

DIALOGUE

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150-word limit. Writers must include home address and evening phone number.

Montco public defender firings

I was born and raised in Montgomery County. Though I moved away several years ago, I was disappointed to see politics retreating to the termination of the two top public defenders. I know neither personally, but I know their reputations as smart, zealous advocates who fight for indigents in our courtroom. I suspect despite this setback, they will continue to do so in a place where they are more appreciated.

Our governor and General Assembly seem to love unnecessary spending. Public defenders are hardly unnecessary. They are a required service benefitting the public under Article I, Section 9 of our state constitution and *Gideon v. Wainwright*. We are one of only two states that fund public defenders at the county level. It is time to end appointed chief public defenders beholden to political commissioners who are apparently easily influenced by local judges. Our Assembly needs to work on state-level funding that puts the defenders on par with prosecutors. This is also another example of the need to end the retention system for judges.

✉ Anthony Tambourino, York, Pa.

Real ID not in Pa.

This afternoon, I sat impatiently in my local PennDOT driver licensing center, waiting to apply for and receive my Real ID. At the outset, I was informed that my likely wait time would be about two hours. What neither I, nor any of the dozens of people waiting with me, were told was that “the system” has shown a marked tendency to crash without notice, statewide, for anything from 15 minutes to two hours. Sure enough, having waited almost an hour, we had our first 30-minute statewide outage. Twenty minutes later, the system crashed again, and we were told, with crushing candor, that no one had any clue how long this might last. At that point, I went home frustrated and empty-handed. Just one of millions of Pennsylvanians who have wasted tens of millions of hours. And heard nothing that sounds like an explanation or an initiative Pennsylvania came very late to the Real ID initiative, and despite having had way more time to prepare for it, has made a mess of things. What will be the consequences for the acting secretary of transportation?

✉ Paul Crotty, Bryn Mawr

Exodus of teachers

Interesting opinion piece (Feb. 26) on the loss of teachers in Philadelphia public schools. No “strategy” will improve if the basic lack of support for the system continues. Deteriorating and dangerous facilities; absence of libraries and librarians; failure to provide necessary teaching materials and supplies; diminution of music, art, and other cultural programs; and disrespect of public schools in general make Philadelphia an unappealing place to teach. These failings inevitably cause loss of qualified teachers and staff, discourage and alienate teachers, students, and parents, and guarantee a lack of success for a majority of Philadelphia students.

Priorities? The city spent \$14 million for useless colored light poles on Broad Street (and then \$57,000



Protestors gather on the steps of the Montgomery County Courthouse to protest the recent firings of top public defenders Dean Beer and Keisha Hudson. A par writer says public defenders should be placed on par with prosecutors and free from political influence.

JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer

more to install “better” lights). How many books, how much lab equipment, how many art teachers, how many environmental cleanups, could have been acquired if instead, Philadelphia public schools had been able to utilize those funds?

✉ Stephen Green, Elkins Park

Timely disclosure limits victims

The verdicts in the Harvey Weinstein trial were appropriate. Waiting years to accuse a rapist, as the two main complainants in this case did, and continuing a relationship with the accused rapist seems like a self-serving attempt to promote one's career. Not reporting a rape immediately after it happens, especially by a serial rapist, puts other women at risk. Had victims reported rapes when they occurred, Weinstein might have gone to prison then. If not, he may have tired of spending his time in jail and money for attorney fees to fight many rape charges and changed his behavior.

It's difficult, I'm sure, for a victim to make public the details of a rape, but it's necessary for the protection of others who are at risk.

✉ Anne Sermarini, Elkins Park

Wise VP picks

I fully understand and agree with the lament and justifiable resentment of all condemning the president of the United States glass ceiling for women in America. So here's my “two cents”: Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, or Stacey Abrams must now get a publicly announced commitment from Joe Biden and/or Bernie Sanders (should either become the next POTUS) for the position of vice president.

A Biden or Sanders win (since neither would likely seek a second term) would give America a minimum of four years of any one of these, and a good chance of eight more years as the next POTUS.

✉ A. Gurmankin, Philadelphia

COMMENTARY

Monroe County: An election bellwether?

By Charles F. McElwee

Located two hours west of Manhattan, in the Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania's Monroe County offers New Yorkers a bucolic escape, while retaining the economic and cultural influence of New York's wooded, but developing, outskirts, older residents recall a more rustic past. Meantime, in gated communities, uprooted New Yorkers find echoes of their previous existence, from bad commutes to crowded schools.

Over the past decade, this rural-urban contrast has changed Monroe's political composition. Once a Republican stronghold, the county now has a sizable Democratic voter advantage. In 2016, however, Donald Trump lost Monroe by only 532 votes — a hint of his strength in Pennsylvania, which he won. Today, Monroe's politics are more complex than ever. This November, the county's rural turnout may determine Trump's electoral fortunes in the Keystone State. Christopher Borick, director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion, believes that Monroe could emerge as an indicator of how Pennsylvania

county's political past. In the early 2000s, Democrats began outnumbering Republicans, and now make up a voting majority in 14 of Monroe's 20 municipalities. Between 1960 and 2004, Monroe favored the Republican candidate in every presidential election, except 1964. That winning streak ended with Barack Obama, who carried the county by significant margins in 2008. Democrats have since enjoyed down-ballot victories, too, but massive rural support for Trump could flip Monroe back to the GOP.

Josephine Ferro, Monroe County's recorder of deeds, finds support for Trump's reelection strong, especially in the county's more rural west end. “Everybody seems to be excited everywhere you go,” said Ferro, former county GOP chairwoman, who also observed voters circulating petitions for Trump's nomination earlier this month. She believes that “there's more passion than 2016.” Borick thinks that Trump could win Monroe County this time around. “It was very close in 2016,” he says, “and while trending Democratic in recent years, the fairly rural makeup of much of the county presents an opportunity for Trump.”



Mr. Jones (center) acts as the grand marshal of the 4th of July parade at Lake Paupac in 2017. Monroe County could play an important role in the upcoming election. Jones Family

votes. “Its growing diversity, mixed with a large rural population, captures some key characteristics of the state as a whole,” said Borick, who began his career in Monroe as a county planner. “I think the results later in 2020 may very well closely mirror the state results.”

New Yorkers' ties to Monroe date back to the 19th century, when residents began opening summer board-inn houses and inns that attracted visitors from New York and New Jersey. The region's recreational amenities drew thousands of city dwellers; some never left. In the late 1800s, Richard Slee, a Brooklyn bacteriologist, arrived at a local inn to recuperate from cholera. He ultimately married the innkeeper's daughter and started Ponce Biological Laboratories — the first American pharmaceutical company to produce France's improved smallpox vaccine. Other New Yorkers followed Slee's lead. Resort hotels and ski lodges made Monroe a honeymoon destination, and postwar newlyweds who stayed helped fuel a population explosion.

In the early 1970s, with a population of only 45,000, Monroe remained a conservative, rural county, where families from the Philadelphia area and New Jersey kept weekend lakeside cabins. But the steady influx of new residents, especially after 9/11 — made Monroe one of Pennsylvania's fastest-growing and most diverse counties. Today, its nearly 170,000 residents work in the region's burgeoning tourism industry, for the federal government, or for local schools and hospitals. They're concentrated in Monroe's east end, from subdivisions and private neighborhoods to Stroudsburg — the Rockwellian county seat — and East Stroudsburg, a state-university town.

Monroe's newer residents represent a break with the

Monroe has fared better than many of Pennsylvania's rural regions. It's the epicenter of Pocono tourism, a multibillion-dollar industry that attracts nearly 30 million visitors annually to its ski resorts, nature preserves, and the nation's largest indoor water park. And Tobyhanna Army Depot, the Defense Department's largest electronics maintenance facility, is Northeastern Pennsylvania's top employer. The lab that's been operating since 1897 is now Sanofi Pasteur, a global pharmaceutical company working with the Department of Homeland Security to develop a coronavirus vaccine.

But Monroe also confronts the challenges of an urban-rural divide. Homeowners are frustrated by high property taxes. Decades of population growth have strained infrastructure. Traffic on I-80 — the county's main highway — often rivals gridlock anywhere else but New York. Thousands of Monroe County commuters pack buses daily into New York City — rated the nation's worst commute — a reminder that many residents must find private-sector jobs elsewhere. And the county, due in part to its topography, hasn't enjoyed the logistics and manufacturing boom occurring immediately south, in the Lehigh Valley.

This year, Monroe's changing economic, cultural, and political dynamics could make the county a bellwether. Every vote will count in a state that Trump won by only 44,000 votes in 2016. This November, his statewide performance could heavily depend on Monroe, where rural voters must outnumber New York-bred Democrats in competitive precincts to put him over the top. “The signs are out, the people have their flags out,” said Ferro. “I'd say this is Trump territory.”

Charles F. McElwee is the assistant editor of City Journal, where this piece originally appeared.

How Phila. senior communities can protect against coronavirus

By Jane Eley

While older adults are not a monolith, they face unique challenges and risks with respect to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Older adults, especially those with certain chronic health conditions, look to be more vulnerable.

In my Philadelphia-based nonprofit that serves adults in their retirement years, Penn's Village in Central Philadelphia — along with East Falls Village and Northwest Village Network — we are wondering how our communities can thrive as we all confront the pending arrival of the coronavirus. We need to prepare ourselves as best we can, as we keep connected and engaged with one another.

Here are issues that might affect older adults most:

► **Health implications:** Older adults and those with disabilities are often at greater risk of contracting a disease, especially if they already have chronic medical conditions. In such cases, there may be added prevention and/or treatment guidelines for these groups.

► **Prescription renewals:** In case communities have to self-quarantine, the American Red Cross and other public health sources are encouraging us to order a 30-day supply of prescriptions, and for those prescriptions not yet eligible for renewal, to note the earliest date at which they can be renewed.

► **Scams:** Sadly, older adults are the group most likely to be preyed upon by scammers taking advantage of the coronavirus, such as online promotions for unproven treatments or vaccines. To avoid



Bernie Evans takes a walk in Rittenhouse Square Park in 2015. Older adults are more vulnerable to the coronavirus, especially those with certain chronic health conditions.

MICHAEL PRONZATO / Staff Photographer

these scams, Carolyn Rosenblatt recommends in *Forbes* that you never accept an online offer for a coronavirus vaccine or click on a link from a source you do not know; don't buy masks, medicines, or sprays purporting to protect against the coronavirus; seek sources you trust instead for information and supplies; and don't fall for offers suggesting that you invest in securities supposed to give a breakthrough treatment or cure.

As with everyone else, we encourage older adults to follow the basic rules for hygiene promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, and other reliable sources. Tips include: Avoid close contact with people who are sick; stay home if you're sick yourself; don't touch your eyes, nose, and mouth; wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; and cough or sneeze ideally into tissue, though failing that, you can do so into your arm.

Symptoms of COVID-19 generally occur two to 14 days after exposure and start as a mild to moder-

ate upper respiratory tract illness, similar to the common cold. Symptoms to watch for, the CDC says, are fever, fatigue, dry cough, and shortness of breath. Should you become sick with those warning signs, contact your health-care provider immediately.

At Penn's Village and our sister organizations, we support our members to live independently in their own homes. But some of these recommendations are especially crucial for older adults who live in retirement homes where a lot of individuals share close quarters.

Penn's Village plans to stay vigilant and supportive of our members, their friends, and their families. Right now, we are focusing on volunteer services for our members and the programs we sponsor to bring older adults together to socialize, educate, and encourage connection and engagement with neighbors. In times of stress, we rely even more than usual on these networks. We at Penn's Village — along with our colleagues at the other villages — are here as always for our members.

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