

Grins and groans

THE ISSUE | Grins and groans from news of the week.
OUR OPINION | Groan to President Obama, the media.

Groan

President Barack Obama finally did what hundreds of birthers, including Donald Trump, have been asking. He finally released the long form birth certificate proving he was, in fact, born in Hawaii.

While one would think this would put the issue to rest once and for all, it didn't. There are still those who are calling Obama's birth certificate a forgery.

Trump himself is now asking for Obama's college transcripts.

Let this be a lesson to Obama, as well as anybody else who is running, thinking about running or currently holds public office.

Media whores, attention seekers and people with agendas will never be satisfied, even when you give them exactly what they claim to want.

Obama also ceded a huge political advantage by releasing his long-form birth certificate.

Poll after poll revealed that those who had questions about Obama's country of origin probably weren't going to vote for him anyway.

Meanwhile the vast majority of the country, including independents and swing voters, were pretty sure, if not downright certain, Obama was born where he said he was born and eligible to be president of the United States.

If left unresolved, the birther issue made even sane Republicans look like crazy conspiracy theorists by association.

Releasing his birth certificate didn't win Obama nearly as many votes as not releasing it might have.

Groan

Of course at the dark, cold heart of the birther frenzy is Trump, who wasn't the first birther, but was the loudest and probably the richest.

And who created the Donald? The media, of course. In its insatiable lust to fill the 24-hour news cycle, the media turned its greedy eye Trump's way and the Donald was more than willing to give the Beast what it wanted.

The two entities formed a symbiotic relationship. Whenever the media began to get bored and look elsewhere for "news," Trump would up the ante, turning his Crazy Knob up to 11.

Here's a tip for media outlets – balanced reporting doesn't necessarily mean you have to give everyone a microphone and a platform.

It's okay to ignore someone if what they are saying is incorrect, a lie or downright insane.

LETTERS POLICY

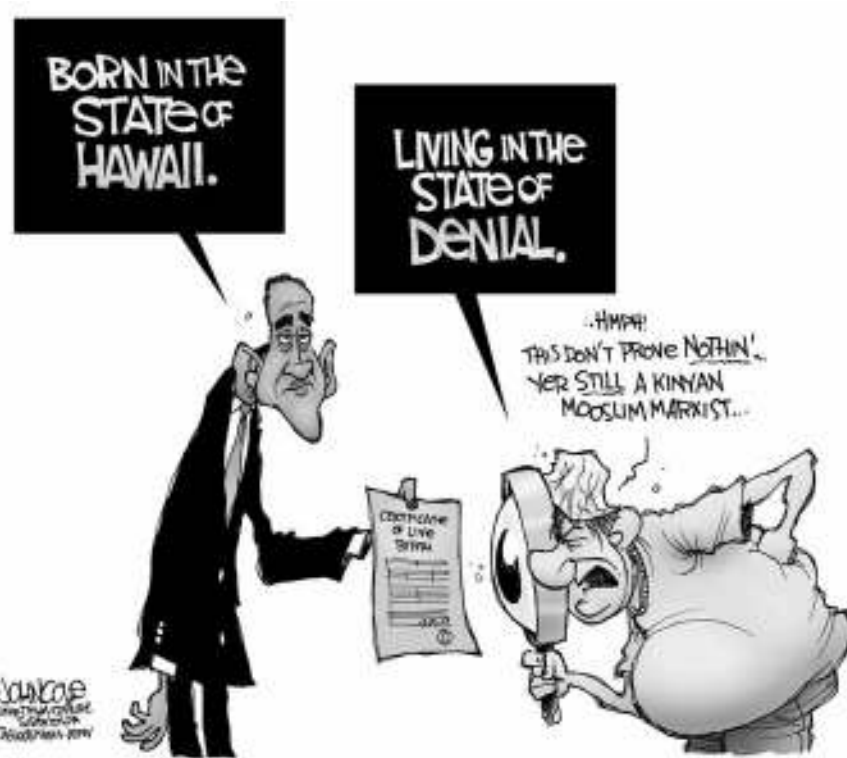
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ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | TOM O'MARA

Right tools for the job

It was just last year that a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ranked New York 26th in the nation in Medicaid fraud recovery. According to the report, states such as Missouri and North Carolina recover about three times as much in Medicaid fraud, while six other states recover twice as much as New York.

That's not good enough. Not at a time when Medicaid is costing state taxpayers more than a billion dollars a week. And not as long as we have estimates that as much as 10 percent of the spending is lost to fraud and other abuses. In other words, in New York, that means as much as \$5 billion mis-spent, wasted, or worse, ripped off. That's simply unacceptable to the responsible patients for whom the system was intended, the honest providers doing their best to make it work, and, of course, the taxpayers.

Under Gov. Andrew Cuomo's leadership, the recently enacted state budget set in motion the most dramatic and, hopefully, the most successful overhaul of Medicaid since it was created nearly a half century ago. The bottom line goal is to make the system less expensive because at its current rate of growth, it's simply unsustainable for state and local taxpayers. It's gobbling up local budgets.

While some effective avenues of preventing abuse, combating fraud, and rooting out waste

have been and continue to be undertaken through the state Office of the Medicaid Inspector General created by the Legislature several years ago, the state attorney general, and others, the fact is that we still read too many news reports and state comptroller's audits about ongoing abuses. So the questions stand: Can we do more to prevent the waste? Can we do it better? I think so. I'm currently sponsoring legislation in the Senate, for example, that calls for reimbursing local governments for the cost of purchasing modern technology that's proven to help pinpoint cases of Medicaid fraud, as well as other potential abuses and inefficiencies within the system.

Any builder, electrician or mechanic worth his or her salt will tell you that a successful job starts with the right tools. The same holds true for the job of reining in the cost of Medicaid. One of the best tools in the box is cutting-edge, data mining computer software like that developed and continually fine-tuned by the Horseheads-based Salient Corp. It can be key to building the foundation of an overall more cost-effective, efficient, better managed system of Medicaid.

For counties willing to make the start-up investment and then follow where it leads, we know it works. It reveals where and how to address the system's shortcomings, including the primary culprits of overutilization, mismanagement,

and outright fraud and other abuses. We know because it's being used by a dozen of New York's 62 counties, including Chemung, as well as the Medicaid inspector general. It was recently reported that Chemung County's one-year-old Medicaid clinic, which utilizes this data tracking tool, has already produced significant savings.

But it starts with a county's investment in the technology. A state reimbursement for this initial local cost could help encourage its more widespread use, which I believe would be a smart state expenditure likely to produce a vastly higher return to taxpayers in long-term cost savings. It at least deserves consideration. Just last week we saw a new USA Today analysis showing that New York has the nation's most expensive Medicaid program. New York spends \$2,903 per person, according to the report, while the national average is \$1,364.

The governor has set the state's sights on the need to control Medicaid spending as the number one way to address New York's highest-in-the-nation tax burden. This year's state budget took important steps, but we need to keep at it. We need a "zero tolerance" policy to reclaim the millions, if not billions of taxpayer dollars lost to Medicaid abuse, fraud and misuse.

■ **State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents the 53rd Senate District.**

OTHER VIEW | SEATTLE TIMES

Obama trumps Trump

Since June 2008, Americans have seen the Certification of Live Birth for Barack Hussein Obama II. It is machine-printed, the only kind Hawaii issues now, and it states that Obama was born at 7:24 p.m., Aug. 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii, United States.

This, and the birth announcement from the Aug. 13, 1961, Honolulu Advertiser, convinced us long ago that Obama is a natural-born citizen, as specified in the U.S. Constitution, and that the "birthers" who insist on disbelieving it have coconut husks for brains.

The birthers asked why Obama had not released the long-form "certificate of birth" filled out in 1961 and signed by the delivering physician?

Why, indeed? Maybe Obama was waiting for a really high-level coconut head to play the fool.

Maybe he was waiting for Donald Trump.

Now comes the very document the birthers clamored for. It is a "certificate" rather than a "certification." It is filled out by typewriter, not printed off a computer. It has the name of the hospital. It has the signatures of Obama's American-born mother and of the delivering physician.

Trump attempts to turn this to his advantage. "I'm very proud of myself," he said.

We knew that. Trump now takes credit for forcing the president of the United States to prove his American birth. It is not an act to

be proud of. There is a nativist tinge to it and, because Obama is of half-African descent, a racial tinge. By quibbling over forms – "certification" versus "certificate," etc. – a false suggestion is planted that Obama is un-American.

The assertion of hidden secrets is an old chestnut in politics. Some people prefer to believe that all appearances are false, and that real truth is concealed. People on both sides do it. Recall the preposterous theories that the 9/11 attacks were an inside job of the administration of George W. Bush.

This lie, at least, could be slain by a piece of paper. That is now done. Please, let the coconut heads be quiet.

We have no business in their wars

The Syrians are cracking heads and piling up bodies in a crack-down against protesters.

Moammar Gadhafi's forces sometimes win and sometimes lose in their combat with a similar rebel band.

They are rioting in Bahrain and several other middle eastern countries.

If the truth were told I could care less.

I can sympathize with the suffering that all these movements bring on both sides but my life is not impacted a

single iota by all this posturing in the Middle East.

Further, I don't think the United States should play any part in

any of this activity – including Libya.

Let the Arabs settle their own disputes and may the best man win.

If you're a rebel that is probably not a thought that gladdens your heart because the establishment generally holds the balance of power in all of these countries.

The United States, however, is not directly affected by any of it.

We can cheer for the underdog and maybe even slip him a gun or four but no U.S. troops should be directly involved in any action in that part of the world.

We are already fighting in two countries which were none of our business and the mind of Washington should be concentrated on one thing only – getting us the hell out.

What did we actually achieve with our Iraqi invasion? We never even got any of the oil which originally attracted us.

And Afghanistan is even worse. Ask the Russians what you gain from an Afghan war. They lost thousands of men and billions of dollars in a 10-year campaign to rule what is basically unruleable.

We may want to get rid of Gadhafi and perhaps some well-aimed missiles could take care of the job.

But the rebels in Libya seem not capable of properly aiming said devices, much less carrying off a kill.

One problem in much of the Middle East is widespread and seemingly inbred corruption.

Without considerable assistance it is very unlikely that more than 480 inmates of Afghanistan's biggest prison would have been able to tunnel their way out a building, into an adjacent house and then disappear into the streets of Kandahar.

Yes, they've gotten nearly 100 back but the majority of escapees were hardened Taliban fighters. And many were commanders of that violent underground.

I'm sure there are many Afghan prison guards whose personal lifestyle took a sharp swing upward since the boys made their exit.

You couldn't organize such a mass breakout without the cooperation of a considerable number of insiders.

But that's the way business is done in that part of the world.

Think you've got troubles?

A section of the Yates County Jail in Penn Yan was flooded Sunday when a female prisoner caused a toilet to overflow.

The move was apparently deliberate because she plugged the device with a pair of jail-issued underwear.

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