

Pre-“With All Due Respect” Commentary by Art Giacalone (July 2011):

A version of the following op-ed piece was published in the July 14, 2011 edition of the *Buffalo Law Journal* under the headline, “Questions linger on Peace Bridge,” and as a letter-to-the-editor in the weekly edition of *ArtVoice*, also on July 14, 2011, under the headline “Residents Have ‘Right’ to Clean Air and Good Schools, Not a ‘Signature’ Bridge”

[[http://artvoice.com/issues/v10n28/letters\\_to\\_artvoice](http://artvoice.com/issues/v10n28/letters_to_artvoice)]. An abbreviated version also appeared as a letter-to-the-editor on July 21, 2011 in *The Buffalo News*.

[Scroll down to the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter at

<http://www.buffalonews.com/article/20110721/OPINION02/307219976>]

Note: It was good to see Buffalo’s daily newspaper not edit-out my opening sentence: “The Buffalo News has been unwilling to provide true leadership on the issue of a new Peace Bridge...”]

### **Residents Have ‘Right’ to Clean Air and Good Schools, Not a ‘Signature’ Bridge**

There are times when “leadership” means having the courage to say “No.” To look the residents, taxpayers and business leaders in the eye and proclaim: “We understand why the concept of a ‘signature’ Peace Bridge is exciting, but, frankly, we don’t need it and we should focus on more important priorities, such as the health and education of our children.”

For years, federal, state and Peace Bridge officials (as well as various media outlets) have been unwilling to provide true leadership on this topic – to objectively assess the need for, and the impacts of, a new bridge. Instead, they have expended valuable time and resources beating the drum for a “signature span,” refusing to listen to the growing chorus who felt that such a bridge, while good for our collective egos, was not worth the potential costs to our environment or the health of West Side residents.

It is absurd to insist, as some voices have, that Western New Yorker’s have a right to a new and dramatic Peace Bridge, or that the building of a “signature” span is a critical project for our area. The “need” for a new bridge, if it ever existed, dissipated after 9/11. Moreover, if our citizens have a “right” to demand anything from their leaders, it is not a majestic bridge, but clean air for our children, grandchildren, and neighbors to breathe, and a first-class public education system to provide our youth a sound foundation for a productive life.

Western New York deserves objectivity and maturity, not insults and divisive commentary, from its elected officials and the media. Pointing to projects built elsewhere with our tax dollars and pouting that Buffalo always gets “the short end of the stick” is more akin to the whining I hear from my adolescent children than the wise words I expect from insightful leaders.

There is no doubt that government officials and agencies failed to look out for the well-being of this community. Despite the fact that public health scientists have shown the link between heavy truck traffic at the Peace Bridge and the poor respiratory health on the West Side of Buffalo, neither the Peace Bridge Authority, Federal Highway Administration, nor New York's Department of Transportation, has ever conducted a meaningful assessment of the human health impacts of the various Peace Bridge alternatives.

Similarly, although the Niagara River Corridor is recognized internationally as a globally significant, but fragile, bird area, Peace Bridge design jurists, elected officials and much of the media chose to ignore obvious environmental problems when making the 2005 recommendation to construct an iconic "signature bridge."

While no one can argue that Buffalo's Mayor and Common Council consistently exemplify the qualities we yearn for in our elected officials, they should not be faulted for failing to see a reason to push for a new bridge. No rational reason exists.

Our government, business and institutional leaders must set aside their personal preferences and work together to create a healthy environment for Buffalo's residents, especially our children. That would be a true source of community pride.

Sincerely,

Arthur J. Giacalone