

COMMENTARY

Raising awareness about energy jobs

Recently a report by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development identified 14 target jobs in the energy industry for which there will be high demand in western Pennsylvania in the decades ahead.

This report tells us there will be ample career opportunities for young people in western Pennsylvania; our primary challenge is raising awareness about those opportunities and preparing our young people to compete for those jobs.

In November, the Governor's Advisory Commission on post-secondary education issued recommendations to ensure that our children — the workforce of tomorrow — will be prepared to fill those target jobs and to benefit from the economic opportunity

the energy sector represents for our region. Specifically, the commission recommended transforming postsecondary education by making it learner-based and driven by consumers; and by ensuring that all K-12 students have access to practical, age-appropriate educational and career-planning resources. At Junior Achievement, we couldn't agree more.

For more than 70 years, Junior Achievement of Western Pennsylvania has given young people the knowledge and skills they need to own their own economic success, plan for their future and make smart academic and economic choice. The recommendations by the Governor's Advisory Commission make possible the opportunity to realize the long overdue need to expand the reach of workforce readiness messages to thousands more young people in schools throughout our region. If the state provides financial backing in support of the commission's recommendations, an infusion of tax dollars and louder public calls to prepare our youth for the jobs of tomorrow could enable us to expand on our work, specifically Junior Achievement's Careers in Energy program.

A little more than a year ago, in cooperation with a number of industry partners, we developed and launched a successful pilot of JA Careers in Energy to provide a comprehensive understanding of the energy sector and the economic impact it can have on a region. Due to the success of the program, Junior Achievement will expand this offering to more students in more counties throughout western Pennsylvania in 2013. In recent weeks, I've reached out to the governor's office to discuss how his commission's recommendations align so closely with the work that Junior Achievement is already doing in the hopes that we might partner with his administration. And I would encourage business leaders and interested volunteers to contact our offices. Together, we have a real opportunity to instill a new sense of hope in the children of our region about the prospects for a prosperous future here in western Pennsylvania.

DENNIS GILFOYLE is president and CEO of Junior Achievement of Western Pennsylvania.

More bipartisanship needed to solve fiscal crisis

Did we learn anything positive about the way Congress dealt with the expiration of the Bush tax cuts on Dec. 31 and their self-imposed, across-the-board budget cuts called sequestration?

Maybe not. But there were some positive developments that suggest a few wiser, less partisan elected officials may, on occasion, put country ahead of party.



GOVERNMENT BUSTERS

Jon Delano

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell was any great piece of legislation.

It did make permanent the Bush tax rates for 98 percent of Americans, something nobody ever thought possible a few years ago. But it only postponed the battle over the nearly 10 percent automatic across-the-board spending cuts in defense and nondefense outlays. Those cuts, which account for many millions of dollars to Pennsylvania, will now take effect March 1.

In the meantime, we are likely to see another debt ceiling battle.

It's a silly issue that no other country seems to have. No money gets spent without congressional appropriation, but many times, sadly, Congress spends money the Treasury does not have. That requires borrowing. But the total amount of borrowing is capped by the debt ceiling, also authorized by Congress.

Congress cannot mandate spending and then renege on its borrowing obligations by refusing to raise the debt ceiling. But that's what some House Republicans tried to do in 2011, creating market turmoil that led to a downgrade in America's credit rating.

Some Republicans are threatening to do that again in 2013.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Jones leaves lasting memories for entrepreneur

Rich (Lunak's) touching tribute to Don (Jones) hit a nerve with me (Donald H. Jones: A deep and meaningful personal legacy, Page 23, Dec. 21 - 27, 2012, issue). When I was building a business in the 1990s, I was invited to participate in the CMU Entrepreneurship program, and Don and Jack Roseman were the serial entrepreneurs running the program and guiding most of the content. I had been in business for 15 years and really wanted to take my business to the next level. Don and Jack pulled me aside to counsel me.

The program was six months of evening classes with about 25 other CEOs, and it was exhilarating. But the most important advice I got from Don sticks with me to this day. "Know a market cold. Know it so well that the world beats a path to your door because you know it better than anyone else."

This time, President Obama says he will refuse to bargain over that issue, and he's right to take that approach. While Congress should make significant spending cuts, in my view, to hurt America's credit-worthiness by denying the full faith and credit of our obligations is self-defeating.

Perhaps we will see more responsible bipartisan leadership on this issue.

I do credit Speaker John Boehner with allowing the House to vote on the fiscal cliff compromise legislation even though a majority of his own party opposed that deal.

Too often, members of Congress in both chambers have been denied the chance to vote, up or down, on bills approved by the other chamber.

Both Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Boehner have been guilty of deep-sixing legislation passed by the other body.

In 2013, I'd like to see both chambers consider the legislation approved by the other. Instead, Reid and Boehner, who obviously don't like each other, bury even the most constructive bills just because they or their party caucus don't like it.

What's wrong with up or down votes on just about everything? Isn't that what a legislative body is supposed to do?

As a new year begins with a new Congress, the public has rarely rated the legislative branch lower in esteem.

Some will say this is just a House Republican problem, accusing the Tea Party element of that party of blocking reasonable compromises on a variety of issues. But it's really a problem for the whole Congress.

Citizens don't sort through who is responsible for what when it comes to Congress. The entire institution gets lumped together, even if blame is unequal.

My prayer for 2013 is to see more occasions when Bob Casey, Pat Toomey, Mike Doyle, Tim Murphy, Mike Kelly and newcomer Keith Rothfus vote together on issues. If such politically diverse and, yes, even partisan members of Congress, can find more common ground on national issues, the nation will be the better for it.

Happy New Year!

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