

Grins and groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans from the news of the week.
OUR OPINION | A grin to Congressman Eric Massa, the Corning-Painted Post school board. Groans to Gov. David Paterson's budget, State of the State speech.

Grin

Before he was officially sworn in, U.S. Rep. Eric Massa, D-Corning, made a powerful statement about his priorities as a freshman Congressman.

Massa drove to Washington in two electric cars fueled by hydrogen.

Actually, Massa's trek to the nation's capital revealed two of his priorities; alternative forms of energy and jobs in the 29th Congressional District.

One of the leading facilities for hydrogen-fueled cars is in Honeoye Falls. If the Obama administration and the 111th Congress places increased emphasis on alternative energy sources, it could mean billions of dollars pumped into Western New York.

That's change we can believe in.

Grin

The Corning-Painted Post school board and administration know full well the financial pain district residents are facing.

That's why the school board recommended administrators develop a 2009-10 budget with no tax increase.

Superintendent Mike Ginalski said this week that's what his team is committed to do.

Here's the bad news. Ginalski said, according to Gov. David Paterson's budget recommendation, to reach a budget with no tax increase, the Corning-Painted Post school board would have to cut \$6 million out of next year's budget.

Those kinds of cuts could very well decimate education in the district for years to come, but the board and district residents won't know until they see exactly what a zero percent tax increase budget looks like.

Maybe, once they have the facts, they'll determine the cuts are too deep and ease off their recommendation.

The board, however, deserves credit for understanding the hardship that is to come and trying to mitigate it as much as possible.

Groan

The reviews are in and they aren't good. Gov. David Paterson's

State of the State speech was a real snoozer.

Much of the problem isn't Paterson's fault. He released his proposed 2009-10 budget in December, a month early, to give state legislators extra time to deliver their own budget proposal.

While the governor deserves credit for the early budget, holding the State of the State speech after the budget's been released is kind of like seeing a movie trailer after you've already seen the movie; very anti-climactic.

The governor's style also leaves something to be desired. It's no surprise to anyone that New York faces a tough fiscal road. What we needed to hear was a speech full of passion to inspire New Yorkers to face the economic hardships to come.

Unfortunately, that doesn't appear to be Paterson's style.

The good news is the governor has a couple years to brush up on his motivational speaking. Nobody thinks this recession is going to end any time soon.

Groan

One of the cuts Paterson made is to the Community Optional

Preventive Services program. This program was founded to help municipalities and school districts create programs designed to head off problems such as teen pregnancy, bullying, teen crime and high school dropouts before they develop.

It's not that the program was cut. It's understandable that in a budget year like this one, hard choices have to be made.

It's the manner in which Paterson made the cut. He made the cut retroactive to October, which means counties like Chemung are on the hook for making up for the lost state funding.

It also means that school districts like Horseheads and Elmira have to decide whether to eliminate their community resource officer program mid year or fund the program themselves for the remainder of the year.

To cut funding is one thing. To renege on money the state has already promised and school districts and municipalities have already spent is both unfair and irresponsible.

ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | GEORGE H. WINNER, JR.

Turn a cold shoulder to success?

I don't need to retell the story of the decline of upstate New York over the past decade, because it's a well-documented and often-told tale of manufacturing job losses, exodus, and incredible challenge that most of us are well aware of by now.

But I will say that it's a still-unfinished chapter in New York's history because there are many of us – in government, in business, in education and elsewhere – who have every determination and every belief that we can rebuild and rejuvenate the upstate region if we put our minds to it, keep working at it, and invest in it.

Which makes at least one proposal in Gov. David Paterson's 2009-2010 state budget especially hard to understand.

I'm talking about Paterson's plan to eliminate state support for the New York Wine & Grape Foundation. In his proposed budget, the governor called for the elimination of the state funding that supports the foundation's highly successful efforts. The foundation received \$2.8 million in state funding last year.

How successful? Very. In fact the rise of New York's wine industry is one of our state's most remarkable success stories, and the New York Wine & Grape Foundation has been a driving force behind the success.

I can quickly recall, as a state assemblyman representing the Finger Lakes region in the early 1980's, when our wine-and-grape industry was in economic freefall, so much so that it quickly became the focus of state-level legislative activity that included the creation of the Wine & Grape Foundation in 1985.

How successful? New York is now America's third-largest wine producing state, with more than 250 wineries, 1,300 grape farms and 31,000 acres of vineyards statewide. Nearly 200 of these wineries were established after the foundation's creation 24 years ago. The industry employs 18,000 workers and annually generates \$3.4 billion for the state economy. More than 3 million people visit the state's wineries every year.

One-third of these visitors come from out of state. Factor in the retail sales of wine in package stores, restaurants, bars and other establishments, and we're talking about at least a \$6 billion industry.

We're talking big business. It's big business throughout New York state, but it's especially one of upstate New York's few remaining, winning hands. I don't have to tell any of you about the importance of this industry to the Finger Lakes region, still the premiere hub of wine production.

Simply put, it's a proud and distinguished mainstay of our culture and economy.

So why would Gov. Paterson risk tossing it away? Why would New York turn its back on such a dynamic source of economic activity and meaningful livelihoods?

We can't. To save a few million dollars, Gov. Paterson's plan puts at risk a statewide industry that generates billions of dollars in economic activity, accounts for thousands of jobs, forms the backbone of Finger Lakes tourism, and brings to New York national and international acclaim.

It's a shortsighted pro-

posal, and I'm urging the governor to reconsider it, the new Senate leadership to immediately reject it, or legislative colleagues in both houses to work to restore it.

There's currently a poll on my Web site, www.senatorwinner.com, where you can express your opinion.

We need to take every necessary and reasonable action to address what we all recognize is a serious fiscal crisis in New York state, but this specific action would only worsen the crisis in the long run. You don't address a fiscal emergency with plans that crush economic activity and produce job losses.

So no, I'm not about to raise a glass to Gov. Paterson's plan.

The New York Wine & Grape Foundation, which for so long now has guided so much of the marketing, promotion, and research that has led to the industry's resurgence, has been a sound state investment.

The New York wine-and-grape industry is about success. It's about quality. It's about hard-working men and women. It's about pride.

In a day and age when businesses and industries come and go on a whim, and fall prey to globalization and other competitive pressures, our grape farmers and wine makers offer stability and long-term growth in so many of our upstate, rural regions.

It's an industry with such a promising future – as long as we never stop working at it.

■ **State Sen. George H. Winner Jr., R-Elmira, represents the 53rd Senate District.**

COMMENTARY | WILL WRIGHT

Resolve to be a more-informed buyer

The party hats are gone but the country's worst financial crisis since the Great Depression is almost certain to plague the nation like a giant hangover throughout the new year. With job losses, home foreclosures and other economic setbacks expected to continue at a distressing rate, Americans are likely to find they will need far more resolve to get through 2009 than the usual new year's resolutions to lose weight, stop smoking, be nice to your mother-in-law and clean out the garage.

Few can argue that the most important resolution for the new year is to forswear "irrational exuberance" in our financial affairs. It got us into the present pickle because we invested recklessly, buying homes we couldn't afford and fancy financial products we didn't understand. We all seemed to want to live a souped-up version of the American Dream. No one seemed to think it could become an American nightmare, collapsing under its own unsustain-

able weight.

For all the blame heaped on Wall Street, a good deal of the fault for the present crisis lies on Main Street. For little or nothing down and what looked like affordable monthly payments, buyers could get that dream home they always wanted. John and Vicki Glicken readily acknowledge they went into their first home purchase with their eyes wide closed, or at least not nearly as open as they should have been. They lost their home in the Cleveland, Ohio, suburb of Lyndhurst a few weeks before Christmas when they couldn't meet their mortgage payments and their lender foreclosed on the property. "We were naive in a lot of areas," Vicki told public radio's "Marketplace" program. "We take responsibility for that."

Like many home buyers with less-than-stellar credit, the Glickens got a zero-down, interest-only adjustable rate mortgage from a subprime lender. But then the interest rate on their loan jumped and their payments ballooned. Unable to keep up, they

filed for bankruptcy and are now back to renting. Vicki says they take responsibility for not being as diligent as they should have been in understanding the darker underside of their loan. But she also blames lenders for steering home buyers like them into loans they couldn't afford. Lenders, she said, "knew exactly what they were doing, and I think they were very greedy. And I think those people are still being greedy, and I think that's a shame."

She has a point. Much of the current financial mess stems from a "don't ask, don't tell" culture where unpleasant truths were not disclosed to home buyers and investors who failed to press for a full accounting of the risks involved. As the meltdown grew, government regulators, often looking for lucrative jobs with the people they are supposed to police, were as blind as deer in headlights when it came to blowing the whistle on shady practices.

■ **Will Wright is a former financial columnist for Money.net.**

Deal between Conlin, school could save money

Dave Conlin has been keeping track of Corning high school graduates since 1992.

He has, over the years,

compiled lists that account for more than 90 percent of all the graduates of both East and West High Schools – living or dead. He has also

collected the history of both schools, from their formation to the present day.

Primarily, the information has been used for planning class reunions, but now there is a potential wider application.

There has come into being an outfit called the Corning-Painted Post Education Foundation, an organization that could raise funds to help pay for special in-school projects not eligible for regular fund sources, or to amass money to be used for things like scholarships.

It is separate, legally, from the school district, though school board members may serve, and the schools' superintendent can be a resource but not a voting member.

As one of its first projects, it is trying to collect the alumni information Dave Conlin already has. But it plans to sell that data to an outfit called Harris Connect, a firm which specializes in compiling – and selling – such material.

Dave believes the latter is an invasion of privacy and he opposes use of the company. But he also wants to join forces so the foundation can use the data he has already so carefully collected.

He's not asking for any up-front money, he told The Insider, though he'd not object if he was eventually paid for some of the time he's already invested in the project.

But the idea of someone paying good money to collect the information he already has seems ridiculous.

At the moment, Dave's own listing efforts are in hiatus. He says he ran out of money for the project recently. But he already has most of the information needed to create the data base the foundation wants to develop.

If ever there was a potential marriage made in heaven, this would seem to be the one.

Yes, the foundation could use the information for fundraising purposes, but that would finance local projects, not go into the pockets of a commercial entity set up to sell directories.

Conlin and the school district are currently talking, I'm told.

Best of luck to all concerned, because this sounds like something that could save a lot of money and eliminate an incredible duplication of effort.

And thanks to reader Ed Louiz for turning me on to the story.

■ **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.**

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NATIONAL VIEW | MIAMI HERALD

Haitians snubbed again

The Bush administration continued its policy of cruelty and bias to Haitians with the recent rejection of President Rene Preval's request that undocumented Haitians be allowed to remain in the United States until their country recovers from last summer's devastating storms.

In a Dec. 19 letter to Preval, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff acknowledged that the four storms that drowned low-lying parts of Haiti in mud and misery had been "severe." He reminded Preval of the tons of humanitarian relief supplies the United States has sent, including "food, water, bed linens, medical supplies, hygienic items and clothing" to help the country get back on its feet.

In the end, though, the rules for granting Haitians Temporary Protected Status are just too narrow, and Haitians don't qualify, Chertoff said. The rules were not so narrow in 1998 when Hurricane Mitch tore through Honduras and Nicaragua, nor

in 2001 when an earthquake ripped through El Salvador. The United States granted TPS to more than 100,000 undocumented immigrants from those countries – as it should have. More than 10 years after those disasters, the Bush administration granted Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorans a renewal of TPS.

Why the administration chooses to treat Haitians differently is baffling. Chertoff's detailed explanation of the "opportunities" available to Haitian parolees and non-immigrant lawful Haitians offers a clue.

The point is to discourage Haitians from leaving the island by not offering any help to undocumented Haitians who already are here. However, this is a rationale that doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Haitians send nearly \$1 billion in remittances back to Haiti, which accounts for almost a third of Haiti's annual GDP. A policy of aggressive repatriation makes matters worse in Haiti, increasing – not decreasing – the likelihood of mass departures.