

Opinions

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Addressing the financial fallout

BY KEVIN R. HARDWICK
 Erie County Legislator
 4th District



County Legislator
 Kevin Hardwick

Can we all finally agree that this coronavirus is not "just like the flu?" That sort of thinking promoted by irresponsible media personalities and amplified by countless social media posts has proven deadly. While we're at

it, can we also admit that maybe our nation's doctors and scientists know more than one of our Facebook friends?

The impact of this pandemic has been devastating. In a little over two months 80,000 of our fellow Americans have lost their lives to it and that's with practically everything shut down. Had extreme measures not been taken, hundreds of thousands more people would be dead. Our economy is now in shambles and the virus continues to exact its terrible toll.

Our county executive, Mark Poloncarz, and our Erie County health commissioner, Dr. Gale Burstein, have been working hard to mitigate the health impacts of the virus. I find it hard to fault any of the measures they have taken, and I have nothing but praise for their efforts. But now it is time for the Erie County Legislature to step up and begin to address the financial mess resulting from pandemic. The county is coming up way

Our leaders must stop grandstanding, get back to business

Despite Cuomo's dire predictions, the sky has not fallen and much of the critical medical supplies from the federal government remain unused or have been returned. A glaring example was the quick turnabout of a 1,000-bed hospital ship which has already left New York Harbor.

Although miscalculations can be excused, daily press releases don't solve problems. Fortunately, foot-dragging by our Congressional leaders has been eclipsed by Trump and his task force, working closely with state governments to provide necessary resources and sensible plans of action.

Such cooperative effort is a must if progress is to be maintained during this life-and-death struggle with the COVID-19 scourge. You and I deserve no less!

Ray Pauley

Say You Saw It In The



short on sales tax revenue because so many businesses have been shut down. This is also impacting the cities, towns, villages and school districts within the county with whom we share our sales tax. This coupled with anticipated cuts in state aid has us looking at a deficit that may stretch into the hundreds of millions of dollars. Even if we are back to business as usual tomorrow, we will never recover the sales tax on the gasoline we did not buy, the restaurant meals we did not eat, the sporting events we did not attend and all the other taxable expenditures we did not make the past two months. Since the county, like all other state and local governments, must maintain a balanced budget, we will need to address this problem right along.

Fortunately, the Erie County charter cites a procedure for us to follow. The county executive is working on a plan that he will submit to the legislature. Once we receive the executive's plan, the county comptroller has seven

days to submit his thoughts to us regarding the plan. We will have another two weeks to act to amend the plan or adopt it as is. If we fail to take action, the executive's plan takes effect automatically.

As it stands now, we are facing the potential of fairly massive layoffs. Nobody wants to see this. There are too many people already out of work. Cutting more jobs will only exacerbate the problem. That is why we are asking the federal government for assistance. Unlike the county, their budget does not have to be balanced and most economists will tell you that now is the time they should be deficit spending. If the federal government can consider aiding cruise lines that do not sail under our flag, they can certainly help state and local governments who provide the services like police, fire, and highways upon which we all rely.

If you have thoughts you would like to share, I would love to hear from you. I can be contacted by

phone at 858-8672 or via email at kevin.hardwick@erie.gov.

Kevin R. Hardwick is chairman of the Erie County Legislature's

Government Affairs Committee, the Community Enrichment Committee, and is a member of the Finance and Management Committee that oversees the budget.

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