

OPINIONS

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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.

— FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

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OUR EDITORIAL

2010 priorities

Legislature can't allow this to be a lost year; there's much work to do to fix Michigan

Lawmakers returning to Lansing this week should dig right into pending legislation for making Michigan better. With a \$1.8 billion budget shortfall looming, there isn't time for the traditional period of lax activity while awaiting Gov. Jennifer Granholm's State of the State address, scheduled this year for Feb. 3.

Legislators can start with important proposals for the retooling of state government that have been put off for too long. Then they could move from those to other worthwhile measures, such as dumping the Michigan Business tax surcharge and improving legal representation for poor people charged with crimes.

Ideas that should be given priority include:

- House Speaker Andy Dillon's plan to save up to \$900 million by pooling health insurance coverage for all public employees and schoolteachers. Some argue that the savings wouldn't be as great as have been claimed, but it's a worthwhile pursuit for even half the estimated amount. Granholm has said there would be an initial cost and savings wouldn't be realized right away. But that shouldn't be used as a reason not to adopt this fiscally responsible reform.
- A proposal to require public workers to pay 20 percent of their health care costs — or 15 percent if their health plan includes wellness incentives and employee-funded health savings accounts. This overdue legislation would more closely match public benefits with those for private-sector workers and help governments and school boards wipe out budget deficits. A U.S. Labor Department report indicates Michigan civil service workers currently pay less than 10 percent of their health care premiums, while private workers pay 20 percent to 30 percent.
- Legislation to restore the concept of using "good time" to reduce prison sentences. Lawmakers have made important changes in



Dale G. Young / The Detroit News

The Legislature should avoid a repeat of 2007, when it met all night on Sept. 30 but missed the deadline to approve a budget. It did pass one early on the morning of Oct. 1.

parole policies that have helped stem the costly increase in Michigan's prison population, but the Corrections budget still verges on \$2 billion and is unaffordable. Organizations such as the Detroit Regional Chamber have noted that the state could save another \$400 million by adopting Corrections policies more like those of neighboring states and the federal government.

■ The state may not be able to afford all of what's laid out in a bill calling for a state-run system of legal defense for the indigent, but lawmakers should do all they can to improve on the current patchwork setup, run and funded by counties, that deprives many criminal defendants of their rights. Certainly, for example, they can pass new state standards for who's entitled to public defenders and assure those facing the most serious charges are represented by the most-skilled court-appointed lawyers.

■ Legislation to phase out the 22 percent surcharge on the Michigan Business Tax by the end of 2011. While some would say state government can't afford this drop in revenue, it's really a matter of setting priorities and being willing to adopt the cost-saving reforms that have been proposed. A business tax reduction right now could spur Michigan's rebound from recession.

The projected \$1.8 billion budget problem is going to require a lot of attention this spring. There's no time to waste and no need to wait for the governor's message.

Michiganians already know what the state of our state is.

News-WJR panel to debate climate

The Detroit News editorial page and WJR are sponsoring a panel Tuesday to debate whether the science on global warming supports the large increase in fuel economy standards that will be imposed on automakers. Frank Beckmann will moderate the debate from 10-11:30 a.m. at the Detroit Athletic Club. It will be taped for future broadcast on WJR-AM 760.

Panel participants include U.S. Rep. Fred Up-

ton, R-St. Joseph; University of Michigan climatologist Henry Pollack; Cato Institute climatologist Patrick Michaels; Kathryn Clay, director of research for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers; and Myron Ebell, director of energy and global warming for the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

It will be held at the Detroit Athletic Club, 241 Madison Avenue, Detroit (313-442-1008). The club asks that no denim be worn on its premises.



LETTERS

Anti-terrorism strategies debated

Stop criminal treatment

It seems that we are, and will be for at least the near future, the prime target for terrorists, and we need to establish a method for dealing with them. Terrorists are not common criminals and should not be tried in court as such. They should first be questioned, and after it has been determined that they have told us all that they are going to, take them out and either shoot or hang them. After all, terrorism is supposed to be punishable by execution.

Dick Brown, South Branch

Overseas allies slip up

The alleged Northwest Flight 253 bomber was on a watch list, had traveled to terrorist-infested countries, was not allowed to enter Britain and his own dad had expressed more than the usual concerns about his behavior. The suspect should be at least watched and, at minimum, asked some questions. Had the minimum effort been applied at any level, Umar Farouk Abdulmuttallab would not have gotten near an aircraft. Now, the security apparatus is treating everyone like criminals and is still not addressing the issues that really allowed this character into the United States. Fundamentally, it is our friends overseas who failed us this time by letting

the terrorist slip through many, many cracks.

Raymond T. Jackson, Detroit

Don't trust Congress

People, it is time to wake up; intelligence is the first bastion of defense against crime. Once again it failed Flight 253, as it did on 9/11. The warning flags were up and no one paid attention. In most cases intelligence of what was about to happen was available and not communicated to the people in charge of prevention. Allowing Congress to revise a terrorist policy only insures more of the same.

Paul A. Heller, Washington Township

Stop foreign flights

How many more times are we going to have breaches in security before someone connects the dots and makes an intelligent decision? This administration has shown the world that it is incompetent. And to even think about sending some 90 terrorists back to Yemen, who may strike again, is insane. It is high time this president stops all foreign flights into this country until our security requirements are met.

Gregg Moe, Troy

Learn from Ford's past to shape future

In his Dec. 17 Think section cover commentary (Michigan should renew Ford's entrepreneurial spirit"), Carl J. Schramm, president and CEO of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, urges Detroit and Michigan to return to their entrepreneurial roots.

Schramm argues that this is the best and proven pathway to effect the economic and cultural transformation we need to regain a measure of greatness our city and state once enjoyed and others enviously acknowledged.

My colleagues and I at The Henry Ford couldn't agree more, and we were delighted that Schramm chose Henry Ford as the historical exemplar for the entrepreneurial spirit that gave

rise to our past prosperity and promise.

The Henry Ford is committed to serving as a major catalyst for rekindling the spirit of American innovation. That's our mission and that's the force that once made our community, region, state and country great; we believe it's what can make us great once again.

So thank you, Mr. Schramm, for reminding us all of the importance of learning from our traditions, heritage and history to shape a better future. We'll keep that American spirit of innovation and entrepreneurialism alive and well here at The Henry Ford.

Patricia E. Mooradian, President, The Henry Ford, Dearborn

Diesel may be better fuel deal for U.S.

BY STEVEN DAWSON

What could be an important milestone in the U.S. auto industry took place in early December at the Los Angeles Auto Show. Amid the hype surrounding hybrids, plug-ins and fuel cells, a diesel car — the Audi A3 TDI — was named "Green Car of the Year." A week later, The Detroit News selected the same diesel as its "Car of the Year."

Today, consumers want to reduce their fuel bills, auto companies must meet stringent fuel economy standards (35.5 miles per gallon by 2016), and the U.S. wants to reduce its dependency on foreign oil and cut carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions. Enter the diesel engine.

Compared with a conventional fuel-injected gasoline engine, a modern diesel provides 30 to 40 percent improved fuel economy.

The savings go up to 60 percent during towing or driving at higher speeds. In addition, diesels emit 10 to 20 percent fewer greenhouse gases.

Diesel sales less than 2 percent of the U.S. vehicle market, while they account for more than half the market in Europe. This could change a little. So far in the U.S. this year, Volkswagen Jetta sales are over 35 percent diesel, the Audi Q7 is 30 percent diesel, the Mercedes-Benz M Class is more than 25 percent and the BMW X5 is 20 percent.

The message is clear: If we build them, consumers will come.

In general terms, the U.S. passenger vehicle mix is one-third small, one-third midsize and one-third large, including pickups and SUVs. If we assume that, on average, small cars get 40 mpg, midsize cars get 30 mpg and large vehicles get 20 mpg, the math tells us that large vehicles consume about 47 percent of the fuel at the pump, compared with 30 percent for midsize cars and 23 percent for small cars.

Thus, to make the largest savings, our focus should be on the largest oil consumers. Sure we need to keep improving the small cars, but the real payback is in making the big vehicles cleaner and

more efficient.

Historically, American motorists have shown a preference for larger vehicles. The Ford F-Series pickup truck remains the top selling vehicle in America. The Chevy Silverado and Dodge Ram pickups aren't far behind. And as the economy continues to recover, many analysts believe consumers will continue to choose large vehicles.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, if one third of the U.S. passenger vehicle fleet were powered by diesels, foreign oil imports could be reduced 1.4 million barrels per day. By comparison, that savings is 40 percent greater than the one million barrels the U.S. imports from Saudi Arabia every day. This reduced crude oil consumption would cut carbon dioxide emissions by 180 million tons per year.

Even when you consider the added cost required for filters and exhaust treatment technology to remove particulates and nitrogen oxide pollutants, the diesel is a more cost-effective package — and offers more residual value — than gas-electric hybrids and other technologies over the life of the vehicle.

So if the diesel has so many advantages, why doesn't the United States provide more motivation to support potential diesel buyers? We can't expect the auto companies to offer rebates for diesel sales — we need them to be healthy and profitable. That leaves Washington to send a signal that diesel is not just good, but in many applications superior to technologies that receive more attention and funding from government. That signal doesn't need to be in the form of subsidies, but rather priorities and policies.

The diesels now winning honors as "cars of the year," could signal just the beginning of a real boom in diesel popularity in the United States. Given its advantages, the diesel can be — should be — the vehicle of choice of increasingly more American motorists.

Steven Dawson is president and chief executive of SinterCast, a Swedish company that has developed technologies for producing high-strength iron. E-mail comments to letters@detnews.com.

- Dana Milbanks draws lessons about the popularity of broadcast pundit Glenn Beck, who a survey finds is more exalted than the pope.
- Christopher Boucek of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argues that Yemen must be saved as part of the way to fight terrorism.
- Find a gallery of cartoons by Henry Payne and nationally syndicated cartoonists such as Chip Bok, Bob Gorrell, Kirk Walters, Rex Babin, John Branch, Kevin Siers and Jeff Koterba.
- Peruse the column archives of Nolan Finley, Amber Arellano, Frank Beckmann and Paul W. Smith.
- Learn how outsiders view Detroit and Michigan in the "How They See Us" blog.
- Get the latest blogs of Nolan Finley, Henry Payne and George Bullard.
- Check out links to the best reports and commentaries around the Web on our reading list. Go to detnews.com/editorial.

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