

OPINION

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Mail: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, THE LEADER PO BOX 1017 CORNING, NY 14830
Fax: 607-936-9939
Email: sdupree@the-leader.com

Online at www.the-leader.com/opinions

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34 W. Pulteney St., Corning, NY 14830
www.the-leader.com

Stella DuPree..... Editor
 Derrick Ek..... Assistant Editor

WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Stage being set for tax relief

The calls for tax relief have been arriving for months now from across the state's political spectrum, well in advance of the opening of the 2014 legislative session in early January.



TOM OMARA

It sure looks and sounds like a consensus is building to do something noteworthy.

That's at least a good note to begin the new year.

In early October, as the state Senate Majority was engaged in a series of statewide public hearings on tax and regulatory reform, Gov. Andrew Cuomo established a bipartisan Tax Relief Commission that's preparing to unveil its tax-cutting recommendations.

It's being reported that the Commission is lining up behind some version of a "circuit breaker" property tax relief strategy that would provide income-based property tax breaks. I think it's important to point out that some fiscal analysts have noted that this strategy would only be effective in the long run if it's accompanied by relief for local governments from unfunded state mandates—and that's a whole different discussion that needs to take place, and will.

The pro-taxpayer group Unshackle Upstate (unshackleupstate.com) has been out lining up support for a plan it calls a "New ERA (Economic Revitalization Agenda) for Upstate." It's a 5-point plan focused on personal income tax relief, business tax cuts, sales tax reductions, a swift phase-out of the so-called 18-a utility assessment, and moving forward with the development of the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry in a responsible manner.

The New York State Republican Committee just weighed in with "The Jobs Agenda" (www.nygop.org/page/the-nygop-jobs-agenda) echoing the Unshackle Upstate plan in fundamental ways, but going beyond it to address key initiatives for regulatory reform, mandate relief, workforce development and education.

And of course I've recently joined many of Senate colleagues in a renewed call for bipartisan action on a comprehensive tax-cutting agenda in 2014 by issuing a preliminary report based upon the findings of our public hearings this fall, "Tax Policy Review & Reform Initiative." You can read our full report on www.omara.nysenate.gov. In the left-hand column of the home page, just click

on the "New Senate Report Calls for Tax Cuts" icon.

This widespread and growing focus on tax relief is undeniably good news—as long as it's followed by meaningful action.

With these goals in mind, the Senate recommendations cover a range of actions to reform, simplify and reduce personal income taxes, business taxes, estate taxes and local property taxes.

For example, it calls for eliminating the franchise tax on manufacturers across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide. It remains our best hope for long-term revitalization. Government can help lead that effort by starting with a pro-job, pro-private-sector, pro-manufacturing tax cut like the one I introduced earlier this year (S.3562/A.3342) to rapidly phase out the franchise tax on manufacturers.

That move, according to manufacturing leaders, would help create upwards of 3,000 good-paying, private-sector jobs over the next few years, encourage existing manufacturers to expand and invest in their New York facilities, and make the state a more attractive place for other manufacturers to locate their operations here in the future.

Overall, the stage is being set for tax relief for all New Yorkers in the new year. Now it's going to be all about the follow through. We have to do better. We need bolder steps to keep building on the efforts of the past several years to turn around the upstate economy, strengthen manufacturing, create good jobs and revitalize upstate regions like our own.

The emerging blueprints could produce a more competitive business climate that invites private-sector job growth, welcomes businesses and industries, and helps provide long-term economic security for workers and their families—if we finally turn all this talk into the right actions.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



'LOOK WHO KNEW WHAT HE REALLY WANTED...'

Should Congress move quickly to pass climate change legislation?

Pro: Sweeping action shows we're serious

In its most recent assessment released this fall, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said that warming of the Earth's climate system is both unequivocal and unprecedented, a conclusion that rests on multiple and independent sources of data.

The authoritative IPCC study also found that it was "extremely likely" that human influence, particularly our reliance on fossil fuels, has been the dominant cause of climate change.

At the same time, international meetings - such as the Climate Change Conference just concluded in Warsaw, Poland - struggle to devise broadly acceptable agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that pose grave risks to the world's economy, its environment and public health and well-being.

What might the United States do to demonstrate convincingly that it is finally prepared to play a leading role in slowing the rate of global climate change and minimizing its effects?

Passing comprehensive national climate change legislation would be a good start.

The United States has hardly been standing still on the issue. More than half of the states and more than a thousand U.S. cities have adopted a diversity of policies that should substantially reduce the release of greenhouse gas emissions. These include innovative actions on renewable fuels, energy efficiency, public transportation, building efficiency and more.

Much has happened at the federal level too. The Obama administration has invested tens of billions of dollars in cutting-edge research on promising renewable energy technologies.

For example, the White House and the Environmental Protection Agency

are developing regulations for new and existing coal-fired power plants that promise to begin shifting the nation away from use of coal to other energy resources that emit far fewer greenhouse gases.

Yet the new regulations and policy initiatives are not sufficient to tackle climate change. They also come with no national political commitment that might prod reluctant nations around the world to do their own part. And some actions, notably the EPA power plant regulations, are certain to be challenged in court by the fossil fuel industry.

National climate change policy would send a different and more definitive signal to the world that the United States takes climate change seriously and that it is prepared to step out in front on the issue.

How likely is it that a highly partisan and polarized Congress can enact climate change legislation? It is certainly not likely at present nor as long as Republicans continue to deny the existence of climate change and defend the fossil fuel industry at all costs.

Nonetheless, it is imperative that Congress at least try to design and approve a national climate change policy - and do so soon. It needs to draft legislation, hold hearings, hear experts and other witnesses, review the evidence, and debate the issue at whatever length is necessary to build support.

Congress should explore all reasonable policy tools, including those that appeal to Republicans and conservatives, such as use of market incentives and reliance on the private sector. Clearly, this will be an uphill battle, but it is imperative to try.

Michael E. Kraft is professor emeritus of political science and public and environmental affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

Con: China, India will swamp efforts

Congress should not waste time debating a comprehensive climate change legislation in the coming year.

First, the combination of the natural gas revolution created by fracking and the economic doldrums we are stuck in have already cut our emissions of greenhouse gases dramatically without Congress doing anything at all. If they did jump in, they'd be as likely to screw that up as make things better.

In addition, we should wait because the current proposals on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are all expensive and will be cheaper in the future as technologies improve.

Consider the change in cell phone technology and prices over the past 20 years. When the director of Wall Street wanted to emphasize Gordon Gecko's power and wealth, he portrayed him holding a brick-size cell phone.

Today, even schoolchildren carry iPhones, which are orders of magnitude more powerful - and much cheaper. That same innovative process will make both emissions reduction technology and mitigation efforts cheaper and better in the future.

The United States alone can do next to nothing about greenhouse gas emissions alone and we should not burden our economy to attempt to do so.

China and India are growing so rapidly that their additional greenhouse gas emissions swamp any reductions possible in the U.S. today.

For example, Chinese car ownership today on a per-capita basis is not even equal to U.S. car ownership in 1920.

When - not if - Chinese consumers close that gap, they'll be driving more than 20 times the number of cars they are driving today. Chinese electricity consumption

is similarly rapidly too, with new coal-fired power plants opening like clockwork.

Finally, this particular Congress is going to be unable to reach agreement on any major legislation before the 2014 elections.

The leaders of the House and Senate are barely on speaking terms with each other. There's plenty of blame to go around, of course, and neither party is innocent.

A serious approach to climate change is going to require legislation touching on many aspects of Americans' daily lives, since reducing greenhouse gas emissions is ultimately going to require substantial changes in our energy consumption.

Since energy touches every aspect of our lives, this is a subject that requires careful consideration and extended debate.

We need candidates putting forward specific proposals and debating their merits on the campaign trail so voters can make an informed choice about the type of approach they want to see. That hasn't happened yet and debating something this important requires more deliberation than we've had yet.

Moreover, as the members of Congress gear up for the 2014 election cycle, their attention will be on fundraising.

Starting a new debate on such a significant issue at this point in the election cycle is a recipe for really bad legislation: to suggest writing a major bill that will touch on virtually every sector of the U.S. economy in an election year will be inviting every special interest in the country to a party where the taxpayers get to play the role of the piqata. Deliberation, not speed, is what we need.

Andrew Morriss holds the D. Paul Jones, Jr. and Charlene A. Jones Chair in Law and professor of business at the University of Alabama.

ONLY ONLINE | WINDOW ON THE WEST

December 1901: A Final Touch of Grace



Once Thanksgiving of 1901 was over, the thoughts of everyone in Hammondsport turned to - Christmas!

W.E. Cook "respectfully" called people's attention to the possibilities of hardware as gifts for their loved ones. "Why not a Range, Stove, Cutter, Whip, Bells, Horse Blankets or Mechanics' Tools? Because they are useful

does not detract from their suitability for Christmas gifts." **Read more from Kirk House's Window on the West blog at www.the-leader.com.**