

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
**WIN Columnist**

Anthony Masiello got it wrong again last week, but at least this time it wasn't his fault. "I'm still in shock," – how many times is it he has all but needed the chest paddles in the last few years? – is how he characterized the Buffalo fire union's initial refusal to sign on to a cost-saving insurance plan endorsed by seven other city groups.

Council member Bonnie Russell chimed in, "I'm so angry, I don't have words. His tactics are disgraceful", in characterizing union leader Joe Foley, who became public enemy number one, two and three last week.

It was easy to pile on poor ol' Joe, who apparently has an insatiable appetite for playing his now pathetically predictable but still sickening game of chicken. So Masiello, Russell, and every other critic who lined up to take a swing could easily be forgiven for their obvious responses.

The critics have it all wrong. We should be lining up in Niagara Square, at-least 10-deep around City Hall, complete with marching bands and floats and lots of confetti and balloons, in saluting good ol' Joe. We need parades, proclamations, platitudes. Joe should be invited to throw out the opening pitch for the Bisons, and drop the ceremonial opening puck whenever it is the Sabres might play hockey again. Maybe the Bills can make him an honorary captain when they open their season in September.

There should be billboards, banners hung across Main Street, and sky writers pledging our everlasting gratitude for the man who at least threatened to accomplish what not one single politician, control board member or average Joe has been able to do before: right size the Buffalo Fire Department in one fell swoop.

It's brilliant, really. Foley, by publicly stating his willingness to sacrifice more than five dozen firefighters to save what remained of his force a few dollars on health insurance, now has himself confirmed that the department size has to be reduced. Masiello, the control board, none of them have to play the heavy.

"Without the city, the workers will have nothing," said the city's true keeper of the purse strings and control board chair Thomas Baker. Foley's insightful and well thought out response: "without its workers, the city is nothing." Of course, his workers will be missing a few little incidentals like pay checks, health benefits and a place to hang their firefighting jackets.

"The biggest obstacle we have is the unions, that's where the choke points always are." said Joel Giambra, more than just an interested bystander in the one-man made drama.

Like the fire issue, Erie County's takeover of city parks needs to be completed by the time you read this; June 9 is the control board's final drop dead date on resolving a Buffalo budget.

"I mean, right now, the parks deal is beginning to unravel. I don't know if I have eight votes across the street (from the county legislature), and the city unions want to keep their white and blue collar parks workers in their union, requiring me to take on two additional unions," Giambra told publishers and editors from the Western New York Independent Newspaper group late last week. "I would now have to negotiate with those parks employees differently than I negotiate with the laborers in our parks. I said absolutely not."

Of course, over the weekend, the fire union amazingly came to its senses, and signed on to the insurance plan. Who really believed, other than Buffalo councilman Marc Coppola -- "This is monumental. No one thought there was going to be a settlement," he oozed after the

announcement -- that Foley would have the intestinal wherewithal to throw some five dozen of his own people over the Falls, and without a barrel. There was much chance of the union allowing that to happen as there is Crowdaddy's suddenly springing back to life on the waterfront.

But the next time around Mr. Foley, if you're truly that clueless, heartless and self-centered, then go Joe go.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at [www.wnynewspapers.com](http://www.wnynewspapers.com). Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)*