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OPINION

# Time for an amicable divorce, America?

**Thomas L. Knapp**

Every four years, the United States elects a new president. And every four years, the outcome makes some Americans so unhappy that talk of secession — never completely absent from our ongoing political discussion — gets a big bump in the “trending topics” lists. 2016 seems to be shaping up as secession’s best year since 1860.

No wonder: The polarization is pretty clear. The two candidates appear to have finished within about 1% of one another in the national popular vote. Geographically, the west

coast and the eastern seaboard from Maine south to Virginia chose Hillary Clinton; the rest of the country, except for four states (Minnesota, Illinois, Colorado and New Mexico) went for Donald Trump.

Maybe it’s time to try this secession thing again, minus the four years of war and the million dead. Activists in California and Oregon certainly think so — they’re already cranking up ballot initiatives to take their states out of the union.

And why not? America never has really been one country in a cultural sense. Not in 1776, not in 1860, not today.

Our smallest state (Rhode Island), if independent, would be larger than at least 30 countries, more than 750 times the size of the smallest country with a coastline (Monaco) and about 3,000

times the size of the smallest independent state in the world (Vatican City). Our least populous state (Wyoming), if independent, would have more citizens than Iceland, which has governed itself without catastrophe since 1944.

Is there any particular reason why the people of Los Angeles, and the people of Dallas, and the people of Miami, and the people of New York MUST be directly governed by the same executive, legislative and judicial organizations? I can’t think of one.

Yes, I know it’s scary. Who gets the kids? Who gets the house? Who gets navigational rights on the Mississippi? But just because it’s scary doesn’t mean it’s doable. Or even that it has to be particularly hard.

Put a timeline on it. Give the states time to decide on options for going it alone or with others. Give people who

don’t want to go with their current states time to move without passports (if we’re too dumb to set up a Schengen-style open borders scenario, which we should).

Create commissions to figure out how to divvy up the tanks and the nukes (which we’ll all need fewer of, since as part of the process we will presumably stop trying to be the world’s policeman).

Complicated? Sure. Impossible? Oh, please — the Soviet Union managed to dissolve without descending into all-out civil war. Is it utopian or naive to think maybe we could carry out the same process at least as well?

One evil empire down, one to go. Thomas L. Knapp is a Florida resident and director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism. Follow him on Twitter @thomasknapp.



## Give Trump a chance to be president

**James S. Robbins**

USA TODAY GUEST COLUMN

Only a week after Donald Trump’s election victory, the same pundits who said he could never win are making it sound like his presidency has already failed. They claim his lack of major Cabinet level appointments thus far show he is bogged down. They say his pledge to “drain the swamp” in Washington is compromised because he is surrounded by “swamp creatures.” Even when Trump steps out for a private dinner with his family, the press hawks about a “lack of transparency.”

President-elect Trump is being held to an impossibly high standard, considering he won’t even take office for 10 weeks. Michael Gerson griped in The Washington Post that Trump has not produced “a set of developed proposals” for his priorities, or indicated a “favored bill or detailed plan” for rebuilding the nation’s infrastructure, or told Congress how he wants to replace Obamacare. “Many Republican members of Congress are frankly confused,” Gerson wrote.

Confused, really? Because a man who won’t move into the White House until mid-January hasn’t submitted a comprehensive agenda to a new Congress that itself hasn’t convened? It would be more confusing if he had.

Contrast Trump’s transition to President-elect Bill Clinton’s. Before his inauguration, Clinton managed to flip-flop on his China policy, water down his promised middle-class tax cut, and abandon his pledge to admit Haitian refugees. Commerce Secretary-designate Ron Brown became embroiled in a scandal about corporations offering to pay for his inaugural party, and attorney general nominee Zoe Lister-Jones fell afoul of the Nannygate controversy and was thrown under the bus. As The New York Times said a few days before the inauguration, “The Clinton administration looks ready to hit the ground stumbling.”

Some claim that the Trump transition is dragging its feet. Politico stated that “Trump was caught flat-footed by the transition,” offering as evidence that “his transition team has been slow to engage with the outgoing administration.” But Trump is sprinting down the track compared with Ronald Reagan’s laid-back transition.

The Gipper’s first move was to take a short vacation at his ranch in California, where transition head Ed Meese said the president-elect “hasn’t even looked at a list” of prospective appointees. Donald Trump met with President Obama a mere two days after the election, while Reagan and President Carter waited until Nov. 20 to sit down together at the White House. A week after that, Reagan had still not reached out to his prospective Cabinet officials. Asked by a reporter outside a barber shop in Beverly Hills whether he had called any potential nominees, the Gipper simply said, “Nope.”

Maybe Trump’s unprecedented rise to the presidency has trained reporters to expect more from him than they did from his predecessors. But they are a little too demanding under the circumstances. People in a hurry to declare Trump’s presidency failed should at least have the courtesy to first let it begin. They should let Trump be Trump and see what happens. It will take more than a week for America to make the transition to being great again.

James S. Robbins, an expert on national security, foreign affairs and the military, is an author and a member of USA TODAY’s Board of Contributors.

**Lt. Col. Dennis Freytes**

## Seismic surveys can improve our lives

As an American veteran who has served my country for many years and in many roles, I know there is an undisputable connection between energy security and national security. And, I feel strongly that we should be doing everything in our power to reduce our reliance on energy resources from foreign countries — many of which are unfriendly to the United States.

For more than 25 years, we have been sending our servicemen and servicewomen to the Middle East to engage in combat operations and security missions (costing us dearly in American lives) partly due to the free world’s dependence on the energy resources located there. It troubles me that we are putting lives at stake to secure this area because of our reliance on foreign oil and natural gas when we have untapped energy resources in our subseas USA.

Earlier this week in Fort Walton Beach, the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) held a hearing on its draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Gulf of Mexico Geological and Geophysical Surveys. This was the only hearing they held in Florida and I felt compelled to take part in it because of the impacts it could ultimately have on our nation’s energy policy.

Included in this draft environmental impact statement are restrictions that would reduce the number of seismic surveys performed in the Gulf of Mexico. Seismic surveys are almost like an ultrasound or MRI of the Earth’s crust. They use sound waves to help scientists map the ocean floor and geology beneath it. Compressed air released into the water creates sound waves that bounce off rock layers beneath the surface to help create 3D maps of what energy resources lie below the ocean floor.

Seismic surveys are a proven, environmentally sound technology. They are needed in the Gulf of Mexico to gather updated and more accurate information. The information we are working off of now is more than 30 years old and wasn’t generated using the latest technology.

While seismic surveys are a necessary prelude to the development of offshore oil reserves, they’re not a commitment to development. They’re simply a means of gaining the information we need to make informed decisions and save lives. Utilizing more advanced technology to better understand our options is only a first step, but it’s an important first step we must take.

The federal government is currently seeking feedback on seismic surveying. I urge other veterans and all Floridians to get involved by voicing your support for this technology that will enable us to see exactly what resources might be available to our country. Becoming energy independent through cutting-edge, safe technology will strengthen our country and ensure a better quality of life for the good of all our families, communities and humanity.

Lt. Col. Dennis Freytes, United States Army (Ret.), is co-chair of Florida Vets4Energy, a group of volunteer veterans who continue to serve America as advocates for energy policies to sustain our national security.

## Medicare enrollment deadline looming

**Dr. Albert Tzeel**

If you have Medicare but haven’t selected a 2017 Medicare Advantage or Prescription Drug Plan, the Dec. 7 annual enrollment deadline is quickly approaching. Here are five simple steps to help you make the best decision:

Review your current Medicare health plan. Analyze how much you’ve spent on health care during the past year, including hospital expenses, prescriptions and doctor bills. This helps you benchmark your 2017 health care expenses and determine if your current Medicare plan still meets your needs.

Select the type of plan that best fits your needs. Options include: Original Medicare, which provides basic coverage for medical expenses, prescriptions and doctor bills. This helps you benchmark your 2017 health care expenses and determine if your current Medicare plan still meets your needs.

under Original Medicare through a private insurer, and may include extra benefits, such as dental, hearing and vision coverage, a nurse advice line and fitness program, as well as prescription drug coverage. Medicare Advantage plans are steadily gaining popularity, with the number of enrollees more than tripling since 2004 to 17.7 million or nearly a third of Medicare beneficiaries, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. This is Medicare Part C.

Medicare Prescription Drug Plans, which offer coverage for prescription medications, and can be added to Original Medicare, a Medicare Supplement (Medigap) plan or some Medicare Advantage Plans that do not include prescription drug coverage. This is Medicare Part D.

Medicare Supplement Plans, which pay some costs not paid by Original Medicare, like deductibles and coinsurance. Enrollment in a Medicare Supplement plan is not limited to the Medicare Annual Enrollment Period and these plans do not include prescription drug coverage.

Comparison Shop. Once you choose the type of Medicare plan that best fits your needs, research the costs, benefits and network of doctors and hospitals associated with each plan. Check to see if your hospital and

doctors are included. Consider the “extras” included. Some Medicare Advantage plans include extra benefits, such as a fitness program and exercise classes specifically designed for people with Medicare. Others include dental, vision and hearing benefits. Determine how important these extra benefits are to your lifestyle and wellness needs.

Seek help. Shopping for a Medicare plan can be daunting, but there are resources available to assist you. You can call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-434-4227) or TTY: 1-877-486-2048 24 hours a day, seven days a week for 2017 Medicare plan information. And websites like www.Medicare.gov and www.humana-medicare.com can help you research plans available in your area before the Dec. 7 Medicare Advantage and Prescription Drug Plan annual enrollment deadline.

It’s also important to note that the plan you select by Dec. 7 will be your Medicare plan for all of 2017, with few exceptions, so it’s smart to carefully research your options.

Remember, the time to act is now. Making sure you have the right health plan in place is one of the best ways to invest in your health. By Dr. Albert Tzeel is the North Florida Medicare Medical Director for Humana.