

SPEAKING OUT

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

INBOX

Want to save on gas? Ride a bicycle for some trips

On Page 3A of Monday's Democrat and Chronicle, there was an article about how to save money on gas directly under an article about testing a bike-share program in Canandaigua. Interestingly enough, not one of the suggestions for saving gas including using a bicycle for shorter trips.

Isn't it about time we started thinking outside the box and broadening our options?

Karen Lankeshofer
Henrietta

Eliminating gas tax is not a solution

On March 20, a reader asked, "Why hasn't New York taken the tax off of gasoline?"

The answer is simple: it wouldn't solve anything.

While eliminating gas taxes would lower gas prices in the short term, it would lead to higher prices overall. Suspending the tax would increase demand and drive-up inflation because of supply problems.

Unfortunately, solutions to the supply problem are not as simple as politicians propose. For one, oil companies can't just drill more for a myriad of reasons.

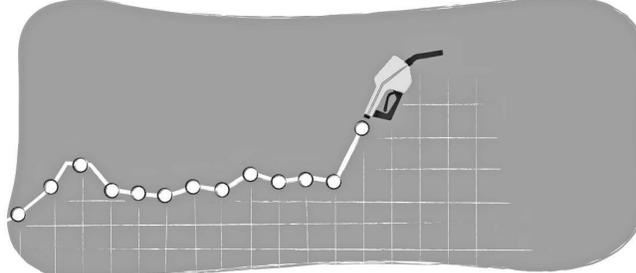
The Keystone XL also isn't a solution; the bitumen from tar sands is better suited for paving asphalt. Converting bitumen into gasoline requires intensive "upgrading" at specialized refineries and is not optimal.

Once again, we are facing an economic boondoggle and our politicians are too busy pandering to their party's lowest common denominator to actually find solutions.

Noah Reger
Holley

Rising fossil-fuel prices give reason to shift power source

Given the jump in oil and gas prices, I'm hoping never to buy another gas furnace, appliance, vehicle, or yard tool.



Gas prices rising JENNIFER BORRESSEN

Why should I buy electric instead?

- My energy costs will be more stable, especially with my solar panels helping.
- My money won't be propping up autocrats in Russia, the Middle East and Venezuela.
- For many uses, electricity now costs less than gas.
- Electric vehicles and tools require much less maintenance than gas ones.
- I won't have to smell the fumes, nor

will they be a factor possibly causing asthma in my family and neighbors.

- I won't be responsible for pollution caused by gas or oil wells or pipelines or refineries.
 - I'll be adding less to the ever-increasing climate change, which is already damaging our coasts, forests, agriculture and national security.
 - Don't pump gas, dump gas.
- Peter Collinge
Pittsford

Future of downtowns post-pandemic shouldn't include skyscrapers

In the Business section last Sunday, Mayor Stothert of Omaha and CEO Blackledge of Mutual of Omaha Insurance extolled a new and shiny skyscraper in their downtown. Mutual believes this will attract their workers, many now working at home, back to the office.

Cost: near half a billion dollars. The time for this kind of urbanism is over. They plan to construct a black hole in their downtown, a very expensive, cold and unattractive mistake they might long regret. Hard not to believe their city or company doesn't have more pressing needs.

Perhaps the Mayor and CEO should listen to CEO Matt McConnell, quoted in the article. He said his own headquarters is "just this big, empty space that no one is using. It doesn't make any sense to maintain that."

We must always think carefully as we toil in the unending and expensive work of reshaping our cities.

Howard Decker
Rochester

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To submit a letter or essay, please go to www.DemocratandChronicle.com/Opinion and click on "Submit Your Opinion." Letters are limited to 150 words. Essay submissions are limited to 425 words. You must provide a one-sentence bio and a headshot when you submit your essay or it may not be considered for publication. Contributors are limited to one published letter or essay every 30 days. All letters and essays chosen for publication are subject to editing for length, clarity and accuracy. We are no longer accepting submissions by email. Our "Submit Your Opinion" form is the only way to submit your opinion online. Due to the high volume of submissions, we are unable to publish all of them, and we cannot personally reply to all submissions. If you do not see your submission published or hear from us within two weeks, please assume that we are not able to use your submission.

Now is time to address child mental health crisis



Your Turn
Sara I. Taylor
Guest columnist

Watching your 13-year-old child struggle with anxiety and depression is heartbreaking for any parent.

Even before the pandemic, our family spent hours running from numerous mental health appointments to psychiatric emergency rooms, trying desperately to get my daughter the help she needed. Unfortunately, like countless children across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on my child's mental health.

Sadly, she is not alone. In New York state and across the country, a growing number of families are grappling with a severe and worsening child mental health crisis. At the end of last year, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a public health advisory to "highlight the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis" as rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation in children soared.

During his first State of the Union Address, President Biden called attention to the crisis, saying the pandemic has turned the lives and education of children "upside down."

Our children's mental health is a matter of life and death. If New York doesn't step up now to invest in proven prevention treatments and expand access to critical behavioral health services for children, more young lives will be lost. Our children, especially children of color, urgently need access to high-quality behavioral health care to overcome the compounding trauma from the pandemic, social isolation and ongoing economic devastation.

Even before the pandemic, roughly half of children with a behavioral health condition did not receive treatment or counseling, and mental health challenges were the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in young people. Additionally, suicidal behaviors among high

school students rose from 2009 to 2019, with 19% seriously considering attempting suicide.

These worsening challenges have been met with even longer wait times for care and an urgent need to hire more care workers. The consequences have been disastrous — especially for parents like myself.

Rochester, where I currently live, is among 13 cities in the country ranked as having struggled with COVID-19 and having limited access to behavioral health services. As an advocate and a mother, I see too many parents in our community suffering in silence, either because they lack access to adequate mental health care or do not trust the health-care system.

This crisis is disproportionately impacting low-income communities and families of color. For too long, Black and brown children and families have faced greater barriers to care due to longstanding inequities and systemic racism embedded in our healthcare system. Countless parents of color like me worry that their child will be criminalized or placed in the child welfare system because they cannot access the mental health services they need.

Too often, our children become involved in the child welfare system or criminal legal system when what they really need are support systems embedded within their communities to address — not reinforce — the compounding cycle of trauma. New York state legislators have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the state's child mental health care system. In her executive budget proposal, Gov. Kathy Hochul made child mental health care a clear priority.

For the sake of my daughter and all the children suffering in my community and across the state, I ask our state legislators to listen to families.

Sara I. Taylor is the founder and director of BIPOC PEEEEEK Parent Mental Health project in Rochester, Buffalo and Syracuse focused on addressing mental health disparities in communities of color (www.bipocparent-voice.org).

Give those who pay debt to society a clean slate



Your Turn
Robert J. Duffy
Guest columnist

In New York, a conviction on a person's record can block opportunities like stable jobs, licenses to practice trades, and secure housing.

When a person is convicted of a crime and sentenced to incarceration, he or she has "repaid their debt to society" once they are released. With very limited exceptions, these individuals should not have to keep paying for the rest of their lives due to the stigma attached to those who serve time in prison.

As former police chief and mayor of Rochester, as former lieutenant governor of New York and in my current role as president and CEO of Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce, I support the Clean Slate NY bill sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie and Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz. This bill, when enacted, would amend the criminal procedure law, the executive law and the correction law by requiring the automatic sealing and expungement of certain convictions for people who have paid their debt to society.

As many as one-in-three New Yorkers has had contact with the criminal punishment system, and more than one-in-seven has a conviction record. Because background checks are used in many circumstances, individuals with conviction histories might feel that they can never move forward with their lives.

The exclusion of people with conviction records from employment opportunities via background checks and other barriers hurts productivity and deprives the workforce of crucial talent. Some national studies estimate that excluding individuals with conviction histories from the workforce costs the economy between \$78 billion and \$87 billion in lost domestic product — and it certainly has an impact on the Greater

Rochester and Finger Lakes region. Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, the majority of individuals are members of historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. The law as it stands is perpetuating years of discrimination, poverty and recidivism.

In 2017, an effort was made to remedy the discrimination faced by those previously incarcerated New Yorkers who paid their debt to society. The application-based record clearing policy was seen as a significant step in the right direction. But in reality, since its implementation, fewer than 0.5 percent of eligible individuals have been able to clear their records.

The number one issue our members in the Greater Rochester/Finger Lakes region face is access to talent. Good-paying jobs with health and education benefits are plentiful. Jobs that allow individuals to work remotely and care for loved ones. Jobs that help build people up and out of poverty. These jobs go unfilled in part because of policies that relegate so many previously incarcerated individuals to second-class status.

Enacting this legislation is a necessary and important step toward righting the wrongs that have left behind a huge population of New Yorkers. Elected leaders of all parties use rhetoric and conjecture like "bridge the gaps" and "fix the inequities" and "repair the damage." Support for this legislation is a good way to put words into action.

This issue is not "soft on crime" but rather it reflects a sense of fairness. People often make horrible mistakes and should be held accountable for their actions. Once they pay for their mistakes, they deserve a second chance to regain their lives and earn a living to support themselves and their families.

Let's provide these men and women with the opportunity to start over and let's judge them on what they do in the future as opposed to their past.

Robert J. Duffy is president and CEO of the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce.