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Hot Button

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Same old joke

Comedian Janeane Garofalo has taken her jokes about conservative "tea party" protesters being "racists" and "retarded" to the nation's capital.

Miss Garofalo initially made such statements on MSNBC's "The Countdown" with Keith Olbermann in April and reprised her offensive commentary in a comedy skit at the 9:30 Club in Washington on Friday night.



Jeff Poor, a blogger for the conservative media-tracking blog Newsbusters.org, attended and recorded audio of Miss Garafalo's routine and put it online.

"It was just so much easier when we could just call them racists. I just don't know why we can't call them racists or functionally retarded adults," Miss Garafalo told the 9:30 Club audience.

"The functionally retarded adults, the racists - with their cries of, 'I want my country back,' you know what they're really saying is, 'I want my white guy back,' " she sneered. "They apparently had no problem at all for the last eight years of habeas corpus being suspended, the Constitution being [expletive] on, illegal surveillance, lied to on a war or two, two stolen elections - yes, the John Kerry one was stolen too."

Judging from the audience's laughter caught by Mr. Poor's audio recording, the stand-up comic's political punch lines went over much better in Washington than they did in Britain in July when she walked off during a comedy festival after her jokes about airport security checks flopped.

Death-panel ax

Betsy McCaughey, the woman who helped push into the mainstream the claim that Democratic health care bills would subsidize and thus encourage euthanasia consultations, resigned as director of Cantel Medical Corp. after a contentious appearance on Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show."

Ms. McCaughey, former GOP lieutenant governor of New York, also was a key player in defeating "Hillarycare" in the 1990s. She has been called a "liar" by liberal bloggers and commentators for saying a provision in a House health care bill would lead to what former Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin quickly dubbed "death panels."

Ms. McCaughey was singled out by many powerful special interests, including AARP, which said her analysis was "rife with gross - and even cruel - distortions."

"The main opponents of this research are those groups with a vested interest in a health care system that wastes billions of dollars each year on ineffective or unnecessary drugs, treatments or tests," AARP Executive Vice President John Rother said in press releases to counter the outspoken Republican. "Given Ms. McCaughey's position as a director of a medical device producer, I would hope that any potential conflict of interest has not influenced her commentary."

In Ms. McCaughey's appearance on "The Daily Show," she tangled with Mr. Stewart over this provision. At one point, Mr. Stewart told Ms. McCaughey, "Your reading of it is hyperbolic and in some cases dangerous."

The fiery segment aired Thursday, the same day she submitted her letter of resignation to Cantel. Producers of "The Daily Show" aired most of the interview and put the unedited version of the interview online.

The company announced Ms. McCaughey's removal in a Friday press release, saying she stepped down to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest during the national debate over health care reform.

Dumb program

The government's "cash for clunkers" program has earned a dubious distinction from the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute.

Chris Edwards, Cato's director of tax policy studies, nominated it as the "dumbest government program ever" in a blog post Friday.

"A few billion dollars worth of wealth was destroyed," he wrote. "About 750,000 cars, many of which could have provided consumer value for many years, were thrown in the trash."

He also said the program hurt low-income earners by removing those cheap cars from the market and "ripped off" taxpayers for \$3 billion. "The government took my money to give to people who will buy new cars that are much nicer than mine!"

"Farm subsidies are unjust," Mr. Edwards said. "Trade restrictions are counter-productive. Energy regulations have done great damage. Housing policies helped cause the financial crisis. But for pure dumbness, Cash for Clunkers takes the cake."

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