

Hugh Reynolds

Time to vote

New York having been a presidential backwater for so many years, “it’s exciting to have candidates visit our state,” in the words of state senator George Amedore. As an historical note, should frontrunners Clinton and Trump prevail, the next president will come from New York for the first time since 1944. This is not, of course, to cast aspersions on Bernie Sanders, born in Brooklyn, or Ted Cruz, delivered just across the border in Canada. (His mother was a citizen.)

New York’s two-party system means that the 40,000 registered Ulster County voters who either choose no party or one of the minor parties will be excluded from the April 19 party primaries. Democrats allow their members not only to vote on presidential candidates but also on delegates to their national convention. Republicans can vote for candidates; delegates will be chosen by party bosses next month.

I predict a higher turnout on the Democratic side and not only because Democrats outnumber Republicans in Ulster by about 12,000. They add to their plurality every year.

I can’t help but notice the clear distinctions between Democrats Hillary Clinton and Sanders, as demonstrated at respective rallies last weekend in Kingston.

Clinton, a two-term senator from New York, represents the establishment and is represented by the establishment. Who else but Clinton could draw to the same room archrivals Mike Hein and Kevin Cahill, standing next to each with clenched teeth? Establishment calls for reform strike me as hollow.

Curmudgeonous Bernie Sanders and his youthful followers appeal to my rebellious side. His candidacy has added fervor and participation to what started as a party-anointment process. That said, I wonder how he’s going to pay for all his promises.

I like that Republicans started with at least a dozen choices. That number has been battered down to just three survivors.

Bernie and The Donald have drawn new people to the fray, for better or worse.

I hope party enrollees turn out. If not, this presidential parade may not return for a long time.

A hundred days and counting

“New Kingston mayor” Steve Noble makes his first address to the Ulster Regional Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfast meeting Wednesday April 20 at 7:30 a.m. at the Best Western Plus on Washington Avenue in Kingston.

With 110 days in office (on the 20th) we can stop calling him “new.” (New Kingston, however, is a real place. Located about 45 miles west of Kingston in Delaware County, New Kingston was founded by refugees from the British burning of the state capital in 1777. The hamlet remains a country crossroad with perhaps a dozen homes.)

Noble has been a busy mayor since assuming office on January 1. The fate of the sales-tax “agreement in principle” reached by city and county officials

rests in the hands of state comptroller Tom DiNapoli. This being a ‘state’ sales tax they’re talking about, the state has the last word.

Given the secrecy surrounding negotiations and state review, only insiders have any idea of what’s going on, and they’re not talking. For Noble to announce a sales-tax agreement at his chamber speech would have reporters running for the phones, to use classic movie imagery, the breakfast crowd buzzing in mid-chomp.

More likely, he’ll stick with ham-and-eggs issues like scrapping the city’s old parking meter system, according to the Chamber newsletter. Before anybody gets their hopes up for permanent free parking, they should keep in mind that cash-strapped Kingston derives some \$500,000 a year in parking-meter revenue and fines, minus the cost of personnel and equipment to manage the program. “Modernizing” the system, as Noble suggests, means only a more efficient way to suck nickels, dimes and quarters from unwary pockets and purses. Not to mention the hefty fines for violators, which I just did.

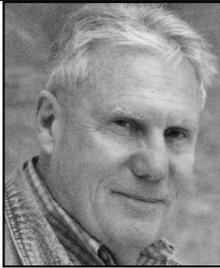
I think Noble gets pretty good marks on his first 100 days, better than, say, Napoleon, who wound up at Waterloo. He has brought some talented young people into government, kept most of the reliable regulars, reached out to various constituencies, and for the most part communicated well.

Quietly, he has taken charge. He doesn’t get rattled and he doesn’t poke fingers at people. He brings a measure of calm to city hall where whack-a-doodles once raved. Political enemies who rarely talk to each other seem to respect the new mayor, at least for the time being. He’s used his honeymoon period wisely, and made good first impressions and good vibrations. On a scale of one to ten, I’ll give him a B+. Everybody needs room for improvement.

State comptroller Tom DiNapoli will be guest speaker at the county Democrats’ annual spring luncheon at Wiltwyck Golf Club on May 1, beginning at noon.

The party will honor three retired legislators with close to 40 years service among them. Jeanette Provenzano of Kingston did 22 years in the legislature, spanning years of Republican dominance to the executive system. Don Gregorius of Woodstock, like feisty Jeanette, was a party leader during his decade in office. Ken Wishnick of New Paltz added to debate with thoughtful insights over two terms. Deadline for reservations is at 594-4512, by April 19.

Methinks that New Paltz village mayor Tim Rogers may be a fan of TV’s *Family Feud* where contestants get “twenty thousand dollars!” if they win the bonus round. A first-termer, Rogers is asking for a \$20,000 raise, something I don’t remember him mentioning



in last year’s mayoral elections. Considered a full-time mayor – he’s not out painting houses during business hours like one of his predecessors did – Rogers may rate a raise. But not until he’s worked through his first budget.

Con(vention) job in Albany

Given widespread corruption in Albany and institutional indifference to reform, there is much talk about a constitutional convention these days. The state constitution allows but does not require a convention every 20 years. The last such convention was in 1967; its recommendations, cynically packaged, some said, as a one-vote, up-or-down proposition, were rejected by an almost two-to-one margin. Apparently in the belief that attempting to reform Albany would be an expensive effort in futility controlled by insiders, voters rejected conventions in 1987 and 2007.

The last voter-approved convention to make a significant impact on state government was held in 1938. A reading of that history indicates some of the issues it considered, like court reform, are still with us.

Among insiders who benefit from the status quo, there doesn’t appear to be much enthusiasm for a game-changing convention in Albany. As an indicator, funding for a convention exploratory commission was omitted from this year’s state budget. Convention advocates are confident they’ll find the money some place in the state’s \$156 billion budget.

As it should be, amending a constitution, be it state or federal, is a heavy lift. New York’s is a three-stage process dating to 1846. Voters must first agree by referendum to hold a convention. Having done so, they elect delegates, three from each of 63 state senate districts and 15 at-large (statewide). After deliberation and debate, which can take months, the convention’s recommendations are presented to voters for final approval.

A convention can be scuttled at any of three points, the sooner the better for those in opposition.

A Siena Institute poll taken last December indicated proponents have their work cut out, with not a lot of time left. Voters would need to approve a convention in November. The poll, taken among 800 representatively selected respondents, indicated that fully three-fourths had no knowledge of a constitutional convention, while the remainder were only dimly aware of the possibility. Talk about starting from scratch.

Forewarned, con-con supporters, which include the Rockefeller Institute, the educational arm of the League of Women Voters, colleges and universities, and good-government groups centered in Albany, have launched an information drive aimed at educating the public on the issues – though not necessarily taking positions.

Statewide media will be asked to join the effort. A Ken Burns-like documentary on the history of conventions is in the works. Proponents face opposition from a plethora of special interests intent on maintaining the status quo. United Teachers, for instance, is urging its members to oppose a convention. Issues of pension rights guaranteed by the present constitution are of particular interest to public unions.

There is a legitimate concern that a constitutional convention could take away rights and freedoms in place for generations.

Locally, that drive will go public with a panel discussion at Deyo Hall at SUNY New Paltz on Wednesday, April 20, at 6:30 p.m. Panelists will include political science guru Gerry Benjamin, head of the Benjamin Center for Public Policy, former president of the League of Women Voters Dare Thompson, and county commissioner of jurors Paul O’Neill.

hills, and our three decades of environmental education programs that serve over 40 area schools and have reached hundreds of thousands of children and adults.

Second, the Preserve agrees with the Town of New Paltz Environmental Conservation Board’s (EnCB) assessment of the Mohonk Preserve Foothills Project. At the beginning of the planning process in 2014, the EnCB provided some comments on the proposed project regarding traffic, wetlands management and bike/pedestrian access. In a letter to the Town of New Paltz Planning Board on November 17, 2015, EnCB chairman Rhett D. Weires outlined the steps

taken by the Preserve to fully respond to those initial comments.

Regarding potential traffic impacts, the EnCB noted that the Preserve subsequently commissioned and completed a traffic study and that they were “satisfied with the applicant’s submission in this regard.”

Regarding potential wetlands impacts, the EnCB noted that initial concerns about a walkway near Humpo Marsh were alleviated when the Preserve re-routed the walkway “so as to minimally impact on the wetland area while at the same time providing for the users of the Preserve to access the trail and trail system.”

Finally, the EnCB welcomed the addition of the proposed River-to-Ridge Trail, which they affirm will “not only result in less traffic on the roadways,” but also “insures preservation of open space.”

The EnCB closed by thanking the Planning Board and noting, “We appreciate the responsive efforts on the part of the applicant to have considered our initial comments and requests and for responding to our requests for further information and study.”

This is a great example of how the town planning process is designed to work. Applicants present an initial site plan, which is then vetted by a variety of town, regional and state organizations, and the