

211 service connects people with local programs

THE ISSUE | A 211 service opens in the Finger Lakes region.
OUR OPINION | Along with being an asset, 211 can handle non-emergency situations that sometimes mistakenly end up at 911

One of the problems faced by many human service organizations is getting word out to the public as to who they are and how they can help.

At the same time, residents who need assistance often have trouble finding the right agency to fulfill their need.

A possible solution has arrived.

A 211 service became operational Friday to help residents navigate through the myriad of service organizations to put them in contact with the agency that can meet their need. By dialing 2-1-1, residents will be put in touch with an operator to direct them to the proper service.

For example, assistance is available for those with questions about food banks, medical programs, services for the elderly, day care, after-school programs, public transportation, counseling and educational programs.

In short, nearly every need addressed by a service deemed

not a critical emergency is handled by 211.

Currently, the service is only for land-line phones. Cell phone and Internet phone users must contact HELPLINE at 776-9604 or (800) 346-2211.

The system started in 1997 but in relatively new to New York state. The 12-county Finger Lakes region for 211 service is one of 10 regions in the state and one of the few that are operational.

It is independent of the 911 emergency service and not directly affiliated with Steuben County. Instead, 211 is paid for by a combination of funds from the state and the United Way.

Along with being a great convenience for users, 211 should prove useful for 911 by handling non-emergency calls that can sometimes tie up that system. That is especially important in disaster situations where life-and-death matters go to 911 and all others can be handled by 211.

NATIONAL VIEW | MIAMI HERALD

What if immigrants go away?

Riverside, a small New Jersey town, got more than it bargained for after passing a get-tough immigration law last year. Proponents of the law blamed newcomers from Latin America for crowding, scarce parking, increased crime and strained public services. Although it never was enforced, the law worked anyway.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of Brazilians and other immigrants fled. Now the town has other woes: a deserted downtown, economic malaise and lingering resentment. Two weeks ago, Riverside repealed the law in the face of mounting legal bills and lawsuits likely to be lost.

Riverside's dynamics were predictable. Wary of strangers who spoke a different language and brought different customs, many residents rebelled. They feared the sudden influx of strangers: Why can't they speak English? They are taking our jobs.

Ironically, Riverside had experienced many immigrant waves before. Portuguese settled there in the 1960s and built businesses. This made the town attractive to Brazilians, who began arriving in 2000. How many of the new arrivals had legal status is unknown. But they revived the local economy.

Then came the new law. It mandated fines, jail time and possible loss of business licenses for anyone who knowingly rented housing or employed an undocumented

immigrant. Soon after the law passed, many newcomers left. Along with them went the prosperity that their work and earnings pumped into the town.

Sad to say, Riverside's experience is quintessentially American. It reflects the love-hate relationship with immigrants that has existed since before our nation's founding. In the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin railed against German immigrants and their presumed threat to the English language. But our language and system of government survived the Germans, along with succeeding waves of Irish, Chinese, Italian, Polish, Mexican and Cuban immigrants. And the United States thrived.

Those groups arriving during eras of highest immigration were key to building U.S. industrial and economic power. The current wave, marked by immigrants from the Southern hemisphere, is no different.

Amid this wave, Riverside blamed undocumented immigrants for its woes, as did many of the 30 towns nationwide that enacted similar laws. Congress shares much of the blame for this. For years, the immigration system hasn't worked in the nation's best interest. Lawmakers with sensible solutions have been outflanked by a resilient minority. Municipalities would be better off lobbying Congress. Self-defeating local laws are no substitute for comprehensive immigration reform.

ELECTION LETTERS POLICY | THE LEADER

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■ Letters must be no more than 200 words.

■ Letters must be issue-oriented. Letters of a personal nature, based on character or moral issues will not be accepted. Form letters will not be accepted.

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ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | JOHN R. 'RANDY' KUHL JR.

SCHIP plan is backdoor socialization

As the father of three sons, I certainly understand the importance of having children covered by a health care program.

I also know the importance of being in control of your own health care decisions. From which doctor you use to the medicines you are prescribed, I believe that the family must have the right to decide how their health care dollars are being spent.

However, the Democratic SCHIP plan is a backdoor attempt at socializing medicine. This would mean that your doctor, prescriptions, and treatment would be determined by the government. The Democrats have expanded SCHIP from covering low-income children (which was the original sole purpose of the program) to covering some households with incomes of up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$83,000 per year).

In fact, of the 5.8 million

children added to the eligibility of SCHIP, the Congressional Budget Office projects that 2 million would need to drop their private insurance to enroll in SCHIP.

Besides this expansion resembling the first step to socialized medicine, it is also fiscally irresponsible to move people from private health insurance to government-controlled insurance.

Another crucial issue that I have with the Democratic SCHIP plan is that it opens the door for illegal immigrants to receive health care. Currently, states are required to seek proof of U.S. citizenship, such as a birth certificate or passport, before they provide coverage. Under the new bill, people will only need to submit a Social Security number instead of showing legitimate and irrefutable proof of citizenship.

We must create a bipartisan solution to ensure that all low-income children can benefit from SCHIP. I refuse to play political games when

it comes to children's health care. Congress must unite to create effective policy that protects America's low-income children and doesn't promote socialized health care and provide health benefits to illegal immigrants.

Last week I voted on a resolution to keep funding SCHIP through 2008 for all 50 states. This ensures that SCHIP will continue to provide health care for low-income children until Congress can foster a SCHIP bill that actually does what the program was designed to do.

There is nothing that I value more than protecting our most vulnerable citizens, low-income children. I am committed to reauthorizing and expanding SCHIP to reach every low-income child in America. But I am also committed to doing so in a manner that is both practical and fiscally responsible.

■ John R. 'Randy' Kuhl Jr., R-Hammondsport, is a U.S. congressman.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Divorce citizenship from capitalism

TO THE EDITOR | The recent debate on immigration and the failed congressional legislation clearly illustrates that both sides have similarities despite their professed differences. The pro-amnesty side supports illegal immigrants as long as they are productive, while the anti-amnesty side believes illegal immigration is a threat to the economy of the United States. The content of humans crossing the border at great peril is actually contained by the multinational form of late capitalism. The fact is, in economic terms, illegal immigrants pose a cheap competition to American labor for particular jobs, but these same immigrants help support the general national economy. The inherent competitive nature of capitalism pits American workers against foreign-born workers even though both are exploited by the overall system. Any possible solidarity against capitalism is thus thwarted and all people in the country are used for mass production or passive consumption, regardless of being native or immigrant. The Green Party holds that no human is illegal, and a real solution to the immigration problem is an expansion of the legal process for coming into the country. In this way there will be a reversal of the almost 50-year gradual limitation of legal immigration as well as a

real separation of honest immigrants from real criminals who are only a small minority of illegal immigration. When the ability to become a citizen is divorced from the capitalist structure, we will see that those who cross over are not criminals.

Darin Robbins
 Corning

Everyone deserves health care

TO THE EDITOR | I am 16 years old and I go to the High School Learning Center in Corning. My father is currently on strike for Dresser-Rand and we don't have any health insurance because of it. I can't go to the doctor if I get sick and my father can't pay for his necessary medications to keep him alive.

But this problem isn't limited to just Corning or Dresser-Rand employees. Honestly, I think that there are too many Americans who don't qualify for health insurance. There are currently 42.6 million Americans who are uninsured. Do you think this is acceptable? My opinion is that all Americans should have free health care. People who don't have insurance can't even get sick without being knee-deep in debt. This is supposed to be the country of freedom, but uninsured people don't have the freedom to get sick without paying for it from their own pockets.

There are too many

insurance companies who aren't accepting people for obscene reasons. We need to change this. Everyone should have the opportunity to get free health care. It shouldn't matter whether you're rich or poor, we all should be treated equally. I come from a lower-income family and we can't afford to pay the high prices of doctor visits or the high prices of medication. Does that make me less of a citizen or less of a person?

In the next election, I hope that people will choose a president based upon their platform for health care reform. Elect someone who will give citizens a fair opportunity to live a free and healthy life.

Rebecca L. Stuart
 Corning

Dresser-Rand protests too much

TO THE EDITOR | Regarding the costly ads that Dresser Rand keeps running - if Dresser Rand thinks they are so right in the proposed contract that they are trying to sell, why do they feel the need to defend themselves with these overdone ads?

Thanks, Elizabeth, for making the union even stronger. I hope you sleep well at night.

Tamara Salisbury
 Savona

COMMENTARY | PYOTR ROMANOV

Putin touches the pawn and wins

Vladimir Putin has confounded all predictions by saying he would head United Russia's federal list at the State Duma elections in December, and might become prime minister in 2008.

This has created a funny, dramatic and paradoxical state of affairs.

The grand scale of United Russia's congress should not deceive anyone. In Soviet times, vacationers loved to play man-size chess, where even the pawns were giants. But whatever its size, a pawn's freedom to maneuver is limited, and it is helpless without defense.

Everyone knows that the success of the pro-Kremlin party depends on the president, which explains its happiness at Putin's agreement to head its list. United Russia's victory in the December parliamentary elections is now assured, and the position of its rival, Fair Russia, headed by upper house speaker Sergei Mironov, has been irrevocably undermined.

The other winner is Putin himself. First, he has reinforced his standing for the time he will spend outside the Kremlin. And second, the promise to become prime minister if an "efficient" person is elected president means that Putin will be free to choose the successor he wants.

The people love Putin and will vote for anyone he describes as "efficient," which in this case means not very ambitious, as ambitions would be an unacceptable disadvantage for his successor.

I don't believe the future Russian president would dare recommend that Prime Minister Putin resign. Given the people's wholehearted support for Putin and a tame parliament, this would be political suicide.

And then, the next presidential elections, in 2012, are not that far away.

As to the drama in the situation, current events show that the mechanism of a formal democracy has been created and commissioned in Russia. All basic laws are respected, yet democracy is dwindling. Officially, we have a multiparty system, but in fact we are steadily moving towards a one-party structure, or rather the pseudo-democracy that once existed in some socialist countries.

And lastly, the paradoxical element: I am sure that the majority of Russians sighed with relief when Putin said he could become prime minister in 2008. They view this as a guarantee of stability and continuation of Russia's current policy. Their feelings are quite sincere, though spin-doctors are working hard to keep them warm.

Russia is apathetic, and so sees only what it wants to see. It will not break out of this state soon. The trouble, though, is that fat years can give way to lean ones, and the currently justified strengthening of the armed forces could lead to an arms race. Mind you, I don't want to sound too pessimistic.

If all of these problems materialize, nobody will be able to deal with them under the conditions of a formal democracy. We have not learned to foresee the situation several moves ahead. In fact, we are playing not chess, but bingo.

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