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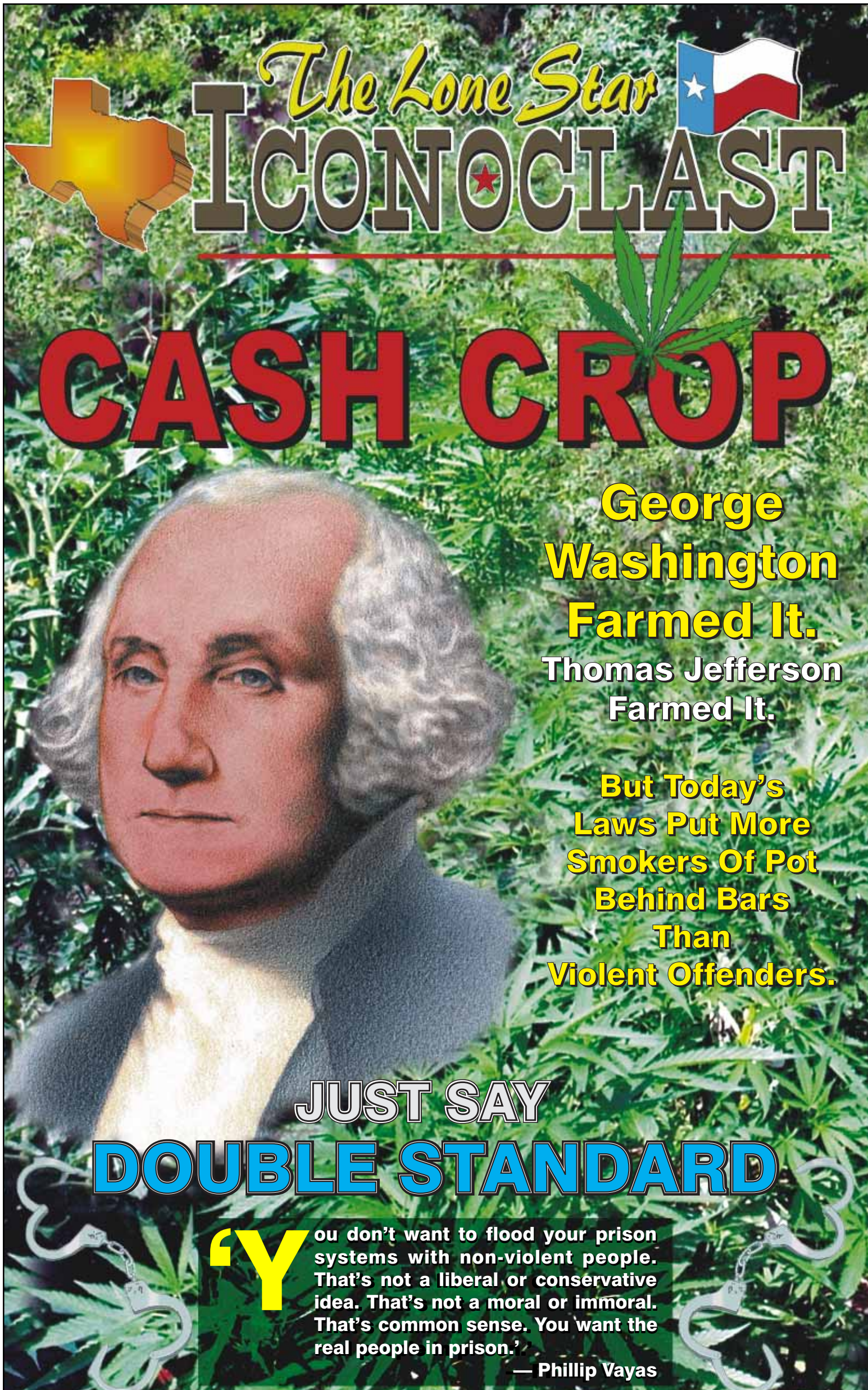
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Farmed It.  
Thomas Jefferson  
Farmed It.**

**But Today's  
Laws Put More  
Smokers Of Pot  
Behind Bars  
Than  
Violent Offenders.**

## JUST SAY DOUBLE STANDARD

**'Y**ou don't want to flood your prison systems with non-violent people. That's not a liberal or conservative idea. That's not a moral or immoral. That's common sense. You want the real people in prison.'

— Phillip Vayas

# Anti-War Challenger, Activists Dog Sen. Clinton

NEW YORK — New York State Sen. Hilary Clinton is facing a challenge to her senate seat and more criticism from anti-war activists for her stance on U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Former National Writers Union president Jonathan Tasini will run against her in the Democratic primary on a progressive party platform centering around bringing U.S. troops home from Iraq, fair trade, economic reforms, and universal health care.

Clinton has not announced her candidacy for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, but she is

nonetheless considered a frontrunner—with deep pockets and name recognition carried over from her husband, President Bill Clinton.

The point of contention with most, if not, all anti-war advocates is Sen. Clinton's stance on the war in Iraq. In 2002, she split from progressives to back President Bush's use of force in Iraq, though since then she has not admitted her support was "wrong" nor has she sided with senators and congressmen, like Rep. John Murtha, who are calling for a quick withdrawal of troops.

## McCain, Bush Near Torture Ban Compromise

WASHINGTON — Sen. John McCain, a former POW tortured during Vietnam, and the White House were coming close last week to an agreement on a Senate-backed bill banning torture as a means of obtaining information from alleged terrorists.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the Republican from Arizona offered to modify language after a military rule that gives soldiers a legal defense comparable to a "reasonable" person finding that the soldier followed a lawful order about the treatment of prisoners.

Sen. McCain initially wanted the proposed law to say no person in U.S. custody could be held to "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment." The Bush administration, on the other hand, stressed the need for harsh interrogations at least in instances of

extreme threats to national security. Vice President Dick Cheney has lobbied for the CIA to be exempted from the measure entirely.

National security adviser, Stephen Hadley, on ABC's "This Week," reiterated the administration's claim — the United States adheres to international laws that address torture. Still, White House spokesman Scott McClellan, declined Tuesday elaborate on President Bush's definition of torture.

Another Senate amendment, though, has been changed to give terrorist suspects held at the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba an avenue to appeal their convictions to federal court. The final bill is expected to be ready on Monday, but it faces final passage in both Houses before adjuring for the year.

## CIA Cleans Secret Bases Before Rice Europe Visit

WASHINGTON — Ahead of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Europe, the CIA moved 11 al-Qa'eda suspects from two secret locations in Europe to complexes in North Africa, according to ABC News last week.

Former and current CIA officials told the news agency that the move was to quell possible controversy, so Rice could smooth over relations with nations upset after The Washington Post reported that the CIA used secret bases in Eastern Europe to extract information through harsh interrogation techniques.

The Bush administration has neither denied nor confirmed the existence of these "black sites." However, Rice has

admitted that mistakes had been made in the U.S. war on terrorism, but denied the use of torture on suspects.

A German national alleging the CIA wrongfully imprisoned and tortured him was a topic of discussion between new German chancellor Angela Merkel and Rice. Although the Secretary of State would not comment on the case to the press, senior U.S. officials said Rice had not conceded a mistake in the case of Khaled el Masri.

Masri, 42, whose lawsuit was filed in U.S. federal court by the American Civil Liberties Union, says that the CIA flew the German from Macedonia to Afghanistan where he was held for five months in violation of U.S. and universal human rights laws.

Sen. Clinton is also at odds with Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier slain in Iraq whose advocacy against the war blossomed during her vigil outside the Bush ranch last August. "I will resist (Clinton's) candidacy with every bit of my power and strength," said Sheehan in a letter written after she met with Clinton to discuss the war.

To show their fury should be taken seriously, members of peace group

CodePink intent to follow Clinton around the country to persuade her to change her policy on Iraq under the moniker "Bird-Dog Hillary," according to co-founder Medea Benjamin. One of the group's first soundings was at a Manhattan fund-raiser for New York's junior senator.

The next Codepink action on Clinton will be at a rally on Dec. 20 in San Francisco.

## Worldwide Protests Heat Up Climate Debate

MONTREAL — A special conference of the United Nations in Montreal, Canada, last week drew the first-ever world-wide demonstration that called for industrialized nations to take bigger steps into reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Almost a million people were estimated to attend rallies held in over 100 cities across 30 countries, while the U.N. representatives of 189 countries at the meeting started negotiations to define a timetable for cutting carbon dioxide levels after the Kyoto treaty expires in 2012.

Though both the protestors and representatives alike aimed to pressure the United States to commit to the international pollution-reduction protocol, some environmentalists reasoned that resources would be better spent on developing the infrastructures of less-industrialized countries away from carbon-based energy sources.

Only attending the conference as an



on-looker, the U.S. — the world's #1 producer of greenhouse gases (25 percent) — has refused to approve Kyoto, a pledge to slash CO2 levels down 5.2 percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012 that a number of the 35 co-signer nations have failed to follow thus far, including Canada, Japan, and 11 countries in the European Union.

Not all green-minded U.S. who attended the conference have turned their backs on working to implement Kyoto-like initiatives inside the United States.

Mayor of Seattle Greg Nickels last Thursday garnered the pledges of five more cities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by seven percent from 1990 levels. Under the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement, now 195 cities with over 40 million Americans represented by both Republican and Democratic Parties have climbed aboard, including half of the largest 50 U.S. cities.

Actor Leonardo DiCaprio also announced his intention to make a documentary about global warming called *11th Hour*. "Global warming is not only the number one environmental challenge we face today, but one of the most important issues facing all of humanity," he said in a statement.



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# JUST SAY DOUBLE STANDARD CASH CROP



**George Washington Farmed It.  
Thomas Jefferson Farmed It.**

**... But Today's Laws Put More Smokers Of Pot  
Behind Bars Than Violent Offenders.**

**DFW Activists Rekindle NORML Chapter  
— Interview With Phillip Vayas —**

By NATHAN DIEBENOW  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

DALLAS — Ryan Rodriguez would rather not use synthetic drugs like vicodin to alleviate the pain in his muscles.

When the El Paso native was diagnosed a few years back with fibromyalgia, the cause of which is still unknown, he was told that vicodin caused liver damage, and he'd have none of that, he said. Rodriguez added that he can't even drink alcohol without risk of further liver damage while using this drug.

Unfortunately, the alternative he prefers is illegal in Texas, but he's working to change the availability of that choice.

Rodriguez, 28, is the President of the DFW Chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, a nonprofit branch he and Phillip Vayas, 24, a social worker in Dallas, started from scratch less than two years ago.

This new group rose from the ashes of a previous NORML chapter that imploded after almost a decade of activism, which at one time included former Dallas Cowboy Mark Stepnoski as its chapter president. Stepnoski currently serves as President of Texas NORML and is a member of NORML's advisory board, a seat among entertainers, like Willie Nelson, Bill Maher, as well as a Nobel laureate, the executive vice-president of Cato Institute, leading academics, and drug policy experts.

Originally founded with a grant from magazine mogul Hugh Hefner in 1970, NORML's purpose is to educate the public about marijuana prohibition and fight toward the reform of marijuana laws that caused the arrests of nearly 735,000 Americans in 2001.

About two weeks after citizens of Denver, Colo. relaxed local law enforcement of marijuana, the LONE STAR ICONOCLAST'S Nathan Diebenow met up with DFW NORML Vice-President Vayas in Dal-

las to talk about the difference between Colorado and Texas on marijuana law enforcement, the continuation of popular culture's acceptance of pot, and the plans the local and state chapters have to lobby the 2007 Texas Legislature to decriminalize use of this misunderstood plant.

.....  
ICONOCLAST: Tell me a little bit about yourself and why you're a member of the DFW chapter of NORML.

PHILLIP VAYAS: I'm in NORML because of that my line of work with drug addicts and people in recovery from drugs and the homeless. Some problems with prohibition have really come to the front door with me what with clients being arrested and having felonies on their record, not being able to get jobs because of that, not being able to get public housing, not being able to get higher education, being generally discriminated against for reasons why they are making a personal decision — nothing more, nothing less.

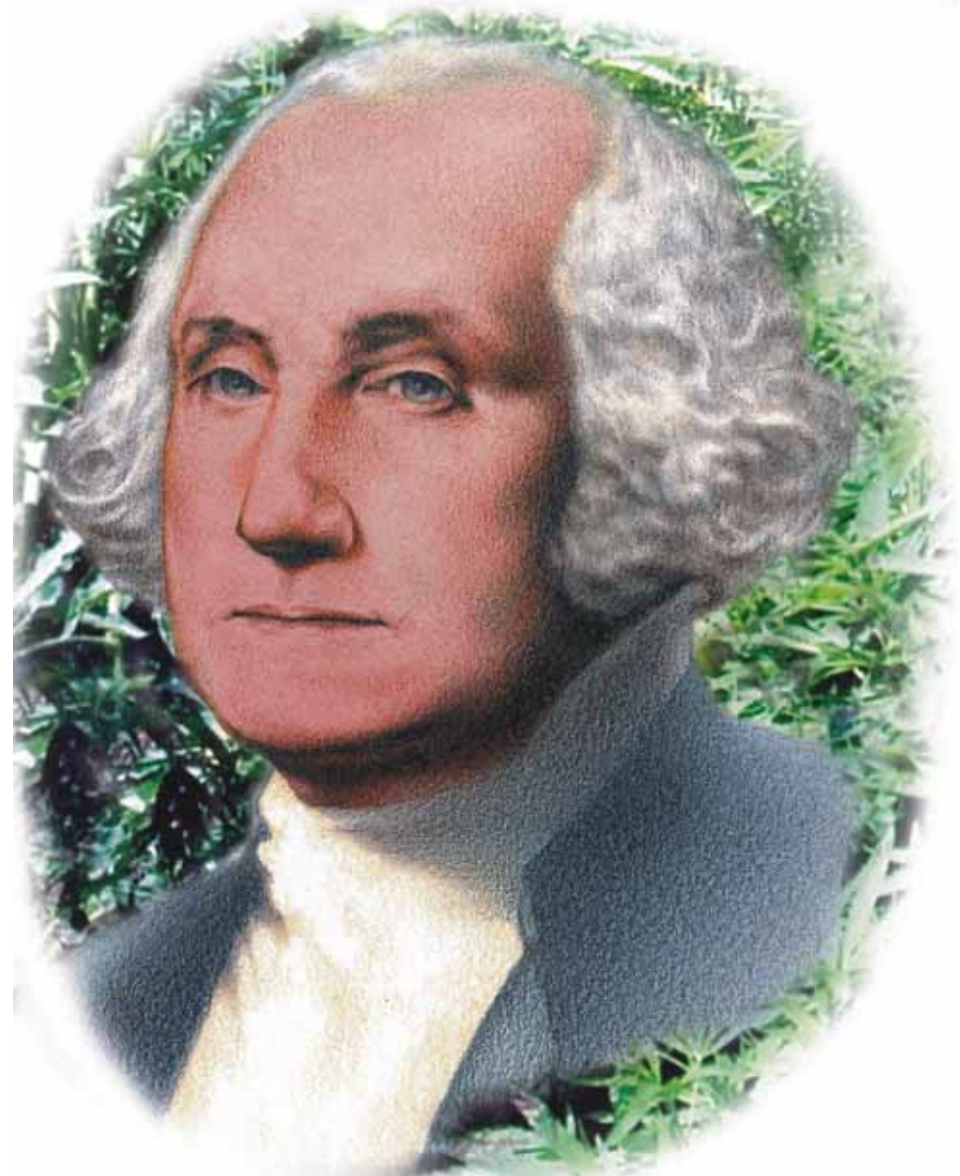
I'm a firm believer from years of working with drug addicts that you can recover from an addiction, but you can't really recover from a conviction. It'll follow you for a long time. It can cause a lot of problems. You can have your house seized, your property seized, families broken up. Generally prohibition has never worked. It's a big social issue, and as a social worker, it's my duty to fight for social justice.

ICONOCLAST: How long have you been a social worker?

VAYAS: I'm 24, and I've been working for a company in Dallas for about two years now. I got prior experience working in Waco where I went to Baylor University. Yeah, two years now, working with the homeless and trying to get them on their feet.

ICONOCLAST: So you don't actually use marijuana. It's just that—

VAYAS: No, I don't use marijuana. I do have clients — It's a social issue for



me. It's a very large policy failure. The people who actually suffer the most are the ones that have already lost everything. It's not rich people with rich kids who can afford million-dollar attorneys to get them out of those situations. It's minority populations that are being targeted.

ICONOCLAST: So how long have you been with NORML?

VAYAS: The funny thing with the Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter is that two or three years ago, we had a chapter here, and it was broken up. A couple people got arrested, and a lot of the leadership got freaked out at that point, and they kind of let it kick out. Nothing was happening here. It was being managed very poorly. We had one person that was ba-

sically keeping an e-mail list. Ryan, our president right now, took over the leadership role, and I'm kind of like a back-up for doing interviews, if necessary.

Our chapter has only been around for 10 months in December. It's very new actually, but we are growing larger already. We have several hundred people on our mailing list. We have a board that is very, very diverse. Our board consists of attorneys, former CPAs, police officers even.

ICONOCLAST: Really?

VAYAS: Yeah, we have police officers who feel that prohibition leads to corruption in the police industry. There's a lot of money to be had in narcotics.

ICONOCLAST: What's the age range  
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• **CASH CROP** ... Continued From Page 3

of your group?

VAYAS: Oh, goodness, gracious! College age kids from 18 to our most vocal activists, the ones who are appearing in our local newspapers — they're in their 50s and 60s. We have a wide, wide range. It's not this young crowd. It's a very common misconception. It's not this pre-30s, against the world type of crowd. Like I said, it's attorneys, doctors, CPAs. One of our most vocal advocates is a police officer. He's retired, out of the force, but there is no age criteria. If anybody is passionate about it.

ICONOCLAST: So what do you guys do? How do you take on the decriminalization of marijuana?

VAYAS: Our mission really is to educate. We educate people about the problems with prohibition, how it affects women's rights, in that women are becoming the new leading population in our jail systems, and even down to the environment with hemp production instead of cotton production. We educate on a vast spectrum of what marijuana is and minimize the dangers associated with it. It's important to note that NORML itself recognizes that marijuana is addictive and that it has potential to be abused, but that abuse is grossly overstated by our government.

The second part of our mission is we go to our local state senators. We speak to them, trying to get them to reschedule marijuana. We actually had a rally last month in front of the Health and Human Services building in downtown Dallas. It went very well. The representative came out, heard our complaints and concerns —

ICONOCLAST: What representative was that?

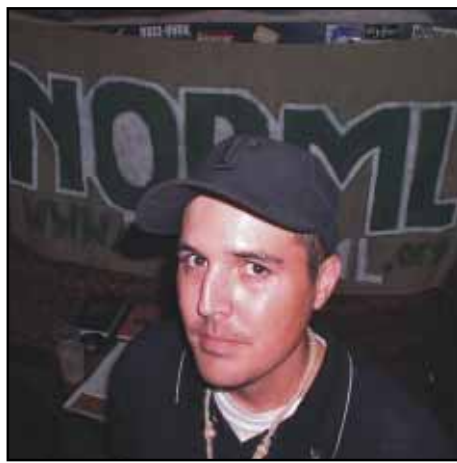
VAYAS: I don't know his name off the top of my head. But he said that he would write a letter to the state health board requesting that marijuana be rescheduled for its medical and medicinal purposes. We are doing a canvassing campaign, door-to-door, and we'll also be going to our local congressmen and school boards, and trying to get them aware as well about what needs to happen and the problems in our community.

ICONOCLAST: When you guys are out in the field talking with people, regular old folks — Texans, who do they react to you guys?

VAYAS: It depends on where we are. When we're doing our things on campuses, talking to local college kids, they have a much more open mind. They're there at college to learn new things, and it's not just in textbooks. They generally give us a positive response.

The older crowds, the more conservative crowds, we have a pretty hard time convincing or really talking to. You know, they have the old propaganda films in their mind, like Reefer Madness and things like that. They grew up with a war on marijuana. They still have those old-style ideas in their heads, that it's a drug that's going to ruin civilization or something, which is not true.

Religious groups we probably have the hard time to convince, just because they feel that it's immoral to intoxicate your body. They're against alcohol and everything. It's a very, very hard problem. We are working on it, though. We're talking to the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church is actually a pioneer in the religious movement for the end of the drug war. They've written letters against the drug war saying that it's



**PAIN CONTROL** — President of the DFW Chapter of NORML, Ryan Rodriguez, 28, said he would rather not take vicodin, a drug that is known to cause liver damage, to alleviate pain associated from his fibromyalgia, a condition related to multiple sclerosis that drains his energy.

— Staff Photo By Nathan Diebenow

immoral to keep incarcerating our fellow man, so we're looking for local religious leaders to sign on.

ICONOCLAST: Well, I have to ask. What's it going to take to decriminalize marijuana?

VAYAS: Well, just with anything, when you're talking about grassroots movements, it's a long process. If look back at our history at different grassroots movements — civil rights, public education, women's rights — it took a long time. The problem with marijuana decriminalization is that the public has been ingrained and drilled with this negative and very uninformed and incorrect information. They've been continually scared. It's going to take a lot of people to be involved. It's going to take a lot of media to get a lot of attention. And money, too.

One of the things we're going up against and what people don't understand is that we get e-mailed from

people saying, "Why isn't medical marijuana allowed?" Well, look at what we're going up against. We're going up against pharmaceutical companies who don't want see something like that out. The DEA destroyed this one study that they were supposed to use vaporizers for medical marijuana because, you know, the government is scared because if they actually see that this stuff is affective, there goes everything.

We have a lot of people working against us. The alcohol and tobacco industry is against the legalization movement. There are a lot of different factors as to how it can actually happened because a lot of concerned people can be educated about it to see how it happens in their local communities first, and then nationally, but they really have to get down to the local level to see what is really happening in their local communities.

For example, being a social worker, we have first track access to things at city hall down in Dallas. The mayor's office came out with a release from the police department of the breakdown of criminals incarcerated in Dallas County prisons. Well, nonviolent offenders took way more precedent over violent offend-

**W**e're getting more members daily. We're getting people like the health and human services to listen to us. We're getting local judges to speak about their positions on this, and a lot of local judges are with us. A lot of Dallas County public defenders are our members, whereas we didn't have that when we first started off. All of a sudden within one year we're just getting this tremendous support from police officers and CPAs and judges.'

— Phillip Vayas

ers. In fact, violent offenders were the least targeted individuals. We're talking nonviolent people like petty theft, drugs, and things of that nature; whereas murderers and rapists were getting away on the street.

But Dallas is the worst city in the nation for homicide and violence, and that's a big problem (chuckles). We need our police department to take a different stand, and maybe doing something like what Denver, Colo. did, but unfortunately, Colorado took the initiative to say that marijuana and alcohol, treat them the same for adults. Well, our Texas constitution actually prohibits local and community governments from making those types of laws. Colorado's constitution allows for that. California's constitution allows that. Texas no.

So, unfortunately, even though there is such a problem here in Dallas County where our police are targeting these nonviolent offenders instead of the violent offenders, it would take a state initiative to change that to make that less of a priority.

It's going to be a long road. I think that we're gaining ground, and I think that our government is finally coming to the realization that we can't enforce everything, that with the war on terror, and

deserve a promotion." That's a big problem with getting more support, but we really are chipping away. We're getting more press time in THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS. We're beginning a campaign in the local papers, DALLAS VOICE, FORT WORTH WEEKLY, DALLAS OBSERVER, so we're getting to be steamrolling here.

ICONOCLAST: Yeah, I heard about the DALLAS OBSERVER article in the last few weeks.

VAYAS: The one in the OBSERVER was about farming marijuana here in Dallas, how big it is, how widespread. It's just everywhere. Even the chief of police, he said, "We've got other stuff to worry about, and we can't catch everybody."

ICONOCLAST: So there's this process by which you are working. First of all, how long do you think it's going to take for Texas to pass a marijuana decriminalization initiative like the one you spoke about before?

VAYAS: Well, I think the key to the future is looking at the past. In this Legislative session, there were several bills related to marijuana, one of which was medical marijuana but that was only to have it used as a permanent offense, not to actually have it legal, like we are trying to do now, particularly like in California.

The other one was decriminalization of up to one pound of marijuana for a misdemeanor. It didn't pass. Right now, you can possess up to four ounces and still have it be up to a misdemeanor, depending on a little scale.

The second its over like .00001, you've got a felony.

The other thing we were working really hard with the ACLU was the notification of search. That was meant for state troopers and local law enforcement. If they wanted to search your car, they had to get a signature from you, because a lot of people still don't understand their 4th and 5th amendment rights, which I can't stress enough. It's very important, so Gov. Rick Perry proposed a bill basically that has to have people sign off first and waive their rights. That just got stuck. It really didn't go anywhere.

Medical marijuana was shot down, unfortunately, so —

ICONOCLAST: It's back to square one.

VAYAS: Yup, in 2007, we'll be shooting for the health and human services to tell the Legislature that it recognizes medical marijuana. We are working on petitioning — get signatures — to ask our representatives to sponsor a bill to reduce the penalties for possession of up to one pound of marijuana. It is quite a bit of marijuana, but a quarter million people are in jail for possession. That's

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**I**t can be used for paper. Hemp only takes about 100-140 days to get fully grown, whereas a tree takes up to 50 years to get to the point where it can be used for paper. Hemp cuts down on greenhouse gases, I think. Instead of cutting down three acres of trees, cut down one acre of hemp. It's the same amount of raw material.'

— Phillip Vayas

you know leave this problem here and nuclear proliferation there, but they can't keep up with fighting this fight and that fight. They're going to have to stop somewhere.

ICONOCLAST: How do you know that you're succeeding?

VAYAS: We're getting more members daily. We're getting people like the health and human services to listen to us. We're getting local judges to speak about their positions on this, and a lot of local judges are with us. A lot of Dallas County public defenders are our members, whereas we didn't have that when we first started off. All of a sudden within one year we're just getting this tremendous support from police officers and CPAs and judges.

ICONOCLAST: When you guys came up to ask them for support, what was their initial reaction?

VAYAS: It was skepticism at first. A lot of it was they like myself have to think about job security, you know, putting food on their table for their families. Well, talking about such a controversial topic puts them in the headbeams of losing their job or becoming this negative public figure. "Oh, he supports pot! Ignore him. He doesn't

• **CASH CROP** ... Continued From Page 4

a lot.

**ICONOCLAST:** You mentioned pharmaceutical companies, liquor and cigarette companies, too, but what about the corporate prison systems? They must be supporters of the drug war on marijuana.

**VAYAS:** They're working pretty hard, too. There are a lot of bid contracts going through, especially the state prisons. Prisoners need to be clothed and fed. Train the security guards, correction officers. The DAs of those counties just love to get their hands on some more people in jail. That's how they make their money. As far as the prison industry goes, anyone from ConAgra who makes the food for the prisoners to Blackwell Smith who makes the weapons. The locking companies. They make big money. They have a vested interest.

A lot of these prisons are located in small-town communities. It's a big boost to their economy. For example, while I was attending Baylor University, my freshman year roommate was from a population of less than 2,000. They built a junior prison for minors in his hometown. The city population almost doubled because it was such an economic boom. They're not going to give that up very easily, but unfortunately, you know, if you don't have prisoners, you're not going to have a prison, so you need people, but nobody really thinks about what those people are going to need afterwards or the money that's really coming out of our pockets. That's what we need to start thinking about.

**ICONOCLAST:** Do you find supporters from the agriculture community?

**VAYAS:** Yes, the American Farmer's Association has said numerous times that they want to start looking into industrial hemp as a product that it can sell. Hemp is a strain of marijuana that has such an incredibly small amount of active ingredient THC that you can't even digest it. You have to eat like an incredible amount of hemp product to even feel anything. You'd probably explode and die before you'd feel anything.

It's hypocritical. I can go to Whole Foods. I can get hemp products. I can buy hemp bars, hemp cereal, hemp ice cream, hemp butter, hemp bread. Even raw hemp seed I can buy. It's being sold to the American people. They're coming from Canada, from Romania, and from other European countries, and it's perfectly fine. People are eating it. People are using it. But the thing is that American farmers can't do that. If it was so dangerous, it wouldn't be legal.

I wrote my congressman, Michael Burgess, and he wrote me back a letter saying, "There's no point in producing hemp. There's perfectly good cotton, etc., etc. and hemp can get you high." (laughs) You know, it's already here.

The unfortunate thing is that our farmers can't make it. They don't have that choice. A long time ago in this country, farmers had to make hemp on their farms.

**ICONOCLAST:** That was during World War II?

**VAYAS:** It was pre-World War II and even Civil War. George Washington farmed hemp. All of our Founding Fathers farmed hemp. They smoked marijuana at the same time. It has been around for a long time.

Industrial hemp has a lot of benefits that aren't stated. It's a great alterna-

tive to cotton production. Cotton requires a tremendous amount of pesticides. Hemp is soft, but it isn't as soft as cotton, but it's a great alternative to polluting rivers. It can be used for paper. Hemp only takes about 100-140 days to get fully grown, whereas a tree takes up to 50 years to get to the point where it can be used for paper. Hemp cuts down on greenhouse gases, I think. Instead of cutting down three acres of trees, cut down one acre of hemp. It's the same amount of raw material. It has a lot of benefits.

**ICONOCLAST:** Why does Dallas County have such a high rate of marijuana prosecution?

**VAYAS:** It basically goes down to our leaders. I can't understand another reason why. I mean, Dallas is a hotbed for the drug trade industry. You have cartels basically using Dallas as a point to spread out West, East, and North. If you think about it, it's connected to pretty much everywhere.

**ICONOCLAST:** Like the airlines.

**VAYAS:** Yeah, where you can connect up. There's a lot of roads from here and a lot of small towns to hideout.

**ICONOCLAST:** That might be one reason why Dallas prosecutes nonviolent offenders as opposed to Tarrant County or San Antonio or any other cities. But how many of them are local?

**VAYAS:** Many of them are local. For example, up in the Colony, there were two young teens that were manufacturing marijuana. Granted, they were extremely stupid. They were putting them in candy bars and selling them in Deep Ellum, of all places. You're going to get nailed doing that. But the penalties for those two young kids were felonies. Those kids just turned 18. They're going to have that for the rest of their lives, and no diversion for them was offered or anything.

Meanwhile, if you look at any of our county websites, you can look up any sex offender. You can look up where they live, their full name, what crime they committed, and get this — you can look up how long they were in jail for, if they got jail. One guy who actually lives in my town, he sexually assaulted a 10-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl. He got differed adjudication. He never saw a day in prison in his entire life. All he has to do is register wherever he goes. That's it. Once differed adjudication is over, he can apply to any job, do anything he wants. You can't do that with a drug offense. And these people who sexually assault kids are the ones really messing people up. In this case, the punishment doesn't fit the crime whatsoever and these people are getting away. That's a fact. You can look that up on the Internet yourself.

The thing that NORML works for is we educate as many people as possible towards what is happening in their communities, and that's one of the things we really want people to be aware of — bad things happen in their communities: murders, rape, child molestation. Well, where does pot smoking stand on that kind of scale of crime? Who's more of a danger to society? A guy who stands outside a kindergarten school ground waiting to take a kid or a couple of college kids in a dorm room taking a hit off a bong? You don't want those people off the streets. You don't want to flood your prison systems with non-violent people. That's not a liberal or conservative idea.



**NORMLIZATION** — Ryan Rodriguez, 28, President of the DFW chapter of NORML and another member of DFW NORML nicknamed Meep, 27, (from left) sign up an interested person to the organization's mailing list at a Spoonfed Tribe show in Fort Worth on Nov. 16.

— Staff Photo By Nathan Diebenow

That's not a moral or immoral. That's common sense. You want the real people in prison.

**ICONOCLAST:** You said that local communities in Texas cannot change their laws against a law in the state constitution, so what are the options to change the law to make it more marijuana friendly?

**VAYAS:** The options would be if Texans decided to make an amendment to the constitution saying that local communities and cities could make their own laws on marijuana such as Denver and Colorado have, or if the Legislature changes the laws concerning marijuana right now.

**ICONOCLAST:** So let's say that the United States decriminalizes marijuana and people are allowed to purchase and smoke marijuana and farmers are allowed to grow and sell industrialized hemp, do you fear that this new system would create another avenue in which multinational corporations can exploit people?

**VAYAS:** I'll answer that question with a question: which one do you think is better, for it to be legally taxed revenue for a country or for drug dealers to buy a town, buy off people, and murder people?

I'm not going to sit here and say corporations are good or Big Tobacco is good. God, no, they're not good. They've got to get young people to start smoking at an early age. You know, Camel and Joe Camel, all these advertisements trying to get kids to do it at a young age. Glamorizing alcohol with women, football and sports and everything like that.

I'm not saying that it's going to be very good thing, but look at the Dutch who have had marijuana decriminalized completely to the point where they can sell small quantities in coffee shops over there. They don't advertise over there. They're just kind of like, "Well, I know what you want." If we take that avenue, I think we can prevent all of that corporate involvement with marijuana, but if not, it's still inevitable that Phillip Morris is going to get a hold of it and do to marijuana what they did to tobacco. I still say it's much better than having it in criminal hands and drug lords in their

third-world countries. At least we can get tax money from them.

NORML does not say, "Hey, go smoke marijuana." We don't want people to smoke it because it's against the law, but if you are going to do it, that's a personal choice. That's just like if you want to smoke. It's a personal choice. If you're an adult, you have to make those types of decisions, like you make decisions about your health, too. But in any condition, it is always better to have that out of criminal hands.

People say that it's a gateway drug. Why is it a gateway drug? Who's selling it? I work with several clients who used to be drug dealers, and one of them, what he used to do was start people on marijuana, and then slowly but surely, he would roll joints for them, and the kids wouldn't look inside the joint. He rolled them with cocaine, and that's the way he made his money. He got kids addicted to cocaine, and there's much more money in cocaine than there is in pot.

I don't know. There are good ways to do things and there are bad ways to do things. Smoking in this country has decreased tremendously over the past 20 years, and the reason why is that we've passed laws saying that you can't smoke in certain places but also through proper education, through proper research of doctors saying, "Oh my God! If you smoke, you're going to get cancer, emphysema, heart disease, viral cirrhosis, mouth cancer, etc." Well, they won't let you do that with marijuana. It's against the law to have it. You can't really do research with it. The only people who are allowed to do research with it is the government, and they keep saying their lines over and over again, so really, there needs to be a lot more independent research about marijuana and it's real harm.

As far as corporations, to your original question, we're able now to really see how bad cigarettes are and Big Tobacco and drinking because our scientists are allowed to study it. These people are able to make informed, rational decisions, based upon facts because we have that kind of access. It's

**Continued On Next Page**

• **CASH CROP** ... Continued From Page 5

very simple.

ICONOCLAST: What's the cultural significance of marijuana in America in your opinion?

VAYAS: As far as culturally, if you look at this through my time, I'm only 24 years old, and God, I remember the "N" word in a rap song or anything like that would get you killed. Now, look at Snoop Dog. For God sakes, the guy was rapping about chronic and getting high, and now he's selling cars for GM. He's doing commercials for GM, and we've got Dave Chappelle. The guy is mainstream. He's got a show on Showtime called Weed about a mom actually making marijuana. As far as the cultural aspect, I would argue that besides apple pie, what else is more American? Our forefathers used it. George Washington farmed it. Thomas Jefferson farmed it. A lot of farmers had to have it.

ICONOCLAST: But in terms of so-called conservative people, they look at images in our culture like Dr. Dre's albums and gangster rap and go, "Marijuana leads to violence."

VAYAS: It's a fear of what they don't understand. I mean, basically, that's what it comes down to. It's being really scared of not knowing or not really experiencing marijuana first hand. Just because a rap artist might go out and make a song about chronic, that doesn't always have to make it a negative thing. Some people will view it as a negative thing, and they'll have book burnings or whatever, but most people will just forget in the long term, I think. I think that's reflects what our society and culture really has to say about it. In urban communities, it's a normal thing. Having drugs in your community, in the in-

tercity, that's just the way it was, so a lot of these rap artists and other artists that have been around it, that's what they'll talk about.

ICONOCLAST: It's kind of funny because I was on HIGH TIMES' website and found Jon Gettman's column. He wrote about people who enjoy marijuana ought to just come out and say it. "We enjoy it for these reasons, and that's why we want it legalized." Music seems like the only place where you can personalize it in a positive way. You mentioned comedians, too, like Dave Chappelle, and for the most part, it's acceptable to talk about it there, and a few other TV spots like That 70s Show.

VAYAS: Well, marijuana has been a part of music — it was ingrained in the Jazz Age back in the 1920s, and that was full of marijuana. That was all they smoked. Then we had the hippie 60s — Willie Nelson, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley. Hell, Paul McCartney and the Beatles! They all came out and said they enjoyed marijuana and that it inspired them to write good music.

I don't think it's going to go away. It's appearing in more mainstream comedy. Dave Chappelle is talking about it. He's made movies about it. There's *Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle*. It's a hilarious movie.

ICONOCLAST: Yup, that's one of my favorite movies.

VAYAS: You've got the Showtime series Weed. You've got a lot more prominent people coming out. Michael Bloomberg, the mayor of New York, admitted to smoking marijuana and not only did he admit to smoking marijuana, he said he enjoyed it.

ICONOCLAST: Is that why he got re-elected? (chuckles)

VAYAS: Oh, if you know Michael Bloomberg, the guy is as Republican as — ah, he's not. He's really not. He's a very rich billionaire who panders pretty much, but he admitted to smoking marijuana. Bill Clinton. He didn't inhale.

Whatever, right? There's been Supreme Court nominees who have admitted to smoking marijuana. It's not a Black thing. It's not a Hispanic thing. It's not a Asian thing. It's not a White thing. It's an American thing. Fifty percent of kids aged from 18 to 30 have tried marijuana. It's here to stay.

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# TAKS Online Testing Melts Down

By DON M. FISHER AND  
NATHAN DIEBENOW  
ASSOCIATE EDITORS

AUSTIN — NCS-Pearson's first attempt at online, high-stakes testing in Texas' public schools resulted in melt-down last week as students throughout the state stared at dead computer screens that no amount of mouse-to-mouse resuscitation could click to life.

Pearson, the state's sweetheart contractor responsible for administering the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exam, was supposed to make the do-or-die exam available by computer simultaneously to students who will be graduating in only three years, and to those who have previously failed it.

But the majority of students who clicked on the test icon on their computer sat and waited for a test that never started.

A handful of students were able to take the test in spite of what Pearson told school districts were "crashed" servers, computer hardware that was not adequate to deliver tests to about 650 schools.

Students who were unable to test last week will be taking the exam in the next few days.

Texas Education Agency's director of student assessment, Lisa Chandler, said the failure would have no effect on students and offered alibis for Pearson, which got the state's quarter-billion dollar high-stakes testing contract five years ago with no competing bids, offering lucrative sub-contracts to companies that might have sought the deal for themselves.

Chandler said she did not know immediately how many students were able



to take the exam, where those schools were located or even how many total students were supposed to be involved.

She said she would contact The Iconoclast later, but never called and did not answer or return calls made the next day.

Chandler said part of the problem stemmed from icy weather in the northern half of the state; although at least as many districts in South Texas, where there were no weather problems, were unable to take the test.

If she was correct in her assessment,

it would be the second time TEA was left out in the cold on TAKS. In February, 2003, the state writing test was compromised when northern Texas schools postponed statewide testing while students in the south took it.

The southerners then e-mailed the prompt to friends and relatives in the north, who went into the test knowing the subject they were to write about, which educational researchers claim made the results invalid.

Texas school test administrators said TEA technicians blamed simultaneous online testing in Tennessee. Officials there said they have done no online testing since spring, when only nine schools were tested as a non-binding pilot project.

Chandler said the online test results would not be affected by the fact that students, some even in the same schools, will take the exam at different times, and those taking it next week may know what was on it.

TAKS scores are arbitrary at best.

TEA can determine how many Texas students pass the test by setting the number of correct answers are required to pass. Since the test content changes every year, the number of passing correct answers can also change.

Chandler said some tests are "pre-equated," that is, the number of right answers required is set before the exam, and some are now. However, the state can always change the number after the test.

The online test was not equated, she said.

Pearson will not be held financially responsible for the foul-ups, and TEA will take no steps to notify the legislature, unless the agency's governmental affairs committee decides to do so, she said.

## At Least 2,140 Soldiers Now Dead In Iraq

BAGHDAD — The number of U.S. soldier death casualties in the Iraq war has reached at least 2,140, according to the Pentagon.

Several deaths occurred this past

week and weekend, say U.S. government sources, including four American soldiers who were killed in attacks in the Baghdad area Saturday. On Friday, a U.S. soldier was killed and 11 more

wounded in a suicide car bombing in western Baghdad.

A soldier died of a suspected heart attack on Thursday, said the military.

## New Chapter Of Veterans For Peace Formed To Continue Protest In Crawford

CRAWFORD — A new chapter of Veterans For Peace was formed in Crawford over the Thanksgiving holiday. According to retired US Army Colonel and a former ambassador who was elected President of the new chapter Ann Wright, over 40 members were signed up during Thanksgiving week at Camp Casey II.

Cindy Sheehan, whose trip to Crawford in August to talk to the president about the "noble cause" for which her son Casey died in the Iraq War turned into a month-long anti-war vigil, was named an Honorary Member of the new Camp Casey Chapter of Veterans For Peace.

"The main objective of this Camp Casey Chapter of Veterans For Peace is to bring veterans and peace activists from around the country to Crawford to protest the Iraq War whenever George W. Bush is at his ranch," reported Carl Rising-Moore, an anti-war activist from

Indiana who is the Field Organizer for the chapter. "This is not meant to be a mass demonstration. It will involve just a few people, but it will be on-going. When Cindy returns to Crawford at Easter, we expect larger numbers of activists to join her."

Members of Veterans For Peace will stand in the bar ditches along the roads leading to the Bush ranch holding banners with the message: "Who Would Jesus Bomb?" in the days before Christmas. Peace activists who supported Cindy Sheehan and came to Crawford at Thanksgiving displayed similar banners to friends of President Bush who were arriving to celebrate Thanksgiving with the Bush family.

After Christmas, the theme will change to "Out of Iraq In 2006." Veterans For Peace will demand an immediate cease-fire in Iraq by our government and

an orderly withdrawal of American troops in the early months of 2006.

Twelve protestors were arrested in November as they challenged the new McLellan County laws that prevented people from "living in the ditches" along roads leading to the Bush ranch. Both Ann Wright and Carl Rising-Moore were among the so-called "Prairie Chapel 12" arrestees, which included Daniel Ellsberg and DeDe Miller, Cindy Sheehan's sister.

"That action was intended to assert our Constitutional rights under the First Amendment," said Rising-Moore. "It is not illegal to stand in the ditches and hold signs and banners, so we do not anticipate any arrests during the Christmas and New Years' actions. However, President Bush will not be able to ignore our presence and our message. Over 2100 US troops have died in Iraq. Enough is enough."

# Burning Miss Dove At The Stake

"I'm sorry, class, I can't teach you what you need to know today. I have to spend the hours helping you memorize the answers to the test. In fact, we will be doing that all year. The survival of this school and our faculty's jobs are at stake, so we will bypass the tried and true. Because of TAKS, there is not time enough to cultivate your imaginations and to enroot ideals. You will have to master creativity on your own. The broadening of your horizons now rests with your X-Box and Gameboy. I'm sorry. I'm so very, very sorry. But I am paid to fail."

— Miss Dove, before she quit  
Ever since the doctrines of learning devised by then-Gov. Bush became imbedded in cement, public education in Texas has been a failure. They called it teaching to a test. Its purpose was to assure accountability. That's when the witch-hunt began — to ferret out the bad teachers and bad school districts while politicizing education.

How do you politicize education? You dumb down the students. You devise a shyster test aimed at prov-

## The Trenchwalker

By W. Leon Smith



ing that public education does not work. Then you play with the results to fictionalize results to meet whatever political agenda you desire.

You scare the teachers, you intimidate school boards throughout the state, you throw millions of taxpayer dollars to corporations to conduct the tests, you load up school districts with untried, unfunded mandates, and, worst of all, you short-change generations of students who lose the well-rounded education they could have otherwise had. You use fear as your primary weapon in this asinine high-stakes game.

Every legislator who supports TAKS is corrupt.

Every legislator who supports the federal No Child Left Behind pro-

gram is corrupt.

It's that simple.

Since these initiative are still intact, the vast majority of those in state office are corrupt.

What can you, as a parent or community leader, do?

Elect people who will kill TAKS.

Make that a pre-requisite for their earning your vote.

This is not to say that testing is not important, for it is.

Why can't state educators devise a test (instead of going out of state to have it done), to be administered each year, without the do-or-die stanza attached and without the pre-requisite being teaching to the test? When the results are in, rank the districts as to how they did on the test. Then require half of the school trustees and all the administrators in the bottom-scoring quarter of the schools to attend a seminar put on by trustees in the top fourth to exchange ideas on how to make overall improvements. Then go from there.

Local school districts should retain the power to make changes "for their situation."

Local teachers have a pretty good idea of which students are learning. Teachers need the flexibility to get the most they can out of students, to teach them to learn, to open them to a vast array of ideas.

There are students who simply do not do well on static tests, but who do learn the material. Teachers know this and can capitalize on this in the best interests of the student. Why should these particular students be discriminated against and emotionally disabled with a monstrosity like TAKS?

Legislators in our state have been led down a barren path and they have been sorely trying to make it work for political reasons. But a bicycle is not a Cadillac, no matter how much shine you put on it.

We need to go back to the root of education and lop off this dead branch. We need to change the foundation of education so that those who teach....can.

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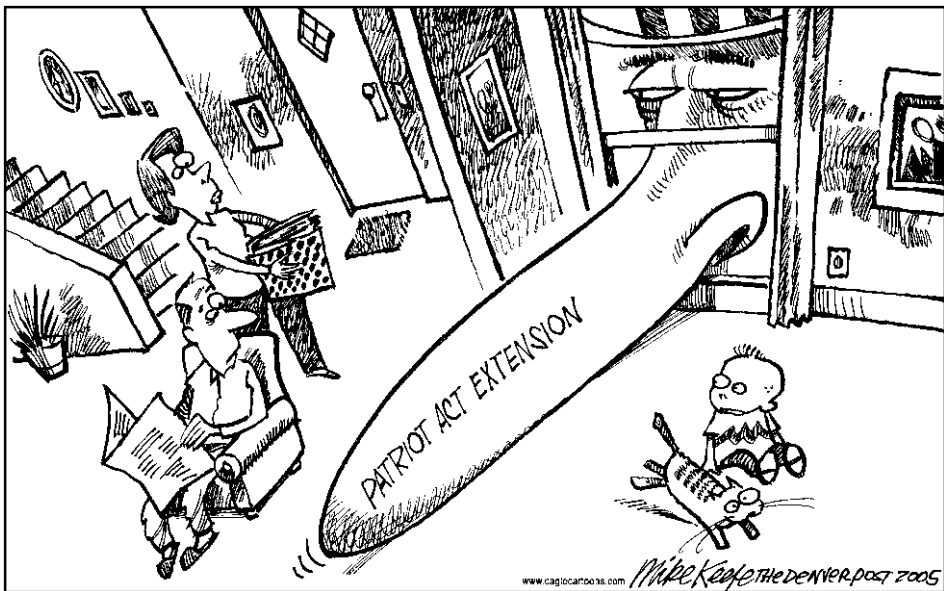
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# Editorial

Opinion - Columns - Letters

OP/ED



— Editorial —

## New Patriot Act Puts Government Above The People

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) apparently got his words mixed up last week when he suggested that the Senate “should unite in a bipartisan way to support the Patriot Act, to stand up for freedom and against terror.”

Since the Patriot Act is actually a stab in the back to the U.S. Constitution, his words should have been “to stand up for terror and against freedom.”

That would have been more accurate. Again, the Rightist Republican elite have decided that this is not a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Their playbook is obviously Mein Kampf and their strategy continues to be the exploitation of fear, a key tactic that befell Germany as it introduced the planet earth to World War II.

There is nothing “patriotic” about the Patriot Act, just as the “Clean Air Act” was designed to do away with clean air. The GOP is determined to misname its initiatives, thinking that the public is too stupid to read the fine print.

The damage that the White House has done to true democracy in America may take decades to repair — if even then. Its hip-pocket Senate and House will have a lot to answer for if approval is awarded to allow the government to access personal data, including library and medical records, and provide for the use of wiretaps.

The new war is the government vs. the people.

The time has come for a full-blown filibuster to kill this bill, hang the consequences.

Forget politics. Think about the rights of Americans.

Surely, there are a few true patriots remaining in the federal government who recognize that desecration of the Constitution and the freedoms it espouses should not be abridged.

To quote Benjamin Franklin, “The man who trades freedom for security does not deserve nor will he ever receive either.”

— W. Leon Smith

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# Christmas Tree or Holiday Tree?

For me, there's a simple answer, and only one. It's a Christmas tree, of course. Any ninny can see that. And I don't say this as a Christian, because I'm not one. I can't speak as an expert for most other non-Christian religions, but I do know that Jews aren't supposed to have holiday trees. Period. It doesn't matter what you call them. Oh, some do have them. It's hard to tell children that Santa is only for others. I mean, every little kid wants toys and all the romance surrounding the jolly fat man. After all, Christmas commercialism is rampant in our society. Most of my Christian friends would say it's gotten way out of hand.

But Jews aren't supposed to have holiday trees. It's not even kosher to call it a Chanukah Bush. You just can't get away with it, no matter what you do. I try not to feel too deprived this time of year. I truly enjoy the Christmas decorations of my friends and neighbors, the wintry spirit of the season. It's great for the economy and gives a real boost to the energy providers as well. I've been invited to hear a friend sing at his church's Christmas program soon, and I hope to go. I love to hear Christmas music. I always figured wishes for good will on earth and peace to man were pretty universal.

Growing up Reform Jewish in Waco, Texas in the 50s and 60s, I'm certainly no expert on all aspects and branches of my religion. But I know enough to tell you from my own point of view that these trees are for Christmas and nothing else.

Jewish folks celebrate Chanukah about the same time of year, but it was never meant to be a substitution holiday to make us feel less left out when December rolled around. In fact, Chanukah has been around a whole lot longer than Christmas. It came first, that's all. And it's a joyous, proud holiday about religious freedom, but not even a major holiday in my religion.

The idea of religious freedom works well at this time of year in a country where we all agree to enjoy our diversity and respect one another's beliefs. So it's only coincidental that both holidays usually fall in the same month and involve gift giving. We didn't start giving gifts at Chanukah to compete with our Christian friends. It's just part of the spirit of the thing. (All Jewish holidays adhere to the Jewish calendar, which follows the moon. That's why they rarely fall on the same date each year). In 2005, Christmas and Chanukah happen to be on the same day. The first night of Chanukah, when the first candle is to be lit, is Dec. 25.

If the Christmas tree is a relatively recent symbol of Christmas (if perhaps commercial Christmas), then a special menorah is symbolic of Chanukah, and has been for hundreds and hundreds of years, with its eight-plus-one spots for candles. I won't take time here to give a tutorial of the holiday. If anyone's interested, just ask. The thing is that Jews are proud to celebrate their own holiday at this time of year and enjoy watching our Christian friends celebrate theirs.

Now if you ask me more pointed questions about the division of church and

## 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.*

state, things might get a little sticky. I'm pretty much a firm believer in that division, as were our founding fathers. They saw fit to place that idea into a pretty important document for good reason. Our nation was established on freedom, including freedom of religion. For instance, what do I think about my tax dollars going to fund elaborate Christmas displays in my town, in my state, or in my nation? Well, truth be

told, I'm not too crazy about that. Am I going to scream and yell about it? Well, no. Do I expect my little town to spend many tax dollars on a large, elaborate, energy sucking Chanukah menorah in the square (as is done in many larger cities) to give equal time to the (probably) only Jewish taxpaying resident? No, of course not. (And do you think the general populace would like it one little bit? No, of course not). Do I think it would be considerate to do a little something to honor non-Christian residents who celebrate other holidays during this time of year? I suppose it would. But we can't start publicly decorating for a myriad of holidays to honor and appease a diverse nation. Maybe not here, but in many places, there are just too many different traditions to be honored. Is it right that we honor even one with public funds?

Is it fair that we single out only one religion at this time of year for our pub-

lic displays? Well, probably not, but the majority rules. It always has. Is it legal to do this with public funds, considering the church and state thing? Probably not. But am I going to challenge it and take the entire country to court, have people screaming obscenities at me when I walk down the street? Well, no, of course not. That brave, I'm not.

Would it be more appropriate to let the churches provide the displays for Christmas rather than the public? I suppose it might. They usually do anyway. Then each religion could display its own symbols of the season at its places of worship. But this isn't the way things are. Public Christmas celebrations have been done this way for a very long time in this country. And they will probably continue to be done this way for a lot longer. I want to live peacefully with my neighbors. I certainly won't make a stink about it.

I grew up singing Christmas carols in public school presentations, making Christmas decorations in Blue Birds and Camp Fire Girls, collecting for Toys for Tots and food for Christmas food drives in public high school, etc. No one told me I had a choice. I did my Jewish stuff in Sunday School. So I sort of got hit double. No one, not one public school teacher or principal wondered if the non-Christian students were uncomfortable with all that, and none of our parents made a big fuss about it. They wanted us to get along. They were still stinging from the horror of the Holocaust and more blatant anti-Semitism. They just explained, early on, that this was a holiday celebrated by most of our friends and neighbors in honor of the birth of Jesus Christ. And we were always taught to respect the beliefs of others.

Did it feel funny to be forced to sing songs from a religion not my own? Well, sure. How do you think most Christian or Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist kids would feel singing Chanukah songs? I knew I was in the minority, and I went along with it, but I have to admit that it bothered me. Yet I was silent. Back then, third graders didn't stand up for themselves much. I was meeker and quieter then.

I think the whole "holiday tree" thing came about in the 90's with communities trying to be politically correct, hoping to avoid lawsuits in our litigious society. I doubt anyone consulted a Rabbi to ask if the term "Christmas tree" was offensive to Jews. It isn't. The item in question IS a Christmas tree, part of a rich Christian tradition for one of the most important holidays in that religion's calendar. It just doesn't encompass Jews, no matter what it's called. I suspect others of different faiths would agree, although I cannot speak for them. It IS a Christmas tree. So what's all the fuss?

The problem isn't what to call it, but whether or not it is appropriate or even legal to use public funds to buy it, light it, and maintain it for a month or so. But I'm not going to fight that fight. I just hope we can all be respectful of each other's beliefs both during the holiday season and all year round.

A happy holiday season to everyone of all beliefs and traditions.

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# Senior Buckley Meddles In Mexican Revolution

William F. Buckley, a sharp-tongued Texan that always spoke his mind, reviled Mexican revolutionaries as south-of-the-border Bolsheviks in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Dec. 13, 1919.

The millionaire oilman and father of the conservative intellectual with the same name was born in 1881 at Washington-on-the-Brazos to Irish immigrants, who came to Texas by way of Canada. He grew up in San Diego, where his father combined sheep raising with a career in law enforcement that included several terms as Duval County sheriff.

Will Buckley graduated from the University of Texas in 1904, the year his dad died, and went onto law school. Figuring his fluency in Spanish would give him a lucrative advantage, the ambitious attorney opened an office in Mexico City.

Buckley was not unduly alarmed in 1911 by the abrupt end of the four-decade dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. He presumed Francisco Madero, the tyrant's reform-minded successor, was strictly a transitional figure whose days were numbered.

The swift overthrow of Madero by Diaz henchman Victoriano Huerta confirmed Buckley's cynical assessment. For American and British investors, who controlled 98 percent of Mexican petroleum production, the military coup meant a return to business as usual.

But Huerta could not put the revolutionary genie back in the bottle. By 1914 he was fending off challenges from fellow generals Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregon as well as peasant insurgents Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata.

Convinced the beleaguered strongman was the last hope for free enterprise and the Catholic Church, Buckley jumped into the middle of the life-and-death struggle. His partisan participation put him on a collision course with the Wilson administration, which sent the navy to Veracruz to enforce an arms embargo against the embattled government. Buckley not only refused an urgent request to assist the intervention but attended U.S.-sponsored talks as Huerta's personal advisor.

After Carranza and Obregon came to power, the hardheaded Texan joined the counterrevolutionary underground. While the new rulers were nothing more than lukewarm nationalists paying lip service to democratic ideals, Buckley believed they were the New World agents of the Bolsheviks, who had just toppled the Russian czar.

That was the gist of his diatribe at a senate hearing in December 1919. But his indictment of the Mexican Revolution as part and parcel of the international Communist conspiracy reeked of paranoia.

Buckley's melodramatic meddling in Mexican affairs was tolerated until November 1921. After his involvement in a second antigovernment plot in as many years, he was kicked out of the country and his property was confiscated.

While Buckley bitterly protested

## This Week In Texas History

By Barte Haile



the punishment, he got off easy by Mexican standards. Had he not been a wealthy and influential American, he would have faced a firing squad.

The banished businessman went straight home, packed up his family and moved to New England. Though a frequent visitor, he never again lived in Texas, which explains why his famous namesake was born a Connecticut Yankee.

Buckley's Mexican experience forever shaped his view of the world. Behind every popular uprising he saw the sinister hand of Communism secretly pulling the strings. He argued for a hands-off policy toward Nazi Germany during the Second World War in the misguided hope that Hitler would crush the Soviet Union.

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Despite soaring unemployment and widespread suffering caused by the Depression, Buckley maintained his fervent faith in free-market capitalism. While most conservative critics eventually credited Franklin Roosevelt for saving the country, the true believer never wavered in his condemnation of the New Deal.

Haunted by the memory of an older brother, a junior who had died in a barroom brawl, Buckley resisted his wife's efforts to name a boy after him. But he finally relented in 1925 and allowed her to christen their sixth child and third son William F. Buckley, Jr.

Billy was a precocious chip off the old block, who absorbed his father's politics like a dry sponge. At the tender age of seven, he wrote a letter to the King of England insisting upon payment in full of the British

war debt. Several years later during the debate over the European war, he dubbed his first sailboat "Sweet Isolation."

At times, however, Junior was too extreme even for zealous Senior. In a note to his 15-year-old clone, Will Buckley encouraged him "to be more moderate in the expression of your views and try to express them in a way that would give as little offense as possible to your friends."

Whether the godfather of the modern conservative movement has heeded dear old dad's advice is, of course, a matter of opinion.

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# How To Make Social Security Work For Americans 'Big Time'

President Bush and his advisers continue to complain about the Social Security Program being in crisis and obsolete for American retirees, along with those on disability benefits.

We constantly hear about the de-

clining dollars in the system and that it must be revamped to provide a system including personal investing. The administration believes that would be beneficial to the Wall Street investment sector as well as all Americans paying into the pro-

gram.

If the government wants Americans to invest their Social Security Tax dollars for personal gain, why doesn't it provide the Social Security Administration with the authority to invest all the Social Security tax dollars currently available into the Iraq war / restoration?

After all, doing so has made billions for firms like Halliburton. Instead of "squawking" about how the system ISN'T working for Americans, why doesn't the Bush administration and Congress work together to "put our tax dollars down where it would make the most investment return"?

Why should only the corporate sector rake-in such huge profits when retirees and the disabled could benefit as well?

Heck, in just a few months time we probably could raise the benefit rates of those currently in the Social Security system so that they could live more comfortable, secure and perhaps more productive lives.

Then those collecting their benefits finally could get some restful sleep knowing that our government really does care about them. In addition, most other Americans could benefit from this because those huge profits could lower or completely eliminate the current Social



Commentary

By  
Peter  
Stern

Security Taxes taken from every paycheck.

*Peter Stern of Driftwood, TX is a political writer well-known and published frequently throughout the Texas community and nationwide. He is a Vietnam-era Disabled Veteran and holds three post-graduate degrees.*

*During the past seven years Mr. Stern voraciously has studied and followed legislative politics in Texas and writes prolifically about various urgent issues and proposed legislation to inform the community without political bias or affiliation. While a lifetime member of the Republican Party, he does NOT support the party's current platforms, philosophies and actions. He maintains he is an "intelligent" Republican with a conscience — a minority branch of the ruling party. You may contact Peter Stern at: <psstern@austin.rr.com>.*

## War on Christmas?

Every time I hear the argument that Liberals are "Stealing Christmas," I cannot help but shake my head. I am an Independent Liberal, and I love Christmas! I celebrate it every year, without fail. I'm a white male, and I was raised in a charismatic Christian home. The real story of Christmas is, on the other hand, not very well known. Indeed, many are willfully ignorant to how this holiday came to be.

Consider the Christmas Tree. The use of a tree to symbolize the spirit of the season is a Pagan tradition. Some argue the tree is actually a phallic symbol, as it was considered to be by the Romans during the Dec. 17-25 tradition of Saturnalia, a week long celebration of lawlessness and sexual indulgence which culminated in the sacrifice of an innocent human. Knowing this, the Puritans outlawed the celebration of Christmas and none of the Founding Fathers participated.

Or take the popular tradition of kissing under the mistletoe. Druids used mistletoe to poison their human sacrifices. The Christian tradition of kissing under the mistletoe is a combination of the sexual license granted to Romans during Saturnalia and the murderous Druidic cult.

Some of the most obscene practices of Saturnalia were intentionally revived by the Catholic Church in 1466 by Pope Paul II for the amusement of Romans. Guards would gather those of Jewish descent, stuff them with food and wine, and force them to run drunk and naked through the streets.

Christmas Caroling is also a tradition taken from Saturnalia. Lucian, a Greek historian and poet, wrote that everyone would drink wine and roam from house to house singing songs in the nude. He also mentions the practice of eating human-shaped biscuits — I.E., ginger bread men.

As for Santa Claus, novelist Washington Irving (remember *Sleepy Hollow*?) wrote a parody of Druidic Dutch culture entitled *Knickerbocker History*. He referenced a fat man with a beard as a joke, using the Dutch name "Santa Claus." Years later, Dr. Clement Moore, a seminary professor, read *Knickerbocker* and published a poem based on Claus — "Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the town ..." A further innovation to the Claus figure was made by Bavarian illustrator Thomas Nast in 1862. He drew cartoon images of Claus as a joke for the newspaper *Harper's Weekly*.

In 1932, the image of Santa was cemented by the Coca-Cola Corporation, which hired Swedish artist Haddon Sundblom. The face and figure were based on Sundblom's friend Lou Prentice. The red coat was one of Coke's stipulations. In all truth, the popular character is nothing more than the wor-



The Webster  
Retort

By  
Stephen  
Webster

ship of a Corporate Golden Calf at brazen alters of commercialization.

Many orthodox Christians believe that Christ was not born in the winter. The principal argument behind this is found in the New Testament, specifically Luke 2:8 which, in part, reads, "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." In Palestine, cattle are only kept outdoors for eight months of the year, specifically March — October. If shepherds kept watch over their flock "abiding in the field," it is obvious Christ was not born in December, or anytime during the winter months.

Summarily, there is no "War on Christmas." If there ever was, it was the church absorbing the traditions of other beliefs into an all-encompassing bonanza under the mistaken guise of seasonal holiness. Today, O'Reilly is trying to play the role of Pope Paul II, whipping the masses into a frenzy that results in the belittlement of Jews and people of other faiths. It is, in part, the need of the Right-Wing press (really just Faux News and Radio Republican) to manufacture a new debate that takes heat off their favorite politicians at a time when so many of the GOP's Federal Elite are under indictment or investigation.

I could go on and on and on about the torrid history of this year-end tradition, but there is not enough room in 50 newspapers to cover it all. Christmas is a day of no more or less significance than whatever you wish to imbue it. So celebrate Christ's birth! Or celebrate Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Solstice, or any other special observance you wish. The argument is pure semantics. It is pointless to boycott any retailer, but if you really want to, be my guest. It's a free country, and you only do yourself harm through undue stress. Nobody wants to take "Christ out of Christmas," okay? Why not get informed about the real controversies of the day?

As George W. Bush's most recent "Holiday Card" closes, "Have a Happy Holiday Season."

*Stephen Webster is an Investigative Reporter and Syndicated Columnist with a North Texas weekly, The News Connection, and a former Science & Technology Contributor with The Dallas Morning News. For more of Webster's musings, visit GonsoMuckraker.BlogSpot.com.*

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# Condoleezza Goes To Europe On A Fool's Errand

Just whom did Condoleezza Rice think she was hoodwinking with her recent European "WE DON'T TORTURE" Tour – *Happy Holidays Edition 2005*?

Our very own Dark Lord, Five-Deferment VP the Dick Cheney has long put his personal stamp of approval on abnormally harsh treatment of prisoners.

Ah, hell, let's call a spade a spade – he does his holiday shopping at "Brutality Mart."

Both RoveBush Attorneys General John Ashcroft and Alberto Gonzales have seen no problem with ignoring rules established under the Geneva Conventions – essential to the training of every U.S. military recruit.

What was Condi's ludicrous rationalization again?

Oh, yeah... using interrogation methods she couldn't discuss has saved countless European lives.

Some crap like that.

What sheer insolence.

Condoleezza Rice lecturing European leaders on the treatment of prisoners, particularly torture, is akin to O.J. Simpson counseling married couples with anger issues.

I can't think of a single individual in the Bush #43 White House who is qualified to discuss matters of war and occupation with any leaders in the European Union.

None of them have the diplomatic skills, the worldliness, the finesse, or the statesmanship to go beyond the stereotype of the crass American.

And there certainly isn't enough just plain common sense or warmth among the lot to win friends and impress folks.

Condoleezza sure doesn't warm the cockles of *my* heart walking around with that pole perpetually shoved up her backside. (Maybe that's what causes her lemon-sucking scowl whenever she's seated.)

Many current EU officials were around during the horror of Hitler's reign of terror. They remember the New World Order of the Nazis, and the Final Solution.

These men and women lost family and friends, homes and businesses to the monsters the madmen in charge created out of ordinary humans, as well as to the most ghastly war ever inflicted on the Earth and its inhabitants.

This was a time when torture was as regular as the next death train to Auschwitz; whereto countless Jews and other undesirables were "renditioned" (the intelligence community's new PC word for being spirited away or kidnapped).

Torture itself was but a prelude to the sweet relief from all pain forevermore.

Those leaders who are too young to remember World War II grew up either under the constant specter of a Soviet attack, or within the abject misery of a Soviet bloc country.

Lest we forget the more recent ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Whatever the case, there's no doubt that these good folks understand oppression.

One German town where I was stationed had an Implements of Torture Museum, filled with fun items like real, honest-to-goodness racks, spiked chambers, branding devices, and other quaint stuff dating back at least as far as the 6th Century.



Out Of The Blue

By  
Jerry  
Tenuto

And Condoleezza Rice is going to tell the EU leaders, long-experienced with torture and oppression, that the United States does not torture, does not condone torture, and has not engaged in torture.

Except, of course, for a few rogue operatives, because Bush #43 cannot possibly keep track of everyone in the field.

Germany's new Chancellor, Angela Merkel, its first woman and from the East, has immediately signed up with the Bush #43 Fan Club, International Chapter.

She forgave our intelligence gatherers for their "mistake" in renditioning a German citizen, Khaled El-Masri, then holding the man incommunicado for five months while torturing and abusing him.

Early indications are Ms. Merkel is more eager to do Bush #43's bidding (well, we all know it's Herr Ubermeister Karl Rove's) than to attend to the welfare of the German people.

Kind of like the Republicans on the Hill, and Sen. Joe Lieberman.

According to DER SPIEGEL, Germany's largest newspaper, Ms. Rice was not widely perceived as being honest and straightforward by the Germans, nor can they wait for the Bush #43 Regime to go away.

Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot used the word "unsatisfactory" in describing Condi's explanations and justifications.

The Europeans simply aren't taking the RoveBush garbage anymore. Even the British Parliament passed a law as soon as Ms. Rice was on her way disallowing any testimony in court that had been acquired through the use of torture.

How coincidental that just before her trip the CIA's torture camps in Europe magically emptied out.

Meanwhile, Dark Lord Cheney had stopped insisting (quite as loudly) that torture was an acceptable process of information gathering.

He also kept busy hosting fundraisers for Tom DeLay's legal fees. I don't see why DeLay needs money – he's certainly amassed enough wealth while in Congress.

And Bush #43 has changed his tune to horse dung-filled tales of how strong the economy is, based upon 216,000 new jobs last month. Not one major news outlet mentioned it is the month retailers traditionally add lots of seasonal help.

So what if nobody's buying cars, and GM announced the impending loss of 30,000 jobs, Ford another 7,500 or so?

It's no big deal that house sales have gone soft, while interest rates are climbing, right?

What about retailer woes, and predictions of a lackluster Christmas shopping season?

Did everyone forget there are still 500,000 jobs that no longer exist in New Orleans, and more around the rest of

the Gulf region?

However, as soon as the oil company bigwigs were trotted out in front of the Senate, then allowed to testify without being sworn in so nothing any of them said would officially be a lie, the arbitrarily gouged \$3.00+ per gallon gas dropped to the unnecessarily over-inflated \$2.15+ per gallon.

Guess what happened next? The shallower, Barbie-brained Americans who responded to that week's polls bought Bush #43's bullshit about a strong economy (he didn't actually say anything of substance, just the usual bragging on generalities), giving him a 4%-5% bump. AAARGH!

The Europeans see what far too many Americans refuse to admit, that we've allowed the 21st Century version of the New World Order to rise up and run amok.

Being the "Holiday" season, I'm going to throw in a couple of personal observations:

Let's start with Thanksgiving Day, because that's what officially gets the season in gear. Have you ever ventured a guess as to why there are so many domestic violence incidents on that day?

For one, you take all kinds of family members and throw them together into one home. There are bound to be those who do not want to be around others.

Many might only see one another once or twice a year, and that may be too often. Let's face it; every family has years and years, and layer upon layer, of bad recollections and animosities to go along with the good memories.

As time wears on, the good stuff dwindles, thus carrying less weight than the bad.

Being forced to give up a day off and waste it trapped with the same damned people and their screaming kids year in, year out, even if they *are* blood kin, will eventually cause certain individuals to explode.

Is family tension really the catalyst that will set this rage in motion?

I think a large part of it is watching the NBC-TV coverage of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The way the floats, balloons and bands are presented, based upon coughing up advertising compensation to the network, is haphazardly done, and I'm being kind here.

Then, there are complete stops in action for numbers and routines from the latest Broadway shows. Good Lord, these get more boring every year! (The last one I actually enjoyed was Bebe Neuwirth doing a song from *Chicago* some years back.)

Moms are too busy to watch these, and kids turn away like they're in math

class.

But the worst part of watching the parade, what makes me want to climb out of my skin, is the overpriced broadcast team of Katie Couric and Matt Lauer. Together these multimillion-dollar twits have enough combined charm, wit and style to turn this joyful annual event into the equivalent of watching snails race.

Neither one of them has even a modicum of ability to ad lib and be interesting, much less funny.

They make watching the greatest parade of the year an exercise in splitting their egos apart. We usually turn off the sound and put on a CD, but for some unknown reason left the television audio on this year.

After a couple of hours I could have committed great violence.

Katie and Matt, I cannot bear to watch The Today Show – you two make it impossible. And year after year, you and the NBC producers turn the Macy's parade into a train wreck.

GE, you guys have tons of money. Couldn't you please hire someone with real personalities and genuine talent for the day, who would *want* to do the job?

Changing the subject...

As to the crap of not being able to have a CHRISTMAS TREE, or wish people a MERRY CHRISTMAS, HAPPY HANUKKAH, or HAPPY KWANZA.

This politically correct garbage has gone on long enough, and I for one am tired of us Liberals getting a bum rap for the secularization of these holidays.

As a once upon a time Roman Catholic who now embraces the Jewish faith, I can honestly say that it bothers me not one whit to see a genuine Christmas display in a city hall, public school or town square, much less a store or other privately-owned venue.

Perhaps a spot for a Menorah or a dreidel, too?

Express your religion, because this is the USA and that's your right. Mine as well.

Just don't force your religious beliefs down anyone else's throat.

This used to be a great country before the Christian zealots decided to take it over.

Jesus Christ was a good guy, and I've studied enough of His teachings to know that's not what He would want.

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# Men Are From NAPA, Women Are From Macy's

If you want to observe the difference between men and women in its purest form, study their shopping habits. With the holiday buying season now officially under way, there's no better time to wit-

ness this phenomenon for yourself.

Here's a brief study guide to get you started.

Women:

a) Define an outfit as something com-

prised of at least three pieces of clothing, all of which are interchangeable and flattering.

b) Have researched the best buys and know where there's a sale today.

c) Are undecided about whether or not a drop-waist makes them look fat.

d) Will try on all clothes within arm's reach of the fitting room.

Men:

a) Define an outfit as something comprised of jeans. And maybe a fishing lure.

b) Have researched today's game schedule on ESPN and know they can get to the store and back during halftime.

c) Are undecided about how to answer when their wives ask if a drop-waist makes them look fat.

d) Won't get within arm's reach of the fitting room.

Obviously, the best time to conduct your study is when both men and women are in the store at the same time. This is easy to do if you just follow the Saturday sports schedule and plan your visits during halftime periods throughout the day.

The first thing you'll notice is the difference between how men and women enter the department store.

Men don't browse, they buy.

Being a man myself, I can attest to the fact that we enter the store with absolute purpose, and continue walking that way, even if we have no idea where we're going. When we do find the clothing section, there's no wasting time on decisions about color or fabric.

If it's denim and has working pockets, we're done shopping.

By comparison, most women enter a department store like an archeologist stumbling upon the remains of a lost civilization. After creating a mental grid of the area, they begin the long, slow process of sifting through every rack and every bin of twisted undergarments until, eventually, they conclude there's nothing worth buying — at which point they move to the next isle.



By  
**Ned  
Hickson**  
Siuslaw News

For a thorough study of the shopping habits of men and women, you must also include men who accompany their wives shopping. Keep in mind that, in most cases, these men are there by choice, i.e., they've chosen to go shopping over having their wives sleep in mechanic's overalls for the next six months. The easiest way to tell these men apart from those who aren't there with their wives is to look for any man leaning on a shopping cart with the "100-yard stare." This is an unblinking gaze fixed on the exit doors, which, in most cases, are within 100 yards.

It's interesting to note some of the defense mechanisms that have evolved in these men over time. For example, waving at them instantly triggers loss of sight. Next comes deafness. Should you somehow manage to get their attention, these individuals will be unable to speak.

Carrying on the experiment passed this point isn't recommended unless you are a certified physician.

That said, as we enter the holiday gift-giving season, let's take time to rejoice in the differences between men and women. Let's embrace our diversity, and savor those things that define our genders.

And if possible, let's do it within 100 feet of the exit.

(You can write to Ned Hickson at the Siuslaw News at P.O. Box 10, Florence, OR. 97439, or visit his website at [www.nedhickson.net](http://www.nedhickson.net).)

## You Can't Make This Stuff Up

What's next? Is the Administration going to produce its own fake news like "The Daily Show" and call it news? The latest revelation that a public relations firm — The Lincoln Group — has been paid by the Pentagon to plant news stories that are favorable to the U.S. in Iraqi papers would be shocking if it weren't so predictable. It's not that long ago that the Administration admitted paying U.S. columnists to write pro-Administration columns. President Bush publicly abandoned this practice, but so far, he hasn't taken responsibility for doing the same thing abroad.

The outrageousness of planting stories in Iraqi newspapers is, obviously, heightened because this occurs at the same time that we are supposedly encouraging Iraq to promote freedom — and a true and free press is the cornerstone of that freedom. If this manipulation of the press continues, how will we ever know what is a legitimate news story or column and what is something paid for by the government? How will we know when they are sneaking their own words into stories?

Obviously, this column is not something the government would ever pay for, and we, I mean, they don't "sneak" words into stories.

We seem to be abandoning the principle that the best way to get other countries to adopt the ways of a free and democratic society is to set a good example for them. For instance, if we want Iraqis to have free speech, we can't call Americans who oppose the war traitors.

Check Garver's passport. I'll bet he's been to Red China. And check his cabinets. I'll bet he owns some Red China.

We can't use the excuse, "The other side uses propaganda in news stories, so why shouldn't we?" We're supposed to be better than they are.

We are better than they are. We are good and they are evil.

Look at the Administration's attitude towards torture. When other countries engage in torture, it is barbaric and a crime against humanity. When we do it, it's "necessary for our security."

The United States does not engage in torture. At the same time, we have reservations about agreeing to abandon this important tool of ours.

And not surprisingly, the planted stories aren't even working in terms of winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. When Muhammad Abdul Jabbar, editor of one of the major Iraqi papers, was asked if the Pentagon's program of fake news was effective, he replied, "I would spend the money another way."

Don't worry, Muhammad. We're spending it all kinds of ways.

It may be a cliché to say that "truth



Modern Times  
By  
**Lloyd  
Garver**

is the first casualty of war," but how many more times can it be mortally wounded? Remember WMDs? Remember the alleged connection between Iraq and Al Qaeda? Remember Colin Powell pointing to all those "threats" at the U.N.? The Bush Administration is certainly not the first to disseminate false information, whether on purpose or because of shamefully bad intelligence. But aren't you tired of hearing things that you know aren't true?

Colin Powell is not a member of the current Administration. Currently, he is a private citizen who has served his country honorably, at least until we hung him out to dry.

We've been told over and over again how well the war in Iraq is going, and yet American casualties mount. We're told that we're winning the war against terrorism as the number of terrorists increase. President Bush has said repeatedly that we must "stay the course." Recently, there have been some calls to start thinking about pulling out of Iraq. First the Administration viewed these calls as unthinkable. But after checking the polls, they began to choose their words more carefully. Now, there are a lot of people who would bet that significant troops will be pulled out before the 2006 Congressional elections. What will the Administration tell us when they pretend that the two events are unrelated?

We do not allow polls or elections to dictate policy. On the other hand, we feel it's important to be responsive to the wants of the people.

So, the next time you're in the supermarket and you see one of those newspapers with a headline like, "Woman Gives Birth To Three-Headed Dog," don't laugh too loudly. That story probably has about as much credibility as whatever's on the front page of THE IRAQI DAILY NEWS.

There is no such newspaper — at least not on the U.S. payroll.

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](mailto:lloydgarver@yahoo.com)

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear W. Leon Smith,

George W. Bush is history's greatest spending president. In his years in office, the feds have borrowed more than \$1 trillion from foreign governments and banks — more than all other administrations (from 1776 to 2000) put together.

Of course, he did not do this alone. Kay Bailey Hutchinson and John Cornyn permitted — indeed encouraged — this calamity for our children.

Through the generations, over thousands of years, each one usually left the world a little better off than it found it. Last month, the U.S. national debt passed the \$8 trillion mark.

Today, each child born in America has got his share of about \$50 trillion in obligations to pay. For all practical purposes, he is born with a government electronic ankle tag on him. No other generation in history has ever done this to their progeny.

This is the Bush/Hutchinson/Cornyn legacy to our grandchildren. SHAME.

Mike Ford, Austin

Dear Mr. Smith:

Some of my veteran friends attended Ms. Sheehan's rally and they keep raving to me about a young, very attractive fashion designer who, in a very unusual and creative manner pinned 8x10 laminated "notes" all over her outfit. They said that they had never seen anything quite like it. This designer apparently also had stickers on both sides the entire length of her Mercedes car, what a fearless and spunky personality!!! This young lady is truly an inspiration, one can only wish that America had many more of her caliber!

Another friend also mentioned that he and his wife talked extensively to this young lady, that she appeared very intelligent and immensely witty, as is her "Importunate Open Letter to the Inept Bush Administration from a European Entrepreneur". God only knows what would/could have changed for the better if this letter had been published widely; this lady single-handedly might have changed the outcome of the election, America surely would be in much better shape today.

We collectively came to the conclusion that this young designer could be a POWERFUL ASSET to the Democratic Movement as she is well-spoken, eloquent and very charismatic. I have not met her, (however, I saw images of her on her fashion site, she is simply gorgeous) but my friends keep raving so much I can't help but be affected by it all; she just MIGHT be THE persona who could incite the passion necessary to reach individuals who will (for whatever reason) not respond well to Ms. Cindy Sheehan.

I was told that Ms. Sheehan asked to be paid \$ 20.00 from people desiring to have their picture taken with her; we believe this to be very poor judgment, (personally I have never encountered such a request at ANY book-signing!) furthermore, there are better ways to communicate than profanity in making a point.

I strongly advocate that IF Crawford had someone articulate and better groomed, you may have more of an edu-

cated following instead of the "hippie crowd" who is by and large not taken all that serious.

In addition, an intelligent person chooses fights he/she can win. The very foolish "civil disobedience" and consequent "arrests" display caused many people to be put off to your cause. Who in their right mind would actually be interested in pitching a tent in a ditch in the middle of nowhere? Yes, definitely the unkept hippies you showed there! We are wondering just what "mental giant" thought of such an absurd maneuver? We all understand that Ms. Sheehan needs to take a stance, but could they not have done something in a more clever manner?

We admired every one of you when you spoke out against the very incompetent Mr. Bush. However, you are in the process of losing credibility when you back a "spokesperson" of such low caliber, you need at least have a balance to entice a following that is educated. If you want the world to look up to America, for heaven's sake, please get a classier spokesperson! My friends who travelled an entire day to show their support said that they decided not to ever return to Crawford as they actually felt embarrassed!

I am almost 84, a poet, retired business man and WWII veteran; I was chief engineer on an American destroyer involved in the first confrontation with the first German submarine in the North-Atlantic.

Last, but not least, many people took pictures of this very courageous young designer, we suggest you read her letter, albeit written before Mr. Bush stole the election again, it still is so very applicable today.

The web-site: <<http://www.European-designer-contre-stupide-bush.com>>.

Very sincerely,

Dr. R. Shideler Ph.D. (Sociology)

# Jesus, Party Liaison

Buddhists are silly creatures. They come up with some of the funniest questions.

Just the other day, a frisky one working as a department store salesman came up to me at the mall, and was like, "Hey, man! Are you Christian?"

I thought to myself, "What a funny question because I'm wearing my 'Lutheran Stud' t-shirt," so I answered him, "Yeah, that's what the shirt says. Why?"

"Well, I'm a Buddhist, and I want to know how come you Christians worship a God who's all mutilated and sad looking? Wouldn't it be better to instead focus on a God whose face is peaceful and smiling like Buddha's?" he asked.

"Hmmm, I don't think so," I replied, getting a little perturbed by his attitude. "Why?"

"Well, let me put it this way," I said. "If I invited you to my church's Christmas Eve candlelight service, would you set yourself ablaze? I'll buy the gasoline!"

By the unpeaceful look on his face, the frisky Buddhist obviously failed to understand my sarcasm, so I apologized, explained I hadn't eaten all day, and added:

"But get this: I'm Lutheran, and we Lutherans don't worship Jesus because we enjoy being depressed. While the Cross of Christ reminds us that there is evil in this world, and we're called to work through it with Him in order to survive.

"But who wouldn't want to work with Jesus?" I continued. "I mean, He was a party animal! He was always on his way to or from feasts, dinners, and weddings. Remember when he turned water into wine and then later used five loaves of bread and two fishes to feed more than 5,000 people?"

"And look at who He hung out with — the pimps, the whores, the drug dealers, the drug addicts, the HIV-positives, the gangsters of his day. You can't just bring these people together during normal business hours to completely re-

## The Rubber Cement Index

By Nathan Diebenow



structure the system of domination in which they live. You *have* to throw a kick ass party!"

Confused, the silly Buddhist looked at me and asked: "Completely restructure the system?" What are you, a Communist?"

"No, no, no," I said, laughing. "Communism, capitalism, socialism, fascism — those are all false promises, inventions that distract people from hearing the Good News, that God's forgiveness is free."

"Well, then, riddle me this, Bagman, why are you out here shopping for Christmas presents?"

"I'm not."

"You're not?" he asked, chuckling. "But what's with the bag?"

"Well, I'm just sooooo in love with how multinational corporations have turned the birth of Jesus Christ into a consumer holiday that me and some friends of mine brought some stuff from home to give away to shoppers."

"Really? What you got?"

I let the silly Buddhist take his time choosing what he wanted from my bag of goodies, and he eventually picked one of my favorite DVDs — *Van Wilder: Party Liaison*.

"I've never seen this. I hear it's good, but my DVD player is busted," he said.

When I suggested that he seek my friend who was giving away his own DVD player outside a nearby electronics store, the Buddhist's jaw dropped in shock, so I said:

"Dude, you're gonna to catch flies. Close your mouth, and consider this question: God sent his own Son to die for us, so what are *you* willing to sacrifice for world peace?"

## DeLay Waits For Pre-Trial Hearing, Draws Protests At Fund-Raiser

AUSTIN — Rep. Tom DeLay will have to wait until after Christmas before a state district judge hears his case on money laundering and conspiracy to commit money laundering.

Earlier in the week Senior Judge Pat Priest dismissed DeLay's charge of conspiracy to violate the Texas election code, a law that took effect a year from when the alleged offenses happened.

The DeLay's trial is expected to occur next year, pending Priest's decision of the defense's argument that Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle has operated inappropriately.

In accordance of House rules, Delay stepped down as House Majority Leader due to his indictment in September. Republican Rep. Roy Blunt of Missouri now holds this leadership position.

The punishment for money laundering is five years to life in prison. The sentence for conspiracy to commit money laundering is two years.

### Delay Protest

Last Monday, about 250 protesters stood outside a fund-raiser thrown for DeLay's re-election campaign. Vice President Dick Cheney spoke there before more than 300 Republican supporters at the Westin Oaks Hotel in Houston.

While DeLay's supporters paid between \$500 to \$4,200 to attend various layers of the VIP event, his opponents chanted phrases like "Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, Dick Cheney Has To Go" and carried signs that read "The GOP is in an ethics free-fall."

With a donation of \$50 she said, Diane Wilson, co-founder peace group Code Pink and author of *An Unreasonable Woman*, snuck into the event, interrupted Cheney's speech, and was later arrested. Though her bail was paid, the resident of Seadrift, Texas was moved to Calhoun County to face charges of trespass stemming from a protest at a chemical plant.

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# Texas Forest Service Gearing Up For Possible Winter Wildfire Siege

AUSTIN — State fire control leaders continue to gear up for what could be a long winter wildfire siege for the state's firefighters. Additional in-state and out-of-state personnel and equipment resources, including six dozers, six engines and a mechanic truck from Wisconsin, have been ordered and mobilized to strategic areas to bolster the state's firefighting arsenal.

Critically dry fuels (vegetation)

exist across much of the state, a fact evidenced by several large wildfires that have already occurred. With no significant change in the weather pattern in sight, fire control leaders are planning for the worst but hoping for the best.

Grasses, weeds and other vegetation in much of the state lie dead and dormant from a combination of drought and hard freezes, according to Mike Dunivan, fire behavior analyst with the Texas Forest Service. Areas hit by hard

frosts earlier in the year are where the lion's share of the known large fires occurred, but essentially all of the state is now at risk, due to the presence of the dead vegetation, said Dunivan.

"Vegetation is critically dry in much of the state," said Dunivan. "Add winds and low humidity during the afternoon prime burning period, and you have a recipe for fast-spreading, dangerous wildfires."

Most of the large wildfires that already occurred statewide resulted from this deadly combination of wildfire ingredients."

The fire analyst noted that the Texas Forest Service sent an advisory to fire departments in Texas warning of the possibility of dangerous fire behavior during periods of dry, windy weather and the need for diligent use of fire safety practices and protective gear.

Already this year, two volunteer firefighters suffered serious burns upon being overrun by wildfires, and another firefighter lost his life in an accident when the fire tanker he was driving rolled over.

"Now that most summer grasses and weeds have gone dormant, any wildfires that arise will have more fuel available to stoke the flames.

Also, wherever dead grass, weeds and other fine-textured fuels are present, even short periods of dry, windy weather can cause a rapid escalation in wildfire risk and difficulty of control," Dunivan declared.

Unless the weather cooperates and brings significant moisture statewide and/or the public exercises greater safety with all outdoor fire use, firefighters fear that additional wildfires are likely.

Many wildfires result from careless burning of household trash, leaves and brush piles. The following are suggestions from the Texas Forest Service:

- Obey outdoor burning bans.
- Postpone all outdoor fires during periods of dry, windy weather.
- When outdoor fires are permitted, establish wide control lines down to bare soil before igniting your fire, and stay with your fire until it is cold to the touch.
- Dispose of smoking materials properly, either in an ashtray or crushed out in bare dirt.
- Avoid using welding or grinding equipment in or near dry grass and weeds.
- Avoid driving or parking in tall grass and weeds that could be ignited by the pollution control equipment on your vehicle.

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The Intelligence Community under the Bush Cheney Administration

Four Years After—This Veterans Day November 11, 2005

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