

# Action needed to encourage volunteering

**THE ISSUE** | The need for volunteer firefighters and medical first responders.

**OUR OPINION** | Both state and federal legislation is needed to encourage recruitment.

A manpower shortage in the South Corning Volunteer Fire Department has resulted in the corps no longer being able to respond to emergency medical calls.

Like many other departments, membership in the South Corning department has dwindled over the years. In just a year and a half, membership has fallen from 38 to 20. Moreover, only five members are certified to give medical treatment.

It's typical of what's happened to many volunteer fire companies and ambulance crews – here and throughout the nation. Membership numbers are down, and keep going down.

Statewide, the number of volunteer firefighters has fallen from 140,000 in the early 1990s to around 110,000 today. The number of volunteer emergency medical technicians dropped from more than 50,000 to 35,000 during that time.

Indeed, many departments like South Corning and others in the rural areas are just a few members away from having to shut down altogether.

There's many reasons for this trend, but one of the most pervasive is that volunteering is time consum-

ing. Not only does it take time to respond to calls, but it requires a lot of training, especially for EMTs. Many folks simply don't have the time or don't think it's worth investing the time to join a corps.

Steuben County and many other areas have tried to encourage volunteerism by offering incentives like assessment reductions. They've had very minimal success, in part, because those benefits are taxable by federal government.

Both state and federal legislation is necessary to correct this situation.

First, a federal law is needed to exempt incentives afforded to fire and medical volunteers.

Second, state legislation is needed to increase funding for training and to enhance the benefits to include income tax deductions and health insurance plans. A bill to meet those goals have passed the state Senate and are awaiting action in the Assembly.

Action is necessary to prevent other volunteer fire and ambulance corps from losing more manpower and eventually shutting down. They provide a vital public service that needs both recognition and reward.

**GUEST EDITORIAL | REP. JOHN R. "RANDY" KUHL JR.**

## Massa's letter inaccurate

I have to say that I wasn't surprised to read the many inaccuracies that my former opponent wrote in his latest "Letter to the Editor" on immigration, but I was surprised to read it in your paper without having first heard from *The Leader* to ask if these wild accusations were, in fact, true. Just like the campaign of last year, Mr. Massa seems to thrive on making wild accusations about my positions even though a quick call to my office would prove his letter to be completely false.

First, last year's Democrat nominee claims that I am not a supporter of a guest worker program for the agricultural sector. It's been widely reported that I am a huge proponent of developing a guest worker program for immigrants who wish to legally enter the United States, work in our agricultural sector, and return to their home nations when they are done. I wrote to the Republican leadership of the 109th Congress asking them to bring this legislation to the floor in 2006, and I wrote a letter to the newly elected Democrat Leadership asking them to do the same early this year.

I do not support allowing illegal aliens to "jump ahead in line" of the millions of others who are waiting to legally become citizens of our nation by following the law. I support a guest worker program that does not

include amnesty. Period.

Second, this defeated candidate for Congress claims that I "support" President Bush's immigration reform plan. I haven't taken a position on this plan because it hasn't appeared in paper here in the House. Therefore, I have no idea what it would entail. As even an elementary school student could tell you, President Bush is not a Member of Congress and therefore is not able to introduce legislation in Congress. That privilege is reserved for citizens who have been elected to serve in Congress.

Mr. Massa has also stated that I "voted against" a guest worker program because I voted for a bill to strengthen the border – legislation with the sole purpose of addressing security at the border and not at all about reforming the immigration system. It's laughable to suggest that voting for a bill that is silent on an issue means that someone is "against" that issue. Yet Mr. Massa has lied to the public before in this regard when he said that I "voted against" a raise in the minimum wage because it wasn't included in a bill, when in fact I was cosponsor of a bill to raise the federal minimum wage, and had stated publicly that I would vote for an increase!

So thank you, Mr. Massa, for providing everyone with an unfortunately not-so-rare glimpse of how you plan to run your future campaigns.

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### ARTIST'S VIEW



**COMMENTARY | CARL P. LEUBSDORF**

## More show than shift

In the weeks leading up to this week's annual summit of industrial nations, the White House has modulated President Bush's stance on a number of issues to bring him more in line with his fellow Western leaders.

It increased U.S. funds to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa, strengthened sanctions against Sudan to curb genocide in Darfur, and proposed a new approach for a fresh round of talks on global warming.

The president even suggested he looks forward to phasing out the U.S. combat role in Iraq.

Aside from the prospect of friendlier atmospherics at the sessions in Germany, however, it's unclear how much has really changed on issues that divide Bush from this nation's historic allies in Europe. Only election of a new American administration is likely to bring the policy changes that would do that.

And Bush showed no sign of give on the issue that has overshadowed his trip and chilled U.S. relations with Russia: his plan to install a radar base and interceptor missiles for a new missile defense system in two democratic successors to Eastern Europe's onetime Soviet satellites, Poland and the Czech Republic.

That could cause some tense moments when Bush meets Russian President Vladimir Putin today. But, despite White House efforts to minimize the differences, the major dividing point between Bush and his fellow G-8 leaders is global warming.

The president continues to reject the call by Germany's Angela Merkel, this year's host, for a mandatory global cap on greenhouse gas emissions.

Instead, he favors talks to develop a looser, country-by-country approach.

Indeed, while the White House drew some plaudits for making a positive proposal, its plan seems likely to push the issue beyond his administration, raising the question of whether it's primarily a ploy to ease its negative image.

Iraq remains a sore point with the allies. Still, Bush's May 24 comment that he'd ultimately like "a different configuration" – in which U.S. troops mainly train Iraqis and protect border security while special forces chase suspected al-Qaida elements – was the first concrete sign he may be easing his resistance to reducing forces.

But the president's words seemed mainly aimed at growing concern among Republicans that failure to chart a clear path out of Iraq could create another GOP electoral disaster next year.

Though some officials immediately suggested the possibility of significant cuts in U.S. combat forces next year, others said that was premature and depended on events over the ensuing months.

At present, of course, the United States is still increasing its troop strength as part of the "surge" aimed at curbing violence in Baghdad. Even now, there have been some suggestions from the military that the force level is still too low to have the desired effect.

As for what follows a planned September review of the situation, a serious question remains as to whether even a modest cut in troops will halt rising domestic pressure to withdraw all combat forces.

The administration does not seem to have helped itself by comparing its expectation of an extended

U.S. presence in Iraq to the presence of nearly 40,000 U.S. troops in Korea some 50 years after hostilities ended there.

Still, none of this suggests that Bush is so wedded to his positions that he's incapable of change. In the past, he has reversed course in a number of instances.

Nine months after the 9/11 attacks, he dropped his opposition and proposed creation of a Cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security. He opposed an independent probe of the terrorist attacks and then accepted one.

But on matters about which he really cares, his changes are often more tactical than substantive. In 2001, he reduced the cost of his tax cut plan by making it expire after nine years, believing political pressures would ensure its extension.

Though many cuts will ultimately be extended, the extent may depend on whether a Democrat or a Republican wins the 2008 election.

Bush also agreed to higher funding levels to get his No Child Left Behind education bill passed. But he has continually resisted Democratic efforts to provide the full amount of money.

Given that history, there's reason to think his pre-summit tweaking of positions was designed more to ensure pleasant sessions on the Baltic sea-coast than to produce significant shifts in policy.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Look more closely at Kuhl's funding

**TO THE EDITOR** | On May 24, *USA Today* ran a major article on "how well-funded interests seek to influence Congress." It described how lobbyists funnel large amounts of money to selected House members by sponsoring campaign fundraising events and how representatives invite lobbyists to have breakfast or lunch – for a fee.

I really got upset when I discovered the article fea-

tured a large picture of Randy Kuhl and a statement that "the campaign of Randy Kuhl, R-N.Y., a transportation committee member, is asking \$500 from individuals and \$1,000 for PACs for lunch at the American Trucking Association headquarters."

If 100 people come at \$750 each, that's \$75,000 straight into Randy's re-election fund.

And we're supposed to believe there are no strings attached? Or don't politicians care what we think? Why would trucking lobby-

ists help Randy get re-elected to represent us? Maybe Randy would discuss this at one of his town hall meetings. Maybe he'll just say that other politicians do it.

We obviously can't expect lifelong politicians who benefit from this deeply flawed system to change it. The only way is to elect people who promise not to take lobbyist money and promise to propose legislation that makes accepting it illegal.

**John Benson**  
Hornby

## The Ryckman factor in the mayoral race in Corning

For the lack of a better term, I'll call it the Ryckman factor. I'm referring to Corning City Manager Mark Ryckman and the unwilling role he could play in Corning City mayor's race.

**CITY BEAT**



**Jbe Dunning**

I say unwilling because Ryckman is a bureaucrat, not a politician. He's a public servant, not an elected official and is careful not to blur the lines between the two.

But he's already seeped into the campaigns of Mayor Frank Coccho and Republican challenger Tom Reed.

Reed dropped Ryckman's name just moments into announcing his candidacy last week. He praised the city manager for the job he's done, something I think he said sincerely but with purpose.

It was a subtle reference to Ryckman's job security and a special city council committee recently set up to examine how the city manager is annually evaluated for his pay raise. Ryckman's contract stipulates he must agree to how he is evaluated so any changes the council wishes to make could only come in the form of a recommendation. Ultimately, the final decision rests with Ryckman.

Why the council wants to mess with Ryckman's contract is anyone's guess. Why does it do most of the things it does?

Word from the council was it wants the process simplified and updated. Others view it as a misguided way to pressure Ryckman to be more of a team player and to bend to the wishes of the mayor and his wife, the 6th Ward councilman. Many feel the mayor wants to eventually weaken the position, either through intimidation or an actual charter change.

The worry both in and out of city hall is that Ryckman will get fed up, pack up his family and leave city government to the Cocchos and their friends.

I'd be remiss not to mention that the mayor praises Ryckman publicly. He even gave him a pat on the back for the 2007-08 city budget that raises taxes nearly 6 percent even though Coccho said in January he wanted a spending plan with little or no tax increase.

That's certainly out of character with the old Frank Coccho who used to fight against tax hikes when he served as 6th Ward alderman. Perhaps it's all the more reason to question the motivation to form the evaluation committee.

Politically, it sure seems like a bad move for the mayor and one that Reed may take advantage of. Ryckman is well respected throughout the city for the job he's done.

Some could view this election as a tacit endorsement of Ryckman's job. A vote for Reed shows support for Ryckman, whereas a vote for Coccho ...

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