



**In the Tradition of the Old-time Pamphleteers, This is An Open Letter
to the Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York**

Dear Governor Andrew Mark Cuomo,

In a recent public speech, you made several remarks about Goat Island at Niagara Falls. One remark had to do with building a "lodge" on Goat Island, "a world class lodge with sweeping views of the Niagara River," and you furthermore said that an RFP has already been issued to "build greater outdoor activities on Goat Island that will boost tourism and give people an international destination to visit." Your radical action compels the asking of questions, but before I ask them, please bear with me for the following News Flash: Niagara Falls is already "an international destination," and has been so for over two centuries.

With all due respect:

1) Did you think of these ideas all by yourself? Or was it one of the "wise men" you made reference to elsewhere in the speech? If not you, who then? Please give us a name.

2) Did you run these ideas by anyone before presenting them publicly?

3) Did no trusted aide approach you quietly to say, "Governor, these are not good ideas."?

4) What is a "greater" outdoor activity? Is it something different from hiking, and strolling with family and friends, enjoying the natural scenery, with birds singing, the sound of water flowing, and perhaps taking photographs to remember the day?

5) What specifically do you have in mind that will encourage this "greater outdoor activity"? Does it involve jungle gyms, swing sets, trampolines, climbing walls, soccer or baseball fields, strategically located basketball hoops, motorized vehicles to rent? Will tourists be required to bring their own soccer balls, etc., or will these be for rent by the hour?

6) Did it ever cross your mind that those tourists who travel for hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles to Niagara Falls, to see that prodigious amount of water flowing, thundering into a ten-thousand-year-old gorge have come to see a phenomenon of the natural world?

7) Did you ever once perceive the trees and foliage and rocky shores of Goat Island to be a frame, an extension of that natural world?

8) Can you understand that whatever detracts from, or commercializes, that natural world does so at a risk of reducing the quality of the experience for the tourist? Can you name ten things that already do this?

9) Have you ever heard of Frederick Law Olmsted? (I know you tossed the name "Olmsted" into your speech, but as a magic charm, in anticipation of objections from those who value the natural environment--to disarm them.)

10) Are you familiar with the term "Niagara Reservation"? Do you know what it implied? Do you believe that designation might have helped to protect Goat Island from the commercial intrusions you now propose?

11) Do you know the name of the brainiac who, over a century later, determined that the title "Niagara Reservation" would no longer be used?

12) Do you think reality bends to the language used to describe it? When the name of the "Robert Moses Parkway" was changed to "Niagara Scenic Parkway" did the parkway become more scenic?

13) Have you ever read the 1887 "General Plan for the Improvement of the Niagara Reservation"? It's posted on the Niagara Heritage Partnership website--where, for those who find the 1887 language too archaic, a translation or "condensation" has been provided.

14) Does the phrase "forever wild" have any meaning for you in this context?

15) Do you know that in the eighteen hundreds, at great expense, labor, and after much consideration that Goat Island and the surrounding parkland was wrested from commercial interests and restored to a natural environment? Do you recognize the assault from commercial interests it's been under since that time? Do you see yourself as part of that?

16) Do you enjoy the natural world, forests, etc.? Where do you go to enjoy it?

17) Do you have friends or business acquaintances, or other contractors, etc., who would like to bid on the "lodge" and other commercial developments on Goat Island?

18) Have you been in Niagara Falls recently, on Goat Island? Did you see the glitter and neon, etc., of Clifton Hill in Canada across the river and feel envy?

19) Who--give us names, please--on the Niagara Frontier enthusiastically supports your ideas? Are these other than the usual politicians and those mesmerized by the "Billion" dollars you seem in a sweat to throw around?

20) When you casually mention in your speech that you are going to "reclaim 135,000 acres of the Niagara Gorge corridor, preserving the rich ecology," what exactly are you reclaiming these acres from, and does that include down in the gorge, the vertical and nearly vertical gorge walls as well as the gorge rim?

21) Are you aware that the Power Authority, as a result of a study they'd commissioned, had announced that such restoration was impossible? What changed their collective minds?

22) The online transcript of your speech gives a 135,000 acre gorge-corridor reclamation number, an article in the Niagara Gazette said 135 acres will be "reclaimed," and the project currently underway is 43 acres. Which is it?

23) Do you realize that according to an EDR study, the most ecologically valuable portion of the gorge rim is between Whirlpool and Devil's Hole--which is currently occupied by the commuter-route parkway, and therefore cannot be restored?

24) Where were you for all those years when the Niagara Heritage Partnership (NHP) was advocating for total parkway removal, the natural restoration of the gorge rim, and the development of a regional ecotourism market based on that restoration?

25) Do you believe you should get a pass on this inane "world class lodge" for Goat Island because you've so generously supported, to high-sung praise, other environmental causes?

26) What will make this lodge "world class," anyway? Will it be big, very, very big? How many stories? Will there be balconies? Will it accommodate 300 or more guests? Will it cost \$1,000 + per night, per guest? Are the furnishings to be plush, ornate, elaborate, and gilded? Will there be a five-star restaurant on the first floor? Can guests still send out for a pizza? Will guests get free passes to the "outdoor activity" opportunities? When the toilets are flushed, where will the flushes go?

27) Do you stay awake at night trying to think of even more ways that State Parks can suck money from the business communities of Niagara Falls, NY?

28) Re this "world class lodge with sweeping views of the Niagara River, blah, blah," have you ever heard of the Red Coach Inn? Just curious.

29) Do you admit to the possibility, however slim, assuming the inevitable reality of the "world class lodge" and jungle gym installation that you might awake one morning as an old man, rubbing your eyes as dawn is breaking, suddenly realizing it was all a huge mistake, and feeling an overwhelming sense of regret and deep shame?

I have suggestions for you, Governor, and I'm writing to you in hopes, unlike the last time I wrote (letter posted on the NHP website), that this time you will give me the courtesy of reading and responding. I was born and raised in Niagara Falls; worked in the factories there; drove the Viewmobile on Goat Island; watched, over the years, up to a half dozen State Parks administrations continue to degrade the Island and parks;

spent months of my youth hiking and exploring the Niagara Gorge; worked on the Niagara Power Project as a carpenters' helper, down at the bottom of the reservoir; attended Niagara County Community College as a student, and later taught there; have had three books published with "Niagara" in the title of each (have a novel in ms, set in Niagara Falls, in which the waterfalls are a central feature, also with "Niagara" in the title); was one of the founding members of Niagara Heritage Partnership, and the founder of the Niagara Frontier Wildlife Habitat Council; was the 2014 keynote speaker for the Northeastern Regional Honors Council (spoke of Niagara Frontier history, prehistoric to present, and the debasement of its natural environment); wrote "Selling the Sacred," an essay proposing that bronze statues of all the daredevils be located all over Goat Island; was recognized as being an advocate for Niagara's natural world by awards from the Friends of the Buffalo Niagara Rivers (2004) and from The Sierra Club, Niagara Group (2016).

The above qualifies me to say that I know Niagara in ways that you never will--and as your elder, I urge you to summon the courage to retract those RFP's in the interest of paying homage to the philosophy of Frederick Law Olmsted as it pertains to Goat Island and the park system at Niagara. Please consider the following to make genuine and meaningful contributions to the Niagara Frontier:

Put some real money down to break ground on the long-discussed Niagara Experience Center, to be constructed in the City of Niagara Falls, New York. Revisit, if indeed, you've visited at all previously, the vision of Niagara Heritage Partnership that proposes a new and exciting market for ecotourism at Niagara. Go to the NHP website and read everything there. You're certain to recognize the high potential for contributions to our regional economies, far higher than the parochial retention of an unnecessary commuter route allows, which is still a scar on our environmental landscape, regardless of the name change.

Then, if the "empty" eastern end of Goat Island still haunts you with its barren parking lot and acres of sterile lawn, consider this: tear out the parking lot, and plow the whole thing up, every square foot of lawn, and plant a forest of native trees. Announce that you're planting an old growth forest of tomorrow. As young seedlings grow, turning into mature trees, try to imagine the publicity this audacious plan will generate. I'm not sure if such a forest has ever been created in a public place like this before, and I'm not suggesting it would be easy.

Hire, if you're fortunate enough to get her to accept, the accomplished botanist P.M. Eckel to head up the project. She's especially familiar with the flora of Niagara--and you can read some of her work under Document Archives on the NHP website. She might share with you information about the genetic uniqueness of some Niagara trees and how a local greenhouse should be available to nurture plants for the large scale restoration work you seem, in any case, to be planning.

You will be alive, providing you get those trees growing by 2020, let's say, when the trees are tall enough to be attractive to the dozens of colorful warblers that migrate over the Island spring and autumn, some coming and going from locations as far away as Peru. You won't be alive, however, when the forest is old enough to qualify as a (young) old growth forest, say in 2175 (again based on that 2020 start date), but by then it will probably be known as Cuomo's Woods. Can you think of a better legacy? Contact me if I can help: erbaxter@aol.com.

Happy trails, Governor,
E.R. Baxter III
www.niagaraheritage.org
www.nfwhc.org
www.erbaxteriii.com

Folks: please contact the Governor to tell him respectfully: No hotel on Goat Island,
world class or otherwise--create a magnificent old growth forest there!

Phone: 1 518 474 8390

Email: Use the contact form on the Governor's website.

Or drop a line to:

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