

Dear Editor,

Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas) the Chairman of the House Science Committee, has a spectacular, even miraculous, idea: he's drafting legislation that would permit politicians to inject themselves into the National Science peer reviews process, to "improve it."

Some politicians on the Niagara Frontier are way ahead of him. They don't need no stinking legislation.

Here they ignore science, which is information and evidence based, in favor of their own ideas, based on what we commonly refer to as zilch. Michael Parsnick has been so kind as to provide us a list of them, and those of like minds, in his Guest View of 28 April 2013. Here we see them, as if they have pledged to do so, ignoring the one authentic study of the gorge parkway conducted by EDR, which concluded the following based on evidence: it would be to the region's economic advantage to totally remove the Niagara Gorge parkway, starting with the section from Findlay drive to the City line at Devil's Hole State Park. The name of the study was: Regional Economic Growth through Ecological Restoration of the Niagara Gorge Rim.

The traffic study performed as part of this investigation revealed no unsafe increase of traffic diverted to alternative routes. EDR had, in fact, gone so far as to exclude Hyde Park Boulevard as a potential alternate route and arrived at the same conclusion. Parsnick, however, based on zilch, has a differing opinion. Senator Maziarz, also ignoring the EDR study results, once told me to my face that there was no need for him to stop implying

that the Niagara Heritage Partnership wanted to remove the parkway from Lewiston to Youngstown, even when I assured him that was not, and never was, the case. He said that there "could be a secret advocacy to remove it." His evidence for this? Zilch, of course.

Assemblyman John Ceretto is another of the zilch-crowd, but he seems to recognize that zilch isn't an effective counter argument. Back in February 2013, I wrote him a letter asking for his support, outlining the benefits of removal, including reducing the threat to homeland security, to which he did not have the courtesy to respond. Since then Congressman Higgins has rightfully noted our border with Canada is a target-rich environment; Senator Shumer has called for increased counter-terrorism funding for our region, citing the recent threat to the Whirlpool Bridge passenger train, for one example, while those who'd do us harm inch ever closer to one of our prime targets. And John Ceretto's response to all of this? Zilch.

You can read the letter he received at www.niagaraheritage.org under Recent Postings. The rationales, hard evidence, and references there defeat his zilch, and he knows it. Other zilchers revealed by Parsnick are "Fort Niagara" and the Niagara County Legislature. The Fort fears no tourists will visit them if the gorge parkway is removed; after 16 years of stating and restating this notion, they have presented zilch to indicate their fear is justified. The Legislature is a different story. After declaring, when asked to take a stand in favor of parkway removal some time ago, that making such a decision was beyond their jurisdiction, the Legislature is now suddenly

convinced of the power of zilch and have climbed aboard the Zilch Express, in favor of keeping it.

An odd companion to this group is Congressman Collins, who struck us prior to this as someone who'd require solid information, scientific evidence revealed by investigation, sound rationales, and legitimate cost estimates, for examples, before taking a position. Unless partisanship is at play, he should have been impressed by the fact that retaining the major part of the parkway, as the zilchers want to do, will cost tens of millions in future maintenance expenses and the eventual replacement of the road. He should have been impressed by the thorough documentation of botanical treasures in the gorge and along its rim that, with the parkway gone and the rim restored with natural landscapes, would be a major part of attracting new populations of eco-tourists. He should have some concern for homeland security. He should value, for future generations, the nurturing of a future old-growth forest beyond the number of board-feet it might produce. We await his re-evaluation of the evidence—and the vision involved in this issue.

In the meantime, many of our politicians are taking a stand against science, against the accumulation of facts and evidence supporting the total removal of the gorge parkway. "We don't need no facts," they seem to be saying. "We don't need evidence or rationales or examples of similar successful projects elsewhere. We scoff at legitimate studies. We ignore them! We have zilch and that's enough! Zilch and political influence, of course. Zilch rules! Where do I get my 'I Got Zilch' lapel button?"

Like Parsnick, we'd also like to see a resolution of the gorge parkway issue.

Unlike him, we want it resolved in favor of total removal, in spite of the gerrymandered "scoping" recently completed, because the honest evidence, and common sense, as well, demand it. Also unlike Parsnick, we have viewed the issue armed with knowledge, which he has not. Near the conclusion of his Guest View, he said, for example, speaking of the gorge parkway, "Also, wild growth of vegetation along the roadway is an eyesore to many."

That may be so. But what he's unaware of is that the stretches of "wild growth" are indeed test plots, initiated by State Parks in an effort to determine the regenerative power of native species along the gorge rim. According to authoritative botanist Patricia M. Eckel, a scientist, in the broad term, the growth there is exceeding expectations in a positive way. So what a person sees often depends on what that person brings to the view. In Parsnick's case he's brought...please don't make me say it. You know the word, small "z," that should have finished off the sentence. If he and others keep whining about "eyesores," State Parks may relent and mow the whole thing down so it resembles somebody's lawn. It's our hope that they will not, and moreover, that they won't relent on the big issue, what more and more people are coming to recognize should be the future of the gorge parkway: total removal.

Sincerely,
Bob Baxter
Niagara Heritage Partnership
Conservation Chair

