BUFFALO ACTION DELIVERED WEEKLY ACROSS NIAGARA, ERIE & MONROE COUNTIES ROCHESTER ACTION

NIAGARA ACTION

FREE July 8th, 2026 - July 14th, 2026 NiagaraAction.com Vol. 1, No. 15 FREE

Red, White... and Maple Leaf: Canada's World Cup Run Overshadows Fourth of July Weekend at Niagara Falls

By: Staff Reports

The annual 4th of July celebration at Niagara Falls looked noticeably different this year as Canada's historic FIFA World Cup run transformed the atmosphere on the American and Canadian side of the border.

For decades, Independence Day has drawn thousands of American visitors to Niagara Falls, creating a familiar holiday scene filled with stars-and-stripes apparel, patriotic celebrations and cross-border tourism. This year, however, much of that was overshadowed by an explosion of Canadian pride as fans packed restaurants, parks and viewing areas to cheer on Canada's men's na-

(Cont. on pg. 2)

SECTIONS

Niagara County Legislator Jesse Gooch Alleges Bid Rigging — He Offered $200,000 Cash for Rapids Theatre and the City Gave it Away for FREE

By: John Watson

Niagara Falls has always been a city of grand illusions.

The water rushes over the brink, tourists snap their photos, and then they leave.

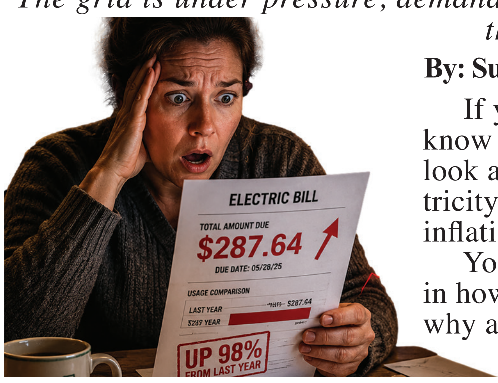
If you walk a few blocks away from the state park, the illusion fades entirely.

Main Street stands as a quiet monument to what was promised but never delivered.

(Cont. on pg. 6)

Why New York Energy Costs Are Bleeding You Dry

The grid is under pressure, demand is exploding, and homeowners are paying the price.



By: Sumit Majumdar

If you live in Western New York, you already know the feeling. You open your monthly utility bill, look at the number, and your chest tightens. Electricity prices are skyrocketing, and no, it's not just inflation.

Your bill is the victim of a massive, strained shift in how our electrical grid operates. To figure out why a basic necessity is becoming a luxury, we have

(Cont. on pg. 13)

The Roadmap, The Vision, and The First Call

From First Phone Call to First Dividend Check — The 24-Month Execution Plan, the Powerhouse District, and Why the Clock Starts Monday Morning

By: John Karcz

Part Four: A Special Report by the Niagara Falls Economic Reinvention Project

This is the final article in a four-part series. Part One diagnosed seventy years of economic failure in Niagara Falls, NY. Part Two documented the global AI data center boom and the Quincy, Washington precedent. Part Three presented the Niagara Municipal Power Cooperative, the deal mechanics, and the Citizens' Dividend. This article maps the complete execution timeline, presents the Powerhouse District vision, and names the exact calls that must happen on Monday morning.

Three articles in, the plan is built. The structure is specific. The precedents are proven. The projections are conservative. What remains is the hardest part in any great undertaking — not the architecture, but the ignition. This is the article about striking the match.

BEFORE THE FIRST SHOVEL

Why this plan puts cash in the city's account before a single piece of heavy equipment arrives

Every great American urban revival proposal has a graveyard, and the graveyard is always the same: a beautifully produced document, a ribbon-cutting, a press release, and then five years of incremental disappointment followed by quiet abandonment. The time horizon of conventional economic development — permits, environmental review, infrastructure, construction, lease-up, stabilization — devours political capital and community patience long before the first real dollar lands. Operation Powerhouse was designed from the beginning to be different.

The plan generates its first revenue not when a data center opens. Not when construction starts. Not when the deal is signed. The first dollars arrive the moment a hyperscale operator writes a check to secure

(Cont. on pgs. 3)

NIAGARA TOURISM

Red, White... and Maple Leaf: Canada's World Cup Run Overshadows Fourth of July Weekend at Niagara Falls (Cont. from cover)

Staff Reports

tional soccer team ahead of its Round of 16 matchup against Morocco.

Instead of a sea of American flags, much of the crowd was dressed in Canada's signature red and white sporting Maple Leaf jerseys, scarves and flags as excitement surrounding the country's deepest-ever run in a men's FIFA World Cup reached its peak.

Although Canada's tournament came to an end with a 3-0 loss to Morocco, the team's historic performance sparked a wave of national pride that reshaped the look and feel of one of North America's busiest tourist destinations during the biggest tourism weekend of the year.

The shift extended beyond soccer.

Local residents said the increase in Canadian patriotism also reflected lingering tensions between Canada and the United States following the imposition of U.S. tariffs on Canadian goods last year. Many suggested the renewed display of Canadian identity has encouraged residents to support domestic businesses and celebrate national pride in ways that were less noticeable in previous years.

Visitors from the United States also remarked that 4th of July celebrations on the Canadian side appeared more subdued than in years past, with noticeably fewer American-themed displays despite large crowds enjoying fireworks, live entertainment, restaurants and attractions throughout the holiday weekend.

Also missing were Americans themselves.

Some American visitors also observed that attendance on the Canadian and U.S. side of the border appeared lighter than what they had experienced during previous years.

Even with those perceptions, the numbers tell a more complicated story.

According to Statistics Canada, approximately 1.3 million U.S. residents traveled to Canada during May 2026, representing a 4.4% increase compared with May 2025. It marked the third consecutive year-over-year monthly increase after cross-border travel began declining in early 2025 amid political rhetoric and trade disputes between the neighboring countries.

The rebound suggests that while politics may have influenced public sentiment, they have not stopped Americans from crossing the border in significant numbers.

That number has not been reflected in the opposite direction, however, as Canadians have not crossed over to the U.S. side as they have in years past.

Tourism officials say Niagara Falls has experienced that recovery firsthand.

David Adames of the Niagara Parks Commission (Ontario) said American visitation to Niagara Parks declined approximately 3% during 2025, a downturn he attributed in part to tensions created by the ongoing tariff dispute and strained political relationship between Canada and the United States.

That trend, however, appears to be reversing.

Niagara Parks had an increase of 25% in transactions U.S visitors which resulted in an increase in 30% revenue, according to Adames.

Those figures suggest not only that more Americans are returning, but that they are also spending more once they arrive. A 25% increase in transactions coupled with a 30% jump in revenue points to stronger consumer spending despite continued trade disagreements between Ottawa and Washington.

Tourism leaders say several factors are helping fuel that rebound.

Pent-up demand for international travel, improving consumer confidence and Canada's role as one of the co-hosts of the 2026 FIFA World Cup have all helped drive additional visitors into the country.

Many international travelers attending World Cup matches have also extended their vacations to include destinations such as Niagara Falls, providing an economic boost to hotels, restaurants, attractions and entertainment venues.

Businesses throughout the Niagara tourism district reported busy sidewalks, crowded restaurants and strong visitor traffic throughout the holiday weekend, even if the visual atmosphere looked dramatically different than in previous 4th of July celebrations.

Clifton Hill was packed.

For many Canadians, the World Cup became more than simply another sporting event.

For decades, hockey has dominated the nation's sporting identity. But this summer, soccer captured the country's attention in a way never experienced before.

The Fourth of July weekend ultimately became a snapshot of two stories unfolding simultaneously.

On one hand, Canadians embraced one of the most memorable sporting moments in their nation's history, celebrating a World Cup run that united the country and transformed Niagara Falls into another sea of red and white.

On the other, Americans continued returning across the border in growing numbers, reinforcing that the economic relationship between the neighboring countries remains far stronger than the political headlines might suggest.

As Canada's remarkable World Cup journey came to an end, Niagara Falls once again demonstrated why it occupies such a unique place in North America. It is a city where two nations, two cultures and two identities meet every day.

This year's 4th of July will likely be remembered less for fireworks and American flags and more for the unexpected sight of thousands of Canadians proudly wearing red and white while cheering their country onto the world stage. A reminder that, for one unforgettable holiday weekend, soccer briefly became the biggest attraction at one of the world's most famous natural wonders.

LOCAL NEWS

NIAGARA FALLS

Operation Powerhouse Part 4: The Roadmap, The Vision, and The First Call

From First Phone Call to First Dividend Check — The 24-Month Execution Plan, the Powerhouse and Why the Clock Starts Monday Morning (Cont. from cover)

A Four-part Series | Part Four of Four

John Karcz

an exclusivity position on the power allocation — before environmental review, before zoning, before a single line is drawn on an architectural plan. In the history of economic development in Niagara Falls, no one has ever gotten paid before the project existed. That changes now.

This front-loaded revenue structure is not an accident. It is the central engineering decision of the entire plan. A mayor who launches Operation Powerhouse needs something to show within one budget cycle — something real, deposited, auditable, and visible. Option fees and exclusivity payments provide exactly that. They also change the negotiating posture of every conversation that follows: a city that has already been paid for its assets is not a city that is begging for investment. It is a city that has something everyone wants.

The Revenue That Arrives Before a Shovel Breaks Ground

- Month 6–9: Option + exclusivity fees from shortlisted operators — \$1–5M in hand
- Month 12–14: Upfront infrastructure co-investment fee at deal signing — \$5–50M
- Month 14+: Property tax accrual on assessed campus improvements — \$3–8M/yr per campus
- Month 18+: NMPC revenue share activates at first power draw — \$8–15M/yr per campus
- Month 24: FIRST CITIZENS' DIVIDEND CHECK MAILED TO EVERY RESIDENT

THE 24-MONTH ROADMAP

Step by step, dollar by dollar — the complete execution sequence from first call to first check

What follows is not a vision statement. It is a schedule. Every item has an actor, an action, and a measurable outcome. This is what launching Operation Powerhouse actually looks like, month by month.

MONTHS 1–3 — Formation and the NYPA Meeting

The Mayor convenes a working group: Corporation Counsel, Director of Planning, and a retained energy finance attorney with NYPA transactional experience. The NMPC entity is formed. The Mayor requests a principal-to-principal meeting with the NYPA Chairman and the Governor's Western New York economic development liaison. Subject: a municipal strategic power allocation. NYPA has never received this request. That is precisely why it will command attention.

MONTHS 3–9 — NYPA Negotiation and Hyperscaler Outreach

With a letter of intent from NYPA in hand, the NMPC engages Invest Buffalo Niagara to draft and issue the Request for Proposals to five primary hyperscale targets: Microsoft, Google, Amazon Web Services, Meta, and Oracle. The RFP is a financial document, not a brochure. It quantifies the power rate advantage, the free-cooling savings, the land terms, and the ESG value of 100% renewable sourcing. The two or three strongest respondents receive exclusive negotiating status — and pay for the privilege.

MONTHS 9–14 — Anchor Deal Negotiated and Signed

The NMPC negotiates the first partnership agreement. Ground lease terms, power allocation commitment, revenue sharing percentage (target: 8–12% of gross), local hiring minimums, infrastructure co-investment, and Citizens' Dividend contribution are all specified and binding. At signing, the operator pays the upfront infrastructure fee. Property tax assessments begin.

MONTHS 14–22 — Construction and Fiber Bond

Ground breaks. Construction employs hundreds of workers with binding local hiring provisions ensuring Niagara Falls residents get first access. The NMPC uses the signed partnership agreement as collateral to issue municipal revenue bonds financing Phase 1 of the gigabit fiber network. Bond investors are buying paper backed by a signed contract with one of the most creditworthy counterparties on Earth.

MONTHS 22–24 — First Data Center Goes Live

The first campus completes commissioning and begins drawing power. The NMPC revenue share activates. Property tax revenue flows at full rate. The fiber network's first phase serves the campus and surrounding neighborhoods.

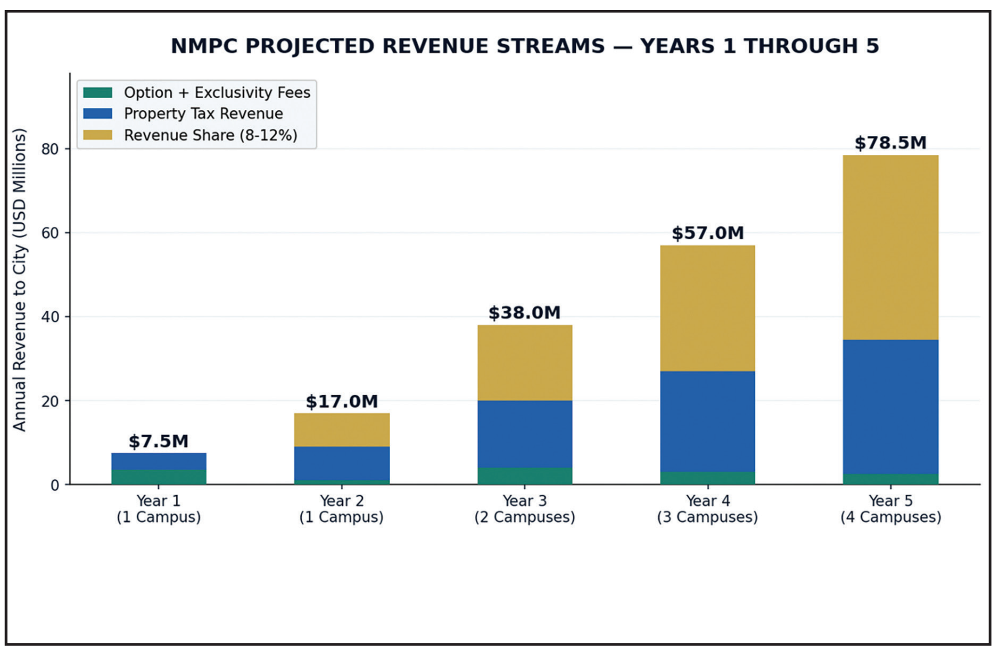
MONTH 24 — FIRST CITIZENS' DIVIDEND CHECK

Twenty-four months after the first phone call, the NMPC mails a dividend check to every registered resident who has maintained primary residence in Niagara Falls for twelve or more consecutive months. The amount in Year One is modest. The fact of it is not. It is real, it is in every mailbox, and it is the tangible, auditable proof that this plan is working.

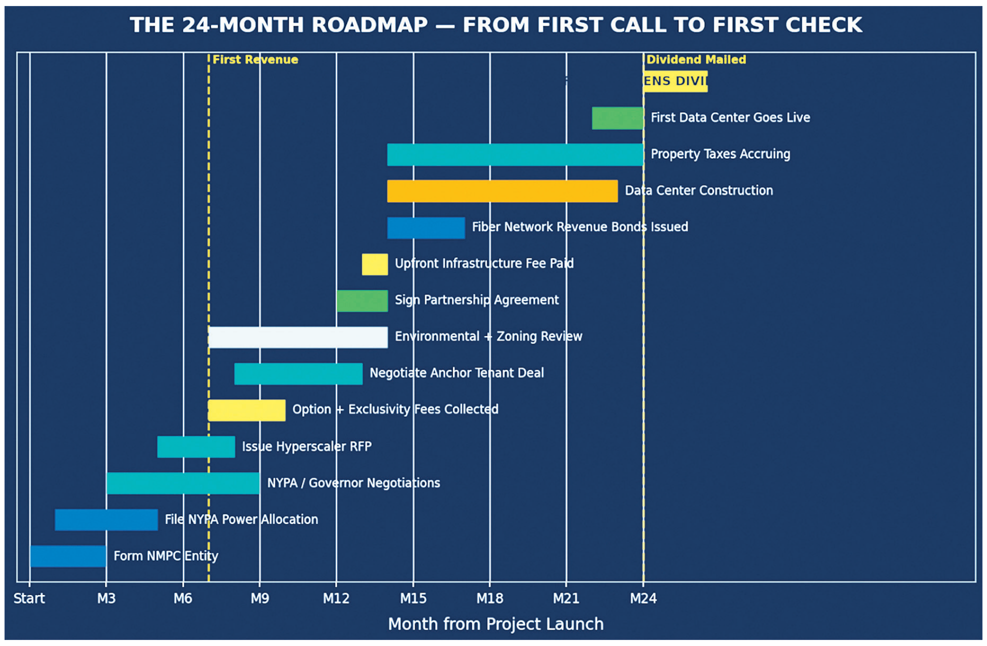
> *"A mayor who launches this plan can point to a deposit receipt in the city's account within six months of the first NYPA meeting. Not a promise. Not a projection. A deposit receipt."*

THE REVENUE MACHINE

How the money flows — and why it compounds faster than almost any comparable urban development model



NMPC Projected Revenue by Stream, Years 1–5. Revenue begins before construction and grows rapidly as campuses come online. By Year 5, total annual revenue to the city exceeds \$78M. Source: Niagara Falls Economic Reinvention Project analysis.



The Operation Powerhouse 24-Month Roadmap. Revenue events are front-loaded: the first dollars arrive before construction begins. The Citizens' Dividend check goes out at Month 24. Source: Niagara Falls Economic Reinvention Project.

The NMPC revenue model has four distinct streams, sequenced and compounding. Understanding how they interact is essential to understanding why this plan is self-accelerating rather than self-depleting.

Stream One — Option and exclusivity fees arrive before construction and fund NMPC operating costs and early outreach. These are non-refundable. They are the market's signal that the power allocation is genuinely valuable.

Stream Two — Upfront infrastructure co-investment arrives at deal signing. The operator's capital contribution to shared site infrastructure: road improvements, utility connections, fiber buildout to the campus perimeter. Non-refundable. Ranges from a few million to \$50 million or more for a hyperscale facility.

Stream Three — Property taxes begin accruing from the moment improvement assessments are established — before the first server ever goes live. A single 100-megawatt campus generates \$3 to \$8 million per year in property tax revenue alone. That is sufficient to fund a new school. It is exactly what Quincy, Washington received from its first Microsoft campus — and used to build exactly that.

Stream Four — The revenue share is the crown jewel. A negotiated percentage of gross operating revenue — targeted at 8 to 12 percent — paid quarterly for the term of the ground lease. On a fully operational 100-megawatt campus, this represents \$8 to \$12 million per year in NMPC income, sustained for thirty to fifty years, growing as the campus expands. This is the stream that funds the Citizens' Dividend and grows with every additional campus.

THE CHECK IN EVERY MAILBOX

The Citizens' Dividend — how it works, what it pays, and why it is the single most important political act in the plan

There is a reason the Alaska Permanent Fund has survived five decades of political change, budget crises, and gubernatorial ambitions without being touched: you cannot take money out of people's mailboxes without facing the consequences at the ballot box. The Citizens' Dividend is not just an economic mechanism. It is a political lock on the entire program — the device that makes Operation Powerhouse irreversible once it begins.

The mechanics are straightforward. The NMPC dedicates 25 percent of its net revenue to a Resident Dividend Fund. Quarterly distributions go to every registered resident who has maintained primary residence in Niagara Falls for twelve or more consecutive months. The payment is automatic. It requires no application. It is not means-tested. The retired steelworker, the single parent working the hotel front desk, the newcomer who chose Niagara Falls for the cheap rent and the fiber internet — everyone gets the same check.

By Year Three, with two campuses fully operational, the per-resident annual payment approaches \$680. By Year Five, at four campuses, it reaches \$920 per resident — approaching \$2,760 for a family of three. At that point, the dividend has crossed a threshold that changes behavior: it is large enough that losing it means something. People who might have left Niagara Falls for Buffalo or Charlotte now have a quarterly check in the calculation. Remote workers choosing between comparably cheap cities now have a quantified reason to pick Niagara Falls.

WHY THE ALASKA COMPARISON IS MORE THAN AN ANALOGY

Alaska's Permanent Fund has paid every resident a direct annual dividend from oil royalty revenue since 1982. The average payment over the program's lifetime: approximately \$1,600 per year per person — totaling over \$25,000 per resident across four decades. Peer-reviewed studies consistently find that the dividend measurably reduces poverty, stabilizes rural communities against outmigration, and creates a distributed sense of ownership in the state's natural resource wealth.

The NMPC Citizens' Dividend is the same structural model applied to a different resource. Alaska discovered oil. Niagara Falls has water that has been generating power for 130 years — and which is now, in the age of artificial intelligence, worth more per megawatt than at any point in its history.

> *"The dividend is not charity. It is a return on an asset. The falls created the power. The power creates the revenue. The revenue belongs to the people who stayed."*

YEARS THREE THROUGH SEVEN — THE COMPOUNDING

What happens when the model proves itself and every hyperscaler knows Niagara Falls' name

The data center industry does not behave like a factory. It clusters. Once a market is established — once the power allocation is proven, the permitting pathway is known, and an operational campus demonstrates that the promise matches the reality — subsequent operators are drawn in with increasing velocity. Quincy, Washington went from one Microsoft campus to thirty-plus operators not because each independently discovered the region. They came because Quincy had become a known quantity in the site-selection world, and known quantities reduce the risk that drives every capital-allocation decision at this scale.

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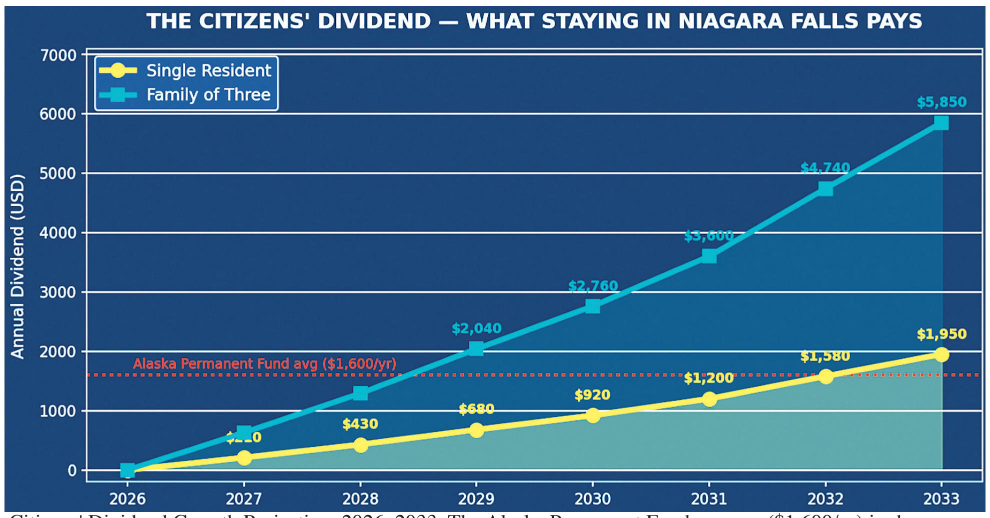
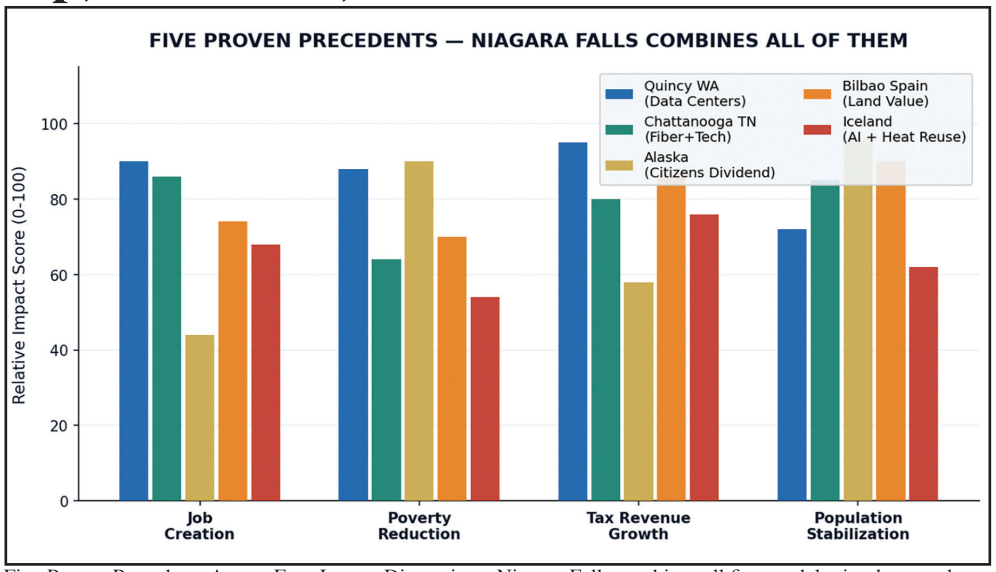
NIAGARA FALLS CONT.

Operation Powerhouse Part 4: The Roadmap, The Vision, and The First Call Cont.



Citizens' Dividend Growth Projection, 2026–2033. The Alaska Permanent Fund average ($1,600/yr) is shown as a benchmark. Niagara Falls crosses that threshold by 2032 with four or more active campuses. Source: Niagara Falls Economic Reinvention Project analysis.



Five Proven Precedents Across Four Impact Dimensions. Niagara Falls combines all five models simultaneously — the only city with the asset profile to do so. Source: Niagara Falls Economic Reinvention Project analysis.

By Year Three, the fiber network is extending into residential neighborhoods. Gigabit internet — city-owned, competitively priced — arrives in homes. Remote workers begin appearing: the first wave of people who moved to Niagara Falls specifically because the math made sense. Cheap housing plus quarterly dividend plus fiber internet plus one of the world's great natural wonders is a combination no other small city in the northeastern United States can currently offer.

By Year Five, the trajectory is visible to anyone walking the city. New businesses oriented toward the data center workforce — restaurants, childcare, professional services, housing renovation — are opening. The Innovation Quarter is filling. The population decline has stopped. For the first time in fifty years, Niagara Falls is growing.

THE POWERHOUSE DISTRICT

Born at Niagara Falls in 1895. Reborn at Niagara Falls in 2026. The story that belongs only here.

In 1895, Nikola Tesla and George Westinghouse threw the switch on the Adams Power Plant at Niagara Falls and transmitted alternating current electricity to the city of Buffalo across twenty-six miles of wire. It was the first time in human history that electricity had traveled that distance. It was the decisive moment in the War of Currents. It was the beginning of the electrification of civilization.

Every outlet in the world is a descendant of what happened at this waterfall. And now, one hundred and thirty years later, the same water that generated Tesla's first long-distance alternating current is powering the servers that run artificial intelligence. The story from 1895 to today is one of the most extraordinary technology narratives in human history. It can only be told here. It should be told here. And telling it properly is worth tens of millions of dollars a year in tourism revenue that the city currently captures almost none of.

The Data Center Viewing Experience: Glass-wall observation galleries into live, operational server halls — the same concept as Boeing's Everett factory tour or the Budweiser facility in St. Louis, but for the physical infrastructure of the internet age. Visitors see the machines processing every AI query on Earth. It is genuinely extraordinary at scale. It exists nowhere else as a public attraction.

The Tesla-to-AI Museum: A world-class immersive science and technology museum tracing the complete arc from Tesla's first AC generators to the modern AI era. Not a regional science center — a landmark cultural institution in the tradition of the Guggenheim Bilbao. A building so architecturally exceptional that it draws visitors who have come specifically for it, independent of any other attraction.

The Innovation Quarter: Mixed-use live/work space in renovated industrial buildings for the engineers, developers, entrepreneurs, and support businesses that follow hyperscale infrastructure. Renovation of existing industrial stock rather than new construction. Activates buildings that are currently vacant and tax-negative.

The Thermal Reuse Network: Data centers generate staggering quantities of waste heat that every facility in the world currently exhausts into the atmosphere. The Thermal Reuse Network captures that heat and pipes it to public buildings, a year-round heated indoor market, urban greenhouses producing local food, and a public recreation facility open through winter. Iceland does this at national scale. The engineering is not experimental.

The tourism math changes completely when the Powerhouse District is operational. A family that drove four hours to see the falls now has a reason to stay two nights. Average visit length extends from four hours to forty-eight. Per-visitor economic impact multiplies. The thirty-year failure to extend the tourist visit — the one structural problem every previous revitalization effort tried and failed to solve — is solved not by building another attraction, but by leaning into the one story that only Niagara Falls can tell.

"The falls didn't just make history as a honeymoon destination. They powered the first industrial revolution. And now, one hundred and thirty years later, they are ready to power the next one."

THE PROOF ALREADY EXISTS

Nobody has done all of this together. That is the point. And that is the advantage.

The most powerful thing about Operation Powerhouse is also the simplest: every piece of it has been proven. Not theorized. Not modeled in isolation. Proven, at scale, in real places, with audited results, by communities that were no better positioned than Niagara Falls when they began.

Quincy, Washington cut its poverty rate from 29.4 to 13.1 percent in under a decade by attracting data centers with cheap hydro power, cold climate, and cheap land. Property tax revenue grew 1,277 percent. A new school and a new hospital were built entirely from data center tax proceeds. Microsoft President Brad Smith calls it the national model.

Chattanooga, Tennessee built a city-owned gigabit fiber utility and generated $5.3 billion in net community economic benefit over fifteen years, created 10,420 jobs, and returned a 6.4-fold return on its total investment. Surplus revenue lowered electric rates for residents.

Alaska has paid every resident a direct annual dividend from natural resource royalties since 1982, averaging $1,600 per person per year. Studies find it has measurably reduced poverty, stabilized rural communities, and created a durable political coalition that has protected the program for five decades.

Bilbao, Spain created a public benefit company that used land value capture to fund a complete urban transformation — including the Guggenheim Bilbao — without relying on conventional public budgets. The company captured the appreciation that its own investment created.

Iceland leveraged cheap renewable power and cold climate to become the preferred destination for AI data center infrastructure from some of the largest technology companies on Earth, while piping waste heat into residential heating systems.

No city on Earth has combined all five of these strategies simultaneously. That is not because the combination is impossible. It is because no city has yet had the specific asset profile that makes all five achievable at once — and the organizational vehicle to pursue them together. Niagara Falls has the assets. The NMPC is the vehicle.

THE FIRST PHONE CALLS

Not a committee. Not a study. Not a task force. Three specific calls. Monday morning.

Plans fail not because they are wrong. They fail because they never become actions. The distance between the final page of a planning document and the first phone call is where most great urban ideas go to die. This section is about closing that gap — not with inspiration, but with specifics.

CALL ONE
THE MAYOR TO THE NYPA CHAIRMAN
Subject: A municipal strategic power allocation for the Niagara Municipal Power Cooperative.
The Mayor requests a principal-to-principal meeting — not a staff briefing — to present the NMPC concept. NYPA has allocated preferential power to regional industry for decades. The ask is for a new category: municipal strategic. This will require Governor-level engagement. That is fine. That is the process. The city should expect this and be prepared to escalate immediately.

CALL TWO
MAYOR TO INVEST IN BUFFALO NIAGARA
Subject: Joint hyperscaler outreach strategy.
Invest Buffalo Niagara has existing relationships with site-selection consultants who represent hyperscale data center operators, and with the economic development teams of the major technology companies. The Mayor requests a joint working session to develop the RFP strategy and identify the first operator targets. This call turns the plan from a city initiative into a regional one — substantially more credible to a hyperscale operator than a single city acting alone.

CALL THREE
THE MAYOR'S COUNSEL TO AN ENERGY FINANCE ATTORNEY
Subject: NMPC legal formation and deal structure.
The legal architecture of the NMPC — ground lease structure, revenue sharing provisions, Citizens' Dividend distribution mechanism, NYPA allocation agreement — requires specialized drafting by attorneys with NYPA transactional and public benefit corporation experience. Retaining the right legal team before any deal is negotiated is not optional. It is the difference between a structure that holds and one that gives away the store.

These three calls, made in sequence beginning the week a mayor decides to proceed, start the clock. Everything else — the RFP, the hyperscaler negotiations, the NMPC board formation, the fiber network bond issuance, the Citizens' Dividend mechanism — follows from them. None of it is easy. All of it is doable. The precedents are in place. The demand is real. The assets are there.

THE FALLS HAVE BEEN ROARING FOR TEN THOUSAND YEARS

There is a fact about Niagara Falls, New York that does not appear in any economic development report, any census table, or any planning document. It is simply this: the people who stayed did so because this place is extraordinary. The falls are extraordinary. The river is extraordinary. The history — the power station, the electricity, the original industrial moment when this waterfall changed the world — is extraordinary.

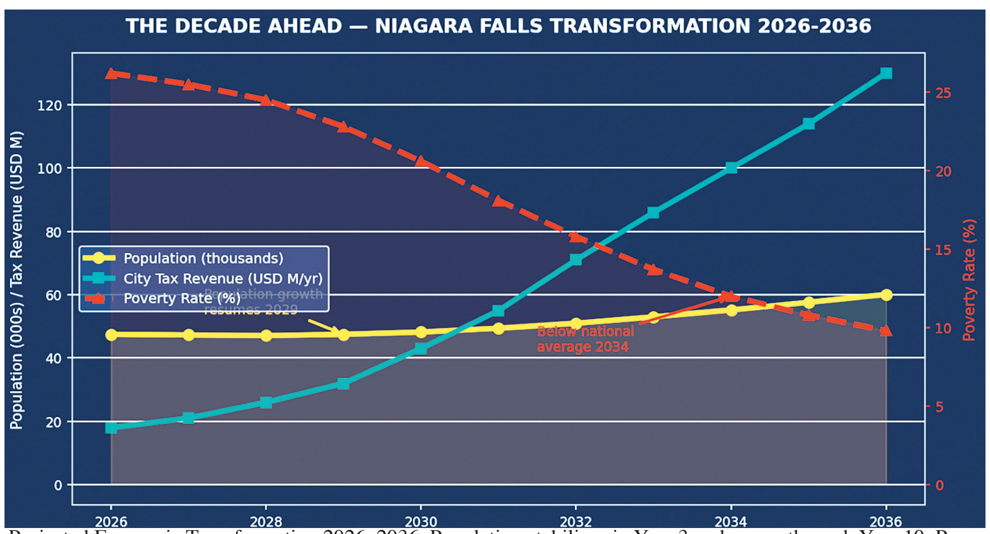
And the people who remained through the casino era and the Robert Moses era and the shrinking schools and the empty storefronts and the lost neighbors who moved to Buffalo or Charlotte or Phoenix — those people stayed because they knew something that the economists and the planners and the developers who came and went did not fully grasp. They knew the place was worth saving.

Operation Powerhouse is not an argument that Niagara Falls can be saved. It is a demonstration that the tools to save it are already there — that the power is real, the demand is real, the precedents are proven, and the structure that keeps value local rather than exporting it can be built with instruments that already exist under New York State law.

The falls have been roaring for ten thousand years. The power has been there all along. What has been missing, for seven decades, is the structural vehicle to capture the value that Niagara Falls already generates — and return it, finally, to the people who stayed. That vehicle now has a name. The clock starts when someone picks up the phone.

We also have the 165 page blueprint and full plan specifically written for the City Fathers available by contacting the author through Niagara Action (email contact@niagaraaction.com).

About the Author:
Before turning to journalism, John Karcz spent years in technical and analytical roles — first as a field and laboratory investigator in the Buffalo State Department of Geography and Planning, then overseeing technical writing and reliability engineering for Sanofi Pharmaceuticals in Swiftwater, Pennsylvania, and later as plant manager at Stollberg Chemical Company where he worked in close conjunction with the NYPA. That background informs his reporting on economic redevelopment and municipal systems. John grew up in Niagara Falls, Is published nationally on medium.com and elsewhere, and is the author of several books.



Projected Economic Transformation 2026–2036. Population stabilizes in Year 3 and grows through Year 10. Property tax revenue increases 622% over the decade. Poverty rate falls below the national average by 2034. Source: Niagara Falls Economic Reinvention Project analysis.

NIAGARA FALLS CONT.

Restaino's $200 Million Arena Push Gets Its Own Government Corporation

New Local Development Corporation hands mayor powerful financing tool as Centennial Park project barrels ahead despite lingering questions over cost, demand and long-term taxpayer exposure.

John Watson

Mayor Robert Restaino's controversial Centennial Park arena project just picked up its biggest assist yet.

The Niagara Falls City Council has approved the creation of a Local Development Corporation (LDC), a new government-backed nonprofit that will now become the legal engine responsible for financing, constructing and eventually operating Restaino's proposed $200 million-plus sports and entertainment complex.

The move represents a significant milestone for a project the mayor has championed for years.

Critics continue to question whether Niagara Falls needs another large entertainment venue.

Taxpayers keep asking if they'll ultimately find themselves paying for a project that never delivers the economic revival City Hall – and Restaino himself – promises.

The newly created corporation will oversee what Restaino envisions as a year-round entertainment campus spanning roughly 10 to 12 acres of downtown property bordered by Falls Street, Eighth Street, 10th Street, and portions of the John B. Daly Memorial Parkway.

Current plans call for a 6-7,000 seat arena, a second entertainment venue, a splash pad that converts into an ice skating rink during winter months, a multi-level parking garage featuring exterior rock-climbing walls and a rooftop capable of hosting concerts and outdoor movies.

On paper, it's an ambitious vision.

On paper, so are a lot of arena projects.

Across North America, economists have spent decades studying publicly financed arenas and entertainment districts. The overwhelming conclusion has remained remarkably consistent: while they often create excitement during construction and ribbon cuttings, many fail to generate the sweeping economic transformation politicians promise.

Instead of creating substantial new wealth, numerous studies have found that arenas frequently shift entertainment dollars from one venue to another while leaving governments responsible for enormous construction costs and ongoing maintenance.

Niagara Falls presents an even more difficult equation.

Unlike cities struggling to attract visitors, Niagara Falls already draws millions of tourists every year as home to one of the world's most recognizable natural wonders.

The problem has never been people visiting, but rather convincing them to stay on the American side and actually open their wallets.

But let's be realistic. Nobody is driving hundreds of miles for a minor-league game or to a mid-sized concert venue when much bigger entertainment options are sitting right down the road.

The newly formed Local Development Corporation is designed to help answer an entirely separate question: who is paying for Centennial Park?

Under New York law, LDCs are nonprofit corporations specifically created to handle public development projects. Unlike City Hall itself, they can issue tax-exempt bonds, pursue state and federal grants, negotiate naming-rights agreements, enter sponsorship contracts and execute complicated operating agreements with private companies.

City officials argue those powers make the structure ideal for a project as large as Centennial Park.

The corporation's debt also would not legally constitute debt backed by the city's taxing authority, a point repeatedly emphasized by the administration.

Critics, however, note that changing the legal entity issuing the bonds does not magically make financial risks disappear if projected revenues fail to materialize.

The five-member board will be chaired by Restaino himself.

The mayor will also appoint two additional directors, while City Council members will appoint the remaining two.

Restaino defended both the project and the decision to create the corporation.

"This is a proven structure for delivering a major public facility, and it is the right approach for Niagara Falls," said Restaino. "An LDC gives us a dedicated, purpose-built organization with the legal authority to access tax-exempt financing, pursue grants, negotiate the complex development and operating agreements a project like this requires, and deliver a world-class arena and events center for our residents and visitors. It also provides a structure to protect the city against financial exposure related to the project."

The mayor has pointed to similar development corporations operating throughout New York including organizations in Buffalo, Jamestown, Batavia and Geneva, arguing that Niagara Falls should utilize the same development model.

Still, critics argue the comparison misses a larger point.

The debate has never centered on whether Local Development Corporations are legal.

The debate is whether the underlying project is financially sound.

Restaino has acknowledged Centennial Park will cost more than $200 million.

Exactly how that money will ultimately be assembled – and whether future operating revenues will cover expenses over the coming decades – remains uncertain.

Independent estimates previously cited by investigative journalist Frank Parlato accounted for annual debt service and operating shortfalls of $17 million. Using those projections, Parlato estimated the burden could translate to a brutal $850 annual tax hit per home for each of Niagara Falls' roughly 20,000 households.

City officials dispute those assumptions and maintain the financing structure is specifically designed to avoid that outcome.

The administration also argues that the Local Development Corporation provides significant financial flexibility beyond simply borrowing money.

Because it qualifies as a nonprofit corporation, revenues generated by the project can be reinvested directly into operations instead of being subject to state taxation. The corporation can also negotiate concession agreements, sponsorships, naming rights and other commercial partnerships intended to generate additional revenue.

Despite operating independently, the corporation will still be considered a public body under New York law. It will remain subject to the state's Open Meetings Law, Freedom of Information Law, annual independent audits, annual financial reporting requirements and oversight by both the New York State Authorities Budget Office and the Office of the State Comptroller.

Restaino described the council's approval as an important turning point for the project.

"Authorization by the council is a critical first step towards the city finally taking control of our own destiny in building a world-class venue to enhance our status as a national and international destination," said Restaino. "The LDC structure means we can move forward with a dedicated organization focused entirely on making this project a success — one that will create jobs, attract visitors, and generate economic activity for generations to come."

Whether Centennial Park ultimately becomes the transformational destination City Hall envisions – or if a shovel even enters the ground – will not be answered by the creation of another government corporation.

But one thing is no longer in doubt.

Restaino now has the organization, legal framework and the financing vehicle to pursue the largest and most expensive development project in Niagara Falls history.

Whether Niagara Falls taxpayers will ultimately consider this a legacy or liability will likely be decided in next year's mayoral election, which may very well be where the actual fate of Centennial Park is decided.

Niagara Falls Boys & Girls Club Expands Into Child Care, Opening New Early Learning Center for 80 Children

Staff Reports

Parents searching for child care in Niagara Falls will soon have another option as the Niagara Falls Boys & Girls Club prepares to open a new early learning center designed to serve infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children.

The nonprofit organization is expected to begin operating its new Cub Club Early Learning Center later this month at 4520 Military Road pending final approval following an inspection by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services scheduled for July 9th.

The inspection is expected to merely be a formality and approval is expected.

Once fully operational, the center will have the capacity to care for 80 children ranging in age from just six weeks old through preschool. Approximately 25 to 28 staff members will oversee daily operations and provide care, educational programming and meals.

"We will be providing age-appropriate programming, meals, and extra great care for kids of that age," said Niagara Falls Boys & Girls Club CEO Rebecca Vincheski, "to help respond to the need for child care in our area."

The new center will occupy the former GuildCare Adult Day Care building, a property that had previously been renovated by another operator with plans to open Little Legacies Day Care.

Although that project never opened its doors, much of the renovation work had already been completed. This allowed the Boys & Girls Club to purchase the facility for approximately $1.15 million and prepare it for operation with relatively little additional work.

Vincheski said expanding into early childhood education had been part of the organization's long-term plans but the cost of constructing or renovating a suitable facility had delayed those efforts until this opportunity became available.

"We talked about moving into the daycare space for a while," said Vincheski. "One reason why it's taken longer than we hoped is because of just how much it would cost to build or renovate a daycare space. When this opportunity came to be, it was just perfect."

The expansion comes as communities across Western New York continue to face a shortage of available child care. According to previously reported regional data, there are approximately 22,000 licensed child care spaces available for

an estimated 80,000 children between birth and age five, leaving many families struggling to find care.

Vincheski said the organization has frequently been approached by parents asking whether the Boys & Girls Club offered programs for younger children, a need the organization had previously been unable to meet.

"Opening the Cub Club Early Learning Center is more than just adding childcare slots. It's creating a foundation for our children, families, and our community to grow," said Vincheski. "This center represents our commitment to meeting families where they are and supporting children from their earliest years and building a stronger future for Niagara Falls and the greater Niagara Falls community."

The Cub Club Early Learning Center will offer 16 spaces for infants, 24 for toddlers and 40 pre-kindergarten seats.

Officials said enrollment will not be limited to Niagara Falls residents, allowing families from surrounding communities to register their children once the center officially opens.

NIAGARA COUNTY

Niagara County Legislator Jesse Gooch Alleges Bid Rigging — He Offered $200k Cash for Rapids Theatre and the City Gave it Away for Free (Cont. from Cover)

Seven years into the Mayor Robert Restaino's administration, the grand business district remains a ghost town.

There are no bustling office complexes rising above the asphalt.

There is not a single new enterprise employing a handful of people.

The most bustling business remains DiCamillo Bakery (as it should be).

Instead, the visible progress amounts to a custom street sign and the carefully staged photo op that accompanied it.

But behind the quiet facade of the district, a bitter dispute has boiled over regarding one of its historic landmarks.

The Rapids Theatre, a 1921 palace, has sat trapped in an economic quagmire for years.

It survived foreclosures, the collapse of a major investment group, and a federal criminal fraud case involving its previous operator.

When the city finally reclaimed the property through foreclosure, it was hailed as a turning point.

The administration called it an anchor property central to reviving the corridor.

Now, the keys are being handed over to a pair of Buffalo nightlife operators.

And depending on who you ask, the process to select them was anything but transparent.

Gooch's Account: "I Have Been Silent Too Long"

Niagara County Legislator Jesse Gooch says he can no longer remain silent about the transaction.

In a detailed public disclosure posted on his Facebook page that has reached tens of thousands of people, Gooch levels direct accusations against the city's evaluation process.

Gooch outlines his background and deep interest in the property from the very beginning.

"The music business has always been a passion of mine," said Gooch. "Since the Theater fell in bankruptcy and became available for public purchase, I immediately did my due diligence to put an offer in."

"I have been in the Construction contracting business for most of my adult life," he continued. "I own and operate a fairly large commercial residential painting company, (Painters Plus), I also own J.G. productions and Entertainment, where my biggest endeavor is Thursdays on the Water. I am also a Niagara County Legislator. With my years of business experience, construction, and hosting one of Western New York largest outdoor free concert series in the summertime, my legislative experience along with my community involvement, the theatre would be a perfect fit for me," Gooch noted.

Gooch explained the exhaustive steps he took to prepare a comprehensive proposal for the Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency.

"I immediately put together a team," said Gooch. "I contacted the URA to set up a tour with my contractors to assess the repairs."

"After several months of getting financing in place, researching the history of the building, putting my team together along with my business plan, it was time to submit my proposal. I created a very in-depth PowerPoint presentation along with letters of intent, tax returns, and all other required items requested by the URA," Gooch explained.

"The application fee was $10,000. I submitted my application three days before the due date. I came up with an assessment of about $500,000 to do the major repairs along with many cosmetic upgrades and an offer of $200,000 for the purchase of the building."

The Local Plan vs. The Competition

Gooch's proposal was explicitly structured to benefit local workers and align with regional goals.

"My plan consisted of all local Niagara Falls and Niagara County employees," detailed Gooch. "We were going to utilize three local Niagara Falls catering companies for our food."

"My Stage and sound engineer lives in Niagara Falls and his operated out of the rapids for over 20 years. The NF police were going to do my security, I was focusing on local and community."

"I have been to many meetings and I know the mayors plan consisted of revitalizing Main Street and bringing in student housing for NU. So I created a plan with former NU alumni students which consisted of hands on apprenticeship training experience, and experiences customized for the students."

"I also had a plan to do many community events, including an outdoor Juneteenth celebration on the street," Gooch added.

He thought he knocked his presentation out of the park.

"My presentation was elaborate, well thought out, and we had a vision to stay in the building if we won the bid for several decades," stated Gooch.

"We were going to work with the Niagara Falls music, Hall of Fame and host their inducted ceremonies annually," wrote Gooch. "We were even going to have a 'Winter Blues Fest' in February. We were going to have fundraisers, charity events, and even weddings!"

Weddings, according to Gooch, would have been a unique addition to the venue that was undervalued in the past.

"I have a letter of intent from a local wedding planner who committed to doing 30 to 40 weddings a year if I was chosen for this project," Gooch revealed.

Gooch notes that his financing model required no public assistance.

"I was not planning on initially using Grant money. I wanted to work with local institutions and I have an investor who put up $1.2 million for this project as well."

"In other words, my Construction was going to be self-financed and my construction/painting company was going to do most of the sweat equity, and I was either going to put a mortgage on the $200,000 or pay cash," explained Gooch.

Then, Gooch addresses his sole competitor, the Buffalo operators. He did not have glowing things to say.

"We knew we were facing one competitor," said Gooch. "They own a popular bar in Buffalo. Although I do not know them, we have many mutual friends. They seemed extremely confident that they were going to win the bid. Basically I didn't have a chance."

The Decision Under Scrutiny

Gooch challenges the lack of clarity in how the Urban Renewal Agency handled the scoring metrics.

"The director of the URA informed me that my proposal and presentation was going to be based on 'scoring', however, she did a very vague description of how the voting members were going to score," stated Gooch.

"There were a total of five people scoring," wrote Gooch. "One member had to recuse herself as she had affiliations with my legislative position. The other four members were scoring. The members are attached in one of the documents on this post. The mayor was not a scoring member, however he was involved with the presentation process, etc."

Not having a vote did not mean Restaino was not directly involved in the scores each candidate received from other members, however. Gooch described the day he presented his plan to the committee at City Hall.

"Now it is presentation day, April 28th at noon at City Hall," Gooch recalled. "I brought a team of nine members."

"My marketing director who help set up our PowerPoint, my office manager/bookkeeper, the two people from Niagara University, who were going to add the apprentice program, my sound and stage technician, a historical renovations contractor who I have done business with for years and has years of historical Preservation experience, the owner of Call Associates, who has over 20 years in business doing federal construction, and he was going to be on our Construction oversight committee, my booking agent, and my son who was going to work with me on every step of this project, moving forward," listed Gooch.

"The presentation was amazing! It could not have went better!" he said. "One member was glowing and couldn't contain her excitement. One member had zero interest at all, and the other two I couldn't get a read. My team said we knocked out of the park."

"This was on a Wednesday and we were expecting an answer on Friday. Several members of the team said there's no way they're going to wait until Friday. They are going to call you tomorrow to tell you that you are the winner."

The Rejection and Zero-dollar Bid Allegation

The outcome was completely different from his team's expectations.

"Friday came I received a call from the business director informing us that we had a great presentation, but the other party scored higher than us and they were going to give them the building," Gooch stated. "I was in complete shock."

The bid was awarded to Rec Room Buffalo co-owners Chris Ring and Dale Segal.

"I said was my bid less than theirs or higher? She said my bid was higher than theirs," Gooch recounted. "I said OK how much higher? She wouldn't answer."

"I said I'm a little confused and shocked that the city would choose a company from Buffalo with no plan to hire anyone locally, who already has a large share of the concert market in Buffalo now you are giving them Niagara and Buffalo? Isn't that creating a monopoly?" Gooch questioned.

"On top of it there are rumors that the other party wants to get Free Grant money, do the renovations for free and put in a zero-dollar bid. Basically, get a free building with taxpayer money to do the renovations, operate it for a little while and then flip it for a massive profit."

According to Gooch, those rumors were subsequently validated.

"Well, it appears the rumors are true because a few days later, it was on all the new stations, and a few local journalist reported that the owners of the rec room are now the owners of the rapids," Gooch wrote. "They did not mention how much they got the building for or who they competed against."

Gooch details the exact financial terms of the winning bid.

"This is where it gets juicy," he continued. "It turns out that the winning bid put an offer in of zero dollars using the $10,000 application fee as 'their offer', and went on to say in one of their interviews that they were solely counting on 100% taxpayer-funded Grants to do the renovations for $1.5 million!!"

"Let that sink in," Gooch stated. "The URA turn down an offer of a proven local businessman who is going to use his own money for renovations and operations and had an offer $200,000 higher than the other party. They gave it away to an owner that lives in Kenmore, no vested business, employees, or taxes in Niagara County."

At this point Gooch was clearly alleging that the bid – for whatever reason – was rigged in favor of Ring and Segal to secure the property.

"As opposed to someone who lives in Niagara County pays taxes in Niagara County, serves in NC, lives in NC, and has a business plan that would grow the local economy, and not counting on taxpayer money for the renovations," Gooch emphasized.

Allegations of a Stonewall by Niagara Falls Mayor Restaino

Gooch directly details how his requests for information were handled by city officials.

"I've spoke with my team and my legal team and I put together a FOIL (freedom of information law) request to all parties involved. I received a response saying that it would take 21 days for an answer. They responded a week later and said that they need about 60 days."

He continued.

"My request is complex, but also simple. I requested the other parties application, presentation, along with several other pertaining information."

Gooch names Mayor Restaino directly regarding the lack of disclosure, seemingly implicating him in the bid-rigging scheme.

"I received a response from the Mayor stating that he has nothing to provide for this request," said Gooch. "I have contacted the clerk's office asking for an update and I am receiving nothing."

This leaves one logical question then: who has the application and presentation documents?

"I have asked what the next process is in regards to the city moving forward with the other party and I received many mixed signals," Gooch added. "The director is keeping it professional and does not want to speak with me."

Gooch further alleges that the local media has delayed coverage of his complaints.

"I did an interview with the Niagara gazette for about two hours a month and a half ago," stated Gooch. "I am being told every week that it is going to be published the following day and it is not been published yet. It is going on two months since my interview."

"I have had local media news stations ready and waiting to do a full interview with me. My legal team is waiting for me to give them the green light to step in with legal action."

"I have been patient in silent long enough," declared Gooch. "My request still have not been answered. It's simple. I am providing my application in this post. I have been very transparent the entire time."

Gooch said above all else he wants transparency.

"The entire process with the URA has not been consistent or transparent. There are many things I am leaving out for legal purposes. I'm sure many of them will be exposed soon. WHAT ARE THEY HIDING??"

"By the way, they kept my refundable $10,000 check that was supposed to be refunded if the bid was not awarded to us," Gooch added.

The administration has long faced criticism regarding its handling of public information requests, with critics pointing to a systemic pattern of delaying or ignoring FOIL filings until forced to comply.

In fact, the City has refused to comply with a lawful FOIL request filed by Niagara Action for months.

Restaino Administration Responds

In response to Gooch's allegations, the Mayor Restaino defended the bidding process and dismissed claims of favoritism.

Restaino stated that the Niagara Falls Urban Renewal Agency (NFURA) efforts and the project review committee process has been "enormously successful" this far and has administered its responsibilities in an impartial manner.

He unequivocally dismissed Gooch's assertions that the winning developers received favored treatment and, at the same time, claimed that Gooch expected favoritism as a sitting county legislator.

Sour Apples or a Push for Accountability

Gooch insists his public challenge is not motivated by the rejection itself.

"This isn't winning or losing," stated Gooch. "This is just a request for transparency. Once these answers become public, then I am good with whatever result happens, win or lose."

"One thing I do know is never give up on your dreams," ended Gooch. "This has been my dream for many years, to own this historical theater and create something special for the community for many years to come. I will not go out without a fight."

The city administration continues to frame the Rapids Theatre deal as a major milestone for Main Street.

In public releases, officials express confidence that the new operators will catalyze broader investment in the neighborhood.

But for the residents who walk past the empty storefronts every day, the rhetoric rings hollow.

The promises of seven years ago have yielded little more than a street sign and a series of promotional photographs.

The business district remains unbuilt. Development has failed to materialize.

Gooch's legal team remains prepared to take formal action if the records continue to be withheld.

Whether court intervention happens remains to be seen.

But as Main Street sits quiet, questions surrounding the zero-dollar transfer continue to grow.

BUFFALO

Family's World Shattered After Sudden Death of Mother Leaves Six Children Behind, Including Newborn Twins Fighting in NICU

Staff Reports

What began as an ordinary day ended in unimaginable heartbreak for one Western New York family.

On June 28th, Selena Spears received the kind of phone call no child is ever prepared to answer. On the other end was someone telling her something had happened to her mother.

Within minutes, her world changed forever.

Racing to her mother's home, Spears hoped she would arrive in time to hear reassuring words from first responders. Instead, she pulled onto a street lined with police vehicles as emergency crews fought to save the woman her family describes as the center of their lives.

Despite more than 40 minutes of life-saving efforts, their mother could not be saved.

Now, only three years after losing their father in what the family describes as a tragic act of violence, Selena and her siblings are once again trying to comprehend a future without a parent.

Their mother leaves behind six children, including newborn twin boys who remain hospitalized in a neonatal intensive care unit after being delivered by emergency Cesarean section.

The loss has left Selena's family grieving while trying to navigate funeral expenses, care for younger siblings and preparing to welcome home two infants who will never have the opportunity to know the mother who gave them life.

For Selena, the frantic drive to her mother's house is a memory she says will never leave her.

"I was screaming at them, telling them to please save my mom because this is my last parent as well as for my siblings," said Spears. "My sisters called me, and they were crying. They said something happened to Mom. So, I left from my friend's and drove over to my mom's house."

When she arrived, the reality of the situation became painfully clear.

Emergency responders were still working tirelessly inside the home while police secured the area outside.

Spears rushed inside, desperately hoping for a miracle.

"They were working on her for 41 minutes and obviously nothing happened," she continued.

In that moment, the family lost not only a mother, but the person they say held everyone together.

Their grief is compounded by the knowledge that the family's newest members – twin boys still receiving specialized medical care in the NICU – will grow up hearing stories about a mother they will never know.

Selena's sister, Gabby, says the twins will forever be a living reminder of the woman they lost.

"They definitely are a piece of her and will remind me of that as well," said Gabby. "But I just obviously, of course, feel bad because they don't have their mom."

For the siblings, memories of their mother are filled with compassion, generosity and unwavering love.

She worked as a nurse, dedicating her professional life to caring for others while making sure her own children never questioned how deeply they were loved.

Her daughters say helping people wasn't only what she did at work, but something that defined who she was every day.

"If all of our friends or family needed help, she would always take them in or help them with anything they needed," said Selena's sister Mia.

Whether you needed a place to stay, encouragement during a difficult time or simply someone willing to listen, the family says their mother never hesitated.

Her home was always open.

Her heart always had room for one more person.

Her daughters describe her as the person everyone turned to whenever life became overwhelming.

"Every time that we would have like an issue with something or overthinking it, we would go to her for comfort or support," said Gabby.

For Selena, no words seem large enough to capture what her mother meant to the family.

"She was always there for us. She's just like the best mom ever," said Spears.

Now the siblings are learning how to move forward without the woman who served as their source of strength.

As they grieve, another difficult reality has emerged.

Because her death was completely unexpected, the family suddenly found themselves facing the overwhelming financial burden of planning a funeral while still trying to process the shock of losing their mother. Not to mention the loss of a steady income stream from her employment as a nurse.

A GoFundMe campaign created by Selena has quickly attracted support from friends, neighbors and complete strangers hoping to ease at least part of that burden.

In the fundraiser, Selena describes the heartbreak of losing both of her parents before the age of 24.

"My name is Selena. I'm 23 years old and writing this with a completely broken heart," she wrote. "Just 3 years after losing my father to a tragic act of violence, on June 28th, 2026, my life changed forever when I lost my mother unexpectedly. There are truly no words to describe the pain of losing a parent so young, so suddenly. Our family is completely devastated."

She explains that her mother's death leaves behind not only herself but three younger sisters, a younger brother and the newborn twin boys who remain hospitalized.

"My mother leaves behind my 3 younger sisters, my little brother, and newborn twin boys who are still fighting in the NICU. We never expected we would have to navigate life without her."

Beyond funeral expenses, Selena says her family is now trying to figure out what life looks like without the person she describes as the glue that held everyone together.

"While we are grieving this unimaginable loss, we are also faced with the overwhelming financial burden of giving our mother the funeral she deserves. Because her passing was so sudden, we were entirely unprepared for the cost of a memorial and burial, let alone figuring out how to move forward as a family. She was the heart of our family that kept us connected through everything."

Although asking for help has never come easily, Selena says the family has reached a point where they simply cannot do it alone.

"Asking for help is hard for me to do, but right now we truly need it. Any donation, no matter how small, will go toward my mom's funeral and burial expenses and help ease the financial stress our family is facing during this incredibly difficult time."

She also encouraged anyone unable to contribute financially to simply keep the family in their prayers and share the fundraiser with others.

"If you're unable to donate, please consider sharing this fundraiser and keeping my family in your thoughts and prayers. Every share, every prayer, and every act of kindness means more than we can ever express. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your love, support, and compassion during the most difficult time of our lives."

The family says the outpouring of support has provided a small measure of comfort during what has become the darkest chapter of their lives.

For Selena, every act of kindness has helped carry her family through days they never imagined they would face.

"I'm just really grateful, and I can't even explain how happy I am that everybody came and is helping," Spears said.

If you would like to donate, you can do so here: https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-for-selenas-family-after-tragic-loss.

As the family prepares to say goodbye to the woman they describe as their rock, they continue to hold onto the memories of a loving mother, devoted nurse and compassionate friend whose greatest priority was always her children.

Those memories now become the legacy her six children – including two little boys who will know her only through stories – will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Quotes in this story were provided during interviews with WIVB and from the family's GoFundMe campaign.

BUFFALO CONT.

Vietnam Veteran's Final Mission: Western New York Hero Searches for Nurse He Says Saved His Legs, and His Life, 58 Years Ago

Staff Reports

For nearly six decades, Michael Militello has carried one mission with him that no military order ever assigned.

It isn't about medals.

It isn't about recognition.

And it isn't about the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame, where he was officially inducted this week.

His final mission is far more personal.

He wants to find the young Western New York nurse who stood over his hospital bed in Vietnam in 1968 after he had been peppered with gunfire during a Viet Cong ambush. A nurse he believes saved not only his legs, but his future.

Her name is Linda Pickert.

He hasn't seen her in 58 years.

And despite decades of searching, he has never been able to thank her.

"I haven't seen her in 58 years. Linda Pickert," said Militello during a ceremony on Wednesday, July 1st. "I looked for her, and I just found somebody in this chapter that says he went to high school with her. She saved my life. I wouldn't be standing. I'd be in a wheelchair, but I'd still be a little spunky, I guess."

Those words came during what should have been one of the proudest moments of Militello's life.

Family, fellow veterans, elected officials and supporters gathered at Veterans Memorial Park in the City of Tonawanda as the Vietnam veteran, businessman and longtime advocate was inducted into the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame.

Established in 2005, the Veterans Hall of Fame recognizes New Yorkers whose military service continued long after they removed the uniform through civic leadership, volunteerism and dedication to fellow veterans.

Militello's story embodies exactly that.

But long before he became a successful businessman and community leader, he was simply a young man from Buffalo's West Side.

Raised as one of six children, Militello spent his teenage years working hard, promoting dances at local Veterans of Foreign Wars halls before enrolling at the University at Buffalo.

Then, on what should have been a day of celebration, his future changed forever.

On his birthday, he received his draft notice and within weeks was on his way to Vietnam.

Like thousands of young Americans during the war, he left home without knowing whether he would ever return.

He nearly didn't.

While serving overseas, Militello was caught in a Viet Cong ambush that left him suffering multiple gunshot wounds.

The injuries were severe enough that he still vividly remembers what happened after he was evacuated from the battlefield.

"They pulled me off a stretcher plane, rolled me into a medevac unit in Cu Chi and there was a blackout, which I could have been dead or not," recalled Militello. "When I woke up, there was a nurse standing over me, and her name was Linda Pickert."

That moment became one of the defining memories of his life.

Militello said Pickert, a nurse from Tonawanda, repeatedly treated his badly damaged legs, carefully irrigating the wounds during his recovery.

He credits those treatments with preventing infections that could have resulted in both legs being amputated.

As he recounted the story Wednesday, the emotion became overwhelming.

For a moment, the decorated veteran who had survived combat struggled to continue speaking.

Remembering the nurse standing beside his hospital bed nearly six decades earlier remains just as powerful today as it was then.

"She stood over my bed and said we're going to be fine."

Those simple words stayed with him throughout the remainder of his recovery.

After Vietnam, Militello was transferred through military hospitals in Japan before eventually returning to the United States.

Like many Vietnam veterans, however, the battle didn't end when the shooting stopped.

Returning home proved to be its own challenge.

Rather than receiving the hero's welcome many veterans of previous wars experienced, thousands of Vietnam veterans came home during one of the most politically divisive periods in American history.

Many encountered hostility, indifference or outright disrespect.

Finding employment was difficult.

Adjusting to civilian life was often even harder.

Militello experienced those struggles firsthand.

Unable to find stable work, he decided to create his own opportunity.

He purchased Milligan's Brick Bar in Buffalo, beginning what would become a successful business career.

Alongside his brother Bobby, he would eventually own several popular Buffalo-area restaurants and bars.

He built a reputation not only as an entrepreneur but also as someone deeply committed to helping fellow veterans and supporting charitable causes throughout Western New York.

The hardships he experienced after returning home also shaped the philosophy that has guided much of his life.

Looking back, Militello says veterans had two choices after returning from Vietnam.

"When you are disrespected that way, you've got two choices. You can wallow in it or you can take the skills that you learned in Vietnam, in training, in advanced training,

in the jungle, having comrades side by side with their lives in your hands, take those skills home with you," said Militello. "You don't leave those at the door. You own them."

Those words resonated with many veterans attending Wednesday's ceremony.

Among those honoring Militello was Stephen Banko III, one of Western New York's most decorated Vietnam veterans, former communications director for Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello and longtime director of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Buffalo office.

Banko reflected on the difficult transition many Vietnam veterans faced after returning home.

"We were taught to kill in Vietnam. But when we came home, nobody really taught us how to live," said Banko. "One of the things that we're recognizing today is a gentleman who has all taught us how to live, who taught us what it was like to come home, to keep your chin up, to keep pushing against the wind and to build something not only better for himself and his family but for all of us Vietnam veterans who knew him and know him today."

Banko has worked closely with Militello on another project close to the veteran's heart.

The two have collaborated on a memoir chronicling Militello's remarkable life, from the streets of Buffalo to the battlefields of Vietnam and eventually to his years in business and veterans advocacy.

The book is expected to be released later this year.

Among its most emotional chapters is the story of Linda Pickert.

Militello says the nurse never realized the lasting impact she had on one wounded soldier.

Now, after recently learning she attended high school in Tonawanda, he believes he may finally be closer than ever to finding her.

Nearly 60 years have passed.

Lives have changed.

Families have grown.

Yet the desire to say two simple words has never faded.

Thank you.

Asked what he would say if he finally stood face-to-face with the nurse he credits with changing his life forever, Militello paused.

The answer, he admitted, has occupied his thoughts for decades.

"I don't know for sure," Militello replied. "I've thought about it a million times."

Whether that reunion ever happens remains uncertain.

But after surviving combat, overcoming the challenges of returning home, building a successful business, dedicating himself to fellow veterans and now earning one of New York's highest honors for military service and community leadership, Michael Militello says there is still one chapter left to write.

For him, the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame is not the end of the story.

Somewhere, he hopes, is a retired nurse from Tonawanda who once stood over the bed of a wounded young soldier in a dark hospital in Vietnam and quietly reassured him that everything would be okay.

Fifty-eight years later he is still trying to find the woman whose compassion gave him the chance to come home, build a life, raise a family and become the man being honored today.

Erie County Holding Center Inmate's Death Ruled Homicide, Renewing Scrutiny Over Jail After Seventh Death in Recent Years

Staff Reports

The death of an inmate inside the Erie County Holding Center is now being investigated as a homicide, marking the latest in a series of inmate deaths that have continued to raise questions about conditions and safety inside the downtown Buffalo jail.

Erie County Sheriff John Garcia announced on Saturday, July 4th that the Erie County Sheriff's Office is investigating the death of Antonio Pizarro who was found unresponsive inside his cell that morning.

According to the Sheriff's Office, correctional staff immediately responded after discovering Pizarro and were joined by personnel from the Buffalo Fire Department and AMR who attempted life-saving measures. Despite those efforts, Pizarro was pronounced dead.

Initially, officials confirmed only that an investigation was underway. Since then, the Erie County Medical Examiner has officially ruled Pizarro's death a homicide, escalating the seriousness of the investigation and prompting renewed attention on the facility's recent history.

While authorities have confirmed the manner of death, investigators have not publicly disclosed how Pizarro died. Officials also have not announced whether any suspects have been identified or if criminal charges are expected.

The Sheriff's Office has likewise not released further details regarding where inside the facility the incident occurred, whether other inmates were involved, or whether surveillance footage is being reviewed as part of the investigation.

Pizarro's death is the latest inmate fatality at the Erie County Holding Center, a facility that has faced repeated scrutiny over the past several years following multiple in-custody deaths.

According to reports from the New York State Commission of Correction and previously confirmed public records, seven inmates have died at the Erie County Holding Center in recent years.

Those deaths include James Ellis on November 30th, 2021; Michael Frears on March 13th, 2021; Sean Riordan on June 14th, 2022; William Henley on November 27th, 2022; Donald McCoy on December 21st, 2023; Tinamarie Cordovano on April 25th, 2024; and now Antonio Pizarro on July 4th, 2026.

Each death has generated its own investigation, while collectively fueling broader discussions surrounding inmate welfare, medical care, supervision and operational practices inside the county jail.

The Erie County Holding Center, located in downtown Buffalo, serves as the county's primary pretrial detention facility, housing individuals awaiting trial, sentencing or transfer to other correctional institutions.

The Erie County Sheriff's Office has not indicated when additional information may be released.

The investigation into Pizarro's death remains ongoing.

ROCHESTER

Rochester Man Sues ICE, Claims Federal Visit Over Critical Email Violated First Amendment Rights

John Watson

A Rochester man has filed a federal lawsuit against U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) alleging federal agents violated his constitutional right to free speech after they appeared at his home and later attempted to contact him at a New York City hotel over an email he sent criticizing the agency's leadership.

David Streever, a U.S. citizen, filed the lawsuit Monday, July 6th in federal court in Washington, D.C., arguing that ICE retaliated against him for expressing political opinions protected by the First Amendment.

The lawsuit follows an incident in June when two federal agents arrived at Streever's Rochester home while he was traveling in Finland with one of his children. According to court filings and his attorneys, the agents presented Streever's wife with an unsigned warning notice informing him that an email he had sent months earlier to Todd Lyons, who was serving as acting director of ICE at the time, was being treated as a potential threat.

Streever's attorneys contend the email was political speech, not a criminal threat, and argue the government's response was intended to discourage protected expression.

The lawsuit is being handled by the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a nonprofit legal organization that frequently litigates First Amendment cases involving free speech and government action.

Attorney Adam Steinbaugh said the organization believes the government's actions crossed a constitutional line.

David Streever

Steinbaugh said that his client's speech clearly falls within the protections of the First Amendment and was within the context of political speech.

According to the lawsuit, Streever sent the email in January after an immigration officer fatally shot Minneapolis resident Renee Good during an anti-ICE demonstration. The email, titled "What's next," sharply criticized Lyons and compared him to a notorious Nazi official.

In the email, Streever wrote:

"You are a monstrous human being and will go down in history as America's Reinhard Heydrich, the butcher. The way you are protecting the obvious execution in Minnesota, even as we see the videos, will lead to your downfall. Even Trump will turn on you before the end, and you will be a sad, despised man who eats himself alive with shame at your own pathetic weakness. You will never know peace. You will seek to lose yourself, to escape the burden of knowing the truth about yourself. But wherever you go, you will find yourself. You will torment yourself until your last day on Earth."

The lawsuit alleges the federal response went beyond the visit to his Rochester residence.

According to Steinbaugh, after Streever returned to the United States from Finland, federal agents also attempted to locate him at a hotel in New York City, but hotel staff did not permit them to meet with him.

Streever argues those actions were designed to intimidate him because of his political speech and create a chilling effect on his willingness to criticize government officials in the future.

The lawsuit names ICE as a defendant along with Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin.

ICE has not publicly commented on the lawsuit itself.

Previously, when asked about the warning issued to Streever, the agency declined to discuss specifics, citing an ongoing investigation.

In a statement released last week, ICE said:

"ICE investigates all credible threats towards its employees and officers, including threats to the ICE Director."

The case comes amid broader debate over the line between protected political speech and communications that law enforcement agencies may interpret as potential threats against public officials.

Federal courts have long recognized that political speech enjoys some of the strongest protections under the First Amendment, though "true threats" are not constitutionally protected. Courts generally examine the context, language and surrounding circumstances to determine whether a communication constitutes a genuine threat or protected expression.

Streever's lawsuit argues his email falls squarely within protected political speech.

His case is not the only recent incident involving federal agents and criticism of ICE in upstate New York.

According to the lawsuit and public reports, Streever is one of at least two Western New York residents who received visits from federal agents after posting or sending messages critical of ICE earlier this year.

The second involved Paigelynne Gonyea, a poll worker who was approached by federal agents during New York's primary elections.

Gonyea has said she believes the contact stemmed from a January social media post that read, "I think today is a great day for Jonathan to be indicted," alongside a photograph of ICE officer Jonathan Ross after his identity had already been publicly reported.

The Department of Homeland Security has offered a different explanation.

Department spokesperson Lauren Bis released an image of another social media post that officials say included Ross' home address, though portions of that post were redacted before being made public.

Bis said:

"Gonyea committed a federal crime by posting the address of an ICE law enforcement officer online."

She added:

"if you doxx our officers, we will investigate you, and you will be brought to justice."

Unlike Gonyea's case, the allegations involving Streever center solely on the contents of the email he sent to ICE leadership rather than the publication of personal information.

The New York Attorney General's Office has acknowledged that it is aware of both incidents involving federal agents contacting New York residents over criticism directed at ICE.

A spokesperson previously said the office has been reviewing the interaction involving Gonyea after agents approached her while she was working at a polling place during the state's primary election.

The lawsuit filed by Streever seeks declaratory relief and asks the court to determine whether ICE's actions violated his constitutional rights. The litigation could also provide additional judicial guidance on where the line is drawn between aggressive political criticism and communications that federal law enforcement agencies may investigate as potential threats.

For now, the case places renewed attention on the balance between protecting government employees from credible threats while preserving Americans' constitutional right to criticize public officials and government agencies.

Nearly 300 Rochester Children Shot in Five Years as Experts Warn Violence Creates Lasting Trauma

John Watson

Six young people were caught in Rochester's latest wave of gun violence over the weekend, including five teenagers and a 12-year-old child, underscoring a troubling reality that hundreds of Rochester children have already experienced firsthand.

According to Rochester Police Department data, 290 people age 19 and younger have been shot in the city over the past five years. While many survived, community leaders, law enforcement officials and researchers say the effects of gun violence often follow young victims long after they leave the hospital.

Justin Morris, founder of Untrapped Ministries, has spent years mentoring young people impacted by violence and recently completed a bicycle ride along the Erie Canal to Albany to raise awareness about the issue.

According to Morris, children who experience gun violence often begin living in a constant state of fear, changing how they think, act and protect themselves. He said many teenagers come to believe they must carry firearms simply to survive. This mentality creates a dangerous cycle where violence becomes normalized.

Morris also noted that even everyday language among young people has changed. Increasingly, many juveniles are replacing traditional expressions wishing one another safety with phrases that encourage remaining preparedness for violence. He said that shift reflects the harsh reality many youths believe they are living every day.

Police Chief David Smith said surviving a shooting often results in far more than physical injuries. According to Smith, gunshot wounds frequently leave victims dealing with lifelong emotional and psychological trauma, even after they recover medically.

Monroe County District Attorney Brian Green pointed to research showing that young people exposed to serious violence are statistically more likely to become involved in violent behavior themselves later in life. Green said those findings illustrate how one act of violence can trigger a chain reaction that affects individuals and neighborhoods for years.

National research reinforces those concerns.

According to Everytown for Gun Safety, an average of approximately 60 children and teenagers are shot every day across the United States. The organization's research found that young shooting victims face significantly higher risks of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts than children who have not experienced gun violence.

The report also found that exposure to shootings changes how children interact with their communities. Young people living in neighborhoods affected by gun violence are less likely to play outside, walk to school, visit parks or participate in neighborhood activities because of ongoing safety concerns. Researchers also found that children exposed to violence often struggle academically and experience lasting behavioral and emotional challenges.

Despite the troubling number of youth shooting victims, Rochester has made some progress reducing overall gun violence.

By this point in the year a decade ago, Rochester had recorded 103 shooting victims. Two years ago, that figure stood at 106. Last year police had investigated 85 people shot during the same period.

This year, the city has recorded 58 shooting victims.

Even more notable, Rochester has not recorded a single firearm homicide so far this year. Overall, the city has experienced just five homicides in 2026.

Law enforcement officials credit a combination of focused policing, violence interruption initiatives and community partnerships for helping reduce shootings throughout the city.

Still, advocates caution that declining crime statistics cannot erase the lasting impact already experienced by hundreds of young victims.

For the nearly 300 Rochester children and teenagers shot during the past five years, recovery extends far beyond the scars left behind.

Community leaders say sustaining Rochester's recent decline in gun violence will require continued investment not only in law enforcement but in youth mentoring, mental health services and neighborhood programs.

Hochul Silent as Pressure Mounts From Liberal Democrats, Environmental Groups to Sign Data Center Moratorium

Staff Reports

Governor Kathy Hochul is facing mounting pressure from members of her own party and environmental organizations to sign legislation that would temporarily halt approvals for new large-scale data centers across New York as critics increasingly accuse her administration of slowing the state's climate agenda while opening the door to energy-intensive development.

The Responsible Data Center Development Act, which passed both houses of the New York State Legislature on June 4th, remains on Hochul's desk awaiting her signature. If signed into law, the measure would place a one-year pause on state approvals for new data centers requiring 20 megawatts or more of electricity while regulators conduct one of the most comprehensive studies ever undertaken on the industry's environmental, economic and infrastructure impacts.

The legislation arrives as artificial intelligence fuels an unprecedented surge in demand for massive computing facilities nationwide. While supporters say data centers are becoming essential pieces of modern infrastructure, critics argue they consume enormous amounts of electricity and water, strain local power grids and threaten to undermine New York's climate goals if expansion continues without stronger oversight.

The governor has not publicly indicated whether she intends to sign or veto the measure.

Many thought that moving from the bill's original 3-year moratorium to 1-year was specifically to gain Hochul's support. That has, at least not up to this point, resulted in ink to paper.

Her silence has frustrated many environmental advocates who have already been sharply critical of Hochul over what they describe as repeated delays implementing New York's ambitious Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), one of the nation's most aggressive clean-energy laws.

Environmental groups including Food & Water Watch, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, WE ACT for Environmental Justice and several climate coalitions have accused the Hochul administration of weakening or postponing portions of the state's clean-energy transition while citing affordability and electric grid reliability concerns.

Those same organizations have increasingly argued that rapidly expanding data centers could consume enormous amounts of electricity generated by fossil fuels if additional safeguards are not put into place first.

The legislation was introduced by Assemblymember Didi Barrett, chair of the Assembly Energy Committee, and State Senator Kristen Gonzalez who chairs the Senate Internet and Technology Committee.

Barrett has argued that New York should fully understand the industry's environmental footprint before allowing large-scale projects to spread across the state. According to Barrett, artificial intelligence has dramatically changed what data centers look like today, transforming them from relatively modest facilities into sprawling campuses capable of consuming extraordinary amounts of electricity and water. She has maintained that communities deserve clear answers before projects of that magnitude begin appearing throughout New York.

Gonzalez has similarly described the bill as a planning tool rather than an attempt to prohibit data center construction permanently. She has said the temporary pause would allow New York to establish responsible statewide standards before approving facilities that could reshape local infrastructure and energy demand for decades.

Supporters say the legislation is intended to avoid repeating situations already unfolding elsewhere in New York.

One of the most closely watched proposals is a potential 1,000-megawatt data center project in East Fishkill that prompted local officials to adopt a three-year moratorium while they evaluate possible impacts. Other large facilities have already begun operating, including DataBank's LGA3 data center in Rockland County.

Although no comparable proposal has surfaced publicly in Columbia County or several other upstate communities, legislators backing the bill argue those regions could eventually become attractive targets for future development because of available land and electric infrastructure.

Under the legislation, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) would be prohibited from issuing permits or approvals for new large data centers for one year after the law takes effect.

Projects already approved – or those that begin construction before the law becomes effective – would not be impacted.

During the moratorium, the DEC would be required to produce a comprehensive environmental impact report in consultation with numerous state agencies, including the Department of Public Service, Department of Health, Environmental Facilities Corporation and the New York Independent System Operator.

The study would examine virtually every aspect of the industry's impact on New York, including the number and location of existing facilities, projected future growth, electricity demand, generation sources, water consumption, wastewater discharge, farmland conversion, electronic waste, air pollution, thermal pollution, infrastructure needs and any taxpayer-funded subsidies or discounted electricity rates supporting the industry.

The legislation also requires a lengthy public review process.

A draft report would be subject to at least 120 days of public comment while state officials would be required to conduct in-person hearings in at least five regions of New York before issuing a final report.

Beyond the temporary pause, the legislation would establish new requirements for future projects.

Host communities would be guaranteed public hearings before permits are approved, with residents receiving advance notice months before any state decision.

The bill also seeks to shield residential utility customers from subsidizing massive industrial electricity users.

State Senator Michelle Hinchey has argued that without new protections, the enormous cost of building infrastructure to serve data centers could eventually be shifted onto everyday ratepayers through higher electric bills. Hinchey has said New Yorkers are already struggling with rising utility costs and that lawmakers have a responsibility to ensure large industrial users – not homeowners – pay the expenses associated with their own growth.

To accomplish that, the legislation would require utilities to establish separate customer classifications for large data centers, assigning infrastructure upgrades and operational costs directly to those facilities rather than distributing them among residential customers.

Similar provisions would apply to municipal water systems.

The bill also includes aggressive renewable-energy benchmarks.

Beginning in 2030, qualifying data centers would have to demonstrate that at least one-third of their electricity comes from renewable sources. That requirement would increase to two-thirds by 2035 and eventually rise to at least 90 percent by 2040 through annual third-party verification.

Meanwhile, the New York Power Authority would be directed to develop statewide energy-efficiency standards specifically for data centers with existing facilities required to comply within two years.

Supporters describe the legislation as a pause designed to let regulators catch up with an industry expanding faster than existing environmental policies.

Barrett has said communities across New York are increasingly asking questions about data centers, expressing concern about their environmental footprint, electricity consumption and long-term costs. She has argued lawmakers should respond with a careful statewide strategy that protects natural resources while ensuring residents are not forced to subsidize either the economic or environmental costs associated with the rapidly growing industry.

The governor's decision now carries added political significance.

Hochul has increasingly attempted to balance New York's aggressive climate mandates with concerns about electric reliability, affordability and economic development.

In recent months, she has promoted new nuclear energy development, delayed implementation of portions of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and emphasized maintaining sufficient electric generation to support future economic growth.

Those moves have drawn criticism from many environmental organizations who argue the administration has retreated from the ambitious climate goals.

The pending data center legislation has become another flashpoint issue.

Environmental advocates argue the state cannot continue approving projects requiring enormous amounts of electricity while simultaneously delaying renewable energy goals and warning New Yorkers about rising utility costs.

Business organizations, however, have generally cautioned against policies they believe could discourage future technology investment.

For now, the bill remains in limbo.

Hochul Talks Like Governor's Race is in the Bag, Says Stefanik Would've Been Harder to Beat [But would still beat her too]

Staff Reports

With more than four months still remaining before New Yorkers cast their ballots for governor, Governor Kathy Hochul is already talking as though the biggest question isn't whether she'll win re-election, but whether she would have preferred facing someone else.

During a recent interview on Long Island, Hochul suggested former U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik would have posed a stronger challenge than Republican nominee Bruce Blakeman, effectively dismissing her current opponent while speculating about a race that never happened.

The comments have raised eyebrows because they come as Hochul herself continues to struggle with personal favorability ratings that remain underwater, even while public polling shows her leading in the race.

According to a recent Newsday column, Hochul said Stefanik would have been the more formidable Republican candidate because of her years in Congress, statewide profile and national prominence within the Republican Party.

Stefanik, once viewed as one of the GOP's strongest potential gubernatorial contenders, ultimately decided against entering the race, leaving Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman as the Republican nominee.

Rather than focusing on the campaign ahead, Hochul instead appeared to compare the Republican she is facing to the one she isn't.

The remarks came as the latest Siena College poll found Hochul holding roughly a 20-point advantage over Blakeman statewide.

But beneath those topline numbers lies a far less comfortable political reality for the incumbent.

Despite leading the horse race, Hochul's personal standing with New Yorkers remains deeply divided.

The Siena survey found 42% of registered voters viewed Hochul favorably while 43% percent held an unfavorable opinion of her. The poll was a reminder that even as governor she has yet to build the kind of broad popularity typically associated with politically dominant incumbents.

In other words, more New Yorkers either dislike Hochul or remain unconvinced by her leadership than actively support her.

Those numbers stand in sharp contrast to the confidence reflected in her recent comments.

Hochul's remarks also arrive as affordability continues to dominate voter concerns across New York.

The same Siena poll found the cost of living remains overwhelmingly the state's top issue with a majority of voters identifying it as their biggest concern.

Housing costs, utility bills, taxes and inflation continue to rank ahead of many of the issues that have defined Albany's recent legislative sessions.

Republicans have centered much of their campaign around those concerns, arguing that New York has become increasingly unaffordable under Democratic leadership.

Blakeman has built his campaign around lowering taxes, combating crime, reducing government spending and reversing what Republicans describe as years of policies that have driven residents and businesses out of New York.

Whether those messages ultimately resonate statewide remains to be seen.

Blakeman biggest challenge is introducing himself to voters as most of New York state still does not know who he is.

The Siena poll found many voters still do not know enough about him to form an opinion. This, according to political analysts, is the single greatest factor contributing to Hochul's double-digit lead in the polls.

Yet Hochul's own favorability numbers suggest she enters the general election with vulnerabilities of her own.

Unlike governors who campaign from a position of broad public popularity, Hochul continues to govern with approval ratings that have remained stubbornly divided throughout much of her tenure.

Environmental groups have criticized her over delays implementing portions of New York's climate agenda.

Fiscal conservatives have attacked her spending priorities and handling of the state budget.

Parents' groups have challenged education policies while Republicans continue criticizing her approach to crime, bail reform and public safety.

Even with those headwinds, Hochul appeared comfortable enough to speculate publicly about which Republican would have presented the greater challenge.

Stefanik consistently polled stronger than Blakeman before deciding not to run, lending support to Hochul's assessment that the North Country congresswoman may have presented a more competitive race.

Still, Hochul's decision to publicly compare opponents was somewhat unusual.

With months remaining before Election Day, Republicans are likely to use the governor's remarks to argue she is taking voters, and her opponent, for granted.

Trump Announces Walmart Price Cuts on Ground Beef, Groceries as Americans Continue Battling High Food Costs

Staff Reports

With grocery prices remaining one of the biggest concerns for American families, President Donald Trump announced Monday, July 6th that Walmart has agreed to reduce prices on a wide range of products after discussions with his administration, calling the move a win for consumers ahead of the nation's 250th anniversary celebration.

The announcement comes as Americans continue paying historically high prices for beef and other grocery staples following years of inflation, shrinking cattle herds and rising production costs.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said Walmart agreed to significantly reduce prices on everyday necessities, highlighting ground beef as one of the largest price reductions.

"This is a huge deal for the many millions of Americans who, smartly, shop at Walmart, which is a truly patriotic Company who loves the U.S.A.," wrote Trump.

Trump said the retailer would lower the price of one pound of ground beef by "almost" 15 percent after his administration requested price reductions as part of the country's semiquincentennial celebrations.

He also praised Walmart's decision and encouraged other retailers to follow suit.

"Walmart is stepping up in a big and bold way, and other Retailers should follow the lead of these absolute Patriots," said Trump.

Shortly after the president's announcement, Walmart confirmed it is rolling out thousands of price reductions nationwide throughout the summer.

While the company did not reference Trump or the White House in its announcement, Walmart said the discounts are part of a broader effort to help customers save on groceries, household necessities and seasonal products during one of the busiest shopping periods of the year.

Among the most notable reductions is fresh 73% lean ground beef.

The price of a one-pound roll will fall from $6.74 to $5.94 at most Walmart locations, which is a reduction of approximately 12 percent.

Fresh produce also received substantial discounts.

Sweet corn will be reduced from 68 cents to 25 cents per ear, while a 2.25-pound bag of fresh red cherries will be cut nearly in half, dropping from $11.18 to $5.63.

Several pantry staples and summer cookout favorites are also seeing lower prices.

Great Value ice cream will decrease from $2.97 to $2.50, Lay's Classic Potato Chips will fall to $2.50, and Frito-Lay Family Fun variety packs will be reduced by one dollar.

Customers purchasing beverages could see some of the largest savings.

Twenty-four packs of Coca-Cola, Diet Coke and Coca-Cola Zero Sugar will be discounted from $14.97 to $9.97, while Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, Dr. Pepper and Diet Mountain Dew 24-packs will fall from $13.97 to $9.97.

Household essentials are included as well with Great Value disposable paper plates dropping from $9.97 to $8.97.

Julie Barber, Walmart U.S. Executive Vice President and Chief Merchant, said the retailer is expanding its investment in lower prices throughout the summer shopping season.

"Customers count on Walmart to deliver the value they need every day, and summer is no exception," said Barber. "This summer, we're making even more investments in price, with thousands of Rollbacks across the products customers are shopping for most including beef, fresh produce and beverages, grills, pools, toys and summer fashion apparel. Whether they're stocking up for a backyard barbecue, heading out on vacation or simply shopping for the week ahead, we're helping everyone save more for every occasion."

The savings extend beyond Walmart stores.

Sam's Club also announced price reductions on more than 250 products aimed at families traveling or grilling during the summer months.

Those discounts include Member's Mark chicken wings, beef hot dogs, pork ribs and ground beef.

At Sam's Club, Member's Mark 88/12 ground beef will be reduced from $6.17 per pound to $5.97 per pound.

The company also said members will continue to benefit from competitive gasoline prices during the busy travel season

The announcement comes as beef prices remain near record highs nationwide.

The U.S. cattle industry has struggled through years of severe drought that reduced grazing land and dramatically increased feed costs. As ranchers discarded herds to reduce expenses, the national cattle inventory fell to its lowest levels in decades.

Agricultural economists have repeatedly warned that rebuilding the U.S. cattle herd is a lengthy process that could take several years before beef supplies return to more normal levels.

Those supply shortages have driven up the cost of steaks, hamburger meat and other beef products across the country.

Earlier this year, additional market pressures also emerged after military strikes involving the United States, Israel and Iran contributed to volatility in global energy markets. Gasoline prices soared, adding further pressure to household budgets.

The Trump administration has pursued several approaches aimed at lowering food prices.

Earlier this year, Trump encouraged increased imports of lower-tariff Argentine beef in an effort to boost supply, a proposal that drew criticism from many American cattle producers who argued imported beef could undercut domestic ranchers.

The administration also directed the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate whether major meatpacking companies were engaging in anti-competitive practices that artificially inflated beef prices.

Meanwhile, restrictions on cattle imports from Mexico have remained in place because of concerns over the spread of the New World screwworm parasite, further limiting available supplies for American beef processors.

For consumers, however, the latest announcement means lower prices are expected to begin appearing immediately on many everyday grocery items.

Walmart said the discounts are available at stores nationwide, online through Walmart.com, Sam's Club locations, SamsClub.com and through the companies' mobile apps. Many items will also be eligible for pickup and home delivery where those services are offered.

Trump Accounts Officially Launch, Giving Eligible Newborns $1,000 Investment Accounts. Here's What Parents Need to Know

Staff Reports

President Donald Trump's newest financial initiative for American families is officially underway.

On Monday, July 6th Trump marked the first trading day of the newly created "Trump Accounts" by remotely ringing the opening bell of the New York Stock Exchange from the Oval Office, formally launching what the administration describes as one of the largest government-backed investment programs ever created for American children.

The program, which became law as part of legislation signed during America's 250th anniversary celebrations on July 4th, automatically provides eligible newborns with a federally funded $1,000 investment account designed to grow alongside the stock market until adulthood.

Administration officials say millions of families have already signed up.

During Monday's announcement, Trump said the accounts would immediately begin participating in the stock market.

"With the ringing of the opening bell for the stock market, those accounts will now begin to grow right along with our booming economy, and I really believe we're going to have the biggest boom of all," said Trump.

He added that both government funding and private contributions would generate substantial investment immediately.

"Between individual contributions and the seed funds, $800 million in new capital will be invested in the stock market for America's children this week," said Trump.

Joining the president at the White House were Michael and Susan Dell whose charitable commitment became one of the largest private investments supporting the initiative. The couple pledged $6.25 billion toward helping fund the program last year.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said public participation has been strong since enrollment opened.

According to Bessent, approximately six million families have already registered for Trump Accounts with roughly 1.4 million children qualifying immediately for the government's $1,000 seed contribution.

What Is a Trump Account?

Trump Accounts are a newly created investment account established under federal law specifically for children.

The accounts function similarly to an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), although they operate under a separate set of rules established by Congress.

Each eligible account automatically receives a one-time, tax-free $1,000 contribution from the federal government.

Those funds are then invested in an index fund tracking the S&P 500, allowing the account to grow with the performance of approximately 500 of America's largest publicly traded companies.

Initially, all government contributions will be invested through the State Street SPDR Portfolio S&P 500 ETF.

Treasury officials have indicated additional investment choices may become available to families in the future, but the S&P 500 fund will serve as the default investment option during the program's rollout.

Although the accounts belong to the child, parents or legal guardians serve as custodians until the child reaches age 18.

Money generally cannot be withdrawn before adulthood.

Once the child turns 18, funds may be used for qualified expenses such as higher education, purchasing a first home or other purposes permitted under federal law.

Which Children Qualify?

Only children who are U.S. citizens born between January 1st, 2025, and December 31st, 2028 qualify for the federal government's one-time $1,000 contribution.

That eligibility period coincides with President Trump's second term in office.

Parents or guardians must establish the account by submitting IRS Form 4547.

The Treasury says families can complete the process through the Trump Accounts mobile application, while filing their federal income taxes or through the IRS Individual Online Account portal.

Children born before January 1st, 2025, are not eligible for the government's $1,000 deposit.

However, they may still open Trump Accounts provided they are U.S. citizens with Social Security numbers and establish the account before reaching age 18.

Families Can Continue Adding Money

The government contribution is only the beginning.

Parents, grandparents, relatives and friends may collectively contribute up to $5,000 annually into each child's account.

Most of those contributions are subject to normal tax rules.

Employers, however, receive a separate benefit.

Businesses may contribute up to $2,500 annually per employee toward their employees' children's Trump Accounts without those contributions being taxed.

State and local governments are also permitted to make tax-free contributions under the legislation.

The Treasury has additionally created a mechanism allowing philanthropists and corporations to donate publicly traded stock directly to the program.

Those shares can then be converted into investments benefiting eligible children based upon the donor's instructions.

"By accepting contributions of publicly traded stock, [the] Treasury is creating a practical pathway for large-scale private giving to support the next generation," said Bessent on July 2nd.

Major Companies Already Participating

Several major financial institutions have already announced plans to participate.

Goldman Sachs, BlackRock and Nasdaq have each pledged to match the federal government's $1,000 contribution for eligible children of their employees.

Semiconductor manufacturer Micron has also announced its own matching program.

The company says it will match employee contributions up to $1,000 for each child under age 18.

Micron will also provide an additional one-time $250 contribution for eligible children living in communities where the company operates including facilities in New York, Idaho, Virginia, California, Colorado, Minnesota and Texas.

Trump praised the growing corporate participation.

"This massive investment will help millions of American children and families get a strong start in life, and give them real financial security," said Trump. "My policies are working, and working 'big.'"

How Much Could the Accounts Grow?

The ultimate value depends on investment performance and how much additional money families contribute.

Using historical long-term S&P 500 investment returns, the administration estimates that a child receiving only the government's initial $1,000 deposit could accumulate approximately $6,000 by age 18 without any further contributions.

Families contributing the maximum $5,000 annually could potentially see balances approaching $271,000 after 18 years, assuming historical average market performance continues.

Like any stock market investment, however, future returns are not guaranteed.

CRIME BLOTTER

CRIME REPORTS PUBLISHED BY NIAGARA ACTION OVER THE LAST WEEK

-Ring Camera Captures Woman Dragged From Niagara Falls Home, Brutally Assaulted. Law enforcement received a call around 8:38pm on June 29th after reports of an assault on the 700 block of A Street in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller, a third party, told police that they watched on the Ring Video Doorbell as their aunt was dragged out of the house and brutally assaulted. The aunt was screaming for help as she was physically abused. There 911 caller had limited additional information. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the male was still at the location and/or if he was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Teen Subway Worker Says Father Showed Up at Her Job Yelling and Swearing in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 5:48pm on June 29th after reports of a domestic dispute at Subway on Pine Avenue in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller, a 16-year-old complainant, told police that her 16-year-old father arrived at her work and was harassing her. While at the restaurant and in the presence of third parties, the father was yelling at her saying she has to "go home [and] pack her stuff and leave." He was swearing and aggressive. It is unknown if he was drunk, but the complainant felt fearful for her safety. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the father was arrested or simply asked to leave the premises. No further information is available at this time.

-Woman Says She Bit Fiancé to Stop Choking Attack in Niagara Falls. Law enforcement received a call around 10:57pm on June 29th after reports of a violent domestic incident on Monteagle Street in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that her fiancé was attacking her and her mother. Dispatch could hear the altercation occurring while on the phone call with the caller, which included hearing her being choked by the fiancé. The caller told police afterward that she was only able to stop her fiancé from choking her further by biting him. The extent of injuries sustained by the caller and her mother are unknown. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the fiancé was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-***Niagara Falls Man Greets Neighbor with Coffee and a Machine Gun in the Morning.*** Law enforcement received a call around 9:09am on June 29th after reports of a weapons check on Nevada Avenue in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller told police that a neighbor came outside with what appeared to be a machine gun and pointed it at the caller. The gun had an orange top, according to the caller. The nature of their disagreement is unknown. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if a machine gun was found and/or if any arrests were made. No further information is available at this time.

-911 Caller Says He Has a Knife, Is Going to Kill Man for Talking to His Young Daughter. Law enforcement received a call around 4:47pm on July 3rd after reports of menacing with a weapon in the area of Northgate and Apple Walk in Niagara Falls. Dispatch advised that the caller on the line was "very argumentative." He stated that he was going to "kill a man" because he came over and started talking to his daughter. It is believed that it was an older male talking to his younger daughter. The man stated that he had a knife on him but wouldn't answer any questions. He just kept on talking to people in the background. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the male was still on scene when law enforcement arrived and/or if he was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-5-year-old Child, His Mother, Pepper Sprayed During Niagara Falls Assault. Law enforcement received a call around 9:03pm on July 3rd after reports of an assault with injuries on Ontario Avenue in Niagara Falls involving a child. The 911 caller told police that a 5-year-old and an adult female were pepper sprayed by a suspect known to the parties. Both the adult and child were in significant distress when first responders arrived and required emergency medical treatment as pepper spray is extremely painful. Police, fire and AMR responded to the scene to provide medical treatment. It is unknown if the suspect was apprehended and taken into custody or if the child required being taken to children's hospital for further treatment. No further information is available at this time.

-Drunk Male Threatens to Expose Himself to Shoppers at North Tonawanda Walmart. Law enforcement received a call around 7:29am on July 4th after reports of public intoxication at Walmart in North Tonawanda. The 911 caller, a Walmart employee, told police that an intoxicated male was threatening to expose himself to women, children and other passerby. He was clearly drunk. The male was described as white and in his 40's wearing a cowboy hat. He was wearing a white t-shirt, white shorts and he was pulling a red wagon. The employee further told police that this has been a "daily occurrence" this week and requested that the male be trespassed. Police responded to the scene. It is believed he was arrested and trespassed from Walmart. No further information is available at this time.

-North Tonawanda Man Threatens to Beat Neighbors with Golf Club Over Setting Off Fireworks on 4th of July. Law enforcement received a call around 11:42pm on July 4th after reports of menacing with a weapon on the 100 block of Oakwood Terrace in North Tonawanda. The 911 caller told police that he was upset about fireworks being blown off (on the 4th of July) and was threatening to beat his neighbor with gold clubs. The caller wasn't specific with police about whether he was using a driver or irons to threaten the neighbors. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the caller was arrested for threatening to assault his neighbors. No further information is available at this time.

-Woman Tries to Run Over Baby Daddy, Flees Police and Left Toddler on Side of Niagara Falls Road. Law enforcement received a call around 10:57am on July 4th after reports of a domestic incident in the area of Highland Avenue and James Avenue in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller reported that a woman, who is the mother of his child, tried to hit him with her vehicle, described as a grey Jeep. The woman did this with their child in the vehicle with her. After doing so, the woman took their child out of her vehicle and placed them on the side of the sidewalk and drove away. Police could hear tires screeching while on the phone. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if they were able to locate the suspect and, if so, whether she was arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Hospital Patient Threatens to Shoot Doctors in Niagara County. Law enforcement received a call around 7:12am on July 5th after reports of menacing with a weapon at St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston. The 911 caller reported that a patient is threatening to shoot doctors. The male was described as black, 5'9", 255 pounds, 50-years-old, and wearing a Dallas Cowboys sweatshirt. At the time of the call, the male was outside of the hospital. He had signed himself out and was calmly sitting with security waiting for police.Police responded to the scene. It is believed the male was arrested and/or taken for mental health treatment. No further information is available at this time.

-Three Teenagers Jump Security Guard at North Tonawanda Hospital. Law enforcement received a call around 10:50pm on July 5th after reports of an assault at DeGraff Hospital in North Tonawanda. The 911 caller told police that there were three teenagers who jumped a security officer there and were beating him up. Onlookers reported that the teens were punching the security officer who received blows to the face, chest, stomach, and other parts of his body. It is unknown what precipitated the altercation. Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if the teenagers were still on scene when law enforcement arrived and, if so, whether they were arrested. No further information is available at this time.

-Witness Watches Woman Abducted on Niagara Falls Boulevard: Grabbed and Dragged into White Van. Law enforcement received a call around 4:59pm on July 5th after reports of an abduction in broad daylight along Niagara Falls Boulevard and Tuscarora Road in Niagara Falls. The 911 caller reported that a white van with two black males inside were following a black female who appeared to be running away from them. One of the males grabbed the female and put her in the vehicle around 8721 Niagara Falls Boulevard (Express Mart). The caller told police that the vehicle was last headed toward Cayuga Drive.Police responded to the scene. It is unknown if any attempt to locate the van was successful. No further information is available at this time.

Fourth of July Violence Leaves 12 Shot Across Buffalo as Police Blame Organized Street Takeover

By: Staff Reports

What began as 4th of July celebrations quickly spiraled into one of Buffalo's most violent holiday weekends in recent memory with12 people shot in six separate incidents, an officer's home vandalized, and multiple fights downtown. Police are placing much of the blame on an organized "street takeover" promoted on social media.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Erika Shields said the department had been monitoring advertisements for a block party on Steven Avenue and a planned takeover at East Delavan Avenue and Grider Street, prompting officers to increase overtime staffing by roughly 150% compared to last year and ask nearby businesses to close early.

Despite those preparations, Shields said the crowd rapidly grew beyond expectations.

"Delavan and Grider, where the promoter had been advertising, began as a manageable crowd, but the crowd size exploded," said Shields. "Unfortunately, many of the individuals at the location and on the adjoining streets were combative and seeking to wreak chaos. Multiple individuals had guns and this presented an enormous safety challenge for the police."

Police said the shooting victims ranged in age from 13 to 51 and all are expected to survive. Authorities later clarified that one victim originally included in Buffalo's total had actually been shot in Niagara Falls.

Shields said officers attempted to make arrests early in the evening but were repeatedly surrounded by large groups.

"You would think there'd be a large number of arrests, but the reality of it is we were just overwhelmed in managing the crowd size," she said.

Calling the organizer's actions unacceptable, Shields announced the city is pursuing a cease-and-desist order and exploring whether the promoter can be held responsible for the city's overtime costs.

"I am beyond disgusted with the organizer of this event," Shields continued.

The night also included an eight-hour SWAT response to an armed individual atop a grain elevator on Ohio Street, multiple large fights in Chippewa's entertainment district, and the vandalism of a Buffalo police officer's home shortly after he responded to a fight on his own street while his wife and two children were inside.

Mayor Sean Ryan condemned both the violence and the attacks on law enforcement.

"All Buffalonians deserve to have a safe and fun holiday, but for many that did not happen this 4th of July," said Ryan. "Let me be crystal clear, acts of violence against our police officers, their families or their homes will not be tolerated."

Ryan also warned that "Street Takeover events will not be tolerated," calling them dangerous, destructive and disrespectful to surrounding neighborhoods.

Buffalo Common Council Member Zeneta Everhart said her heart goes out to the victims and their families, adding that Buffalo needs more resources for youth and families while also demanding greater accountability from those responsible for the weekend's violence.

The unrest mirrored violence elsewhere across Western New York. Niagara Falls recorded two fatal shootings while Rochester police investigated two shootings that left seven people wounded, including a 12-year-old, along with a stabbing. Investigations into all six Buffalo shootings remain ongoing.

Two Dead, One Injured in Separate Shootings Just Hours After July Fourth Fireworks in Niagara Falls

By: Staff Reports

Niagara Falls Police are investigating two separate fatal shootings that claimed the lives of two people within just a few hours in the early hours of Sunday, July 5th, marking another violent night in the city.

The first shooting was reported around 1am near the intersection of Fairfield and Highland avenues where a large gathering was taking place. Officers responding to reports of gunfire arrived to find a crowd still at the scene and immediately began dispersing those in attendance.

While officers were securing the area they learned that one of the shooting victims had already been driven by private vehicle to Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. Despite emergency treatment, the victim died from their injuries. The name of this individual is not being released at this time.

Roughly two-and-a-half hours later, police were called to another shooting on the 3000 block of Niagara Street where a large party was underway at the former Bakery Restaurant and Lounge.

Video circulating from the scene captured a large crowd in panic after two separate bursts of gunfire erupted within moments of one another.

When officers arrived, they located one victim in an alley behind 3004 Niagara Street. First responders immediately began lifesaving measures before the victim was transported to Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. That individual later died while receiving treatment in the hospital's emergency department.

Investigators also learned that a second person wounded during the Niagara Street shooting had been transported to the hospital by private vehicle. Police said that victim was treated for injuries and later released.

Detectives from the Niagara Falls Police Department's Criminal Investigation Division continue to investigate both shootings and have not announced whether the incidents are connected. No information regarding suspects or possible motives has been released.

Anyone with information about either shooting is urged to contact the Niagara Falls Police Department Criminal Investigation Division at (716) 286-4553 or the department's general information line at (716) 286-4711.

Both investigations remain ongoing.

Why New York Energy Costs Are Bleeding You Dry (Cont. from cover)

The grid is under pressure, demand is exploding, and homeowners are paying the price.

Sumit Majumdar
Vice Chairman, Chief Sustainability Officer, & Operating Partner at Verite Capital Partners

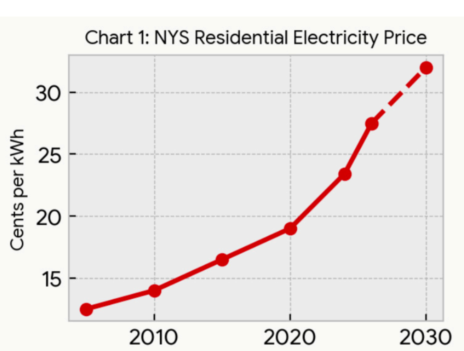
to look under the hood of the New York Independent System Operator (NYISO)—the folks who manage the state's power grid. We're facing a perfect storm: aggressive state climate laws, a fragile power supply struggling with generator deactivations, the multi-billion dollar cost of upgrading aging distribution grids, and the sudden, staggering invasion of energy-guzzling data centers.

THE 20-YEAR CLIMB: FROM AFFORDABLE TO A BUDGET BUSTER

Not too long ago, New York's power rates were stable. In the early 2000s, ratepayers were used to paying about 12 to 14 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh). Fast forward to today? Residential rates have blasted past 27 cents per kWh, and retail electricity prices nationally surged 23% between 2019 and 2024 alone. Your bill has essentially doubled.

For the average New York household, the reality of the next five years is grim. Electricity demand is forecast to grow by 1% in 2026 and 3% in 2027, driven largely by the data center boom, which is expected to keep prices trending upward through 2030.

What does this mean for your wallet? An average household power bill that used to be $150 a month is now routinely hitting $250 to $300. Annually, this translates into $3,000 to $3,600 stripped from a family's budget just to keep the lights and heat on. If current trends continue, annual household electricity costs could easily breach $4,000 by 2030.



Why the huge spike? Much of it comes down to how New York buys power.

It's an auction. The grid operator takes the cheapest power bids first (like wind and hydro). But when demand spikes, they have to accept bids from the most expensive power plants just to keep the lights on. In these wholesale electricity markets, demand-driven spike prices act as the primary determinants of major price fluctuations, generating extreme marginal costs that are ultimately passed down to consumers (Li et al., 2019).

Furthermore, utilities are passing the costs of aging grid infrastructure down to you; nationwide capital spending on distribution grids increased by 160% from 2003 to 2023, hitting $50.9 billion.

THE ENERGY MIX: WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY BURNING?

State politicians love to tout a green future, largely driven by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). Passed in 2019, the CLCPA legally mandates an aggressive transformation of the state's energy system, targeting a 70% renewable grid by 2030 and a fully zero-emissions power system by 2040 (Liu et al., 2021).

But let's look at the reality of the grid today. Roughly half of the electricity generated in New York State still relies on natural gas. When the weather gets extreme, that reliance skyrockets.

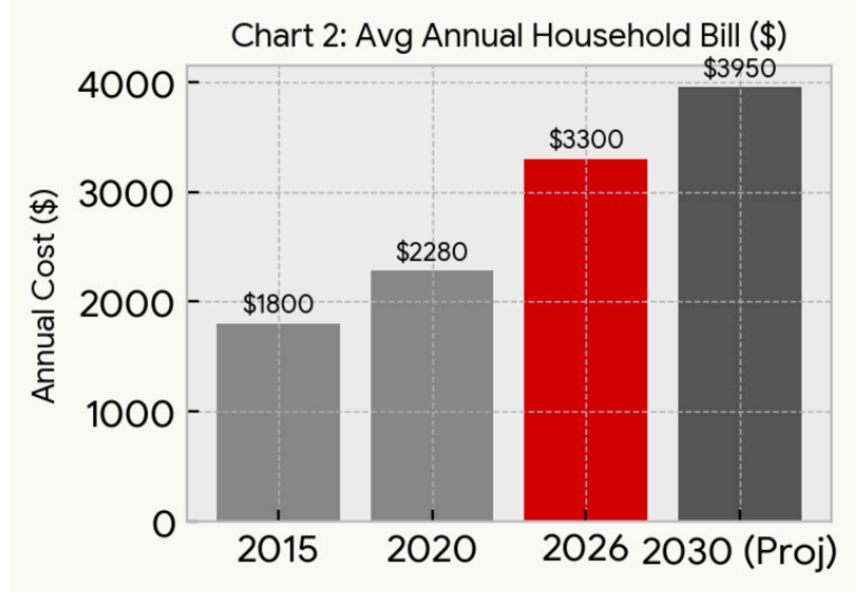
During a severe winter cold snap in early 2026, fossil fuels provided a massive 62% of the state's power to meet peak loads. Nuclear energy provided 19%, and hydro provided 14%. Meanwhile, wind and solar drastically underperformed, contributing negligible amounts during the highest demand periods.

The cost to produce this energy is highly volatile. In 2024, the wholesale price of electricity in New York averaged $41.81 per Megawatt-hour (MWh). In 2025, because natural gas prices spiked 120% higher than the previous year, wholesale electricity prices surged to $74.40/MWh. When gas prices jump, your bill goes right up with it.

Additionally, state mandates add direct fees: consumers subsidize clean energy through Zero-Emission Credits (ZECs) and Renewable Energy Credits (RECs), which for 2026 are priced at $1.65/MWh and roughly $2.00/MWh respectively.

THE DIRTY REALITY OF "PEAKER" PLANTS

To understand why peak power is so expensive, you have to understand "peaker" plants. These are highly polluting oil and gas-burning power plants that typically operate at low capacity factors—less than 15% of the time—firing up only when demand is highest.



Between 2023 and 2025, New York implemented strict nitrogen oxide emission limits aimed at phasing out these inefficient peaker plants. But reality hit hard: generator deactivations are now outpacing new supply additions.

Research indicates that during extreme weather events, covariability between high load and low wind/solar yields major short-term resource gaps that must be filled by dispatchable resources (Doering et al., 2023). Consequently, the NYISO has explicitly warned that traditional fossil-fueled generation is still desperately needed to maintain grid reliability and prevent blackouts.

Here's the kicker regarding costs: under NYISO "market-clearing price" rules, all power generators get paid whatever the highest, most expensive price is at that moment.

Because peakers are incredibly expensive to run—often bidding well over $100 to $150/MWh compared to base-load hydro or nuclear—they drive up the price for the entire market. Until reliable, dispatchable emissions-free technologies are actually built, we are trapped paying premium prices for dirty power just to keep the lights on.

MEGAWATT MONSTERS: THE DATA CENTER INVASION

While we struggle to maintain a reliable power supply, demand is exploding. Ten years ago, data centers were just big server rooms. Today, fueled by the rise of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cryptocurrency mining, hyperscale data centers are becoming the biggest power hogs on the planet.

Forecasts project an incredible 3,200 MW to over 5,000 MW of new large load demand hitting the New York grid by 2030.

Look at Western New York's Genesee County. A single hyperscale data center campus at the STAMP site is projected to suck up 500 Megawatts (MW) of power.

To put that in perspective, 500 MW is enough to power half a million Upstate New York homes.

What happens when a monster like that plugs in?

Our margin for error vanishes. Shrinking reliability margins mean that consumers face a much greater risk of outages. The grid will be forced to run those ultra-expensive gas "peaker" plants more often, and utilities will have to spend billions more to upgrade local distribution networks.

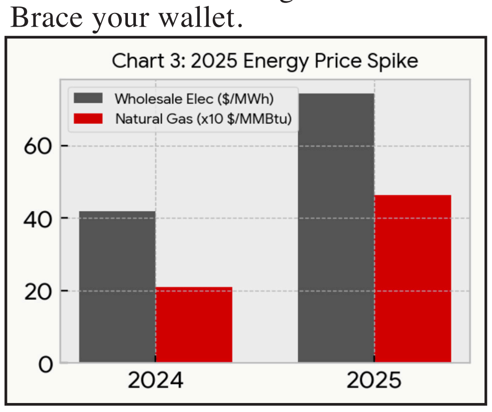
THE BOTTOM LINE

We are caught in a brutal vise. On one side, public policy is driving fossil generators into retirement without adding new carbon-free resources fast enough to replace them. On the other side, an AI-driven tech boom and building electrification are sending demand through the roof.

The math is simple, and it punishes everyday ratepayers.

The NYISO warns that New York will shift to a winter-peaking grid by the 2040s, and if gas supplies run short, we could see grid deficiencies as early as the winter of 2029–2030.

Unless lawmakers force big tech to generate its own power and realistically balance climate goals with actual grid capacity, your utility bills will continue breaking records. Brace your wallet.



About the Author:
Sumit Majumdar is the Vice Chairman, Chief Sustainability Officer, and Operating Partner of Verite Capital Partners. 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	52,900.07
NASDAQ	25,832.67
S&P 500	7,483.24
TSX (CANADA)	34,966.67
NIKKEI 225	68,733.15
SSE (CHINA)	4,028.90
FTSE 100 (UK)	10,652.87

METALS COMMODITIES

GOLD	$4,134.24 per troy oz.
SILVER	$61.68 per troy oz.
COPPER	$13,298.50 per metric ton
PLATINUM	$1,633.40 per troy oz.
PALLADIUM	$1,285.45 per troy oz.
TIN	$51,200 per metric ton
NICKEL	$16,115 per metric ton
ZINC	$3,546 per metric ton
ALUMINUM	$3,080 per metric ton

LIVESTOCK

LIVE CATTLE	$2.39 lb.
FEEDER CATTLE	$3.61 lb.
LEAN HOGS	$.94 lb.
BEEF	$391.26 cwt
POULTRY	$1.19 lb.

AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES

COFFEE	$3.01 lb.
SUGAR	$.17 lb.
CORN	$4.23 bushel
SOYBEANS	$11.36 bushel
WHEAT	$5.99 bushel
COTTON	$.77 lb.
FCOJ	$1.69 lb.

ENERGY COMMODITIES

GASOLINE	$3.80 gallon avg.
DIESEL	$4.67 gallon avg.
NATURAL GAS	$3.18 MMBtu
HEATING OIL	$3.18 gallon
WTI (West Texas int.)	$68.69 barrel
BRENT CRUDE	$71.80 barrel
USED COOKING OIL (UCO)	$.74 per lb.

A SNAPSHOT IN TIME

AS OF 6AM MONDAY, JULY 6TH, 2026

Climate & Environment

The Grid's Missing Link: Navigating the Realities of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

Sumit Majumdar
Vice Chairman, Chief Sustainability Officer, & Operating Partner at Verite Capital Partners

The transition to a circular, green industrial model isn't just about generating renewable power; it's about holding onto it. Right now, global power grids are bleeding energy. We are seeing staggering levels of "curtailment"—where grid operators literally force wind and solar farms to shut off because they are generating more power than the local infrastructure can transmit or consume at that exact moment. Without massive Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) to capture that excess electricity, our renewable ambitions hit a hard wall.

When analyzing heavy infrastructure and regional energy loops, it quickly becomes apparent that storage dictates economic viability. We have to look past the marketing hype and examine the hard physics, economics, and chemistry of these batteries to understand what actually belongs on our grid. More importantly, we must figure out how to build this infrastructure without creating a new ecological and economic disaster tied to toxic mining and volatile commodities.

The Current Scale of American Power

To understand the depth of the storage crisis, we must first look at the sheer scale of the United States power grid. The U.S. consumes an astronomical amount of electricity—over 4 million Gigawatt-hours (or 4,000 Terawatt-hours) annually. Despite aggressive investments in renewables over the last two decades, the bedrock of our electrical supply remains heavily tethered to carbon-emitting fossil fuels and legacy nuclear plants.

As state legislatures mandate the closure of aging, heavily polluting coal plants, a dangerous void has opened in base power generation. Without adequate energy storage, the grid relies almost entirely on natural gas "peaker" plants to fill sudden gaps when the wind dies down or the sun sets. These open-cycle gas peaker plants are highly inefficient. Because they are constantly ramping up and down to chase the fluctuating output of solar and wind, they emit massive plumes of CO2 and methane precisely when power demand spikes. Natural gas is the ultimate backup, but using it in this reactionary, start-stop manner is economically and environmentally punishing.

The Nuclear Dilemma: A Legacy of Unresolved Waste

Currently, nuclear power stands as the only truly reliable, zero-emission baseload generation capable of running 24/7 regardless of weather. Because of this, a growing chorus of technologists and policymakers are pushing for a nuclear renaissance, heavily promoting advanced Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) as the silver bullet to our baseload problem.

However, this enthusiasm often ignores a grim historical and logistical reality. The nuclear industry once promised the world that Chernobyl was a uniquely Soviet failure—a tragic anomaly born of flawed RBMK reactor design and authoritarian mismanagement. We were assured, with absolute certainty, that such an event could never happen again. Then came Fukushima. A technologically advanced, highly regulated nation watched helplessly as a tsunami overwhelmed backup generators, leading to multi-reactor meltdowns, hydrogen explosions, and the widespread radioactive contamination of the Pacific ecosystem. Engineering hubris met the raw, unpredictable power of nature, and nature won.

Today, proponents of advanced SMRs insist the new technology is inherently safe, designed to passively cool itself and theoretically incapable of melting down. But even if we accept this premise unconditionally—even if a modern reactor operates flawlessly for 60 years without a single safety incident or mechanical failure—it does not solve the fundamental flaw of fission: the waste.

To date, the United States has accumulated over 90,000 metric tons of highly radioactive commercial spent nuclear fuel. The backend of the nuclear fuel cycle remains an unresolved global crisis. The original plan to store high-level nuclear waste deep within Yucca Mountain in Nevada failed entirely due to decades of political gridlock and geological concerns.

With Yucca Mountain effectively dead, the federal government and private contractors have desperately sought alternative "stranded" waste sites. Recently, a consortium pushed to build a massive Consolidated Interim Storage Facility (CISF) in southeastern New Mexico. The plan was met with fierce, organized resistance. Local townspeople, ranchers, environmentalists, and Indigenous communities fundamentally understood the reality of the nuclear shell game: once radioactive waste arrives, it rarely leaves.

Despite assurances from developers that the site would be strictly "temporary," the locals successfully fought back, taking the fight to federal courts and state legislatures. They questioned the basic morality and safety of transporting thousands of tons of high-level waste across the country via rail, only to park it in their communities. After all, who wants a permanent nuclear waste dump in their backyard? This grassroots opposition in New Mexico proves that the backend of the nuclear fuel cycle is not just an engineering problem; it is an insurmountable political and social crisis. We are generating toxic material that will outlast human civilization, with no viable plan for where to put it. Nuclear may not emit carbon, but it is fundamentally not a sustainable, circular solution for the modern grid.

The Heavyweight Champion and Its Toxic Shadow: Lithium-Ion

With nuclear expansion stalled by its own waste and natural gas emitting too much carbon, massive grid storage is the only viable path forward. Currently, most modern BESS installations rely on lithium-ion technology. These batteries work on the principle of intercalation: lithium ions move back and forth between a positive cathode and a negative anode through a liquid electrolyte. While prized for high energy density and specific capacity (often pushing 0.20 Amp-hours per gram), scaling this chemistry to the multi-megawatt level introduces severe vulnerabilities.

Toxicity, Fire, and Water: Thermal runaway is a catastrophic reality for lithium chemistry. If a lithium cell shorts or overheats, it can ignite the flammable electrolyte, creating a self-sustaining chemical fire that generates its own oxygen. When burning, these batteries release highly toxic hydrofluoric acid (HF) gas. Furthermore, the chemistry involves heavy metals like cobalt and nickel, which carry severe environmental and human toxicity risks from mining operations to end-of-life disposal.

The extraction of lithium itself is an ecological disaster. In regions like South America's Lithium Triangle (the Atacama Desert), lithium is extracted via massive brine evaporation pools. This process consumes astronomical volumes of local groundwater—up to 500,000 gallons of water per metric ton of lithium—devastating local agriculture, indigenous communities, and fragile desert ecosystems. We are destroying one environment to ostensibly "save" another.

Furthermore, lithium batteries are thermal divas. Push them past 30°C, and their cycle life degrades rapidly. In sub-zero temperatures, charging them causes lithium plating, irreversibly ruining the cell. Maintaining these narrow thermal bands requires massive HVAC cooling systems that drain parasitic power directly from the grid they are supposed to be supporting.

The Illusion of Nameplate Capacity vs. Grid Reality

We are deploying solar arrays and wind turbines faster than the grid can transmit their power or store their excess. A fundamental misunderstanding in energy policy is the confusion between "nameplate capacity" (the theoretical maximum power a generator can produce) and its "capacity factor" (what it actually generates based on weather and daylight).

If wind and solar could run at 100% theoretical capacity—if the wind never stopped blowing and the sun shone 12 hours a day globally without clouds—our power profile would easily displace fossil fuels. Instead, a massive amount of clean energy is wasted. Because grid operators must match supply to demand in real-time, any excess solar power generated at noon is literally thrown away. Solar inverters are shut off. Wind turbines are braked. This forced curtailment equates to tens of thousands of Gigawatt-hours of pure, zero-emission energy entirely lost every year.

To completely decarbonize the U.S. grid—accounting for multi-day weather events, massive diurnal shifts, and the high-cycle demands of modern infrastructure—engineers estimate a baseline requirement of at least 12,000 to 24,000 GWh (12-24 TWh) of highly cyclable, fast-dispatch storage. Delivering this much storage using rare-earth metals like lithium, cobalt, and nickel is physically, politically, and economically impossible. There is simply not enough viable mining capacity on Earth. We require an entirely new, deeply scalable, domestic supply chain.

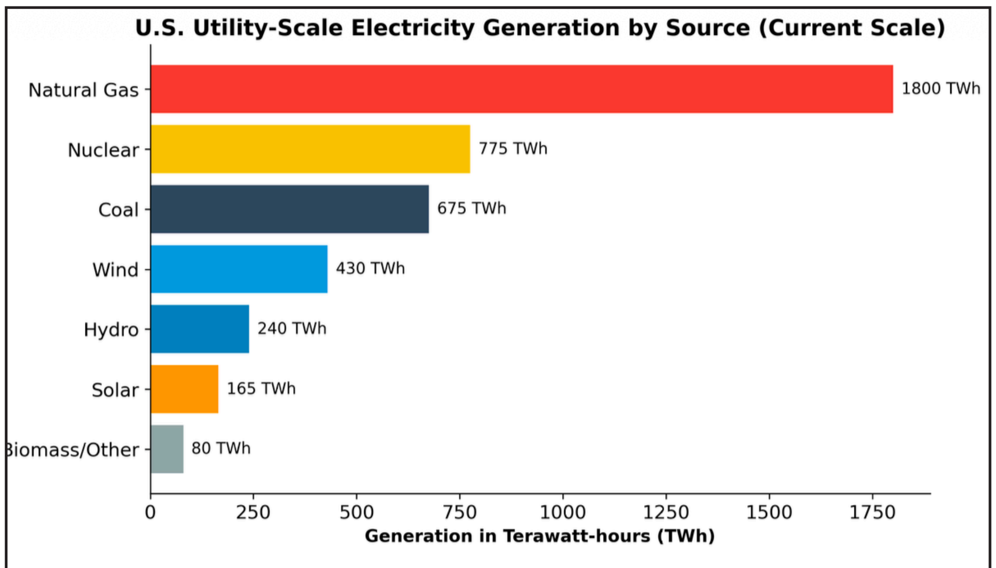


Figure 1: Approximate annual U.S. utility-scale electricity generation. Natural gas remains the dominant baseload and peaker fuel, compensating for the intermittency of renewables.

The Real Solution: Organically Sourced Sodium-Ion

Because of lithium's volatility, toxicity, and supply chain bottlenecks, the industry must pivot. While true iron flow batteries are arguably the safest, non-toxic chemistry for ultra-long-duration stationary storage (yielding rust water if a tank ruptures), they lack the immediate power density required for fast grid-balancing and frequency regulation.

This points directly to the actual green solution: Advanced Sodium-Ion Batteries utilizing Hard Carbon derived from Biomass.

Sodium operates similarly to lithium but uses cheap, globally abundant salt. Historically, sodium struggled with lower specific capacity and energy density. The core scientific challenge is that sodium ions are physically larger than lithium ions. They cannot efficiently wedge themselves (intercalate) between the tightly packed, highly ordered graphene layers of standard graphite anodes. They require a more chaotic, porous, and expanded carbon structure to house them. This structure is known as "hard carbon."

Transforming Waste into Grid Storage

Instead of mining toxic graphite, we can produce battery-grade hard carbon directly from agricultural waste, wood lignin, forestry byproducts, and municipal organic waste. Currently, when timber is harvested or crops are processed, millions of tons of biological waste are either burned (releasing massive amounts of CO2 and particulate matter) or left to rot (releasing methane, a greenhouse gas 80 times more potent than CO2 over a 20-year period).

Through thermal decomposition (pyrolysis) and lowest-tech refinement principles—optimizing for reduced regulatory friction and robust, highly scalable domestic manufacturing—this organic waste is converted into high-grade biochar. This biochar is further synthesized into advanced carbon structures, including synthetic G3 graphene. When integrated into a sodium-ion cell, this graphene-enhanced hard carbon dramatically increases electrical conductivity, accommodating the larger sodium ions with incredible efficiency.

The Carbon Sequestration Advantage: When we use agricultural and wood waste to manufacture battery anodes, we are literally capturing carbon that would otherwise decompose and release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The carbon is permanently locked into the physical, solid-state structure of the battery for decades. This makes organically sourced sodium batteries not just carbon-neutral, but actively and aggressively carbon-negative. It represents a monumental shift: the very act of building the battery cleans the atmosphere.

Operational Superiority

Weight and Applications

1. Sodium-ion cells are heavier and less energy-dense per kilogram than lithium. You would not use them in a smartphone or an electric sports car. However, for utility-scale grid storage, data centers, marine vessel propulsion, and commercial building backups—where massive footprint and weight are secondary to safety and longevity—they are the perfect engineering solution.
2. Fire Safety and Deep Discharge
3. Unlike lithium, sodium batteries have virtually zero risk of thermal runaway. Crucially, they can be discharged all the way to 0 volts for safe transportation and storage without causing any chemical degradation or "bricking" the cell. Try fully discharging a lithium battery, and its internal copper current collectors will dissolve, ruining it forever.

Extreme Weather Resilience

Sodium chemistry excels in extreme environments, maintaining near-full capacity at -30°C. They can cycle rapidly and safely, making them ideal for the fast-response frequency regulation the grid demands, all without the parasitic drain of massive HVAC cooling units.

Synergy with Natural Gas: Hydrogen and CCUS

Deploying terawatt-scale sodium storage also dramatically alters the reality of our fossil fuel infrastructure. If we have massive BESS buffers, natural gas plants no longer need to operate as wildly inefficient, start-stop "peakers." They can be run at a steady, continuous, highly efficient baseline.

Running gas turbines at a steady state makes Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) mechanically and economically viable. Furthermore, excess green electricity stored in massive sodium BESS networks can be used to power industrial electrolyzers to produce green hydrogen. This hydrogen can then be blended into the natural gas supply—or synthesized into Renewable Natural Gas (RNG)—allowing existing gas-fired plants to burn cleaner fuel while capturing the remaining carbon emissions. Storage is the key that unlocks low-emission transitional fuels, bridging the gap between today's reality and tomorrow's fully renewable grid.

Shattering the Cost Barrier: The $150/kW Target

Ultimately, the transition to green energy is an unforgiving economic equation. Current BESS economic models price utility-scale storage between $250 and $400 per kilowatt (kW). These costs are heavily tethered to the volatile, geopolitical commodities markets for lithium, copper, nickel, and cobalt. When a global supply chain hiccup occurs, project economics collapse.

However, by utilizing locally sourced biomass to produce hard carbon and synthetic G3 graphene, and pairing it with infinitely abundant sodium, we can entirely bypass the rare-earth commodities market. Based on current modeling, establishing this circular, localized manufacturing loop can compress capital expenditure targets down to $150 per kW installed capacity.

Double-checking the global economic thresholds for energy infrastructure, $150/kW is the magic number. At this price point, grid-scale storage reaches absolute parity with fossil fuel peaker plants without the need for government subsidies. The financial barriers to terawatt-scale deployment evaporate, making rapid grid stabilization economically viable not just in the developed world, but across the global South.

The economics of modern energy are no longer just about generation; they are strictly about capture and dispatch. Getting the chemistry right—by rejecting the toxic legacy of lithium and the unresolved waste of nuclear, and instead embracing circular, organic sodium technology—is the only way we transition from a fragile, emitting grid to a truly resilient, decarbonized power network.

About the Author:
Sumit Majumdar is the Vice Chairman, Chief Sustainability Officer, and Operating Partner of Verite Capital Partners. 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

2	7	4	5		3	8	9	1
	3	5			9			
9		8	4	1		3		
	8	2		5	1	9		
5			6			7		4
	1		3		4		2	8
7	4	9		3	6	2	8	
			9	4	2	1		
				7	5	6		

7			3		1			
	2	1		4			3	6
	3	4	6			7		1
		7			9	2		
1		8			2		5	
			1	6	7	3	9	8
8			9		4	1		
6	1	2	8	5	3	4		9
4		9	2	1	6			3

THE INTERACTIVE WNY SUMMER FUN ZONE!

POP QUIZ! (CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER)

1. Which of these animals is most active during summer nights in Western New York?

A) Black Bear
B) Northern Cardinal
C) Eastern Chipmunk

2. Which celestial object is at its closest to Earth and appears brightest in the summer sky?

A) Jupiter
B) The Moon
C) Venus

3. What atmospheric condition most often leads to summer thunderstorms in WNY?

A) High pressure and cool, dry air
B) Warm, moist air colliding with cool, dry air
C) Steady winds from the north

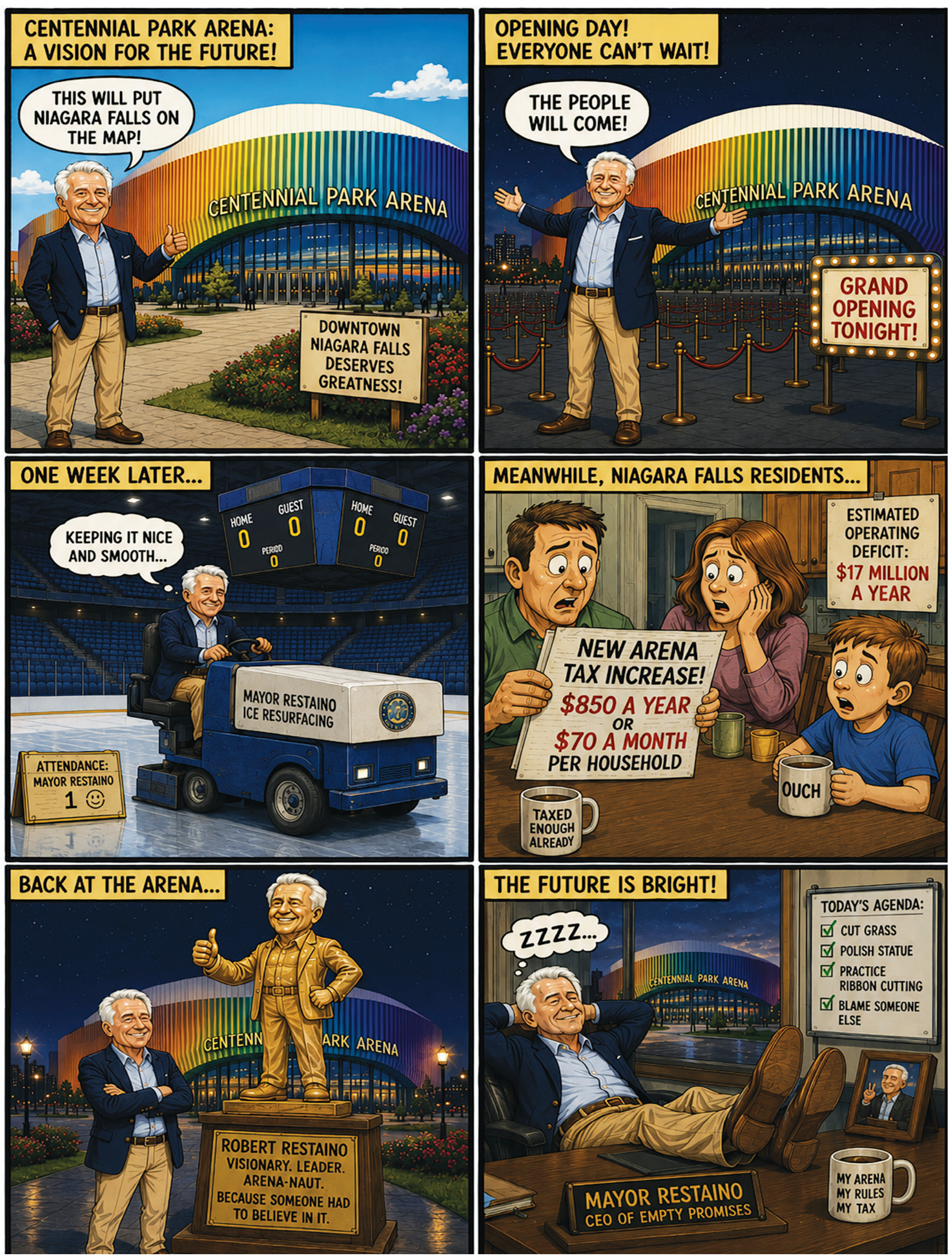
CONSTELLATIONS: SPEND 30 MINUTES OUTSIDE.

Take 30 minutes and write down all the different constellations you see at night. If you need help, download an app!

WNY SUMMER BINGO

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

B	I	N	G	O
Sunburn line from a baseball hat	Fresh picked strawberries from a farm	Hearing crickets on a warm evening	Sunset at Niagara Falls	Paddle down the Niagara River
Homemade ice cream cone	Backyard water slip 'n slide	**FREE SPACE (You survived Winter)**	Mini golf with family	Fireworks over Darien Lake
Boat ride on Lake Ontario	Picnic lunch in the shade	Spotting a rainbow after a summer shower	Local farmers market find	Ice cold lemonade on a hot day
Sleeping with the windows open	Floating on a lake or river	Bike ride on the Erie Canal Trail	Sandcastle at the beach	Catching fireflies at dusk
Concert at Artpark	Camping under the stars	Grilling out with friends	Watermelon eating contest	Hiking to a scenic waterfall



Top 20 Ice Cream Flavors

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Z L Q R A S P B E R R Y E F V C H E R R Y Y Q Y L
C O C O N U T D P C C G O B G X H I I U R M U S W
S U I H I A Z V T P I V D A B B L U E B E R R Y J
K X S M Z Y G M O O S E T R A C K S J N G P C C R
X T X N J P Q Z C C N E A P O L I T A N U B E U Q
G Y N R Z F Z V Q Q O C T Z T I X K M P Y U P J P
G J Z B L J M L X O T O O C K N Y V I V D Y S E H
F V Y M R M C G Y L M Z K O A E Z O N A D D J S B
O D A Y A H X A J L Z R P I K R R D T W B H S G Y
X V B N O N T R W X P C A Y E I A D E O W Q Z B J
I Y S B I P G V Z R X K H A E S E M C R P W Q H A
G J R M H L E O K S N K U E T E A D E A B I T A I
E B T K I E L Y V Q T M T D E O G N O L J L Q J V
S Z J Y V H K A N F X R U C O S W Y D U U N R X J
G M K G V B I R I B V M A H V B E A N C G D T Q T
Z S C U A F Z Y H U U M Q W P N R C K N R H F C N
W G N H L N Y F E N P T G M B I S L A X U E N L R
Z T G T O E R P N F Y C T W B E S Y G K W L A J V
L H O J J C M W O U V D C E S H R T X C E U V M Z
C X R T I M O U K D T F X V R E D R A F Z L T H A
A J F S C L C L F G Y R L F B P D K Y C Q J R P K
X O Q M B L X N A E K H T W L Y E E N U H C H U F
N E Q Y P X W U L T X O F M M U R C H G B I G T A
H N R E J O T I Q X E C O F F E E Q A P B Z O H A
K P R O C K Y R O A D L N I C G W S T N G F R K F
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CookiesandCream	ButterPecan	MooseTracks	Mint
CookieDough	Neapolitan	Strawberry	
Cheesecake	RockyRoad	Chocolate	
Blueberry	Raspberry	Pistachio	
Vanilla	Caramel	Coffee	
Coconut	Cherry	Fudge	
Mango			

NIAGARA ACTION

BI-WEEKLY HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21 – April 19)
This week rewards persistence. A project or goal that seemed slow to develop begins showing signs of progress. Stay focused on what you can control rather than worrying about the bigger picture. A thoughtful decision regarding work or finances will benefit you in the weeks ahead.

TAURUS (April 20 – May 20)
Stability remains your greatest advantage. This is an excellent week to organize finances, complete unfinished tasks, and strengthen important relationships. Your calm approach helps others navigate challenges. Don't hesitate to share your practical advice—it will be appreciated.

GEMINI (May 21 – June 20)
Your natural curiosity leads you toward new opportunities. Conversations, networking, or learning something new may open doors you didn't expect. Stay flexible as plans evolve. An unexpected invitation or chance meeting could become one of the highlights of your week.

CANCER (June 21 – July 22)
Your birthday season continues to encourage personal growth and self-confidence. Trust yourself to make decisions that support your long-term happiness. Family or close friends may provide encouragement just when you need it. Small victories now build momentum for larger successes.

LEO (July 23 – August 22)
Take time to slow down before your season begins. Reflection and preparation are just as valuable as action this week. Avoid unnecessary conflicts and focus your energy on what truly matters. A quiet moment of insight may help solve a lingering problem.

VIRGO (August 23 – September 22)
Friends and community connections become valuable sources of encouragement. Collaboration leads to stronger results than working alone. Stay open to new ideas, even if they challenge your usual routine. A shared project could exceed expectations.

LIBRA (September 23 – October 22)
Professional goals move forward steadily. Your diplomacy and reliability help you earn the respect of those around you. A leadership opportunity or important responsibility may come your way. Stay confident and trust the experience you've already gained.

SCORPIO (October 23 – November 21)
Adventure calls in unexpected ways. Whether through travel, education, or exploring a new interest, you'll benefit from stepping outside your comfort zone. Keep an open mind during conversations with people who have different perspectives. Growth comes through curiosity.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 – December 21)
Financial matters deserve careful planning this week. Review long-term goals before making significant commitments. Honest communication strengthens both personal and professional relationships. Your patience now prevents unnecessary complications later.

CAPRICORN (December 22 – January 19)
Partnerships continue to flourish through cooperation and trust. Whether working with a colleague or strengthening a personal relationship, listening carefully brings better outcomes than trying to control every detail. Mutual respect creates lasting progress.

AQUARIUS (January 20 – February 18)
A productive week lies ahead as organization and consistency help you stay on track. Improving daily routines or simplifying your schedule can reduce stress. Small changes made now will have a lasting impact. Focus on steady improvement rather than perfection.

PISCES (February 19 – March 20)
Creativity and personal expression are highlighted throughout the week. Whether through art, hobbies, or time with loved ones, you'll find inspiration in unexpected places. Trust your imagination and don't be afraid to pursue an idea that excites you. Joy often arrives when you least expect it.