

Voices & Commentary

Read more Register columnists and reader blogs at DesMoinesRegister.com/opinion.

Paula Deen will bounce back from her slur exile

After all, she's a liberal and supporter of Obama

Hurrying to the sporting goods section of the big store, mere steps from the rods, reels and worms I spot the image of a grinning blonde.

It's that Paula Deen woman, and her picture is all over the pots and pans and other kitchen-related stuff. Hmm. I get to the cash register with my fishing gear, and there she is on the cover of a magazine, the headline reading, "Paula Belly Melting Swaps."

I don't know what that means, but I'm sure that the people who run the store hadn't been informed Ms. Deen is a vicious racist. But that was only Tuesday. By Thursday, the big store announced it was cutting its business ties to Deen. Same with the Food Network, Smithfield Foods and almost everybody else who uses Deen's name to make money.

This is because the authorities have determined that Deen, the queen of whipped cream and butterscotch puddin', is done. Finished. Disgraced.



JOHN CARLSON

johncarlson1111@live.com

Carlson is a retired Register columnist and writes twice a month for the Sunday Register.

The background: Deen owns some companies, including a few restaurants. A restaurant employee alleges the workplace is hostile for gays and blacks. She sued. Deen answered questions in a deposition.

Asked by the plaintiff's lawyers if she ever uses the "N-word," Deen said no.

Asked if she'd ever used the "N-word" in her 66 years of life she said, "Of course," explaining it was three decades ago after she had a gun put to her head during a robbery. She says she used the word while describing the incident to her husband.

That was it. Out \$10 million, a possible financial death penalty and humiliation for life. Deen begged for forgiveness, cried and begged some more. She went to the Rev. Jesse Jackson for absolution. He says she might get redemption. The man who famously referred to New York as "Hymietown" will get back to her.

I think she'll be fine. It seems Deen is a liberal, in fact a supporter of President Obama, and liberals are very forgiving of each other, even when the N-word is spoken by one of their own.

The late Robert Byrd, a West Virginia Democrat who served as his party's leader in the Senate and president pro-tempore of the body, making him third in the line of succession to the presidency, was once a big shot in the Ku Klux Klan.

Liberal apologists said all that Klan stuff was while Byrd was young and foolish, and he'd gotten his mind right over the years. When he used the N-word three times on a Sunday news program in 2001— at the young and foolish age of 83—he said, oops, sorry. Didn't mean to offend. No problem.

For others, it's a problem. Want to bring a group of chatty people dead silent? Ask the ques-



Businesses have canceled some of their deals with celebrity chef Paula Deen since disclosures about her use of racial slurs in the past. ASSOCIATED PRESS

tion, "Have any of you ever used the N-word?" You'll be hated for embarrassing everybody, especially if those being asked are of a certain age.

A good friend explained it this way when I asked him.

"It would not be too far wrong to say there are two kinds of 60-year-old Americans: Those who admit they used the term 'n-----' and those who lie about whether they used the term 'n-----'."

Not being a liar, and past the age of 60, he admitted saying the word as a youngster.

I asked the question to six people, individually, vowing to never reveal the answers in a way that would identify them.

All are over 50 years old, educated, sophisticated, respectable and successful. Four said, well, yeah, duh, they'd said it when they were young and most people they knew back then did the same. Two were from small Iowa towns, one was from a major Midwestern city, one from a medium-sized city in Iowa. All were men.

The other two, both women from small Iowa towns, said no, they couldn't recall ever saying it.

Me?

Yes, I've said the vile word. I grew up a long time ago in a small town with no minorities, and racial slurs were uttered by people who probably never gave a thought to the hate the words conveyed. I don't remember any specific context. I just know it was 50 years ago and haven't done it since.

To some that makes me forever a bigot. I figure that's their problem, not mine.

Deen? She should write a \$1 million check to a liberal political organization. She'll be back on TV quicker than you can whip up a chocolate caramel cheesecake.

Food Prize goes too far in honoring Monsanto

Sometimes, even very smart people don't seem to connect the dots to see the bigger picture. But there are also times when that failure is deliberate. Which of those is responsible for the decision to award the World Food Prize to a Monsanto official?

The company's chief technology officer is one of three biotechnology pioneers to be chosen for this year's prize, the signature Iowa honor that is awarded annually in recognition of the father of the Green Revolution. The prize recognizes people who have helped feed the world's hungry, yet many would argue Monsanto has, by its actions, jeopardized health, thwarted democracy and forced some farmers themselves into hunger.

The very fact that Monsanto money has flowed to the World Food Prize Foundation should make one if its own ineligible for the prize. But that's the least of why the selection is inappropriate.

Monsanto owns 90 percent of the world's biotech seeds, and it needs neither the accolades nor a share in the \$250,000 prize money. Its iron-fisted policies and aggressive lawsuits for patent infringement have hurt farmers in the United States and abroad while helping to pay for its research.

While the World Food Prize claims to promote a nutritious and sustainable food supply, biotech seeds are the antithesis of sustainability. They have to be purchased every year and cannot be saved and reused, as farmers have done for generations. Health and environmental concerns have caused several European and African countries to ban such seeds.

None of this is a secret. Just do an online search of Monsanto and see what comes up.

Let's start with the film "The World According to Monsanto," which opens with a farmer touting Roundup Ready soybeans in Iowa. The film goes on to describe how Monsanto got permission to bury PCBs in Anniston, Ala., causing decades of pollution, resulting in serious illness and deaths. Internal files show the company knew of the health hazards but covered them up. It paid \$390 million to settle a lawsuit.

It helps to have friends in high places, though. Check out the so-called "Monsanto Protection Act" that was slipped anonymously into a spending bill that averted a government shutdown. The "farmer assurance provision" limits judges' ability to stop Monsanto from selling GMO seeds or farmers from growing or harvesting those crops even if courts find evidence of potential health risks. Calling the act "an outrageous example of a special interest loophole," Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., plans to introduce an amendment to the farm bill overturning those protections.

Even as organic farmers in the United States find their crops threatened by cross pollination from GMO seeds, which compromises their ability to sell them, Monsanto sues farmers to whom that happens for using its seeds without paying. In one case, it sued an Indiana farmer all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in the company's favor, finding the farmer had no permission to replant a third generation of seeds that included some of Monsanto's.

Monsanto doesn't need the World Food Prize. It already has the U.S. government to do its bidding. Our State Department and embassies have actively promoted the company's seeds and tried to squelch criticism of them, facilitating negotiations between Monsanto and foreign governments over patents and intellectual property issues.

That happened even after Monsanto paid \$1.5 million in fines over charges of bribing an Indonesian official and violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in 2005. This came to light in nearly 1,000 diplomatic cables from 2005 to 2009 released by Wikileaks and pub-



REKHA BASU

rbasu@dmreg.com

Congress cuts itself out of the action

It's been a momentous week in terms of social policy in the United States. It's notable that the flurry of actions on divisive issues — abortion, affirmative action, voting discrimination and gay marriage — happened at the state level and the Supreme Court, not Congress.

The divided U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key part of the Voting Rights Act, saying it was fatally outdated. It also gutted the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA, saying in effect that a marriage license issued to a same-sex couple is the

ON POLITICS



KATHIE OBRADOVICH

kobradov@dmreg.com

courts and the states — not by Congress.

It's significant that both the DOMA and voting rights rulings deferred to states' rights at the

Santorum didn't complain about the ruling on the Voting Rights Act, which was applauded by many conservatives as an affirmation of state's rights.

That blind spot aside, however, the Supreme Court's role as a catalyst for major change is magnified because it is operating in a vacuum. Congress has taken itself off the board with its unwillingness, or inability, to simply take a vote and let the majority rule.

Take the immigration debate. The Senate has delivered a bill. It needs work, but it moves toward

It's that Paula Deen woman, and her picture is all over the pots and pans and other kitchen-related stuff. Hmm. I get to the cash register with my fishing gear, and there she is on the cover of a magazine, the headline reading, "Paula Belly Melting Swaps."

I don't know what that means, but I'm sure that the people who run the store hadn't been informed Ms. Deen is a vicious racist. But that was only Tuesday. By Thursday, the big store announced it was cutting its business ties to Deen. Same with the Food Network, Smithfield Foods and almost everybody else who uses Deen's name to make money.

This is because the authorities have determined that Deen, the queen of whipped cream and butterscotch puddin', is done. Finished. Disgraced.



JOHN CARLSON

johncarlson1111@live.com

Carlson is a retired Register columnist and writes twice a month for the Sunday Register.

The background: Deen owns some companies, including a few restaurants. A restaurant employee alleges the workplace is hostile for gays and blacks. She sued. Deen answered questions in a deposition.

Asked by the plaintiff's lawyers if she ever uses the "N-word," Deen said no.

Asked if she'd ever used the "N-word" in her 66 years of life she said, "Of course," explaining it was three decades ago after she had a gun put to her head during a robbery. She says she used the word while describing the incident to her husband.

That was it. Out \$10 million, a possible financial death penalty and humiliation for life. Deen begged for forgiveness, cried and begged some more. She went to the Rev. Jesse Jackson for absolution. He says she might get redemption. The man who famously referred to New York as "Hymietown" will get back to her.

I think she'll be fine. It seems Deen is a liberal, in fact a supporter of President Obama, and liberals are very forgiving of each other, even when the N-word is spoken by one of their own.

The late Robert Byrd, a West Virginia Democrat who served as his party's leader in the Senate and president pro-tempore of the body, making him third in the line of succession to the presidency, was once a big shot in the Ku Klux Klan.

Liberal apologists said all that Klan stuff was while Byrd was young and foolish, and he'd gotten his mind right over the years. When he used the N-word three times on a Sunday news program in 2001—at the young and foolish age of 83—he said, oops, sorry. Didn't mean to offend. No problem.

For others, it's a problem. Want to bring a group of chatty people dead silent? Ask the ques-



Businesses have canceled some of their deals with celebrity chef Paula Deen since disclosures about her use of racial slurs in the past. ASSOCIATED PRESS

tion, "Have any of you ever used the N-word?"

You'll be hated for embarrassing everybody, especially if those being asked are of a certain age.

A good friend explained it this way when I asked him.

"It would not be too far wrong to say there are two kinds of 60-year-old Americans: Those who admit they used the term 'n-----' and those who lie about whether they used the term 'n-----'."

Not being a liar, and past the age of 60, he admitted saying the word as a youngster.

I asked the question to six people, individually, vowing to never reveal the answers in a way that would identify them.

All are over 50 years old, educated, sophisticated, respectable and successful. Four said, well, yeah, duh, they'd said it when they were young and most people they knew back then did the same. Two were from small Iowa towns, one was from a major Midwestern city, one from a medium-sized city in Iowa. All were men.

The other two, both women from small Iowa towns, said no, they couldn't recall ever saying it.

Me?

Yes, I've said the vile word. I grew up a long time ago in a small town with no minorities, and racial slurs were uttered by people who probably never gave a thought to the hate the words conveyed. I don't remember any specific context. I just know it was 50 years ago and haven't done it since.

To some that makes me forever a bigot. I figure that's their problem, not mine.

Deen? She should write a \$1 million check to a liberal political organization. She'll be back on TV quicker than you can whip up a chocolate caramel cheesecake.

one of three biotechnology pioneers to be chosen for this year's prize, the signature Iowa honor that is awarded annually in recognition of the father of the Green Revolution. The prize recognizes people who have helped feed the world's hungry, yet many would argue Monsanto has, by its actions, jeopardized health, thwarted democracy and forced some farmers themselves into hunger.



REKHA BASU

rbasu@dmreg.com

The very fact that Monsanto money has flowed to the World Food Prize Foundation should make one if its own ineligible for the prize. But that's the least of why the selection is inappropriate.

Monsanto owns 90 percent of the world's biotech seeds, and it needs neither the accolades nor a share in the \$250,000 prize money. Its iron-fisted policies and aggressive lawsuits for patent infringement have hurt farmers in the United States and abroad while helping to pay for its research.

While the World Food Prize claims to promote a nutritious and sustainable food supply, biotech seeds are the antithesis of sustainability. They have to be purchased every year and cannot be saved and reused, as farmers have done for generations. Health and environmental concerns have caused several European and African countries to ban such seeds.

None of this is a secret. Just do an online search of Monsanto and see what comes up.

Let's start with the film "The World According to Monsanto," which opens with a farmer touting Roundup Ready soybeans in Iowa. The film goes on to describe how Monsanto got permission to bury PCBs in Anniston, Ala., causing decades of pollution, resulting in serious illness and deaths. Internal files show the company knew of the health hazards but covered them up. It paid \$390 million to settle a lawsuit.

It helps to have friends in high places, though. Check out the so-called "Monsanto Protection Act" that was slipped anonymously into a spending bill that averted a government shutdown. The "farmer assurance provision" limits judges' ability to stop Monsanto from selling GMO seeds or farmers from growing or harvesting those crops even if courts find evidence of potential health risks. Calling the act "an outrageous example of a special interest loophole," Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., plans to introduce an amendment to the farm bill overturning those protections.

Even as organic farmers in the United States find their crops threatened by cross-pollination from GMO seeds, which compromises their ability to sell them, Monsanto sues farmers to whom that happens for using its seeds without paying. In one case, it sued an Indiana farmer all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in the company's favor, finding the farmer had no permission to replant a third generation of seeds that included some of Monsanto's.

Monsanto doesn't need the World Food Prize. It already has the U.S. government to do its bidding. Our State Department and embassies have actively promoted the company's seeds and tried to squelch criticism of them, facilitating negotiations between Monsanto and foreign governments over patents and intellectual property issues.

That happened even after Monsanto paid \$1.5 million in fines over charges of bribing an Indonesian official and violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in 2005. This came to light in nearly 1,000 diplomatic cables from 2005 to 2009 released by Wikileaks and publicized by the nonprofit consumer protection group Food & Water Watch. One 2009 cable from the American embassy in Spain sought "high-level U.S. government intervention" at the "urgent request" of Monsanto to combat biotech crop opponents there.

Hesitate to write all of this because I'm fond of Kenneth Quinn, the World Food Prize Foundation president and former U.S. ambassador to Cambodia. He has a big heart and a passion for what he does.

But while the World Food Prize is said to honor people helping to feed the world's hungry, in India, a rash of farmer suicides has resulted from their inability to feed even their own families thanks in part to GMOs. These farmers can't afford costly Monsanto seeds or chemical pesticides and fertilizers, so they are driven to moneylenders charging exorbitant interest rates to compete with large farmers who can. Saddled with debt, some drink those poisonous chemicals to die.

These facts, the company's unscrupulous behavior and the government's coddling of it all leave me wondering why Monsanto deserves this prestigious prize — which Iowa taxpayer dollars help to support — and what's expected in return.

Congress cuts itself out of the action

It's been a momentous week in terms of social policy in the United States. It's notable that the flurry of actions on divisive issues — abortion, affirmative action, voting discrimination and gay marriage — happened at the state level and the Supreme Court, not Congress.

The divided U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key part of the Voting Rights Act, saying it was fatally outdated. It also gutted the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA, saying in effect that a marriage license issued to a same-sex couple is the same as any other, as far as the federal government is concerned. California gay couples, in a narrow decision over the state's Proposition 8, will be able to wed again.

Meanwhile, in Texas, a passionate battle over abortion restrictions is headed to round two after legislators failed to take an official vote before the deadline of a special session. If Republicans manage to pass the legislation, the law will almost certainly be headed to court for review.

Time magazine's David Von Drehle tied the Supreme Court cases together: "The thread running through all these cases is the possibility of change in American society." He points to rulings that reflect a changing societal view of gay marriage and changed circumstances for black voters in the South.

There's another, coarser thread running through these issues: The decisions that deal with major societal change are being made by

ON POLITICS



KATHIE OBRADOVICH

kobradov@dmreg.com

courts and the states — not by Congress.

It's significant that both the DOMA and voting rights rulings deferred to states' rights at the expense of the federal government. It's now up to states, not the feds, to decide what constitutes a legal marriage. It's now the responsibility of all states to protect the rights of racial minorities to vote, even states whose past discrimination earned them federal scrutiny.

Some argue the courts are overstepping their authority. We've heard that theme repeatedly in Iowa, and that's likely to continue.

In fact, former presidential candidate Rick Santorum quickly chalked up the DOMA ruling to judicial activism.

In a statement after the ruling, he said, "The DOMA decision is another case of the high court overstepping its role, just as it did with Roe v. Wade. Further, the Proposition 8 ruling refuses to affirm the process envisioned by our Founders for the American people to express its will. These great moral issues of our time should be left to the democratic process, not to five activist judges."

Santorum didn't complain about the ruling on the Voting Rights Act, which was applauded by many conservatives as an affirmation of state's rights.

That blind spot aside, however, the Supreme Court's role as a catalyst for major change is magnified because it is operating in a vacuum. Congress has taken itself off the board with its unwillingness, or inability, to simply take a vote and let the majority rule.

Take the immigration debate. The Senate has delivered a bill. It needs work, but it moves toward addressing an intolerable status quo. House Republican leaders say it's dead on arrival.

Congress had opportunities to fix the Voting Rights Act as recently as its reauthorization in 2006, but it punted. Instead, it continued to impose regulation on states without regard to the change in minority status since the 1960s. The problem now is that the only recourse for would-be voters if states decide to discriminate is — you guessed it — the courts.

The courts have always been the arbiter when government encroaches on civil liberties. It's the courts' job to protect the rights of the minority. It's the legislative branch's job to enact the will of the majority. But more often than not these days, leaders in Congress have trouble even allowing the majority to say yes or no.

We should be less worried about activism from judges and far more worried about Congress' lack of anything resembling action.