

VIEWPOINTS

SECTION | F

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DEREK GEE, BUFFALO NEWS

Ginny Oehler prepares for the free online meditation group she started during the pandemic, which continues on Fridays from her home office in Williamsville. “The key is for people to stay safe and cared for in their homes,” she says of a state master plan for aging.

What aging really looks like in New York – and why this moment matters

ADAM S. HERBST
Special to The News

Aging in New York doesn’t begin with a policy memo. It begins when a parent falls. When a diagnosis lands on your kitchen table. When the home health aide doesn’t show up.

Suddenly, what felt like a distant worry becomes a full-time job – and a full-blown crisis.

I’ve seen that crisis from every angle. As a lawyer. As a policy-maker. As the former Deputy Commissioner of the New York State Department of Health, where I co-chaired the state’s Master Plan for Aging. And most personally, as a son and a husband, trying to hold things together when the systems meant to support us fell short.

Here’s the truth: aging isn’t a personal failure. But it often feels like

one – because we’ve built systems that treat it as a private burden instead of a shared responsibility.

Too many New Yorkers are navigating this alone. The care workforce is overburdened and underpaid. The benefits are out there – but hard to find, harder to qualify for, and rarely coordinated. It’s a confusing, exhausting maze. And by the time you realize you’re in it, you’re already in crisis.

That’s what New York’s Master Plan for Aging is trying to change. It’s not legislation, and it doesn’t carry the force of law. It’s a policy road map – developed through an executive order – that lays out a vision for a more coordinated, equitable, and proactive approach to aging. Is it perfect? Of course not. But it’s an important start – and maybe more than that, it’s a shift in

mindset. It says: let’s stop waiting for people to break down before we help them. Let’s start building a system that treats aging as something we plan for, not something we patch together in moments of crisis.

The plan recognizes that affordability is foundational. You can’t expect older adults to live with dignity when food, housing, medicine, and transportation are all out of reach. We can start by fixing how people access SNAP, prescription assistance, and utility relief – making it easier, less stigmatizing, and more automatic. But in the long run, we need to ask harder questions about what a livable retirement actually requires, especially in New York’s high-cost communities.

It also affirms what caregiv-ers have known for decades: that

caregiving is work. Families are burning out. Paid workers are undercompensated, undervalued, and disappearing from the field. We can modernize our community-based network, expand respite, and invest in training now – but none of it will stick unless we fix the wage floor and build long-term reimbursement models that sustain the workforce this system depends on.

On the health care side, we need to move from episodic care to continuous support. That means expanding models like PACE, which provide comprehensive services for older adults, and investing in integrated care that treats the whole person – not just isolated symptoms. It means unlocking telehealth, expanding mobile ser-

Please see AGING, Page F4

Pope Leo is becoming the climate champion we need

While the leader of 340 million Americans furiously works to derail climate action, the leader of 1.4 billion Catholics is embracing it.



MARK GONGLOFF

to turn the U.S. from one of the world’s leading protectors of the environment to one of its worst vandals. So far, Leo has given no reason to doubt he’ll be at least

In May, when Pope Leo XIV succeeded the late Pope Francis, I suggested he could be the kind of climate champion the world needs when President Trump seems determined

as green as Francis, who was arguably the greenest pope in modern history.

Italy’s government recently approved a 2024 proposal by Francis to build a solar array in a field north of Rome that will generate enough power to provide “the complete energy sustenance of Vatican City State,” as Francis put it. Leo championed the plan just weeks after succeeding Francis, calling it an example for the world. “We all know the effects of climate change, and it is necessary to truly care for the whole world, for all of creation,” Leo told Italian state TV at the site in June.

The solar array, which still needs Italian parliamentary approval, will put the Vatican

among the handful of countries generating all their power from renewable energy. Of course, at 0.17 square miles, the Vatican will be the tiniest of that tiny group.

But a little symbolism in this case could go a long way. Trap-pings like solar panels on the Vatican roof and an all-electric Popemobile aren’t just green window dressing. They manifest a worldview expounded by Francis in his 2015 encyclical, Laudato Si’, which condemned humanity’s degradation of the environment for short-term financial gain.

The 184-page letter to Catholic bishops tied the climate issue to the church’s social-justice mission, warning – correctly

– that an increasingly chaotic environment would worsen already steep global inequalities and inflict death and suffering on untold billions of current and future humans, particularly the most vulnerable. The moral case Francis built was strong enough to help convince many world leaders to join the landmark climate accord in Paris that year.

In the decade since, the world seems to have lost much of its appetite for climate action, stung by the kind of fossil-fuel-stoked political backlash embodied by Trump. That makes Leo’s ascension well timed to offer a corrective. He seems to be embracing the opportunity.

Along with pushing the solar project, Leo has overseen the addition of a “green” Mass to the church’s list of 49 approved services for various occasions, called the Mass for the Care of Creation. He delivered it for the first time last month at the Laudato Si’ Center in Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer digs.

“We must pray for the conversion of so many people, inside and out of the church, who still don’t recognize the urgency of caring for our common home,” he said, wearing an emerald robe for the occasion. “We see so many natural disasters in the world, nearly every day and in so many countries, that are

Please see POPE, Page F4

VIEWPOINTS

EVERYBODY’S COLUMN | LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

State must help redemption centers

I am writing to urge the assembly to please get legislation to the floor to address the crisis of redemption centers and New York’s bottle deposit system.

Please understand that choosing the path of zero action results in consumers being robbed by New York State and billionaire beverage companies. For every deposit a consumer cannot claim, the state and beverage industry get to keep it.

Legislators are well aware of the suppressed handling fee (pay) redemption centers are receiving, the increasing expenses they are suffering (most of which is handed down by New York State), and that it is causing mass closures of these crucial businesses.

This is causing consumers to lose access to deposit money they are mandated to pay and promised the ability to get back. But consumers can’t simply get that money back when the state is chopping their access off at the knees.

The situation is significantly worse in Upstate New York, where communities are more spread out and transportation and costs become an issue. Consumers can’t simply step outside their home to find a store on every corner to accept their containers and pay their deposit.

In areas where redemption centers have closed, consumers face intense volume and brand restrictions at stores nearby. In many cases, if there is a store available, they are refusing to accept containers as they are not equipped for the volume they are receiving in the absence of redemption centers. These businesses are needed in these communities.

James Vogt
West Seneca

Health care approvals must have time limits

In this present health care crisis, tweaking prior authorization is not the solution to our problem; prior authorization is the problem.

Any delay in care, once decided upon by a physician and their patient, results in needless stress to that patient and the system. The administrator who decides these matters answers not to the patient or their family, but to the shareholder seeking profits and the CEO seeking compensation. If the insurance company truly cared, each denial would be followed by a call to the patient with an explanation and an alternative. They simply don’t care; they don’t offer any alternative except confusion and despair.

A.3789 (Weprin)/S.7297 (Hoylman-Sigal) places common sense time limits on the insurance industry to approve care. The insurance industry is against this because it may actually cause them to spend the money on you, the patient, and not their CEOs and investors. In my opinion, remote administrators have no role in your care.

They are not there when you have a heart attack and need that artery opened. They are not there when you break your bone and need it set. Your doctor, your nurse, and your hospital are the ones to care for you. Insurance companies are not there, they do not care, and they should not be



Agents prepare to detain an immigrant from Pakistan on June 4 in Chicago. Letter writers voice strong opinions about immigration enforcement under President Trump’s administration. NEW YORK TIMES

WE GOT MAIL

34 letters received this week.

- 1. Immigration
- 2. Republicans
- 3. Climate goals
- 4. Crime, justice
- 5. Local, town news



House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., talks to reporters. Some writers criticize Republicans and what they see as a decline of the Grand Old Party. ASSOCIATED PRESS

allowed to profit at your despair.

Support common sense time limits on prior authorization. Call your assemblyperson and senator and tell them you support this bill.

David M. Jakubowicz, M.D.
President
Medical Society of the State of New York

Don’t let GOP thwart clean energy goals

Most Americans celebrate the high ideals and enormous organization and investment that FDR used to pull this country out of the Great Depression and to victory in World War II (“Nuclear power energizes Democrats’ future,” July 31).

FDR was clearly President Biden’s inspiration for the Democrats’ massive clean energy and infrastructure rollout. Renewable energy would have brought union jobs in construction, manufacturing and logistics. Forgotten ports were coming alive with workers. Schools were opening to teach new job skills.

Then the GOP brought the wrecking ball. Oil and gas billionaires paid the GOP to take affordable and competitive solar, wind and battery storage off the table, and their companies are getting \$190 billion in tax breaks over the next 10 years. But pursuing nuclear power would take even more money out of our pockets, given its inevitable cost overruns and screw-ups. And nuclear power is neither renewable nor clean.

Today, Gov. Hochul needs to lead the charge against GOP overreach against democracy

itself, while trying to boost the state’s renewable energy and not stick working people with the cost of nuclear power.

Something decidedly unsexy for a start: release the cap and invest regulations and pump some cash into the clean energy economy.

Sandra Ebert
West Amherst

Trump wrongly uses Alien Enemies Act

President Trump issued the Alien Enemies Act on March 15. The reason for issuing the Alien Enemies Act, according to the White House proclamation, was an invasion by the Tren de Aragua (TdA) gang directed from the Venezuelan government. (Note, if we are being invaded by Venezuela why did the Trump administration send troops to Los Angeles?)

The administration alleges that the gang is engaged in “undermining public safety and supporting the Maduro regime’s goal of destabilizing democratic nations in the Americas, including the United States.”

Trump’s own intelligence disputes these claims, meaning there is no supporting evidence for the Alien Enemies Act. Trump is using this act to detain and deport citizens of foreign countries, especially citizens from Central and South America or Africa (except white Africans), without due process, in violation of the Constitution.

The immigration officers used to detain and arrest immigrants use full military tactical gear and facial coverings to hide

their identities like a secret police force. The reason given for the masks is to avoid being doxed by bystanders. But they are operating more like a secret police force of an authoritarian regime.

For example, they targeted legal residents Mahmoud Khalil and Rumeysa Ozturk for their constitutionally protected free speech. Recently, agents have detained and handcuffed officials without a warrant for doing their mandated oversight, in violation of the Constitution.

Contrary to official explanations, video and audio recording show that the officials were not interfering with agents’ official duties. These violation of the Constitution should concern all citizens.

William Fine
Brockport

Political corruption has hit all-time high

First, make a lot of promises that you have no intention of keeping in order to get elected to office. Once in office, fire the government inspectors general and ethics watchdogs; then you are free to enrich yourself and your family without regard to the people that you promised to serve. This describes the current administration, poised to become the most corrupt in the history of the United States.

In only a few months, POTUS and his wealthy circle of sycophants have only gotten richer, whether through cryptocurrency schemes, government contracts, insider stock trading, or the continuation of tax cuts for the

upper 10%, who will benefit substantially while safety nets for the poor will be cut or eliminated by bystanders. But they are operating more like a secret police force of an authoritarian regime.

Qatar gifted our American leader a jet valued between \$3 million to \$4 million, a jet he expects to keep when he is out of office. A gift of this size is more than all other gifts for all previous presidents combined.

We now have a leader who apparently thinks he can do anything at all to enrich and aggrandize himself. His golf trips have cost over \$18 million so far. Facts like these should enrage everyone, especially those who claim to care about deficits and corruption.

Barbara Jezioro
Buffalo

Shun toxic behaviors to lead a peaceful life

In a recent My View (July 1) a writer facing the passage of time laments over strained or ended family relationships. As someone that has chosen to eliminate the stress and toxicity accompanying such a relationship, I would offer the view of closure.

Childhood behaviors resurface as we watch parents age and leave us. Firmly rooted greed, insensitivity and ego show themselves. The difference being that as an adult, I can choose to protect myself and those I love. As my father would say, the first time is a mistake, the second, a choice. A peaceful life comes in many forms.

Judith Masters
Snyder

Pope

From F1

in part caused by the excesses of being human, with our lifestyle.”

Some Catholic critics said the new Mass didn’t go far enough. And Leo’s embrace of Francis’ progressive views, including his embrace of immigrants, will surely agitate the conservative American Catholics who rebelled against Francis. Some ended up in Trump’s reactionary government.

But the new pope’s views align with those of most Americans – and most American Catholics, 72% of whom in a 2023 poll by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University agreed that “environmental justice is a legitimate issue that needs urgent attention.” In that same poll, “care for the environment” was ranked the second-most important issue for the church after “marriage.” A 2022 Pew poll found 57% of U.S.

Catholics considered climate change a serious problem, compared with 46% of Protestants. Francis’ Laudato Si’ inspired a movement of Catholic climate action around the world.

Leo’s embrace of Francis’ message has come during a series of heat waves gripping Italy and the rest of Europe this summer, taking lives, breaking temperature records and fueling wildfires. In fact, the whole world is suffering from a series of climate-related disasters in this mean season, from continent-spanning wildfires in Canada and deadly floods in Texas to crushing heat waves in Japan.

With some of the world’s biggest parties to the Paris climate accord either backpedaling or in full retreat from climate action, you don’t have to be Catholic, or even religious, to appreciate at least one highly platformed voice speaking out for humanity’s interests.

Bloomberg Opinion

Aging

From F1

vices, and aligning Medicare and Medicaid so that public programs stop working at cross-purposes.

Some of this is achievable through executive action and regulatory alignment. Other parts will take long-term commitment – including hard conversations about how we finance aging in this country.

There’s also untapped potential in prevention and connection. We already have promising programs focused on nutrition, fall prevention, mental health, and digital access. What we need is scale – and the political will to follow through. A home-delivered meal, a functioning wheelchair ramp, or even a phone call can fundamentally shift a person’s trajectory. These aren’t extras. They’re infrastructure.

And none of it works if people

don’t have a place to live. Safe, accessible, affordable housing is non-negotiable. From accessory dwelling units to aging-in-place retrofits to supportive housing for those with complex needs, we already have policy tools. What we need now is alignment – across agencies, funders, and local governments – to actually implement.

Will this plan fix everything? No. But the more urgent question is: what happens if we don’t act?

If we fail to invest now, we all but guarantee a future of more emergency room visits, more nursing home placements, more unpaid family caregivers burning out, and more preventable suffering.

This isn’t abstract policy. This is daily life for millions of New Yorkers – older adults trying to stay independent, home care workers commuting two hours for a minimum wage, and adult children caught between caring for their kids and managing

their parents’ care.

If we’re serious about showing up for them, then this plan deserves more than a press release. It deserves sustained action.

What gives me hope is that we know what works. We’ve seen it. We’ve piloted it. We’ve studied it. Now we need the courage – and the coordination – to take it statewide. This moment gives us that chance: to move from patchwork to policy, from intention to investment, from silence to leadership.

Let’s not waste it.

Read the NYS Master Plan for Aging at planforaging.ny.gov.

Adam S. Herbst is a partner at Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP. He served as Deputy Commissioner of the New York State Department of Health and co-chaired the New York State Master Plan for Aging from 2022 to 2024. The views expressed here are his own and do not reflect those of Sheppard Mullin or its clients.