

Obama may become first invalid U.S. President

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Internet drives Barack Obama birth-certificate battle

Five weeks after the State of Hawaii vouched for the authenticity of President-elect Barack Obama's birth certificate, the controversy over allegations that Obama is not eligible to take office next month has reached the Supreme Court, which is expected to announce Monday whether it will consider the matter.

The fight is unusual because it thrives outside the so-called mainstream media, far beyond the oak-paneled offices of \$700-an-hour lawyers and a world away from the 535 individuals whose surnames are preceded by Representative or Senator.

This is a different army at work, in an environment increasingly influenced by the Internet.

"It's only being mentioned by a relative few, by the real die-hard, anti-Obama crowd," said Michael Harrison, editor and publisher of Talkers magazine, the trade bible of the talk-radio industry. "On mainstream talk radio, it's not a big deal right now. I think it's run its course."

"But," Harrison added, "we live in a time that, because of the Internet, all points of view can live forever."

Just as there is a split on the legitimacy of the legal claims, there is also a split within the media on the merits of the story. Is it the last gasp of opposition from opponents of Obama who have a found community of like-minded believers on the Internet, or is there a legal question to be resolved? The court will answer the latter question this week.

The campaign challenging the legitimacy of Obama's 1961 birth certificate or the legality of his taking office is chronicled by WorldNetDaily, a popular, politically right-leaning site that was the 26th most-visited news and media Web site during November, according to Hitwise, which monitors Net traffic.

"If this [Obama taking office] happens, the question of eligibility for the highest office in the land will no longer even be a matter for concern," wrote Joseph Farah, founder and editor of WorldNetDaily.

"Precedent will have been established. Arnold Schwarzenegger will suddenly be eligible to run for the office in 2012," Farah wrote, referring to the Austrian-born California governor and film star.

An Obama spokesman declined to comment for this story.

The lawyers who, in at least six states including New Jersey and Connecticut, have argued Obama is not a natural-born citizen and cannot be president include one who supported Hillary Clinton's presidential bid, one who has thundered for decades against the legality of the federal government collecting income tax, and one who argues that Sen. John McCain, by virtue of his birth 72 years ago in the Panama Canal Zone, would be banned from moving into the Oval Office, had he won last month's election.

Leo Donofrio is a New Jersey lawyer who tried to get Obama and McCain stricken from the New Jersey ballot in November. Donofrio's case was presented Friday to justices of the Supreme Court. Another case challenging Obama's eligibility, this one from Pennsylvania, has not yet been presented to the full court for its consideration.

"My question is on a pure constitutional ground," said Donofrio. "[Obama] is a citizen of the United States. I just don't believe he's a natural-born citizen."

This is the thrust of the attack, picked up by people such as Bob Schulz, an upstate New York engineer who bought two full-page ads in the Tribune this month that called Obama "a usurper" who "would be entitled to no allegiance, obedience or support from the People."

Schulz has challenged the federal government on issues including the Iraq War, the Patriot Act and the income tax. "I have a long history of petitioning the government for redress of grievances for violations of the constitution and the law," said Schulz, who said he and his wife live on Social Security checks. Schulz said the ads cost "tens of thousands of dollars" and were paid for with more than 500 private donations from individuals who support the effort. He said there were "no financial angels" behind it.

If the Supreme Court decides not to consider the case, Donofrio said there "won't be any beating on the drums saying there wasn't any justice."

But that will not be the end of the matter, Farah vowed.

"It'll plague Obama throughout his presidency. It'll be a nagging issue and a sore on his administration, much like Monica Lewinsky was on [President Bill] Clinton," Farah said. "It's not going to go away and it will drive a wedge in an already divided public."

That may underscore a landscape change in the media, where the Internet is playing a bigger role in setting the agenda. In 2004, the so-called swift boat campaign against Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic presidential nominee, began on the Internet. In fact, the co-author of "Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry," Jerome Corsi, also wrote "Obama Nation," a book critical of Obama, published earlier this year.

Brendan Nyhan, a political scientist at Duke University, said the Internet's role in forming public opinion is gaining strength. WorldNetDaily, for instance, has one of the faster-growing audiences on the Internet, up 62 percent in the past year, according to Hitwise.

Nyhan co-wrote a study this year that said journalists' attempts to correct misinformation is unlikely to sway public perceptions because many people want to believe the misperception.

"People often have a strong bias for believing the evidence they want to believe and disbelieving what they don't believe," Nyhan said. "There is less of a sense that we all have a common set of facts we can agree on. There's a polarization, and we can't even agree on the basic factual assumptions to have a debate."

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 [Writ against Obama](#)

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