

OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Postal workers deserve appreciation

To the Editor,
I think we should have a new holiday that celebrates all the American postal workers. They are an unsung group of dedicated people that do not get enough appreciation for the work they do for all of us every day of the calendar year in the worst conditions.

There is no snow day, hot day, or bad weather day for these people - just report to work as usual being the motto they live by every day.

I am glad to see Tom Reed worked on the USPS Fairness Act which ends the unfair pre-funding mandate for the United States Postal Service. This bill has been endorsed by the American Postal Workers Union and the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Congratulations and I hope this is just the beginning of more appreciation and recognition to a fine group of people who serve every day without much more due recognition and respect for the job carriers have embarked upon and do every day for all of us.

Fran Avagliano Corning

Bi-partisan bill would be good

To the Editor,
I am so happy to see a bipartisan bill introduced by NY Reps Tom Reed (R-23) and Tom Suozzi (D-3), to encourage innovation that will fight climate change.

H.R. 5523, the Energy Sector Innovation Credit Act, would implement a new kind of tax credit - not one that subsidizes the existing technologies of wind and solar, but one that rewards inventors and entrepreneurs for bringing new, complementary technologies to market.

For years wind and solar have borne the burden of bringing our

nation's carbon footprint back down where it needs to be - but they cannot push that effort across the finish line alone. Today, solar and large-scale wind are cheap and commercially successful, but significant improvements in the efficiency and affordability of batteries and other energy storage technologies are needed to truly replace fossil fuels.

H.R. 5523 provides subsidies for improved storage technology, as well as technologies that sequester carbon from fossil fuel plants or significantly improve the performance of carbon-free power plants.

We need to improve our technology in all of these areas to address the great challenge of climate change, and this bill will provide the stimulus to turn American ingenuity into game-changing reality.

Stimulating innovation alone, however, will not be enough to solve the crisis. While the introduction of H.R. 5523 will help us start addressing our pollution problem in new ways, the next necessary step is putting a price on carbon emissions.

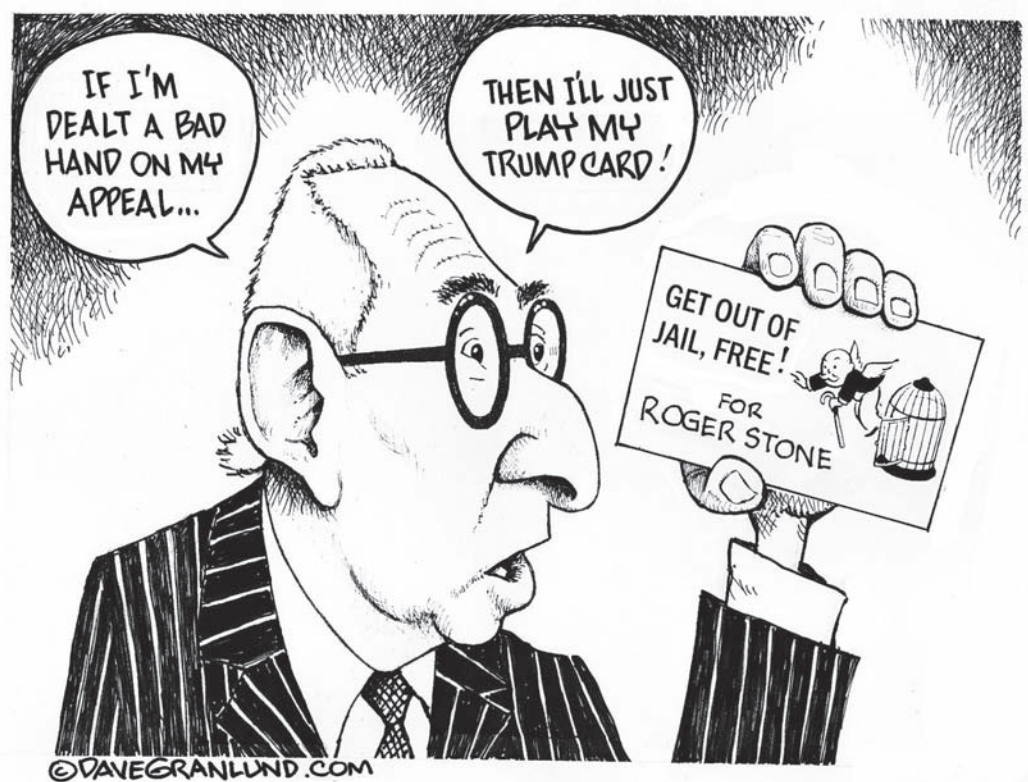
Economic experts agree that this is the most cost-effective way to sustain the pollution reductions we need in the long term. Rep. Suozzi has already co-sponsored the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (H.R. 763), which taxes carbon and returns the revenues to the American people.

This would protect low- and middle-income people from rising costs and further stimulate the economy - and provide the incentive for consumers to adopt the innovative technologies that H.R. 5523 will produce.

I hope that Rep. Reed will also take this important next step. What a bright economic future this could lead to.

Kelly Smith-Frank Horseheads

ANOTHER VIEW



TOM O'MARA | 58TH DISTRICT

Will NY regulate more farms out of business?



Tom Omara

New York's farmers and the agricultural industry as a whole have been hard hit over the past year.

Despite many burdens weighing on farm families, Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Democrat majorities of the state Legislature piled on a new law last June with serious consequences in the months ahead. The law's opponents - count me firmly among them - warn that it could produce a nightmare of a ripple effect.

Known as the "Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act," the law took effect on January 1 and, among other provisions, it grants collective bargaining rights, overtime pay, paid family leave and unemployment benefits to farm laborers. Since the dawn of

labor laws, farm labor has been treated differently than other employment because, plain and simple, it is different. Farms "have to make hay while the sun is shining." It's seasonal and requires planting, fertilizing, pesticide application, pruning and harvesting, all of which are driven by Mother Nature, not by a nine-to-five, five-day workweek.

Governor Cuomo has already proposed changes to ease cost increases on farms, a move that by itself signals trouble ahead. How hard will the governor push for the changes? Will the Legislature's progressives ever accept them? These are key questions without answers.

What we do know is that many farmers view the law as a threat. According to one recent report, farm labor costs in New York State increased 40 percent over the past decade. Total farm labor costs are at least 63 percent of net cash farm income in New York, compared to 36 percent nationally.

One of the law's most onerous provisions created a three-member Farm Laborers Wage Board that is supposed to hold the first of at least three public hearings by March 1. Following hearings, this wage board is empowered to change the law. I was especially critical of this action to grant such far-reaching authority to an unelected, unaccountable body.

Yes, the New York Farm Bureau is represented on the board. It is fundamentally important to have farming's voice directly involved. However, the Farm Bureau's voice (and vote) can be easily overridden by the board's other two members - the state's largest labor union, the AFL-CIO, and an appointee by the governor's Labor Department.

The fear, which I stressed during debate on the Senate floor before voting no, is that this board will move quickly to revise the act in ways that will increase farmworkers' pay at the great expense of farmers.

Farm Bureau President

David Fischer warns that the March public hearing is far too early to be helpful in assessing the law's impact.

"Keep in mind, the first hearing will happen before the first crops are even in the ground," he said recently. "It will be incredibly difficult to judge in a significant way how farms and their employees are managing schedules and dealing with the financial burdens just two months into the year."

The Farm Bureau wants the board to have adequate time, resources and appropriate data to assess the law's full impact before recommending changes. I am skeptical, to put it mildly.

It remains imperative for upstate legislators, for whom the farm economy is a foundation of communities we represent, to keep close watch on a wage board now holding so many farmers' futures in its hands.

We cannot risk the state mandating and regulating more farms out of business - and that is exactly what's at stake here.

OTHER VIEW | SYRACUSE POST-STANDARD

Spectrum must improve communication

New York regulators should hold Spectrum's feet to the fire over its poor response to a service interruption affecting 2 million customers in the Northeast earlier this month.

Spectrum's TV, internet and phone services went down Feb. 7 and 8 when snow and ice damaged the company's fiber-optic lines in several locations. The storm also took out lines that are supposed to provide "critical redundancy."

Clearly, Spectrum needs a better backup. Regulators ought to examine the network's vulnerabilities and ask whether Spectrum should be doing more to harden it or build in more redundancy.

The cable company also needs to improve the way it communicates with its customers. Spectrum announced its service failure on Twitter. That is not sufficient to reach hundreds

of thousands of subscribers. Spectrum's customer service phone lines were crushed by the call volume. That should trigger a review.

We're glad to see Spectrum is crediting customers for the time they were without TV, internet and phone service - but only if customers call and ask for it. Surely, Spectrum knows which households were affected. Why not credit everyone, automatically? That would have been a gesture of good corporate citizenship.

At this point, the company could use all the goodwill it can muster. Spectrum is the cable and internet provider its subscribers love to hate. Many have no choice; Spectrum has no competition in many areas of Upstate New York. The company's monopoly position means consumers have little recourse when it raises rates or offers poor

service. For example, former Time Warner customers who wanted to watch Syracuse University sports on the new ACC Network were required to switch to higher-priced plans.

Rep. Anthony Brindisi, D-Utica, has long criticized Spectrum over its pricing, expansion of broadband in rural areas and failure to deliver promised internet speeds. Brindisi also prodded the state Public Service Commission to investigate this most recent outage. "Spectrum needs to be held accountable and look to create redundancies to make sure this type of prolonged outage doesn't happen again," he said.

The regulator is following up with a "series of formal interrogatory questions" to Spectrum to establish the timeline and cause of the outage, its impact on customers and the steps taken to restore service. The company's

communication with customers also ought to be part of that investigation.

Spectrum's spectacular failure merits more than a strongly worded letter as an official response.

Losing internet, TV and phone service is more than an inconvenience for people stuck inside during a snowstorm. It's a lifeline in an emergency. It's also a critical tool for businesses taking electronic payments or online orders.

Look, weather happens. Utility lines come down. It takes time to put them back up. Even so, the fact that one snowstorm could cripple an internet/TV/phone provider over two days, and across multiple states, deserves scrutiny from Albany and Washington.

Spectrum's communication problem has an easy fix: Simply be more transparent and deliver information to the public as broadly and quickly as possible.

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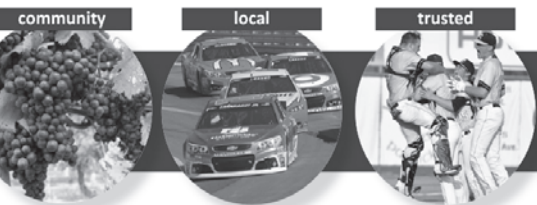
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