

# OPINION

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## The LEADER

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### OTHER VIEW | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

## Zimmerman may get trial by Twitter

If you live in Illinois, where we've just begun experimenting with cameras in the courtroom, you might be surprised to learn that jury selection in the Trayvon Martin case is being live-streamed, live-blogged and live-tweeted, straight to your iPhone or tablet.

The New Media circus has pitched its tent outside the Seminole County, Fla., courthouse to witness the search for 10 people - six jurors and four alternates - who haven't made up their minds about who started the fight that ended in Martin's death on Feb. 26, 2012.

There are 500 people in the jury pool.

George Zimmerman, a volunteer watchman at a gated community in Sanford, says he shot Martin, an unarmed black teenager, in self-defense. Much of America quickly chose sides when police initially declined to make an arrest, citing Florida's "stand your ground" law, which allows the use of lethal force if the person has a reasonable fear of being seriously injured or killed.

Next thing you know, a petition demanding Zimmerman's arrest had been launched at change.org; more than 2 million people have "signed" it. An online defense fund - PayPal accepted - has raised almost \$400,000 to fight the second-degree murder charge filed nearly six weeks after Martin's death.

Jury selection is expected to take weeks, but more than 200 journalists already are stationed in and around the courthouse, dutifully relaying their observations: To protect their anonymity, prospective jurors are identified by a letter and number, such as B52. Defense attorneys want the judge to prohibit prosecutors from using the words "vigilante" and "profile" in opening statements. Zimmerman has gained 130 pounds since his arrest.

"Potential juror is the mother of two teenagers ages 11 and 13," a television reporter tweeted. "She looks young."

"Potential Juror E40 has short white hair, glasses and does not have a Facebook account."

Potential juror R39 "is wearing a T-shirt and hasn't shaved in days."

As we used to say in the Old Media era: Stop the presses.

During a break in the action on Day One, reporters trooped obediently to Courtroom 1B when the defendant's older brother, rzimmermanjr, tweeted:

"I'll do a brief Q&A w/ Press NOW from within the courthouse."

The brother, Robert Zimmerman Jr., caused a stir in March with a Twitter rant about black teens. He told reporters Monday that he'll stop tweeting about the case once a jury is picked.

At that point, of course, the jurors will be instructed to avoid media coverage anyway. For most of those questioned so far, that doesn't sound like it will be a problem.

One potential juror said she gets the Orlando Sentinel for the coupons; another said she used the newspapers to line her parrot's cage. One gets her news from Facebook, another from her church. Juror B30 doesn't watch the news because it's "too negative" but has learned about the case "in drips."

The truth is that juries are very good at setting aside pretrial noise. It's what happens after a verdict that's becoming problematic.

Mark O'Mara, Zimmerman's lawyer, is afraid jurors will be influenced by fear of public backlash over an unpopular verdict. He has good reason to worry. Two years ago, jurors in another made-for-TV trial in nearby Orange County were publicly vilified after acquitting Casey Anthony in the murder of her 2-year-old daughter.

CNN legal analyst Nancy Grace called that jury "kooky." Fox News' Bill O'Reilly's post-verdict recap was headlined "Dumb beyond a reasonable doubt." Commenters on Internet news sites called the jurors cowards and idiots and questioned whether they might have reached a different conclusion if Anthony weren't attractive, white and female.

We suspect that's what Potential Juror B7 was thinking about when he admitted he'd find it easier to keep an open mind if jurors' names weren't made public after a verdict. "I would be afraid that it might anger strangers," he said.

Those strangers will make up their minds, if they haven't already, with help from legal experts found on cable TV, talk radio, social media and the bottoms of bird cages - the very sources jurors will be instructed to avoid.

Try to keep that in mind, when you find yourself deliberating all that unfiltered "evidence" from the comfort of your couch. Would you rather be tried by a painstakingly vetted jury, or by the Twitterverse?

### COMMENTARY | STATE SEN. TOM O'MARA

# A week of victories and close finishes

We're coming down the home stretch of this year's regular legislative session, which is scheduled to finish on Thursday, June 20, and so, sticking with the horse racing analogy, it's a week when individual legislators try to bring their legislation across the wire and into the winner's circle.

So I'll be doing just that. For example there are a number of bills that I'm either sponsoring or co-sponsoring that have been overwhelmingly approved by the Senate, with strong bipartisan support, but still need the OK from the Democratic leadership of the state Assembly before they can be delivered to the governor to be signed into law. Here's just a few I'll be pushing Assembly leaders to act on:

■ Senate Bill Numbers 3639 and 4652 would further outlaw and seek to deter the operation of clandestine methamphetamine labs. There were three meth lab discoveries in Chemung County alone last week. It's alarming. Meth labs put police officers, first responders and local residents in harm's way. Seven years ago, a



TOM O'MARA

state investigative report singled out the Southern Tier as a hotbed of meth-related criminal activity. The report also warned that unless New York adopted tougher new laws to combat the drug's proliferation, meth would become a "dire public health and safety threat." We better pay attention. Our laws need to keep pace with the goal of putting meth manufacturers out of business in New York State.

S.3639 would further outlaw the operation of meth labs by increasing the criminal penalties for the possession of meth manufacturing material and the unlawful manufacture of meth, implementing a series of increasingly severe felony offenses. S.4652 would strengthen state law to enhance the ability of local police and district attorneys to track and prosecute violations of restrictions on

over-the-counter sales of cold medications that are key ingredients used to cook meth.

We need to send a strong message that we're not going to tolerate the operation of meth labs. These Senate-approved measures aren't the sole answer to meth's resurgence across our region - not by any means - but they're part of the needed response;

■ Senate Bill Number 1294 would put an end to the unfunded state mandates that impose unfair and unreasonable fiscal burdens on counties, cities, towns, villages and school districts. The legislation would ban the imposition of any future state mandates on local governments and school districts that are not accompanied by state funding to localities to pay for delivering the required programs and services. Mandate relief has to remain a state priority. Localities, school districts and local property taxpayers facing tough fiscal challenges still have their hands tied by too many unfunded state mandates. In short, this legislation delivers a clear, commonsense message: If the state mandates it, the state should pay for it; and

■ Senate Bill Number 2617 would enhance the incentive for counties to identify and prosecute Medicaid fraud. Current state law limits reimbursements to local governments for successfully prosecuting Medicaid fraud cases. Under this legislation, local governments would keep 100% of the local share of any successful Medicaid fraud prosecution or settlement, or 10% of the total recovery, whichever amount is greater. We keep reading story after story that Medicaid fraud still costs taxpayers millions upon millions of dollars. It's a mismanaged system. Something needs to change. Huge amounts of upstate tax dollars go to support vast Medicaid spending statewide, especially in New York City, and we can't keep footing the bill for mismanagement, misspending, fraud and waste.

The days ahead in New York State government usually produce some high drama on many key and prominent issues. It inevitably leads to a few victories. But more often than not it's a week of close finishes that leave you waiting for - and working toward - the next race.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Check out the Dormann Library

TO THE EDITOR | Did you attend the Open House at the Dormann Library last month? Have you stopped by to enjoy a freshly made smoothie or other blended drink at Chapters Cafe? Did you know that the Dormann Library staff and volunteers offer a variety of programming for all ages - from story time for infants, to crafts for all ages, to teen after hours? Have you utilized the 24/7 free internet service for fun, or for free job search assistance?

In 2012, there were more than 75,000 visitors to the Dormann Library.



The Dormann Library in Bath. PAIGE BEACH/THE LEADER

We hope that you are one of them, or will join us in celebrating this resource in your community.

I would like to invite all residents of the Haverling School District to show support of the Dormann

Library and its dedicated employees and volunteers. The Board of Trustees is proposing a 2 percent tax levy increase for the library's 2013 budget. This would increase the tax levy from

\$191,760 to \$196,964 per year, which would help the library to continue to provide great programs and services to the community, as well as maintaining the building and property. Please join us at the Dormann Library on Thursday, June 20 from noon-8pm to vote. For more information, join us at the public meeting on Tuesday, June 18 at 6:30pm.

Come check out our unique library with its cafe and 36 computers for patron use, and while you're here, show your support and vote on June 20th.

**Angie Longwell**  
Bath

### READER VIEW | JEFF HELLER

## Time to consider seceding from Downstate?

Is it possible Abe Lincoln foresaw the ridiculous political situation in New York? Could he have anticipated that 5 percent of the land mass of the state would have total control over the other 95 percent? Could he have anticipated that demographically, under "one man, one vote", it would be impossible for that situation to improve for the minority? Could he have foreseen that Ithaca, (even more than New York City!), would consistently vote to the left of Moscow? Could he have foreseen that a liberal/environmentalist coalition would take away the mineral rights of all the landowners in the state? Even recognizing that Lincoln was one of our sharpest presidents (not bad for a second or third grade education!), he

could not have been that sharp - could he?

"If, by the mere force of numbers, a majority should deprive a minority of any clearly written constitutional right, it might, in a moral point of view, justify revolution - certainly would, if such right were a vital one." - Lincoln's 1st inaugural address.

I have not really researched the gory details of this speech. However, he could not have been referring to the right of secession from the Union - he was already committed to fighting a war to invalidate that right. I would assume he was more likely thinking about West Virginia. West Virginians were in the process of separating (seceding?) from Virginia - that is state from state. Virginia (substitute liberal New York

City) did not represent the interests of the people of western Virginia (substitute "upstate" New York).

We should also be watching what's going on in Colorado - a fairly serious movement to create a northern state - separate from that part of the state that no longer represents the interests of the north. (Sound vaguely familiar?) This in spite of the fact that Colorado is in excellent economic/fiscal shape, compared to New York. Even the political divide is not as severe as here.

Ok, it's a little early to think about names for our new state - but what the heck! North & West New York - too verbal? Upstate New York - most accurate, but doesn't ring right. Second New York - nice play on the different

philosophies on the Second Amendment, but really doesn't sound right. New Amsterdam - too historical, and it's been used before. Right New York - most descriptive, for political philosophy, economics, fiscal policies, common sense, etc.

All kidding aside: Some of us are very, very bitter about what the "down state" majority are doing to us. We have basically three choices - flight, statehood change, or acceptance. To those of us who have lost our mineral rights, and those of us who have lost our Second Amendment rights, our choices are getting more and more limited. For now, flight is the most realistic.

*Jeff Heller is a Bradford resident.*

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