



NIAGARA COUNTY
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LEGISLATORS OPPOSE NATIONAL FUEL CLOSING
VIRTUOSO URGES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICIALS TO INTERVENE

LOCKPORT—County lawmakers from Niagara Falls and the town of Niagara won unanimous backing for a resolution urging National Fuel to reconsider closing its Packard Road customer assistance center Tuesday in Lockport.

Minority Leader Dennis F. Virtuoso, D-Niagara Falls, also won an assurance from Legislature Chairman William L. Ross, C-Wheatfield, that Niagara County economic development officials would contact National Fuel and explore alternatives to shuttering the customer assistance center.

The resolution, which spelled out the clear opposition of county legislators to National Fuel's decision to close the facility, was introduced by Virtuoso, and jointly sponsored by the entire Niagara Falls delegation as well as Legislature Community Services Committee Chairman Danny W. Sklarski of the town of Niagara. The passage of the resolution puts the county on the same side of the issue as the Niagara Falls Common Council, which passed a similar measure.

"National Fuel is looking to move their customer assistance center out of Niagara, and it services all of Lewiston, Niagara Falls, the town of Niagara, and Wheatfield," Virtuoso said. "That's what it is: a customer assistance center. They're going to move that out, so how are they going to assist us anymore?"

Virtuoso's resolution makes particular note of the impact on local National Fuel customers if the company shifts its customer assistance center to Buffalo, as is currently planned.

"This will be a hardship on the residents of the Town of Niagara and the City of Niagara Falls, especially during the winter months, and...will force these residents to seek assistance beyond reasonable travel limits," the resolution notes.

Virtuoso said that while he respected the right of National Fuel to make business decisions, this left many National Fuel customers without any easy recourse to pay bills and resolve issues arising from service. The Minority Leader noted that elderly and lower-income residents would likely be among those facing the most adverse consequences from the decision to close the facility

"I can understand that they're trying to cut costs," Virtuoso said. "But not at the expense of our seniors and the people of Niagara County."

Sklarski echoed Virtuoso's sentiments.

"The customer center has been there for a number of years," Sklarski said. "This closing is affecting our residents. We need to send a strong message when it comes to protecting our residents and the services that are provided by the utilities they rely on."

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