

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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COMMENTARY | ANN McFEATTERS

Historians will recall our leaders' inaction

When historians look back on 2014, they will note not just how flagrantly Vladimir Putin disregarded international law or how stubbornly Gaza and Israel kept firing missiles at each other. They will also be puzzled at how poorly the United States handled its economy.

They undoubtedly will conclude that 2014 was a year of missed opportunities.

The world's record in dealing with bullies and tyrants has not been good; it remains to be seen if economic sanctions work with the lawless Putin whose takeover of Crimea has led to a series of disasters for scores of innocent people. Thus far sanctions have not worked.

The incredible brutality of the missiles raining down in the Middle East feels like the mindless violence in the "Game of Thrones." The intransigence of people who live so closely together is mind-boggling, as are the staggering numbers of children who are dying and being maimed.

But the economic warfare in the U.S. also will have serious worldwide consequences for years to come that are preventable.

■ America's labor force is not growing and, even more alarming, its productivity is falling.

■ America's long-envied middle class is disappearing. Millions of workers are being paid insufficient wages and benefits. Their families are suffering as corporations plow billions of dollars in profits not into new jobs but into offshore accounts and businesses.

The number of working age Americans increased 1.2 percent each year in the 1990s. In 2013, it increased only 0.4 percent. Because of the slow rebound from the 2008 recession, millions have stopped looking for work.

Many couples of child-bearing age are afraid for economic reasons to have children. The influx of immigrants, including the highly skilled, who traditionally have helped to grow the economy, has stopped. Congress, which should fix the problem, is broken.

The number of government jobs is down because of cuts at all levels of government. Investments that should be made in America's decrepit infrastructure from roads to bridges to ports to airports to rails are not



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happening. Unwilling to take risks because of the inability of political leaders in Washington to compromise to get anything done, businesses are contributing to economic stagnancy.

Job retraining programs, vitally needed to put workers in new high-tech jobs that are going begging, are mostly a joke. At the same time, the number of people on disability has doubled to 9 million in the last 15 years. Productivity, dependent on risk-taking and innovation, is declining. Only 63 percent of working-age Americans are actually employed.

Government incentives to keep home-grown businesses and industries from moving abroad have been slow in coming. The long-promised tax reforms to help businesses cope with the changing global business climate disappeared along with Brigadoon.

It's difficult to justify our outrage over the failure of the Palestinians and the Israelis to act in the best interests of their people when Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill can't do it either.

It is the tiniest bit hypocritical for us to condemn Putin's appalling lack of humanitarianism when one of our governors (read Texas Gov. Rick Perry) orders 1,000 National Guard troops to turn back starving children who have traveled 1,000 miles without their parents to get to our southern border. (When not plotting against children, Perry heads to Iowa trying once again to run for president. Please save us, good people of Iowa.)

Eventually even Russian stud-muffin/KGB agent Putin will be out of power; sooner or later a cease-fire in the Middle East will be worked out.

But the damage to the U.S. economy will take much longer to repair. And everybody who caused it will be gone. Only the historians will be around to cast the blame where it should go - the nincompoops in government who couldn't do business with each other. *Ann McFeatters is an op-ed columnist for the McClatchy-Tribune News Service.*

WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Broadband comes to rural New York

The Legislative Commission on Rural Resources (LCRR), on which I currently serve as a member, believes that the availability of high-speed Internet is the gateway to economic, educational and other fundamental successes for communities across rural, Upstate New York, as well as across the nation and around the world.

Each of our regional economic development councils, those representing the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, has highlighted the importance of broadband development as a key building block of the future.

For example, the need for modern telemedicine capabilities is highlighted by the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council in its final report, which states that telemedicine-based initiatives "will reduce hospitalizations, create Medicare and Medicaid savings, eliminate transportation issues and disintegration of services for elderly and low-income populations" and provide cost-effective alternatives and reduced health care costs for rural residents.

That's just one example, but it's one that our Rural Resources Commission is particularly interested in. We view it as a potentially groundbreaking achievement in rural health care. The Senate approved legislation this session to try to create more opportunities for patients, particularly in rural areas, to utilize telehealth and telemedicine services. The Cuomo administration has expressed its willingness to explore the development of a more extensive



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statewide "telemedicine/telehealth network" and this overall effort will remain one ongoing focus of the Rural Resources Commission.

Nearly three years ago, the New York State Broadband Development and Deployment Council (www.nysbroadband.ny.gov) set forth the following mission: "Broadband has not fully arrived for all New Yorkers. Overcoming the digital divide to become a national and global leader for broadband availability, capacity, and adoption will be challenging...To help New York remain competitive on a national and global scale, proactive executive leadership, strong policy mandates, and clear broadband guidelines will ensure broadband networks are widely deployed, affordable and accessible to all New Yorkers."

In those three years, our region has made amazing progress.

The Southern Tier Network (STN) has completed an open-access dark fiber network across Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties and earlier this year was recognized at the State Broadband Summit with an Economic Leadership Award for "successful implementation of innovative, economically promising projects or programs in a community or region that enhance New York's social and economic fabric, and quality of life

for its residents."

High-speed connections are already in place across the region, and other service providers are expanding their services and providing affordable broadband services using STN's fiber. We are already seeing the use of the telehealth and telemedicine applications supported by the Rural Resources Commission.

Besides what has already been accomplished by STN, they will also receive a \$5-million state grant from the Southern Tier Economic Development Council to extend their dark fiber backbone into Broome and Tioga counties, while also reaching into Tompkins and Allegany counties to connect Cornell, Alfred and Binghamton universities for education, research and economic development. Yates County has also been awarded a state grant to build a fiber network that will connect to STN and to Access Ontario in Ontario County, increasing the reach and opportunities for all.

Similarly important access enhancements are ongoing in Tompkins County, which has just been recognized as one of the country's leading digital counties by the Center for Digital Government and the National Association of Counties (<http://www.digitalcommunities.com/survey/counties>).

There are so many ways this technology is changing our methods of doing business. Another piece of legislation approved by both houses of the Legislature this year, for instance, speaks to the increasing value of broadband to farmers.

The legislation, which will be delivered to the governor to be signed into law, calls for a joint study between the state Department of Agriculture and Markets, and the State Broadband Program Office on the value of "precision agriculture" to farmers, most specifically its economic benefits to farm operations and its importance to sustaining environmental quality.

Farmers who utilize precision agriculture systems, which require global positioning services and, thus, broadband, improve the efficiency of their operations, cut costs, lead to potentially lower prices for consumers, enhance food safety and protect the environment. If enacted, the new law requires a state-level report on precision agriculture and recommendations on improving the necessary broadband accessibility to implement it.

As we move further into the 21st century, there are increasingly critical reasons to close the digital divide -- particularly in rural, Upstate New York -- and we welcome the public-private partnerships that are accomplishing this goal, enabling the citizens of these communities to access the expanding broadband and telecommunications infrastructure that will strengthen our economy and improve health care, education and public safety across our region.

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



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Country club bothers me with early mowing

TO THE EDITOR | Residents of the Town of Elmira, did you know that there is a noise ordinance (Article 145-12 of the Town Code) that prohibits you and me doing construction projects and using machinery

(lawn mowers, tractors, blowers) before 8 am on weekdays and 9 am on weekends.

So why does the management of the Elmira Country Club feel they have the right to start mowing grass before I

can?

After 14 months of voicing my concerns and getting nowhere, I am asking my friends and neighbors, who live near the Elmira Country Club, if this mowing bothers you, call the Town

Supervisor David Sullivan, members of the Town Board or the leadership of the Elmira Country Club and let them know how you feel.

—David Clovsky
Elmira

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