and Schuyler Teens against Alcohol, Nicotine, and other Drugs (STAND) would like to remind everyone that providing alcohol to kids under the age of 21 is illegal. I would also like to let all kids know that drinking when you are not 21 is illegal and totally bad for your brain. Your brain may not develop how it is supposed to if you drink alcohol when you are a kid.

I want people to learn more about the danger of underage drinking and what they can do if they do have a drinking problem. Along with SCCUDD, the students from STAND are going to continue to inform the community about underage drinking.

If you or someone you know needs help because of underage alcohol use or you would like more information you can contact the Finger Lakes Area Counseling & Recovery Agency (FLACRA) online at <https://www.flacra.org> or by phone 315-462-9466 or the Council on Alcoholism and Addictions of the Finger Lakes online at <http://councilonalcoholismfingerlakes.org> or by phone 315-789-0310. For more information, or to become involved with SCCUDD, visit SCCUDD online at www.schuylercounty.us/sccudd, or follow SCCUDD on Facebook and Twitter.

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