

### Gaughan's latest idea would shrink excess government

By LYNN M. BOCHENEK

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Committed or to be committed, that is the question everyone inevitably asks about community activist Kevin Gaughan. Even though he may disappear for awhile, he will not go away.

Gaughan's new study, titled "The Cost," details the true amount taxpayers are paying for their elected politicians in Erie County, and the numbers are staggering.

The annual amount shelled out to pay our 439 elected officials in Erie County is \$32,140,386, according to the Web site TheCost.org, created to publicize the study's findings. The study also shows that other cities and regions of comparable size have fewer elected officials than we do.

Baltimore, a former rust belt sister-city that Mayor Byron W. Brown is trying to emulate, borrowing programs like CitiStat, has only 33 elected officials. Even the powerhouse New York City makes due with 248 elected officials.

For an even closer look, Gaughan's Web site allows you to pick your city, town or village from a drop-down box to see what you pay your hometown pols.

"The Cost" also highlights a formula with the extra perks of political office most citizens might forget about in the voting booths. The study specifically included pension and health care benefits provided to elected politicians, which are a large chunk of the actual cost of paying one, and a larger state-wide problem stifling other upstate cities from experiencing the growth they deserve.

Whether you think Gaughan a gadfly or a godsend, you must give him credit for keeping on keepin' on. He simply will not take no for an answer. After "regionalism" became marginalized and manipulated to be thought of as a nasty word in our community, he tried in his campaign for Buffalo mayor to promote a metropolitan government that would focus on consolidation of entities and services.

Stifled and stymied by the politicians entrenched in their patronage-providing system, he now has found a new way to reduce some governmental costs. Instead of erasing the boundaries, he is focused on erasing some positions. Innovative, yes. Crazy, no.

Not only is the thought innovative, so is the solution he proposes. We can reduce the number of elected officials in each jurisdiction through attrition. Each time a town or village council member retires, the position is simply left unfilled and therefore abolished.

If you think it can't be done, look at the Town of Tonawanda, Erie County and the City of Buffalo. They implemented the idea on their own to save the taxpayers some cash, and so far, so good.

A baby step? Yes. But baby steps will soon get us up and walking on our own, without two control boards holding our hands along the way.

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