

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Outlook 2024: Stories to inspire and to sustain

WITH SUNDAY'S EDITION, WE PUT A SMALL book in your hands: our four Outlook 2024 sections. If it were an actual book, it would be shelved with volumes on business, work and the economy — and sit beside all the hefty Outlook chapters that have rolled out of our newsroom in winters past.

For our staff, the months leading up to Outlook offer a chance to think past the next day's top stories. This yearly project brings a call to report more broadly on issues that can get short shrift in each day's newspaper.

As an introduction on J1 explains, this year's coverage provides a crash course for readers on the inner workings of the Pioneer Valley economy. Stories go big and small. Pieces labeled "Survey Course" take stock of trends in main sectors of the local economy. Our "Class of '24" installments introduce readers to people in a variety of these fields. "Field Trip" reports venture far and wide — all in service of depicting this thing called an economy.

As you page through, we hope you find facts you didn't know. Connections you hadn't seen. Examples of choices you find inspirational.

Those of Afrike Phakos, who is finishing her training as a nurse at Holyoke Community College. Or the students enhancing their training as medical first responders. One of them is Joe Scott of Springfield. He told reporter Nicole Williams he used to work in the food industry. "It really wasn't hitting the mark for me," he said. "I really wanted to help people and make a difference."

In our economy, many define success as more than meeting payroll.

Mission-driven companies like Baystate Health work to make health care more accessible and culturally sensitive. Arts organizations in the region, though a small slice of our gross domestic product, enrich in other ways.

We introduce readers to people whose reach, in their professions, extends far beyond Western Massachusetts. They include Kevin Sears, the Springfield broker now serving as president of the National Association of Realtors. And Anna Nagurney, a professor at the Iseberg school at UMass. She forged a link between the university and the Kyiv School of Economics in Ukraine, one piece of what another Outlook story describes as that school's long and expanding engagement with global learning.

In the world of business, the first challenge is survival. Responding to adversity is a theme throughout today's coverage. But so is finding opportunity.

The two live side by side in modern life. We hope our coverage today, and in Monday's expanded business section, helps people steer their way forward.

EDITORIAL

NATO serves US well, despite Trump's view

IN A FEW WEEKS, SCOPE ARENA IN NORFOLK WILL be busy with activity as the city holds its annual NATO Festival, the longest continuous festival on the Hampton Roads calendar. It pays tribute to our region's unique status as the home to NATO's only command operations in North America.

Owing to that long and fruitful relationship, our region needs no lesson about how the multinational alliance has helped preserve peace in Europe and advance American interests abroad. NATO is an invaluable force for good that the United States must resolutely preserve and protect, contrary to former President Donald Trump's unconscionable invitation a week ago that Russia attack its members.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization emerged from the rubble of World War II as a defensive alliance in Western Europe to guard against the growing threat posed by the Soviet Union's expansion into Eastern Europe following Germany's defeat. It facilitated European integration and sought to replace nationalist militarism with continental cooperation.

Central to that is the United States' involvement in NATO's formation and development. After American forces helped defeat fascism, the U.S. wanted to forge a new global order based on the principles of freedom, democracy and opportunity.

The most important aspect of the NATO treaty is Section V, which states "that an armed attack against one or more [members] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all" and that all parties agree to mutual self-defense in accordance with each nation's constitutional process. (In the case of the United States, a commitment of troops for a war effort would still require congressional approval.)

Although intended as a bulwark against a Soviet invasion, Section V has only been invoked once: on Sept. 12, 2001. Following the terrorist attacks against this country, our NATO allies provided aircraft to help patrol American skies and assistance in the fight against al-Qaida.

When it mattered most, America's allies in NATO had our backs. While that swift and decisive response should never be forgotten, some who should know better apparently need a reminder.

Speaking to a rally this month in South Carolina, the former president launched into a savage broadside of the coalition, reflecting a fundamental misunderstanding of both the treaty's obligations and the alliance's importance to our national security.

That he made that statement as Ukraine bravely defends itself is especially despicable. It only serves to embolden America's enemies.

— *The Virginian-Pilot and Daily Press*

SHENEMAN THE STAR-LEDGER



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Talk to your teen about dating and relationships

February is Teen Dating Violence Prevention month. If you have a teen or pre-teen in your life, we'd like to ask you to talk to them about relationship health.

It can be hard for all of us to know what we have in a relationship. Most relationships start out healthy, and if they do become unhealthy or abusive it is often gradual. Teens often miss the early warning signs and misunderstand what their partner's behavior means. Jealousy can look like love.

Possessiveness and wanting to spend time only with you can feel flattering. Blame shifting and gaslighting can make teens feel that being mistreated is their fault and that if they only tried harder their relationship would go back to being how good it was at the beginning.

We think that if teens and pre-teens understand the signs of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships early on, they will have a better chance of avoiding harmful relationships and understanding that being mistreated is never their fault. We also think that if they are used to talking to adults they trust about relationships, they will be more likely to reach out if they ever do need help.

A good way to start a conversation is to ask a question. You might ask a teen if they think the relationships they see at school are healthy or not, and why they think so.

Add what you know about relationships a little bit at a time, without overwhelming them. Listen more than you talk. And don't worry if they don't agree with you. It is when there is tension between two ideas that real learning often happens.

If you are worried your teen may already be in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, here are some more tips: Ask questions about your teen's life. Listen with an open mind and don't interrupt. Ask them what they want to do and help them review their options. Be supportive and remind them of their strengths rather than criticizing them. Don't insult their partner, but instead talk about their partner's behaviors that worry you.

Above all, keep communicating and try to maintain a connection with your teen.

Two websites we recommend are www.loveisrespect.org and www.joinonelove.org.

MONICA MORAN & DONNA LAROCQUE

The writers represent the Southern Hilltown Domestic Violence Task Force. Other signers include Phil Barry, Steph Conway, Lindsey Maxwell, Police Chief Jennifer Dubiel Sarah McGuinness and Kim Savery.

Flawed measure on gun control

Under cover of darkness on Feb. 1, the Massachusetts Senate voted to advance



February is Teen Dating Violence Prevention Month. (METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION)

yet another deeply flawed piece of legislation under the misguided premise of "gun control."

That they did this only hours after it was introduced to the floor with nearly 80 amendments considered is only slightly less concerning than the fact that it all happened without any public hearing. One can only assume that the legislators know the outrage that would ensue were the contents of this bill exposed to the light of day.

With Massachusetts already home to some of the strictest gun control policies in the country, these lawmakers decided to further harass the law-abiding majority instead of working to enforce existing laws and punish the actions of the criminal minority.

Instead of cracking down on crime, this legislation creates new definitions of a "firearm industry member" and "firearm industry product" that will include any person or entity that produces materials that could be used in conjunction with a firearm.

This opens a massive liability and lawsuit loophole for civil action against suppliers of such products — an intentional end run against the federal banning frivolous lawsuits. As written, those "firearm industry products" would include things like clothing, hearing protection, eye protection and marketing materials.

Do any of these legislators believe for a second that gun-toting drug dealers, gang members, terrorists, or deranged madmen will be dissuaded from their violent actions by any of these new regulations? Or do they instead believe that by expanding the already labyrinthian laws and making gun ownership more difficult, more expensive, and more complicated, they'll discourage law-abiding citizens from exercising their constitutional rights?

The answer seems obvious. The majority of states now allow "constitutional carry" and have reduced the restrictions on law-abiding gun owners with the data

showing no increase — and often a statistically significant decrease — in violent crime.

I would hope that Massachusetts — so often is touted as a leader in other freedoms — would follow suit, trusting in its citizenry, instead of further restricting our rights.

JOSEPH C. LONGO
Feeding Hills

The new 'nabobs' of Agnew's party

As a precinct captain in the suburbs of Chicago, I worked to elect Ronald Reagan. Iran Contra, religiosity, blown budgets and tax cuts for the wealthy opened my eyes. I switched!

Fiscally, I'm conservative, socially I'm liberal. I don't believe I will live long enough to see any positive changes in the Republican Party that would entice me to switch back. The Republican Party has become a party of naysayers, haters, fear mongers, cult worshipers and contributes no solutions to our national problems.

Don't believe me ... after all I'm a liberal now. Look up Chip Roy's rant for details.

Their rhetoric is pure vitriol loaded with projection and nothing positive to say about anything or anybody, except their indicted leader.

The Republican Congress provides lots of hot air but no solutions. They can't get out of their own way, Immigration reform to wit! Their narrative is best described by Spiro Agnew when he said, "In the United States today, we have more than our share of the nattering nabobs of negativism."

To that I would add nauseating.

Little did he know that he was describing the future of his own party.

JÓSE LINARES
Feeding Hills

Is President Biden mentally capable?

Recently, President Biden was cleared of all charges stemming from possession and improper storage of classified documents. The reason

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

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■ Join the conversation at masslive.com/opinion.

Biden was cleared is that he was found to be mentally incapable of standing trial.

If he is mentally incapable of standing trial, how is he mentally capable of being president of the United States?

Asking for a friend.

MICHAEL DIALESSI
Agawam

WIC money gap imperils health

We rapidly approach the moment of decision — March 1 — when millions of women and infants may lose their nutrition benefits. It will happen when WIC, USDA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, runs out of funding due to the 2024 budget negotiations.

The January 2024 continuing resolution, would fund WIC at a level that would create a shortfall of \$1 billion, equivalent to 1.5 months of benefits for the nearly 6.7 million people who use the program.

Two million pregnant and postpartum women and their little ones won't get necessary food and health assistance.

Recently the House passed a bipartisan tax package including an expansion of the Child Tax Credit in a decisive vote of 357-70. The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024 expands the credit over the next three years so that more families with low incomes — including those with multiple children — can access the full credit amount.

This would ensure that 16 million children receive some amount of this benefit. And we know from the 2021 expanded credit this money contributes to decreasing food insecurity.

Now we must push the Senate to pass this law as well, with no time to spare.

As one of the richest nations, it is a travesty for us to rank so poorly on measures of food insecurity and child poverty. We can and must do better — our future depends on it.

LESLYE HEILIG, M.D.
Great Barrington