

## letters

## to the Editor

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## Rev. Bagley's memory honored

The Rev. Gary Bagley, recently deceased pastor of St. Benedict Church, was school chaplain at Sacred Heart Academy, where he will be fondly remembered for years to come. He served the Sacred Heart Academy community for more than 30 years.

This school year, Rev. Bagley celebrated three Masses sharing messages of love, faith and community with students and friends. He opened the school year with a Mass for teachers and staff, reminding them of the importance of their job of educating young women of Sacred

Heart with love, compassion and humor.

In honor of Rev. Bagley's years of dedicated service and commitment to Sacred Heart Academy, a memorial service was held. The memorial service was attended by his parents, Howard and Bea, faculty, staff, the entire student body and members of the Sacred Heart community.

Sacred Heart Academy alumna Eileen Warner gave a moving reflection on Rev. Bagley. Those in attendance were reminded of his message of "planting the seeds" of faith, hope and spiritual insight in our lives.

Rev. Bagley would question us, challenge us and make us work (Please turn to page six)

## No savings too small in our troubled county

It's a warm, dry, sunny January day in Buffalo when something wafts down from the top of the Edward A. Rath Erie County Office Building that doesn't remind us all of driving through Lackawanna when Bethlehem was a thriving economic interest.

So when it actually happens twice in one day, it's time to dial up a local chiropractor, so quick was the head turn late last week, when not one but two cogent thoughts actually crystallized from the Humpty Dumpty heap of broken promises that collectively have come to define Joel Giambra and his administration.

The first didn't actually come from Giambra himself, but Jim Hartman, whose appearances before Erie County's now "hard" control board could easily rival "I Love Lucy" or "Everybody Loves Raymond" as one of television's all-time great comedies. As Giambra's delegate on all things dollars, what is supposed to be a monthly thrust and parry of ideas and solutions between the budget director and seven-person board is usually more like a stomp and sigh session.

It is impossible to side with the Giambra administration in almost any argument — that's what happens when you've spent seven years shoveling your credibility into a steel plant's blast furnace — but one of Hartman's parting shots, a challenge to the control board to go ahead and freeze county wages, was spot on, if not for the reasoning, at least for the idea itself.

Why won't the control board do just that? Obviously, it's an unpopular step, and those who might want to take that leap argue that it would result in less savings than many people might think. Hartman said he believes the board won't do it because it doesn't want to tick off local unions.

With an administration that continually finds ways not to save money — did they hear the news that American Axle and its 1,700 Western New York jobs are on the verge of "going Bethlehem" too? — the control board must use all the tools at its disposal in doing just that, regardless of who might be made unhappy in taking that step. There are no savings too small, no union too large (rarely does any court ever rule against the broad and undisputed powers of a state-created control

board), to continue to ignore such low-hanging fruit. There is little argument that such a freeze has been one of the key pillars of Buffalo's financial rebuilding.

The best line of the week was all Joel's, however. On the same day he ripped page No. 353 off his "Days 'Til I Leave Office" calendar, Giambra boiled down problems with the ongoing Buffalo Creek Casino conundrum with this succinct and dead-on analysis: "Screwing local business is not economic development."

Of course, unable to contain himself (understanding that less said is oftentimes more, especially after a perfect zinger like that was never a strong suit of his), the king tried to use his Cracker Jack box crystal ball, the same one undoubtedly he uses for all his financial forecasts, to predict, "Today is an historic day. There will be no casino in the City of Buffalo."

Guess again. By the time this winds its way through levels of the federal government most of us have never heard of, the casino will be pouring drinks and collecting chips at a prodigious rate. After all, how can we shut down a project that's this far along now, is how the argument will ultimately go.

Since there is no legacy left to protect — all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Joel back together again — and rebuilding it in such a short period of time would be akin to reconfiguring the Aud into a new Bass Pro in approximately 11 months, maybe Giambra and his administration will spend their time between now and Dec. 31 more rooted in a reality that would for once be constructive to our region. That would be a relief.

We're tired of holding our noses.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community-based weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our Web site at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)



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## Laws now in effect will benefit New York taxpayers

On Jan. 1, new laws went into effect that will save New York's families and businesses almost \$1 billion in taxes, preserve jobs and valuable industries such as manufacturing, and drastically cut down on Medicaid fraud.

As we move forward into a new legislative session, my Senate colleagues and I remain committed to building on our record by providing greater relief to New York State's taxpayers.

The Senate has already announced a three-part plan to significantly expand the Senate-initiated property tax relief rebate program to provide \$2.6 billion in property tax relief this year and \$3.4 billion in 2008.

This plan would triple the size of direct property tax rebate checks in the first year, give voters greater input on local property tax rates and establish a blue ribbon commission to make reforms to help reduce property taxes.

Laws that went into effect at the beginning of the year include:

- **Empire State Child Tax Credit** — To help parents meet the rising costs of classroom supplies and educational materials, this measure gives taxpayers a personal income tax credit equal to one-third of the federal child tax credit for children between the ages of four and 17, saving New York parents \$600 million in 2007.

- **Elimination of the Marriage Penalty** — Recognizing the unfairness that requires taxpayers to pay more simply because they are married, legislation passed last year corrects this inequity by bringing the standard deduction for married

taxpayers in line with the one granted to single taxpayers. Beginning this year, married taxpayers will see an increase in their standard deduction to \$15,000 for joint filers to \$7,500 for separate filers, saving married taxpayers \$41 million.

- **Phasing in of the 'Single Sales Factor'** — Under previously existing law, businesses that increased payroll or capital investments in the state incurred a higher state income tax liability, which encouraged job outsourcing, especially in the manufacturing, securities and broadcasting industries.

Now, with the implementation of the second phase of a three-phase plan, the tax has been reduced and will not only help businesses currently operating in New York but will also encourage outside companies to locate here as well, creating more jobs within our borders.

This initiative is expected to save New York businesses \$43 million in 2007 and \$130 million when fully implemented.

- **Medicaid Inspector General** — The Legislature established an independent Office of the Medicaid Inspector General within the state Department of Health. The inspector will establish regulations to root out fraud in the system that could potentially save taxpayers billions of dollars.

These represent just a few of the new laws aimed at enhancing the quality of life for New York's citizens.

For a complete list, please visit my Web site at www.senatorrath.com or contact my office.



MARY LOU RATH

New York State Senator