

Lawson optimistic about area's recovery

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While Lake Ontario water levels have settled down for the time being – allowing for much-needed infrastructure repairs along the shoreline to get underway – businesses continue to struggle. The ongoing effects of the coronavirus exacerbate this fight.

“We were sharing our experiences, information,” Lawson said of the group’s discussion with Jacobs, who recently assumed the 27th District seat in Congress following his special election victory in April. “He was genuinely interested; he heard much from area businesses.”

As noted, much of the area’s struggles continue to center on the loss in tourism and from the impact of shutdowns beyond its control – namely the U.S. bridge closures into Canada.

Just this week, Canadian Depu-

ty Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland announced Canada and the U.S. have agreed to extend the temporary restrictions covering all nonessential travel across the entire border until Sept. 21.

Impacting travel on all U.S. border-crossings in Buffalo-Niagara, the measure continues to exempt the flow of trade and commerce, as well as temporary foreign workers and those in the health care industry who may reside on both sides of the border. But it has also had a pronounced negative impact on cross-border traffic and the region’s economy. Lawson noted the comments he heard from the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission visitors.

“They said traffic on the three Niagara Falls bridges was down 96% from May-June 2019 to the same period this year,” Lawson said. “There were 300,000 car

crossings during that time last year and 12,000 for the same month this year. He (Jacobs) seemed concerned; many businesses spoke on the loss of Canadian travel.”

Lawson said many of the businesses do continue to struggle, not only from COVID-19, but also from the impact of the high water levels and damaged property. He said some of the area’s core reported business declines of up to 60% from May 2017, when high water levels began to be a problem, to this day.

“No one was prepared for that at all; we didn’t see that coming,” Lawson said.

Anne Bellone Basille, a Town of Wilson council member, director of Wilson Tourism NY and president of Mirage Tours, joined with many in calls to Jacobs for greater federal assistance to address the

struggles.

“Our tourism industry needs help on a federal level, and the international border needs to allow nonessential travel soon in order for all of our community’s small business to survive ... which actually goes for both sides of the border,” Basille said.

“Just as an FYI, the general feeling is that the border will be closed to nonessential travel until the first of the year,” she added.

Despite the lakeshore area’s struggles, Lawson did take note of some recent positives. He said grant funding from Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s Lake Ontario Resiliency and Economic Development Initiative is now beginning to move and that lakeshore projects are either starting to get underway or expected to begin in coming months. Lawson also noted discussions continue with the state

with regard to addressing the 5% REDI funding share placed on localities.

Slowly but surely, he said he feels the area is beginning to recover. Lawson noted four successful business startups occurred in the lakeshore area over the past six months despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and that business at area Airbnbs has been good over the summer.

“We’re hopeful for the future. These small businesses are our whole lives,” he said.

Norris said, “We spoke to many local small business owners about the struggles they face right now due to COVID-19 along with Lake Ontario water infrastructure. Thank you, Mayor Arthur Lawson, for making this forum a success while following state and local guidelines.”

Cuomo: School districts needs to be prepared

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distance for the past six months. Go look at Manhattan on a Thursday night, Friday, Saturday night, and tell me how well they’ve been listening. You think their behavior’s going to change when they go back to school? One hundred thirty students in one week. That is a failure of the testing and contact tracing operations. It shouldn’t get to 130.

“Look at that, and then look at your school reopening plan, and how would you make sure you don’t wind up in that situation.

What was your testing procedure? Could it have gotten that big that fast?

“Now, frankly, on a college, in some ways it’s not as bad, because the student was infecting other students. K to 12, if you had 130 students positive, it’s not 130, it’s 500, because the student would have gone home and dealt with people in their immediate family. You know in some ways being on a college campus is less problematic from a spread point of view than K-12. But I want the schools to take this situation into

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consideration and answer the question, ‘Would this have happened in your school? Could you have caught the spread before it got to 130 students?’ And if you can’t answer ‘Yes,’ then there’s a problem. But the basic point on both is opening schools, risky and problematic. That happens in September.

“In September the flu season starts. It’s going to make it much harder to diagnose symptomatic people; it’s going to make some people sick with the flu, which will then make them in a more

serious situation if they get COVID – and then it’s going to really stress our testing capacity. That all happens in a matter of weeks. This is not over. The second wave is coming. It’s going to be more challenging.

“On top of that, we still have states all around us getting infected and quarantine facilities and procedures, and lack of compliance in bars and restaurants, which if I had to guess that lack of compliance is going to be transferred to college campuses all across the state. And we still have local police departments that are not stepping up and doing their job.”

Local Infection Rate Problematic

On Tuesday, Western New York once again had the highest positive test rate in the state, at 1.4%. Erie County reported 54 new cases, while Niagara County

had nine positives. By comparison, of the 80,425 test results reported to New York that day, 631, or 0.78%, were positive.

The Niagara County Department of Health, on Wednesday, issued a warning that youth need to remain diligent, as they’re not immune from the coronavirus.

“We are very concerned that eight of the nine cases today are individuals under the age of 30, and were not directly tied to other positives of which we were previously aware,” Niagara County Public Health Director Daniel Stapleton said. “We cannot emphasize enough that young people are susceptible to COVID-19 and must take precautions like social distancing and wearing masks.”

To date, Niagara County has had 1,538 positive cases, with 99 deaths and 1,406 people recovered.

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