

Dear Editor,

Niagara County Legislator, John D. Ceretto, also an employee of the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), has called for a “constructive dialog” (as opposed to a destructive one?) between Niagara Falls and northtown communities about the future of the gorge parkway, a dialog “free of the influences of a small group...totally unwilling to compromise and consider other viewpoints.” He says, “it’s only a small group that wants to eliminate the parkway from one end to the other” adding that “the group seeking to remove the entire parkway is hurting Western New York.” He calls for an “honest dialog and reasonable discussion.”

Considering comments such as these, it appears that most of the effort toward “honest dialog and reasonable discussion” needs to be made by Ceretto. He could begin by not making further references to the “entire parkway” and to the elimination of the parkway “from one end to the other.”

There are about 18 miles of parkway, North Grand Island Bridge to Fort Niagara. Even the “pressure groups with extreme agendas” (an instance of name-calling by Ceretto, which is by definition, illogical), have never advocated for, or even suggested, removal of anything other than the segment between Niagara Falls and Lewiston, the gorge parkway. This is about 5 miles, excluding the concrete over the power plant. The resolution Legislator Renae Kimble submitted to the County Legislature, to which Ceretto refers, calls for removal of only 3.3 miles. Her resolution is already supported, in at least three instances, by identical resolutions already passed by the Niagara Falls City Council, the Niagara Falls Tourism Advisory Board, as well as three Business and Professional Associations in Niagara Falls. A 3.3 mile removal out of 18 sounds remarkably like compromise to us. But the 3.3 mile removal is evidently not “compromise” enough for Ceretto, because what he means by “compromise” is whatever keeps the parkway open from Niagara Falls to Lewiston. He refuses to acknowledge, to mention, or even to imply there are alternative routes, other than Lewiston Road, because doing so weakens his argument.

Ceretto could also get closer to honesty if he’d refrain from minimizing the hundreds of thousands of individuals (many in groups listed at www.niagaraheritage.org) in favor of gorge parkway removal by noting they are “largely...individuals far removed from Niagara County.” Some of us call these people tourists, or potential tourists, telling us what they want to experience here. Isn’t it reasonable to mention this as a point of view?

So Ceretto can throw a dialog party and exclude anyone or any group that he wishes. It’s his party. But he shouldn’t delude himself into thinking that only those he invites have a right to weigh in on the issues. The parkway runs over State Park land, which belongs to all New York State residents. The OPRHP has a huge stakeholder interest, as well. They will be the lead agency in upcoming hearings to determine the disposition of the parkway, even though public comments made by the Commissioner suggests a bias in favor of retention.

If anyone should be excluded from the dialog it should be Ceretto himself, because he works for the OPRHP. This is a conflict of interest. When good and reasonable people blow away the smoke and cover the mirrors, the conflict is clear. Ceretto should be encouraged, or required, to walk away from the parkway issue entirely—or to ride away from it on a trolley if that suits him, as long as the trolley is not rolling along the gorge parkway.

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