

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 disposable 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

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Disturbed by impact COVID-19 could have on veterans care

To the Editor:

I am deeply concerned about the impact the COVID-19 could have on veterans who rely upon social services, VA, and veteran service organization for life-saving care. Due to their service-connected injuries and illnesses, disabled veterans are more vulnerable to this virus than our civilian counterparts.

As a servant leader and advocate for disabled veterans, it is essential to thoughtfully for me to balance the needs of those who served our country, with the safety of all others living in our communities. I am still committed to commute to NYC on the daily basis to assist veterans with their VA claims and benefits, representing them before the Board of Veterans Appeals and answering any questions they may have about their benefits, with strict compliance with CDC guidance to protect myself from being infected. I appreciate the patience and understanding of veterans as I am only able to provide service via email, mail, fax or telephone.

We cannot know how long this will persist, but we can't forget how important our duty as a citizen and as a member of the community is. Wherever possible, I am going to look to leverage technology to help and continue to serve and advocate. I encourage everybody to educate yourselves on the coronavirus and incorporate preventive measures into your daily routines, while helping others as much as you can.

My prayers go out to all of you who have been or will be impacted by this disease. I know this will create hardships for many. As it has already devastated our economy, that fallout will undoubtedly impact the ability for our government to take care of our nation's deserving heroes and their families. But this is where we shine as servant