

\$1.50 Per Copy

CRAWFORD, TEXAS

Vol. 7, No. 3

JANUARY 18, 2006

www.lonestaricon.com

© 2006, THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST

**INSIDE
STORIES**



Karen Hadden and Lon Burnam

**'Peace
Action
Texas'
Active In
Crawford**

Page 2

*If I Was
Governor Of
Texas*

The Trenchwalker

Page 8



Starla Queen

**Jazzabillies
Have New CD**

Page 12

WAR IN IRAQ

Casualties:

U.S. Military Deaths

2,214

U.S. Govt. Statistics

The Lone Star ICONOCLAST

Can Ranchers Hold On?

**'Extreme' Drought Leaves Ranchers
With Toughest Conditions In Their History**

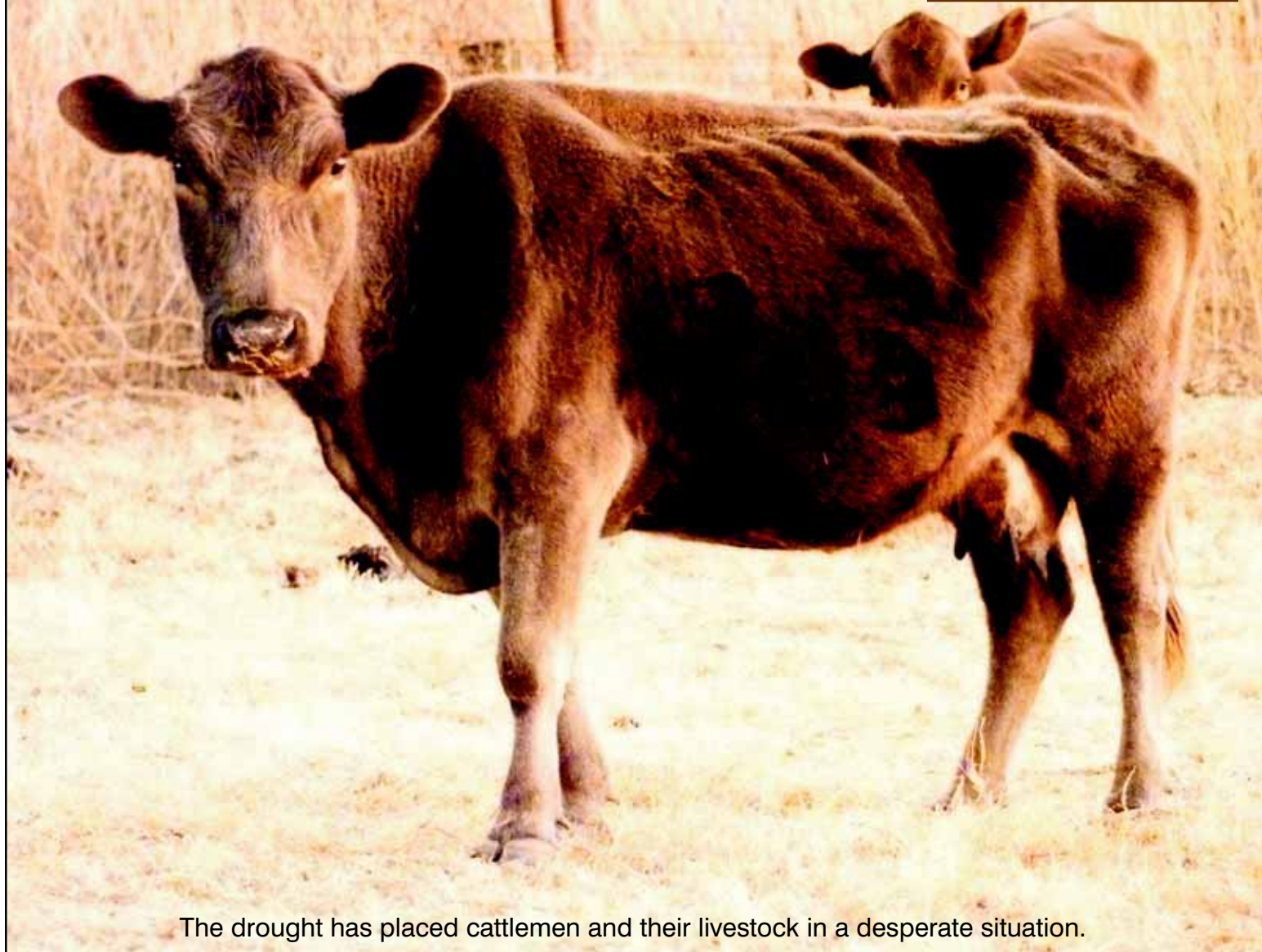
'This drought isn't just going to affect farmers and ranchers. It's going to have a very quick impact on restaurants, retail stores, landlords, and banks. This is a full-blown crisis.'

— Congressman Chet Edwards

**LACK OF HAY
FORCING
MANY RANCHERS
TO SELL THEIR
HERDS**

Story By
Deborah Mathews
Page 3

Editorial
**Starving The
Golden Goose**
Page 5



The drought has placed cattlemen and their livestock in a desperate situation.



MEMBERS OF PEACE ACTION TEXAS Karen Hadden and Lon Burnam organized the annual meeting, Planning for Peace, at the Crawford Peace House.

— Staff Photo By Deborah Mathews

‘Peace Action Texas’ Active In Crawford

CRAWFORD — Members of Peace Action Texas held their annual meeting, Planning for Peace, in Crawford on Saturday, Jan. 14, at the Crawford Peace House.

Part of the agenda reviewed possible 2006 projects, which included building capacity and sustainability to have the

“power to effectively address coming issues — Iran, Iraq, nuclear reactor research, elections, restoration of civil and human rights.”

Organizer and member of Peace Action National Karen Hadden explained that the meeting helps to “move toward a more peaceful world.”

Bush ‘Greatest Terrorist’, Says ‘Day-O’ Singer

CARACAS, Venezuela — Activist Harry Belafonte, 78, known for recording *The Banana Boat Song* (“Day-O”) in the 1950s, heavily criticized President Bush on Venezuelan television and radio early last week and voiced support for Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez’s government.

“No matter what the greatest tyrant in the world, the greatest terrorist in the world, George W. Bush says, we’re here to tell you: Not hundreds, not thousands, but millions of the American people ... support your revolution,” said Belafonte, who sup-

ported the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. before recently becoming a UNICEF goodwill ambassador.

Chavez said he backs the social justice efforts of blacks in the U.S. and Venezuela and urged his government to prevent discrimination.

Belafonte’s delegation included actor Danny Glover, the Princeton University scholar Cornel West, and Dolores Huerta of the United Farm Workers labor union. For six hours on Saturday, the delegation met with Chavez, who blames Bush for attempts to overthrow him. The U.S. denies any connection.

Robertson Eats Crow Over Sharon Insult

TEL AVIV, Israel — After condemnations from Christian leaders, President Bush, and Israeli officials, Religious Right broadcaster Pat Robertson apologized last week saying that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s stroke was God’s punishment for moving Israelis from the Gaza Strip.

Robertson said in a letter hand-delivered to Sharon’s son, Omri, that the 77-year-old Sharon is a “kind, gracious and gentle man” who was “carrying an almost insurmountable burden of making decisions for his nation.”

“My concern for the future safety of your nation led me to make remarks which I can now view in retrospect as inappropriate and insensitive in light of a national grief experienced because of your father’s illness,” the letter continued.

“I ask your forgiveness and the forgiveness of the people of Israel,” Robertson wrote.

This apology was quite a different tone than the televangelist’s damning insinuation the day after Sharon’s stroke when he said that God was punishing Sharon for not helping to fulfill a prophecy formulated by the Religious Right to return Jewish sovereignty over Israel.

“God considers this land to be his,” Robertson said on his show “The 700 Club.” “You read the Bible and he says ‘This is my land,’ and for any prime minister of Israel who decides he is going to carve it up and give it away, God says, ‘No, this is mine.’”

As of Friday, the Israeli government was still “outraged” by Robertson’s remarks, despite the letter of apology. Robertson and his financial resources have also been shunned by those associated with a proposed complex in Israel that plans to house a communication network to broadcast live from the Holy Land.

Former NSA Employee Admits Being Whistleblower

WASHINGTON — Russell Tice, a 20-year veteran of the National Security Agency, admitted to ABC News last week that he is the whistleblower quoted in *THE NEW YORK TIMES* the agency wants silence.

Tice said his job required him to spy on conversations around the world through “special access programs” or “black world” programs and operations.”

However, Tice now believes that some of these operations violated the law, and is ready to reveal to Congress his knowledge of the illegal activities the Defense Department and the NSA ran after 9/11.

Tice said that he disagreed with President Bush’s insistence that only a small number of Americans were spied upon

without warrants. The full range of the secret NSA program could be millions of people inside the United States, Tice said.

Tice said he told the agency he was the whistleblower the day the *TIMES*’ story broke. The NSA took away Tice’s security clearance in May 2005, but Tice refutes the agencies reason (“psychological concerns”) for his dismissal.

Tice said he wasn’t worried about repercussions.

“As far as I’m concerned, as long as I don’t say anything that’s classified, I’m not worried,” he told ABC News. “We need to clean up the intelligence community. We’ve had abuses, and they need to be addressed.”

Houston ISD Ties Teachers’ Pay To Test Scores

HOUSTON — Teachers working in the Houston Independent School District must now focus on their students’ state and national test scores or risk not receiving as much as \$3,000 in bonus pay.

The Houston school board by a unanimous 9-0 vote accepted the program last week, even though a number of teachers complained that the plan was unfair to those teachers who are not eligible for larger bonuses and pits teachers against one another unnecessarily.

Each level of the three tiered scale is tied to a possible \$1,000 in bonuses. The levels include all teachers that work in schools rated acceptable or higher, teachers that increase student improvement on standardized

tests based on nationwide performance levels, and reading and math teachers whose students perform better than others in the district.

The teachers’ union complains that the plan over-stresses performance based on test scores. The district superintendent, though, says the plan will be changed as warranted and that he will try to increase teachers’ base pay.

Teacher base pay in the U.S. is usually based on their experience and education. Houston teachers start at about \$36,000 a year. About \$45,000 is the average salary in Houston’s district.

Houston isn’t the only one in the nation to do so, though it is now the largest district after Denver’s to implement such a policy.



The Lone Star Iconoclast (USPS 022-833) is published weekly, on Wednesdays, by Smith Media, Inc., P.O. Box 420, Crawford, TX 76638 and 310 W. 5th St., P.O. Box 369, Clifton, TX 76634

Periodicals Postage is Paid at Clifton, TX 76634.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: McLennan & Bosque Counties, one year: \$40; Elsewhere, one year: \$45. Give old address when requesting change of address.

POSTMASTER: Please send address change to:
The Lone Star Iconoclast, P.O. Box 353, Clifton, TX 76634.

DEADLINES: 5 p.m. Fridays.
Telephone (All Departments) — (254) 675-3634
Fax No. — (254) 675-4090 • Email: news@lonestaricon.com
Web Newspaper: www.lonestaricon.com

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

ADVERTISING
Melanie Harvey
Carolyn Black

PUBLISHER
& EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
W. Leon Smith

BUSINESS
Kay Ortiz, Front Office Manager
Allison Smith, Internet Manager
Michael Harvey, Bookkeeping

ICONOCLAST:
An exposor of icons. Icon-buster.
Fighter for Truth, Justice, and the American Way.

CIRCULATION
Charlie Gandy
Pernie Stanford
Wayne Thompson
Bud Shaffer
Evelyn Suesz
Wanda Raines
Georgia Bell

THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST welcomes letters of up to 150 words on any public issue. Any letter that exceeds the word limit may not be considered for publication. We publish only original letters addressed to The Iconoclast. An address and daytime phone number must be included so the author’s identity can be verified. No letters will be published until authorship is confirmed. Those who write letters are asked to limit their entries to one per month. All letters are subject to editing. The Iconoclast reserves the right to decline publication of any submission. Letters must be signed. Letters written in the promotion of political candidates or issues to be decided by an election will not be considered for publication unless they are scheduled for publication three weeks or more prior to the election. Individuals may purchase advertising space during the period prior to the election in support of candidates or issues to be voted upon. Letters written as cards of thanks may be charged classified ad rate and be placed in classified section of newspaper, at editors’ option.

THE ENTIRE CONTENTS of each issue of The Lone Star Iconoclast are protected under the Federal Copyright Act. Reproduction of any portion of any issue will not be permitted without the express permission of Smith Media, Inc.

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC: Any error or erroneous reflection upon the character, standing, or reputation of any person, firm, or corporation which may appear in this newspaper will be gladly corrected upon being brought to the attention of the management.

Can Ranchers Hold On?

'Extreme' Drought Leaves Ranchers With Toughest Conditions In Their History

By DEBORAH MATHEWS
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

CRAWFORD — With the drought situation being considered "extreme" by the state and federal meteorological agencies, Texas farmers and ranchers are facing some of the toughest conditions in their history. Cattle prices have begun to drop, hay is gone, crops are lost, and there's no end in sight. Without some kind of relief from the government, local ranchers speculate that all cattle will "cease to be in Texas."

Droughts are normal parts of all environments, and as such, they have plagued all agriculturalists. True drought has been defined as 75 percent or less of the average yearly rainfall. Moving from East to Far West Texas, this occurs from 16% to 45% of the time.

The lack of hay in the state has reached desperate levels. What little hay is still available in Texas carries a price tag that is triple the normal. With the only hay available being nearly used up and prohibitively expensive, ranchers are looking to producers in other states.

Historically, Oklahoma has been a good source of hay for Texas buyers. Facing similar drought conditions, even the protein rich alfalfa Texas ranchers annually purchase from Oklahoma ranchers is drying up.

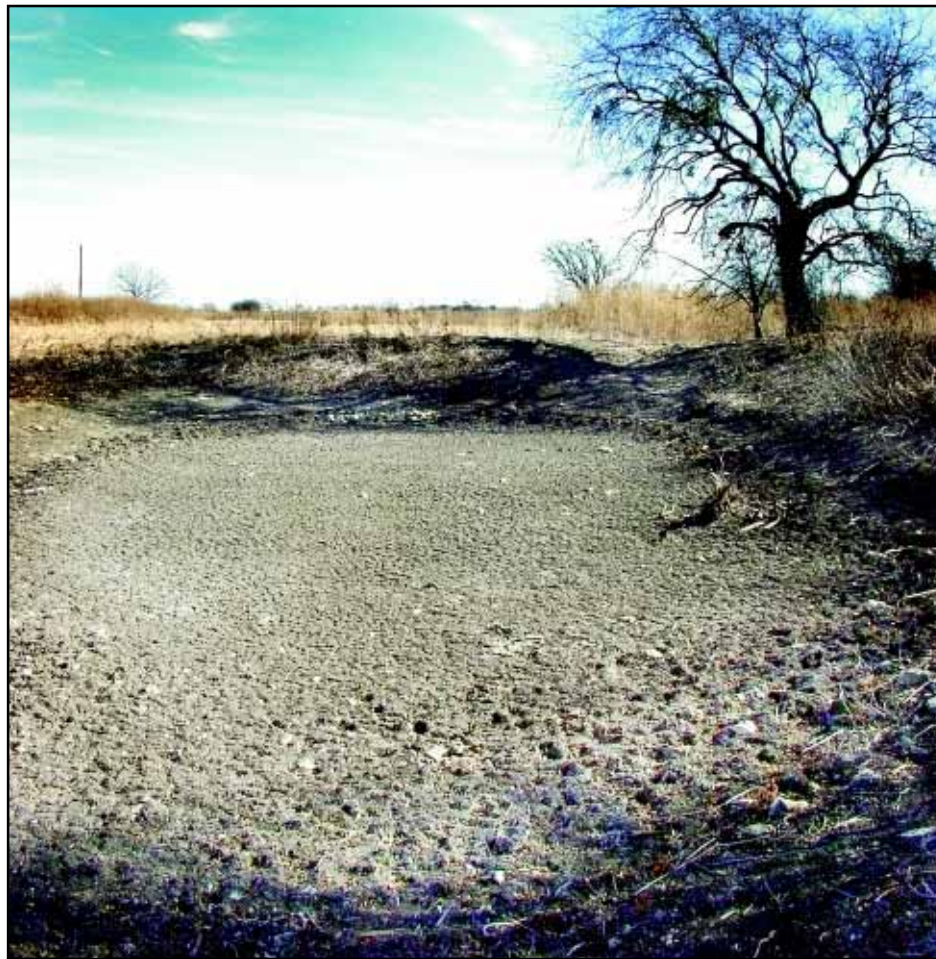
Now the Texas cattlemen are having to search farther north for the precious commodity, and are facing the unaffordable cost of shipping. Without some sort of governmental intervention or assistance, a countless number of farmers and ranchers will be forced out of business.

USDA has declared the area to be in an disaster designation, with McLennan County as the primary county. Farmers and ranchers in Bosque County can go to the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office and apply for long-term, low interest loans.

These loans can then be used to purchase additional pasture for grazing, hay, and other necessary products. However, without rain in the very near future, "We're just tilting at windmills," said Director of Public Relations of Texas Farm Bureau Gene Hall.

"At this point, there are no grants available and I don't know of any federal programs that would transport hay, but we're going to keep asking," said Congressman Chet Edwards. "Federal programs are limited. A loan might carry them through the tough times."

Recognizing the urgent need of the crisis, Edwards is lending his support to some creative ideas. Local officials have



Dry ponds spot the countryside in Central Texas.

— Staff Photo By Deborah Mathews

**LACK OF HAY
FORCING
MANY RANCHERS
TO SELL THEIR
HERDS**



Mother Nature's weight-loss program for cattle is resulting in a premature rush to market for some producers.

according to agreed terms.

"We're working to get disaster assistance from the Federal government. That is what we're set up to do," said Hall. "The deficit situation being what it is, it's a tough road."

"While the Federal government can never guarantee a profit for every farmer and rancher every year, I do think there is a proper role for the government to help provide a safety net for family farmers and ranchers, when you have disasters that were not caused by bad decision making," said Congressman Edwards. "The problem now is that the disaster assistance is limited to the loans."

According to Edwards, "This is a serious, serious problem that will affect all of Central Texas."

According to executive vice president of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association Matt Brockman, the severity of the situation is not restricted to McLennan, Bosque, and surrounding counties, but the majority of the state.

"Whoever takes on these things is going to have to have the resources to assist tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of producers," said Brockman.

"Freight is a commodity just like hay, just like grain, just like gasoline — whatever the solution is, it's going to be a huge challenge. It is a monumental task, and I applaud those who try it," said Brockman.

"Numbers are higher than normal for October, November, and December," he continued. "The cattle sold in auction markets during those three months eclipsed the number from the previous year. We had 1.5 million in 2005, versus 1.3 million the year before for the same three months. Already we have felt the impact of this drought."

"The impacts of this disaster are being felt across a large section of this state, particularly in Central Texas, but also in Northeast Texas," he explains. "TSCRA (Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association) has been in almost constant dialogue with the Secretary of Agriculture's office, Senator Hutchinson, Senator Cornin, Congressman Henry Benea, and other congressional offices, making them aware of the extent of the problem. I fully expect that by next week, a plan will come together to get some financial assistance down to producers in the state."

"We're a trade association that's on a pretty tight budget," said Brockman. "The leadership at TSCRA is worried sick over this situation and we're going to keep at it until we get something down here to our producers."

begun looking at other alternatives for shipping, examining the possibility of the rail system.

Logistically, the concept may be difficult, but ultimately cheaper than trucking. The problem with "dead heading" (returning to the home state with an empty truck) is solved, along with the high priced diesel. Putting the hay on the train cars is doable.

"Maybe there's a chance there's some unutilized capacity in the rail system," said Congressman Edwards. "We're certainly going to investigate it. We need to do whatever it takes to tide our good producers through these tough times."

"This drought isn't just going to affect farmers and ranchers," said Edwards. "It's going to have a very quick impact on restaurants, retail stores, landlords, and banks. This is a full-blown crisis."

Agriculture is the second largest industry in the state, generating \$80 billion

for the economy annually. Conditions now are forcing ranchers to sell young cows at reduced prices. While Texas and Oklahoma ranchers struggle with the drought, ranchers elsewhere are expanding using proceeds from high cattle prices, industry sources said.

Livestock Marketing Information Center agricultural economist Jim Robb said, "From a nationwide perspective, in the current state, the drought is not going to cause much of a disruption. If the drought expands and persists through the spring then it is going to be an issue," he said.

Conditions locally have reached the point where ranchers are willing to "do what it takes" to get what hay there is for themselves. A variety of sources indicated that ranchers who have worked side-by-side for a number of years are demonstrating that a handshake isn't binding anymore. Working under that premise, hay is shipped in and then not distributed



Gene Hall



Chet Edwards



Jim Robb



Matt Brockman

Medicare Drug Program Blindsides Pharmacists

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Pharmacists in Connecticut were blindsided last week by the new Medicare prescription drug plan for seniors, according to Margherita R. Giuliano, executive vice president of the Connecticut Pharmacists Association.

"Pharmacies knew it would be bad, but not this bad," she told the Associated Press. "I don't think anyone recognized the cost to the pharmacists of this in time and money."

The program, which began on Jan. 1, has caused pharmacists to scramble to help confused seniors with their insurance plans, fill medication orders out of their own pockets, and sort out the loads of insurance plans. Time to fill prescriptions now takes about 45 minutes when it used to take three to five minutes, Giuliano said.

Critics say these problems stem from the pharmacists being shut out from the program's planning, not trained accord-

ingly, and unable to use a broken Medicare website to identify plan members.

The U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) said through a spokeswoman that the pharmacists'

problems are mainly due to "a late surge in enrollment." The private plans have been ordered to upgrade their Internet servers to a higher capacity, she said.

The new law prohibits pharmacists from aiding consumers choose the best drug plan for them; however, pharmacists can hand out telephone numbers for plans to seniors.

"In reality we're not legally bound to fill prescriptions that are not paid for. But are we going to turn down a 90-year-old woman?" said pharmacist Frederick Vegliante, 77.

Enron Lawyers Fail To Prove Prosecutor Misconduct: Judge

HOUSTON — The lawyers for Enron Corp. founder Kenneth Lay and former CEO Jeffrey Skilling failed to prove claims that the prosecution threatened critical witnesses which allegedly disrupted their trial preparations, according to U.S. District Judge Sim Lake.

Attorneys for Lay and Skilling have claimed for a few months that the prosecuting attorneys told witnesses that if they talked to the defense teams, they could be indicted. The prosecutors deny such accusations.

In September, Lake notified witnesses in letters that they were free to engage with the defense without problems. Though he also said he would be available to meet with witnesses if needed, no one approached him to discuss the matter.

Skilling is charged with 35 counts of fraud, conspiracy, insider trading, and lying to auditors. He allegedly conspired to make investors believe Enron was performing well when in fact the company cooked its books before collapsing in December 2001.

Lay is charged with seven counts of conspiracy and fraud. He allegedly continued Skilling's cover up after the CEO resigned. Both submitted not guilty pleas.

CORYELL COUNTY COMMISSION CO.

Sale Every Saturday

Cattle 12:00 Noon
Jody & Robin Thomas
(254) 865-8219

Date: 1-7-05

No. 1 Steers
under 300 lb. 150-210
300-400 lb. 130-172
400-500 lb. 120-150 \$1 Up
500-600 lb. 110-128
600-700 lb. 105-118
700-800 lb. 100-110

No. 1 Heifers
under 300 lb. 130-185
300-400 lb. 115-141
400-500 lb. 110-136 \$1 Up
500-600 lb. 105-123
600-700 lbs. 100-114
700-800 lbs. 95-104

Slaughter Cows
High Yielding 44 to 51
Low Yielding 37 to 42 \$1-2 Down
Fats 41 to 47
Thin & Shelly 28 to 35

Packer Bulls (1250-2075 lb.)
Yield Grade 1&2 50 to 65 \$1-2 Down

Cow & Calf Pairs
Young Choice 950 to 1195
Young Fair 750 to 950 \$10-15 Up
Aged Pairs 600 to 750

Young Pregnancy Test Stocker
Replacement Cows
450 to 1050 \$10-20 Up
Number of Head....1,643

Gatesville
Jody Thomas (254) 865-8219
Sale (254) 865-9121
Mobile (254) 223-2958

Family Is Most Important. Be Home For Them Daily.

Positions Available for the
Petroleum Products
Delivery Drivers
in the DFW and Waco Area.

Waco 1-800-782-5064
DFW 1-888-371-9107

\$1,000
Sign On Bonus



- Excellent Pay
- Paid Holidays
- 401K Retirement
- Great Benefits
- Paid Vacation
- Paid College Tuition for Children

Class A CDL License with X Endorsement and
1 Year recent driving experience necessary

www.coastaltransport.net

**POLARIS SPORTSMAN:
ONE TOUGH FAMILY!**

Built for the real world, Polaris Sportsman is the best selling line of automatic 4x4.

- ★ New for 2006: Sportsman 450 and Sportsman 500 with EFI.
- ★ Power choices from 450cc to 800cc Twin EFI.
- ★ World-renowned Sportsman ride and handling.
- ★ Lock & Ride Accessory System.

LAKE WHITNEY POLARIS
211 S. Hwy. 22, Whitney, TX • (254) 694-2655

POLARIS
The World's Toughest ATVs

WARNING: All Polaris vehicles are for riders age 16 and older. Polaris youth models of 50 cc or less are 6 and older. For general safety, always wear a helmet, eye protection and protective clothing, and be sure to take a safety training course. For safety and training information in the U.S., call the 811 or (800) 342-2267, or visit us at (800) 342-2267. In Canada, contact your Polaris dealer. Not intended for use on public roads. ©2005 Polaris Sales Inc.

THE REAL GUN SHOW

Jan. 28 & 29
Bell County Expo

IH 35, exit 292
Info. 979-247-2895
www.realgunshow.com

BULLETIN BOARD



CC, Etc.

675-3511 • 675-3732 • Toll Free 866-439-4794
402 N. Ave. G (Hwy. 6), Clifton

Editorial

Opinion - Columns - Letters

— Editorial —

Starving The Golden Goose

There's a full moon out tonight. And its menacing beams are shining on Central Texas agriculture.

The next 30 days will tell whether ranches in the Lone Star State will become bereft of beef, or whether the overseers of America and our state awoken to do what's right for their neighbors, and, ultimately, themselves.

The problem is the lack of a commodity called hay that, coupled with a stretch of dry weather, has forced many area ranchers to prematurely sell off their herds.

Although a Harvard economist might argue to "let supply and demand take care of itself," this unique situation could have far-reaching, negative consequences.

Perhaps no occupation in America is as important as agriculture, or as difficult. You've got to have brains, brawn, and guts to be a rancher...not to mention tenacity, faith, and the courage to gamble. Outguessing the tantrums of Mother Nature comes with the territory.

But the drought is taking its toll, and the answer of reason is being ignored.

Why? The powers that be are too busy politicking and fighting among themselves to listen to the heartbeat of America.

For instance, at the federal level public money has been wasted to perform a kangaroo inquisition on a potential Supreme Court justice. This money could have gone for something more important, the delivery of hay.

At the state level, "suits" are frolicking over the countryside to again do lip service about fixing school finance in order to create an illusion of "progress being made." After all, this is an election year and the previous dismal failings don't buy votes.

The state is squandering money on a would-be Trans-Texas Corridor that nobody in his right mind wants.

In short, too many of our elected officials are blind to the real values of our state, as the waste continues.

The bottom line is this:

Texas ranchers have been weathering the drought as best they can, but it has gone on and on — day after day after week after month — and now, the ability of ag producers to hang on is becoming critical. Without rain, their seasonal grasses are not coming up and their storehouses of hay are becoming vacant.

Hay, if you can find it, is selling for double or three times the usual market price, which is simply not affordable to most ranchers. Unfortunately, it is a commodity ranchers must have to provide the necessary roughage for healthy cattle.

The result for many has been the rationing of hay, which means cattle are not up to weight standards. Some are literally starving and are being cut from herds to be sold.

Some ranches have estimated that this drought has already set them back three years and some are ready to close up shop, for good.

In several of the northern central states, hay is plentiful and available for transport to Texas. But due to exorbitant fuel costs, it is not deemed cost-effective to ship it this far south.

There is a disconnect between hay that is sorely needed and available hay that is at a distance.

The practical answer would be for government and ag associations to find a way to ship the hay to Texas and offer it to ranchers at the usual costs, \$40-\$45 per round bale.

Call it a subsidy, a grant, or an investment.

But definitely call it an emergency, for it is.

Why not ditch the Trans-Texas Corridor and put a smidgen of those funds toward this endeavor? Ditch costly, wasteful hearings and do what's right by our ag industry. Quit wasting money for "politics as usual" and do something tangible.

Some might consider this a hand-out, or pork, but it's not. This situation is like any other disaster, for it will uproot families from their homes and, worst of all, could disable an important, positive arm of our Texas economy, not to mention lifetimes of hard work and sacrifice down the drain.

One of those lost special sessions of the Texas Legislature would have paid for this, as would a thousand other special interest initiatives that robbed Texas taxpayers of precious dollars during the past few years.

Take note! We did not elect true conservatives to state office. We elected political rapists who called themselves conservatives because that's what they thought we wanted to hear.

Now is the time to hold their hands to the fire, for this is of extreme importance. "Powerless to do anything" is not an acceptable answer.

In Texas, agriculture touches everything. If ranchers go broke, it impacts the cities where they trade. Land values go down, products no longer exist, and innovations that are an important part of the equation are less likely to happen. School kids are at risk of losing FFA and 4-H experiences that should be expanded, not inhibited. The price of food goes up. The availability of food goes down. We all lose.

So here we are. The clock is ticking. Our cattle orchards are drying up. Ranchers are continuing to direct to the sale barn cattle they would otherwise keep, knowing that it would normally be the wrong thing to do.

While state officials slither under a rock to ride out this year's black blizzard of winter, the ranchers wait, and struggle, and calculate, and wait, hoping for a rainbow, knowing that any rain that falls will likely be too little, too late.

But if only they could get the hay. It might buy them enough time to see this through. It might save their ranches.

This disaster is happening right now, right here. We have the tools to stop it. Why don't we?

— W. Leon Smith



Business Cards

Coast-to-Coast

Go Pirates!

*Doreen Wagner
Chicago, Illinois*

Book/Bible Repair (Specializing in conservation restoration)
Custom-made books for all occasions.
We are "Bound to Please"

THE BOOK DOCTOR

320 W. 7th St., Dallas, TX 75208 (214) 946-1760
www.thebookdr.com

PERSONAL INJURY & WRONGFUL DEATH

IN WACO: 254-772-7500
www.withvic.com
1-877-WITH-VIC

THE LAW OFFICES
Vic Feazell P.C.
TRIAL ATTORNEYS & COUNSELORS OF LAW

SERVING CENTRAL TEXAS
WITH OFFICES IN WACO,
TEMPLE AND AUSTIN

Principal office in Austin.
Meetings with attorneys by appointment only.
Not certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization.

If I Was Governor Of Texas

No, don't worry. I'm not running. But I do encourage those who are running to plagiarize my ideas.

Assuming that I had a slam-dunk Texas House and Senate behind me, ready to sign off on my thoughts, this is how I would run the state.

First, I would demand that every elected official shed his or her party affiliation, break ranks with the party organization, for it is now no longer the party that they serve. It's the citizens of the state. If they disagreed with this proclamation, they could take it up with me in the street.

Next, we would trim useless, over-optimized agencies by 50 percent and increase agencies in need of growth by 25 percent.

Then, after cleaning up much of the mess already in place, for instance, deep-sixing the Trans-Texas Corridor and the TAKS test, and not cooperating with the federal No Child Left Behind program, the new approach would be toward tangible results, with emphasis on the word tangible.

Don't get me wrong. School districts do need to have standards, but there are ways of getting there minus terrorizing students and faculty. We need to again have it so that those who teach, can.

Perhaps what rankles me the most about the current education system is its teaching to students allegiance and worship to gaining the Almighty dollar over development in students to create something they can be proud of. In these days of creationism vs. evolution, which do you think the Almighty would prefer? I tend to think it would be following creative endeavors as opposed to following the dollar. Teaching to the test does nothing to promote creative thought.

Several things in "Smith's plan" would go into play simultaneously, and, mind you, some of this is definitely outside the box.

First, I would think of Texas as an independent country. Oh, we would still be part of the United States and help them out some, but Texas' diversity has the potential of putting us well above the curve, so the mindset would be Texas First. I think this is the way my forefathers would have wanted it. When my great-great-great-great grandfather, the Rev. Abner Smith, came to Texas in the early 1800s to start a multitude of churches, I think he saw this potential, as did his younger brother, Erastus "Deaf" Smith (my great-great-great-great uncle), who played a key role in Texas' independence as a favored scout and spy for Sam Houston. Their input into the history of the state reminds me of some words on a poster in my office: "Texans never really change, because Texas, after all, is more than a place, it is a state of mind."

That said, how do we deal with some of the current problems?

Let's take three of them and roll them into one big solution.

- Illegal aliens from Mexico.
- School finance.
- Energy and agriculture.

Several years ago when I ran for the office of state representative (and lost), one of my ideas was the creation of a central education fund, where new money would be funneled to devise a super fund that would eventually do away with school property taxes statewide and forever solve the question of how to fund education. Had I won and this plan been enacted, there would be no school property taxes in the state today. Education would be supported without any new taxes of any kind. But it didn't happen.

The Trenchwalker

By W. Leon Smith



So current legislators keep looking at the same old taps that leave Texans holding the bag, such as constantly tweaking sales taxes and property taxes.

Messing around with sales taxes is problematic in that changes cause regressive results. Once sales taxes are in place, it's best to leave them alone. Business people become accustomed to the rates and how they impact their own individual markets. Changes can be devastating.

There's a similar problem in altering property taxes. Personal budgets thrown out of sync sometimes take years to correct.

The key here is to skim off "new money," from the get-go.

When the central education fund was first proposed, a major source of the "new money" would have come from transactions dealing with home equity loans, allowed at that time by newly passed legislation. Here, the state could have skimmed income off new loans to go toward the education fund without damaging that which was already in place. But it didn't happen, a lost opportunity.

Later, I suggested to lawmakers that they might consider creation of a rainy day fund that I called the Texas Income Loan System, whereby the state would "borrow" money from members of the civilian labor force with a small amount withheld from salaries and use this money to grow the central education fund. This would count federally as a small income tax that could be written off federal taxes by the individual, but would actually be a loan to the state that the payee could get back if he or she becomes unemployed for any reason, including retirement. In this case, the payments would be repaid to them at a rate of about \$1,000 a month until all is paid back, interest free. It would be a safety net for the worker plus a way to grow a principal basis on which interest could be raised by the state. In essence, it would be a tax that's not a tax. With 94 percent employed and six percent unemployed, the payback is much less than what is coming in. This still might work, to some degree.

But to make a substantial difference would require "new money."

Let's jump outside the box.

Here, you will need to dump, at least temporarily, some preconceived notions and biases.

Let's say the state began allowing the growth and harvesting of hemp, and, in fact, took it over as a state-owned enterprise. Hemp is an outlawed crop since it is where marijuana comes from. But it is also a crop that would be perfect for use in bio-diesel fuel. It can be used in the manufacture of paper products (producing more product per acre than trees), is softer and stronger than cotton for fabrics, and has a vast multitude of other uses, even as food products.

The state would eagerly develop bio-diesel production as a state-owned enterprise. Instead of having oil companies control prices, bio-diesel would belong to the state. Farmers would grow hemp and sell it to the state-controlled industries.

Service stations would be established throughout the state, in every city, for the dispensation of bio-diesel. The state would embark in establishing automotive production facilities, much like Detroit, but the cars and trucks would be geared exclusively to bio-diesel.

The state would also begin building paper mills and other production facilities, to exploit by-products of hemp and bring in even more money.

These production facilities sponsored by the state would be located near the Rio Grande border.

Instead of building a wall to keep illegals out, the state would welcome them into one of a few newly created "colonies" or "cities" near the production facilities and hire illegals to work there. Illegals could also work for farmers and ranchers elsewhere in the state, provided permission from the state was granted and a small fee to the state paid.

Currently, some farms and ranches hire illegals on the sly. This would make it legal, only it would be regulated and the state would see some compensation from the process.

Overall, the state would also get a cut on all bio-diesel products, all hemp products, and the new industries created.

The Rio Grande border would be controlled by electronic surveillance, the idea, though, being that if illegals are encouraged to come to Texas to work (for less than normal wages, which they are eager to do), they would naturally come across the border at the correct locations, to be registered and become "legal" illegals.

They would have to live in one of the new "colonies" when they first arrive and if they want the benefits of citizenship which would lend application to federal and state laws regarding compensation, they would have to pass the appropriate

tests. Illegals born here would have their citizenship automatically corresponding with their mother's.

Monies derived from this exercise would in large part go toward the central education fund, with the purpose being the ultimate dissolution of school property taxes statewide. A side advantage would be cheaper fuel, with profits going to the state to pay for things we need, such as education and infrastructural improvements in our cities and in our counties.

If the state chose to do away with possession of marijuana as a crime, this would vastly reduce costs in operating some of our prisons. In fact, some grades of prisoners could be utilized at the bio-diesel and associated factories.

Anyway, this is my plan, in a very compact, undetailed nutshell. Every element can be expanded upon.

The exploitation of this plan, or one very much like it, would result in a gigantic financial boon to agriculture, enable much greater control of the illegal alien problem, bring wealth and jobs to the state, and correct school finance, saving citizens considerably in taxation and fuel costs, plus it is pro-environment. It is a plan with a future, utilizing "new money."

After reading this, you may be thinking, "Thank God, he's not running for Governor."

The point is this.

We must think outside the box to improve our state, and win-win considerations are allowed.

Texas has within itself the ability to become truly independent, with its own eco-system.

On one hand, you can strive for tangible results, or, on the other, you can simply sit back and graze while being continuously taxed to death with no improvements to show for it.

In Response To Border Problems: Fences Are Made For Climbing

This legislative proposal would be extremely humorous if it wasn't such a touchy and significant issue.

The resolution for illegal immigration by building fences across the border between the U.S. and Mexico is ludicrous and racist.

Don't forget that this resolution is being brought to you by the same administration that supported the equally absurd resolution to Americans as protection from chemical attacks by terrorists — to wrap our houses in plastic using duct tape! Now there's an intelligent resolution for you!

With thinking like that from the Bush Administration we can see how an inferior management system aids national insecurity. Honestly, what thinking person could EVER listen to advice from such leaders? Answer: Unfortunately, quite a few!

This reminds me of the 1950s mentality of having children in American schools practice hiding under their wooden desks to protect them from a nuclear attack! More intelligent thinking — BTW, doesn't wood burn under extreme heat?

The idea to fence-in America as protection from illegal Mexican immigrants reeks of the World War II racist mentality here within this nation that morally and physically destroyed so many Japanese and German American families.

But wait, I just had a thought: *Maybe the idea to build the fence along our borders originated with a legislator*



Commentary

By
Peter
Stern

who owns a fencing company?

There is no doubt that illegal Mexican immigration is a volatile, urgent issue that needs some intelligent and expedient resolutions, *but building a fence along the borders?* Only an idiot would consider that approach! Well, we certainly have a lot of idiots at the Washington Capitol — *no shortage there, folks.*

Isn't it time we get rid of most of those idiots so we can start resolving the urgent World and National issues in a more productive, intelligent and reality-based manner?

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.

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>.

Ben Franklin's 300th Birthday

Ben Franklin, who was born Jan. 17, 1706, is one of our most important but often overlooked Founding Fathers. He's immortalized forever on the \$100 bill. And he's known by every school boy and girl for his "Poor Richard's Almanacks" and his experiments with kites. But as former TIME magazine managing editor Walter Isaacson showed in his 2003 book, "Benjamin Franklin: An American Life," Franklin just may have been the most indispensable and most multitalented of the men who made America.

Brilliant, charming, gregarious, tolerant, witty and wise, Franklin was an inventor, printer, philosopher and civic do-gooder with an eye for the ladies who was involved with every aspect of the Revolution — from the writing of the Declaration to the diplomacy in France that brought the money, men and ships we needed to win our independence.

To mark Franklin's 300th birthday and get a better appreciation of a great man who reflects — and in fact invented — many of our best national qualities, here is a reprise of a 2003 telephone interview with Isaacson, who is now president of the Aspen Institute.

Q: Shouldn't Ben Franklin almost own the title of "Father of Our Coun-

try"?

A: Yeah, and the "Grandfather of Our Country" as well. He was a generation older than most of the Founders, but he was the wisest of them all. And he was the one who instilled in America the notion of religious tolerance, compromise and a feel for real democracy.

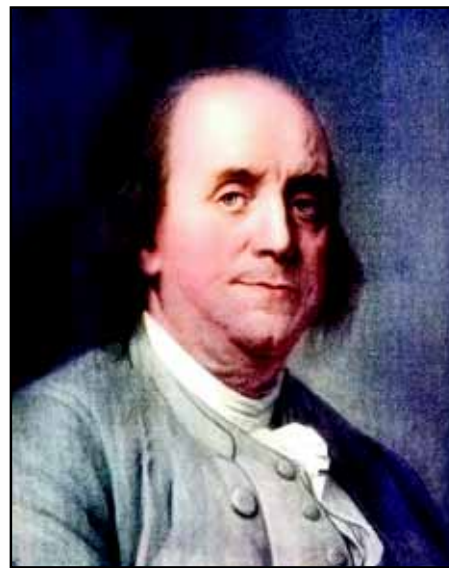
Q: Of all his many accomplishments — he was scientist, an inventor, a statesman, a printer, a musician, philosopher, an economist

A: If he had to pick one, he would pick printer or publisher. At age 16 he became a printer and in his last will and testament, at age 84, it begins, "I, Ben Franklin, printer...."

He liked being in the media. He liked being a publisher and an editor. He felt that the free flow of information was indispensable to both tolerance and democracy.

So even though he was a great scientist and a great diplomat and a great statesman and a political leader, he took pride in the fact that he was a shopkeeper who wore a leather apron and believed in middle-class values.

Q: What do you think his greatest accomplishment was, in terms of helping to create the American character?



Benjamin Franklin



Becoming Irrelevant

As Uncle Hugh used to say, "It ain't agin the law to forget a man to death."

For every action there is an equal and opposite screw-up.

Vacuum cleaners get rid of more dirt than brooms, but straw won't damage your hearing.

Boxing gloves cut down on facial injuries, but nobody would hit an opponent hard enough to do dain bramage with bare knuckles. Not more than once, anyway, unless you wanted to finish the fight with knuckles the consistency of Malt-O-Meal.

Improving football pads and helmets turned them into weapons.

Freeways move us from place to cemetery faster.

Alexander Graham Bell was the craziest man who ever lived, so he invented a device that drove everybody else just as crazy.

And privacy is replaced with a mechanical siren song of your favorite tune beckoning a whole population that needs to talk with nothing to say.

The British Empire thrived until the invention of faster transit and communications.

Back when messages from England took weeks to reach New Delhi, Hong Kong, or Singapore, officers of the Empire in those places made most of the decisions.

By the time they got orders from the home office, the issues were usually moot.

With airplanes, telegraphs and radios came immediate interference from those who'd never been to New Delhi, Hong Kong, or Singapore, and knew squat about the problem.

But the Indians, Chinese, and Malays did.

That's the Empire upon which the sun never set now needs Grow Lights.

So Pollyanna had it only half right. God's in his heaven . . . and he's got a sense of humor.

And the joke's always on us.

So you see, things will always work

Call To Mind

By Don M. Fisher



themselves out in time.

Like a nail in your foot.

Thus we lead in to the story of the week:

Jim Sulkers had his life automated.

The Winnipeg native had his condominium payments and his bills automatically deducted from his bank account.

A multiple sclerosis victim, his pension check was sent to his bank via direct deposit.

All the functions of his day-to-day were so carefully managed that for two years, nobody noticed that he was dead.

His mummified remains were found in his bed last week.

His only relatives, cousins, had been in town a few months ago for a wedding.

They went by for a visit, but left when they knocked on his door and got no answer.

Nobody home.

Anybody who called got no answer, so they just left a message on the machine.

The condo reps, when a neighbor asked about him, said as long as the bills were paid, they didn't worry about it.

Neither did anybody else.

It's hard to imagine a life so empty as to be entirely irrelevant, even to the bill collector.

And, brief as this may seem, that's it for this week, friends.

When you battle the mindless voice at the supermarket or automatic checkout, when you get everything from fundamentals to frills to thrills from the anonymous void's online wishbook, when your life doesn't even need you any more, remember Jim Sulkers.

And the price we pay to live in an age so automated it doesn't really matter whether you live or die.

A: There's a little anecdote I like to tell, which was when Thomas Jefferson wrote the draft of the Declaration of Independence. He writes the sentence "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable" and Franklin uses his heavy printer's back-slashes to cross those words out and to replace them with, "We hold these truths to be self-evident."

So Franklin insisted that our country was founded on rights that derived from reason, rather than from religion. And that we were not a religious theocracy. We could all be religious, but be tolerant of other people's religions. I think the notion of religious tolerance was his most important contribution.

Q: How is Franklin a product of his age?

A: He was the first leader of the Enlightenment period that was flourishing by the end of the 18th century. The Enlightenment believed in reason, experiment, tolerance, and it helped shape what this nation became. He was born in Boston, which was a fervent Puritan theocracy, but he helped bring the values of the Enlightenment to America.

Q: Did he create as much as reflect the American ethos — that passion for freedom and common sense and all that self-reliance stuff?

A: He talked about running away from being an apprentice to his brother because he had an aversion to tyranny. He said "that aversion to tyranny has stayed with me my whole life, and that's what made me an American."

Q: What would he think of today's world?

A: He would be happy that America is a democracy based on middle-class values and respect for the common citizen. He would not like the religious fanaticism that threatens the world. And he would not like the extreme partisanship that we have in America sometimes.

Q: If he ran for president, could his personal life and his ideas pass muster with the media today?

A: Well, he was involved in many elections. If we think the press is scurrilous today, in the elections in the 1760s, when he was running, they took after his personal life — all sorts of pamphlets and newspaper articles about his love for younger women and the fact that he had an illegitimate child all were very much

publicized.

He didn't mind that. He admitted he had an illegitimate child. He raised the child and he shrugged off all the attacks on his private life.

Q: What kind of character did he have? Was he a good, decent man?

A: He had basic middle-class virtues — honesty, frugality, industry. He had a simple creed, which is that the best way to serve God is to do good by your fellow man. He lived by that. He was deeply generous, deeply philanthropic, and he did more to help his community and fellow citizens than any other person of his time.

Q: That includes fire departments, stoves — practical things.

A: Yeah. He created the first fire department, the first lending library, a militia, a discussion club, insurance societies — all of these things.

Q: Would he be considered brilliant?

A: Franklin was very wise. Secondly, he was very ingenious and inventive. And his intelligence was also reflected in how articulate and what a great writer he was. He was considered both witty

and wise, which were the two most important components of intelligence back then.

Q: What party would he belong to today?

A: I'm not sure. He very strongly opposed partisanship. He believed you could always find common ground and look at the evidence and see what policies worked without being unduly partisan.

He was very populist, but also he was conservative in the sense that he didn't believe in welfare. He thought that that would lead to dependency and laziness.

On the other hand, he believed in volunteerism and he didn't believe in excess wealth. So he'd be a Democrat in that he was very much in favor of the estate tax, but he'd be a Republican in that he was very skeptical of government handouts and welfare.

Q: What would he think of the country today, with the size and scope of the federal government and the tax bite of all levels of governments?

A: He would be upset, because he basically believed in citizens' volunteerism and populist government, but not in big spending, especially on welfare.

Continued On Next Page



Somewhere, There's A Soviet Satellite Hurling Toward My TV

After getting the kids to bed last night, my wife and I settled onto the couch for some much-needed down time only to find that our television was having transmission problems — beginning with the remote. My wife is the only one in our family qualified to operate it. Being a male, the longer I fool with it the further I revert along the evolutionary scale, until I'm reduced to beating the remote on the coffee table like a chimp trying to open a Superball.

That's usually when my wife informs me I'm not pushing the right buttons, which is a direct contradiction to what I've been told at various points throughout our 15-year marriage. Regardless, on this particular occasion, even the "great wizard" was having problems with getting the remote to work. I know this because she kept moving closer and closer to the TV while pushing a mystical sequence of numbers and buttons that, if not effecting our television, were surely reprogramming the coordinates of a Soviet satellite somewhere.



By
**Ned
Hickson**
Siuslaw News

Finally, as she stood fiddling with the remote less than six inches away from the screen, I politely asked if she wouldn't mind reaching over and turning on the television. Now, until you've been hit by a flying remote, it's hard to appreciate its practical application as a weapon. I now carry one at all times, comforted by the knowledge that — be it would-be thug or rogue television — I have the means to handle the situation.

After getting a cold compress, I returned to find the TV screen, though on, now resembled an Etch A Sketch.

"I think it's the antenna," my wife said, immediately disregarding other possible scenarios I suggested, like the aforementioned Soviet satellite taking out the local transmitter.

"No, I really think it's the antenna," my wife insisted. "You should wear a coat."

As much as my wife is the master of the remote, I am the master of the TV antenna — an extremely advanced, V-shaped assemblage of metal bars mounted to an 18-foot pole attached to the side of our house. Aside from hanging our ceiling fan, it is my greatest technological achievement.

Only I know where to slide aluminum foil, which wire to jiggle, and how much duct tape is needed to keep the pole from swinging when it's windy. Without me, every station would look like old reruns of *The Outer Limits*. Which is why, when my wife yelled "That's perfect!" before I had a chance to do anything, I did what any husband desperate to hold on to his only sliver of leverage would do.

That's right. I shook that pole until

there was enough static on the screen to suck the sweater off a sumo wrestler.

"Hey! What happened to the picture?"

"Give me a minute. You know how this process is. It's a very exact science," I reminded her.

After some duct tape, an adjustment of the foil, and a couple of jiggles, I got the picture back.

"What was the problem?" my wife asked when I came back in.

"It's hard to explain. Very complicated," I said, and removed my coat. "But I got it working again."

As we dimmed the lights and settled back onto the couch, my wife smiled at me.

"Thanks for doing that," she said softly, then snuggled closer and whispered: "But if you ever again make me miss the first 10 minutes of my favorite show by shaking the antenna, we're getting cable."

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

Abramoff Family Values, Part Two

Last week, I wrote about the illegal dealings between indicted Houston Congressman Tom DeLay and indicted Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Abramoff's ties to other Texas Republicans are, so far, some of the least explored back-slappings in this whole torrid affair. Rest assured, Lone Star State officials have plenty of green blood on their hands.

John Cornyn, former Texas Attorney General turned Republican Senator, has some good friends in the Christian Coalition. Ralph Reed, director of the religious group, is a longtime Abramoff associate. Their relationship stretches back to Abramoff's time as president of the College Republicans, where Reed served as his lieutenant.

Between 2001 and 2004, Abramoff worked as a lobbyist for the Louisiana Coushatta tribe in a concerted effort to stop rival casinos from cutting into the Coushatta's Texas customers. Along with ex-DeLay associate Michael Scanlon, Abramoff paid Reed "consulting" fees to lobby Cornyn, urging him to shut down Tigua and Alabama-Coushatta casinos in Texas. Emails linking Cornyn, Reed and Abramoff were released in November of 2005 as part of the Department of Justice investigation into Abramoff's dealings.

In a 2001 email to Abramoff, Reed claimed "We have also choreographed Cornyn's response." Once the Texas casinos were closed and boarded-up, Abramoff and Scanlon convinced the bilked tribes to pay nearly \$4.2 million for lobbying to get their gaming centers reopened. Sen. Cornyn played a valuable role in Abramoff's scheme to play both sides of the issue and rob millions from these tribes. "I think we should budget an ataboy for cornyn [sic]," wrote Reed in a Jan. 7, 2002 follow-up email to Abramoff. The lobbyist then contributed \$1,000 to Cornyn's campaign, the maximum allowed by law.

While all of this horse-trading was afoot, Abramoff's associates were busy convincing his beneficiaries that their bids were safe and sound. Scanlon, the first of Abramoff's partners to plead guilty, appeased the Louisiana tribe by invoking his influence on the Religious

Right via Reed. Scanlon's most famous quote in the matter comes from an email which was introduced into evidence during Senate hearings. According to official records, Scanlon told the Louisiana tribes "[We will] see that the *Christian WACKOS* [sic] would vote it down."

This, ladies and gentlemen, from a self-proclaimed, born again Christian and longtime servant of the Republican Party who was instrumental in DeLay's efforts to illegally redistrict the Texas voting map. That particular scheme sliced several Texas Democrats out of Congress and lumped small groups of minorities into districts with predominantly white Republican voters. Scanlon's remarks are nothing more than a glimpse into the murky courtship between the Republican Party and the Christian Right. Dirty politicians love single-issue voters, and the DeLay/Scanlon/Abramoff cabal is a perfect example of their religious heresy.

Interestingly enough, in the first months of the DeLay investigation, Congressional Republicans changed ethics rules in order to stifle further probes into his illegal practices. Several months later, the bi-partisan panel decided to reinstate the original ethics rules, and the house supported the move in a vote of 406 to 20.

Of the 20 representatives that voted to keep the weakened rules — which may have saved DeLay from his recent removal as House Majority Leader — seven were from Texas. District 26 representative Michael Burgess was one of the few who pushed to keep the ethics rules restrained and broken, thereby keeping the Houston Congressman in power. Democrats twice put forward plans to strengthen House ethics rules, but on both occasions Burgess voted to ensure the measures never came to an up or down vote.

After DeLay was admonished three times by the House Ethics Committee, Burgess donated \$5,000 to DeLay's legal defense fund. It should not come as a surprise that Burgess previously accepted \$15,000 from DeLay's ARMPAC (Americans for a Republican Majority Political Action Committee), a group that became little more than a front and Laundromat for Abramoff/Scanlon dol-

lars. From Jan. 1, 2004 to March 31, 2005, Burgess voted in lock-step with DeLay 95 percent of the time. During his tenure in congress, Rep. Burgess has been little more than a rubber-stamp for the Neo-Con agenda; a tried-and-true apologist for the Bush administration and supporter of restrained ethics rules.

So "Attaboy," Texas Republicans. Keep on drinking from the faucet of Abramoff's dirty money and Bush's destructive politics. Your so-called "*Wacko*" vote is sure to wake up to the fragrant aroma of truth sooner or later. *Feeling the Republican love, my Christian brothers and sisters?*



The Webster
Retort

By
**Stephen
Webster**

Culture of Corruption indeed.

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.

Ben Franklin's 300th Birthday

Continued From Page 7

Q: Do you think America has sort of forgotten about Ben Franklin?

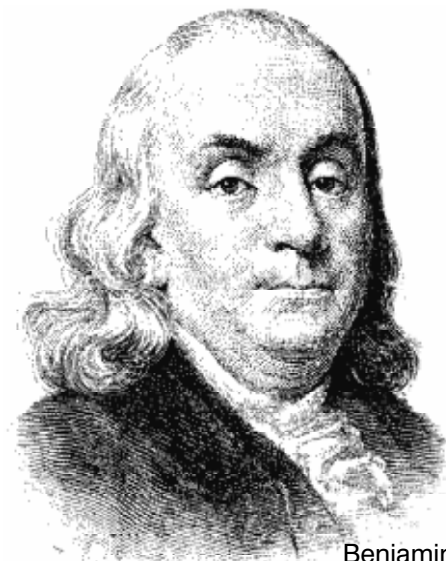
A: No. I think there's a great Franklin revival happening, because the 1990s were a period where we lost touch with our values, whether it was our business values, or our political values, or our family values. I think there is a sense that we need to come back to stronger values.

Q: I saw that his autobiography was very influential. It was used in education in the 1830s and 1840s and 1850s. He was held up as an exemplar of individualism and entrepreneurialism and his autobiography inspired Andrew Carnegie and Thomas Mellon. What was so powerful about that autobiography?

A: It was the first great rags-to-riches tale, in which a person can rise in the world based on hard work. It inspired Carnegie and Mellon and others because of its message of self-reliance, but also because of its message of trying to help others rise as well. Both Carnegie and Mellon worshipped Franklin, both in terms of his industriousness and in terms of his philanthropy.

Q: Having seen Mr. Franklin up close, do you like the man?

A: I like him a lot, even with all of his flaws.



Benjamin
Franklin

Q: Do you think he could get elected president today?

A: I think he could because he's such an endearing character, and his values are so well-grounded.

Bill Steigerwald is a columnist at the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*. E-mail Bill at bsteigerwald@tribweb.com. ©Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, All Rights Reserved.

Politicians Say, 'We Don't Know Jack.'

The current Washington scandal featuring lobbyist Jack Abramoff is sad and disgraceful. Fortunately, there is some comic relief attached to the shameful-ness. It's fun to watch Jack's one-time pals distance themselves from the guy. The rats started jumping off this ship before it even started to sink. American history hasn't had a similar instance of running far away from another individual since Typhoid Mary.

I'll bet those who depended on Tom Delay to help get something passed in Congress didn't send him Christmas (or Happy Holiday) cards this year. And those who spent time watching the Washington Wizards play from Abramoff's skybox are now saying, "I really didn't



Modern Times
By
Lloyd
Garver

know Jack."

The most entertaining aspect of the Abramoff scandal is watching the dozens of politicians struggle with what to do with the money they took. Some have decided to only keep a portion of the money. (I guess they're really good in

math and are able to calculate what percentage of the money they received was tainted). And some are keeping the money, saying that to return it would be admitting that they did something wrong. The problem with this logic is, they probably did do something wrong.

Most of them just want to get rid of the money. But what should they do? They can't just leave their house unlocked and hope that some burglars steal the right amount of cash. They can't just bet it all on a horse in the hope that the nag will lose. They can't just throw it away in the garbage or in a river. How would that look on the news? And they certainly can't hand it back to Jack. So, what's a politician who wants to look good supposed to

do with "dirty money?" He or she gives it to charity.

Although Abramoff helped raise more than \$100,000 for President Bush's 2004 re-election campaign, Abramoff only personally donated \$6,000 to the campaign. So, the President is donating \$6,000 to the American Heart Association. I don't know what he's doing about the other \$94,000.

The beacon of virtue, Tom DeLay, has said he'll donate \$15,000 to local charities. Elizabeth Dole will give \$1,000 and New York's Charles Rangel and Hillary Clinton will each give \$2,000 to local charities. Dennis Hastert plans on ridding himself of \$69,000 worth of "dirty money" and Senator Conrad Burns who refunded \$150,000 to Native American charities.

It's nice that politicians are giving money to charity. It's just a shame that their motives aren't all that pure. Do they really think that once they get this money out of their bank accounts or shoeboxes, that means that nobody will wonder why they took the money from this guy? Were they all so stupid or naive as to think that Abramoff & Company were legitimate? Abramoff is being called, "The Man Who Bought Washington." But in order for him to have bought, somebody had to be selling.

Some people feel that the press and crazy conspiracy theorists are often responsible for stirring up scandals. The media are accused of making a big deal out of nothing just to have controversial headlines to talk about. While this might be true more than it should be, I think the opposite is true when it comes to scandals in government. We are so used to scandals in Washington, that we tend to ignore most of them. It takes a really big one to get our attention.

To prove my point, I can give you an example of something that headline-crazed conspiracy theorists seemed to have ignored. It was January 4th, right before the big football game between the University of Texas and the University of Southern California. Retiring Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor tossed the coin that decided which team would get the ball first. And where was Justice O'Connor born? El Paso, Texas. And who won that coin toss? Texas. And who went on to win the game and the National Championship? Texas. Was all this a coincidence or something that should be looked into?

The prudent thing would have been for Justice O'Connor, who was probably rooting for Texas, to have recused herself from the coin toss. I'm not saying that she slipped in a coin that had the Texas longhorn logo on both sides, but that was the only side they showed the TV audience.

It was bad enough when the Supreme Court was asked to settle a Presidential election. But aren't you just a little surprised that nobody has investigated why a Supreme Court justice was involved in something as important as deciding which football team would kick off to start the National Championship game? Now, that would be a fun investigation to watch on C-Span.

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

Early Oil Man Flew Skull And Crossbones

"Buckskin Joe" Cullinan arrived at Spindletop on Jan. 11, 1901, less than 24 hours after the eruption of the Lucas gusher, ready to bet his bottom dollar that the bonanza would spark the biggest oil boom ever.

The son of Irish immigrants was born in Pennsylvania on New Year's Eve 1860 just a few miles from the first producing well on the North American continent. Going to work for Standard Oil as a 22-year-old roughneck, he climbed to the top rung of the corporate ladder in a fast-paced 15 years.

Cullinan received an unusual letter in 1897 from the mayor of Corsicana. A fortune in black gold lay beneath his sleepy community, claimed the civic leader, but no one had the money or the know-how to retrieve the fossil fuel. Could the oil executive come take a look?

On a cross-country trip later that year, Cullinan stopped at Corsicana just to satisfy his curiosity. A guided tour of the countryside convinced the self-educated geologist of the petroleum potential, and he promptly canceled his West Coast vacation.

In no time flat, the Pennsylvanian secured the financing for the first pipeline and refining operation in Lone Star history, which he named the J.S. Cullinan Company. His exploratory wells soon struck pay dirt transforming Corsicana into an honest-to-goodness boomtown.

But before enthusiastic investors could become bona fide millionaires, their Yankee benefactor had to figure out what to

This Week In Texas History

By Barte Haile



do with all that crude — a monumental challenge in the horse-and-buggy era. Cullinan cleverly solved the problem and opened up two brand-new markets by extolling the virtues of oil as a locomotive fuel and dust-settling agent for dirt roads.

To Cullinan's surprise, his former associates at Standard Oil did not recognize the potential of the Spindletop discovery in 1901. Firmly convinced their loss would be his gain, he built a storage tank, bought up every drop of cheap crude he could get his hands on and sat back to wait for the price to rise.

Reckless drilling practices, as well as outright sabotage, frequently sent sections of the Spindletop field up in flames. During an especially dangerous blaze, Cullinan asked a district judge to grant him broad emergency powers to fight the fire.

The hard-nosed oil man read the order issued by the obliging magistrate and snorted, "This is not enough!"

"What more do you need?" the bewildered judge inquired.

"I want the authority to kill a man if such is necessary in the discharge of my

duty," replied Cullinan.

The order was amended on the spot giving Buckskin Joe the power of life and death at Spindletop. When word spread that he could legally shoot troublemakers on sight, arsonists and assorted wrongdoers quickly cleared out.

Cullinan and a number of oilfield entrepreneurs merged with eastern money lenders in 1902 to form the Texas Company. Cullinan served as president of Texaco for 11 years, and his relocation of the company headquarters to Houston in 1905 guaranteed the inevitable emergence of the Bayou City as the oil capital of the world.

Horrified by the wasteful methods of early producers, Cullinan lobbied for federal regulation of the oil industry and even went so far as to advocate price-fixing by the government. He ultimately changed his mind, however, and ended up telling Washington in no uncertain terms to keep its bureaucratic nose out of the oil business.

Buckskin Joe was fiercely proud of his Emerald Isle heritage. Every St. Patrick's Day he hoisted the Irish national flag over his home in Houston.

For years he also flew the Jolly Roger atop his office building in the downtown business district. The prominent display of the notorious skull and crossbones puzzled passersby and became a local conversation piece.

Did the banner suggest that Cullinan saw himself as a petroleum pirate? On the contrary, the New Deal critic once remarked, the Jolly Roger served "as a warning to the privilege and oppression within and without the law, the latter including witch burners, fanatics, and the like who fail to realize that liberty is a right and not a privilege."

While visiting San Francisco in March 1937, the oil tycoon was shaken from his slumber by a mild earthquake. Fearing a repeat of the natural disaster that reduced the city to smoking rubble three decades earlier, he fled his hotel room wearing only a pair of thin pajamas.

Buckskin Joe Cullinan caught cold in the chilly night air. He stubbornly ignored the minor ailment until it developed into a severe case of pneumonia. By the time he finally sought treatment, there was nothing the doctors could do, and the petroleum pioneer passed away in a California hospital.

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

C & C Collision Center, LLC



• Truck
• Trailer
• Auto
Repair Specialists

"We Make Friends By Accident"

www.cccollision.com

- Free Estimates at your place or ours
- Pick-up & delivery (if needed)
- PPG certified paint specialists
- Fiberglass specialists
- Expert frame straightening
- Computerized Comp-Est and Mitchell Estimating Software
- Eagle Spray-on Bed Liners
- 30 day billing for Approved Fleet Accounts
- DOT inspections for commercial trucks and trailers
- State inspections for automobiles
- Lifetime warranty
- E-mail updates regarding your vehicle (pictures included)

254-848-7008

1-888-345-1178

5849 N. State Hwy 6
(Speegleville Area) Waco

The FCC Took My Baby Away

So I saw a midnight showing of *Sarah Silverman: Jesus Is Magic* last Friday. Great film.

Before the show, these two effeminate film geeks commented about all the advertisements on the screen for churches in the area.

I watched the slide show all the way through, and yup, one after another, ads for Christian churches appeared on the screen.

So I turned around and asked the geeks, "So where are all the ads for mosques and temples?"

"Not in Dallas!" replied the loudest geek.

Woo-wee! Imagine my surprise! I'd expect this kind of blackout from Rupert Murdoch's News Corps., not from an art house movie theatre!

In fact, I experienced censorship last

week when the use of YouTube was denied from Rup's newly acquired property MySpace.com. (FYI, YouTube is a website in which members can upload homemade videos for others to see.)

In my case, I posted a pro-war video found on YouTube to my MySpace blog (<<http://blog.myspace.com/diebenow>>) in order to ridicule those who made the video.

The video depicted what appeared to be two teenage boys reconfiguring an anti-war message posted on a fence using paper cups to say "Nuke Iraq."

Of course, since the title of the video was "Nuke Iraq," I had to titled my piece "Make Sex Tapes, Not War."

My blog post went a little something like this:

I have mixed feelings about this "Nuke Iraq" video.

One: "Ain't the First Amendment great? But will we have it three years from now?"

Two: "Pity all the pro-war military moms whose children died for nothing when we could have just nuked Saddam from the get-go."

Three: "These guys are so stupid, I bet they were kicked out of high school AND the military."

Four: "Hey guys, we only nuke countries we're at war with. The last time I heard Bush said we're not at war."

Five: "King Kong has better chance to win an Oscar, and he's a monkey."

Six: "Pity the pro-war Republicans and Democrats in Congress and the pro-military fascists across the pond who are whores of Big Oil. How are they going to explain oil that glows?"

Seven: "Seven was one of Brad Pitt's better movies."

Eight: "If we nuke Iraq, Iran will just get jealous and then want us to nuke them, and then in no time, every Middle Eastern country will want us to nuke them. By no means can we have that. I mean, what kind of message will we be sending when we actually give countries what they want?"

Nine: "We already are nuking Iraq. It's called depleted uranium. Here is what the effects of our secret nuclear war look like:" (Here I pasted a picture of victims of depleted uranium.)

Ten: "Make sex tapes, not war."

FIN

At first I thought that Rup's move was

The Rubber Cement Index

By Nathan Diebenow



just corporate-sponsored censorship, which is certainly not befitting of an American democracy.

But later, I learned that he removed YouTube to pave the way for a News Corps.-controlled website that offers free video downloads.

I guess the "marketplace of ideas" is more about the market than the ideas, and that only those who have the access to the market have the privilege to control the ideas.

What's worse is that Microsoft recently shut down a Chinese national's blog because the Chinese government told Bill Gate's firm to do so.

Turns out no one is safe from corporate-controlled speech, not pro-war militarists, not even communists.

Will someone tell the FCC to bring my free speech back and put an end to these Big Media oligopolies?

INFO

Dieb'sRCI Blog
<blog.myspace.com/diebenow>
Sarah Silverman
<www.jesusismagictthemovie.com>



To The Editor:

Consider this,

Professor Norman Borlaug, Vice Chancellor, Texas A&M, and the 1970 winner of the Noble Peace Prize, has been getting a lot of press this Summer about the great works he has been doing for developing nations and the hungry across the globe.

There is a great deal more information on the NET concerning this marvelous agricultural scientist and humanitarian that you might find interesting, but, in summation, we have at our Texas doorstep the single man who saved more human lives than any other person in history!

As a former medic, cook, and someone who has been homeless and hungry in his life, I know without the shadow of a doubt that if the food Americans throws away each night could be saved and re-used, we could go a long way in solving the hunger crisis in this country and beyond.

A non-profit organization in Manhattan—"God's Love, We deliver" has done something along these same lines for the hungry in New York City.

All the best,
William "Wild Bill" Taylor

To The Editor:

We must band together and rein in the power that Bush is amassing. It's the responsibility of the senate to check the power of the executive branch. Sadly, the Republican-controlled senate have become Bush enablers, and have done nothing.

A good example is the McCain anti-torture legislation. Bush signed it into law and immediately said he is the boss and he will do what he wants, thumbing his nose at the law.

It's obvious Bush thinks he is above the law, and his yes-men in congress reenforce that belief. The Republicans have betrayed the public trust, they are out to take permanent control of our government.

The only way to save our country is restore our two-party system, assure balance. Our country is in grave danger. Don't impeach Bush, fire the Republicans in 2006. If it wasn't for the GOP-controlled congress, Bush wouldn't be able

to continue assaulting the middle-class, the strength of our country.

Remember the Bush/GOP cronyism, incompetence and deception when you vote in 2006.

Dan Lavielle, Seattle, Washington

Dear Sir:

How many more lies will we tolerate from George Bush and his administration?

First he told us that Saddam had WMD, that mushroom clouds were imminent and we were all in great danger!

It was a lie.

Then he told us that Saddam had connections to Al Qaeda. Separate investigations by the 9/11 Commission and the UN proved that to be false.

Another lie.

Jeff Gannon a/k/a Jim Guckert kept appearing at Daily White House briefings and lobbing softball questions. Turns out he wasn't a reporter at all but a male "escort."

Another lie.

Staged town hall meetings with hand picked participants and scripted questions.

Reporters (both here and abroad) were paid to plant favorable stories in various newspapers.

Then Bush tells the public that he has never spied on the American people without a warrant.

Turns out he's been spying on us since 2003 without any warrants.

He lied again.

How many more lies will we tolerate from George Bush?

When will we stop swallowing his nonsense and demand the truth?

If your friend lied as much as GW, you'd dump him.

If your spouse lied as much as GW, you'd divorce her.

If your employee lied as much as GW, you'd fire him.

When are we gonna do the same to GW? He's lied, over and over and over again. Time for him to pay the price for lying to the American public — Impeachment.

Its time to stop the lies.

Concetta Castro Murray, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.

MCC Dance Company Ranked Second In Nation

WACO — The McLennan Community College Dance Company has been ranked second in the nation by the National Dance Alliance.

MCC's competition video placed second behind Tamagawa University of Japan. The video consisted of 30-second performances in pom, jazz, and hip hop as well as a demonstration of technical skills.

Officials To Be In Waco This Friday To Sign Up Area Seniors For New Drug Plan

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congressman Chet Edwards has announced that the Medicare Mobile Education Center and its counselors will be in Waco on Friday, Jan. 20, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Sul Ross Senior Center, 15th and Waco Drive, to share local, regional, and statewide prescription drug coverage plans that are available for people with Medicare to enroll in, discuss prescription drug coverage, and review costs, convenience, and value of each option available. Edwards' staff will also be on hand to answer questions.

In November and December, Edwards held town halls throughout Congressional District 17 to discuss the new Medicare prescription drug plan with seniors.

"I am glad that Medicare representatives are out in the community increasing awareness about the new Medicare prescription drug program," said Edwards. "It is important for senior citizens to fully understand all their options before deciding if the new Medicare prescription drug plan is right for them. My goal is to help answer seniors'

In 2005's NDA national championship competition, MCC placed second in Division II Dance, also behind Tamagawa.

The video was compiled in preparation of the NDA national championship in April.

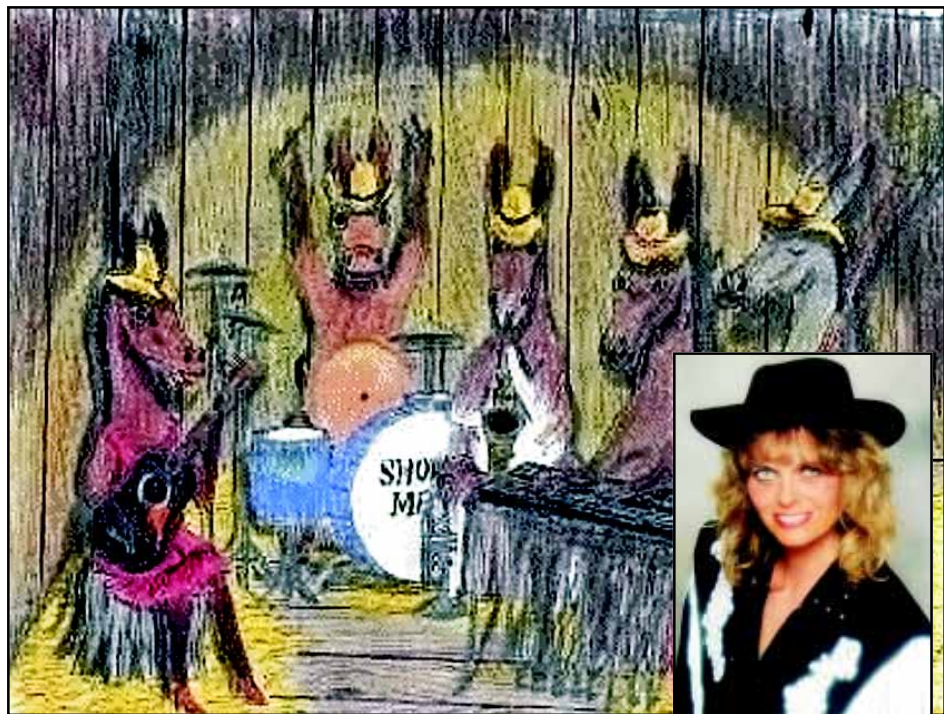
Sandy Hinton, director of the dance company, said the 21-member squad she has this year is one of the largest in her 31 years overseeing the team.

questions, clear up confusion, and discuss ways to improve the new program."

"These events offer people in McLennan County and surrounding communities an opportunity to talk one-on-one with a trained counselor about new Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage and how it affects you, a family member, or other people with Medicare" noted Edwards.

Interested people are encouraged to bring their Medicare/Medicaid card, current prescriptions (either on a list containing current dosages or the empty containers) and important financial information to expedite counseling and enrollment.

BACKGROUND: Beginning Jan. 1, 2006, prescription drug coverage became available to all Americans with Medicare. They will need to make a decision soon about signing up for Medicare's new prescription drug coverage — and President Bush has launched a nationwide outreach effort to help them to make an informed decision. Enrollment ends without a penalty on May 15, 2006.



The Jazzabilles and Starla Queen

Jazzabilles Present New CD

LAKE OF THE OZARKS — The Jazzabilles appear on a new CD "Show Me" by Q-Tone Records, blending western swing, country, blues, dixieland, and jazz into a unique style.

The band features Starla Queen, Jimmy Queen, Scotty Henderson, and Dave Owens.

Jimmy Queen has performed with Ray Pennington, Ray Price, Wade Ray, Sammi Smith, Johnny Paycheck, Ronnie Milsap,

Waylon Jennings, and others. He was music director for TNN's "Pappy's Place" and performs at various steel guitar shows. Queen received St Louis Entertainer of the Year, Drummer of the Year, and Band Leader of the Year.

Starla Queen, Jimmy Dean Country Showdown finalist, has performed at various steel guitar shows sharing the stage with Johnny Bush and Curtis Potter.

Dave Owens has backed artists such as; George Morgan, Wanda Jackson, Tex Williams, Leona Williams, Ferlin Huskey, Jan Howard, Darrell McCall, Charlie Louvin, David Houston, Johnny Western, Lefty Frizzell, Hank Williams Junior and others. Owens recorded with artists Wynn Stewart, Peggy Sue, Sonny Wright, Sheb Wooley, Jerry Wallace and others. Owens received Entertainer of the Year at the Central Country News Awards, a Grammy nominee for "Jukebox Saturday Night," and is a Missouri Country Music Hall of Fame member.

Scotty Henderson, Kansas Steel Guitar Hall of Fame member, appears at steel guitar shows and has worked with Charlie Daniels, Wanda Jackson, Hank Thompson, and appeared on the Lee Mace Country Music Show.

The CD features Ernie Reed on fiddle who appeared courtesy of Mel Tillis. Reed formerly traveled with Ray Price.

This cd has received accolades from radio stations worldwide including: Australia, Germany, England, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Stations from New England to Sacramento, Calif. are playing the Jazzabilles.

For more information, to listen to song samples, or to purchase the new CD; go to <www.jazzabilles.com>.

Texas Stars & Guitars Fest Set May 27 At Lake Whitney

LAKE WHITNEY — The second annual Texas Stars & Guitars Fest will be held May 27 at Lake Whitney State Park.

Featured will be Blues, Country, Folk, Bluegrass, acoustic music, and singing.

The event boasted 18 performers last year and promoters hope this year's entertainment is bigger and better.

The event is open to the public and free to all Lake Whitney State Park guests with normal paid entrance fee.

Guests will vote for their favorite musicians and awards will be given to top performers.

The program starts at noon. Single and group music artist are welcome.

The event is open to all Texas musicians, with vocal and acoustic/acoustic-electric music only. There is no sign-up fee.

Musicians should register to assure venue placement.

A complete PA system, house speakers, monitors, power mixer, microphones and stands, and cables will be provided. Musicians need only bring personal instruments.

MUELLER, INC.
STEEL BUILDING SYSTEMS & COMPONENTS

*Now Stocking Material for Customer Pickup
Call For Availability — Delivery Available*

Waco: 800-525-3814
Mark Noland (ext. 5426) - Roland Hicks (ext. 5427)
5591 N. Hwy. 6, Waco • 254-848-2560 • Fax: 254-848-9997
www.muellerinc.com

Texas Preservation Conference Set For April In Galveston

AUSTIN — The Texas Historical Commission has selected Galveston as the site for the Annual Historic Preservation Conference to be held April 20-22.

"Deep in the Heart of Texas, Preservation Makes Cents" is a three-day conference featuring seminars, workshops, and panel discussions on preservation issues.

One of the conference highlights is the awards luncheon where the recipients of the THC's 2005 historic preservation awards will be honored.

The conference will be held at the historic Tremont Hotel.

Preservationists, county historical commission members, government officials, history buffs, students, teachers, volunteers, community activists, or individuals considering a career in historic preservation are urged to attend.

Registration forms and brochures will be available in February.

For more information, call (512) 463-6255.

Fun with Dick & Jane

When the company Dick (Jim Carrey) works for becomes involved in an Enron-like scandal and he takes the fall for the team, Dick & Jane (Tea Leoni) are faced with the prospect of losing everything. After trying to find employment the old fashion way, the desperate couple resort to knocking off retail stores and banks. They soon discover their newfound skills suite them well. After a few more robberies, the couple launches a plot to revenge Dick's old boss.

PG-13
Runtime: 1 hour 30 minutes

Since 1916
CLIFTEX
TALKIES

306 W. 5th St. Clifton, Texas All tickets: \$5.00 per person (254) 675-1229

COMING SOON: *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Cheaper by the Dozen 2*, *Glory Road*, *Annapolis*

Thurs., Jan. 19 7 p.m. - Adults Only
Friday, Jan. 20 7 p.m.
Sat., Jan. 21 7 p.m.
Sun., Jan. 22 7 p.m.

Services

For advertising information, call (254) 675-3634

Wrecker Service 24 Hr.	Full Service Glass Work Service by Lynx	Foreign & Domestic
---------------------------	--	--------------------

Bill's Body Shop

REPAIR FACILITY ALWAYS OWNER'S CHOICE
Brewco Frame Machine & Measuring System

Highway 6 in Valley Mills, TX phone: (254) 932-6536
fax: (254) 932-6588
cell: (254) 709-2235

Leon's
FLOOR COVERING

Carpet & Vinyl
Formica Cabinet Tops
Wallpaper
Eureka Vacuum Cleaners and Service

QUALITY MATERIAL SOLD AND INSTALLED WITH PRIDE
302 West 5th Clifton, Texas FREE ESTIMATES Mike & Kim Prescher Phone 675-8686 Home 675-8291