

Want to make it in Trenton? Name a highway off ramp

JAMES FLACHSENHAAR | AUGUST 12, 2012

“In conclusion,” the Cato Institute has written, “the fall of Rome was fundamentally due to economic deterioration resulting from excessive taxation, inflation, and over-regulation. Higher and higher taxes failed to raise additional revenues because wealthier taxpayers could evade such taxes while the middle class — and its taxpaying capacity — were exterminated.”

Almost 1,400 years later, French King Louis XVI succumbed to anger over a huge national debt, indifference to lower-class hardships and resentment of the church’s influence over public policy. No one cared for wife Marie Antoinette (a sort of early Snooki) either.

Thank goodness New Jersey is safe from such rebellion. After all, no one comes *close* to our state government in terms of efficiency, transparency and equality for all. Where else, for instance, can a citizen wallow in inspired government achievement like this?

- Assembly bill ACR 98, co-sponsored by Scott Rumana and David Russo, declared Nov. 15, 2011, as “Neuroblastoma Awareness Day” in New Jersey.
- Assembly bill ACR 151 and its Senate companion bill, co-sponsored by nine lawmakers, “Respectfully requests that Major League Baseball retire the number 21 in honor of the life and career of Roberto Clemente.”
- Assemblyman Sean Kean’s A-2886 would designate blueberry pie as the New Jersey dessert.
- A-4156 — the brainchild of Assembly members Alison Littell McHose and Gary Chiusano — would repeal the requirement that chain restaurants post calorie information for menu items.

Do I have to even mention the scores of intersections, road segments and highway on and off ramps these guys are so good at naming?

You're probably thinking what I'm thinking: How do legislators find the time for these initiatives on top of all their other responsibilities? You'd think stabilizing pensions, creating jobs, achieving lasting property tax reform and being the nationwide leader in government ethics would leave so very little time.

Not only that, there's the day-to-day stuff: polishing vanity license plates, mounting Legislature gold shields in car windows, making sure wallets are filled with PBA "get-out-of-a-summons-free" cards. It's a wonder they can back out of the driveway!

And the mental stress of voting as your party dictates, no matter what you think? Oh my God — what a nightmare!

Still, there might be a *speck* of room for improvement, no? For starters, the governor might stop bounding around the state like a modern-day Nero, brandishing an ice cream cone instead of a shield.

As for the rest of our ruling class? Here's an idea:

The Ocean County prosecutor and the county's local police chiefs are buying cell phone apps that temporarily disable the texting and calling mechanism of a cell phone in a car traveling more than 20 mph. Their plan: Give the apps — paid for with drug forfeiture money — to parents and others who want to ensure driver safety.

"This app is a 100-percent cure to distracted driving," said Prosecutor Marlene Lynch Ford.

What better cure for distracted government than an app that locks officials out of the Statehouse every time they try to add to their legacy of in consequence? Maybe, huddled there on the sidewalk, they'd have the time to plot useful laws.

If not, no great loss. As the Cato Institute reminds us, "Although the final demise of the Roman Empire in the West ... was an event of great historical importance, for most Romans it was a relief."

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