

Grins and groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans from events last week.

OUR OPINION | Groans to a failed inspection and substandard care for veterans. A grin to federal aid for local dairy farmers.

Groan

Steuben's new health care facility fails state inspection.

It's the little things: That's what county officials found out recently when they

learned the state would not sign off on the new health care facility unless some minor corrections were made. It seems the air intake vents on the roof are too close to sewer vents, the size of bureaus and wardrobes in the residents' rooms aren't quite right, and those small gaps between some hall railings and doors are still too big.

That's a shame for the 105 residents who thought they would be moving in weeks ago – and yet find themselves still in the older facility just yards away. The new care center boasts bigger rooms and overall nicer amenities than the outdated one – and we're sure many started packing after an open house was held in early April.

It is not yet known how much the changes will cost or who will pay for it all.

Grin

Help for dairy farmers. Gov. David Paterson

announced last week an amendment to the federal Farm Bill includes some aid for New York

dairy farmers. Federal funds will be coming our way so farmers can benefit from a milk price support program despite rising feed costs.

As times get tougher, any good news – and any amount of money – is welcome, especially by the state's 6,200 dairy farms, which generate \$2.4 billion each year.

Groan

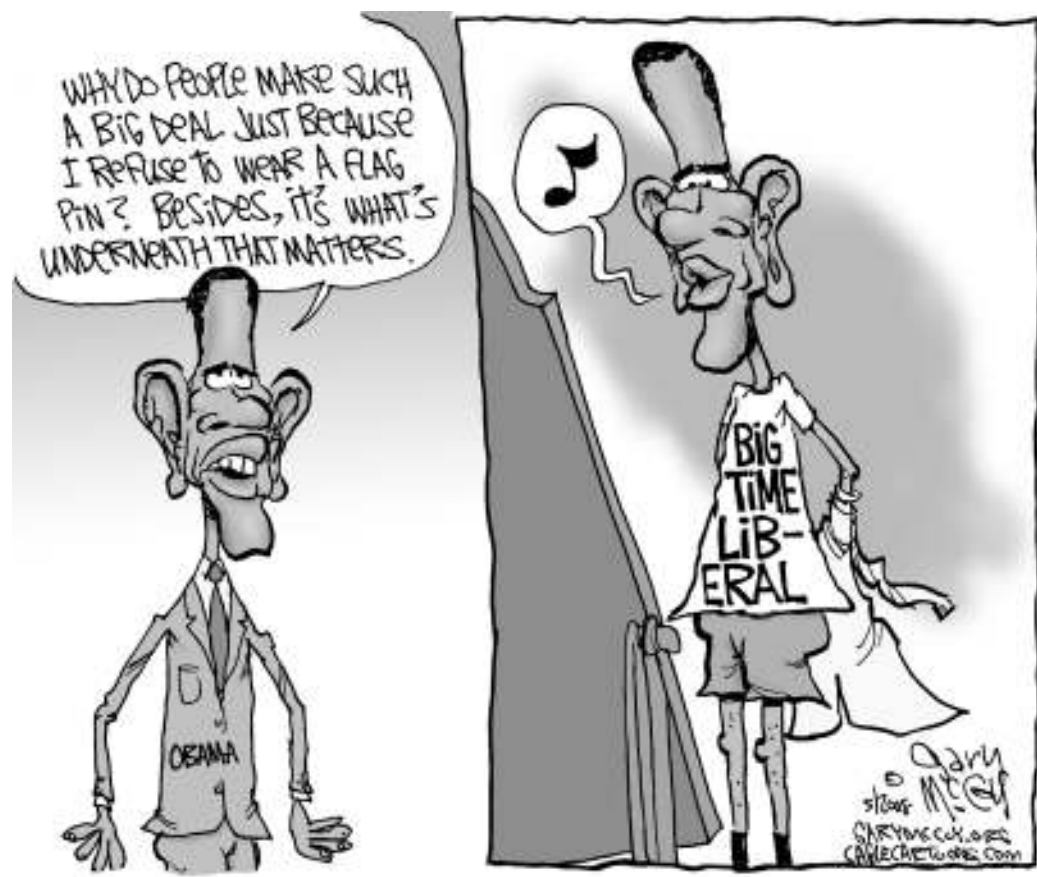
We fail our servicemen, again.

We've all heard of the deplorable conditions at some of our VA hospitals. Now, it has come to light our barracks are in just as poor shape. A

disgusted father's YouTube video of substandard conditions led to a month of inspections and a laundry list of work that needs to be done. That includes new heating and cooling equipment, repainting and mold removal. Things are so bad the government had to use \$248 million in emergency funds to address the needs at eight facilities, such as West Point and Fort Bragg, where the video was shot.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates says he's appalled by the video and the reports. Well, so are we. And we want to know who's to blame and why our troops are being treated so poorly – especially during wartime.

ARTIST'S VIEW



GUEST COMMENTARY | JOHN R. KUHL JR.

United we stand, divided we fall

In Thomas Jefferson's first inaugural address on March 4, 1801, he said, "The minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression." This sentiment was echoed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi's "A New Direction for America." Also promised in her doctrine is, "Every person in America has a right to have his or her voice heard. No Member of Congress should be silenced on the floor... guaranteeing that the voices of all the people are heard."

These important philosophies are the founding principles of America. The principles that when we work together we accomplish more, the "United we stand, divided we fall" mentality. Unfortunately, as recent events have shown, Speaker Pelosi's words are hollow and her promise to America has been broken leaving a trail of the trust and faith of Americans in her rear view mirror.

When I was elected to Congress, I never imagined the amount of political pandering and stunts that would be used to gain political points. This week, Congress was scheduled to take up the supplemental appropriations bill to fund

our brave men and women serving their country, as well as critical housing legislation. Instead of allowing an open and transparent discussion on funding for our troops and reasonable solutions to the housing crunch, the Speaker has chosen to bypass congressional committees and has essentially hijacked the legislative process so no dissent can be heard on these bills. Our country has chided other governments around the world for suppressing the voices of their people and Speaker Pelosi is coming dangerously close to the practices of these oppressive regimes. This unprecedented power grab on the part of the majority goes against Speaker Pelosi's promises for equality and transparency and nothing short of a rapid reverse course can begin to repair the damage.

The most tragic aspect of this suppression of discussion by the majority is that we have seen the success that can occur when we work together to fix our nation's problems. In February, both Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate worked together to initiate the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008, which resulted in addressing the growing concern about the direction

of our economy and provided relief to cash-strapped Americans. The 2008 Farm Bill Reauthorization is another key example of what can happen when both Republicans and Democrats join forces to find a solution for our nation's farming communities. These two pieces of legislation made significant strides in combating two issues that face this country.

The minority in Congress isn't asking for anything out of the ordinary. We should have the opportunity to analyze the bill and offer suggestions that would improve the legislation. We want Speaker Pelosi to keep the promises that she made in "A New Direction for America" and maintain her position that "no Member of Congress should be silenced on the floor." The American public has unmistakably conveyed to this government that the partisan bickering isn't what they want to see. We need solutions, not more political games at the cost of our soldiers, middle class, and children.

■ John R. "Randy" Kuhl Jr., R-Hammondsport is a member of the House of Representatives representing the 29th District.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kuhl is divisive, out of touch

TO THE EDITOR | In a recent editorial, Randy Kuhl clearly demonstrated all that is wrong with the current politics of professional Washington, D.C. Unlike the vast majority of Americans, he continues to define our political reality in terms of "my party against their party." By doing so, he also demonstrated that he has missed a fundamental change in the mandate of the voters. The debate is no longer Republican versus Democrat, but rather the past versus the future. We as a people must decide if we are going to continue with more of the same, regardless of who is doing it, or whether we want to change the course for our nation.

Randy Kuhl, who has spent decades playing the same game of professional politics, has clearly had a hard time adapting to the new needs of a nation in recession. Do we expect nothing more from our leaders than to simply pass blame for our rising gas prices after almost an entire decade of single party rule? Do they assume that we

have forgotten that gasoline was \$1.42 per gallon the day Bush took office? Do they really expect us to disregard their votes to hand corporate welfare checks to the Big Oil corporations as they continue making record profits? Now, Randy Kuhl would like you and I to believe that it's all Nancy Pelosi's fault, while he just sat on the sidelines, despite his own voting record. Such behavior exhibits an utter contempt for the intelligence of voters, and a shameless disregard for the people those votes affect each and every day.

This is unacceptable, and families in Western New York are sick of the spin and blame shifting. We want good jobs with benefits, and we don't want to spend our savings on the fuel to get to work.

Under the reign of George Bush and Randy Kuhl, the unemployment rate right here in Steuben County has climbed higher and higher and now sits at 6.9 percent. In October of 2004, when Kuhl was first running for Congress on the promise of more jobs, the unemployment rate was 5.1 percent. So what happened? With utter disregard, George Bush and

Randy Kuhl signed free trade agreement after free trade agreement and gave tax breaks to the wealthiest 1 percent amongst us, even when they weren't asking for it. They raised taxes on middle class Americans, exported our jobs to foreign countries like China and Peru, and used their power to ensure that our nation remained addicted to oil from the Middle East – all while allowing our national debt to spin wildly out of control. Clearly it is time for a new direction.

2008 finds America at a historic crossroads. This November, we will decide whether we want to continue down the road of job loss, higher taxes, and recession, or whether we're ready to walk a new path toward job creation, real economic stimulus, and a fair tax structure that helps the middle class save money. I urge everyone to examine the facts for themselves and not get caught up in the hype. The choice is yours, and the stakes couldn't be higher.

Eric Massa, Democratic candidate for 29th Congressional District
Corning

Gas prices hurt AND we have to pump it ourselves!

The letter was unsigned, but it obviously came from the heart of its author.

THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

"We no longer have a gas station in the Corning area that pumps gas for their customers," the person wrote. "We are on our own. I can't

help but wonder how our tourists will like it.

"As for me, I will go to Big Flats for gas because they still have customer service. While there, I will do my grocery shopping and check out the other shops or stores that are in the area.

"After all, I don't want to waste gas."

Now there's a person who's annoyed at the increasing mechanization of our society – and heartily sick of the rising price of gas.

The Insider, obviously, can do nothing to help the letter writer on either count.

Gas station owners try to run their businesses as economically as possible, and eliminating pump jockeys is an obvious move.

As for the price of gasoline, nothing seems to slow the upward spiral that's hitting us all in the pocket. I doubt if even the Saudis can control that situation.

Oh, our politicians are spouting their own "solutions" but to characterize them as "Band-Aids" would not even approach the situation.

John McCain and Hillary Clinton want a three-month summer moratorium on the federal gas tax.

Hillary would pay for it by taxing the oil companies – who'd only jump their prices to absorb the extra tariff. McCain's plan might leave a lot of construction workers without jobs this summer, since federal gas tax money pays for highway construction aid.

Besides, as was repeatedly pointed out by supporters of Barack Obama, who didn't join the summer charge, Hillary was trying to buy votes for 18 cents each – the average savings the "holiday" would provide on a daily basis.

If the federal government permanently froze gas prices, then we might be able to relax. But that will never happen as long as the oil companies are among those who hold the real reins in our nation's capitol.

So I guess my unknown correspondent will have to continue to go to Big Flats and watch someone else insert the nozzle into the petrol tank.

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Congratulations to the City Council for ratifying the nomination of former alderman Warren Blackwell to the Civil Service Commission.

There are few people who know city government as well as he and that experience can't help but help the commission.

■ Bob Rolfe, a retired *Leader* reporter/editor (1965-2002), can be reached at theinsider1@aol.com or write c/o *The Leader*, P.O. Box 1017, Corning, N.Y., 14830. He is also periodic co-host of the "Coleman & Co." public affairs TV program, which airs at 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. Sundays on WETM.2.

Letters for the May 20 school budget votes and school board elections must be received by 5 p.m. May 14. Letters will not be accepted after that deadline.

NATIONAL VIEW | MIAMI HERALD

Bolivia heading wrong way

The political crisis in Bolivia worsened last weekend when voters in the country's wealthiest region defied President Evo Morales and the violence led by pro-Morales thugs to vote overwhelmingly for autonomy from the central government. This is a clear setback for Morales, who has waged a nonstop campaign of vilification against opponents who don't go along with his plans for a radical transformation of the country. With Bolivia rapidly dissolving into warring camps, Morales is running out of time to forge a compromise that will avoid a violent outcome.

At least three other provinces will soon follow the lead of Santa Cruz and hold autonomy votes. All are in the eastern part of Bolivia, the economic heartland of this landlocked country where pro-autonomy sentiment runs high. For that, Morales has only himself to blame. Elected in 2005 after a career as a firebrand leader of coca-growing peasants, he proudly proclaimed himself the first indigenous president of the country. Instead of using his electoral success to heal Bolivia's long-standing geographic and ethnic fissures, Morales made a series of mistakes that deepened its polarization.

The centerpiece of his political scheme is a constitution adopted after a series of violent confrontations with the opposition that was voted on under questionable circumstances. Its features

include a form of "community justice" in place of a conventional judicial system and the distribution of political power to indigenous communities as a way to sideline – and silence – political adversaries in places like Santa Cruz.

Understandably, the provincial leaders are wary of this plan and don't subscribe to Morales' other political recipes. Despite the rantings of a few autonomy advocates, Bolivians in the eastern region don't want their own country, but rather the right to have a greater say over local affairs and how local taxes are spent. Their differences with Mr. Morales can be negotiated, but not if he chooses to continue demonizing the opponents as a "white oligarchy" bent on subjugating the country's indigenous majority.

Morales seems to have made a bet that he could cow the opposition into submission. Instead, he has squandered a historic opportunity to heal the breach in Bolivian society. Autonomy votes in the provinces may be "symbolic" rather than legally binding, but they are politically meaningful because they represent a defiant rejection of his policies.

The challenge for Morales is to find a way to change course. He must bridge the differences with the opposition before violence gets out of hand. Bolivia is heading over the precipice, and the clock is rapidly winding down.

LETTERS POLICY | THE LEADER

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■ Letters must be kept to a maximum of 250 words. Letters longer than that will not be considered.
■ Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. No letters will be published unless verified with

the author in person or by telephone.
■ Letters may be edited for space considerations.
■ The publication of any letter is at the discretion of the editor.
■ All letters become the property of *The Leader* and cannot be returned to sender.