

Grins & Groans

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

OUR OPINION | Groan to Congressional candidate Tom Reed. Grin to Corning Enterprises and the Corning-Painted Post School District Foundation.

Groan

Republican Congressional candidate Tom Reed recently tried to link his opponent, U.S. Rep. Eric Massa, with the Communist USA Party because the party supposedly applauded Massa for legislation he co-sponsored.

Communists? Are you serious? Does Tom Reed know what decade this is?

Nobody's been afraid of Communists since Patrick Swayze kicked their butts in "Red Dawn".

Maybe Tom didn't get the memo. Socialists, not Communists, are the right wing's new bogey man.

If Tom Reed is going to try to demonize somebody, he should at least get his demons straight.

Grin

Corning Enterprises and the Corning-Painted Post School District Foundation have made a significant contribution to education in the Corning-Painted Post school district.

The two organizations recently made it possible for Corning Free Academy and Northside Blodgett middle schools to begin using the Full Option Science System (FOSS) in sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade science classes.

The new system stresses hands-on learning and teaches children to ask questions, use observation and "think like scientists."

The new program is getting rave reviews from teachers and students alike.

With a budget that's tight and getting tighter, it's unlikely the school district could have afforded the new program on its own.

It's nice to see two organizations that care about education in the community and are looking toward the future, not the past.

Groan

Based on the Republican response to President Barack Obama's State of the Union address, it looks like the GOP is putting all of its chips on being obstructionist.

And why not. By being the party of no, Republicans have pretty much killed health care reform, cap and trade and got Scott Brown elected in deep blue Massachusetts.

It would seem, however, the president is on to them.

Obama's call for a freeze on non-defense spending was just the sort of populist, middle-of-the-road idea Republicans would be foolish not to support.

If the president continues to propose small, bite-size pieces of legislation that are popular with independent and moderate voters, Republicans could very well be shooting themselves in the foot by continuing to say no.

It wouldn't be the first time Republicans have shot themselves in the foot. Speaking of which, how is Sarah Palin doing on Fox News anyway?

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ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | STATE SEN. GEORGE WINNER JR.

Budget race under way

When New York Governor David Paterson unveiled his 2010-2011 proposed state budget in Albany recently, he threw the starting gate wide open on the start of this year's budget adoption process. So I'll take a shot at handicapping this year's budget – to share some insights on a few favorites, as well as offer a few long shots that just might surprise everyone at the end. Governor Paterson has proposed a \$134 billion state budget plan calling for a range of spending cuts, particularly in the areas of education and health care, and approximately \$1 billion in tax and fee increases to address an estimated \$7.4-billion state budget deficit.

■ Taxes. Unfortunately, the governor's budget plan immediately gives an edge to another round of state tax and fee increases, which would arrive on top of the more than \$8 billion in new taxes and fees that the governor and legislative leaders enacted in 2009. Let's not forget that Governor Paterson and the Democratic leaders of the Legislature went behind closed doors together last year and emerged with an outrageous tax-and-fee hike.

They appear headed in the same direction this year. It just looks like when the going gets tough – and it's rarely been tougher – one of the first things these leaders do is go looking for a new tax. So I'll join

many upstate New York colleagues to once again send a clear message on new taxes: our communities and our taxpayers can't stand a repeat of last year's performance.

■ Medicaid fraud recovery. It just seems like common sense in a fiscal crisis like this one for government to immediately adopt a "zero tolerance" policy against abuse, fraud, and waste in its programs and services – and we know that New York's extravagant system of Medicaid remains a prime target. Governor Paterson has proposed several new anti-fraud actions, and that's encouraging. But I still think we can do even more.

■ Upstate economic development. This year's budget is going to dramatically impact the ability of upstate economic developers to pursue economic growth and job creation, but it's simply too early to predict exactly how. We know for sure that the Empire Zone program, currently the only program providing any meaningful benefits to upstate communities, will go out of existence. But what will take its place? It's still too early to say. I remain troubled by the push to eliminate the Empire Zone program without putting in place a comparable economic development strategy for upstate. I'm all for securing New York's position in the new, high-tech economy, like the governor wants to do, but not at the expense of the small businesses and manufacturers that have always been and will always be

fundamental to the strength of the local economy. I'm concerned that Albany's leaders might not hesitate to turn their backs on thousands of Southern Tier jobs by simply tossing the Empire Zone program on the scrapheap.

■ Marcellus Shale. Governor Paterson has recognized the value of developing the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry on a modern regulatory bedrock built on environmental safety. That's a good sign. It's encouraging that he's proposed to increase staffing within the state Department of Environmental Conservation to take steps to ensure that the department will have whatever it takes to properly and effectively monitor and supervise the safety of any future well development.

■ State spending cap. It's a long shot that the governor's proposed cap – which mirrors an initiative acted on by the Senate Republican conference in the past as a way to streamline state government and provide local property tax relief – will make it past the expected resistance from Albany's current legislative leaders.

Those are just a few early observations. I hope you'll remember that my Web site, winner.nysenate.gov, can help you stay up to date on a budget adoption process that's going to be full of setbacks and surprises in the coming weeks.

■ State Sen. George H. Winner represents the 53rd State Senate District.

Allegany? Chemung would make better partner

Was somewhat surprised the other day to read that Steuben County was studying a shared 911 emergency call system with Schuyler and Allegany counties.

Allegany? Steuben and Schuyler are already partners in many activities – and have been for years. But the regional combination that dominates the

THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

economic and political life of this part of the Southern Tier consists of Steuben, Schuyler and Chemung.

Nothing against our neighbors to the west. If you live in Hornell, you have considerable interaction with Allegany County and its northern neighbor, Livingston.

But that's hardly the case for residents of most of Steuben.

We are more traditionally oriented toward Chemung, which is the trading center for this part of the world.

Yes, we have Corning Inc. and Alstom, as well as Dresser-Rand.

But the retail center of the region is definitely Chemung County – which also has the lowest tax rates and is the best-managed governmental entity you'll find in all of upstate New York.

So teaming up with Allegany seems like a very strange choice.

Chemung had 911 service long before any of the surrounding counties. It's long established and works very well.

Steuben's 911 service, however, has one of the most horrible histories of any ever established in the state.

Yes, Steuben's operation might well improve if it was part of a larger system. But that partnership would make much more sense if it embraced the region the state classifies as the Southern Tier Central. And that pairs Steuben and Schuyler with Chemung, not Allegany.

Allegany would much more naturally pair up with Livingston or even Cattaraugus. With either of those counties, it has a logical mate. Particularly Livingston, whose biggest influence is Rochester, while Cattaraugus has only Olean to relate to, unless you want to make the big stretch toward Buffalo.

Anyway, so far the whole idea is just that – an idea. Let's not let it grow into anything more specific.

And let's not spend quantities of taxpayers' money to determine the obvious.

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Most depressing thought of the day: After the chilling finish recorded by the month of January, AccuWeather is predicting February is going to be a lot worse.

Just what we need. Not.

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OTHER VIEW | SEATTLE TIMES

Obama heard the call to focus on economy

President Obama spoke with the urgency and purpose of a leader who acknowledged rising echoes of discontent. The second year of his administration will focus on jobs and the economy.

His State of the Union message ranged from foreign policy to home-grown environmental opportunities, but in time and content, the theme was putting Americans back to work. He had a politician's instinct to claim credit for 2 million jobs created through a stimulus plan, but another 7 million people are out of work. Triage for stubborn

unemployment numbers will include tax credits for small businesses, elimination of capital-gains taxes on those job incubators and a variety of clean-energy incentives.

Obama pointedly called for a slashing of tax credits for companies that ship jobs offshore. Instead the president wants to promote a national export initiative for U.S. manufacturing.

Virtually each new topic had the common thread of jobs, jobs and more jobs. Obama pledged to build on existing incentives for the nation's school systems and noted that the best anti-poverty program is a world-class

education.

Support for middle-income America included relief on student-loan payments and forgiveness of debt if graduates take up public-service careers.

Obama challenged his audience to take on the federal deficit, by restoring pay-as-you-go budget policies that had balanced the budget in 2000. He was not the least apologetic for a trillion-dollar deficit he described as necessary to prop up the nation's financial system and forestall another Great Depression, after he took office.

Obama leaned heavily on a theme of "before and after" to draw a

sharp line between what he inherited and what he had done in the past 12 months. Yes, he has run up epic deficits, but the nation was awash in red ink from not paying for two wars, buying into an expensive prescription-drug plan and the consequences of a recession with a \$3 trillion hit on the treasury.

His challenge to Congress to impose a freeze on domestic spending in 2011, the year after midterm elections, provoked snickers and knowing laughter. Obama's call for a bipartisan fiscal commission to study the deficit is a practical idea that should be adopted sooner rather than later. So

are his ideas about transparency in the budget process and real-time links to information about budgetary earmarks, the stuff of pork-barrel-spending legends.

The president did not step back from promoting health-care reforms, indeed, he spoke to the connection between access to care and stability of family budgets. But the president took responsibility for a muddle of messages that complicated its legislative progress.

In foreign policy, he emphasized the use of diplomacy to make the world a safer place. A stark change from the past eight years.