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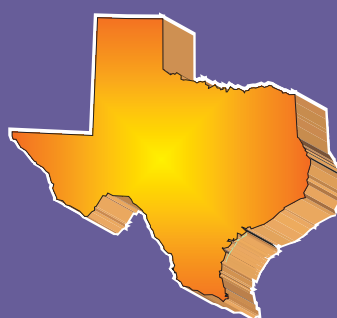
WAR IN IRAQ Casualties:

U.S. Military Deaths

2,172

U.S. Govt. Statistics

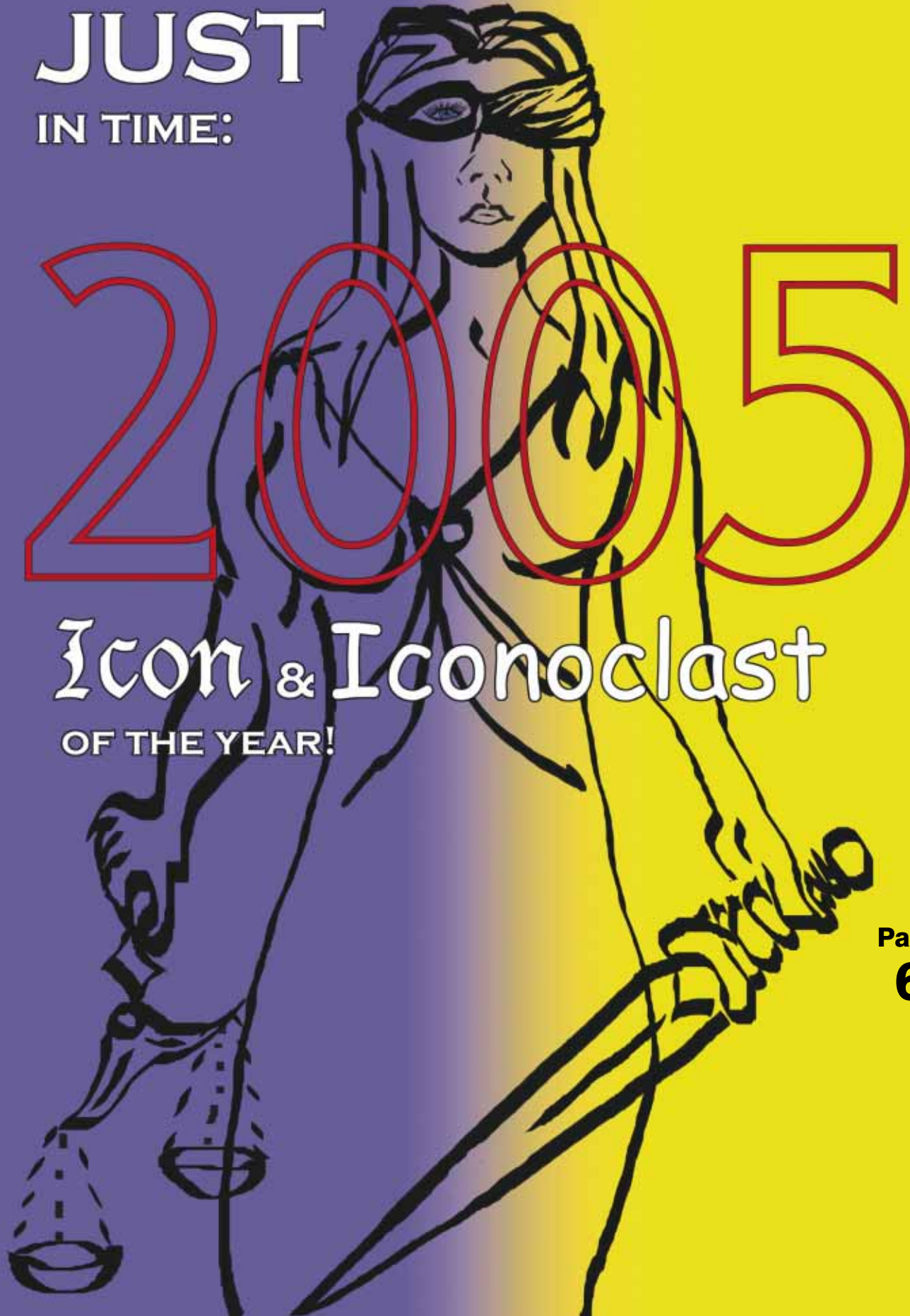
The Lone Star ICONOCLAST



JUST IN TIME:

2005

Icon & Iconoclast OF THE YEAR!



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Texas, 19 Others Miss Deadline To Upgrade Election Systems

WASHINGTON — As many as 19 states, including Texas, will more than likely miss the Jan. 1, 2006 deadline to meet a federal law ensuring accurate and honest elections, Help America Vote Act. Reasons for the delay include technology problems, power politics, and legal disputes with contractors, according to Election Online.

Election Online reported last month that state officials expect delays for HAVA implementation from a couple months to over a year, and the U.S. Department of Justice has yet to indicate

its enforcement strategy against non-compilers.

Passed into law in 2002 in the wake of the controversial 2000 presidential election, HAVA requires states to upgrade voting equipment, create statewide voter registration databases, develop better voter identification methods, and make available provisional ballots to qualified voters.

A survey conducted by the National Association of Secretaries of State showed that 24 states will be ready for the 2006 elections.

However, the Secretary of State announced in August 2005 that Texas' new HAVA compliant voter registration/election management system, TEAM, will be deployed in June 2006. Until the TEAM system is online, an interim system based on the state's existing TVRS application will be used.

According to an election advisory dated Nov. 23, 2005 from Ann McGeehan, Director of Elections, the DOJ has already sought information on the progress of Texas' HAVA upgrades. Noncompliance, she said, could bring

monetary consequences.

"Any instance of noncompliance could affect the HAVA funding already awarded to your county to obtain a HAVA-compliant voting system as well as future HAVA funding, such as the funding the state has allocated for voter registration upgrades to be compatible with the TEAM system," said McGeehan. "In addition, the issuance of Chapter 19 funds is dependent on compliance with the procedures outlined above."

Congress appropriated \$3.9 billion to states to comply with the HAVA law.

Medicare Drugs Pricier Than Veterans' By 48 Percent

WASHINGTON — A survey released last month shows that the new Medicare drug program fails to live up to the Bush administration's promise to keep the price of drugs low through competition for seniors.

According to the consumer health organization Families USA, the median price difference for the 20 drugs most frequently used by seniors is 48.2 percent, much higher than the prices negotiated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The Families USA report found that the lowest VA price is much lower than the lowest Medicare prescription drug plan (PDP) price for 19 of the 20 drugs. Also, VA prices are lower for both generic and brand-name drugs.

The survey also found that through premiums, deductibles, and co-payments, seniors will bear about one-fourth of the new drug program's costs, while taxpayers will pay remaining three-quarters.

"The huge prices paid by seniors and taxpayers could have been avoided if Congress and the President had not caved in to the pressure of the drug lobby," said Ron Pollack, Executive Director of Families USA. "They prohibited Medicare from bargaining for cheaper prices and, to ensure that this would never change, they delegated the administration of the benefit to private plans, which have far less bargaining clout.

Disparity In Drug Dollars

Among the top seven drugs prescribed for seniors, the annual difference between the lowest VA prices and lowest Medicare drug plan prices are as follows:

Plavix (75 mg., an anti-clotting agent): lowest VA price is \$887.16; lowest Medicare plan price is \$1,229.64 - a difference of \$342.48, or 38.6 percent.

Lipitor (10 mg., cholesterol lowering agent): lowest VA price is \$497.16; lowest Medicare plan price is \$717.84 - a difference of \$220.68, or 44.4 percent.

Fosamax (70 mg., osteoporosis treatment): lowest VA price is \$493.32; lowest Medicare plan price is \$709.68 - a difference of \$216.36, or 43.9 percent.

Norvasc (5 mg., calcium channel blocker): lowest VA price is \$301.68; lowest Medicare plan price is \$458.88 - a difference of \$157.20, or 52.1 percent.

Protonix (40 mg., gastrointestinal agent): lowest VA price is \$253.32; lowest Medicare plan price is \$1,080 - a difference of \$826.68, or 326.3 percent.

Celebrex (200 mg., anti-inflammatory agent): lowest VA price is \$619.80; lowest Medicare plan price is \$865.08 - a difference of \$245.28, or 39.6 percent.

Zocor (20 mg., cholesterol lowering agent): lowest VA price is \$167.80; lowest Medicare plan price is \$1,323.72 - a difference of \$1,155.92, or 688.9 percent.

"As a result, many seniors will be burdened with unaffordable high drug costs, and America's taxpayers will be fleeced."

The Families USA survey compared VA prices with the prices in two Medicare drug regions: region 5 (covering the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Delaware) and Region 14 (covering Ohio). Only drugs that were on a Medicare prescription drug plan's formulary

— drugs for which the plan would have actively negotiated prices — were included in the analysis.

All data were collected during the week of Nov. 14, 2005 when the new program's enrollment began from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service's "Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Finder" (www.medicare.gov).

For a copy of the report, and for a copy of the prices for each of the 20 drugs in

all plans in the two regions, visit the Families USA website.

INFO

www.familiesusa.org

Japan Joins U.S. To Develop Missile Defense Program

TOKYO — After years of living under a constitution that denounces military use of force to settle conflicts, the Japanese government under Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced it is joining the United States to develop a ballistic missile defense program.

The Japanese government's three-decade ban on arms exports was eased a year ago, paving the way for talks between Tokyo and Washington to plan for a joint defense shield costing about \$3 billion. Japan is said to pay for a third of the program.

Security worries and arms research grew when North Korea test-fired a long-range ballistic missile over Japan in 1998.

Japan's Defense Agency said last month that a site in northeastern Japan has been considered as a base for the missile shield's radar system.



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Military Sharply Increases Airstrikes In Iraq

WASHINGTON — The U.S. forces have sharply increased airstrikes in Iraq in the last two months due to aid ground forces in the western Anbar province and to improve security ahead of the Dec. 15

parliamentary elections, according to U.S. officers stationed there.

According to the U.S. military, warplanes have struck targets in Iraq 25 times a month until the end of August,

then doubled attacks to 62 in September, 122 in October, and 120 in November.

These airstrikes — like most in Iraq — employ 500-pound, precision-guided bombs aimed to destroy targets without

killing innocent Iraqi civilians.

Experts believe that the U.S. will increase the use of air forces ahead and during the reduction of U.S. ground forces next year.

Diebold CEO O'Dell Resigns Ahead Of Lawsuit

NORTH CANTON, Ohio — Diebold, Inc.'s controversial chief executive officer and chairman, Walden W. O'Dell, 60, resigned his position last month for unspecified personal reasons.

The day after his announcement, Scott+Scott, LLC initiated a class action lawsuit in United States District Court

for the Northern District of Ohio.

The complaint alleges securities fraud, lack of internal quality controls over its voting machine products, insider trading, and the concealment of costs and problems during the restructuring of the company.

The former head of the manufacturer of

electronic voting machine is known for stating his intent to help "Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president" in an invitation to a fundraiser for President Bush in 2003.

Though company policy now dictates no top executive can make political contributions, business for its subsidiary Diebold Election Systems has still

slowed. This year Hurricane Katrina helped postpone the deliveries of \$10 million in voting machine in Gulf areas.

Diebold's main business is manufacturing ATMs and security systems. It started developing e-voting touch-screen technology after Florida's "hanging chad" election controversy in 2000.



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Veterans For Peace Active In Crawford

By DEBORAH MATHEWS
STAFF WRITER

CRAWFORD — Continuing a vigil, the Camp Casey Chapter of Veterans for Peace in Crawford recently attempted to deliver an open letter to the President to Secret Service personnel at the barricade on the road leading to the ranch. Refused acceptance, activists plan to send the information directly to the White House.

"Our tiny band of patriots attempted to deliver the letter to the president at the Secret Service guard station into the estate. Of course, they won't accept anything for delivery to him," said Veterans for Peace member Dean Bridges. Bridges is one of only two members stationed in Crawford, but said, "We are few, but we feel mighty. We're reminding Mr. Bush of our presence and the nation's desire for peace."

The open letter is as follows:

Who Would Jesus Bomb?

Date: Dec. 24, 2005, At the Gates of the Western White House, Crawford, Texas
Subject: Who Would Jesus Bomb?
Dear President Bush,

On March 19, 2003, you took our country to war in Iraq. Regardless of the reasons for your actions, the results include more than 2,150 American soldiers killed, more than 20,000 American soldiers wounded and more than 100,000 Iraqis killed and wounded. The burden of this horrific toll falls heavily upon families, women and children particularly. A grieving mother or father, a dead son or daughter, a mangled and dismembered child; these images represent a common language of horror, understood by all nations and all faiths and provide a global unity of grief.

During this season of Christmas, we ask you to reflect upon your Christian faith and the lessons of two thousand years built around the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. We emphasize the uncontested fact that Jesus is one of the most profound pacifists of our time. Peace and compassion were at the center of everything he stood for and the peaceloving of all faiths (or no faith) aspire to the ascendant morality he preached.

In order to quell some of the unrest about American casualties in the Iraq war here in America, the resurrected strategy of air war has been initiated. While we understand that this strategy will reduce the number of American soldiers killed, it will increase the numbers of innocent Iraqi men, women and children who are antiseptically called collateral casualties. We ask you to reconsider this strategy by asking the question "Who

Would Jesus Bomb?

We ask this with the greatest respect for your position and the awesome power and historical consequence of the presidential mantle you wear. We ask this also with the greatest compassion for you as a human being, considering the personal responsibility you must bear for the blood that has been shed. But the American people also share this responsibility, for you have done this in our name. Please understand that this question is in no way a protest. Rather, it is a promotion of world peace, the noblest cause of all.

One of the most enduring teachings of all major faiths is the Golden Rule. Matthew 7:12 says "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." We have made available quotes from other faiths around the world saying the same basic thing. Shouldn't we, as a predominately Christian nation be practicing what we preach?

You have the opportunity during the remainder of your administration to take our nation from war to peace. If you were to do so, you would establish an enduring legacy as president. All rational human beings desire peace. We would also like to point out that while America was cut by 9/11, we were gutted by Katrina and Rita. It is a worthy lesson that even the horrors of terrorism and war are nothing compared to the power of nature. Wouldn't you much rather be known as the Peace President rather than the War President?

Mr. President, we are a wounded country. Please help us to heal. Now that Iraqi elections have been held, bring our troops home to their families and out of harm's way. Do this as soon as possible, early in 2006 and leave Iraq to its own destiny, with respect for the holy land that it is to those who live there. Please turn to your attention to our own great nation, for we desperately need your compassion.

People of conscience around the world are asking for peace. Calls for non-violent civil resistance are coming from Nobel laureates, poets and many others. Our nation will fragment even more in the face of these efforts unless you, personally, can unite us. Hear our plea, Mr. President and recall the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

Respectfully,
Carl Rising-Moore, VFP Field Organizer
Veterans for Peace
Camp Casey Chapter

P.O. Box 252
Crawford, Texas 76638-0252
317.777.4805
crawfordv4p@yahoo.com

Important Note: Veterans for Peace is a secular, not-for-profit corporation promoting peace and justice throughout the world. Attached to the letter was:

The Golden Rule

Provided by Veterans for Peace, Camp Casey Chapter, Crawford, Texas
Dec. 24, 2005

• All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

Matthew 7:12
Christianity

• Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

Udana Varga 5:18
Buddhism

• What is hateful to you, do not to your fellowmen. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.

Talmud, Shabbat 31:a
Judaism

• No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

Sunnah
Islam

• This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.

Mahabharata 5:1517
Brahmanism.

• Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you.

Analects 15:23
Confucianism.

• Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

T'ai Shag Kan Ying P'ien
Taoism

• To those that are good to me, I am good; to those that are not good to me, I am also good. Thus all get to be good. To those that are sincere with me, I am sincere; to those who are not sincere with me, I am also sincere. Thus all get to be sincere.

Taoist Proverb

• That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good: for itself.

Dadistan-i-dinik 94:5
Zoroastrianism

• In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.

Lor Mahavir, 24th Tirthan Kara
Jainism

• Respect for all life is the foundation The Great Law of Peace Iriquois Five Nations.

• Do as you would be done by

Persian saying

• Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself.

Baha'i

• Don't go around hurting people, and try to understand things.

Hopi Indian Wisdom

• One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts

Yourba Proverb
Nigerian

• The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form

Shinto saying

• No one is my enemy, none a stranger and everyone is my friend.

Guru Arjan Dev
Sikhism

• Humanists acknowledge human interdependence, the need for mutual respect and the kinship of all humanity. The highest aim and sense of human life is the striving to attain the welfare of one's neighbor

Humanism

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Newspaper Chooses Best and Worst of 2005

More on next page...

Iconoclast

2005 + OF THE YEAR

Ronnie Earle

Ronnie Earle is everything Tom DeLay pretends to be.

Earle was graduated from Birdville High, an Eagle Scout, lifeguard, football starter and president of the student council. He was graduated from the University of Texas, admitted to law school and passed the state bar.

DeLay was a wealthy oilman's spoiled son, who grew up in South America. Known as "Hot Tub Tom," who got kicked out of Baylor for drinking, he got a biology degree from the University of Houston (known at the time as "Cougar High") and ran an exterminator company, where to know him was to sue him. He got three IRS tax liens for failing to pay his employees' income tax and settled out of court with two different associates. Two different press accounts have accused him of perjury in one of those cases.

Earle worked for John Connally for a while, then was elected Austin municipal judge. In the city of libertines during the era of Love, Drugs and Rock n' Roll, Earle was the first city magistrate to issue search warrants for drugs. He was elected to the Legislature, then ran successfully for district attorney, an office he has held for almost three decades.

DeLay was anointed for a "safe" Houston suburban congressional seat, then rode Dick Cheney's coattails and a string of buying and bullying tactics to a position of party power.

Earle transformed the office from a stepping-stone for young lawyers to earn experience before going to big law firms to an efficient, professional prosecution agency.

Earle himself is no trial lawyer; he is an administrator. Make that an *efficient* administrator, who is frugal with the cases he chooses to prosecute and has an eye for tough courtroom practitioners who are, from a won-loss perspective, very good at convicting criminals.

Much has been made of his populist view, but just as he was no friend to the hippies as a municipal judge, he is no friend of Democratic politicians in the new century. He has prosecuted a dozen of them.

And two Republicans . . . well, three now.

Current Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison shouldn't count by "conservative" stan-

dards, since the evidence against her was thrown out on a technicality.

And we all know how Republicans feel about activist judges tying the hands of the police.

Ronnie Earle has but one prejudice when it comes to his duty: He doesn't like criminals.

Earle is most deserving of this award, however, because he experienced what

Gary Trudeau once described as "premature morality."

When the rest of us were bowing down to the Bush gang in the panic and fear following the attack on the World Trade Center, Ronnie Earle did not forget that he is an American, and Americans hold their leaders



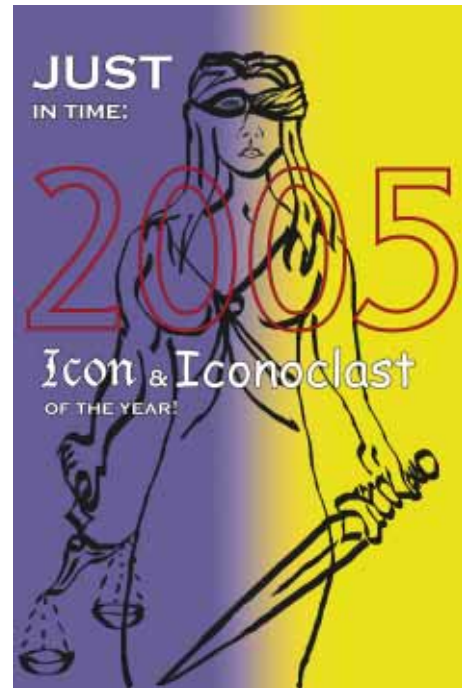
Ronnie Earle

to high standards; they do not worship them.

When the broadcast propagandists were beating the phony patriotic drum and decrying those who suggested less than blind obedience to the party line, Ronnie Earle was working.

He suspected that the electoral process that makes America work had been circumvented by a pack of political thugs.

Just as he would build a case against



an East Austin drive-by, he set about investigating and collecting evidence against a political machine as criminal as any drug cartel.

Ronnie Earle is smart, committed and unwavering in his principals; a man who turned himself in and paid a fine for filing his campaign contribution list a day late.

If the man he is prosecuting were so principled, he'd save the taxpayers a great deal of money.

Hard To Decide

When the editorial board of THE ICONOCLAST (Don M. Fisher, Nathan Diebenow, and W. Leon Smith) embarked on choosing this year's Icon and Iconoclast of the Year, the decision was difficult.

We wanted to award the titles to truly deserving individuals, but there were quite a few at the top of each heap to consider.

By definition, The Iconoclast of the Year award goes to an individual who has exemplified courage in the fight for freedom, justice, truth, and the best interests of our country.

The Icon of the Year award goes to an individual at the other end of the spectrum whose deplorable actions reside on the dark side of decency.

In his "Call To Mind" column last week, Don Fisher mentioned some of the runners-up.

On the negative side were Joe Lieberman, Ben Barnes, "Tricky" Rick Perry (who, as Fisher noted, "never met a sleazy tactic he didn't like"), Bill O'Reilly, President Bush (and his merry men, plus Condi and the Veep), and the Texas Legislature for its "do nothing" posture. Added to the list is Kay Bailey Hutchison for her "thoughtless" lock-step adherence to party politics over what's really needed in the country.

On the positive side, Fisher lavished praise on "the real Katrina Chris-

tians 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."

He also offered accolades to "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," and to "churches that have continued to preach and pray without asking the federal government to force the rest of us to listen."

He concluded his positive runner-up list with this:

"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."

Very high among the runners-up for Iconoclast of the Year was Cindy Sheehan, the mother whose son, Casey, died in battle in Iraq. Sheehan launched a month-long vigil in Crawford to ignite anti-war sentiments nationwide.

Sheehan played a significant role in kindling a growing quest for truth.

As a result, one by one, red states

The Trenchwalker

By W. Leon Smith



turned blue as the public become more aware and outraged at the lies that had been spewing from The White House.

Another top pick was Patrick J. Fitzgerald, who was appointed Special Counsel in the Plame affair investigation. His relentless, non-partisan pursuit of the truth made him an iconoclastic hero.

When the persnickety Kay Bailey Hutchison said, "I certainly hope that if there is going to be an indictment that says something happened, that it is an indictment on a crime and not some perjury technicality," Fitzgerald responded, "That talking point won't fly. The truth is the engine of our judicial system. If you compromise the truth, the whole process is lost."

Truth is on trial in America. It was a prime yardstick in our determination of this year's awards.

As Iconoclast of the Year, Ronnie Earle was chosen, among other things, for his tenacity, courage, and undying devotion to the truth. He saw Tom DeLay (winner of the Icon of the Year Award) for what he was long before most of the country did and exhibited the fortitude to not bow to politics.

Newspaper Chooses Best and Worst of 2005

ICON

2005 OF THE YEAR

Tom DeLay

One comment that stood out in our discussion about awarding this year's worst:

"You know, we could just as easily name George Bush every year until he's out of office."

This year's winner, therefore, is the person who most thoroughly illustrates that point.

This administration has proven itself not just to be in error or incompetent, but genuinely venal, a slicker version of an ancient enemy not merely to democracy, but to human decency.

Tom DeLay, the administration's Congressional catspaw, has epitomized all that has been wrong with American politics for two decades.

His demise, his legal and popular reckoning, has exposed the amoral arrogance of a political movement with no standards but elitism, no ethics but winning.

As the Sultan of Sleaze, revelations about Tom DeLay have vindicated all those whose wariness of this administration's dangerous policies were shouted down by television networks more interested in feeding at the slick propaganda trough than living up to their obligations to report political realities.

Tom DeLay represents government by bribe and threat.

He has sold his favor not merely to the highest bidder, but to those most inimical to the welfare of the American people.

He feasted at an elaborate banquet and lined his political pockets in exchange for legislation to permit sweatshops to continue operating in American territories at the expense of American jobs.

He was Enron's voice in the United States Congress, and has pushed a dirty laundry list of environmental poisoning legislation from anyone with the money to buy it.

He eliminated post-911 security training for flight attendants when airlines decided it was too expensive. DeLay apparently didn't come that high.

He pushed proposals to turn Social Security and Medicare over to supportive fly-by-night insurance companies and lined up lobbyists to fund a full slate of toady Congressional campaigns.

It is no surprise that DeLay has said that politicians should have the right to keep their political contributions secret. It is, in his view, none of your business who bribes him.

Finally, he used out-of-state bribes to stack a Texas Legislature that took three sessions to fail at an education spending bill. That legislature attempted more assaults of Texans' freedom than anyone since Santa

Anna.

Even now, trapped like a monkey that refuses to release the bait, DeLay and his legal team floods the court with motions, trying to hustle a trial that he can spin away in time for the spring primaries.

His political strategy is, as it ever has been, geared toward the natural trust of American voters of their leaders. DeLay's tactics are geared toward turning that trust into gullibility.

And why did Tom DeLay mount an illegally financed propaganda campaign that turned Texas government into a hodge-podge of greed and incompe-



Tom DeLay

tence that would be an embarrassment anywhere in Latin America?

To enhance his personal power.

But the most compelling reason Tom DeLay is so deserving of this award is his damage to his own political allies.

For years Texans endured the deceit and manipulation from Big Jim Ferguson and W. Lee O'Daniel to Lyndon Johnson and Gus Mutscher.

Through it all, there was a constant cry from a minority, often all but non-existent, the Republican Party. A two-party system, they claimed, would provide the necessary political checks and balances that keep government honest.

Tom DeLay and the rest of the Bush Bandits have turned that promise into a fascist power grab and ensured a continuation of Texas political vilification tradition that trades in propaganda, not policy; demagoguery, not democracy; distrust, not decency.



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Austin Forgives His Scandalous 'Right Hand'

On Dec. 30, 1847, eleven years after the death of Stephen F. Austin, the Father of Texas' right-hand man opened the first real bank in independent Texas.

Samuel May Williams belonged to a distinguished Rhode Island clan that took root in New England a century before his birth in 1795. The long list of illustrious ancestors included a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a president of Yale College.

Leaving home at the age of 20, the young wanderer wound up in New Orleans. During his seven-year stay in the Crescent City, he picked up enough French and Spanish to become fluent in both tongues.

Williams' linguistic skills landed him a job as an interpreter right after his arrival in Texas in the spring of 1822. He soon met Austin, two years his senior at 29, and in 1824 accepted an offer of employment from the colonizer.

Assuming a multitude of varied and demanding responsibilities, Williams evolved into the *empresario's* indispensable right-hand man. Although his formal titles were restricted to official secretary and public recorder of the Anglo-American settlement, there was no limit to his actual duties. He did whatever had to be done, which regularly meant running the contentious colony during Austin's extended absences.

The position was anything but cushy. Williams' headquarters, the land office at San Felipe de Austin, was a ramshackle structure that provided minimal shelter against the whimsical weather. The sum total of furniture was two chairs and a whiskey barrel converted into a desk.

Essential supplies were incredibly scarce in the primitive province. Williams had to send off to Louisiana for a log to record land transactions, a routine request that took six months.

Austin was an exceptionally private person, who rarely confided in anybody. But his assistant gradually earned his trust and in time became his closest if not only true friend.

By 1834 the colony was a thriving community, and Williams finally felt free to pursue more personal goals after a decade of dedicated service. Austin grudgingly accepted the fact that his

This Week In Texas History

By Barte Haile



able aide needed to get on with his life, and the pair parted on amicable terms.

However, in a matter of months, the ex-employee managed to besmirch the reputation his mentor had labored so long to keep above reproach. Williams engaged in land speculations which, though technically legal, provoked harsh criticism from many colonists who jumped to the unfounded conclusion that Austin was involved in the shady deals.

The resultant rift wrecked the relationship both men treasured. For two years they did not exchange a single word.

In August 1836, four months after the Battle of San Jacinto, Williams broke the awkward silence.

"I am informed that you charge me with a want of regard for your standing and character," he wrote without a hint of an apology. "All that I can do is to call upon you to reflect and examine the motives you think I could have for such a proceeding towards any man I esteemed as a friend, and more especially towards you."

Austin waited until early November to reply. Considering the fact that the land speculation scandal had just cost him the presidency of the Republic, his response was remarkably charitable.

"Williams, you have wounded me very deeply, but you are so deeply rooted in my affections that, with all your faults, you are at heart too much like a wild and heedless brother to be entirely banished."

That touching and magnanimous letter may have been Austin's last. Exhausted by his nation-building exertions, he died seven weeks later at the tragically early age of 43.

Ever the shrewd though not always scrupulous entrepreneur, Williams went on to make a fortune in the shipping business. Using his political con-

tacts to circumvent the constitutional ban on banks, he opened the Commercial and Agricultural Bank at the corner of Market and Twenty-Third Street in Galveston at the end of 1847.

The intense animosity of most Texans toward land speculators was surpassed only by their burning hatred of bankers. Opponents immediately filed suit to have Williams' charter canceled and subjected him to a relentless campaign of public vilification while awaiting the verdict.

The Texas supreme court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in 1859. The justices ordered the Commercial and Agricul-

tural Bank closed and its assets liquidated down to the last cent.

But Samuel May Williams was beyond caring. He died six months before the decision, the victim of what his doctor called "a giving way mentally and physically."

Put another way, he lost interest in living. Austin tried to tell him there was more to life than money, but his right hand stubbornly ignored that simple truth.

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

Editorial OP/ED

Opinion - Columns - Letters

— Editorial —

Confusion For Seniors; Windfall For Pharmas, Insurers

If you can't privatize Social Security, why not woo its sister, Medicare?

If you can't deliver a windfall for Wall Street, at least by privatizing Medicare, drug companies and private health insurers will become filthy rich, and a wooden stake in the heart of Medicare will have been poised.

But to best pull this off, you must first make it so complicated that even the people running the show don't know what's going on.

Senior citizens from throughout the nation are scrambling to meet a Medicare Plan D May 2006 deadline to sign on with a private health insurer in order to avoid severe penalties that could extend well into the future.

And, already, insurance company vultures are luring easily seniors into their clutches, largely because of choice overload, a lack of timely assistance, and an intensely complicated system that many seniors simply cannot understand. In many events, choices — bad choices — are being made for them. When they call for government assistance, they can plan on at least an hour's wait, and even then, when it comes, they are directed to obtain material from as many as 40 different companies, to compare coverages and attempt to make a decision.

One might ask why Congress did not keep the program government-run and in a position to negotiate lower drug prices, while at the same time offering a less complicated yet comprehensive program that is both understandable and not abuse-prone.

Instead Congress followed President Bush's suggestion of privatizing Medicare, placing prescription drug coverage in the hands of private insurance companies and health care plans, while forbidding the government from negotiating with drug companies for

better prices. At the same time, the bill blocked the import of drugs — up to 75 percent cheaper — from Canada.

What this does is to allow drug companies to engage in continued price-gouging that could easily increase their profits by 30 percent.

When seniors come out of the forest and look behind them, they will likely see higher costs than before and will then know they have been had.

Medicare Plan D, according to government sources, will cover 75 percent of annual prescription costs up to \$2,250, after a \$250 deductible (in most cases) and a \$35 monthly premium. After the \$2,250 figure has been reached, beneficiaries will receive nothing until another \$2,850 is spent by the individual and his out-of-pocket costs reach \$3,600. At that point, Medicare will cover 95 percent of the additional costs.

But who is to say how the drug companies will set their prices and how soon the \$2,250 figure will be reached? Will there ever be a true-up to assure that seniors won't be ripped off and their "real" benefits diminished by rising costs of prescription drugs? Cutting benefits and increasing premiums are still options, according to the bill, which could result in substantial losses instead of gains for the elderly.

Granted, measures to provide assistance in covering rising prescription drug costs for seniors and others have been needed a long time.

But the government chose instead to worship Big Pharma and insurance companies, moving its public trust responsibilities to profit-driven corporate entities and throwing senior citizens into the lion's cage.

As we are witnessing throughout the country, the cats are hungry and the feast has begun.

— W. Leon Smith



"I WANT TO EXCHANGE HIM FOR A PRESIDENT."

When is a Fox NOT a Fox?

Obviously, it is when the Mexican president initiates a massive advertising campaign in the U.S. denouncing the proposal by America's congress to build a fence along the borders between our two countries, instead of using that money to generate jobs and improve the quality of life for Mexican citizens. If President Vincente Fox instead applied that money to helping poor Mexicans and their families, American taxpayers would be spared a small fortune and Mexican families would be a lot better off and would stay inside their nation.

During the past five years I advocated that the U.S. bill the Mexican government for the yearly cost of taking care of those who flee illegally into our country to find work and a better quality of life. President Bush and Texas Gov. Rick Perry have opted NOT to do so, because of the "bigger picture" each one sees in the near future. The president knows that it's a boon to big business to hire illegals at a fraction of the cost of hiring Americans to do the same job, plus, illegals don't get health benefits paid for by the companies — instead, they often get free medical services for themselves and members of their families, treated by American doctors, paid by American taxpayers. In addition, illegals are often provided free education for their children in American public schools. Gov. Perry salivates every time he thinks about his Trans Texas Toll Corridor, that he envisions will start in Canada and stretch down through the U.S. and Mexico all the way to Central and South America. To do so, Perry has to "make nice" to Pres. Fox and then double-tax Texans for building and maintaining the toll roads.

There are several issues here. First, during the past several generations the U.S. traditionally has upheld a yearly quota system of those entering our nation to find work, freedoms, religious rights and educating their children. Furthermore, most immigrants who come here follow the U.S. immigration laws and rules set so they can achieve those goals. The rules include having a valid passport and/or work visa/green card from their native country. Most Mexicans entering illegally are fleeing their homeland because of economic travesties and the unaffordability of applying for a passport and/or work visa. Since many are starving, they will do anything to get to the U.S., which is understandable. A fence may cause a delay, but it won't stop the trend.

President Fox knows this. Pres. Fox is a sly fox, who wants the U.S. to pay for the upkeep of his people. Talk about a leader abusing the populace in Iraq, let's look more closely at what Fox does consciously to his own people. Because "El Presidente" doesn't develop more jobs for the poor, they go hungry. Because Pres. Fox doesn't provide the children of poor families with an education, they remain illiterate. Because the poor are limited in receiving medical care, they become unhealthy and diseased. In short, the possibility of dying crossing the border into the U.S. is viewed as a better option.

But let's not blame the illegals. Let's



Commentary

By
Peter
Stern

place the blame where it's deserved. It's the two leaders, Fox and Bush, who are to blame. Secondly we can blame American businesses — first for outsourcing American jobs globally and then "insourcing" jobs to illegal immigrants who will do anything and take any job to survive. To blame illegals is unjust. Remember that most of our own

ancestors left their homelands for the same reasons the Mexican illegals are doing so — to find a better life.

We, American voters, need to demand a change in immigration law **oversight, accountability and enforcement.** Voters must demand that our leaders stop the economic and social travesties employed by Pres. Fox, and we must also demand that American taxpayers must NOT be charged to assume Fox's responsibility to his own people. If we're going to build a fence, then let's build one around the perimeter of President Fox's government HQ and one around our Washington Capitol to protect both the Mexican and American people from further socio-economic abuse.

Peter Stern of Driftwood, TX is a po-

litical writer well-known and published frequently throughout the Texas community and nationwide. He is a Vietnam-era Disabled Veteran and holds three post-graduate degrees. During the past seven years Mr. Stern voraciously has studied and followed legislative politics in Texas and writes prolifically about various urgent issues and proposed legislation to inform the community without political bias or affiliation. While a lifetime member of the Republican Party, he does NOT support the party's current platforms, philosophies and actions. He maintains he is an "intelligent" Republican with a conscience — a minority branch of the ruling party. You may contact Peter Stern at: <pstern@austin.rr.com>.

And A Merry New Year

Now that we've moved onto a New Year, I'm happy that we can put the Great Issue of The Day behind us — the proper way to phrase holiday greetings. Some people were irate that on President Bush's official Christmas card, the word "Christmas" was absent. He and Mrs. Bush wished everybody a "Happy Holiday." People don't get mad at him over the war, the economy, or the response to Katrina, but they're upset about "Happy Holiday?"

Personally, I'm pleased to receive any good wishes from anybody. I'm not offended if someone wishes me a specific or a generic happy holiday. Also, here's one thing the "great includer" does that is actually inclusive, and instead of everybody congratulating him, some people are angry. I like that he didn't single out one religion. I like that he was sensitive to the fact that some of the recipients of the card who don't celebrate Christmas might enjoy feeling more included in the greeting.

But Bill O'Reilly, Jerry Falwell, and some other non-inclusivites don't see it that way. They see it as an "assault on Christmas." O'Reilly warned that "Christmas is under siege," and Falwell said that Americans who celebrate Christmas are "facing persecution." Do you think this could be a tad bit of an overreaction to a greeting card?

The other day, I saw a bumper sticker on a car that read, "It's OK to say, 'Merry Christmas.'" I agree. It's also OK not to say, "Merry Christmas." If this woman keeps her sticker on the car all year, will she be offended if I don't say, "Merry Christmas" to her in July?

Some on the far right organized boycotts of stores that dropped the word "Christmas" from their holiday advertising. This seems a bit ironic since usually people complain about the over-commercialization of Christmas, and now these people want businesses more involved with a religious holiday.

The second irony in all this is to somehow feel that the omission of the C-word means that President Bush is anti-Christmas, and therefore anti-Christian. Has there ever been a President who has talked more about his religious philosophy? Has there ever been a President who has courted the religious right more vigorously? President Bush, anti-Christmas? Humbug!

On the Bush card, there were two dogs and a cat on the White House lawn. Why the discrepancy? Why only one cat? Is Bush ashamed to admit that he's a cat owner? Is this part of the general assault against cat owners? Because of the insidious pressure of dog owners, will cats be eliminated from the card altogether next year?

It's hard not to laugh at all this, but there's a serious side, too. Some extremists are blaming the alleged attack on Christmas on liberals, Jews, and Jewish liberals. There's more than a hint of anti-Semitism (and probably some anti-Muslim feelings as well) in these people's tirades. And, as usual, it's baseless. Jews or liberals certainly don't control the courts that decide what's okay and what's not in terms of public displays. They don't control the big corporations that own the stores that are trying to draw customers of all



Modern Times

By
Lloyd
Garver

faiths, either. Liberals telling Wal-Mart what to do? Double Humbug!

So, the biggest irony is the spreading of all this venom by those who claim to love Christmas. I'm far from an expert on Christmas, but I've seen all the old movies. And I can't imagine anything less Christmassy than feeling anger and hatred towards those who are different from you or disagree with you.

So, there is no "attack on Christmas." Oh, sure, political correctness sometimes goes too far, but when it does, maybe you can just laugh at it rather than getting mad. I'm still going to call an evergreen decorated with ornaments and a star on top a "Christmas tree" even if some people don't want me to.

Christmas wasn't ruined this year by any anti-Christmas forces. Nobody stopped people from celebrating it in their church, in their home, or wherever they wanted to celebrate it. Nobody stopped those neighbors of yours from putting up too many ornaments. Nobody stopped anyone from spending more than they had planned on gifts. And certainly, nobody stopped the joy on a child's face as he saw the gifts under the tree Christmas morning.

My only objection to the Bush card is this: he sent out over 1.4 million of them, and I didn't get one. Considering how often I mention him in this column, you'd think the least he could have done was send me a card.

And now, I hope I'm not being too generic when I say, "Happy New Year to everybody."

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

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RIGHTWINGMEDIAOSOS – A BLIGHT UPON AMERICA

Back in March, I introduced you to my old pal Ken (not his real name).

Ken and I have been as thick as thieves since being stationed together in Germany. That was 1976, a lifetime ago.

He's a hell of a guy, closer to me than my own brother.

Ken's guided me through some pretty difficult times; I like to think he'll call on me whenever help is needed.

And I love him.

I'm not talkin' *Brokeback Mountain* kind of love here, but a familial, mutual respect that transcends friendship.

Hugging is okay, but only when fully clothed; no touching between the breastplate and knees, nor kissing on the lips.

In 2000, Ken wouldn't even consider voting for George W. Bush, or any candidate from either of the "two equally guilty parties."

He made a silent protest by tossing his vote away on Ralph Nader, a wholly wasted effort, especially in Illinois.

I'm really not sure whom Ken voted for in 2004.

What I do know is that for someone who regularly claimed strong dislike for the Army systems, and bucked its authority at every turn, he sure has done a 180-degree about face.

The festering boil on the nose of America that is the RoveBush Fascist Regime has entered pretty much every conversation we've engaged in since some time before the 2004 election debacle.

Methinks Ken's intellect hath been subjugated through laving with an agent of excessive cleansing strength, a poul-tice of such puissance wherein all logical conception becomes perverse and reversion is a road fraught with strife.

In short, my good friend suffers from too much AM talk radio, FOXNEWSCHANNEL and MSNBC, or extreme "Rightwingmediaosos."

It doesn't help that he spends all day, every day, five days (sometimes six or seven) a week, semi-incarcerated with a bunch of Central Illinois good ol' boys and wimmins in the middle of nowhere.

That's no place for a University of Illinois graduate from Chicago to be stuck.

It'll definitely do strange things to the mind.

Like the conversation we had on his Christmas evening, my first night of Chanukah.

One topic that came up was torture.

My take was that we live in a democratic society, where it's common belief that torturing another human is wrong.

Ken said that he's perfectly okay with our government torturing people. It's one way to keep us safe.

Says I, most of what the torturers get out of them is false information.

He said that doesn't matter. They're enemies of our country.

Who are these enemies of our country? asks I.

The people they're taking prisoner and torturing, responds Ken.

Okay, I say, all these hundreds of poor schleps that some nameless United States government agency, in its infinite wisdom, pulled out of their houses, then were blindfolded and swept away to another country, "renditioned" is the new gentler term, to be kept incommunicado, beaten and abused for months, even years, sometimes killed, only to be sent home with an, "Sorry, mistaken identity, our bad." There's nothing wrong with that?

No, says Ken. We've been doing it for



Out Of The Blue

By
Jerry
Tenuto

years.

What? When? I inquire.

I read it on the Internet, he replies.

So I asked Ken if he remembered what middle 20th Century regime it was that kicked in doors and pulled people out of their homes at random, to be dragged away to the unknown without cause — the same reason that made it necessary for us to have even been stationed in Germany?

(Since this conversation took place, it has come to light that "renditions" were begun during the administration of President Bill Clinton, about 10 years ago. There were, however, several differences: Clinton's goal was to root out and destroy al Qaeda, which he left to the pros at the CIA; captured individuals were bona fide suspects, not innocents caught up in blanket dragnets as dictated by the RoveBush and Dark Lord Cheney fanatics; captives were transported to friendly countries and turned over to local authorities, rather than kept in U.S. facilities or interrogated by CIA personnel.)

Then the wiretap crap came up.

Ken said it was perfectly all right with him.

Look, I responded, I didn't spend seven years in the Army so Dubya could play King George XLIII and his gang of draft-dodging, layabout rich evildoers could run our Constitution and Bill of Rights through a shredder. Remember, this country had its own insurgents who ran the King's soldiers out what, like three times about two hundred years or so ago.

Well, I was in the Army nearly four years, says Ken, and if Bush wants to order wiretaps it's okay with me. He's not gonna tap my phone. And Mr. Clinton had his own wiretap situation.

Here you go again, Ken, bringing in Clinton when it doesn't mean a damned thing! Clinton's "wiretap situation" was Linda Tripp breaking the law in Virginia or wherever — a state law. Clinton had nothing to do with that wiretap! Why is every defense of George W. Bush an assault on somebody named Clinton, whether or not it has any bearing on the subject? Because that's the only argument the Right-wing Neo-cons have! Why do you buy their convoluted bullshit!?

The president has the right to order wiretaps.

No, he doesn't! It's against the law, plain and simple. Bush thinks that he can just make this stuff up as he goes along, that as president he has unlimited powers. He wasn't even honestly elected, Ken! Now, they've found evidence of taps beyond the original 30 or so Bush admitted to. Lots more.

We spoke of many other things that evening, but for some reason Ken just will not see the errors of Bush #43's ways.

That need not be a permanent condition. It is possible to bring him back from the dark side.

Hope springs eternal!

We need to get help for our friends and family who once were able to think logically and reason through everyday situations with common sense. Only a fool would deny that there have been myriad rotten goings on within our White House these past five years.

Or someone who's had their brain scrubbed white by the Ultra-Conservative hate media —

"Rightwingmediaosos."

In truth, what have these slugs done for the internal workings of our Nation? Most Children Left Behind? Ted Stevens' \$250 Million Bridge to Nowhere, Alaska? Ted Stevens' other \$250 Million "Ted Stevens Bridge" in Alaska? The new and improved New Orleans?

The worse alternative is to say "It's always been like that" or "The Democrats aren't any better."

That's exactly what the Neo-cons want, keep the status quo. It's much easier to burrow into the ecosystem of American life and culture and disrupt it from inside while nobody's paying attention.

Which is precisely what's been happening since William H. Rehnquist paid back Saint Ronald Reagan and Daddy Bush by illegally installing Spurious

George as presidential poster child.

Take up the fight. I don't mean a fight with fists or weapons, that's *their* way. Our fight utilizes brainpower, hearts, words, deeds — take a stand for your country, for your family, your children and grandchildren, for your friends and your pets: Stamp out

RIGHTWINGMEDIAOSOS

before it stamps out the free America we all knew and loved through the 20th Century!

DAY 1,851 OF AMERICA HELD HOSTAGE — our White House and the Executive Branch overrun by the Karl Rove-led Neo-con Fascist Regime.

The most patriotic act we can make in 2006 would be to take back our government. Tell your Senators and Representative to return the Government of The People to the people.

Impeach the George W. Bush and his entire staff.

(Depending upon your taste in political stew, you can either blame or thank Jerry Tenuto for his weekly "Out Of The Blue" feature in THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST, Crawford, Texas. You may read more installments, scold or applaud him at www.LoneStarICON.com)

If At First You Don't Succeed, I'll Meet You At Customer Service

It was six years ago this week I found myself standing in line with approximately 800 other husbands (conservative estimate) who, like me, had been sent to return the Christmas gift they had gotten their wives. I distinctly remember this for a number of reasons. First, because it's rare to see so many men standing in line for something that isn't leading to a sporting event, urinal, or more beer.

Not necessarily in that order.

Secondly, I remember it because the loudspeaker, which was positioned directly over my head, played the same Christmas song 16 times. This was over the course of an hour, by the end of which I was making up lyrics I can't print here.

What I can tell you is that my son will never, EVER be allowed to have a drum.

However, the main reason I remember this so well is due to sheer coincidence, i.e., coincidentally, every man standing in line with me was returning an Epilady Shaver. Each conversation with the customer service person went something like this:

"Can I help you?"

"I'd like to return this."

"Is there something wrong with it?"

"Yes, my wife can't use it without throwing it at me."

"It looks like it's been damaged. Is this the way it came?"

"No, that happened when it landed in the driveway. My wife has a good arm but not much aim."

(Uncomfortable pause.)

"I'm serious. She chased me. Naked. I don't think I'd be alive if she hadn't slipped on the linoleum. I'm just glad the dog was there to break her fall."

"Sir, unfortunately I can't give you a refund because of the damage. All I can do is give you a store credit, which you can use to get her something else."



By
Ned
Hickson
Siuslaw News

"...oh God..."

This is the typical male reaction when it comes to gift buying for their wives, particularly in this case, when the stakes have been raised exponentially by the "make-up gift" factor. For example, let's say a man gives his wife a robe that is too big. Exponentially speaking, we're talking about a factor of one because, in spite of the sizing error, his wife had been made to feel petite. Therefore, he can simply exchange the robe for a smaller one. Looking at the opposite end of the spectrum, let's say the robe in question is too small. Exponentially speaking, we're talking about a factor of 50, which is the number of times he will be rat-tail whipped with his wife's robe before she has exhausted herself enough for him to yank it away.

As I stood in line that day, it was obvious that every man was attempting to calculate the exponential "make-up" factor for a gift that had come from the heart and left through the bathroom window. It was also obvious that most of us had forgotten every mathematical equation we'd learned since the seventh grade, which could explain why several men broke from the line and disappeared into the business supply section.

I, however, was not one of those men.

I'd like to say it was because I managed to calculate the "make-up" factor in my head and, through my mathemat-

Continued On Next Page



**LETTERS
TO THE
EDITOR**

To The Editor:

Although George has been their ticket into the limelight and to riches above and beyond mere wealth, co-conspirators Dick and Donald must harbor some contempt for their often complaining, preoccupied and bewildered protege, as well a gnawing fear that he could, well, blow it. Words like “sniveling” might come to mind. No need, though, to remind him to say “stay the course”—he could say it in his sleep and when someone like Scooter gets caught, he knows enough to deny any knowledge of the shenanigans. The true master of the lie, lie, lie credo, Karl, says contradicting self and fellows doesn't matter as long as you just keep lying: there are *too* WMD in Iraq; America doesn't condone or authorize the use of torture (even while defending its use). Who knows better than Karl?

Once the latest storm has blown over, Dick will sneer his famous sneer and Donald will squint his signature squint-and-grimace and George will grin his crooked grin and all will be well again. Won't it?

Elizabeth Gerteiny, Westport, CT
To The Editor:

Critics are correct when they assert Ang Lee's new movie, *Brokeback Mountain*, has a social agenda. Any movie that dismantles damaging stereotypes and humanizes members of society denigrated to second-class citizenship has a social agenda. This agenda-one that attempts to educate and foster dialogue about the cruelty of social discrimination and hateful prejudices-is absolutely vital and long over due.

Most media venues fall victim to stereotypes and generalizations when portraying homosexuality. Shows like *Will and Grace* and *Queer as Folk*, while helpful in bringing gay-themed stories to mainstream media, do not fully embrace the wide diversity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) Americans. This comes at a time when bigots in society continue their assault on the GLBT community, taking away their rights to marry, adopt, form partnerships, and even achieve health-care benefits for their loved ones.

If Hollywood and other media venues had the courage and vision to fight against stereotypes and educate people about the destruction of social prejudice and assumptions, it would be a lot harder to hate and discriminate gay and lesbian Americans. Bravo to Ang Lee for demonstrating admirable integrity by doing what's right, despite his critics; *Brokeback Mountain* bravely brings us a “social agenda” that calls for compassion, tolerance, and human dignity.

Ken Seifert, Arlington, VA
Dear W. Leon Smith,

In a recent letter, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson writes, “The best action the federal government can take to balance the budget is to ensure a strong economy and to control spending.” and “That is why I continue to work hard for smaller government, a balanced federal budget, and lower taxes.”

In less than 5 years, the Republican-controlled Congress of which Senator Hutchison is such a prominent member has increased its spending from \$1.5 trillion per year to \$2.5 trillion per year — a 66% increase in less than 5 years.

I guess when you are a Senator and get to SPEND the money — rather than having it extracted from you, you have an entirely different idea of what “control spending” means.

Mike Ford, Austin, TX

To The Editor:

Corrupt Iraqis?

In the President's Dec.18, 2005 speech on Iraq, he alluded to corruption in Iraq as one of the problems that needs to be dealt with. Very insightful!

Why then does he not use the bully pulpit to encourage Congressional investigations of corruption within his own Administration and the Republican-dominated Congress? I hear nothing from the president regarding Republican efforts to stifle investigations or silence debate. Oh, silly me! It's got to be because Karl Rove, Bill Frist, Ken Lay, Scooter Libby, Tom Delay, Duke Cunningham, Bernie Ebers et al. are among those under suspicion and/or indictment for corruption. Alas, birds of a feather still flock together.

Paul G. Jaehnert, Vadnais Hts., MN
Dear Editor,

Regarding the Bush government's shameless spying on American citizens:

Santa Shrub

He knows when you are sleeping.

He knows when you're awake.

He knows if your are evil or good; 'cause you're in his database.

We better watch out.

We better beware.

He's taking our freedoms in a fog of fear.

He's the Pres-i-dent of the U-ni-ted States.

Sincerely,

Bruce Joffe, Piedmont, CA

To The Editor:

Corruption that pervades this administration from the Presidency to Congress, the Senate and the House goes beyond the struggle for personal freedom from human foibles! You Mr. President are LIVING sins manifesting extreme greed and Laws against the poor compounds that sin. Those whom you have surrounded yourself with are far more corrupt than any president. The eyes of the world are on you, Mr. President!

Probably the worst sin of all...is falsely professing to be Born again in Christ...while your greed has taken from the least of us and been given to those who follow your lead. While twisting and finding amazing new contortions of fact and truth the justify an immoral and ignoble war, for your personal purposes, defies the command of Christ whom you profess to follow! You profess Christ is Lord, yet you defy His teachings and mandates. You claim to be a born again Christian yet you live by the morals of a heretic.

Plunging America into extreme deficit, destroying our industrial might,

pandering to despotic nations, such as China. Your policies, plunging many American's into abject poverty and the middle class pushed into the state of poverty! Denying those who are destitute a path to self-sufficiency Is not only unchristian, it is un-American, it is Un-godly. The loss of jobs is a truth you have distorted while Americans struggle to survive without the means to do so, right here in America! Your policies, Mr. President, are creating the lowest level of life for Americans. Americans plunged lower and with greater impact than all the suffering of the Great Depression!

Because you Sir, have destroyed their livelihood, the safety net to lift them into self-sufficiency and taken their health care, grinding their pride into human misery.

You are walking the path where your soul abides in darkness and your mind turned away from enlightenment. The path that turns a human heart into the mold of the Prince of Darkness is the path you are taking. You are filled with the passions of a fanatic and devoid of Christ, so full of greed and power you fail to see beyond that darkness of your own avarice.

Sissy Riffin, Waco

Oranges Of The Universe

Okay, so let me get this straight...

Humans are the only living creatures on this earth that kill their own, eat their own, have sex with their own dead—all in one complete package!

Excuse me, but where's the intelligence in that design?

No, wait, I know it's disco!

No, that won't work. Disco is dead.

How about influenza? Ebola? Botulism? Rabies? Ulcers? Lupus? Epilepsy?

No, I've got it—

Spam!

Now, if Hawaiians think Spam is “divine,” I won't argue with them, but from what I can tell, the human race has really screwed the pooch.

Our track record here in the good ol' USofA should speak for itself:

Native American genocide, African slavery, exploitation of farmers, laborers, children, women, and homosexuals, Japanese internment camps, the empowerment of dictators in Central and Latin America, secret CIA prisons in Eastern Europe, secret domestic spy programs—

—in a country in which ultra-wealthy teens go through cellphones like candy.

And they say technology will set us free. Yeah, sure, uh-huh, right, what technology? Bombs, butter, or butter-powered bombs?

I prefer Slurpee-powered hovercrafts myself.

“Scotty, beam me down a couple dozen of them Slurpee-powered hovercrafts, pronto! There's a storm of Tribbles brewing, and we've got to get'em before they hit New Orleans!”

You know Captain Kirk would have kicked Brownie's ass on principle.

I mean, Brownie is the type of moron who would feed gremlins after midnight, pour water over them, and then blame the security guards for the evil

The Rubber Cement Index

By Nathan Diebenow



gremlin orgy mess at the local mall.

Actually, doesn't that sound an awful lot like Bush's plan to improve America's popularity?

“Gitmo, ka-ka!”

Anyway, not only is Intelligent Design (ID) bad science, it's bad theology.

As we Lutherans would say, “All Law and no Gospel.”

This cult-ish quackery serves only to alienate and oppress women, homosexuals, and minorities.

“That's one small step for Mengele; one giant leap for the master race.”

I'm tellin' ya, confusing ID with Christianity is like confusing *Aliens* with *E.T.* You don't show it to kids—especially the kids you like!

ID is so against Christianity, it's not even funny.

Jesus never said on the cross dying, “You know what, Dad? Why me? Why are you doing this to me? I washed the dishes. I filled the tank with gas. I cleaned my room. What more do you want from me?”

Nope.

Jesus knew better than to test His Dad's judgment. The Bible doesn't say why God allows evil to breed, but my guess is God does what God does, and we're just here along for the ride.

So, get over yourself, you Christians Gone Wild!

Repent.

In the meantime, I'm gonna pick me up a Slurpee.

Anybody want one? I'm buying.

NED HICKSON...Continued From Previous Page

cal prowess, determined the exponential number to be...

Well, a big one.

Possibly involving something algebraic.

But, no. The reason I didn't race for a calculating device is because, by that time, my brain had been lulled into submission by a drumbeat pattern. When I got to the customer service counter, our conversation went something like this:

“How can I help you, sir?”

“Rum-ba-ba-bum.”

“Are you returning that Epilady?”

“Rum-ba-ba-BUM.”

“Sir, it looks damaged. All I can give you is an in-store credit. Is that OK?”

“Rum-ba-ba...oh God...”

So men, as you return that special gift this week, remember the “make-up” factor and exchange your wife's gift accordingly.

It probably wouldn't hurt to bring a calculator.

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



FIRE DEPARTMENTS from throughout Central Texas were dispatched to a blaze between Valley Mills and China Spring on Saturday and again on Monday. Fire department personnel say that high winds made it difficult to control the grass fire during a dry season for this region of the state. Among the fire departments assisting was Crawford VFD. — Photo By Allen Fisher

Wildfires Ravage Central Texas

CRAWFORD — Firefighters from across Central Texas have been battling wildfires amid 20-30 mph winds and dry, warm weather.

The Crawford Volunteer Fire Department assisted in fighting a grassfire that burned hundreds of acres between Valley Mills and China Spring Christmas weekend.

After the fire east of China Spring first

ignited on Christmas eve, nearly two dozen area fire departments responded. White smoke could be seen miles away. That same fire flared up again on Dec. 26, at which a dozen fire departments were called.

According to fire officials, arson is suspected in that blaze that cost perhaps thousands of man hours to contain.

Firemen were hoping that Central Texans would forego utilizing fireworks during New Year's, as continued dry and windy weather was predicted.

According to Mike Dunivan, fire behavior analyst with the Texas Forest Service, grasses, weeds, and other vegetation in much of the state lie dead and dormant for a combination of drought and hard freezes, making the entire

state at risk.

"Vegetation is critically dry in much of the state," said Dunivan. "Add winds and low humidity during the afternoon prime burning period, and you have a recipe for fast-spreading, dangerous wildfires. Most of the large wildfires that already occurred statewide resulted from this deadly combination of wildfire ingredients."

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