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'Environment Texas' Director

We know that if we don't take action within the next decade to dramatically reduce emissions, we're going to, in the words of James Hampton from NASA, have a "vastly different planet," in that we're going to see more extreme weather. We're going to see more drought. We're going to have more smog and heat, more infectious diseases. So, yeah, that's definitely going to have a toll on the human population.'

— Luke Metzger

Luke Metzger, 'Environment Texas' Director

Lame Duck Session Calls It Quits

WASHINGTON, D.C. — In the waning hours of the 109th Congress, lawmakers enacted legislation to keep the government operating until the new legislature takes over.

Of the 11 annual spending bills, only two were completed. Approved was a series of “stop-gap” funding measures just to keep the government operating until next month, along with a few tax and trade appropriations.

Before adjourning, Congress revived expiring tax breaks, including a sales-tax deduction for residents of Texas and seven other states, extended trade agreements for foreign countries, and enacted legislation to protect physicians from a significant cut in Medicare payments.

Left unattended, however, were more than \$450 billion in annual funding measures and several hot-button issues, such as immigration and ethics reforms, items the new Congress will have to address.

The approved appropriations are expected to keep the government operating until Feb. 15.

Among the spending measures approved, including expiring tax cuts costing the Federal government \$38 billion over five years, was a tax credit for business research and development, tax deductions on college tuition, a tax credit for those hiring welfare recipients, along with tax credits for alternative energy producers and credits for purchases of solar energy equipment by homeowners and businesses.

Of major importance in the field of medicine was action to prevent a five percent cut in Medicare payments to physicians from taking effect on Jan. 1.

Legislation was passed extending permanent normal trade relations to Vietnam and allowing poor countries to export more clothing goods to the United States duty-free.

Since the sales-tax break was set to expire this year, certain



Mike Kagle THE DENVER POST 12/10/06 www.caglecartoons.com

taxpayers in Texas and seven other states will be able to deduct state sales taxes on their federal income tax returns, which compares to a tax break enjoyed by residents of states who deduct state income taxes.

Also included in legislation were deductions for college tuition and fees and deductions for schoolteachers who use their own money for classroom expenses.

Several initiatives and funding measures were left undone, however, including health care programs for veterans.

U.S. Representative Chet Edwards, who represents President Bush's Texas district, blasted the House and Senate leadership for leaving undone the appropriations bill to fund military construction and veterans health care programs.

“It is unconscionable for the House and Senate Leadership to let Members of Congress go on vacation until Jan. 4th without having passed the 2007 Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill. We should have stayed in session until this Congress ends on Jan. 3rd if that is what it took to do

right by our troops and vets, especially during a time of war,” said Edwards.

Since the 2007 fiscal year began on Oct. 1, 2006, military construction projects and veteran's health care programs have been funded at fiscal year 2006 levels via a temporary funding bill known as a Continuing Resolution (CR).

Edwards commented, “There are serious problems with a Continuing Resolution. Regarding VA health care, a \$3 billion increase is needed for fiscal year 2007 just to maintain present services, because of health care inflation and the increasing number of veterans needing VA health services. Consequently, funding the VA at 2006 levels leaves a \$750 million shortfall already for October, November, and December. Every month thereafter under a Continuing Resolution means \$250 million more in shortfalls for veterans' health care,” said Edwards.

The Continuing Resolution Congress is expected to have passed late Friday night would last until Feb. 15. While it specifically

gives the VA the authority to move up to \$684 million from other veterans' programs to VA health care, Edwards believes that is like robbing Peter to pay Paul. “It's flat wrong for some veterans to lose services to fund other veterans' health care, when the right thing to do would have been to pass the 2007 Appropriations bill on time,” said Edwards.

While the House passed its version of the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill on May 19, the Senate did not pass its bill until Nov. 14, and then did not appoint Senators to a House-Senate Conference Committee until just 48 hours before the House was to adjourn for the year, making it virtually impossible to negotiate a final bill in such limited time.

According to Edwards, the Continuing Resolution also hurts military troops and their families. “The Resolution, in effect, kills the \$18 million that Congressman John Carter and I funded for Ft. Hood for a top priority helicopter hanger and the \$3.5 million I had personally added to the House bill for the Waco VA and Ft. Hood to do a

joint research project for veterans' post traumatic stress syndrome,” said Edwards.

Edwards is expected in January to be selected to be the new Chairman of the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. He commented, “I intend to use my chairmanship to make it a top priority to pass as quickly as possible the bill to fund veterans and military construction projects, and I will go to the wall to restore funding for the needed projects at Ft. Hood and the Waco VA hospital.”

Edwards concluded, “It is a sad legacy of the 109th Congress and its leadership that it found time for meaningless resolutions and renaming dozens of post offices, but it did not find time to carry out its responsibility to fund veterans' health care and military construction projects. Starting on the first day of the new Congress on Jan. 4th, I intend to see that our troops, their families and our veterans are treated as a top priority, which they have earned through their selfless service to country.”



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State of Nature

Texas Legislature Faces Environmental Challenges



Interview With
Luke Metzger,
‘Environment Texas’ Director

By **NATHAN DIEBENOW**
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

AUSTIN — Luke Metzger has lived in Texas almost as long as George W. Bush has been President of the United States.

During that time, the president has undone almost 30 years of federal law that have sought to protect the nation's natural environment.

The last time the environment took this kind of pounding was back when President Ronald Reagan and his Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, were in power.

It's been well documented that Reagan thought that plants caused air pollution and Watt believed that destroying the environment was cool since Jesus would be back to terminate it all eventually.

The Bush administration has since taken Reagan's torch and lit legislative fires such as the Orwellian-titled Clean Air and Clear Water Acts, gutted the Environmental Protection Agency's enforcement division and its Superfund clean-up pro-

gram, and sparked big business' interests in logging, mining, and drilling millions of acres of wilderness — not to mention inflaming the international community by ignoring the Kyoto Treaty to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Metzger, on the other hand, has been fighting for the health of not only the environment but also the people effected by those changes statewide as director of Environment Texas.

Before Texas, Metzger lived in California where he worked with Environment Texas' sister organization — an environmental consumer group called the California Public Interest Research Group (CalPIRG).

According to Environment Texas' mission statement:

“We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress. That's the idea behind Environment

Texas. We focus exclusively on protecting Texas' air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST'S Nathan Diebenow recently spoke with Metzger about the environmental issues coming up in the next session of the Texas Legislature and the role of Congressional Democrats in framing green issues nationally.

Here is that interview:

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ICONOCLAST: Why are you an advocate for the environment in Texas?

LUKE METZGER: I've been in Texas for about six years. I was an Army brat so I grew up in Oklahoma, Germany, Alabama, California, and growing up, I was a Boy Scout and had a particular interest in nature and camping.

Since coming to Texas, I also have had the opportunity to explore a lot of the beautiful, natu-

ral areas of the state, everything from Padre Island and sea turtles down there to canoeing on the Pedernales River.

I've been able to have great experiences with that, but like with many other people, I've noticed the increased environmental problems in the state, everything from air pollution to global warming. I just had a baby boy four-months-ago and now more than ever, I'm really concerned about what are the things that he's breathing, what am I exposing him to.

The science is just overwhelming and you see almost every day there's a new study coming out showing that we're already facing huge problems and that things are only going to get worse, so I really worry about what the planet is going to be like both here in Texas and globally if all those things happen.

Then also, I've just been attracted by the rich history in Texas of populism and activism, everything from 19th century folks fighting the railroads serv-

ing as the birthplace of the populist movement to the more recent agitators like Jim Hightower and others that have been really impressed by that rich history and tradition of activism and organizing. I hope to try and step into those huge shoes, and be able to whip up a political firestorm on some of these issues.

ICONOCLAST: Well, why Environment Texas? Can you tell me how you got to work with them?

METZGER: Yeah, after graduating college, I worked with the California Public Interest Research Group or CalPIRG, which is an environmental consumer group. I worked as a campus organizer at UC-Santa Cruz for two years organizing students and getting involved in different campaigns from protecting forests to clean water.

After that I moved to Texas to work for the Texas Public Interest Research Group. Just this past February we started
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Environment Texas as the new home for TexPIRG's environmental work. So we basically decided to separate the two organizations to have a better focus on the specific mission. Environment Texas focuses in on things like environment, wilderness, clean air issues, and TexPIRG is focusing on our consumer, democracy agenda.

ICONOCLAST: Where does Environment Texas get its funding?

METZGER: Most of our funding comes from going door-to-door, talking to people about the issues, and raising money at \$15 - \$25 chunks at a time. We also get some funding from private foundations in the state.

ICONOCLAST: A lot of people have said that the 2006 mid-term elections were a referendum on the president's foreign policy with regard to Iraq. But how well will the environment in Texas fare now that there are more Democrats in state and national legislatures?

METZGER: Well, the climate has certainly improved at the national level, and we're very excited about the possibilities in Congress. In Texas, we've got a huge delegation that's going to play a key role on some of the issues coming up.

For example, Speaker (Nancy) Pelosi has included in her first "100 hours" agenda policies to repeal some of the tax breaks for oil companies, which have been egregious over the last few years, and the Texas delegation is going to play a key role in that, so we're going to work to make sure our members veer the right way for clean energy, and really, energy has risen to the top environmental concerns in the state.

In a lot of the key races around the country, energy was certainly talked about, from gas prices to dependence on foreign oil, also concerns about global warming. It's definitely become a hotter issue, and legislators are starting to pay attention. In Texas, the Democrats picked up a few seats, so what folks say is that might moderate how Speaker (Tom) Craddick operates the House of Representatives, which could potentially open some doors to pro-environment legislation.

ICONOCLAST: What will be the priorities Environmental Texas will lobby for in the Texas Legislature next session?

METZGER: The big ones are definitely power plants, state parks, and energy policy. These

are going to be the ones we're concerned with.

To start with, the state parks during the elections was a hot issue. All the gubernatorial candidates took stances on it including Gov. (Rick) Perry who called for full funding of the state parks. Speaker Craddick also did so, and so in that place, we're in a pretty good position.

This summer there was a blue-ribbon panel that recommended an increase of \$85 mil-

lion a year for the state park system to catch up on some of the huge backlog of maintenance issues, re-hire a lot of the park rangers that were laid off last Christmas, and also to invest in new parkland acquisition to help protect the threat of natural areas and improve access to Texans particularly living in urban areas where they are pretty under-served for parks. I'm pretty optimistic on that.

We've got a lot of support. I think the time has come. The issue has been burning so much that the crisis has finally gotten to the point where the legislators can't ignore it anymore.

The other big issue, of course, is going to be power plants. Last year, of course, Gov. Perry issued an executive order fast-tracking the permitting of new power plants in Texas, specifically new coal facilities proposed by TXU and other utilities, so with that move, it has basically created a short timeline in order for the public to weigh in and have an input.

For example, they're having

hearings on the same day at exactly the same time effecting power plants next door to each other, so people living close to both of them weren't able to weigh in and actually have comments at the hearing because Gov. Perry enforced this ridiculous speed that is shutting out the public.

If all these plants are built, that's a serious problem. You know, we're locked into 50 more years of pollution that would re-

we can attend state parks, but we just can't breath the air. (laughs)

METZGER: Right. Unfortunately. Hopefully, the parks are far enough away from the power plants that you can do both.

ICONOCLAST: In your estimation, how green-minded are the average Texans?

METZGER: They are very green. If you look at polls that have been done, just for example if you look at renewable energy. The oil and gas industry did a poll about a year or two ago and asked people, "How much do you support renewables?" And something like 80 percent of Texans supported increased

businesses here in the state that have been very actively developing new wind farms, everything from Florida Power and Light to General Electric. Renewables is a big business for the state.

Then if you look at parks for example, parks is a billion dollar industry. They are providing lots of the tourism dollars, sporting goods sales, and other things, so there are a lot of businesses that rely on our parks as a funder.

And if you look at the issues of quality of life, a lot of major corporations when deciding where to set up their headquarters are looking at issues like, "Am I able to attract employees to a city that ranks number one for smog and has no parks?" Regulators will choose other cities that have those kinds of quality of life measures that will attract high-talented employees which they need in order to compete.

Boeing, I believe, was looking at Dallas versus Chicago for a new headquarters, and they went with Chicago because of those kinds of considerations.

ICONOCLAST: What's been your experience with religious conservatives and their pro-environment activities?

METZGER: Actually, they are pretty active in Texas. For example, the Texas Baptists put out a great position paper on the environment, showing that it's a moral imperative to protect God's creation.

Groups like the Texas Baptists, Texas Impact, and others — the Houston Dominican Sisters — lots of religious folks around the state have really helped raise the profile of this issue and show that it's not some lefty, treehugger issue, but a matter of basic moral fairness and concern.

That's been a huge help. A lot of churches are doing things like purchasing renewable energy credits, making their places of worship more energy efficient and other things, so they can do their part to help. Increasingly they are also organizing the congregations to contact legislators in support of different measures.

ICONOCLAST: I also want to ask you about Gaia theorist James Lovelock. He said recently that the earth is going through a natural shed of the human population through climate change. He predicts that a hot earth will sustain 500 million people as opposed to the six billion now currently living here. What are your thoughts on Lovelock's analysis?

METZGER: Yeah, the predictions are pretty dire. We know that if we don't take action within the next decade to dramatically reduce emissions, we're going to, in the words of James Hamp



ally wipe out some of the advances that we made in air quality in the state as well as dramatically increase our carbon dioxide emissions which of course will hurt global warming.

The good news is that there are legislators that don't agree with Gov. Perry. There are about 40 legislators, including four Republicans, that signed on to a letter to TCEQ (Texas Commission On Environmental Quality) asking them to slow down the process, so the proper air quality studies can be completed before these plants are built. I think there's legislation to issue a moratorium on the construction of these plants until that's done.

So I think that's going to be a really tough fight. TXU has spent tons of money in campaign contributions not only to the governor but to members of the Legislature, and they're going to have a pretty high-powered lobby team in there spreading their lies. It's going to be an uphill fight for us.

ICONOCLAST: So basically

renewables.

Other polls show that when they asked, "What should be the main way that we produce our power in the future? Should it be renewables? Should it be coal? Liquified natural gas?" And again, renewables stomped the other ones which were in single digits. Renewables gets 70 percent. There's strong support in that, and these are just common sense issues. Everybody wants clean air. They want clean water. Unfortunately, because there are these powerful interests that are standing in the way of progress, we don't get those kinds of environmental protections, but even legislators who routinely vote against the environment at least claim that they care about the environment and recognize that broad public support for it.

ICONOCLAST: What about industries that are in Texas that support clean energy? How do we compare with other states?

METZGER: We're number one in the nation for wind energy, and so we've got a lot of

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ton from NASA, have a "vastly different planet," in that we're going to see more extreme weather. We're going to see more drought. We're going to have more smog and heat, more infectious diseases. So, yeah, that's definitely going to have a toll on the human population.

I think the World Health Organization already estimates that something like 100,000 deaths a year are linked to climate change. That's a huge

number, and they're only going to get worse if we don't do something about it.

ICONOCLAST: Any functions that Environment Texas will be holding in the near future?

METZGER: We're part of a coalition of groups called the Alliance for a Clean Texas, and we're having a lobby day on Feb. 26. It'll be at the capitol. We haven't determined a time or place, but people can find out details on our website where they can also join our email list.

INFO
www.EnvironmentTexas.org

Over Half World Wealth In 'Super Rich' Hands

WASHINGTON — Over a half of the world's wealth is in the hands of the top two percent of the "super rich," said a new report from a United Nations development research institute.

The study in personal assets — the most comprehensive of its kind — found that 85 percent of global wealth is controlled by the richest 10 percent of adults.

On the other extreme, almost one percent of world's assets are owned by the bottom 50 percent of adults.

The most wealth can be found in North America, Europe, and certain Asian-Pacific countries, according to the report. The United States had the largest economy followed by Japan and Britain.

The definition of wealth, in this case, is the value of physical and financial assets minus debts.

The richest one percent of adults, more specifically, would have \$500,000 in net assets, whereas the top half of rich had \$2,200 in net assets, as defined under the study by the World Institute for Development Economics Research of the U.N. University.

The trend, however, toward inequalities in both income and wealth distribution has widened in the last quarter century and are seen as factors that prevent poorer nations from attaining more wealth.

The World Distribution of Household Wealth report showed that the average wealth in Japan was at \$180,837 per person while in the U.S., \$143,727.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, which happened to swear in its first freely elected leader last week, Joseph Kabila, was last among nations per capita wealth with \$180.

President Carter Rebuffs Racism Claims

ATLANTA — Former President Jimmy Carter last Sunday rebuffed claims that he was an anti-Semite for suggesting that Americans should view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more evenly.

"You're a racist and anti-Semite," yelled one caller during a live, three-hour nationally-broadcasted interview on C-Span.

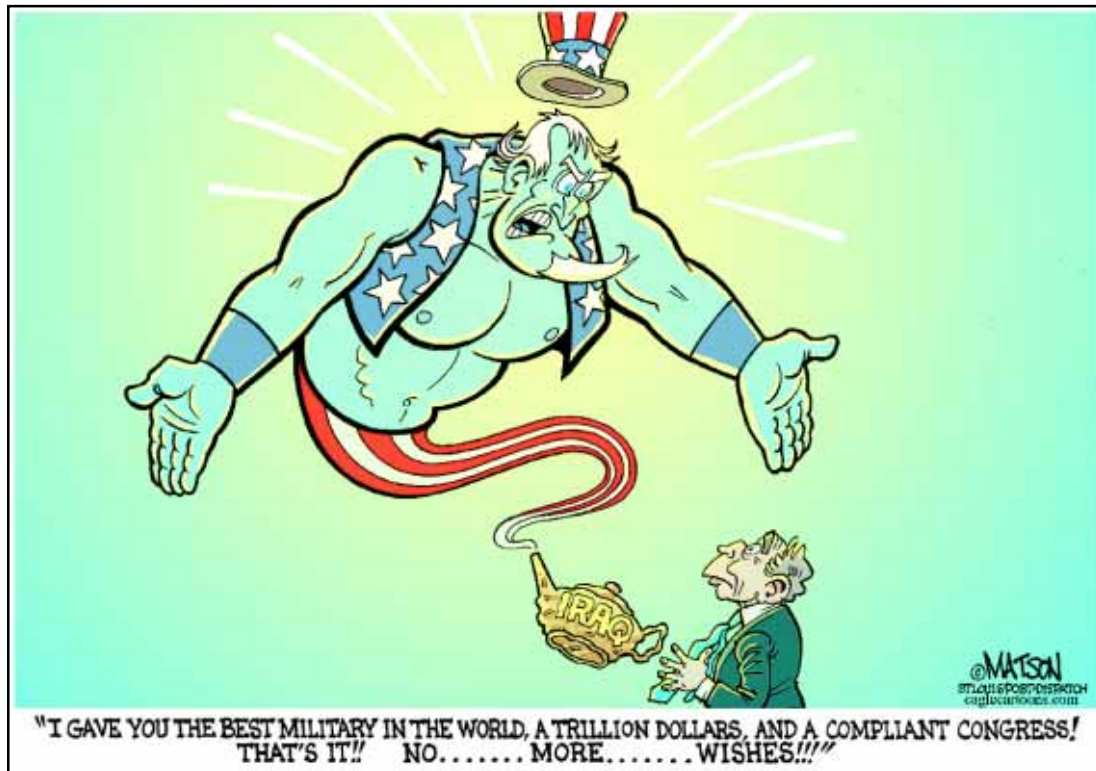
"I reject that with enthusiasm," said the 82-year-old Carter, who has been vigorously promoting his new book "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid."

Carter said that no American politician could ever be elected to office today and blame Israel for any violence in the Middle East.

As a result, the United States would be hindered from developing peace in the region as an honest broker, he argued.

In 1978, Carter helped negotiate a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt known as the Camp David Accords.

During President George W. Bush's six years in office, the U.S. government has taken Israel's side over the Palestinians.



100 New Orleans Families Face Eviction

NEW ORLEANS — About 100 families are facing eviction from an apartment complex in the Algiers area of New Orleans.

But leaders of the Green Party have condemned the evictions, saying that police officers and the previous landlord had illegally obtained files from the management office and taped notices informing the families of the change in ownership.

The new owner, Johnson Properties Group - LLC, is now seeking the eviction of the residents of Woodlands Apartment Complex and has refused to

share documents concerning improvements to the property and the tenant's leases.

For the past five months, the New Orleans-based nonprofit group Common Ground had managed and rehabilitated 100 units at the Woodlands Complex while keeping rents the lowest in the city.

Elsewhere in New Orleans, the historically predominant African American population have seen their rents double since Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc there in August 2005.

"In New Orleans and other

Gulf Coast areas, middle- and low-income working people have been forced out of their homes twice — first, because of Katrina, and then because of development plans designed to benefit wealthy real estate companies and landlords," said Louisiana Green Party member Romi Elnagar.

INFO
Common Ground Collective
www.commongroundrelief.org
Green Party of the United States
www.gp.org
Green Party of Louisiana
www.lagreens.org



Remove Troops, Start Diplomacy: Iraq Study Group

WASHINGTON — The Iraq Study Group last Wednesday issued a report suggesting that the Bush administration remove unnecessary combat troops from Iraq and begin dialogues with her Arab neighbors.

President George W. Bush, who has set up his own policy advisory committee on Iraq, said that he would consider the findings but not be bound to them.

After working for nine months, the authors of “The Way Forward” report acknowledged that no party would be entirely happy with their suggestions.

Though the situation in Iraq “grave and deteriorating” and could the region’s chaos into all-out war, the group said there was no “magic formula” to solve the war-torn nation’s problems.

The report calls for no complete troop withdrawal, no strict timetable for even a gradual withdrawal, but no increase in troop levels, though it suggests troops that “force protection” could return from Iraq by the beginning of 2008.

It also recommends that the training of Iraqi security forces happen quicker and that U.S. troops serve in support of their Iraqi counterparts.

Still, the report is not soft on the Iraqi government when it suggests that U.S. troops should be removed if the Iraqis fail to make major changes to their government and security.

Iraq’s prime minister has said that his security forces could be ready for action by June 2007.

Also among the 142-page report’s 79 recommendations are challenges to the administration to immediately enter into talks with Syria and Iran and help resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict — moves that would stand the president’s current policies on their heads.

The Iraq Study Group led by for Secretary of State James Baker III, a Republican, and former Rep. Lee Hamilton, a Democrat, is itself comprised of five Republicans and five Democrats.

The group’s existence is seen as a political move to win back Democrats as well as the American voters to the administration’s side before the November midterm elections. As such, the American troops can be seen as pawns in this political game.

In fact, the U.S. military isn’t happy with the report’s unrealistic expectations either, noting that the Iraqi security forces will be nowhere near ready to take control of their country in the allotted time.

Gen. Jack Keane, a retired army chief of staff who advised the Baker/Hamilton group, told reporters that the report reflects more “the absence of political will



in Washington than the harsh realities in Iraq.”

Outspoken critic of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) said he doesn’t buy the report and neither do the American people.

“Unfortunately, the Iraq Study Group report does too little to change the flawed mind-set that led to the misguided war in Iraq,” he said in a statement. “Maybe there are still people in Washington who need a study group to tell them that the policy in Iraq isn’t working, but the American people are way ahead of this report.”

Sixty-two percent of the American people and 80 percent of all Iraqis want the U.S. government

to redeploy every single U.S. troops back to the United States within the next year or sooner.

With that said, Baker and Hamilton washed their hands of the matter in their cover letter to the ISG report, by making the American people, not their leaders, as scapegoats if the policy fails.

“Success depends on unity of the American people at a time of political polarization ... Foreign policy is doomed to failure — as is any action in Iraq — if not supported by broad, sustained consensus,” they wrote.

While the new Democratic-majority in Congress may be split on Iraq policy directions, their lead-

ers and members have indicated that they would provide stricter oversight to any supplemental military spending bills that may prolong the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

As the new chairman of the military appropriations subcommittee, Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), a one-time supporter of the Iraq war supporter, has pledged to re-introduce a provision ban-

Hoffman Says Bush Taking Advantage Of 9/11 Grief

HOLLYWOOD, Calif. — President George W. Bush continues to take political advantages of the

ning the creation of permanent U.S. bases in Iraq.

Thus far, the U.S. government has spent about \$375 billion on military operations in Iraq.

The U.S. involvement in World War II took less time than the U.S.-led war and occupation of Iraq. This current conflict has taken the lives of more than 2,900 American soldiers in the 3-1/2 years since the March 2003 invasion.

The outgoing U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan last week remarked that the Iraq people were better off living under the regime of their last leader Saddam Hussein.

Annan, who is to step down from office after 10 years on Dec. 31, also told the BBC that Iraq is in a state of despair “much worse” than civil war.

Iraqi officials have taken issue with Annan’s comment.

Iraq’s interior ministry reported that the civilian death toll increased by 44 percent in November compared to the previous month. About 1,850 civilians perished in November according to the ministry.

The U.N. said, however, that it calculated the Iraqi death toll to be double the Iraqi government’s figures. The U.N. accounted for 3,709 Iraqi civilian deaths this past October.

The estimated total number of civilian deaths in Iraq is around 46,000.

terrorist attacks that occurred on Sept 11, 2001, according to American actor Dustin Hoffman.

“I think that the administration manipulated the grief of 9/11. They did it then and they do it now,” he told ANI. “Everybody knows why they wanted to go into Iraq and it had nothing to do with weapons of mass destruction.”

The two-time Academy Award winner also said that his understanding of world-wide resentment against the United States has made him “self-conscious.”

“I’m an American, and it’s not a good feeling. When Americans say, ‘I don’t know why they hate us so much,’ that’s an uneducated response,” he said. “There are lots of reasons why we’re hated.”

Hoffman earned his first Oscar for his role as the workaholic father Ted Kramer in “Kramer Vs. Kramer” and his second as autistic savant in “Rain Man.”

Hoffman is also known for his portrayal of *Washington Post* reporter Carl Bernstein in “All The President’s Men” about the Watergate scandal that led to President Richard Nixon’s resignation.



Poverty Spreads Across Suburban America

WASHINGTON — For the first time ever last year, there are more American in poverty living in the suburbs than in the inner cities, according to a new report by a Washington-based think tank.

The Brookings Institution in its study of the largest 100 metro areas found that there are over 12 million suburban residents in poverty.

Times have changed when the suburbs rode out recessions that would have otherwise tanked cities, said Alan Berube, the research director at Brookings' Metropolitan Policy Program.

"Where you see increases in city poverty, in almost every metropolitan area, you also see increases in suburban poverty" he told the Associated Press.

This trend in poverty demographics happened gradually

as the outlying suburbs caught up and eventually surpassed cities in population, partly due to the influx of immigrants who generally have lower incomes on average.

Poverty is now seen as a re-

gional phenomenon with economic recovery dragging in the Northeast and Midwest — even though the poverty rate has been maintained at 12.6 percent.

Large cities still have the

highest poverty rates compared to the suburbs (18.8 percent to 9.4 percent).

The poverty level as defined by the federal government in 2005 is \$15,577 for a family of three.

The suburb with the highest poverty rate last year was McAllen in south Texas with 43.9 percent. The lowest poverty rate in suburban America was Des Moines, Iowa, with 3.7 percent.

\$20 Billion In Foreign Arms Sales Forecast For Next Year

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has forecasted the sale of roughly \$20 billion in military arms to foreign nations in fiscal year 2007.

Sales in the last fiscal year which ended on Sept. 30 topped \$20.9 billion — the second highest sales year since 1993 when the U.S. military was engaged in the first Gulf War.

The current sales projections, however, take into account security fears related to Iran and North Korea.

Saudi Arabia, for example,

has eyed the purchase a number of \$220 million ships to protect its own Persian Gulf-based oil infrastructure from any type of Iranian provocation.

Also in the Middle Eastern region, the United Arab Emirates has sought to increase its naval strength and missile defense. Iraq and Afghanistan, though, are expected to purchase the same amount of weapons — about \$3 billion worth.

To guard against "threats" from North Korea, Japan and

South Korea has looked into purchasing more Patriot missiles, each running from \$50 million to \$300 million each.

These sales come after North Korea launched missiles and blew up a nuclear device against international wishes this last summer.

India has been showing more interest in acquiring weapons from the United States.

The U.S. government, however, has continued to pledge its refusal to sell 66 F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan.

While the deal would cost \$5.5 billion, the U.S. has told the tiny island nation that it must first buy a package of eight submarines, 12 anti-submarine aircraft, and anti-missile system.

Peace Group To Play 'An Inconvenient Truth' In Waco Dec. 13

WACO — A free showing of former Vice President Al Gore's hit documentary about global warming will be held Wednesday, Dec. 13, at 6 p.m., at Poppa Rollo's Pizza in Waco.

As a special treat, a free pizza buffet will be offered to audience members, though seating is limited.

The organizers of this event — Waco Friends of Peace — said they are sponsoring this event because the corporate-owned movie theaters in Waco have refused to show the film.

This is not the first time the local theater chains have not played socially-progressive political films. Michael Moore's documentary "Fahrenheit 9/11," for example, was not aired there the summer before the 2004 presidential elections.

Like Moore's film, "An Inconvenient Truth" has been shown at a few area churches, say organizers.

Some critics say the film is an attempt to boost the popularity of the former vice president who lost his presidential election bid to then-Texas Gov. George W. Bush in 2000.

Organizers of the Waco showing, however, note that the information in Gore's film is especially relevant to the people of Central Texas in light of the coal-fired power plants proposed for construction in the region.

Scientists who study climate change have backed the film for its accurate explanation of the issue of global warming.

"Let's all take a larger part in the dialog. There are solutions, but only if we are aware of and then acknowledge the problems," said the organizers in a statement.

The restaurant is located at 703 North Valley Mills in Waco.

INFO
Waco Friends of Peace
www.friendsofpeace.org

Four Anti-War Activists Seek Apology From Bolton

— Bolton Resigns, Gates Confirmed, Rumsfeld Left 'Run' Memo —

WASHINGTON — Four anti-war activists last week sought an apology from a controversial U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

The apology was sought on the same day that John Bolton announced his resignation from his post and the activists started their trial on charges of trespassing, disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and obstructing government administration.

The activists had attempted to deliver an anti-war petition to Bolton's office along with 50 other women in celebration of International Women's Day last March 6.

New York City police officers, however, stopped the group and arrested the four leaders — CODEPINK cofounder Medea Benjamin, Episcopal priest Patti Ackerman, and Gold Star Families for Peace members Missy Beattie and Cindy Sheehan.

"It's terrible that women working for peace and representing the sentiments of the majority of people in this country—and the world—should be treated like dangerous criminals," said Sheehan, whose soldier-son died in Iraq. "Instead of being on trial, we should get an apology from Mr. Bolton before he leaves office."

Bolton, who served as ambassador as a result of a mid-



term appointment, was not expected to be confirmed with a new Democratic Party majority in the U.S. Senate.

Gates Confirmed

The former head of the CIA Robert Gates was approved to be Donald Rumsfeld's successor as the Secretary of Defense.

The Senate Armed Services Committee confirmed Gates unanimously (21-0) after five hours of testimony.

Gates backed the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq but during his confirmation hearing criticized the Bush administration on its managing of the occupation.

The White House in its defense said that Gates and President George W. Bush agree that

Iraq must learn to sustain its own security.

As for whether the U.S. was winning or losing in Iraq, Gates told the committee members differing answers depending on the senator's party. He said to Sen. Carl Levin, (D-Mich.) that the U.S. was losing, but he told Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) that its forces were not losing.

Overall, Gates gave the committee members what they wanted to hear, that he would help them formulate bi-partisan foreign policy plans.

Rumsfeld's Memo

Two days before his resignation and a day before the mid-term elections, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld issued a memo to the president suggesting a reduction to the U.S. bases

in Iraq — 55 to 15 by April 2007 and down to five by July.

Troops would also be moved to safer locations such as Kuwait so as to also be able to quickly react when necessary.

Rumsfeld also suggested that the Iraqi security personnel would need to be trained with more U.S. specialists, and the U.S. should quit allocating reconstruction funds to violent sections of the country.

This advice is a departure from Rumsfeld's "stay the course" policy which he created.

Still, President Bush continued to say that the U.S. military was going to remain in Iraq "to get the job done as long as the government wants us there."

Rumsfeld's Ally Resigns

The Friday before this leaked memo was confirmed, a close ally to Rumsfeld inside the Pentagon announced that he would resign at year's end.

Stephen A. Cambone, a top intelligence official, is the first key department member to step down since Rumsfeld's resignation.

The Pentagon said that Gates had not asked for Cambone's resignation.

During his watch, Cambone was not without his critics, such as when the Defense Department was accused of usurping the powers of the government's intelligence community.

Celebrate an American Anniversary: Dec. 16, 1775 — The Boston Tea Party

By MELINDA PILLSBURY-FOSTER
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

On Aug. 14, 1765, a small group of colonists came together to form a secret society in furtherance of independence. They first met in Boston under a tree located at the corner of Essex and Orange Streets near Hanover Square. They had gathered to protest the Stamp Act. When they left they had founded a secret society that would promote independence for the colonies, a front line for action. Effigies of two tax collectors had been hanged from what was ever after known as the Tree of Liberty.

The Sons of Liberty came into existence because awareness was growing that action would soon be necessary. As the 231st anniversary of the Boston Tea Party approaches all Americans should take a moment to thank those stalwart men who agreed on the need to preserve the autonomy of the colonies and took action. Today we have lost sight of the specific events that motivated the dumping of artificially cheap tea into Boston Harbor. But the reasons went to the insistence of the colonists that they were free, a truth we should never forget.

The colonists in New England had served in the French and Indian Wars fought out far to the west of them, but since they were not allowed representation in the British Parliament they rejected the idea that they were obliged to pay for that war.

In the wake of the French and Indian Wars the British Crown demanded payment for the expenditure of monies that war had cost the Crown, this despite the fact that the war was the continuation of a territorial conflict among the British Crown, France, and Spain. For Britain, the spoils of war was Canada, ceded to them by France. The colonists saw no reason that they should pay for the adventuring taking place far to the west of their own hard-won colonies. But Britain had decided that the independence of those colonies, now developing and profitable, needed to be brought under firm control and used the war, which ended with the Treaty of Paris, Feb. 10, 1763, as their excuse.

The Crown was well aware that the colonists were used to governing themselves; after all, that is why the Puritans had gone there in the first place. But

by imposing a tax the Crown hoped to both raise money and at the same time assert the right to impose whatever policies the Crown wished later. Imposition of the Stamp Act and the Townsend Act in 1765 and 1767 were, therefore, a strategy aimed at both augmenting income to the Crown and establishing grounds for further control. This was clear to the colonists. Tensions rose, erupting in the Boston Massacre in 1770.

Many Americans could see where the actions of Parliament were taking them and began to prepare for war in their towns. The Committees of Correspondence started meeting to read and discuss the causes in detail. The population as a whole was alive to the issues and well informed.

The Boston Tea Party took place on Dec. 16, 1773, the culmination of that campaign by Parliament to coax colonists into establishing the right to tax. The previous Stamp and Townsend Acts has been rescinded, leaving only that small tax on tea. The Crown put the first part of the agenda, raising money, on the back burner to establish the principle that they could impose control without representation. The colonial leadership in Boston was determined that their plan be thwarted. American freedom was not to be purchased for the cost of cheap tea.

Three East India Company ships entered Boston Harbor. They were confronted with the sight of a crowd of 7,000 colonists, talking and shouting. That morning a group had met at the Old South Church and voted to demand the ships leave the harbor without paying the required duty. A delegation was sent to the Customs House to demand the ships lift anchor and leave the harbor. The Collector of Customs demanded payment; the ships would not leave otherwise.

A cry went up from the milling throng when this news was relayed to them. The response came just a few hours later from the Sons of Liberty.

"It was now evening, and I immediately dressed myself in the costume of an Indian, equipped with a small hatchet, which I and my associates denominated the tomahawk, with which, and a club, after having painted my face and hands with coal dust in the shop of a



The national office of Improved Order of Red Men is located at 4521 Speight Ave., in Waco, Texas, sharing space with the Great Council of Texas office. Here, also, the Texas Red Men Foundation, Inc. maintains the Red Men Museum and Library, containing reference materials, documents, and exhibits of historical significance. The Museum and Library is open to the public without cost.

— Iconoclast Photo By Deborah Mathews

blacksmith, I repaired to Griffin's wharf, where the ships lay that contained the tea. When I first appeared in the street after being thus disguised, I fell in with many who were dressed, equipped and painted as I was, and who fell in with me and marched in order to the place of our destination."

In 1834 the above report by George Hewes would be published. Hewes reported that the group had marched in costume down the nearby hill where they had gathered, two by two dressed in Indian garb, divided into three groups and made sure that the tea was no longer an issue; rowboats of men later made sure it was unusable. This resulted the next spring in the closing of Boston Harbor by order of Parliament.

The Sons of Liberty had adopted the forms and terms of the Iroquois tribe for their own secret rituals. When the Revolution began they extinguished their camp fire and picked up arms to fight in that war. Uncer-

tain whether the new government would be stable they remained a secret society, ready to take action as necessary, until after the War of 1812.

In 1813, at historic Fort Mifflin, near Philadelphia, various groups that were descended from the original Sons of Liberty had come together to form the Society of Red Men. In 1847 they would again meet at Baltimore, Maryland and founded the national organization called the Grand Council of the United States, the Improved Order of Redmen. The Red Men is one of only three organizations ever chartered by Congress. That bill was passed by the 58th Congress 2D Session. March 15, 1904.

Over the 19th Century their form had changed but they continued to impact the course of American life. The Revolution had been capitalized by the blood, sweat, and tears of ordinary Americans, asserting their right to determine their individual and community direction and culture against the greatest

super power in the world as it was then. The America that was coming into existence would confront a series of crises that carried forward the same theme with different players. Will the people govern themselves or will they be subject to the control of others?

At the same time ordinary Americans were confronting the fact that a newly mobile society had needs for social insurance to spread the risk of events in the lives of individuals. In 1867 the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks came into existence to ensure that its members and their families would be cared for in the event of the death of the head of the household. The need for security of this kind resulted in an explosion in fraternal orders and programs aimed at ensuring that disaster would not destroy families. The Masons, the Foresters, the Moose, Woodmen of the World, and the reconstituted order that sprang from the Sons Of Liberty saw the need and be

Continued On Next Page

Crawford Sales Tax Rebates For Year Down 13.95%

AUSTIN — Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn last week sent final checks for the year to cities, counties, and other taxing entities subject to the state sales tax. The City of Crawford ended the year down 13.95 percent from a year ago.

For the month, Crawford also

saw a reduction, down 3.86 percent, while McLennan County as a whole saw an increase, both monthly and at year-end, amounting to 5.31 percent and 8.76 percent, respectively.

Crawford's monthly payment was \$3,469.72, compared to a December payment of \$3,609.38

last year. Year-to-date totals were \$46,629.79 in 2006, compared to \$57,681.26 in 2005.

McLennan County's monthly payment this December was \$867,846.27, compared to \$824,020.10 in December 2005. Year-to-date total for McLennan County this year was

\$11,503,045.71, compared to \$10,576,023.82 in 2005.

Statewide, the Texas collected \$1.73 billion in sales tax in November, up 9.4 percent compared to November 2005. The Comptroller sent local governments \$403.8 million in December sales tax allocations, up 8.4 percent compared to December 2005.

Strayhorn sent Texas cities December sales tax allocations of \$273.1 million, up 8 percent compared to December 2005. City sales tax allocations during calendar year 2006 totaled \$3.5 billion, up 13.5 percent compared to calendar year 2005. Counties' December sales tax allocations were \$24.8 million, up 13.9 percent compared to December 2005. Coun-

ties received \$312.7 million in sales tax during calendar year 2006, up 16 percent compared to last year.

Ten local transit systems received December sales tax allocations of \$93.2 million, a 7 percent increase over December 2005. Sales tax allocations to transit systems in 2006 totaled \$1.2 billion, up 14.1 percent compared to the 2005 total. December sales tax allocations of \$12.5 million went to 115 special purpose taxing districts, an increase of 17.6 percent compared to last December. Special purpose districts received \$153.1 million during 2006, up 17.1 percent compared to 2005.

The next local sales tax allocation will be made on Friday, Jan.12.

RED MEN, From Previous Page

gan providing social insurance programs for their members. From those programs Teddy and Franklin Delano Roosevelt plucked the plans for such programs as Social Security.

The variety in fraternal orders had allowed Americans to choose one that suited their needs providing for their own security while extending the benefits of their efforts into their communities.

The purpose of the fraternal orders was to see that Americans had in their own hands

control of their security and well being. In the hands of the fraternal orders the costs of maintaining these programs remained low; retired businessmen administered them as volunteers. Since this was money they had raised themselves they counted every penny. Government costs grew astronomically from then until today.

On Dec. 16, America will celebrate the 231st anniversary of the Boston Tea Party. It is an occasion that has been overlooked and neglected for far too long. The date marks the occasion

when a small group of people thought through the issues and took action that kept control local.

This Dec.16, many of us will gather to read the account of Hewes, toast the Sons of Liberty in whatever beverage most pleases us, and hold a moment of silence for those who took the actions that lead to Lexington, Concord, and finally to the Declaration of Independence. By steps we become free. Awareness should be with us always that by steps we can also return to serfdom.

U.S. Rep. McKinney Calls For Impeachment

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Although the incoming Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, says that impeachment of President Bush is off the table, the 109th Congress did not end without an attempt to bring it up.

“President George W. Bush has failed to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States; he has failed to ensure that senior members of his administration do the same; and he has betrayed the trust of the American people,” Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney said Friday upon submitting articles of impeachment against President Bush, Vice President Cheney and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

This was McKinney's last legislative act before leaving Congress. McKinney, in her last legislative act before leaving the House at the end of her current term.

The Georgia congresswoman said that the submission is not about “political gamesmanship,” but is founded in her principles. “This,

instead, is about beginning the long road back to regaining the high standards of truth and democracy upon which our great country was founded,” she said.

The six-term legislator, considered a controversial figure in the Democratic Party by not always going along with the status quo, had last year co-sponsored a resolution to create “a select committee to investigate the Administration's intent to go to war before congressional authorization, manipulation of pre-war intelligence, encouraging and countenancing torture, retaliating against critics, and to make recommendations regarding grounds for possible impeachment.”

She argued that her constituents constituents in Congress had refused to hold President Bush accountable for misgoverning.

She said, “As I leave this Congress, it is in your hands to hold your representatives accountable, and to show those with the courage to stand for what is right, that they do not stand alone.”

Chavez Defeats Opponent In Landslide Re-Election

CARACAS — Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez will remain in office for another six years after he won re-election in a landslide last weekend.

The outspoken critic of the U.S. government said he is now proceeding with a mandate to continue his socialist agenda.

“That new era has begun,” Chavez shouted from the balcony of the presidential palace to thousands of red-shirted supporters in a pouring rain.

“We have shown that Venezuela is red! ... No one should fear socialism ... Socialism is human. Socialism is love,” he added. “Down with imperialism! We need a new world!”

Losing with just under 40 percent of the vote, his challenger Manuel Rosales vowed to stay in opposition of Chavez's policies. Rosales, a cattle rancher and former state governor, was one of 13 candidates vying for the presidency.

During his campaign, Chavez had rhetorically linked Rosales with U.S. President George W. Bush, the later of whom he has called “the devil.”

Chavez blames the Bush administration for staging a coup against him in 2002. The White House has denied these allegations.

After the election last week, President-elect Chavez toured South America to visit with other left-leaning leaders, such as President Nestor Kirchner of Argentina, President-elect Rafael Correa of Ecuador, and President Tabare Vazquez of Uruguay.

On one stop, he met with Brazilian President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva about a pro-

posed transcontinental natural gas pipeline connecting Venezuela to Brazil, Argentina and elsewhere.

Nicaraguan President-elect Daniel Ortega and Bolivian President Evo Morales both praised Chavez's win as strengthening Latin America.

“The most important (thing) is to fight for integration, fight for the spirit of solidarity,” said President Ortega.

“The democracies of Latin America are getting stronger,” said President Morales, who became the first indigenous leader of his country last December. “We have practically done away with the controlled democracies, the servile democracies in Latin America.”

Elected last year as Bolivia's first Indian president, Morales has followed in Chavez's footsteps by nationalizing his country's natural gas reserves and redistributing land in favor of the poor.

In fact, Morales recently renegotiated 44 contracts with foreign energy companies in order to increase revenue to his government.

While Morales attended the 60th birthday of Cuban President Fidel Castro, Chavez was unable to travel to Cuba over the weekend to meet with his mentor.

Chavez's ties to Castro have made it difficult in his relations with Washington, though judging by the remarks he made in Brazil last week, he doesn't seem to care.

“To me Brasilia is more important (than Washington) and that is why I am here,” said Chavez to journalists in Brasil's capital.

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Proposed George W. Bush Library Receives More Protests In Waco

WACO — A dozen peace activists expressed their displeasure about their town pursuing the President George W. Bush presidential library last Wednesday.

Holding a sign that read “No War Crimes Library,” protestor Carl Rising-Moore of Crawford was allowed to stay during a lecture on the global impact of the library on Central Texas and the City of Waco.

As an example of the local impact, William Mitchell, director of Baylor University’s Center for International Education, said that foreign leaders would undoubtedly make a stop here should the president select Waco his library’s location.

Mitchell, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, spoke to about 90 local leaders at the Lee Lockwood Library and Museum. His lecture the fourth in a series sponsored by the WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD.

Outside the museum, the protest with banners that read “Worst President Ever” was sponsored by Waco Friends of Peace.

Protest organizer Alan Northcutt admitted that the presidential library would bring economic dollars to Waco through tourism, “but we feel there is a higher good than money, and that opposing the library is a matter of conscience.”

Northcutt added that the Bush library would taint the reputation of Waco, pointing to the administration’s handling of both foreign and domestic policy.

“We reject a monument that would glorify the Bush legacy,” he wrote on the Friends of Peace blog.

“A legacy of the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq (a war crime by international standards), lies and deception that placed us in that quagmire, the resultant deaths of almost 3,000 Americans and 650,000 Iraqi civilians, the estimated ultimate cost of \$1 trillion, torture, illegal surveillance, abuse of the U.S. Constitution, environmental damage, and opposition to equal protection for all citizens (gays and lesbians).”

The proposed location of the library in Waco is Baylor University. The University of Dallas and Southern Methodist University in Dallas are also vying for the library.

Whatever the location, the structure would house documents and items acquired during President Bush’s two terms of office as well as serve as a policy institute (think tank).

The president’s library site-selection committee could choose a winner among the three finalists as early as next month.

First Lady Laura Bush, who sits on the SMU board, has indicated the Bushes may re-establish a home in the Dallas area, where they lived before moving to Austin in 1995 when he became governor. SMU is her alma mater.

The cost of the library has been undetermined, but some have suggested half-a-billion dollars. The library would house

the President’s papers and archives, and include a museum and public policy think tank designed to uphold the Bush legacy and continually promote

his policies.

Promoters of their potential sites claim that the advantage of having a presidential library is enhanced tourism and the new

development that would be drawn to the area. They say that the Clinton library, at a cost of \$165 million, drew half-a-million visitors during its first year.



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NO WAR CRIMES LIBRARY — A dozen or so peace activists last Wednesday protested the possibility of the President George W. Bush presidential library coming to the Waco area.

TxDOT Ceases Funding For Brazos Trail Enhancements

CLIFTON — In response to TxDOT's recent decision to cease funding of transportation enhancement (TE) projects, the Texas Brazos Trail Region has announced it will work with its supporters to convince TxDOT to reverse its decision. The Texas Brazos Trail Region is one of ten regions in the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) award winning Heritage Trails Program. The Texas Brazos Trail Region, which seeks to promote heritage tourism, economic development, and historic preservation, is funded in large part by TE funding.

At the end of last month, TxDOT announced its decision to abruptly cease funding the Transportation Enhancement Program which has long benefited Texas communities and heritage tourism programs aimed at rural Texas. With this decision, the agency has denied funding to hundreds of projects and programs, including the Heritage Trails Program.

TxDOT claims that its decision is based on several nationwide rescissions of unobligated highway funds to the states by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Since December 2005, the FHWA has made three nationwide rescissions of unobligated federal highway funds, \$305,000,000 of which was apportioned to Texas, the vast majority coming from enhancement funds. At the FHWA's request, TxDOT provided a list of funding categories to cut.

In its letter to TE applicants, TxDOT states, "FHWA's rescissions put us in the position of having to choose between congestion-relief projects and enhancement projects," and it was decided that transportation enhancements had a weaker relation to their "core functions." However, the federal government does not require them to eliminate the program. In fact, federal law requires a 10-percent set-aside of state apportioned funding to go to the transportation enhancements program.

Nearly all of the funding for the nationally-recognized and award-winning Texas Heritage Trails Program came from the Transportation Enhancement Program. The Texas Heritage Trails Program provides technical, financial, and marketing assistance to heritage regions across Texas.

Since 1997, the program has revitalized local economies, increased visitation to cultural and historic sites and raised the awareness of the importance of historic preservation to the tourism industry. Funding remains in place for the Texas Heritage Trails Program and the Texas Brazos Trail Region through August 2007.

Larry Oaks, Executive Director of the THC said, "The ten heritage regions are the backbone of the Texas Heritage Trails Program. It is imperative to the continued success of the program that these heritage re-

gions continue to be fully funded. The Texas Historical Commission is doing everything in its power to secure the necessary monies to continue to fund all ten heritage regions."

Since the announcement of the funding cuts, the Texas Brazos Trail has been working closely with all the Trail Regions, and with other preservation and tourism organizations seeking to reverse TxDOT's decision. Additionally, the Texas Brazos Trail Region will continue to pursue other sources of funding.

"Over the last three years, TxDOT Enhancement funding has assisted us in developing our Region into a major travel destination for heritage tourists. Initially, funds allowed us to conduct historical site assessments, site development consultations and education workshops as well as the design, print and distribution of a regional travel guide and map.

More recently, enhancement funding has allowed us to continue hosting educational workshops, attend tradeshows to promote the region, offer small partnership grants to community, create seasonal event brochures, and develop a website which highlights the region's historical and cultural attractions," says Emily Lutz, Regional Coordinator.

Since the launch of the Heritage Trails program in 1997, visitation to tracked heritage sites has increased an average of 20 percent. The program has received more than 1.5 million individual requests for its heritage travel guides. In May, 2005 the Heritage Trails Program was awarded the prestigious Preserve America Award from President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush.

Lutz went on to say, "We are encouraging anyone that disagrees with TxDOT's decision to contact their elected officials

and to write a letter to the TxDOT voicing their opinion. If readers are unsure of who represents them, they can visit <www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us> to find out who to contact. Letters to TxDOT can be sent to TxDOT, 125 East 11th Street, Austin, TX 78701-2483"

The Texas Brazos Trail Region includes Bastrop, Bell, Bosque, Brazos, Burleson, Coryell, Falls, Freestone, Grimes, Hamilton, Lee, Leon, Limestone, McLennan, Madison, Milam, Robertson, and Williamson counties.

The Texas Heritage Trails Program is a regional tourism initiative of the Texas Historical Commission. The program helps Texas communities promote tourism, revitalize local economies and foster community leadership through historic preservation.

For more information contact Emily Lutz, Regional Coordinator at 254-749-5256.

Texas RR Money Drying Up

Texas State Railroad Funded Only Through August 2007

AUSTIN — The Texas State Railroad State Park will continue operating through Aug. 31, 2007, although the historic train's long-term future is tied to the broader issue of state funding for parks to be resolved in the upcoming legislative session.

Within the last few days, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Legislative Budget Board verified that the department has an additional \$2.2 million available for state parks. That amount includes a \$1.2 million oil and gas lease bonus payment which is a one-time, non-recurring source of revenue.

"We are pleased that we're able to keep the Texas State Railroad running, and we're grateful to state elected leaders for their guidance and to the community supporters who have rallied behind the railroad," said Robert L. Cook, TPWD executive director. "This is good news, and will provide adequate funding to operate the railroad through the spring and summer of 2007."

"The level of local community interest and support to keep the railroad going has been much appreciated," said Joseph Fitzsimons, who chairs the TPW Commission appointed by the governor to oversee TPWD. "When push came to

shove last year, the department had to make difficult choices for the good of the entire state park system, and the railroad is a big ticket expense. We look forward to

continuing to work with state and local leaders in implementing their plan to move the Texas State Railroad from state to local control."

For more information about state and local park funding, see the TPWD website <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/releases/news_roundup/state_park_funding_facts>.

THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To The Editor:

I was pleasantly shocked recently to see the news report of Congressman Virgil H. Goode, Jr. (R-Va.) introducing House Concurrent Resolution-487- co-sponsored by Congressmen Ron Paul (R-Texas), Walter B. Jones, Jr. (R. N.C.), and Tom Tancredo (R- Colo.)—

"Expressing the sense of Congress that the United States should not engage in the construction of a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Superhighway System or enter into a North American Union with Mexico and Canada."

What a breath of fresh air in this era of stagnant subversive congresses to see these dedicated patriotic congressmen courageously stand up to oppose the steamroller tactics of

the Bush administrations' efforts to drive our country down to Third World status through enforced open borders, and so-called "Free Trade (regional government treaty) Agreements" such as the job and border destroying North American Union and NAFTA Superhighway System.

Let's help derail by e-mail the Cheney-Bush- New World Order big-money boys' steamroller coming down the congressional track by supporting H. Con. Res. 487 by going to <www.jbs.org> -click on 'The John Birch Society' and look for 'Take Action!' or by calling or writing our congressmen directly.

We must save our great Republic!

Best Regards,
Larry Hamblin, Hesperia, Ca.

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The Difference Between Treason And Reason

As Uncle Hugh used to say, "This world is so full of fools that we're bound to elect a good many of 'em."

Run. Tuck your arrogant, flag-waving, yellow-ribboned tail between your preppy Bass Penny Macs and run like a high-headed heifer in a hailstorm.

Leave behind 3,000 dead men and women who believed in you . . . well, did their jobs and followed you, anyway.

Ignore uncountable hundreds of thousands of dead natives in your wake, abandon the tons of wasted material, write off the billions of wasted dollars that you shoveled into your buddies' pockets, get your Propaganda Relations firm to make it look like peace in our time . . . and RUN!

Run. Now that your political capital is as deficit as the real thing, you phony, lying wannabe robber baron gutless armchair pseudo-Rambo, run like the gutless hot-house profiteering chauvinist you are.

In case you haven't figured it out by now, I just finished reading the Iraq Study Group Report.

Which reads exactly like the kind of thing that, two years ago, Neighbor Bush would have called defeatist and Closet Karl Rove would have decreed treasonous.

It is also, sadly, the sum and substance of what I have written in this space since the Bush War began:

We are going to lose. We had no intention of winning.

You don't fight wars so someone else will win.

Even though this report pointedly ignores the reasons for this country to be in Iraq, its brutal criticism of American strategy and administration of the war exposes its fundamental folly.

Consider this part of the Executive Summary:

The Iraqi people have a democratically elected government, yet it is not adequately advancing national reconciliation, providing basic security, or delivering essential services. Pessimism is pervasive.

They don't hate us for our freedom.

They hate us for THEIR freedom.

This report alleges \$5 to \$7 billion per day of Iraqi corruption losses; up to 500,000 barrels of oil per day stolen, inflation at 50 percent, unemployment somewhere between 20 and 60 percent, basic human services are provided on the basis of re-

Call To Mind

By Don M. Fisher



ligion, local security is virtually non-existent, competent professionals and technicians have fled the country, infrastructure is in pieces and there is practically no judiciary.

Apart from that, we've done a bang-up job.

Emphasis on the "bang." As one U.S. official observed to us, Iraq's economy has been badly shocked and is dysfunctional after suffering decades of problems: Iraq had a police state economy in the 1970s, a war economy in the 1980s, and a sanctions economy in the 1990s. Immediate and long term growth depends predominantly on the oil sector.

It was, and is, all about oil. Which means that our policy has been to provide security for oil companies.

Both foreign and domestic. Terrorism could grow. As one Iraqi official told us, "Al Qaeda is now a franchise in Iraq, like McDonald's." Left unchecked, al Qaeda in Iraq could continue to incite violence between Sunnis and Shia. A chaotic Iraq could provide a still stronger base of operations for terrorists who seek to act regionally or even globally. Al Qaeda will portray any failure by the United States in Iraq as a significant victory that will be featured prominently as they recruit for their cause in the region and around the world.

And we got into this war to halt the rise of international WHAT?

Whatever we do, we cannot come out of this looking good.

We are somehow going to expect Syria and Iran to help us.

Like a tapeworm is going to help you lose weight!

But let's forget Iraq for a moment.

Consider just us:

Current U.S. policy is not working, as the level of violence in Iraq is rising and the government is not advancing national reconciliation. Making no changes in policy would simply delay the day of reckoning at a high cost. Nearly 100 Americans are dying every month. The United States is spending \$2 billion a week. Our ability to respond to other international crises is constrained. A majority of the American people are soured on the war. This level of

expense is not sustainable over an extended period, especially when progress is not being made. The longer the United States remains in Iraq without progress, the more resentment will grow among Iraqis who believe they are subjects of a repressive American occupation.

The words "repressive American occupation" some-

how just don't jibe with "When in the course of human events . . ."


I never thought I'd ever believe anything James Baker said, but, again, there is one word that lies between every line of this report: Run.

Whatever happens, their fault, our fault, nobody's fault, we are going to put our best face on the heels of our boots and run.

I hate being right when it comes to body count.

And I bitterly resent the flag-waving, exploitive propaganda that the Rove Regime has thrown at those voices that, with all the lights on, now sound like remarkably like reason.

So, what about those Americans who believe they are subjects of a repressive American occupation?



EDITORIAL

No Budget?

What The Hell's Going On?

When the 109th Congress called it quits for the year, lawmakers left behind a mountain of unfinished business. Their attentions had been diverted to the "dark side" of governance — dealing with massive corruption among members, enacting legislation that our forefathers would vigorously denounce, and taking their eyes off the ball of reality.

Of the 11 annual spending bills, only two were completed. Approved was a series of "stop-gap" funding measures just to keep the government operating until next month, along with a few tax and trade appropriations.

What we had was a lame duck on life support. Ignored were more than \$450 billion in annual funding measures and an onslaught of issues, such as immigration and ethics reforms, that were ditched, as well.

This Congress was fixated on gays, removing individual rights and desecrating the Constitution by extending the Patriot Act, and building a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border, plus continuing its destruction of national industry by promoting "free trade" agreements over "fair trade."

And dreaming up excuses for the insanity in Iraq.

This will leave the upcoming 110th Congress with a full plate — to perhaps undo some of the ills generated by this past worthless Congress while masticating its leftovers related to the

2007 budget, and at the same time dealing with the new 2008 appropriations bills. One of the bills left undone was the appropriations bill to fund the veterans health care program.

This during a time of war. And they claim they care about our soldiers.

Congress chose vacation instead of attending to business, which is in keeping with the work ethic that is becoming a norm in Washington.

When Bush took office, the minimum wage of the Presidency was doubled, from \$200,000 to \$400,000, and then he took more vacations than any other President.

When Congressional pay goes up we get — you guessed it — less attention to business. The Federal government has become a country club.

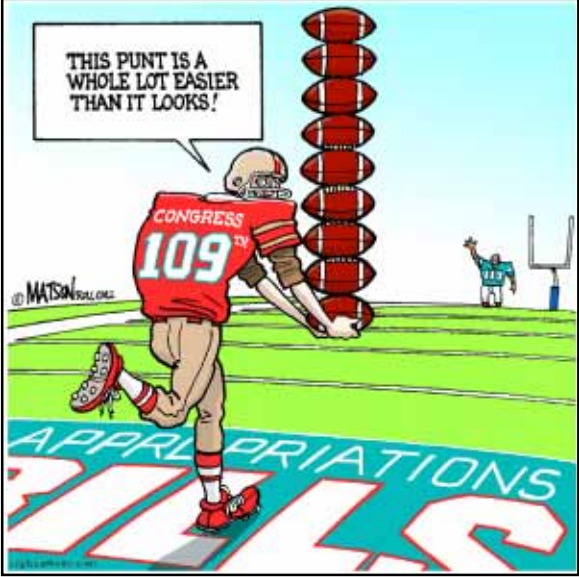
Ask a Congressman to "build us a house" with his \$162,500 salary and when time is up all you have is the front door. That's what this past session was like.

The United States of America was ripped off. With what has been unachieved this past session, Congressional pay would more rightly be at the current national minimum wage, and only expended if the work is completed.

The real issue is accountability and public service.

The legislative and executive branches haven't a clue what this means.

— W. Leon Smith



Will New Citizens Meet The Test?

The federal government recently came out with a new citizenship test, because the feeling was that to pass the old test, prospective citizens could just memorize facts rather than understand principles. For example, on the old test, they might've been asked the question, "How many stripes are there in the flag?" On the new test, they may be asked the question, "Why does the flag have 13 stripes?"

Here are a few examples of the questions on the new exam: How many amendments does the Constitution have?

Do non-citizens living in the United States have the right to bear arms?

Who becomes president if both the president and the vice president can no longer serve?

How many members does the House of Representatives have?

Not so easy, huh? I hate to think what would happen if all current U.S. citizens had to take the test.

But in addition to making the new exam harder, I think they should make it more relevant. I'd like them to include questions that would indicate a greater understanding of America, so these new Americans will be able to be fully informed citizens. For example:

1.Q: What is the "two-party" system?

A: It's the system in which one party is held after a political group wins an election, and the second party is held when they gleefully decide to exclude those from the other political group from participating in anything meaningful.

2.Q: What are the three branches of the federal government?

A: Lately, that would be the Presidency, the State Department, and the Department of Defense.

3. Q: Which of the 50 states lies in the middle of the Pacific Ocean?

A: Hawaii, and, let me look out the window for a second. ... Yep, California's still attached.

4. Q: What does "Separation of Church and State" mean?

A: It means that religion and government should be separate, except when politicians are pandering to the large bloc of religious extremists.

5. Q: What is "bipartisanship"?

A: That is a way to participate in government that the party not in power always asks for.

6. Q: What is our system of



Modern Times

By Lloyd Garver

"checks and balances?"

A: This is a system in which politicians receive big checks from powerful people and still try to balance their books.

7. Q: Regarding the war in Iraq, what is the difference between the "cut and run" approach and the "reasonable exit strategy" approach?

A: There is no difference. One just sounds worse, so that's what they say their political opponent believes in.

8. Q: Even though the nominees have already been determined before then, why do the Republicans and Democrats still hold political conventions every four years?

A: They're just being responsible. If they canceled the conventions, the silly hat industry would go out of business.

9. Q: Why have former presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush been hanging out with each other so much lately?

A: Some people will do almost anything to get out of the house.

10. Q: My son recently had a partially used tube of toothpaste confiscated at an airport checkpoint. Was this over zealousness on the part of the inspector?

A: Absolutely not. It turned out that they didn't just get him for "possession," but it was "possession with intent to brush."

11. Q: What is the meaning of the term, "distrustful immigrant?"

A: A "distrustful immigrant" is someone who wants to become a citizen after you and your family have already become citizens.

12. Q: Can a poor person be elected president?

A: Of course, just not of the United States.

13. Q: Who decides when members of Congress should get a raise?

A: Members of Congress.

14. Q: Isn't that a conflict of interest?

A: Not by Congressional standards.

15. Q: Why is it so hard to get people to vote in American political elections, but TV shows like "American Idol" seem to have no problem getting people to vote?

A: When more politicians do

things worthy of applause, maybe more people will vote.

So, I think that if there were questions like the ones above, new citizens would be better prepared for their responsibilities as new Americans. Oh, I almost forgot one:

Q: Since our enemy usually

becomes our friend after we fight them in wars, why don't we just skip the wars?

A: This sounds like something a naive child would ask. In other words, it's something we should think about.

Lloyd Garver has written for many television shows, rang-

ing 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 can be reached at lloydgarver@yahoo.com

Electric Railway Could Not Compete With Model T

Postal inspectors effectively pulled the plug on a Corsicana-to-Palestine electric railway by banning the fraudulent firm from the U.S. mail on Dec. 5, 1907.

Following a modest debut in Ohio in 1889, the revolutionary new mode of transportation took the country by storm. Enthusiasts brashly predicted the so-called "interurban" would make the iron horse as obsolete as the covered wagon.

More realistic boosters never seriously suggested the electric conveyance would replace the steam locomotive, which would continue to carry cargo and passengers over long distances. They did believe, however, that the interurban had a promising future in the short-haul commute.

While the steam competition kept the number of daily runs and stops to a barebones minimum, lower operating costs enabled the electric alternative to provide hourly departures as well as connections to communities outside the existing system. Besides convenience, interurbans offered travelers cleaner and more comfortable accommodations with the catchy slogan of "no cinders, no dirt, no dust, and no smoke."

From the very beginning, ambitious Lone Star promoters envisioned electric links between the state's two most populous pairs of twin cities. As early as 1892 and 1895 respectively, Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston-Galveston interurbans were already in the planning stage.

But those premature pipe dreams proved to be just so much smoke, and the interurban did not get on track in Texas until the inaugural year of the twentieth century. The first functioning line was a far less ambitious undertaking slightly south of the Red River, which spanned the ten and a half miles between Sherman and Denison.

The Big D-Cowtown con-

This Week In Texas History

By Barte Haile



nection was finally finished in 1902, but the Bayou City and its seaside neighbor had to wait another decade. The long delay did not diminish the popularity of the routes, and both were soon standing-room-only successes.

The nationwide boom in interurban construction peaked in 1907, the same year the U.S. economy took one of its periodic nose dives. Electric entrepreneurs quickly found that skittish investors were no longer willing to put their precious cash into risky ventures.

But in Texas the latest transportation trend did not hit its stride until 1914, when at least 35 different companies unveiled plans for future interurbans. In the end, however, barely one in 30 ever made it off the drawing board.

The shorter the better was the recipe for success. Of the dozen interurbans actually built, the longest was a puny 134 miles — mighty tiny by Texas standards. More revealing is the fascinating fact that the average length of the abbreviated lines was a mere 40 miles.

The hundred-percent failure rate of the larger projects did not discourage the ten or more dreamers, who went broke trying to unite Dallas-Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Houston in a transportation triangle. Sixty years later, their expensive exercise in futility had not been learned by "bullet train" proponents.

Even in the Depression heyday of the interurbans, the total track mileage of 518 represented a paltry three percent of the statewide rail network. But in an apples-to-apples comparison, Texas trailed only California in the interurban race west of the Mississippi.

The ultimate nemesis of the cross-country trolley turned out to be a gas-guzzling newcomer instead of its traditional coal-

burning rival. The motor car not only gave ordinary Texans dependable low-cost mobility but more importantly restored the treasured independence of the horse-and-buggy era. Like their frontier forefathers, they could pick up and go whenever the mood struck them.

Every Model T that rolled off Henry Ford's assembly was a nail in the coffin of the interurban. Texans scrimped and saved to buy one of the all-black marvels, and the incredible increase in motor vehicle registrations reflected their love affair with the horseless carriage. The number of privately owned cars and trucks soared from 430,000 in 1920 to 1.8 million on the eve of World War II.

The last interurban built in the Lone Star State was also the last to go out of business. From 1925 until its melancholy demise in 1949, the North Shore line scooted back and forth along a 37-mile route from the north side of Houston to Goose Creek.

More than half a century later, an estimated 18 million vehicles clog Texas' urban arteries. Would-be city saviors plead with commuters to park their cars and take the bus, but they have discovered, as did the interurban operators before them, that it will take a crowbar to pry most drivers' fingers off their steering wheels.

Nowadays some folks think that three-dollar-a-gallon gas will finally force Texans to leave their car or truck in the garage and give mass transit a try. But where are the public transportation systems capable of taking millions of people to work and back home again? Such things are not built overnight, and in the meantime most Texans have no choice but to pay through the nose for the privilege of sitting in traffic.

Do your Christmas shopping at www.twith.com or request a gift list from P.O. Box 152, Friendswood, TX 77549.

Don't Be Denied

I wonder what the distance is from the state of Texas to the state of Denial.

How about the distance from the state of Maine to the state of Denial by way of the state of Texas.

It's very difficult to get any kind of precise measurements because there are no map references.

Can one drive on the Interstates; are the only routes over blue highways? Or is the trip, as they say in Maine, a situation where, "You can't get there from here?"

Is Denial serviced by Amtrak? What about commercial airlines?

Woe be to us, Denial in this instance is the state wherein Lame Dubya's head has taken refuge from the real world to these past five to 10 years.

The unfortunate reality is, this schmuck has been allowed to play "High Sheriff of Texas" then "Dictator of the World" while languishing in such a state far too long without the benefit of professional assistance.

A puppetmaster in the form of Herr Oberst Karl Rove, taskmaster Dark Lord the Dick Cheney, a collection of nabobs the likes the World has not seen in decades, perhaps centuries — Condoliar Rice, Donny "Rummy" Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, "Scooter" Libby, et alia — have all contributed to the rosy scenario that Bushocracy was on the march, the ultimate answer for a New World Order... *whether or not the rest of the World was ready to embrace it.*



Out Of The Blue

By Jerry Tenuto

Those who rule by illegal ascension would believe beyond all else in their own unbridled imperial powers. Thus they have always been more than willing to accept the continued forward thrusts of those power mad individuals with whom their thrones are surrounded.

This past week, Lame Dubya was confronted with some pretty stern realistic views of his failures, foreign as well as domestic.

Last week Robert Gates appeared before the Senate to be considered for acceptance as Secretary of Defense. When asked if he thought the U.S. was winning the war in Iraq, Mr. Gates responded with two words, "No, sir."

The Senate chamber was, for the first time in five years, afresh with clean, breathable air. The truth had been told, and instead of being called unpatriotic the witness was thanked for his honesty and candor.

As you well know by now, the Iraq Study Group released its report this past Wednesday — just in time for Christmas and Hanukkah gift giving. The bipartisan 142-page report held back no equivocation: The United States policy in Iraq is a mess, and in short order it will

be a complete disaster.

Also known as the Baker-Hamilton Commission, these 10 Americans from both major parties and varied backgrounds brought a wealth of experience and insight to bear on the Middle East catastrophe initiated by the current White House Fascisti.

The Republican members included former Secretary of State James Baker; retired Supreme Sandra Day O'Connor; Lawrence Eagleburger (former Sec. Of St.); Edwin Meese III (former USAG); former Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming.

On the Democratic side were former U.S. Rep. Lee Hamilton, vice chair, 9/11 Commission; Vernon Jordan, Jr.; Leon E. Panetta, White House Chief of Staff; former Sec. of Def. William J. Perry; Charles S. Robb, former Va. Gov. and U.S. Senator.

Among the most important of their 79 recommendations were these three: Phase out U.S. combat troops during the next 15 months (by early 2008); train Iraqi troops with more enthusiasm and vigor to handle their country's own security; engage in broader dialect with nations in the region.

As Baker stated, the U.S. negotiated with the Soviet Union, an enemy sworn to our destruction, for 40 years until it collapsed from within. You don't pick-and-choose with whom you negotiate — you talk to your enemies as well as your allies. That's how you keep the peace.

This is a concept that's completely at odds with Lame Dubya's personality.

The commission also cautioned Li'l Georgie against his predilection for "cherry-pickin'"

which of its recommendations he'll choose to implement, if any. There was a strong reminder that he was given these 79 very specific suggestions for a reason.

Upon meeting with the commission and discussing the report, Lame Dubya's comment was a non-committal, unenthusiastic, "It's got some interesting suggestions."

Then, as the specter of complete and utter failure under the heading of foreign policy came crashing down without fazing Fearless Leader, one of his social policies reared back and slapped him right in the ass.

Mary Cheney, daughter of Dark Lord and Evil Lynne, announced that she and her long-time companion, Heather Poe, were about to embark upon the journey known as 'Parenthood'.

Well done, Ms. C and Ms. P! This has really got to be frying Li'l Georgie's groin, because you know they ain't about to get one of those "Snowflake Babies" he's so intent on finding "happy homes" for — even though the child would probably be happier with Mary and Heather than many of the Snowflake parental flakes.

Do you think they were able to find a suitable Republican donor? Maybe Melissa Etheridge turned them on to someone she knew who had reliable seed.

In all honesty, my best to the prospective new parents.

Now, if the girls wish to get married all they have to do is move to New Jersey and find a Liberal synagogue.

As coincidences happen, this announcement came right on the heels of the acceptance by

the legal body of Conservative Judaism to accept gay rabbis as well as the celebration of same-sex commitment ceremonies.

This isn't intended as a blanket endorsement for the entirety of the Jewish community Worldwide. The 25 Rabbis on the law committee have concurred that legal opinions do conflict with each other. They are leaving the decision on whether or not to allow gay rabbis, or unions, up to individual synagogues.

That's one thing I like about the Jewish religion — its Democratic options.

This Friday, December 15, at sundown marks the beginning of Hanukkah, the *Festival of Lights*.

Simply told, the Jews had been overrun by Alexander the Great around 335 B.C.E. In 199 B.C.E. the Seleucid dynasty, rulers of Syria, took over Israel from Greek Ptolemies. The Syrians put forth an edict that the practice of Jewish religion was to stop.

The holiest Jewish temple was thus turned into a Greek temple, systematically filled with statues and symbols of Greek gods. The Jews rebelled between 167 and 165 B.C.E., with the fighters coming to be known as Maccabees — *Men Who are as Strong as Hammers*.

On the 25th day of the month of Kislev, 165 B.C.E., a small Jewish force led by Jonah Maccabee, son of Mattiyahu who had begun the rebellion, retook the Temple from a far superior Greek army. There was but a single bottle of lamp oil, barely enough to keep the Temple lights lit for one night.

Miraculously, that lone bottle of oil kept the flames going for eight nights, long enough to make more oil for the lamps of the Holiest Temple.

For eight nights, Jews light candles, one more each consecutive evening, and give thanks for the miracle that saved the Temple.

It's no coincidence that Jews and Christians have the happiest of our Holidays bumping up against each others' at the same time of year. It's more convenient this way.

Whatever you observe, whom ever you celebrate with, don't be denied a Merry Hanukkah and a Happy Christmas!

Shalom!
(Jerry Tenuto is an erstwhile Philosopher and sometime Educator. A veteran with seven years of service in the U.S. Army, he holds a BS and MA in Communications from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Depending upon your taste in political stew, you can either blame or thank Jerry for his weekly "Out Of The Blue" feature in THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST. Visit his blog BLUE STATE VIEW at illinoiscentral.blogspot.com)

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Undocumented Immigrants Add \$17.7 Billion To Economy

AUSTIN — Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn recently released her special report that shows undocumented immigrants in Texas in fiscal year 2005 added \$17.7 billion to the gross state product and produced \$1.58 billion in state revenues.

"This is an historic report," Strayhorn said. "It is the first time any state has done a comprehensive financial analysis of the impact of undocumented immigrants on a state's budget and economy, looking at gross state product, revenues generated, taxes paid and the cost of state services."

"The absence of the estimated 1.4 million undocumented immigrants in Texas in fiscal 2005 would have been a loss to our gross state product of \$17.7 billion. Undocumented immigrants produced \$1.58 billion in state revenues, which exceeded the \$1.16 billion in state services they received."

"However, local governments bore the burden of \$1.44 billion in uncompensated health care costs and local law enforcement costs not paid for by the state," Strayhorn said. "While state revenues exceed state expenditures for undocumented immigrants by more than an

estimated \$420 million, local governments experience the opposite, with the estimated difference being more than \$920 million for 2005."

Strayhorn's special report, *Undocumented Immigrants in Texas: A Financial Analysis of the Impact to the State Budget and Economy*, estimated undocumented immigrants paid \$1.58 billion in state fees and taxes, and an additional \$513 million in local taxes in fiscal year 2005.

Because Texas does not have a state income tax and relies on sales tax and other consumption taxes, undocumented immigrants in Texas pay a higher portion of state revenues than in other states.

Comptroller Strayhorn's report also estimated the state spent \$957 million on K through 12 education for undocumented students during the 2004-05 school year; \$11.2 million for higher education for undocumented students, classified as Texas residents and thus paid in-state tuition during the 2004-05 school year; \$58 million for health care services for undocumented immigrants in FY 2005; and \$130.6 million on incarceration for undocumented immigrants in FY 2006.

The full report is available at <www.window.state.tx.us>.

Hot Socks

It's human nature to take things for granted after we become accustomed to them, I suppose. I was thinking the other day that, living as we do, in an old farmhouse, we actually do NOT take things as much for granted as some of our friends, or at least, we probably take different things for granted.

When all I had for heat out here was a wood-burning stove, I certainly didn't take that warmth for granted. It was a real chore to get that fire going before we froze to death some cold mornings. And sometimes it was necessary to rise in the dead of night to stoke the fire and add a log.

The old wood-burning stove still sits in the farmhouse and could be used in a pinch. But we plumbed for propane a few years ago, and I'm grateful for our old Dearborn heaters. Our friends and family think nothing of walking into a climate controlled home, no matter the season. Their windows are rarely raised, even when the weather is beautiful. Let's face it; central air and heat are the norm for most folks these days, especially in the cities. And most people don't have hundred-year-old windows with sash weights, the kind that allows cold winter air in rather easily. The advantage of this "breathing" of the old house is that we rarely worry about a lack of oxygen, should the propane deplete the supply. Sometimes we do open a window a crack, but it probably isn't necessary. We aren't exactly airtight here.

The old heaters warm things up rapidly, so we don't leave them on when we're not around unless we're in the middle of a really cold spell. If we did, the house would be like an oven. Most of our old Dearborns were probably made before the addition of thermostats. So we turn them on and off as needed. This seems very old fashioned to our friends and family, although "charming," and I admit it's a bit of a pain. I expect folks probably wonder why we put up with the inconvenience, but for us, it's a great improvement over the wood. Everything is relative. Consequently, we don't take the warmth of the propane heaters for granted. Quite the opposite. We're extremely grateful for it.

Anyone who knows me well knows that I hate to be cold. So when the heaters go off at night, I have my own version of the old heated brick at my feet. I promised a while back to publish my recipe for "hot socks," so below, here it is. I swear by them, They're a delight for anyone who gets cold feet at night, and a wonderful remedy for aching muscles in places that a heating

Rustic Ramblings

By Dr. Gene Ellis



Gene Ellis, Ed.D. is a Bosque County resident who returned to the family farm after years of living in New Orleans, New York and Florida. She is an artist who holds a doctoral degree from New York University and is writing a book about the minor catastrophes of life.

pad just won't curve around. And unlike the new heat patches we see on the market, they're inexpensive and reusable. Enjoy!

Genie's Hot Socks

You'll need two long, athletic tube socks for each hot sock. (used is OK if they are clean). I suggest you make two to four hot socks, or more if you want to give some as gifts. People will love you for them.— You will also need one shoestring or other type of strong cloth tie for each sock, and a big bag or two of the cheapest white rice you can buy, enough to fill each sock about 2/3 full. Save the tube from a roll of paper towels or use a piece of PVC pipe or something similar —about a foot or two long by a couple of inches in diameter or more. You will also need a funnel, preferably one with a wide mouth (like a canning funnel), or you probably can make something that will work. I think once I cut the top third off an old, clean bleach bottle. (These make great funnels for big jobs). Work over the sink or a big bowl in case of spills. I discovered this tip the hard way. Ask a friend or family member to help if possible. It's easier to maneuver with two people, but not impossible to do alone.

Put the tube into the sock, almost all the way to the bottom, and position the funnel at the top of the tube. Slowly pour rice into the funnel and allow the sock to fill up from the bottom first, moving the tube up as the sock fills. This is why you use the tube. (Otherwise the bottom of the sock wouldn't fill eas-

ily and you would have a big lump of rice toward the top). Fill the sock up about 2/3 or 3/4 full, not jam packed with rice, but firm. Tie the top tightly closed with a shoelace or other non-metal closure. You'll probably want to tie a good, permanent knot twice. You aren't going to ever open this up again. Slip the newly made hot sock into another athletic sock (sort of like putting a pillow into a pillowcase), and you've done it! The outer sock can be removed for washing as needed, but never wash the sock holding the rice!

Heat your hot sock in a microwave oven for three minutes, and you're ready to enjoy your creation! If you leave it in the microwave too long, it might burn or be too hot to the touch. And be careful using directly on tender or older skin, as the socks can become rather warm. That's the idea. Under blankets, a hot sock can stay warm all night.

After hundreds of uses, you will probably want to discard your hot sock and make a new one. They eventually get little holes in them if you use them as much as I do. If you open a hot sock at that point, you will see that the rice has dried up and turned brown. My hot socks usually last a season or two, with nightly winter use. I suppose you could make this item with any size sock, but I like the long ones the best. You could also sew any shapes or sizes of thick, soft fabric to hold the rice and also as a cover for the inner shape— if you are the creative type. A child might enjoy "hot socks" in other shapes. My kids grew up with hot socks when we would visit the ranch, back when we had nothing for heat but the old wood burning stove.

So go get creative and write to the paper or the forum online to tell me of your success!

Happy Holiday Season to all!



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Santa's Reindeer Grounded For Drinking

TxDOT Unveils New Animated TV Commercial To Curb Drunk Driving

AUSTIN — Santa's reindeer star in a new animated TV commercial produced by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and airing throughout Texas this month. In the spot, Santa's reindeer are grounded for drinking on Christmas Eve, prompting Santa to hook up his sleigh to a quartet of yellow taxis. TxDOT's message to holiday revelers: if you've been drinking, designate a driver or take a cab to get home safely.

With holiday revelry now in full swing, state officials are urging motorists to take the precautionary step of planning ahead to get home safely when their holiday celebrations include alcohol.

"Drunk driving will ruin the holidays for hundreds of families," said Carlos Lopez,

TxDOT's traffic operations director. "We can't say it enough: plan ahead and plan not to get behind the wheel if you've been drinking."

TxDOT's 9th annual holiday-themed campaign also uses radio commercials based on popular Christmas carols, billboards along interstate highways, ads at gas stations and festive coasters in bars and restaurants to deliver the reminder to designate a driver. The \$500,000 public education initiative extends through New Year's Day.

Safety advocates credit stepped-up enforcement of the state's DWI laws and ongoing advertising reminding Texans not to drink and drive with the continued decline in impaired driving fatalities. Federal offi-

cial reports that 135 fewer people died in Texas last year in alcohol-related crashes than in 2004, continuing the trend from 2003.

Supporting increased traffic enforcement allows TxDOT to accomplish one of its primary goals of enhancing safety on Texas highways.

The Texas Restaurant Association, the Texas Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association, the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, the Texas Municipal Police Association and Valero Corporation are also participating in the holiday DWI-prevention campaign.

Penalties for a first-time DWI offense include driver's license suspension for up to one year, a fine of up to \$2,000 and up to six months in jail.

Male Defense Against Shopping Linked To Tryptophan Reserves

It's an American tradition to kick off the holiday shopping season by spending the morning after Thanksgiving standing in line at your favorite department store, shivering in the pre-dawn hours, determined to be among the first to get through the doors before your holiday dinner bowel movement hits. It's a calculated risk, but one we are willing to take in order to make our loved ones' holiday dreams come true, even if it means wearing Depends Undergarments and knocking fellow shoppers unconscious with a Spongebob Squarepants beach chair.

Admittedly, the last time I participated in the madness of holiday shopping was several years ago as an observer, which is a little like trying to be an "observer" while standing in a mosh pit. One minute I was leaning on a rack of scarves; the next minute I was being used by two large women as a battering ram to knock over an electric cart blocking the video game aisle. The women's names were "Marge" and "Judy." I know this because, before swinging me forward, I would hear the following exchange:

"Ready, Marge!"

"You bet your sweet [BLEEP], Judy!"

After three tries the cart was cleared and I was tossed onto a table of wool sweaters, where I remained in a fetal position until the three-hour sale ended.

I have avoided the madness of holiday shopping (and wool sweaters) ever since. However, as a service to our male readers, I'd like to offer some insight as to why by utilizing a man-on-the-street approach, i.e., no man in his right mind should be on the streets ANYWHERE NEAR a shopping mall between now and January 2.

That's because a recent study conducted by the American Medical Association shows that women — and I'm paraphrasing here — are insane while Christmas shopping. According to the study, the act of shopping in a "competitive environment" causes the release of a hormone similar to the hormone released by "female cheetahs fighting over a zebra carcass."

As part of the study, researchers compared footage of women shopping at a Macy's One-Hour Sale to footage of female cheetahs



Life Is A Funny Place

By Ned Hickson

Siuslaw News

competing for the hind quarters of a wounded wildebeest. After watching the videos they noted "Three key progressions of the 'huntress mentality:'"

1) In both cases the females began by working together to bring down their prey, which in the case of the Macy's footage was a teenaged clerk named "Todd," who made the costly mistake of getting separated from his group. Like the wildebeest, he went down quickly, unable to defend himself and his box of Isotoner gloves.

2) Once the quarry had been brought down, the cooperation ended as the females in both examples began to compete for their share of the spoils. Unlike the unfortunate wildebeest, "Todd" was able to save himself by lobbing handfuls of gloves into the casual wear aisle and crawling to safety beneath a circular clothing rack.

And lastly,

3) The most aggressive female in each group took a moment to display her dominance by growling and shaking her tail.

By comparison, men who are put into a "competitive shopping environment" have a different physiological reaction. That's because thousands of years of evolution has led to the creation of special "turkey meat reserves," which automatically trigger a stream of tryptophan at the mere mention of shopping. Researchers believe this is a defense mechanism designed to render males unconscious as a way of keeping them out of danger between December and January.

"It's a perfect example of how the evolutionary process is geared toward survival," said one researcher. "You can't find yourself surrounded by a pack of wild huntresses if you can't make it off the couch."

And if you do, make sure to stay away from "Judy" and "Marge."

(You can write to Ned Hickson at the Siuslaw News at P.O. Box 10, Florence, OR 97439, or visit his website at

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