



## Our view: No pain, no gain for taxpayers in face of change

### Observer-Dispatch

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The closing of a school is always an emotional experience — for students, for staff, but especially for community. Such was the case last week as West Frankfort Elementary School closed its doors for the last time, a victim of district budget cuts.

But beneath the emotion is the reality. And as costs continue to rise, communities — and governments — must grasp that reality because sooner or later it will trump tradition and the strong emotions that feed it.

In short, we need to change the way we do things because we no longer can afford the old ways. Resisting will only prolong the pain — in our hearts, but even more so in our pocketbooks.

An Oneida County legislator recently remarked that the reason more consolidations haven't happened is because "taxes aren't high enough yet." He's absolutely right.

Case in point: A 2008 study by the Center for Governmental Research in Rochester suggested that merging the five police agencies in the town of Whitesboro — the town plus its four villages — could lower annual operating costs by about 14 percent, saving taxpayers as much as \$226,000. But three years later, little action has been taken. More recently, two of the villages — Yorkville and Whitesboro — have discussed shared coverage, and Yorkville also is pondering an offer from the Sheriff's Department. Still, nothing has been done — largely due to a passive constituency.

Taxes aren't high enough. If they were, residents would storm board sessions to demand that something be done.

Only the constituency can effect change. Our elected officials are simply ambassadors for the people, but if they aren't pressed by the public on issues, there's little chance they'll take steps necessary to change their situation. It's easier to maintain the status quo.

One or two people at a board meeting screaming about something tend to be characterized as crackpots. Founding Father Samuel Adams was often thought to have had a screw loose because of his public rants for revolution. It wasn't until other colonial leaders realized that England would not budge that they were able to muster the strength in numbers necessary to change government.

Was it radical change? You bet. Was it worth it? Absolutely.

We're at a tipping point now. There are schools, agencies and even municipalities in the Mohawk Valley that need to merge, but such radical change is still met with resistance because people don't want to part with the old ways. Maybe it won't happen until taxes finally get high enough. You need to decide where that is. More important, you need to decide whether you want to go there.

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