

December 7, 2009

Letters to the editor for Monday, 12/7

Hall and Molinaro's help appreciated

On Thursday, Nov. 12, the state Department of Health met with residents living in the Hopewell Precision Superfund site to discuss our health issues and to compare our cancers to other areas in New York state. The Department of Health completed a health statistics review. We invited the Poughkeepsie Journal to attend the meeting but unfortunately they were unable to attend. Fortunately our elected officials, Assemblyman Marc Molinaro and Congressman John Hall, sent staff members to attend. These staff members were very informed and did their homework. These types of reports are very difficult to understand and their help was needed and appreciated.

Congressman Hall and Assemblyman Molinaro have not missed one meeting since both took office three years ago. Every time they were asked to make a call about something important or write a letter to comment on reports, they have listened and helped. It does not matter that they both sit on opposite sides of the aisle. Nor does it matter that one works on the state level and the other works on a federal level.

All that matters to them is our well being. Thank you Assemblyman and Congressman for doing your job well.

Debra Hall

Hopewell Junction Citizens for Clean Water

Hopewell Junction

School safety story missed the point

Larry Hertz's article regarding unreliable school safety data missed the point ("Exclusive: Schools' safety data unreliable since 2006," Nov. 16). Instead of provocatively questioning school safety, he should be questioning why New York state is collecting this data in the first place.

Twenty years ago, as a political, knee-jerk response to a terrible tragedy caused by a freak tornado hitting a school in Coldenham, N.Y., all schools were required to hire engineers and annually inspect and report on building structural integrity.

Since school districts, ultimately responsible for school safety, have their own monitoring procedures, no one ever referred to this data compiled by the state. So, for 20 years school districts and New York state have been spending millions to compile information that was never used or referred to by anybody, all at the taxpayers' expense.

That is, until Larry Hertz through some excellent investigative reporting uncovered this useless state mandate.

Our schools are run by highly qualified and highly paid principals and district superintendents.

In addition, each school district is overseen by an elected school board.

These people are very aware of their responsibility to maintain the structural integrity and safety of our schools and don't need Albany looking over their shoulder.

Waste of taxpayer money, not school safety is the issue. If New York state politicians are serious about cutting taxes, instead of scheming for more ways of grabbing money through fees, they should cease funding all state agencies that cannot annually demonstrate their usefulness.

Vincent Pangia, C.P.A.

Poughkeepsie

Student test scores get too much weight

Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced recently that New York City public schools would start immediately using student test scores as a factor in figuring faculty tenure.

Bloomberg joins Barack Obama and Arne Duncan, the U.S. secretary of education, in using the No Child Left Behind scores even more widely than they are used for now: bonus pay for teaching and administrative staff, the A-F scores now used to rate the New York City schools themselves, which schools to shut down, and which teachers should stay or be removed.

It is hard to imagine that a rating system so variable in its design and application, already so destructively powerful in its effects on our schools and school programs would now increase its range of influence to cover more levels of staff and their professional futures and not yield even more to the temptation of tampering with the results.

Let us make every effort to avoid adding to the already excessive powers of the No Child Left Behind programs and their tests, spreading them even wider across the state. Like Poughkeepsie, for example.

Leonard E. Opdycke

Poughkeepsie
