

Justice, not compassion, for airplane bomber

THE ISSUE | A dying terrorist is released from prison.

OUR OPINION | Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi had no compassion for those he murdered. He deserves none in turn.

Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi was convicted of blowing up an airplane full of people in 1988, murdering 259 people on board and 11 on the ground. Of those who died in Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, 189 were Americans. The former Libyan intelligence agent was brought to trial late – 13 years after the bombing – and now he's getting out of jail early, just eight years into a 27-year minimum sentence.

The Scottish government released the 57-year-old al-Megrahi because he has prostate cancer and is expected to die soon. The decision was one man's – Scotland's Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill.

In fairness it is worth noting that al-Megrahi has always denied involvement in the attack, though the Libyan government accepted responsibility in 2003. There are a fair number of people in the U.K. who believe the wrong man was jailed, in which case justice was not served here on multiple fronts. If that were MacAskill's rationale and he had

evidence of it, we might have a different opinion. But MacAskill did not cite a belief in al-Megrahi's innocence, merely a duty to "compassion."

Funny, because if guilty al-Megrahi showed his victims no compassion. He did not give them a second chance. They were not allowed to grow a couple of decades older, as he has been. All of this MacAskill acknowledged. Yet he is letting al-Megrahi off the hook anyway for "cruelly" – his word – killing 270 innocents who were not at war with Libya nor anyone else. Among them were two newlyweds, 46 college students and 3-year-old Suruchi Rattan, "the little girl in the red dress" who died with four other members of her family after they were supposed to be on another flight.

The White House has strongly objected to the release, for all the good that did.

MacAskill can rationalize this decision on behalf of his government any way he wants. And the United States should not forget it.

NATIONAL VIEW | MIAMI HERALD

Banks must try harder

Earlier this month, the nation's mortgage lenders received a report card on their participation in a national effort to stop home foreclosures. Many of them flunked.

Keep that in mind next time you hear that the recession is easing. The economic slide began with a collapse of the housing market and it's not likely to make a solid recovery until the housing market stabilizes. That will require mortgage lenders to get serious about helping homeowners who have fallen behind on their payments, and so far they aren't showing much enthusiasm.

Along with Nevada, California and Arizona, Florida has seen more turmoil in its housing market than most states.

Florida accounted for 18 percent, or nearly one in five, of the 1,528,364 properties with foreclosure filings reported nationwide halfway through the year. No surprise: Broward County led the state with 36,654 properties with foreclosure filings during the first six months of 2009. Miami-Dade County came in second with 34,442.

What makes these figures particularly hard to take is that the government devised a \$75 billion program earlier this year to stop the foreclosures epidemic. The Obama administration reported in early August, however, that banks have made little progress in helping homeowners in dire straits with their troubled mortgages.

The effort is designed to help some four million homeowners by reducing their mortgage payments. As of July, however, only 9 percent of eligible borrowers had benefited from mortgage payment reductions. Banks had extended only 400,000 offers among 2.7 million eligible borrowers who are more than two months behind on payments. More than 235,000 of those borrowers have enrolled in three-month trials.

The progress report showed that 10 lenders had not changed a single mortgage. Two of the biggest banks in the mortgage market, Wells Fargo and Bank of America, had some of the lowest help rates of all. Wells Fargo reduced payments for only 6 percent of eligible homeowners under the government program and Bank of America modified just 4 percent.

Both institutions, to their credit, modified other loans outside the government program, with Wells Fargo reporting a total of 240,000 modifications, of which only 20,000 fell under the government's plan. And the administration itself must take some of the blame for the disappointing numbers because it did not come up with a full program until May, and the guidelines were updated again in early July.

Both the government and the banks must work harder to make this plan a success because a rebound in the housing market is an indispensable element of the recovery that so far remains out of reach.

After the report was issued, the administration won a promise from mortgage lenders to reach 500,000 distressed homeowners by Nov. 1. That would effectively double the number of participants in the program and help to kick-start the housing market. The administration should insist that the lenders live up to this verbal promise.

Housing advocates say the federal government needs to get tougher with lenders, insisting on a change in federal law that would allow bankruptcy judges to reduce the principal owed on home mortgages. Such a drastic step may not be necessary, but if lenders do not step up their efforts to help stressed-out homeowners, it will have to be considered as a last resort to put a halt to the foreclosure epidemic and get the economy back on track.

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ARTIST'S VIEW



POLITICS | U.S. REP. ERIC MASSA, D-CORNING

Setting the record straight

I wanted to take this opportunity to speak directly to you, the constituents of New York's 29th Congressional District. There is a video of me speaking, which has been cut, spliced and played out of context both locally and nationally. It's time to set the record straight.

In the last week there have been countless accusations levied against me, my position on health care reform and my support for this district. I want you to know that I have always voted for the best possible outcome for this region and I believe that my actions over the past eight months speak louder than any out of context half-sentence ever can.

For example, when Congress was debating the Cap and Trade bill, I was called in to meet with President Obama the night before the vote. He wanted my vote, but I refused because I had concerns with the bill and because constituent response was overwhelmingly against it. Contrary to what some have said, this was not a "give away" vote, but rather one of the closest and hardest fought votes in Congress thus far.

When this health care

debate began, I again stood up and argued that members of Congress should have the opportunity to return to their districts to hold open and public town hall meetings to hear from their constituents. The leadership wanted a vote in July, but I and others demanded a chance for all of us to hear from our constituents first.

The news has reported that I am the only area member of Congress who is holding these meetings. In fact, by the time August is over, I will have held 52 of these meetings – some of which have gone on for 4.5 hours so that every question can be answered.

Finally, I want to clarify what I was discussing in this recent video. If you read the entire transcript, which your congressional office would be happy to provide for you, you will see that I voiced my opposition to H.R. 3200, the House version of the current health care bill. I also reinforced my support for H.R. 676, a bill that I have been on the record supporting for more than five years, but is not on the table for a vote.

Few realize that almost half of the constituents of this congressional district

live in the Rochester area where support for HR 3200 is overwhelming. If my friends and neighbors in the Southern Tier always want me to vote for the perceived popular sentiment then the more rural areas of this district will always be frustrated. Thus, careful time-consuming consideration should always trump pandering. This is why I have read the bill four times and base my opinions on the facts in it.

Don't let the pundits or spinmeisters fool you by using half of one sentence as a basis of attack. I am your representative in Congress and I take all opinions and views seriously. I welcome your input and hope to hear from you at one of our upcoming town hall meetings, on the Internet at massa.house.gov, or in person at one of your district congressional offices. I am nobody's congressman but yours, and I work for you – all of you. The only way I know how to do this is by listening to as many people as possible and then acting as thoughtfully as I can.

■ U.S. Rep. Eric Massa represents the 29th Congressional District.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Farrand gets things done

TO THE EDITOR | The thing that's been most impressive to me about County Legislature Dan Farrand is his willingness to listen and then get a response from government.

A quick example: I attended one of Dan's regular town hall meetings in Woodhull. At that meeting we brought a situation involving the condition of local sidewalks to Dan's attention – it was something we felt was the county's responsibility to address. Dan carefully heard our concerns, quickly gave the issue his full attention, and then made sure the county provided the necessary repairs. I think it's exactly the way government needs to work, but it's definitely not the way that government works often enough.

It's been my experience that Dan Farrand gets government to work the way it should, and so I'm glad to be able to support his reelection to the Steuben County Legislature. Dan Farrand gets the job done.

That's what he's all about.

Please join me in supporting Dan Farrand, District 10, Steuben County Legislature.

Pat Calkins
Woodhull

New paint, not new taxes

TO THE EDITOR | There is an old adage, "New paint on an old barn does wonders." Just look at us now! Hammondsport has taken off. There is new paint on buildings around the Village Square including the Village Tavern, the dentist office, and Cinnamon Stick; a new store front of Crooked Lake Ice Cream; new shops such as Limeberry and Somers Art and Frame; plus new eateries, Greenhouse Cafe, Union Block Italian Bistro and Coneheads. Top that off with a bandstand makeover!

People from everywhere are everywhere around town. B&B's are running at full capacity. We have even come close to heavy traffic. Chamber events are draw-

ing crowds. Everyone is in good spirits. I saw our local policeman give assistance to someone with a broken down boat trailer on William Street. He went to a local garage and returned with a mechanic to help the boat owner. You can't beat that!

Who needs stimulus money? Hammondsport has a stimulus attitude!

Having said that, I must comment on the SCCVB (Steuben County Conference and Visitors Bureau) suggestion that we have a 2 percent room tax hike to increase the number of visitors to the area. New York seems to have the attitude that if there is a problem, tax it.

I say try a little "paint on the old barn." Create a stimulus attitude. Greet people with enthusiasm not tax increases. Enthusiasm is contagious. If you don't believe it, come to Hammondsport and catch some. However, please don't raise our taxes!

Dick and Patty
Leonberger
Blushing Rose Bed and Breakfast
Hammondsport

Something is better than nothing

What do the national debate on reforming health care and the latest facilities proposal offered by the Corning-Painted Post school district have in common?

CITY BEAT



Jbe Dunning

It's that I feel the same about both of them, and I bet others do, too. Which is: Things are so bad, that whatever is done to fix

them will be an improvement.

That sounds desperate, but consider just how far gone both the health care system and C-PP schools are and it's hard not to feel that *any* reasonable solution would make things better.

Everyone agrees that both are bad and need fixing; getting there has been the tough part. I say we can't lose if we just try something.

The problem with health care insurance is that 47 million Americans don't have it, the premiums for those who do keep rising faster than the rate of inflation and the insurance companies are making a killing.

The system is fundamentally broken, can't be self-corrected and needs to be fixed. Everyone agrees something needs to be done.

The solution?

Obama's plan would address those problems, and maybe create some new ones along the way. Some alternatives probably would do just as well.

Whether the solution is offered by Democrats, Republicans, liberals or conservatives isn't important to me, although I know it is to them.

Just getting a solution in place is what matters. Later on, if it appears the plan isn't working quite right, it can be adjusted so that it does work. Health care is something that's been a work in progress, anyway.

As for the C-PP schools, again, everyone agrees they're in bad shape and that there's too many of them because enrollment has declined, and will continue to decline.

Moreover, if the facilities aren't fixed, the quality of education will suffer and more families, both new and established, will elect not to live in the district.

The solution?

The one now on the table – Alternative C – is pretty good but must receive at least 60 percent voter approval on Dec. 15. That's a tall order for any school district, but particularly in C-PP, which first recognized its problems 30 years ago and has failed several times in the last 10 years to solve them.

Alternative C was selected over two other plans by the school board last month for several reasons, but mostly because it would accomplish the most without raising local taxes. In a sense, it offers more for less.

Now, school officials admit Alternative C is not a perfect plan. It has flaws and it proposes to close some schools, which will surely frustrate students, parents and staff who use them.

But it may be the best way for the district to finally go from the Stone Age into the 21st century on many fronts. Also, Alternative C creates equity for more students than the other plans would provide.

So I think it's time both of these issues were resolved so we can move on to other things.

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