

Other Viewpoints

Credibility missing in ballot challenge

At least Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach is consistent. The conservative Republican has doggedly pursued ways to interfere with the election process, such as pushing for a voter ID requirement when there's no proof of a voter fraud problem.

And last week, he was involved in the public airing of a complaint from a Kansas-based "birther" looking to prove President Obama isn't a natural-born citizen and have his name removed from Kansas ballots in November.

But rather than simply dismissing the Manhattan resident's claim, Kobach and other state officials acted as if there was something to investigate.

Reasonable people have moved past the "birther" nonsense regarding Obama. But Kobach, in particular, suggested there was some credence to the complaint.

"I don't think it's a frivolous objection," he reportedly said. "I do think the factual record could be supplemented."

Seriously? Apparently Kobach and others still aren't satisfied with a factual record that includes a certificate of live birth authenticated by Hawaiian officials, and verified by the doctor who delivered Obama. Local newspaper birth announcements provide more proof.

Instead, the State Objections Board – Kobach, Attorney General Derek Schmidt and Lt. Gov. Jeff Colyer – saw fit to request that Hawaii, Arizona and Mississippi officials submit copies of the president's birth records.

If the "birther" conspiracy theory embraced by extremists wasn't so disturbing, it would be downright laughable. It figures that Kansas officials would be willing to be front and center in such absurdity.

Interestingly, the Kansas "birther" withdrew his challenge Friday. The State Objections Board was scheduled to consider the complaint on Monday.

Regardless of the claim being dropped, there never was cause to question Obama's eligibility. And the all-Republican board should have known there was nothing to gain politically in doing so (other than pandering to extremists), as Obama has practically zero chance of winning the Republican stronghold of Kansas.

The latest "birther" episode was a ridiculous waste of taxpayer time and money. By taking up the outlandish claim in such a way, state officials only gave the rest of the nation yet another reason to have a good laugh at Kansas' expense.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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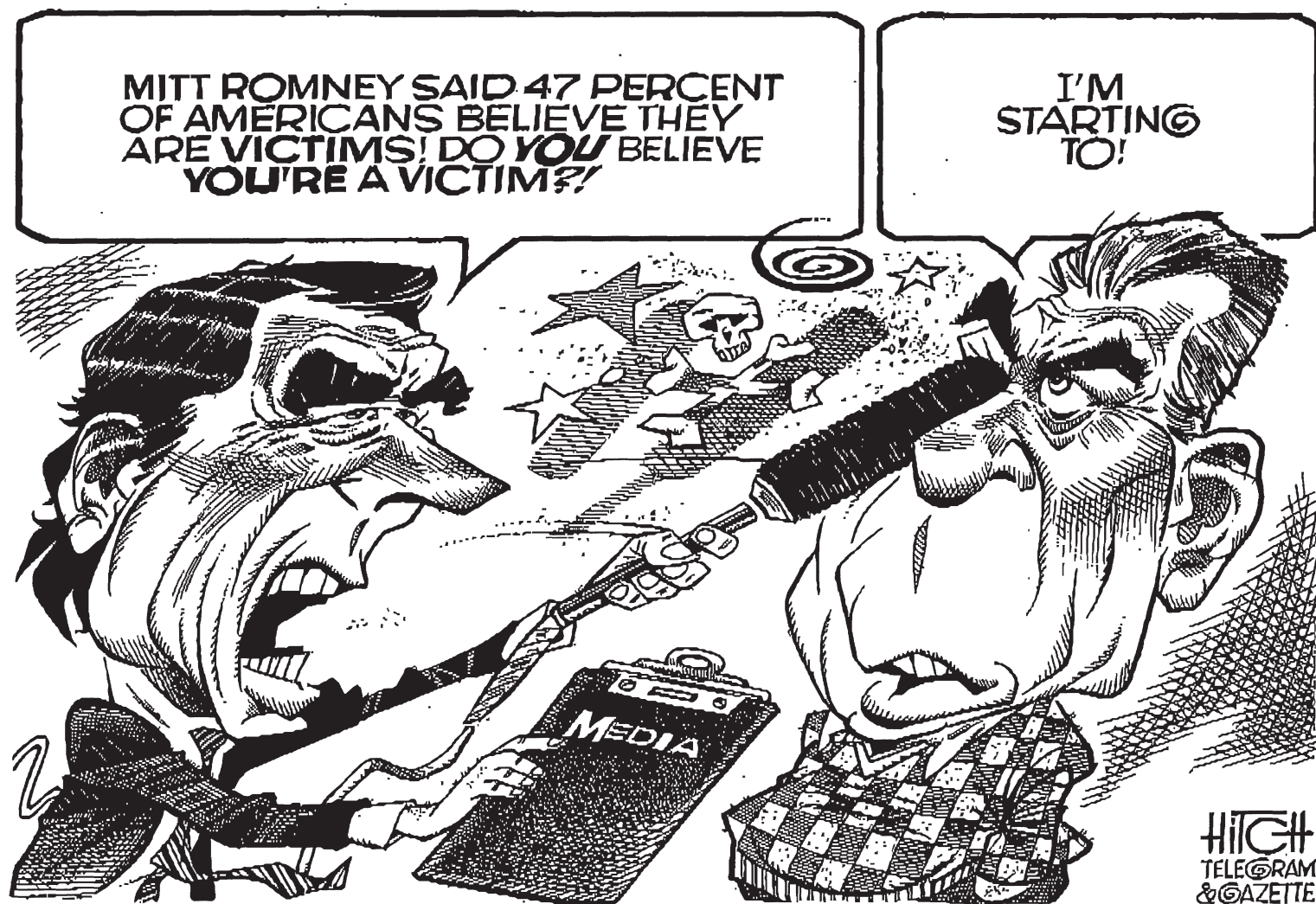
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Romney's statements missed the boat

Much has been made of the Muslim protests – supposedly sparked by an incendiary anti-Islam film – that have erupted in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The most tragic result of this turmoil has been the deaths of four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens, after a deadly assault on a U.S. consulate in Benghazi Sept. 11.

Former governor and presidential hopeful Mitt Romney used the tragedy to try and score cheap political points at the expense of President Barack Obama based on a statement made by the U.S. embassy in Cairo hours before a protest erupted outside the embassy. Having gotten word about this vile film, and given the violence that had occurred previously when the Prophet Muhammad has been depicted in a negative or satirical light, the embassy released a statement condemning the video.

"The Embassy of the United States in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims – as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions," the release said.

It goes on to say that Americans are honoring the patriots and those who serve in the 11th anniversary of Sept. 11 as a fitting response to the enemies of democracy.

"Respect for religion is a cornerstone of democracy," it continued. "We firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others."

Though this statement was released hours



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

before the protesters stormed the embassy compound, Romney interpreted – if you give him the benefit of the doubt and assume he was being genuine – the statement as being sympathetic to the radical protesters.

Romney, probably from the comfort of some air-conditioned office, released a chest-thumping statement that included this line: "It's disgraceful that the Obama administration's first response was not to condemn attacks on our diplomatic missions, but to sympathize with those who waged the attacks."

Obama has claimed his administration didn't authorize the statement to be released and some critics have cast doubt on this claim. But whether the Obama administration knew about the release or not is irrelevant because the statement itself is not an apology, but an affirmation of free speech. It recognizes the universal right of free speech, while condemning those that abuse this right.

What is upsetting, however, is the chilling effect these hypersensitive, bloodthirsty mobs of Islamic fundamentalists – as opposed to the Muslims who have peacefully protested this grotesque film – have had on freedom of

speech in the past. This is far from the first time that radical Islamists have advocated violence to punish someone whom they have deemed guilty of blasphemy toward Islam. As Paul Berman points out in a brilliant article for the *New Republic* titled "The Thought Police," much of the success for the ever-expanding growth of Islamist political groups is owed to a campaign of systematic intimidation aimed at narrowing the limits of permissible thought.

Berman wrote that past examples of this disturbing phenomenon in the so-called Western world include the removal in 2009 of Danish cartoons lampooning Muslim terrorism from a scholarly Yale University Press book about the Danish cartoons; the cancellation in 2009 of a German mystery novel about Muslim honor killings; and the decision by 800 newspapers in the United States to not run a syndicated cartoon by Wiley Miller.

Radical Islamists' actions should not cause Americans or other citizens of democratic countries to engage in acts of voluntary self-censorship as a way to forestall violence in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world. Freedom of speech and thought is the answer, not the problem, to authoritarian forms of intolerance.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate and former Colby Free Press sports editor now living in Ottumwa, Iowa, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing. You can find his blog at www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision.

Remember the Electoral College

A recent ABC News-Washington Post poll disclosed that President Barack Obama leads challenger Mitt Romney by three percentage points in the race for president – well within the margin of error. If the race remains this close, chances are the one with the popular vote may lose to the one with the Electoral College vote, as has happened before.

The Founding Fathers opposed a democracy and hoped descendants would never turn what they created into such. The word democracy is not in any of our original governing documents. Benjamin Franklin referred to democracy as two wolves and a lamb voting on what they would have for lunch – the well-armed lamb contesting the vote.

Realizing that the majority is not always right and could trample the rights of the minority, becoming tyrannical, they created a republic instead. Thus we pledge allegiance to "the republic for which it stands." A lynch mob is a democracy; everyone voting to hang the accused except the one proposed to be hung.

The vote system they created, referred to as the Electoral College, spread the vote geographically, and favored the informed over the less informed. Spreading the vote geographically was not easy, as everyone knew that the popular vote could be won by a few populated states and that rural states or sections would never see the candidate nor would he make an appeal to their interests.

To equalize the population advantage and encourage candidates to make a larger appeal, the college gave population-deprived states at least three votes. Although candidates could still ignore the rural states, the college made it less tempting to do so.

The college system intentionally favors the

Other Opinions

• Harold Pease
Liberty Under Fire

informed. Those less informed tend to vote for leaders who can give them the most from their vote, but the Constitution is designed to give nothing to anyone except the opportunity to maximize their talent in an environment of freedom from excessive government.

The moment government takes from one and gives to another, recipient voters henceforth expect something from their vote and politicians have shown they can be purchased. It becomes a "blood sport" as to which candidate can give the most "goodies" to get elected.

I asked my students how long they studied the propositions on the last California ballot prior to voting. Months? Days? Hours? Seldom was it more than the least amount possible to give them a "gut" feeling. I then ask why they should have the same vote power as one who did spend months studying an issue?

When put this way they better understand the principles of a republic, which rejects a popular vote for the president, having the states make that decision instead. States select a number of voters for the president equal to the number of members of Congress (both House and Senate) they have. These non-governmental individuals, selected by state legislatures presumably for their integrity, experience, success and wisdom, are presumably less emotionally

driven – they have seen it all – and less susceptible to the emergence of a tyrant.

Remember, Adolph Hitler was elected. Presumably his election would have been thwarted had Germany an electoral college to mitigate the emotion or ignorance of the masses. The citizens chosen to be Electoral College voters do so in their separate state capitols usually sometime in late November and that vote is sent to, and read by, the vice president of the U.S. before a combined session of Congress, usually the first week in December. Normally there is little coverage of the real election of the president and it's usually negative.

This process is not without its problems, but when the ill informed have the same vote strength, or higher, as the well-informed, the Electoral College offsets this by placing the weight of government in favor of reason and experience. It remains the best system.

I realize that in a day when we have high-speed communication it is easy to assume that, as a result, we have high-speed knowledge and experience as well. As a college professor, I can emphatically argue otherwise. Nothing replaces reason and experience and these don't come high speed.

Given our history it is likely that the Electoral College will be called upon again to go against the popular vote when the seasoned voters of the college have reason to distrust the peoples' choice. It is their duty. It is decidedly undemocratic but we are not a democracy. Hopefully they won't have to do so this year.

Dr. Harold Pease teaches history and political science at Taft College. To read more of his weekly articles, go to www.LibertyUnderFire.org.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

