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Explaining Niagara County's gas sales tax cap

As I am writing this column, the average price of a gallon of gasoline in Western New York, according to AAA, is \$4.24 a gallon. One year ago, that same gallon of gas cost \$2.86. Clearly, the rise in gas prices, and the overall inflation of prices on everything, is hitting the wallets of families across Niagara County.

In the recently enacted New York state budget, the state suspended an excise tax and sales tax on gasoline, and authorized counties to follow suit by capping their own local sales on gas purchases. While the county portion of sales tax is relatively small, the sentiment was that the state and county actions taken together could provide some much-needed relief to motorists.

With that in mind, the Niagara County Legislature voted unanimously this week to cap our

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



Becky Wydysh
Chairwoman

county sales tax of 4% at the first \$3 per gallon. Let me clear what this means, since this has created some confusion. At \$4.24 per gallon, consumers would pay the county sales tax only on the first \$3, meaning the last \$1.24 would not

be taxed.

It has been estimated that the state and county actions – both of which take effect on June 1 – will lower gas prices anywhere from 20 to 25 cents per gallon. When you are dealing with increasing prices on everything – most notably in the grocery store – every little bit of savings helps.

The county sales tax cap will

mean about \$2 million in lost revenue to the county. But it is important to remember that the county budget was based on sales tax estimates that predated these spikes in prices. The fact is, the county collects more in sales tax revenue during periods of inflation, because higher prices mean more sales tax. Our county manager and county budget director believe the integrity of our county budget is not impacted with our action on the gas sales tax. This is important, because it would not make sense to cap the gas tax and then have a revenue shortfall that impacted our ability to maintain a budget under the property tax cap.

Several of my colleagues raised another important issue, and that's how we ensure that every penny in reduction of gas taxes goes directly into the pocket of

consumers at the pump. The state Attorney General's Office has made it clear that they will be monitoring this very issue and will take appropriate action if gas prices are kept artificially high to profit from the tax relief. I'm hopeful this will ultimately not be a problem.

Clearly, county legislators are very limited in our ability to impact the price of gasoline, so we took the opportunity to make an impact where we could. While most people I have talked to are supportive of our cap on the sales tax, some have said the savings just are not significant enough to bother. However, for anyone who has ever experienced living paycheck to paycheck, we know that every nickel matters.

Town Clerk's Corner

Lewiston bicentennial fundraiser on Saturday

•Residents are reminded the Lewiston Bicentennial Committee will hold its Chiavetta's chicken barbecue fundraiser from 3-6 p.m. Saturday, April 30, in the parking lot at Lewiston Town Hall, 1375 Ridge Road. The event will be drive-thru only. Tickets are available for \$15 that day in the Town Hall parking lot.

•Leaf pick-up for Town of Lewiston residents will end April 30, with brush pick-up continuing from April 1-Oct. 1. Town residents are asked to bag any remaining leaves for the regular garbage collection by Modern. There is no need to contact the town Highway Department; leaf and brush pick-up will continue on a regular rotation schedule. The

Highway Department noted town crews do not pick up construction materials.

•Modern Disposal collects garbage and recycling for the Town of Lewiston every Monday. Residents are reminded that Modern crews will not collect on the following Monday holidays: Memorial Day, July 4 and Labor Day. Garbage and recycling collections will take place on Tuesdays on those weeks.

•Niagara County is sponsoring a household hazardous waste collection event in Lewiston on Saturday, June 18. Interested residents are requested to preregister prior to the event online starting May 18. For more information, visit the county's link at www.rethinkyourwaste.com/events or at www.hazmanusa.com.

•At this writing, the primary election is scheduled to take place Tuesday, June 28. For all necessary information on voter

registration, early voting, absentee ballots and polling places, visit the Niagara County Board of Elections webpage at www.elections.niagara.ny.us.

•Dog owners are reminded the Town of Lewiston, including the village, has a leash law. For the safety of our residents and other dogs, please adhere to this law. The local law also addresses residents cleaning up after their dogs. Please remove and dispose properly of your dog's waste.

•Returning Lewiston snowbirds are reminded the U.S. Postal Service will not forward your water bill. To avoid receiving a water bill late, or the possibility of not receiving it at all, the town Water Department asks anyone returning to Lewiston to contact them to change the bill back to your home address. Call 716-754-8213, ext. 235 or ext. 236.

•Residents who notice a street light out or flickering are asked to

contact the town clerk's office at 716-754-8213, ext. 222 or ext. 256, or enter the information on the town website, www.townoflewiston.us, under the comment dropdown. The following information is necessary in order to report this to National Grid: pole number, closest house address and closest street intersection to the pole.

•Plan for summer travel with the purchase of an "E-ZPass on the Go." The clerk's office is an authorized "E-ZPass on the Go" retailer. Tag cost is \$25. Once you register the tag, those monies go directly on the tag to use for tolls. Any questions, contact the clerk's office.

•The town's "drive-up" mailbox is located across from the main entrance to the Town Hall, and is a convenient way to make payments of water bills and dog licenses. Include all paperwork/bill along with payment, in check form, in the box.

TOWN CLERK'S CORNER



Donna R. Garfinkel

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