

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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COLUMN | URI DROMI

Not a surprise

Once again Americans are perplexed and frustrated by the blows they suffer from the Islamic and Arab world. Watching the gruesome sights from Benghazi and Cairo, Americans may be thinking: Look how much we have done for them. We went to two wars to give them a free Iraq; our fighting men and women have sacrificed their lives to rid Afghanistan of terror; we have supported the Arab Spring and helped oust Hosni Mubarak and Moammar Gadhafi. Why do we deserve such a slap in the face in return?

Some of us, who are not just observers of the Middle East but who actually live here, were not so surprised. Especially those of us who have a long memory. Let's borrow a page from the history book.

On Feb. 14, 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt met King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia on board the USS Quincy, in the Great Bitter Lake of the Suez Canal. The American president, returning from the Yalta Summit, where the victorious allies had just decided how to rule the postwar world, met the Saudi king, hoping to achieve three goals: A Saudi consent to the settlement of Jews in Palestine; the establishment of American bases on Saudi soil; and a free flow of cheap oil.

On the first request, President Roosevelt received from his host a flat negative answer. Ibn Saud, however, had a very original solution for the Jews: Now that three millions of them have been murdered by the Nazis in Poland, he told his American guest, why don't the rest of them go to the areas vacated by their dead brothers and sisters?

A fine suggestion, you have to admit. Says a lot about the Arab attitude in general, especially if we bear in mind that one of the most vocal Arab figures during the war was Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, who met Hitler in Berlin in Nov. 21, 1941. The fuhrer promised his guest that when Nazi troops had conquered the Southern Caucasus, "Then the time of the liberation of the Arabs will have arrived. And you can rely on my word." Unfortunately for the Mufti, he bet on the wrong horse.

Back to the Roosevelt-Ibn Saud meeting, which signaled a milestone in American involvement in the Middle East. After being rebuffed by the Saudi King on the Jewish issue, President Roosevelt nevertheless sent him a letter (one of his last) in which he reminisced on "the memorable conversation which we had not so long ago and in the course of which I had an opportunity to obtain so vivid

an impression of Your Majesty's sentiments on this question." He then went on to reassure Ibn Saud that, "I would take no action, in my capacity as chief of the executive branch of this government, which might prove hostile to the Arab people."

While thinking about this American need to find grace in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims, I can't resist the temptation to recall President Obama's Cairo appeal to the Islamic world, on June 4, 2009: "I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles — principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings." Words which sound so hollow in light of this week's events.

Let's go back to 1945. Jewish settlement in Palestine aside, the American president did secure from Ibn Saud the two other requests, American bases and oil. Yet on his way back home, President Roosevelt gave a press conference on board the USS Quincy in which he made some interesting remarks on the state of Arabs in the Middle East: "They've got no purchasing power to do anything with. Their only purchasing instrument is oil. Their people are not educated, do not get enough to eat, cannot cope with health problems. Now, of course, all that is tied up more or less with peace. A country that isn't moving forward with civilization is always more of a potential war danger than a country that is making progress."

So true, and so depressing. Because whenever Americans tried to help the Arabs move toward progress and modernity, they received results opposite to what they had expected. "Liberating" Egypt and Libya from their dictators, without developing civil societies, fighting unemployment, poverty and illiteracy, is worthless. It only frees the most anti-American forces.

Yet even the in Arab countries which remain stable, under their dictators or monarchs, and which have enjoyed American support for so long, anti-Americanism exists. Almost seven decades after the historic Roosevelt-Ibn Saud meeting, al-Qaida terrorists hit America in the most horrible way. Of the 19 9/11 terrorists, 15 were Saudi nationals.

Uri Dromi writes for The Miami Herald.

First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Recovering the economy

The Census Bureau reported late last week that the nation's median household income declined last year to its lowest level in 16 years. This news about yet another hit on America's households, especially middle class households, comes on the heels of a federal jobs report in August that fell far below the expectations of most economists and signaled, at best, a disturbingly weak economic recovery.

It all points to the ongoing and deep-rooted stubbornness of this economic recession, throughout which the country's jobless rate has stayed above 8 percent for the longest stretch since the Great Depression. And it all points to what must remain the ongoing focus of our legislative efforts here in New York State heading into the 2013 legislative session: getting New York back to work.

In releasing its two-year review of the Legislature late last week, the state's leading small business advocacy group, the National Federal of Independent Business (NFIB/NY) pointed to many of the positive steps Governor Cuomo and the Legislature have taken over the past two years. But the group also sent a clear and important message that the job's far from done.

"What's encouraging about this year's Voting Record is that it shows a sustained commitment by the Senate Majority and the Assembly Minority to reduce business costs, reduce taxes and improve



TOM O'MARA

New York's economy for small businesses," said NFIB/NY Director Mike Durant. "There has been progress over the past two years... Their commitment to New York's small businesses is commendable, and, as Election Day comes and goes, I would urge them to maintain the focus on reducing New York's high cost of doing business." You can read their full report on <http://www.nfib.com>.

Maintain the focus on reducing New York's high cost of doing business, says NFIB/NY. I couldn't agree more.

Here's the assessment from the upstate New York advocacy group, Unshackle Upstate (<http://www.unshackleupstate.com/>), "We're encouraged to see that many legislators have responded to their constituents by supporting two consecutive fiscally responsible state budgets and several pro-taxpayer initiatives such as the 2 percent property tax cap and pension reform ... But we still have so much more to do to strengthen New York's economy."

And one more while we're at it, this one from the Business Council of New York (www.bcnys.org), "The pro-business, pro-jobs, pro-growth momentum we saw in the

2010, 2011 and 2012 legislative sessions needs to continue in order for New York to regain its economic strength."

I was glad to receive a strong nod of support from each of the above groups. It's always good to receive a reaffirmation that your key commitment and priorities are making a difference.

But the main point, in all of these recent assessments, is this one: don't stop now. The truth is that Election Day is going to come and go, yet the challenge of a stubborn economic recovery appears here to stay. So New York will need to immediately get back to work, post election, to stay focused on building a better business climate through lower taxes, less state spending, and fewer regulations.

New York needs to keep making smart investments in local economies. I recently had the chance to join Assemblyman Phil Palmesano and the Hornell Chamber of Commerce to announce that the chamber has received state aid to continue a valuable on-the-job training and placement program aimed at assisting the economically disadvantaged, veterans, displaced workers and the unemployed and underemployed throughout Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties.

As Phil and I noted, state investments like this one in local job training, workforce development and employment placement programs represent a key step in the

ongoing and overall effort to strengthen regional economies. The Hornell Chamber has a long-standing, proven track record of utilizing this strategy for finding jobs for local workers and developing a quality, highly skilled workforce for regional businesses and manufacturers. It's a winning combination and we're grateful for the opportunity to help the Chamber's economic development strategy grow, prosper and succeed.

So staying focused on investments like these is important.

And so are ongoing measures to get Medicaid spending under control — especially initiatives to combat the fraud and abuse that has plagued and continues to riddle the system with waste. Just recently we saw the state reach a multimillion-dollar settlement with a New York City hospital for illegal Medicaid payments the hospital received. But this type of Medicaid fraud shouldn't occur in the first place.

So staying focused on Medicaid reform will remain critical.

And mandate relief. And, well, you get the picture. There's a lot of work ahead of us.

But ultimately it comes full circle to the overriding need to keep doing anything and everything possible to control the cost, size and interference of government in order to help get this economy back on its feet.

Sen. Tom O'Mara is a Republican from Big Flats.

ANOTHER VIEW



OTHER VIEW | LOS ANGELES TIMES

Sex change at taxpayer expense?

Though the psychiatric world recognizes and treats gender identity disorder — defined by the National Institutes of Health as a disconnect between a person's physical gender and the gender the person identifies with — that recognition hasn't translated into widespread insurance coverage for sex-change operations that some patients feel is the only solution to their turmoil. Most private insurance and Medicaid programs do not pay for the surgery, viewing it as elective; neither does Medicare.

Yet a Massachusetts judge has ordered the state to pay for sex-reassignment surgery for an imprisoned murderer.

There is little doubt that Michelle Kosilek — known as Robert in 1990, when he killed his wife after she discovered him dressing in her clothes — struggles with the disorder. After entering prison, Kosilek took hormone therapy, switched sexual identity and chose a new first name, though she is still in a men's prison serving a sentence of life without parole.

According to doctors,

she has attempted both self-castration and suicide because her image of her gender is so at odds with her body.

At first it might seem ridiculous for a person guilty of a heinous crime to receive taxpayer-funded surgery that is not necessary to save life or limb. But prisons do not deny psychiatric drugs to inmates who need them.

Nor is it a simple matter of saving taxpayers money. Kosilek's surgery would cost only about \$20,000; by contrast, if she doesn't undergo the surgery, the added cost

for housing her in a men's penitentiary (she would be moved to a women's prison after surgery) would be significant over her lifetime; so would the expense of preventing further attempts at suicide or self-castration, or treating injuries sustained in those attempts.

Nevertheless, The Times sees no reason for a convicted criminal to receive medical attention that is above and beyond the community standard of care. A year ago, a California court rightly rejected a similar lawsuit by a convicted killer.