

# KeizerOpinion

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## EpiPen is mighty—but only for those who can afford it

By SCOTTA CALLISTER

Controversy continues to rage over the EpiPen, fueled by social media protests over what many see as price gouging or profiteering by Mylan, the company that makes the device.

EpiPens are used to easily inject a dose of epinephrine into someone struck by a severe allergic reaction. According to the Centers for Disease Control, epinephrine is the only recommended first-line treatment for the most serious reaction, anaphylaxis, which can progress to seizures, cardiac distress and death.

Such emergencies are no longer rare. The CDC estimates that 4-6 percent of U.S. children suffer food allergies that can cause serious reactions. In addition to some common foods — such as peanuts, milk, eggs, and shellfish — substances like latex and insect stings are common culprits. Adults, as well as children, are at risk.

The problem is so pervasive today that restaurants, schools, hospitals and other institutions routinely post warnings about the use of nuts and other trigger ingredients in their menus.

Against that backdrop of concern, the price of EpiPens is soaring out of reach of many households. A recent *Washington Post* article put the increase at 450 percent since 2004. And Mylan has a monopoly on the device.

The most recent price hikes spurred howls of protest from consumers online, drawing attention in the media and the halls of Congress. Facing unprecedented scrutiny, Mylan CEO Heather Bresch took a stab at calming the debate earlier this month. However, there was a definite cringe factor in her closing defense that, hey, we're a for-profit business. We can certainly see the profit motive, given that EpiPen sales have been worth \$1 billion a year to Mylan. And given that the devices cost a few bucks to make and now sell for \$600 a two-pack. And given that Bresch's total compensation rose 671 percent

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from 2007 to 2015.

The company's profit motive isn't apt to calm the frustration of parents whose children could die because they no longer can afford to have these devices on hand. For these families, it's not like a choice between expensive Nikes and low-cost Keds; it's about life or death, because there's no low-cost alternative to the EpiPen on the market.

That may be changing. With continuing public outrage, the company produced plan B: It would remedy the situation by offering savings cards — worth up to \$300 on the cost of the two pack — and there's also talk that it will produce a lower-cost "generic" version of its own product.

Those moves haven't blunted all the criticism.

Harvard Medical School professor Aaron Kesselheim told the *Post* that the cards are "a classic public relations move by the pharmaceutical industry" — offering a benefit that will reach only a fraction of the people who need the pens. Other critics say generics only guarantee competitive prices when there are other manufacturers in the market.

Meanwhile, *Huffington Post* writer Andrew Palumbo, himself a parent of a child with food allergies, cast the discounts as a way to distract the public until the hubbub dies down, at which point any special programs could be quietly discontinued. In a post, he demanded that Bresch "cut the price of EpiPens and resign."

We doubt that Bresch will step down to suit one angry parent, or even a deluge of them on social media. But we also believe the issue is far from dead. This week, a Congressional committee launched an investigation.

One thing's certain: If the price remains too high for many families, a toddler or child could die because a simple device is out of their financial reach. The resulting PR storm would make this one look like a gentle summer breeze.

(Scotta Callister is the publisher of the *Malheur Enterprise* in Vale, OR.)



## Does Trump know what it means to preach?

By MICHAEL GERSON

So far, Donald Trump's outreach to African-Americans has consisted of stereotyping them as impoverished, as attending failed schools and as unemployed, and then asking what the hell they have to lose by supporting him.

If this sounds like a typically biased media summary of Trump's views, here he is: "You live in your poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs ... What the hell do you have to lose?"

Most people, it turns out, don't like being referred to as part of an undifferentiated mass of failure and despair, particularly when the assertion is wildly inaccurate (most African-Americans don't live in poverty). And this message is particularly difficult to swallow from a white guy who initially could not bring himself to repudiate David Duke, who has retweeted bogus and racist crime statistics, and whose campaign chairman ran a website that legitimizes white nationalism.

In his (very partial) defense, Trump often seems unaware that he is spouting offensive drivel. In speaking to "the blacks," Trump is Archie Bunker on an outreach tour (the youngsters should look it up). But this is part of the problem for the GOP. Archie Bunker didn't realize he was acting like Archie Bunker.

In many ways, Trump's campaign seems like a rerun of politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. On foreign policy, the Republican nominee sometimes sounds like George McGovern's "Come Home America." In appealing to racial division and blue-collar resentment, Trump echoes George Wallace's "Stand Up for America." In placing "law and order" at the center of his campaign, Trump is channeling

other  
views

Richard Nixon, who played to a silent majority's fear of social disorder.

But political nostalgia can have major policy implications.

For example, when Nixon employed "lock 'em up" rhetoric, only about 100 people were incarcerated per 100,000 of the population (a level that had not substantially changed since the 1920s). Now that figure is more than 700—lower than at the peak, but still the highest rate in the world. Trump is addressing the crime issue near the end of a massive, unprecedented experiment in routine incarceration. And he seems to have no idea what he is doing, or undoing.

Trump is correct that people in poor and minority communities suffer first and most when crime is rampant and violent recidivists go free. Wealthier people can purchase order with gates, guards and moving trucks. But an understandable response to high crime rates has had a series of unintended consequences. Some neighborhoods feel like they are under military occupation. Mass incarceration removes large numbers of men and women from communities, then returns large numbers to communities with even worse problems and prospects—a constant churn of downward mobility. Children are hurt in countless ways when their parents are imprisoned. Young people are too easily sucked into a criminal justice system that too often recruits them into criminal careers.

The elements of our criminal jus-

tice system that are most destructive and criminogenic have become the focus of a remarkable reform movement in recent years. Steven Teles and David Dagan tell the story in their recent book, *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turned Against Mass Incarceration*. Unexpectedly, they argue that the almost complete consolidation of Republican power in certain states has reduced the political motivation for attacking Democrats as soft on crime. Deep red states such as Texas and Georgia have taken the lead in juvenile justice reform that offers alternatives to incarceration without making the streets less safe.

Libertarians such as the Koch brothers are predictably skeptical of denying liberty, as a matter of course, to more than 2 million people at any given time. But they have been joined by religious conservatives who are prone to believe in the possibility of human redemption and influenced by the prison reform work of the late Chuck Colson. House Speaker Paul Ryan would probably fall into both categories. "I think we need to let more people earn a second chance in life," he has argued. "Instead of locking people up, why don't we unlock their potential?"

With his misguided, simplistic and offensive rhetoric, Trump has been blowing up bridges across ideological divides for more than a year now, which may take many Republican presidential campaigns to rebuild. But this is one area—if he and his advisers are smart and willing to reverse course—that he might abandon a slogan from 1968 for a policy more suited to our time.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

## VFW snubbed by state fair

To the Editor:

After more than 16 years, the new management of the Oregon State Fair is not going to allow VFW Post 661 to show its nation's uniforms at the fair.

The VFW was given a spot as a non-profit; now it is pay-to-play. Whatever answer they give it's all political. It is their way of getting

letters

to the truth. All for the money. I'm a veteran and I think all veterans should boycott the fair.

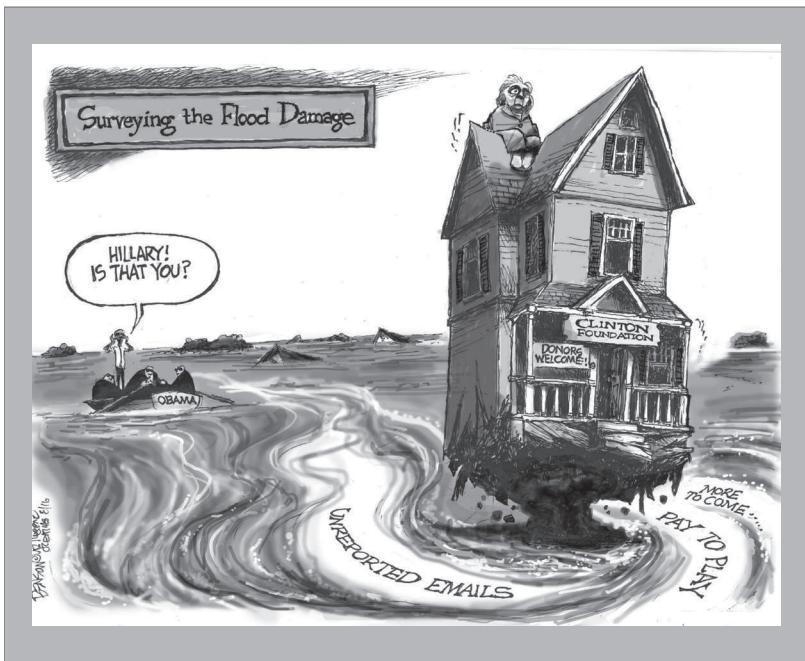
Carlos Grant  
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## Freedom of, and from, religion

Being ignorant does not necessarily mean a person is evil or bad; rather, it simply can mean that the person does not know. He may not wish to know something and he may reject knowledge in order to protect his beliefs. Whatever the case, this consideration with all its permutations and complications has a lot to do with a debate that's continued unsettled in the minds of many among us for well over 200 years. Is the United States of America a Christian nation?

There are a few arguments that, when considered, may serve to refute what turns out to be a Christian nation myth. Yet, even with presentation of relevant information, the myth's legacy endures and has now—as it has for all those years since the adoption of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights in the late 1700s—and remains to influence American politics and public policy.

But let's get directly into this persistent issue with this relevant question: If a Christian nation had been the intent of our nation's founders, would those men of old not have written it at the very front of our Constitution? However, if the seeker of truth will just read the document from start to finish he will find no reference to God, Jesus Christ, or Christianity. If one stays within the document itself, it does not state that our nation is officially a Christian nation.

The Constitution provides no recognition to or acknowledgement of Christianity, including Article VI that bans "religious tests" for public office. The First Amendment bars all laws "respecting an establishment of religion" and protects "the free exercise thereof." Should he who doubts seek refuge in the Declaration of Independence where the reference to

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"the creator" is made, there again he will be denied a Christian reference.

George Washington viewed his god as the "supreme

architect" of the universe. He saw religion as necessary for good and moral behavior but wrote in support of religious liberty. In his 1790 Touro Synagogue letter he wanted Jews to enjoy religious liberty not mere toleration and outlined his preferences in the design of a new nation—not a Christian nation—but one of multi-faith where all would be free to practice as they will.

Founding Fathers James Madison and Thomas Jefferson stood firmly against the co-mingling of state and church. They did not support the establishment of an official Christian nation. They were knowledgeable in world history and knew how the official Christian governments of Europe had deprived their citizens of freedoms. Then, too, they were well acquainted with the religious wars among rival factions of Christianity.

Alexander Hamilton wrote in one of his papers that there were to be no religious duties of the U.S. president. Hamilton explained that the president would differ from the English king in that "the one (president) has no particle of spiritual jurisdiction; the other is the supreme head and governor of the national church" (in England).

Suffice it to say that the United States was not founded on the Christian faith; rather, those who put it together sought a refuge for all faiths where men and women could come

together as brothers and sisters of good will for the common good and establish and sustain a nation. That condition of union has been the case for the past 225 years, its existence, rights and beliefs kept whole by a Constitution and its 27 amendments in the Bill of Rights.

Although caution is my watchword, a final note from this columnist's personal experience, having lived and worked in the Middle East, has to do with Muslims. *Inshallah* is one of their favorite expressions, one they utter about everything all day long. Translated, it means, "If God's willing." They recognize their religious leaders as representing Allah and thereby what they're told by their imams they do because their thinking process is a priori (blind-faith acceptance of dogma without question), that is, that imams speak God's will.

Thousands of them are coming into the U.S. as refugees. Will they try to be Americans and abide by the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights? Or, will they try by every means possible to destroy America as so many of their insidiously hateful brethren seek to achieve overseas? Our founding fathers knew about Islam but it's doubtful they ever thought it'd be present in America and that the Koran would one day be used as a road map to a Muslim nation where a Constitution prevails.

The U.S. will never establish democracies in the Middle East because Muslims do not want the West's freedoms there any more than they want them here. They accept only their religious enslavement as their government: that's their culture and way of life and they totally reject any change.

(Gene H. McIntyre's column appears weekly in the *Keizertimes*.)

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