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**Interview With Peggy and Gene Helmick-Richardson**

PROFESSIONAL STORYTELLERS Peggy and Gene Helmick-Richardson act out a story involving Gene's beard at a coffee shop in Richardson. The couple based in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex has been performing together as professional storytellers for the last 10 years around the country.

— Staff Photo By Nathan Diebenow

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# The Higher Education Act: Increasing Opportunity For 40 Years

WASHINGTON — This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Higher Education Act, the piece of legislation that created the federal government's large scale involvement in funding postsecondary education for lower income citizens. By most measurements, the results of that involvement have been revolutionary, with the number of colleges, universities, and vocational schools growing rapidly, and the percentage of Americans with some higher education expanding greatly as well.

In 1960, 7.7 percent of Americans held a bachelor's degree or higher; in 2000, that number was 24.4 percent. In 2002, a majority of the population — 55.2 percent — had attended some college, while in 1967 only 22.9 percent had done so. According to the Census Bureau, the increase in educational achievement between the late sixties and the early part of this decade accounts for 93 percent of the average gain in family income over that period.

For more information on federal student aid, for tips on how to establish high expectations for students as early as middle school, and for

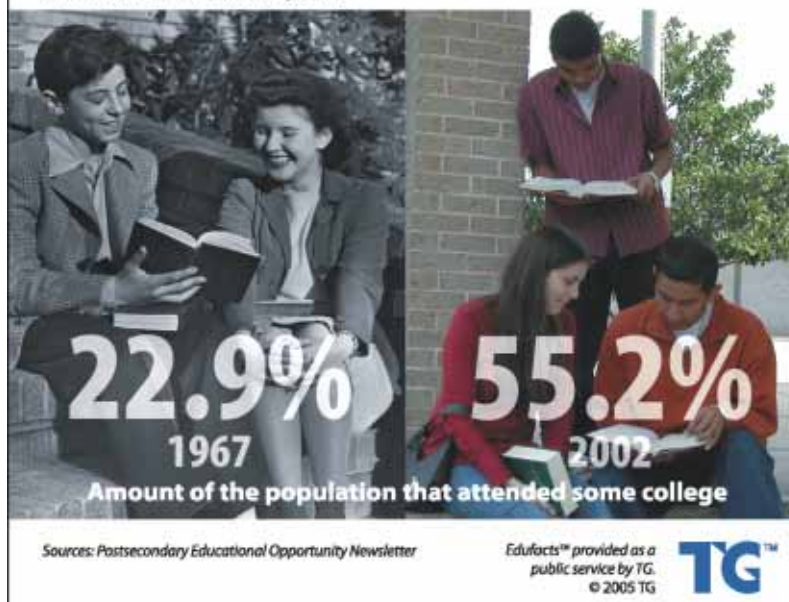
assistance in planning for higher education academically and financially, visit <[www.AIE.org](http://www.AIE.org)>. TG provides this Web site as a public service to help all families and students achieve their educational and career dreams.

\* Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Postsecondary Educational Opportunity Newsletter

*About TG — TG is a public, nonprofit corporation that helps create access to higher education for millions of families and students through its role as an administrator of the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP). As a public service, TG provides Edufacts, a publication containing current information about education issues, on a monthly basis. Edufacts is one of the many ways in which TG promotes awareness of education issues, advising the public on national and state trends in education and student aid, and serving as a premier source of information.*

## The Higher Education Act: Increasing opportunity for 40 years

The results of the Higher Education Act have been revolutionary, as the percentage of Americans with some higher education has more than doubled over the last 40 years.



# Disaster Recovery Aid Exceeds \$564.6 Million For Hurricane Rita

AUSTIN— Families and individuals who suffered damage from Hurricane Rita have received more than \$564,654,596 in assistance from state, federal, local and voluntary agencies. These agencies are working in partnership to continue to help affected Texas residents.

Recovery services summary as of Dec. 16, 2005 10:30 a.m.:

- 477,319 individuals have registered for Individual Assistance.
- \$549,365,396 has been approved through the Individuals and Household

Program. Of that, FEMA has provided \$484,222,400 in Individual Assistance and \$65,142,995 in Other Needs Assistance.

- \$15,289,200 in loans has been approved by the Small Business Administration (SBA).
- 347,630 people have visited the Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs). Individuals affected by Hurricane Rita may go to any DRC to have questions answered about disaster assistance in person.
- 332,449 home inspections have been

requested. Ninety-four percent of those submitted have been completed. There are 232 inspectors in the field.

· 84 percent of the debris from Hurricane Rita has been removed. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), cities and counties have hauled away an estimated 7.1 million cubic yards of debris with 1.3 million cubic yards pending removal.

· 3,119 requests for travel trailers have been received. Some 1,808 units are occupied. Accessible units with a wider entrance, handrails, and low-step

tub entry also are available.

· \$353,989,239 in Public Assistance has been obligated by the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The funds will be used by the State of Texas to reimburse local governments and agencies for eligible and documented debris removal, temporary sheltering, interim housing and emergency protective measures associated with Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

· Jan. 11, 2006: Final day to register for assistance with FEMA.

# More Blacks Than Whites Exposed To Pollution

CHICAGO — Black Americans are still 79 percent more likely than whites to reside in areas near suspected health dangers related to industrial pollution, according to an Associated Press analysis.

The Associated Press found that little has changed 12 years after President Clinton ordered federal agencies to seek "environmental justice" by reducing exposure to pollution for Americans

who are minorities and poor.

The news service, using 2000 data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Census Bureau, to compare health risks among neighborhoods and to study the racial and economic status of the people who breathe America's most unhealthy air.

The Bush administration has said the goal is to protect every American facing the highest health risks from air pol-

lution, not just a handful of specific racial and ethnic groups.

An EPA official said that the agency has been choosing its enforcement initiatives to maximize the impact on minority and poor communities. Other officials say industrial air pollution has been cut steadily over the past 30 years due to improved regulations and technology.

Environmentalists point to historical

land use decisions and local development policies as causes of the health inequalities minorities face.

At the same time, legal recourse for these citizens is limited. Under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, plaintiffs must prove the alleged polluters intentionally discriminated against them. The Supreme Court has ruled that private citizens can't sue to make federal agencies enforce their rules.



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Telephone (All Departments) — (254) 675-3634

Fax No. — (254) 675-4090 • Email: [news@lonestaricon.com](mailto:news@lonestaricon.com)

Web Newspaper: [www.lonestaricon.com](http://www.lonestaricon.com)

**EDITORIAL**  
Associate Editors:  
Don M. Fisher  
Nathan Diebenow  
Reporters:  
Deborah Mathews  
Michael Harvey

**ADVERTISING**  
Melanie Harvey  
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Allison Pinkerton

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& EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
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# Unity Tales

## Storytellers Work To Heal Society

By NATHAN DIEBENOW  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

RICHARDSON — Storytelling is serious business, though most people tend to lump it in the corner as child's play. But for Peggy and Gene Helmick-Richardson, stories are not only how they make their living but they are also the tools in which they use to make the world better place.

For the last 10 years, the couple has shared their gifts with audiences from children to criminals. While they haven't quite made it full-time professionally, the Helmick-Richardsons are very active in the storytelling circuit here in Texas while holding down day jobs.

At a coffee shop in Richardson, THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST'S Nathan Diebenow recently met with Gene, a Ph.D. in etymology and organic pest control expert, and Peggy, a free-lance writer with a master's degree in journalism, to talk about the importance of stories, the tricks of their trade, and the news story that they remember the most from this year.

.....  
ICONOCLAST: Tell me a little about yourself and how you became storytellers.

GENE: Well, I've been a storyteller for most of my life. I come from a long line of storytellers. My grandfather loved to tell stories. My dad would tell tales, but I began professionally telling stories in the 70s at Georgia Agrirama in Tifton, Ga.

They needed someone to tell ghost stories at their cane grinding parties, and I was an obvious candidate because I had grown a long beard for the bicentennial of our nation in '76. I started telling ghost stories and found it to be a lot of fun. I later worked at The Homeplace 1850 at the Land Between the Lakes (a TVA historic site) in Tennessee.

ICONOCLAST: And your beard became grayer as you told more and more ghost stories.

GENE: Absolutely. In this very spot last year, I was Santa Claus' younger brother, Clyde Claus. You've never heard of me. It's really the pits to have an over-achieving elder sibling. When Nick got sainted, that was the end of it.

Actually it's a lot of fun telling stories. I do it for fun and then Peggy was kind of my publicist and worked with me in my storytelling career for a long time as a behind-the-scenes sort of agent or handler, if you will.

PEGGY: And I got involved doing storytelling with Gene in 2000. Gene had been telling about five years at a drug and alcohol treatment center in Dallas twice a month. He worked with another female storyteller, and she moved to Albuquerque, N.M., so Gene needed to find another woman teller. We started

hunting. You know, there are a lot of requirements you have when you tell stories in an alcohol setting.

I wouldn't have told stories to save my life before then. I wouldn't have gone up on stage. I wouldn't have told to more than three or four people because I was just way too shy, but Gene and Suzie, the other teller, basically told me I needed to get over it because they couldn't find another woman to tell. I knew the stories. I knew the setting and the issues that were having to be dealt with telling there, so I told one story the first time, two stories the second time, and by the end of that time, I was bit. I'm no longer shy. I'm no longer afraid to get in front of people and Gene and I have told to audiences over 1,000 now. I don't think twice about it.

ICONOCLAST: So it's grown substantially since the 1970s.

GENE: Well, the 70s was kind of the renaissance of storytelling. There's an organization called NAPPS, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling, which was a mouthful, and now there's the NSN, the National Storytelling Network. They're in Jonesboro, Tenn., founded in the 70s. Since that time the National Storytelling Festival has grown into a huge affair. About 20 years ago, the Tejas Storytelling Association started the Tejas Storytelling Festival in Denton. We've been intimately involved in that because I was site director and Peggy was the publicist, and we've had a lot of fun with the Tejas Storytelling Festival, which is coming up, as a matter of fact.

PEGGY: March 31 through April 1.

GENE: In Denton, Texas, at the Civic Center Park. Come and bring a few hundred of your closest friends. It's quite a festival. The main venue seats 1,000 people. We have two other venues. We use around 3,000 chairs and eight tents. It's quite a big deal.

ICONOCLAST: So for the rest of the year, what do you guys do? Who uses your storytelling services?

GENE: We tell at a number of venues regularly. Of course, the Genesis Women's Shelter is one of our regular stops. Pro bono. Homeward Bound which is the Trinity Center for drug and alcohol rehab. We tell at the men's unit one Wednesday night and women's unit another Wednesday night. Those are also free.

We have done some work in prisons over in Fort Worth out in Winnsboro. Telling in prisons is one of our interests because you've got a captive audience. They can't leave.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs)

PEGGY: Actually, they are the most appreciative audience we've ever had. Most people say, "Are you really afraid of telling in prisons?" and I say, "No, I'm



Interview with  
Peggy and Gene Helmick-Richardson

more afraid of the guards than I am the prisoners." They truly appreciate it. I don't think they see enough kindness, and when they know that we are there because we want to be there for them, they really appreciate it. It's the one place where we've got a standing ovation before we've started. That kind of ripped my heart out the first time.

ICONOCLAST: That kind of reminds me of Johnny Cash, so that makes a lot of sense to me.

PEGGY: Our bread and butter where we earn most of our money in storytelling is in schools and libraries.

ICONOCLAST: Is telling stories in public schools become more or less lucrative as the years have progressed?

PEGGY: It was actually becoming more lucrative. We were seriously considering doing it full-time and not worrying about the day jobs, but with the economy the way it is, there are a lot of professional storytellers who were working full-time who have had to get side jobs just to support their storytelling career.

ICONOCLAST: How is it an economy thing?

PEGGY: The libraries and schools have all had their budgets cut.

GENE: Every storyteller left behind.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs) Wait, I shouldn't be laughing.

GENE: We truly have little money in the budget, in discretionary funds. The whole education system has cut back—libraries, schools, everything from YMCAs to anything where there's children involved.

ICONOCLAST: Are you seeing more of the funding going toward standardized testing and resource materials? So you guys are feeling the pinch there with that policy/value choice?

PEGGY: Yes.

GENE: I'm not sure where all the money is going, but I do know that everybody's budget is tight and they just aren't hiring. When you have to cut the outside programs, the field trips, the storytellers, we're all in that mix.

PEGGY: Well, even within the schools themselves, a lot of the schools that used to have a fulltime librarian, you know have two schools sharing one librarian. Some of the schools are cutting the art departments, the music departments. There's just not that much value placed on anything that they cannot see a direct relationship to the test.

ICONOCLAST: So are there any groups you won't work with?

GENE: (laughs)

PEGGY: Yes, as a matter of fact. I'll give you an example of something that happened. This man called saying he wanted us to tell before a large group of Boy Scouts. Well, I have to admit I kind of gritted my teeth on the Boy Scouts because I have problems with their stance on homosexuals, but I don't see any reason to penalize the boys for that. And they can be fun. The first thing they want is ghost stories. We've been hired before to tell ghost stories to Boy Scouts, so since it was a fall gig, I assumed he wanted ghost stories. He said, "No, absolutely not." "Okay, folk tales?" "Yeah,

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## • UNITY TALES ... Continued From Page 3

that would be nice.” So I started listing off some folk tales that we tell that I’d recommend, and he was like, “No, I don’t like any of those.” “Well, okay, they’re popular with the kids, but if they’re not what you want...,” so I said, “We did this whole program for a touring Smithsonian exhibit on prairie a couple of years ago, and it’s a whole hour-long session of stories about living on the prairie. How about that one? It’s a nice educational but entertaining program.” He said, “Well, what kind of stories do you tell on that?” “Well, one of them is about two kids who live during the Depression who steal a watermelon, and even though they never get caught, they do get punished.” He said, “I don’t want you telling that.” “Why not?” “It’ll encourage the boys to steal.” At which point I told him, I didn’t think we could work with him. He asked if I could recommend anyone else, and I said no. (laughs) There wasn’t a storyteller in the Metroplex that I disliked that much.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs)

PEGGY: Any group that I think that is closed-minded like that or anything dogmatically religious, anything that is pushing an agenda especially that I don’t agree with. I mean, I won’t sell us out.

ICONOCLAST: Talking about selling out, you have a journalism background, and I remember you mentioned at the Teaching Peace in Texas Schools Conference that advertising agencies hire storytellers to teach their staff how to tell stories to make better advertisements. I think you guys said you wouldn’t work for any agency, but —

PEGGY: In all honesty, it would have to depend on who the client was. If it was a client that I felt like was actually promoting something that there’s a need for, that is — how do I phrase this so I don’t get myself in trouble with certain storytellers who have sold out (laughs). There have been storytellers that we love and absolutely love who have gone and worked with ad departments with certain companies that I would not have allowed my shadow to fall on their door.

ICONOCLAST: I know that there are ad agencies that work only with socially responsible and environmentally friendly.

PEGGY: Sure. If Green Mountain Energy contacted us, well, yeah, we can talk.

ICONOCLAST: Right. I just wanted to know where that line was.

GENE: I think the line is drawn at truth and of course everybody’s perception of truths is a little difference but there are certain fundamental truths that Sam King said, “The only true profession is to save the earth.” And that’s kind of where we stand. If it’s not going to save the earth, then I don’t want to be apart of it. That’s hard rock mining companies, oil, tobacco, some of the things that are more destructive to humans and human nature. Stories are dangerous things. They’re powerful things, and if you can tell a story and have people believe you, you can motivate people to do all kinds of good things or all kinds of bad things. Hitler told his story about the Aryan race and the purity and all that—people believed this story, and it was just a story.

PEGGY: I’ve heard Gene tell stories—outrageous lies. There is this classic story of The Blow-Dried Rabbit about a dead rabbit that another pet digs up and

they think their pet killed it. It’s absolutely outrageous, and I’ve heard Gene tell this story before and people come up to him afterwards and go, “Did that really happen?” So yeah, people believe you because one of the things you work on as a storyteller is having a report with the audience.

One of the big differences between storytelling and theater is you want the house lights up, you want to be able to look them in the eye when you’re telling so that they can relate to you, and you can easily get people to believe what you’re saying. So you have a moral responsibility to be sure you are representing yourself and your story.

ICONOCLAST: On the subject of your audience, what are some of the differences in how men and women respond to stories? Are there any differences?

GENE: Absolutely. Telling at the Trinity Center women’s unit one week and the men’s unit on another week, there’s a marked difference between the way the men and the women respond to stories and the kind of stories we tell. Men are really big on the hero’s quest, the stories of Sir Gawaine—

ICONOCLAST: Warriors?

GENE: Yeah, warrior heros. The stories and the narratives define the way they see their life. They are linear and narrative, and on the other hand, the women respond much better to the long relationship type stories.

PEGGY: And the fairy tales.

GENE: The Stolen Mare. The story’s subtleties of manipulation like The Lion’s Whisker.

PEGGY: Or the emotional aspect to the stories.

GENE: Yeah. Men are more action-oriented. I think that’s hardwiring in that defective chromosome we have. I think that goes back to that women are the creative force and men don’t—I mean, they’re stories. There’s myths back to the dawn of time about how creation came into being and those original myths almost always included the Great Mother, the one who gives birth, whereas men can’t give birth, no matter how much they may try. They can’t give birth to anything, and that’s a fundamental biological fact reflected in the stories which is in turn either mirrors or engenders male behavior.

ICONOCLAST: What about between social classes of people? Is there a noticeable difference in how they react to stories?

GENE: Cultural, I think, more than class. Cultural stories, the Native American stories tend to be a little different than the African stories which tend to be a lot different than the East Indian stories.

PEGGY: I think there’s so many differences. You can even get preferred stories by age, even though the people are of different classes. But we’re telling at the Bathhouse for the next three weekends, Thursdays through Sundays. Gene and I go every Saturday. We’re alternating with other tellers. The first night, the audience response was ho-hum. The storytellers were dynamite. Last night when we did our program, the audience loved everything. The audience on the first night was a much older audience, and I run into that a lot. Sometimes Gene and I will run in front of an audience and take a look at it and go, “Oh, damn, we’re changing our stories!” We can tell just by looking.

GENE: Socio-economically, there is a lot of difference. I mean, if I was telling stories about outhouses to a Plano audience, they wouldn’t know what I was talking about anyway except if they had a book knowledge or a general feeling for what an outhouse is. But if I was telling in Jonesboro, Tenn., a lot of people will have first-hand experience with their grandma’s outhouse. That’s a different story. They understand it.

Likewise, Ed Stivender does a wonderful rap. He’s a white Catholic guy. The kids relate to the rap music and his respectfully mocking them (laughs) or his ineptitude at it.

PEGGY: I see the biggest difference is telling in metropolitan areas versus small towns. If I get a vote in, I’d much prefer small town audience. You get better turn out, better response, and both adults and children know how to listen better. I think it’s because in metropolitan areas, we are just bombarded constantly, that our system kind of shuts down. We don’t pay as much attention. We shut out stuff to keep our brains from getting overloaded. I can get people in small towns to give me feedback afterwards than I can audiences in cities. They understand more of what we are trying to communicate. Audiences in big cities are looking for laser light shows behind us. You know, storytelling is a basic skill, and it’s very simple, so all the complexity is in the words and presentation. Nothing else. People are disappointed quite often because there’s no glitz.

ICONOCLAST: Well, what are some dos and don’ts for aspiring storytellers?

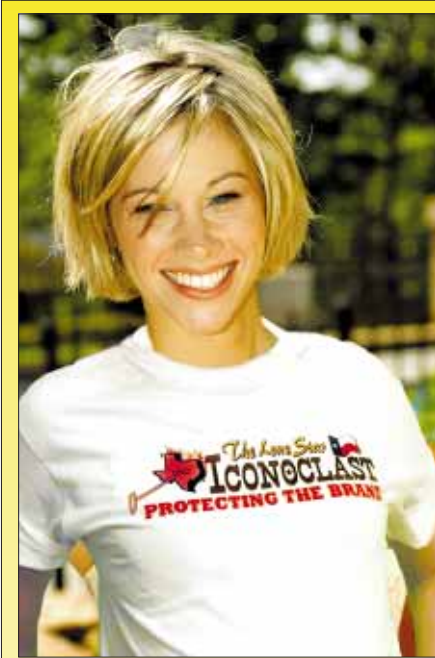
GENE: First of all, the very mechanics of storytelling is not reading the story. A lot of times I get asked, “What story are you going to read?” “Oh, we’re not reading. It’s storytelling and that’s a different thing.” As one kid says, “Yeah, it’s kind of like having a movie in your head. You draw the images and the kids can see it. When I say, “Okay there was this elephant,” suddenly, you see this elephant. “This elephant is pink with yellow polka dots holding an umbrella on a highwire.” All of a sudden the kid sees this. Well every kid can see it, but every kids sees a different thing. Some have a circus tent. Some have it outside. Some just see the elephant. Some see it as a cartoon. Some see it as real.

So the power of story is that it’s a told, descriptive tale, not read. Once you put the words down on paper, they’re frozen and fossilized, and the oral tradition is that you speak it. Last night while I was telling a story, Full Moon Over Bethlehem, which is a story I tell every Christmas, it came out a lot different than when I told it the night before in rehearsals. What was it?

PEGGY: Five minutes longer.

GENE: Five minutes longer, and so a told tale is something that comes straight from your heart through your mouth and to the other person’s ear and into their heart. That kind of communication is different and so that’s it. The reason I said all this is to tell people is that if they want to tell stories, don’t memorize. Don’t read them. Just know what went on and just tell them in your own words. Make it your story, and that way the story becomes part of you and you can tell it anytime you want because you know what happened in your head.

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• **UNITY TALES ... Continued From Page 4**

It's, once again, hardwired in the human psyche since Caveman Og narrowly escaped being eaten by a saber-toothed tiger. He came back and he told people: "I was out there and there was a saber-toothed tiger and he nearly got me! But I jumped out of the way and I threw a rock and he ran away." And that story was his. Now his son who heard the story went and told his playmates, and those playmates grew up and they told about Og the friend of their great uncle. That story went on and got bigger, and everything got more dangerous and there was death and blood. That's how stories evolved, and every story is somebody's story.

Ask a storyteller a question and you get a dissertation.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs)

PEGGY: I know when you asked that, I thought, "Oh, how long do you have?" (laughs) One of the things that is important to remember is that it's not about you. It's about the story.

GENE: Oops! (laughs) I preach too much. Peggy claims I preach too much, that I try to explain the story. "Now what does that story really mean?" It's the story of the Buddhist teacher. He was telling these obscure stories, and a student raised his hand, and said, "Master!" "Yes, what is it?" "You're always telling us these stories, but you never tell us what they really mean." And the master smiled and said, "Would you like this piece of fruit?" The student says, "Sure!" And the teacher said, "You want I should chew it up for you?" (laughs)

ICONOCLAST: Right. That's a good one.

GENE: So I chew my stories up and beat them to death: "So now you know what this means? The tiger was really your addiction!"

ICONOCLAST: (laughs)

PEGGY: By this time, I'm sitting behind him and jerking on his pants, going, "Shut up!"

GENE: "Let the people enjoy the story. They'll get it." Trust your audience.

PEGGY: A lot of times you don't see what's coming until you tell a story. The Stolen Bairn is one I get asked to tell a lot. It's about a woman whose baby is stolen by fairies and she has to earn it back. There's no Prince Charming. There are men and women who help her both equally. But in the end, she's the one who has to do the work. It is one of my favorite stories. It's very empowering for women. But I have had it trigger issues with women that have turned them into basket cases.

ICONOCLAST: Really?

PEGGY: Yeah, and it comes totally unexpected. Here's this story that I'm telling to uplift women, but instead, I have just ripped them up.

ICONOCLAST: Why is that?

GENE: It's the thought of having your child taken away.

ICONOCLAST: So they take the story wrong?

GENE: No wrong. It's just the way they take it.

PEGGY: They internalize it, and turn it into what they think it means. The first time that happened to me, I thought, "Oh my God, I just did this person damage!" But then I discovered I wasn't doing damage. You go into it with conscious awareness because there are some stories that I've read that I went,

"Oh, no, that is not a story to tell here. Period. End of discussion." But there are a lot of stories where you can see the benefit of telling some place you don't see the reaction you get coming, and sometimes, you just have to open up, accept it, and let it be because at that point, I'm putting my opinion on the way they've responded, and as it turned out, one time it really ripped a woman open, and I found out later that by doing that, it actually did a great deal of good.

ICONOCLAST: Because it exposed that inner thing.

GENE: Let the healing begin!

PEGGY: At one point, you have to be judgmental and careful about what stories you can tell. Once the stories are out there, you have done the best job you can in telling the stories you think will be of greatest benefit. Then you have to cease being judgmental and allow the listener to take that story, internalize it, and take from it what they need. It's not my job to decide what it is they need of the story. It's up to them.

ICONOCLAST: So there are stories you won't tell, for example to children in public schools.

PEGGY: Oh, yeah, one of my favorite stories that I tell at the treatment center, and I actually told it at a prison once, and the guy took me aside afterwards and said, "You can't tell that one." I didn't know in prisons you cannot — in a federal penitentiary, I can tell it, but in a state one, I couldn't — use swear words. Well, that's the whole impact of the story. Basically, you have to use the word "shit" in the story or you lose the whole impact of the story. But especially when I tell it to men, they see this 50-year-old woman, and they instantly go, "Isn't that sweet? I'm not going to open up to her. I don't want to use the words I feel like expressing." So after I tell this story, it's like, "Wow, she said that word. I guess I can be a little bit more open." And it's a funny story, so it loosens them up.

GENE: It gets back to the idea of gender appropriate, age appropriate, culturally appropriate stories, and the way you do that is to have a large pallet to draw from. Your story range should include everything from little mime stories for little bitty kids to long, epic adventures to difficult to tell personal stories that are really to tell yourself with a caveat that you should never process on stage.

We've had that happen, too, where people start telling us the story of the death of their mother and they're in tears and they're downloading on the audience. A storyteller has the obligation to be in control at all times because truly, you are the guide. You are taking them on a journey. You've got to take them out and into some dangerous places. People could get hurt, but you are also responsible for bringing them back and delivering them with a benediction at the end, that we're okay, we're safe, that we've talked about really dangerous stuff, but it's okay. I think the true power of storytelling is you are the guide. You are the teacher. You are the mentor or shaman.

Every culture has storytellers and these storytellers varied from the troubadours who sang love songs to the historian who kept the history of the whole group to those healing stories. There are subdivisions within storytelling and the Healing Stories Alliance of the Na-

tional Storytelling Network is where Peggy and I usually gravitate. The Healing Stories Alliance focuses on those kinds of stories that change people's lives. We have business storytellers. We have environmental storytellers. Biblical storytellers. They all have different motivations, I guess you could say, but for your average reader at the ICONOCLAST, we have Storytelling 101 courses. We have storytelling workshops. Beginning storytelling course books.

PEGGY: There are storytelling organizations around the United States. As a matter of fact, in November just before Thanksgiving, something like Tellabration, and it's an international day of storytelling. Groups around the world are telling stories that day. It's pretty cool to see how much its grown in the 19 years they've had it. I can't remember how many years, but it hasn't been that long. It started out as this one day even in Connecticut.

ICONOCLAST: You already mentioned how Hitler used stories to get his agenda going. Are there any stories you would tell politicians to help them with their jobs?

PEGGY: I think that one of the things that reaches politicians more than anything is when their own constituents call them up with their own stories. "This happened to me." And I think that as politicians, they are going to be more disturbed if the story they are hearing is articulately communicated, that "if this person can tell it to me like this, who else are they telling it to?"

From a pure mercenary point of view, if someone can get up there and tell a dynamic story about what happened, they are going to move people, so I think that by communicating your stories to the politicians, they are going to be more apt to listen to you rather than just showing up with a list of problems.

GENE: And there is a subtle distinction between a story and a lie. A lie is a story told to conceal the truth. A story is a tale told to reveal the truth. It may not be true, but it is there to reveal the truth. There are a lot of things that are told to conceal the truth, and that's where the danger comes from, like the Hitler story. It was told to conceal the truth instead to reveal the truth, and it was combated by those stories told by the Jewish tradition which revealed the truth and eventually won. That's the power of a good story.

PEGGY: You can tell we're fond of Jewish stories. Oh, the Jews have such a great tradition of wonderful storytelling. Some of the best stories are from the Jewish tradition. As a matter of fact, I think Gene and I have personally told more Jewish and Muslim stories than any other culture. If I started counting them up, I think we have more from those two cultures.

ICONOCLAST: Why is that? What's so attractive about those?

PEGGY: I think the reason we like to tell them is that there's a lot of universal truth in those stories. They are more human. They tend to be, "This could happen to me" types of story, and since the vast majority of our audience are neither Jewish nor Muslim, it opens our audience's eyes to "Gee, these people are more like me than I realized. I can relate to this."

GENE: The shortest story I tell is from a man named Reuven Gold whose been dead these 10 years, God rest his

soul. But Reuven Gold, when he heard somebody complaining about anything at all, he'd say, "That reminds me of a story. There once was this man who lived in hell. Yeah, he lived in hell! This man could leave anytime he wanted to but he never did. No, he never did. See, he knew the names of all the streets."

ICONOCLAST: (laughs)

PEGGY: That story will come back to bite you in the butt.

GENE: If you're not happy, well, whose fault is that? (laughs)

PEGGY: I just thought of another culture we tell stories from, the Buddhist.

GENE: Wisdom tales. We tell wisdom tales from the Native American tradition—

ICONOCLAST: Is that because your audience likes them or you like them?

PEGGY: Well, both. Quite often, our audiences don't know they like them, but once they hear them, they do. We get a good response from them, but we initially started telling them because they were stories we liked. More than likely, you will have a really tough time telling a story that you don't like.

GENE: The voice of experience says that you hear this wonderful story: "Oh, that's a great story. I'd love to tell that." So you try to tell somebody else's story and it doesn't work. You don't get the same response. You don't get the same energy because you're not vested in that story.

ICONOCLAST: But you tell people these stories are from other cultures when you're on stage, right?

PEGGY: Yes! Or before.

GENE: Almost always. We want to tell the stories and give credit to the culture, and sometimes that's not as easy as it might seem. "There's a wonderful Native American story about The Talkative Turtle. Well, wait a minute, I heard that as an African story about The Talkative Turtle." "No, wait, that's a Buddhist story about a turtle." And so these stories have made their way into every culture and a good story will be picked up by a storyteller in Europe who will tell it as a European tale, then it goes into the Jewish culture, and they have their twist on it, and it comes to American and somebody else tells it, and "My old Italian grandmother used to tell it." Well, it's a human folk tale.

PEGGY: Even stories we're familiar with, like Cinderella. The story of the rich girl turned poor who loses her shoe and is rescued by someone magical and gives her gifts, there's a Japanese version of that. The only difference between that and the European version is that instead of a fairy godmother, she has a dead fish.

ICONOCLAST: Wow!

PEGGY: There's a lot of universal truths in these stories and the cultures years and years ago recognized that and one of our primary jobs is to help our audiences recognize that there's more similarities in our cultures than we realize. And for so many years we have been told to isolate ourselves and separate from all other cultures.

GENE: People have proven recently, oh, yes, that there's been breaking research showing that people remember things better if they are told a story. Gosh, I think Jesus did that and Buddha did that and Confucius. You know, the parables are a way to remember. If you ever give you kid your phone num

**Continued On Next Page**

• **UNITY TALES ... Continued From Page 5**

ber at work and say, "Don't call unless it's really important." You'll discover that children don't understand that, but if you tell them the story of The Boy Who Cried Wolf, which is a universal story, they suddenly understand that if you call when it's not important, he won't come when it is. That kind of story sticks with them, whereas "Don't call unless it's really important" doesn't mean anything. That's the manual writer's problem. You tell him how to do this is one thing, but show him how it's done and what happens when you do it is the idiot's guide to storytelling.

ICONOCLAST: (laughs) Right. Well, what's your favorite part of storytelling?

PEGGY: I guess knowing and witnessing that some of the stories we've told make a difference in people's lives. I'll never forget. One time Gene and I were at a theater celebrating our anniversary, and we heard somebody yelling across the lobby, "It's storytellers!" This guy runs up to us, and basically, he pulled this rock out of his pocket. When we're up at the drug and alcohol treatment center, Gene passes out rocks and explains their symbolism, and I'll spare you all the details here, but the guy pulled out the rock and we knew he was from the treatment center. He said, "I've been clean for a year now and I want to tell you how much help the stories you told were to me." That like made all those years of pain and agony worth it. (laughs)

GENE: What I do it for is the pleasure it gives me. It's certainly not a very lucrative career. For those of you who want to be a storyteller, that's an oxymoron—a storyteller with a pager. But being a storyteller is and has been in the past, a very honorable and honored profession. In fact, in many cultures, the storyteller was more powerful than the kings because the storyteller could travel from kingdom to kingdom and be loved whereas the king had to be real careful where he went.

Storytelling is a kind of a self-rewarding thing because you learn and grow through the stories and then you make the world a better place through your stories and the self-gratification is that you are doing something important.

PEGGY: One of the things I really like is that with storytellers, you actually connect with your listeners. There's not that fourth wall, you know, like with the theater. When we go onstage like at the Bathhouse, we're doing performances with singers and actresses, but as soon as we come on stage, they have to pull up the house lights so we can see the audience and make contact. It's not a closed cycle. It's an open cycle. You get feedback from the audience, and I get feedback, and I love that.

GENE: It's almost addictive. You

make that connection with people and you make eye contact, and you see them do the little bobble head thing, "Yeah, I get it! I get it! Yeah!"

ICONOCLAST: Well, to end the year 2005, my last question for you is, what was the news story or stories that you most remember from this year? What stuck out in your head?

PEGGY: News stories? Well, to me the person I'd love to be able to tell stories about was Cindy Sheehan.

GENE: The heroine's journey.

PEGGY: Gutsy woman. She really is. Like Gene said, it's the heroine's journey because she's walking through her

pain and doing something to make the world a better place. That's what storytelling is all about, to show other people how to walk through your pain to heal, and that's what she's going. Great story.

GENE: As a storyteller, I have all kinds of mixed feelings at times because it's the hero's journey. Being a man, I think about making the world a different place by your actions and by your choices, and I'm sure that the current administration thinks that they are on the hero's journey, trying to save the world from the dragon of terrorism. If they aren't out to slay that dragon, if they're not out to do something good, and I have a deeper faith in human nature than I should, but I think everybody

thinks they are doing the right thing.

Nobody wants to do the wrong thing, and if I see someone doing something for the wrong reasons, I think of the stories of King Midas. You know, there are wonderful stories about the man who destroyed the sacred grove. There's stories of the coyote and his greed and what happens when you overreach. Icarus who flew too close to the sun, all these stories are the stories being enacted. I see on the news the headlines everyday, everybody has these stories. I mean how many times has the Oedipus story been reenacted? All this is sad but it's true, and putting it in a storyteller's perspective kind of gives me hope for human nature. That's one of the reasons we tell stories.

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# Cheney's Party Searched Before Afghan Visit

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Associated Press reported last Monday that Afghan security forces searched Vice President Dick Cheney's entourage ahead of an otherwise glowing seven-hour campaign to tout the accomplishments since the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

At one point, an armed Afghan soldier shoved a portion of Cheney's staff and press corp against a wall while they were on their way to the parliament building after arriving by aircraft.

Things grew increasingly heated, AP reported, as the Secret Service objected to the Afghan security force's insistence to search all the Americans' bags, and one U.S. official strongly urged the Afghans to withdraw their weapons.

"The vice president's military aides refused to have their bags searched - they were carrying classified nuclear war

plans that are supposed to be with Cheney at all times," said the AP report. "A White House advance staffer angrily demanded that the Afghans allow them inside to be near Cheney without being searched."

The story said that the Afghans instead performed body searches on everyone in the traveling party but Cheney. The American men were patted down outside. Afghan women searched the American women by hand indoors.

Cheney's wife, Lynne, was present during the Afghanistan tour as well as U.S. Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann and coalition commander Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, according to the report.

The day prior, the vice president made a surprise visit to Iraq while on a five-day tour to strengthen support for the war on terror. Other tour stops planned were Pakistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia before coming home Sunday.

# Alaska Sues BP, Exxon Mobil Over Gas

JUNEAU, Alaska — An Alaskan governmental agency is suing two giants in the oil-gas industry for allegedly acting together to control the natural gas market from Alaska's North Slope.

The antitrust lawsuit was filed last Monday in U.S. District Court in Fairbanks by the Alaska Gasline Port Authority against Exxon Mobil Corp. and BP PLC.

The cause of the lawsuit stems from the two company's refusal to sell natural gas to the port authority which wants to construct a pipeline from the North Slope to Valdez where the gas would be then sent by ship to the U.S.

A spokesperson for BP said that the company did not believe the pipeline project is "viable." BP, Exxon Mobile, and

ConocoPhillips are in negotiations with the state to build their own pipeline.

The port authority says that its pipeline plans have stalled because the gas companies won't sell the gas.

BP and Exxon Mobil lease and operate the North Slope's largest oil and gas fields. The whole area of North Slope has about 35 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves, a supply of seven percent to 10 percent of the natural gas in the United States.

Last week, Gov. Frank Murkowski was intent on finalizing terms the three oil companies' \$20 billion pipeline proposal. The gubernatorial candidates from both parties, State Rep. Eric Croft (D-Anchorage) and Sarah Palin (R-Wasilla), are in favor of the lawsuit.

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# 'Who Would Jesus Bomb?'

## Theme Of Crawford Holiday Vigil

CRAWFORD — Starting at 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve, members and supporters of Veterans For Peace were scheduled to stand in the bar ditches at the Secret Service checkpoints leading to the Bush ranch holding banners with the message: "WHO WOULD JESUS BOMB?" 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.

A new chapter of Veterans For Peace was formed in Crawford over the Thanksgiving holiday. According to Ann Wright, a retired US Army Colonel and a former Deputy Ambassador who was elected President of the new chapter, 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,

### DATELINE:

# Crawford

## Hometown of the President of the United States

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, Texas 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," he said. "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."

Twelve protestors were arrested in November as they challenged the new McLennan County laws that prevented people from "living in the ditches" along

roads leading to the Bush ranch. Both Wright and 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. Not one more!"

## Securities Fraud Class Action Suit Filed Against Dibold, Inc.

WASHINGTON — Eight current and former executives have been named co-defendants in a class action suite alleging fraud, insider trading, manipulation of stock prices, concealment of known flaws in voting machines, and company

structural problems, reports Brad Friedman of Brad Blog.

The suit was filed by plaintiff Janice Konkol, alleging securities fraud against the North Canton, Ohio-based manufacturer of Voting Systems and

ATM machines on behalf of investors who owned shares of Diebold stock and lost money due to an alleged fraudulent scheme by the company and its executives to deceive shareholders during the "class period" of Oct. 22, 2003 through Sept. 21, 2005, says Friedman.

The suit was filed in U.S. Federal District Court in Ohio and alleges the company "artificially inflated" stock prices through misleading public information designed to conceal the true nature of Diebold's financial and legal situation. The defendants are also alleged to have attempted to disguise well-known and ongoing problems with Diebold's Voting Machine equipment and software. Additionally, the suit alleges insider trading by defendants resulting in proceeds of \$2.7 million. Remedies are sought under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, reported Brad Blog.

### 200 Activists Protest

#### 'Real Christmas Scandal'

WASHINGTON, D.C. — More than 200 demonstrators Wednesday protested the cuts in social programs found in the House Republican budget plan at Cannon House Office Building.

About 115 religious activists were peacefully arrested for refusing to remove themselves from obstructing the entrance to building and faced a \$50 fine, according to a U.S. Capitol Police spokesperson.

Among those arrested were its organizer Jim Wallis, the founder of the Christian ministry group Sojourners.

"These are political choices being made that are hurting low-income people," said Wallis, who later called the House budget plan, which proposes to save \$50 billion over five years, "the real Christmas scandal."

During House-Senate negotiations, the Senate again voiced its opposition to the proposed increases to premiums and co-payments to Medicaid benefits, and the dumping of 250,000 beneficiaries from the food stamp program.

### THE VIGIL 26 DAYS IN CRAWFORD, TEXAS

REPORTED BY W. LEON SMITH FOREWORD BY CINDY SHEEHAN  
& THE STAFF OF THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST



## 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."



# Editorial

OP/ED  
Opinion - Columns - Letters

— Editorial —

# Only Way To Really Win: Destroy Big Oil

If we want to live in a real democracy, We the People should destroy Big Oil because in our pursuit of oil, we become what we profess we are not—evil!

Odds are that by staying addicted to this limited supply of black gold, the United States will most likely continue to be embroiled in global conflicts to protect the shallow interests of the oil aristocracy.

Because our president is an oil-prince, the halls of Congress are lined with greasy palms, and practically all industries and consumers here function on carbon-fueled technologies, the switch to renewable energy will be a political bloodletting.

We know better. We know our military is not needed to oversee elections in Iraq because the Congo, ripe with insurgents, successfully held its own elections last week without one U.S. soldier. We know that a petroleum-less future is possible.

Take Brazil. The government there forced a near-total conversation to ethanol *within five years*, so now this clean-burning sugarcane product, coupled with its biomass production, turns more cranks, sustains more jobs, and produces less hydrocarbon emissions than petroleum. For each unit of energy generated, oil creates one job, coal production employs four, and ethanol 152 in Brazil, and for each job created, the petrochemical industry spends \$220,000 U.S. dollars compared to ethanol producers who spend \$15,000.

If Brazil can do it with sugarcane, the United States (the world's second largest producer of ethanol behind Brazil) can, too, with corn, but to make our switch would require the total annihilation of the oil industry and a shake down of government handouts to domestic corn and sugar producers in order to decrease the price of corn to make ethanol cheaper than gasoline.

Currently, domestic gasoline refiners receive a 51-cent kickback on every gallon of ethanol used, and since the largest ethanol producer, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), controls the global market shares in corn and other feed grains, guess who's Congress' sugarmama?

Through heavy taxation, regulation, and enforcement of anti-trust laws, Big Oil could die the same death as the 19th-century railroad oligopoly. Again, this won't be easy since as much as 80 percent of our national budget goes to defense spending that protects Big Oil's interests across the globe with the blood of American GIs.

Put into perspective, even if there is another thousand years of oil in the ground, our best bet is to rid ourselves of such a crude economy. It is not worth the life of one dead soldier or the lungs of a million school children. We are in denial if we believe the opposite were true.

If this means Big Oil and ADM must bite the bullet, oh well. The payoff will be in new job creation, lowered energy costs, cheaper goods and services, and cleaner neighborhoods.

If truth be told, the know-how to convert is already here. While Hawaii and Minnesota now mandate that ethanol and gasoline be blended, other states like California are eyeing ethanol use. Willie Nelson is selling bio-diesel with his BioWillie brand. And the Apollo Alliance has a blueprint to create energy independence by the year 2015.

So, the year 2006 is upon us. Let's, as a country, make a resolution to defeat our government's support of corporate terrorists like Big Oil on our own terms. We have the brains, the guts, the willpower, and the vision to make it possible. It's time to use them now.

— Written By W. Leon Smith, Nathan Diebenow, and Don M. Fisher

# Move Over, King George

King George is out to prove that democracy in America does not work.

Why else would you *not* put it to the test....hold it accountable?

If the answer to our survival lies in replacing our democratic principles for those that lie somewhere between fascism and a dictatorship, what does this say for the mettle in the bones of our democracy? That it can't stand the heat? That our democracy was a lie all along?

Americans of yore got behind these stoneground principles and made them work. They certainly did not forfeit them when Chicken Little started screaming that we should all be afraid...that extreme fear (terror) is going to get us.

Who the hell did we declare war on, anyway? Fear? Or was it the country of Iraq? Or was it an individual in the country of Iraq? Or was it bad guys who frequented Iraq? What ever happened to bin Laden? Remember him? Let's get some definitions going here, otherwise we are spending a shitload of money to aim at an unsure target. Is the sun at our back or are we looking into it? That's a question even Rumsfeld can't answer. He never thought of it.

As the domestic wiretapping charade unravels here at home, much as it did for Richard Nixon who resigned in disgrace for the same types of deeds that King George is so proud of, it is becoming clear that the form of democracy that we have traditionally held dear simply does

## The Trenchwalker

By W. Leon Smith



not jibe with Bush's inebriated vision of a bizarro Big Brotherdome.

Let's face it. Things are getting out of hand — waaaaaay out of hand.

It is irksome that some among us believe our only means of survival is to trash the Constitution. "In times of war we have to go to extraordinary means." Trenching on the Constitution is plain, unadulterated bull! Extraordinary does not mean disposing of our principles. It should mean flaunting them! Using them!

That's why we have them!

They are the strength of our nation.

It is a weak administration that does not have the skills, knowledge, and courage to properly utilize these immense tools. And it is a weak country that let's him get away with it.

If King George does not have the strength to take this fine equipment, these magnificent principles, and use them as they were intended, maybe we don't need a king after all. Maybe we need a president.



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# Making Mention Of The Excess Tinsel

As Uncle Hugh used to say, "Life ain't nothin' but a minstrel show without the greasepaint."

Call me Mr. Bones.

The annual selection of the Icon and Iconoclast of the Year wore me out.

I haven't a derision, cynicism or sarcasm left in me.

It has been a year of unashamed naughtiness and null niceties.

But among these inevitable (and dare I say insufferable) year-enders from every periodical disparaging innocent ink or electricity, one rarely finds mention of the runners-up, the also-fell-on-their-faces, the voices crying in the off-camera wilderness.

So I've gathered up the excess tinsel, those inevitably failed Christmas light strings, greed-ripped wrapping and shredded Christmas cards (can't be too careful about identity theft) and cobbled together some awards for those who weren't quite regurgitated at the top of the Lone Star Iconoclast's Ipecac IV computer, which calculates those who most frequently turned somebody's stomach for good or ill.

**And the Un-Winners in the Icon category:**

**The NFL Referee's "Whose Side Are You On, Anyway" Leftover Bows:**

A tie (and a repugnant superfluous pun) to Joe Lieberman and Ben Barnes.

Lieberman, donning his Kevlar yarmulke, has expressed an opinion poll-felt commitment of America's fighting men and women to the proposition that Arabs and Persians can take their places among the world's democracies: in the front seat of a cab or behind the cigarettes and magazines of a 7-Eleven.

Have I offended anyone?

No?

Rats! Well, read on.

I have not yet begun to spite.

Barnes, once known around Austin, D.C., as the Fastest Zipper on the Hill, fell from Lyndon Johnson's grace in the 1970's Sharpestown Stock Fraud Scandal.

Now a lobbyist (what's a political pariah to do but become a social pariah), he has been doing some organizing for gopper gubernatorial aspirant Carol Strayhorn, a Democrat in wolf's clothing.

Doubtless she was counting on Barnes to deliver the scorpion, tarantula, and pit viper vote.

Don't laugh.

In some Texas counties those are the swing ballots.

Lying Idiot Texas Governor Tricky Ricky Perry, who never met a sleazy tactic he didn't like, even if he didn't really understand it, was quick to point out that Barnes is as crooked as a tornado reconstruction bill brought to the floor at end-of-session midnight.

And Tricky knows crooked when he sees it.

Even if he doesn't understand it.

Tricky's sewer squad quickly squeezed out an attack ad pointing out that Barnes once said he scratched George I's Vietnam itch by sneaking young Neighbor Bush into the Texas Guard two favors ahead of the draft board.

The ad said Barnes' accusation was "discredited."

Anything Barnes says is discredited, even if it's true.

And the truth is, Neighbor Bush is a draft dodger, which, at the time could get you laid at most parties, especially if you had a couple of joints of really good shit.

Or so I've heard.

I really don't remember that much about the Sixties and Seventies.

I'm not even really sure I was there.

Anyway, I wonder how prosecuting an oil war through deception would be somehow ok if it were done by a war hero.

Strayhorn, in a refreshing, if somewhat judgmentally questionable, stroke of candor said Barnes is an old friend, and she ain't gonna bail on him.

Sort of like visiting an old friend in the penitentiary, I guess.

Tricky said Texas doesn't need a governor who associates with crooks.

Like Tom DeLay, Scooter Libby, Duke Cunningham, Jack Abramoff or Karl Rove?

**The "All Them Wasted Years In The Third Grade" Used Candied Apple Sticks Award**

To Bill O'Reilly, who called Plano Independent School District "fascist" because they banned Christmas colors, red and green, from school.

There was only one problem.

They didn't.

A local evangelical cult said they did. It wasn't true.

That Bill Oh Really would repeat a lie should not be the issue here.

He never let the truth get in the way of a good slobbering lunatic raving.

First, he should go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/mussolini-fascism.html> and read Benito Mussolini's description for an encyclopedia entry on facism that Il Duce wrote in 1932.

Then he should go and find a mirror.

Second, schools can do that, if they want.

Education is not a democracy.

It is, by definition, totalitarian, because the majority would vote not to do all those tiresome LESSONS.

Would Foxed News' Lord Hawhaw Novum suggest that schools should not be allowed to ban the wearing of certain colors?

I'd like to introduce him to some of my former students and their colleagues with the Latin Kings or the CAG (Crazy-Ass Ganstaz).

Now, would it be ok with O'Quisling to ban black and silver or, you guessed it, red and green, from school property?

Okay, it was lime green and hot pink (No, really. I think the idea was to make the rival gangs puke so they couldn't shoot straight.) but the principle is the same.

It seems ironic that the right seeks to force mind control through high-stakes testing, but won't give schools the authority to keep religious instruction at home and at church where it belongs.

O'Reilly evidently thinks America's churches are doing a poor job giving our children instruction in their families' chosen religion.

## Call To Mind

By Don M. Fisher



He thinks we should turn that over to the government.

And who is the fascist here?

**And the Iconoclasts?**

**The Michael Jackson/O.J. Simpson "Thanks For Nothing" Empty Box Award:**

To the Texas Legislature. Through one regular and two special sessions they labored long and hard over an education spending bill and accomplished NOTHING.

But since the gop-owned Leg promised to dismantle Texas public education and re-create it in their own image, it could have been so-o-o-o-o much worse.

And, to end on a sober note, which has nothing to do with the fact that I am pouring my last drop of "Maker's Mistake" bourbon even as we speak, there

are some real Iconoclasts out there who need mentioning:

The real Katrina Christians who ran ambulances, opened homes, patrolled dangerous streets, rescued pets, fed the hungry and comforted the dismayed without judging whether their charges deserved their efforts or blaming someone else for the shortcomings.

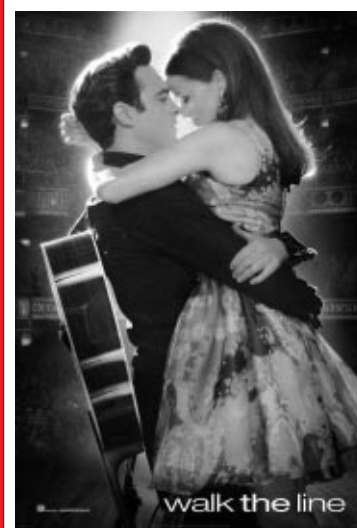
The writers and broadcasters who never fell in love with the post-911 propaganda, and who finally got their stories across that we, the American people, have been had.

The churches that have continued to preach and pray without asking the federal government to force the rest of us to listen.

Those who manned watering stations in the desert instead of hunting down those who risk their lives for better ones.

And, most of all, those who walked the dangerous patrols in an ill-advised war, offering their lives and their aid in spite of the aggressive arrogance of their government; those who carry the real America as they carry their weapons, and do good where they can. Would that those who sent them there had hearts and minds as noble.

## Walk the Line



This biopic about Johnny Cash stars Joaquin Phoenix as the legendary country icon and focuses on the singer's early career in Memphis, including his struggles with drug addiction. Reese Witherspoon stars as his wife and bandmate, June Carter Cash.

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# Who Needs A Constitution Anyway?

*“The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”*

*- Fourth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States*

On Friday, Dec. 16, 2005, THE NEW YORK TIMES broke the story about President Bush authorizing the NSA to spy on American citizens without a warrant. It is one thing to tap the lines of foreign dignitaries, or international callers, but

these were our people. The full list of targets has not come out yet, and it likely never will. Until Congress holds an investigation, all we know is that the individuals being spied upon are American citizens. This is contrary to our constitution. Such actions are a clear infraction of the law, and the crime carries significant penalties laid out in US Code Title 50, § 1809.

Say what you will of the politics of the day or even the former President Bill Clinton. All the spin in the world cannot muddy the water enough on this issue. The fact is, President Bush clearly violated the aforementioned law. What he authorized, over three dozen times,



**The Webster Retort**

**By Stephen Webster**

were felonies. He knowingly and specifically violated Section (a), Article (2) of US Code which states the activity prohibited as “disclos[ing] or us[ing] information obtained under color of law by electronic surveillance, knowing or having reason to know that the information

was obtained through electronic surveillance not authorized by statute.” I.E.: Get a warrant.

The penalty for this crime is, according to the law, “not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than five years, or both.”

“I don’t know of any legal basis to go around that,” said Republican Senator Lindsey Graham. “Even in a time of war, you have to follow the process, because that’s what a democracy is all about: a process.”

When Nixon did it, he lied about it. It was one of many reasons he was chased from office. Bush’s response has been different. To his, um, credit, he did not lie. He admitted to multiple felonies and promised he would continue acting illegally. As I recall, he swore to protect and uphold the constitution of these United States. This includes all amendments to the document.

In the late 70’s, Congress went as far as writing legislation called the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), which established a court that gives out search warrants like candy to expedite the intelligence gathering process. The court can even rubber-stamp documents *after* the search or wiretap has been administered. But that does not matter to Bush. Court oversight, the law, the very foundation of our nation, does not matter to Bush.

Wake up! This is not making the country safer! The 9/11 Commission recently gave the administration’s efforts to beef up national security an abysmal grade; “More F’s than A’s,” said one member of the bi-partisan panel. “God help us if we are attacked again,” said another. Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) has pledged his support of any drafted articles of impeachment, and I stand with him. The law is clear. The process of obtaining a warrant for a wiretap is simple, but it is a required process nonetheless. When the leader of a country acknowledges yet refuses to obey the laws, he becomes a dictator. We must not let that happen here.

A crime has been committed. The law must be followed. It is time to appoint a Special Prosecutor. Tell your Congressman. Tell your Senators. No president is above the law. Not even this favorite son.

These days, the works of George Orwell seem more and more pertinent. But one need not look to our great novelists for wisdom in this matter. An American history textbook should suffice. Look into the early chapters. You may find one quote by Benjamin Franklin that stands out:

“They who would give up an essential liberty for temporary security, deserve neither liberty or security.”

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Mahalo.

Stephen Webster is an Investigative Reporter and Syndicated Columnist with The News Connection, a Staff Columnist with George W. Bush’s hometown weekly The Lone Star Iconoclast, and a former Contributor to The Dallas Morning News’ Science & Technology section. For more of Webster’s musings, visit [GonzoMuckraker.BlogSpot.com](http://GonzoMuckraker.BlogSpot.com).

## Eavesdropping Can Be More Than Bad Manners

The President of the United States has enormous powers. During wartime, he has even greater powers, as he should. But he doesn’t have “unlimited powers.” Countries in which the rulers have unlimited powers are known as dictatorships, and those are the kinds of governments that we are supposedly against.

So, when I heard the President use as an excuse for eavesdropping on U.S. citizens the fact that he just felt it was necessary, it didn’t seem like a good enough reason. We already have a system in which there is a special court set up to issue secret warrants for this purpose.

These warrants can be granted quickly, and are rarely turned down. If time is of the essence, the President can even get these warrants after the fact. The only thing is, if you get a warrant, there will be a record of whom you have eavesdropped on.

This warrant system came about after the Vietnam War when it was discovered that the Federal Government had been spying on people whose positions on the war were different from the Administration’s, and on people the Government just didn’t like.

One of the presidents involved in these tapings was Richard Nixon, and he had an infamous “enemies list,” and he felt he had a right to spy on whomever he wanted.

As I recall, Mr. Nixon got into a lot of trouble.

A few days after it was revealed that the government was secretly spying on U.S. citizens without warrants, President Bush used words like “unexcusable” and “shameful.” I was happily surprised that he took this position, but when I read closer, I saw that he was saying that what was “unexcusable” and “shameful” was the media’s telling the American people that this spying was going on.

The problem with all this secret taping is that once it gets started, it can get out of control. Since all of this is so secretive, how are we — or Congress — to know who’s listening in on what conversations?

And sure enough, a transcript of a phone call was given to me by a fictitious, yet unreliable, source. It deals with the President getting advice on the domestic spying issue from one of his closest advisors:

HARRIET MIERS: Hello.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Hello, Harriet. It’s the President.

LONG PAUSE

PRESIDENT BUSH: Can you hear me all right?

HARRIET MIERS: I hear you just fine. I’m still a little peeved at you, that’s all. Bailing before they even held hearings on me.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Harriet, I told you that was because of pressure from the Far Right Wackos. Now, I really need your advice.

HARRIET MIERS: Why don’t you call those “Far

Right Wackos” for advice if you care about them so much? Or do what you think is best. After all, “aren’t you the smartest man” I ever met?



**Modern Times**

**By Lloyd Garver**

PRESIDENT BUSH: Look, I really need some help on this domestic spying thing.

HARRIET MIERS: Well, if you had called me first, I would have told you to get warrants. Now, let’s see. Have

you played the, “stopping this will help the enemy” angle yet?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yep, first thing.

HARRIET MIERS: Good. Have you attacked the media for revealing what you shouldn’t have done?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Almost immediately. I’m also thinking of raising the threat level to the next color to prove that extraordinary means are necessary at this time.

HARRIET MIERS: I wouldn’t. Nobody pays attention to that anymore. I’ll bet even you couldn’t tell me what color we’re on today.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Orange? No, yellow? I guess you’re right. Well, what should I do?

HARRIET MIERS: Relax. The worst that could happen is that this thing will go to the Supreme Court to decide what powers you have.

PRESIDENT BUSH: The Supreme Court? Ha! I guess we know how they’ll decide. So, I have nothing to worry about.

HARRIET MIERS: Only your conscience bothering you for selling out an old friend. I could’ve been one of those Justices who would grant you this outrageous power.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Listen, I gotta go. I’m late for my bike ride.

CLICK AS PRESIDENT BUSH HANGS UP

HARRIET MIERS: Did you get all that?

HILLARY CLINTON: Every word, Harriet.

HARRIET MIERS: And you won’t forget me?

HILLARY CLINTON: Not a chance.

HARRIET MIERS: And you know what size black robe I wear, right?

HILLARY CLINTON: Uh, right.

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)

# Questions and Philosophies for 2006

Well, there they go... *WHOOSH!*  
Another 12 months zooming right by us.

Gone in the blink of an eye.  
The older I get, the more rapidly each of these cycles of the moon zips along.  
For years as time slithered past, while any hope of personal accomplishment faded with each additional gray hair or achy joint, the realization burrowed deeper into my brain that whenever I made New Year's resolutions they were either broken by January 3rd at the latest, or too silly to even begin.

So, several decades ago I made a resolution to not make resolutions.

*That's the one I kept.*

Rather, I ask myself questions about stupid stuff that came along during the previous year. Also, I reflect philosophically upon those quandaries responsible for many of the anthropologic blights hindering mankind since we first learned to communicate with grunts.

Kind of a drinking binge with myself, only I haven't been drinking.

Yet.

Stuff like...

Why are we here?

Okay, if there really was (is) such a thing as "Intelligent Design," how do we explain George W. Bush to our children, grandchildren, and future generations?

Or the rationale attached to anybody who voted for him?

One question that keeps rolling around in my mind is why do cats and "grays" – you know, extra-terrestrial visitors as they are commonly perceived – have eyes of similar shape and coloration?

Why were cats worshipped by high-level ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians?

With whom is the cat in contact during the wee hours of the morning, when she thinks rest of the household is asleep?

What's their big attraction to rings from plastic milk jug caps, and why do they stash them all over the house (especially under throw rugs)?

I've read the opinion that "a dog has one master but a cat has a staff."

My take is: "Humans adopt dogs. Cats select the people whose lives and homes they wish to study and take over."

Mind you, I love DAX, the cat that hypnotized me and moved in.

She's just the cutest little eight pounds of furry delight ever!

(DAX is in the room, right next to me on her personal office chair, so I *have* to write that. She reads my thoughts, you know.)

The cats, they make us think they're sleeping like 15 to 18 hours a day, see, but I know it's all a cover. They're really playing possum. Almost every time I look over at DAX she has her eyes at least partially open.

But she's *such* a sweetheart...

Why is it most of the people in control of programming children's television at the network level are single women who've never been mothers, or teachers, or even worked with youngsters in any capacity?

We're supposed to be living in an en-



Out Of The Blue

By  
Jerry  
Tenuto

lightened age. However, our American schools are turning out unprepared grads who lag severely behind their contemporaries around the world.

The chasm is widening instead of being rectified.

Why?

Because most public and many private schools hold on to those tried-and-true antique pre-20th Century methods of teaching – rote memorization.

Universities have been trying to wean school districts of this boring, inadequate, somewhat unjust system for decades by offering degrees in *Curriculum and Instruction*. The C&I method allows a teacher the agility and common sense approach to instruct any subject when provided the necessary points to cover.

I minored in C&I in graduate school. Not only does it work, but it also makes teaching as well as learning both fun and easy.

Yet, in America today it is virtually impossible for people who have advanced degrees, years (decades even) of actual experience, and a genuine love for the field of study or endeavor to become full-time teachers. Practically every state only licenses individuals who took specific college courses, in addition to their specialty, covering child psychology, classroom behavior, et al.

Logic dictates a 22-year-old, fresh out of college, with just one semester of OJT under her or his belt, can't be expected to step into a classroom one hot August morning without facing an uphill climb.

Especially if dealing with sixth graders or older.

All this person has to offer is book learning, a disservice to the students.

The person with experience "in the field" brings a lot to the table: Examples of practical application; situational knowledge for reference; even anecdotes.

We lose an outrageous number of teachers in their first five years because of stupid stuff like salary and administrative politics.

There's no real dedication for many – it's just a job.

It's hard for me to eat lunch or even take a break in the faculty lounges at the schools where I sub, especially the junior highs. So many of the teachers have a look in their eyes and body language that says they've been beaten to the ground; this is what the next 15 to 20 years is going to be for them.

Between they who have given up, and the young ones who never cared, the students – the future of America – is being shortchanged.

Several weeks ago I was a substitute in a number of seventh and eighth grade classes. Near the end of each period I asked the young'ns if they knew the significance of Crawford, Texas. Mind you,

the total number of students was about 360, with 130 or so being in Social Studies classes.

One young man – that's it, *one out of 360*, a miniscule .28% – in Spanish class knew that Crawford was where George W. Bush had a ranch. There were two others who erroneously thought he was born there.

That's unbelievably pathetic, especially when you consider this is the hardcore Right-wing, Christian Conservative "Red Swath" midsection of a very Blue state.

In 1960, everybody knew Jack Kennedy was from Hyannis Port, Mass. And, who didn't know Bill Clinton was the man from Hope?

We really need to start in on improving the system of education in our Nation as soon as 2006 rolls around.

A good start might be to publish a handbook entitled "K-12 Educational Administration For Dummies" so school board idiots can figure out the basic problem.

Here's one that comes up at family get-togethers every so often: If Little Tony buries Pauly the Gimp out in the woods while he's still alive, but Tony doesn't know that, and there's nobody around for say three or four miles, do Pauly's screams make any noise?

How's this for timing? On the very same day that General Motors announced seven factories would soon close, resulting in lay-offs for some 30,000 employees, MOTOR TREND magazine smiled favorably upon Japanese automaker Honda by awarding its prestigious "Car Of The Year" award to all four versions of the 2006 Civic.

Now, the American automotive press has been licking the boots (and other sundry unmentionable parts) of the Japanese and German automakers for at least the last three decades. At first I thought it was pandering.

However, during all that time Chrysler has been the only U.S. car manufacturer to make a running effort at technological advancements – and it's now owned by Mercedes' parent company, Daimler-Benz. So one couldn't say the U.S. automotive industry was not warned.

As to GM, it's the same auto manufacturer that shot itself in the foot by

becoming the world's largest auto manufacturer. Management apparently figured they could get away with substituting bling for automotive improvements while continuing to jack the prices ever skyward.

They learned the hard way that when it came to paying for a car, the sky was definitely *not* the limit.

Suits bother the hell out of me.

It just isn't natural to wear more than one layer of clothing when not dictated by weather conditions.

The tie just symbolizes the yoke of oppression around the neck of the beast of burden, whether animal or slave.

Ties have also been tied to increases in heart attack and stroke, a key factor why women outlive men.

Consider that the old adage "clothes make the man" is correct, then you have yet another reason why suits bother me all to hell.

Well, whatever you choose to do to ring in the New Year, I hope you choose wisely.

If you find your legs are wobbly; if you're seeing two of each of your friends; if your flame can't find the tip of your cigar or cigarette, then don't even think about getting into the dammed car!

Just pull up a nice piece of floor and rest yourself safely away to dreamland.

Better to be passed out on the floor than splattered all over the road.

That'd be one hell of a rotten start to the New Year.

This is one night when it's probably best to do your drinking at home, or somewhere you'll be welcome to zonk out.

Hey, I've got a personal stake in your well-being. Who's gonna read my crap if you're not around?

I hope your 2005 was good, try as the RoveBush Fascists did to make it as rotten as possible for as many folks as they could.

My sincere wish for you, for me, for everyone in 2006 is Peace, Harmony and Joy – trouble is, we all know that ain't gonna happen as long as there are religious zealots running around, don't we.

So, let's keep on fighting the good fight, and with any luck, the troops in Iraq will be reduced by 30,000 or more.

*May you enjoy a Most Happy and Prosperous New Year 2006!*

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# What If There Really Was A Liberal Bias In The Press?

By JOHN KELLEY  
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

What if you woke up one morning and went to your front walk and picked up your morning paper to find that overnight there had been a revolution and the press really had been taken over by liberals. What would it look like? I think it might look something like this.

**Republicans Push New Tax Plan**  
Today house Republicans voted unanimously to dump more disabled, poor children and seniors off healthcare, deprive hungry families of food and shut down Headstart programs across America so that Joe & Jane Millionaire can get another yacht. Further, it has been decided officially that getting your money while sitting on your yacht (collecting dividends) is favored over actually physically working for it (wages), and as such millionaires will be excused from taxes on dividends and capital gains.

**Hugo Chavez Bails Out Poor**  
Hugo Chavez, the hero President of Venezuela and the leader of the democracy movement in South America saved poor people in the Bronx and Massachusetts from freezing to death in their homes by selling them cheap oil to stay warm with. The Bush Administration stated, "This is a distortion of the free market where some people get to freeze while others just fly to the Bahamas, and we think it sets a terrible precedent that will just make poor people want more."

**U.S. Attempts to Avoid Responsibility in Mass Murder**

In Iraq today, the puppet court of Donald Rumsfeld attempted to focus on the oldest, smallest crimes possible hoping to get a conviction and immediate execution of Saddam Hussein, former dictator of Iraq. Representative of truth in law, Ramsey Clark issued a statement saying, "The U.S. hopes to get Saddam executed before he can talk about their complicity in the gassing of the Kurds and Iranians."

**Syria and Iran Threatened by the U.S. and Israel**

The U.S. upped its threats to Iranian and Syrian sovereignty today demanding a McDonalds on every corner, that *The Washington Times* and Fox take over their media and that they go back to burning camel dung for fuel in order to prove they were no threat to western oil and economic control. Israel offered to bomb Iranian energy sites "just for the hell of it."

**Corruption on Every Corner**

It appears that the Republican Party will have so many congressman, senators, governors and other illegally elected officials indicted that the rest of the congressional session will have to be canceled for lack of a quorum until new elections are held. Asked for a statement, jailed leaders Tom Delay and Bill Frist stated, "We don't really understand the problem."

**Megalomanics Cheney and Rove Plotting Overthrow of Government**

The evil Machiavellian machinations of Vice President Dick Cheney and Chief of Staff Karl Rove have reached a new level. Threatened with being forced into resignation or indictment, the two have secretly hatched a plot to fake a terrorist act so they can declare martial law. Asked what he thought of this,

## GUEST COMMENTARY

President Bush choked on a pretzel and fell to the ground. Luckily Condolezza Rice was there to perform the Heimlich maneuver and give him mouth to mouth which seemed to go on for an extraordinary length of time.

**President Shows Lack of Knowledge Once Again**

Yesterday, when asked how many civilians were killed in Iraq, President Bush took a wild stab in the dark and guessed 30,000. When it was pointed out that independent sources had estimated Iraqi civilian deaths at approximately 120,000, he responded that he seemed to remember from 8<sup>th</sup> grade history that dark-skinned people counted less. He also stated when asked about whether the color of people's skin impacted his decision making about New Orleans, that he was insulted that anybody would imply that he was prejudiced.

**Governor Schwarzenegger Refuses Act of Simple Decency**

Governor Schwarzenegger refused to commute Crips founder Stanley "Tookie" Williams death penalty allowing the execution. The governor said, "Without an apology and atonement for these senseless and brutal killings, there can be no redemption." The statement was read by his former lover who was 15 years old at the time of their involvement.

**General Motors Announces Expansion of Indian Auto Production**

General Motors announced today that they will be producing up to 40,000 cars a year in new facilities in India as soon as the plants can be built. Asked if these were an off shoring of jobs given the fact that GM would be laying off 30,000 domestic auto workers, management said, "No, these are cars that will be built for India and China, and everyone knows those couldn't be built in America." Asked why the reverse was true, management responded by saying, "We will be offering our laid off workers the right to transfer to the new plants at a salary of one bowl of rice a day, but they will have to move there on their own dime."

**Hillary Clinton Totally Sells Out to Get Nomination**

Hillary Clinton announced to day that she would be divorcing Former President Bill Clinton and marrying Newt Gingrich as soon as Mr. Gingrich could get is 3<sup>rd</sup> divorce. Asked if she had totally went over to the Republicans, she said no and went on to talk about how Jerry Falwell would be doing the ceremony, and they would be honeymooning in Crawford, Texas.

**Government Turns Officially Turns Into Police State**

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales announced today that it was now official: the government can spy on you for anything anytime and pick you up with out charge, hold you as long as it wants, and, of course, not let you speak to anyone. He said not to worry though, that no one would be tortured. Asked what was defined as torture he stated, "We don't really know, but we're working on

defining it." When asked whether this would help reign in terrorism, he stated he hoped so, but just in case, Intelligence Czar John Negroponte was developing a plan that had been successful for him in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Iraq, namely secret death squads. Asked whether rendition was still being used, he stated the government had a

new policy that would negate the need for that.

*John M. Kelley is a teacher, philosopher, writer, artist, political activist, singer of ballads, rebellious Irishman and agent for change who worries daily about the world he is leaving for his grandchildren. His blog is at (www.mytown.ca/johnkelley).*

## Texans Caught In An 'Endless Loop' — Highest Home Insurance Costs In The Nation

Perhaps now the public realizes that Texas Department of Insurance Commissioner Mike Geeslin, Gov. Perry and legislators will NOT demand urgently needed insurance reform and instead will continue to permit the industry to force Texans to pay the highest cost of home insurance anywhere in the nation.

Texans should be tired of trite unworthy explanations and an ongoing irresponsibility to consumers. Greedily, the industry is gouging-out an unfair profit margin and state officials look the other way. After all, the insurance industry lobby paid-off the governor and lawmakers with huge campaign contributions, so no wonder there's no drive for legislation to improve oversight and/or reductions in astronomical insurance costs.

Wait! Before you believe the Commissioner and the insurance industry who say it's justified due to the mold, hailstorms and/or frivolous claims, what about earthquakes, fires, Santa Ana dust storms and heavy rains in California? What about the torrential rains and active volcanoes in Hawaii? What about the hurricane damage in Florida, Louisiana and other southern states? True, those catastrophic events aren't covered under standard home insurance, but neither is mold infestation currently throughout our state. Furthermore, the Texas insurance industry is "conservative" in what it pays-out in claims due to hailstorms. Meanwhile, Texas doesn't have any more frivolous insurance claims than most other states. So, what's the deal?

Two years ago due to lax insurance legislation and a "hard" market the industry was "permitted" to double its costs overnight and in a crusade to overcorrect the market. BTW, the insurance industry has a significant history of "overcorrecting" during long "hard" markets, so this is no surprise to anyone who follows the industry.



**Commentary**  
**By**  
**Peter**  
**Stern**

The governor and the industry gloat that costs have decrease a maximum of 14-percent during the past year; however, most homeowners haven't seen a significant reduction in their costs. Further more, what exactly is the basis for gloating about a miniscule 14-percent when costs two years ago rocketed 100-percent?

It's high time that Texas voters send a clear message to the governor, the industry and legislative constituents that they refuse to keep paying double insurance costs, more than homeowners in any other state, and that the insurance industry no longer should be permitted to continue its ongoing cost abuse of consumers.

*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 "inteligent" Republican with a conscience — a minority branch of the ruling party. You may contact Peter Stern at: <pstern@austin.rr.com>.*

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# What Says 'Thirsty' Better Than A Sweaty Humor Columnist?

As I'm sure you can imagine, being a humor columnist, I am constantly working up a sweat. In fact, I can already feel perspiration forming. By the end of this paragraph, I will be a drippy, sweat-stained mess. Most people don't know it can take hours to finish a column. The reason has nothing to do with procrastination, writer's block, or even the ability to Google Jessica Simpson; many of us humor columnists simply become too sweaty to operate our keyboards without sliding off and potentially endangering ourselves and others. Newsrooms everywhere understand this, which is why we are often placed in special cubicles that are either refrigerated or, at the very least, equipped with a drain pan.

Yet, somehow, beverage companies continue to overlook us as potential thirst-quenching icons when developing trendy ad campaigns. Chances are, you'll never see a commercial featuring a humor columnist at a keyboard with green Gatorade streaming out of every pore in his body. Or witness a humor columnist emerge from a droplet of Propel fitness water and do a back flip out of an office chair (which we often do, by the way, sometimes for no reason at all.) That's because our segment of the beverage-buying market is considered too small to worry about, even though, as analysts have shown, it is a powerful one, at least in terms of odor.

According to the advertising people I spoke with, the key is finding a beverage product that fits the humor columnist profile; something that seamlessly combines beverage consumption and sweaty writing; something that speaks to millions of thirsty consumers and tells them:

Hey, what you really want is a beverage that tastes funny.

I had given up on finding such a beverage until this past week, when I opened a package containing what has to be the strangest soda concept since New Coke. In this case, we're talking about quenching your thirst with the crisp, refreshing taste of "Broccoli Rice Casserole."

Or "Salmon Pate'."

Or my personal favorite, "Brussels Sprout."

Apparently, the folks at Jones Soda Co., who produce these flavors as part of a limited-edition "Holiday Pack" each year, are aggressively targeting a niche market known in the advertising world as the "gagging consumer." This became clear during an impromptu taste test I held here in our newsroom, where all 10 of my test subjects preferred drinking these sodas over, say...

The taste of bile.

I knew right away I'd found my product. Who better than a humor columnist to promote a beverage that is marginally preferred over stomach juice? I immediately contacted Diana Turner at Jones Soda Co. and informed her of my availability.

I then called her back and explained I meant as an advertising icon.

After careful consideration that



By  
**Ned  
Hickson**  
Siuslaw News

seemed to go on forever but lasted closer to four seconds, I was told that the goal of the "Holiday Pack"

was to raise \$150,000 for children's charities, and that paying for a "beverage icon" would mean less money for those charities.

I told her I was cheap.

She said every dollar counts.

I agreed to do it for free.

She asked me to please stop calling her.

As it stands, I still haven't become a beverage icon, and it doesn't look like I'll become one anytime soon. Until then, I'll just have to quench my thirst for becoming a promo-

tional figurehead by consuming these extra bottles of "Turkey & Gravy" soda.

That's if I can hold onto them with these sweaty hands.

(Visit the Jones Soda Co. website at <[www.jonessoda.com](http://www.jonessoda.com)>. to learn more about its holiday fund raiser for St. Jude's Children's Hospital and Toys For Tots. 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).)

## It's All About Water and Fences

Texas weather, you gotta love it. It's one of our favorite subjects around here. In August and September, we were sweltering. But of course, that's perfectly normal. And no rain. Not unusual for summer in Central Texas.

By October, we had experienced our first freeze, an early one. Here at the ranch, we went down to 28 degrees; certainly low enough to turn all my beautiful summer flowers brown. — Seems we're always either much colder or much warmer here than the forecast predicts, situated as we must be in some sort of extreme weather wormhole.

After my flowers were rendered worthless by the freeze, the weather warmed again, so all the cold-loving plants I had installed keeled over and died. Too hot. And still no rain. I probably didn't water enough either. In the summer, you KNOW you must water the plants every day. By fall, you expect Mother Nature to take some of the heat off. (Pun intended). Sometimes you just can't win.

Although we had a few cold nights, November was still warm enough to play host to insects that should have been long dead. Only last week, I found a respectable sized mosquito, dead from heatstroke at my steaming kitchen window. There he lay, like a cartoon figure, on his back, with his little legs up stretched into the 90-degree plus air. Oh yes, out here, it was in the 90s in November. Sunbathing weather. And don't think we didn't. I saved the mosquito for Zack to see. He didn't seem to fully appreciate the humor in that.

We had flies last week as if it were the height of the summer. And down in the Caribbean somewhere, a tropical storm blossomed the day after hurricane season officially ended. Go fig. What a bad year for hurricanes, an understatement. At least, as they travel northward from the Gulf of Mexico, they usually give the gift of rain to a parched state, but no, not this time. Not a drop did we receive. Amazing.

A few days after the parched mosquito lay in state in the kitchen, the weather suddenly turned cold. When the weatherman predicts 32 degrees, we prepare for a hard freeze out here, and sure enough, last week bore that out. The mercury dropped into the low 20s, and we were glad we had turned on heaters, opened cabinets underneath sinks, and either turned off water and drained pipes or left faucets dripping. We kept the windmill pump running hoping that moving water wouldn't freeze. It didn't. And it gave us the most spectacular icicle display as it overflowed the high tank of our

### 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.

old gravity feed system.

We've had some wonderful (and cold) walks at dawn. I had the opportunity to break ice on the troughs a few times. Yesterday the frozen crust was about five inches thick. (And the resident trough goldfish were just fine below the ice, thank goodness). You can take out a whole lot of frustrations breaking ice with a big ol' pick ax. I highly recommend it. (Strikes of the ax can be accompanied by all manner of conversation and expletives, as there's not a soul around to hear. It's better than therapy and a whole lot cheaper. And the doctor tells me all this weight-bearing exercise is great for women "my age," a phrase I have come to hate).

Since our old tractor won't start in cold weather, I had already dropped four bales of hay in gated pens before the cold spell hit. Thank goodness we have worked so hard to get the fences and gates in order. For once, we had foresight. So every morning, instead of getting on the tractor in 18 degrees or whatever, I'd just pull on the ol' long johns, jeans, two sweaters, insulated overalls (and muffler, coat, ear-warmers, etc. I hate to be cold), hop in the truck, and go open a gate. — Had to whack the hooks on some of the chains a couple of mornings, so frozen were they with their coatings of ice. It was a winter wonderland out there. After the shock of having to actually get moving in weather that cold, I appreciated it all. I was also grateful I didn't slip on the ice. Next time, I'm putting in my order for snow.

We've had only one casualty from the cold so far, and it was one of the resident raccoons, a yearling, I figure. Poor thing must have tried a little figure-skating atop a larger trough. I suppose the ice gave way; he fell in and froze. Guess who had to fish him out? Where was the big, strong man when I needed him? Poor raccoon. If he had only waited another night, the ice would have been plenty thick enough to have held his weight, and indeed held the weight of a whole raccoon village.

(I suspect we may have more casual-

ties from this awful drought than from the cold. If we all don't lose cattle, many of us will certainly be forced to sell them rather than allow them to starve. Few among us have deep enough pockets to buy months of feed after our meager supplies of hay run out. And talk about gas gouging by Big Oil — Around here lately we have seen small time hay gouging by our luckier neighbors to the north or west or wherever this imported hay is arriving from. Instead of pitching in to help fellow farmers in their time of need, our neighbors are offering us their extra hay at premium prices. And thanks to Big Oil, it costs more to truck it down to us. Nice way to help your fellowman, friends. What we need is some sort of hay co-op — so that when one part of the country has a bad spell, things are in place to spread the surplus at reasonable prices to people in need in our OWN country. How about THAT idea, President Bush?

Does FEMA have any extra funds available for drought relief? I heard someone mention something about a possible payment of maybe \$19. a head from the ASCS. Wow. That'll really help a lot. . . . Excuse me, did I sound cynical? Ungrateful? We've got people in this country who haven't worked in years, who play the welfare system like a fine tuned instrument, who have babies after babies after babies with no way to support them, and they all get money, housing, aid, and health care. But hardworking farmers and ranchers get \$19/ head during their time of need. They have the opportunity to sell off herds of cattle they've raised and nurtured and start all over again at a later date when cattle prices will no doubt be higher than they are even now. And to top it all off, they have the pleasure of paying their own inflated health insurance with no group rate, come up with money to meet rising taxes, and shell out hard won dollars for ridiculous gas and diesel prices to run the equipment that fuels their operations).

But back to the weather before my blood pressure strokes me out. . . . Our lowest night so far was 10 degrees. Despite our precautions, we had a pipe on the north side of one house freeze solid. — Not sure yet if we have a resulting leak. Last night, it was only a mild 20 degrees, and now the thermometer on the breezeway says 70 (in the shade). I can't wait to check the one in direct sunlight. From 10 degrees to (I'm guessing) 80 in 48 hours. Texas weather, you gotta love it.

Now if we could just please get some rain. I figure that'll be less of a miracle than help from our government.

# Two Ex-Presidents Trade Charges Over Texas

On Dec. 17, 1829, a career diplomat told President Andrew Jackson the inside story of how the Sabine River ended up the dividing line between Louisiana and Spanish territory — a political bombshell Old Hickory waited 15 years to drop.

Picture this: Instead of crossing the country arm in arm raising money for the victims of last year's tsunami, Bill Clinton and George Bush the Elder are embroiled in nasty, nonstop public feud. Couldn't happen? Two former presidents would never act like that! Well, guess again.

The 1803 treaty that closed the sweetest land deal in American history — the Louisiana Purchase — failed to set hard and fast boundaries. Negotiations with Spain remained at an impasse until 1819, when an obliging secretary of state abandoned a long-standing claim to Texas in exchange for Florida. To the delight of the Spaniards, John Quincy Adams also agreed U.S. sovereignty ended at the Sabine River.

When none of the four candidates in the presidential free-for-all of 1824 obtained an electoral college majority, the House of Representatives picked the winner. Although Andrew Jackson led the popular and electoral college votes, he lost to Adams after fourth-place Henry Clay endorsed the runner-up. The Tennessee's supporters accused the pair of striking a "corrupt bargain," a charge which the appointment of Clay to a cabinet post seemed to sustain.

Jackson humiliated the colorless incumbent four years later with the biggest ballot-box landslide of the nineteenth century. The rough-and-tumble campaign so embittered both that the president-elect refused to make the customary courtesy call at the White House, and Adams boycotted the inauguration of his successor.

The new chief executive immediately launched an aggressive campaign to "reannex" Texas, which Jackson always had considered a part of the Louisiana Purchase. Surrogate spokesmen vaguely alluded to documents which supposedly showed the unconscionable loss was John Quincy Adams' fault.

At Jackson's request, diplomat G.W. Erving submitted a detailed description of the high-level talks with the Spanish government that culminated in the controversial accord of 1819. The president filed away the so-called "Erving Affidavit" for future use in his war of words with Adams.

Meanwhile, Jackson believed the United States would soon regain Texas by force of arms or the power of the purse. He confided to his Mexico minister in February 1832, "I have but little doubt there will be an insurrection in Texas in less than six months."

But his optimism was tempered by the prospect of American intervention to thwart a Mexican counterattack against the victorious rebels. "This necessity I do not wish to see and would much deplore if it should occur." This ambivalent view foreshadowed the tightrope Jackson would walk after the Battle of San Jacinto, when he postponed recognizing the Lone Star Republic until his last day in office.

Jackson waited until even longer to play his trump card against Adams, who

## This Week In Texas History

By Bartee Haile



returned to Washington as the self-appointed conscience of the congress and chief opponent of statehood for Texas. At the height of the heated debate over bringing the Republic into the Union, Old Hickory dusted off the Erving Affidavit.

In a letter widely reprinted by newspapers in the spring of 1844, Jackson contended Erving had persuaded the Spaniards to accept the Rio Grande as the western limit of Louisiana, thereby ceding Texas to the United States. But at the insistence of his state department superior, John Quincy Adams, the

boundary was moved back to the Sabine.

"I knew at once," wrote Jackson, "that Mr. Adams' object was to keep down the growing political ascendancy of the South and the West."

Congressman Adams angrily denied the sensational allegation and charged his old nemesis with fraud. He countered by claiming Jackson had approved the Sabine prior to the signing of the treaty and as "proof" quoted a passage from his diary.

The central character in the affair finally spoke up in November 1844. Erving questioned the accuracy of Jackson's interpretation of his statement and apologized for the apparent "misunderstanding." He did not, however, take the next logical step and release the text of the affidavit for publication.

Nor, for that matter, did Jackson, who in his last words on the subject said sim-

ply, "I believe from the disclosures made to me that Mr. Adams surrendered the interests of the United States when he took the Sabine River as the boundary between us and Spain, when he might have gone to the Colorado if not to the Rio Grande."

Adams exposed his own bias, not to mention paranoia, by raving about "a conspiracy to ruin my good name and fabricate a fable to justify the robbery of Texas from Mexico by the pretense that Texas had been by me treacherously surrendered to Spain."

The last round in the presidential feud clearly went to Andrew Jackson. He died the next June after the tempest over Texas ended in another defeat for John Quincy Adams.

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

## Revelations

"Myth? Ray, has it ever occurred to you that maybe the reason we've been so busy lately is because the dead \*have\* been rising from the grave?"

— Winston Zeddemore (*Ghostbusters* - 1985)

Liberals are a-holes. Screw 'em.

Don't for a minute think any of them are going to save this country if elected into office next year or the years after that.

They won't.

I know this may come as a revelation to some of you armchair politicians out there.

I know it did for me.

I mean, I know it's "The End of Times" for President George Bush, Rep. Tom DeLay and presidential advisor Karl Rove, and, sure, Vice President Dick Cheney is a slice of ham and a spoonful of mayonnaise away from a heart attack—

—but don't be in a hurry to give all the credit to liberals!

Liberals are not pigs dipped in white gelatinous goo.

Nope.

Contrary to popular belief, liberals are not the cause of tsunamis and hurricanes either.

\*snap\*snap\* Focus, people! Liberals are a-holes, remember?

Much of the effort to nail the Bush administration and his allies in Congress has actually come from normal, everyday people that stay politically active with what little time they have—

—*Greedbusters*, if you will.

I first saw a wing of this group in action this past Halloween up at my

friendly neighborhood bar.

Instead of bashing Bush, though, they were warning everybody there about the looming Draconian cuts to social programs to pay for the war in Iraq which was coming for a vote before Congress.

Although the cuts were passed this month, the bar folk are still going to remember the Texas Greedbusters in their matching uniforms with anti-corporate symbols depicting a pig dressed in a suit and tie.

At least I hope they remember.

The Texas Greedbusters modeled themselves after the Greedbusters organized by striking actors to protest advertisers in LA with *Ghostbusters* cast member Ernie "Winston Zeddemore" Hudson back in 2000.

"They're Here To Save America" was their motto.

They said they liked my idea to follow Veep Cheney around the country and try to scare him back into the hospital where he can't hurt anybody—you know, like sneak up behind him and scream "Boo!" when the opportunity presented itself.

But the Texas Greedbusters said they were more into educating the public rather than assassinating an evil political figure.

"Who Ya Gonna Believe?" was their other motto.

These kids aren't anything special, but they seemed to love their country,

## The Rubber Cement Index

By Nathan Diebenow



have a good grasp of statistics, and displayed excellent communication skills.

And it showed. They had a lot of fun explaining the size of the national debt, the number of nuclear weapons in the U.S., and the number of homeless people—that is, explaining them with Twinkies.

"We're Ready To Help You" was another one of their mottos.

Yeah, I can understand how Greedbusters and Greedbuster sympathizers inside and outside the government can be pretty scary to multi-national corporations and the so-called "liberal" and "conservative" politicians who love them—

—but not as scary as the costume Nemo wore for Halloween! Woo-hoo!

Nemo is a six-year-old, cross-eyed Siamese cat owned by my roommate who would rather die a slow death by mayo than be famous, by the way.

Me and Nemo went as characters from *Alien*. I was John Hurt's character, Kane, and Nemo was the "chestbuster" that popped out of Kane's chest.

He was awesome, but you should have seen the "Greedbuster" Sigourney Weaver and the "Alien" Sigourney Weaver.

Damn, they were hot, and I'm talking melt-diamonds hot!

## Honda To Make Solar Cells In 2007

TOKYO — Japan's third-biggest automaker Honda Motor Co. announced plans last week to start mass-producing solar cells composed of non-silicon compound materials in 2007.

A new manufacturing plant will be built near a car factory on the southwestern

Japanese island of Kyushu to produce the cells for residential and industrial use at first in the Japanese market, according to a statement from the company.

At full capacity, annual sales from Honda's solar cells are estimated at \$40 million to \$70 million.

The solar cells will be made from materials that will use half as much energy and produce half as much carbon dioxide during manufacturing than silicon-based solar cells.

Honda's rivals in the solar cell industry are Kyocera, Sharp, and Mitsubishi.

# Democrats Join Republicans In Continued Desecration Of Constitution

## USA PATRIOT Act 'Senatized,' Likely Extended Six Months

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Senate voted Thursday night to reauthorize 16 provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act that were set to expire on Dec. 31.

Negotiation had been under way several days after the House approved it.

With some changes to the House version, it is now back in Congress' ballpark.

Critics of the Act, which nullifies part of the U.S. Constitution, filibustered to keep the Act from becoming perma-

nent, to the chagrin of President Bush who demanded its passage. As a means of compromise, Democrats and some Republicans sought a three-month extension of the Act to allow for debate on some of the more worrisome language

related to civil rights.

The Senate's Republican majority, however, as a counter-offer, asked for a one-year extension. They two sides met in the middle, with the Act extended six months, pending approval by the House.

## Bush Claims Constitutional Authority To Continue Spy Program

WASHINGTON — While he acknowledged that past foreign intelligence failures have compromised international confidence in the United States, President Bush said he okayed a program aimed at spying on suspected terrorists inside the nation's boarders without warrants.

In a news conference last Monday, Bush said that his position under the Constitution requires him to protect citizens and so the program will continue even as it had already without the issuance of court orders.

Republican and Democratic leaders alike, though, questioned the legality of the president's abilities and rationale.

"Where does he find in the Constitution the authority to tap the wires and the phones of American citizens without any court oversight?" said Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.).

Leaders of both parties last week called for

probes into Bush's decision to conduct warrant-less domestic surveillance, a program in which Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said Congress approved through legislation passed after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"The president has, I think, made up a law that we never passed," said Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.). "He is the president, not a king."

Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Penn.) said last Sunday he wanted to hold hearings.

"They talk about constitutional authority," Specter said. "There are limits as to what the president can do."

Since The New York Times exposed the program last week amid strife over the reauthorization of the controversial USA Patriot Act, the Bush administration has dropped previous excuses, such as citings of national security, to now discuss the secret surveillance conducted by the National Security Agency. Under normal circumstances, wiretapping to monitor phone calls and e-mails of American citizens is

only allowed here by a court order.

While Democratic and Republican leaders admit they have had knowledge of the spy program through regular briefings, they say the possibly unlawful program is solely President Bush's, and he should explain why he ignored a requirement that called for him to seek the approval of a secret court for such wiretaps under extreme circumstances through the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

Bush said that only outgoing international calls from the United States and those sent to individuals within the U.S. were monitored by the NSA.

## Iraq Election Results In Bad News For 'Bush's Democracy'

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The preliminary results of Iraqi's Dec. 15 parliamentary elections have cast a dark cloud over President Bush's vision of a westernized democracy in the oil-rich, post-Saddam nation.

Although the Iraqi Election Commission said that about 90 percent of Iraq turned out to vote, most of those voters appeared to have been cast for Shi'ite and Sunni religious parties that wanted the U.S. military to leave their country yesterday.

Another thing is clear: Iran is glowing with pleasure at the early counts because the unofficial winner, the Shiites, are overwhelmingly supportive of Tehran.

"The Shi'ite religious coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), not only held together, but also can be expected to dominate the new 275-member National Assembly for the next four years," said the ASIA TIMES. "Former premier Ayad Allawi's prospects of leading the new government seem virtually nil. And Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Accord suffered a shattering defeat."

This means that the Iraqi nationals saw through Washington's George Washington strawmen, Allawi and Chalabi, because the two Iraqi exiles played such huge roles with the Bush administration and the CIA leading up to and after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Final results are to be certified in early January 2006 after the election commission investigates allegations of voter fraud

and intimidation. More than 1,000 complaints from across Iraq have been filed, according to one Iraqi election official.

Since early results show the Shi'ite coalition leading, the Sunni Arab coalition, the Iraqi Consensus Front, have decided to challenge the election numbers and might call for a re-vote.

In Istanbul, Turkey, about 80 percent of the 25,000 votes will be voided due to complaints by Iraqi Kurdish parties who are upset over the high number of votes from the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF). The Turkish government blames the Iraqi Election Commission for the problems at three polls in Istanbul.

For Americans, the future of the U.S. troops in Iraq as well as their civil liberties at home is at stake as the Bush administration and Congress watch who takes the 275-seats in Iraq's Council of Representatives.

The Pentagon announced that about nine insurgents were slain and 16 held after two incidents there last Monday and Tuesday. The ASIA TIMES reported in its story "Iran Wins Big in Iraq's Elections" that right after the elections, 10 Iraqis, five of which were police officers and an American, were slain.

So far, the U.S. Senate approved a six-month extension to the USA Patriot Act Wednesday, while Senate hearings are being planned to investigate Bush's secret domestic surveillance program of U.S. citizens which he finally admitted to earlier in the week.



**Spying  
On You!**

## Cheney's Vote Decides Cuts To Medicare

WASHINGTON — Vice President Dick Cheney flew back early from an overseas campaign to garner support for the U.S.-led "war on terror" last week to cast the deciding vote, 51-50, in the Senate to cut the federal deficit by \$39.7 billion.

Senate Harry Reid (D-Nevada) said the GOP budget "caters to lobbyists and an elite group of ultraconservative ideologues here in Washington, all at the expense of middle class Americans."

The bill freezes home healthcare payments under Medicare at today's levels for a year, makes it difficult for the elderly to gain nursing home benefits under Medicaid, and squeezes \$12.6 billion from student loan programs.

After five-years of extreme federal spending by the GOP-controlled government, the total deficit cuts would account for about 2.5 percent of projected shortfalls totaling \$1.6 trillion over the same years.

A separate \$454 billion defense-spending bill remained in limbo, however, after Senate Democrats successfully pulled off a filibuster to stop a provision calling for oil drilling in an Alaska wildlife refuge with a vote of 56 to 44. To break a filibuster requires 60 votes.

Democrats said the defense-spending bill would have passed unscathed had the oil drilling provision been left out. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, (D-Calif.) said tinkering with SUV mileage requirements would have created an equal amount of savings.

"Destroying this wilderness will do very little to reduce energy costs, nor does it do very much for oil independence...and it would offer a number of false hopes," she said.

The defense bill also sets aside \$29 billion for hurricane relief, \$2 billion for poor families to pay their winter heating bills, and cash for troops in Iraq.