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Editorial | Emerging horror stories a shame

Veterans deserve the care promised them

Americans are by now tired of hearing horror stories of how certain supervisors and employees with the Department of Veterans Affairs are failing miserably at their jobs. The men and women entrusted to their care, the nation's protectors, deserve everything and anything the country has to offer to help them get back on their feet. We owe them at least that much, federal budget deficit or not.

That is not happening, though. Stories of life-threatening neglect and deceit abound. Usually, Congress will get involved and demand demotions or firings. Other than that, little else is done by the department to make sure the problems are not repeated, which is why they often are.

As the children, parents or friends of veterans, we never quite know what to expect when someone we love or know enters a VA hospital or program. We wonder if our veteran is getting the full attention and respect he or she has earned.

Most of the time the answer is yes. The majority of medical facilities run by Veterans Affairs are staffed by professional and caring individuals, people who go the extra mile when necessary to return a veteran to good physical or

mental health. More of our wounded warriors are helped than not helped.

But there are those places, due to poor and ineffective leadership, where broken veterans are not getting proper treatment. It's why congressmen like Rep. Jack Kingston are having to urge the president and VA inspector today to look into claims that dozens of veterans have died while waiting to be admitted to the VA hospital in Phoenix. Those operating the program deny the accusations and welcome the scrutiny.

The unfortunate part of it is, true or false, Rep. Kingston has no choice but to ask for an investigation and the VA has no choice but to look into the allegations given the department's blemished track record.

And that's a shame — a crying shame.

We've urged Congress in the past to do more than just fire high-ranking officials who allow problems to persist under their watch. They should have to forfeit all federal retirement benefits.

Congress might want to take punishment one step further. It might also want to consider harsh criminal charges in some circumstances, especially when neglect by government officials leads to a lifetime of suffering or death for someone in their care.

Another view | Steve Breen



Letters to the editor

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You must include your name, address and phone number.

God is not in one place

Dear Dr. Graham: Where is God? My Christian friend says He is somewhere up in heaven, but my yoga instructor says God dwells in every one of us, and we just need to look within to connect with The Divine (which is what she calls God). Who's right? — Mrs. M.D.

Dear Mrs. M.D.: God is not limited to one place; He is what theologians call "omnipresent" — that is, He is everywhere. The Psalmist declared, "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there" (Psalm 139:8).

At the same time, it's a mistake to think that we only need to look within ourselves to find God. God is far greater than this, and we will miss the reality of His greatness and perfection and holiness if we try to find Him within our minds or souls. We'll also be in danger of overlooking our own sin, and deceiving ourselves into thinking we don't need God's forgiveness and grace. The Bible warns, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive



My Answer

ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Where should we look for God? Not in a place, but in a person — Jesus Christ! He was God in human flesh who came down from heaven to cleanse us from our sins and bring us back to God. Sin separates us from God, but by His death and resurrection Jesus Christ provided the way for us to be forgiven and restored.

I invite you to turn to Jesus and commit your life to Him. God loves you, and life's greatest joy comes from knowing Him and walking with Him every day. Then pray for others who don't know Him, that they may open their lives to His transforming love.

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Nation | Obama declares ACA debate 'over'

Obama: Adolescent president

WASHINGTON — Recently, Barack Obama — a Demosthenes determined to elevate our politics from coarseness to elegance; a Pericles sent to ameliorate our rhetorical impoverishment — spoke at the University of Michigan. He came to that very friendly venue — in 2012, he received 67 percent of the vote in Ann Arbor's county — after visiting a local sandwich shop, where a muse must have whispered in the presidential ear. Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., had recently released his budget, so Obama expressed his disapproval by calling it, for the benefit of his academic audience, a "meanwich" and a "stinkburger."

Try to imagine Franklin Roosevelt or Dwight Eisenhower or John Kennedy or Ronald Reagan talking like that. It is unimaginable that those grown-ups would resort to japes that fourth-graders would not consider sufficiently clever for use on a playground.

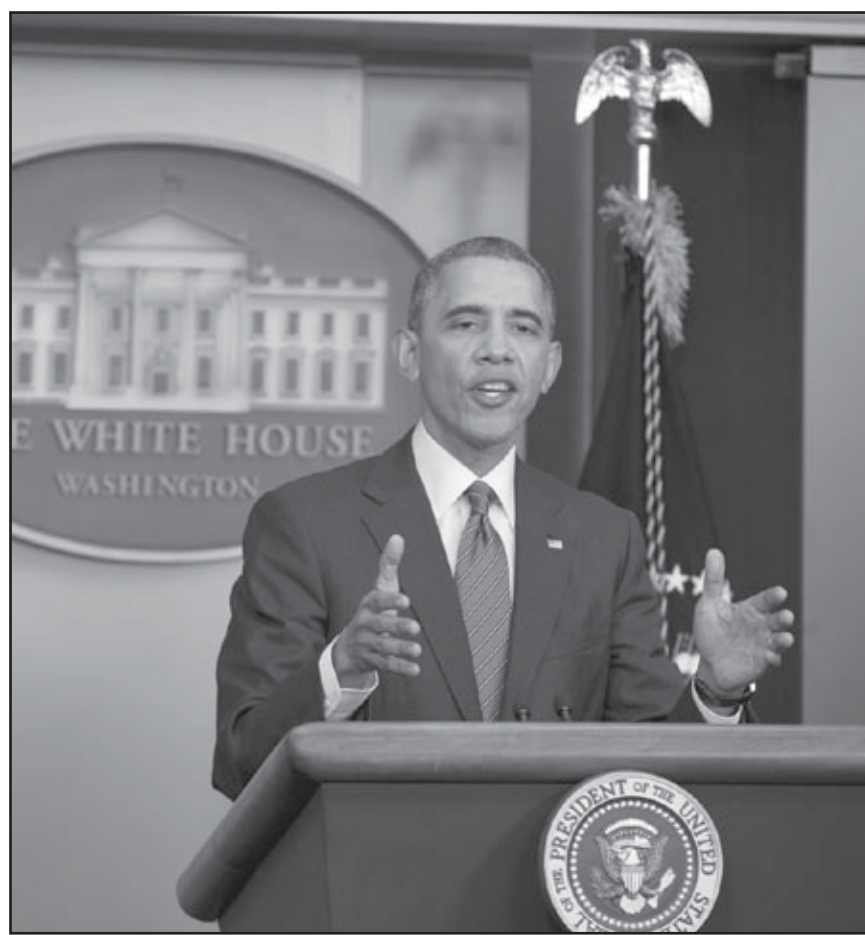
When Theodore Roosevelt was president, one of his good friends — he had been best man at TR's 1886 wedding — was the British diplomat Cecil Spring Rice. So, when visitors to Washington wanted to learn about TR, they asked Rice about him, and Springie, as TR called him, would say: "You must always remember that the president is about 6." Today's president is older than that. But he talks like an arrested-development adolescent.

Anyone who has tried to engage a member of that age cohort in an argument probably recognizes the four basic teenage tropes, which also are the only arrows in Obama's overrated rhetorical quiver. They were all employed by him last week when he went to the White House briefing room to exclaim, as he is wont to do, about the excellence of the Affordable Care Act.

First came the invocation of a straw man. Celebrating the ACA's enrollment numbers, Obama, referring to Republicans, charged: "They said nobody would sign up." Of course, no one said this. Obama often is what political philosopher Kenneth Minogue said of an adversary — "a pyromaniac in a field of straw men."

Adolescents also try to truncate arguments by saying that nothing remains of any arguments against their arguments. Regarding the ACA, Obama said the debate is "settled" and "over." Progressives also say the debate about catastrophic consequences of man-made climate change is "over," so everyone should pipe down. And they say the debates about the efficacy of universal preschool, and the cost-benefit balance of a minimum wage increase, are over. Declaring an argument over is so much more restful than engaging with evidence.

A third rhetorical move by argumen-



Carolyn Kaster/AP

President Barack Obama gestures as he speaks in the White House briefing room April 17 in Washington. The president spoke about the health care overhaul, the situation in Ukraine and other topics.



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tative adolescents is to declare that there is nothing to argue about because everything is going along swimmingly. Seven times Obama asserted that the ACA is "working." That is, however, uninformative because it is ambiguous. The ethanol program is "working" in the sense that it is being implemented as its misguided architects intended. Nevertheless, the program is a substantial net subtraction from the nation's well-being. The same can be said of sugar import quotas, or agriculture subsidies generally, or many hundreds of other government programs that are, unfortunately, "working."

Finally, the real discussion-stopper for the righteous — and there is no righteousness like an adolescent's — is an assertion that has always been an Obama specialty. It is that there cannot be honorable and intelligent disagreement with him. So last week, less than two minutes after saying that the argu-

ment about the ACA "isn't about me," he said some important opposition to the ACA is about him, citing "states that have chosen not to expand Medicaid for no other reason than political spite."

This, he said, must be spiteful because expanding Medicaid involves "zero cost to these states." Well. The federal government does pay the full cost of expansion — for three years. After that, however, states will pay up to 10 percent of the expansion's costs, which itself will be a large sum. And the 10 percent figure has not been graven on stone by the finger of God. It can be enlarged whenever Congress wants, as surely it will, to enable more federal spending by imposing more burdens on the states. Yet Obama, who aspired to tutor Washington about civility, is incapable of crediting opponents with other than base motives.

About one thing Obama was right, if contradictory. He said Americans want politicians to talk about other subjects — but that Democrats should campaign by celebrating the wondrousness of the ACA. This would be candid because it is what progressivism is — a top-down, continent-wide tissue of taxes, mandates and other coercions. Is the debate about it over? Not quite.

State | If Sea Island spit gets developed, it could happen anywhere

Proposal full of controversy

The Sea Island Company wants to build a group of condominiums on what many people believe to be environmentally unsound ground. Why should you care?

According to Pierre Howard, "If Sea Island (Co.) can do this, then it can be done anywhere. The Georgia coast belongs to everybody." That, he says, is why you should care. Whether you live in Resaca or Rincon, to quote legendary folk singer Woody Guthrie, "This land is your land. This land is my land." That includes Georgia's mountains and our seashore.

Remember Pierre Howard? He was a long-time member of the Georgia state Senate and later served as the state's lieutenant governor. I tried to convince him to run for governor but after a quarter-century in politics, he decided there was more to life than living under a public microscope. A long-time conservationist, he has served the past five years as president of the Georgia Conservancy, a major force in conservation and environmental issues. He will retire from that post this summer but if the Sea Island Company thinks Pierre Howard is going to ride off into the sunset, I have some bad news for them.

So, what is the controversy all about? Sea Island wants to build eight residences on the southern end of the island, including a road through what is considered eco-sensitive marsh land. Opponents, including local citizens, environmentalists and even some Sea Island homeowners, say the 7.3-acre spit of land has greatly eroded over the past several decades and will continue to do so. Construction could destabilize the area. They say that much of the proposed area is underwater



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at high tide and that flood insurance will be prohibited due to the area's vulnerability to erosion and flooding.

Howard simply calls it "the worst development I have ever seen in my career" and has let it be known the company is in for a fight unless it is willing to sit down and talk about its proposed development, which Sea Island seems disinclined to do at this point.

The Sea Island Co. claims to have the law on its side. Indeed, the local planning commission recommended the Glynn County Commission approve the plan.

Opponents disagree with the findings and want the commission to hold public hearings on whether or not the disputed land was a part of a 2004 rezoning plan. As politicians are wont to do, local commissioners say they are still "gathering information" and "awaiting more findings and facts" from the state and federal government. Plus, it is an election year. Their tap dancing is worthy of Bojangles.

No question that Sea Island Acquisition LLC has money and power. In politics that usually translates into influence. It will be interesting to see what our state and federally-elected officials and assorted bureaucrats do as a result. Keep a close eye on the Coastal Resources Division, a part of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Its stated mission

is to "manage Georgia's coastal marshes, beaches, waters, and marine fisheries resources for the benefit of present and future generations." That means all Georgians, not just a privileged few.

This is not the family-owned Sea Island we remember from the past. That one was acquired by Sea Island Acquisition LLC in 2010. The company's press releases describe the firm as "a limited liability company comprising investment funds managed by the global investment firms The Anschutz Corporation, Avenue Capital Group, Oaktree Capital Management, L.P. and Starwood Capital Group." One has to wonder if this hodgepodge of out-of-state investors is in for the long haul or just trying to maximize its investment and sell it off to the next hodgepodge of out-of-state investors.

Howard wonders, too. He says, "The company is going in a bad direction that could negatively impact the Sea Island brand." Why would they risk that if they plan on hanging around?

Sea Island's management needs to consider the Yarbrough Rule, which says: You may win in a court of law, but you can have your reputation seriously damaged in the court of public opinion. Maybe the law will eventually allow it to build on the environmentally-sensitive land. Is it willing to risk its reputation to find out?

Pierre Howard says he intends to see that the court of public opinion — that is you and me and all people who care about our state's natural resources — is fully engaged in the deliberations. That is as it should be. Remember, this is not just about Sea Island. This is your land, too.

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