

Viewpoints

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters may be edited for legal considerations, reader interest and length. Please include a telephone number and address for verification purposes. **Deadline for letters is Friday at noon.** Letters must be submitted by e-mail to be considered for publication. Letters can be e-mailed to newsplace@aol.com, and the phrase "Letter to the Editor" should be included in the subject line of the e-mail.

Letters to the Editor do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the staff or management of the Southern Dutchess News Group.

Eight legislators challenge Pulver's order

To the Editor:

The following letter was sent to Gregg Pulver, chair of the Dutchess County Legislature.

We are writing to protest in the strongest terms your intention, stated during a COVID update conference call last week and reported in the Mid-Hudson News, to cancel the legislature's April meetings. We have five reasons for opposing this action.

1. Meetings can now be held remotely. In response to the COVID-19 crisis the governor, by Executive Order 202.1, has suspended Article 7 of the Public Officers Law, known as the "open meetings law." Until the crisis has passed, members of the public may now view government meetings remotely and participate telephonically, and the legislature as a whole can also meet telephonically. (Link below.)

Helped by this directive, many other New York counties are developing strategies to continue working through what will clearly be a prolonged period of disruption. Ulster County's legislature met this week and has issued a statement on how it will proceed (link below). Westchester's legislative committees meet next week and their legislature has also outlined clear procedures (link below). Other counties--including many with confirmed cases of COVID-19--are postponing public hearings but finding ways to conduct essential business. Our work can continue in ways fully compatible with public health mandates.

2. It violates the Permanent Rules of the Dutchess County Legislature. Rule 4.3.G states that "the Chair may declare an emergency and adjourn a regular or special meeting to a date not to exceed seven (7) days beyond the meeting so adjourned." The Chair has no power to declare that a meeting will not occur.

3. By deferring to an Executive Order, it violates the Dutchess County Charter. Article 2.02(d) of the Charter states that the legislature "adopts all necessary rules and regulations for its own conduct and procedure." The County Executive himself indicated this during today's phone call. His order to restrict "social, community, and public events or gatherings" clearly does not apply to an elected body with powers distinct from, and coequal with, his own. The Charter also specifies, in 2.10, that "the legislature must meet at least once in each calendar month."

4. It demonstrates an inaccurate and disturbing assumption that the legislature is dispensable in challenging times. The legislative branch is a necessary counterbalance to the executive at all levels of American government. It would be shocking--indeed, un-American--for the US Congress to adjourn itself and cede all decision-making power to the president. It would be equally wrong for the New York State legislature to close up shop for an extended period and leave the governor wholly in charge. The same is true at the county level.

In the regular course of business we find that the Republican majority in the Dutchess County Legislature shows excessive deference to executive authority, acting largely as a rubber-stamp body with little deliberation. The decision to suspend meeting in April illustrates an even more extreme form of deference by the Chair, one that goes beyond any acquiescence the Executive himself is seeking. That the chair shared his decision with the news media, which reported it, but did not inform legislators until the following day, compounds this flagrant violation of governmental norms.

5. It insults the work of other hard-working county employees who are serving

actively during the COVID-19 crisis and even risking their lives to protect the public. We may be part-time legislators, but our Democratic caucus takes the work of governance very seriously, especially at this critical time. As you know, yesterday morning we submitted five resolutions for the April agenda. We proposed:

- expanded county COVID-19 hotline services, so that residents can get more individualized answers and referrals (in both English and Spanish) and less often hear a recorded message;
- funding to expand emergency food supplies for unemployed and at-risk residents and children out of school;
- public hand-washing stations for homeless individuals and at locations where essential public services are provided;
- a moratorium on mortgage foreclosures (to complement the state legislature's moratorium on tenant evictions); and
- a moratorium on shut-offs of gas, electric, telephone, and Internet utilities.

We suggested that these measures might be taken sooner by executive action (or by New York State) and we indicated flexibility in both ends and means, as we respond to a rapidly evolving situation. But our resolutions indicate our readiness to participate actively in problem-solving as our communities face the deadly threat of COVID-19. We believe this continued, engaged public service--not a month off--is the legislature's appropriate role.

The Chair's decision must be rescinded immediately. Arrangements must be made, as is being done in other counties, for the Dutchess County legislature to proceed with its April meetings, in a format that protects everyone's health and also protects the operations of our elected government.

Rebecca Edwards (Poughkeepsie) and Nick Page (Beacon and Fishkill), Minority Leader and Assistant Leader
 Hannah Black (Hyde Park)
 Craig Brendli (Poughkeepsie)
 Brennan Kearney (Clinton/Rhinebeck)
 Giancarlo Llaverias (Poughkeepsie)
 Kris Munn (Red Hook and Tivoli)
 Frits Zernike (Beacon and Fishkill)

Protectionism's double-edged sword

To the Editor:

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has swept across the globe, scouring cities and rural communities alike. To date there are 16 (now 36) documented cases in Dutchess County. Government rightfully wants to "flatten the curve" of contagion, but some of the measures which government has taken are doing us considerable harm.

The most obvious example is seen at your local supermarket. On March 7th the Governor ramped up the state of emergency which he had first declared on January 20th. This triggered the Price Gouging law, capping the price which retailers could charge for many essential items, like milk, bread and sanitizer. These being items for which the public's demand had surged, shoppers all rushed to supermarkets to stock up on as many units as they could buy before other shoppers could do the same. Whereas government advises against the congregation of many people into confined spaces, those long lines of shoppers breathing on each other which you saw last week at supermarkets are exactly what the government's tinkering with the economy had produced.

Mainstream media has also played its role in supporting government's folly. The press abounds with stories of villainous price gougers scandalously stockpiling supplies to sell at higher prices. Seemingly it is bad for a supplier to "hoard" items for re-sale at mark-ups, but it's good for a shopper to buy far more cartloads of Lysol than the shopper can personally use, only to deny the product to other shoppers!

What is lost in all this havoc is that government's consumer protectionism harmfully restricts consumers' freedoms. By denying us the right to pay more for those items we want, government has prevented competing retailers from maintaining their supply, resulting in shelves ominously emptied in ways not seen even during Hurricane Sandy. Some establishments like Costco have shoppers waiting for hours in rationing lines. Maybe the extra buck you'll pay for Kleenex is worth less to you than the hour you'd wait in line to buy it, and you alone should have that choice! Maybe you'd happily pay that extra buck to ensure the constant supply of needed items rather than resort to fisticuffs with your neighbors in the aisles over the last roll of toilet paper.

Daniel Donnelly
 Amenia

Dutchess County Libertarian Party, Vice-Chair

BEACON FREE PRESS

Published Weekly, Wappingers Falls Shopper, Inc.
 84 East Main Street, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590

Albert Osten, President • Beatrice Osten, Secretary - Treasurer
 SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF:

Wappingers Falls, Hopewell Junction, Southern Poughkeepsie,
 New Hamburg, Red Oaks Mill, Fishkill, Chelsea, Wiccopee,
 New Hackensack and Stormville

Publisher - Albert Osten

Editor - Kristine Coulter

Reporter - Rich Thomaselli

Art Director - Sharon Browne

General Manager - Curtis Schmidt

Advertising Representative - Jaimie Rodriguez

Advertising Assistant - Roxanne Hoffman

Advertising rates - furnished upon request

To advertise - 845-297-3723 - sdnadvertising@aol.com

Advertising deadline is Friday at noon

TELEPHONE: 297-3723 FAX: 297-6810

E-MAIL address for letters: newsplace@aol.com

(USPS 665900)

(USPS 665900)

THE BEACON FREE PRESS (ISSN 0192-9631) is published weekly by the Wappingers Falls Shopper, Inc., 84 East Main Street, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590. Second-Class postage paid at Wappingers Falls, 12590 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE BEACON FREE PRESS, 84 East Main Street, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590.

Dutchess Stadium to serve as Mobile Coronavirus Test Site

By Rich Thomaselli

While hopes are still high that there will be a Hudson Valley Renegades minor league baseball season that fills Dutchess Stadium starting June 18, the county-owned stadium will start serving another purpose this week.

Dutchess County is set to open a mobile coronavirus testing facility at the stadium, Assistant County Executive Ron Hicks said. The ballpark is located at 1500 Route 9D in Wappingers Falls, a mile or so from the I-84 interchange and Newburgh-Beacon Bridge.

Though tents are already set up in the parking lot, the county is waiting until the testing site is fully functional this week and then will release a phone number to call in order to be screened. Nobody will be allowed to just drive up to be tested without first calling the number and answering questions about their health to



A "Stay Home Stop the Spread" reminder on a sign across the street from Dutchess Stadium, which will serve as a Mobile Coronavirus Test Site.

-Photo by Kristine Coulter

determine if they possibly have the virus, also known as COVID-19.

In Dutchess County, 49 people have tested positive as of Saturday, March 21.