

Editorials

Obama: 'We live in a time of extraordinary change'

In the president's final State of the Union address Tuesday night, he nailed what's at the root of so much of the political angst riling the country: the rapid pace of change fueled by a global economy causing widespread job disruption among working-class Americans.

"We live in a time of extraordinary change—change that is reshaping the way we live, the way we work, our planet, our place in the world," he said to the nation. "It's change that promises amazing medical breakthroughs, but also economic disruptions that strain working families. It promises education for girls in the most remote villages, but also connects terrorists, plotting an ocean away. It's change that can broaden opportunity, or widen inequality. And whether we like it or not, the pace of this change will only accelerate."

If you're an American working in the coal mines, or in manufacturing jobs whose work is being exported overseas, you're angry about that change and feeling vulnerable that you won't find another job that pays half as well. In that mindset, it's easy to be mad and want to believe politicians who sell the belief that if only they were elected president, their bolder leadership would beat back the hands of time and restore things to the way they were.

It is, of course, so much snake oil.

The truth for the past 20 years is that the global economy is forcing economic disruptions throughout all advanced economies. The panacea is not to resist that change, but, as the president said, make "change work for us... Our unique strengths as a nation—our optimism and work ethic, our spirit of discovery, our diversity, our commitment to rule of law—these things give us everything we need to ensure prosperity and security for generations to come."

In looking toward the future, President Obama asked Americans to think about four important questions:

- How do we give everyone a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy;
- How do we make technology work for us and not against us, especially when it comes to solving urgent challenges like climate change;
- How do we keep America safe and lead the world without becoming its policeman; and
- How can we make our politics reflect what's best in us, and not what's worst?

Fair questions that allowed the president to set the record straight on a few issues, and focus the public's attention on longer-term goals, rather than being beset by the fear so pronounced in the reactionary politics of his critics. It was his review of the nation's economy, however, that corrects the myths of the political right and charts a constructive way forward.

Polls have showed that Americans who watch primarily conservative media believe the economy is in the worst tailspin in recent history. They'd be wrong. The dollar in America is surprisingly strong throughout the world precisely because the country has weathered the Great Recession of 2007-8 (at the end of President George W. Bush's term in office when the country was losing 700,000 jobs a month) better than most other nations in the world. More than 14 million jobs have been created in the U.S. since President Obama was elected, the president said, adding that the nation has just seen the strongest two years of job growth since the 1990s.

Even though the economy is strong, the president helped define the changes that have caused so much angst for workers.

"Today," he said, "technology doesn't just replace jobs on the assembly line, but any job where work can be automated. Companies in a global economy can locate anywhere, and they face tougher competition. As a result, workers have less leverage for a raise. Companies have less loyalty to their communities. And more and more wealth and income is concentrated at the very top."

To understand that fundamental change is to also embrace the need for more education, and at every age group. President Obama's response is clear: "real opportunity requires every American to get the education and training they need to land a good-paying job." That means, providing Pre-K for all and offering every student hands-on computer science and math classes; making college affordable for every American; and providing two years of community college at no cost for every responsible student. In addition to a better education and training, Obama advocated for "benefits and protections that provide a basic measure of security" for all Americans.

The president was frank in his disagreement with the Republican Congress on the suitable role of government in "making sure the economy is not rigged in favor of the wealthiest and biggest corporations," noting that "food stamp recipients (a favorite target of Republicans) did not cause the financial crisis; recklessness on Wall Street did."

The president broke new ground with his unexpected call to put American in the forefront of finding a cure for cancer, appointing Vice President Joe Biden "in charge of mission control" and comparing the quest to the country's goal in the 1960s to put a man on the moon; he emphasized the necessity of curbing fossil fuel use, and pledged to invest in the future of renewable energy and reduce the subsidies of dirty fuels. He spoke on foreign affairs and outlined his vision of what American strength means, while criticizing the irresponsible political speech among Republican candidates "that targets people because of race or religion." Such rhetoric "diminishes us in the eyes of the world," he said. "It makes it harder to achieve our goals. It betrays who we are as a country."

Finally, the president took on the current political system as failing the country. He singled out the need to reverse the effects of gerrymandering, the need for campaign finance reform, and making voting easier not more restrictive. "We have to change the system to reflect our better selves," he said, implying that the current system brings out the worst.

It was vintage Obama: eloquent, thoughtful, humble, and regretful that he wasn't able to unite Americans in the ways he had hoped. Nonetheless, he appealed to unity and common cause, even if he was unable to overcome the rancor that has come to define the GOP throughout his presidency.

Angelo S. Lynn



Dock on the rocks

A SHORT, SNOW-COVERED dock extends out over a frozen Bristol Pond Tuesday morning.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

First Folio helps us 'press flesh' with the Bard

Don't tell my cats ... but if my house were burning I would have a split second of hesitation choosing between them and my facsimile copy of Shakespeare's First Folio. Don't worry. I would definitely save the cats first (all four of them ... and the dog ... and the lizard). Exiled to a desert island? I would definitely pack my First Folio. Or if I were one of those book memorizer people in the book-burning world of Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451"? Ditto.

A real First Folio — not a facsimile, like my copy — a real First Folio, one of only 230 known to be in existence, will come to Middlebury College early in February, as one of the first stops on its tour of the U.S. from the Folger Shakespeare Library.

Why should we care? Well, there's what it says in the Introduction to my facsimile edition: "The King James Bible and the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays are the two greatest books in the cultural history of the English-speaking peoples." There's that.

After all, without the First Folio we'd be missing about half of Shakespeare's plays, including "As You Like It," "The Tempest," "Twelfth Night" and "Macbeth." A world without "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" would truly be "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing." Do not sign me up.

But the argument about "greatness" always makes me feel a bit like I'm about to have my knuckles whacked by a pince-nez wearing, ultra-strict school master. Or worse yet, be lectured at by some wind bag of a pedant.

We should care about the First Folio and the collected works of Shakespeare because: The plays are powerful. The plays are beautiful. They make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. They contain pretty much the most glorious words ever uttered in the English tongue.

They make you feel and understand. They entertain.

A world without the plays in the First Folio would be a grayer, sadder, thinner world. A tamer world. Full of less truth. A world more devoid of wildness.

If you have any doubt about the enduring power of Shakespeare (that's "power" to move and entertain not stuffy "greatness") don't miss the next time fifth-graders from around Addison County do another of their 30-minute productions. Two years ago, I was mesmerized to watch my younger daughter glide across the stage carrying her candle and saying, "Out damn spot!" as the driven-mad-by-guilt Lady Macbeth. But it wasn't just that parent pride that makes you annoyingly love everything your kid does. Every kid on that stage from all the different schools did a great job

as cloaks and hats and swords were passed from one kid to another, signifying that another child was taking up a role. You could follow the story, fifth-grade diction and all. And it was gripping. Lo all these many "Macbeth's" later, I was still on the edge of my seat.

But why the First Folio itself? Why not scoop up the cat and run with no second thoughts? Why not any old collected Shakespeare — of which there are legion?

Kristin Linklater, renowned teacher of voice for the actor and cofounder of Shakespeare and Company, said it best: Shakespeare's language is "a language 400 years younger than ours." Not older. Younger.

Shakespeare died April 23, 1616. Queen Elizabeth I was already dead. Her distant cousin James was on the throne. The First Folio came out in 1623. In Shakespeare's time, printing was still relatively new, a little over a hundred years old, the great technological revolution of its age (along with realizing you truly didn't fall

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Clippings

By Gaen Murphree



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(See Clippings, Page 7A)

A billion reasons to skip the lottery

In case you were wondering, I didn't win the U.S. Powerball jackpot last night.

That's no big surprise, given that the odds of winning were one in 292,201,338. The chances of me being attacked by a shark — in Vermont, yesterday — were exponentially higher.

But the main reason I didn't win is that I didn't play.

When a huge jackpot comes along, I usually buy a ticket, just in case. A few years ago, for instance, I went in with my officemates on a bunch of tickets. We didn't win. (In retrospect, I shouldn't have cleaned out my desk just before the drawing. I had to put everything back the next Monday morning, and the incident didn't look good on my performance review.)

I'd hate to feel such disappointment again, but that's not why I didn't buy a ticket for Wednesday's Powerball. It's because the jackpot was \$1.5 billion.

That's too much.

It's bad enough when someone wins a measly \$200 million or so. They quit their job, buy a few extra houses and sports cars, travel on a private jet and light their cigars with \$20 bills. Also, for some inexplicable reason they invariably buy a jet ski — it must be part of the lottery terms and conditions.

Sure, it sounds like paradise, but in a few years the winners end up divorced, broke, disillusioned and with yellow teeth (from the cigars). Too much money can destroy your

perspective on what really matters in life, such as love, family and the satisfaction that comes from struggling to make ends meet, day after day, until you die.

If a couple hundred million can ruin your life, a billion would be even worse. You'd be overwhelmed with financial decisions and dazzled by the ability to buy anything you wanted without thinking. You'd

be a target for kidnapers. And if everyone in the office decided to pitch in five bucks for a retirement gift for a co-worker, you'd look like a jerk if you didn't offer to throw in at least a \$20.

Of course, that implies that you'd still be working. As if. You always hear about people who say they love their jobs so much they'd never quit even if they won the lottery. "It's not about the money," they say. "My job gives me purpose, and without that, what else is there?" (See "private jet," above.)

Would you move? You'd have to, because if you stayed in Addison County, you'd be answering your phone and your door a hundred times a day to individuals and organizations wanting money.

I guess you'd have a valet or someone to handle that stuff for you. But who wants their house all cluttered up with servants?

In some states, you can choose to remain anonymous. Good idea: Don't tell anyone it was you who bought the

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Letters to the Editor

Unification vote merits support

Let's talk about the kids. "Vermont students outpace their peers in most other states on national tests, can hold their own on international assessments, and have one of the highest graduation rates in the nation — 92% in 2014" (The Mountain Times, Dec. 17, 2015).

Education is an ever-evolving process which needs to mirror the culture and society our children are growing up in. Act 46 serves to ensure that we do not lag behind in providing a structure that works for all the towns, large and small, in Vermont.

In the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union, our small elementary schools must provide an equitable education which prepares students for secondary schools and beyond. Our state requires of schools and students mastery of academic achievement, personalized learning, safety and school climate, high-quality staffing and cost-effectiveness. The choice of district consolidation is not ours at this point; but it is our responsibility to support the efforts of our state education leaders who have our children's best interests in mind, and to pass Act 46 at this phase in the three-step process. It is a win-win for everyone.

I have been an active participant in Vermont's education system for over 35 years as a parent, teacher, administrator and taxpayer. I strongly believe that we should vote YES on Act 46 School District Consolidation on Jan. 19 because it is inevitable that this will happen in the near future with or without our blessings.

If we choose to support this act now we will benefit from many financial incentives that will not be available in the future; and we can be assured that our small schools will remain open for four more years. This effort is being handled responsibly and in a timely manner.

After attending the last study committee meeting at Otter Valley Union High School, I was impressed with the effort being put forward by representatives from all our local communities to work together to make this opportunity for our collective districts happen. I honestly expected some disagreements, bad feelings and otherwise rocky banter. But I was pleasantly surprised that this committee and Superintendent Jeanne Collins had the facts, the expertise and the wisdom to know what is good for children.

The world of education is changing faster than we can imagine, and our children need the skills and knowledge to compete. Visit any high school in this area and see for yourself how vastly different our curriculum and teaching strategies have become. This is not about nostalgic memories — but rather the hard realities of our economic and social structures today. We all have a lot to learn and act upon.

In closing, I am urging you to come out and support this consolidation on Jan. 19. Also, as a representative from Sudbury for a seat on the At-Large District Board, please vote for me so I can continue to work hard to keep Vermont schools one of the nation's best school systems.

If you need more information there will be many public informational meetings in this area in the coming weeks, and I urge you to attend any one of them (all the same information) in any town and hear the facts for yourself. Your children will thank you.

Linda Kokinis
Sudbury

Marijuana stats were misleading

Despite widely reported, oft-repeated claims by opponents of marijuana legalization, there was not a 32 percent increase in marijuana-related traffic deaths in Colorado between 2013 and 2014. Quite the contrary, an honest presentation of the data reveals that there was actually a slight decrease in drugged driving in Colorado following legalization.

The 32 percent increase claim comes from a report titled "The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado: The Impact, Volume 3" issued by the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (RMHIDTA), a program of the federal Office of National Drug Control Policy — the so-called "Drug Czar," which is

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Letters to the Editor

Single-payer is primary care for all

A publicly financed universal health care system (single-payer) removes health insurers as the “middleman,” reduces administrative complexity and paperwork costs, and by removing barriers to health care, gets us to the doctor earlier, when our conditions are less serious.

Although Gov. Shumlin pressed the pause button on single-payer in 2014, it is worth asking if we can still make progress toward the goal of healthcare as a public good originally enacted in Act 48 (passed by the Legislature in 2011). Can we get there through incremental steps rather than in one giant leap?

Many ideas have been put forward, but even incremental steps, if they are to take us in the direction of a universal public system, must have two key ingredients: They must enable universal access and create a public good. Fortunately, there is good news on that front. At the end of the last session the Legislature mandated an official study of the cost of financing a universal primary care system and the results are now in.

Why universal primary care? First, primary care is that crucial first-contact health care service that most of us use most of the time in our interactions with the health care system, and it keeps us healthy by diagnosing problems early. Public health studies show that a system of universal primary care is the single most important measure that can be taken to improve public health in a given population. Primary care services include those provided by internists, pediatricians, specialists in family medicine, gynecology, nurse practitioners and even those who provide mental health and substance abuse services.

Primary care for all is also relatively inexpensive. While it occupies a critical place in any first rate public health system, it comprises only a small portion of total system costs — less than 6 percent of health care costs in Vermont, for instance. The recently completed study results show us that for just a little more than we spend now (about \$48 more per Vermonter per year), we can make primary care a public service for all Vermonters, with no out-of-pocket

costs.

This is a critical step because according to the state’s 2014 survey of the privately insured, nearly one-third of all privately insured Vermont residents under age 65 are under-insured, and we all know that high out-of-pocket costs often deter people from seeking timely care.

Financing primary care as a public good will reduce the costs of private health insurance for all Vermonters, since private insurers will no longer be paying for those services (and therefore cannot charge for them). With a publicly financed primary care system we will also save money in the long run, because universal primary care catches problems early, before they are serious and more costly.

As important as saving on long-run costs and eliminating out-of-pocket costs might be, equally important is the fact that public health studies confirm that in case after case, widely accessible primary care is the single most important step that can be taken in improving public health. Guaranteed primary care for all has been linked to longer life expectancies, fewer emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and lower rates of mortality.

If we want to break down barriers to health care, improve public health and contain costs, a universal publicly financed primary care system is a crucial first step. There is something in this for every one of us, as we would all benefit from a universal primary care system. Providers would also be positively impacted as a publicly financed primary care will simplify the administrative complexities under which they currently operate, and such a system will attract badly needed primary care providers to our state.

The Legislature would be well advised to take the results of the recently completed study seriously and to consider how to move forward with a universal primary care system. Two bills presently in the House and Senate (S.88 and H.207) propose steps to create such a system, and they deserve our support.

**Ellen Oxfeld
Middlebury**

Trump and his wall makes no sense, if you think about it

It is sad to see Americans, again, going after show rather than content in this election campaign.

Rather than look for content and practical problem-solving abilities, we are once again looking for showmanship and ignoring the impossibilities of solutions offered by those seeking our most important job. Bill Clinton said of this situation, “I thought this was supposed to be a job interview.”

Instead we get absurd proposals like building a wall along the Mexico border. The closed mindset says, “Ho, boy, this guy really takes charge and charges forward. He’s got macho coming out of his ears. Our duty is not to analyze the reality of proposals, but cheer such bold (but stupid) movement.”

For instance, Mexico is

expected to build this wall? Trump did say this several times, even if supporters were not listening. Mexico doesn’t have the money to police the place so drug kings are terrorizing Mexico, which is driving people north, a big part of our immigration problem.

And the concept of a wall to keep them out? How many walls along the border, now, have holes and tunnels that allow illegal traffic? Will Mexico also have to pay for surveillance, when it can’t afford to build the wall? And, of course, we must not worry about the diplomacy of such ideas. With inflated self assurance, no other country can possibly disagree with us, we can only make them happy. That is worth 500 Brooklyn Bridges.

And people believe this stuff, without thinking, overwhelmed

by his outward (leadership?) qualities, so that his inward motivations must be totally desirable, even if they are obviously absurd.

Then there is the rest of the Republican slate that tries to outdo the rest of the slate with more stupid and harmful ideas. Remember one said that the pyramids of Egypt were made to store grain and Trump said something like Paris was in Germany? How did the most important office in the world get turned over to fools?

Back in 1980, on a trip around the world, I was stopped by many in many places and asked, “You’re American, right? Ronald Reagan?” with total disbelief that America could do that. As Ronald (the Reagan, not the clown) once said, “Here we go again.”

**Peter Grant
Bristol**

Letters to the editor

The Addison Independent encourages readers to write letters to the editor. We believe a newspaper should be a community forum for people to debate issues of the day

Because we believe that accountability makes for responsible debate, we will print signed letters only. Be sure to include an address and telephone number, too, so we can call to clear up any questions.

If you have something to say, send it to: Letters to the Editor, Addison Independent, 58 Maple St., Middlebury, VT 05753. Or email to news@addisonindependent.com

See Letters on Pages 4A, 5A, 6A and 7A

Clippings

(Continued from Page 4A)
off the edge of the world and get eaten by sea serpents when you went past Cape Bojador).

Because printing was still so new, spelling was often by ear. There weren’t really dictionaries. Things weren’t standardized. The language was young, raw, in flux.

When I flip through my First Folio, I get that same feeling of newness, of rawness, of youth. I can feel more like the text is a script for production. It’s not weighed down by footnotes and explanations. Editors aren’t telling me where a scene is set. I have to read the scene, hear what’s described, and figure out where we are using my mind and my imagination.

I love the kooky range of spellings. The seemingly random italicizations. The odd punctuations, that many theater artists feel bring you just one shade closer to those earliest productions. It’s as if you can hear echoes of those first actors in those earliest of English stages. I love the wiggled out s’s that look like f’s. I love the 17th century typography that always looks a little bit roughed up around the edges. I could go on and on. It’s kind of like people who

want to “Feel the Bern” by hugging Bernie. Sometimes you just want to press flesh to feel closer to the thing that moves you.

The First Folio reminds me of the startling newness of so much that goes with Shakespeare. Blank verse — first made palatable and powerful, first made better than dog trot, by Shakespeare’s rival Christopher Marlowe (like Shakespeare the son of a working man, brilliant, unpredictable, Marlowe died in a tavern brawl, knifed, they say, through the eye; some suspected he was a spy; who knows?). Real professional theaters — the first ones got built in Shakespeare’s lifetime. Before that, actors made do with inn yards and the great halls of great houses. Real professional actors — before that, actors got kicked around a lot and run out of town.

The First Folio also reminds us of how so many of the most important things in life are fragile, subject to enormous changes at the last moment, subject to human error and to chance. Being a guy of his time, Shakespeare thought that his poems were going to Make His Name Go Down Forever in Human History. So he carefully guided his poems — but

not his plays — through publication. Alone among Elizabethan playwrights, satirist Ben Jonson made sure his plays got published, perfectly proofread down to the last jot.

Shakespeare died, leaving no complete published plays behind. There were various versions of some of the plays floating around. Some more or less authentic. Some the “acting version.” Some loosely pirated. But it took two theater buddies of Shakespeare’s, John Heminge and Henry Condell, to sit down, collect the various manuscripts (undoubtedly), quartos and folios of the individual plays and bring them all together.

Can you imagine?

I bought my facsimile of the First Folio decades back, in a used bookshop in Berkeley, Calif. Back then I was a struggling theater artist. Dead broke. In those days, I made my living — aside from my glorious six months’ stint as a Wacky Mom on Stilts in a touring circus theater (this is true) — copyediting computer magazines, books on food policy, and Asian histories. In those days, \$125 for a used facsimile First Folio might have been \$1,000. But I

bought it anyway. Some things are just that important.

The First Folio — the genuine article — is touring the United States and coming to Middlebury, as part of a whole host of celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death.

Here’s my advice for how to celebrate.

First, make sure you see the First Folio when it comes to Middlebury.

Second, watch “Shakespeare in Love.” This filmic reimagining of how Shakespeare came to write “Romeo and Juliet” takes you into Shakespeare’s world, onto the streets of Elizabethan England, into the mind of a poet and into the joys and frustrations of playwrights and actors better than just about anything I’ve ever seen. The screenplay is written by a playwright and man of the theater, which explains a lot of what’s right about it.

Third, grab a copy of Shakespeare. Any copy. Any copy at all. Open it up. And read. Don’t read it silently. Read it aloud, maybe with a friend or a kid. Say the words. Say them out loud. And let the words and the story take you. Press flesh with Shakespeare.

We could simplify train bridge problem

Last week’s two community forums seem related. Monday’s forum concerned solving the “truck a minute” through Vergennes. Thursday’s forum concerned solving double-deck train traffic through Middlebury. That reminded me of trucks and low bridges.

Or rather letting the air out of truck tires to lower ... Bear with me here: There is a proposal to lower the trains to fit under the new bridges after all. We in New Jersey are spending over \$1 billion to raise a bridge to allow many-decked ships to pass despite a long history of canals and locks that could lower those ships. And that reminded me of the many New Jersey drawbridges to allow canal boats and sailing ships to pass. See where I am going here?

Train track width is 10 feet. Two 5-foot cantilevered draw bridges

would do the trick. Sidewalk to sidewalk is long but railroads know how to build draw bridges. No worry about clearance or dynamite or even disturbing train traffic. Main Street would only be blocked when high-deck trains need to pass. I like the idea of Merchant’s Row as a pedestrian mall. Maybe with a stile to the park or Town Hall Theater?

How does this help solve Vergennes truck traffic? There is a need to move that truck freight off the 60 miles of country road from Glens Falls to Vergennes. VTrans seems to favor trains for western Vermont freight. If freight trucks go rail, then Amtrak double-decker passengers will follow.

Looking forward to my new summer home in New Haven.

**David Spencer
Phillipsburg, N.J.**

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“I totally love your paper. I read it front to back. I learn so many things about Addison County. I need to get my pet write-up to you.”

Quotes are taken from reader comments submitted with subscription renewals.



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