

SPEAKING OUT

Public takeover of RG&E not in ratepayers' interests

Your Turn

Jeff Sondervan
Guest columnist

As an employee of Rochester Gas and Electric and the business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 36, I have watched for months as calls for a takeover of the utility have increased in Rochester.

Municipalization won't solve consumers' energy woes. In fact, places like Puerto Rico have abandoned public power and are moving towards privatizing. For years, Puerto Rico's government-run power authority caused reliability issues, leading to decades of random power outages.

On the surface, a public utility might look attractive. Things like the lack of a profit motive and communities having close input to operations seem like a good idea. But the concept of public power creates more problems than it solves for union workers and ratepayers.

First, it creates a significant amount of debt. The investor-owned utilities own the assets that transmit and deliver power. These assets would need to be purchased by the municipality, creating debt that your grandchildren would inherit, not to mention the millions of taxpayer dollars in litigation. In 1986, the Long Island Lighting Company, a private company with private shareholders and bondholders was taken over by the Long Island Power Authority. The money borrowed by LIPA to pay LILCO for their assets has led to Long Island ratepayers' power bills being among the highest in the country.

Ratepayers would be facing massive increases in their power bills should Rochester purchase private entities' as-



Rodney Johnson of Rochester talks about his issues with RG&E during a public forum about complaints about RG&E and NYSEG held at Rochester City Hall recently. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE / ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

sets. Ratepayers would bear the enormous burden of paying again for an existing system, which makes no sense.

Second, while the response by investor-owned utilities has been mixed at times, there is still a decision-making body, the Public Service Commission, which holds them accountable. The PSC is the state regulator which is responsible for closely examining a utility company for efficiency, reliability, and safety before adjudicating any rate case. When utilities fail to provide service, they are penalized and required to make corrections to operate; whereas if a local government run power authority were to fail to provide service there is no incentive to make corrective action.

For example, the Metropolitan

Transportation Authority, is a publicly run entity, and elected officials have stated there has been mismanagement, overspending, and underperformance. Operating, maintaining, and expanding an electric utility is an incredibly sprawling behemoth of an operation which consumers are becoming increasingly reliant upon as the state moves towards its climate goals.

Studies have found government-owned utilities cost more overall and provide inferior services. Support the union workforce and protect rate payers by saying "NO" to public power.

Jeff Sondervan is business manager and president of IBEW Local 36 and secretary of the Utility Labor Council State of New York.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Legislation isn't answer to reducing number of shootings

Between the federal government and New York state, we have countless laws relating to gun control. Does anyone in the real world, that is, outside of Washington, D.C., and Albany, think that more laws are the answer to stopping violence?

First of all, it's not gun violence, but criminal violence. Our Democratic legislators have gone soft on criminals, thereby emboldening them. Then they have the incredible gall to blame gun owners, dealers and manufacturers for the resulting violence.

With regards to mass shootings, criminologist John Lott tells us that nearly all mass shootings occur in so-called "Gun Safe Zones." With the latest knee-jerk legislation to come out of Albany, the governor and her allies have created many such zones.

Are you feeling safer yet?

*Richard Frear
Webster*

Could new Yankees shortstop follow in famous footsteps?

This month, I have been a diehard New York Yankees fan for 67 years. I started loving them in 1956, the year Mickey Mantle won the Triple Crown.

The 2023 edition of the Yankees have a young new starting shortstop by the name of Anthony Volpe. In watching the first three games of the season, he seems like a class act. He wanted to wear No. 11, and he called Brett Gardner, who previously wore that number, to see if it was OK with him.

I can remember back on April 2, 1996, there was another young man who got the job as the starting shortstop. In his first at bat, he homered. Later in the game, he made the first of his signature catches – the over the shoulder catch in short left field.

His name, of course, was Derek Jeter.

I hope that young Anthony Volpe has a similarly great career with the Yankees.

*Diane Gowin
Rochester*

No complaints about warmer winter? This reader says otherwise

In response to Rochester's abnormally low snowfall and near-record warmth this past winter, Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Robert Duffy commented that "I have not complained or heard others complain."

Evidently, he is not listening to the scientists and other experts who are deeply concerned about the catastrophic damage that is occurring in our country and around the world due to global warming.

On the economic front, he is also not listening to the ski resort operators, snowplow contractors and retailers of winter sporting goods and apparel who have experienced financial losses as the result of the warm and relatively snowless winter. And, he is not listening to the many children and winter enthusiasts who enjoy winter activities such as building snowmen, sledding, skiing, snowmobiling, and simply taking a walk outdoors to enjoy the beauty of snow-covered scenery.

These are people who are indeed complaining.

*Jackie Donofrio
Rochester*

Support funding to attract medical talent

Your Turn

Harry Bronson and Jeremy Cooney
Guest columnists

With the state budget still under negotiation, we often talk about spending and return on investment. Surprisingly, many programs the state funds actually generate more money for the state.

One of those programs is NYFIRST, a program that supports the recruitment and retention of world-class scientific talent at our 17 medical schools. In the first three grant cycles of the program, every dollar invested by the state saw a \$3.72 return. The total \$9 million state investment has resulted in the creation of over 180 jobs with an average salary of about \$75,000. That's an investment of which we should be proud.

Funding for the program is running out. The state should make a commitment in the upcoming budget to continue to support NYFIRST – and expand the funding.

The University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, located in my district, was awarded two NYFIRST grants. In both instances, the school was able to recruit researchers who are at the top of their field and making advances in medicine that are critical to improving and prolonging the lives of

New York-based medical schools are up against schools in states like Massachusetts, California, and Texas, that invest billions to recruit away the most talented researchers.

New Yorkers – and all people.

Paula Vertino was working at Emory University when Rochester was able to recruit her to continue her research on cancer epigenetics, which is used to understand how cancer cells react to their environments and discover ways to control those reactions.

The CDC projects a 49% increase in cancer rates, so more breakthroughs can't come soon enough.

Rochester was also able to recruit Steven Silverstein to be the director of the newly established Rochester Center for Brain and Retina. Rochester anticipates that the research led by Silverstein will increase the number of copyright and trademark registrations and patentable discoveries by approximate-

ly five each year and create 41 new jobs.

Other medical schools who have been awarded grants include SUNY Upstate, Columbia, and Mount Sinai. Funding from the program, which was designed by Empire State Development with input from the Associated Medical Schools of New York, is used to upgrade lab spaces, purchase equipment and hire support staff.

Like most industries, the medical research field is seeing stiff competition for talent recruitment, and New York-based medical schools are up against schools in states like Massachusetts, California, and Texas, that invest billions to recruit away the most talented researchers. NYFIRST, by comparison, is small, but has been highly effective.

The Legislature has supported this program from its inception and this year the Assembly has committed a new \$20 million to the program. Let's keep it going and keep recruiting great talent to Rochester and other New York communities.

Harry Bronson is a state Assembly member and chair of the Assembly Committee on Economic Development, Job Creation, Commerce and Industry. Jeremy Cooney is a state senator and chair of the Senate Committee on Procurement and Contracts.

Editorial

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followed Russian state news reports with the encouraging news that Gershkovich was appealing his arrest.

But, despite our hopes, a complicated and surely long slog lies ahead for Gershkovich.

The espionage charges leveled at Gershkovich will make for a complex and likely tedious period ahead – recent history has shown that Russian detentions of Americans are aimed at transactional goals. In the cases of Griner and Reed, whose releases were ultimately negotiated through diplomatic channels orchestrated by the Biden Administration, trades were made for Russians serving prison sentences of their own for crimes committed on American soil.

That said, neither Griner nor Reed were journalists. Nor were they journalists accredited with the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The message from Putin's Kremlin, in arresting a credentialed American journalist working for an international out-

let with a broad reputation and journalistic tradition is deeply chilling.

"Gershkovich's unwarranted and unjust arrest is a significant escalation in your government's anti-press actions," wrote the signers of the letter to Antonov. "Russia is sending the message that journalism within your borders is criminalized and that foreign correspondents seeking to report from Russia do not enjoy the benefits of the rule of law."

Gershkovich should be released directly and we urgently call on the Biden Administration to pursue his release with all dispatch. Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken must continue to press his counterparts in Moscow for Gershkovich's safe release.

Why we take notice

Gershkovich grew up as the son of two Russian emigres in Princeton, the university town in Central Jersey that has and surely always will command international attention. He played on the Princeton High School soccer team.

At Bowdoin College in Maine, he was a staff writer at The Bowdoin Orient, the college's feisty newspaper. He was in-

involved in other student journalism opportunities, too – as an editor on a college magazine and as a DJ on the Bowdoin student radio station.

After graduating with a degree in philosophy and English in 2014, Gershkovich studied in Thailand on a fellowship from Princeton. Gershkovich then landed at the New York Times, where he worked as a news assistant for public editors Margaret Sullivan and Liz Spayd. After a few other assignments, he decamped to Moscow – he grew up speaking Russian at home, as had been reported – for a job as a correspondent at The Moscow Times. A stint at Agence France Presse followed and, in 2022, Gershkovich was named Moscow bureau chief for the Journal.

This week, as our newsroom pauses to celebrate Passover, Easter and Ramadan, we encourage our staff – and our readers – to follow our Wall Street Journal colleagues' example: Leave an empty chair for Evan at your seder, your Easter table or as you break your fast.

President Biden, Secretary Blinken and all others involved in strategizing a path forward, we say this: Bring Evan home.

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