



# SECOND OPINION

A virtual meeting of The Sun's editorial board, where issues are discussed, opinions made.

March 11, 2010

## Oh, say can you say that?

Marylanders are rightfully proud of this state's connection to the national anthem. When [Francis Scott Key](#) wrote what would become the anthem's lyrics, he was drawing from his experience at the Battle of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812.

It's a bit like knowing the "amber waves of grain" of "America the Beautiful" came from your backyard, or that the actual "oceans, white with foam" mentioned in "God Bless America" happened to be located along the Ocean City boardwalk. The [War of 1812](#) may not get the press of other U.S. wars, but you can't attend a baseball game without hearing about that one inspiring battle.

But such pride in our role is getting stretched a bit far in Annapolis, where lawmakers would like to rewrite Maryland vehicle license plates to add this sales pitch: "[Home of Our National Anthem.](#)"

The first problem is that the proposed slogan doesn't make much sense. Maryland might claim to be the birthplace of national anthem or the home of Francis Scott Key, but home of the anthem? Is the anthem housed here? All four stanzas? (If so, rarely sung Stanzas 2, 3 and 4 deserve a break on their rent.)

Songs don't have a single home, and if they did it would probably be at their publisher's office or perhaps his copyright lawyer's. They live everywhere -- from theater orchestra pits to the iPod of the kid who cuts your grass. Maybe "birthplace" doesn't fit on a plate, but that hardly justifies making it sound as if the anthem was kept under lock and key down by the Inner Harbor.

But there's also the matter of Mr. Key famously writing the lyrics but not the tune. The anthem is set to an English drinking song. That makes Maryland home to the Frederick lawyer who did half the work. But again, such a lengthy explanation wouldn't fit particularly well on the back of a moving car.

Has any of this deterred legislators? Not in the Senate, where the proposal was approved unanimously last week. Now it's up the House of Delegates to show some restraint — and respect for American history and the English language.

Just because Maryland doesn't currently have a slogan running between the bolt holes of its standard-issue license plates doesn't mean we ought to have one, especially a version that doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Like any proud parent of a 196-year-old that has gone off to accomplish great things, let us take pride in our role in the nurturing of the anthem -- but not still claim it as some kind of live-in dependent.

Posted by [Peter Jensen](#)