

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Commuter Pass Changes
Create More Problems

To the Editor:

The Mackinac Bridge Authority has proven to the public that they do not listen. When someone came in late to the meeting in St. Ignace, it created the impression that the decision was cut and dried and that the public meeting was a joke.

By changing the 24 hour limit to 36 hours and extending the commuter card expiration date until December 31, 2011, you have created other problems and angered many. These are only token temporary changes and do not solve the problems.

Are you installing card readers at the gates to issue receipts with dates and times for the first trip and to deduct the appropriate amount on the second trip? Must everyone wait in the staffed lines, thus creating more work and longer lines? Don't be surprised if commuter parking lots pop up on both sides. Maybe it's time for a business to start driving commuters across the bridge.

It was stated at the meeting in St. Ignace that you receive no monetary compensation for being on the Bridge Authority. Obviously your compensation is power. It was stated that you are trying to get federal and state dollars. Maybe it is time to get federal and state money by becoming part of the highway system. Could it possibly be that by becoming part of this system, the Bridge Authority might be told what to do? It was also stated that semi-trucks do more damage to roads and bridges than passenger vehicles. In that case, why is there a lower fare for frequent commercial crossings?

In Michigan, it is illegal to have an expiration date on gift cards. It was stated that the commuter pass is not a gift card. If I buy one and give it away, even to a family member, it becomes a gift card.

Living and working in the Lower Peninsula, we are constantly talking to people about the benefits of crossing the bridge, while most tourists drive to the bridge and stop. Many times, meals, golf, and lodging, to name a few things, are more reasonable in St. Ignace. Maybe the real way to increase bridge revenues is a public relations problem, and not to take advantage of residents and property owners.

Having a second home in St. Ignace, I will keep my commuter pass for now, but will make sure I can fill my seven-passenger vehicle for unnecessary trips, or will eliminate these trips.

Remember your history. The colonists only took the increased tax on tea and Rosa Parks only took giving up her seat for so long before changes had to be made. It's just a matter of time before the public has had enough arrogance and Band-Aid fixes. Maybe that time is now.

Jo-Ann Hassen Gatz
St. Ignace

LaSalle Players Aware
of Social Needs

To the Editor:

On behalf of St. Ignace Area Hope and Habitat for Humanity, we want to celebrate the LaSalle Players and their director, Kathleen Schacht, for their consciousness of the social needs present in their community.

The Players were given the opportunity to read about a dozen plays and to choose one to use for their spring performance. They chose the play "Blues," a play about homelessness. Rather than spending money on props, costumes, and program covers, the students chose to "make do," and to donate all of the proceeds from their performances to two of the organizations in the St. Ignace area that are actively working on the issues of homelessness and poverty, Habitat for Humanity and St. Ignace Area Hope. Not all communities can boast of young people who are cognizant of the needs of those less fortunate among their community and who are willing to do what they can to help.

We want to recognize this group of outstanding young people and their advisor for their hard work, interest, and concern for their neighbors.

Reverend James Balfour
St. Ignace

Habitat for Humanity
St. Ignace Area Hope

Mackinac Bridge Is
Neighborhood Road

To the Editor:

To those of us who live in the U.P., the Mackinac Bridge is more than a span of highway linking the two peninsulas, it is part of our neighborhood road system, and we use it like any other street. Our "neighborhood" has expanded, thanks to mass media coverage, to include anywhere north of M-72. We use it to go to work, shopping, restaurants, doctor and hospital appointments, festivals, fairs, craft and art shows, concerts, museums, to visit friends and families, and to otherwise support businesses and endeavors in our extended economic community. College students are able to return home regularly, and people with homes, cabins, and other property can come and go by using commuter cards.

We acknowledge that maintenance is costly and that each of us must pay our fair share, but when we learn that any federal highway funds that could be used to help maintain the bridge are redirected downstate, the attitude that commuters and other bridge crossers assume the differential is infuriating. The pieces to this financial conundrum may be all there, but the puzzle is not going together. As it stands, the bridge, while it is considered to be a part of I-75, is totally funded by fares. When the fares go up, the traffic count goes down; when the count is down, revenue is down and maintenance is jeopardized. But, in the 52 years of actually requesting federal highway funds, the moneys have either not been appropriated or have been used elsewhere in the state. Millions of dollars are being lost for our area. Are there so many strings attached to federal funds that the Mackinac Bridge Authority cannot accept them because of the threat to its autonomy? We do need to maintain control the state level, but at what cost? Is there no one who represents us in Lansing or Washington with enough influence and power to get funds to unequivocally maintain this small and specific section of interstate roadway without selling our souls to the Devil?

Trying to address each exception and "abuse" will only result in regulations so tight and preposterous (the 24-hour rule) that those who need and use the bridge the most will be shut out. The tokens are gone, therefore, so is the abuse of doling them out with gasoline purchases. The only real abuse seems to be the lack of highway funds, either state or federal, to help with costs, and the resulting financial burden on those who must pay the fares. When we buy our commuter cards, we are essentially giving the bridge an interest-free loan. It really doesn't matter if the card is used by a resident or someone from another state or Canada who uses it infrequently; the Mackinac Bridge Authority has the money upfront. The less often the card is used, the greater the return. How is this money being invested?

Perhaps "commuter" is a misnomer; maybe "frequent-" or "resident-crossover" or just "Friend of the Bridge" might be used with some kind of adjusted fare schedule. Whatever you call us, when the bridge and its fares begin to "get in the way," we will have to decide whether "to cross or not to cross." It all comes down to the attitude of the Mackinac Bridge Authority toward the loyal people who value the access the bridge provides and the principle of asking them to pay more than their fair share, while the millions of government dollars are allowed to go elsewhere.

Chris Tuckett
Hessel

Commuter Rate Shouldn't
Have Time Restrictions

To the Editor:

I live in St. Ignace and I currently have a Mackinac Bridge commuter card. Before the cards came out, we had used the paper scripts since our first daughter was born nine weeks prematurely and we were visiting her in Petoskey on a frequent basis. Sometimes we went down and stayed for a weekend at the Hospitality House across from the hospital so that we wouldn't have to drive back and forth. If we did that under the new proposals, we would be penalized.

I think that both of the current proposals [voted on by Mackinac Bridge Authority Friday, July 10] are ridiculous! I work on Mackinac Island, so I do not cross the bridge for work, but I do cross the bridge frequently for medical appointments, shopping, family outings, personal business, and visiting family downstate. So, you are telling me that even though I live in St. Ignace, if our family decides to go to Traverse City for the weekend, or perhaps 36 hours, we will now have to pay full fare for the bridge? If we decide to visit my family, which is a 5.5-hour drive one way, and we don't head right back the next morning, we will have to pay regular fare? We certainly cross the bridge more than 12 times a year, frequently it's 12 times a month, depending on high school athletics, doctor appointments, recreation, or whatever else is going on. I think the "commuter" rate should be offered without restriction to people living in Mackinac, Emmet, and Cheboygan counties. We often have no choice but to cross the bridge, but I don't understand why we should be penalized if we choose to consolidate our trips and not return home within 24 hours. If you are intent on having a time limit, it should be expanded to at least 72 hours, not 24.

Susan Horn
St. Ignace

St. Ignace News Policies

Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

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Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks

Citizen Group Claims Victory
Over Bottled Water

Small groups of committed citizens can make big impacts.

So it was last week when the 2,000-member Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation (MCWC), after nine years of legal battle that cost it about \$1 million, thwarted a giant international company's attempt to increase its pumping of Michigan water for sale from a Mecosta County stream and lake.

MCWC and Nestle Waters North America reached a settlement on the first day of a scheduled weeklong circuit court hearing to resolve opposing claims on whether Nestlé's pumping for its Ice Mountain bottled water should be reduced or increased under criteria of a 2006 injunction order that allowed pumping of an average of 218 gallons per minute.

The 218 gallons was down from the 400 gallons per minute originally approved in 2001 by the state. Nestle sought to boost the 218-gallon rate.

While the modified order reached by agreement reduces Nestle's originally intended water removal by about 50% from what the state had permitted, the company was relieved that the binding settlement gets those pesky citizen water warriors off its back.

"Under this modified injunction order, Nestle cannot pump more water from Dead Stream or Thompson Lake," MCWC President Terry Swier said of a legal battle long led by Traverse City attorney Jim Olson to protect the stream, lake, and wetlands from excessive water extraction. "This new order completes one of MCWC's goals. Nestle must reduce its pumping earlier in the spring and continue its low pumping rates during the summer months. This will leave more water in the system and should eliminate the more serious impacts to the stream that occur in drier years and summers."

Nestle Vice President Heidi Paul said: "Reaching this agreement is very important for Nestle Waters, employees and their families, the west Michigan community, and our company, in that it brings certainty for our operations, supports local jobs, and puts an issue behind us."

When I asked Swier if this might be only a partial victory, she said, "I don't see it as partial. I see it as victory. A small grassroots group brought [Nestle] to its knees."

Actually, it is still standing, although not as tall as it would have. Meanwhile, Swier correctly says, "It is time to turn to the task of assuring water remains owned by the public."

In this task, enter U.S. Representative Bart Stupak (D-Menominee), who is second to none as Capitol Hill guardian of Great Lakes, which is appropriate since his district has more shoreline --1,613 miles -- than any other congressional district in the continental United States and is the only one to border three of the five Great Lakes.

I've noted these factoids previously, but they're worth citing now considering these developments:

• Stupak, who in 1998 blocked the Ontario Nova Group's proposal to sell Great Lakes water years in bulk by 20 or so freighters for export to Asia, in June introduced a welcome resolution clarifying that in ratifying the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Compact last fall, Congress expressly prohibited Great Lakes water from being sold, diverted, or exported outside of the Great Lakes basin.

When the compact was considered last year, Stupak raised concerns that the wording of the com-

pact was too weak, and opposed its ratification.

"I continue to have concerns that the Great Lakes Compact is not strong enough to protect the Great Lakes against diversions through privatization, commercialization, and exportation," Stupak said. "There is no question that Congress intended for the compact to protect Great Lakes water but the wording of the compact leaves some question. That is why I have introduced this resolution to put Congress on record in opposition to the exploitation of Great Lakes waters."

Stupak has long fretted about the loophole on bottled water.

"It's not simply a matter of how much water in the short term is bottled and shipped away; the long-term threat is control of water and the possibility that private interests will assert ownership of the very substance of the Great Lakes," Stupak said in his foreword to "Great Lakes for Sale: From Whitecaps to Bottlecaps," by Dave Dempsey, published in 2008 by the University of Michigan Press and Petoskey Publishing of Traverse City.

Dempsey, environmental adviser to ex-Governor Jim Blanchard and former Michigan Environmental Council policy director who is now communications director for Conservation Minnesota, said it well June 28 in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*:

"The little-publicized flaw in the compact is that it threatens to turn the waters of the Great Lakes into a product."

• As chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Stupak last week held a hearing in which he raised questions about regulation of the safety of the billion-dollar-a-year bottled water industry, whose sales increased 83% this decade.

He particularly wants to know why the regulations governing bottled water are weaker than those governing tap water.

"Many Americans believe that water they drink from a bottle is healthier than water that comes from their faucets," said Stupak. "The Water Research Foundation found that nearly 56% of bottled water drinkers cite health and safety as the primary reason they choose bottled water over tap water. As a result, Americans are willing to pay top dollar for bottled water, which costs up to 1,900 times more than tap water and uses up to 2,000 times more energy to produce and deliver."

"Over the past several years, however, bottled water has been recalled due to contamination by arsenic, bromate, cleaning compounds, mold, and bacteria. Consumers may not realize that many regulations that apply to municipalities responsible for tap water do not apply to companies that produce bottled water."

After the hearing, Stupak and House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-California) sent letters to about a dozen bottlers, including Nestle, seeking information on their water sources, treatment methods, and results of contaminant testing.

All in all, it has not been a good few weeks for the bottled water folks on the legal and political front, as successful as they remain on the sales front.

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

Steve Lehto To Speak at Chippewa
Historical Society in Sault Ste. Marie

Steve Lehto, author of the new book "Michigan's Columbus, The Life of Douglass Houghton," will speak at the Chippewa County Historical Society Thursday, July 23, at 7 p.m. at 115 Ashmun Street, in Sault Ste. Marie.

The event is free to the public and refreshments will be provided. Parking is available on Ashmun Street or in the Portage Avenue parking lot.

The St. Ignace News

and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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Telephone (906) 643-9150 • Facsimile (906) 643-9122

www.SaintIgnaceNews.com

USPS Periodical Publication Number - 462-380

ESTABLISHED 1878

Published each Thursday at Saint Ignace, Mackinac County, Michigan

Entered in Saint Ignace, Michigan Post Office as Periodical Mail Matter. Act of March 3, 1879

Periodical Postage Paid at Saint Ignace, MI • Additional Postage Paid at Gaylord, MI

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to St. Ignace News, PO Box 277, St. Ignace, MI 49781

Volume 130, Number 15 Thursday, July 16, 2009

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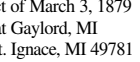
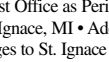
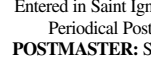
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Subscriptions:

\$42 in Mackinac, Chippewa, Emmet, Luce, and Cheboygan counties.

\$52 elsewhere in the United States and military post offices.

\$35 for the Web edition at www.saintignaceneews.com

We take Visa, MasterCard, and Discover

The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.