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— EDITORIAL —

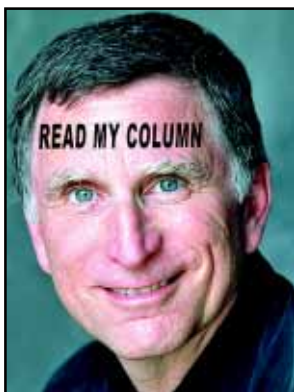
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HB3

ECONOMICS 101 CANCELLED TODAY

Texas House Proposes Tax Cuts For The Wealthy With School Finance Plan

Story By Jonmichael Swetnam See Page 3

Western White House Plans To Host 3 World Leaders In Next Two Months

WASHINGTON — Mexican President Vicente Fox and Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin are scheduled to visit Central Texas this Wednesday, followed by visits from Middle Eastern leaders in the coming months.

With the Mexican and Canadian leaders, President Bush plans to hold working sessions at Baylor University in Waco and hold a lunch at his private ranch over his Easter holiday.

The Bush Ranch will next host Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on April 11. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas plans to visit Bush in Washington in coming weeks.

Both visits by the Middle Eastern officials come as Bush has cited progress in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, hailing signs of "democracy" in that region.

Abbas would be the first Palestinian leader to visit the U.S. capital since the outbreak of Palestinian-Israeli violence in September 2000. The United States refused to deal with Abbas's predecessor, the late Yasser Arafat, accusing him

of fomenting violence.

Bush has said both sides have responsibilities in the peace process — Palestinian leaders must dismantle terrorist

groups, fight corruption and establish a successful democracy, while Israel must halt settlement activity and help the Palestinians rebuild their economy

and a contiguous territory on the West Bank.

— *The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

DATELINE:

Crawford

Hometown of the President of the United States

Mayor Robert Campbell Not Seeking Re-Election

CRAWFORD — Mayor Robert Campbell will not to run for Mayor of Crawford again. Two candidates are seeking to replace him in the May 7 election.

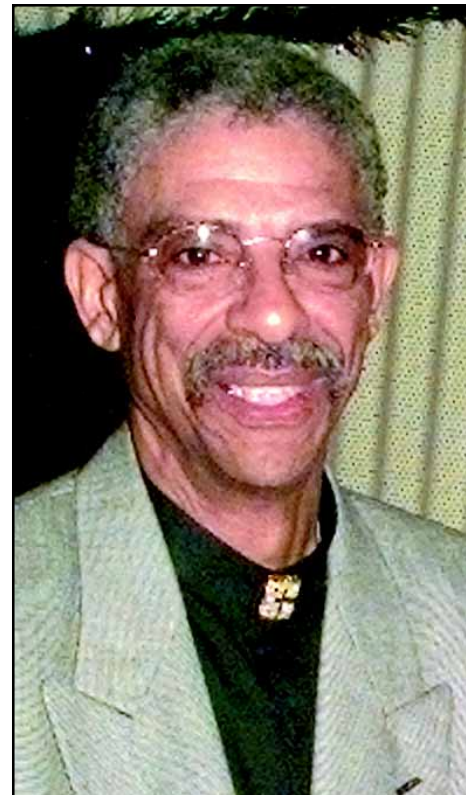
Campbell became a councilman in 1990 and then mayor in 1998 after the resignation of his predecessor. Campbell was elected to the post the next year and twice after.

In recent years many of the town's 705 residents have been irked by

Campbell's political affiliation. The frustration was especially strong last year when Campbell became one of 100 black mayors to endorse John Kerry in the presidential race.

Currently serving on the council, David Posten, 54, and Franklin Abel, 64, are running for mayor.

Posten, the facilities engineer for Trane in McGregor, served on the council for eight years. Abel owns Abel Service Air Conditioning in Crawford.



Mayor Robert Campbell

Too Late To Stop Global Warming: Study

WASHINGTON — A new study published in the journal *SCIENCE* said that it's too late to stop global warming — even if all greenhouse gas emissions were held at today's levels, there would still be warming temperatures and rising oceans for the next 100 years.

A team of scientists from the National Center for Atmospheric Research based in Boulder, Colo., conducted the study. They found that North American could face excessive heat waves and a possible swarm of crop-eating insects.

Tom Wigley, one of the authors of the study, explained, "If you take your foot off the accelerator, the vehicle doesn't stop; it just keeps going for a while. That's essentially what's happening because of the massive thermal inertia of the ocean."

The authors said that they hope their study encourages people to action.

— *Elitestv.com contributed to this report.*

China Spring Civic Club's Spring Rummage Sale Slated Beginning Of April

CHINA SPRING — The China Spring Civic Club will hold a fund-raising rummage sale at the China Spring Tabernacle on Business 1637 on Friday and Saturday, April 1 and 2, from 7 a.m. - 5 p.m.

The club is a nonprofit organization that provides services for the China Spring area including the China spring volunteer Fire Department, China Spring Schools and various other services throughout the year. For more information contact Olga Crow (836-0311), or Jo Ann Uptmor (836-4587).



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HB3

Texas House Proposes Tax Cuts For The Wealthy With School Finance Plan

By JONMICHAEL SWETNAM
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

AUSTIN — A non-partisan analysis by the Legislative Budget Board says that a bill passed by the house will result in net tax cuts for people making over \$100,000 a year. Everyone else will be facing a tax increase of over five percent.

The bill cuts school property taxes by a third. It also replaces the money cut with a state sales tax rate of 7.25 percent: the highest in the nation. Additionally, House Bill 3 imposes a new business payroll tax, revamps the franchise tax, increases taxes on snack foods, soda, and cigarettes, and expands the tax to include bottled water.

According to the analysis, the bill's initial impact will fall primarily on businesses, with service businesses taking a 20 percent tax increase, while the finance, insurance, and real estate sectors will likely see a tax reduction of over 10 percent. Ultimately, most individuals would pay 1.32 percent more in taxes.

The bill met with resistance from Democrats, who said the bill was unfair and inadequate.

"When you look at the tax incidence report published by the LBB, if you make under \$100,000 a year, your taxes go up. If you make over that, they go down. It's basically a tax shift. It provides zero dollars for education. All it does is swap out taxes and creates property tax cuts for certain people," Rep. Garnet F. Coleman (D-Houston) said.

Under the LBB analysis, the bill hits low-income families particularly hard: people making under \$30,000 a year will face a tax increase of roughly 5.6 percent in fiscal year 2007. Those Texans who make over \$140,000 a year will receive a 2.9 percent tax cut.

"The way I would describe it, is that the people making over \$100,000 get a massage while the people making under \$100,000 are getting smacked upside the head with a baseball bat," Coleman said.

"People are saying it's basically a back door income tax," Coleman said.

Republicans pointed out that the analysis might not provide an entirely accurate picture.

"You can look at it two different ways, and in this case there are two different models," said Rep. Rob Orr (R-Burleson).

"The LBB analysis was based on a static model; that is, if you took a snapshot of various income level families and the amount they would be paying at a certain point in time under the bill, those are true numbers. But the other side of that coin is a dynamic model, which accounts for factors like growth, whether people own or rent their property, how much they spend on luxury goods, that sort of thing. And under that model, by 2015 this bill will generate \$8

billion in growth," Orr explained.

Waco Rep. Charles (Doc) Anderson (R) said, "I think it provides a more stable, predictable tax base. Our economy used to be in the oil and gas industry; now it's in technology and services. We think this bill provides a simple, fair tax system that keeps the state viable for the future."

"The thing I look at is that every property owner in the state of Texas gets a 33 percent property tax cut," Orr said.

Orr and Anderson emphasized that the bill revamps the franchise tax code, ridding it of many loopholes and making it more uniform.

"House Bill 3 contains a modified franchise tax. Under the old code they had the Delaware loophole, which let people register businesses in Delaware, which changed their business model and let them avoid paying the tax," Anderson said.

Orr explained that this allowed people to establish their businesses as out of state corporations that didn't pay a dollar.

"The numbers, we were told, was that under the old system, 85 percent of businesses had bowed out of the franchise tax using legal maneuvers," Orr said.

"Back when this bill was first going through the hopper I called businesses in my district and asked what this bill's effect on them would be — whether it would help them or hurt them. The consensus among people I spoke to is that they don't mind paying their fair share as long as the bill doesn't single out their business and just crucify them."

The new tax code doesn't cover sole proprietors who have no employees, though it does affect sole proprietorships with employees.

The new franchise tax would not touch small businesses with single owners, but a restaurant with kitchen staff and other employees would fall under the new tax, Orr said.

The bill also allows businesses to choose between paying the franchise tax or a compensation tax.

"Basically the bill allows business owners to choose what tax they pay based on their business model," Orr said.

Rep. Coleman, however, was less supportive of the new tax code.

"They call it the reformed franchise tax," he said. "I don't know what's reformed about it, but basically it closes the Delaware loophole and extends the tax across all forms of business, from corporations to partnerships to small proprietorships. So, for example, if you were a freelance writer under contract then that tax would extend to you."

Representatives also disagree over whether House Bill 2, passed earlier, provides any real benefit for schools.

"It still needs work, but there were a couple of changes in it that really excited me. One was that many rural dis-

tricts weren't getting enough money, while other districts were drawing a transportation allotment when they didn't even have buses. So instead of just giving out an allotment based on the number of students enrolled somewhere, we worked it so you get paid based on miles traveled. So now you actually have to have buses," Orr said.

"There are benefits in accountability, or transparency aspects, that protect taxpayers. There's a mechanism in there now that will let people see where their money is going," Anderson said.

For all of its benefits, House Bill 2 renders far too little aid to schools, Coleman argued

"When you look at it, the bill is inadequate when it comes to improving schools. First off, it brings too little money into the deal. Also, the money that isn't being replaced is the money that went to initiatives in reading, science, and programs like that. The way it used to work, we had money going in to help students who were, under the current testing system, deficient when it came to those skills," Coleman said.

The bill also fails on other key points, Coleman said.

"There's not enough money provided for textbooks. It doesn't add money for gifted and talented programs, bilingual education programs, and comp-ed programs," Coleman said.

"This bill cuts auxiliary health benefits. It completely wipes out health benefits for bus drivers, janitorial staff, cafeteria staff, and anyone else not classed as educational staff," Coleman said.

"The money for public education is supposed to come out of the existing budget. There's no money in the budget. And all of this money we're talking about putting in; that's just to maintain. That doesn't address improving schools. Again, it's inadequate," Coleman said.

"When they say there's \$3 billion going into education, what you have to remember is that \$1 billion of that was cut back in '02. So there's really only about half left to cover all of Texas. That may sound like a lot, but when you get down to it, it's just not enough," Coleman said.

"The way I see the whole thing, is if you look at it from a cost/benefit analysis, there's too high cost for too little benefit."

House Bill 3 levies a three percent tax increase on certain snack foods.

"I should point out that there are some different opinions on this, but basically some people seem to think that snack taxes will deter kids from eating Chee-tos or drinking soda. I think we're just going to end up having kids who pay more to eat Chee-tos. So I don't think it's going to have the impact that some people seem to think it will," Coleman said.

"That's one of the things that makes this bill so regressive: whenever you

have consumption taxes, it tends to take more money from people with less income. They wind up having to pay more to buy the same amount of goods," he said. "They are going to buy down property taxes, and so they create all of these other taxes. If you're going to lower taxes, you have to make the money up somewhere."

Additionally, House Bill 3 expands the sales tax to include bottled water.

"This is one of those, what I call, 'cute taxes.' It sounds good, but it doesn't take into account the realities of the world," Coleman said, adding, "For some reason, the writers seem to think water is a luxury. In reality, in many cases and for many reasons, a lot of people, if their water doesn't come from the store they don't drink. In some cases, people have medical conditions where they can't drink tap water. There are several places where for whatever reasons the water isn't potable. So the way I look at it this bill is kind of like taxing food."

The House has passed both bills. The Senate will begin debating them in mid-April to early May, Orr said.

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U.S. Senate Votes To Open Arctic National Wildlife Refuge To Oil Drilling

Puts Measure In Proposed Budget To Avoid Threat Of Filibuster

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate, with a close 51-49 vote last week, voted to include a provision in its proposed budget to allow the opening of the 1.5 million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeast Alaska to oil drilling. By placing the provision in the budget, which is immune to a likely Democratic Party filibuster, there is greater likelihood that it will be approved should Congress leave the language intact.

Proponents of drilling in the refuge have termed the success of avoiding a filibuster a major victory for President Bush and the oil industry, who have long sought the Alaskan coastal plain

area as a potentially rich source for future oil development.

Opponents fear that drilling in the area would ruin its pristine, fragile environment with the running of numerous pipelines and the construction of drilling platforms. They claim that wildlife victims could easily be millions of migratory birds, polar bears, and caribou.

Bush claims that 10 billion barrels of oil could be extracted from the refuge "with almost no impact on land or wildlife." However, the U.S. Geological Survey has estimated the number at 5.6 billion to 16 billion barrels and recoverable oil.

Navy Sonar Tagged As Probable Cause Of Whale Stampede

SAUSALITO, Calif. — Navy sonar has been designated the culprit that caused an orca stampede on the Haro Strait nearly two years ago, according to the release of a report on March 10 by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The 10-page report was dated Jan. 21.

The Navy had been conducting guided-missile destroyer training exercises near the San Juan Islands when whales bolted in search of shallow water in May 2003.

"This event is the first time that the sounds of mid-frequency sonar were recorded along with video of the effects on orcas, so the association was pretty clear," said an official with Seaflow, an educational nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of whales, dolphins and all marine life from active sonars and other lethal ocean noise pollution. "The orcas were stampeding and seemed in a panic, attempting to get into shallow waters to attenuate the loud noise. The noise was a very loud and grating digital communications signal. This noise is hard to listen to even at low volume, giving us clues into the effects of this type of noise on sound-sensitive marine animals."

NMFS's findings contradict those of the Navy that orcas in Puget Sound seemed unaffected by the sonar.

However, Ken Balcomb of the Center for Whale Research questioned the Navy's opinion of the negative impact on the whales.

"They are trying to get away, and they are stranding and dying. It is irrelevant whether they had hearing loss if they are dead."



Sibel Edmonds Files More Detailed Lawsuit

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Former FBI contract linguist Sibel Edmonds, who was discharged in the wake of becoming a whistleblower after the 9/11 attacks, has filed a complaint under the Federal Torts Claims Act detailing her interactions with a former FBI associate.

Edmonds' attorneys claim that her allegations of wrongdoing within the FBI translation unit, including espionage, were drawn entirely from the FBI's own internal investigation and unclassified sources.

The Department of Justice's Office of Inspector General has been investigating the allegations for two years and has concluded that the FBI failed to adequately pursue Edmonds' allegations of espionage against a co-worker and that her allegations contributed to her dismissal from employment by the agency.

Edmonds has alleged that her efforts to expose the FBI's misconduct has led to retaliation and that, to date, "not a single person in the FBI has been held accountable or criminally prosecuted despite public confirmation by the Inspector General's Office and members of Congress that wrongdoing occurred."

"Unless, and until, those responsible are held accountable, no corrective action will be taken within the FBI, and the security of our nation will continue to suffer," she added.

Bush Nominates Wolfowitz To Head World Bank

Neo-Conservative Hawk Finding European Acceptance Questionable

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Bush's nomination of former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz as president of the World Bank has become a public relations nightmare in Europe, where allies regard him as a leading hawk in the Bush administration, a main architect of the war in Iraq, which was solidly opposed by Germany and France.

Reports from Europe suggest that residents there are not keen on Bush's hardline neo-conservative agenda, and the nomination of Wolfowitz is considered an aggressive initiative to inject that element into world affairs.

According to President Bush, Wolfowitz has been successfully involved in managing the Pentagon and is a skilled diplomat, having been an ambassador to Indo-

nesia.

Wolfowitz says that being nominated is more than an honor, "It's humbling and challenging to be nominated for this incredibly important position. I believe deeply and passionately in the mission of the World Bank."

Some Western Europeans, however, suggest that the nomination was a bad move, since denizens there identify Wolfowitz as a mastermind in the Iraq war.

The spectre of protests has been raised should Wolfowitz become president of the World Bank, since some Europeans feel the World Bank would become an instrument of American foreign policy.

The Board of the World Bank must confirm Wolfowitz at president before he can assume that position.

Conyers Blasts Administration Over Fake Reporter Inaction

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI) last week took issue with the White House's reluctance to provide requested information regarding Jeff Gannon, who Conyers termed a "phony reporter, operating under an alias" for a "Republican-controlled media front operation."

It has been alleged that Gannon was able to obtain White House press passes and lob "softball" questions to the President during press conferences.

Conyers, in a written statement, last Wednesday, said, "We are here today because we have an Administration that is all too willing to flaunt the law, and a Congress that refuses to investigate even the most serious ethical transgressions. Whether it is torture at Abu Ghraib, sole source contracts with Haliburton, or the outing of a CIA operative, this Congress has been willing and unable to ask the hard questions or issue the difficult subpoenas."

He continued, "We are here today because the Administration has either rejected or ignored every bona fide request for information concerning Jeff Gannon. On Feb. 9, Rep. Slaughter asked the White House how Gannon was able to obtain his special access -

her request has been ignored. On Feb. 10, Rep. Slaughter and I asked the same question of the Secret Service - we received a non-responsive response. On Feb. 15, Rep. Slaughter and I filed a FOIA request with the Department of Homeland Security - again, no response. In the light of this stonewalling, we have no choice but to ask this Committee and this Congress to do its job and request these materials from the Administration.

"We are here today because we are simply unwilling to tolerate the continued manufacture of news by our government. Taxpayers don't want their money used to pay reporters to recycle Administration propaganda. Citizens can no longer tolerate paying reporters for their opinions while we can't fund our jobs and poverty programs. Americans don't want the White House press room to churn out releases that reporters like Jeff Gannon plagiarize and report as their own."

He added, "What we have today is a government by fiat, not a system of checks and balances. If we won't investigate this scandal, where will we draw the line? If we don't act now, when will we say enough is enough?"

Homeland Security Negotiating No-Bid Contract With College

WASHINGTON — A college in former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge's hometown may be the recipient of a no-bid contract to develop and operate an intelligence analyst certificate program for the Department of Homeland Security, at a time when no-bid contracts to Halliburton in Iraq are coming under scrutiny.

Normally, a request for bids would be used to solicit proposals from several

colleges, including some larger institutions that already offer similar programs.

However, in February, DHS began negotiations on a sole-source basis with Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pa. to operate an intelligence analyst certificate program for DHS.

Mercyhurst is planning to name a new academic building after former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge and his wife, Michele.

Anti-Gambling Rally Scheduled March 24 At State Capitol

AUSTIN — Republican Party of Texas Chairman Tina Benkiser will be speaking at an anti-gambling rally at the south steps of the State Capitol on Thursday, March 31, at 11 a.m. The rally to send a clear message to state lawmakers that Texans do not want any expansion of state sponsored gambling.

In addition to the Republican Party of Texas, the rally is sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas —

Christian Life Commission, Common Sense Sound Public Policy, Texas Eagle Forum, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Texans Against Gambling, Texas Conference of Churches, Texas Impact and the Tarrant County Republican Party.

INFO

www.TexasGOP.org

Green Party Presidential Candidate Joins 'Divestiture for Democracy'

WASHINGTON — Green Party Presidential candidate David Cobb has endorsed the Velvet Revolution's "Divestiture for Democracy" campaign that seeks to assure accurate and fair voting procedures in future elections.

Cobb last week sent a letter to voting machine companies urging them to adopt VR's recommendations to restore confidence in the electoral system.

The Green Party candidate told voting machine companies in his letter: "As an American citizen and a recent presidential candidate, I want to have faith in the vote counting process. Unfortunately, with more than 50,000 documented instances of irregularities in the past election, I am unable to trust ei-

ther the vote counting process or its results without an open, accountable and independent method of public verification.

"Public involvement and oversight in the voting process is essential. The integrity of our democracy demands that steps must be taken immediately to restore faith in our elections and the winners that they produce. These steps must include: having a paper ballot for each vote cast, independent analysis of voting machine software and hardware, open software source code, no contributions from voting companies to candidates for public office, no networking of machines and the public dissemination of all relevant voting data and documents."

Documents Link DeLay's ARMPAC With TRMPAC

AUSTIN — Documents filed in a civil lawsuit show that U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's federal leadership political fund, Americans for a Republican Majority, coordinated with Texans for a Republican Majority to deliver \$23,000 in contributions to help finance the GOP takeover of the Texas House in 2002.

DeLay (R-Sugar Land) has said that neither group had anything to do with the other, although some of his associates worked for both and these new documents show a working relationship between the groups.

DeLay had a loose advisory position with TRMPAC. DeLay uses ARMPAC to raise money for U.S. congressional candidates to help him hold his status in the House.

Under Texas law, corporate money can cover a committee's administrative costs, not political purposes. Republicans say that excess money not spent on candidates is an administrative expenditure.

Two Accounts

DeLay's spokesmen maintain that the ARMPAC expenditures in Texas were legal because two accounts were kept: one for corporate money and another for candidate-eligible money.

TRMPAC also created two bank accounts for the same purpose, but an

ongoing investigation showed the corporate money paid for candidate fundraising.

The new documents are copies of ARMPAC checks and letters on TRMPAC's stationery delivered to 15 House candidates. These documents are evidence in a civil lawsuit against TRMPAC Treasurer Bill Ceverha who signed the letters. He testified that he never saw most of what TRMPAC sent out under his name.

— *The Houston Chronicle* contributed to this report.

Pentagon Adopts 'Preemptive Strikes' As New Policy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A policy adopted by the Pentagon last week could spell a more aggressive approach for the United States in its quest to contain emerging enemies. Part of the plan involves expanded relationships with allies to act in unison, but the Pentagon is clear in that the United States will act alone, if necessary.

The new policy of "active deterrence" replaces the former Cold War approach with a global initiative to engage potential enemies more immediately.

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Editorial

OP/ED

Opinion - Columns - Letters

Riding For The Brand

As Uncle Hugh used to say, "What some folks say is progress, some others call laziness."

I do not wear cowboy boots.
Or a hat. Or a trophy buckle.
Or even blue jeans.

And I've got more right to than some others.

But to my mind it would be like wearing a fatigue jacket or cop's uniform when you don't tote a badge or a gun for a living.

It would be more than impersonation.
It would be disrespectful.

And I have respect for cowboys.

I spent much of my life around real cowboys.

Leon Overton was as real as it gets.

He was my hero, everything any cowboy can hope to be, everything any little boy dreams about being.

He came out of the Northeast Texas cotton patch back the last time the Republicans messed up the country.

He found work.

He said he went to bed a hoe hand and woke up a cowboy.

The line cook would dip one of them five-gallon blue enamel coffee pots into the creek and dump in a pound can of coffee. The night crew pushed the remuda up close to camp, and you handed the foreman your rope. He'd throw it on the first horse he come to. That'n and one more was your mount for the day.

If you were a good hand and got there early, you'd probably draw a pretty good cow pony.

But if you were slow out of your blankets or shirked work or got stingy on payday, you might start the day with a rodeo.

But Leon rode for the brand, and before too many years he *was* the foreman.

Of the XIT.

The daddy of 'em all.

When they worked cattle on the big spreads, they'd mill the herd while one bunch of hands built the branding fires and got the possibles ready, marking their position with two barrels about 10 yards apart..

Then the men on horseback would ride into the herd, rope and drag the calves past those barrels, where the stock was branded, vaccinated and turned into steers, providing they weren't lucky enough to be born heifers.

Leon said when you passed that second barrel, you un-dallied your rope, coiled and rode back into the herd.

Aunt Eula, who he met and married when she was cook for the outfit, said she watched him do that year after year, day after day, and never miss.

If you don't know what those last two words, "NEVER miss," mean to those who have worked on horseback, I can't explain it.

I don't have room here to write all the Leon Overton stories.

Call To Mind



By Don M. Fisher

Besides, his oldest son is doing that. But I'll tell you two of them.

He got caught out on the prairie in one of them big Panhandle northers. His horse gave out busting through the snow, so he got down and broke trail for both of them, leading him to a line shack. See, he and Eula had adopted two boys. That was a pretty rough go back then. If something happened to him, the agency would take the boys back. No single parent adoptions.

For everybody's sake, he had to stay alive.

He found the pumphouse, but through that howling white wall, he couldn't find the shack. He struggled to the end of his rope in every direction, but he just couldn't find it.

He said he pulled the saddle and blanket off and prepared to try to shelter in the pump house, when some other lost cowhand hung a lantern in the window of the cabin.

He'd made it.

That was Leon's way of saying that no matter how high you sit in the saddle, how wide you throw your loop, nobody rides alone.

Long after Leon and Eula moved out onto the red dirt prairie, made a good life, raised their four successful children and should have been at their ease, Leon volunteered to watch over some of his neighbor's heifers calving out.

He saw one of them in trouble late one afternoon and made his way through the fence out to the suffering new mama. With his walker. He dropped the walker and threw his weight onto the half-born calf's legs, pulling the calf and saving the heifer. But it landed on top of him.

Some time later Eula got worried, and went out and found him.

"Mr. Overton, why did you do that," the neighbor asked.

The answer was obvious.

"Because I ride for the brand."

Last Friday, another passing cowhand put a lantern in the window of the line shack, and Leon Overton ended his 94-year struggle against the storm.

His like will not pass this way again.

He showed us how to be tough without being hard. To laugh at the thorns and the snakes and the storms, for he had the best sense of humor I've ever known. I couldn't go into that here because my heart is still slow trailing Leon Overton, hoping he's still out there on the prairie somewhere, still living that most important of all lessons.

Ride for the brand.

— Editorial —

The Time Has Come In Texas For Initiative, Referendum, Recall

In recent years, the Texas Legislature has experienced something perhaps even worse than gridlock — ignorance: not in the form of a lack of knowledge, but in the form of ignoring issues that the Texas public thinks is important. Sure, the Legislature is currently wrestling with school finance, but it took a back burner to redistricting, which voters in Texas overwhelmingly thought was unimportant, last session.

About half the states in the union have instituted the grassroots capabilities of initiative, referendum, and recall as a "TAKS" test for politicians, to hold their noses to the roses they want plucked and a way to weed out politicians who just don't get it when it comes to representing the residents of the state over lobbyists.

- **Initiative** gives citizens the authority to collect signatures on petitions and to eventually place laws or constitutional amendments on the ballot for consideration by the voters.
- **Referendum** makes it possible for citizens to ratify or reject laws or constitutional amendments that are proposed by the Legislature.
- **Recall** is a procedure allowing voters to discharge and replace a public official deemed unfit mid-term.

This would be an ideal time for Texas to move forward in assuring better scrutiny and an ability to step in and act by the public. Three previous governors have shouted the praises of initiative and referendum, including former Governors Bill Clements, Dolph Briscoe, and George W. Bush, who said upon his election as Governor, "Initiative and referendum make government more responsive to its citizens, neutralize the power of the special interests and stimulate public involvement in state issues."

To enhance the performance of the Federal government, a national approach to initiative, referendum, and recall should also be implemented in such a way as to draw attention to both state and national issues from those elected, while providing a robust avenue toward keeping both omissions and commissions by Congress in check.

I-R-R has both champions and detractors:

Pros think it helps keep elected officials' feet to the fire and allows the populace to take a larger role in decision-making.

Those against think the general public is too apathetic to make important decisions and worry that lobbyists, instead of hounding legislators, would take their case to the public with glittery campaigns that might tend to mislead.

Lobbyists are totally against I-R-R, which should tell you something. It would make their jobs of influencing the votes of elected officials much more difficult, since the umbrella of the public would extend farther and would have more immediate power in dumping legislative scoundrels.

Our representatives do not write bills in the Texas Legislature; they pick from a pile of possible laws written by lobbyists, their decision usually based on whether the special interest group that wrote the bill has the influence among the legislators' peers to ensure passage. With I-R-R, lobbyists would lose the stranglehold they currently hold over lawmaking in Texas.

Of course I-R-R would not eliminate special interest abuse in this state. Slick, and expensive, PR media blitzes by those who prey on the public coffers would still influence the public, and phoney initiatives or mud-slinging campaigns would bloat the advertising world. But in the public eye, it would be much easier to expose those campaigns for what they are: An effort to continue the current system of government of the money, by the money and for the money.

The prevailing Catch-22 of the I-R-R basketball is that the party in power tends to be against it, for it could ruin these officials' abilities to get their policies approved, especially if the general public is against what they are attempting. The temporary safe haven for them to exploit the public is reduced, and, as we all know, there are prices (votes) to be paid to lobbyists who financed their ascension into public office. The sphere, is therefore, bounced back and forth and nobody tries to pop the net.

Everyone agrees on one thing — these are volatile times at all levels of government.

To bring the citizens out of the shadows of apathy and into the real world of decision-making and governmental education will strengthen the outcome of the country. Now is the time to take aim and put it through the hoop.

— Written By W. Leon Smith and Don M. Fisher

Frozen Lima Beans: The Gift That Keeps On Gagging

It was 75 years ago this month that Clarence Birdseye, inspired by ancient food preservation methods used by Arctic Eskimos, made history by introducing the very first frozen food option: “Savory Caribou on a Stick.”

Though his first selection was met with little enthusiasm, Birdseye persisted, and eventually created a line of frozen vegetables that many of us are still gagging on today. I, for one, am still unable to walk past lima beans in the frozen food section without getting the dry heaves. This reaction stems from my childhood, and a spoonful of lima beans I’ve been trying to swallow since 1973.

Unless you’ve been hermetically sealed and stuck in a freezer, you already know this is “National Frozen Food Month.” Coincidentally, I should mention this happens to fall in the same month as “National Ear Muff Day,” “Extraterrestrial Abduction Day” and “National Pig Day,” meaning that, for anyone whose pig happened to be wearing ear muffs at the time it was flash frozen by alien abductors, this is a big month for you. For the rest of us, March is when frozen food manufacturers remind us to consider foods we wouldn’t dish up without some type of extra incentive, such as giving it to a cell mate named “Big Red” in exchange for protection.

Which isn’t to say all frozen food experiences have to be terrible. When I was a kid, I couldn’t wait for Mom to pull my Libbyland “Sundown Supper” from the oven. That’s because the makers of



By
**Ned
Hickson**
Siuslaw News

Libbyland provided enough games, toys and other distractions that, for all I knew, I was eating breaded eel.

In fact, I’m pretty sure I remember seeing an actual eel on the cover of the Libbyland box. This should have sent my childhood gag reflex into high alert. And it probably would have if not for the fact that this particular eel was wearing a cowboy hat and spurs. It didn’t matter that a sea creature leading a wagon train through the high plains made no sense whatsoever. Or that the cowboy cook was a prairie dog who appeared to be stirring a pot of buzzard beaks. What mattered was that each dinner came with a packet of “Milk Magic” that turned my milk the color of gangrene and, even more importantly, grossed my mother out.

With those fond memories in mind, I went looking for the same kind of frozen dinner excitement for my own children. This led me to a collection of entrees that are either (a) the ultimate example of truth in advertising, or (b) menu items submitted by Hannibal Lecter.

The first thing I found was something

called Jurassic Fried Chicken, which, for all I knew, meant really, really old fried chicken. I also grabbed Cheese Blaster Mac & Cheese, a Carnival Corn Dog meal, and, against my better judgment, Bug Hunt Fun Nuggets. The idea was to cook all four meals and let the kids have a frozen dinner buffet. This plan began to fade once I actually started reading through the meal descriptions, beginning with the Carnival Corn Dog: “A batter-dipped Frank made with chicken, pork and beef on a stick.”

In this case, it wasn’t the combination of meats that concerned me; it was the fact that “Frank” was capitalized.

This made the whole Bug Hunt Fun Nuggets concept of “finding” processed

nuggets in the shape of insects a little hard to swallow. And to be honest, I had my concerns about how my five-year-old son’s intestinal tract would react to a meal that included the term “Cheese Blaster.”

Of course, none of these concerns mattered to my kids; all that mattered to them was that Dad was grossed out.

Things probably would’ve ended there. But I felt obligated, as a concerned father, to show them my lima beans.

(You can write to Ned Hickson at nhickson@oregonfast.net, or at the Siuslaw News at P.O. Box 10, Florence, OR 97439.)

The Hairy German

If it weren’t for name-calling, I wouldn’t have had any friends.

The guys I ran around with in high school, for instance, were all soccer players who gave each other nicknames associated with their ancestors’ nationality and their body abnormalities.

The nickname they gave me was “The Hairy German” because I’ve got a mixture of German and werewolf blood — with a splash of Himalayan yeti. *Just a splash.*

Whenever I played for the skins team versus the shirts, I got a lot of trash talk in fake German accents like: “Queeck! Heed ze cheeldrens, und feend me seelvr boollits!”

Not to be outdone by my hairless, pale Irish teammates, my usual reply was, “Ah, the sun! The sun! My eyes! The burning! Flesh! Sun!”

Sometimes, the guys dropped the nationality, and called me stuff like “Nate Dawg, the Wonder Poodle,” so whenever they would catch me off-guard and kick the ball between my legs, they’d be like, “Ah-ha! I neutered Nate Dawg!”

I had a lot of fun listening as my “pet names” evolved ... from Baron von Wookie, for example, to Dr. Barnikel Dookie ... Otto Doggie Dog to Scrappy Doo-a-Tang ... Bismarkly Mark to Bob Barker...

What caused the teammates to start using these playful nicknames is still a mystery to me. But I know why I participated:

It certainly helped me get into shape by running harder and more often as my friends chased me around with duct tape, threatening to mummify me during soccer practice.

True, they almost got me once, but that’s only because those follicle-challenged kids are more aerodynamic than we wild and woolly ones.

Name-calling also allowed me to expand my world view and start deeper conversations with my friends about their families and their values...

I knew my Mexican-American teammates and I were getting closer when they started calling me “Rug Back” — even though I didn’t have any back hair ... and still don’t.

Name-calling for us was an act of solidarity. We were democratic about it. Everyone got a nickname, just like how everyone knew they would eventually get physically hurt on the soccer field.

For those of you who don’t realize it, soccer is the world’s most dangerous sport, surpassing football, hockey, and rugby.

Soccer is the only team sport that requires a player to deflect with his brain box a leather ball travelling at over 100 mph, not to mention the extreme possibility for the karate-like kicks to faces and groins on a regular basis.

To think that name-calling was the least of our worries is really a misnomer, since the point of name-calling for us had more to do with friendship than animosity. It *had* to because without friendship, there’s no teamwork, and if there’s no teamwork, there’s no goal.

Honestly, we probably would have played better had we been taught soccer in Europe because if there are no goals, we’d be skinned alive by our fans, especially our grannies.

In the same way, I hear all these political labels flying around from “liberal” and “neo-conservative” to “feminazi” the same way. We’re all on the same team here, and our goal is to improve our world and the people who live in it for the common good, not the chosen few.

The real question we should be asking ourselves everyday is, “What are we doing to support the common good today?”

If we don’t, let me pose the question in European terms: “How do we want our grannies to skin us alive if Senor Paco Taco is sick and misses a great scoring opportunity today?”

Color me a socialist, but don’t think for a second I’m not a team player. Kaiser Bunny Rolls signing off.

The Rubber Cement Index

By Nathan Diebenow



— Guest Commentary —

The Universal Gesture for Stop!

By TRISH BOWCOCK
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

My curiosity is morbid. I have never been in a war zone. It must be a horrifying place. The stress and pressure upon our nation’s youth, called upon to execute our country’s foreign policy agenda must be otherworldly. At home, most of our enlisted would be considered mere youngsters. Their job is to kill other human beings. We are told they must do so in order to protect our freedom. We declared war in Iraq to save the citizens from tyranny.

So, why are American soldiers killing innocent civilians at Iraqi roadside checkpoints? Recent news coverage of the death of an Italian military agent, occurring while protecting an Italian journalist from gunfire, brings the issue to mainstream media’s forefront. The coverage is consistent. Military personnel claim strict adherence to policy. First, hand signals are used to halt the vehicle. If it progresses, the engine block is fired upon. If the vehicle continues, fatal force is used. Witnesses to checkpoint civilian deaths dispute the consistent use of this tiered protocol. Miscommunication is the alleged culprit.

Cultural differences can create communication barriers. When culturally misunderstood commands

are issued in a war zone, innocent lives can be lost. In occupied Iraq, the U.S. military has an obligation to research cultural mores and educate soldiers on communication techniques, minimizing civilian loss. The universal gesture ordering a motor vehicle stop is a raised arm with flat palm facing outward. Instead the United States military uses a raised clinched fist for ordering a vehicle stop (*New York Times*, 3/7/05). A raised clinched fist epitomizes defiance. It is the traditional symbol used by revolutionists in the communist movement. It is a symbol of violence and distain. It was the symbol embracing Black Power in the 1960s. Nowhere in my travels have I seen it used as a traffic control device.

I am not privy to the rationale followed by the U.S. military when choosing to adopt this hostile symbol as an order to Stop! I do know that miscommunication at Iraqi vehicle checkpoints is occurring and innocent civilians are dying. In light of the most recent debacle where U.S. military killed an Italian officer, a modification in checkpoint control technique ought to be considered. As the first tier in a stop rather than a raised clinched fist military should consider the more traditional, albeit less confrontational, mode for halting traffic.

The First Cubs Game Of 2005

This past Monday I actually got to watch the first televised Chicago Cubs game of the year. Here I was in Central Illinois, where the outside temperature hovered somewhere around that of dry ice, and I was watching baseball.

Greg Maddux on the mound, Aramis Ramirez pounding a two-run shot over the fence. Sparkling double plays and the crack of the bat, green grass and blue skies. That big diamond measuring 90 square feet.

So what if it's only Spring Training and the game is essentially meaningless — it's BASEBALL!

When it comes right down to the nitty



Out Of The Blue

By
**Jerry
Tenuto**

gritty, no game of baseball is meaningless. There's always something to be derived from the play on a given day. The possible emergence of a shining young star, or maybe a pitcher unveiling a devastating new slider.

I enjoyed the game despite the fact that it was on that big cable sports network. Its sole function seems to be to drain the heart, soul and fun right out of athletic events.

During the day the Cubs belted either three or four homers, but I couldn't keep track. The egomaniacal announcers were more pre-occupied with talking about Sammy Sosa's departure to Baltimore half of the time than covering the game. There's an example of why Cubs fans turn down the TV audio and listen to the radio.

No matter how much the network clowns fouled the game, the Cubs were still triumphant over — now, please don't get irate — the Texas Rangers.

Ah, but when baseball returns the whole world seems to awaken. It's tradition and all the accoutrement: Kids and dads; hot dogs and beer; swinging away and rhubarbs with umpires whose only job requirement is failing an eye exam.

Nothing else sounds like baseball spikes echoing through a tunnel under the stands. What wondrous music to my ears. Baseball is an adults' game played by kids, a kids' game played by adults. It makes us all young again, yet reminds us that we can't be young forever.

Now, this coming Saturday Cubs fans will get our first opportunity to size up the new hometown television broadcast team of Len Kasper and Bob Brenly. These guys have to be coming in well aware of the considerable heap of fan expectations. If they drop routine flies, people will be tuning to Pat Hughes and Ron Santo on the radio.

The snow that fell during this week in Chicago shall not diminish the enthusiasm of die-hard Cubs fans for this telecast. In fact, it will probably increase the fervor. We faithful suffer year in and year out, yet every Spring the anticipation builds.

For those of us who think of Wrigley Field as the shrine to the holiest of games, come April of each year *hope springs eternal*. Looking at things through a philosophical lens, Boston got theirs last year, so 2005 is *our* year.

Now, when I started writing this my intention was to continue on about baseball. As you may have guessed I love the game. And, there's a long time, roughly eight months, left until the Cubs win the World Series. So, I have plenty of opportunity to touch upon this subject.

Yesterday, however, my 24-year-old son had been watching Court TV. He's gotten hooked on the trial of this 18-year-old young woman in South Dakota or wherever who supposedly shot her parents. The prosecution's contention is that they objected to her boyfriend. I don't know, maybe he's getting pointers.

However, since the jury was in deliberation the network saw it as their chance to obsess over the Michael Jackson trial.

Back in 1995 I had a lot of time, too much in fact, to devote to following the O.J. criminal trial. That was interesting if an exercise in celebrity media fas-

ination. This Michael Jackson trial, though, is beyond surreal.

First and foremost, who are these losers that hang around the courthouse everyday to watch him come and go, and cheer him on? It's not like his music is all that clever or inventive, and his singing is hardly superlative. "King of Pop" my elbow. More aptly the "King of Mediocrity."

By the time The Jackson Five came along I was well into the likes of Led Zeppelin. At no time in my life did I ever have any desire to listen to anything MJ had put out. He was one of those celebrities I always thought of as an annoyance. In my radio days I took every mention of his harebrained antics in the news as an opportunity to jest at his expense.

Yesterday, I simply could not help be distracted by what I saw outside the courthouse. This is a 46-year-old man who has made a mockery out of the justice system ever since he bought off his first accuser in the last decade.

From Mikey's first appearances outside court when he hopped on top of cars and danced for his loyal subjects, to his showing up late for initial proceedings, he has shown absolutely no sense of propriety or concept of reality.

Wearing the white stage outfit with all the bling bling during jury selection was silly and completely inappropriate. Then delaying the court because he suddenly got the flu caused me to think, "Hmmm."

How much of this behavior is real, and how much is an act? Does he do this stuff against his attorney's advice, or at the man's behest? Just what planet does MJ come from?

Yesterday, mind you, I wasn't paying real close attention to the television. It was just on. My son was out of the room. I happened to look up and here comes Mikey walking toward the courthouse in a semi-normal sport coat, his usual bling bling, and... *pajama bottoms*.

I yelled for my son to come into the room, because he wouldn't believe this. Imagine showing up for court in pj's and slippers. Mikey's excuse for arriving some two hours late was a backache. Right.

How outrageous! Even the biggest slimeball wouldn't show up for court dressed like that. I couldn't stop laughing!

So while he was barely able to walk even with the assistance of his father and another man, how was it Mikey could manage to free his arms, turn and wave to fans while not missing stride?

Okay, this is just speculation, but it's a pretty safe guess the majority of these duds who think MJ is the greatest thing since peanut butter and hang out at the courthouse don't have to go to work or school. And, one could further assume they have overly indulgent moms (no dad is going to tolerate Michael Jacksonism) who won't make them move out on their own.

So where are they going to hang out after he's convicted — the prison?

All I wanted to think about was baseball, but the sight of MJ showing up to his molestation trial in pajamas eclipses even my annual Rite of Spring.

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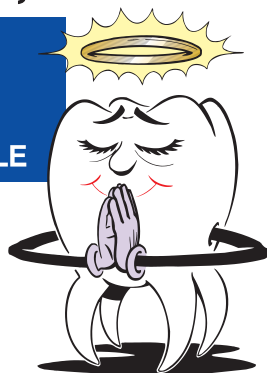
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A Real Head For Advertising



By
**Lloyd
Garver**

You can't get away from ads and commercials these days. They are on bus benches, all over sports stadiums, and now they're in that place that used to be a sanctuary from advertising – your local movie theater. Some magazines have more ads than articles, and TV and radio commercials seem to dominate the airwaves. There are even ads in urinals, although I can't imagine why anyone would want their product name to be watered in this manner. And in case you think it can't possibly get any worse, think again. The latest trend in advertising is for slogans and logos to be tattooed on people's bodies.

More and more people are renting out their bodies these days. Many of them auction themselves off on E-bay. One man got over \$30,000 to put a temporary tattoo on his forehead advertising something called, "SnoreStop." He's not on a TV with this tattoo. He just walks around, using his head as a billboard. An on-line casino has advertised on the backs of more than 40 boxers. A female runner will wear a tattoo ad for an appetite suppressant when she runs in the next Boston Marathon. (This is particularly ironic since I think seeing any tattoos on certain bodies would automatically be an appetite suppressant). Most of the time, these slogans are temporary tattoos, but a California restaurant has offered free food for life to anybody who will get a permanent tattoo representing the restaurant. Is there anyone out there who

doubts that they'll find a volunteer?

The forehead is the most popular place for the ads. Other choice locations are arms and hands and a pregnant woman's stomach. Maybe soon, Gerber's will start advertising mashed-up chicken on pregnant women's bellies. I don't even want to think about where the makers of Viagra are going to want to advertise.

How effective can this method of advertising be? How many people are going to come into contact with one of these human commercials? Besides, to put it mildly, isn't this whole thing just a tad undignified and tasteless? Selling one's body or body parts may be a long-standing tradition, but it's never been one that's been respected by society. And what about the companies who choose to advertise like this? If you see the words, "Smith's Funeral Parlor" on some guy's forehead, are you more or less likely to use Smith's the next time a loved one passes away?

Crazed sports fans have been painting their favorite team logos and names

on their bodies for years. But these sports enthusiasts do these things because of love, commitment to team, and cheap beer. But now companies are actually paying money to put their product names on people's bodies. Those who are selling space on themselves somehow make the guy in the bleachers with the letters C-U-B-S on his hairy gut seem like a role model.

I've been looking for the silver lining in all this, and I think I found it. This advertising trend will benefit two groups that are often maligned: bald people and overweight folks. Because they have more room for words on their bodies, they'll become the most sought-after models for this type of advertising. After they become successful, look for some discrimination suits filed by thin and full-haired people.

Maybe I'm taking it all too seriously. Maybe it's just a fun way to get some

recognition for a product. Maybe it's just an easy way for someone with skin and a sense of humor to make a buck. Am I overreacting to what is just the latest example of good ol' American ingenuity? I don't think so. I can't imagine paying someone to have the words, "Read Lloyd's Column" on his forehead. I have much too much dignity for that. On the other hand, if any of you readers want to advertise my column for the same reasons that sports fans paint their bodies, there's nothing I can do to stop you. This is still a "Free Country" – as we'll probably be reading on some candidates' heads in the next election.

Lloyd Garver has written for many television shows, ranging from "Sesame Street" to "Family Ties" to "Frasier" to "Home Improvement." He has also read many books, some of them in hardcover. He can be reached at lloydgarver@yahoo.com



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The Last Days Of Sam Houston

Speaking in public for the last time on March 18, 1863, Sam Houston told the citizens of the town that bore his name, "The welfare and glory of Texas will be the uppermost thought while the spark of life remains in this breast."

Two years before, almost to the day, the governor had polled four trusted friends on President Abraham Lincoln's secret offer of federal troops to keep him in office and Texas in the Union. Going along with the majority opposed to the reckless proposal, the 68-year-old general ruefully remarked, "Gentlemen, I have asked your advice and will take it, but if I were 10 years younger I would not."

Having already refused to swear allegiance to the Confederacy, Houston had no alternative but to resign. On his way east from Austin, he stopped in Brenham for a speech disrupted by "a howling mob."

A wealthy planter waving a loaded revolver warned the hecklers, "I and a hundred other friends of Governor Houston have invited him to address us and will kill the first man who insults or attempts to injure him. There is no other man alive who has more right to be heard by the people of Texas!"

The week after the North and South went to war, Houston blamed the bloodshed on his would-be benefactor. He called the president "precipitate and foolish" and insisted Lincoln "should have left the South alone."

With armed conflict an irrevocable fact, Houston was forced to choose sides. "So long as there was a hope of obtaining our rights and maintaining our institutions, I was for preserving the Union," he explained at Independence on May 10, 1861. "The time has come when a man's section is his country. I stand by mine."

Houston then turned his attention to a pressing personal concern, but there was no talking his 18-year-old namesake out of enlisting. Fortunately Sam Houston, Jr. chose a Confederate company under the command of Ashbel Smith, an

This Week In Texas History

By Barte Haile



old friend who promised the worried father that he would look out for his headstrong offspring.

Toward the end of 1861, Sam took sick, and the major illness sparked rumors of his demise. He was, however, soon strong enough to quip, "Tell my enemies that I am not dead, that Sam Houston still lives!"

The defiant declaration seemed tragically premature a few weeks later, when he suffered a serious relapse. Told by his physician that the end was near, the patient prepared to meet his maker.

Ever mindful of his unique place in history, Houston dictated his dying words to the reliable Ashbel Smith. "It is my misfortune to be a prophet like Cassandra for my warnings are disbelieved. This war will be disastrous to the South and to Texas. The Northern armies will cut the

Confederacy asunder."

After his remarkable recovery, Houston did not disavow the depressing deathbed statement. He had seen the future and to deny the validity of his vision would have been dishonest.

Houston personally congratulated Gen. John Bankhead Magruder on his brilliant New Year's Day 1863 liberation of Galveston from Yankee occupation. "You have breathed new life into everything," he wrote in a trembling hand.

Those Houstonians present for the old warrior's curtain call in March 1863 had trouble hearing their old hero. Age had reduced his booming baritone to barely more than a whisper, and newspaper accounts confirmed his appearance was as feeble as his voice.

Despite the General's poor health, many Texans thought the real purpose of his swing through Houston and Galveston was to drum up support for a third gubernatorial campaign. In truth, he had even bolder ambitions.

Houston hoped to single-handedly pull his beloved Texas out of the Confederacy and the Civil War. He simply would proclaim himself "the lawful magistrate of the state" and order all native

troops to come home. The Lone Star Republic would be reestablished, and Texas would sit out the conflict as a neutral nation.

Misinterpreting the polite reception in Houston for political support, he divulged the details of his daring scheme to two loyal associates. They pleaded with him to forget the preposterous plan and never to breathe a word of it to anybody else.

Houston went home to Huntsville a broken man. For almost half a century, he had shaped history with his bare hands. Now he was an impotent spectator, an intolerable role for a living legend.

His dream of saving Texas shattered, Houston no longer had a reason to cling so stubbornly to life. In early July, he gave himself just 15 days to live.

He was not far off. On the evening of July 26, 1863, Sam Houston stirred from a pneumonia coma and muttered, "Texas! Texas! Margaret!" A moment later, the Hero of San Jacinto was gone.

Barte Haile welcomes your comments, questions and suggestions at haile@pdq.net or 1912 Meadow Creek Dr., Pearland, TX 77581.

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Stupid Pet Tricks

Remember Stupid Pet Tricks on The Tonight Show? (There may still be that segment on the show. I haven't stayed up late enough to watch lately, so I wouldn't know). I think Ed Sullivan had his own version of it, as well. When I was a kid, my parents and I would especially make fun of the pet owners who brought in singing dogs.

I have to admit that I have had some pets do some pretty unusual things over the years myself. I have had pets do some smart things, some stupid things and also things that totally confound me, that make me scratch my head in wonder. Sometimes I wish I had become an animal psychologist.

Wolfie had a thing for balloons and clear plastic wrap. If he could see through something that he knew was really there, he would go nuts and bark like mad, try to bite the balloons or plastic wrap. Of course, the balloons would pop, which he absolutely hated.

Also, if one of his humans' feet went off the ground, it would make him crazy. If one of us climbed a ladder, picked one another up in the air so that feet left the floor, or even if we jumped up and down, then Wolfie just couldn't stand it. —Something about altered reality perhaps. Wolfie didn't like the laws of nature tampered with. He understood gravity. Feet were supposed to stay grounded. Wolfie didn't handle change very well.

As stupid as I thought the singing dogs on TV, I have known some that howl to "music." And right now there is a cat in this house that talks. She never says more than two words, "right" and "now". She sits at her bowl and emphatically demands, "Right now." Just to annoy her, and to make sure you aren't hearing things, you ask her, "When?" And she repeats it. Sometimes she only answers, "Now!" If you confirm her demand, ending with a question, "Right now?" she will look you directly in the eye and answer, "Right!"

I know you're sure I'm crazy, but I swear I'm not making this up. All Seeky seems to be interested in is food and eating, so "right now" is the extent of our conversation. At some point, she might decide to expand her areas of interest and consequently also her vocabulary. Or not. Like every other cat in the world, she will do exactly what she wants.

After living in this house for a year, the same (talking) cat has suddenly discovered the stairs to the upstairs room. I have no idea why it took her so long to get curious (unnatural for a cat), or why she is suddenly so very interested.

Several times during the last week, there has been a dull "thud" in the middle of the night. This was indeed a mystery. Then we walked in and caught her halfway up the stairs (during daylight hours). She obviously had expected the house to be free of humans and was sneaking up to her newfound playroom. As she attempted a hasty retreat, we discovered, without a doubt, the origin of the mysterious thud. She hasn't learned to negotiate the slick, painted wooden stairs very well.

Rustic Ramblings

By Gene Ellis



Gene Ellis, Ed.D. is a Bosque County resident who returned to the family farm after years of living in New Orleans, New York and Florida. She is an artist who holds a doctoral degree from New York University and is writing a book about the minor catastrophes of life.

And she can't reach the brass hand-rail we installed for our own safety (to avoid dull thuds). We have now placed barriers on the stairs to dissuade her, hopefully, to keep her from breaking her neck. I thought all cats were wonderful climbers. Well, maybe not.

The two inside cats (the talking one who is stair-challenged and the other neurotic one) do another thing that confounds me. They gallop through the house. —Not at the same time, but seemingly whenever the mood strikes them individually. This usually happens in the middle of the night or around dawn. From what I can gather, they start from a sitting position and just take off for no darned good reason at all.

No matter how often this impromptu racing happens, the sudden shock of hearing it while I am still in a sleeping state is quite jarring. It makes me sit straight up in bed, certain that a herd of thundering wild horses or cattle has invaded the house. It's amazing how such a small animal can make so much noise in a quiet house.

Lately, Stinky the dog has been doing something bizarre as well. During the middle of the night, or during the day if he is by himself, he picks up his bowl (I assume, in his mouth) and carries it off the porch, down a step or two, and into the far corners of the yard. There he drops it. Often the bowl is still filled with plenty of dry food when I go searching for it later. I don't understand why he does it, but it's a neat trick —to carry a full bowl of food up and down steps way into the yard, in one's mouth, without spilling it. I couldn't do it. (Nor would I want to).

I'm wondering if Stinky uses the bowl of food as bait, when he is bored or lonely. I think perhaps he tries to lure unsuspecting creatures into his yard to "play." (Of course, we all know what happened to that possum he "played with" one night last month). If this is the reason behind the ongoing bowl relocation project, then Stinky is a whole lot smarter than I thought he was.

The last observation is about a wild thing, not one of the pets. We were setting fire to yet another brush pile the other day, and apparently disturbed a raccoon who had made his home there. The poor little thing shot out as if his . . . well, as if his house were on fire. (And it was). I hope he was able to relocate satisfactorily. But if he chose another brush pile, he will be sadly out of luck.

Please share your "stupid pet tricks" and other animal stories with me. Surely I'm not the only one!

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Bush Must Be Held Accountable for Emptying the Social Security Trust Fund

By ALLEN W. SMITH, Ph.D.
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

GUEST COMMENTARY



Allen W. Smith

On March 16, 2005, President Bush stood before reporters at a press conference and made a statement that should have shocked and outraged every American who heard it. He said, "We're paying for a lot of programs other than Social Security with the payroll tax coming in, thereby leaving a pile of IOUs."

The issue of spending Social Security money for non-Social Security purposes was widely debated in the 2000 election campaign. Al Gore denounced this practice and promised to put all payroll tax revenue into a "lockbox" from which funds would be withdrawn only to pay Social Security benefits. Bush also made promises to protect the Social Security surplus, both during the campaign and after becoming president.

In his radio address to the nation on February 3, 2001, President Bush said, "My plan will keep all Social Security money in the Social Security system where it belongs." In his March 3 radio speech Bush declared, "We're going to keep the promise of Social Security and keep the government from raiding the Social Security surplus."

In his February 27, 2001, State of the Union address Bush said, "To make sure the retirement savings of

America's seniors are not diverted in any other program, my budget protects all \$2.6 trillion of the Social Security surplus for Social Security, and for Social Security alone."

Despite all those promises, Bush began raiding the Social Security trust fund immediately. His large tax cuts, which were targeted heavily in favor of the rich, were financed with revenue that came from Social Security contributions paid by working Americans. And from that point on, the trust fund became a convenient slush fund for the Bush administration.

The authority to decide whether the surplus payroll taxes would be invested in marketable "good-as-gold" Treasury bonds or deposited in the general fund and spent, rested exclusively with the president. The Treasury Secretary has statutory authority to decide whether to invest the money in regular marketable Treasury bonds, or to issue instead special issue government IOUs, which allow the money to be spent.

President Bush should have chosen to invest all surplus payroll tax revenue in marketable bonds, thus honoring his

pledge to the American people. But he chose instead to have the Treasury Secretary deposit the money in the general fund where it would be available for funding other government programs.

More than \$600 billion in surplus payroll tax revenue has been generated since President Bush took office, and every penny has been spent. More than \$400 million additional surplus dollars become available each and every day, and Bush continues to spend it.

Bush has been unusually open about his misuse of the trust fund money. In a March 17, 2005, Bloomberg news feature titled, "Bush Belittles Assets in Social Security Trust Fund," Bush is quoted as having said in a March 10 speech in Montgomery, Ala., "The government takes your money and spends it on other things and puts an IOU, a piece of paper, on your behalf, which may be worth something, and it may not be worth something."

President Bush first publicly acknowledged misusing Social Security money in a Washington speech on February 9, 2005. He said, "The money-payroll taxes going into the Social Security are spent. They're spent on benefits and they're spent on government programs. There is no trust."

There may be "no trust" when it

comes to Bush's handling of Social Security money, but there most certainly is a trust fund. That fund is empty today because President Bush has used the money as if it were general fund revenue to pay for tax cuts, the war in Iraq, and many other programs. The American people must demand that Bush stop raiding the trust fund and replace the money he has already spent.

This can be accomplished by borrowing enough from private investors to pay off the debt to Social Security. The Social Security funds should then be invested in marketable Treasury bonds, which are default proof. Such action would not increase the national debt. It would just shift the Social Security debt to private investors. This is the only way to insure that the Social Security contributions of working Americans will be used to fund retirement benefits instead of ending up in a government slush fund.

Allen W. Smith is Professor Emeritus, Eastern Illinois University; Ph.D. in Economics, Indiana University, 1970; Author of five books on economics, including, "The Looting of Social Security: How The Government Is Draining America's Retirement Account (2004 Carroll & Graf); and "The Alleged Budget Surplus, Social Security, and Voodoo Economics"; Appearances on CNBC, CNN, CNNfn, and more than 150 radio talk shows.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To The Editor:

The Bush Horde is prepared to launch a propaganda campaign costing in the neighborhood of \$75 million to convince us that the Social Security system is in crisis. The fact is that not only is it not in crisis, it is prospering, if you disregard the borrowing being done to fund entitlements and government programs. In fact the administrative costs are less than 1%.

Under George's next boondoggle, if he succeeds, it will go well with his pledge to get bin Laden, and his weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. So far in his term as Duh President, he has succeeded in nothing other than making a complete ass of himself and alienating our allies.

If this pointed headed pea brained misfit was concerned about the welfare of the country, he would concern himself with the American health care system, which affects Americans now, not what his soothsayers predict forty years from now. With health insurance the highest in history, with citizens one hospitalization away from bankruptcy, *this* is the tragedy that should be under attack, not Social Security.

This schmuck doesn't seem to realize that there are more pressing problems at hand, like global warming, clean air, clean water, energy, and protection of the environment. The Cretin from Crawford doesn't want to violate his industry friendly decisions, consequently these issues are ignored. It still amazes me as to what has happened to this country under the guidance of DUBYA, a name that will go down infamy.

N.M.

To The Editor:

Most of the American People are in a state of Denial. They refuse to believe the Truth, that the Government is and has been lying to them. They want to believe that when a person gets elected, or selected for the office of the President, then that makes that person credible. The Christians believe that George W. Bush is a good Christian, just because he says he is. Yet the Bible tells them that many will come in my name, yet if they don't do as I have taught, then they are not of me. Christ came healing the sick, feeding the poor and comforting the suffering. He taught that you are supposed to prove everything to be true, before you believe it. Yet half the people in America take the word of Bush, just because he says so.

Maybe with the looting of the Social Security, when it hits people in their pockets, they will wake up to the massive amount of lies being feed to them. This is not Bush bashing, this is stating facts. The other half of America, still believe that the only thing that Clinton did wrong was to lie about an affair with an intern. They forget about Ruby Ridge, and the shooting of a Mother while she was holding her baby. And the fact that the FBI shot her son in the back, while he was on his own land. All because a shotgun was a quarter of an inch too short!!.

How about the 17 children, and rest of the Branch Davidians that were in-

cinerated after being held in siege by not just the police, but also our military. Let us not forget the OKC Bombing. Many people have seen the videos of the fireman holding the dead child that had just pulled out of the blown up Murray Federal Building. But how many of you have seen newscaster in OKC that day, talk about the other bombs, two other bombs, taken out of the building that day. Most of us were working, and didn't see it live, so it disappeared, and the focus went to a truck bomb. General Parton (Ret.), demolition expert, has toured the country, telling the people the truth, that there is no way, a fertilizer bomb could have done the damage to that building. But because you don't hear it from the Boob Tube, it can't be true.

All mainstream publication are owned by a handful of Mega-Corporations. These mega-corporations control our government/or the government controls them. What it is, is propaganda. Hitler said "The bigger the lie, the easier it is to sell to the people. Just keep repeating the lie, and it becomes the truth, in the minds of the people."

One of the biggest lies is the War on Drugs. This is the most drugged out country in the world. The MD's make sure the people get the drug of their choice, without bothering to learn the side effects, and warn the people. I thought with the Vioxx scandal, killing 100,000's of people, that maybe that would wake the people. Now I hear they are going to put it back on the market, because some people would rather die, then be in pain?!?! What kind of reasoning is that.

It is time to wake up. Tell your congressmen to stop the wars, and bring our troops home, so we can care for them. They will all be coming home sick, because of the Depleted Uranium ammunition that we have been blowing-up over in Iraq. This is WWII, and it is our worst nightmare, an atomic war, using DU, to contaminate the country, their people, and our troops. Stop the insanity. Don't let them use your tax dollars to perpetuate this war for "Democracy". Democracy, in it's true sense, is mob rule. If enough people are convinced that slavery is ok, then it can be voted back in. We want our Constitutional "Civil" government back, not this Elitist controlled Corporate Entity that is working on ruling the world.

We also don't want the UN ruling the world either. Just say "NO" to the New World Order.

Truth Seeker,
Sheila Leasure, Florence, OR

To The Editor:

At last! An explanation of what, exactly, the "nuclear option" would entail. (This is an excerpt from a recent New Yorker piece; link provided below.)

"Changing the Senate's rules on judicial filibustering was first addressed in 2003, during the successful Democratic filibuster against Miguel Estrada, whom Bush had nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Ted Stevens, a Republican Senate veteran

from Alaska, was complaining in the cloakroom that the Democratic tactic should simply be declared out of order, and, soon enough, a group of Republican aides began to talk about changing the rules. It was understood at once that such a change would be explosive; Senator Trent Lott, the former Majority Leader, came up with "nuclear option," and the term stuck.

"This cloakroom conversation has evolved into a full-fledged proposal, complete with an intellectual pedigree. Several Republican senators told me that they had spent part of the Christmas recess reading the draft of a law-review article co-written by Martin B. Gold, an expert on Senate procedures, who served as an aide to Bill Frist after he became Majority Leader. The article, "The Constitutional Option to Change Senate Rules and Procedures: A Majoritarian Means to Overcome the Filibuster," which was recently published by the Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy, is a step-by-step guide to changing the Senate rules.

"According to Gold's scenario, in an

extended debate over a judicial nominee a senator could raise a point of order that "any further debate is dilatory and not in order." If the Presiding Officer of the Senate—Vice-President Dick Cheney—sustained the point of order, Gold wrote, "he would set a new, binding Senate precedent allowing Senators to cut off debate." Democrats could challenge the Vice-President, but it takes only a majority vote to sustain a ruling by the Presiding Officer. The Republicans, with their majority, could both cut off debate on a nominee and establish a precedent that would apply to all future judicial nominations. (A legal challenge by Democrats would almost surely fail, because courts generally defer to the other branches of government on matters concerning their internal operations.) Henceforth, then, filibusters on judges would be impossible."

Amateur historians, take note: the dismantling of our Senate, as an institution, has begun.

Donna Knipp

Continued On Next Page



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Continued From Previous Page

To The Editor:

Legislators illegally shirking responsibility?

If elected officials are so dead-set against fixing the ailing public school financing system, then they should write and approve legislation to change the mandated provision of the state constitution, which highlights that Texas must provide and pay for a quality education for all children. Otherwise, the ongoing lax attempt to change the source of financing — yet NOT provide additional revenue to fund schools — may constitute an illegal attempt to avoid the state's commitment and responsibility to public schools. During the past decade every year has seen a decrease in the state's financing of public schools. Consequently, lawmakers must be held accountable.

Since the state constitution mandates a public education system, legislators must determine whether they want to change the constitution to eliminate public schools entirely in favor of a privatized reorganization or finally provide additional long-needed financing into the currently mandated and underfunded public school system. Meanwhile, legislators can't have it both ways. Their actions in avoiding the state's commitment is illegal. If the state keeps public schools, it has to finance them properly.

Vote "No" to HB2, HB3

Senators, the people of Texas are tired of "backdoor" taxes and special interest legislation. The House has approved more hidden taxes that affect the majority of Texas in a negative manner. Exactly how greedy are special interests? The word "infinity" comes to mind.

The Senate has usually been the more reasonable of the state's two legislative bodies. Texans ask that you do what is the right thing for their families and children. Personally I have no problem if legislators want to provide wealthy homeowners with a one-third reduction in their property taxes as long as there are provisions in HB 2 and HB 3 to also benefit middle and lower classes. For example, don't raise the sales tax more than one-half cent; eliminate the proposed taxes on bottled water, car repairs, and on other services most often used by middle and poor classes. Wealthy interests have benefited all decade long. It's time to heal some poor ills as well.

There are many other wealthy vs. poor issues in these two bills, of which I will not bore you further. You comprehend the political chicanery that is consistently occurring within our state. The majority of people have been abused sufficiently by the doubling of home insurance costs, sky-high health care costs, increased costs of energy/fuels, and general increase in the cost of daily living expenses. Now the House has created a "back-door" state income tax that must NOT be approved by the Senate.

Furthermore, nothing has been accomplished to resolve the antiquated and inadequate school financing issues that currently plagues most Texas schools. If the state does NOT want to

properly finance public education, then legislators must change the provisions of the state constitution. Currently the state is illegally withholding adequate financing to public schools. You don't have to be a Democrat Judge to acknowledge that fact.

Please work united and bi-partisan to rewrite HB2 and HB3, and establish realistic and long-needed resolutions to the urgent problems facing Texans and their children. It's long overdue.

Peter Stern, Driftwood, TX

To The Editors:

Here follows a letter I wrote to a daughter living in Philadelphia who is very concerned about the direction we are headed under this Bush administration. Since I mention the Iconoclast, I thought I should send you a copy.

Richard K. Heacock, Jr., Fairbanks, AK

Dear Lorelle:

We the People have two options as I see it. One is impeachment of this president and his cabinet via the charges already drawn up by former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark. This is highly unlikely given the Republican control of both House and Senate with leaders like unethical Tom DeLay of Texas and Dennis Hastert - at the moment at least.

The other is to hang tight and try to protect Social Security and bring our troops home from Iraq while doing all we can to find and support a worthy presidential candidate to support in the 2008 election. One of the bright people I am watching is Barak Obama. Since he is young and new in Congress, he would make a great choice for VP. Hillary Clinton is bright, but moving toward the "center" and sounding more and more like a military "hawk". I doubt that John Kerry can generate sufficient charisma to get enough popular votes to win. So I'm still looking for the best possible presidential candidate...someone like Abraham Lincoln or maybe Franklin Delano Roosevelt maybe!

I have just ordered a copy of the 488 page report "U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis" released last May. I have always known that some of the top Nazi rocket and military scientists had been secretly brought to the U.S., quietly avoiding the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, to work for us. But the classified documents proving all this were only recently declassified. They showed that some also have influenced our U.S. intelligence services!

In spite of all the disastrous effects of this administration - which is a mix of arrogant ignorance and supreme military power - I still have hope and even confidence in We the People to survive and overcome even this. Education and the democratic process seem always so slow in bringing change. However, the internet is helping it to happen much faster than during the Vietnam era. I thought we would never get that brutal and stupid slaughter stopped, until MLK, Jr. joining the Civil Rights movement with the Peace movement finally made it possible. (Also the young Texas lawyer who organized the billboard campaign to "Bring Lyndon Home"!)

By the way, I subscribed for the

Crawford, Texas (Bush's hometown) "Lone Star Iconoclast" newspaper after it came out with strong editorial support for John Kerry. Its latest front page story is of the very conservative Republican author Karl W.B. Schwartz's new book: "One Way Ticket to Crawford, Texas". In the book he says things like "We did not attack Afghanistan as a result of 9/11. We planned long before 9/11 to attack them. There was a big oil deal held up by the Taliban and a non-U.S. oil company." His book, along with Jim Wallis' "God's Politics" just may help get a campaign started in Texas to "Bring Dubya Home".

Anyway, hang on to hope and let's keep thinking globally and acting locally! We must be able to help shape a more just and peaceful Planet Earth for all our beautiful and intelligent descendants!

Love, Dad

To The Editor:

Again and again, George W. Bush has challenged the people of America and the world to choose between principle and following his tempting lead.

He makes plain that he will do horrible, amoral things, such as roll back environmental regulations, which will - according to reports by people called scientists by most, evil intellectuals by George W. Bush - cause 18,000 people a year to die prematurely. In return, he promised to put some money in people's pockets via tax cuts.

Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.

George W. Bush made clear he wanted us to go without our allies into Iraq - even if he occasionally lied and said otherwise. He never hid the fact that he wanted the booty of oil and rebuilding contracts all to himself - and for those who were willing to follow him. Yes, more Americans would lose their lives if we went in without our allies. Yes, there was a greater risk of the mission being unsuccessful. Yes, the grounds for undertaking the mission were tenuous at best to begin with. But he promised the mission would be easy money, people giving us flowers and the second largest oil reserves on the planet. And so people supported his alliance-destroying hatred and arrogance.

Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.

George W. Bush sent out a call to the leaders of the world: either you are with me or you are against me. I am undertaking a mission you are being told is unjustified by those who are best in position to know - the UN weapons inspectors - he told the world's leaders plainly. I am going to undertake this mission, regardless of what facts and evidence tell me, and anyone who comes along will get to share the booty; anyone who does not will miss out on millions and millions of dollars. Give me your sons lives, he told the world's leaders, ignore the will of your people, and I will give your wealth beyond your wildest dreams and fame and popularity like you never imagined.

Most leaders stood strong against the siren song, some did not.

Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.

George W. Bush had already depleted the nation's coffers, having promised to line the pockets of those who had followed him with hordes of cash and bounteous jobs. The hordes and jobs never came. Then, he said to the people again, I will rob the coffers a second time. Support me, and I will line your pockets - I will give you \$400 a head for your young ones. Let me line the pockets of the rich once again, leaving the nation in bankrupted tatters, and I will give your real wealth this time - not like the lies and empty promises I gave you before. Follow me into this temptation just one more time, and you will see. Empty the nation's coffers with me, and I will make you rich. And again people gave their support to George W. Bush.

Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.

And now the President stands again before the nation and says plainly: I have bankrupted your nation without lining your pockets as promised, I have led your sons to death but delivered none of the riches or flowers I promised in return, instead of the glory I promised I have earned you the scorn of the good people of the world, I have put more deadly toxins into your air and water and food. And for all of this, I have given you nothing in return. But if you come with me further on the down the road, I will give you riches beyond your wildest dreams. I will give you wealth, prestige and security around the world. Fame and fortune and power.

He continued, doing his Lucifer-like job of making sure those being tempted know exactly what they are signing on for, thus making the purchase of their souls a valid contract.

N.M.

Dear Editor,

My fellow citizens, help is needed now to explain the social security program to the people in Washington D.C. and to our neighbors.

People need to know Social Security is a social program. It is not an investment program for the individual. We have the 401K & IRA plans for those of us interested in investing for retirement. The Social Security program places a small monthly payment in every retired person's hand once a month. Social Security also supports the handicapped people of this nation.

The long term funding of Social Security can be improved by removing the cap & by investing a small portion of the total fund in one of the five mutual funds the government now owns. Investing in the market is not as secure as US Government bonds which is the investment now used by the Social Security system. A fact we must keep in mind.

The great national push to avoid civic responsibility is difficult for me to understand.

Thank You,

Tom Keyes, Burnet, TX

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Continued From Previous Page

Dear Editor,

Why has Social Security's yield been only two percent when the 10-year treasury bond has averaged 7.21 percent since 1962? To improve social security, the first thing we should do is separate Social Security into one fund and hire someone with some investment expertise to handle the fund.

I am of retirement age and I hope when I die, I have given more to my country than I have received. If my payments into Social Security were invested at two percent, I would use my investment up in less than seven years. At six percent, the interest in my investment would be greater than the monthly payments I receive; thus I could receive these payments forever and never use up my Social Security investment if it was invested in 10-year T-bonds.

It looks to me as if our government has not lived up to its fiducial responsibility toward Social Security in order to reduce the interest cost in our national budget. If they did, our Social Security would be greatly strengthened and people like me can meet our goals of giving more to our country than what our country has given to us.

Sincerely,
Ed Hinders
Olton

Dear Editor,

The greatest minds in history endorsed a Creator, including Galileo, Martin Luther, Einstein, Robert Bork, Billy Graham, Erasmus, William Tyndale, Immanuel Kent, and Isaac Newton.

I recently met with some Creation Scientists and they told me what in the near future, evolution will be exposed as the biggest fraud ever perpetrated on mankind. They also informed me that more scientists are accepting a Creator as the basis for everything that exists. In fact, according to Gallup Polls taken between 1982-1999, nearly half of all Americans polled consistently believe in a Creator, and that Charles Darwin was wrong. Only 12 percent support Darwin's theory, and approximately 38 percent believe in a combination of a Creator with evolution playing a minor role. Therefore, it is truly amazing to me that every major college and university teaches evolution as fact, and scoff at the idea of a "Holy God." This is troubling because it is a fact that some of the greatest scientific minds believed in a Creator.

Why have Biblical facts and discoveries substantiating the true meaning of the Bible been hidden? And why is the mere mention of God, Creation, and Christianity controversial in public schools, but theories like evolution and other spiritual practices are a part of the curriculum? The answer is frightening: there is a lethal enemy of God who is busy attacking the minds of people to distort the truth. The God of the Bible is very clear: anyone seeking the truth will be led to find it in Jesus Christ. As a former atheist who accepted the Lord

nearly 10 years ago, I can honestly say that pure truth is Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, it is interesting if not ironic to report that Charles Darwin, an admitted agnostic who reportedly lost his Christian faith in the course of his life work, is buried in Westminster Abby, considered one of the holiest places on Earth! He is buried a few feet from Isaac Newton, along with several other great scientific minds in a section known as "Scientists' Corner." In death, Darwin unknowingly contradicts his life work.

Until His Return,
Frank Bernabei
Sterling Hts., Mich.

Dear Mr. President,

I'm a lifelong Republican. I would like to make the following observations:

When it comes to guest workers, why don't you encourage employers to pay a decent, livable wage instead of relying on foreign workers who will work for anything. We have over 14 million people who are out of work but can't or won't work for \$6 an hour.

Why don't you see if our overpaid, under-worked Congressmen and Senators, who by the way are "eligible for multi-million dollar retirement program after six years in office" can live on \$6 an hour? Mr. President, you are worried more about the hole that you are the donut. You are so concerned about hurting some illegal immigrant's feelings that you are forgetting about the people who put you in office. Most of us do not want illegal immigrants who we have to subsidize their living expenses plus pay for their medical, legal and educational costs. This only helps employers who are too cheap to pay a decent wage and Mexico President Fox who would love to dump all his economic problems on the U.S.

Like most Americans I have a great deal of respect for the Mexican people who are, by the most part, hard-working, family-oriented people, but why do you want to help a government who has never, and I mean never, helped the U.S. Mexico has never supported us in any of our world conflicts and would not even condemn hijackers who crashed the planes into the World Trade Center. And while I am at it, what rights or privileges do U.S. citizens have in Mexico? We can't even get the time of day without paying for it. With friends like the Mexican government, we sure don't need enemies!

So rather than bringing in foreign workers, let's see if we can encourage the business community to pay a livable wage and help our own citizens get back to work. Also keep in mind every time you allow an illegal or foreign person to stay in this country you tax an already overburdened social system. If you continue to pursue the guest worker program, the least you can do is have the federal government reimburse the cities and counties for all the related cost associated with this program including housing, medical, legal, and education.

Respectfully,
David L. Smith
Amarillo

Re: The Fox Watching The Henhouse:
Senate Bill 5

Dear Editor,

The proposed changes to the Texas workers' compensation as envisioned in Senate Bill 5, are a farce.

Many of the proposed changes to the Texas worker's compensation system are based on research compiled by the Workers Compensation Research Institute (WCRI). On its website, the WCRI touts its mission: "To be a catalyst for significant improvements in workers' compensation systems, providing the public with objective, credible, high-quality research on important public policy issues."

A cursory review of WCRI's Board of Directors and their respective affiliations suggests that the organization's avowed objectivity and credibility is an unconscionable distortion of reality:

Vincent Armentano, Chair, The St. Paul Travelers Companies, Inc.; Ronald Walton, Jr., Vice-Chair, SBC Communications, Inc.; Mark Hogle, Treasurer, Accident Fund Insurance Company of America; Cristina D. Dobleman, Stanford University; Michael Fenlon, United Parcel Service; Roger J. Fries, Kentucky Employers' Mutual Insurance; Gregory W. Heidrich, Property Casualty Insurers Association of America; John H. Jones, Jr., Nationwide Indemnity Company; Janine Martin Kral, Nordstrom, Inc.; Kathy Langner, Chubb & Son, a division of Federal Insurance Company; David Patterson, ACE USA; Pete McPartland, General Casualty Companies of Wisconsin; Paul Mattered, Liberty Mutual Group; Richard L. Thomas, American Insurance Group; Joseph Treacy, The Hartford Insurance Group; Joseph Wells, Zurich North America.

Conspicuously absent from the Board of Directors is any advocate on behalf of injured workers.

Additionally, WCRI's Research Committee, i.e., those steering the "high-quality research" of WCRI, consists of the following individuals:

Keith T. Bateman, Property Casualty Insurers Association of America; William G. Carney, GE Insurance Solutions; Darrell DeMoss, MedRisk, Inc.; David Dodge, PHT Services, Ltd.; Rosemary Favier, Preferred Employers Insurance Company; William Franzen, Zurich North America; Robert King, Fireman's Fund Insurance Company, Janine M. Kral, Nordstrom, Inc.; Robert Malooly, Washington Department of Labor & Industries; Philip Millhollon, Chevron Texaco Corp.; Kathleen Muedder, ACE USA; Stephanie Perilli, The Home Depot, Inc.; Glen Pitruzzello, The Hartford Financial Services Group; Mike Schimke, General Casualty Company of Wisconsin; Thomas Spratt, Liberty Mutual Insurance Group.

A cursory analysis of the Texas Legislature's "Fact Sheet" regarding the workers' compensation system makes clear that the WCRI specializes in carefully selecting the statistics which it feels most bolster whatever claim it happens to be making at the time. Another problem with the research conducted by WCRI is that the data upon which the studies have been based is considered "proprietary" by WCRI and has not been released. Whatever conclusions are reached in any WCRI study are simply not subject to any peer review and, as such, are wholly, unreliable in any serious analytical discussion of workers' compensation prob-

lems. Relying on unverifiable scientific data seems a bit, well, unscientific.

Statistics provided by other research groups suggest different problems with the Texas workers' compensation system. By way of example, one group, NCCI Holdings, Inc., reports that between the years 2000 and 2002, medical payments in the Texas workers' compensation system declined by 14.5 percent. Over the same time period, Texas workers' compensation premiums shot up 39 percent. So, the insurance companies in Texas are making more money than ever though increased premiums, paying out less than ever in benefits, while at the same time arguing to the Legislature that their research arm's "objective, credible, high-quality" data, which is completely unavailable for any public scrutiny, suggests that what is needed to "fix" the workers' compensation system is more insurance company control under the guise of managed care.

It is an affront to Texas' intelligent citizenry that our Representatives and Senators would accept the recommendations of this obviously biased insurance-industry mouthpiece, one which refuses to release its data for independent verification. Once again, our Legislature is bending to the will of the insurance industry, while Texas workers are left out to dry.

Sincerely,
David Herrman
Dallas

Re: Senate Bill 5

Dear Editor,

Well, the Texas Legislature and their insurance company buddies are at it again. This time with Senate Bill 5, they are looting the Texas workers' compensation system and hard-working Texans to protect record insurance company profits. That's right. The Legislature is in cahoots with the insurance companies. Some things never change!

There are problems in the system, but the Legislature's solution of allowing an insurance company mouthpiece, the Workers' Compensation Research Institute to decide what changes need to be made suggests that our politicians aren't listening to the workers of Texas. The WCRI won't even release their data to the public, but the citizens of Texas are supposed to trust them? Does the Legislature think Texas workers are idiots?

Concerned workers of Texas should contact their local Senator of Representative immediately to let the Legislature know that relying on insurance company "secret" data will not be tolerated. Ask your legislator why the insurance companies are hiding the data, and find out if your legislator supports Texas workers of the fat-cat insurance companies.

It's time for the workers of Texas to stand up and be counted. Tell your legislator that enough is enough before it's too late! What are the insurance companies so afraid of? If their data is accurate, why won't they show it to any of us? Texas legislators need to do better by Texas workers.

Let's not remain silent any longer. Contact your local Senator and Representative today. If you are unsure as to who to contact, call (512) 463-4630 or visit the Legislature's website at (www.capitol.state.tx.us/fyi/fyi.html) to locate your representative.

Sincerely,
Dixon Wiles
Dallas

Propaganda

— Guest Commentary —

Coming Soon to Your Mailbox: Government Misinformation

By AMY CHASANOV
ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE

My annual Social Security Statement arrived recently. Right there on the front page under the heading "About Social Security's future" is another example of how the administration is spending taxpayer dollars to push misleading, even downright false information. While senior officials from the Social Security Administration barnstorm the country to help promote the president's plan to privatize Social Security, a more subtle part of the campaign package is arriving in our mailboxes.

In 2004, the Bush administration spent \$88 million on public rela-

tions, up 128% from 2000. Government agencies have paid pliable columnists to pitch for administration policies on education and social issues. The administration has been caught passing off phony, pre-packaged news videos as if they were real reports by real journalists. The General Accounting Office concluded that two of these ersatz reports crossed the line into illegal, covert propaganda. It's not just inappropriate, it's illegal for an administration to use taxpayer dollars to try to manipulate public opinion like this.

In January, a 31-year veteran with the Social Security Administration testified at a Senate hear-

ing that frontline agency workers are instructed "to promote the idea that Social Security is in crisis and that Social Security privatization is the answer." She said this is the first time career employees had been asked to take sides in a major political controversy. And, a few weeks ago, House Democrats released a report demonstrating how the Social Security Administration—which is supposed to be nonpartisan—has systematically changed its publications to undermine public confidence and press for changes.

Which takes us back to the Social Security Statements mailed to millions of workers to help them plan for retirement. It claims the system is "facing serious future financial problems" and "action is needed soon to make sure the system is sound." It also blames demographics, falsely asserting that our economy cannot maintain future scheduled benefits.

While the administration has been generating a false sense of crisis, it has failed the first test of leadership: to present a plan that addresses the problem.

The administration's only clear proposal so far—private accounts—would do nothing to make Social Security more solvent.

An expert at a recent White House briefing on privatization admitted as much. Private accounts actually make things worse, not better, requiring trillions in new borrowing and diverting money that would otherwise pay current beneficiaries.

Here's a little-known fact that you won't find in your Social Security Statement: the trust fund is actually more solvent today than it has been in years and it keeps improving. According to the Congressional Budget Office, there is ample money to pay 100% of scheduled benefits until today's high schoolers are nearing retirement. After that, Social Security

can pay 78% of scheduled benefits, which (because benefits rise over time) is higher than those being paid today. The rest of government's finances should be so strong.

But what about demon demographics? Rising longevity and aging baby boomers aren't news. While demographics are easy to blame, that argument pits younger workers against the elderly in a zero-sum game. That's not just wrong, it's inaccurate. Research finds that the most significant reason for the shortfall is increasing wage inequality.

Because wage growth has been slower than predicted—especially for low and middle-income workers—Social Security collected less revenue than expected. At the top of the wage scale, where most of wage growth has been concentrated, Social Security taxes are only collected on the first \$90,000 of wages. Even though that cap rises annually to reflect increases in average wage growth, faster-than-average growth at the top has put 15% of all wages above the cap—up from 10% in 1983. In other words, when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, Social Security's finances suffer.

Serious and balanced proposals to address the long-term shortfall should be carefully considered. But, we should not rush to displace this important program that has kept millions of retirees, workers, and families out of poverty with a program that puts these same individuals at risk.

President Bush's State of the Union warned that some would try to mislead us about Social Security and urged us not to buy their story. Let's follow that advice.

Amy Chasanov is deputy policy director at the Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank in Washington, DC (that researches how the economy affects working people)



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