

Viewpoint

Our view

2014 gave Lea plenty to be grateful for

THE ISSUE: 2014 was a year of robust economic activity in Lea County.

WE SAY: Let's give thanks for the prosperity of 2014 and hope a dip in oil prices evens out in the coming year.

Another year has passed and many cities in Lea County experienced another year of record gross receipts taxes.

Another year has passed and we have seen new houses go up and apartment complexes being constructed.

Another year has passed and several new restaurants – whether it is Dickey’s or Taco Bell or a locally-owned place – opened their doors.

Lea County has much to be grateful for in 2014 even as the coming new year brings lower oil prices and concern about what the future holds.

But what happened in 2014 is amazing.

New stores, housing and restaurants have also meant growth in the student enrollment. Hobbs Municipal Schools is busting out, having to build two new elementary schools and was the fastest growing school system in the state in 2014. Other districts around Lea County also experienced new student enrollment records as the county dealt with the influx of new workers and families.

Low unemployment in 2014 meant jobs remained plentiful and opportunities abounded for those who wanted to work. Help wanted signs remained common themes at most retail and oilfield businesses throughout 2014.

For sure, 2015 is shaping up to be an interesting year with oil and gas prices down around 40 percent. Just what impact that will have on the local economy remains to be seen but it would not be the first time this area has dealt with a dip in prices.

So we look forward to the new year, we give thanks for the bounty that was 2014 for Lea County. May we all find 2015 just as fulfilling and bountiful.

Pledge targets influence of money in politics

To the Editor:

This was the dark money election.

Elections are supposed to be the way voters hold elected officials accountable to the will of the people, not to the will of the people with the most money.

Nationally, political candidates and their allies spent some \$4 billion on campaigns. Here in New Mexico, only 65 percent of spending reports have been tallied so far and the cost of elections in the state has already topped \$32 million.

All of this money has a devastating impact on Americans generally and New Mexicans in particular.

Once a longtime leader in job growth New Mexico is now ranked dead last nationally. At the same time, the income gap between the state’s wealthiest residents and middle and lower classes has widened to an unprecedented level, and the number of New Mexicans on food stamps has surged to 400,000. It’s no secret that New Mexico needs to jumpstart economic growth and create many more high-quality jobs.

But currently our state government isn’t designed to work toward solutions on these pressing problems. Our broken system keeps elected officials focused elsewhere. They are increasingly attentive to the tiny group of individuals and corporations funding their campaigns. Meanwhile, the needs of the rest of

us – the local mechanic, teacher and small business owner – go unaddressed.

This status quo is unacceptable. Government should work for all New Mexicans, not just the people financing elections. The New Mexico Pledge can help us get there, and solutions are in sight.

The movement is already achieving real policy and political wins around the country, and the New Mexico Pledge campaign is a golden opportunity for New Mexico to lead the movement to another win in 2015.

The New Mexico Pledge is based on three fundamental principles we all believe in. First, we deserve to know who is influencing our elections and government. Second, a robust democracy encourages broad participation and ensures we all have a voice in government decisions. And third, public officials must be held accountable when they break the public trust. By renewing our commitment to these shared values, we can ensure that a democracy of the people, by the people, and for the people endures in the 21st Century.

We can achieve this democratic vision. Community leaders in our state have laid solid groundwork over the past two decades, and there is now a real opening for reform in New Mexico. Since launching just a few months ago, thousands of New Mexicans have already signed the Pledge in support of state legislation to

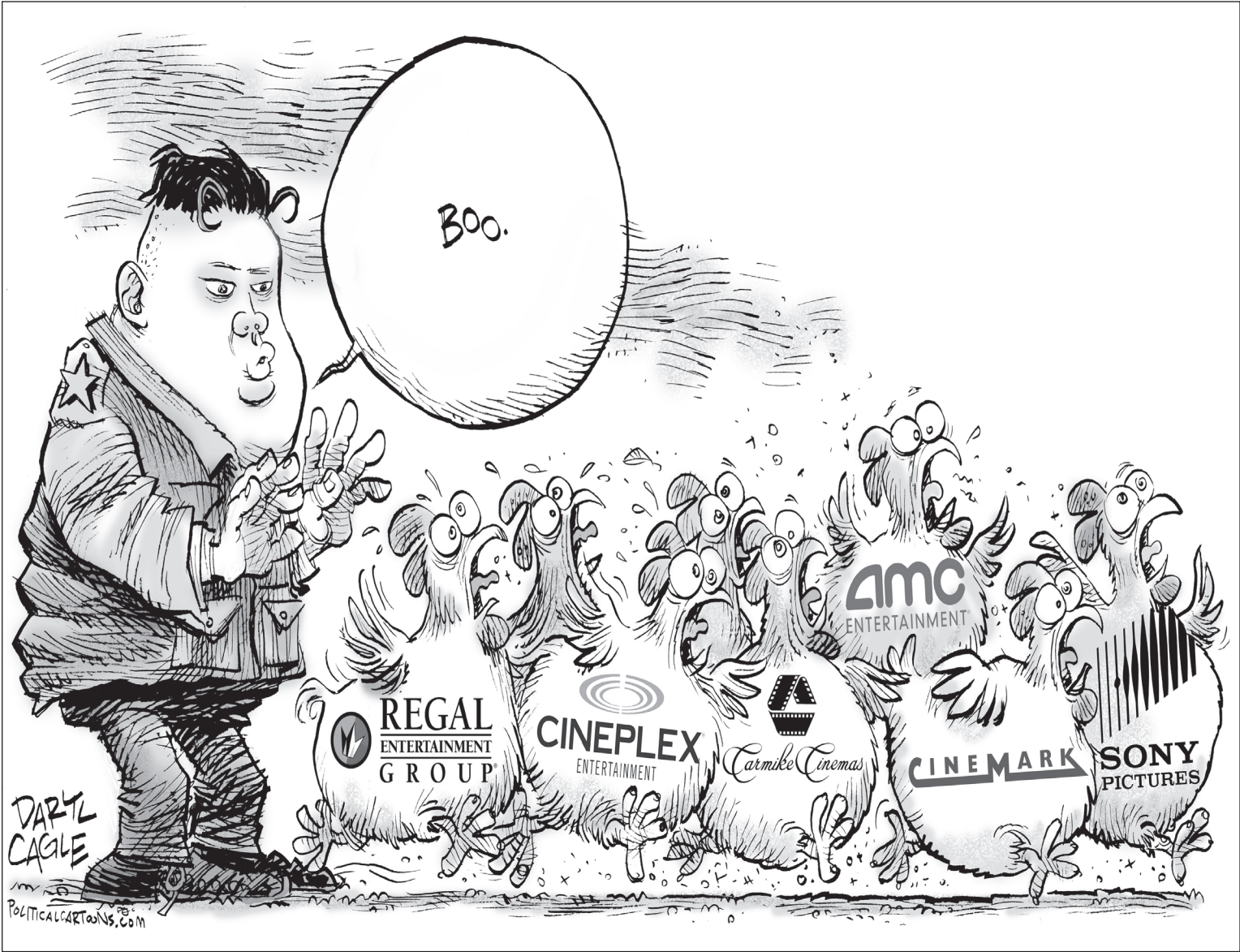
increase government transparency and accountability.

For example, implementing better technology that makes disclosing election and lobbying spending easier and more transparent will improve our right to know the forces shaping public policy. Moreover, strengthening and expanding public campaign financing will amplify the voices of everyday New Mexicans in the election process while also encouraging a more diverse and representative pool of candidates to run for office. And a bipartisan ethics commission will ensure enforcement of tough ethical standards for all public officials.

These commonsense reforms are winnable, especially if even more New Mexicans speak out in support.

If you’re tired of paying a heavy price for the overwhelmingly influence of money in politics, join me and thousands of your neighbors in pledging your “support for solutions that address the harmful impact of money in politics, increase transparency in our government, and help get our state focused on big issues that impact us all.” The future prosperity of New Mexico depends on it.

Kathi Bearden is the President of the board of directors of the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government and the former Publisher of the Hobbs News Sun.



Hearts and darts

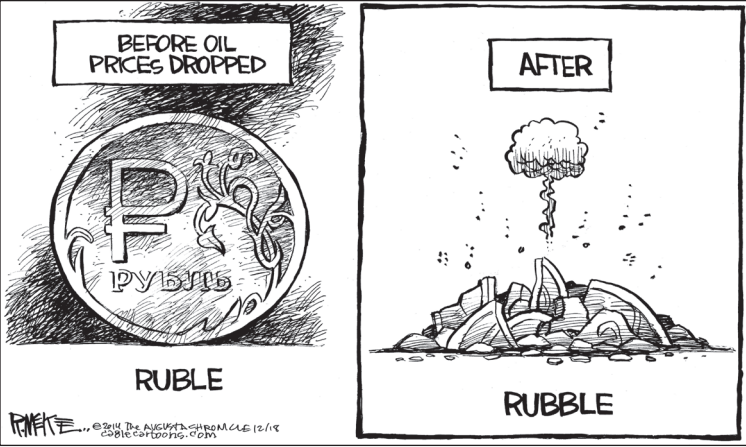
Thank you to the Hobbs Veterans Administration Clinic for all the work they do to take care of local veterans.

Robert Lujan, Vietnam veteran

Veterans would like to thank Heizer Middle School students for donating toys for a Christmas toy drive to children in need. The toys were picked up Friday and taken to the Hobbs Veterans of Foreign Wars building to be distributed.

Robert Lujan

Isaiah’s Kitchen would like to thank Highland Middle School, Houston Middle School, Heizer Middle School, Hobbs News-Sun and the Hobbs Alternative School.



Write us

- Send your submissions to: Letters to the Editor**
- by mail to **P.O.Box 850, Hobbs, N.M. 88240;**
 - by fax to **575-393-5724;** or
 - by e-mail to **editor@hobbsnews.com**

Letters must have a full name, address and daytime telephone number for verification purposes.

They should be concise, to the point and original – no form letters, please. Letters need to be limited to around 300 words.

Emotions aside, Cuba move is on target

With all due respect.” That’s a fitting sentiment to express to Cuban-Americans angered by President Obama’s decision to restore diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Their emotions run deep, an indication of the decades of loss and hardship they and their parents experienced as exiles making a new life in a foreign land. To dismiss that pain would be cruel and unjust.

On the other hand, those feelings are not a sufficient reason to maintain an outmoded and failed policy. Rather, we must acknowledge that the United States’ objective remains the same: to bring about in Cuba a transition to democracy that makes its people freer and more prosperous. What’s changing is the strategy.

This is hard for many Cuban-Americans to accept, especially those in politics. You could hear it in the adamant tone of Sen. Marco Rubio as he pounded through media interviews after the announcement of the administration’s new policy, which aims also to diminish trade and travel restrictions.

Rubio cast his feelings in strong language. He called the shift “willfully ignorant.” It is “absurd” and a concession to oppressors and tyranny.

This language speaks for a community that for the most part chose to leave its homeland not for economic opportunity but because to stay there they risked losing their liberty or even their lives. Most of them left behind their livelihoods, and

many left homes, businesses, property and other wealth for which they would never be compensated.

New Year’s Day will mark the 56th anniversary of Fidel Castro’s overthrow of Fulgencio Batista and the beginning of Castro’s regime. The turmoil and suffering the revolution created for families who fled the island is now often channeled through their children.

Rubio, it should be noted, is not one of these. His parent emigrated before Castro came to power. Yet he sticks to the Cold War script, expressed with typical Republican bluster. He denounced Obama the “single worst negotiator” serving as president in his 43-year lifetime.

No, senator. The U.S.-imposed trade embargo has not toppled the communist regime in Cuba, and it will not. Our country’s stand against the Castro regime was always mostly about the geopolitical threat to us, our country, than it was about the oppression of the Cuban people. The latter is important to us, and always must be, but the geopolitical threat is gone and a new approach is needed. Obama understands that.

Rubio may be gallantly standing up for the honor of the Cuban emigres, for family loyalty, but what exactly does he think he’s doing for actual Cubans?

A common refrain among Cuban-Americans is that the U.S. just needs to cling a little longer to the sanctions. We’re so close, some argue. Just wait a few more years and Fidel Castro will be dead. Venezuela will continue to falter and be unable to prop up Cuba with its oil fortune. As if Raul Castro isn’t now well in control, along with the rest of the Communist Party.

It is time to approach Cuba – cautiously – with a policy of strategic engagement.

Isolation has not worked and will not work. One need only consider the other sensational news item this week, involving another totalitarian regime supposedly on its last legs. North Korea was revealed as the force behind the hacking of Sony Pictures and the terroristic threats that prompted the company to pull an upcoming movie from distribution.

In today’s world, even impoverished, isolated rogue nations can use “asymmetrical” tactics, aided by technology, to attack greater powers such as ourselves. Our approach to Cuba ought to be to help it participate in regional trade and prosperity in exchange for ensuring human rights for its citizens and democratic reforms.

Part of the agreement between our nations, hammered out in meetings in Canada and at the Vatican, includes the release of 53 political prisoners from Cuban jails. Tracing what happens to those people next, and monitoring that the jails do not refill, is exactly how the U.S. will press for human rights.

Cuba for too many Americans has become an almost mythical land trapped in a charming time warp. Rubio is right to imply that far too many of us don’t fully grasp that Cubans are trapped in a very different and sinister way, their lives controlled and monitored by the Castros.

He’s wrong, however, to claim that the U.S. government’s new approach is not aimed at freeing them.

Mary Sanchez is an opinion-page columnist for The Kansas City Star. Readers may write to her at: Kansas City Star, 1729 Grand Blvd., Kansas City, Mo. 64108-1413, or via e-mail at msanchez@kcstar.com.