

TODAY'S TOPIC: POLITICS

Environmental issues take back seat

GREEN VOTE: *Local environmentalists say the candidates don't say much about the environment.*

By Teresa H. Sharp

Niagara Gazette

Environmental issues pervade the campaigns of political candidates in the Western and Southwestern United States as elections draw near.

But are they present in candidates' platforms across New York?

Many local environmentalists don't think so, and at least one local environmental group is requesting a meeting with gubernatorial candidates to demand some answers.

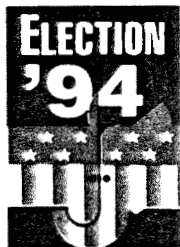
Youngstown resident R. Nils

Olsen Jr. heads the law clinic at the University at Buffalo Law School. He also is the attorney for Residents Organized for Lewiston and Porter's Environment.

"Quite clearly, the biggest environmental issue in Western New York is geographic equity in siting hazardous solid waste disposal facilities," he said. "There are a grossly disproportionate number of facilities sited in this part of the state.

"What, if anything, are they planning to do about it? Nothing?"

Please see **Environment**, 5A



Elisa Olderman/Niagara Gazette

DUMP ISSUES: Tim Henderson, left, holds his grandson, 3-month-old Charles Anthony Henderson, while John Kohl looks on near the gate of the Niagara Falls Storage Site in Lewiston.

Environment takes back seat

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Or bite the bullet and deal with it?

"We (R.O.L.E.) are trying to arrange a meeting with the gubernatorial candidates right now," he said, referring to Democratic incumbent Gov. Mario Cuomo and his foe, Republican state Sen. George Pataki.

"I think the secondary concern in Niagara County would be what are they going to do to ensure that their regulatory opinions regarding the unsuitability for long-term storage at the Niagara Falls Storage Site are respected?" Olsen said. "Will they get tough? Will they join the citizens in a coordinated effort to stop having the waste buried there forever?"

Olsen was referring to the Lewiston site where one-third of the world's mined supply of radium is buried, a result of the Manhattan project, which created the first atomic bomb. The Department of Energy wants to put a final cap on the radioactive material and leave it there.

"These issues aren't discussed because they're not statewide issues, they're regional, and they can't talk about them without hurting somebody's feelings, so they tend not to talk about it," Olsen said. "But the problems do exist, and we need a forthright and courageous response."

R.O.L.E. member John W. Kohl of Lewiston echoed Olsen's sentiments.

"My main concern is the state DEC (Department of Environmental Conservation) making this area the only one for toxic dumps," Kohl said, referring to CWM Chemical

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**Timothy Henderson
President of R.O.L.E.**

Services Inc. in Porter — the only toxic waste dump site in the state. "I think they've written us off."

"Cuomo won't talk about it because he's controlled by New York City, and they don't want it, so they send it here. And if you look at Pataki's record, he's always voted with the DEC. So neither one is an environmentalist. I don't think either has an interest in the environment except to make money off the taxes these people (waste handlers) pay."

Joan E. Gipp of Lewiston represents the state on the Great Lakes Commission. She also serves on a citizen's advisory panel to Occidental Chemical Corp.

"I'm especially concerned as a commissioner because we've spent many years drawing up an ecological plan for the Great Lakes," she said. "Quite specifically, it says what we must do. The Clean Waters Act was supposed to go in to effect in 1985, but it was killed by the Reagan administration. The act said we must slowly get to zero discharge into the lakes."

"New York is backing off (on the

plan). And I don't know if this will be true of the other states. Industries are saying they didn't have enough say in it."

Mrs. Gipp did say, however, that to Cuomo's credit, he did appoint two environmentalists to the commission "probably the only state that's done that. The rest are all bureaucrats."

She also is concerned with the Niagara Falls Storage Facility.

"We've begged to have it (the buried waste) taken out of there," she said. "I don't see a lot of legislative pressure on the Department of Energy (to do otherwise)."

Timothy Henderson, president of R.O.L.E., said, "I'm kind of disappointed. I don't hear the word 'environment' being used remarkably in this election. There was a time not too long ago when it had to be addressed. I don't know if it's because the candidates who ran on environmental platforms were elected and got amnesia or if they learned there's a difference between campaigning and governing."

Henderson was quick to point out, however, that U.S. Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Tonawanda, who will oppose Republican William Miller Jr. in November, "has been real good as far as opening up the process."

Henderson added that "Sen. (John B.) Daly and Assemblyman (Joseph T.) Pilitterre have had lots of legislation passed on the environment."

Daly, a Republican, faces Conservative Donald Hobel to retain his seat, while Democrat Pilitterre faces Republican Al Joseph.