

Dear Editor,

A recent letter about gorge parkway removal, by Porter Town Councilman Thomas A. Baia, in which he states it "stands to reason that some compromise could be worked out to satisfy both sides in this debate," reveals his fundamental ignorance about the issue. What kind of "reason" would that be?

He does not mention that retaining the parkway, all four lanes or two, would continue to detour traffic around the business districts of Niagara Falls; he does not mention the natural environment that the parkway has degraded for a half century; he does not mention, to cite specific examples, the annual emissions of 231,768.75 tons of carbon from parkway vehicular traffic and tons of winter-spread salt that have a negative impact on fragile gorge botanical environments before ending up in the river. He does not mention the potential for an ecotourism market to positively transform our entire region.

Baia does mention, however, my "long and tedious letters to the Niagara Gazette," and so I hesitated before noting some of the above details, fearing that he might find reading them a burden. But that's the way it is with debate--if it's to be worthwhile: eventually the general blathering has to lead to supporting evidence.

Baia is in favor of "refurbishing" the walking path between Whirlpool and Devil's Hole State Park "at a reasonable cost," rather than spending "millions of tax payer's dollars" to remove the parkway. This is a baffling alternative, perhaps related to, in Baia's mind, a sufficient enticement for ecotourists. That aside, our inquiries produced estimated removal costs of \$50,000 per lane mile. One mile of four lanes removed: \$200,000. Removing the gorge parkway between Whirlpool and Devil's Hole (about one and a half miles), for example, would be \$300,000. Add \$100,000 to that if you like, because actual costs frequently exceed estimates--and the total is still a far cry from millions. Let's note that it costs about \$250,000 a year (of tax payer's dollars!) for gorge parkway maintenance, grass mowing, snow plowing, salt spreading, and so on. (Baia, incidentally, is vague about the costs of "refurbishing" the pathway, whatever that means, and about the need for "refurbishing" in the first place.)

Baia concludes by saying he recently attended a meeting to discuss the gorge parkway issue with other citizens from Youngstown, Lewiston, etc and that nearly all those in attendance had "a deep feeling and love of Niagara Falls [the city]." They've got a funny way of showing it. Loving Niagara Falls as they do, they shouldn't be so willing to oppose the concept of parkway removal, which would benefit Niagara Falls and the region, without giving the facts and arguments for removal thoughtful consideration. The Niagara Heritage Partnership suggests visiting www.niagaraheritage.org would be a good start. Baia needs to spend some time there, as well.

Bob Baxter, NHP Conservation Chair