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Andy hits jack'pot'

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With the battle over stop-and-frisk threatening to become a war, Gov. Cuomo has demonstrated again a knack for threading the political needle. Much as he is taming Albany's ferocious appetite for spending, Cuomo found a judicious fix that should reduce objections to the crime-stopping tool while leaving the program largely intact.

Cuomo's proposal to treat small amounts of marijuana as a violation rather than a misdemeanor would remove what he calls an "aggravation." When those stopped are asked to empty their pockets, marijuana weighing less than 25 grams becomes "public," and the owner is subject to arrest and a criminal record. The same amount found in the home or another private location would be a violation, subject to a fine.

Of the 53,000 arrests for that charge in the state last year, 94 percent were in the five boroughs. More than 80 percent involved blacks and Hispanics.

Mayor Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly support the change, which Kelly actually initiated as an order last year. For them, the voluminous arrests for small amounts of marijuana, only 10 percent of which lead to convictions, are usually beside the point anyway.

The main purpose is to catch wanted suspects and to prevent violence and serious crimes by confiscating guns, knives and other weapons. Bloomberg and Kelly maintain that stop-and-frisk is a key part of the success in driving crime to historic lows and has saved thousands of lives, most of them minorities.

Yet pressure is building on the left to curb or end the practice, and a federal judge green-lighted a class action suit against it. The issue is shaping up as a litmus test for Democrats hoping to be the next mayor.

Cuomo, as the party leader, has gone a long way toward taking it off the table, or at least venting much of the steam. To hear him tell it, any benefit in that regard is a by-product of his intent.

Asked at Monday's news conference if he wanted to curtail stop-and-frisk, he answered "no" emphatically and repeated that he was just trying to fix a "blatant inconsistency" in the 1977 law that had become apparent because of the arrests.

Then he went on to give his blessing to the practice in a way that should cheer New Yorkers who have come to expect low crime rates, and put a chill in liberals who hope to force an end to the practice.

"I think the change will actually help the situation," Cuomo said. "Stop-and-frisk is a well-accepted police strategy all around the country."

He also conceded the controversy, saying it's all about "balance" and "relationships," but added that Bloomberg and Kelly are working on that.

Bingo. It was the right tone and substance. Assuming that the GOP-controlled state Senate agrees, the change will let critics of stop-and-frisk claim a genuine improvement that does not come at the expense of public safety or handcuff cops.

The episode illustrates why, 18 months into his tenure, Cuomo is proving to be both skillful and popular.

The Legislature, which got used to running the government in the previous four years, mostly has bent to his will on major legislation, even though it hasn't forsaken its bipartisan corrupt ways.

Cashing in on special-interest favors remains too common, and a "pay to play" mentality still prevails. One election is generally a guarantee of lifetime tenure, subject only to indictment and conviction.

So Cuomo has miles to go before he can claim to have drained the swamp and set the state on a sustainable course.

But at moments like these, there is reason to believe he's willing and able to go the distance.

Never forget!

Today is the 68th anniversary of D-Day, the amphibious invasion that involved 163,000 Allied troops and 5,000 ships. The attack on the French coastline in Normandy marked the daring final push to victory over Hitler.

If you don't know the stories of valor, make yourself a promise to learn them. My favorites are Stephen Ambrose's "D-Day," an exhaustive chronicle published for the 50th anniversary, and Andrew Roberts' "The Storm of War," a recent account set in context of the entire war.

Best of all, visit the battlefield and cemetery near Omaha Beach, which holds the remains of 9,387 Americans. You will come away with an unforgettable lesson on the price of liberty.

Bubba's \$hillary

Not for nothing is Bill Clinton showing up for President Obama. Literally — not for nothing.

Clinton's sudden appearances at Obama campaign events, including three in New York, where he dutifully bashed Mitt Romney, are paid performances. Instead of cash, payment comes in the form of Obama donors being squeezed to help Hillary Rodham Clinton pay down her 2008 campaign debt.

"Bill Clinton never walks away empty-handed," said an Obama donor who confirmed the arrangement. "There's always something in it for him."

At last counting, Hillary Clinton still owes about \$240,000, most of it to vendors, including her polling firm. The irony, of course, is that she ran up the tab trying to defeat Obama for the Democratic nomination, but, while serving as secretary of state, cannot participate in partisan politics.

So Bubba is a stand-in and, according to The New York Times, he's also helping to raise money for an Obama super PAC.

Obama's promise to help retire Clinton debts came after a negotiated deal, a necessity because there is some lingering bad blood. The key term is that only donors to the president who have maxed out in direct contributions of about \$2,500 would be asked to kick in \$2,300 to Clinton.

Sources say the deal has zero connection to the idea that Hillary would replace Vice President Joe Biden on the fall ticket. I believe them.

I also believe they mean it when they say that Biden is staying on the ticket. That's definitely their plan.

But if they need to change plans, the new running mate would start debt-free. What a happy coincidence.

With pals like this ...

Not all endorsements are a good thing. Take the one President Obama got from Raul Castro's daughter, whose father and uncle have run a communist police state for 54 years.

"I believe that Obama is a fair man," Mariela Castro Espin told CNN. Intriguingly, she backs him because he wants "to do much more" with Cuba in a second term.

Hmmm, is she more in the loop about Obama's plans than American voters? Probably.

Class-ified information

Reader Jim Soviero has a point.

"Isn't it ironic that the public has been leaked more information about top-secret clandestine operations than it has been given about President Obama's schooling? It's hard to believe sharing his high-school and college records would put him at the same level of risk as the covert agents, in hostile territory, whose survival is threatened by the constant, self-serving, chatter coming from national insecurity sources."

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