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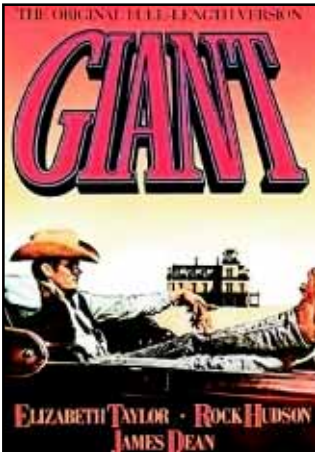
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I'm so optimistic because every time I talk to people about a department of peace, every time I do, it moves people so powerfully. People really love this idea.'

— Matt Harris

MATT HARRIS, the Peace Alliance's optimistic co-director of communication
— Photo By The Peace Alliance

Rodriguez Beats Bonilla In Texas Redistricting Upset

SAN ANTONIO — Democrat Ciro Rodriguez defeated Republican Incumbent Henry Bonilla last Tuesday in the runoff election for the 23rd Congressional District of Texas.

The Rodriguez win came as a big upset against former House Speaker Tom DeLay's mid-decade Texas redistricting plan that favored Bonilla.

The victory also served as yet another sting to the Republicans in their worst election season since the first election after the Watergate scandal in 1974.

Rodriguez won the runoff last week with 55 percent of the vote against Bonilla who had received 48.6 percent in the Nov. 7 "blanket primary" that solidified the runoff's match up. The Democrat placed second in the primary, picking up only 22 percent of the vote.

The runoff was required as a result of a ruling by a three-judge panel in federal district court.

The U.S. Supreme Court gave the panel the power to redraw the district after it found portions were unconstitutional for preventing Hispanics the ability to elect their own candidate.

To win, Rodriguez overcame his opponent's name-recognition from a seven-term incumbency in the 23rd District with help from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee which spent at least \$900,000 to level the fund-raising field in the race.

Rodriguez might have had the advantage of a low voter turnout made possible by the run-off's close proximity to the Christmas holiday. The voting pool within the district is made up of nearly 652,000 residents — 61 percent of whom are Hispanic voters.

During the runoff campaign, Rodriguez also could have also ran on being a new member of the House majority when elected.

Tuesday's win also served as a personal comeback for

Rodriguez who served in the House from 1997 to 2005 in the 28th District. He had lost two Democratic primary elections in the past three years — both to Democrat Henry Cuellar.

Twenty-two House Republi-

cans lost their election this year, and the Democrats also picked up eight open districts.

The only unsettled House race is in Florida's 13th District where Democrat Christine Jennings is contesting official

state results showing Republican Vern Buchanan winning by 369 votes.

So, 233 Democrats and 202 Republicans will be returning to the House when the 110th Congress convenes on Jan. 4.

Federal Judge Rejects Gitmo Habeas Petition

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A federal judge last week used the new Military Commissions Act to reject a habeas corpus petition filed by a detainee at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

U.S. District Judge James Robertson denied Salim Hamdan's petition on grounds that the act removes the federal courts from jurisdiction to consider such appeals.

Since Hamdan is held outside U.S. sovereignty on foreign soil and is not a U.S. citizen, he is not entitled to access to the writ of habeas corpus under the Constitution, according the ruling.

The United States government leases the Guantánamo base from Cuba and has complete control over the detainees held in it. Cuba, though, has sovereignty over the land.

"This hair-splitting over sovereignty has no traction in international law. This is nothing more than lawlessness by lease," said Amnesty International in a prepared statement.

Hamdan's habeas challenge led to the U.S. Supreme Court to rule in June that the military commission system the Bush administration installed was unconstitutional.

In order to deny detainees

access to U.S. courts, Congress and the administration then passed the Military Commissions Act, which sets up military tribunals though no timetables for trials or fair standards.

Said to be terrorist organizer Osama bin Ladin's driver, Hamdan is a Yemeni national who was in U.S. military custody in Afghanistan in November 2001.

Judge Robertson acknowledged Hamdan's detention as "historically unique" but failed to rule on the constitutionality of the act itself.

Hamdan is one of over 400 other detainees still held at the Guantánamo Bay facility.

Chileans Mourn, Celebrate President Pinochet's Death

NEW YORK — Tens of thousands mourned the loss of the former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet, 91, who passed away last week.

Many Chileans, however, celebrated his death though angry that he had not stood trial for the thousands of alleged human rights violations he committed against his own people during his 17-year regime.

Chile's Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported in 1991 that 3,196 people died as a result of political violence from 1973 to 1990. Of that total, 1,185 remain disappeared.

Pinochet was untouched by legal action in Chile due to laws there giving him amnesty as a former president and senator. Chilean law dictates that the former leader would have to be stripped of his immunity on a case-by-case basis before charges are filed.

In late 1998, an attempt was

made to bring Pinochet to justice using international law. While seeking medical treatment in Briton, he was arrested on a Spanish provisional warrant. Pinochet was released without trial on medical grounds by a British official.

At the time of his death, Pinochet was facing charges in Chilean courts in one financial enquiry and five human rights cases.

"It is essential that Chile's government continue to build on the momentum first set in motion by this London arrest," said Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) in a statement. "It must push for judicial results and continue to dismantle the obstacles that have so far prevented the relatives from knowing what happened to their loved ones and seeing those responsible brought to justice."

Ironically, Pinochet died on the International Day for Human Rights.

Democrat's Malady Could Swing Senate To GOP Control

WASHINGTON — Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson of South Dakota was in critical but stable condition at deadline late last week after he underwent emergency surgery at a Washington hospital.

The senator appeared to have "stroke-like symptoms" during a conference call with reporters last Tuesday. He was later taken by ambulance to George Washington University Hospital.

Doctors reportedly untangled large blood vessels from Johnson's brain and successfully prevented it from bleeding any further during over-night surgery.

After visiting Sen. Johnson

in the hospital, the incoming majority leader Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nevada) told reporters: "He really looks good. We're all praying for a full recovery and confident that will be the case."

A medical expert working for CNN stated that the senator's recovery time could be long depending on the location of the bleeding.

Sen. Johnson, who turns 60 on Dec. 28, was diagnosed with a rare congenital condition that causes abnormal tangling of blood vessels in the brain. The condition called "congenital arteriovenous malformation" affects one of 700 Americans, 80 percent of whom suffer no complications from it.

Should Sen. Johnson step down from office, South Dakota's Republican governor must by law appoint a temporary replacement, though the temp could come from any political party.

Gov. Mike Rounds' choice could flip control of the Senate back into the hands of the Republican Party who now has a 51-49 disadvantage after the November elections.

The senator and his wife, Barbara, are cancer survivors and parents of three children.

Sen. Johnson served in the House for 10 years before getting elected to the Senate in 1996. Johnson's term ends in 2008.



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STAFF: Editorial — W. Leon Smith (publisher, editor-in-chief), Don M. Fisher (associate editor), Nathan Diebenow (associate editor), Deborah Mathews. Advertising — Melanie Harvey, Tammy Shelton, Tiffany Shelton. Business — Kay Ortiz (office), Allison Smith (Internet, web master). Circulation: Charlie Gandy, Pernie Stanford, Wayne Thompson, Bud Shaffer, Wanda Raines, Georgia Bell.

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Full Peace Ahead

'Department of Peace' Campaign Looks Optimistic



Interview With
Matt Harris,
The Peace Alliance's
Co-Director of Communication

By NATHAN DIEBENOW
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Matt Harris is enthusiastically optimistic about the creation of an agency inside the federal government that would focus on peaceful, nonviolent, and practical solutions to domestic and international conflict.

This idea for a United States Department of Peace is as old as our democratic republic, but the importance of such an institution has grown significantly, Harris told THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST in a recent interview.

Judging by the casualty totals from all the conflicts in the 20th Century — more than 100 million lives lost to war — Harris may have a point. And since the rate of non-combatant civilians deaths have risen, too, in the years after World War II — his point has nonetheless gotten sharper.

The latest campaign to create

a federal peace department was officially launched during the first Department of Peace Conference on April 8, 2003, while the 108th Congress was in session.

Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), who threw his hat in the 2006 presidential race last week, has led the effort to establish the cabinet-level position by introducing three bills in the House. In September 2005, Sen. Mark Dayton (D-Minnesota) introduced the department-creating legislation in the Senate.

The U.S. Department of Peace campaign was first organized under the Global Renaissance Alliance (now called "The Peace Alliance Foundation"), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization founded by the current chairperson of the board of directors, Marianne Williamson.

The Peace Alliance, a 501(c)4 non-profit organization and sister to the Foundation, was

PEACE TRAINING DAY — Kai Brand-Jacobsen, Director of the Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania (PATIR), (from left), Aaron Voldman, Student Peace Alliance organizer, and Matt Harris, communications co-director, listen to Dot Maver, Peace Alliance Executive Director during a recent one-day training session for Peace Alliance staff and directors.

— Photo By The Peace Alliance

founded in May of 2004 and further organized the U.S. Department of Peace Campaign.

Harris, the Peace Alliance's optimistic co-director of communication, said that he entered the peace department's campaign during Kucinich's first run for president in 2004.

Harris also spoke to THE ICONOCLAST's Nathan Diebenow about the concept of the Department of Peace campaign, the growth its movement has seen, and likelihood of the agency's establishment in the near future.

Here is the interview:

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ICONOCLAST: What's your background in, and how did you become involved in the Department of Peace campaign?

MATT HARRIS: I've been a writer and something of a social activist for most of my life, but I really went through a change in 2002 or 2003 when we were on the brink of invading Afghanistan, and all of a sudden, I felt like I was adrift in a sea that I didn't recognize anymore.

I was looking around for ways to get involved and do something, and I came across this amazing man, Dennis Kucinich. I loved what I heard him say when I went to see him speak in Seattle one time. I shook his hand and said I wanted to work on his campaign. I started with the Washington state presidential campaign and was recruited to the national campaign.

I worked on that campaign, and I loved the Department of

Peace. It was such a beautiful thing — a gem — that I came to be involved with the Peace Alliance. You probably know that the executive director of the Peace Alliance, Dot Maver, was Congressman Kucinich's national campaign director. Dot asked me to join the Peace Alliance, and that's where I am.

ICONOCLAST: From where did the idea for a "U.S. Department of Peace" come?

HARRIS: That's been around for a long, long time. In one form or another, it goes back to the beginning of our country. Both Washington and Jefferson were talking about it.

And there have been 90 bills to introduce a Department of Peace that have been tossed

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Full Peace Ahead

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about in Congress since 1935, so Congressman Kucinich picked up on that idea and crafted a very comprehensive and I think a very beautiful piece of legislation. It's a document worth reading.

ICONOCLAST: What is the difference between the original idea for this department, their successors, and this newest proposal?

HARRIS: You know, that's a question that I haven't been asked before. I don't have an answer for that one.

ICONOCLAST: Okay. From what I understand, the Department of Peace would "augment the efforts" of the Department of State and the Department of Defense. Can you explain to me how peace-building techniques "complement" war-making techniques as literature on your website says? This relationship seems contradictory.

HARRIS: Well, we like to call ourselves a trans-partisan organization, so we're very careful to be not oppositional. We don't oppose the military, but we want to in fact help the military avoid war, avoid conflict. From our discussions, I don't think anyone is really in favor of war. War is a thing that we've gotten used to thinking as an inevitable component of modern life, but we all accept it only if we have to.

What we're saying about a Department of Peace is that it would provide a focus for our evolving energy. I really think we're on the verge of a profound paradigm shift in human consciousness, human evolution, and that we're at a crossroads right now. David Korten talks about it in his book "The Great Turning." We can either choose to go on our path and that would be "the great unraveling" where everything falls apart and we descend into chaos. All the forces at work in the world right now, the mushrooming wars, the threat to our environment, our reliance to tinderbox carbon fuels that are running out and the wars that will generate. Global warming. China and India coming on as superpowers in their own right demanding their fair share of resources.

All these forces are coming into play right now, and we can either continue on this path which I think is guaranteed to lead to our own destruction, or we can consciously choose to evolve and embrace that part of ourselves that we all have within us that we're all capable of, and that's peace.

The great beauty for me in the Department of Peace legislation



2007 MEDIA PLAN — Co-Directors of Communications for the Peace Alliance Patty Kuderer and Matt Harris (from left) presented the strategic media plan for the Peace Alliance for 2007 to the core Peace Alliance team during a recent retreat.

— Photo By The Peace Alliance

is that it provides the most powerful symbol I can think of to everyone in this country and to everyone in this world, that the U.S. is choosing to use its great strength to focus on peace. Our Department of State used to be called the War Department and that's probably a more accurate label for it, though it's one that I think we shy away from.

But you know this as well as I do, we get what we focus on. It's what we look for. It's what we think about, what we discuss, and if those things that we're thinking about, talking about, funding, putting energy into, education, counseling, talent, creativity — if all those things are going into war and the arms industry, then war is what we're going to get. But if we have Department of Peace, it'll provide the most powerful symbol I can think of to everyone in this country and everyone in the world that we are focusing our energies toward peace instead of war.

ICONOCLAST: The campaign suggests that two percent should be taken out of our \$400 billion defense budget to create this new layer of bureaucracy in our national government. How did the alliance come up with that number — two percent of \$400 billion?

HARRIS: That's not our number. I think that comes out of the legislation itself, and what it says also is not that it be taken

from the military budget, but all that number is is an equivalent. We're saying that for the equivalent of this small, tiny fraction of what we currently allocate officially to our Defense Department, we can create this Department of Peace.

And by the way, what we actually spend on our military is far greater than the amount we officially report. It's probably an excess of \$500 billion a year when you factor in the Iraq war.

ICONOCLAST: Right. All those other emergency spending bills. Is that what you're referring to?

HARRIS: Yes.

ICONOCLAST: So from where would the funding for this come then?

HARRIS: I don't know that there's a funding source designated. What we're saying is just out of the general fund, it would be the equivalent of two percent, which is a very small number. I mean, \$8 billion for a country of our size and wealth, that's a very small number.

ICONOCLAST: It seems difficult. I mean, not only are war-making and prison-building very profitable businesses that feed a lot of American families — but violence has also been institutionalized inside the United States for so long.

HARRIS: Absolutely.

ICONOCLAST: Once the Department is up and running, how would it make peace-mak-

ing more profitable than war-making and violence? Is that one of the goals of the department?

HARRIS: I think what it would do would be to reach out with compassion and embrace all the people whose livelihoods you correctly point out are now involved in these institutional manifestations of violence. It would recognize that they need an income and their lives need to be preserved as well.

But there are all sorts of ways in which we could save money by spending on pro-active violence prevention, which is one of the reasons why one very exciting thing we're seeing unfold right now is across the country on their own initiatives, municipalities large and small are passing resolutions supporting and endorsing the Department of Peace.

The Minneapolis City Council recently signed a resolution. Chicago was the most recent to endorse. New York City is about to consider that, and just the other day, we found out that there's talk in Newark, New Jersey's largest city, of doing something similar. This is a spark that's catching fire all across the country because it really appeals to people's hearts and their imaginations. They really see the value in focusing on peace instead of war and violence.

ICONOCLAST: Though it's good to see that three Democrats from Texas' congressional delegation co-sponsored the resolution authorizing the Department, there's not one Republican in Congress that backed it in the last session. Now that the Democrats control both Houses, what's the likelihood of the Senate (SB 1756) and House (3760) versions of the authorization bill getting passed before the next election?

HARRIS: I don't want to wager on the likelihood of the legislation passing at any particular point in time. I think it's worth pointing out that some of the shifts in legislative consciousness of this country have taken not just years but decades. The suffrage movement took something like 76 years from the time it was started to actually securing the right of women to vote. The civil rights movement took many, many years.

So I don't want to bet when this legislation passes, but I think that with the recent elections and the clear signal that they send, this country is fed up with our focus on squandering dollars and lies in war. I think that clearly this election was a referendum on the war. The time is right for not just additional Democrats but with Republicans to see the beauty of

this legislation that will save us resources, save us lives. We're always reaching out. As I said, we don't consider ourselves "nonpartisan." We consider ourselves "trans-partisan."

This is legislation that is practical, sensible, down-to-earth, and when you're talking about saving money and lives, I don't think that's a partisan issue.

ICONOCLAST: You were talking about all those movements and the last creation of an agency that I thought of that was unique in its era was the Environmental Protection Agency.

HARRIS: Absolutely.

ICONOCLAST: What boggles my mind is that President Richard Nixon approved it back in the 1970s, and then I'm thinking, "What's the likelihood of the Bush administration approving such an ambitious department as one for peace, especially as some sort of conciliatory move for his failed 'war on terrorism' policy?" So it really doesn't matter what kind of president is in power. Just the timing has to be right.

HARRIS: I think the timing just has to be right, and again, I'm so optimistic because every time I talk to people about a department of peace, every time I do, it moves people so powerfully. People really love this idea. Part of our job has been and is to continue just elevating the visibility of this. It is an idea that appeals to so many people, and even President Bush recently called for communities to have a list of "best practices" to prevent and respond to school attacks. A Department of Peace would provide for that, for educators to work with them and help teach our children the know-how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

I don't think its beyond the realm of possibility, that even this administration would come to see this as a very practical solution to the institutionalized violence that we've all sadly gotten used to.

ICONOCLAST: As you noted before, you gave me a quick list of the cities that have supported the department's creation. I read on your website that 18 U.S. city councils representing over 6.5 million people have passed resolutions in support of the Department. Of the cities located in the South, only one — Atlanta — has passed the resolution. I would have thought the City of Austin would have endorsed it by now, but be that as it may, I also didn't recognize any suburban areas on your list. What's going on in the South, and what about suburbia?

HARRIS: The initiatives to pass city council resolutions is completely grassroots and homegrown. We're not going out

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The Peace Alliance's Board of Directors President Heart Phoenix (far right) listens as Co-Directors of Communications for the Peace Alliance Patty Kuderer (left) and Matt Harris (middle) made a presentation at a Peace Alliance retreat recently.

— Photo By The Peace Alliance

Full Peace Ahead

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and instigating for that. As I said, I heard about Newark in an e-mail. It wasn't something that we went out and agitated for. It's happening on its own. I couldn't really tell you where it's going to spring up next. That's one of the beauties to me. It's amazing to sit back and watch and see how this idea is just catching on its own.

One of the cities, of course, that's endorsed — Atlanta is one of the country's largest, most prominent cities. I think anything is possible. When you mentioned Austin, I think, "Of course! That sounds like a natural fit." I wouldn't be surprised to see that.

ICONOCLAST: In the mean-

time, can you recommend some web sites and/or organizations that are already doing some of the work of the Department would do if it existed today?

HARRIS: The Center for Non-Violence Communications is one. Amnesty International. Tikkun.

ICONOCLAST: Have some of these organizations endorsed the Department?

HARRIS: Yeah, and there are others, too. In Seattle, there's something called the Freedom Project that is absolutely doing the type of work that a Department of Peace would support and help other municipalities adopt.

The Freedom Project is a wonderful program. It works with people both in prison and coming out of prison and the communities they come out into. It helps integrate these ex-offenders back into the community. It gives them the support they would otherwise lack — not just practical support with helping them with housing and jobs, but a network of support teaching them non-violent communication and mindfulness skills, so they're not thrown back on their old destructive and violent ways.

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Americans Fear Rich-Poor Gap

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A new poll found that about three out of four Americans are in fear of the widening gap between the incomes of rich and poor citizens.

Fifty-five percent of Republicans polled say there is cause for concern of the income gap, according to the Bloomberg/Los Angeles Times poll taken Dec. 8 to Dec. 11.

While three in five of 1,489 adult respondents reported that the economy was performing well, half disapproved of President George W. Bush's management of it.

The fear of the income gap was less important to people with large incomes than people with smaller incomes, the poll numbers indicated.

Eighty percent of citizens earning less than \$40,000 a year said the gap is serious. Over half of them said it is "very serious." The gap is taken seri-

ously by over three in five of the respondents who earn over \$100,000, according to the poll.

Still, Census Bureau figures show that the rich have gotten richer over the last 20 years.

The top 20 percent of households are taking home 4.8 percent more of the national income than they were in 1985. The bottom 60 percent of households, though, lost 3.3 percent over the same period.

Medicare Drug Negotiations

In a different poll, Americans want the government to negotiate price for prescription drugs on the Medicare program.

The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 85 percent of 1,867 adults polled favored the negotiations, a wish that the cut across party lines.

The Bush administration has indicated it would fight against House Democrats' promise to

re-instate the government practice of negotiating Medicare drug prices that was scrapped in 2003.

Current federal law allows private insurers to sell Medicare drug plans in each state. Over 20 million people have been enrolled this year.

Proponents of this new system say that the open marketplace should reduce drug prices out of competition.

Citizens needing the drugs and their pharmacies, however, have complained of confusion and increased paperwork caused by the plethora of plans and choices.

Critics point to the success of the Department of Veterans Affairs, which negotiates better drug prices on behalf of 4.4 million veterans.

The only difference, they say, is that Medicare has 10 times as many beneficiaries for whom to negotiate.

Anti-War Activists Convicted In Trespassing Case

NEW YORK CITY — A criminal judge in Manhattan convicted four anti-war activists last Monday for trespassing, gave them a conditional charge, and ordered that they pay the court surcharges.

Should the activists be arrested in the next six months, they could face a penalty according to the conditional charge.

The judge acquitted the four women of disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and obstructing government administration.

The activists had attempted to give a petition to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations when they were arrested for refusing police orders to leave.

Patricia Ackerman, 48, of Nyack, N.Y.; Melissa Beattie, 57, of New York; Susan "Medea" Benjamin, 54, of San Francisco; and Cindy Sheehan, 49, of Vacaville, Calif., were a part of a 100-person group associated with advocacy organization, Global Exchange.

The women said they wanted to deliver the petition to the mission's liaison for non-governmental organizations like they had previously, but the liaison refused the offer, citing in her testimony that the meeting amounted to a publicity stunt.

The liaison was Peggy Kerry, the sister of Sen. John Kerry, a Massachusetts Democrat and former presidential candidate.

Three Governors Back 'Apollo Alliance' Plan

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Three governors, all Democrats, backed a plan to develop renewable power, create oil savings, and promote energy efficiency and job growth.

The plan is the one put forth by the Apollo Alliance, a group named after President John F. Kennedy's original Apollo mission.

"We need a 'Man on the Moon' effort to end our reliance on for-

eign energy," said Gov. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.) at the National Press Club.

Gov. Richardson praised the plan for its four-point focus on each state's ability to be "the incubators of innovation" when the federal government lacks leadership.

Gov. Edward Rendell (D-Pa.) pointed to his state's adoption of energy standards, which are not unlike the one promoted by the Apollo Alliance, as an example of a federal energy strategy.

"We are the 21st state to have those advanced standards and we believe ours are the most comprehensive. However, we need national advanced energy portfolio standards, and the Apollo Alliance energy plan calls for that," said Gov. Rendell.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer (D-Mont.) said he applauded Apollo Alliance's roadmap for advocating national security and job creation.

"Today, 65 percent of our energy — the lifeblood of this entire country — is imported, and most of it comes from unstable regions around the world," said Gov. Schweitzer. "We could create hundreds of thousands of jobs for the heartland using less energy. We could produce a billion barrels of biofuels. And we could do it during the next 10 years."

United Steel Workers President Leo Gerard said that this plan reflects the public's wishes.

"Many of our nation's new governors campaigned on the idea that states could create good jobs by promoting clean energy," said Gerard, a co-chair of the Alliance. "This plan outlines how to breathe life into that commitment."

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Texans Oppose 'Fast Tracking' Of Coal-Fired Power Plants

AUSTIN — An overwhelming majority of Texas residents (81 percent) are not on board with Governor Rick Perry's controversial plan to "fast track" consideration of 12 or more new coal-fired power plants without first addressing the concerns raised by health and environmental experts about the added pollution generated by the new power plants, according to a major new Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) survey conducted for the Austin office of the nonprofit and nonpartisan Environmental Integrity Project (EIP).

The EIP poll made possible with support from the nonprofit Civil Society Institute shows:

- Just 14 percent of Texas adults favor fast-tracking the approval process for new coal-fired power plants, while more than four out of five state residents (81 percent) want the health and environmental concerns associated with any potential new power plants addressed first. Governor Perry's fast-tracking approach is favored by a slim 22 percent of Republicans, 13 percent of Independents and 8 percent of Democrats.

- Two-thirds of Texans oppose the new coal-fired power plants - including roughly half (47 percent) who say they do so "strongly." A weak 28 percent of Texas adults support the construction of more coal-fired power plants that would create new health and environmental problems in the state.

- Roughly three out of four Texas adults (74 percent) would prefer to see major conservation efforts undertaken in the state first in order to offset a major portion of the electricity that would be required from the proposed new coal-fired power plants.

Ilan Levin, counsel, Environment Integrity Project, Austin office, said, "The message here could not be any plainer: Fast tracking more dirty coal-fired power plants for Texas is opposed by nearly all Texans. Texans do not want to see the state short change the deliberate review that should take place of what would be very serious environmental and health downsides of these needlessly dirty power sources. To say that Governor Perry has no mandate from the public for his plan to rubber stamp these dirty power plants may be the understatement of the year."

ment of the year."

Texas Ratepayers' Organization to Save Energy (Texas ROSE) Executive Director Carol Biedrzycki said, "Energy efficiency could supplant one-third of Texas' power plants. It's reliable, it's clean and it lowers costs for consumers. For years, TXU and others claimed that electricity prices were too low and there was too much excess capacity to justify greater investments in energy efficiency. Now TXU's electricity prices are among the highest in the

country and capacity shortages are possible. The decision to build more coal fired plants is a resource strategy that benefits TXU, not the consumer."

Dr. Lloyd Jeff Dumas, professor of economics and public policy, University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), said, "This survey shows that Texans understand what makes the most sense for the state. We are better off in terms of the economics, the environment and our own health if we explore conservation and alternative energy

sources before turning back the technology clock in favor of dirty coal-fired power plants. By embracing the future rather than clinging to one of the worst and most counterproductive technologies of the past, Texas can have more jobs, cleaner air and healthier state residents."

Texas NAACP Environmental Justice Chair Gene Collins said, "In the 1980s and 1990s the environmental justice movement focused on the injustices to minorities and unempowered communities done by industry and government who could, without any remorse, use the 'jobs versus the environment' argument to validate their actions. With the scientific developments of the 21st Century pertaining to global warming and other planetary challenges we face from fossil fuels, the argument of environmental justice has been broadened to reflect 'the health of the masses versus the wealth of the few.' What is happening in Texas with TXU's fast-track plan to expand their coal-fired operations is a flagship example of the two ideologies colliding leaving Earth in the balance."

Key Findings

Other key survey findings include the following points:

- More than four out of five Texas adults (82 percent) are concerned about the increased health risks associated with pollution from more coal-fired power plants in Texas. Well over half of Texans (55 percent) say that they are "very" concerned. Nearly nine out of 10 women (89 percent) are concerned about the pollution danger to health, compared to 75 percent of men.

- Nearly nine out of 10 Texas adults (85 percent) want to see existing power plants in the state cleaned up (including older "grandfathered" plants that are allowed to escape key pollution control requirements) before new coal-fired power plants are constructed in the state. More than three out of five state residents (63 percent) agree strongly with the wisdom of this clean-up-the-old-plants-first approach, compared to fewer than one in 10 (8 percent) who strongly disagree on the need for such a course of action. While Democrats (92 percent) and Independents (85 percent) are overwhelmingly in favor of this approach, Republicans (77 percent) are not far behind. Those who think older power plants should be cleaned up first

include 74 percent of those who say they "definitely" live within 100 miles of one of the proposed new coal-fired power plants.

- Though still in a distinct minority, support for the power plants is stronger among Republicans (42 percent) and men (37 percent) than among women (19 percent) and Independents (27 percent). The intensity of the opposition of women to the new power plants may be seen in that over half (53 percent) "strongly" oppose the new power plants.

- Under one in four Texans (23 percent) disagreed with pursuing the "conservation first" approach and, instead, want to move ahead immediately with proposed new power plants. Only about one in four Republicans and Independents (26 percent and 27 percent, respectively) oppose trying conservation as a way to reduce the need for new coal-fired power plants in Texas. The "conservation first" approach is favored on a roughly equal basis by Texans who say they "definitely" are (68 percent) or are not (70 percent) living within 100 miles of one of the proposed new power plants.

- Nearly half of Texas adults (47 percent) said they are "not aware at all" of Governor Perry's plans to fast-track consideration of 12 or more new power plants in the state. About four in ten state residents (38 percent) said they were very or somewhat aware of the Perry fast-track plans.

- More than two out of five Texas adults (44 percent) say they definitely (14 percent) or probably/may (30 percent) live within 100 miles of one of the proposed new coal-fired power plants.

Survey Methodology

The Environmental Integrity Project survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted by ORC among a sample of 602 adults (302 men and 300 women) age 18 and over, living in private households in the state of Texas. Interviewing was completed during the period of November 15-19, 2006. Completed interviews of the 602 adults were weighted by two variables: age and gender to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the adult population. The margin of error is plus or minus four percentage points for the sample of 602 adults. Smaller sub-groups will have larger error margins.

DSHS Offering Rabies Vaccine

CRAWFORD — It's time for the Texas Department of State Health Services' (DSHS) annual winter drop of rations for coyotes and gray foxes in South and West-Central Texas. And as these wild animals gobble up the sweet-tasting dog food and fish meal treats, they get an added benefit - a hidden dose of oral rabies vaccine.

As full field operations for the DSHS Zoonosis Control Branch's Oral Rabies Vaccination Program (ORVP) begin Jan. 5, from the Zapata County Airport, health officials hope to continue seeing fewer incidences of canine and gray fox rabies.

"Surveillance indicates that the program continues to show dramatic, measurable results year after year," said DSHS vet-

erinarian Ernest Oertli, ORVP director. "Again this year we've seen no human cases of rabies in either the South Texas or the West-

Central Texas area since the vaccine airdrop began in 1994. And no cases of canine or gray fox rabies in animals have been reported outside the original containment zones since the program's beginning."

For several weeks in January, about 3.2 million baits will drop from five specially-equipped airplanes flying across 35 Texas counties. Following the Zapata flights, the ORVP crews move to Kimble County Airport in Junction and Alpine-Casparis Municipal Airport in Alpine around Jan. 12 for the second leg of the program. All flight schedules depend on good weather.

Disaster Aid Still Needed Due To Drought

CRAWFORD — Area farmers and ranchers are thankful for recent rains that have helped alleviate drought conditions and are anticipating more wet weather ahead with El Nino brewing in the Pacific Ocean.

"However, all the moisture in the world won't replace the losses dealt by this year's devastating drought," said Bosque County Farm Bureau President Alan Day.

According to the National Weather Service, the El Nino phenomenon usually means a wetter-than-normal winter for Texas. This should be good news for this year's winter wheat crops and next year's spring crops. But with the loss of crops and higher costs associated with the drought earlier in the year, area farmers are struggling.

"Congress needs to get serious about passing disaster legislation and the time to do so is now," Day said. "If disaster aid is not passed during this lame-duck session, it will be 2007 before legislation could be considered again."

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 bil-

lion 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.

African Children's Choir Slated To Perform Locally

LAGUNA PARK — The internationally acclaimed African Children's Choir™ will be performing at First Baptist Church in Laguna Park on Sunday, Dec. 31, and again that evening at 6 p.m. at First Baptist Church of Valley Mills.

The African Children's Choir is comprised of 24 African children, ages seven to eleven. Each child in the Choir has lost one or both parents to poverty or AIDS. This year's Choir members come from Uganda.

The concert includes well-loved children's songs, popular gospel tunes, and lively spirituals. Through their songs and dances, the Choir brings Africa alive, in all its colour and splendor creating a truly unforgettable musical experience.

There is no admission charge for the concert. A free-will offering will be taken at the performance to support the African Children's Choir care and emergency relief programs.

"The children in the Choir represent millions of children in Africa. These children are bright, articulate, and motivated to realize their potential. We believe they can make a difference and we believe that when audiences see Africa through their eyes they will want to partner with us to give these children every opportunity to succeed and impact their countries," says Ray Barnett,



African Children's Choir

founder of the Choir.

The first Choir was formed in 1984. Each year a new Choir is formed and the children from the previous Choir return to their homelands to attend school. Their education is completely funded by the African Children's Choir. Since its inception, the Choir has established schools and provided educational scholarships in Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa.

In addition to education efforts, the Choir, through ongoing support from donors, finances numerous relief and development projects throughout Africa. The current Choir tour is appealing for donations

for the nKomazi region in South Africa. An area that is being devastated by the AIDS pandemic, many households in nKomazi are now being led by children who face the daunting task of caring for themselves and their siblings without income or an education.

The African Children's Choir remains committed to helping Africa's most vulnerable children so they can help Africa tomorrow.

For more information about the Choir and current relief efforts for nKomazi, visit www.africanchildrenschoir.com

For more information about the local performances, call 254/622-3226.



Congressman Edwards' Larynx Surgery Delayed



Congressman Edwards

WASHINGTON D.C. — Congressman Chet Edwards' planned surgery to remove two benign polyps from his larynx on Tuesday has been postponed until sometime in January or February.

After examining Congressman Edwards in Nashville, Dr. Robert Ossaff, who has operated on notable performers such as Larry Gatlin, Kenny Rogers, and Johnny Cash, recommended that Edwards rest his voice for several weeks before any operation in order to allow some minor inflammation to subside.

"While I had hoped to have the operation while Congress was not in session, I'm grateful that the surgery should allow a full recovery of my voice, which has been hoarse for several months now," Edwards commented. "I asked Dr. Ossaff if he could get me a voice like some of his past patients, but he reminded me that he is not in the miracle business," Edwards joked.

Edwards will be asked to remain quiet for two weeks before his operation and three weeks afterwards.

"Now that would be a miracle," Edwards observed.

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What James Byron Dean Taught Me About Christmas

By MELINDA PILLSBURY-FOSTER
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

I last saw Jimmy though the front window of our home in West Los Angeles in September of 1955. He looked up and smiled at me, my nose pressed to the glass. In just a few days he would be dead but the ideas and conversations we had lived on in my memory. Eventually, those memories became a family tradition we call The Star for Christmas. It is a tradition that involves finding our way through life and doing the right thing as individuals. Jimmy was someone who thought intensely about who he was and what he should do.

All of my children grew to adulthood stuffing tiny folded and spindled letters of intention and wishes for the year to come into the musty interior of the Star that tops our Christmas Tree. Their tiny fingers were eager and trusting. Every Christmas Eve we gathered to read the last years letters and write anew. A generation of their wishes stretched both the Star's stitches and the faded yellow felt I had cut it from so many years before. At the end of three decades the Star had become an object notable mostly for its ugliness but remained the most cherished decoration on our tree.

Now all the children have grown up, found their own homes and carried the tradition with them into new families and a new century. As their mother I was glad for that. But over the Thanksgiving table one year, lingering over seconds on everything, my youngest daughter asked me how the custom had begun. Was it a New England custom? Had I filled my own small white paper with intentions and wishes when I was little?



James Dean, 1955 — By Bert Six for Warner Bros.

Had I folded the paper up small and stuffed it into another older Star, perhaps made by my own mother? None of her friends followed the custom, she knew. No, I

told her, I had not. The custom was my own, begun before she was born in honor of a friend who had died when I was just six years old. Then I told them about Jimmy and our conver-

sations.

James Dean has been in his grave for nearly fifty years at that moment but I have never forgotten the many gifts he gave me. Christmas is about

gifts of unexpected grace that make us stronger. Jimmy had shared his own wishes and intentions with me in those conversations; each insight was a gift I cherished. Since Christmas is about gifts I came to associate the holiday with him. The gifts that stay with us are not the kind normally found under any evergreen. But they were the kind of gifts that last long after toys are lost and forgotten.

Jimmy gave me gifts of insight; he shared his own confrontations with life. He told me once that in celebrating Christmas we need to remember that Christ was born to live a life that was itself a message. Reverence your life, Jimmy said, by living it honestly, with understanding, and courage.

Truth is where you find it.

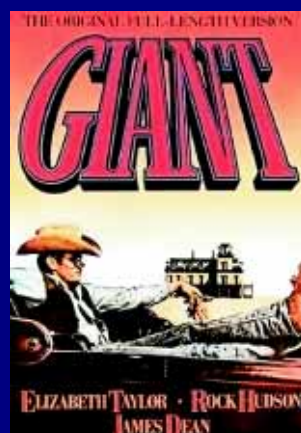
Kneeling over the desiccated carcass of a tortoise that I discovered behind a bush in the backyard one golden afternoon Jimmy had explained to me about dying. I was only three then but I can hear his words as clearly as if he was standing here now. Jimmy's voice told me he did not fear death. He explained that the essence of Tortoise did not die with its body but moved on to someplace else. Nothing really dies, he said. Jimmy accepted mortality as a part of life, believing that spirit would endure. This lesson was also taught by the Man whose birth we celebrate on December 25th.

That was the first lesson Jimmy taught me. Others followed.

Jimmy visited us sometimes in the afternoon, usually around lunchtime. This began, I think, when he was a student at UCLA. He wore thick glasses, just like me. He hunched his shoulders, just a little. He was quiet, sometimes pensive, and sometimes a little crazy. But he talked to me as if I were a grownup who could understand anything.

This taught me that I could do anything.

Over the next three years Jimmy taught me many more things. He taught me to listen to my heart beating as we sat quietly in the back yard. He said that I could hear my heartbeat and my breath as it moved through my throat and into my lungs if I listened and stilled the sounds outside myself. There was much in me to understand, he said. He had heard his own heart



James Dean Thumbnail Biography

James Dean was born Feb. 8, 1931 and died Sept. 30, 1955 in an automobile accident. Like other actors who died young, Dean became a cultural icon and a symbol of youthful rebellion. After playing some bit parts on 1950s television, he played the lead in *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without A Cause*. His last film, *Giant*, released posthumously in 1956, featured Dean in a supporting role to both Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson. Dean played a poor-to-rich Texas oilman, Jett Rink, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award after release of the film.

(left, movie posters from the three films)

Continued On Next Page

James Dean

From Previous Page

and breath and it taught him about himself; Listen to your self always, he said. Know yourself because you are here for a purpose and by listening you will learn that purpose. Jimmy believed he had a purpose and that his life's work would have meaning. He would do wonderful things, he told me.

Jimmy did amazing things in a life that was far too short.

When I was much older I began attending Quaker Meeting; Jimmy had learned to hear the silence in a Quaker Meeting in Fairmount, Indiana. There, he had found what he needed to fill the emptiness left in the wake of his mother's death. In the deep silence that healed grief, he had said to me, you touch your own soul and find your truth.

Jimmy taught me both to know myself and to trust myself.

I still have the old stuffed horse that Jimmy gave me when I broke both my arms. It is as dusty and as old as his memory is new. I have a tiny car, smaller than my then five-year-old finger that he flicked across the floor to me one afternoon just after he dropped by. He made the sound of a car, crying,

Vrooom, vrooom, as it traveled like a shot into my hands. I carried it around in the pocket of my corduroy jumper for two weeks.

Insignificant material things may carry memories that can be far more precious than diamonds.

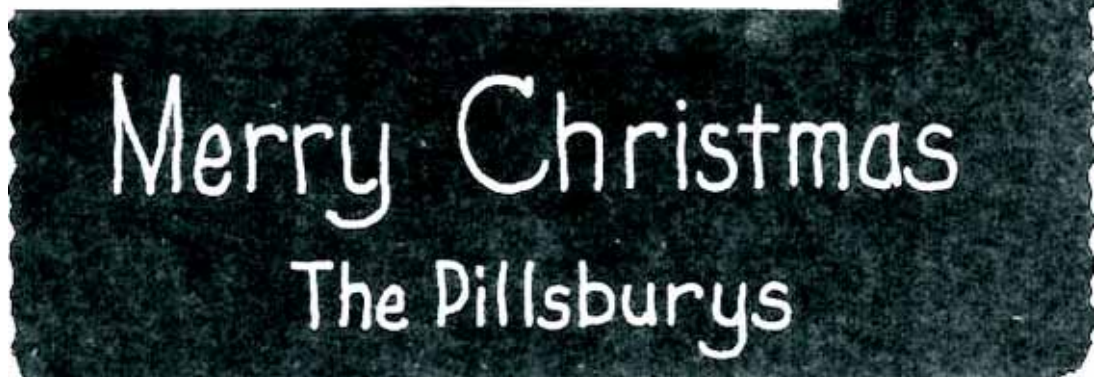
To the small child I was then the lessons of Jimmy were magic, magic that the older woman remembered when she placed a Star at the top of a Christmas Tree to carry the intentions of one year into the reality of the next. The ceremony, I told my children, was about gifts that do not fit under the tree, but that have great value.

After our family placed its new intentions in the Star the tradition was to light a candle for remembering and say a prayer. The small folded papers that the children filled up with words remained in the Star from one Christmas Eve until the next when they were taken out and read aloud, each by their author. Confronting yourself can also be a gift of unexpected value because in that you find new direction.

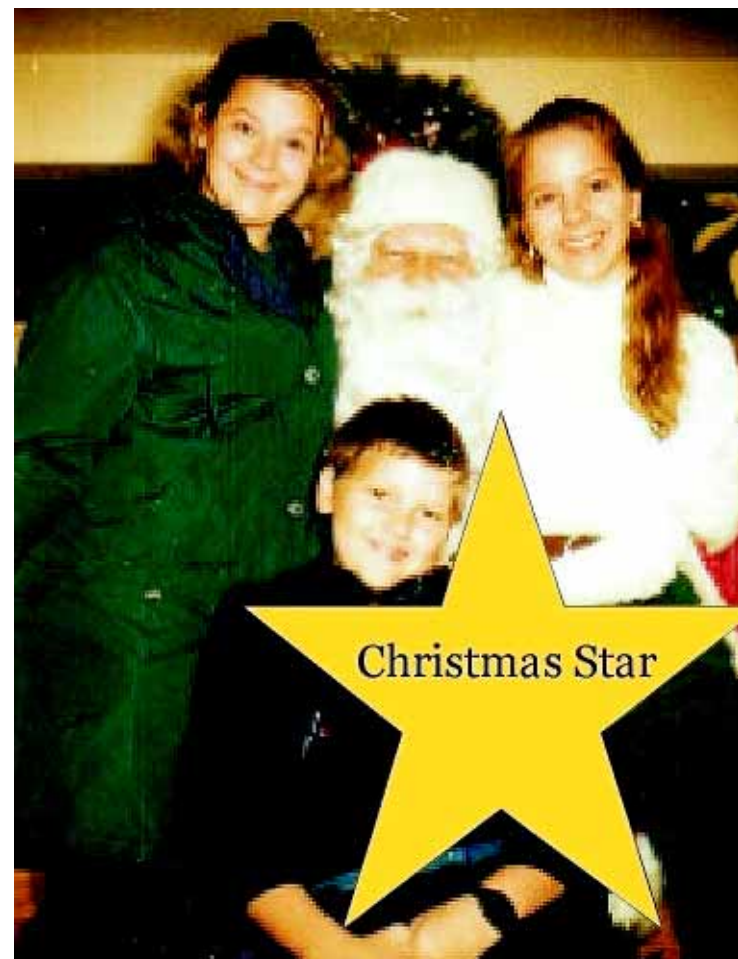
Saving those papers was part of the magic.

1979 Dawn (then four) - "I want to be an angel so I can turn Carolyn into a pumpkin."

1984 Ayn (then eight) - "I wish that when I grow up I become a witch like Sam on Bewitched."



On the rocking horse is Melinda Pillsbury-Foster



1985 Dawn (then ten) - "I wish the Ethiopians stop starving by next year and it's God damed pres. is assassinated."

1985 Arthur (then six) - I want every single Transformer in the world.

1988 Dawn - I wish for the advancement of the human race through my genius. I also wish for the dissolution of all governments.

1992 Ayn (then sixteen)

1. To be brave enough to read this in front of the whole family.

2. to be a strong Christian.
3. to be happy at whichever school I go to.

4. that the family will be living anywhere but Burnet.

5. World Peace (Somalia) NOT!

1993 Dawn (then eighteen) - I wish for whirled pease,

Clinton to have been impeached for his various crimes, Hillary to be in prison - nah, she'd enjoy it too much ala "caged fury"

Because I was always involved in politics, first as a Republican, then a Libertarian, and then again as a Republican, what was happening in politics became part of our family culture, working its way into the Intentions we placed in the Star on Christmas Eve. Jimmy would have approved, he always said if you want it to happen you need to start walking in that direction; he was not happy with the direction politics was taking even then. Jimmy believed each of us have inherent freedoms government cannot touch and that the job of government was to protect those

rights, not cancel them.

This Christmas Eve we will again gather around the Tree to read wishes and place next year's intentions in the Star. We will light the candle; we will pray for justice and a new direction for America. This year the wishes that go into the Star from our house will be for Impeachment. Doing the right thing matters; Jimmy would agree.

Melinda Pillsbury-Foster is a prominent activist, author, poet, commentator, and critic of Neoconservative theory and policy. A member of the Republican Part, she is founder and president of the Arthur C. Pillsbury Foundation and hosts a radio talk-show program, The Spiritual Politician, at <BBSRadio.com>.

Merry Christmas From Juvy Hall

This column began about three decades ago. I began working on it in 1985.

I'm still not sure I've got it right, but it is my Christmas present to you, as it once was to me.

Christmas never meant that much to me.

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

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

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

But that was before I had supper with Santa Claus.

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

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

He was nursing a cup of bad coffee and line of worse jokes. The cook ignored him so he tried a few on the waitress.

She wasn't buying, either. Humor doesn't sit well on hot griddles and flat feet.

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

His name was Meyer.

He lived alone.

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

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

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

Bitter? Nah! He was an immigrant.

Maybe if he hadn't come here, his son would never have been born at all.

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

Juvenile Hall?

Jeez, Meyer, juvy hall? An orphan's home or the children's hospital maybe.

But juvy hall? That's like de-

Call To Mind

By Don M. Fisher



livering kittens to a hyena den! The kids they lock up out there have broken glass for souls!

Yeah. This year a kid they had in isolation (That's the child psychology euphemism for solitary.) spit on him.

Youngster about fifteen. You probably remember reading about him.

No. I wrote about him.

I remembered all right.

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

I remembered a young woman with a couple of babies who would have to make do with a smiling cop's fading, black-draped picture instead of a father.

She had that kind of stunned agony on her face people get when they've been told their life is over; but they've got to go on living anyway.

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

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

He was a punk.

Now he was a killer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So maybe a guy from Nazareth wasn't a Jew? Lemme tell you something. When my boy died, they took a long time getting the body home. So long I got mad about it. It seems sort of foolish now, but at the time it was important to me. So they finally told me why.

"See, he wounded. And this corpsman, this other kid named Reilly was carrying him. And when they got hit by this mortar shell, they got all mixed up together, and they took some time straightening things out. How many Jews you know named Reilly? Tell me how a Lace Curtain Mick from New Rochelle gets mixed up in the same plastic sack with a Jew from Dallas. Maybe then we can talk more about Christians and Jews."

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

I didn't notice until he said his goodbyes and reached to pay for his coffee.

As his hand extended across the counter, the frayed red sleeve hiked up about halfway to reveal a tattoo on the underside of his forearm; a series of dark blue numbers.

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

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

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

Meetings Set For Central Texas Bio Fuel Program

BELTON — The Central Texas Bio Fuel program for Agricultural Producers will be held on two dates and in two locations, including Jan. 24, in Belton at the Bell County Expo and on Jan. 31, at Hill County College. Both programs will begin at 9 a.m. with registration and conclude with a lunch at 1 p.m.

Topics to be covered for producers will be ethanol production from corn and sorghum grain; quality assessment of bio-fuel products; an economic assessment of production; updates on emerging Texas operations; and information on On-Farm Production systems.

EDITORIAL

Away In A Menagerie

Mary and Joseph's kid got better healthcare in a manger 2,000 years ago than he could have in Texas today.

For a state that prides itself on freedom, democracy, and opportunity, it is utterly disgraceful that 25 percent of children in Texas live in poverty.

That's 1.4 million out of out of 6.1 million children, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

That's roughly equal to the total population of two Alaskas, or a Delaware and a half, or one Hawaii.

An almost similar number of children (21 percent) lack even basic insurance.

To make matters worse, Republican Gov. Rick Perry ordered state agencies to cut 10 percent from their budgets for the next biennium.

Cut funding from the children's health insurance, mental health services for children, child care for working families, and foster care services with what Republican House Speaker Tom Craddick says is a \$15 billion "surplus" in the state coffers?

Is he crazy?

Yes.

In fact, Perry is also eyeing a change to the Texas Constitution that would allow him to return public funds to taxpayers, and this is before the state sees one penny from its new business tax.

Currently, the Constitution prevents tax money to be given to individuals.

First, the Texas fascists re-write the Constitution to ban gay marriage, and now they've got their sights on poverty-stricken children.

Where is the shame?

If Lt Gov. David Dewhurst is so bent up on going after "child predators," may he look no further than his buddy in the governor's office.

Healthcare Parlor Tricks

Sen. Ron Wyden's heart is in the right place, but his plan to keep national healthcare privatized is cancerous.

The Oregon Democrat's proposal is merely a new parlor trick to keep insurance companies' hands filled with cards marked "universal healthcare."

Wyden used the work of a 14-member panel — the Citizens' Health Care Working Group — to interview 28,000 citizens to come up with a new national health care system.

The plan amounts to a reshuffling of who pays what; instead of employers paying out healthcare benefits, they increase the income of their workers who would then pay for their choice of private plans.

Sounds good, huh?

Wrong!

A single-payer healthcare system is the answer, which means cut out the middle man insurance companies that spend tons of money on their overhead, underwriting, billing, sales and marketing departments.

All of their for-profit administration equals 31 percent of the healthcare dollar, according to the Physicians for a National Healthcare Program.

The savings in paperwork alone (\$350 billion per year) could cover every single American without increasing any current healthcare costs.

Under the single-payer system, physician pay and hospital expenses would be determined through negotiations and global budgets.

And if more healthcare dollars are needed, ask Congress to stop ordering weapons systems designed for Cold War use.

Are we really going to miss 295 F/A-22 Raptor fighter planes that in all cost \$70 billion, or 30 Virginia-class submarines to the tune of \$74 billion?

Probably not.

— Nathan Diebenow

Socialists Unmasked

BY MELINDA PILLSBURY-FOSTER
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

Charges against Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez. "Chavez has won a loyal following among the poor through multibillion-dollar social programs including subsidized food, free university education and cash benefits for single mothers. The president insists he is a democrat and will continue to respect private property - though he has boosted state control over the oil industry and has said he might nationalize utilities."

As Jon Stewart and other prominent American critics point to Venezuela and the actions of Hugo Chavez, re-elected by an overwhelming majority to the office of President, accusing him of being a socialist, Chavez even describes himself uses the "S" word. How could they all be so wrong? But wrong they are. Chavez is not a socialist, but socialists lurk all across the United States and it is time to expose them.

Let's begin by defining our terms. What is a socialist? Thanks to the Internet, this is a question easily answered.

"An economic, social and political doctrine which expresses the struggle for the equal distribution of wealth by eliminating private property and the exploitative ruling class. In practice, such a distribution of wealth is achieved by social ownership of the means of production, exchange and diffusion." <www.ilstu.edu/class/hist127/terms.html>.

The programs provided to poor Venezuelans are funded through income generated through the Venezuela Petroleum Corporation, a corporation owned by that nation. Venezuela nationalized the petroleum industry in the mid 70s, long before Hugo Chavez had anything to say in the matter. The programs he provides pay for education, housing, subsidies on food for the poor, and aid to single mothers. The list may strike you as familiar; America funds similar programs, the difference being that here they are funded through the seizure of private property through taxation. Is America therefore a socialist state? How can it be socialism to offer such programs in South America but democracy here? Does the source of the money make that difference? Curiously enough, today Alaskans receive money from the State of Alaska as a share of the money generated by the Alaskan oil production. Is Alaska a socialist state? Sounds as if that might be the case.

The definition of socialism seems to depend on a struggle for control of private property, not found property. Private prop-

erty is that property that is the creation of an individual using their energy, intelligence, and innovation. Such property is justly earned when it is acquired without deceit, manipulation or violence. Property not justly earned is stolen, by definition. No one who knows the history of the oil industry can have any illusions about how their wealth was acquired.

Naturally, as a life-long Republican and Libertarian I am opposed to socialism, but this does not look like socialism to me. It looks like spending the money on one good, services for poor Venezuelans, instead of other potential goods, for instance secreting the money in a Swiss bank account or buying my own private island. Hugo Chavez was duly elected as CEO of this country; it is difficult to see why it is any concern to anyone else.

The oil was under that chunk of real estate before anyone now living was there. But as individuals who live on specific pieces of land we all understand that living someplace may bring hazards or rewards for which we are not responsible. Naturally occurring events are defined by insurance companies as, "Acts of God." Living in Pompeii in A. D. 79 turned out to be hazardous. Living in an area that experiences subsidence due to the extraction of the underlying reservoir of oil may also prove to be hazardous but a human element of causality has been introduced. We know that oil is a naturally occurring substance. Extracting it from the layers of the Earth in which it is found may have a long term impact not now understood and subsidence of the land covering it is always a possibility. Its extraction is cheap; selling it turned small bands of Arabs without two camels to rub together into an international power, all through the accident of location. However, location, occupying the land where the oil is being extracted, does make those living there vulnerable to the potential problems of subsidence, toxic spills, and potential incineration, for instance if the oil blows up, which has been known to happen.

Curiously enough, those living there, for instance in Venezuela before that industry was confiscated by the government, benefited least from the presence of the potentially harmful oil being extracted. As a matter of tradition we observe the practice of ceding control of resources to those with a valid claim on the land where those resources are located or, at their option, to the government who orders the business of the

GUEST COMMENTARY

people who entrust them with governing. The oil therefore seems to belong to all of the people who live in Venezuela although for a good long time only a small percentage of those people were allowed to profit from its presence. Should those who got the lion's share for so long make restitution? Probably. But that is up to those involved. Perhaps other residents of Saudi Arabia should take note of this curious oversight.

If someone is going to assert a right to profit from pumping oil, which arguably belongs to everyone occupying the land under which the oil sits, then you would think that those individuals would recognize an obligation to ensure that those who do not profit would not pay the costs of potential liabilities, such as having their children incinerated by faulty piping necessitated by the transport of such oil, as in the case of Koch Industries. But in fact those who are most likely to profit from pumping out oil are likely to demand that with the power cancel any potential liability if damage is done. In America, oil companies often pay those in Congress to zero out their potential liabilities, for instance in the case of the Liquid Natural Gas they are so eager to import.

Responsible capitalism and private property means accepting full liability for costs extracted from those who do not directly benefit from profits. Alabama recently received a 3.5 billion dollar judgment against Mobil-Exxon for diddling on royalty payments. Presumably, if a corporation can be held liable for cheating in its bookkeeping it should be liable for other damages even to the full extent of the damages done.

Hugo Chavez thinks he is a socialist. He is wrong. But the case can be made that BushCo and their core constituents are a new species of socialist as yet unidentified. They fund programs through the confiscation of private wealth, they use legislation to dictate their own social agenda, and they have been working on wresting away control of the means for real production for generations, but instead of pretending they are doing it for the good of the masses they simply amass the goods.

Melinda Pillsbury-Foster is a prominent activist, author, poet, commentator, and critic of Neoconservative theory and policy. A member of the Republican Part, she is founder and president of the Arthur C. Pillsbury Foundation and hosts a radio talk-show program, *The Spiritual Politician*, at <BBSRadio.com>.



Physicians Urge Kids To Wear Bike Helmets

CRAWFORD — When parents give bikes, skates, skateboards, and scooters to children this Christmas, "include the gift that could save a life, then make sure it fits," the physicians of the Texas Medical Association (TMA) advise.

Give a bicycle helmet, and ensure that it fits the child well, physicians recommend. "We tell parents to make sure the helmet fits down over the child's forehead, snugly, and truly protects the head," said Tamra Kay Deuser, MD, a family medicine physician in Flower Mound. "Otherwise, the helmet's just a pretty dressing."

When properly fitted, the bicycle helmet can prevent serious head injury or even death, which can occur when a child takes a spill on his or her bike. "If a helmet doesn't fit right, the child is more likely to suffer serious injuries that could change his or her life forever," Dr. Deuser added. A helmet is made to absorb the energy of an impact, provided it fits properly.

TMA sponsors the Hard Hats for Little Heads program, in which TMA physicians encourage children to wear bicycle helmets when riding bikes and participating in other wheeled activities. With support from TMA's philanthropic arm, the TMA Foundation, the medical society's physicians have given more than 30,000 helmets to children. At Hard Hats outreach events, doctors stress that the helmet must fit properly for it to offer the most protection.

Dr. Deuser notes that most helmets are sized based on the child's age or weight, so parents should look for that

guidance when making the purchase.

"Kids are generally very healthy - it's accidents that can cause serious, life-altering injuries or even death. We can't prevent all accidents, but we must do what we can to minimize the effects of those accidents."

Dr. Deuser is sponsoring her fourth Hard Hats event, which will provide 500 helmets free to people in need this holiday.

TMA's Hard Hats for Little Heads physicians recommend these steps to fit a helmet:

- The helmet must sit squarely on top of the child's head.
- The front of the helmet should cover the forehead, approximately one inch above the eyebrows.
- Un-twist the chin straps.
- Fasten together the ends of the chin strap and tighten them to secure the helmet to the proper fit. The straps should be snug but comfortable.
- Use the pads included with the helmet to make it fit snugly.
- Test the fit by pushing the helmet with your hand. If it shifts or slides off, adjust the straps to tighten the fit, or try a different-size helmet. "If they wiggle their head and the helmet bobs around, the fit is not good enough," advises Dr. Deuser.

TMA is the largest state medical society in the nation, representing more than 41,000 physician and medical student members. It is located in Austin and has 120 component county medical societies around the state. TMA's key objective since 1853 is to improve the health of all Texans.

O, The Compassion Of The Season

*So this is Christmas
And what have you done
Another year over
And a new one just begun
And so this is Christmas
I hope you have fun
The near and the dear ones
The old and the young**

As the season of Peace and Goodwill toward All Men on Earth encompasses us, it's heartwarming to see the depth of compassion Fearless Leader has for those brave members of the military he's needlessly thrown into harm's way.

Why, Lame Dubya cares so much for their safety, health and well-being that he's going to take all the advice being heaped upon him with slow and deliberate consideration.

As far as he's concerned, the GIs can just let their asses hang out as targets for the folks who don't want us in Iraq until his version of "God's Will" — aka "The Job" — has been accomplished.

Whatever in hell that is.

I've heard the comment numerous times that Lame Dubya has lost his "moral center." Does anyone on Planet Earth even believe by now that George Walker Bush ever had a moral center to begin with?

Anyone and everyone who has even the least ability to think, reason, and discern what is proper and just knows there was no reason for the U.S. Military to unload its might upon hapless Iraq. And 45 months later there's absolutely no reason our combat troops remain in that nation.

The only explanation is the U.S.A. is illegally ruled by the most cowardly, self-indulgent nabob in our history.

Lame Dubya is so devoid of knowledge, particularly where the Arab part of our World is concerned, it's not a case of he doesn't get it, rather it's that he can't get it. Li'l Georgie is so thick that he'll never get it, either, because people like him just don't listen to any opinions other than those that reinforce their own simple thought processes.

*A very merry Christmas
And a happy New Year
Let's hope it's a good one
Without any fear**

I know how this works all too well, because my own brother is exactly that type of personality. Decades ago, long about Grade One, Bro got it into his head that everyone else was wrong, and he was forever right.

He makes a decision and that's the way it is. No amount of logical explanation can sway



Out Of The Blue

By Jerry Tenuto

my brother. Truth be told, he refuses to engage in any kind of debate whatsoever on any subject. Bro refers to any give-and-take discussion as an "argument" and shuts down instead of listening to a rational alternative viewpoint.

To my brother's mindset, anyone with college is an idiot. This includes those who went through Hard Knocks U. as well as the traditional, never-had-to-worry-about-finances students.

Yes, by watching my own brother for over five decades I know precisely what a stubborn, pullet-headed, unenlightened guy Fearless Leader is.

One difference between them, I would hope, is that my brother, a VietNam veteran, would not have sent an armed force into Iraq willy-nilly as Lame Dubya couldn't wait to. Another difference, with Christmas just two weeks away my brother, schmuck that he might be, would not tell the World he was going to do nothing about easing the troops' pain until sometime the following year.

This entire stall tactic of Lame Dubya's is nothing more than his ongoing megalomaniac ego trip. 'How dare anyone, especially people who know far more about the World around us and its machinations, tell me what's good for America and its foreign policy?'

In the wake of Li'l Georgie's hissy fits and utter ignorance, more and more and more people shall die without any reason on all sides.

Merry Christmas from the Compassionate Conservative...

And so this is Christmas (War is over)

For weak and for strong (If you want it)

For rich and the poor ones (War is over)

The world is so wrong (Now)

And so happy Christmas (War is over)

For black and for white (If you want it)

For yellow and red ones (War is over)

*Let's stop all the fight (Now)**

Still, despite Lame Dubya there are some things to be happy about this Holiday Season.

For instance, Ol' Smiler DeLay started up his own

website, and it crashed the first day.

Word leaked out almost immediately thereafter that in true "Hammer" fashion he was not the person actually writing the blogs attributed to him. When your name goes on a blog, Tom, it's supposed to be written by you.

Once a liar... you know. It was not at all difficult to discern that one DeLay blog was written in a style that didn't match the next DeLay blog.

Tommy Boy also doesn't get the rationale behind the Internet or a website. If you open up to comments, the notion is there should be a free exchange of ideas — not just the ones with which your mindset agrees. Apparently there are staffers who are on board to excise any comments from site visitors who offer opinions contrary to those of Smiler DeLay.

Ah, free speech, what a concept.

And so this is Christmas (War is over)

And what have we done (If you want it)

Another year over (War is over)

And a new one just begun (Now)

And so happy Christmas (War is over)

I hope you have fun (If you want it)

The near and the dear one (War is over)

*The old and the young (Now)**

How about those administrators at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport? I'll bet they couldn't find their derrieres with both hands and a roomful of mirrors.

There were 14 Christmas trees on display at Sea-Tac — count 'em, 14! All Rabbi Elazar Bogomilsky asked was couldn't one measly Menorah be put on display.

Oy, vay! So what if he wanted it to be eight feet tall? Wasn't the shortest tree?

The good Rabbi's request was originally placed in October, when he was told it had to be "formal" in nature. So, come November that's what he did, only to be told this year's decorations had already been planned.

Rabbi Bogomilsky then filed a suit to have a Menorah included.

The airport authorities felt that capitulation would create a maelstrom of playing up to every ethnicity in the Pacific Northwest; their response was to remove all the trees, thus annihilating what had become a

tradition at the airport for more than a quarter century — a Christmas tree at every entrance.

The first people to get their dander up about the tree removals were the employees around the airport. To put it mildly, the workers were incensed; many told friends and family to call and complain. One estimate was that pro-tree calls were running 99 to one versus anti-tree calls.

Rabbi Bogomilsky himself got a bad rap from this overreach by the airport authorities. Although blamed by many, the Rabbi never asked for removal of the trees. Quite the contrary — the man is completely in favor of Christians enjoying their festive season. All he wanted was some acknowledgement of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

Following about a week of being an international joke, the

Port of Seattle replaced the Christmas (*sic* "Holiday") trees.

However, there was no room for a Menorah. Fie.

War is over

*If you want it**

Do you think George W. Bush or Dick Cheney ever heard a Beatles' song?

Shalom.

**Happy Xmas (War Is Over)/*
John Lennon

(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)

Holiday Travelers Should Slow Down, Buckle Up, Drive Sober

AUSTIN — Holiday travelers should expect to see plenty of Highway Patrol troopers out on Texas roadways. Troopers will be looking for drivers who are speeding, driving while intoxicated or who are not properly restrained, or have passengers who aren't buckled up.

"The upcoming holiday season should be a happy time," said Col. Thomas A. Davis Jr., director of the DPS. "Don't turn the holiday into a tragic time for you or others because of bad driving decisions."

During the recent five-day Thanksgiving period, DPS troopers were kept busy issuing tickets for speeding, no insurance, no seat belts, and child restraint violations. DPS has a no-warnings policy for seat belt and child restraint violations.

Troopers also arrested hundreds for DWI, and issued tickets to minors who were operating a motor vehicle after consuming alcohol.

"If you drink, you should not drive. Be sure to designate a driver who has not been drinking alcoholic beverages," Col. Davis said.

DPS is participating in Operation CARE — Combined Accident Reduction Effort — a nationwide effort by police agencies to reduce fatalities on major interstate highways during holiday weekends.

Since roads are more likely to be crowded, DPS reminds drivers to leave themselves plenty of time to get where they're going, and to plan your route and be aware that construction may delay your travel. Avoid bad driving habits that lead to road rage, such as:

- Not using turn signals.
- Driving in the passing lane.
- Tailgating, flashing lights, or honking.
- Using high beams in traffic.
- Not allowing adequate time for a given trip.

When confronted with aggressive drivers, the DPS recommends that you:

- Put your pride in the back seat and move aside.
- Do not speed up, block lanes, slam or tap on brakes.
- Report extreme cases of reckless driving to the appropriate authorities when the incident occurs.
- Do not retaliate, gesture, or make eye contact.
- Make sure everyone is buckled up.

THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

So, state lawmaker Rep. Edmund Kuempel wants to help hunters who are legally blind by allowing them to use laser sights to target animals.

What's he going to do to help hunters who aren't visually impaired but still can't shoot straight?

Hunters have shot—and sometimes killed—other hunters, people walking their dogs, people tending to disabled cars alongside the road, people sleeping in their beds (yes, inside their homes), and sometimes, themselves. Other hunters injure themselves falling out of tree stands, they get lost in the woods, or they suffer heart attacks because their bodies are not used to anything more demanding than changing channels with the remote.

For the sake of both animals and humans alike, hunters (legally blind or not) should lay down their weapons and stick to less dangerous pursuits, like bingo or shuffleboard.

Sincerely,
Paula Moore, Senior Writer, PETA
Norfolk, VA

To the Editor:

In early November, an editorial calling for Donald Rumsfeld to be replaced as secretary of defense, showed up simultaneously in the *Army Times*, *Navy Times*, *Air Force Times*, and *Marine Corps Times*. Distributed to members of the U.S. armed forces throughout the world, these publications stated that President Bush must “face the hard bruising truth [that] Rumsfeld has lost credibility with the uniformed leadership, with the troops, with Congress, and with the public at large.”

Only days earlier, Mr. Bush stated that he wanted both Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney to remain in their posts for the remaining two years of his administration. As he spoke, more troops were being killed and wounded in a war that has degenerated into a civil conflict between Muslim factions competing for power.

Then, one day after the Republicans suffered what Mr. Bush himself called a “thumping” on Election Day, Rumsfeld’s resignation was announced. To replace him, Mr. Bush turned to Council on Foreign Relations veteran and former CIA Director Robert Gates, a move that does not bode well for the troops caught in a civil war between Islamic factions. Iraq is no place for American forces no matter who is secretary of defense.

Sincerely,
Frank M. Pelteson, Las Vegas, NV

Dear Editor:

This week’s well-publicized immigration raid on the Swift & Co. meatpacking plant in Cactus, in the Texas Panhandle, serves as a troubling reminder that our immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed.

Texas businesses want and need to follow the law. Unfortunately, they lack a sensible and reliable system to verify an employee’s legal status.

Employers are forced to navigate tricky waters each time they make a hire. Texas businesses must deal with complex immigration regulations; a glut of seemingly valid, but sometimes counterfeit, worker identification documents; and the threat of discrimination lawsuits if they ask the ‘wrong’ questions about employees’ documents.

Enforcement alone will not fix our immigration system, and it has failed in the past. We can’t just build walls around a broken system – we need to fix the system to make sure we achieve real security, restore law and order and have enough workers to continue growing our economy.

It is time for a serious solution to this serious challenge. It is time for Congress to act.

Sincerely,
Bill Hammond
President, Texas Association of Business
Austin, Texas

Suzanne Swift Receives 30-Day Confinement

FORT LEWIS, Wash. — A female military police specialist who refused a second deployment to Iraq last year received a 30-day prison confinement and a demotion in rank to private last week.

Army Spc. Suzanne Swift will still be eligible to receive an

honorable discharge when she completes her military service in January 2009.

Swift, 22, was charged with being “absent without leave” and “missing movement,” but she agreed to these terms before a summary court-martial proceeding last Wednesday,

which was originally scheduled for next month.

Swift’s mother, Sara Rich, told Democracy Now’s Amy Goodman: “The alternative [to accepting the guilty plea] was, she’d go to trial, be re-victimized and re-traumatized and stand up to a year in prison.”

The military brought charges against Swift last September but had not issued a court date at the time.

Swift has said that she went AWOL last January rather than endure the possibility of sexual harassment from the superiors in her unit, the 54th Military Police Co.

From February 2004 to February 2005, Swift served in Iraq with the her original unit, the 66th Military Police Co.

Swift said that during this time, her platoon leader sexually harassed her and her squad leader forced her into a sexual relationship, also known as “command rape.” Upon her return to the United States, a third sergeant harassed her with sexual comments, she said.

Police arrested her in her mother’s house in Eugene, Oregon, last June. She is currently serving with a different unit at Fort Lewis, but is reportedly suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of her experiences.

An Army investigation into Swift’s allegations could substantiate one allegation related to the stateside incident but not the other two in Iraq.

In September, Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) pledged to open a congressional investigation into Swift’s allegations. The pledge came only after members of Iraq Veterans Against the War and Veterans for Peace staged a sit-in at the congressman’s Washington, D.C. office demanding action.

INFO
www.SuzanneSwift.org

MCC Spring Registration Now Under Way

WACO — Registration for Spring 2007 classes at McLennan Community College has begun, and continues through Tuesday, Jan. 2. Spring classes begin Monday, Jan. 8.

Registration can be completed over the telephone at (254) 299-TREG (8734) or through WebAdvisor on the college’s website <www.mclennan.edu>. Both systems are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the registration period.

America’s Veterans Need Your Help NOW!

BY MELINDA PILLSBURY-FOSTER
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

Americans who care about our veterans and doing the right thing have a problem. It is a serious problem but together we can solve it. The problem is that when Congress packed it in and left for the holidays they left many things undone. One of those neglected duties was ensuring that continuing veterans services were funded; Congress decamped to decorate their Christmas Trees and attend rounds of holiday celebrations, social and political. Evidently, returning veterans were the farthest things from their minds. Therefore veterans will be coming home to anguish and closed doors when they need essential services.

This is the sort of thing we have come to expect from government. Government is paid billions to oversee veterans services. They have failed over and over again to do the job. Does it matter if a veteran of Iraq can’t get his medication? Treatment? A bed in the hospital? To some of us it does.

But while Congress and government neglects its charge there are those who do care and who can be depended on to give their own money to ensure that America keeps its bond with those who serve.

The first Veteran’s hospital in the United States was not funded by government. In 1918 the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks wrote a check for one million dollars, real money back then, to ensure that veterans returning from the War to End all Wars would be cared for.

Today, locally and nationally, Elks Lodges still routinely help veterans, providing food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities. Elks, Redmen, the Moose, the Masons, and other fraternal orders help those who government forgets. These organizations use their own money just as they did in 1918. Veteran’s organizations help where and when they know there is a need. But they need to know what is happening so they can prepare. Then, working together, we can solve the short term problem created by the sloth of Congress. Long term we need to think about ways to eliminate the problem entirely by returning to local solutions. Perhaps the Elks should have started that hospital themselves. That is for later.

Solving problems is an old and honorable tradition for those who understand what it means to be an American.

Right now what is needed is a way for veterans who have encountered the closed door of bureaucracy to find help. The way for that to happen is for organizations in communities to come together to do what must be done and let those in need know where help can be found. Together, we can make sure that no veteran falls through the cracks. It is Christmas and those who served need us. Let us not fail to do what is right, no matter how government fails all of us. Veteran’s organizations, fraternal orders, and more. Nearly all of them will be willing to help if asked. Through active military and online sites we can also get the word out.

Our veterans need to know they will not be forgotten.

America has always been a do it yourself project. The time has come to start doing it again.

God bless each of us this Christmas Season, especially those who served.

Next time this happens we will have a site up that aids coordination for this kind of emergency. Be looking for Local Liberty, a way for Americans to solve the problems that confront all of us.

If you have questions or need a connection contact me at: <justice42freedom@yahoo.com>.

Erasmus, Not Juan, The Seguin To Remember

Erasmus Seguin took his seat in the Mexican constitutional assembly on Dec. 11, 1823, as the lone deputy from the province of Texas.

Stephen F. Austin could not have made a better friend in 1821 than the patriarch of the Seguin clan. Sent by the governor to welcome Moses Austin back to Texas, Erasmus met instead the young foreigner who hoped to pick up where his dead dad had left off.

The first official to acknowledge Stephen's legal claim to the land granted Moses, Erasmus Seguin went the extra mile by pleading the American's case before skeptical and unsympathetic superiors. He also opened his home to Austin and his brother, who learned Spanish from their patient host during the long stay under his roof.

Two years later at the constitutional assembly, deputy Seguin spoke out for Texas. His expert politicking produced several important compromises essential to the successful settlement of the province, including exemption from the strict new anti-slavery statute.

Erasmus was a dedicated democrat, who never wavered in his opposition to the dictatorial rule of Santa Anna. When government troops occupied San Antonio in October 1835, the callous commander forced the 53-year-old critic to walk the 30 miles home as punishment for his defiance.

Erasmus passed the baton to his oldest son Juan, who did the family proud in the struggle for independence. Organizing an all-Mexican company after the Battle of Gonzales, he fought bravely at Concepcion in the first serious skirmish of the in-

This Week In Texas History

By Barte Haile



surrection and convinced many conscripts to defect. His gallantry under fire at San Jacinto in April 1836 earned a promotion to lieutenant colonel.

As military chief of San Antonio, Juan Seguin, with the invaluable aid of his respected father, calmed the fears of the Mexican inhabitants. Elected to the Republic senate in 1838, he was an eloquent exponent of racial harmony and a bilingual legal system. At the peak of his popularity, the Guadalupe County community of Walnut Springs honored him by changing its name to Seguin.

Soon after Juan was elected mayor of San Antonio in January 1841, a vicious rumor threatened his promising career. Anonymous gossip-mongers accused him of sabotaging the Santa Fe Expedition, a reckless attempt to annex New Mexico, by tipping off the Mexican military. This supposed subterfuge resulted in the capture and cruel incarceration of more than 300 Texans.

Early the next year, the hit-and-run seizure of San Antonio by a Santa Anna strike force destroyed Juan's already tarnished reputation. The officer in charge sealed his fate with a public expression of affection for the alleged amigo.

The embattled mayor tried to ride out the political storm but was finally forced to resign. Instead of retiring to the family ranch, he left Texas in a huff.

When Mexican invaders reoc-

cupied San Antonio five months later, Texans were stunned to see none other than Juan Seguin leading the pack. His staunchest supporters could not explain away the damning fact that the former hero had gone over to the enemy.

Relentless Rangers kept an eye peeled for the turncoat, an officer in Santa Anna's cavalry, throughout the Mexican War. To their regret and his relief, their paths never crossed.

A personal appeal to Sam Houston secured permission for Juan to return to his homeland in 1849. Despite the rock-hard feelings of most Texans, not a hand was raised against the outcast.

Four years after Erasmus' death in 1858, unpredictable Juan was back on the other side of the border. The romantic appeal of another revolt was irresistible, and he answered the call of Benito Juarez.

A decade and a half later, Juan once again chose to be a Texan. Overlooking his checkered past, the tolerant state government okayed a generous pension for the 67-year-old exile.

But even in old age Juan could not stay put. In 1883 he moved to Nuevo Laredo, where his son served as mayor, and applied for an annuity from his adopted country. Ironically the request was rejected by unforgiving bureaucrats, who cited his controversial contribution to Texas independence nearly four decades later.

Juan never ran out of implausible excuses for his erratic behavior. To the bitter end, which came in Mexico at the age of 83, he blamed his mistakes and misfortune on Texas.

During and after the Texas Sesquicentennial, Juan Seguin was completely rehabilitated. At the climax of this public-relations campaign, the intersection of Loop 610 and Highway 225 in Houston was christened the "Juan N. Seguin Memorial Interchange."

The steadfast father that stood by the Anglo-American colonists through thick and thin has been forgotten, but the wishy-washy son who never could decide which side he was on is now the Seguin everyone remembers.

"Outlaws & Lawmen" - "Best of This Week in Texas History" Vol. VI is \$10.95 plus \$3.25 postage and handling from Barte Haile, P.O. Box 152, Friendswood, TX 77549 or buy on-line at www.twith.com.

In Praise Of Wishy-Washiness

Recently, the headline of the Los Angeles Times read, "Bush Refuses To Be Swayed By Findings." At first glance, I wasn't sure what the headline referred to. Were they talking about weapons of mass destruction? Global warming? Evolution? It turned out they were referring to President Bush not embracing the report of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

I wasn't surprised, even though the President asked for this group's opinion and respects many of its members. It's not the first time he has refused "to be swayed by findings." President Bush is definitely not wishy-washy. He's not a "You know, you're right and I was wrong" kind of guy. Some criticize him for this aspect of his personality, but without it, I doubt that he would have been elected president.

In recent years, I've learned that the worst thing people in public life can be is wishy-washy. Apparently in politics, getting caught changing your mind is worse than getting caught stealing money from a charity while committing adultery. With a cousin. On Christmas. In the family room.

In the last Presidential election, John Kerry was blasted for being wishy-washy. Other politicians - and former military experts - initially supported the president and the war on Iraq, but changed their minds after they learned more of the facts. At times, these people have been criticized for being wishy-washy instead of congratulated for being open, and having the courage to admit they were wrong.

Since being wishy-washy is one of my most defining characteristics, I could never go into politics. I'm just not someone who always thinks I definitely know the right answer. And I think most people are like me in this respect. But politicians are a different breed from the rest of us. Their DNA must be different from ours. They're like those people who have that recessive gene that makes them snort when they laugh.

I can't categorically say that if I eat Italian food tonight instead of Chinese, I'll have a better dinner. I can't say that people should never respond with force, and I can't say that they always should. I can't tell you definitely at what age all children should be able to read or all adults should stop wearing shorts in public. But politicians somehow feel certain about all these things.

I think about things way too



Modern Times

By Lloyd Garver

much to be a politician. I question my decisions. "Maybe I made a mistake" is a pretty frequent thought of mine. It's right up there with, "I hope I didn't hurt anybody's feelings." Politicians aren't introspective like that. They make a decision, and move on. I worry about things, and sometimes you can tell I've been worrying just by looking at my face. Politicians aren't supposed to look worried, no matter what. If they accidentally walked into the public restroom of the opposite gender, they'd try to convince everyone else in there that they were in the wrong place.

I apologize far too often to be a politician. If you and I were to accidentally bump carts in the grocery store, I'd probably apologize - even if it were technically your fault. That's not the attitude of a successful politician. He'd keep standing there with his cart, blocking the aisle for "as long as it takes to be successful." I just want to finish shopping and get out of the store. (If that makes me guilty of "cutting and running," so be it.)

I recognize that a person who gets paralyzed with indecision would not make a great leader. But I'm not so sure that we should always be voting for the "decisive" people who refuse to change their minds and who have trouble admitting their mistakes.

Since most of us apologize, change our minds, and worry, shouldn't those who represent us do those same things? Acting human like this isn't considered a bad thing outside of politics. So, why shouldn't we want our political leaders to have the same characteristics that we like in our loved ones, our friends, and in ourselves?

We've tried it the other way for so long. So to paraphrase the Beatles, all I am saying is, give wishy-washiness a chance.

Lloyd Garver has written for many television shows, ranging from "Sesame Street" to "Family Ties" to "Frasier" to "Home Improvement." He has also read many books, some of them in hardcover. He writes the "Modern Times" column for CBSnews.com's Opinion page and a can be reached at lloydgarver@yahoo.com

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Republicans Must Speak Out For Impeachment: Ron Paul For President

By MELINDA PILLSBURY-FOSTER
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

The murmurs began in the halls of Congress even before legislators and their staffs packed up and left, marking the end of this Congress and the beginning of the holiday season. Those offices will be quiet for the moment; politicians considering how they can benefit from coming out on impeachment or confronting their now receding fears have time to caucus their home districts. The murmurs come in many different cadences and tones. They are marked with anger and elation, ambition and calculation.

Democrats are beginning to listen to the tenor of the country, slowly letting themselves realize just how many Americans view this administration, perhaps more than they did themselves, as a criminal enterprise. Impeachment is becoming a word that speaks not of sleaze and cigars but the promise of a new beginning and, perhaps more important to many of them, political positioning that could take a career all the way to the White House.

Real Republicans, those who watched the NeoCon Nazis smash every tenet on which the Republican Party was founded, also have time to think. Those invested in career quests for power will consider first how they are now viewed. Those Republicans who believe in the principles that made them Republicans must confront another issue. Their party was hijacked, its moral capital used to accrue profits for Bush and his corporate sponsors. In so doing, all Americans lost, some, their lives, others our wealth, and all of us a sense of trust. Rhetoric replaced truth as the principles long associated with being a Republican were smashed beyond recognition. Small government, individual rights, Constitutional integrity, low taxes, local control, the principles of the Republican Party that those of us who believed the message of Barry Goldwater, stand in stark contrast to how this administration eviscerated the rights and honor with which it was entrusted.

Torture, deceit, spying on Americans, lies told to profit megacorporations and oil interests; before this Congress decamped, they took time to vote in ten billion in incentives for oil companies; nothing for veterans. There was seemingly no limit to what Bush and company

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would do to line their pockets and live out their fantasies. Sometimes doing the right thing forces us to confront our own souls. It should never have happened. It did. Now America needs justice so that healing can begin. You can bank on the fact that the NeoCons rely on spinning this as a partisan battle. That, Republicans must not allow.

This Republican says that time is now. While the murmurs continue advising that the now hamstrung administration be allowed to sputter into history this Republican says impeach and then indict.

America needs justice like a drowning man needs air. For that justice to be real we need to send a message to anyone who comes after that even for the president there will be absolute accountability. Without that there may be a pause in the growth of power that has taken America into the chilling realm of fascism but it will continue.

Republicans who care about the principles that made them Republicans need to shoot their own dog. That is what real men do. Rumor has it that mixed in with those murmurs in the halls of Congress were the voices of Republican Senators and Congressmen who are considering how the public now views the Republican Party. That this has been a public relations disaster is true; but that is a minor issue. Real men and women do the right thing even when it does not provide better political positioning. In the last two years the Republican Party has lost registrants, respect, credibility, and now teeters on the edge of oblivion. That was just, people were speaking with their hearts and feet. It would be better that the Republican Party cease to exist than that it remain the tool it became. Political parties are the tools we use to move our country towards freedom and justice. They should not be used to steal. Political parties are just tools.

The point of the American Experiment is that people, understanding that their rights come not from government but from God, come together to govern themselves from their own communities.

Republicans must therefore shoot their own dog. It was not a Democrat who delivered the message to Richard Nixon, it

was the man that both sides of the Aisle knew would tell the truth. That man was Barry Goldwater. But what Nixon did was a cigar to what Bush has done. This message must come with the hard truth that resigning is not enough. This time we need real, systemic change so that never again will the simple tools of government be used to anoint would-be dictators.

That process must begin with unified efforts from both sides of the aisle.

This impeachment must not be tainted with politics. It is about the survival of America and the vision of possibility that summoned a nation of free people into being.

Cheney must be impeached and replaced with a man of unquestionable integrity, respected by both Republicans and Democrats. That man is Congressman Ron Paul.

Congressman Paul is a man who had the moral integrity to do the right thing when the days were darkest. Paul has withstood the attempts by NeoCons to unseat him many times by redistricting, through Tom Delay, and by funding his

opposition. But his constituents know he is to be trusted and have returned the family doctor to office over and over again. He refused to be silenced.

Democrats who have followed the machinations of the NeoCons know Ron Paul is a man who stood up against the War in Iraq, against the Patriot Act, and against torture.

The names championed by the Democrats speak partisanship; none of them spoke out in those darkest days. Paul has demonstrated an ability to work with anyone who is working for the rights of Americans. He understands the Constitution and no one deceived him when the cries of necessity went up after 9/11.

The present sentiment for impeachment could tear America apart – or it could bring us together to start again. America's President is both the CEO of the executive branch and a symbol of forward direction. Ron Paul as President sends a message no one will misunderstand. When he is in office, let Paul choose Dennis Kucinich as his Vice-President.



Ron Paul

Dennis Kucinich

Impeach Cheney and then Bush and then let Congress put a man in the Oval Office who said yes to honor and truth when doing so made him so often stand alone. It is alone we enter life and alone we die. Those who stand alone when others are silent through fear have passed through a tempering that burns out doubt. We need an individual who has passed through that fire.

Send a message America, and the world, will really hear.

Melinda Pillsbury-Foster is a prominent activist, author, poet, commentator, and critic of Neoconservative theory and policy. A member of the Republican Part, she is founder and president of the Arthur C. Pillsbury Foundation and hosts a radio talk-show program, The Spiritual Politician, at <BBSRadio.com>.

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