

letters

to the Editor

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Suspending gas tax not thought out

This election year is becoming the year in which "leadership incompetence" is demonstrated by politicians who insult voters' intelligence with meritless, even harmful, proposals to garner votes in the upcoming elections. Witness Republican Assemblyman James Hayes' May 7, 2008, Amherst Bee article proposing to suspend New York's tax on gas during the summer months. Assemblyman Hayes follows the lead of State Senate Republicans who, on April 30, 2008, called for a summer gas tax holiday. They follow the lead of Republican

presidential candidate John McCain and Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton who proposed a federal gas tax holiday.

Assemblyman Hayes and his gas-tax-holiday friends ignore the reality that the gas tax revenues are dedicated sources of money to build, maintain and rebuild our highways. That building, maintenance and rebuilding create good construction jobs for Americans. The State Senate Republicans propose to fund highways through other sources, but that simply means that what you are not taxed at the pump you will be taxed elsewhere. It is cheap

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Philosophy, stubbornness reasons why Williams would not be missed

He's been stirring the pot since he first came to town, so it's really no surprise that the latest furor caused by the revelation that James Williams is a finalist for a school superintendent position in Tennessee has opened up a public dialogue on whether or not Williams' departure would help or hinder the City of Buffalo School District.

For what it's worth, my evaluation of Williams' flirtation with the job in Memphis can be summed up in a 12-word phrase that a dearly departed family member often used to utter — "Don't let the door hit ya where the good Lord split ya."

Simply put, just like certain politicians who have worn out their welcome (former Erie County Executive Joel Giambra immediately comes to mind) for one reason or another, Williams has expired when talking about the shelf life of a public official whose name and seemingly everything he or she touches become toxic.

Williams has been controversial since he first came to Buffalo three years ago. While he gets credit for spearheading initiatives that have helped improve certain aspects of what happens in the classroom and on the athletic field, he has more than his fair share of clouds of uncertainty floating over his head when speaking directly to his leadership and management skills and his approach to running the school district on a day-to-day basis.

It's that philosophy of one-size-fits-all that has caused Williams to butt heads with some folks, namely Buffalo Teachers Federation President Phil Rumore. Williams didn't get off on the right foot with Rumore, spewing out that infamous "snake in the grass" comment that was soon followed by a threat to use his fists to straighten Rumore out.

Part of his stubbornness comes from his ego and also from his approach to direct interaction with others. Say what you want about Rumore and his cohorts from the teachers' union, but please don't forget that eight of the nine unions that represent district employees have been unable to reach an agreement with the city on new contracts, a serious blight on Williams' resume that you can add to that lengthy list of unfinished

projects that have not come to fruition while Williams has been at the helm.

I find myself analyzing him based more on his personality clashes with others and outright refusal to take the blame when someone has to be held accountable than for any of the work he did to help improve the learning atmosphere in the district.

His agenda is peppered with pettiness and a personal ambition to push the blame onto others. He's not afraid to throw others under the bus in attempts to cover his own backside. His horrific handling of the controversies at City Honors School, Discovery School 67 and McKinley High School has more than a few city officials privately cheering for Williams to knock the socks off the folks in Memphis and get offered the job.

If Williams ends up not getting that gig or is offered the position and then decides to turn it down, what we are left with is a lame duck administrator who has very little support since so many bridges have already been burned.

It's sad, because I was among those who really believed Williams had what it takes to lead the district to new heights and take a strong stand for the children and the taxpayers of Buffalo. His initial work was inspiring and had people talking that maybe he was the chief executive officer that the city has so desperately needed to give students, teachers and other district employees hope that great things can be realized through cooperation, determination and inspiration.

Williams has resorted to playing favorites, name-calling and outright bullying. Yes, the majority of the School Board should not escape blame for failing to find an answer to the real problem that faces Buffalo, specifically how to fix a system that is severely flawed and in drastic need of a complete overhaul. But ultimately, the buck starts and stops with Williams.

Buffalo's school system is in no better shape than it was prior to Williams arriving. His leadership style can best be described as arrogant, incompetent and belligerent.

A demand for no more theatrical antics and petty personal politics is needed. It starts with Williams leaving Buffalo.

(Opinions are those of the author.)



DAN MEYER

Political Columnist

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Success can be seen in many aspects of education

It is hard to believe that we are quickly approaching the end of another school year. Preparations for graduation and the many other activities that symbolize the end of the school year are well under way. This is always an exciting time for our families and our faculty members.

It has been a very busy year for our students and staff. Our students continue to participate in the various local and state assessments at all levels.

Although we have not yet received the state reports, we anticipate that our students will continue to do well in the various subject areas. As an educator, it is important to keep in perspective that one of the primary purposes of this testing is to provide the school districts with a quantitative approach of measuring academic performance over a period of several years.

We hope that through this information, we will be better able to determine the strengths and weaknesses of our students and programs in the assessed academic areas.

This can then assist the district in determining the best practices for providing educational programs for our students. In addition, we will also continue to provide our staff with professional growth opportunities that will encourage our instructional staff to identify and modify instructional strategies that will best address the individual needs of our students while working toward continued improvement on our state assessment results.

Success also comes in many shapes and forms. Our students have demonstrated a great deal of success in the many other areas that we offer as

part of our educational program at Amherst.

For each individual, student success may mean very different things. Knowing an individual student's strengths and weaknesses and giving them the opportunity to experience success based on their abilities are critical. Amherst has traditionally been a district that encourages all students to work toward their potential in an effort to achieve the goals that they have set for themselves.

The options for every student are endless. I hope that through the education that they have received at Amherst all students feel that they are ready to take on the challenges that lie ahead. As an educator, it is certainly satisfying and rewarding to watch these students receive their diplomas and be recognized for their efforts and hard work.

As one year winds down, we immediately begin preparing for the next school year. Once again, the administrative team and Board of Education will be faced with the challenge of maintaining educational programs and mandated services for our students within the budgetary guidelines that have been established. We will continue to evaluate and prioritize the needs of our district as we face these challenges.

At the least, we want to continue to provide our students with opportunities to excel and continue to help prepare them for the ever-changing world that lies ahead.

As always, I thank you for your continued support and look forward to seeing many of you at the activities and programs throughout the end of May and June.



LAURA CHABE

Amherst School Superintendent