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How Niagara Falls, NY Became the Most Baffling Economic Failure in America — And Why the Answer Was There All Along

By: John Karcz

A Special Report by the Niagara Falls Economic Reinvention Project.

This is the first article in a four-part series examining a comprehensive plan to economically transform Niagara Falls, New York using its own underutilized assets. Part Two examines the hidden opportunity. Part Three presents the plan and the Citizens' Dividend. Part Four maps the path forward.

The most baffling economic paradox in America sits on the border of New York and Canada, roaring twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. It draws more visitors than Yellowstone. It generates enough electricity to power a small

(Cont. on pg. 4)

Bill Removing 'Mother' and 'Father' in New York Law with 'Non-gestating parent' Heads to Hochul's Desk

By: Staff Reports

A bill approved by New York Democrats that would replace references to "mother" and "father" in portions of state law with gender-neutral language is now awaiting action from Governor Kathy Hochul.

The legislation, which focuses on child custody and parental laws, passed the State Senate this week after previously clearing the Assembly in March. If signed into law, the measure would revise various legal definitions by replacing "mother" with "gestating parent," "father" with "non-gestating parent," and "paternity" with "parentage."

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SECTIONS

Beating the Meter and the Pump: Taking Control of Your Energy Costs

By: Sumit Majumdar

Every time the utility bill arrives, it feels like a one-way conversation. We watch the rates fluctuate—almost always trending upwards—and it's easy to feel powerless. We can't change the market prices of natural gas, electricity, or gasoline, but we have absolute control over our consumption. The strategy is three-fold: master the small, daily habits that stop the bleed at home, optimize how we drive, and leverage the significant incentives currently sitting on the table from National Grid, NYSERDA, and the New York State government.

(Cont. on pg. 10)

Restaino Declares Victory on Centennial Park – But Will a $200 Million Arena Save Niagara Falls?

By: John Watson

After years of lawsuits, land battles and political infighting, Mayor Robert Restaino is celebrating what he calls a major breakthrough for his controversial Centennial Park project.

Following City Council's approval of a sweeping settlement agreement with Niagara Falls Redevelopment (NFR), the mayor declared on Thursday, June 4th that the city finally has control of the land needed to move forward with his vision for a downtown arena and entertainment complex.

"Last night was very important for the city of Niagara Falls," said Restaino during a news conference. "Everyone has been asking us [since the project was proposed], 'Do you have the land?' Now we can respond with a resounding 'Yes.' "

The agreement ends years of litigation between the city and NFR and transfers 10 acres near Falls and 10th streets to Niagara Falls for the proposed Centennial Park project.

But while the mayor is portraying the deal as a turning point, major questions remain about whether taxpayers will ever see a return on what is projected to be a roughly $200 million public project centered around a 6,000-to-9,000-seat arena in a city that already struggles to attract visitors beyond the waterfalls themselves.

The settlement requires the city to pay NFR $4.029 million for the property while granting the company the zoning approvals necessary to pursue its proposed $1.5 billion Niagara Digital Campus data center

(Cont. on pgs. 3)

Ontario Gets the World Cup Crowds. Niagara Falls, NY Gets Nothing

Canadian tourists are disappearing as Niagara Falls continues to wrestle with a problem city leaders have failed to solve for decades: getting visitors to stick around.

Staff Reports

As Niagara Falls, Ontario prepares for weeks of World Cup celebrations, giant viewing parties and tens of thousands of international visitors, officials on the American side of the border are once again confronting an uncomfortable reality: fewer Canadian tourists are crossing into the United States and Niagara Falls, New York still struggles to convince visitors to stay longer than a few hours.

The decline comes at a time when tourism officials across the region are searching for ways to offset falling cross-border travel and growing competition from destinations offering larger entertainment districts, major events and multi-day attractions.

According to data released by Statistics Canada earlier this year, road trips by Canadians into the United States have fallen sharply, dropping 32% compared to the previous year. At the same time, Canadian travel to other international destinations increased by 7.2%.

The numbers are particularly concerning for Niagara Falls, New York, which has long relied on visitors from Southern Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area.

Mayor Robert Restaino acknowledged that the decline is real and that the city has lost a significant portion of a tourism market that traditionally generated extended stays and overnight visits.

Speaking with WBEN, Restaino said the reduction in Canadian travel is not being overstated and confirmed that visitors from the Toronto region, many of whom historically stayed for multiple days, are increasingly choosing not to cross the border.

The mayor suggested the reasons extend beyond politics, pointing instead to economic issues such as the weakened Canadian dollar and broader financial pressures that make travel to the United States more expensive.

But for many observers – and anyone with eyes – the decline also highlights a problem Niagara Falls, New York has been wrestling with for decades.

Millions of people continue to visit Niagara Falls State Park every year to see one of the world's most recognizable natural wonders. Yet many visitors spend a few hours in the city before heading elsewhere.

Think about it.

You have the attractions within Niagara Falls State Park itself: the Maid of the Mist, Cave of the Winds, Trolley system, and Prospect Point Observation Deck. A little down the street you have the Aquarium of Niagara.

But then you have . . . what?

The Underground History Museum is not for everyone, especially those with small children.

The Seneca Niagara Casino is great for people who want to gamble, but not exactly what you want as a tourism draw.

If you are a Niagara Falls public official, you really don't want a tourist wandering down Niagara Street toward 19th Street and Pine Avenue is a shell of what it once was.

So, where do they go? A pool hotel might be the third most fun draw for a family staying in downtown Niagara Falls.

The challenge has been converting tourists who come to see the Falls into overnight guests who stay, dine, shop and spend money throughout the city.

Despite decades of redevelopment plans, studies, public investments and promises from elected officials, Niagara Falls has struggled to establish itself as a true multi-day destination.

Visitors frequently arrive, view the Falls, walk through the state park and leave.

Many continue on to Buffalo, Toronto or Niagara Falls, Ontario, where a concentrated tourism district includes attractions, entertainment venues, restaurants, hotels, casinos and nightlife options designed to keep visitors occupied long after they have finished viewing the Falls.

Everyone who has visited Niagara Falls State Park and looked across toward Niagara Falls, Ontario towards Clifton Hill knows the feeling of thinking, "wow, I wish I was over there."

That is the Niagara Falls, New York problem.

That contrast may become even more visible this summer.

While the American side received little attention in planning related to the FIFA World Cup festivities, Niagara Falls, Ontario is preparing for a major tourism boost.

Officials across the border have announced a large-scale World Cup Fan Fest running from June 11th through July 19th at Queen Victoria Park.

The event will feature two massive outdoor viewing screens operating daily from 11am until 11pm allowing visitors to watch matches throughout the tournament.

The fan zone will also include vendors, entertainment, interactive experiences, food offerings and special programming aimed at drawing visitors into the heart of the tourism district.

The festivities are expected to attract soccer fans from around the world while creating another reason for tourists already visiting Niagara Falls to extend their stay.

Meanwhile, the American side has been left on the sidelines.

Buffalo is scheduled to host a handful of viewing events at Canalside and Silo City, but Niagara Falls, New York was not selected for a major state-supported World Cup activity despite being one of New York's most recognizable tourism destinations.

Restaino expressed disappointment that Niagara Falls was not included in the state's plans.

The mayor said city officials were frustrated that the Falls were left out but indicated local tourism organizations would attempt to organize their own activities, particularly around the tournament final, in an effort to attract visitors and generate excitement on the American side of the river.

The omission has reignited criticism over the city's tourism strategy and broader development priorities.

For years, local officials have argued that new attractions are needed to transform Niagara Falls into a destination capable of competing with other tourism markets.

Restaino has repeatedly promoted his proposed Centennial Park project, a plan that would include a 6,000-7,000 seat arena, event space, recreational facilities and other attractions on land near downtown.

The mayor says the project could create year-round activity. Whether that be just the maintenance crew in and around the facility or some other type of activity remains to be seen.

Critics, of which there are many, argue similar arena-centered developments across North America have frequently failed to deliver the economic transformation promised by public officials.

In fact, numerous independent studies examining sports arenas and entertainment districts have concluded that such facilities often shift spending rather than create substantial new economic activity.

Based on estimates, Niagara Falls residents are also expected to pay hundreds of dollars a year for Restaino's Centennial Park.

As reported by Investigative Journalist Frank Parlato, that number is expected to be $800 or more per year.

"Let's calculate the per-household impact," said Parlato. "When accounting for debt service and operational shortfalls, (absent an NHL team) the proposed arena in Niagara Falls would result in an estimated $17 million annual fiscal burden. Distributed across the city's approximately 20,000 households, this translates to $850 per year in new taxes —$70 a month—for every home, in a city – where half the residents can't afford car repairs, for 30 years. That's $850 per household, to cover the shortfall—never mind improvements, emergencies, or inflation."

Many longtime residents question why basic tourism challenges remain unresolved decades after similar promises were made through previous redevelopment efforts.

Restaino himself said six years ago when he was first elected that he had the answers. Two terms later and that has not been the case.

The city's tourism struggles come despite significant public investments over the years including state-funded development projects, downtown revitalization initiatives and various attempts to create new attractions beyond the state park.

Yet the central question remains largely unchanged: how do you persuade visitors to stay?

For now, that challenge appears to be growing more difficult.

As thousands of soccer fans gather in Queen Victoria Park this summer and international visitors pour into Ontario's tourism district, the American side will be left hoping that a glimpse of the Falls alone remains enough reason for travelers to cross the bridge.

Increasingly, however, the numbers suggest many are deciding otherwise.

Local News

NIAGARA FALLS

Time for local Residents and Politicians to Get Smart

Lou Rizzo

In 1887, a Scottish history professor once wrote: "A democracy is always temporary in nature: it simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time voters discover that they can vote for themselves generous gifts from the public treasury.

From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasure, with that the result that every democracy will finally collapse over loose fiscal policy and that is always followed by a dictatorship". Imagine if Congress grants amnesty and citizenship to 20 million illegal invaders and they vote.

Let's take a closer look in our own back yard in Niagara Falls where more than half of the population is collecting some type of public assistance. Lowest property values in the country and the highest taxed county per capital. What has it achieved? A simple drive through the harden Streets of a once great City will reveal that form of government is a failure.

America's past generations had the right philosophy, had the best work ethics, faced the greatest challenges which made this Nation what it is today. But the entitlement mentality of this generation is destroying that very foundation this country was built on. First, before I go any further, let me say the welfare system was designed for a very good reason and I am not opposed to the concept. In fact, it is needed. It's waste and fraud that needs to be dealt with and if it is not soon this great Nation will no longer exist.

Just look around and you can see how it destroyed the City of Niagara Falls. I blame the politicians. It's their duty as elected officials to take charge and make sound decisions when governing the masses. Over the past 50 years they have failed us terribly by their self-serving agendas.

What are the solutions? First, if you need public assistance, you should not have the right to vote, that privilege needs to be earned. Second, children whose parents are collecting public assistance need to be held accountable in our school system.

Ever wonder why they have the highest rate of dropouts? Because some parents are producing children out of wedlock to increase the public hand-outs. Third, drug testing needs to be mandatory when collecting public assistance.

Now let's say an individual tests positive for drug use what do we do? No, the answer is not to kick them off the welfare system that would be cruel. The answer is all of their bills would be a direct voucher system and we would no longer supply them with a food benefits card that they sell for 50 cents on the dollar. Instead, we would supply them with picture ID food card that is good for three meals a day at their local soup kitchen and the monies saved food stamps would be used to fund that soup kitchen.

We would also eliminate their dignity money. You may ask what is dignity money? After we pay all their bills the State gives them a few extra dollars, so they have money in their pockets in case they want to buy a pop or a magazine, according to a past politician.

Fourth, the State puts these people to work 11 days out of the month that needs to be increased to 20 days out of the month. With a population that has more than half collecting public money the one guarantee I could make the City of Niagara Falls would be the cleanliest city in the world, instead we are one of the filthiest.

Fifth, a miss appropriation of government money is a crime and needs to be dealt with as a crime. The list goes on and on but only so much space to write. I wanted to leave you with a lesson my dear father taught me as a child. Now understand he was from the greatest generation and had that mindset and spoke with broken English. "When people dumb that no he fault he can't help that but stupid that he fault but when you dumb and stupid that's bad don't be dumb and stupid."

Look around folks, look at the state of this city, there is an election around the corner. Please don't be dumb and stupid because that is bad.

Restaino Declares Victory on Centennial Park – But Will a $200 Million Arena Save Niagara Falls Cont. from Cover

John Watson

project.

NFR spokesman James Haggerty applauded the agreement.

"We are pleased that the City Council has approved the settlement of all litigation between NFR and the City of Niagara Falls, and has established the Planned Unit Development (PUD) district and implemented other zoning-related changes that allows the Niagara Digital Campus to become a reality. Our efforts have always been about bringing jobs and economic development to the people of Niagara Falls. The Niagara Digital Campus will bring 10 years of union construction jobs to area residents, as well as hundreds of permanent jobs."

Haggerty also argued the project would generate unprecedented tax revenue for the city.

"The Niagara Digital Campus will generate tax revenues unlike anything Niagara Falls has ever seen – most of which will directly benefit the people of Niagara Falls and can be used to fund education, roads, police and firefighters, and other essential benefits."

Ironically, the Digital Campus – not Centennial Park – may ultimately become the more significant economic development component of the settlement.

Could an arena save Niagara Falls?

For years, economic development experts have raised concerns about publicly funded arena projects noting that many fail to produce the promised economic impact. Numerous studies examining sports and entertainment facilities across North America have found little evidence that publicly financed arenas significantly increase tourism, household income or long-term economic growth.

Visitors generally do not travel hundreds of miles to attend a minor-league sporting event or a mid-sized concert venue when larger entertainment options already exist in nearby markets.

Niagara Falls also faces a unique challenge as it already possesses one of the most recognizable tourism attractions in the world.

The issue has never been getting people to visit Niagara Falls. The issue has been convincing them to stay longer and spend more money on the American side.

Critics have repeatedly questioned whether an arena would accomplish that goal. Even ardent supporters of the project cannot explain how such an addition to downtown Niagara Falls accomplishes increasing the average stay of tourists beyond a few hours.

Still, Restaino remains committed to the project.

The mayor's vision includes a year-round events campus featuring a large arena, a secondary entertainment venue, a splash pad that converts into an ice-skating rink, a parking ramp with rock-climbing walls and rooftop event space for concerts and movies.

Although how many days out of the week, or weeks out of the year, the arena would remain empty remains to be seen, one thing remains clear: the arena itself would not be a meaningful everyday driver of economic activity for the city.

Now that the land issue has been resolved, Restaino said attention can shift toward funding.

"The city is charting its own course," said Restaino. "We haven't had an opportunity to do that in two decades."

The problem is that charting a course and paying for it are two very different things.

The city currently does not have financing in place for the estimated

$200 million project.

Instead, Restaino is looking toward Albany.

"The city of Niagara Falls is at the point where other communities have enjoyed large state investments in their downtowns," said the mayor. "My hope is [financing] is something that accelerates over the next two years."

That means taxpayers across New York could ultimately be asked to help fund the project if state officials agree with the mayor's vision.

Restaino also was clear on Thursday that despite approving the settlement, the city has not actually approved construction of a data center.

"Last night wasn't the approval of a data center," said Restaino. "There are still things that have to happen for that to occur. The city isn't necessarily promoting data centers as its preferred industry."

Asked whether he believes NFR will actually build the Digital Campus, Restaino was uncertain.

"That's a question for the landowner, not me," he said. "I don't know what they will do. There is nothing in the agreement that addresses that, in terms of requiring them to do something."

That uncertainty leaves Niagara Falls with a settlement that guarantees the city acquires land for Centennial Park but offers no guarantee that the neighboring $1.5 billion Digital Campus will ever materialize.

For now, Restaino has secured the property he spent years fighting to obtain.

Whether Centennial Park ultimately becomes the economic engine he envisions, or another expensive government-backed development project that falls short of expectations, remains a question that likely won't be answered for years.

NIAGARA FALLS CONT.

Operation Powerhouse: How Niagara Falls, NY Became the Most Baffling Economic Failure in America — And Why the Answer Was There All Along Cont from Cover

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nation. And for seventy years, its people have been getting poorer. What went wrong — and why the answer has been hiding in plain sight the entire time.

American Falls, Niagara Falls, New York. Twelve to fourteen million visitors per year — more than Yellowstone National Park — and still one of New York State's most economically distressed cities.

THE NUMBERS THAT SHOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE

Begin with the raw arithmetic, because the raw arithmetic is the story. Niagara Falls, New York receives between twelve and fourteen million visitors per year. That figure exceeds the annual visitation of Yellowstone National Park. It exceeds the entire annual tourism traffic of Ireland. It places Niagara Falls among the most-visited destinations in the United States — not most-visited in New York, not most-visited in the northeast, but most-visited in the country. Twelve to fourteen million people travel to this city every year to stand at the edge of one of the seven natural wonders of the world. They come from every continent. They come in every season. They come because there is nothing else on Earth that looks quite like this.

And yet. The city's population has fallen from a mid-century peak of more than 102,000 residents to approximately 47,512 as of the 2024 U.S. Census Bureau estimate — a collapse of more than 53 percent in seventy years. The poverty rate sits between 23 and 28 percent, nearly double the national average of 12.5 percent. Per capita income hovers around $30,707 — roughly two-thirds of the national figure. More than a third of the city's children live below the federal poverty line. Median household income is approximately $38,000, against a national median of over $74,000. Niagara Falls has appeared on New York State's municipal fiscal distress list for years, requiring state oversight of its finances to ensure that basic obligations are met.

These are the numbers of a city in collapse. They are also, simultaneously, the numbers of a city that sits beside one of the most spectacular natural phenomena on Earth, that hosts more than a thousand times its own population in tourists every year, and that is physically located on top of one of the most powerful and valuable clean energy sources in the eastern United States. There is nowhere else in America where these two realities coexist. There is nowhere else where the gap between what a place has and what its residents experience is this wide, this persistent, and this complete.

The dissonance is total. The paradox is genuine. And understanding how it happened — really understanding it, not the surface version, not the version that blames deindustrialization or bad luck or simple mismanagement — is the only way to understand why the solution that this series proposes is not only possible but, in retrospect, almost obvious. Niagara Falls did not fail because it lacked assets. It failed because every structure built around those assets was designed, whether by intent or negligence, to move value out of the city rather than keep it inside. The problem was never the falls. The problem was always the plumbing.

FOUR HOURS AND A MAGNET: Why Niagara Falls has twelve million visitors and almost nothing to show for it

The average visitor to Niagara Falls, New York spends approximately four hours in the city. They arrive, they park — often paying a private lot operator whose profits leave the city entirely — they walk to the state park overlook, they take photographs of the falls, and they leave. Most of them — the majority of international visitors, a substantial share of domestic visitors — leave across the Rainbow Bridge into Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. They do this because the Canadian side has something the American side does not: a reason to stay.

The Canadian side is a functioning tourist city. High-rise hotels line the rim of the gorge, their upper floors offering panoramic views of both the American and Horseshoe Falls. The Fallsview Casino Resort is one of the largest gaming facilities in North America, drawing visitors with a combination of gaming, entertainment, and accommodation that creates an overnight draw the American side cannot match. There is a Ferris wheel, a wax museum, a waterpark, a miniature golf course, multiple entertainment venues, a functioning restaurant strip, and a skyline that communicates, even from a distance, that there is something here worth staying for. The Canadian side has built an entire economy around extending the tourist visit — keeping people overnight, keeping them spending, keeping them coming back. It has done so with deliberation and sustained civic investment over several decades.

The American side has Niagara Falls State Park — the oldest state park in the United States, genuinely beautiful, genuinely worth visiting — a scattering of hotels of varying quality, a Rainbow Centre Mall that has seen better decades, and a collection of tourist-facing businesses struggling to compete with the Canadian experience visible from across the river. The ratio of hotel rooms tells the story with painful clarity: the Canadian side has roughly four times the hotel room capacity of the American side within the tourism zone. When visitors walk out of the park and look around for somewhere to extend their experience, the American side does not make that case effectively. Canada does.

American Falls, Niagara Falls, New York. Twelve to fourteen million visitors per year — more than Yellowstone National Park — and still one of New York State's most economically distressed cities.

This is not a matter of the falls being less impressive from the American vantage point. Geologically and visually, the American side offers some of the most dramatic close-range views available anywhere along the gorge. The proximity to the Bridal Veil and American Falls from the state park's Prospect Point is remarkable. The mist rising from Horseshoe Falls, visible from Goat Island in conditions that make photography nearly impossible and the physical sensation entirely overwhelming, is genuinely breathtaking in a way that no photograph fully captures. The falls are not the problem. The experience built — or not built — around them is.

The result is an economy that captures almost nothing from its core asset. The visitor arrives, spends two hours in the state park (which is operated by New York State, not the City of Niagara Falls, meaning that park revenues flow to Albany rather than to city coffers), eats at a chain restaurant, buys a magnet at a gift shop, and drives to Canada or drives home. The economic multiplier that every functioning tourist economy depends on — the second night, the third meal, the guided tour, the additional attraction, the return visit with different family members — simply does not exist on the American side in any systematic way. The city is a lobby for an experience that happens somewhere else.

THE MAN WHO BROKE THE CITY: Robert Moses, 200 acres of dynamite, and the wound that never healed

To understand Niagara Falls, New York, you have to understand Robert Moses — and you have to understand what he did here specifically, not as an abstraction of midcentury planning hubris but as a concrete series of decisions that remade the physical city in ways that still shape daily life six decades later. What happened in Niagara Falls was not a side effect of Moses' larger ambitions. It was a central act of them, executed with his characteristic conviction and its characteristic aftermath. Robert Moses was the most powerful unelected official in American history. For four decades, from the 1930s through the 1960s, he controlled the physical shape of New York — its highways, its bridges, its parks, its housing, its neighborhoods. He built things at a scale and speed that no public official before or since has matched. He built things that genuinely served the public good, and he built things that destroyed functioning communities with an efficiency that bordered on systematic. He did all of this with an autocratic indifference to the lives of the people he displaced that has become the central case study in twentieth-century American planning dysfunction. Robert Caro's biography of Moses, published in 1974, documented the human cost of his methods in exhaustive, devastating detail. Urban planning has spent the fifty years since trying to reckon with what it enabled.

In Niagara Falls, Moses arrived with a vision: a grand scenic parkway along the Niagara River gorge that would allow motorists to drive in comfort beside one of the world's great natural spectacles. It was a vision consistent with Moses' broader philosophy, which held that the automobile was the appropriate vehicle for experiencing American landscapes and that highways were the appropriate infrastructure for organizing American cities. To build the parkway, he cleared approximately 200 acres of downtown Niagara Falls — removing entire residential neighborhoods, historic commercial blocks, and the street grid that had connected the city's downtown to its waterfront since the nineteenth century. The scale of the clearance was enormous. It was not surgical. It was not careful. It was the Moses method applied with the Moses indifference.

The Robert Moses Niagara Scenic Parkway was completed in the 1960s. It did what parkways do: it moved cars efficiently from one end to the other, and it did so in a setting that was genuinely scenic. What it did not do was create the kind of urban waterfront connection that every successful waterfront city in America has spent the last thirty years desperately trying to rebuild. The parkway severed the city from the gorge. It replaced streets with a highway designed for automobiles traveling at speed. It removed the organic, walkable, commercial tissue — the corner stores, the neighborhood restaurants, the small professional offices, the residential density — that makes a city a city, and replaced it with asphalt.

The parkway was eventually decommissioned and converted to a recreational trail — an acknowledgment, however belated and inadequate, of the damage it had done. But the scar tissue it left on the city's urban fabric never fully regenerated. The neighborhoods Moses cleared were not rebuilt. The commercial streets he eliminated did not return. The population that was displaced — disproportionately lower-income residents and communities of color, as was the pattern with Moses projects across New York — did not come back. What was left was a downtown with gaps in it where continuity should be, a waterfront that felt disconnected from the city it was supposed to anchor, and a physical urban structure that made it harder, not easier, to build the pedestrian-friendly, visitor-retaining, economically active streetscape that the city desperately needed and continues to need.

Moses' impact on Niagara Falls is not the only cause of the city's decline. Deindustrialization hollowed out the manufacturing base. Federal disinvestment removed resources that had sustained mid-century working-class communities. Suburban flight followed the highways Moses himself had built throughout the region. But the parkway project was the original wound, and it matters because it established the template that would be repeated, in different forms, for the next six decades: outside experts, outside visions, outside money, applied to Niagara Falls without genuine regard for the people who lived there, and leaving the city worse for the intervention.

THE MOSES PLAYBOOK AND WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Robert Moses' approach to urban development shared a common feature with nearly every subsequent redevelopment attempt in Niagara Falls: the benefits flowed outward and the costs stayed local. Highway commuters from the suburbs benefited from the parkway. Niagara Falls residents lost their neighborhoods. Casino investors benefited from gaming revenue. Niagara Falls residents received parking attendant wages. State agencies benefited from park revenues generated on city land. Niagara Falls received no meaningful share. Understanding this pattern — understanding it as a structural pattern rather than a series of isolated bad decisions — is essential to understanding why the plan proposed in this series is structured the way it is. Every element of the proposal is specifically designed to prevent value from following the historical path out of the city. The goal is not to attract investment. Every plan of the last sixty years has attracted investment. The goal is to build the structure that keeps what investment generates inside the community that hosts it.

THE CASINO THAT PROMISED EVERYTHING: How the Seneca Nation, New York State, and decades of wishful thinking failed the city again

The casino era began with genuine optimism, and it is worth taking that optimism seriously before examining what followed. In 2002, the Seneca Niagara Casino and Resort opened in the former Niagara Falls Convention Center — a large, prominent downtown building that had itself been a product of earlier urban renewal ambitions that had similarly promised transformation and delivered something more modest. The Seneca Nation of Indians had negotiated gaming rights with New York State through a compact that reflected both the legal evolution of tribal gaming rights and the political dynamics of a state looking for economic development tools that did not require direct public expenditure. The casino represented the most significant economic development investment the city had seen in a generation, and the people of Niagara Falls had reason to hope.

The promises were substantial and specific. Thousands of jobs in a city that needed them badly. Millions of dollars in revenue that would flow to city coffers and fund services that fiscal distress had degraded. A downtown revitalized by the constant traffic of gaming visitors who would spill out into restaurants,

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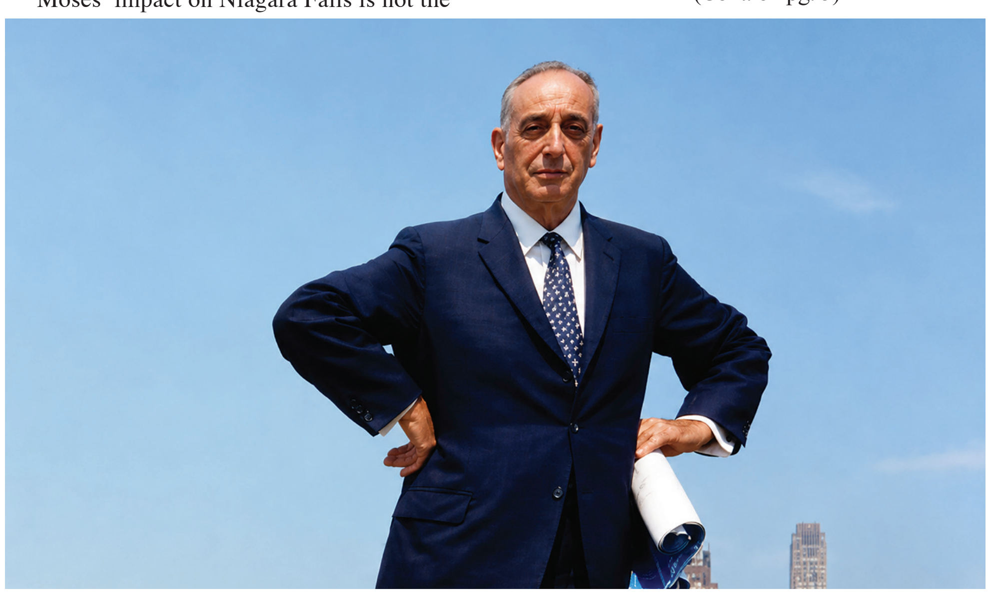

Robert Moses (1888–1981), the unelected master planner whose Niagara Scenic Parkway project cleared 200 acres of downtown Niagara Falls in the 1960s, severing the city from its waterfront.

NIAGARA FALLS CONT.

Operation Powerhouse: How Niagara Falls, NY Became the Most Baffling Economic Failure in America — And Why the Answer Was There All Along Cont from Cover

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hotels, and shops that would spring up to serve them. The casino would be the anchor around which a new Niagara Falls economy would be built — the first of many such anchors, the planning documents suggested, in a revitalization that would proceed outward from the gaming floor into the surrounding blocks.

What actually happened was more complicated, and more familiar to anyone who has studied the economic impact literature on casino development in economically distressed communities. The casino did generate jobs — at its peak, several thousand — but they were concentrated in the service category: dealers, food service workers, hospitality staff, security personnel, housekeeping workers. These are legitimate jobs, and for the workers who held them, they were genuinely important in a city where alternatives were scarce. But they were not the kind of jobs that build a middle class, generate meaningful local economic multipliers, or create the institutional density and tax base that a city needs to sustain long-term fiscal health. The wage floor was not high enough, and the benefits were not robust enough, to move the poverty dial at scale.

More significantly, the revenue structure of the gaming compact meant that a substantial share of casino proceeds flowed to the Seneca Nation and to New York State rather than to the City of Niagara Falls. The arrangements were complex, the negotiations were protracted, and the relationship between the city and the Nation was chronically contested — there were years in which the Seneca Nation withheld revenue-sharing payments entirely, citing good-faith disputes over compact terms, leaving the city scrambling to cover basic municipal services from a budget already stretched past breaking. The legal and political energy consumed by these disputes was itself a cost that the city could not afford to pay.

The casino also replicated the fundamental failure of the tourism economy in a new form: it captured visitors for a few hours in a climate-controlled box, gave them no reason to engage with the rest of the city, and sent them home or to Canada. The hoped-for spillover — the restaurants and shops and hotels that were supposed to spring up around the casino's gravitational pull and transform the surrounding blocks — never fully materialized. The downtown remained largely hollow outside the casino's immediate footprint. The Seneca Niagara Casino continues to operate and continues to employ residents of Niagara Falls. This is not nothing, and any honest accounting must acknowledge it. But as a model for urban economic transformation, as the foundation of a new Niagara Falls prosperity, it has not delivered what was promised.

"Every plan Niagara Falls has tried in the last sixty years shared a fatal flaw: the money moved through the city. It did not stay there. It did not belong to the people who lived there."

THE PATTERN OF EXTRACTION: Why every development deal in Niagara Falls history has left residents exactly where they started

Robert Moses. The casino. The parking operators. The chain hotels. The souvenir shops run on franchise models with headquarters in other states. The pattern across seventy years of Niagara Falls economic history is consistent enough to be called a structural law rather than a series of accidents: investment arrives from outside, extracts value from the city's natural asset and its captive visitor traffic, and the proceeds leave with it. Residents get jobs — sometimes good ones, more often not — but they do not get equity. They do not get ownership. They do not get a stake in the underlying asset that made the investment worth making in the first place. They are renters in their own city, providing labor and infrastructure for enterprises whose returns accrue elsewhere.

This is not unique to Niagara Falls. It is the recognizable story of resource economies everywhere in the world, from Appalachian coal towns that powered the industrialization of the eastern seaboard while their residents lived in persistent poverty to Gulf Coast oil cities whose boom-and-bust cycles left communities more economically fragile than before the resource was discovered. Amazon warehouse communities in the contemporary economy follow the same template: a large employer arrives, extracts labor value, generates logistics infrastructure that benefits consumers in other markets, and leaves the host community with low wages and degraded roads. The entity that controls the natural resource — or, in the logistics case, the distribution network — determines who captures the value. When that control rests entirely with outside interests, the community that hosts the resource is a service provider, not a beneficiary.

What makes Niagara Falls distinctive — and what makes the proposal this series is advancing genuinely novel rather than simply another variation on the familiar theme of outside investment — is the nature of the specific asset that has gone uncaptured. It is not the scenery itself. Scenery cannot be owned in the conventional sense, cannot be controlled as an equity instrument, cannot be structured as a financial vehicle that distributes returns to community members. But the power that the falls generate? That is a different matter entirely. Power can be structured. Power can be intermediated. Power can be made the foundation of a community wealth vehicle that keeps value inside the city rather than exporting it to shareholders in distant states.

That is the insight at the center of Operation Powerhouse. Niagara Falls has been selling the wrong thing for eighty years. The falls are the marketing. The power they generate is the product. And the product, properly structured through the right legal and financial vehicle, can pay every resident of this city a quarterly check — not as charity, not as welfare, but as a return on an asset they collectively host and from which they have collectively received almost nothing for generations.

WHAT NIAGARA FALLS ACTUALLY HAS: Three assets, hiding in plain sight, that no other city on Earth possesses simultaneously

The diagnosis of failure is essential, but it is only useful as the foundation for a different question: what, specifically, does Niagara Falls have that makes a different outcome not just possible but, in the current moment, almost urgently available? The answer is three things — three assets that, taken individually, are each powerful, and that in combination are essentially unprecedented among American cities east of the Mississippi.

The first is power. Specifically, the cheap, clean, abundant hydroelectric power generated by the New York Power Authority's Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant — a facility that, whatever one thinks of its namesake's other legacies, is an extraordinary piece of infrastructure. The plant generates approximately 2.6 million kilowatts of hydroelectric capacity, making it one of the largest hydroelectric facilities in the United States. The New York Power Authority has a long-standing policy of allocating preferential low-cost power to industrial and commercial users within a defined radius of the facility, on application and through a structured allocation process. This power is among the cheapest available anywhere in the eastern United States. It is also 100 percent renewable — generated by water flowing through turbines, not by fossil fuels, not by combustion, not by any process that produces carbon emissions. Companies including EnerPlate, Plug Power, and Saint-Gobain have received NYPA power allocations for operations in the region. The preferential rates are substantially — in some documented cases, 40 to 60 percent — below prevailing market rates for commercial and industrial power in the Northeast.

The second asset is cold. Niagara Falls has an average year-round temperature of approximately 48 degrees Fahrenheit. Its winters are deep, sustained, and reliable, driven by its position at the eastern end of Lake Erie and the lake-effect climate patterns that define Western New York's meteorological character. This cold is not a liability to be endured. For a specific and extraordinarily fast-growing category of user, it is a resource of extraordinary value. Cooling accounts for between 30 and 40 percent of the total operating cost of a data center. In warm climates — in Virginia, in Texas, in Arizona, in the markets where most current hyperscale data center development is concentrated — that cooling must be manufactured through mechanical chillers, cooling towers, and refrigeration systems that run continuously and consume enormous quantities of power in the process of cooling the equipment that consumes enormous quantities of power. In Niagara Falls, for six or more months of the year, the outside air does that work for free. The physics are simple and the economics are compelling.

The Robert Moses Niagara Hydroelectric Power Station

The third asset is land. Decades of population loss, deindustrialization, and the accumulated damage of urban renewal have left Niagara Falls with hundreds of acres of vacant, city-owned, and brownfield land — former industrial sites cleared and never redeveloped, urban renewal parcels from the Moses era that have sat empty for sixty years, tax-foreclosed properties that have reverted to municipal ownership — available at costs that are essentially negligible by the standards of any major real estate market. In markets where hyperscale data center development is currently concentrated, land costs represent a significant constraint. In Niagara Falls, that constraint does not exist. The city owns substantial portions of this inventory directly, which means the community — not private landowners — sits in the position to negotiate the terms on which that land is made available.

- NYPA Robert Moses Plant capacity: 2.6 million kilowatts of clean hydroelectric power
- NYPA preferential rates for regional industry: 40–60% below market in documented cases
- Cooling accounts for 30–40% of total data center operating costs
- Niagara Falls average annual temperature: 48°F — free ambient cooling for 6+ months per year
- Hundreds of acres of city-owned and brownfield land available at near-zero acquisition cost

Aquarium of Niagara Celebrates Arrival of New Humboldt Penguin Chick, Launches Public Naming Contest

Staff Reports

The Aquarium of Niagara has a new addition to its Humboldt penguin colony, announcing the hatching of a female chick that is already showing signs of becoming one of the aquarium's most spirited residents.

Aquarium officials said the chick hatched after approximately 40 days of incubation and weighed about 81 grams at birth. The young penguin is currently being cared for by her parents, Blanca and PJ Jr., who are sharing parenting duties as she continues to grow behind the scenes.

The hatchling represents an important milestone for the aquarium's conservation efforts involving Humboldt penguins, a species native to the coastal regions of Peru and Chile that faces ongoing challenges in the wild.

"This chick represents both a conservation success story and a chance to celebrate our community's history," said Chad Fifer, president and CEO of the Aquarium of Niagara. "Through the naming contest, guests can connect with the people and stories that helped shape the Niagara region while learning about the importance of protecting vulnerable species like Humboldt penguins."

Because the chick remains in a nesting area with her parents, aquarium visitors may not always be able to get a clear view of the newest member of the colony. However, staff members say the young bird is already making an impression.

"Humboldt penguins have distinct personalities, and this chick is shaping up to be one of the most charismatic members of the colony. She's very curious and vocal, and she's certainly made her presence known," said Hallie Torre, Curator of Marine Mammals and Birds.

To celebrate the hatchling's arrival, the aquarium is inviting the public to help select her name through a community voting contest that highlights notable women and cultural figures connected to Western New York and Niagara Falls.

Voting began June 5 and will continue through June 14.

One option is Annie, inspired by Annie Edson Taylor, the pioneering daredevil who became the first woman to survive a trip over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Aquarium officials noted that Humboldt penguins are naturally curious animals capable of navigating rugged coastal environments, characteristics that mirror Taylor's adventurous legacy.

Another choice is Burnett, honoring Buffalo civil rights leader Mary Burnett Talbert. Talbert was a founding member of the Niagara Movement, which later helped pave the way for the creation of the NAACP. Aquarium officials said her dedication to protecting vulnerable communities reflects the ongoing conservation efforts needed to protect Humboldt penguins and ensure the species' survival.

A third possibility is Iris, named after the iconic 1998 hit song by the Goo Goo Dolls. Aquarium officials said the title represents one of Western New York's most recognizable cultural touchstones and would be a fitting name for a penguin chick expected to become a popular member of the colony.

The final option is Theodosia, inspired by Theodosia Burr, daughter of former Vice President Aaron Burr. Historical records identify Burr and her husband as the first documented couple to honeymoon in Niagara Falls, helping establish the city's long-standing reputation as the "Honeymoon Capital of the World." Aquarium officials noted that the facility's bonded penguin pairs enjoy what amounts to a permanent honeymoon of their own at Penguin Coast, where they receive specialized care, daily enrichment activities and a steady supply of seafood.

Members of the public can cast their vote online or in person at the Aquarium of Niagara. Niagara Action will include the online form submission in our online article that you can find with this headline on niagaraaction.com.

Officials noted that online voting is limited to one submission per email address, though guests who vote online before visiting the aquarium may still cast an additional vote in person.

BUFFALO

Crystal Peoples-Stokes Closes Out Nearly 24 Years in Albany with Emotional Farewell

Staff Reports

After nearly a quarter-century in the New York State Assembly, Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes delivered an emotional farewell on Friday, June 5th, as lawmakers concluded the 2026 legislative session.

The Buffalo Democrat, who made history as the first woman and first black woman to serve as Assembly majority leader, used her final remarks on the Assembly floor to reflect on her career, discuss a recent health scare and urge colleagues to speak out against what she described as growing challenges facing people of color at the national level.

Addressing fellow lawmakers during her final session in office, Peoples-Stokes spoke candidly about concerns she has regarding the political climate across the country and the treatment of minority communities.

"At the national level, my whole being is being reconsidered whether I should even be here – not just for a vote, but to have a job," said Peoples-Stokes, referring to the threat of job loss for "people who look like me."

Her comments came amid broader national debates over voting rights, race and employment policies. Peoples-Stokes specifically referenced concerns following recent legal and political developments affecting minority representation and protections.

She told colleagues that debates taking place in Albany can sometimes be difficult to hear when viewed through the lens of what she believes many minority communities are experiencing nationwide.

"It hurts, sometimes, coming in here and hearing the debate that we have to go through when there's no regard for people like me suffering what is going on at the national level," said Peoples-Stokes.

The longtime lawmaker also challenged colleagues to be more vocal when confronting comments or actions they believe are unfair.

"And in my opinion, silence is complicity. And so, if we're friends, let's be friends all the time. And let's be friends when we can get to a place where we can say, 'Those other folks who are in our party that are our friends? You can't say that about my people, even though they don't look like me.' You have to be fair."

Peoples-Stokes then turned her attention to a broader message of unity, expressing hope that future generations will focus less on racial and ethnic differences and more on common humanity.

"I hope that we can move forward as people who don't think of ourselves as Italian or African American or Irish or white or black but think of us as the people who God created. And the reason that he created us was so we could help other people."

During her remarks, Peoples-Stokes also discussed a recent "serious" medical procedure. She told colleagues the procedure temporarily affected her mobility, though she has since regained much of her strength and movement.

The farewell speech prompted an emotional response from lawmakers throughout the Assembly chamber.

A message displayed inside the chamber read, "Thank You Majority Leader Peoples-Stokes."

Members responded with standing ovations as colleagues from both parties acknowledged her decades of public service.

One of the few occasions of unanimity

in recent memory on the assembly floor.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie became visibly emotional while reflecting on their longtime friendship.

Heastie recalled first meeting Peoples-Stokes years before he entered public office while traveling to Buffalo for a Juneteenth celebration.

"I had no idea what Juneteenth was, if you can believe that, but Crystal taught me what Juneteenth was," said Heastie, "and she's been a friend and a sister."

The speaker also shared a personal story about his rise through Assembly leadership.

According to Heastie, when he was first considering a run for Assembly speaker in 2015, Peoples-Stokes was among those who encouraged him and pledged her support.

"Love you dearly," Heastie told Peoples-Stokes. "You have been a big sister, my protector and I am so much, so much going to miss you. I love you so much, Crystal."

Heastie also recognized several other departing lawmakers during his remarks, including Assemblyman Angelo Morinello of Niagara Falls, who is leaving Albany after serving for a decade in the State Assembly.

Before concluding her farewell address, Peoples-Stokes injected some humor into the moment.

"Whoever takes this seat, whoever the speaker assigns to be the next majority leader, I just want you to know I'm going to be watching you."

She ended her final speech with a simple message to her colleagues.

"God bless you all. Stay safe. Stay healthy."

Buffalo Council Member Calls for Prostitution Task Force Amid Growing Concerns Along Broadway Corridor

Staff Reports

A Buffalo Common Council member is calling for a coordinated law enforcement response to what he describes as a longstanding and highly visible prostitution problem along portions of Broadway, arguing that vulnerable women are being exploited while illegal activity continues in plain sight.

Fillmore District Council Member Mitch Nowakowski is urging city officials, police and social service agencies to take a more aggressive approach to addressing prostitution, drug activity and related quality-of-life concerns in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood.

The effort comes after Nowakowski formally submitted a letter to Buffalo Mayor Sean Ryan and Buffalo Police Commissioner Erika Shields requesting the creation of a dedicated task force focused on the issue.

According to Nowakowski, prostitution and related criminal activity have become an increasingly visible problem along a stretch of Broadway between the Bailey Avenue corridor and Broadway viaduct.

Nowakowski said the activity is no secret to residents who live and work in the area.

"We have a pervasive problem of prostitution," said Nowakowski. "I see it in broad daylight, of people outside the city proper and sometimes in it, that are exploiting women."

The councilman argues that two separate forces are helping drive the problem.

First, he believes individuals from outside Buffalo are regularly traveling into the neighborhood specifically to purchase sex and exploit vulnerable women.

"Individuals from the first ring suburbs come down Broadway from Bailey in my district and start actively exploiting women," said Nowakowski.

Second, he suspects there may be some level of organized activity occurring within the city itself.

"The second is, I believe, that there is some form of organization that is happening with people that are in the city, in my district, that are leading a coordinated ring of it," he said.

While the council member believes there may be organized elements involved, advocates who work directly with survivors of exploitation say the situation is often more complicated.

Kelly Diane Galloway, founder of Project Mona's House, an organization dedicated to helping women recover from sexual exploitation and human trafficking, said the Broadway-Bailey corridor has been known as an area where exploitation occurs for many years.

However, Galloway said the underlying causes are often rooted in economic hardship rather than sophisticated criminal enterprises.

"We always say that poverty is the biggest pimp," said Galloway said. "It's not necessarily that people want to be out there engaged in sexual exploitation."

According to Galloway, many of the individuals involved are facing desperate circumstances that leave them with few options.

"A lot of times, people don't have food, they don't have heat, they don't have water, they don't have medicine," Galloway continued.

Organizations that work with trafficking victims and exploited women frequently point to poverty, homelessness, addiction, mental health challenges and domestic violence as factors that can leave individuals vulnerable to exploitation.

National studies have found that many people involved in prostitution report experiencing economic instability, housing insecurity or coercion at some point in their lives.

Nowakowski said those realities are exactly why a broader, coordinated response is needed.

Rather than relying solely on periodic arrests or individual police investigations, he wants a task force that brings together law enforcement, social service providers and community organizations to address both criminal activity and the circumstances contributing to exploitation.

Buffalo Police officials acknowledged the concerns being raised and indicated they are continuing to work with community leaders and partner agencies.

A department spokesperson said Buffalo Police are "happy to continue our work with Councilman Nowakowski, law enforcement partners, and social services to combat prostitution and drug activities in the area of Broadway-Fillmore. Our shared goal is improving safety and quality of life for residents."

Law enforcement sources also indicated that investigators are familiar with many of the concerns outlined by Nowakowski.

However, police officials reportedly maintain that much of the activity currently being observed appears to involve individuals operating independently rather than a large organized criminal enterprise.

Tracking the scope of the problem can also be difficult.

Buffalo Police do not maintain separate publicly reported statistics specifically for prostitution and solicitation arrests because those offenses are generally categorized under broader sexual offense classifications.

In New York, prostitution-related offenses are generally prosecuted as Class B misdemeanors, though additional charges can apply in cases involving trafficking, coercion, exploitation of minors or organized criminal activity.

Human trafficking advocates say prostitution enforcement has evolved significantly in recent years as law enforcement agencies increasingly focus on identifying traffickers and individuals profiting from exploitation rather than treating exploited persons solely as offenders.

The Erie County Sheriff's Office also maintains resources dedicated to combating exploitation and trafficking.

County officials note that the Sheriff's Office has a dedicated detective assigned to investigate reports involving human trafficking and exploitation concerns.

Authorities encourage anyone who suspects human trafficking or exploitation activity to contact law enforcement immediately.

For residents living along Broadway and nearby neighborhoods, however, the concerns are not theoretical.

Nowakowski argues that the activity remains highly visible and continues to impact the quality of life for families, businesses and residents throughout the corridor.

Whether city leaders ultimately move forward with a dedicated task force remains to be seen, but Nowakowski says the message is simple: those exploiting vulnerable women should know they are no longer welcome in the neighborhood.

BUFFALO CONT.

UB Abruptly Shutters Oral Surgery Residency Program, Raising Questions About Future of Specialized Care in Western New York

Staff Reports

The University at Buffalo is closing its Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery residency program at the end of the academic year, a decision that's surprised dental and medical professionals across the country and sparked concerns about the future of specialized oral surgery care in Western New York.

The move will force residents currently enrolled in the highly competitive six-year training program to seek placements elsewhere to complete their education, while also removing a key training pipeline that has supplied surgeons to hospitals and healthcare systems throughout the region.

University officials say the closure was necessary because the program no longer had enough faculty members to meet accreditation requirements. However, individuals closely connected to the program have questioned whether staffing concerns alone explain the decision, particularly given reports of internal conflict that surfaced within the residency program over the past year.

The Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, or OMFS, residency program trains dentists to become highly specialized surgeons capable of performing complex procedures involving the mouth, jaw, face and neck. Graduates often go on to provide care ranging from wisdom tooth extractions and dental surgery to facial trauma reconstruction, oral cancer treatment and management of severe infections.

The program's closure means Western New York will no longer train new oral and maxillofacial surgeons locally, something healthcare leaders say will have long-term consequences for patient access and provider availability.

According to the university, nine residents will be directly affected by the decision.

In a statement announcing the closure, UB said faculty and administrators are working to help those residents secure positions at other institutions so they can complete their training.

"School leadership reached the difficult decision this spring after determining the program could not sustain all aspects of the educational experience needed to satisfy stringent accreditation requirements for an OMFS residency program," said the university in a statement.

UB also emphasized that its Doctor of Dental Surgery program will continue operating and that faculty members associated with the OMFS department will remain involved in educating dental students.

According to the university, the department currently consists of four full-time faculty members and two part-time faculty members. Officials said that staffing level is insufficient to satisfy standards established by the Commission on Dental Accreditation for an advanced residency program.

The closure comes even though oral and maxillofacial surgeons remain in high demand throughout New York State and across the country.

Unlike many dental specialties, OMFS residents often spend years rotating through hospitals, emergency departments and surgical settings while managing significant patient volumes. Residents can work up to 80 hours per week during portions of their training and frequently serve as a critical part of hospital care teams.

Healthcare experts note that the loss of residents can have a substantial impact on patient care because attending surgeons often rely on them to help manage consultations, surgeries, inpatient care and emergency cases.

Several hospitals that worked closely with UB's residency program have already begun preparing for the change.

At Erie County Medical Center, where residents routinely trained alongside attending surgeons, officials said preparations have been underway for some time.

"We have prepared for this outcome by retaining staff to help care for OMFS patients at ECMC, as well as recruit additional providers to ensure our patients will receive the care they need," said ECMC spokesperson Peter Cutler.

Kaleida Health also acknowledged the disruption caused by the closure, particularly for residents who must now relocate to complete their education.

In a statement, Kaleida said patient care at Oishei Children's Hospital and the Laurence C. Wright Craniofacial Center will continue uninterrupted.

"However, in terms of patient care, Golisano Children's Hospital of Buffalo will provide continuous care for children in both the Laurence C. Wright Craniofacial Center and in the hospital, relying on the physicians and dentists who currently manage the care: Drs. Bob Perry, Ashley Rogers, Renee Reynolds, Michael Markiewicz, Vincent Aquino, and Jessica Canallatos."

While hospitals insist patient care will continue, many in the oral surgery community argue that the broader consequences may not become apparent for years.

Residency programs often serve as a pipeline for recruiting specialists to remain in the communities where they train. Without an OMFS residency program in Buffalo, some fear fewer surgeons will ultimately choose to practice in Western New York.

Students of the UB School of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

That concern is particularly significant because oral and maxillofacial surgeons frequently care for underserved populations, trauma patients and individuals with limited access to specialty services.

There is also a concern that some patients may increasingly need to travel to Rochester or other cities for treatment if local provider shortages develop.

The abrupt nature of the closure has also generated frustration among many individuals connected to the program.

Several observers have questioned why the university chose to eliminate the residency instead of pursuing aggressive recruitment efforts to add faculty and preserve accreditation.

Those concerns have been amplified by reports of internal turmoil that surfaced months before the decision was announced.

Documents obtained from union correspondence, and public reporting based on them, show that concerns regarding the residency program were formally raised in early 2025.

A March 17th, 2025 letter from UAPD, the union representing OMFS residents, was sent to leadership at the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

The letter alleged that some residents experienced retaliation after raising concerns about what they described as a hostile and unsupportive learning environment.

"If this kind of retaliation is allowed to continue without forceful and prompt action, the entire program will be undermined," the letter read.

The allegations prompted a formal response from university officials.

In a March 21st, 2025 letter, George Zimmermann, senior campus counsel for SUNY Buffalo, confirmed that the university had launched an investigation into the claims.

The university stated it would "address and take appropriate action in response to any violations of law or policy that may be substantiated through its investigation."

UB has maintained that those allegations were not the reason the residency program was ultimately discontinued.

University officials have repeatedly stated that the decision was based on accreditation challenges related to faculty staffing levels rather than internal disputes.

Even so, questions remain among some residents, faculty members and healthcare professionals who believe the program's difficulties may have been building behind the scenes long before the public announcement.

For now, the immediate focus remains on the nine residents whose training plans have been abruptly upended.

As the academic year comes to a close, one of Western New York's most specialized medical training programs will officially disappear, ending a chapter that for decades helped train surgeons who cared for thousands of patients throughout the region.

Three Democrats Battle for 149th Assembly Seat as Affordability Dominates Primary Race

Staff Reports

Affordability has emerged as the defining issue in the Democratic primary for New York's 149th Assembly District, where Karen Hoak, Adam Bojak and Kevin Deese are competing to replace outgoing Assemblyman Jon Rivera.

While all three candidates say they want to lower costs for residents, each is offering a different path forward as voters prepare to head to the polls later this month.

Deese, an M&T Bank executive, has built his campaign around childcare affordability, opposition to large-scale data center development and what he describes as a practical approach to government. He has argued that rising childcare costs are forcing many families to delay major life decisions and says the state should pursue a universal childcare pilot program to help working parents. Deese has also highlighted his personal experience overcoming barriers to become a Naval officer after receiving an HIV diagnosis, presenting himself as a candidate capable of challenging powerful institutions and delivering results.

Bojak, a tenants' rights attorney running as a Democratic Socialist, has centered his campaign on expanding government programs and protections. His platform includes support for universal healthcare through the New York Health Act, stronger protections for undocumented immigrants and expanded affordable housing initiatives. He has advocated for measures such as good-cause eviction protections, rent controls and increased housing construction while arguing that higher taxes on wealthy individuals are necessary to address affordability concerns. Bojak has emphasized that many of the issues he is campaigning on are causes he has spent years fighting for professionally.

Hoak, who serves as deputy commissioner of highways for Erie County, is focused on healthcare, housing affordability, utility costs and infrastructure. She has warned about looming healthcare coverage issues facing hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and argues that state leaders need to take action quickly. Hoak has also leaned heavily on her background in construction and public works, saying her experience working with government agencies, contractors and residents has prepared her to navigate complex challenges and build consensus.

The race has also exposed divisions within local Democratic politics. Hoak is backed by the Erie County Democratic Committee while Bojak has secured the support of Rivera. Bojak has criticized party involvement in primary elections and argued that voters should decide nominees without political organizations influencing the process. Hoak has countered that voters should focus on the candidates and their plans for the district rather than larger political battles.

Meanwhile, Deese has largely stayed out of those debates, portraying himself as someone who can work with all factions of the Democratic Party and build relationships necessary to advance legislation.

The campaign has also seen tensions over outside spending. Bojak has criticized independent political action committees that have spent heavily supporting Hoak through advertising and mail campaigns. Hoak has responded that state law prohibits coordination between campaigns and outside groups and says her campaign has no involvement in those efforts.

Despite their disagreements, all three candidates agree that affordability remains the district's top concern. The debate heading into Election Day is less about what problems need to be solved and more about who is best equipped to solve them.

The Democratic primary will be held June 23rd with early voting running from June 13th through June 21st.

AROUND ERIE COUNTY

Poloncarz Signs Landmark Biometric Privacy Law Following Concerns Over Customer Surveillance Practices at Wegmans

Staff Reports

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz has signed a first-of-its-kind biometric privacy law that prohibits businesses from collecting, retaining or selling customers' biometric information, making Erie County the first county in New York State to enact such protections.

The new law, known as the Biometric Transparency and Privacy Act (BTPA), comes amid growing concerns about how corporations gather and use personal information, particularly after public attention focused on the extensive customer data collection practices outlined in Wegmans' privacy policy.

Poloncarz was joined by Erie County legislators, consumer protection officials and county attorneys during the signing ceremony as county leaders touted the measure as a major step forward for consumer privacy rights.

“This law creates a safer community for all by protecting a person's most basic and unique features: their face and biometric data,” said County Executive Poloncarz. “I again thank County Legislator Lawrence Dupre for sponsoring the bill and also thank the members of the Democratic Caucus who voted in favor of the legislation.”

The measure had previously been approved by the Erie County Legislature and now establishes sweeping restrictions on the collection and storage of biometric information by commercial establishments.

Under the law, businesses that provide goods or services to the public are prohibited from collecting, storing or selling biometric identifiers, including facial recognition data, fingerprints, voice recognition information, iris scans and other biometric markers.

The law applies to both for-profit and nonprofit organizations operating within Erie County.

Any business that currently possesses biometric information must notify Erie County's Division of Consumer Protection and provide a detailed explanation of how it intends to permanently erase, destroy or delete that information.

Those businesses must then submit an affidavit within 30 days certifying that all biometric information has been permanently removed.

Violators face significant financial penalties.

Businesses found to be improperly collecting biometric information will receive notice of the violation and be given 30 days to correct the issue. Failure to comply can result in fines of $1,000 per day.

Organizations that fail to destroy biometric data already in their possession could face penalties of up to $5,000 per day.

The legislation was advocated for by Erie County Legislator Lawrence Dupre who said the concept began by asking fundamental questions about privacy rights in the digital age.

"I want to thank County Executive Poloncarz for his support as I developed this legislation," said Dupre. "This started with a simple question: does a store have the right to scan your face, keep it in a database and sell it for profit? The answer today in Erie County is that no one can take your biometrics without permission, and no one can sell them. Your body is not a data point for a corporation to collect and sell. A sign on the door was never enough protection. You can reset a password. You can cancel a credit card. You cannot reset your face. As of today, in Erie County, no corporation can own a piece of you. That is the law."

The legislation gained momentum after concerns emerged regarding the growing use of surveillance technology by retailers and other commercial establishments.

Much of the public discussion centered on Wegmans, whose privacy policies revealed an extensive range of customer information collection practices.

Wegmans had been in the news several times over the preceding months for their surveillance practices in both New York City and Buffalo.

According to the company's publicly available privacy policy, data collection can begin before customers even enter a store.

Wegmans states that cameras may record vehicles and license plate numbers in parking lots. Once inside, customers can be recorded by surveillance systems throughout stores while additional information may be gathered through mobile applications, WiFi networks, loyalty programs and checkout systems.

The controversy intensified after questions emerged about the company's use of facial recognition technology.

Wegmans has acknowledged that facial recognition technology is used in certain stores considered to have elevated crime concerns. According to the company, the technology is intended to identify individuals who have previously been flagged for misconduct.

However, the grocery chain has declined to publicly identify which stores utilize the technology, how long biometric information is retained or whether the technology is currently being used in Western New York locations.

Those unanswered questions fueled criticism from privacy advocates and elected officials who argued that customers deserve greater transparency about how personal information is being collected, stored and potentially shared.

According to Wegmans' privacy policy, information collected from customers may include names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, credit and debit card information, purchase histories, demographic information, online identifiers, geolocation data and biometric information used by its asset protection team.

The policy also states that information may be gathered directly from customers through devices associated with customers, through in-store technologies, from third-party marketing companies, social media platforms and through analytical tools that draw conclusions from previously collected data.

Among the most controversial disclosures was the company's acknowledgment that it shares customer purchase information with advertising platforms and works with major technology companies, including Google and Meta, to deliver targeted advertising.

“Wegmans may work with third parties to show you tailored ads. We may also work with third parties, like Google or Meta, to show Wegmans ads on these platforms,” the policy says. “We also share customer purchase data with third-party advertising platforms.”

The company further states that de-identified customer data may be shared with brands and advertisers to assist with marketing campaigns.

Wegmans maintains that video recordings, license plate information and vehicle data are collected primarily for security purposes.

But it does not say how long they keep it.

While customers may request deletion of certain personal information, Wegmans' policy indicates that some information may still be retained. The company has not publicly disclosed how long surveillance footage, license plate records or biometric information are stored before being deleted.

Those uncertainties became a major factor in the push for stronger local protections.

Supporters of Erie County's new law argue that biometric information is fundamentally different from other forms of personal data because it cannot be changed if compromised.

Unlike a password, username or credit card number, biometric identifiers are permanently tied to an individual.

Advocates say that reality makes protections against unauthorized collection and storage especially important.

With the legislation now officially signed into law, Erie County has become the first county in New York State to enact a comprehensive prohibition on the commercial collection and retention of biometric data.

Supporters hope the measure will serve as a model for other local governments and potentially inspire statewide action as concerns continue to grow over surveillance technologies, facial recognition systems and the increasing amount of personal information collected by corporations.

For consumers, the new law represents one of the strongest local privacy protections currently on the books in New York and marks a significant shift in the ongoing debate over who owns and controls personal biometric information in the digital age.

Erie County Confirms First Measles Case Since 2018, Issues Public Exposure Warning

Staff Reports

Health officials confirmed the first case of measles in Erie County in nearly eight years this past week prompting a public health alert for residents who may have been exposed at several locations across Buffalo.

The Erie County Department of Health announced Thursday, June 4th that an Erie County resident tested positive for measles after recently traveling internationally to a country where the highly contagious virus has been circulating for at least a year.

According to health officials, the individual was infectious while visiting multiple public locations in Erie County on May 24th and May 28th, potentially exposing others to the virus.

The confirmed case marks the first reported measles infection in Erie County since 2018.

Public health officials are now working to identify anyone who may have come into contact with the infected individual and are urging residents who were present at specific locations during designated time periods to monitor themselves for symptoms and contact healthcare providers if concerns arise.

One of the potential exposure locations was the emergency department at Golisano Children's Hospital of Buffalo.

Health officials said individuals may have been exposed there on May 24th between 7:30am and 4:30pm.

A second potential exposure site was a multi-tenant building located at 1021 Broadway in Buffalo on May 28th between 10:30am and 2pm.

The building houses several organizations and businesses including Jericho Road Community Health Center, Broadway Pediatrics, the U.S. Postal Service Broadway Buffalo location, UBMD Internal Medicine, Chy's Kitchen and Catering, and the Care Management Coalition of Western New York.

The Care Management Coalition offices include a number of organizations and programs serving local residents including EPIC – Every Person Influences Children, Mental Health Advocates of Western New York, Buffalo Urban League Project Hope, Beyond Support Network, Parent Network of Western New York, Project Play WNY, the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State, the Center for Self Advocacy and the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities.

Health officials also identified a second exposure period at Golisano Children's Hospital's emergency department on May 28th between noon and 9:30pm.

Because measles can remain airborne and survive on surfaces even after an infected person leaves an area, officials said the listed exposure windows include an additional two-hour period after the infected individual was present.

Measles is considered one of the most contagious diseases in the world.

According to public health experts, the virus spreads through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes or breathes. Individuals can become infected simply by entering a room where a contagious person was previously present.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that up to 90% of susceptible individuals exposed to measles may become infected if they are not immune through vaccination or prior infection.

Early signs of measles often include fever, cough, runny nose and red, watery eyes. A distinctive rash typically develops several days later.

According to the Erie County Department of Health, symptoms generally appear between 10 and 12 days after exposure, though in some cases they can take longer to develop.

Officials are asking anyone who believes they were exposed or who begins experiencing symptoms to make contact by phone and NOT walk into a doctor's office, urgent care center or emergency room.

Public health officials noted that vaccination remains the most effective protection against measles.

ROCHESTER

New Bus Contractor Offers Jobs to Nearly 200 Rochester School Transportation Workers Facing Layoffs

John Watson

With the end of the school year rapidly approaching, nearly 200 employees of Monroe School Transportation are facing the prospect of losing their jobs following a major change in Rochester's student transportation services.

But the company set to take over those routes says it wants many of those workers to remain behind the wheel when students return to class in September.

Transpo Bus Service, which was awarded the transportation contract following a competitive bidding process, has begun actively recruiting drivers, monitors and other transportation workers currently employed by Monroe School Transportation in an effort to create continuity for students and families while avoiding disruptions when the new school year begins.

The transition comes as school districts across New York and nationwide continue to grapple with transportation challenges, including persistent driver shortages, rising operating costs and difficulties maintaining reliable service.

Over the past several years, districts throughout the state have faced bus route consolidations, delayed pickups and staffing shortages as transportation providers compete for qualified commercial drivers in an increasingly tight labor market.

Against that backdrop, Transpo Bus Service officials say retaining experienced workers already familiar with local routes and students is a top priority.

Company leadership noted that while the transportation provider will be changing, many of the routes themselves will remain the same.

The contract change is expected to generate significant savings for the city while maintaining transportation services for students.

In fact, the new arrangement could save taxpayers approximately $2.8 million.

The transition has understandably created uncertainty among employees who remain under contract with Monroe School Transportation for the final weeks of the school year.

Some workers have expressed concerns privately but have been reluctant to speak publicly about their future employment situation.

Recognizing the potential impact on workers, the New York State Department of Labor recently met with employees to discuss employment opportunities and assist with job placement efforts.

At the same time, Transpo established an outreach effort designed to simplify the hiring process for affected workers.

Company representatives met directly with employees and provided immediate opportunities to apply for positions that could allow them to continue serving many of the same students they currently transport.

One of the company's primary goals is preserving consistency for students, particularly those with special needs who often develop strong relationships with the drivers and monitors they see every school day.

Company officials emphasized that maintaining familiar faces on school buses benefits not only parents but also the students themselves.

They noted that many students spend a meaningful amount of time each day with transportation staff and can become anxious when routines suddenly change.

Student transportation providers across New York have increasingly focused on retaining experienced personnel because consistency is often viewed as a critical component of student safety and service reliability.

Founded nearly a decade ago, Transpo Bus Service has grown into one of the larger regional transportation providers serving Rochester, the Finger Lakes and portions of Western New York.

The company currently operates more than 200 buses each day across the region.

With the addition of new Rochester-area routes this fall, officials expect that number to exceed 250 buses daily.

Company leaders say they are encouraging existing driver-monitor teams to remain together during the transition whenever possible.

In addition to hiring experienced transportation workers, the company is also seeking to recruit new drivers into the profession.

Officials say they provide training programs and opportunities for individuals interested in obtaining a commercial driver's license, commonly known as a CDL.

For now, however, the immediate focus remains on the nearly 200 workers whose employment status will change once the current school year concludes.

With fewer than three weeks remaining before summer break, Transpo officials say they hope to keep as many experienced employees working as possible while ensuring students experience a smooth transition when buses begin rolling again this fall.

Webster Town Board Votes to Remove Pride Flag From Town Hall Property

John Watson

A divided Webster Town Board voted Thursday night (June 4th) to remove an LGBTQ Pride flag that had been raised earlier that week at the Town Hall, ending what had been a historic but short-lived display that sparking passionate debate among residents on both sides of the political spectrum.

The Pride flag was raised Monday, June 1st marking the first time in the town's history that the symbol had been displayed on municipal property. Just days later, however, the board voted 3-2 to remove it after a lengthy and emotional public discussion about the role of government, public property and community representation.

The vote came after Councilmember John Cahill introduced a motion establishing a policy that only government flags may be flown on town-owned properties.

Under the policy approved by the board, the American flag and New York State flag will be the only flags permitted on town grounds moving forward.

Supporters of the measure argued that public buildings should remain politically and socially neutral and that government property should be reserved for official government symbols.

Resident Laurie Read voiced support for the policy change, telling board members, "Government property should only display government flags: the U.S. flag, the [New York] state flag and the municipal flag. This ensures neutrality, avoids political or social favoritism and respects the purpose of public property as a shared civic space."

Others strongly disagreed, arguing that the Pride flag served as a symbol of inclusion and acceptance for members of the LGBTQ community.

Resident Wanda Moore urged the board to consider the message the display sent to individuals who often feel marginalized.

"We have so many people in this community that aren't considered 'of the norm'," said Moore. "And I think flying the flag shows them that this community supports them and the life that they live."

Following the vote, town officials confirmed the Pride flag would be removed at 9am Friday.

The board's decision quickly generated reaction throughout the community and on social media, where residents debated whether municipal governments should display flags representing social causes, cultural groups or community movements.

Town Supervisor Alex Scialdone, who opposed removing the flag, released a statement Friday expressing disappointment with the outcome.

"Everyone deserves to be seen, heard and accepted for who they are."

Scialdone said he was deeply affected by testimony from residents who spoke during the public meeting and described finally feeling acknowledged by their local government.

"Last evening, I was moved hearing from members of our communities-many of the lifelong residents-who finally felt recognized and accepted by the Town they live in."

While criticizing the board's decision, Scialdone also pointed to what he described as an outpouring of support from residents and supporters beyond Webster.

"While I am extremely disappointed in my colleagues' actions last evening, I am equally encouraged by the resounding messages of love from Webster and beyond."

He concluded by pledging to continue advocating for a more inclusive community.

"This is the Webster I see and will advocate for now and into the future."

The controversy also fueled additional public commentary online.

Resident Wayne King supported the board's decision and argued that government facilities should not be used to promote causes or viewpoints.

"Laurie nailed it. You are free to fly your flags on your property as you see fit. HOWEVER - don't hijack governmental property to promote your agendas."

Another resident posting online praised the vote and argued that government buildings should be limited to official state and national symbols.

"Sanity prevails! I agree the only flags that should be flown at a public building are the American and state flag."

Another resident also criticized what they viewed as inconsistent standards regarding which flags are permitted on government property.

"The Democrats pushed for flying a flag that supposedly symbolizes sexual preference while the blue and red line flag that represents law-enforcement and firefighters who are there to protect everyone wasn't allowed because it offended people."

A third resident identifying himself as a gay man also supported the board's action, saying he did not believe government endorsement or recognition was necessary.

"LOVE IT. I'm a homosexual man, I DO NOT NEED NOR WANT any form of government approval, or 'support,' or 'celebration' for who I am."

He continued, "ENOUGH with the interminable pandering. I have all the rights everyone else does in this country and I AM NOT OPPRESSED."

The debate in Webster reflects similar controversies that have unfolded in communities across the country in recent years as local governments grapple with questions about which flags should be displayed on public property.

Some municipalities have embraced Pride flag displays as symbols of inclusion and support for LGBTQ residents. Others have adopted policies prohibiting them altogether.

For now, Webster has joined the latter group.

With the board's vote now finalized, the Pride flag has been removed from Town Hall property leaving the American and New York State flags as the only banners authorized to fly over municipal grounds under the town's new policy.

State News

Beating the Meter and the Pump: Taking Control of Your Energy Costs- Cont. from Cover

Sumit Majumdar
Limited Partner, Verite Capital Partners
Lead Director, Energy and Agriculture Sectors

#1. The Small Stuff: Plugging the Leaks at Home

Before spending a dime on major upgrades, the first step is tightening up how we run our homes. Heating and cooling demand the lion's share of our energy, but "vampire" loads and inefficient settings silently drain our wallets.

We can systematically attack these sectors. Putting entertainment centers on smart power strips cuts "phantom draw." Dropping your water heater from 140°F to 120°F prevents scalding and saves natural gas. Simply setting a programmable thermostat to dial back 7–10 degrees for the eight hours you are asleep or away can cut heating and cooling costs by up to 10% annually. Finally, cheap weatherstripping immediately reduces the workload on your furnace.

Smart power strips that eliminate phantom draw typically cost between $20 and $40 and can save approximately $40 to $60 annually on electricity costs. Setting a thermostat back 7 to 10 degrees while away or sleeping costs nothing and can save an estimated $80 to $120 annually on heating expenses. Lowering a water heater temperature to 120°F also costs nothing and can save approximately $30 to $50 per year. DIY weatherstripping and caulking generally cost between $15 and $30 and can save roughly $50 to $90 annually. Combined, these measures can be implemented for under $70 and may save up to $320 per year.

#2. Hitting the Pump: The Gasoline Factor

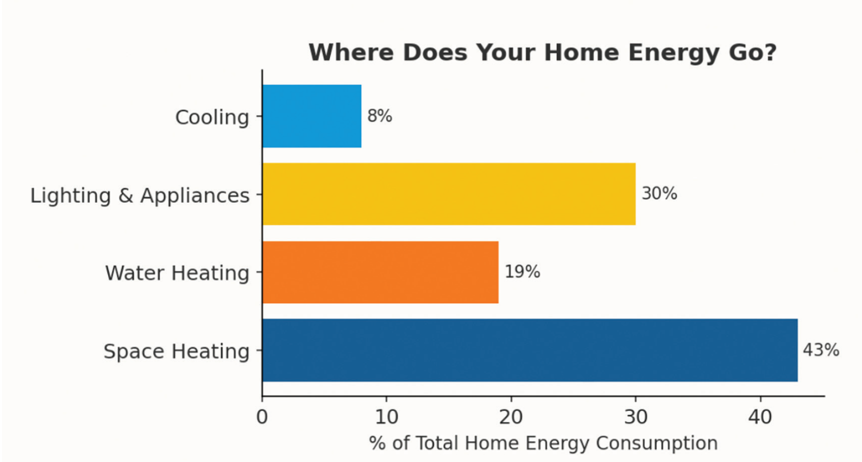
We focus so intensely on the meter attached to the side of our house that we frequently ignore the pump at the corner store. For many families in Western New York, commuting and driving actually account for the largest single slice of the household energy pie.

You don't need to buy an EV tomorrow to save money on gas today. Modifying how you drive on the I-190 or I-290 yields immediate financial returns. Every 5 mph you drive over 50 mph is equivalent to paying an extra $0.30 per gallon for gas. Furthermore, under-inflated tires lower gas mileage by about 0.2% for every 1 psi drop in pressure of all four tires. Cutting out unnecessary idling—which consumes up to a half-gallon of fuel per hour—keeps money directly in your checking account.

Observing highway speed limits reduces aerodynamic drag significantly above 50 mph and can save an estimated $150 to $250 annually for someone driving 15,000 miles per year. Maintaining proper tire pressure reduces rolling resistance and can save approximately $40 to $60 annually. Eliminating extended idling stops burning between 0.2 and 0.5 gallons of fuel per hour and can save roughly $50 to $80 annually. Together, these behavioral changes can save up to $390 per year.

#3. Bringing in the Heavy Hitters: NYS and Utility Incentives

Once your habits are locked in, it's time to look at your infrastructure. In 2026, the landscape of home energy rebates in New York is arguably the most robust it has ever been. Millions of dollars are allocated to help residents lower the strain on the grid. If you aren't tapping into these programs, you are leaving money on the table.



Visual 1: Typical home energy expenditure breakdown. Space heating is the primary target for cost reduction.

NYSERDA's EmPower+ Program

For low- and moderate-income New Yorkers, EmPower+ is the gold standard. It focuses on whole-home performance. Low-income households can qualify for up to $10,000 in no-cost energy efficiency improvements, while moderate-income households can access up to $5,000. These funds cover core improvements like attic and wall insulation, which is the single most effective way to permanently slash natural gas heating costs.

National Grid & Federal Programs

National Grid offers direct rebates for upgrading to high-efficiency gas systems and heat pumps. Additionally, their ConnectedSolutions program actually pays you annually for allowing slight smart thermostat adjustments during peak grid demand. Stack these with the Federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) credits, and infrastructure upgrades become incredibly viable.

The EmPower+ Program through NYSERDA provides between $5,000 and $10,000 for insulation, air sealing, and replacement of inefficient appliances. National Grid offers high-efficiency equipment rebates typically ranging from $500 to more than $1,000 for furnaces, boilers, and heat pump water heaters. National Grid's ConnectedSolutions Program provides ongoing annual payments of approximately $25 for participation through smart thermostats. The Federal IRA Energy Efficient Home Credit can provide up to $2,000 per year, equal to 30% of eligible costs, for improvements such as cold-climate heat pumps, panel upgrades, and doors.

The Bottom Line: Compounding Your Savings

We are not at the mercy of the utility companies or global oil markets. By combining disciplined daily habits in the home and on the road, alongside the strategic use of state and utility-funded rebate programs, we can permanently lower our baseload energy requirements.

Take Action: It takes one weekend of caulking, a minor thermostat adjustment, checking your tire pressure, and a single phone call to schedule a free home energy assessment to get started. The energy market will do what it does—but we can choose to buy less of it.

Bill Removing 'Mother' and 'Father' in New York Law Heads to Hochul's Desk Cont. from Cover

Staff Reports

Democrats argue the changes are intended to make state law more inclusive and reflective of different family structures. Republicans, however, view the proposal as an unnecessary rewriting of longstanding legal terminology and another example of Albany Democrats prioritizing ideological issues over concerns facing many New Yorkers.

The bill now heads to Hochul who has increasingly found herself balancing pressure from progressive lawmakers and activists while campaigning for reelection.

During a recent news conference, Hochul said she had not yet reviewed the legislation and declined to indicate whether she supports or opposes it.

"I have until the end of the year to review them and make a decision, so I won't be commenting on pending legislation," said Hochul.

The proposal emerged during a legislative session that saw Democrats advance a number of measures focused on social and cultural issues. Republicans emerged from the session critical of democrats, arguing that they spent too much time on symbolic legislation and not enough on affordability, public safety and the state's ongoing population decline.

New York Republicans Criticizes Hochul

Republican gubernatorial candidate Bruce Blakeman quickly seized on the bill, framing it as part of a broader trend in New York politics.

"In Kathy Hochul's New York, 'mom' is now defined as 'gestating parent,'" Blakeman wrote. "Not when I'm Governor! I'll stand up for moms and dads against this insanity."

Blakeman also connected the legislation directly to Hochul's leadership.

"This bill is a continuation of Hochul's war on families, and I won't stop fighting until we take New York back," he added.

The proposal has also drawn criticism from other Republicans who argue the terminology changes diminish the traditional roles of mothers and fathers.

Representative Claudia Tenney criticized the legislation shortly after its passage.

"The party that can't define a woman is now rewriting New York law to erase mothers and fathers. Only in Albany could 'mom' and 'dad' become too controversial," said Tenney.

Hochul's decision on whether to sign the bill is likely to draw attention regardless of what she chooses as cultural issues continue to play an increasing role in this election cycle.

Liberal Democrats Pass Data Center Moratorium, Putting New York Tech Investment on Hold

Staff Reports

New York lawmakers have approved a controversial one-year moratorium on large-scale data center development, a move backed by liberal Democrats and environmental groups that opponents say could cost the state jobs, investment and a competitive edge in one of the fastest-growing industries in the world.

The legislation now heads to Governor Kathy Hochul whose administration has expressed concerns about data center growth but has not yet committed to signing the measure into law.

However, Albany insiders say that the legislation's change from a three year moratorium to one year was to appease Hochul into signing the bill.

If approved by the governor, the Responsible Data Center Development Act would temporarily halt new permits for data centers requiring 20 megawatts or more of electricity. The legislation would also impose new regulations on utilities, energy usage, labor standards and community benefit requirements.

Democrats argue the pause is necessary to study the impact of data centers on New York's electric grid, water supplies and environment.

Republicans and business leaders throughout New York see it differently.

At a time when states across the country are competing to attract artificial intelligence infrastructure, cloud computing facilities and technology investment, opponents warn that New York is sending a message that major projects are not welcome.

The New York Independent System Operator currently has 24 proposed data center projects under review representing more than 9,000 megawatts of potential demand.

Those projects represent billions of dollars in possible private investment, thousands of construction jobs and significant future tax revenue.

Nevertheless, Democratic lawmakers pushed the moratorium forward before leaving Albany.

State Senator Jeremy Zellner from Western New York argued that lawmakers need additional time to evaluate questions surrounding electricity demand and water usage before allowing major projects to move forward.

"We've got to have answers as to how much electricity is going to be coming here," said Zellner. "What is going to happen with that closed-loop water system with the chemicals, how do they flush that system? And I think that this moratorium pauses things right now so that we can ask those questions, get them answered and put some guardrails in across the state."

Even so, business groups and technology advocates have warned that temporary moratoriums often create long-term uncertainty for investors looking to commit billions of dollars to infrastructure projects.

The legislation was sponsored in the Senate by Democratic Senator Kristen Gonzalez who has become one of the leading voices behind efforts to slow data center development.

Gonzalez argued that unchecked growth could place additional strain on New York's power grid.

"Technology should improve peoples' lives, not drive up our energy bills or exhaust our natural resources and increase pollution," said Gonzalez.

The bill requires the Department of Environmental Conservation to conduct studies examining the impact of data centers on water supplies, farmland, electronic waste and environmental conditions.

It also creates a separate utility rate classification for large facilities so companies pay for infrastructure upgrades associated with their projects rather than shifting costs onto residential customers.

Democrats insist those measures are necessary protections. For now, the bill's future rests with Hochul.

National News

Trump Administration Launches Largest Denaturalization Effort in U.S. History, Targets 17 Naturalized Citizens

Staff Reports

The Trump administration has launched what officials describe as the largest denaturalization effort ever undertaken by the federal government, filing legal actions against 17 naturalized U.S. citizens accused of fraud, serious criminal conduct or allegedly obtaining citizenship under false pretenses.

The announcement, made on Monday, June 8th by the U.S. Department of Justice, marks a significant expansion of the administration's efforts to strip citizenship from foreign-born Americans who federal authorities believe were never legally entitled to naturalization.

The move is part of a broader immigration enforcement strategy pursued since President Donald Trump returned to office, with administration officials arguing that citizenship obtained through deception should not be allowed to stand.

Denaturalization – the legal process of revoking U.S. citizenship – is relatively rare in American history. Federal law allows the government to seek removal of citizenship from naturalized Americans if prosecutors can prove they obtained it through fraud, concealment of material facts or other forms of misrepresentation.

Historically, however, the process has been used sparingly because of the high legal burden involved. Government attorneys must convince a federal judge that citizenship was improperly granted and should be revoked.

According to historical data, the Justice Department filed an average of only 11 denaturalization cases annually between 1990 and 2017.

That pace has accelerated significantly under the current administration.

Earlier this year, federal officials expanded the categories of cases that could be prioritized for denaturalization proceedings. Last month, the administration announced a dozen denaturalization actions, which at the time represented one of the largest such initiatives in recent memory.

The latest round adds 17 more cases and represents the largest coordinated denaturalization effort publicly announced by federal officials.

According to court filings, the individuals targeted include people convicted of serious criminal offenses including crimes involving children as well as others accused of immigration fraud, financial crimes and identity-related offenses.

Justice Department attorneys argue that many of the individuals either concealed criminal activity during the naturalization process or failed to meet legal requirements necessary to become American citizens.

Among those identified in court filings are a Haitian immigrant accused of sexually abusing his daughter, a man from the former Yugoslavia convicted of sexually abusing a child under 15, a Mexican immigrant convicted of receiving sexually explicit images of minors, a former Catholic priest from Colombia accused of child sexual abuse and a Filipino-born man who pleaded guilty to a child sex crime.

Federal officials have also targeted an Indian immigrant accused of submitting fraudulent H-1B visa petitions, the daughter of a Colombian drug trafficker accused of money laundering, a Jamaican-born man convicted of wire fraud, a Cuban-born woman accused of defrauding a tribal casino and several individuals accused of using false identities during the immigration process.

In announcing the new cases, Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said federal authorities would aggressively pursue those who allegedly manipulated the immigration system.

"Criminal aliens are lying about their past crimes, including drug dealers, sexual predators, and fraudsters," said Blanche.

Administration officials say the effort is intended to preserve the integrity of the naturalization process and ensure that individuals who obtained citizenship unlawfully do not retain the benefits associated with it.

The Department of Homeland Security echoed that message following the announcement.

Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin said the administration intends to continue using every available legal tool to pursue individuals who allegedly deceived immigration authorities.

"American citizenship is a privilege, and it must be earned honestly. If you come here, break our laws, and lie in your immigration proceedings, you forfeit that privilege," said Mullin.

The expansion of denaturalization efforts has generated both support and criticism among immigration experts, legal scholars and advocacy organizations.

Supporters argue that individuals who obtained citizenship through fraud never had a lawful claim to it and that the government has an obligation to protect the integrity of the immigration system.

Democrats and other critics, however, have warned that large-scale denaturalization efforts could create uncertainty for naturalized citizens and raise concerns about how broadly federal authorities may apply the law.

Unlike deportation proceedings involving non-citizens, denaturalization cases target individuals who have already completed the naturalization process and obtained full American citizenship.

Those accused are entitled to challenge the government's allegations in federal court.

The administration's lawsuits do not automatically revoke citizenship. Instead, judges must review evidence presented by both sides before determining whether citizenship should be stripped.

If the government prevails, affected individuals lose all rights and protections associated with U.S. citizenship.

In most cases, a person who is denaturalized reverts to the immigration status they held before becoming a citizen, often lawful permanent resident status. Once citizenship is revoked, however, the individual may become subject to removal proceedings and potential deportation.

The administration has argued that denaturalization should be reserved for cases involving fraud, serious criminal conduct or significant deception during the immigration process.

Federal officials maintain that the latest cases involve individuals who either concealed information that would have disqualified them from citizenship or engaged in conduct demonstrating they did not satisfy the legal standards required for naturalization.

For now, the Justice Department says it will continue reviewing additional cases as part of what has become the most aggressive denaturalization campaign in modern American history.

New Poll Shows Trump Approval Rating Remains Near Career Low as Americans Worry About Economy and Gas Prices

Staff Reports

President Donald Trump's approval rating remains near the lowest levels of his political career according to a newly released national survey. The polling highlights continued voter concern over inflation, fuel costs and the economic impact of the ongoing conflict involving Iran.

The Reuters/Ipsos poll, released June 8th, found that 35% of Americans approve of Trump's performance in office. The figure is largely unchanged from similar surveys conducted in April and May and remains close to the lowest approval ratings recorded during his first term in office.

The survey, which questioned 4,531 Americans nationwide, found that economic concerns continue to dominate public opinion. Rising food prices, elevated gasoline costs and broader concerns about household affordability remain among the primary reasons many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the administration.

The findings suggest that despite improvements in some areas of the economy, many Americans continue to feel financial pressure in their day-to-day lives.

One of the most significant concerns identified in the poll involves energy prices.

Nearly six in ten Americans surveyed said they expect gasoline prices to increase over the next year. Only a small percentage believe fuel prices will decline while nearly a quarter remain uncertain about where prices are headed.

Those concerns come as geopolitical tensions in the Middle East continue to influence energy markets. Ongoing instability and fears of supply disruptions have contributed to uncertainty about future fuel costs, which economists say could affect household budgets and consumer spending patterns throughout the remainder of the year.

The survey found particularly weak support for Trump's handling of cost-of-living issues.

Just 22% of respondents approved of the administration's management of household affordability while roughly 70% disapproved.

Those numbers are lower than the ratings received by former President Joe Biden on the same issue at the conclusion of his presidency, indicating that voters continue to view inflation and household costs as major challenges regardless of which party occupies the White House.

However, that is probably little comfort to Trump.

Economic anxieties reflected in the poll mirror broader consumer sentiment trends.

Recent economic reports have shown consumer confidence softening as Americans continue to wrestle with elevated prices and uncertainty surrounding future economic conditions.

Analysts say consumers have not dramatically reduced spending yet, but there are signs that many households are becoming more cautious.

Economic researchers note that gasoline prices could become a particularly important factor during the summer travel season and the back-to-school shopping period later this year. If fuel prices remain elevated, many families may be forced to reduce discretionary spending in other areas.

The survey also examined public opinion regarding the United States' military involvement in Iran.

Results showed that public support for the military campaign remains limited.

Only about 36% of respondents said they approve of U.S. strikes against Iran while an even smaller percentage believe the benefits of the military action have outweighed the financial and strategic costs.

The poll also offered an early snapshot of voter attitudes heading into future congressional elections.

If elections were held today, surveyed voters indicated a slight preference for Democratic candidates over Republican candidates.

The findings represent a notable shift from polls conducted during previous election cycles when Republicans often maintained a clearer advantage on economic issues.

The latest results suggest that neither party currently holds a commanding lead when voters are asked which side has a better plan for the nation's economy.

Republicans maintain a narrow edge on that question, but the gap has largely disappeared as economic frustrations continue to affect voters across party lines.

Political analysts caution that approval ratings can fluctuate significantly based on economic conditions, international events and developments closer to election season.

A .25 to .50 cent drop in gas could be the difference between Republicans maintaining the House of Representatives and Democrats flipping it.

You just never know.

CRIME BLOTTER

CRIME REPORTS PUBLISHED BY NIAGARA ACTION OVER THE LAST WEEK

-North Tonawanda Mother Calls Police After Daughter Consumed Gasoline and Marijuana. Law enforcement received a call around 8:08pm on June 2nd after reports of a medical emergency in North Tonawanda. The 911 caller stated that her daughter has consumed "ample amounts" of gasoline and marijuana. The daughter was exhibiting symptoms of being under the influence of drugs and was ill. Police and emergency medical services responded to the scene. The female received medical assistance. It is unknown if she was transported to a local hospital. No further information is available at this time.

-Water Gun Drama Turns Violent as Group Tries to Drag Girl from Car in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 12:11am on June 3rd after reports of a disturbance on the 500 block of 22nd Street in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller stated that four women are trying to fight her over the "water gun dispute" that occurred earlier in the shift. The females were currently trying to pull her out of her vehicle where she was hiding while calling police. The water gun dispute turned violent earlier in the day requiring police involvement as well, with this incident being the second-related call. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the females were still there when law enforcement arrived and if any arrests took place. No further information is available at this time.

-McNasty: Customer Spits in Worker's Face During Late-night Food Run in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 11:27pm on June 4th after reports of an assault and disorderly conduct at McDonald's on Pine Avenue in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller, an employee at the restaurant, told police that an unknown male – described as a light skinned with tattoos on his face wearing a reflective vest – spit on them, possibly in their face, and refused to leave. He was argumentative with the 911 caller. However, the call does not elaborate as to what their disagreement was about. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the male was still at the location when they arrived. No further information is available at this time.

-Man Climbs Out Window to Escape Roommate and his Shotgun in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 7:44pm on June 4th after reports of menacing with a weapon on 79th Street in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that his roommate threatened to shoot him with a shotgun in the foot. Dispatch remained on the phone with the caller throughout the encounter. He climbed through a back window to exit the house due to fearing for his safety. The shotgun remained inside the home with his roommate. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the suspect was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Niagara Falls Driver Draws Police Attention Drinking Ice-cold Beer at Gas Pump. Law enforcement received a call around 12:30pm on June 5th after reports of drinking and driving at Delta Sonic on Niagara Falls Boulevard in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that there was a "male at pump 8" drinking a large can of Natural Ice beer while pumping his gas. The caller further told police that he arrived in a grey Ford fusion. Police responded to the scene. Law enforcement did arrive while the male was still at the location. It is unknown if he was arrested and taken into custody. No further information is available at this time.

-Buffalo Police Called After Woman Removes Pants, Takes Off Dirty Diaper on Sidewalk. Law enforcement received a call around 5:21pm on June 5th after reports of indecent exposure in the area Highland Parkway and Colvin in Buffalo, New York. The 911 caller stated that a female in her 60's pulled her pants down, ripped off her adult diaper, and left it on the sidewalk. She then walked away wearing only a shirt. The caller did note that she had a walking stick. The diaper was not new. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the woman was located and, if so, whether she was transported for mental health treatment. No further information is available at this time.

-Rent Money Gone, Weave Gone, Boyfriend Gone: Niagara Falls Woman Calls Police. Law enforcement received a call around 3am on June 6th after reports of a domestic incident and larceny on Portage Road in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that her boyfriend took her rent money and hair weave before leaving the apartment on foot. She believed he had no intention of returning. He was described as a black male wearing a white t-shirt, green suede pants, and a carrying a red suitcase. He was walking towards either the train station or bus station. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the male was located and, if so, whether he was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Armed Robber Gets Away from 7-Eleven with Cash in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 1:28am on June 5th after reports of an armed robbery at the 7-Eleven on Niagara Falls Boulevard in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that a white male, 5'7" wearing a blue Carhart and cargo shorts, came in and threatened use of a firearm. He took an unknown amount of cash and was last seen running into Cayuga Village across the street. No one was harmed during the encounter. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the suspect was located. No further information is available at this time.

-Uber Driver Holds 18-year-old Girl Hostage in North Tonawanda for Sexual Favors. Law enforcement received a call around 3:57pm on June 6th after reports of a hostage situation in North Tonawanda on 8th Avenue. The 911 caller, who was described as an 18-year-old by police, told dispatch that he Uber driver was "holding her hostage" trying to arrange payment outside of the app. According to the call, this sounded to be something of a sexual nature. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the 18-year-old was still being held in the vehicle when law enforcement arrived. The suspect's identity is known to police. No further information is available at this time.

*-**Kid Threatens to Shoot up Home Over Gift Cards and Pokemon Cards in Niagara Falls.*** Law enforcement received a call around 9:22pm on June 7th after reports of menacing with a weapon on the 1900 block of Mackenna Avenue in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that a black male wearing a red shirt and riding a purple mountain bike threatened to get a gun and another person and come back to the house and "shoot it up." The suspect thinks that the caller has his gift card(s) and Pokémon cards. The caller, however, says that she gave them back to him. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the suspect and his purple mountain bike were still at the scene when law enforcement arrived. No further information is available at this time.

-Victim of Stabbing with Warrants Flees Niagara Falls Police. Law enforcement received a call around 10:06pm on June 7th after reports of a stabbing on Walnut avenue in Niagara Falls. Multiple units were originally called to this location for a male who was stabbed. However, the party that was stabbed then started running down the street. Dispatch described him as a white male, bald, running down Ferry Avenue with no shirt on. Officers were aware of his name and that he had an active warrant. He was bleeding as he ran. Police were actively engaged in a manhunt during the call. It is unknown if the male was apprehended. No further information is available at this time.

-Kids Get Drunk and Start Food Fights at Niagara Falls McDonalds. Law enforcement received a call around 2:50am on June 7th after reports of a public disturbance at McDonalds on Delaware Avenue and Sheridan Drive. The 911 caller, who is also an employee, told police that there are several juveniles in the lobby drinking alcohol and having "food fights." All parties refused to leave when asked to do so by employees and management. They merely threw more food. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the juveniles were still on scene when police arrived. No further information is available at this time.

-Mother Calls Police on Autistic Daughter After Violent Stabbing. Law enforcement received a call around 71:43pm on June 8th after reports of a domestic disturbance and assault on Sheridan Drive in Tonawanda. The 911 caller, and mother of the suspect, told police that her 30-year-old autistic daughter stabbed her in the arm. The caller reported that her autistic daughter was being aggressive and wished for her to be removed from the home. Dispatch referred to the mother as an "older woman," likely in her 60's. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the autistic daughter was removed from the home and taken for mental health treatment or of she was arrested and charged with a crime. No further information is available at this time.

Woman Carjacked at Gunpoint by Masked Group Outside Wegmans

Staff Reports

A woman was robbed of her vehicle at gunpoint Wednesday night, June 3rd, in the parking lot of the Wegmans on Transit Road in Williamsville according to police dispatch information and witness accounts.

The incident, which reportedly involved multiple masked suspects, sparked immediate panic among shoppers and the community as details circulated on social media and emergency communications.

According to information provided during a police dispatch call, officers were sent to the Wegmans parking lot following reports of an armed carjacking.

Investigators were told that a woman had been confronted by several masked males shortly after returning to her vehicle.

The suspects arrived in a BMW and approached the victim in the parking lot before displaying both a handgun and a knife.

Police were informed that the suspects took the woman's keys and fled the scene in her black BMW sedan.

Authorities said the group left in two separate vehicles, including the stolen BMW and another vehicle described as a black Honda. Dispatch information also referenced a gray BMW sedan associated with the suspects.

Responding officers were told their direction of travel as the vehicles left the parking lot and headed along Transit Road.

The woman was not harmed during the encounter.

The brazen nature of the crime generated significant reaction online, particularly because it occurred in a busy commercial area frequently visited by families and shoppers.

One witness who claimed to have observed the incident described seeing a group of masked men waiting for the victim before confronting her and taking her vehicle at gunpoint.

The witness said the incident changed their perception of safety while shopping at night and urged others to remain alert and aware of their surroundings. The witness also stated that police indicated similar incidents have become more common in recent months.

Vehicle thefts have become a growing concern throughout Western New York with law enforcement agencies regularly reporting stolen vehicles recovered across Niagara and counties.

However, while many vehicle thefts occur when owners are asleep or away from their vehicles, armed carjackings involving direct confrontations with victims remain far less common.

Over the past several years, local police have responded to numerous calls from individuals who reported feeling followed or suspiciously watched while shopping at area retail destinations.

Niagara Action has reported several of these instances at shopping plazas in Niagara Falls after women commented on posts published to our social media page. They described first-hand accounts of being followed and even of males attempting to get them to enter their vehicles.

Police have not yet released information regarding possible arrests or whether the suspects have been identified.

Investigators are expected to review surveillance footage from Wegmans.

The investigation remains ongoing.

Anyone who witnessed the incident or has information related to the incident is asked to contact local law enforcement.

Former North Tonawanda Bus Driver Arrested on Multiple Felony Child Exploitation Charges

Staff Reports

A North Tonawanda man who worked as a school bus driver is facing multiple felony charges after a joint investigation involving local law enforcement and federal authorities allegedly uncovered a large collection of child sexual abuse material during searches of two city properties.

The investigation concluded on Friday, June 5th when members of the North Tonawanda Police Department and Homeland Security Investigations executed search warrants at residences on Payne Avenue and Vandervoort Street.

According to police, investigators targeted 26-year-old Nicholas Macdonald during the operation.

Authorities said Macdonald was detained while officers carried out the searches and seized electronic devices and other digital evidence for examination.

Following a review of that evidence, investigators reported discovering what they described as a substantial quantity of photographs and videos depicting child sexual abuse material. Police said some of the files allegedly involved prepubescent children.

As a result of the investigation, Macdonald was charged with two sexually motivated felony counts of promoting a sexual performance by a child and two felony counts of possessing a sexual performance by a child.

The charges stem from allegations that Macdonald both possessed and promoted illegal material involving minors.

After being taken into custody, Macdonald was transported to the North Tonawanda Police Department for processing before being held pending arraignment proceedings.

Police said the investigation revealed that Macdonald had been employed as a bus driver for Transpo Bus Services LLC.

According to a statement released by the department, the company terminated Macdonald's employment immediately after learning of his arrest and has been cooperating fully with investigators throughout the case.

The arrest has raised additional concerns because of Macdonald's position transporting students, although police have not announced any allegations involving children connected to his employment.

Investigators have not released details regarding how long Macdonald worked as a bus driver or whether the investigation uncovered any evidence suggesting criminal conduct beyond the possession and promotion charges already filed.

During an arraignment in North Tonawanda City Court, a judge ordered Macdonald held on bail set at $30,000 cash or $300,000 bond.

North Tonawanda police are asking anyone who may have information relevant to the investigation or information regarding Macdonald to contact the department's Detective Bureau at (716) 692-4312.

The investigation remains ongoing.

THE TRUE COST OF ENERGY: Navigating High Fuel Prices in WNY

Sumit Majumdar
Limited Partner, Verite Capital Partners
Lead Director, Energy and Agriculture Sectors

We are operating in an era of engineered scarcity. The current trajectory of the fuel market—characterized by stubbornly high prices at the pump, volatile natural gas futures, and soaring electricity rates—is not solely the byproduct of geopolitical conflict. It is the direct result of structural underinvestment in refining capacity, compounded by aggressive state-level regulatory policies that penalize fossil fuel infrastructure before viable alternatives are deployed at scale.

THE GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND CRUDE FUTURES

Global crude oil futures are signaling sustained tightness. While prompt-month WTI and Brent crude experience daily volatility based on Red Sea shipping disruptions or OPEC+ quotas, the long-term futures curve indicates that the "floor" for crude oil has structurally shifted higher. The market is pricing in a sustained geopolitical risk premium because spare production capacity is razor-thin.

"We are looking at a structural deficit in the second half of the year. The lack of investment in upstream exploration means any supply shock immediately translates to a sustained price spike." — Daan Struyven, Head of Oil Research, Goldman Sachs

"The era of cheap energy is behind us. We must prepare for higher baseline prices as the global energy map is redrawn by both policy and conflict." — Fatih Birol, Executive Director, IEA

"You cannot wish away the need for oil and gas. Prematurely starving the capital markets of fossil fuel investments is a recipe for immense economic pain." — Jamie Dimon, CEO, JPMorgan Chase

REFINING CAPACITY: THE BOTTLENECK WE CREATED

Even if crude oil flooded the market tomorrow, gasoline and diesel prices would remain high due to refining bottlenecks. Since 2019, the United States has lost over 1.3 million barrels per day of refining capacity. Facilities were shuttered during the pandemic and never reopened, largely due to the prohibitive costs of retrofitting aging plants to meet new environmental regulations.

"The downstream sector is structurally tight. We simply do not have the buffer we had five years ago to absorb seasonal maintenance or hurricane disruptions." — Amrita Sen, Founder & Director of Research, Energy Aspects

"We are running our remaining refineries at maximum utilization, but policy headwinds are actively discouraging the deployment of new downstream capital." — Mike Sommers, President, API

This dynamic is exacerbated in New York. State leadership has actively blocked the expansion of natural gas pipelines and forced the retirement of peaking plants without equivalent baseload replacements. PADD 1 (the East Coast refining district) has seen its capacity decimated over the last decade. When you cut down regional refining and block pipeline transit, the region must import refined products via maritime shipping (Jones Act vessels) or long-haul trucking, layering massive logistical costs onto the consumer.

THE IMPACT ON WESTERN NEW YORK

In Western New York, this isn't just macroeconomic theory; it hits household ledgers directly. Our region is highly dependent on natural gas for winter heating. The New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) mandates aggressive shifts away from natural gas. By restricting new gas hookups and imposing fees on existing infrastructure, the state has effectively created a premium on thermal energy.

Furthermore, WNY is a commuter-heavy region. With limited public transit options outside the immediate Buffalo metro core, residents from the Southtowns, Northtowns, and Niagara County rely on passenger vehicles. The commuter fuel burden index has spiked 40% since 2020. High diesel prices also inflate the cost of every good delivered to local grocery store shelves.

STUDY HIGHLIGHT: THE CLCPA FINANCIAL IMPACT

A recent economic analysis by the Empire Center for Public Policy modeled the impact of New York's CLCPA mandates. The study concluded that restricting natural gas pipeline expansions into Upstate NY creates artificial scarcity, potentially driving utility bills up by 30-40% during peak winter months, disproportionately affecting working-class families in regions like Buffalo and Rochester.

"The Northeast is uniquely vulnerable. When you constrict pipeline capacity and lose regional refiners, any cold snap or supply hiccup sends localized prices through the roof. Consumers in New York are paying a massive policy premium." — Patrick De Haan, Head of Petroleum Analysis, GasBuddy

THE EV ILLUSION: THE REAL COST OF SUPERCHARGING

For years, the pivot to Electric Vehicles (EVs) was sold not just as an environmental imperative, but as a financial bargain. "Never pay for gas again," the marketing promised. But as EV adoption has scaled, the underlying economics have quietly inverted.

STUDY HIGHLIGHT: NBER ON EV CHARGING ECONOMICS

A comprehensive working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) analyzed the real-world charging behaviors of EV owners. It found that while home charging remains competitive, reliance on commercial fast chargers (DCFC) completely erodes the operating cost advantage of EVs compared to modern, highly efficient internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

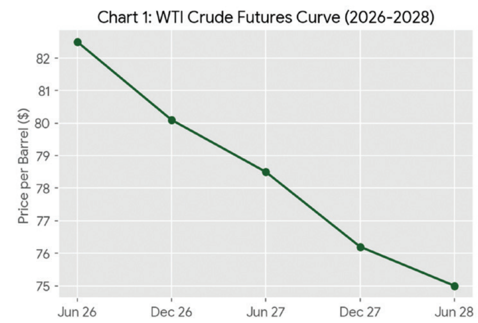
If you own a home in WNY with an off-peak charging setup, an EV remains cost-effective. However, if you rely on public infrastructure like a Tesla Supercharger, the math is brutal. In New York, Supercharger rates routinely hit 40 to 48 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) during peak times, plus idle fees. When factoring in highway driving efficiency (which degrades EV range by 15-20%), the cost to drive 100 miles using a Supercharger is now equal to, and sometimes greater than, putting gasoline in a hybrid or efficient ICE vehicle.

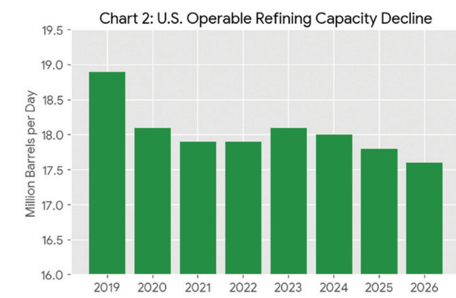
Electricity is a commodity subject to the same grid pressures as any other fuel. As New York decommissions firm generation (nuclear and gas) in favor of intermittent renewables, the baseload cost of electricity will rise. EVs are not immune to inflation; they are simply shifting the fuel source from the gas pump to the grid.

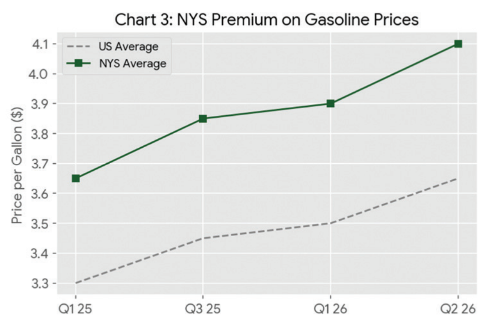
The path forward requires pragmatism, not ideology. We need an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy that includes maintaining robust domestic refining capacity, expanding transitional natural gas infrastructure for cold-weather regions like WNY, and adopting realistic timelines for grid modernization. Until policy aligns with physics and economics, consumers will continue to bear the heavy burden of high energy prices.

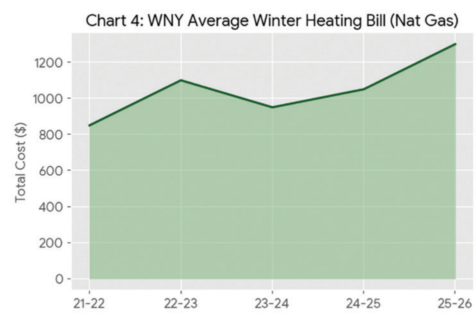
THE REAL BARGAIN?

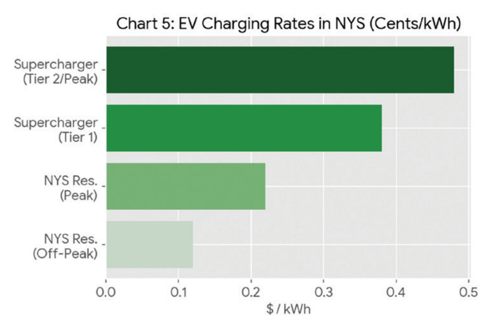
In the meantime, the truest hedge against energy inflation requires zero technological breakthroughs: Carpool when you can. Take the bus, or better yet, walk or ride your bike. Who needs GLP-1s if you can do it the old-fashioned way?

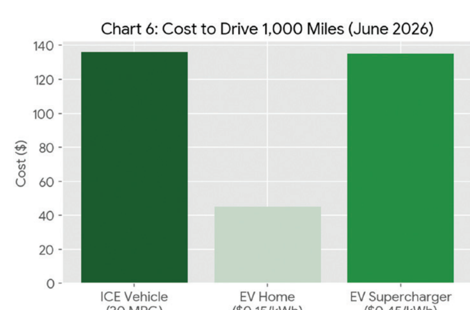


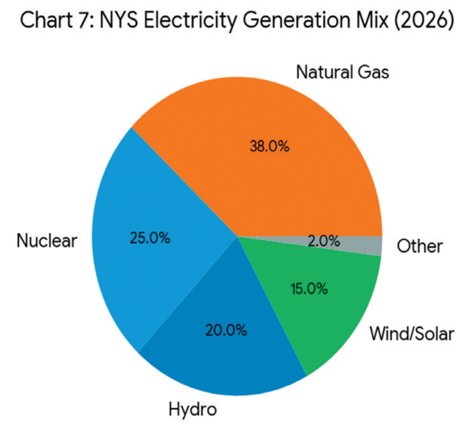


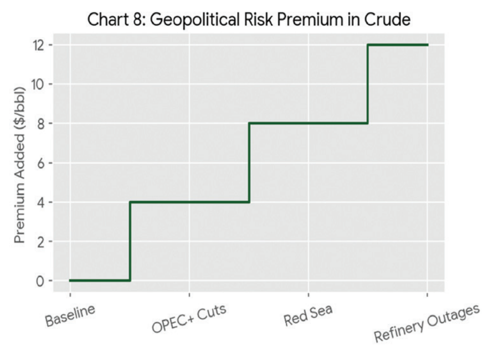


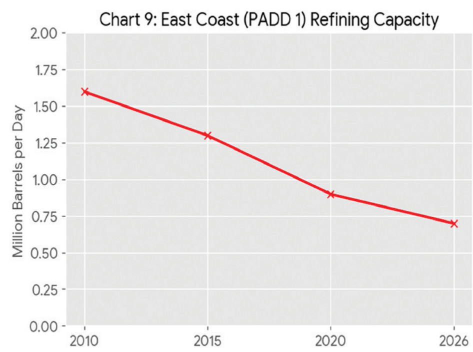


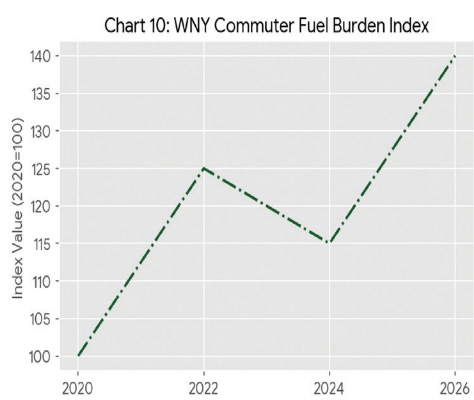












About the Author:
Sumit Majumdar is a Limited Partner at Verite Capital Partners and Lead Director for Energy and Agriculture. For over 20 years, he has been a leading voice in the fight against climate change, specializing in practical solutions for reducing carbon and methane emissions through sustainable fuel technology and industrial oversight.

FINANCIAL MARKETS & COMMODITIES

STOCK MARKET INDEXES

DOW JONES	50,866.78
NASDAQ	25,709.43
S&P 500	7,383.74
TSX (CANADA)	34,413.45
NIKKEI 225	66,588.12
SSE (CHINA)	4,027.74
FTSE 100 (UK)	10,368.05

METALS COMMODITIES

GOLD	$4,339.61 per troy oz.
SILVER	68.57 per troy oz.
COPPER	$13,731 per metric ton
PLATINUM	$1,792.90 per troy oz.
PALLADIUM	$1,247.25 per troy oz.
TIN	$54,000 per metric ton
NICKEL	$18,545 per metric ton
ZINC	$3,575 per metric ton
ALUMINUM	$3,736 per metric ton

LIVESTOCK

LIVE CATTLE	$2.46 lb.
FEEDER CATTLE	$3.50 lb.
LEAN HOGS	$.96 lb.
BEEF	$392.70 cwt
POULTRY	$1.25 lb.

AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES

COFFEE	$2.465 lb.
SUGAR	$.14 lb.
CORN	$4.17 bushel
SOYBEANS	$11.21 bushel
WHEAT	$5.80 bushel
COTTON	$.77 lb.
FCOJ	$1.64 lb.

ENERGY COMMODITIES

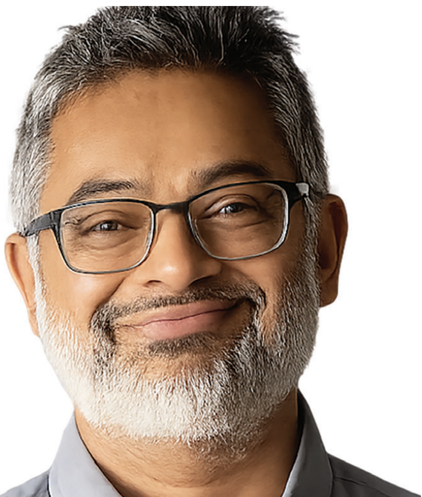
GASOLINE	$4.22 gallon avg.
DIESEL	$5.36 gallon avg.
NATURAL GAS	$3.34 MMBtu
HEATING OIL	$3.605 gallon
WTI (West Texas int.)	$89.93 barrel
BRENT CRUDE	$92.95 barrel
USED COOKING OIL (UCO)	$.78 per lb.

A SNAPSHOT IN TIME

AS OF 6AM MONDAY, JUNE 8TH, 2026

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

The Untapped Potential of Rainwater



Sumit Majumdar
Limited Partner, Verite Capital Partners
Lead Director, Energy and Agriculture Sectors

Having been fortunate enough to live abroad and visit many countries, it struck me as odd not seeing rain barrels or rain ponds here. No one wants standing water and the mosquitoes, but there are some great uses with rainwater, and we can learn about water conservation from our fellow humans that don't have the abundance we have.

Living in Upstate New York, right on the edge of the Great Lakes, we are incredibly lucky. We sit next to one of the largest freshwater reserves on the planet. Our lawns are green, our taps flow freely, and the concept of a severe drought often feels like a distant news headline rather than a local reality. But one should never take water for granted. The illusion of infinite abundance breeds complacency, and environmental stewardship requires us to look beyond our immediate geography.

The Global Reality of Water Scarcity

To understand the urgency of water conservation, we only need to look at the American South, or the severe water shortages facing Arizona and the Colorado River basin. Decades of overuse, agricultural demands, and shifting climate patterns have pushed vital reservoirs like Lake Mead to historic lows. Mandatory water cuts are now a reality for millions of Americans. And outside of the United States, water scarcity is a crippling, daily crisis.

Just because we are in Upstate New York does not mean we are exempt from practicing sound environmental stewardship. Around the world, rainwater harvesting is a standard way of life. In countries like Australia, Germany, and parts of India, collecting rainwater isn't just a hobby for gardeners—it is integrated into building codes, subsidized by governments, and recognized as a critical pillar of national infrastructure.

Better Than the Tap: The Science of Rainwater

Harvesting rainwater isn't just about shaving a few dollars off your municipal water bill—though saving money is certainly a welcome advantage. Rainwater is fundamentally better for your landscape. Municipal tap water is treated with chlorine, fluoride, and other chemicals necessary to make it safe for human consumption. While these chemicals protect us from waterborne pathogens, they are indiscriminate. When applied to a garden, they can strip your soil of beneficial microbes, alter the soil's pH, and stunt plant growth.

Rainwater, by contrast, is naturally soft, highly oxygenated, and completely free of the salts and treatment chemicals found in city water. It contains trace amounts of nitrogen captured from the atmosphere, making it the ultimate natural fertilizer and tonic for your garden, lawns, and potted plants.

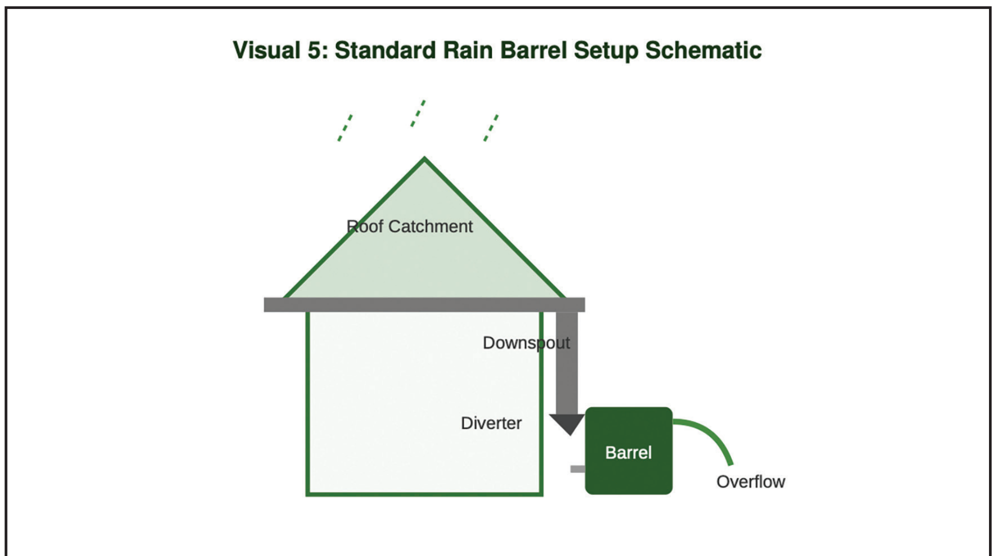
Crucial Limitations: What You CANNOT Use Rainwater For

While the benefits are vast, rainwater collected from residential roofs is not pure spring water. As rain hits your roof, it washes away accumulated debris. Asphalt shingles can leach petroleum compounds, while flashing can contribute trace heavy metals like copper or zinc. Furthermore, wildlife activity guarantees the presence of bacteria.

If you intend to use rainwater for vegetable gardens, apply it strictly to the base of the plant (the soil) using a drip line, rather than spraying it directly onto the foliage or the vegetables themselves.

Beyond the Garden: Advanced Setups and Pools

For the more ambitious homeowner, rainwater can even be used to refill a swimming pool. Through direct-connect retrofits on existing gutter systems or integrated plumbing in new builds, you can route filtered rainwater directly into your pool. This seamlessly offsets natural evaporation losses without ever touching the municipal supply, saving money and reducing the chemical balancing required when adding hard city water.



A standard diverter prevents the barrel from overflowing by routing excess water back into the downspout.

Setting up a rain barrel is remarkably simple and accessible. You can purchase them at any major home improvement store, local garden centers, or online. Often, the best place to start is with local municipal programs or soil and water conservation districts, which frequently sell high-quality barrels at a steep discount. Modern barrels are equipped with fine mesh screens at the intake to completely prevent mosquitoes from breeding, solving the "standing water" worry immediately.

Aesthetics: How to Hide an "Ugly" Rain Barrel

Let's be honest: a large plastic drum isn't always a visual asset to your landscaping. Fortunately, integrating a rain barrel into your yard can be done beautifully. Many manufacturers now design barrels that mimic the look of terra cotta planters, whiskey barrels, or stone obelisks, turning them into architectural features rather than eyesores. If you have a standard industrial barrel, there are creative ways to conceal it.

CAMOUFLAGE TECHNIQUES

The Trellis Trick: Build or buy a custom wooden trellis to place in front of the barrel, and train climbing vines like clematis or ivy to grow over it.

- Cedar Enclosures: Construct a simple cedar slat box or screen around the barrel. Cedar naturally resists rot and blends perfectly with outdoor environments.
- Strategic Planting: Surround the barrel with tall, native ornamental grasses or dense shrubs that obscure it from the street or patio view.

Being a steward of the environment doesn't always require massive industrial shifts or complex policy changes. Sometimes, it starts right at the end of your driveway. By adopting rain barrels, we embrace a smarter, more resourceful way of living—one drop at a time.

Come on WNY, save some of that rain water, you'll be glad you did!

And if you decide to setup a system or already have one, please send us a photo of it and a brief write up on how you did it and what you use the water for.

THE SCIENCE AND SCARCITY OF STAYING COOL: Decoding the Great Refrigerant Transition

Sumit Majumdar

"Why is it that everyone can't wait for summer, and the second it comes, people bitch about the heat? That's when you know you live in WNY. It's like being a Bills or Sabres fan—we have a deep desire to be disappointed and to be stressed."

We see it every year. We endure months of brutal, gray, freezing lake-effect snow, counting down the days until the thermometer cracks 70 degrees. Then, the calendar hits June, the humidity rolls off Lake Erie like a damp wool blanket, and the collective griping begins. But this summer, the stress isn't just existential—it's mechanical. My central air conditioning system decided to celebrate the first heatwave by blowing its main blower motor. One emergency HVAC dispatch and $2,800 later, the motor is spinning again. Yet, the air trickling out of the vents isn't that crisp, bone-chilling cold of yesteryear. It needs a coolant recharge. And that is where the real economic and thermodynamic rabbit hole begins.

A HISTORY OF KEEPING COOL: FROM WET REEDS TO WNY INNOVATION

Humanity's battle against ambient temperature is ancient. Long before complex chemical compressors existed, our ancestors relied on clever phase-change physics and architecture. In ancient Egypt, wealthy citizens hung wet reeds in doorways; the dry desert wind evaporated the water, dropping indoor temperatures significantly. The Romans routed cold mountain water from their vast aqueduct networks directly through the stone walls of their villas, creating early hydronic radiant cooling.

True modern climate control, however, has direct roots right here in Western New York. In 1902, a young engineer named Willis Carrier was tasked with solving a humidity problem at a printing plant in Brooklyn. His solution—which controlled humidity and temperature by looping air across chilled coils—became the world's first modern electrical air conditioner. Crucially, Carrier designed and manufactured much of this revolutionary technology while working for the Buffalo Forge Company in Buffalo, New York. We literally birthed modern air conditioning, which makes our localized suffering during a breakdown all the more ironic.

THE GREAT REFRIGERANT SHIFT: WHY IT DOESN'T FEEL AS COLD

If you've noticed that a brand-new, hyper-efficient AC system doesn't blast that immediate, arctic, tooth-chattering air that your parents' 1985 window unit did, you aren't imagining things. The chemistry of cold has radically transformed due to global environmental accords.

For decades, the undisputed king of cooling was Freon. First came Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) like R-12, followed closely by Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) like R-22. These molecules were engineering miracles: non-toxic, non-flammable, incredibly stable, and possessing phenomenal thermodynamic properties. Unfortunately, their stability was their downfall. When leaked, they floated into the stratosphere, where solar radiation broke them down, releasing chlorine atoms that devoured the ozone layer. The 1987 Montreal Protocol systematically mandated their eradication.

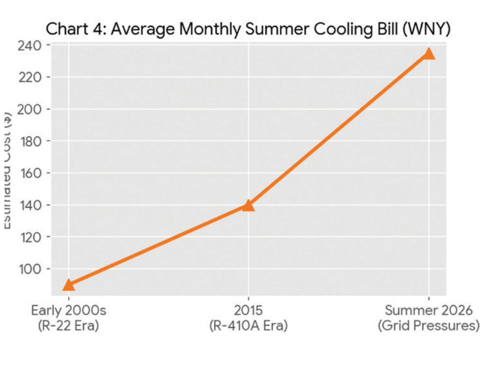
The industry transitioned to Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) like R-410A. While safe for the ozone layer, R-410A turned out to be a potent greenhouse gas, carrying a Global Warming Potential (GWP) over 2,000 times greater than carbon dioxide. This triggered the current regulatory clampdown. Under the EPA's AIM Act, production of R-410A is being slashed, driving a massive transition to next-generation "A2L" refrigerants like R-32 and R-454B.

Why does this make your air feel less intensely cold? It comes down to thermodynamic design and operating pressures. Legacy R-22 systems operated at lower pressures and had an exceptional latent heat capacity, allowing them to drop air temperature rapidly across a compact evaporator coil. Modern eco-coolants operate at vastly higher pressures and require much larger coil surface areas to transfer the same amount of heat. They are engineered to conserve energy over long, steady run cycles rather than delivering that aggressive shock of sub-zero air. They cool your home gently and efficiently, but they lack that raw, immediate "meat locker" punch.

THE MICROECONOMICS OF A BREAKDOWN

When an AC component like a blower motor fails today, the mechanical repair bill is only half the battle. If your system has even a minor leak, the cost of a refrigerant top-off can easily rival the hardware itself. Because the EPA is actively squeezing the supply of older gases, the wholesale market has responded with aggressive, artificially induced price spikes.

If you have an older system running on R-22, a full recharge can quickly run into four figures, shifting a simple maintenance call into an outright capital expenditure decision. Even standard R-410A is feeling the pinch as baseline production drops. Compounding this, the



incoming generation of A2L coolants carries a "mildly flammable" rating, meaning technicians must utilize entirely new, spark-proof recovery machines and specialized tools, driving up structural labor costs across the board.

Navigating this landscape requires balancing long-term infrastructure investment against short-term operational realities. As utilities face grid strains and fuel costs alter generation overhead, the absolute cost to cool a home in WNY continues its upward march. But regardless of whether you're dealing with an aging compressor or waiting out a multi-thousand-dollar system swap, remember that our hot streak is fleeting.

Don't complain about the heat, WNY—or you'll force winter in too quickly.

About the Author:
Sumit Majumdar is a Limited Partner at Verite Capital Partners and Lead Director for Energy and Agriculture. For over 20 years, he has been a leading voice in the fight against climate change, specializing in practical solutions for reducing carbon and methane emissions through sustainable fuel technology and industrial oversight.

Horoscopes, Funnies & Puzzles

SUDOKU

	3			5			1	9
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	6		1	8	2			
	8					3	2	
			7	9		6		

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O B Q B R Q U N I T E D K I N G D O M B A H B H G
U W H M D I I P B H M C N R B V X F P X Y J A X L
S N U I M T H A I L A N D E U P K A Y L G A E T Q
G P I P C P G I T A L Y O C N M G T J N Q R V Q M
C O T T O V M G T P Q J L C I D G X K S D Y M X S
N R P M E L A Q G H J U U B T B Y O F F C T G R A
J T J Q J D A Z W J W F T U E B X T G C Z T A W U
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D H L Y F O A M N J V M B X E P O F U W J O D C B
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B A O S I E X I M X R P G E R M A N Y D L I P C X
X L J O A M P N E T H E R L A N D S X Z M P M G J

UnitedArabEmirates, UnitedKingdom, Italy
UnitedStates, SaudiArabia, Thailand
Netherlands, Portugal, Malaysia
Germany, Austria, France
Turkey, Mexico, Canada
Poland, Greece, Japan
Spain, China

THE INTERACTIVE WNY SUMMER FUN ZONE!

POP QUIZ! (CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER)

1. Why do our days get longer in summer?
A) The sun gets larger
B) Earth's 23.5° axial tilt
C) We ask it nicely

2. What is the Summer Solstice?
A) An indie rock band
B) The day the sun is highest in the sky
C) The day we finally put away the snow shovels

3. Which planet spins backwards?
A) Mars
B) Venus
C) Jupiter

ART CLASS: DRAW YOUR FACE...

...when you realize the sun is setting at 4:30 PM in November:

[Draw Face Here]

WNY SUMMER BINGO

Take this paper outside and cross off these local WNY summer phenomenons as you spot them!

B	I	N	G	O
Someone wearing shorts in 45° weather	A rogue seagull stealing french fries	Complaining it's "too humid"	Smelling cheerios near the waterfront	Getting stuck behind a tractor
Sunburn line from a Buffalo Bills hat	Eating a Wardynski hot dog	**FREE SPACE (You survived Winter)**	Debating if the lake is warm enough yet	Seeing fireworks on a random Tuesday
Grilling in the driveway at 8:30 PM	Pothole the size of a crater	A completely random 10-minute rainstorm	Someone mentions "sponge candy"	Ice cream cone melting instantly

ARIES (March 21 – April 19)
This week encourages steady progress rather than dramatic moves. You may find yourself revisiting a project or decision that deserves a second look. Stay focused on long-term goals and avoid distractions. A practical solution to a lingering problem could appear unexpectedly.

TAURUS (April 20 – May 20)
Relationships and communication take center stage. Whether at work or at home, honest conversations help strengthen important connections. Be willing to listen as much as you speak. A small opportunity could grow into something much more significant over time.

GEMINI (May 21 – June 20)
Your season is nearing its conclusion, making this an excellent time to finish what you started. Confidence remains high, and others are drawn to your energy and ideas. Stay organized as new opportunities emerge. A positive surprise may arrive before week's end.

CANCER (June 21 – July 22)
As your birthday season approaches, you may feel increasingly motivated to focus on personal goals. This is a good week for reflection and preparation. Trust your instincts when making decisions involving family or finances. Quiet progress now lays the groundwork for future success.

LEO (July 23 – August 22)
Teamwork and collaboration bring the best results. Friends, colleagues, or community connections may offer valuable support. Don't be afraid to ask for help when needed. A shared effort could move a project forward faster than expected.

VIRGO (August 23 – September 22)
Professional responsibilities require your attention, but your dedication is paying off. Recognition may come through consistency and reliability. Stay focused on priorities and avoid getting caught up in minor details. A leadership role could present itself unexpectedly.

LIBRA (September 23 – October 22)
A fresh perspective helps you see new possibilities. Learning opportunities, travel plans, or future goals may inspire excitement. Stay open to different viewpoints and avoid overthinking every decision. Confidence grows when you embrace change.

SCORPIO (October 23 – November 21)
Financial matters and long-term commitments deserve careful consideration. This is a strong week for planning rather than acting impulsively. Honest conversations help resolve lingering concerns. Trust your instincts but make sure the facts support your decisions.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 – December 21)
Relationships remain a major focus. Cooperation and compromise help strengthen important partnerships. Someone close may provide valuable insight or encouragement. Clear communication helps prevent misunderstandings and builds trust.

CAPRICORN (December 22 – January 19)
Daily routines and responsibilities may feel demanding, but your discipline keeps everything moving forward. Focus on organization and consistency. Small improvements to your schedule or habits can produce noticeable benefits over time.

AQUARIUS (January 20 – February 18)
Creativity and self-expression shine brightly this week. Whether through hobbies, social activities, or personal projects, you'll find opportunities to enjoy yourself and connect with others. Don't ignore an idea simply because it seems unconventional.

PISCES (February 19 – March 20)
Home and family matters bring comfort and stability. You may feel inspired to strengthen personal relationships or improve your surroundings. A meaningful conversation helps create a deeper sense of understanding. Focus on what truly matters most.