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## Big issues, local implications

BY CHRIS BORGOTTI

Chairman, Niagara County Democratic Committee

Tip O'Neil, the former speaker of the House of Representatives, famously said "all politics is local." Historically, this meant that an elected leader's success was often tied to their ability to relate to the everyday concerns of those who elect them into office.

It's a simple yet powerful statement. It's why most people get involved in their community in the first place, and what normally leads someone to run for office – the drive to create change and deliver real results for their hometown or home district. It's the kind of youthful idealism that drove me to get involved in elections 15 years ago.

This quote has been sitting on my mind these days, as I recently became the chairman of the Niagara County Democratic Committee. It wasn't a position I planned on taking, as I had enrolled in law school at the University at Buffalo just a few weeks prior. Time was already of the essence.

People tell me all the time, "You're young; why are you wasting your time in politics?" I sigh, take a deep breath, and tell them I feel a responsibility to be involved. It was my time to step up, and I'm going to try my best to make a difference with the things most in my control – local issues.

Daily, I am reminded of how the "local" part of that famous quote is largely a thing of the past. National issues are at the top of everyone's mind, maybe rightfully so. We are dealing with huge and complex issues, as we slowly dig our way out of the pandemic. However, it is hard not to notice the correlation between how people align on the national issues and how our local elections turn out. I'm convinced that some people believe local races are an opportunity to send a message to the highest office holders in the land. Sadly, I think that view has landed our county in a difficult place.

Niagara County is losing population annually. It has a brutally stagnant private sector job market,

while the friends and family job pipeline of county government continues to grow. The county has significantly outdated infrastructure, the legislature ranks near the bottom in open government ratings, is home to one of the highest unemployment rates by ZIP code in the entire state, and loses out to Buffalo and Erie County on development opportunities regularly. I recently asked a major WNY developer why he hasn't invested in Niagara Falls. His response, "The median income is too low."

I love living here; most of us do – it's home. But how much longer can we go on without addressing one of the root causes to our problems? Our democracy is weak. Competitive elections are rare, and voter turnout is abysmal. The same few people have been in control of county government decision-making for the last two decades, and they have little motivation to change their ways. If we continue to let national issues dictate conversations on the local issues that are within our control,

nothing will ever change. We will continue to lag behind the rest of the region.

We have tremendous opportunities to grow our regional economy, invite private sector investment, and provide our youth with a future that includes staying here. But we have to strengthen our democracy right here at home.

Therefore, I ask my fellow Niagara County residents to reflect for a minute: Are we better off now than we were 10 or 20 years ago? What will cause an elected official to work harder? Is there a local issue you wish people would talk about more?

I urge you to get involved and start conversations. Hold your elected leaders accountable. Give the local issues and local elections the same attention you do to the national issues. Learn who the candidates are and what they stand for. And, most importantly, vote in the upcoming election on Nov. 2 or during early voting from Oct. 23-31.

## Hochul reminds New Yorkers to get vaccinated as flu season begins

Releases new PSA encouraging people to get vaccinated for flu and COVID-19

√ COVID-19 vaccine can be received at same time as flu shot

√ Flu cases hit record low in 2020 due to mask wearing and social distancing, show preventive measures for 2021 flu season will be critical

Gov. Kathy Hochul released a new public service announcement encouraging New Yorkers to get both a flu shot and COVID-19 vaccine this season. The COVID-19 vaccine and/or a booster dose can be received at the same time as the seasonal flu shot.

Flu season occurs primarily from October through May, often peaking between December and February.

"Vaccination is the best defense against both the flu and COVID-19," Hochul said. "Getting vaccinated is not just about protecting yourself, it also protects people around you. I urge all New Yorkers to get vaccinated to protect themselves, their family, friends and coworkers from both the flu and COVID-19 viruses."

The New York State Health Department recommends ev-

eryone 6 months of age or older receive an influenza vaccination. It says, "The vaccine is especially important for people at high risk for complications from influenza, including children under age 2, pregnant women and adults over age 65. People with preexisting conditions, such as asthma and heart disease, are also at greater risk, as are individuals with weakened immune systems due to disease or medications, such as chemotherapy or chronic steroid use. Since influenza virus can spread easily by coughing or sneezing, it is also important that family members and people in regular contact with high-risk individuals get an influenza vaccine."

Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker said, "We actively monitor both flu activity and COVID-19 to help protect and raise awareness among New Yorkers, and encourage them to get vaccinated against both infectious diseases. Both of these viruses can cause serious complications that may require hospitalization, so

while getting vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 remains the best way to combat these infections, it's also important to wear a mask, social distance where possible and practice good hygiene in order to stay healthy and reduce hospitalizations."

Learn more at [health.ny.gov/flu](http://health.ny.gov/flu). Influenza activity data will be available on the New York state flu tracker – a dashboard on the New York State Health Connector that provides timely information about local, regional and state-wide influenza activity.

Hochul's team said, "Last flu season, flu cases in New York state hit a record low because of people wearing masks, social distancing and practicing frequent handwashing, which are the same public health measures used to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic."

"In addition to getting a flu shot and staying home when sick, it's essential to practice good hand-hygiene."

Hochul's team offered the fol-

lowing tips:

√ Wash your hands often with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds to protect yourself from germs and avoid spreading them to others.

√ Carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to use when soap and water are not available. Choose a product with at least 60% alcohol.

√ Do not cough or sneeze into your hands. Instead, cover your mouth and nose.

All New York state mass-vaccination sites are open to eligible New Yorkers for walk-in COVID-19 vaccination on a first-come, first-served basis. People who would prefer to schedule an appointment at a state-run mass vaccination site can do so on the "Am I Eligible" app or by calling 1-833-NYS-4-VAX.

People may also contact their local health department, pharmacy, doctor or hospital to schedule appointments where vaccines are available, or visit [vaccines.gov](http://vaccines.gov) to find information on COVID-19 vaccine appointments near them.

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