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Our neighbors yearn to breathe free

Immigrants enrich our national fabric

President Obama's simple eloquence as a speechmaker is nowhere more evident than when he speaks on immigration. In November he could not have been clearer: "We are and always will be a nation of immigrants."

As he gears up for his State of the Union speech, it's likely that topic will be one of many challenges he addresses.

Obama is not suggesting a full amnesty for everyone who has entered the United States illegally. Instead, his plan is that people who can prove they have been here five years, or have children born here, be encouraged to come out of "the shadows" and be provided a smooth path to citizenship. This would involve criminal background checks and eventually have them paying the same taxes as their neighbors.

Fairness is at the heart of Obama's efforts. "Are we a nation that tolerates the hypocrisy of a system where workers who pick our fruit and make our beds never have a chance to get right with the law?"

"Or are we a nation that gives them a chance to make amends, take responsibility, and give their kids a better future?"

Regrettably, his comments come against a background of voices being raised against his very reasonable efforts to reform what he and many others have labeled our "broken" system of immigration.

It is sickening to see Republican extremists in Congress bristle in opposition when they have demanded action for so long without getting anything accomplished.

More than 10 million people live in America illegally. Obama suggests a way to embrace them.

"Mass amnesty would be unfair. Mass deportation would be both impossible and contrary to our character."

At the heart of the debate is the work world. Undocumented workers help keep America's economy going.

Obama noted the unfairness that business owners who offer good wages and benefits encounter when their competitors exploit undocumented immigrants by paying them far less.

"All of us take offense to anyone who reaps the rewards of living in America without taking on the responsibilities of living in America," he said. "And undocumented

immigrants, who desperately want to embrace those responsibilities, see little option but to remain in the shadows, or risk their families being torn apart."

The president believes reform efforts must combine expediency, efficiency and compassion. "Tracking down, rounding up and deporting millions of people isn't realistic. Anyone who suggests otherwise isn't being straight with you. It's also not who we are as Americans."

His multiple-part strategy involves:

- Accepting the reality that the U.S. has more than 10 million undocumented residents who are contributing to several sectors of the economy and should not be persecuted;

- Reshaping an easier path for immigrants who entered illegally to seek legal status and helping them adjust to living in the United States;

- Acknowledging that our southern border with Mexico is a dangerous zone that needs efficient policing.

A key element woven into these latest reforms is compassion for families. Birthright citizenship is more than a tradition in the United States — it is the law. All children born in the United States are American citizens. Separating them from their parents, who may be undocumented, is unjust and inhumane.

It is time for the moderates in Congress to speak up. We are tired of the shrill voices playing the race card or the fear card. Immigrants enrich our melting pot society.

Of course if we need historical guidance on the topic there's a certain beautiful statue in New York Harbor. A plaque underneath the lady with the torch reads:

"Give me your tired, your poor,

"Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

"The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

"Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

"I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Poet Emma Lazarus sure had a way with words.

Guest column

Free help available when signing up for health care

We at The Insurance Store NW are finding that many people in Clatsop County do not understand the requirements, deadlines, and penalties of the Affordable Care Act.

And of those who do understand, there are many who are unsure of what to do or where to turn for help.

Help with enrollment can come from an assister or agent. The advantages of going through an agent are:

Working with a licensed agent is free ... no cost to you

They are licensed by the State of Oregon

They are able to discuss deductibles, co-pays, and prescription benefits on all health plans

They are experienced and knowledgeable about insurance

The deadline to enroll in a major medical health plan is Feb. 15. After that date you will have to wait until November to enroll and you will accrue penalties. There are a few excep-

The deadline to enroll in a major medical health plan is Feb. 15.

tions which would enable you to enroll after February. To do so you will have to have a qualifying life event. A few examples of a qualifying event are marriage/divorce, birth of a child or adoption, move, release from incarceration, change of income, and loss of coverage, loss of job or a new job.

The penalties for having no coverage in 2015 are \$325 per person (\$162.50 per child under 18) or 2 percent of your yearly income, whichever is greater, up to a maximum of \$975 per family. The penalty increases every year. In 2016, it will be 2.5 percent of income or \$695 per person. After that it will be adjusted for inflation. You will pay the fee on the federal income tax return you file

for the year you don't have coverage.

There are many factors that help determine your eligibility for assistance in paying for your insurance premium including household size, tax filing status, and income. If you make less than \$16,105 per year for a household of one you may qualify for the Oregon Health Plan. A family of four with an income of \$32,913 or less may qualify for the Oregon Health Plan. With higher income you may still qualify to receive monthly tax credits to help pay for your monthly insurance premiums. Some may also qualify for additional cost-sharing, which, with a qualified plan, will reduce the deductibles and co-pays significantly.

Local insurance agents are:

- Jamay Larson, 503-861-2672, Warrenton/Astoria
- Phil Morrill, 503-861-2672, Warrenton/Astoria
- Steve Putman, 503-738-7181, Seaside
- Karen Halverson, 360-244-3561, Washington

Does Obama even see threat of terror?

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — On Sunday, at the great Paris rally, the whole world was Charlie.

By Tuesday, the veneer of solidarity was exposed as tissue thin.



Charles Krauthammer

It began dissolving as soon as the real, remaining Charlie Hebdo put out its post-massacre issue featuring a Muhammad cover that, as *The New York Times* put it, "reignited the debate pitting free speech against religious sensitivities."

Again? Already? Had not 4 million marchers and 44 foreign leaders just turned out on the streets of France to declare "No" to intimidation, and pledging solidarity, indeed identification with ("Je suis Charlie"), a satirical weekly specializing in the most outrageous and often tasteless portrayals of Muhammad? And yet, within 48 hours, the new Charlie Hebdo issue featuring the image of Muhammad — albeit a sorrowful, indeed sympathetic Muhammad — sparked new protests, denunciations and threats of violence, which in turn evinced another round of doubt and self-flagellation in the West about the propriety and limits of free expression. Hopeless.

As for President Obama, he never was Charlie, not even for those 48 hours. From the day of the massacre, he has been practically invisible. At the interstices of various political rallies, he issued bits of muted, mealy-mouthed boilerplate. Followed by the now-famous absence of any U.S. representative of any stature at the Paris rally, an abdication of moral and political leadership for which the White House has already admitted error.

But this was no mere error of judgment or optics or, most absurdly, of communications in which we are supposed to believe that the president was not informed by staff about the magnitude, both actual and symbolic, of the demonstration he ignored. (He needed to be told?)

On the contrary, the no-show, following the near silence, precisely reflected the president's profound ambivalence about the very idea of the war on terror. Obama began his administration by purging the phrase from the lexicon of official Washington. He has ever since shuttled between saying that (a) the war must end because of the damage "keeping America on a perpetual wartime footing" was doing to us, or (b) the war has already ended, as he suggested repeatedly during the 2012



AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi

Iranian demonstrators chant slogans during a rally against the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo's latest publication of a cartoon depicting the Prophet Muhammad, which some Muslims deem an insult to Islam, in front of the French Embassy, Tehran, Iran, Monday.

campaign, with bin Laden dead and al-Qaeda "on the run."

Hence his call in a major address at the National Defense University to "refine and ultimately repeal" Congress' 2001 Authorization of the Use of Military Force, the very legal basis for the war on terror. Hence his accelerating release of Gitmo inmates, fully knowing that about 30 percent will return to the battlefield. (Five more releases were announced Wednesday.) Which is why, since, oh, the Neolithic era, POWs tend to be released after a war is over.

Paris shows that this war is not.

On the contrary. As it rages, it is entering an ominous third phase.

The first, circa 9/11, involved sending Middle Eastern terrorists abroad to attack the infidel West.

Then came the lone wolf — local individuals inspired by foreign jihadists launching one-off attacks, as seen most recently in Québec, Ottawa and Sydney.

Paris marks Phase 3: coordinated commando strikes by homegrown native-speaking Islamists activated and instructed from abroad. (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has claimed responsibility for the Charlie Hebdo killings, while the kosher-grocery shooter proclaimed allegiance to the Islamic State.) They develop and flourish in Europe's no-

go zones where Sharia reigns and legitimate state authorities dare not tread.

To call them lone wolves, as did our hapless attorney general, is to define jihadism down. It makes them the equivalent of the pitiable, mentally unstable Sydney hostage taker.

The Paris killers were well-trained, thoroughly radicalized, clear-eyed jihadist warriors. They cannot be dismissed as lone loons. Worse, they represent a growing generation of alienated European Muslims whose sheer number is approaching critical mass.

The war on terror 2015 is at a new phase with a new geography. At the core are parallel would-be caliphates: in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State; in central Africa, now spilling out of Nigeria into Cameroon, a near-sovereign Boko Haram; in the badlands of Yemen, AQAP,

the most dangerous of all al-Qaeda affiliates. And beyond lie not just a cast of minicaliphates embedded in the most ungovernable parts of the Third World from Libya to Somalia to the borderlands of Pakistan, but an archipelago of no-go Islamist islands embedded in the heart of Europe.

This is serious. In both size and reach it is growing. Our president will not say it. Fine. But does he even see it?

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Where to write

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