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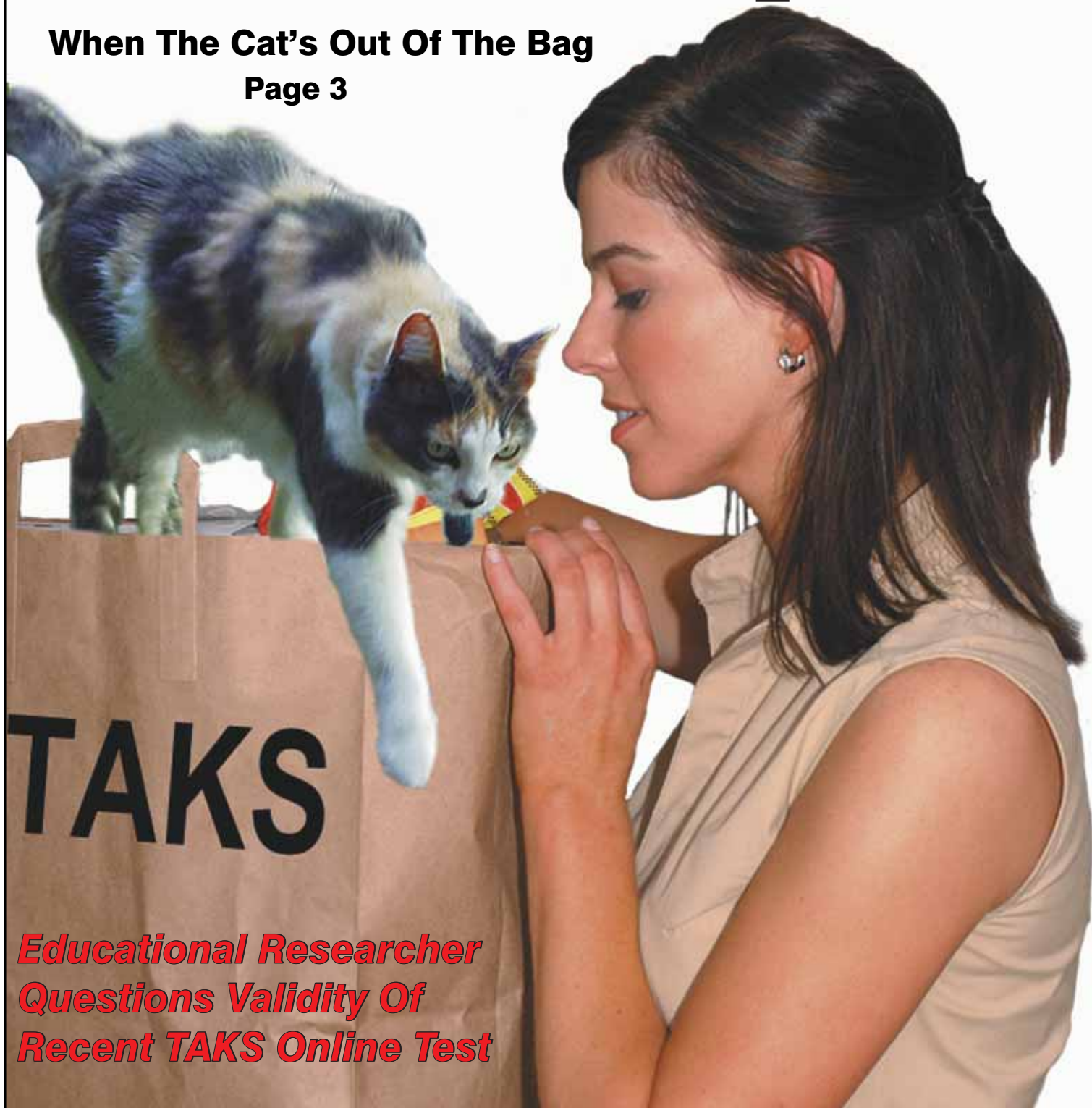
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# Texas Redistricting Map Heads To Supreme Court

WASHINGTON — The constitutionality of the 2003 Texas congressional map will be put to a test in the nation's highest court before the state's Congressional primaries in March.

The U.S. Supreme Court on March 1 will hear four separate appeals rolled into a single case that challenges the map forged by Rep. Tom DeLay to fill more Republican seats in Congress. The plaintiffs are a mixture of Democrats, Hispanics, and black voters, the city of Austin, and Travis County.

While the hearing comes six days before the state primaries, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott said that the 2006 elections will occur using the Delay-backed map, which was approved the Justice Department despite objections from staff lawyers that said it undercut minority voting rights.

Although a three-judge Federal District Court in Austin upheld the constitutionality of the mid-decade map this

## Pacific Rim Farmers Protest WTO Meeting

HONG KONG — Around farmers, fishermen, and others from around the Pacific Rim marched through the streets of Hong Kong Tuesday protesting against the World Trade Organization meeting.

Beating drums and gongs and carrying signs that said "RIP WTO" and "World Threatening Organization," the Japanese, Indian, Filipino, South Korean and Brazilian farmers said they are afraid a new WTO treaty will destroy their livelihood by harming their local agricultural markets in favor of corporations from rich countries.

Using pepper spray, riot police with helmets and shields fought back several dozen protesters armed with bamboo sticks trying to overcome a police roadblock. The fight ended 30 minutes later after more police arrived.

The six-day WTO meeting itself was in turmoil with poor nations arguing that the rich nations (United States, European Union, and others) reduce agricultural tariffs and farm subsidies to exclude the poor nations' exports.

The developing nations remain skeptical of several offers to them, including the United States' proposed elimination of export subsidies on farm products by 2010 and reduction of domestic farm subsidies by 60 percent over the next five years.

past June, an overturn of the current map could mean the Texas Legislature would have to redraw a new one. The next regular session of the Legislature is January 2007, which means lawmakers would have to call a special session to draw a newer map sooner.

To accurately represent their changing populations, states must change their congressional district lines every 10 years, according to the Constitution. However, a court and then state law-

makers led by Delay redrew the lines after the 2000 census.

The majority opinion in a 2004 case in Pennsylvania stated that since the Constitution does not provide a "judicially enforceable limit on the political considerations that the states and Congress may take into account when districting," the federal courts cannot rule in gerrymandering cases. In an opinion, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy said that he would be open to hear such cases "if some lim-

ited and precise rationale were found to correct an established violation of the Constitution."

The plaintiffs in the Jackson v. Perry appeal argue that a redistricting plan should be unconstitutional "when it is enacted solely to skew future election results in favor of one political party and against another, at a time when a perfectly lawful map is already in place and there is no other legitimate justification for changing the district lines."

## Gang Founder Dies Claiming Innocence

SAN QUENTIN, Calif. — Supporters of a convicted murderer turned anti-gang advocate shouted, "The state of California just killed an innocent man," as they exited the execution chamber at San Quentin State Prison Tuesday morning.

After a series of appeals to courts and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger were rejected, Stanley "Tookie" Williams, 51, died at 12:35 a.m. for killing four people in 1979, a charge the co-founder of the Crips gang claimed he was innocent until his death.

A relative of the four victims, Lora Owens, told ABC's "Good Morning America," "I believe it was a just punishment long overdue."

Williams' supporters, a cadre of Hollywood celebrities and capital punishment foes, argued that his sentence should be lessened to life in prison be-

cause, they said, he redeemed himself for his work advocating against gangs and violence through writing children's books. During his time on death row, Williams was nominated five times for Nobel Prizes for peace and literature by a Swiss legislator and college professors.

While Williams' supporters here called Gov. Schwarzenegger a "cold-blooded murderer" for denying his request for clemency, the California governor also faced criticism from Europe, including his native Austria where the removal of his name from a hometown stadium is being considered.

On Monday, Gov. Schwarzenegger questioned Williams' remorse for his actions. "Is Williams' redemption complete and sincere, or is it just a hollow promise?" Schwarzenegger wrote.

"Without an apology and atonement for these senseless and brutal killings, there can be no redemption."

The California governor never met with the inmate on death row, and during the weekend before Williams' execution, Schwarzenegger spent time watching his son play soccer, according to reports.

## Judge Declares Mistrial In Federal Vioxx Case

HOUSTON — The first of four federal trials over the painkiller Vioxx was called a mistrial last Monday. Lawyers predict that the retrial will take place in February in New Orleans.

Jurors after 18 hours of deliberations and a two week long trial were unable to reach the required unanimous decision in the case between Merck & Co. and the wife of a 53-year-old man who died while taking the drug for about a month.

Merck, who is a one-and-one in state Vioxx litigation, took its once-popular drug off shelves last year after it was connected to cardiovascular problems. Vioxx denies its drug has contributed to any deaths.

The New England Journal of Medicine reported last week that Merck altered data in a report about a Merck-funded study to conceal the actual number of heart attacks Vioxx caused compared with another painkiller.

There are about 7,000 state and federal lawsuits against the company with damages for liability estimated at \$50 billion. A \$235 million verdict, which was cut down to \$26.1 million due to state limits on punitive damages, fell on Merck in Texas. New Jersey is the site of the next state trial on Feb. 27.

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# High-Stakes Catastrophe

## Educational Researcher Questions Validity Of Recent TAKS Online Test

By **DON M. FISHER**  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

AUSTIN — Texas' first statewide online exam results are probably invalid and, at best, questionable, according to one of the nation's leading educational testing researchers, but are merely symptomatic of a general lack of security and meaningful results with the No Child Left Behind mandated testing.

NCS-Pearson, the multi-million dollar contractor that runs Texas' high-stakes testing, was supposed to deliver simultaneous online Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exit tests to students in about 650 schools throughout the state on Dec. 6 and 7. However, due to Pearson computer problems, most students were unable to log on and take the exam, passage of which is required for graduation and determines eligibility for higher education in Texas.

Testing continued sporadically into last week.

Some students at the same schools were able to take the test on the prescribed date, while their classmates took it later. As a result, test questions were available to some students before they took the exam.

That means results are in serious doubt, according to UT-San Antonio researcher Dr. Sharon L. Nichols, co-author of the University of Arizona's exhaustive study on high stakes testing that was published earlier this year.

"I would question it," she said last week. "One would have to ask how much sharing goes on (among students throughout the state) that there would have to be questions about the reliability of any results.

"I do think it is problematic," she said.

"But there are so many problems with exam security (nationwide) so that high stakes testing results are always severely compromised."

"We should be very cautious with how we interpret any of those results," Nichols said.

She said while she knows of no research the result of technical glitches in test administration, but established educational principles indicate that some students' scores will be affected by the online test problems.

Anxiety would be an inevitable result of being unable to take the exam, she



*Researcher Says  
Do-Or-Die Testing  
Increases Anxiety,  
Decreases Performance  
Among Students*

said, because they would question whether the computer problems will alter their all-important test results..

"Students feel they are being threatened by the process," she said.

"As anxiety increases," Nichols said, "performance only decreases."

Nichols is also co-author of "The Inevitable Corruption of Indicators and Educators Through High-Stakes Testing," which makes the case that NCLB testing corrupts the education system in general, often making test cheating and manipulating results a matter of survival for both students and schools

That study views high-stakes testing through Campbell's law: "The more any quantitative social indicators used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor."

Do-or-die testing, she said, forces

schools and students into a moral dilemma: Passing the test becomes a matter of survival, and both people and institutions must sacrifice principles just to survive.

"Because of what's at stake, the students' future, many actions become more justifiable, so that our schools increasingly allow even blatant acts of cheating."

"There is plenty of data that shows there is little retention" of information students memorize just to pass a high-stakes test, Nichols said.

Any correlation between learning and scores on this kind test is "largely a myth."

"It actually reduces learning," she said.

It also reduces opportunity for students' future, she said, by narrowing the curriculum, stifling creative teaching methods, taking resources away from learning that the student will be able to



Dr. Sharon L. Nichols

use and forcing them to merely repeat largely useless and irrelevant information that they are not likely to remember.

Further, the system reduces meaningful education reform, like investment in better teachers and more resources.

"Largely the issue is poverty," Nichols said, pointing out that there are few "bad" schools in affluent neighborhoods, but the system that the nation has adopted punishes the poor students who need help most.

Virtually all the research verifies these findings she said.

A minority of studies have attempted to pick some increased test scores as indications of high-stakes learning success.

"But the results are so few, so sporadic, that they can't be validated," she said.

So why does the system persist in a system that lowers ethical standards and reduces learning?

Money.

"It's a business model," she said.

Political leaders simply believe they can treat children in the same way as a commercial output, and do not understand the complexities of learning.

"It's a 'do it or else' attitude in effort as a way to spark change," she said.

Further, she said, the system makes a profit for private industries.

"Testing is big business," Nichols said, "it generates millions of dollars annually."

Nichols said she was not familiar with Texas testing's financial history, but it illustrates her point.

NCS Pearson's Texas contract is roughly a quarter-billion dollars over five years.

NCS, a testing company, merged with Pearson Publishing, a minor textbook company, before the Texas contract was let. NCS Pearson was the only bidder, accomplished largely through promises of subcontracts to possible competitors, according to state officials and other textbook representatives.

That contract, however, did not include provisions for supplying study materials for the TAKS test, which the new publishing arm of NCS Pearson, with a clear advantage, now offers to school districts at additional cost, significantly increasing Pearson's revenue from Texas taxpayers.

Texas is no anomaly, she said.

Nationally, the testing business has virtually no oversight, Nichols said.



# Bush Secretly Authorized NSA To Eavesdrop On Americans

WASHINGTON — President Bush, during the months following Sept. 11, 2001, secretly authorized the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on perhaps thousands of Americans and others inside the U.S., according to a story published last week in THE NEW YORK TIMES.

According to the article, some NSA officials were concerned about the legality of the unprecedented eavesdropping program and thereby refused to participate.

Questions about the legality of the program led the Bush administration to

temporarily suspend it last year, noted the TIMES article.

Some officials familiar with the previously undisclosed operation have questioned whether the surveillance violated constitutional limits on legal searches.

THE TIMES learned about the eavesdropping a year ago, and at the request of the White House did not publish the article at that time.

After the story broke, President Bush defended his action in a radio address and lashed out at those who made the program public. "This is a highly classified program that is crucial to our national security," he said, vowing to continue domestic wiretapping.

Members of Congress, from both sides of the aisle, have taken exception to the use of secret domestic wiretap-

ping.

Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) said the President's remarks were "breathtaking in how extreme they were" and labeled these new powers as "absurd."

"If that's true, he doesn't need the Patriot Act because he can just make it up as he goes along," said Feingold. "I tell you, he's President George Bush, not King George Bush."

The revelation about the secret program came on the heels of fierce debate as the White House sought continuation of the Patriot Act. The House approved a version, but the Senate did not, in light of a filibuster that has, at least temporarily, killed the Act which is up for renewal by the end of the year. Critics, both Democrats and Republicans, say the Patriot Act threatens constitutional liberties.

## Florida Elections Director Now Believes '2000 Presidential Election Hacked'

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Leon County's Ion Sancho believes electronic manipulation of votes occurred in Florida's 2000 contested presidential race, says investigative journalist Brad Friedman in a recent report on BradBlog.

The "hack test" of a mock election using Diebold voting equipment last week in Leon County, Fla. — in which results of the election were completely flipped from 2-6 to 7-1 without even a trail of evidence left behind — has continued to send shockwaves from Florida to Ohio to California and everywhere else in between, notes Friedman.

The Director of Elections in Leon County, Ian Sancho reportedly proclaimed, after the stunning results of last Tuesday's test, that he would never use Diebold voting machines in any election in the county again, says Friedman.

Due to security design issues and contractual non-performance, Leon County supervisor of elections Ion Sancho told Black Box Voting that he will never use Diebold in an election again. He has requested funds to replace the Diebold system from the county. He will issue a formal announcement to this effect shortly, Friedman said.

According to Friedman, Finnish security expert Harri Hursti proved that Diebold lied to Secretaries of State across the nation when Diebold claimed votes could not be changed on the memory card.

On his website, Friedman explained how the test was conducted:

"A test election was run in Leon County today with a total of eight ballots - six ballots voted 'no' on a ballot question as to whether Diebold voting machines can be hacked or not. Two

ballots, cast by Dr. Herbert Thomson and by Harri Hursti voted 'yes' indicating a belief that the Diebold machines could be hacked.

"At the beginning of the test election the memory card programmed by Harri Hursti was inserted into an Optical Scan Diebold voting machine. A 'zero report' was run indicating zero votes on the memory card. In fact, however, Hursti had pre-loaded the memory card with plus and minus votes.

"The eight ballots were run through the optical scan machine. The standard Diebold-supplied 'ender card' was run through as is normal procedure ending the election. A results tape was run from the voting machine.

"Correct results should have been: Yes:2 No:6

"However the results tape read: Yes:7 No:1

"The results were then uploaded from the optical scan voting machine into the GEMS central tabulator. The central tabulator is the 'mothership' that pulls in all votes from voting machines. The results in the central tabulator read: Yes:7 No:1.

"This proves that the votes themselves were changed in a one-step process that would not be detected in any normal canvassing procedure — using only a credit-card sized memory card.

"Diebold Elections Systems head of research and development Pat Green specifically told the Cuyahoga County [OH] board of elections that votes could not be changed on the memory card.

"According to Public Records responses obtained by Black Box Voting in response to our requests shows that Diebold promulgated this misrepresentation to as many as 800 state and local elections officials."

## Labor Costs Not Source Of Inflation: EPI

WASHINGTON — The Economic Policy Institute reported before the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meets on Dec. 13 that labor costs are not the main inflation problem facing the U.S. economy.

"These rate hikes will slow down potential wage growth by braking economic growth, yet, it's not wage growth that constitutes the main inflation problem," reported EPI economists Jared Bernstein and L. Josh Bivens.

The EPI report showed that unit labor costs (ULC), which measure the labor costs to employers of producing one unit of output, were level from 2001 through the third quarter of 2004. Inflation, however, has risen consistently, and even accelerated in recent quarters when ULC growth actually decelerated, the analysis found.

"Obviously, other forces, particularly energy costs, are pushing up prices. Even when comparing ULCs to 'core in-

flation' over the period covered in the chart, ULCs are up only two percent, while core inflation is up eight percent," reported Bernstein and Bivens.

The report stated that in light of the flat ULC levels, by raising interest rates for the 13th consecutive time, to 4.25 percent, "the Fed is hitting the brakes too hard."

"In fact, one the biggest challenges facing American workers right now is the historically large gap between overall economic growth and their paychecks," reported Bernstein and Bivens. "Productivity is up 17 percent over the cycle, yet real compensation is up only seven percent, and real average wages (i.e., excluding benefit costs) are up by less than one percent."

"By tightening, the Fed makes it less likely that the living standards of working families will finally connect to the expanding economy," the report concluded.

# Editorial

OP/ED  
Opinion - Columns - Letters

— Editorial —

## Easier To Ask Forgiveness Than For Permission

"What's done is done. There's no use re-hashing it."

Famous last words.

Some might ignorantly argue that it is in the best interests of everyone to at times stomp upon the Constitution of the United States, to deny one's God-sworn oath to uphold the letter of the document, and to secretly run roughshod over privacy rights.

It is an empty argument.

The world is reeling at the very thought that the Bush Administration would turn to secretive domestic eavesdropping without first seeking permission from the legislative and judicial branches of government, much less the citizenry in general.

Generations of Americans have fought and died in order to keep the

Constitution and its ideals intact, for it is a living, breathing document. It defines the framework of all our lives.

If one president can take it upon himself to desecrate the Constitution to move forward a political agenda, then where does it leave that framework?

When the new century took hold, Americans were hoping for a country filled with security, faith, prosperity, hope, and progress as we continued to be the light of the world.

Look around you.

It didn't happen.

You know why!

It is much easier to forego permission and simply say, "Forgive us, for we know not what we do."

— W. Leon Smith

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# Merry Christmas From Juvy Hall

This column began about three decades ago. I began working on it in 1985. I'm still not sure I've got it right, but it is my Christmas present to you, as it once was to me.

Christmas never meant that much to me.

Well, not after I quit sticking my feet under mama's table, anyway.

Most of my Christmases were spent in some bar or greasy spoon poring over a still-damp early edition with my byline and somebody else's bloody mistake all over it.

I had about as much goodwill in my soul as a multiple-car pileup or a family reunion shooting.

But that was before I had supper with Santa Claus.

It was called Pete's, or maybe Joe's, or the Deluxe Diner; someplace with enough chrome out front to grille a Cadillac and enough grease out back to lube one. About the only thing to recommend it was that it hadn't the decency to close on Christmas Eve.

He was sitting there in a dirty red suit that looked like it came from the north pole, alright, by way of the seedier parts of New Jersey. His hat and mittens lay in a crumpled heap on the only other occupied seat in the joint.

He was nursing a cup of bad coffee and line of worse jokes. The cook ignored him so he tried a few on the waitress. She wasn't buying, either. Humor doesn't sit well on hot griddles and flat feet.

More out of curiosity than compassion, boredom than benevolence, I sat down and soaked up a couple of his jokes.

His name was Meyer.

He lived alone.

He sensed he had an ear beside him primed for more than corny puns, so he filled it with his life's story.

His wife died. Car wreck. They said the guy was drunk. Who knows? To this day, he said, he still slept on the one side of the bed.

They had a son, born just in time for Khe San.

Bitter? Nah! He was an immigrant. Maybe if he hadn't come here, his sone would never have been born at all.

But he missed kids, So every year he put on the suit and went down to juvenile hall to play Santa . . .

Juvenile Hall?

Jeez, Meyer, juvy hall? An orphan's home or the children's hospital maybe. But juvy hall? That's like delivering kittens to a hyena den! The kids they lock up out there have broken glass for souls!

Yeah. This year a kid they had in isolation (That's the child psychology euphemism for solitary.) spit on him. Youngster about fifteen. You probably remember reading about him.

No. I wrote about him.

I remembered all right.

I remembered a pool of congealed blood next to a busted open candy machine.

I remembered a young woman with a couple of babies who would have to make do with a smiling cop's fading, black-draped picture instead of a father. She had that kind of stunned agony on her face people get when they've been told their life is over, but they've got to go on living anyway.

I remembered the obituary of a naive kid just out of the academy who once told his partner he didn't like wearing a gun, but if he did, maybe everybody else

## Call To Mind

By Don M. Fisher



wouldn't have to.

I remembered a rap sheet on a youngster about fifteen that took up three pages.

He was a punk.

Now he was a killer.

"Lord, Meyer, what kind of kid spits on Santa Claus?"

"Exactly the kind of kid who needs to know there is a Santa Claus.

"Come on, Meyer, I been to more than three county fairs and a taffy pull. I don't want to hear that sheep dip about how there ain't no bad kids . . ."

"Oh no, there's bad kids. Lot's of 'em.

And bad places where they come from and most of them never get out of. Sure there's bad kids. Why do you think I go down to juvy hall every year in this lousy suit and pretend not to die inside when I remember putting together an electric train for my little boy and talking to my Sarah about really important things like getting a new couch, or where we would send him to college or whether we should try to get a new car next year or the year after? I don't let all that kill my soul because there's bad kids. And because there's not much you or me or anybody can do about it except whatever we can."

"C'mon, Meyer, you're not even a

Christian . . ."

"So maybe a guy from Nazareth wasn't a Jew? Lemme tell you something. When my boy died, they took a long time getting the body home. So long I got mad about it. It seems sort of foolish now, but at the time it was important to me. So they finally told me why. "See, he wounded. And this corpsman, this other kid named Reilly was carrying him. And when they got hit by this mortar shell, they got all mixed up together, and they took some time straightening things out. How many Jews you know named Reilly? Tell me how a Lace Curtain Mick from New Rochelle gets mixed up in the same plastic sack with a Jew from Dallas. Maybe then we can talk more about Christians and Jews."

We talked some more. I don't remember about what. Christmas mostly.

I didn't notice until he said his good-byes and reached to pay for his coffee. As his hand extended across the counter, the frayed red sleeve hiked up about half-way to reveal a tattoo on the underside of his forearm; a series of dark blue numbers.

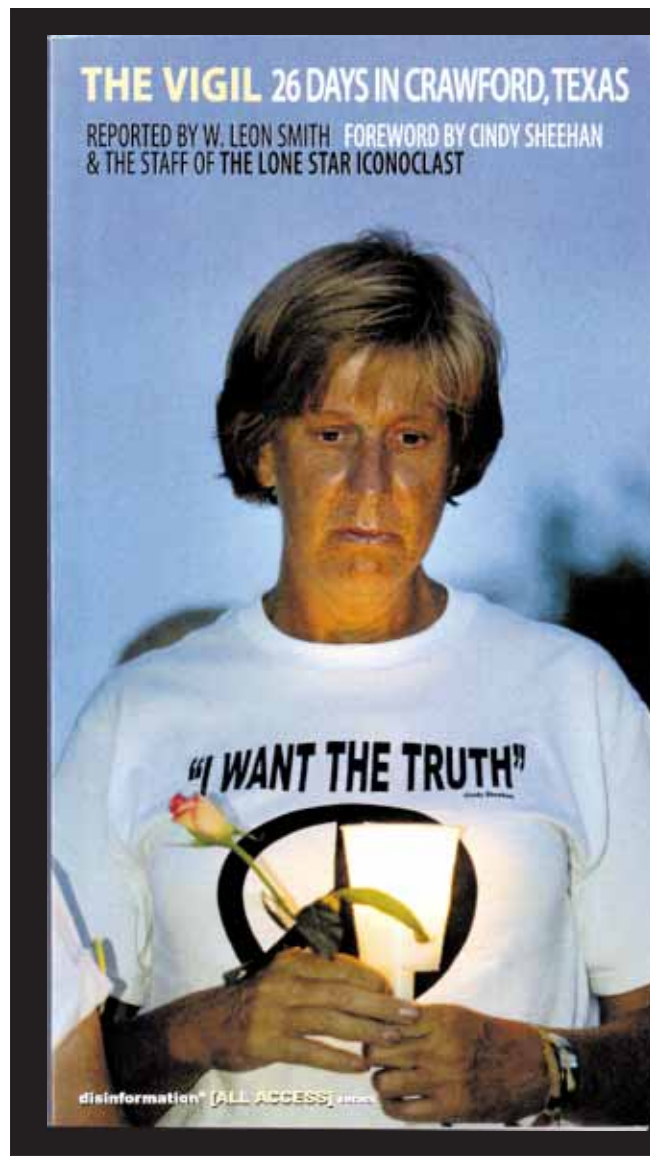
I sat for a long time after he left, staring at my own reflection against the moonless city night, thinking. Thinking about history; humankind, whatever that is. Thoughts. Deeds. Words.

Mostly some words I hadn't thought of in a long time, but have thought of quite a lot since:

"Fear not, for I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day."

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## AVAILABLE IN BOOKSTORES & ON THE WEB...

### THE VIGIL

In August of 2005, a grieving mother and her supporters laid siege to Crawford, Texas. Cindy Sheehan set up camp outside of President Bush's ranch, determined to find some answers. For 26 days, all eyes were on Camp Casey.

At the center of it all was Crawford's own *Lone Star Iconoclast*. In the heart of the reddest of Red States, *The Iconoclast* found itself caught between the public's (deeply conservative) expectations, and the paper's publisher, W. Leon Smith's, sense of journalistic duty to report objectively. **THE VIGIL** is an invaluable record of *The Iconoclast's* coverage, with Sheehan herself providing a scene-setting foreword.

The result is a high stakes, blow-by-blow account of the events as they unfolded. You experience this vigil right along with the writers and participants: the heat, the fire ants, the gunplay, the celebrity appearances, and the intense emotional rollercoaster that has yet to end. Smith and his crew demonstrated a level of professional virtue that—to quote Sheehan herself—"shines like a lone spark of integrity in the prairie darkness."



# Christmases Of The Way Past

For some reason I remember Christmases past in black and white.

These are the Christmases of *way* past, before my personal onset of puberty.

When the world was still innocent.

At least in *my* mind.

There was a genuine charm in the Chicago of the 1950s and early 1960s.

One image that remains fixed in my memory is a stretch of Belmont Avenue, between Harlem Avenue to the west and Oak Park Avenue to the east.

My mother's eldest full-sister Mary and her husband, Frank, lived on Oak Park Ave. just around the corner from Belmont. That's where Uncle Frank had his tailor shop.

Mom was the baby with three more sisters (full-blood), and two half-sisters (the oldest). Her brother had been killed in a car wreck in Arizona sometime during the 1940s.

My paternal grandfather lived a mile or so east of Aunt Mary on Belmont, but we never visited him at home — something about Mom going at it nail and claw with his wife before I was even conceived.

My maternal grandmother died when I was around two, but that didn't matter, either, because Dad met her just once, before my parents were married, and refused to ever be in the same room with her again.

In 1980, while celebrating Uncle Frank's 80th birthday, one of my cousins conjectured that our grandmother must have been a "strong" woman to raise eight kids after burying two husbands.

Aunt Mary must have thought it was time to get the truth out, because in an atypical burst of candor, she immediately countered the comment with, "*My Mother was a slut!*"

Not one person in the room had ever conceived Aunt Mary even knew the word "slut," much less that she would say it out loud. Its mere utterance created an instantaneous combination of gasps and belly laughs.

Uncle Frank looked thoroughly shocked... and stunned.

This was a woman whose favorite expression was "Benedict," kind of her own personal Italian slang for "God bless..." — the situation would itself dictate who or what received the blessing, like a new baby, or a decorated birthday cake, my first beard, whatever.

I think Aunt Mary picked that moment because none of her sisters were present.

Italian families are so harmonious.

For instance, it's possible that comedienne Judy Tenuta may be my third cousin, but we've never met. When Grandpa and his brother arrived in America as kids, one went to live with Uncle A, the other moved in with Uncle B. Problem was, neither uncle spoke to the other, thus the two brothers were kept apart.

Add being uneducated and spelling discrepancies of our surname throughout the years.

Bottom line, there are Tenuto's/Tenuta's around the Chicago area I know are relations, some in high places, yet I don't know any beyond Grandpa and my dad's brother, Uncle Puffy, and his family.

Even Puff used to spell it Tanuta, until Dad got on his case around 1963.

Had we been Sicilian, and Wiseguys, maybe all of us would have stayed close to these many decades.

So, as things went we spent more time with Mom's side of the family, especially Christmas Eves.

Before the family stuff, there'd usually be two trips to The Loop — you know, Downtown Chicago.

Now, Mom had no job but did have a car

available all day long. Well, we lived in the suburbs, about 30 miles from the Loop, and under no circumstances was she going to schlep that 1950 Dodge into and around Downtown traffic.

I'm probably alive today to write this because of her trepidation.

One day during every Christmas break, my older (by three years) brother and I would walk four full blocks with Mom, no matter how horrendous the weather, to catch the "Bluebird."

This was the bus to *Downtown*.

I can't remember the name of the transportation agency, because everyone called it the Bluebird — after the manufacturer's logo on the roof. You still see their coaches all around.

The ride took about an hour, I guess. The route included some pretty bleak neighborhoods.

It was invariably a dark trip.

One of the charms of Downtown as opposed to the suburbs was it would be a crush of people.

We'd primarily go to the big department stores. Of course, it was obligatory to soak in the window displays before entering — each and every one of them.

Montgomery Ward had store windows filled with Christmas delights, brightly colorful and sparkingly lit.

Sears, Roebuck and Company had mini-shows window-to-window, as did Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company.

There were mechanical figures of all sorts, dancing, singing and making toys; trains of all sizes and types; flying Santas.

The best windows of all, the *crème de la crème* of Christmas store displays, year in and year out the Cadillac, were those at Chicago's premier retailer, Marshall Field and Company.

Not only was Field's the biggest store with the most massive windows, they transformed those windows into the most gloriously wonderful dream-inducing Christmas manifestations in the city.

Back in the day, kids would stand there despite freezing temperatures, point out specific toys, and discuss how much each one wanted this or that for Christmas. To a stranger they might seem like old friends, but in reality neither had ever seen the other until just moments ago.

It might be that they lived three states and hundreds of miles apart.

We were a more civil, personable society circa 1958.

Except for my brother, who was too full of himself to ever engage in such repartee with any strangers.

The displays were designed sequentially, making it necessary to start at one corner of the store and work your way along State Street to derive the full effect.

Funny thing, I remember the window displays in color, while everything around them — the sidewalk, the people, the streets and cars, the "El" tracks — all come back in very bleak black and white.

I guess that's the lasting beauty of those displays.

As to the store innards, Field's was hands down the best.

And presented itself in overly saturated 1950s Technicolor.

The tree stood right in the middle of the sales floor, an astounding eight stories high.

Incredible.

Palace-sized chandeliers; Christmas banners and oversized ornaments hanging all around; wooden soldiers 10 feet tall; pixies and elves; sparkly stuff everywhere.

Wall-to-wall people actually being polite (as I remember).

We wouldn't buy much, if anything, at Field's.

Heck, we really wouldn't make any purchases at all on these trips — too much of a hassle carrying packages back on the bus. The day would be spent mostly sightseeing.

These were merely excursions, reconnaissance missions for the upcoming weekend trip Downtown with Dad.

If the line wasn't too long at Field's, we'd visit with Santa there. Plan B was the guy at Carson's would get our wish lists.

Several times Mom splurged and we lunched at Field's prestigious Walnut Room.

Mom's favorite place to eat Downtown, however, was a leftover guilty pleasure from her days as a WAVE in the Navy during WWII. She absolutely loved WIMPY'S HAMBURGERS, a fast food chain based on a *Popeye* character, now long defunct thanks to McD's. Back then, it seemed as though there was a WIMPY'S on every other block Downtown.

(No matter where we ate, and it remains a mystery to me why, my brother felt compelled to give Mom a hard time.)

On the Saturday when we would drive Downtown with Dad, the in-store time was pared down considerably.

First, any shopping that had to get done was over as quickly as possible. The Old Man was *not* spending a lot of time in any department store.

Sears and Ward's could be avoided altogether because they had plenty stores in the neighborhoods.

We'd already seen the window displays, so Dad only paused at those he found interesting.

There were extra good parts, though, with Dad. Like we usually got to eat at TAD'S STEAKHOUSE. These were the places where they grilled the steaks over an open flame right in the window. There were five or six Downtown, and in cities all around the country.

As I recollect, a steak, potato, salad and soda went for somewhere in the \$1.49 neighborhood.

Dad also loved seeing big movies on the humongous screens in the gargantuan Downtown movie palaces — The Chicago; State Lake; Roosevelt; Michael Todd; Oriental; United Artists. As far back as I can remember the Downtown theatres all had multitrack surround sound.

These theatres each held thousands of people, and the audience generally kept its collective mouth shut.

The restrooms were bigger than most cineplex auditoriums!

When it came time to gather with family, more often than not we went to Aunt Mary and Uncle Frank's. They were surrogate grandparents to my brother and me; more so to me, I would say, my brother being a natural born noodle and schnorer.

Uncle Frank always had some last minute tailoring to get done.

He also personally delivered dry-cleaning and tailoring to customers. Being so infinitely good-hearted Uncle Frank would never allow anyone to go without some article of clothing they might need for Christmas or immediately thereafter. So, getting out to the suburbs would typically be a bit difficult for them.

Besides, Aunt Mary was far and away the best cook in the family, and what she would put together for Christmas Eve was beyond masterful: Calamari (decades before yuppies heard about it); stuffed shells (of various types); homemade meatballs; sausage; smelts; mostacioli; ravioli; roast beast; and her red sauce was to die for...

Although he never ate them, my Dad would provide the clams.



Out Of The Blue

By  
Jerry  
Tenuto

Raw.

Her baked goods, well, Aunt Mary had some specialties that *made* Christmas Eve Christmas Eve.

Nobody else in the family has ever been able to reproduce these.

Besides, there were far superior bakeries in the city than in the suburbs.

For a couple of Christmas Eves everyone tried getting together at our house, but it just wasn't the same.

Mom couldn't compete with Aunt Mary in the kitchen; it became apparent early that Aunt Mary wasn't comfortably up to her game anywhere but in her own environment.

Plus, we'd missed the drive up Belmont Avenue, which from Thanksgiving through early January seemed to be perpetually covered in snow or in the midst of a snowfall.

A study in glorious black and white.

Street lamps giving off insufficiently bright canopies of light every 30 feet or so.

A steady stream of big, clunky cars — lead sleds — lumbering along, apt to stop or turn without warning (turn signals were not yet standard equipment).

The meshing of clutches and gears, slush crunching all around.

Even in these non-commercial areas people afoot on the sidewalks, proof life never stops in the Big City.

And the whirr of the massive electric buses of the Chicago Transit Authority, dual masts rising from their roofs at a 45-degree angle, magically connected throughout the city by an endless network of overhead wires.

Every 20 seconds or so the crackle of electricity accompanied by green sparks shooting out, the only bursts of color, whenever the pole ends come in contact with a connecting juncture in the wires.

Completed by the emission of a whiff of sulfur.

Then we'd turn down "Candy Cane Lane."

These were several side streets just north of Belmont where everyone on a given block was *expected* to erect the same basic Christmas display.

One block might have Santa in his sleigh, another an oversized Frosty.

Suddenly, color!

Dad had two aunts who lived on the Giant Candy Cane block.

One year, an uncle chose to not participate. Instead, he made a sign and put it on display in the front window under a spotlight: "I am a Scrooge."

Back onto Belmont and on to Aunt Mary and Uncle Frank's.

I always remember Aunt Mary's food in color, mostly because it was so full of red.

The fact that she made the most delicious Italian delights this side of Naples doesn't hurt.

Whatever the occasion, wherever he was, Uncle Frank always wore a black suit with a vest (sometimes a sweater), and a snow-white shirt.

In winter he had a black overcoat, black fedora.

This was like a uniform to the generation of long ago from the Old Country.

Despite being the sweetest guy on Earth, he looked like something out of central casting for THE FRANK NITTI STORY.

For the longest time he drove a big  
**Continued On Next Page**



# Put Anti-Agency Potion In Texas' Stocking

By the third day of January the populace of Texas will know who are the candidates for statewide office. Let's hope that the discourse during the campaigns turn to how to get state agencies under control.

Each and every one should be put under a microscope.

The relationships among the agencies and lower forms of governments need to improve, as do relationships between agencies and small business.

It is quite easy for the state to hold down taxes by shifting the burden to locals — cities, counties, and school districts. The result is overall higher taxes and discouragement of local initiatives.

Part of the problem is that state agencies find that much of their income derives from mandates they put on these lower forms of government and the agencies' fiscal survival depends upon milking taxpayers at the lower end of the totem pole, thus mandates and unrealistic penalties for non-compliance.

Suboptimization has set in, where the survival of the agency, including its perks and jobs, becomes more

## The Trenchwalker



By W. Leon Smith

important than rendering useful services. This, of course, is perhaps not applicable to every agency, for some, we suspect, are underfunded, thereby underscoring the need for objective scrutiny.

Small cities in Texas are having a problem with infrastructure. In the past, much of the ad valorem tax income went to pay for infrastructural needs. Now it is being siphoned off to state agencies, leaving too little behind to cover local needs. This is theft, pure and simple.

When agencies do offer assistance, it is available only to projects that the state thinks are important, but are often either on the backburner for cities or are for things locals do not want. A virtuoso disconnect.

One drawing-board example lies in the proposed Trans-Texas Corridor, a boondoggle if ever there was one. Instead of focusing on toll roads, the state should be focusing on helping cities rebuild their streets, a major problem that virtually every small city faces.

Some agencies, like MHMR, need increased attention, while agencies such as the TCEQ are bloated beyond belief.

When elected officials are running for office, maybe it's appropriate to flaunt political party. It is not appropriate once they become statesmen, which is a major part of the problem.

I have had the privilege of serving as the mayor of a small city for about five years now (in my third term), so I do witness first-hand some of the problems. We do not run our council meetings according to political

party. In fact, I would be hard-pressed to define which party most of my councilmen belong to. It simply is not an issue — or a deterrent to getting things done. Party means nothing.

Such should be the approach at the state level.

It comes down to independence, viewing the real needs of the state, and solving problems. Not ignoring public education funding, for example, in order to push an unneeded redistricting scheme that costs taxpayers millions of dollars, and not taking bribes from lobbyists in order to move their agendas forward.

The people of Texas need to take back their state and demand a return to integrity. Until that happens, they will continue to be saddled with soaring costs and little to show for it, as their interests continue to be ignored.

### • TENUTO

Continued From Previous Page

black Pontiac.

Back then, my Dad always wore gray, and white socks.

It was a monochromatic world.

Until 1963 or so, all the pictures were in black and white.

Aunt Mary passed in 1980; Uncle Frank in 1983.

Mom went to her reward on December 23, 1993.

All of their sisters are gone.

The electric buses are long since history.

Montgomery Ward stores have vanished.

Sears is now owned by K-Mart, God help us.

Carson's, established in the 19th Century, is a subsidiary of Saks.

Come September, the great name of Marshall Field, associated for generations with Chicago, will be removed and elbowed aside, replaced by that of a New York bully — Macy's. (In my humble opinion, the yuppies running Federated-May Department Stores have blown the loyal Field's customer base right out of the water.)

Christmas has been relegated to that place in my memory where it belongs, the world of my inner child.

The world of black and white was a far simpler place.

We were happier.

We thought with childlike wonder; we laughed with childish glee.

Before the complexities of Technicolor provided too much input, exposed too much of the harshness.

'Tis easier to see through the eyes of a child when all the pictures are in black and white.

I'd like to wish a Very

Merry Christmas

And

Happy Chanukah

to All!

And for goodness sake, put down that damned digital camera and shoot some black and white film over the Holidays (they do sell b&w single use cameras, y'know!)

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# Patriot Act Provisions Dead...For The Moment

WASHINGTON — On a 52-47 vote Friday, the U.S. Senate rejected permanent reauthorization of several provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act. Proponents of the act were not able to obtain the 60 votes necessary to overcome a threatened filibuster, but by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist changing his vote at the last minute to go with the majority vote, he is now enabled to call for a new vote at any time.

The argument was that the President would not sign a short-term extension, which was offered by critics.

Sixteen provisions of the act expire on Dec. 31.

During debate, Sen. Russ Feingold said, "This morning we saw an astounding story in the NEW YORK TIMES. Since 2002, the government has been reportedly wiretapping the international phone and email conversations of hundreds, even thousands of people inside the United States, without wiretap orders. You want to talk about abuses? I can't imagine a more shocking example of an abuse of power, to eavesdrop on American citizens without first getting a court order based on some evidence that they are possibly criminals, terrorists or spies. Mr. President, it is truly astonishing to read that this Administration would go this far beyond the bounds of the statutes and the Constitution. We as an institution have the duty, the obligation, to get to the bottom of this.

"I hope that this morning's revelation drives home to people that this body must be absolutely vigilant in our oversight of government power. And I don't want to hear again from the Attorney General or anyone on this floor that this government has shown it can be trusted to use the power we give it with restraint and care. This shocking revelation ought to send a chill down the spine of every Senator and every American."

Regarding the provisions of the Patriot Act, Feingold commented, "The provisions of the bill relating to National Security Letters are also seriously deficient. There is no requirement that the records sought under that authority, which doesn't involve a court at all, have some connection to a suspected terrorist or spy. The judicial review that the conference report allows after the fact, of the NSL itself and the mandatory gag order, is a mirage. After what the Times reported this morning, no one in this body should be comfortable with the government having this kind of unreviewable power.

"Finally, there is the issue of so-called sneak and peek searches, when the government secretly enters and searches someone's home. The question here is when the government has to notify someone that a search has taken place. The Senate bill allowed seven days for the government to get back to the court and justify continued delay in providing notice of a sneak and peek search. The conference report, unfortunately, permits 30-day delays. Some have argued that the difference between a week and a month is not that big a deal. It is a big deal, Mr. President. We are talking about an important constitutional right, the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures. No one in this body should take that right lightly, and I think most people would agree that having to wait thirty days to find out your home has been secretly searched is a very big deal.

"So this conference report is inadequate and it should not be passed. I believe it will not pass. So let me talk for a minute about what happens next if, as I expect, the cloture motion fails. Do those who oppose the conference report want the Patriot Act to expire? Of course not. It is false to suggest that we do, and it is shameful to threaten that that is what will happen if the Senate does not approve this conference report. The only way that the Patriot Act will expire at the end of this year is if the proponents of the conference report, in this body or the other body, block alternative reauthori-

zation bills that can easily pass with widespread, bipartisan support. Now is not the time for brinkmanship or threats. Now is the time to do the right thing for the American people and for the constitutional rights and freedoms that make our country great.

"It is becoming more and more clear that this conference report cannot pass. So it is time to figure out what can pass. I submit that the Senate bill is the consensus that we seek. We should pass it again, as we did by unanimous consent before, and send it to the other body. And we should with one voice call on the House to pass that bill and send it to the President for signature. That should have happened months ago and it is what should happen today.

"Mr. President, I am very proud to be part of a bipartisan coalition working together to strengthen protections for civil liberties in the Patriot Act. I think the demonstration of bipartisanship on this floor over the last few days has been remarkable. I remember well a hearing on the SAFE Act in the last Congress when the Senator from Idaho, Senator Craig, was still on the Judiciary Committee. He said something that struck me at the time and has stayed with me since. I don't have his exact words here, but he basically said that the Patriot Act will not be reauthorized without addressing the issues we raised in the SAFE Act. He was making a prediction and a promise then. And soon I believe we will see that he was right."



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## Novak Confident Bush Knows CIA Leak

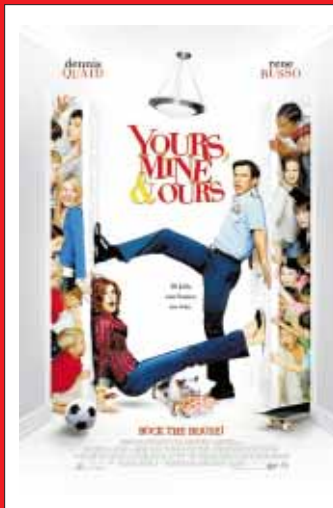
WASHINGTON — A Democrat Senator from New York State urged President Bush to reveal the identity of Bob Novak's source after the columnist said in a Q&A session that the president should know who leaked the name of covert CIA officer Valerie Plame.

Sen. Charles Schumer sent a letter pressuring the White House last Wednesday to share the identity of the leaker if Bush knows.

"You are in a position to clear this matter up quickly," Schumer wrote. "Unlike Mr. Novak, who can claim an interest in maintaining the confidentiality of his sources, there is no similar privilege arguably preventing you from sharing this information."

Novak first published the identity of Plame in 2003 a week after her husband, a former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, said the Bush administration lied about Iraq's weapons capabilities using faulty intelligence.

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## Time Runs Out For Cursed Colony

Five dozen Europeans from the slums of New York City set foot in Texas on Dec. 14, 1833, en route to a promised paradise on the Rio Grande.

John Charles Beales was an English expatriate, who moved to Mexico in 1804. A physician by profession, he was a late entrant in the race for Texas real estate. By the time he filed his application, the choice sites had long since been settled.

No knowledgeable empressario would have accepted the eight million acres awarded to the ignorant amateur in 1833. But Beales and his partner, another doctor named James Grant, were oblivious to the dangers between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers.

Dr. Beales went back east to recruit industrious Europeans for the doomed endeavor and signed up several families of English, Spanish and German refugees eager to swap the squalor of Manhattan for Texas' wide-open spaces. Fifty-nine men, women, and children set sail with their messiah on Nov. 11, 1833.

After a month at sea, they dropped anchor in Aransas Bay. Because the disorganized doctor had not arranged transportation for the next leg of the trip, his followers spent three wretched weeks on the windswept beach with only flimsy tents for shelter.

The party eventually proceeded inland by way of Goliad and San Antonio. To commemorate their crossing of the Nueces, these words were carved on a tree trunk: "The first colonists of the village of Dolores passed here on the 28th of February 1834."

Sixteen days later, the column of 15 carts and wagons reached the site the founder had named for his wife. Not far from the Rio Grande and 30 miles downriver from modern Eagle Pass, Dolores really was in the middle of nowhere.

Dr. Beales in his slick sales pitch had omitted any mention of the hot climate, poor soil, and constant threat of attack from hostile Indians. The pioneers hired Mexican mercenaries for protection against the red raiders, but nothing prevented their crops from turning to dust in the parched fields.

The cursed colony steadily shrank in size as bitter disappointment replaced boundless optimism. Scarcely a month went by without more defections as frightened families abandoned the hellish hamlet for the safety of the Mexican interior.

Late word of Santa Anna's invasion of Texas was the cue for the reluctant departure of the Dolores diehards. Last to leave were eight unattached men, the Horns and their two small sons and the Harrises with a three month old baby. On March 10, 1836, four days after the fall of the Alamo, they began the 200-mile trek to the coastal colony of San Patricio.

East of the Nueces and almost in sight of their destination, the evacuees were surprised by a Comanche war party. The warriors swiftly slaughtered nine of the 11 adult males and took the survivors captive.

Before breaking camp the next day, the Indians disposed of those considered excess baggage. The Harris infant was casually killed in front of the horrified mother, and an arrow-and-lance volley put a pair of wounded men out of their misery.

## This Week In Texas History

By Bartee Haile



The band of 400 Comanches resumed their raid with the two widows and the Horn brothers in tow. Riding past the scene of a skirmish between the rebels and government cavalry, one of the women recognized the remains of Beales' partner Dr. Grant.

Sometime that summer, Mrs. Horn was permanently separated from her boys. Except for fleeting glimpses on the trail, the heartbroken mother never saw them again.

Mexican traders bought the freedom of Mrs. Harris in June 1837, but the capricious Comanches rejected their equally generous offer for her companion. "Now left a lonely exile in the bonds of savage slavery," wrote Mrs. Horn, "haunted by night and by day with the image of my murdered husband and tortured continually by an undying solicitude for my dear little ones, my life was little else than unmitigated misery."

Three months later in New Mexico, a wealthy American asked the Comanches if their white captive was for sale. Told that she was, he approached the forlorn figure.

"You are the woman I have heard of," the well-dressed merchant announced. "I suppose you would be happy to get away from these people."

Mrs. Horn stammered she would be eternally grateful for her liberty. Without another word, the stranger turned on his heel and walked away leaving the pitiful prisoner to ponder his intentions.

For three nerve-racking days, Mrs. Horn waited in vain for her would-be rescuer to return. She had all but given up hope, when a second businessman paid a chief's ransom for her freedom.

Her health ruined by the 18-month ordeal, Mrs. Horn died soon after her dramatic deliverance. Her sons presumably lived out their lives as white Comanches.

As for Dr. John Charles Beales, he was conveniently absent from Texas when his ill-fated colony collapsed. He never returned and reportedly practiced medicine in New York until his death in the 1870s.

Bartee Haile welcomes your comments, questions and suggestions at [haile@pdq.net](mailto:haile@pdq.net) or 1912 Meadow Creek Dr., Pearland, TX 77581.

## There's No Quick Pass To Security

'Tis the season to wait impatiently in lines. And among the lines that people complain about the most are the ones at airport security. It wasn't always like that. If you summon the ghost of Christmas Past and go all the way back to a year or two ago, most people were saying things like, "If it's a little inconvenient, if I have to show up at the airport a little early, if I have to take off my shoes, it's a small price to pay for being safe." I guess most people have forgotten those words. Now, you're more likely to hear things like, "I can't believe how slow the security people are," or "They actually made me take off my shoes," or "Why can't they just search the people who look like terrorists?"

Well soon, those impatient travelers may not have to wait in long lines with everybody else. Both the Transportation Security Administration and private companies are developing a kind of quick E-Z pass. The way it would work is that the customer would voluntarily undergo a background check, an iris and fingerprint scan, and probably have some secret code word like their pet's maiden name. Then, they'll still have to go through the metal detector at the airport, but their search won't be as thorough and they probably won't have to be "wanded."

It's being hailed as the answer to frequent fliers' prayers. I'm not so sure. Personally, I'd like to have more comfortable seats or some air conditioning even when the plane's on the ground.

First of all, don't the government and private companies have enough personal information on each of us without our voluntarily giving out more? Theoretically, the line with pre-screened "E-Z pass people" will be shorter than the regular line. But if this thing really works the way its proponents say it will, won't just about everybody join in? Then we'll have two lines: a long line of "special" people who don't want to wait in the regular long line right next to them.

If we're still worried about bad guys sneaking on planes, isn't this just another opportunity to make it easier for them? If there's a way of faking a background check or an iris scan, isn't there a chance that the "wrong people" will figure it out? Do you really feel secure that no terrorist will ever be able to get one of these Quick N' E-Z passes?

This reminds me of the recent decision to allow people to fly with small scissors or tools. I guess the reasoning was that the odds were great that



Modern Times  
By  
Lloyd  
Garver

a terrorist could do any real damage with a scissors less than 4" long or a screwdriver less than 7". (They don't sound all that small to me. How big is a "box-cutter" anyway)? Also, even if it's a minor risk, why take it? How important are those scissors and screwdrivers to passengers in-flight? Can't they repair their glasses or make paper dolls after they land?

And how much money is being spent on developing these Quick Passes? Is this the best way to spend Transportation Security Administration dollars? Wouldn't it be better spent on things like examining cargo or hiring more inspectors?

Excited proponents of the I.D. Pass say that its use wouldn't just be limited to airplanes. It could be used anywhere that there are security lines and searches: ballgames, concerts, parties at rich, paranoids' houses, etc. I don't know about you, but I haven't found security to be an enormous inconvenience when going to a concert or a sports event. Instead of trying to perfect this I.D. card, I'd rather they concentrated on a good sound system and clean bathrooms.

So, it's not that this thing is necessarily a bad idea, but like so many ideas, it seems like something we don't need. Get to the airport a little early, and wear shoes that go off and on easily. Don't look at the long line as a nuisance. Look at it as a demonstration of how much people care about your being safe. Maybe you should see it as a social experience, too. Make new friends with the others in line. And pretty soon, possibly you'll be saying again, "It's a little inconvenient, but at least I feel safer." And maybe you'll meet somebody who thinks you have really sexy feet.

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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# Santa Summit Prompts Greenland 'No-Fly Zone'

(This column was printed in December, 2001)

What makes e-mail great is that it's so darned easy to use. For example: If you come across something that absolutely HAS TO BE SEEN by everyone you know — like say a picture of a cat doing chin-ups — you can simply click a button and send it to 100 people. Or in the case of my favorite aunt who still hasn't mastered this process, you can send that very same knee-slapping picture to one person — such as your favorite nephew — 100 times.

The reason I bring this up is because, if not for e-mail, I sincerely doubt someone from Midland, Mich., would've gone



By  
**Ned  
Hickson**  
*Siuslaw News*

to the trouble of sending me a photo of 176 Santas standing on the deck of a fishing boat off the coast of Greenland (And YES, this is primarily the kind of e-mail I get.)

I should mention that we were one of 50 newspapers that received the photo, which was part of an announcement letting people know that classes at the Charles W. Howard Santa Claus School had come to an end.

Now, opening my e-mail at 5:45 in the morning to find a pack of wild Santas waving champagne glasses at me from the bow of a fishing boat was enough to make me re-start my computer AND swear-off watching any more claymation Christmas cartoons after 9 p.m. However, it wasn't enough to keep me from visiting the school's website in order to find out the connection between Michigan, 176 wild Santas, and what must've been the strangest cruise ship experience this side of Orlando.

What I discovered was that the photo was taken during the first-ever Santa Summit in Northern Greenland, where men and women from 13 different countries — including the U.S. — came together to exchange ideas, drink too much, and get stuck in the chimneys of local villagers. This would explain why all 176 Santas were apparently confined to a large fishing boat and taken out to sea.

It also explains why Greenland, a peace-loving country that has no military of its own and proudly proclaims it has never waged war on anyone, recently passed a resolution allowing persons dressed as Santa to be attacked by snow dogs and/or harpooned on sight.

No questions asked.

Given that all three of my questions had been answered, the safe thing to do would have been to delete the photo and get back to work. But as we all know, the

Internet can be a dangerous place, particularly for those who are impressionable, unsupervised, and not facing a deadline. As a result, I discovered some interesting mathematical equations about Santa's yearly trip around the world.

To begin with, Santa actually has 31 hours to work with on Christmas Eve, thanks to the different time zones and the rotation of the earth. Considering that Santa is able to deliver an estimated 91.8 million presents in that amount of time, I really have no business whining about going to Wal-Mart and having my dozen or so presents wrapped for me while I sit across the street drinking coffee at Starbucks. In addition, for Santa to make all of his stops by Christmas morning, he must fly at speeds in excess of 650 miles per second — or roughly 3,000 times the speed of light.

Given that the air resistance would be similar to a spacecraft re-entering the earth's atmosphere, we can safely assume that Rudolf and the rest of Santa's reindeer would burst into flames and cause a sonic boom loud enough to knock the top ornament off of every Christmas tree on the planet.

Santa, meanwhile, would be pinned to the back of his sleigh by a gravitational force about 17,500 times stronger than Earth's gravity.

Of course, this is all just speculation.

Odds are, he might not make it past Greenland.

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

— Guest Column —

## Time To Stop Beating Up On Illegal Immigrants

By **JAMES C. HARRINGTON**  
DIRECTOR, TEXAS CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT

President George W. Bush noticeably stiffened his stance on immigration issues during his recent speaking foray along the border with Mexico. As is his current custom, Bush appeared in non-public forums — a military base in Arizona and with border patrol officials in El Paso, wearing a green agent's jacket.

Bush talked about "hardening" the border and imprisoning people who enter the country illegally. He shifted away from his earlier talk of regularizing illegal immigration with a guest worker plan.

Bush's trip occurred two weeks after it came to light that soldiers from Ft. Bliss were patrolling the border in Arizona and New Mexico, assisting immigration agents. They dodged the issue of using American military for internal law enforcement by claiming they were gathering intelligence, not arresting anyone — and learning lessons to apply in Iraq.

Bush's visit also played into the agenda of the Minutemen, who, amid considerable fanfare, have deployed themselves along the same areas visited by the president. The Minutemen want to seal off the border, either with armed presence or an impenetrable 1800-mile fence along the border. Some in Congress support this unworkable idea.

Bush's change of pace doesn't help a bit. No matter how much the border is "hardened," people will continue to cross because their economic need is so great. People simply cannot survive in Mexico. Mexicans receive \$1 billion/year from people working in the United States. This is Mexico's largest source of income — even greater than from its oil and petroleum industry. It's also easier on Mexico to have some ten million of its people working in the United States, than face possible upheaval there in they were unable to migrate.

The other part of the equation is that the American economy is dependent of inexpensive labor — construc-

tion, agriculture, and the service industry, in particular.

The immigration problem will not be resolved until the severe economic dislocation between the United States and Mexico is lessened. All that "hardening" the border does is increase the peril for undocumented people coming into this country, forcing them to walk through the desert's extreme heat by day and freezing temperatures at night, without water. This year alone, some 500 persons will perish during the trek.

President Bush's recent pronouncements dodge the phenomenal problems at the heart of illegal immigration. They do nothing to move the United States and Mexico toward really tackling perhaps the greatest economic crises facing the northern hemisphere, made worse by NAFTA. They reflect a lack of political will.

Playing to the anti-immigration and nativist forces in this country doesn't help. Nor does it help if the president is simply trying to distract attention from other issues, such as Iraq and rapidly declining public support. It would be extremely difficult for Bush to convince his business and political allies to undertake the kind of dramatic economic re-structuring without which there can never be meaningful immigration reform.

Politicians are short-term and short-vision leaders. Their survival generally motivates them, not necessarily the long-term good of the country. Added to this mix is the fact undocumented immigrants don't form a political constituency since they cannot vote. This makes it easy to scapegoat them.

This country needs to commit itself to real economic structural reform and address illegal immigration in that context. We don't need political grandstanding and beating up on people whose only crime is to try to survive.

*The Texas Civil Rights Project, a nonprofit foundation, promotes civil rights and economic and racial justice throughout Texas.*

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Dear W. Leon Smith,  
Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson advises me that the Department of Defense takes allegations of abuse among the its 68,000 detainees seriously. She says that, as of late last year, 71 of 187 abuse allegations investigated were found to be substantiated. She writes, "As a result, 36 courts-martial have been conducted and 115 service members punished."  
Torture has been established as U. S. government policy by the very highest level. The President is threatening to veto bills that prohibit torture. The Vice President is lobbying Congress NOT to prohibit

torture. The Attorney General has invented an absurdly narrow definition of the word "torture" — so the government can claim it does not torture.  
Therefore, the pertinent question (apparently not asked by Sen. Hutchinson) is: why are the enlisted personnel at the bottom who are ordered to inflict the pain being punished?  
Why are PFC Lyndie England and other enlisted personnel punished, while those at the top (Cheney, Bush, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft and Gonzales) who require the torture walk free?  
Mike Ford, Austin

# The Gnat in the Vat

Canadians hate American Lutherans.  
I know it sounds absurd, but it's true.

Why?  
Because Mike Myers and Jim Carrey made mockeries of Dr. Seuss' most beloved works, *The Cat in the Hat* and *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*.

From here on, if any Canadian attempts to "deconstruct" the work of any American Lutherans, they should be thrown out in the street and shot—

—um, that is, shot *with a thousand pounds of lutefisk!*

(Lutefisk is "a repulsive gelatinous fish-like dish that tasted of soap and gave off an odor that would gag a goat," according to humorist Garrison Keillor.)

And, so, therefore, we must reinforce our northern borders to protect our children from Canuck comedians who desecrate children's literature written by American Lutherans.

"Ha! Ha!" you laugh, but if any network executive big-wig decided that this year *A Charlie Brown Christmas* won't be airing after 40 straight years, white people would riot in suburbia!

It would make D-Day look like Black Friday at the South Pole!

I love That '60s Show because if there ever was an antidote to the "War on Christmas," it'd be *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

If we really took the message of Charles Schulz's classic seriously, we'd drag the heads of these multinational corporations into the street and shoot them for continuously commercializing the birth of Jesus Christ—

—uh, that is, shoot them *with a thousand pounds of lutefisk!*

I'm with Pope Benedict on this one:

## The Rubber Cement Index

By Nathan Diebenow



"In today's consumer society, this time (of the year) is unfortunately subjected to a sort of commercial 'pollution' that is in danger of altering its true spirit, which is characterized by meditation, sobriety and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate," he said two Sundays ago.

Now that we all agree on the potential for terrorist threats from Canada, what should we do when a children's book author is executed inside the United States?

What about one that devoted the last decade or so of his life to brokering peace deals among violent street gangs?

What about one that was nominated for the Nobel Prize for peace and literature a total of five times?

Well, in the case of Stanley "Tookie" William, we mourn the loss of a peacemaker who fought gang violence, racism, and economic injustice.

We can clearly see that by not stopping Williams' execution for these three simple reasons, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger hates children, and you know what we do with people who hate children?

"We shoot them *with a thousand pounds of lutefisk?*" you ask.

Not exactly, but thanks for listening. Actually, what we do is demand that the State abolish the death penalty or face a fate worse than lutefisk...

— like 24-7 karaoke marathons coast to coast!!!

Remember, kids: governors are more likely to kill people than action movies.

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