

The Monroe News

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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 the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

— The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

OUR VIEW

► TO THE POINT

After years of setbacks, the recent passing of the farm bill is a signal that Washington gridlock can be broken to help provide measures for the common good.

Bipartisanship grows with farm bill passage

President Barack Obama visited Michigan State University on Friday to put on a show signing into law a major piece of bipartisan legislation — the 10-year farm bill — and he wanted to celebrate this rare Washington political compromise at the epicenter of heartland America.

The president also wanted to show his gratitude to Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., who, as chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, helped broker the hard-fought farm bill compromise after years of setbacks. MSU, a leading agricultural research school, is Sen. Stabenow's alma mater.

Despite lingering criticism, most Americans should be content with the new bill, mainly because it is a greatly improved agricultural package from what was in place before.

Most important, this bill expands federal crop insurance and ends direct government payments. It eliminates a program that paid farmers \$5 billion a year whether they grew anything, a throwback to New Deal days. Instead, this bill helps them with crop insurance, meaning farmers will have to pay premiums and only be paid when they take a loss.

President Obama said he supported the bill because it will reduce the deficit "without gutting the vital assistance programs millions of hard-working Americans count on to help put food on the table for their families."

In fact, the bill cuts food stamps by \$800 million a year, or around 1 percent, but that is only one-fifth of the cut approved last fall by the Republican-led House. Conservatives remain unhappy with the bill and its generous new subsidies for farmers in every region of the country, including Southern peanut growers, Midwest corn farmers and the Northeast maple syrup industry.

And liberals grouse about the 1 percent cut to food stamps, which they say seriously harms low-income families across the country. About 1 in 7 Americans depend on food stamps to survive.

Jack Lessenberry on NPR commented recently that "nobody thinks this 10-year farm bill is perfect. (Liberals) are especially bitter that it cuts money for food stamps by \$8 billion over the next decade. There is no disputing that this bill is not good for those who depend on food assistance. ... But it should be remembered that Republicans, who control the House, originally wanted to end food stamps entirely. This bill does do some worthwhile things."

Besides its major elements, the bill also provides assistance for rural Internet services and boosts organic agriculture. Sen. Stabenow said the bill also is intended to help consumers, boosting farmers markets, encouraging local food production and seeking to improve access to grocery stores in low-income communities.

President Obama added an announcement he made to go along with the signing of the bill. He announced a new administration initiative to boost exports called "Made in Rural America." According to a draft of the initiative, Obama plans to direct his administration to work on connecting rural businesses with federal resources that can help sell their products and services abroad.

Above everything else, the new farm bill is noteworthy in that it is a symbol of what Americans can do when they work together on a common goal. It took more than two years, but Democrats and Republicans worked together to make this happen, and now we have a working blueprint of how farmers and the northeast move our country forward.



► LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Economic benefits could be impetus for broader immigration reform

Thank you for printing the Jan. 31 op-ed piece by Cokie and Steven Roberts commending Gov. Rick Snyder for his support for immigration reform.

The piece clearly laid out the governor's economic case for improving our immigration system. Soon after Gov. Snyder made his remarks, the U.S. House Republicans released their own "Standards for Immigration Reform." Several of its points echoed Gov. Snyder's economic rationale, including preference for highly skilled, foreign-born workers and a guest-worker program.

It is heartening to see renewed, bipartisan interest in this critical issue. The economic arguments for immigration reform are compelling and may be just what is needed to win broad support. However, our nation's immigration system should not be shaped solely on what is economically beneficial. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, an association of more than 1,400 leaders of Catholic women's religious congregations in the United States, emphasizes that our immigration system should not "pit one group of aspiring Americans against another."

I hope Congress will continue to

work for comprehensive legislation that creates an achievable pathway to citizenship for all aspiring citizens — not just those seen as economically valuable. We need immigration reform that reunites families, protects workers, promotes the full integration of newcomers and respects the special needs of the most vulnerable. Immigration reform should also address the violence, persecution and poverty that force migrants from their homes.

Mary Jane Herb, IHM — President Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Monroe

► OTHER VIEWPOINTS

Obamacare creates a 'work trap'

Health law builds in incentives not to climb economic ladder

So let me get this right. Team Obama taxes millionaires who create jobs, while Obamacare creates incentives not to work at those jobs. No wonder recovery is so anemic. The policy here is to create fewer jobs and induce people to work less at those jobs. If my logic is correct, this runs counter to the most basic principles of our economy and our country.



Lawrence Kudlow
Creators Syndicate

I thought the American Idea (see Jack Kemp and Paul Ryan) had at least something to do with the virtues of work, family and opportunity. But what I see from the Obama administration are policies that undermine these ideals.

Here's a contrasting vision: I recently interviewed the great entrepreneur Harold Hamm, the chief executive officer of Continental Resources, who has harnessed the technologies of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing to completely revolutionize the energy sector of our economy. He has turned North Dakota into Saudi Arabia. Energy independence is in sight.

Now, the energy sector is responsible for roughly 10 percent of our growth. And tens of thousands of energy jobs are being created at high wages, all while our trade deficit is evaporating and our entire Middle East foreign policy may be changing.

Of course, the Obama administration is taking credit for the oil-and-gas revolution. But they initially opposed it and, in fact, had nothing to do with it. And if they opened up federal lands and offshore drilling, the energy success would be even greater. But that's not happening.

The fact is, the energy revolution is a perfect down-home example of free-market economics at work, not

government planning.

One of the things that caught my eye about the Harold Hamm story is that roughly 10 million oil-and-gas royalty owners now exist across the country. I am going to bet the energy revolution has created thousands of new millionaires. This reminds me of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, whose wildly successful entrepreneurial ventures also created thousands of new millionaires. Not just investors, but low-level staffers who got just a little bit of stock when Microsoft or Apple or Facebook was started. They became millionaires.

And that money didn't go under mattresses. One way or the other, it circulated through our economic system, creating thousands of new companies, vastly more jobs and even more millionaires.

In other words, wealth creates businesses that create jobs that create a rising tide that lifts all boats.

I say this because President Obama doesn't seem to get this. He is hung up on inequality. But why is wealth- and income-inequality bad? If the oil-royalty owner makes \$1 million while the roustabout in the field in North Dakota or Texas or Ohio or Pennsylvania makes \$100,000, there is greater inequality, but everybody benefits. What Obama doesn't get is that the creation of successful millionaires is not a zero-sum game. The millionaire's success does not come at the expense of everyone else. In fact, that success makes everyone better off.

Free-market capitalism should make us all equal at the starting line, and that should lead to better, though unequal, outcomes at the finish line. The point here is opportunity, freedom and economic dynamism. More millionaires create healthier economies with more jobs, stronger families and better lives than our parents and grand-

parents had.

But now comes a new CBO study of Obamacare, which exposes a perverse incentive system that will cause the equivalent loss of 2.5 million jobs over the next decade as people work less, not more.

In the Obama scheme, an industrious person climbing the ladder of opportunity is penalized heavily for his or her success. Health care subsidies are reduced as a result of her higher income, while marginal tax rates go up as she shifts into a higher tax bracket. So she loses the government benefit and her effective federal tax climbs higher.

There is no ladder of opportunity here. It's really a work trap that becomes a poverty trap. It's similar to the other traps found in welfare, food stamps, unemployment compensation and the marriage penalty.

Democrats defend this work trap as providing more leisure time. But they forget to tell you that the perverse health care incentives that lead to less work also lead to less income, less wealth, less opportunity and less economic freedom to prosper.

So step back for a moment, and look at the contrasting visions of Harold Hamm and Obamacare. Mr. Hamm's roustabouts and millionaires create huge incentives to work and prosper. President Obama's health care plan creates huge incentives not to work, not to supply labor, not to work harder and not to create the opportunity for a rosier future.

The former is an optimistic vision. The latter is profoundly pessimistic. This whole central-planning rigmarole called Obamacare runs counter to the great traditions and values of America.

To find out more about Lawrence Kudlow and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

