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Niagara County working hard on budget, hoping to reduce tax rate

All across the media spectrum, reports show that Americans are most concerned about current economic conditions. There is a great feeling of unease as the pandemic lingers on and a rise in inflation, the likes of which we have not seen in a generation or more, drives up costs on families. I can't tell you how many conversations I have had of late about how much people paid for a gallon of gas.

This is why I have always been a staunch believer that those in government must treat every dollar we spend as if it were coming out of our own wallet. So, with that said, Niagara County right now is deep into our budget process, with the tentative budget having been released last week. I stress tentative because the final vote is not until mid-December.

As it stands right now, the proposed budget would reduce the tax rate by 4.4% per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. We would be at

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



Becky Wydysh Chairwoman

the lowest rate at least since Niagara County moved from a Board of Supervisors to a legislature form of government 50 years ago. The overall budget stays under the tax cap for the 11th straight year, something that we have worked very hard to maintain.

The frustrating part about our county budget is that so much of it is dictated by unfunded state mandates. Thirty years ago, then-County Legislator and proud Lewiston resident Lee Simonson was a leader on behalf of all county governments in calling out New York state on unfunded mandates. This is when the state requires counties to provide some service without providing any funding

for that service and/or to pay for some service without having any control over how the funds are spent. Sadly, this practice continues.

The New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) even launched an advocacy effort on this issue, called the "9 for 90 Campaign." This effort highlights the fact that just nine state mandates could potentially consume 90% or more of county property tax levies statewide. In Niagara County, these nine mandates account for nearly \$74 million of our total tax levy of \$88 million, which is 92%.

But that is something we have no choice to deal with, which is why we continue to be very cautious in our budget. This year, we continue to maintain a fund balance equivalent to 6% of our budget, as well as \$200,000 in a contingency fund. We always want to be in a position where we can

weather the unexpected, as happened during the beginning of the pandemic last year.

Thankfully, our sales tax revenue has continued to rebound from the pandemic. Niagara County business activity has been increasing throughout 2021 and we expect to see that continue next year. The budget plans for a \$2.9 million increase in sales tax revenue - about 4%.

As I stated, this is just the tentative proposal. The public can view the entire tentative budget at <https://www.niagaracounty.com/Departments/Management-Budget>. There will then be a series of public hearings on each section of the budget on Dec. 7 at the Niagara County Courthouse in Lockport beginning at 5:10 and running right up until the legislature meets at 6 p.m. The budget is voted on at our meeting on Dec. 14.

Be thankful for what you have

Sitting on a building's stairs, a blind boy sat with a hat at his feet. Beside the hat was a sign that read, "Please help me I am blind."

As time passed, just a few coins were dropped into the hat. A man, passing by, took the few coins he had and dropped them into the hat. On turning to leave, he noticed the sign. He took the sign, and began to change the wording.

Putting the sign back, he walked away. Soon, the boy's hat began to fill.

Some time later, the man returned. He noticed the boy's hat was overflowing with coins. Recognizing the man's footsteps, the boy asked, "Are you the one responsible for my good fortune?"

"Yes," answered the man. "Thank you," said the boy. "But

how did you do this?"

The man answered, "I rewrote your message, but put it in a different way. I wrote today is a beautiful day, but I can't see it because I am blind."

Both signs indicated the boy's physical limitations, but the second sign told those passing by to be thankful for all that they have.

As we go through our day, we

only see the reasons not to be thankful for all that we have. We fail to see both sides to everything. When life gives us 100 reasons to complain, we fail to stop and see the 1,000 reasons to smile. We fail to face adversity.

Paulette Glasgow

Labor supports United Way of Greater Niagara

The AFL/CIO Niagara Orleans Central Labor Council and the United Way of Greater Niagara have been partners for over 80 years.

The past two years, working people have faced unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions have died, fallen sick, lost jobs - and working people, who thought they were economically secure, have suddenly feared that they can't feed their families.

In times of profound challenges, the labor movement always steps up. We stand by each other and the communities we live and work in. Now it is time for those of us who are fortunate enough to be working to give back to our communities and to the working people who are in need today.

That is why I am writing to ask you to support the 2021 United Way campaign drive.

For many years, the AFL/CIO Niagara Orleans Central Labor

Council and its union affiliates have contributed to the annual United Way Campaign. By donating to the United Way, we help fund vital services necessary to assist people in need. Whether it is through financial security, general health and well being or early childhood education, our contributions go a long way to support the programs that advance the common good for all.

On behalf of the AFL/CIO Niagara Orleans Central Labor

Council, we proudly endorse the 2021 United Way of Greater Niagara's campaign drive, and urge all of our brothers and sisters to support this year's campaign. By contributing, you are investing in our community, our neighbors and our future.

In Solidarity.

Jim Briggs
President
AFL/CIO Niagara Orleans
Central Labor Council

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