

Grins and Groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans over events last week.
OUR OPINION | Grins to expansion plans, dropping the license plan and dropping taxes. A groan to rising gas prices.

GRIN

Expansions. Ground was broken last week on a \$300 million expansion at Sullivan Park in Gang Mills that will eventually create 300 new jobs. The addition to Corning Inc.'s research facility is another good sign things are going well for the area's largest employer.

Also last week, Salient Corp. in Horseheads said it hopes to double its staff in the next four years. The company, which makes business management software, plans to soon fully occupy a building it now shares with Fortuna Energy. Fortuna, another growing business, plans to move into new digs this summer in Airport Corporate Park in Big Flats. This is all great news for the local economy.

GRIN

License plan dropped. Amid mounting scrutiny and public outcry, Gov. Eliot Spitzer abandoned his plan to give illegal aliens drivers' licenses. Even when Spitzer modified his original proposal first given in September, most gave it the thumb's down.

He finally gave up last week but the endeavor greatly damaged his popularity and began to become an issue with Democrat presidential candidates. Perhaps he was misguided to correct a national problem – that being illegal immigration – at the state level but he may

have put that issue back in the spotlight.

The question now is can he rebound and refocus his efforts on important state issues like the upstate economy.

GROAN

Rising gas prices. This could be a groan every week as it seems the price at the pump continues to rise. Locally, the price for a gallon of regular unleaded gas is around \$3.30. Concerns are it could go higher in coming months to eventually reach \$4 a gallon.

Historically, this is the time of year when gas prices usually ease after inflating during the summer vacation months. Not so this year.

GRIN

Taxes dropping. It's not often that it happens but proposed property taxes in Chemung and Schuyler counties and the Town of Corning might be going down next year.

That's according to tentative budgets in those areas for 2008.

The reasons vary, but the tax bases in those areas have expanded to bring in more revenue. Spending also seems to be under control, especially for the counties where the state-imposed cap on Medicaid is having the desired effect.

Taxpayers can always use a break and at least in these three areas, they're going to get it.



GUEST EDITORIAL | JOHN R. RANDY KUHL JR.

The party of higher taxes

Whether it's the Democrats' budget that included the second largest tax increase in American history, Rep. Charles Rangel's new \$3.5 trillion new "mother of all tax bills," or the \$2,000 average tax increase for 23 million taxpayers for the alternative minimum tax, the Democrat leadership has made it clear they are the party of higher taxes.

The alternative minimum tax (AMT) is the first fight of the New York Congressman Rangel's tax hike. The AMT was created in 1969 with the purpose of ensuring that all taxpayers pay at least the minimum federal income tax for their income level, no matter how many deductions or credits they claim. The original AMT imposed a tax on 155 individuals who made more than \$200,000. But those 155 individuals have grown into a tax that burdens 21 million Americans, most of whom do not make \$200,000 a year. In fact, it is set to hit people who make under \$50,000 a year.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson reminded Congress three weeks ago that if middle-class taxpayers weren't protected from the burdensome AMT by

November 16, 2007, Internal Revenue Service tax forms would be printed under the belief that as many as 23 million taxpayers would be forced to pay the tax next year. As a result, as many as 50 million taxpayers could see a significant delay in the arrival of some \$75 billion in refund checks and will face an average tax increase of \$2,000.

And now, after months of no movement on the AMT, Rep. Rangel has unveiled the "mother of all tax hikes" which is the biggest and most expensive tax code overhaul since 1986 and reportedly includes everything but the kitchen sink. To put it simply, the mother of all tax hikes is a job killer in Upstate New York. The tax increase brings the death tax back to life, which is estimated to cost our economy between 170,000 and 250,000 jobs annually – especially among small businesses and family farms. Also many small businesses will be hit with a new "surtax" on top of standard federal income taxes and would lose a key manufacturing tax deduction that reduces their annual tax bill.

The Rangel plan also eliminates tax cuts enacted

by Congress and the President in 2001 – tax cuts that have put more money in the pockets of every taxpayer for the last six years. Americans in every tax bracket – not just the very wealthy – will see their taxes increase under the plan; the mother of all tax hikes would even eliminate the new 10 percent rate Congress established for the sole purpose of reducing the taxes for low- and middle-income working families. What's more, the Rangel plan would reinstate the marriage penalty, which means married couples would pay higher taxes again simply because they are married.

As American families feel the crunch from skyrocketing prices for energy and gasoline, why is the Democratic leadership stepping in to confiscate even more of their money? It's time to repeal the AMT permanently – without raising taxes – and reform the tax code on behalf of middle-class families and small businesses alike.

■ **U.S. Rep. John R. Randy Kuhl Jr. is a Hammondsport Republican who represents the 29th District.**

NATIONAL VIEW | DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Must halt nuclear arms race

Trivia question: When was the last time the United States came within two minutes of a nuclear attack? If you guessed sometime around the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, think again. It was 1995, when Russia mistook a Norwegian rocket test for a U.S. submarine-launched missile. Luckily, decades of well-practiced safeguards averted disaster.

Today, those safeguards offer much less comfort because nuclear-weapons technology is spreading to countries with minimal appreciation of concepts such as restraint and mutually assured destruction.

Nuclear-armed Pakistan is in a state of military emergency. Iran is on the brink of attaining nuclear bomb components, and Western proliferation experts say Saudi Arabia probably will follow suit. Nuclear-armed Israel recently attacked a Syrian site rumored to contain some kind of nuclear facility.

On this side of the globe, it

wasn't until 1997 that Brazil ratified the international Non-Proliferation Treaty and formally ended its nuclear arms race with Argentina. Even so, Brazil's leaders haven't quite let go of the dream. In 2003, the candidate who became Brazil's president, Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva, expressed what many in developing countries feel about the shortcomings of the Non-Proliferation Treaty: "If someone asks me to disarm and keep a slingshot while he comes at me with a cannon, what good does that do?"

In January, former Sen. Sam Nunn and former Cabinet secretaries George Shultz, Henry Kissinger and William Perry called for reviving the goal of universal nuclear disarmament. That audacious idea, first proposed by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986, deserves serious consideration.

These are not the musings of crazed leftist peaceniks.

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NATIONAL VIEW | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A tail is not a leg

When Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf gave a televised address announcing a state of emergency, he justified it by quoting Abraham Lincoln, who suspended habeas corpus during the Civil War.

It's encouraging to see him drawing lessons from American history. But if the general is familiar with the Great Emancipator, he may remember the question Lincoln would sometimes ask: "How many legs does a dog have, if you call the tail a leg?"

When the answer would come back, "Five," Lincoln would reply, "Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."

By the same token, an election held under a state of emergency is an election in name only. Musharraf, under pressure from the United States, has promised to let voters go to the polls to elect a new parliament by Jan. 9. But he says the state of emergency will remain in place.

He held out the promise of elections even as his police were arresting thou-

sands of members of the opposition Pakistan People's Party, whose leader, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, has been under house arrest. Most of the country's other opposition leaders have also been confined.

It's hard to see how you can have an election when your opponents are in jail or under house arrest. But that's just one of the obstacles. Under Musharraf's decree, the constitution and basic liberties are no longer in effect. Judges who stood up to him have been removed from their posts. Critics of his rule are not allowed to meet, demonstrate or gain access to the nation's airwaves to spread their message.

Independent news outlets have been shut down. Any journalist who "ridicules" Musharraf can go to prison for up to three years.

Under these circumstances, how are Pakistan's civilian politicians supposed to be able to make the case for their policies? How are Pakistan's people supposed to acquire the information they need to make a decision in the vot-

ing booth? How is anyone supposed to believe that ballots will be counted accurately and the outcome respected?

Voting is not the sum of democracy. Voting is just one element of the many-layered process that makes up any genuine democracy.

Musharraf defends the state of emergency as essential to fighting terrorists. But when you assign 900 police officers to make sure Bhutto doesn't venture out in public, they are not available for the more urgent task of going after violent extremists. And the crackdown punishes those Pakistanis who prefer to work peacefully for change, thus fostering the sort of anger that fuels radicalism. It's hard to see how anyone but the militants can help but gain from the current turmoil.

But the general wants to hold on to power, and he clearly doesn't think free and fair elections would be much help to him. No doubt he's discovered something Lincoln could have told him: There are limits on how many people you can fool, and for how long.

A dip in the news cycle

There's a natural lull in the news cycle that follows every election season. And the nearness of Thanksgiving doesn't help the situation.

Actually, the late November doldrums are one of several dips in the season's news. The end of the school year is one and the Christmas holidays are another. There are also several smaller interruptions but the point remains the same: People periodically don't tend to participate in politics or other public events and limit their activities to family-oriented happenings. Sometimes even the crime rate shows a downturn.

It is during these periods that newspapers must rely more heavily on softer news "features" because space must be filled no matter what the situation. So tales of family heroism and pictures of cute youngsters, preferably holding cuter animals, proliferate. Personally, I was a hard news guy and when I was an editor, I'd sometimes hold my nose when approving some feature for display in a very prominent position. But I couldn't help it, nor could any of the people who not only succeeded me but had done the same job long before my era.

It's just the nature of the business.

Very occasionally something startling occurs during one of these "down" times, in which case the headlines scream and all the fancy story display techniques are put into play. But it doesn't happen often. Fortunately, however, there is usually a distinct up-tick in the development of hard news events once the placid periods go away. Then life gets much more bearable for editors and hopefully, more involving for the readers.

But don't hold your nose too tightly when you're looking at that lighter feature because they, too, mark events that merit attention. It's just not the attention that a more involving item might generate.

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I was particularly sorry to note the death last week of author Norman Mailer.

He was always one of my personal favorites and the sweep of the subjects he'd attempt seemed almost limitless.

If you didn't like one Mailer offering, you had only to wait a few months and he'd offer another in a completely different field.

When he died at age 84, I was in the midst of reading "The Castle in the Forest," which apparently will be his last book.

I read that he was at work on a sequel when he died, but I doubt it will see the light of day.

Mailer could be maddening, and "Castle" is no exception. It's the memoir of a devil who was assigned by "the Maestro" to oversee the early childhood of Adolf Hitler.

I can think of no other author who'd attempt such a thing.

Or much less almost bring it off.

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