

Republican Perspective

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by John Littig

“Zany” Pronunciations

Donald Trump has been counseled to “act more presidential.” So on April 27, he gave a teleprompted speech on foreign policy. The thrust of the speech was that American interests should be paramount in national security, international diplomacy, and global trade. Reviews were mixed.

But critics pounced on his pronunciation of the African nation Tanzania. Trump was slammed by political pundits. White House press secretary Josh Earnest got in on the fun, saying “Apparently the phonetics are not included on the teleprompter.”

Pria Lal, an assistant professor of African History at Boston College, said there is “no debate” about the correct pronunciation. She also declared that “it is a serious error and it is ignorant” and that “it seems quite flippant to mispronounce the name of a big country.”

But was it a mispronunciation? Trump said *tan-ZANY-a* which, by the way, was the pronunciation in common use when I was a youngster. Those who seized upon his pronunciation as needing criticism declared the correct pronunciation to be *tan-za-NEE-a*.

Despite assistant professor Lal’s declaration that there is “no debate,” there actually is. The Guardian reported that “A representative of the Tanzanian embassy in Washington DC said that although most natives pronounce the word differently from Trump, [Trump’s] pronunciation is typically accepted in the country.” Tweeter Edgar Mwakipesile offered that “Trump pronounced Tanzania the way we Tanzanians do. So it’s weird for us to see it being called a gaffe.” So apparently it’s not settled science.

Now let’s take a trip down memory lane for a comparison of currently in vogue pronunciations versus those back in the day.

Staying with Africa for the moment, the nation of Niger used to be *NY-jer*. Now it’s *nee-JAIR*.

Kalakaua Avenue in Honolulu was *kala-ka-OO-a*. When did it become *kala-KOW-a*?

The Turkish capital used to be *AN-ka-ra*. Now it’s *an-KA-ra*.

The capital of China was *pee-KING*. Where did *bay-JING* come from?

And then there’s our own Guerneville, which used to be *GUR-nee-ville*. It has become *GURN-ville*, although there are purist hold-outs.

Finally, there’s the planet Uranus. Well, let’s not examine that one too closely.