

So, for those scoring at home, here's the tally from last week's Buffalo Niagara advancement agenda: "Waterfront land sale may end up in court," "County's hired counsel suing furniture vendor," "Casino suit is the latest in sorry saga."

That would be the judicial system three, progress zero. The tort trifecta, a tribunal triad. It was a good week to be a lawyer. And since Joel Giambra hasn't really come up with a good answer for the half million or so he overpaid for office furniture, how about "Well, we really needed all those shiny new file cabinets for all the briefs we're gonna have to catalog."

Fingers snapped off at the knuckle joint, the pointing was so quick. Court clerks skipped their planned jaunts to the local gym or swimming pool. Running around with all that paperwork was more than an adequate workout. Lawsuits, or their threat, were whipped out on everything from land to lamps, everything it seemed save the Anchor Bar serving papers on Perdue and Tyson because their chicken wings are too small.

The sun rises in the east, war is ugly and Buffalo is out of money. Each statement is as true as the next, but only one will require a lawsuit to confirm it. Guess which one it will be.

As always, it's never anyone's fault. Giambra went so far as to launch his own personal advertising blitz blaming Albany for financial woes that may soon engulf his administration. That on top of a preemptive, and as it turned out, totally unnecessary suit against a major political fundraiser and ally, even though all along both insisted each desk, chair and paper clip were on the up and up. It was bizarre even by Tony Masiello standards, and far beneath Giambra's perceived rationality.

Eyes glaze over like Lake Erie in January at the mere mention of waterfront development, now officially the area's biggest, most embarrassing and, in practical terms, economically devastating debacle. It used to be funny to talk about the lack of development there. The comedy turned to a tragedy decades ago, but it was surely someone else's fault. And suing the Senecas? The lake breeze has more accountability in most matters than our casino-constructing friends.

The Buffalo Common Council believes there is ulterior motive behind everything from parks to pen purchases. Even the simplest of ideas are met with desk pounding which needed to happen decades ago, when the front door to the vault was wide open, and everyone started walking in. Maybe they could raise the garbage tax again, or water fees, so they can launch their own advertising blitz.

The most convenient whipping post these days is the Buffalo financial control board, which as it is turning out may or may not have arrived in time to save a city from itself. Better to have called it the Guys and Gals to Take the Fall Club. When stripped to its barest essence, it is exactly what the nine-member panel was brought in to do. They're the somebody in "somebody's got to do it."

Which, deep down, seems just fine with most anyone who draws a public paycheck. Elected officials can continue to fret, flash furrowed brows and feign indignation over job layoffs, service cuts and program closings. But, they can still point, posture and pass blame to someone, or something, over which in the end, thankfully, they have no control. It's the best of all worlds, the "hey, it's-not-us-making-the-tough-decisions" defense, which is exactly why a control board is here in the first place.

Most lawsuits – at least in the governmental arena – are simply ways to pass blame, nothing more than convenient shields for the inactivity and incompetence of those who feel wronged. On the taxpayer's scoreboard, it's why the good guys are always behind.

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