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You've had constitutional law professors come out and say if you pass that amendment in Texas, you actually end up prohibiting all marriages because that is in fact what the second clause appears to say...There's a lot of sloppiness in the conservative movement in terms of what they want to achieve and, in the case of the Texas amendment, what they have actually written.'

— The Rev. Barry Lynn

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Libby Indicted In CIA Leak Case

WASHINGTON — The chief of staff for Vice President Dick Cheney resigned from his post after he was indicted on five counts last Friday at the end of a two-year investigation into whether any officials in the Bush administration knowingly leaking the identity of an undercover CIA agent whose husband criticized the initial reasons for invading Iraq.

I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby Jr., 55, is

charged with obstructing a federal grand jury investigation, lying about his knowledge about CIA official Valerie Plame's identity in 2003 and then telling reporters about this classified information.

Although Cheney told Libby of Plame's identity, Fitzgerald said that this contact was legal. Considered Cheney's alter ego and a chief architect of the war with Iraq, Libby said he be-

lieves he will be exonerated.

Libby, if convicted, could face a maximum of 30 years in prison and \$1.25 million in fines.

Though he escaped indictment Friday,

President Bush's top advisor Karl Rove remains under investigation for making false statements. Special prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald has yet to decide let alone comment on Rove's status.

Sheehan Arrested Again As 2,000th U.S. Soldier Is Reported Dead

WASHINGTON — Along with two dozen others, Cindy Sheehan, anti-war advocate and the mother of a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq, was arrested last Wednesday for protesting without a permit near the White House.

At the time of their arrest, the protesters were staging a "die-in" where they lied on the sidewalk to symbolize U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq as Staff Sgt. George T. Alexander Jr., 34, officially became the 2,000th soldier to die in the Iraq war.

Lieutenant Phil Beck of the U.S. Park Police said that the protestors were warned three times to leave the area for demonstrating without a permit. Each face a \$75 fine.

Sheehan and 370 other protestors were arrested in late September and then released after demanding the withdrawal of the 140,000 U.S. troops from Iraq in front of the White House on the same charge.

"There comes a time when we have

to break a small law, like sitting down in front of the White House, in order to point out a greater law that's being broken," Sheehan said in a statement.

Sheehan has been compared to the late Rosa Parks, who died last week at 92 almost 50 years after sparking the civil rights movement by getting arrested for refusing to step to the back of a bus for a white man in Alabama.

MoveOn.org Political Action estimated that more than 100,000 people attended 1,354 candlelight vigils in all 50 states and the District of Columbia last Wednesday evening.

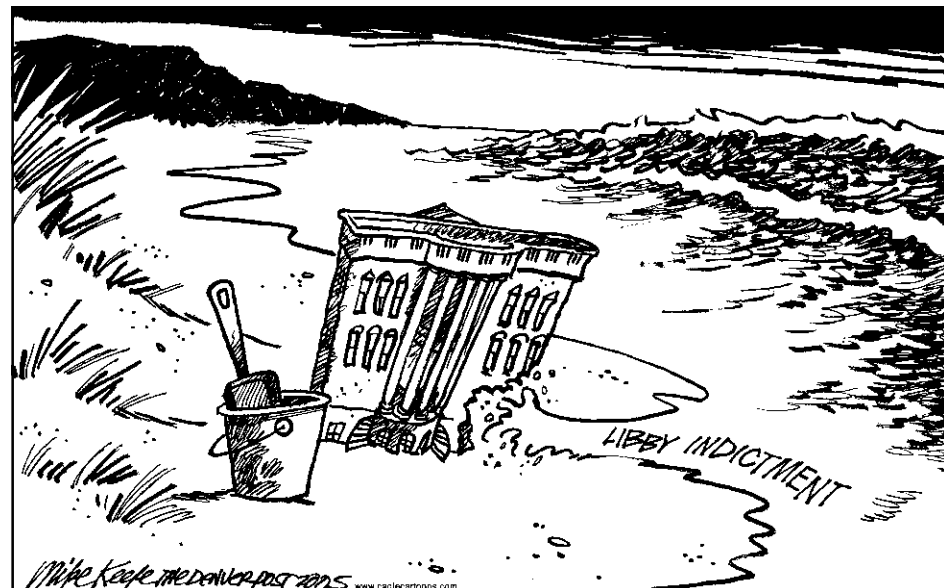
A Harris interactive survey found that 53 percent of the American public think that "taking military action against Iraq was the... wrong thing to do," while 34 percent who thought it was correct.

A New York Times-CBS News Poll showed that 60 percent of Americans disapprove of Bush's handling of the war, and 44 percent of Americans believe the U.S. made the right decision to invade Iraq.



Cindy Sheehan

— Iconoclast Photo



Three More U.S. Soldiers Killed In Iraq

WASHINGTON — Three U.S. soldiers were killed by insurgents and four were wounded on Saturday, according to the Pentagon.

A land mine killed one U.S. soldier and wounded four others Saturday near Beiji. Two additional soldiers died in south Baghdad when their patrol encountered a roadside bomb.

These deaths elevate the number of U.S. service members who have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003 to 2,015, says the Pentagon.

Iraqi civilians were also killed or wounded during these incidents and others. According to military figures, at least 30 were killed and another 30 wounded.

Bush To Restore Prevailing Wage Law In Katrina Torn Areas

WASHINGTON — Companies awarded federal contracts for Hurricane Katrina will soon have to pay their workers the prevailing wages in hurricane-affected areas.

The Bush administration will restore the 74-year-old Davis-Bacon Act on Nov. 8, usually an amount close to the pay scales in local union contracts.

The White House promised to reinstate the suspended act after two months of pressure from pro-labor Re-

publicans and Democrats.

The administration initially argued that the suspension would reduce rebuilding costs for locals, but unions and others noted that lower pay for workers would also result.

Democrats have said that since the Bush administration was attempting to permanently remove the Davis-Bacon Act because the suspension was open-ended. The White House contends that the suspension was always intended to be temporary.



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Texas Marriage MASSACRE

Prop 2 Threatens Religious Liberty

Interview With The Rev. Barry Lynn, Americans United's Executive Director

BY NATHAN DIEBENOW
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

CRAWFORD — It's almost like the beginning of a horror movie.

First, we see an SVU driving through the countryside at sunset. Next, inside the vehicle is a young newlywed couple, a young groom in his tuxedo and his bride still in her wedding gown.

Dick and Jane, as we'll call them, are on their way to this lavish honeymoon resort on the Texas Gulf Coast. They're coming from the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex.

Their gas tank is full, their clothes are all packed neatly in the truck, and judging by the smiles on their faces, the newlyweds definitely think they're safe.

But along comes Todd in his own SUV who is heading west toward Dick and Jane. Todd can't see too well because the setting sun is shining directly in his eyes, and he's also drunk like a skunk because he just got laid off work and isn't taking it very well.

Then, blammo! Todd's SUV hits Dick and Jane's SUV, sending Jane into such a horrible state that the only thing keeping her alive is the life support system at a nearby hospital. Otherwise, she's a brain-dead vegetable.

Dick would like to pull the plug on Jane because that's what she would have wanted him to do, but her parents are against it. It's against their religion.

Now you'd think that since Dick and Jane were married, Dick would have the legal right to pull the plug, but does he?

According to the folks at SaveTexasMarriage.com, if Texans vote to pass Prop 2 on Nov. 8, the institution of marriage will be destroyed here in Texas, and my hypothetical Dick/Jane story would perhaps end in favor of Jane's parents, although Jane's parents wouldn't be legally married anymore either.

Prop 2, authored by Rep. Warren Chisum (R - Pampa), is supposed to be the anti-gay marriage amendment, although Texas already has laws on the books that ban same-sex marriage...

But while Prop 2 defines a marriage as a union consisting only between a man and a woman, it also has a second clause that "prohibit(s) this state or a political subdivision of this state from

creating or recognizing any legal status identical or similar to marriage."

So will Prop 2 destroy all marriages in Texas? Will Rep. Chisum be known as the "marriage slayer?" Will Dick have the power to hypothetically release Jane from her earthly vessel if Prop 2 is passed?

We'll just have to wait and see.

In the meantime, pass the popcorn and read this interview between the Iconoclast's Nathan Diebenow and Rev. Barry Lynn, 57, the executive director of Americans United, a nonprofit grassroots organization that has fought to protect religious liberties of all Americans since 1947 (www.au.org).

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ICONOCLAST: You're a United Church of Christ minister and an attorney. What came first?

REV. BARRY LYNN: Frankly, I was particularly interested in being in a progressive religious community during the Vietnam War because they seemed to be doing and saying a lot more than the legal community was doing at the time, and that's why I turned from my initial interest in the law to theology.

Then during theology school, when I started to deal one-on-one with people's problems whether they were in the hospital or a rehab center or whatever, it became clear that the law actually had a lot of answers that were possibly as important to them at the time as any spiritual answers. I went to law school at night when I moved to Washington and there-in lies why I have two degrees.

ICONOCLAST: What led you to become executive director of Americans United?

REV. LYNN: I had been interested in this organization for some time. I used to speak at their events and so on, contribute to their magazine and so on, and when they had the opportunity to look for another director, I had actually left Washington for a couple of years, but I was eager to come back, and this was a perfect fit for me.

ICONOCLAST: Americans United has been around for over 50 years, but I would imagine that religious people have been trying to breach the wall between church and state since the beginning of this republic, right?

REV. LYNN: Yeah, absolutely. Some of the same fights that are going on now are the kinds of issues that were floating around 215 years ago. I like to say that our side won 215 years ago, and unfortunately now, we've reached a point where some people would rather reverse all that sentiment.

That's not to say that we haven't screwed up on occasion because certainly we have, but in general, the country has been remarkably thoughtful in

terms of avoiding sectarian conflict, the kind that we see in so many parts of the world. We did get real ugly after the Civil War, for example. There were literally riots and burned churches in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania over which version of the Bible should be read in the public schools, which prompted some people to say, "Gee, maybe we shouldn't be reading the Bible in public schools to start with, and then we would have avoided this." And as a consequence, as you know, this issue went to the United States Supreme Court in the early 1960s, but these are old issues. Old issues.

ICONOCLAST: Well, who was defending religious liberty here prior to 1947?

REV. LYNN: Well, it's interesting. For a reasonable amount of time, there wasn't anybody, and then when the American Civil Liberties Union was founded in the 1920s and when people started to go into court on their own saying the Bill of Rights gives me as an individual American the right to challenge restrictions on speech or restrictions on my religion, they started to do it.

But the founding of the Supreme Court until the 1920s, very few people even thought about using the courts as a way to vindicate individual freedom. I know that sounds bizarre today when everybody having anything go wrong in their life immediately will take it to the Supreme Court, but this is a pretty modern-day phenomemon when you think about it. You know, for a lot of decades well into the 20th century, people said, "Ah, we didn't know that gave us a private right to complain when the government is trying to spend our money on things we don't like or restrict our speech or our ability to proselytize, or whatever folks wanted to do.

ICONOCLAST: So I guess what you're saying is that we're currently living in a time of increased activity from religious people trying to compromise religious liberties?

REV. LYNN: Oh, yeah, this is the most aggressive they have ever been because this is the time when they figure that we've got openings in the Supreme Court, control of the White House, control of both Houses of Congress, if we can't move now on our pet agendas, school vouchers, prayer in school, ending reproductive rights, closing the door to same-sex marriage, (if) we can't do it now, we may never be able to do it.

They are aggressive now as ever. They are as well funded as ever, and they just don't depend on Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell anymore. There are many more players on top of the Religious Right hierarchy: D. James Kennedy from Florida; James Dobson has become more and more powerful —



The Rev. Barry Lynn

arguably the single most powerful person on the Religious Right; as well as more legal groups that have sprung up in recent years that are much more aggressive in litigating on the side of the Religious Right.

ICONOCLAST: And there are increased attempts to rewrite history, right?

REV. LYNN: Oh, yeah, the principle rewrite, frankly — it comes from a guy named David Barton, a historian, that is to say he has a history degree, who has written a series of books and videos, and does speeches, and also is vice-chair of the Texas Republican Party, as a matter of fact. He's persistently out there trying to argue that this is a Christian nation, that the evidence of history and the early Constitution demonstrates it was intended to be as such, and he's very glib, and he has this flashy material. I've seen him do his little road show a couple of times.

This has been a big selling point, and we've caught him where he's used phony quotes from the Framers (of the Constitution), things (James) Madison, (Thomas) Jefferson never even said. He has had to change some of his material from the criticism that we've had of his scholarship, but he is a very potent figure on the Right, just not as well known because he doesn't live on cable television. They don't know him from that.

ICONOCLAST: Is the Bible Belt moving north, east, west?

REV. LYNN: This Bible Belt has an increasing number of buckles, and they're not just in the South. There are extremely active Religious Right movements, even in places like New York City. They don't generally win, but they do make a lot of noise. They're happy. It feeds into their victimization status because one of the things the Religious Right is always doing is claiming to be persecuted, even thought they're "the majority." It's hard to understand how a majority can be persecuted, but they claim to be persecuted.

David Limbaugh — Rush Limbaugh's younger, smarter brother — has a book that is very popular called — I think it's called "Persecution." It's got a lion on

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the cover to remind people that Christians used to be thrown to the lions, although that's not going on any more to my knowledge.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs)

REV. BARRY: He thinks that if you don't put up a nativity scene in the firehouse, that's pretty much the same as being eaten by a lion. It's a very disturbing metaphor and quite strange, but that's the mindset they get into. You know, when I do a public speech somewhere where it's not a dinner talking to the mainly converted, people'll come up and say, "Oh, you just don't know how tough it is."

I'll ask them for stories, and usually, frankly, it's the most ridiculous stuff you can imagine, or it's something that did not happen to them. It happened to somebody else. We often check these stories out. Usually, they are completely wrong — the facts are just not quite as right they are reported in Christian press. It happens all the time.

I've even had a woman who called into a television show, and she told me that she was told she couldn't carry a Bible in her school even to read in her free time, and I said that's shocking and that's wrong, and there are things, errors where people go too far. I said, "Call the producer here. He'll give you my number. We'll get to the bottom of this, and we'll fix it." She calls me personally and says it actually didn't happen. It really didn't happen to her.

ICONOCLAST: She —

REV. BARRY: She thought it happened to somebody else at some other school. I consider it a major accomplishment when a teenage high school student who called a national call-in show actually says, "I want to apologize. I made it up. I'm not a victim of anything." So I mean there's just so much nonsense. The Big Lie technique — you repeat something enough times and people start to believe it. It's just very unfortunate.

ICONOCLAST: I understand that work is under way to establish an AU chapter in Austin. How many other new chapters are being established in the U.S.?

REV. LYNN: We have over 50 what I call active chapters at the moment, that is where there are enough core issues and plans that groups have to get local community involvement.

There's been a significant increase in the last 10 months of interest, but we do have a process. You can't just call up and say, "I want to be a chapter." We have to have some control over the process. There's a lot of interest, and obviously, although we now have 34 on the staff here, a small percentage of them are field operations, so it takes a little longer to actually get something formalized, but there is a tremendous increase in members out there as well as growth in chapters.

Some of (the growth) is a reaction to last year's election of President Bush; however, we find that our membership has grown steadily. It has grown steadily in each of the 14 years I've been here through Bill Clinton. You know, people didn't quite trust his commitment to the separation of church and state either, at least if they were our members, so we don't have the decline.

For a lot of groups, somebody gets in that's on their end of the political spec-

trum, and then they stop giving to groups because they figure the problem is solved. Well, our members didn't think Clinton was going to solve anything, and indeed there were an enormous amount of problems we encountered during his administration. The Religious Right hated him so much that they bolstered attention to these issues, and President Clinton was a little shaky on these issues himself.

ICONOCLAST: Which issues are you referring to? I don't remember any issues on religious liberty. I remember — I was just a teenager when Clinton was in office — but I remember Tipper Gore doing her thing and outrage over gangster rap. That sort of thing.

REV. LYNN: Well, there was that, but he had made some comments about prayer in school, if it was student initiated it might be constitutional in some circumstances. A little mushy. I think he gradually came to a clearer awareness of what he meant, but it took a couple of years to get him there.

And he signed legislation that was the foundation for President Bush's faith-based initiative. He had reservations about what he signed. The Justice Department wrote memoranda questioning the constitutionality of some of the provisions of giving money to churches for their missions into the community, but he still signed the bill. It wasn't that he signed it because he felt so deeply about it, so there were some issues that had to be dealt with.

ICONOCLAST: What's the legal question AU is asked the most when people call in? Is there one question or are there just a whole bunch?

REV. LYNN: There are so many. I was in Minnesota yesterday. I just got back about an hour ago. There are messages here about "Can you celebrate Halloween in public schools? Is that a violation of church/state separation?" Questions about the Federal Emergency Management Agency giving money to reimburse churches for some of their hurricane relief efforts. A letter from a member looking for advice in regard to using churches as voting places in a special election in early November. I don't forget what state that's in, but I mean, these are just three things from today.

Every January I try to actually write down in a notebook what everybody calls — at least what every reporter that I talk to wants to know about. I give up by February.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs) Really?

REV. LYNN: There's just too many. It's all over the place. I mean, in California, there's an effort to give a Christian group the right to manage a public theatre, so the obvious question is — and it's a pretty conservative group — will they allow a play with nudity to be performed that they are running the theatre now? They've got the government contract. There's a big fuss over that — a legitimate fuss — in the city council. San Diego, California.

It's a never-ending set of variations on the central theme, and the central theme is this: to what degree do we need to keep a decent distance between the institutions of government and those of religion? How do we understand that we're living in the same country? I mean, there are churches here and governments here, and it's not like you can't

I'll ask them for stories, and usually, frankly, it's the most ridiculous stuff you can imagine, or it's something that did not happen to them. It happened to somebody else. We often check these stories out. Usually, they are completely wrong — the facts are just not quite as right they are reported in Christian press. It happens all the time.'

— The Rev. Barry Lynn

have one literally not communicate to the other, but what is the proper balance? And that's really been the battle for 200 years.

ICONOCLAST: The Religious Right has been active since the late 1970s in earnest, but the Rev. Jim Wallis, anti-poverty/social justice advocate and publisher of Sojourners magazine, emerged last year after the 2004 elections, though he's been around for quite some time, too. One of his points is that religion is supposed to criticize both the Left and the Right — or whoever participates in government — because they tend to get "it" wrong. What is your take on Wallis' approach to politics and religious liberty?

REV. LYNN: Um, it's not entirely favorable. I think he's got some real blind spots. I don't see how you can create a system for the kind of economic justice he talks about and be as disinterested as he in fundamental civil rights and women's rights including reproductive choice. He is bad on those issues. He does not seem to connect them to the fact that the part of what justice in America ought to be in the 21st century is to respect everyone's moral decision-making capabilities, and I don't think he does that, and I've said this to him publically, and we had a debate at Yale Law School a couple months ago that went on for a couple of hours, hundreds of students. It wouldn't surprise him. I'm just disappointed that he has not fully put into place an agenda that would grant genuine justice to everyone.

When he talks about the war and when he talks about poverty, yeah, I agree with virtually all of that, but he's really got some blind spots, and I think that's a real problem. The other thing that happens, although he would deny that he's responsible, is that sometimes, particularly when Democrats hear him, they go, "Yeah, we need to put more Bible passages in our speeches." And you have Bible-quoting wars on the floor of Congress which is an absurd way to make decisions by politicians in a secular democracy which is what we've got. I don't want to have Bible debates to make policy. The Constitution is the source of values for making public policy, not my scriptural tradition or Jim Wallis' or Jerry Falwell's. None of us.

We can inform the debate, and I agree with Jim that churches have every right and maybe even a responsibility to speak to power and to criticize policies, but when it comes down to making those policies, politicians can't rely on the Bible or the Koran. They've got to rely on the commonly shared values present in our Constitution.

ICONOCLAST: So when Rev. Wallis talks about all these progressive social movements that were led by religious leaders, like the Civil Rights movement

and the Abolitionist movement, do you think that this is an accurate analysis or was the catalyst for these movements something other than religion?

REV. LYNN: No, I think there is a lot of truth to religious leaders being seminal figures in the movements he's talking about. There's no doubt about that. But they are not just talking to politicians, remember. The moral authority of the church in the Civil Rights movement, they were saying to people, "Listen, if you're the grocer, you've got to serve everybody. That's a moral obligation."

Yeah, eventually, that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act a few years later, but the basic moral message was not just directed to politicians. Martin Luther King never endorsed a single candidate for public office his entire life from the pulpit. He never did it. He didn't think that was the responsibility of the church, and I think he was more powerful because of that. He did not allow himself to be used in a partisan way by politicians of either party.

The other thing Jim I think would acknowledge is this: at the same time that there were people working on integration from the churches, there were also churches literally saying, "We've got to keep the races segregated because in the book of Genesis, it says God separated the light from the darkness."

ICONOCLAST: (laughs) I've never heard that before.

REV. LYNN: Yeah, no, I mean, it's true. It's unfortunate. When it's convenient we look at religious movements as really positive, and there is a lot that's positive, but there's a little good and bad and ugly if you look at the overall picture.

ICONOCLAST: I'm sitting here beside myself. I didn't know they used that passage.

REV. LYNN: It's just one of the proof texts. Look, the entire debate — I was in Minneapolis accepting this pro-choice award last night, and the word abortion, the concept of abortion is not even mentioned in the Christian Bible. Never. So why is this an issue for the Christian Right? It's a non-Biblical issue. They find poetry — the book of Jeremiah or somewhere — they say, "Well, here's a passage. It must be about abortion! God said, 'I have known you when I formed you in the womb.' So that means you should criminalize abortion." Huh? What?

Well, that's the only thing they've got to rely on, and they say it and repeat that verse, and there are few others, but there's no reference to the topic in the Bible at all. Jesus never talks about gays. He talks about hypocrites a lot. He never talks about homosexuality. Now,

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admittedly there are other passages. But you'd think that if it was that big a deal, one of the four gospel writers would have probably remembered Jesus talking about it, but he didn't.

So there's a lot of phoniness on the part of the Religious Right about the very political basis for the positions they take. Then, of course, when it comes to the flat tax, some of them will give you a proof text on why we should have a flat tax or support some other ultra conservative view of some other issue. So I don't want to see, I

mean, the Left or the Religious Left or whatever you want to call it should not be in the position of just saying, "To win this debate we need to find a better text and have politicians repeat it." That's no answer.

ICONOCLAST: What did you think of that "values" poll that was taken after the election?

REV. LYNN: That poll was really a huge blunder. I mean, I think it's irresponsible journalism to talk about it the way it did because it was without — in 1996, the LOS ANGELES TIMES did an exit poll that asked about the percentage of people who are voting on the phrase that year was "moral and family values." And it was 36 percent in 1996 and this year it was 20 or 22. Does that mean we're less interested? No, it's just that people put all kinds of different issues into the same basket.

Once people saw that one statistic from one polling group, the people go, "Wow! This is an untapped voting block. We must get values." Well, progressives have always had values, and maybe they should talk about them more and call them values, but that doesn't mean you have to find a proof-text in the Christian Bible to prove you have a value.

The whole Constitution is filled with values. We believe in freedom of conscience. We believe in a freedom of speech. We believe people ought to be treated equally in the courts of the land. Those are values. So all you have to do to prove you got values is say, "I love those values and they come from the Constitution, and you elect me, and I'm going to enforce them." I mean, that's what you should do. You shouldn't find some quote from the Bible and throw it into a speech.

ICONOCLAST: Yeah, I follow you. It sounds like people are making it harder than it really is.

REV. LYNN: Yeah, it's just spin, another variation. "How can we spin our issue in a different way?"

ICONOCLAST: Do you see signs of the Republican Party moving away from the Religious Right anytime soon or are they too embedded?

REV. LYNN: They are certainly deeply embedded, but I will tell you that there are some examples including the reaction to the Mrs. Terri Schaivo case. A lot of Republicans have had second and third thoughts about why they allowed themselves to get railroaded into making that a big national issue when in fact

it should have been and eventually was resolved simply as a matter of state law in family courts which is where those decisions ought to be made. They looked foolish like they were federalizing this issue. They got steamrolled by Tom DeLay and some of them are still mad about it.

And then, in other instances, there are certainly some Republicans who are very upset about the John Bolton nomination to the U.N. They think that guy is just too far to the right in any sense be comfortable with and, as a

consequence, there is a bit of a development of the moderate Republicans who historically have been among other things good church/state separationists. Lowell Weicker of Connecticut, Mike Hatfield from Oregon, Jake Danforth from Missouri. These were stalwarts on the cause, and I'd like to think some of those types are coming back.

ICONOCLAST: The big news right now is Harriet Miers, President Bush's pick for Supreme Court Justice, withdrawing. What I've noticed is that President Bush has a habit of stressing his nominee's faith over his nominee's professional qualifications. Businessmen don't normally operate this way. They actually care about qualifications over faith.

REV. LYNN: Of course.

ICONOCLAST: Then again since the

On The Nov. 8 Texas Ballot:

• Proposition 2: HJR 6 — "The constitutional amendment providing that marriage in this state consists only of the union of one man and one woman and prohibiting this state or a political subdivision of this state from creating or recognizing any legal status identical or similar to marriage."

“Martin Luther King never endorsed a single candidate for public office his entire life from the pulpit. He never did it. He didn't think that was the responsibility of the church, and I think he was more powerful because of that. He did not allow himself to be used in a partisan way by politicians of either party.”

— The Rev. Barry Lynn

fall of Enron, there has been a growth in "social corporate responsibility." Do you see a threat to religious liberty from corporations with religious preferences that go after governmental contracts? You know, like a "Christian Halliburton" or something?

REV. LYNN: Oh, sure, any government contractor in my view is obliged to do what they've been required to do since the Harry Truman administration which is not discriminate on the basis of race or religion in contracts or employment under contracts, but under the President's faith-based initiative, he would like to make that much murkier, and if it was religious big corporations, some of these are enormous organizations, they would be allowed to discriminate on the basis of religion by extension discriminate on the basis of race if that was a religious doctrine or a church-related business held. There is a danger there.

Also there is a point that some of the big corporate givers to conservative politicians are starting to see some of the conservative agenda coming back to bite them. For example, high-tech industries and medical companies that are basically looking to compete in the market for using stem cell research and find cures for diseases are finding that ideological conservatives are winning the day and we're not spending the money to be competitive in that incredibly lucrative market around the world. Other coun-

‘So I mean there's just so much nonsense. The Big Lie technique — you repeat something enough times and people start to believe it. It's just very unfortunate.'

— The Rev. Barry Lynn

tries are going to do that research if we don't, so there is a clash, in a sense, between some of the corporate interests that have traditionally supported conservative candidates and some of these conservative Christian activists in the movement.

ICONOCLAST: Texans will be voting on a gay marriage amendment — Prop 2 — in a week, Nov. 8, to be exact. From what I understand, the economic impact of such amendments in other states is up for debate. In fact I've heard that businesses/corporations will cater to their employees who are homosexual whether or not there are laws defining marriage as solely between a man and a woman.

REV. LYNN: Oh, yeah, there's a tremendous pressure because you want a qualified workforce, and if the most qualified person happens to be gay, he'd be a nutty businessman to say, "Well, we're going to fire that person. We're going to make it so uncomfortable that he leaves." To the extent that you stabilize family relationships, which is what same-sex marriage is intended to do, that's even better. It stabilizes the workforce. It means that people are going to get benefits and stay with companies longer because there's a stability that the system recognizes to the relationships that they have.

In addition, this week, you've had constitutional law professors come out and say if you pass that amendment in Texas, you actually end up prohibiting all marriages because that is in fact what the second clause appears to say to me, so foolishly the conservatives who drafted this thing have

probably written an amendment which would say the state wouldn't acknowledge any marriages anymore which would be an unintended consequence, obviously, but a real one. There's a lot of sloppiness in the conservative movement in terms of what they want to achieve and, in the case of the Texas amendment, what they have actually written.

ICONOCLAST: Doesn't homosexual-ity undermine the whole concept of "Intelligent Design" anyway?

REV. LYNN: (laughs) Nobody has actually asked that question before. Well, yes, but sadly there's an answer to it. If I was the Religious Right, here's what I'd say: I'd say you're absolutely right, and that's why it proves that homosexuality is a choice. It's not a genetic factor because if it were not procreative, then it would be a disadvantage in terms of evolutionary theory, and, therefore, it would have died out by now, so it must, therefore, be a moral choice to choose to do something that the Bible condemns. That's the answer they would give you.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs) So out of this deterministic, closed system, there is a choice.

REV. LYNN: Nobody said they had to be logical or reasonable, but I'm saying that's probably the answer they'd give you. It's frightening that I can give you these answers, but I've spent so much

time with them that I can do that.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs) I'll pray for you harder then. (laughs) Well, I'm interested with how AU works with other civil liberty groups like The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and The Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

REV. LYNN: We've on occasions worked with both of those groups and very closely with other organizations: the Faith Alliance Foundation, the Interfaith Alliance Organization, which have chapters around the country. Also we certainly co-litigate as we're doing in the case in Dover on Intelligent Design with the ACLU affiliates around the country, sometimes with the national ACLU. We've worked with people with the American Way, the National Education Association, the National Council of Jewish Women, lots and lots of groups that share a commitment to individual freedom and to a decent separation between church and state.

ICONOCLAST: Do you think its hypocritical that the United States with its doctrine of religious liberty sends aid — be it military or food — to countries in which a theocracy rules the land?

REV. LYNN: It is. I find it very odd, but it's also — to be a lawyer now for a second — if you go to court over these things, there's a doctrine called the "political question doctrine" which says that, although it's not a crazy legal argument, there are such enormous political kind of over-arching issues, the issue you bring up is not going to be heard in a federal court. It just basically says that we don't have jurisdiction because these questions arise to such an enormous broad political matter of issues that we're just not going to intervene. And that's what happens when people say, "Oh well, we shouldn't be sending any foreign aid unless it puts the separation of church and state in the country's constitution or a separation of mosque and state."

Pat Robertson was talking to me the one day, and he said, "We're writing Afghanistan's constitution but it might turn out to be basically a religious state." I said, "Yeah, that's true, and if you started worrying about theocracies in the United States, Pat, I'd have a little more time to work with you trying to prevent theocracies in Afghanistan or Iraq." But it didn't really change his mind about it, but he understood what I was saying. So we're making progress I guess.

ICONOCLAST: What is the most frustrating thing about being an advocate for the protecting of religious liberty here?

REV. LYNN: The most frustrating thing? It's just that it is very hard to get the mass media to focus on core issues. It's so easy to go to some little controversy — that is to say it's in one little city, it's kind of a curiosity. It's like somebody suspends Halloween or somebody puts up a nativity scene on a courthouse lawn, and then the debate is focused on that one issue and not the broad principles, so I spend a lot of time talking about these issues and the people say, "Well, that one. It's real trivial." The point is that it's a part of a larger pattern that the Religious Right is engaged in to literally dismantle this wall of separation, and these are just examples, but sometimes you can get lost in the examples, and never get to the basic bottomline principle.

My Own Ghost Story

It's Halloween again, and having borrowed my headline from Kipling, I shall now borrow this column from myself. I wrote it a dozen years ago, and it seems to have lost none of its popularity. One can hardly lose what he does not possess.

Most people like ghost stories.

The lover's lane killer with the hook, the headless corpse, the disappearing midnight hitchhiker all are timeless tales that have chilled bedtimes since bedtimes began.

Why?

It's fun to be scared.

Well, it's fun to be scared when being scared is all in fun.

There are no intriguing yarns about things truly scary: poverty, oppression, loneliness, madness.

No, real ghost stories are about things surreal, things that, in the cold, clear light of day we know could never be.

Such fanciful fears excite us, stimulate our imaginations, make us appreciate that we are alive and, regardless of our goose bumps, well and safe.

But some ghosts are real; though not in the way we imagine.

I know.

I once did battle with just such a ghost.

When I was a first grader in Avery, Texas, my parents moved into an old house near the tracks.

It had once been a grand Victorian, but had fallen into disrepair over the years and had been divided into apartments.

My parents, my brother, older by

Call To Mind

By Don M. Fisher



three years, and I lived in one and a pleasant, elderly couple named Marsh lived in the other.

Across the rear of the house we shared a large screened-in porch.

Before public water service became available in East Texas, most folks depended on cisterns, large, brick-encased holes in the ground that captured and stored roof runoff for household use.

Even though Avery had long since installed a city water system, many homes still had a cistern.

Our cistern was located in the middle of the back porch.

After school one day, my older, smarter brother, Fred, and I learned some eerie facts about the house in which we lived.

"It's haunted," pronounced my friend and classmate, Guy Lemmond.

"The feller that lived there taken a butcher knife to his wife and kids. After he cut 'em up and threw 'em in the cistern, he tied the wringer off'n that big warshin' machine on the back porch 'round his neck and drowned hisself down there, too. Ever since then, his ghost climbs up out of that cistern an' roams the house with a bloody

Continued On Next Page

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• MY OWN GHOST STORY

... Continued From Page 7

butcher knife lookin' for his wife and kids."

"How come he roams the house lookin' if he threw 'em in the cistern? Why don't he look for 'em down there?" I asked. "That don't make no sense."

"How do I know? I ain't no ghost. 'Sides, ghosts don't have to make sense. They're dead."

"That ain't true," scoffed Fred.

"Is too!" Guy whined.

"Ain't neither. You don't know nothin'. You're just a little kid."

"Oh, it's true, all right. 'Least the part about him jumpin' in the cistern," added Paul Wayne Meggason.

He was older than any of us.

"I seen th' sheriff an' th' farmen when they come to drag him out with ropes and big ol' hooks."

Neither Fred nor I said much more about it, but I knew that the tale was much on my brother's mind.

Certainly it was much on mine.

That night at supper, we asked the ultimate authority in all such matters, our father.

"Yes," he said, adopting a grave,

school principal's expression.

"A man named Farley did live here before us. Poor man went nuts."

"And did he kill his wife an' kids and cut 'em up an' throw 'em in th' cistern?" I asked, already dreading his answer.

"I heard that, but I'm not sure it's true. I also heard that he just attacked his wife; that she ran out of the house and escaped with only a badly cut arm."

"And is his ghost..."

"This is not fit conversation for the supper table," pronounced my mother.

While my father was the ultimate authority, my mother was the ultimate authoritarian. The subject was closed.

We wondered about the dreaded Farley ghost for some time after that, but it effected us little until basketball season.

Both our parents coached; my father, the boy's team and my mother, the girls. Each Tuesday and Friday night they were away from home until quite late.

Fred and I were left on our own with a cold supper and strict orders to be in bed by nine. It was only on nights that our parents were away that the ghost

of Farley began to move about.

Ghosts are clever like that.

They never appear around those who can dispel their mythology.

After we were in bed, the noises began.

First we would hear a seemingly harmless drip from the dank cistern.

Or perhaps it would disguise itself as a sound like the scurry of a cat or some other innocent night-prowling animal.

But we knew better.

We knew it was the Farley ghost beginning his ghastly ascent, gory knife clinched in his rotting yellow teeth, searching for innocent children as his next victims.

"Did you hear that?" I would ask from beneath the covers.

"No!" would answer my brother, a little too loudly.

"Yes, you did!"

"It wasn't nothin'! Go to sleep. Ooo! There it is again."

"He's comin' up! I know it!"

"One of us has to go and throw somethin' down there an' knock him back down 'fore he gits out."

Fred always had a plan. Rarely did it involve him.

"O.K. You go."

"No! You!"

"No, I'm too skeered."

"Well, if you don't go, he might git us and he might not. But if you don't go, I'm gonna hurt your face. Ain't no 'might' about it!"

There are terrible consequences to being born three years late.

I crept through the kitchen to the back door and eased it open, dreading with each step a sudden attack from the rank, decomposed, dripping Farley.

I could practically feel the icy plunge of his terrible, ooze-coated blade ripping through the soft flannel of my pajamas as the door yielded to my timid touch. I leaned frozen across the sill.

No Farley.

But I knew he was down there, perhaps inches from the top of the cistern ready to leap from ambush once I stepped onto the porch. "What are doin'?"

"AH-H-H-H-H!" I screamed and dashed back to the bed, running headlong into a dark figure that I knew must be Farley, knocking it sprawling to the floor as I scrambled back to the uncertain safety of the covers.

"Git out there!" growled Fred, getting up from the floor.

"You skeered the far outa me!" I said, peeking from beneath the quilt.

"I'm goan do more'n skeer you if you don't git out there an' knock that ghost

back down in that cistern," he spit through clinched teeth.

"But what'll I throw?" I pleaded. "If we throw anything we got, mother or daddy'll miss it, an' they ain't goan believe there was no ghost in that cistern."

"Yeah, you're right. O.K. Throw something from the Marshes' side of the porch."

"Plumb t'other side of th' porch? That's too far. 'Sides, won't they miss it?"

"They won't care. They're nice folks. 'Sides, they'd let you if they'd knowed it was to git rid of a ghost! Now go on."

This new plan meant that twice I had to risk exposure to Farley's dread realm.

I had to pass the cistern on the way to find some missile, then actually approach the opening, the very yawning maw from which he might spring at any moment, upon my return to hurl it down at him.

The porch was a moonlit blue realm of unnatural shapes and shadows. My bare feet on the worn planks released a cacophony creaks and groans as I tiptoed across what seemed miles until I passed the cistern. Then something, who knew what, made a scritch, wet plop far in its depths. I dashed to the Marsh's side, looking frantically for a weapon. A rusted toolbox. Maybe it would do. It was heavy. My fingers slipped on the dust-covered rust. I could only lift one end, but there was no time to find something else. I managed to hoist one end and drag it to the cistern. I more pushed than lifted it up the barely sloping sides, got my weight under it and, sprawling across the brick face of the cistern, worried it over the edge.

I never heard the splash.

There was half a porch, 15 feet of kitchen floor linoleum, a bedroom door, two quilts and a sheet between me and the cistern ere that toolbox hit water.

"Didja git 'im?" Fred asked, sticking his head under the edge of my bedclothes shelter.

"I don' know."

"Whatcha mean, 'You don't know?' Didja hit 'im 'r not? Maybe you better go back an' see..."

"NO! I got 'im! Busted 'im smack dab in th' face. He won't be back no more!"

True to my word, we heard no more from Farley that night, nor did we for the next few evenings.

But eventually, his dank stirrings began again.

And again I hitched up my courage and my pajama bottoms to make my trepiditous journey across the back porch haunts. Each time I would fling another object down the cistern and dash Farley back into his tormented lair.



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• MY OWN GHOST STORY ... Continued From Page 8

Once or twice, Fred actually made the journey himself.

Farley no longer ruled our lives, and we had a lot more play room on the back porch.

Meanwhile, all over Avery Elementary School, we gained the reputation as fearless ghost hunters. Every recess would find the Fisher boys out under the big sweetgum, regaling our peers with the latest skirmish with the dreaded Farley ghost, ending, of course, in another hair's breadth victory.

Life was good again.

Until one day I came home from school and saw Mr. Marsh and my father standing out in the front yard, then overheard their conversation as I stood half concealed trying to look inconspicuous, invisible if I could have managed it, behind a corner of the house. A dread more terrible than any Farley inspired crept along my spine.

"I tell you, Mr. Fisher, I've never seen or heard of a burglar like this. He never takes anything valuable. An old toolbox I kept some window weights in. A

singletree. Busted lawn chair, things like that. And you haven't missed anything?"

My father recognized guilt even out of the corner of his eye.

"Son, do you know anything about this?"

I was caught like a fly in lard.

It would have done no good to lie.

I was never very good at it, especially to my father.

I blurted out the whole terrible Farley saga, now made truly terrible by virtue of our discovery. My father's knowledge swiftly killed the Farley ghost, finally and irrevocably, there in our front yard.

Farley was no longer frightening.

Now he was just silly.

I thought Mr. Marsh was going to have a heart attack, laughing like that. Years later, even after I was grown, he would see me on the street and burst into fits of mirth, regaling any passerby within 20 yards with the story of that dull-witted Fisher boy and the ghost in his cistern.

I don't remember whether my father

spanked me.

I doubt it. My spankings were rare, but memorable events.

But I do remember what he told me. Farley wasn't worth much when he was alive.

Certainly less after he was dead.

His troubles were of his own making and his fate was sealed by his failure to deal with his misfortunes.

But I had made of him in death much more than he had ever hoped to be in life.

I had extended Farley's troubles beyond the grave where they should have lain rotting and forgotten with him.

There are no such things as ghosts, he said, until people decide to make them real.

Ghosts are like toys.

We can take them out and play with them in fun. Left out and in the way, they are at best annoying and at worst, dangerous.

When we trouble others with our superstitions, we plague the world with our own foolishness.

And the fears of a fool are to be feared far more than any ghost.

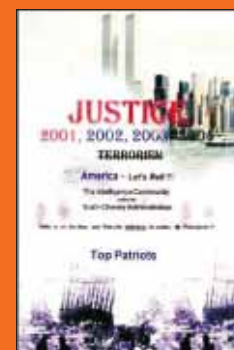
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Editorial

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— Editorial —

Disrupting CIA For Personal Gain Is Treason

This lie is not white.

This lie is black and bloody.

Its roots are embedded deeply in the Executive Branch, and its exploitation runs all the way to the Vice President of the United States, even to the President, for he pulled the trigger.

The multiple indictments of I. Lewis (Scooter) Libby, a key figure in the inner circle of neoconservative think-tankers who constructed a war based on baldfaced lies — lies that have been admitted — is but an entry-way into the cabal of corruption that exploited falsehoods to create a war whose basis was fear.

“We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

Those were the enshrined words of Franklin D. Roosevelt — words that might now be appropriately attached in the opposite to the cloak of the “terror President,” the self-proclaimed “war President,” who has time and again used fear to get what he wants.

To suggest that perhaps Libby was a lone wolf in this bag of tricks upon the American public is incomprehensible, for due diligence would dictate involvement and acquiescence by stalwarts of the entire inner circle composed of radical war hawks who knew that personal gains were at stake.

No-bid contracts, oil, revenge, power, greed, corporatism, control.

Capturing these “ideals” would, of course, involve the extrication of anyone who might throw obstacles onto the track, the outing of potential naysayers, even if it perhaps meant disrupting the capabilities of the CIA, endangering the lives of agents, and making no sense in the competent commission of foreign affairs.

The Administration’s history of appointments, largely consisting of oilmen, now raises questions as to why

gasoline prices have skyrocketed beyond belief while oil companies are making obscene, record-breaking profits. Go figure.

Exorbitant no-bid contracts for war profiteers tied to the Vice President? Go figure.

Ineptitude at dealing with local disasters when unqualified “friends” are appointed to positions of responsibility as political reward? Go figure.

Highly questionable election outcomes controlled by corporate firms promising to deliver a victory to an incumbent? Go figure.

A Vice President who embraces torture as admirable? Go figure.

That’s what we have. Like it or not, believe it or not.

It is a shame that NEW YORK TIMES reporter Judith Miller remained conveniently silent until after the 2004 election. If the revelations had erupted in August 2004, what impact might they have had?

Then again, the same type of general timetable befell Richard Nixon, who won a second term before the sickening corruptions in his Administration were finally exposed.

Only, Watergate was child’s play.

The indictments of Libby should force the demand for a complete non-partisan investigation of the inner circle and the ghost agencies it has created. If Congress and the Senate had guts, fortitude, ethics, and decency, they would act immediately.

Pre-Bush America was a land of promise for everybody. Now only the very rich need apply.

The suicidal verbiage “This is for our own good” by lock-step consumers and glassy-eyed inebriants of the neo-con doctrine must stop.

Let’s explore the truth for awhile.

— W. Leon Smith

Hurricane Wilma Impacts Iconoclast

How could a hurricane thousands of miles away cause problems for a newspaper in Central Texas?

It’s easy, if your domain server is in Boca Raton, Fla. and that portion of the state is awash by Hurricane Wilma.

A couple of months ago, THE ICONOCLAST began making changes in its online edition due to excessive bandwidth usage that had caused severe problems for its previous internet company. Changes in domain names were also taking place and as of this writing are still not wholly resolved.

Persons who had previously browsed <www.iconoclast-texas.com> were being redirected to <www.lonestaricon.com> (the new url based is in Florida).

After Hurricane Wilma knocked out power to most of the southern portion of the state last week, access to <www.lonestaricon.com> became impossible.

The Category 3 hurricane with 125 mph winds caused power outages and left Floridians stranded, as the search for gasoline became difficult, if not im-

The
Trenchwalker

By W. Leon Smith



possible at times. The storm left most of the 5 million people in Florida’s most populous region, the metropolitan area of Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, without lights, air conditioning and refrigeration.

We are in the process of making several changes to THE ICONOCLAST, including the website address, a new phone number, (254) 675-3634, and a new mailing address: P.O. Box 569, Clifton, TX 76634.

The newspaper also sports a new main e-mail address: news@lonestaron.com.

Readers are encouraged to take note of these changes, altering “favorites” on their browsers and changing e-mail address contacts as applicable.

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The Rich Get Richer

I suppose that old saying is right (for the most part) that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Certainly during hard times, this seems so true. (Companies like Haliburton were first to receive contracts to rebuild Louisiana, without even a bid. Need I say more? This brings to mind another old saying, "It's all who you know").

Everything seems to be increasing in price right now. Catastrophes all over the world are resulting in thousands of deaths and much destruction. We have no control over that. We're in a war that 60% of the country doesn't want to be involved in. No control over that either. Our government seems to be spending money we don't have on things we can't agree upon. Somebody raided the Social Security fund. Now we have to worry about bird flu. Just what we need, a little more anxiety.

Oil and gas companies are gouging prices, whether or not they have justification. All the media had to say was, "The cost of gasoline might go up due to damaged refineries or offshore wells". Bingo, the next day, the price at the pump rose like magic. Black magic. No way any problems could have been reflected so quickly. They were just hedging their bets. As it turned out, there wasn't so much damage anyway, but we're paying the price. Literally.

I guess the oil companies figured it was a good way to make a fast buck off all us helpless consumers. And that set in motion a string of rising prices, the end of which is nowhere in sight. After all, what can we do? —Stop gassing up the vehicles we rely upon to take us to our jobs and deliver goods? —Stop buying food? —Stop putting diesel in our tractors to do our farm and ranch work? —Stop using heavy equipment that requires fuel?

Someone suggested we all avoid buying gas on Sundays, just boycott, send a message that the consumer is mad as

hell and isn't going to take it any more, Show strength by numbers. But by Monday, most protestors would break down and gas up for the drive to work (unless they all just call in sick, another idea. But most folks can't protest by calling in sick. They need that day's pay and don't dare jeopardize their jobs). Do you get the feeling that no one would take us seriously anyway? I do.

I know people who are planning to quit their jobs because the cost of driving to work will soon equal their salaries. The weird thing is that the big oil companies are able to get us all excited now if we see gasoline below \$2.65 a gallon. Like that's some big bargain. It's NOT! This is outrageous. It was too high at \$2.00 a gallon, and everyone knows it. The oil companies are making huge profits. What is wrong with this picture?

Why aren't all of us writing our congressmen or better yet, beating down their doors? When is this government going to start reflecting the will of the people? Aren't those guys supposed to work for US? Don't our tax dollars pay their salaries? I suppose I'm naïve to expect such justice. It doesn't work that way, does it?

I don't know about you, but I am certainly watching my mileage these days. I try not to go out on the highway unless I must. I don't even drive into town for errands until there are several I can do on one loop.

I was frugal before, so there aren't too many more corners to cut. I can't fire the maid because I don't have that kind of help. That country club membership would certainly have to go, except there's not one. There are no expensive restaurant dinners to curtail or big shopping splurges to swear off. (Gosh darn, and I was hoping to buy that cute pair of Manolo Blahnik strappy sandals for about a grand). I wasn't planning to purchase a new car

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.

or take a nice vacation, so I can't forgo those luxuries to save money. Thoughts of vacations and new vehicles are totally alien to me and have been for decades. What extras are there left to cut? I can't stop putting diesel in the farm truck and gasoline into the old tractors.

I was sort of hoping to stay afloat in my chosen line of work. You know, the American dream and all that. Work hard and get ahead. I'd rather not end my days indigent and a drain on society, like so many seem to be without any remorse at all. (I'm not talking about decent people who honestly need help). It appears we have a whole generation of folks who don't mind being on the public dole, who sort of expect it as a given, a way of life passed from one generation to the next. The whole concept of welfare has gone absolutely crazy, gotten way out of line.

I remember when people applied for assistance only as a last resort, were horribly embarrassed about it. Now teenagers having babies out of wedlock are the rule rather than the exception in a large segment of society, and they assume the government will give them money to help care for their offspring. And the government will! Does no one else see the irony of this cycle? Lots of people who are certainly able to work and surely need the money just don't bother to find jobs. I don't get that. But I digress.

Back to the opposite end of the spectrum, hard work and trying to make it on our own. Even with cattle prices high, it's looking like we might well work ourselves to death this year only to break even (or lose money). It isn't supposed to be like this. (Was I whining?) Yeah, I know, farmers don't make profits. Everyone knows that. But with prices of basic goods and services sky high, it seems no one else in the middle or lower class will be able to make it ei-

ther. I thought we were supposed to be the richest country on earth. Did I dream that?

I was wondering what would happen if all us ranchers nationwide just withheld our cattle and stopped the flow of beef to people like Mickey D's? What if we refused to sell those calves unless the prices we received honestly reflected the higher costs of raising the animals, of ranching in 2005? (—The feed we must buy, medications, equipment, the seed we must plant, labor to harvest crops, herbicides, insecticides, fertilizers, veterinary care, not to mention basics like water and electricity, etc.)

A couple of years ago, when President Bush signed some trade agreement with Mexico or China, suddenly the price of steel doubled. Have you tried to put up a metal building lately or bought barbed wire or T-posts? We have. It was sticker shock.

Now all our other supplies (and yours, no matter what business you are in) have gone or will go up because of rising gas prices. If we received a commensurate price for the cattle we produce, then maybe we could afford to continue buying those bags of range cubes for more than \$5.00 each to feed the hungry mouths. We've had a severe drought here. There is no grass for livestock to eat. (I wonder if I can get some government, maybe even our own, to send me some aid?) What if a hamburger at a fast food chain suddenly cost \$10 tomorrow? What if sirloin was \$15 a pound? Or \$20?

Prescription drug costs are rising like crazy. So are all kinds of insurance. Everything having to do with gas and oil, from the transporting of goods to heating fuel has gone or is going up. The middle class is being squeezed dry.

People on fixed incomes have nowhere to go for additional funds. People planning retirement are being informed they will receive less social security than expected or be forced to work years longer. We have been lied to at almost every turn. There are high-ranking government officials who apparently think this is OK. It's not. Welcome to our brave new world. Welcome to the world of the very hardworking poor.

Do me a favor. Take a moment to write your representatives. Let them know that we would very much like to take back our own country now, please.

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Harriet Miers, You've Done The U.S.A. Solid

Please forgive any euphoric feeling or attitude that might pass through my fingertips and onto the keys, then come to rest on the page as I write this.

Last night, the Chicago White Sox became the World Champions of Major League Baseball! Although I'm but a secondary Sox fan (I've always been and forever shall be a suffering diehard Cubs fan), as a native Chicagoan this truly is big.

After all, it only took one of our two teams 88 years to ascend to this level. That would be the Sox in 1917; the Cubs haven't posted a title since going back-to-back in aught-seven and aught-eight.

Ozzie Guillen's marvel from 35th and Shields, without question the best team during MLB's 2005 season, swept the pitifully outmatched Houston Astros. Although they played quite well, it seemed the Astros really didn't know what hit them.

There is something about the Astros as an organization that bothers me, beyond their essentially all white fans in the stands – devoid of any African-American players, this has got to be the whitest team in MLB. The manager, Phil "Pig Iron" Garner, is a guy I have never found likeable. "Pig-Headed" is how he's always struck me; i.e. his comments about being "embarrassed" after the 14-inning loss in game three.

There's a smattering of Hispanic players, of course, but considering its proximity to the Gulf region that's a given in Houston. However, the only Caucasian on the roster with an obvious ethnic background is Craig Biggio's Italian surname.

I've never thought of a baseball team in terms of "elitist" or "exclusionary" before, but the Astros give me shivers in both those directions.

(We made the mistake of attending a Cubs-Astros game at the Dome some years back. Now, earlier that week we had been to a Rangers-Brewers game over to Arlington, didn't care about either team, yet it was a blast. But the Houston "fans" were most annoying, inconsiderate, obnoxious, uppity – it was perhaps the worst baseball game experience ever for us. And we've been to ballparks from Montreal to Los Angeles.)

Amazingly, Chicago's Southsiders accomplished the most difficult feat in team sports – don't dare to compare a 16-game football season to 162 games and six months of baseball with all of its intricacies – on a miniscule \$69 million payroll. In comparison, the Tribune Company shelled out twice as much to their disappointing Cubs players, while the lackluster Yankees conned George Steinbrenner away from over \$200M of his pocket change.

In what could be a precursor to political upheavals waiting just around the bend, a team from my Blue State of Illinois came down to (the Bushes' own) Red State of Texas and prevailed in the granddaddy of all professional sporting events.

To make the victories even more sweetly officious, Mother Barbara Bush was present to witness games three and four (first with son Neil, the savings and loan brigand; then Big Daddy George H.W.).

How sweep it is!

But the good times weren't over.

This morning, I was awakened to a most pleasant sound, the news that Harriet Miers had retracted her nomination.

How cool is that?



Out Of The Blue

By
Jerry
Tenuto

She must have had a premonition, or maybe one of those messages from God like Bush #43 got before raining death upon innocent Iraqis, that this was not going to be a very good week for anyone associated with either the Bush family or Texas.

There is some strange kind of symbolism, Karma perhaps, or simply the random fluttering of a butterfly's wings somewhere in the rain forest, that Harriet called Bush #43 to pull out at 8:30 p.m. EDT, Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2005 – just minutes before the first pitch of game four between the Sox and the Astros.

Just as the vaunted baseball team from Texas was about to collapse, so, too, the bogus Fascist Regime that stole our government is destined to soon follow suit.

If Bush #43 had ever read a history book, or even scanned a newspaper, or seen one specific Anthony Hopkins movie, he might know what a major screw up Richard Milhouse Nixon was.

Thankfully, during the 1970s Bush #43 was too busy getting plowed to be concerned with anything beyond the next party locale, so he obviously missed Watergate and the subsequent brouhaha.

Anyway, Ms. Harriet Miers, may I take this opportunity, on behalf of Liberals, Progressives, and Democrats everywhere, to Thank You Sincerely for having the good sense of decorum to remove yourself from consideration as nominee for Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Not only was it the right thing to do for our country, you could not have picked a better moment in the matrix of time to have tendered your withdrawal.

By eliminating your name from consideration, you have done this nation the great service of illuminating the fact that the minority fanatical evangelical Right-wing supremacists are only interested in ramrodding their agenda down the collective gullet of 300,000,000 Americans.

The next time your boss hands out medals, you deserve the extra big, Texas-sized model. Hell, you're the first person in the RoveBush Regime who's done anything to earn a medal.

By taking a step back as you have, Harriet, you have inadvertently exposed Bush #43 and the extreme Right-wingers for what they are: Truly dangerous manipulators of Government for the Few, a stranglehold that is choking the life out of our country.

The schmucks pushing this agenda are rich beyond belief, yet every time they open their mouths more gold gets tossed at them in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Supreme Court does not exist to be the extended arm of the evangelical fanatics.

The Supreme Court exists to be a functionality for the well-being of all Americans.

As I wrote last week, the first people to seek refuge in the New Land came here under the guise of escaping religious persecution in Europe. The fact of the matter was, they were pretty much thrown out of one country after another because of their own tyrannical bastardization of Biblical interpretations. (It's never been easy

to get a straight answer out of a religious zealot.)

There's really no other way to describe the Puritan leaders than as a small cabal of evil men who ruled by fear and treachery. They twisted the Word of God into something sick and depraved, while manipulating and controlling entire communities into living as they dictated – with the alternatives being accusations either of witchcraft (certain death) or adultery (ostracism in the extreme).

The concept of joy was nowhere to be found within these societies. In fact, any public display of mirth or jubilation was dealt with severity.

This irrational lifestyle was long gone by the time our hemp-growing, spirit-enjoying Forefathers decided it was time to get on with a Revolution, break with King and Country, and thus once and for all become independent.

So, they set forth on parchment a statement entitled Declaration of Independence.

Then, with the foresight to put formalization and constructs onto the program at hand, these progressive thinking gentlemen put together a little something they named The Constitution of The United States.

As things go, several Amendments were included to cover specific areas, lest questions or squabbles arise.

Now, this system has served our nation pretty damned well lo these past 229 years. Or at least for most of them, until some selfish creeps who didn't want to play by the rules usurped a couple of presidential elections in 2000 and 2004.

That's okay, though, because we know who those Fascist Rats and their Turd Blossom architect are.

They control the Executive Branch. They control the Legislative Branch.

Now, here's what the extreme Rightist, evangelical, way-beyond-any-kind-of-reasoned-thought ultra-Conservative Fascists want: The courts must be populated by judges who are predisposed to strike down anything that doesn't fit into their proper interpretation of The Bible.

That means all courts – local; circuit; state; Federal District; right on up to the Supremes.

See, to these self-righteous dictatorial thugs, nobody else has any rights but them. And none of the branches of Government are of the people, for the people, and by the people – these branches are all of the true believers, for the true believers, and by the true believers ONLY!

As to the other 70% of Americans, the vast majority, well, we have no idea what's good for ourselves; we're just rabble; and all 210,000,000 of us can just go to hell!

Literally.

Remember your George Orwell? "All animals are equal – but some animals are more equal than others."

The Neo-cons' hue and cry is that a Bush #43 nominee for any bench must be one of them:

Pro-life (willing to deny a woman the right to exercise God-given free will regarding what she does with her own body and future);

Anti-Gay (intolerant of accepting those whose lifestyles differ from that which they insist is correct);

Possess a pinheaded attitude of continuing to overcrowd our prisons in a never-ending, unwinnable, insane "war on drugs," wasting billions of dollars and countless hours of constabulary manpower, along with tens of thousands of lives annually, primarily to stop the un-

stoppable killer weed – marijuana (its legalization would run the big drug companies into the poorhouse);

A warmonger, willing to uphold the sending of any other poor sap's offspring (in the Lord's name) to kill evil Muslim heathens, to fight and die or be maimed for oil or other personal gain;

One who sees nothing wrong with the torture of aforementioned heathen prisoners;

An advocate of the 2nd Amendment over common sense gun laws within the framework of the more densely-populated 21st Century;

A champion of the interests of Big Business over individual rights and such non-essential entities as school boards, public works projects, environmental concerns, et al;

An evangelical, born-again Christian whose every thought, decision and breath is dictated by Biblical directive.

The Neo-cons insist that Bush #43 must put up judicial nominees who will not make law, but will follow the letter of the Constitution as it was written.

The spanner in this particular works is that their interpretation of the 18th Century Constitution is a convoluted hybridization of 16th and 17th Century perversions, plus unwillingness to accept social mores of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

Most of the "moral" questions do not personally affect the preponderance of the wealthy, influential people who push these agendas; none of their arguments have any relationship or basis in fact with the Constitution.

For starters, just where in the hell does the Constitution say anything at all about abortion or homosexuality? There's nary a word. Nor are these big subjects in The Bible.

How about drugs? There is absolutely nothing covering that subject in the original document.

It's common knowledge that George, Jeff and the other "gentry" grew what was referred to as "hemp." It's not that much of a stretch to think that in all likelihood they dried, cured, and tamped it into their pipes just like tobacco.

Why else would they have become so rebellious?

How do you think those Boston boys got the idea for that little stunt to disguise themselves as Indians and throw the tea into the harbor?

As for the Revolution, they only waged war to gain freedom from a ruthless and oppressive king. There was no going over to Persia and slaughtering the brown folks to force democracy down their throats at gunpoint.

Hey, that Iraqi constitutional vote hasn't worked out so well, either. There were the expected accusations of voter fraud, but that's what you get with a Bush #43-sanctioned vote.

Of course, the Sunnis got screwed. Like we all didn't see that coming. They should get to know the African-Americans who are over in Iraq.

The U.S. has long been the world standard in fair treatment for prisoners of war. In truth, many soldiers have willingly given up to American troops in previous hostile actions because they knew the rest of the war would be like living on Easy Street.

Well, Bush #43 and his Neo-con base have made that something our troops will need years to correct.

The original concept of the 2nd Amend
Continued On Next Page

Railroad Finally Reaches Panhandle

The Fort Worth and Denver Railroad reached Clarendon on Oct. 31, 1887, ending the isolation of yet another community in the Panhandle and tying the northernmost tip of Texas to the rest of the Lone Star State more than half a century after the Battle of San Jacinto.

When the idea of running rails to the faraway Panhandle was initially raised in the 1870s, most Texans questioned why anyone in his right mind would go to all that trouble. The area was not much more than an inhospitable wasteland with many more cows than people.

The Panhandle was, in fact, not the only sparsely inhabited section of the sprawling state. In 1875 the nearest settlement deserving of the name due east of Charles Goodnight's Palo Duro Canyon ranch was 200 miles away at Henrietta.

The Panhandle ranchers, who regarded the region as their private pasture, wanted the railroad about as much as an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease. Trains would bring "nesters," whose very presence meant fences and the elimination of the open range and with it the fiercely independent cattlemen's way of life.

This Week In Texas History

By Bartee Haile



Ranchers and their allies took heart after rail construction came to a dead stop in the late 1870s. For four and a half years, Fort Worth reaped the benefits of being the end of the line — a unique status which transformed the dusty cow town of 500 into a thriving city of more than 6,000.

The Fort Worth and Denver City line began laying track to Decatur in 1881 and completed the task on May 1, 1882. An excited eyewitness recorded his impressions of the historic event: "Brawney men of woods and pastures closed in and vented their feelings by emitting a wild Comanche whoop. Of all days in Wise County before and since, this was the prodigies day."

Meanwhile, events in Austin threatened future construction. In their zeal to usher in the age of the iron horse, the

generous legislature handed the railroads 40 million acres — a fifth of Texas' territory — in land subsidies. The popular backlash against this gigantic giveaway forced skittish politicians to retrace their spendthrift steps and to reclaim the public lands.

Like Fort Worth before it, Wichita Falls had the good fortune to wind up the western railhead when construction came to a screeching halt in the summer of 1882. By the time the idle crews returned to work three years later, the sleepy hamlet was a boomtown.

The impatient inhabitants of Vernon, previously known as Eagle Flats, practically gave the shirts off their backs to speed up the process. They contributed right-of-way, grass for the horse and mule teams and sleeping quarters for laborers without requesting a cent in compensation. Their wish came true at last in October 1886.

Five months and 30 miles later, it was tiny Quanah's turn. Within the year, the population of the frontier hamlet quadrupled to 1,200. Crude dugouts and makeshift shelters hardly fit for human habitation were replaced by sturdy homes, a bustling business district and two hotels.

In adjacent Childress County, the coming of the railroad sparked a bitter debate between the residents of Henry and Childress City. At stake was nothing less than the survival of their struggling communities that were just four miles apart. The Fort Worth and Denver settled the dispute by selecting a route through Henry, which obligingly changed its name to Childress after the

losers relocated en masse.

Two counties to the northwest, the community of Clarendon, nicknamed Saint's Roost because of the pious founders' ambitious plan to bring salvation to the wicked West, anxiously awaited the surveyors' decision. When told that the railroad would miss them by five miles, the pragmatic majority packed up and moved. For a time there were two Clarendons, one "Old" and one "New," until the handful of holdouts abandoned the original site.

When the first locomotive chugged into an anonymous assortment of tents in Armstrong County, the engineer offered the tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the place be called Claude in his honor. Subsequent efforts in favor of Armstrong City failed, and the name stuck.

The Fort Worth and Denver completed its historic trans-Panhandle trek in January 1888, but the trailblazing crews kept on going for the long-awaited rendezvous with their Colorado colleagues. In the hills of northeastern New Mexico on Mar. 13, 1888, the cities of Fort Worth and Denver were linked by 808 miles of steel and spikes.

To the skeptics who said it could not be done, the answer was the epic deed. To those that wondered whether the Panhandle was worth it, the proof was the steady stream of immigrants that took the train to the High Plains.

"Outlaws & Lawmen" - "Best of This Week in Texas History" Vol. VI now available for \$10.95 plus \$3.25 postage and handling from Bartee Haile, 1912 Meadow Creek Dr., Pearland, TX 77581.

• TENUTO ... Continued From Previous Page

ment was to allow a rural society some protection from marauding king's soldiers. We have our own military these days, and a plethora of police departments. I can see the point that for anyone who lives in the country, a gun might be a good idea. However, for those of us denizens of cities and towns access to a gun usually just leads to tragedy.

And you certainly don't need to be packin' when headin' off to the supermarket or neighborhood tavern.

The very concept of the Constitution was the unencumbered possibility for the individual, and the small businessman or farmer to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Alas and alack, today's hardcore Jesus crowd has been hoodwinked by those with deep pockets into thinking that Big Business has an "Amen" set aside just for them.

The idea itself that these extremist Righties insist upon all Bush #43 court nominees fitting within their acceptable parameters is disruptive to our Constitution, our Legislative and Executive Branches of Government, and especially our Judicial Branch of Government.

It is a painful affront to, and a sin against, the entire population of this great Nation.

The insidious demands that these people put on the White House to bend to their will goes against our Country's basic tenet of Separation of Church and State.

Every branch of Government, especially the Courts, is intended for all citizens, plus anybody else whose good fortune it is to be on American soil. Court Justice appointments are to be based upon qualifications in the realm of jurisprudence and experience therein — not religious conviction or social consensus.

Then again, as for a jurist "making" law, that's hardly the case when 65% of the voters in a given state approve a measure. Denying the obvious wishes of such an overwhelming majority is "making" law, as in the recent decision by the Supremes to throw out a vote by Californians.

If these Christian Conservatives are

such good folks, why is Bible Hammerin' Tom DeLay under multiple indictments (with more likely to come)? And why is his reaction that of the common criminal, a public denouncement of the person who caught him?

Why is Bill Frist, Senate's Number 1 Christian, being investigated for insider trading?

Why did Bush #43 lie to us about rushing off to war in Iraq — and virtually everything else? Why did he then tell Arab leaders "God told me to" bomb Iraq into submission?

Now that Libby has "Scooted" out of our White House, can Herr Obermeister Rove be far behind? The Bush #43 herd is thinning.

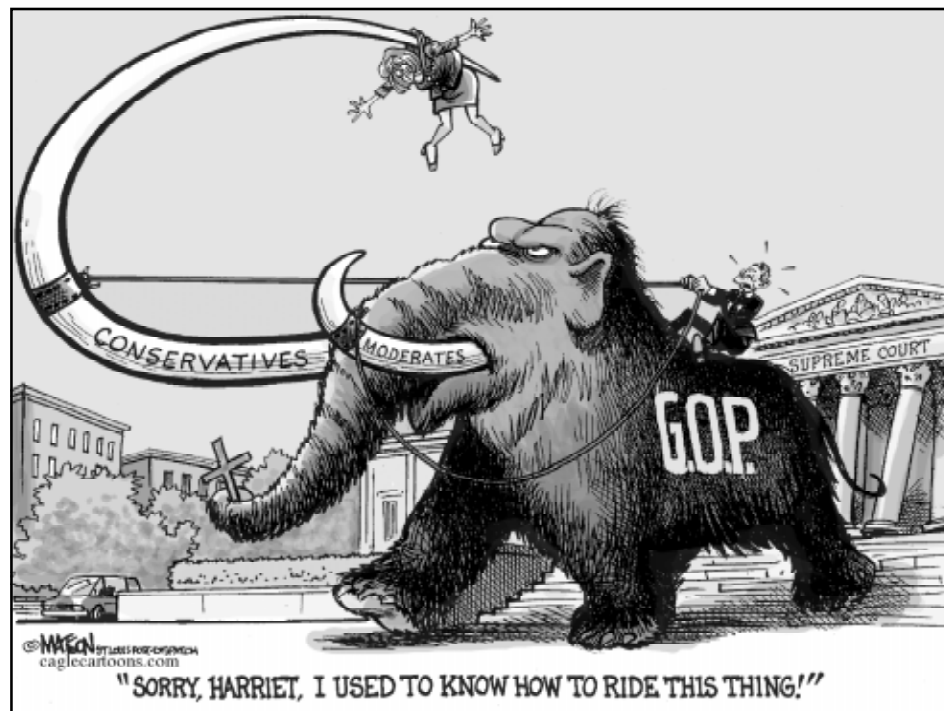
Time and again I have read articles and commentaries in British newspapers in which they are alarmed at the Right-wing, evangelical fanaticism in this country. From an outsider's viewpoint, our closest and most common friends on the planet see this as an extremely dangerous trend — not only for us, but for them and the rest of the world as well.

Try these comparisons on for size: Our evangelicals hate the Muslims, and would like to see them gone; they demonize alcohol use and sex for anything other than procreation, often believing a woman's place is "barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen"; they disallow dancing and listening to anything but "acceptable" music; everything (supposedly) revolves around church and the Bible.

The Muslims hate Christians, and would like to destroy them; they don't allow drinking alcohol, keep their women hidden, pregnant and downtrodden; only men dance with men to "acceptable" music; all activities revolve around the mosque and the Quran.

The only real difference between these two groups is the name of the deity to whom each prays.

Let either one get a firm grip on the USA and we can kiss good-bye to the fun stuff that makes life interesting and uniquely American — like the World Series.



No Pumpkin-Carving Experience Is Complete Without A Near-fatal Knife Wound

Carving a jack-o-lantern used to require little more than a pumpkin, an oversized kitchen knife, and a tourniquet. It was a simple matter of plunging a 10-inch French knife into the gourd of your choice and creating a triangle-eyed, square-toothed masterpiece of horror.

In those days, the trickiest thing about making your jack-o-lantern was deciding on how to light the candle.

Option one: Light candle, then attempt to lower it into the pumpkin without catching your sleeve on fire.

Option two: Put the candle inside the pumpkin *first*. Then attempt to light it without catching your sleeve on fire.

Option three: Accept the inevitable and just light yourself on fire, then go find a candle.

After a quick trip to the emergency room for stitches and some light skin grafting, you could return home and set your jack-o-lantern on the porch, where it would remain until gravity and molecular breakdown eventually caused it to collapse in on itself like the birth of a new star — appropriately enough, usually around Christmas time.

But somewhere along the way, things have gotten complicated. The 10-inch French knife — once the pumpkin-carver's tool of choice — has been replaced by kits that include sophisticated, high-precision instruments that, aside from creating fancy Halloween scenes on your pumpkin, can also be used, if necessary, to perform an emergency triple-bypass.

The first time I saw one of these kits was a few years ago on Good Morning America, when Martha Stewart was recreating the flying monkey scene from The Wizard of Oz on the face of an 800-pound pumpkin.

After scooping out the insides with a back-hoe (which she had forged herself out of recycled Mason jar lids), Stewart demonstrated how anyone could sculpt their own gourd into a Halloween Mecca by first creating a simple pattern using common household items, such as a dry-erase marker, overhead projector, and \$300,000 movie still.

In spite of this newfound knowledge, I kept with tradition because it's hard to imagine any Halloween without a near-fatal knife wound to reminisce about.

That was until this year, when my children quietly took me aside and told me our pumpkins always look ... how did they put it?

Oh yeah.

Really stupid.

Being a father dedicated to his children's happiness, I of course told them that I appreciated and respected their honesty. After which I told them Halloween had actually been cancelled this year, and that we would be proceeding directly to Arbor Day. That's assuming that Santa and the Easter Bunny were still missing.

I didn't really say that! Ha! Ha!

Okay — so I did.

The important thing is that my children have learned to laugh HEARTILY whenever their therapist brings the subject up.

As you've probably guessed, I gave in and bought a fancy carving kit this year. The first thing I discovered about these



By
**Ned
Hickson**
Siuslaw News

kits is that, once spread out, the assortment of tools bares a striking resemblance to an operating tray on ER; lots of shiny things that look sharp but ap-

pear to serve no obvious purpose.

Next, there are the instructions, which describe how the tools can be used to create any of the following As Seen on TV! images:

- 1) *Witch riding broom across moon.*
- 2) *Black cat with hair standing on end.*
- 3) *Bat sitting on tombstone.*
- 4) *Martha Stewart.*

Included in the kit are four patterns, along with a list of the really cool patterns which, naturally, are sold separately. Knowing how important this was to my children, I was willing to make one

final trip to the store in order to obtain the blueprints to our ultimate pumpkin masterpiece:

Martha Stewart hitting bat with tombstone.

Of course, by the time you read this, we will have already completed our jack-o-lantern. I promise to share the details with you.

Just as soon as I put these flames out.

(You can write to Ned Hickson at the Siuslaw News at P.O. Box 10, Florence, OR 97439, or visit his webiste at www.nedhickson.net)

Hedging On The Federal Department Of Peace

BY DANIEL J. SMIECHOWSKI
CALIFORNIA CHRONICLE

A few weeks ago at the University of California San Diego during a public debate for Mayor, a telling sign emerged with regard to the political philosophy of Candidate Jerry Sanders.

When posed a question regarding The City of San Diego supporting a Federal Department of Peace, Mr. Sanders appeared uncomfortable and avoided a clear-cut yes answer. This non-violent proposal would strengthen ties with both our allies and adversaries throughout the world. That is, if we believe that peace and not violence is our strength.

There is currently both a House Resolution and Companion Bill in The Upper Chamber promoting such Department within our Federal Government. Why is it that the very mention of a Department of Peace evokes images of unpatriotic and left leaning radicals? Do we not pride ourselves in our so-called peaceful society?

Why do Democratic Politicians espouse nonviolence through federal mandates while their colleagues on the right leave it to the individual?

We do not allow carcinogens in our water supply by appealing to singular individuals but rather consider the welfare of our Nation as a whole.

Speaking of America, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg would be run out of town on a rail for refusing to support a Federal Department of Peace. Are the millions of Conservative Catholics and other religious devotees asleep in their pews or do they truly believe in the teachings of Christ?

Not long ago, it was the late Pope John Paul II who had admonished President Bush not to invade Iraq but rather strive for peace.

Is this why we Americans have so quickly forgotten the work of Mother Theresa and The Holy Pontiff himself?



Smiechowski

I believe that Mr. Sanders was fearful of supporting such a measure on grounds based in political-philosophy.

The GOP, at least for several generations, has viewed the work of peacemakers as being strangely subversive to America's vital interests.

There exist many San Diegans who share this twisted view of peace not being patriotic. Maybe it stems from the fact that the United States has not won a major world conflict since WWII. They are for the most part, a belligerent group of flag wavers concealed as always calm and in control. Nothing could be further from the truth. Raining bombs on a sovereign non-culpable third-world country is no one's idea of control except maybe a bull in a china shop. These folks fail to recognize why a Badger fights ferociously when cornered.

Maybe if Mr. Sanders examined his own human condition coupled with a grain of philosophical self examination, he would then see the rainbow of peace across our great nation. Our City Fathers would do us all a favor, as did many municipalities in our great land, by endorsing the concept of a Federal Department of Peace.

But, I am afraid this is too much to ask of leaders paralyzed by fear of the badger. Ironically, San Diego's Military has the most to gain from such proposal. Is there a better deterrent to unnecessary war than peace?

Daniel J. Smiechowski is a columnist for the Hillcrest News in San Diego, Calif. He is a former public school teacher with a diverse academic background in Sociology, Politics, French, Linguistics and Education. He has traveled abroad 18 times including study at the University of Paris, France, "La Sorbonne." Smiechowski writes primarily on social philosophy and psychology and resides in San Diego. <SmiechowskiD@aol.com>

Reject ALL 9 Propositions

BY PETER STERN
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

Quite a few newspapers are endorsing all or some of the nine proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution. This is a big mistake. I respectfully URGE you to print this rebuttal as a needed comparison of fact on these proposition for your readers. This response cannot be printed enough! The people need to know the truth.

Prop. 1 is a special interest "back-door" move to tie rails in with plans for toll roads throughout Texas. In addition, it forces taxpayers to foot a BLANK CHECK (no total amount is determined) to provide railroad companies (who have been extravagant campaign contributors) with financing when the money to do this should come from them and NOT taxpayers. Vote "NO" to Prop. 1.

Proposition 2 is a wasteful attempt to single out the gay population, much the way during the 1930's Hitler did the Jews. There are laws currently "protecting" Texas from "accepting" same sex marriages; consequently, no amendment is needed. Vote "NO" to Prop. 2.

Prop. 3 is a boondoggle by legislators to permit their special interest corporate sector to ignore its debts. Otherwise this does nothing to increase the quality of life for Texas families. Vote "NO" on Prop. 4.

Prop. 4 also is NOT needed because judges have a variety

of ways available to deal with such issues and there is a law on the books that permits this option. Vote "NO" on Prop. 4.

Prop. 5 is another special interest ploy paid for by the corporate sector to legislators via large campaign contributions. Being "good for business" unfortunately is NOT enough reason to approve this as an amendment to the constitution. Vote "NO" to Prop. 5.

Prop. 6 is another attempt by special interests to increase the number of members for the State Commission of Judicial Conduct. This was done once before increasing members from 9 to 11. Now special interests want membership increased to 13. How many times must we amend the constitution for this absurd effort that adds nothing tangible for most Texas fami



Peter Stern

Peter Stern, of Driftwood, Texas, grew up in New York City and holds three post-graduate degrees in English and Writing (New York University), Administration & Supervision (Queens College), and Computer Science (Nassau College). He is a Disabled Vietnam-era Veteran. His job experience highlights 15 years in Education as a university professor, school administrator, and public school teacher; 10 years in the computer field as Director of Information Services.

Continued On Next Page

Harriet's Answers

The Senate Judiciary Committee has said that Harriet Miers' answers to their questionnaire were "incomplete," "unsatisfactory," "elliptical," and just plain "incorrect." Through a leak from a source I can't name, I received a copy of what is purported to be her questionnaire. I will never reveal this source unless I'm threatened with jail or if anyone yells at me. I don't know if this document is really legitimate, but I feel it's my duty to share it with you. Perhaps you, the public, should decide if it's truly a copy of the actual questionnaire.

NAME: Harriet

Q: Considering your relationship with the President, under what circumstances would you recuse yourself from cases involving the Administration?

A: Don't mean to be picky, but I think you made a spelling mistake. There's no such word as "recuse." You obviously meant, "accuse."

Q: As a woman on the court, would you feel a special responsibility to deal with women's issues, or do you feel that it would be your duty to concentrate equally on issues that affect everyone?

A: That is an excellent question – the kind of question I like to roll up my sleeves and take a bite out of. I am both a person and a woman, and while I do feel a certain kinship to others of my gender, I also feel I'm part of the great human family. I

• PETER STERN

Continued From Previous Page

lies? Vote "NO" to Prop. 6.

Prop. 7 is an attempt by loan companies to permit the senior population easier access to their money for reverse mortgages. This specific population most often is subject to financial abuse in this effort. There should be more oversight to protect seniors from losing their homes and money before such a proposition is approved. Vote "NO" to Prop. 7.

Prop. 8 is another special interest effort in these counties. These laws are several hundred years old and an amendment is NOT needed by having the public vote on it. A legislative committee must review the issue and then an amendment may be filed if truly needed. Currently there is no PROOF showing the need. Vote "NO" on Prop. 8.

Finally, Prop. 9 is nothing more than an "end-run" by special interests to increase the terms from 2 to 6 years for pro-toll members on the Board of Regional Mobility Authorities (RMA's). These people are NOT elected but are appointed by the governor and other officials. If a six-year term is truly necessary (which it isn't) then members should be elected by voters every six years. Vote "NO" to Prop. 9.

These 9 propositions have been worded VERY carefully to present voters with a view that they are needed, when in truth, all the proposed amendments do NOT provide Texas families with a better quality of life, nor are they PROVEN to be in the best interests of the community at-large. Therefore, voters should reject ALL propositions.



Modern Times
By
Lloyd
Garver

also consider myself a "lady," and I don't really think it would be ladylike of me to go into any more details about this issue.

Q: What are your feelings about the separation of Church and State?

A: I have always felt that government should stay out of religion.

Q: At what age were you admitted to the bar?

A: 21, but I'm not much of a drinker.

Q: Even though it's not specifically stated in the Constitution, do you think it guarantees everyone the "right of privacy?"

A: I'd love to answer that question, but to do so would invade my privacy.

Q: Without violating attorney-client privileges, was there anything that you learned from President Bush that would make it inappropriate for you to be a Justice?

A: President Bush is the smartest and coolest man I've ever met.

Q: Because of your lack of judicial experience, we'd like to know, is there any judge whom you admire and whom you might model yourself after?

A: I like Judge Judy.

Q: In what way do you think you would positively contribute to the makeup of the Supreme Court?

A: I look good in black. But not as good as Laura, of course.

Q: Are there any words of wisdom that inspire you?

A: "Don't Mess With Texas."

Q: What quality would you bring to the bench that other judges might lack?

A: Well, I'm very nonjudgmental.

Q: Since Roe Vs. Wade was decided by the Supreme Court, would you say that issue has been dealt with and therefore should remain the law of the land?

A: Another typo or spelling mistake. It's Karl Rove, not Roe.

Q: Would you call yourself a "strict constructionist?"

A: No, I'm an Evangelical

Q: Are there things you still want to accomplish in your life that serving on the Supreme Court might prevent you from doing?

A: I'll just do them after I finish on the Supreme Court. It's not like it's for life.

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 writes the "Modern Times" column for CBSnews.com's Opinion page and a weekly column for SportsLine.com. He can be reached at lloydgarver@yahoo.com

MAILBAG ICONOCLAST LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To The Editor:

I write this letter with a troubled heart. Over the years I have built up a good strong wall for cruelties that come my way - one has to be gay. So I'm not usually bothered when someone makes a disparaging remark to me. But recently at my home town's Fall Fest, the Master of Ceremonies publicly announced the support for Prop 2 banning Gay marriage. Then visiting my neighbors at the Republican booth I saw their sign for Prop 2. I consider them friends and still do. They have been very kind to my partner and me and even brought over fresh bread and a Jesus pamphlet when we moved in. They are good people but I'm sure they probably don't approve of our relationship. Still to hear my own community and see my own neighbor's petition against us has brought back some awful feelings that I thought were long gone. My wall has been shattered by this amendment and it happened that day. I woke up the next morning hurt. I was surprised but thought it would go away. One week later and it hasn't. This was a stinging reminder that even good people would support this amendment, maybe even my own sisters will. This amendment at best is repetitious as it is already the law of Texas. At worst it is mean-spirited and hateful.

My partner and I have been together for almost seven years. We love each other deeply and are gay yet we don't believe in "Gay Marriage". (See Mathew Chapter 19:10-12.) Notice that this may be the ONLY time Jesus the Son of God himself talks about gays. But our religious beliefs don't belong in the constitution and neither does yours. How would you feel if Muslims or Buddhists passed laws you did not believe in? We certainly believe we are due all the same rights and privileges that married couples have, (over a thousand) especially since we live together like married couples do and pay property taxes for your kids to go to school each year.

Obviously I believe in our Bill of Rights that was ratified by our Founding Fathers in 1789. The very first sentence states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." But if you can't help yourself and must include religion in our government then don't marry the same sex. Also, don't have sex with your wife during menstruation or wear scarlet red anymore otherwise I may get the urge to hurl stones at you if this amendment passes. Hopefully I will remember "WWJD."

If you want to be a "Christian" then do what Christ commands. (1 Peter 4:8 - "Above all else love each other deeply, for love covers a multitude of sins.") I fail to see how this amendment accomplishes God's Greatest Commandment. Or better yet, read James 4:12 - "There is only one Judge, the one who can save or destroy. But you - who are you to judge your neighbor?"

We are not asking for you to accept us, or even befriend us. Just leave us be. Please vote No for Prop 2.

Blessings,
Charles Dean Bowen

Dear Editor,

The Iraqi war is a meat grinder of the Bush Government's own cynical making. They lied about WMDs to gain approval. Invading Iraq hasn't captured Osama bin Ladin, nor diminished Al Qaeda. On the contrary, more people have joined the insurgents to fight U.S. occupation. While we kill more Iraqis and lose more of our sol-

diers, grinding up more lives will not bring stability, nor peace, and certainly not democracy. Eventually, we will have to leave. Will it be soon, with 2,000 dead American sons and daughters, or later, when the body count is even greater?

Sincerely,
Bruce Joffe, Piedmont, CA

To The Editor:

President Bush says Libby has sacrificed much in service of the White House and should be presumed innocent pending trial.

Then what about Jose Padilla, an American citizen being held indefinitely in a Navy brig (jail) without charge awaiting trial? Where is Jose Padilla's presumed innocence? Why isn't Lewis Libby in a jail?

Nicholas Hancock

To The Editor:

All those who are facilitating the Bush Administration by excusing their deceptions are aiding and abetting. All those people who are splitting hairs and rewriting events are hypocrites. The people who are helping to perpetrate some of the biggest lies in American history are accessories to the fact.

Kay Bailey Hutchinson's defense of the Bush Administration is a slap in the face. Either she thinks we're all stupid or she can no longer recognize the border between right and wrong.

Ann Coulter's demand that we swallow her spewed excuses for Bush and the Neo-cons borders on treason.

So, as the pious right-wingers go about peddling their whitewash and slinging their detractors they are, in fact, involved in amoral behavior. They are in fact just as guilty as the Bush Administration and their Neo-con minions.

Remember the old saying, "Clinton lied and nobody died. Bush lied and people died." Well... the truth of the matter is that people are still dying as a result of their despicable, unethical behavior.

Libby and Rove told reporters with malice aforethought about Joseph Wilson and his wife. No amount of ifs, ands or buts changes that fact. And if you want to believe that George Bush and Dick Cheney didn't condone that behavior I've got a bridge to an Alaskan island to sell you.

The fact that we are even allowing a debate over this kind of behavior as being acceptable demonstrates just how morally bankrupt the far right has become. The slippery slope has turned into a vertical sheet of glass ending in pragmatic ends justifying means. These are excuses we're hearing, we are witnessing first hand obstruction of justice.

Sweetie pies. This isn't a dad gum whine. This is a sure enough roar of righteous indignation. We must rip the guise of acceptability from this abhorrent behavior and show it for what it is. We must yank out the evil by its roots and reject the concept that it's OK for politics to be a profession of ill repute. IT IS NOT OK.

Defeating Roe v. Wade does not mean selling your soul to the devil. Hoping that affirmative action is thrown out does not justify closing your eyes to the amoral behavior going on in front of you. Demanding an end to Medicaid does not mean erecting a fascist state with lies. Wanting a strong America doesn't mean starting unilateral wars and justifying them with falsehoods, half-truths and omissions.

The only thing that should be coming out of the mouths of supporters of the George Bush Administration should be "I'm sorry!"
Angie Pratt

Texans To Vote On Proposed Amendments

AUSTIN — On Tuesday, Nov. 8, Texans will be going to the polls to decide whether to ratify nine proposed amend-

ments to the state constitution.

The constitutional amendments will appear on the ballot in the following or-

der:

- Proposition 1: HJR 54 — “The constitutional amendment creating the Texas rail relocation and improvement fund and authorizing grants of money and issuance of obligations for financing the relocation, rehabilitation and expansion of rail facilities.”

- Proposition 2: HJR 6 — “The constitutional amendment providing that marriage in this state consists only of the union of one man and one woman and prohibiting this state or a political subdivision of this state from creating or recognizing any legal status identical or similar to marriage.”

- Proposition 3: HJR 80 — “The constitutional amendment clarifying that certain economic development programs do not constitute a debt.”

- Proposition 4: SJR 17 — “The constitutional amendment authorizing the denial of bail to a criminal defendant who violates a condition of the defendant’s release pending

trial.”

- Proposition 5: SJR 21 — “The constitutional amendment allowing the legislature to define rates of interest for commercial loans.”

- Proposition 6: HJR 87 — “The constitutional amendment to include one additional public member and a constitutional county court judge in the membership of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct.”

- Proposition 7: SJR 7 — “The constitutional amendment authorizing line-of-credit advances under a reverse mortgage.”

- Proposition 8: SJR 40 — “The constitutional amendment providing for the clearing of land titles by relinquishing and releasing any state claim to sovereign ownership or title to interest in certain land in Upshur County and in Smith County.”

- Proposition 9: HJR 79 — “The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide for a six-year term for a board member of a regional mobility authority.”

Ag Dept.:

Texans At Highest Risk Of Hunger

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Agriculture has released data indicating that a higher percentage of Texas households are at risk of going hungry than in any other state, based on statistics gathered during the past three years.

According to the USDA report, between 2002 and 2004, more than 16 percent of Texas households at some point had difficulty providing enough food for their families and in nearly five percent of Texas households, at least one family member went hungry at least one time during the period due to lack of funds for food.

The USDA says that the study reveals that, nationally, the risk of households going hungry is growing.

Strayhorn Wants To Return Tax Surplus To Texas Homeowners

AUSTIN — Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn recently said every homeowner in the state should get a check for \$260 under her plan to return unanticipated surplus tax revenue. She called on Gov. Rick Perry to call a “quick, productive three-day special session of the Legislature.”

“This money needs to be returned to its rightful owner — Texas taxpayers,” Strayhorn said. “Return the favor, return the check. Local property taxes are picking up 62 percent of the cost of educating our children, and we need to give homeowners who are paying these skyrocketing property taxes a break.”

As comptroller, Strayhorn closed the books on the 2004-05 biennium Aug. 31. She then identified \$1.2 billion in unanticipated revenue that came into the state during the last three months of the year, primarily because of accelerated oil and gas severance taxes, increased automobile sales, and an

overall increase in sales.

“There are about 4.6 million homesteads in Texas,” she said. “If the \$1.2 billion surplus were distributed to each homeowner, that would be \$260 per homeowner.”

Strayhorn said the refund checks would jump to \$307 per homeowner if the \$210.9 million currently in the Texas Enterprise Fund were added to the pot.

“Homeowners this month are getting their property tax statements and this money could provide immediate property tax relief,” she said. “The average property tax payment for homeowners is about \$2,300 a year. A \$260 rebate would be an 11.3 percent property tax cut and a \$307 rebate would be a 13.4 percent reduction. That’s real money — that’s real relief.”

Strayhorn said Gov. Perry needs to call a quick, three-day special session of the Legislature so the money can be returned. The session would cost no more than \$168,000.

AT LAST... the MAGI as THREE WISE WOMEN

This Christmas send

“EPIPHANY”

by Janet McKenzie © 2003



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