

OPINION

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OTHER VIEW | DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Obama should OK pipeline

All evidence to the contrary, campaign seasons eventually end. And once the votes are counted – Florida, you done yet? – we can refocus on the task of governance.

In such times, politics have a way of overriding common sense. Such was the case with the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada's oil sands to the Texas Gulf Coast.

President Barack Obama faced intense heat from environmentalist supporters to reject the privately funded, 1,660-mile pipeline on climate change and potential spill concerns. He faced similar heat from union supporters to approve it for the jobs it would create.

As we noted a year ago, Obama flipped a coin on to its edge and put off a decision until after the election. House Republicans, in another nakedly political move, overplayed their hand by embedding a 60-day deadline in the payroll-tax-cut deal, which moved Obama not at all.

Now that the president has won his second term, perhaps we can let common sense override politics.

While sharing many of the environmentalists' concerns, this newspaper again encourages the president to approve the Keystone XL and the Canadian oil it would bring to U.S. refineries.

This project could yield thousands of new jobs and millions in new investment, but more important are the benefits to U.S. energy

security. More Canadian oil would help displace crude imported from places unfriendly to the U.S. or in perpetual turmoil with oil from a stable trading partner and close ally.

Canadian companies already move oil sands crude into the U.S. through other pipelines, and their government wants very much to send more.

Pipeline transport has proved safer than ship, truck or train. TransCanada Corp. has jumped through every regulatory hoop – including rerouting the Keystone XL around Nebraska's environmentally sensitive Sandhills region – and has agreed to dozens of improvements beyond current standards. No pipeline is perfect, but this was already the most researched infrastructure project in U.S. history, even before the latest delay.

In a rare show of bipartisanship, 18 senators – nine Republicans and nine Democrats – wrote to Obama recently urging him to approve the pipeline, which also is planned to carry oil south from the booming Bakken field in North Dakota and Montana.

The environmental concerns are real – as pipeline protesters reminded us recently in Washington – but manageable. On balance, if our nation is ever to achieve something close to energy independence, it must take better advantage of friendly sources, even as it transitions toward a cleaner, more renewable future.

POLITICS | TOM O'MARA

Post-Sandy New York



TOM O'MARA

It's been a little over one month since Hurricane Sandy devastated a large swath of the Atlantic seaboard, including segments of New York City and Long Island. While the fury of this latest natural disaster to hit New York doesn't dominate the headlines like during Sandy's immediate aftermath, let's be clear: the recovery and reconstruction effort remains in its very earliest stages despite all that's been done already.

First and foremost, it's most important to recognize that thousands upon thousands of New Yorkers continue to, literally, pick up the pieces of their lives. In the short term, I'll say again that I simply can't say enough about all of the businesses, first responders, relief groups, volunteers and concerned citizens who have answered the call from throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions. We here at home understand that it's only through all of these helping hands that any community can ever begin to recover and keep hope.

But it's also time to start thinking about the short- and long-term governmental burden. Early last week, Governor Andrew Cuomo pegged New York's request for federal disaster aid at \$42 billion. That move sets the stage for one key – and overwhelmingly critical – governmental and political battleground in post-Sandy New York. Our congressional representatives face a tough task in securing this federal reimbursement. But it's imperative to all of us. The cost obviously can't be

borne by New York's taxpayers alone. The amount of federal disaster aid New York receives from Washington – and how soon it's delivered – will in the end largely determine the burden that's going to be left to state and local taxpayers.

One month from now, in early January 2013, the new state legislative session gets underway. As tradition dictates, it starts with the governor's State of the State message to the Legislature. And this time around, this speech is going to give every New Yorker the most specific indication yet, from a strictly governmental standpoint, of what we're facing in post-Sandy New York.

Governor Cuomo has already signaled the agenda that, many believe, will dominate New York government for at least the next year, and probably longer. In mid-November the governor formed three state commissions to undertake a total review and make specific recommendations to “overhaul and improve” New York's emergency response capabilities. They're charged with re-envisioning the state's systems of communications, energy, environmental protection, transportation and others to better withstand future severe weather events. You can read more about each of these commissions, and

we all should, on Governor Cuomo's website (www.governor.ny.gov). I recently heard one pundit characterize it as an “FDR-style” rebuilding effort. In announcing the new commissions, Governor Cuomo was clear about the urgency, “Over the past two years, New York State has been hit by some of the most destructive storms in our state's history, causing untold damage and the tragic loss of many lives. Regardless of the cause of these storms, New York State must undertake major reforms to adapt to the reality that storms such as Sandy, Irene, and Lee can hit the state at any time. For this reason, I have charged these three commissions to seriously examine existing systems and present a comprehensive blueprint so we can bring our emergency preparedness and response capabilities into the 21st century and ensure our infrastructure is built to survive major weather incidents.”

It's a huge undertaking. While the images of Hurricane Sandy's destruction have been powerfully clear, developing a better picture of the economic and fiscal toll for the state, for New York City and Long Island, and ultimately for localities statewide will be ongoing. As I noted, so much hinges on federal assistance. But it's clear that all of the challenges we face here in New York – upstate and downstate – have become more difficult in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. The burdens and the responsibilities of recovering and rebuilding will be enormous.

New York and states across the nation over these past several years of economic downturn have already been struggling with tough fiscal choices forced by ever-diminishing revenues to address ever-growing demands. We've had to face budget deficits and try to address them, for the short and long run, and the decisions have been painful. But my sense is that we've never faced choices like we're going to face in post-Sandy New York. Legislators statewide will be asking what it means for the future of mandate relief, education aid, economic development and so much more.

During a time of crisis like this one – although it's taking place so far from our immediate homes and somewhat removed for many of us – when ongoing uncertainty and day-to-day turmoil is the norm in many places, it's imperative that government emerge as a level head and a steady force.

In 2013, the governor's and the Legislature's challenge is going to be great. It's safe to say, I believe, we're going to be asked to call upon all of the empathy, cooperation, balance, perseverance, patience, common sense and reason imaginable. And it's going to determine the course of all of New York State for the remainder of this decade, at least. Bottom line: the stakes will be enormous during the upcoming legislative session.

Tom O'Mara is a Republican state senator from Big Flats.

ONLY ONLINE | POLL

RECENT QUESTION

The Steuben County Legislature voted against a plan that would have banned smoking on county property. Do you agree?

- Yes, the county was butting into the private lives of its residents. 34%
- No, second-hand smoke is a health hazard. 23%
- No, smoking causes many health issues that are costly to treat. 18%
- Yes, a ban would have been too difficult to enforce. 14%
- Don't care either way. 8%

Total votes: 345

New question: Do you support the \$7 billion Keystone XL project?

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ANOTHER VIEW



OTHER VIEW | LOS ANGELES TIMES

Seeking safe peanut butter, and beyond

The bins of peanuts outside were uncovered, food safety inspectors reported, allowing birds to do on them what birds do. Employees failed to wash their hands regularly or to practice other basic hygiene. Salmonella was found in dozens of locations throughout the plant, which had shipped jars of peanut butter even though its own tests showed they were tainted with the potentially deadly bacteria. After more than 40 people were sickened,

the plant closed voluntarily in September and the company's products were recalled. And yet Sunland Inc. announced plans to reopen the New Mexico facility, which sold organic peanut butter to Trader Joe's and other markets.

Citing the conditions at Sunland as well as its history of health violations, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration put at least a temporary hold on those plans Monday, suspending operations at the plant and exercising for the first time

its new authority to shut down potentially dangerous food facilities. Luckily for consumers, this was made possible by the Food Safety Modernization Act, signed into law nearly two years ago – and long overdue even then. But other, much more sweeping changes required by the law haven't yet been implemented.

The law doesn't simply expand the FDA's authority; it calls for an overhaul of food safety enforcement that relies more on prevention than on punishment

of errant food producers. Foreign companies, whose products make up an ever-larger share of domestic food consumption, will be required to show that their plants meet U.S. standards, and the FDA will form partnerships with food safety agencies in those countries to bolster its global inspection reach. Domestic food businesses will be required to develop their own science-based safety programs, subject to FDA approval, and inspections will be stepped up at plants

that handle foods deemed to be at higher risk for food poisoning, such as leafy greens or salads containing mayonnaise.

Provisional regulations were supposed to be released a year after the law was signed – in January – but that hasn't happened. The FDA did its job, delivering the new regulations to the Office of Management and Budget in late 2011. But the OMB hasn't moved them forward. Some theorize that this was a political decision by the Obama

administration, to avoid implementing sweeping regulations during a campaign marked by Republican complaints of over-regulation (though the bill passed Congress with significant Republican support).

The FDA's decisive move to keep the Sunland plant from reopening shows how necessary the new law was. Surely one of the most important regulatory missions of government should be assuring the safety of what we eat. Implementation of the rest of the law is past due.