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Bush Employs Fear In National Address

WASHINGTON — President George W. Bush employed a rhetoric of fear during his first State of the Union address to the Democratic-controlled Congress last Tuesday.

The speech was intended to gain support for his unpopular plan to send 21,500 more U.S. troops to Iraq after four years of unresolved conflict ignited by the U.S.-led invasion of the Middle Eastern country.

"If American forces step back before Baghdad is secure, the Iraqi government would be overrun by extremists on all sides," the president said.

President Bush predicted "an epic battle" in which Iran-backed Shi'ite groups fought their al-Qaida-backed Sunni counterparts unless the U.S. military intervened.

"For America, this is a nightmare scenario," Bush said.

While Bush noted that failure in Iraq would be "grievous and far-reaching," his plan has failed to impress Democrats, Republicans, and the rest of the American public because it offers to timetable for U.S. troop withdrawal and no benchmarks to gauge progress in Iraq's security.

"Our country is pursuing a new strategy in Iraq, and I ask you to give it a chance to work," he said, pleading to lawmakers. "And I ask you to support our troops in the field and those on their way."

"This is not the fight we en-

tered in Iraq, but it is the fight we are in," the president added.

Gareth Porter, author of the book "Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam," said the president's plan serves only to fuel the violence already raging in Iraq.

"If Bush were really focused on the problem of worsening sectarian violence in Iraq, he would have learned that continuing to make war against Sunni insurgents while supporting a largely Shiite security structure which is only interested in targeting Sunnis — and not just al-Qaeda — is the worst option he could pursue," he said.

In a joint statement, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said the Democratic Congress would hold Bush accountable for this course change in Iraq.

A day after the speech, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed a nonbinding resolution to dismiss the troop increase to Iraq. This measure is expected reach the Senate floor for a vote this week. Similar bipartisan resolutions have been circulating in Congress as well.

Democratic Rebuttal

In the Democratic rebuttal to the president's speech, Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia pulled no punches, slamming the administration's failed policy on Iraq.

"The president took us into this war recklessly," said Webb, who is one of a handful of congressmen who have children serving in the armed forces in Iraq. "We are now, as a nation, held hostage to the predictable, and predicted, disarray that has followed."

Webb, a Vietnam veteran who served as President Ronald Reagan's navy secretary, called for "an immediate shift toward strong regionally-based diplomacy" that would remove the U.S. ground forces from Iraq entirely.

"The war's costs to our nation have been staggering," said Webb. "Financially. The damage to our reputation around the world. The lost opportunities to defeat the forces of international terrorism, and especially the precious blood of our citizens who have stepped forward to serve."

To date, the U.S.-led war and occupation of Iraq has cost American taxpayers about \$400 billion and the lives of more than 3,000 U.S. troops.

Webb, who is said to have written his own speech over rejecting one provided by the Democratic Party, called the president's positive assessment of the growing national economy nearsighted in favor of corporate interests over and above the lower-and middle-classes.

"When one looks at the health of our economy, it's almost as if

we are living in two different countries. Some say that things have never been better. The stock market is at an all-time high, and so are corporate profits. But these benefits are not being fairly shared," he said.

Drawing from personal experience, Webb continued, "When I graduated from college, the average corporate CEO made 20 times what the average worker did; today, it's nearly 400 times. In other words, it takes the average worker more than a year to make the money that his or her boss makes in one day."

Webb also drew from the history of two Republican presidents in criticizing the current administration.

Webb applauded President Dwight Eisenhower for ending that "bloody stalemate," the Korean War; and President Teddy Roosevelt for fighting the "improper corporate influence" last century.

"America was then, as now, drifting apart along class lines. The so-called robber barons were unapologetically raking in a huge percentage of the national wealth. The dispossessed workers at the bottom were threatening revolt," Webb noted about Roosevelt's era.

The day before the State of the Union speech, a Washington Post-ABC News poll found that the president's approval ratings hit the lowest for any president since Richard Nixon in 1974 at

33 percent.

A CBS poll released the same day put the president's approval at an all-time low of 28 percent.

New Orleans Omission

The president failed to mention the plight of Gulf Coast states yet to receive full relief from the after-effects of the two 2005 hurricanes. In his speech last year, he addressed the ongoing Gulf Coast nightmare in only 163 words.

However, sitting in the First Lady's viewing box during the speech was Craig Cuccia, co-founder of Café Reconcile, a New Orleans nonprofit group that has served meals to first responders and construction crews.

In his personally crafted remarks, Webb at least included New Orleans, La. among his party's priorities.

"Let me simply say that we in the Democratic Party hope that this administration is serious about improving education and health care for all Americans, and addressing such domestic priorities as restoring the vitality of the great city of New Orleans," he said.

Most Louisiana lawmakers in both political parties took issue with the president's silence toward the Gulf Coast. Rep. William Jefferson (D-New Orleans) said that the fact that "Katrina didn't make [the president's] list ... was pretty discouraging."

In all the federal government has allocated over \$100 billion for Gulf Coast recovery. Both executive and legislative branches okayed \$7.5 billion for Louisiana's Road Home housing program last year.

Health Insurance

During the first half of his speech, Bush addressed domestic issues, urging lawmakers to support his plans on health insurance, alternative energy, immigration, and education.

His proposal on providing tax deductions for people with no employer-based health insurance was immediately met with such extreme criticism that

Continued On Page 4

FBI Spies On Americans Via Cell Phones

WASHINGTON — The FBI has found a way to spy on American through their powered-down cell phones.

This technology can only be stopped when the cell phone battery is removed, according to experts.

The surveillance method known as "roving bug" allows the FBI to activate the microphone in a cell phone and use it as a listening device without physically holding them.

James Atkinson, a counterintelligence security consultant, told ABC News last month: "Any recently manufactured cell phone has a built-in tracking device, which can allow eavesdroppers to pinpoint someone's location to within just a few feet."

This use of technology for surveillance purposes was first revealed in a court ruling in a case against the Genovese crime family.

U.S. District Court Judge Lewis Kaplan ruled in the Genovese case that the roving bug raises no new privacy concerns.

"It simply dispenses with the need for repeated installations and surreptitious entries into buildings," Judge Kaplan wrote. "It does not invade zones of privacy that the government could not reach by more conventional means."

Richard Rehbock, attorney

for one of the Genovese defendants, told ABC News that the judge's ruling was farther from the truth — a truth which has become more akin to life inside the society under surveillance described in George Orwell's novel "1984."

"Big Brother is upon us...1984 happened a long time ago," he said.

The FBI refuses to discuss its spy techniques and maintains that such applications are performed under a court order.



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Road Warriors

Australian Group Buys Texas Newspaper Chain

— Aussie Firm Has Ties To Toll Road Operator —

SYDNEY, Australia — An Australian media group with corporate ties to a toll road consortium is in line to purchase a string of 40 newspapers in Texas and Oklahoma.

Macquarie Media Group Ltd. agreed last week to take over the American Consolidated Media in a \$80 million deal.

The final financial settlement, which is still subject to regulatory approval, is expected in early February.

But the deal smells fishy to anti-toll road advocates in Texas.

“Editorial independence is being bought out,” said Sal Costello, founder of the Texas Toll Party, on his blog.

“The purchase comes after the ACM’s rural independent newspapers have clearly been the most vocal opposition to the Trans-Texas Corridor (TTC),” he added. “The deal could help to clear a political path for potential Texas contracts worth billions.”

Macquarie Media Group is a subsidiary of Macquarie Bank, which is itself the parent of Macquarie Infrastructure, one of the largest toll road operators in the world.

Macquarie Infrastructure last year partnered with the Spanish-consortium Cintra Concesiones de Infraestructuras de Transporte S.A. to manage the Indiana Toll Road under a \$3.85 billion lease from the state of Indiana for the next 75 years. The deal was said to be the largest public-private partnership agreement in the world.

Macquarie and Cintra through the Skyway Concession Company (SCC) also manage the Chicago Skyway Toll Bridge System on behalf of the City of Chicago under a 99-year operating lease. The SCC lease agreement sent \$1.83 billion to the City of Chicago.

“The Chicago Skyway and Indiana Toll Road transactions signal a new day for highway transportation in the U.S.,” said D.J. Gribbin, a division director for Macquarie and former chief counsel for the Federal Highway Administration.

“Billions of dollars are waiting to invest in our roads and bridges. The only question is — are we willing to adapt to this

new world,” added the advocate for public-private partnerships.

This new media transaction, however, is Macquarie’s first print media purchase and first move into the U.S. media market.

MMG Managing Director Alex Harvey said that the purchase of American Consolidated Media (ACM) met “key investment criteria.”

“It provides essential local news and information to the communities in which it operates, some of which are among the fastest growing regions of the U.S., has strong positions and long established histories in those communities and generates stable cash flows from a large diverse base of local advertisers,” he said in a press release.

American Consolidated Media publishes 40 newspapers scattered across nine regional communities, eight in Texas and one in Oklahoma.

Sixteen of these publications locked in the transaction are “shopper” and specialty publications, 19 are weekly newspapers, and five are dailies. ACM’s average weekly distribution of 555,000 paid and free publications reaches a readership of 1.7 million people.

Among the publications ACM operates are the HEARNE DEMOCRAT, CALVERT TRIBUNE, ALVARADO POST, BONHAM JOURNAL, ELLIS COUNTY CHRONICLE, ENNIS JOURNAL, STEPHENVILLE EMPIRE TRIBUNE, WAXAHACHIE DAILY LIGHT, MIDLOTHIAN MIRROR, and the FRANKLIN ADVOCATE.

Many of these publications are located along the proposed I-35 route for the Trans-Texas Corridor, a large network of toll roads, gas and water lines, and telecommunication wire planned to run from the U.S./Mexico border to the Texas/Oklahoma border. Financing for the construction of the corridor has yet to be identified.

But if there were any concerns about “editorial independence” in the ACM/ Macquarie deal, none were raised by ACM founder and Chief Executive Officer Jeremy L. Halbreich.

“The entire ACM management team eagerly looks forward to our new affiliation with MMG as we execute continued growth and expansion of our local community newspaper plat-

form,” Halbreich said in a press release from Macquarie.

“ACM and MMG share the same mission and operating philosophies, and we believe the MMG strategy for media business represents the best and most attractive model for shareholder investors, employees, customers and prospective acquisition targets alike,” he added.

Halbreich will continue to head the newspaper chain he founded in 1998. He has over 30 years’ experience managing newspaper businesses, including a 12-year stint as president and general manager of THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS.

Macquarie is setting its sights on acquiring more of the 7,800 community newspapers currently operating in the United States, said Harvey.

“We have identified community newspapers as an asset class which meets our investment criteria, generating stable cash flows from predominantly local advertisers, with low dependence on circulation and classified advertising, limited capex requirements and potential for earnings improvement through organic growth and consolidation,” Harvey said.

Harvey refused to elaborate as to what newspapers MMG had identified for possible purchase, though the spokesperson noted that Australia’s declining newspaper market led to the purchase of the U.S. media chain.

“We’re talking about a community newspaper business, so it’s kind of hyper-local, with a highly targeted audience and very local news,” he said, referring to American operations. “So there’s little competition from other media.”

Macquarie Media will buy ACM from its shareholder groups which include Halyard Capital, Arena Capital Partners, and New York- and Boston-based private equity funds.

In July 2004, Halyard invested in ACM to acquire Valley Media, a publisher of shopper and community newspaper publications with Hispanic audiences in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, one of the fastest growing regions in the nation.

Halyard’s other media investments have included



ImpreMedia and Herald Media.

Dirks, Van Essen & Murray acted as the Halyard’s financial advisor and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP as well as Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP served as legal advisors to the company.

The purchase price and associated transaction costs will be funded by MMG with the proceeds of the refinance of Macquarie Regional Radioworks and the issue of MMG securities to a number of ACM’s existing investors.

Court Says Massive Power Plant Fish Kill In New York Illegal

EPA Faulted For Placing Power Plant Profits Over Public Trust

NEW YORK — A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit ruled yesterday that EPA cannot allow power plants to kill a trillion fish per year through their cooling water intakes. Cooling water intakes gulp in billions of gallons of river, lake and coastal water to cool power plant machinery. Along with the water, these intakes devour countless fish and fish larvae, devastating fish populations across the country.

In a major victory for environmentalists, fishermen, and the public, the court found that regulations issued by EPA in 2004 improperly rejected “closed cycle cooling,” a technology that cools plant machinery while nearly eliminating the need for large infusions of fresh water. This technology also greatly reduces the massive fish kills associated with power plant operations. The court also found that EPA violated the law by placing the profits of power companies above the protection of America’s fisheries, defying the direct mandate of Congress in 1972 to EPA to stop these unnecessary impacts.

“This historic decision validates what the environmental community has been saying for decades,” said Alex Matthiessen, Hudson

Riverkeeper and President of Riverkeeper, Inc. “The Clean Water Act requires use of the best technology available. By ignoring that requirement EPA has thwarted the will of Congress and repeatedly failed to protect fish and wildlife from needless devastation at the hands of power plants.”

“Once again the courts have prevented EPA from rewriting the Clean Water Act at the behest of industry,” said Reed Super, Senior Clinical Staff Attorney at Columbia Law School’s Environmental Law Clinic and lead attorney for the Environmental Petitioners.

Steve Fleischli, Executive Director of Waterkeeper Alliance explained, “Waterkeeper Alliance filed this lawsuit because EPA has ignored the Clean Water Act by allowing power plants to kill billions of fish each day. The solutions to this problem have been available, affordable and in common use for decades. With this victory, this indiscriminate and illegal slaughter will now stop.”

The case is *Riverkeeper, Inc., et al. v. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*, No. 04-6692-ag(L) (2nd Cir. Jan. 25, 2007).

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Democrats refuse to conduct hearings on the proposal.

Healthcare experts say that a possible effect of the plan would be that employers would drop all of their workers from their company's plan in order to cut costs.

Don McCanne, M.D. — a senior health policy fellow with the group Physicians for a National Health Program — said that such an effort should not be allowed unless “we can replace private plans with national health insurance.”

“Bush’s plan is part of his agenda to shift more of the responsibility of paying for care to individuals with health care needs. A few higher-income people with no insurance might benefit; many average-income people, especially those with union-negotiated coverage, will be hurt,” he said.

Under Bush’s proposal, families could receive a standard tax deduction for health insurance of \$15,000. Single Americans could deduct \$7,500. These deductions would be allowed either through personal or group health insurance plans through employers.

Up to five million people might benefit from the president’s proposal, though 46 million Americans are currently without health insurance.

Clean Energy

During his State of the Union speech last year, Bush referred to America’s addiction to foreign oil. This year, he finally referred to climate change (aka global warming) as a “serious challenge.”

But while the president proposed to reduce domestic gasoline consumption by 20 percent over 10 years, he refused to support mandatory reductions of greenhouse gas emissions in his speech.

Steve Kretzmann, executive director of Oil Change International, said the irony in the administration’s energy and foreign policies is “hard to miss,” since Bush is sending more troops to Iraq against the wishes of the majority of Americans who support peace there and more domestic clean energy sources.

“You don’t stop climate change by waging more war for oil,” he said. “When the environment is on the line, we hear a lot of talk about market forces and voluntary action. What about letting market forces (the last election, polls) determine our course in Iraq? And how about a clean energy surge to end oil addiction and stop global warming?”

Immigration

Bush lacked details on his plan for immigration reform but

continued to tout ideas for a temporary guest-worker program and more security along the U.S./Mexico border.

Roberto Rodriguez, who writes the syndicated Column of the Americas with Patricia Gonzales, said that Bush’s stance on immigration is actually quite inhumane, though it seems moderate compared with those who advocate building a 2,000 mile wall.

“[Bush] is opposed to amnesty and ultimately his policy is a form of indentured servitude for Mexican workers in the U.S.,” said Rodriguez. “There is a reasonable alternative, but it is rarely raised: the way in which the European Union members deal with each other.”

In an interview with Rueters, the president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) said Bush is selling the same goods put forth last year when the Republican-controlled Congress attempted to reach a consensus on U.S. immigration policy.

“I am disappointed ... I really didn’t hear anything new from the president,” said LULAC President Rosa Rosales. “We want to see more than just a guest-worker program, and it didn’t go into any detail about the situation of immigrants already living here.”

There are roughly 12 million illegal immigrants living and working in the United States.

Education

Bush in his speech asked Congress to return to a spirit of bipartisanship to reauthorize his comprehensive education bill, No Child Left Behind.

This federal law passed with the help of key Democrats six years ago. Under the law, public schools must test students progress by grade level, gender, and race.

Should the students fail to improve, their schools could lose public funding, close their doors, and be privatized.

The law has faced extremely harsh criticism from education professionals who argue that it was not only under-funded but also unfairly punishes school districts that miss the mark.

Henry Giroux, author of the book *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear*, described Bush’s educational policy as “Leaving most children behind.”

“Rather than focus on real education reform that would point to smaller classrooms, increasing Head Start, coupling matters of excellence with equity, building the infrastructure of our nation’s schools, providing incentives for college graduates to join the ranks of

teachers, especially in poor areas, the Bush program is really about testing, memorization, enforcing discriminatory zero tolerance policies and in the end, destroying public education as a democratic public sphere,” he said.

Giroux, the chair at McMaster University in Ontario, added, “Bush’s policies are at odds with any viable notion of critical learning, teacher autonomy, and professionalization. All in all, his program is geared to both bleeding public schools of resources, turning them into dreary drill and test centers, and eventually turning them over to privatizing and corporate interests.”

Special Guests

Acknowledging history, President Bush began his seventh talk with Congress by remarking that he was the first chief executive to “begin the State of the Union with the words Madam Speaker.”

In response, the first female House speaker, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, shook the president’s hand and smiled as the Congress erupted with applause. Pelosi then returned to her seat next to Vice President Dick Cheney on the dais behind the president.

In the First Lady’s section sat the founder of a children’s video series, the New Yorker who saved a man from a subway train, an Army sergeant who save his comrades, and a professional basketball player who built a hospital in his home-African nation.

Actor Michael J. Fox was also in attendance as a guest of Rep. Jim Langevin (D-R.I.). Both men have health problems that scientists believe could be solved through embryonic stem cell research. Fox has Parkinson’s disease, and Langevin is a quadriplegic.

U.S. Attack On Iran Would Lead To War: Analyst

WASHINGTON — A former U.S. intelligence analyst said last week that the planned U.S. military action against Iran would amount to an all-out war.

Wayne White told the Middle East Policy Council that the Pentagon’s plans more than a “surgical strike” on Iran’s nuclear program.

The U.S. offensive would likely destabilize the Middle East indefinitely, said White, a top Middle East analyst for the State Department’s bureau of intelligence and research until March 2005.

The kind of attacks Washington has in mind include destroying the Iranian Air Force, Kilo submarines, anti-ship missiles, and perhaps Iran’s ballistic missiles, he explained.

White added that the aftermath of strikes against Iran’s nuclear program concerns him more than Iraq’s civil war. The former would force Iran’s hand at violent revenge, while the latter is more likely to not spread outside Iraq’s borders.

Kenneth Katzman, a Middle East expert with the Library of Congress’ Congressional Research Service, said that Iran poses a very limited threat to the United States since its only bargaining chip is oil which is exported above and beyond any other commodity.

In fact, Katzman explained, the Islamic republic’s oil production is slowing and its military is weak.

Katzman suggested that it is in Washington’s best interests to call Tehran’s bluff some day, though he added the time would be proper when both countries’ needs could be met.

President George W. Bush’s position on Iran’s nuclear program has remained two-fold.

One the one hand, he says he want to use diplomacy to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons which experts say won’t be online for another decade.

On the other hand, Bush has expressed willingness to apply military pressure on Iran. Two U.S. aircraft carrier groups are currently deployed in the Persian Gulf.

Israel has also announced it would consider pre-emptive military action against Iran. Such an attack would be not unlike its air strike on an atomic reactor in Iraq in 1981.

Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, told participants of the World Economic Forum Thursday that any attack on Iran would undoubtedly backfire and lead to great catastrophe.

“This strengthens the hands of those in Iran who say ‘let’s develop a bomb to protect ourselves,’” said ElBaradei, the head of the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog group.

“We have to invest in peace,” he added. “I hope we will stop speaking about a military option and focus on finding a solution.”

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Plan For Iran Six Years Long, Says Investigation

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Although possible military action against Iran has just recently become a hot topic, Raw Story journalists Larisa Alexandrovna and Muriel Kane, in a report released Jan. 23, say that “the escalation of U.S. military planning on Iran is only the latest chess move in a six-year push within the Bush Administration to attack Iran.”

“While Iran was named a part of President George W. Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ in 2002, efforts to ignite a confrontation with Iran date back long before the post-9/11 war on terror,” says Raw Story. “Presently, the Administration is trumpeting claims that Iran is closer to a nuclear weapon than the CIA’s own analysis shows and positioning Iranian influence in Iraq’s

insurgency, but efforts to destabilize Iran have been conducted covertly for years, often using members of Congress or non-government actors in a way reminiscent of the 1980s Iran-Contra scandal.

“The motivations for an Iran strike were laid out as far back as 1992. In classified defense planning guidance written for then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney by then-Pentagon staffers I. Lewis ‘Scooter’ Libby, World Bank Chief Paul Wolfowitz, and ambassador-nominee to the United Nations Zalmay Khalilzad Cheney’s aides called for the United States to assume the position of lone superpower and act preemptively to prevent the emergence of even regional competitors,” reports Raw

Story.

“The draft document was leaked to the NEW YORK TIMES and the WASHINGTON POST and caused an uproar among Democrats and many in George H. W. Bush’s Administration.”

According to Raw Story, “This approach became official U.S. military policy during the current Bush Administration. It was starkly on display yesterday when Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns noted a second aircraft carrier strike force headed for the Persian Gulf, saying, ‘The Middle East isn’t a region to be dominated by Iran. The Gulf isn’t a body of water to be controlled by Iran. That’s why we’ve seen the United States station two carrier battle groups in the region.’”

Easy To Find Backbone At Some Places In D.C.

SEATTLE, Wash. — While Washington D.C.’s January weather isn’t typically the kind that would encourage out-of-town visitors to head to the country’s capitol, thousands of Americans marched on D.C. this weekend with this message: “Stop the war.”

As a message to Congress to grow some backbone, a giant puppet depicting backbone carried these words: “Fund Operation Homecoming” on one side and “Indict-Impeach-Imprison” on the other in giant letters.

“Our sincere hope is that the new Congress has enough spine to stand up for the American people’s mandate to get out of Iraq and stay out of Iran,” said Amy Morrison, managing director of the non-profit Backbone Campaign. “We want them to find the backbone for an ‘Operation Homecoming’ to end the occupation of Iraq and investigate and hold accountable those who squandered so much life, national treasure, and moral credibility getting us there Just

in case they need a reminder of what a backbone looks like, we’re bringing ours.”

Based in Seattle, the politically progressive but non-partisan organization brought the 70-foot-long, parade float-style backbone carried by 10 of the organization’s members – with the intent of driving home to Congress the need to stop the war before more dollars are spent and more lives – American and Iraqi – are lost.

Leading the organization’s march will be the Bush & Co. Chain Gang, the oversized, prison stripe-wearing “human puppets” made famous the world over by photojournalists who’ve captured the caricatures of George Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney and Karl Rove as symbols of the dissatisfaction that’s grown within the American public for the current administration’s unwillingness to end the war in Iraq, and the manipulations used to justify it.

The Privatization Of Iraq

Iraq Negotiating With Chevron, Exxon Mobil To Build \$3 Billion Petrochemical Facility

HOUSTON — With hopes of having a memorandum of understanding in place this summer, Iraq has been negotiating with two major U.S. oil companies, Chevron Corp. and Exxon Mobil Corp. to construct a \$3 billion petrochemical facility and with other companies to provide industrial projects.

Fowzi Hariri, Iraq’s minister for indus-

try and minerals, said that plans include multi-million-dollar contracts for rehabilitating existing facilities. Among companies listed in the talks were ABB Lummus, Dow Chemical Corp., KBR Inc., General Electric Corp., and Bechtel Corp.

He indicated that the country is considering the privatization of all state-owned industry.

Rove, Bartlett May Be Forced To Testify In Libby Case

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Two top White House officials — deputy chief of staff Karl Rove and counselor Dan Bartlett — may be called to testify in the perjury and obstruction trial of Lewis (Scooter) Libby, who is charged with laying about when and from whom he learned about the leaking of the identity of CIA operative Valerie Plame in 2003.

Plame, the wife of former U.S. ambassador Joe Wilson, who had criticized the White House’s rationale for going to war.

Wilson had been sent to Niger to determine whether Iraq was attempting to purchase uranium from Africa and had reported that there was nothing to the story. However, in his 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush used the claim. Shortly after Wilson said that the Bush Administration had manipulated intelligence about Iraq, writer Robert Novak reported that Plame worked for the CIA, which ruined her cover.

Hagel Says White House Originally Wanted 2002 Iraq War Resolution To Cover Entire Middle East

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Progress Report Newsletter has revealed that Sen. Chuck Hagel, in an interview with GQ Magazine, has commented that the Bush Administration attempted to persuade Congress to approve military action “anywhere in the Middle East,” not just Iraq, in the fall of 2002.

Currently in question is the reach of Congress’s initial approval for the President to go to war, since Bush has made overtures to launch military action in Iran.

According to Hagel, the origi-

nal query, asking for “no boundaries, no restrictions” was rewritten by himself, Sen. Joe Biden, and Sen. Dick Lugar, to strip that language.

This, he indicated, was soon after the tragedies of Sept. 11

and the country was off balance. What the public was hearing, he said, were things like Saddam Hussein having weapons of mass destruction and that the recently executed dictator was capable of weaponizing.

Perry To Deliver ‘State Of The State’ Address Feb. 6

AUSTIN — Gov. Rick Perry will deliver his State of the State address before a joint session of the 80th Texas Legislature on Tuesday, Feb. 6, at 10:30 a.m., in the House Chamber of the State Capitol.

McCain Campaign Recruits Bush's Media Minds

WASHINGTON — The very advertising team that helped unravel Sen. John McCain's presidential campaign in 2000 is now working for the Arizona Republican's next run for the White House.

Sen. McCain's 2008 exploratory campaign announced the move last week.

Hired were Russ Schriefer, Stuart Stevens, and Fred Davis.

Schriefer and Stevens are responsible for television advertisements painting Sen. John Kerry as a "flip-flopping," elitist windsurfer during the 2004 presidential campaign.

The two men also worked for then-Gov. George W. Bush on his 2000 presidential campaign.

During the 2000 Republican primary, Sen. McCain's political advertisements compared the honesty of Gov. Bush to Democratic President Bill Clinton who lied to the nation about his affair with an intern.

However, McCain was a victim of a whisper campaign aimed at conservative Republican voters in the Deep South.

The rumor inferred that McCain had an illegitimate interracial daughter with a black woman. In reality, one of the senator's daughters was

adopted from Bangladesh.

Based in Hollywood, Calif., Davis worked on the 2006 electoral campaigns of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bob

Corker in Tennessee.

The Corker campaign attracted controversy last November when the Republican Party ran a television attack ad depict-

ing a blond white woman asking Ford, who is black and unmarried, to call her.

The last words in the "Call me!" ad were "He's just not right," which political analysts say sent a subtle racist message since the words "right" and "white" sound so similar.

Former Republican Sen. William Cohen concurred with these analysts, calling the ad "a very serious appeal to a racist sentiment."

Corker pulled the ad against the wishes of the GOP, but ended up winning the Senate seat anyway.

The McCain campaign has already hired Bush's chief media strategist in 2004, Mark McKinnon, as well as Stevens, Reed, Curcio & Potholm — the firm known for producing the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth advertisements against Sen. Kerry in 2004.

McKinnon is said to have taken a senior advisory role; Schriefer, the chief strategist role; and Davis, the chief creative consultant.

Wal-Mart To Include Birth Control In Insurance Plan

WASHINGTON — The world's largest retail chain recently decided to include birth control in its basic health insurance coverage plan for the first time.

Pro-choice advocates have praised Wal-Mart's step as a way forward for women's health and reproductive freedom.

Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, call the Wal-Mart's decision "a victory for thousands of American women."

"As the nation's largest employer, Wal-Mart's announcement should send a strong message that ensuring women's access to birth control is a commonsense policy that Americans support," said Keenan.

Keenan added, though, that women across the country are still struggling to gain access to contraception.

Twenty-four states refuse to require insurance companies to cover birth control. Earlier this year, Wal-Mart caved in to public pressure and agreed to stock Plan B® in each of its 3,400 stores.

The pressure was ignited by a lawsuit urging the retailer to carry the emergency contraception.

Wal-Mart still allows its pharmacists the opportunity to deny women such prescriptions based on their personal beliefs.

Birth control is a legally prescribed medication.

Tax Breaks Provision Interrupt Minimum Wage Hike

— Business Leaders: Low Minimum Wage Hurts Economy —

WASHINGTON — The Democratic promise to increase the federal minimum wage was interrupted last Wednesday.

Senate Republicans introduced a provision to the bill granting tax breaks to business owners.

The Senate bill, therefore, was unable to garner the six votes needed to proceed with a vote.

The House passed the wage measure by an overwhelming 315-116 vote two weeks prior.

This legislation would have raised the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 over the next two years.

The last time the minimum wage was increased was during the Clinton administration 10 years ago.

The Senate is now expected to review amendments to a second minimum wage bill, which would increase funding for Women's Business Centers coast to coast.

A vote on this bill will probably take place this week.

Businesses Back Fair Wage Floor

Prior to Wednesday's Senate vote, business owners, executives, and venture capitalists across the nation backed the increase to federal wage floor, saying the low minimum wage

hurts the economy, especially small businesses.

Lew Prince, co-owner of Vintage Vinyl in St. Louis, Mo., told reporters at a Senate news conference that raising the minimum wage not only increases consumer purchasing power but it also helps retain workers who are productive, experienced, and happy.

"Small business owners know that keeping workers is easier and cheaper than finding and training new ones," Prince said. "Our long-term employees are way more likely to establish ongoing relationships with customers."

Including Prince, venture capitalists, farmers, and restaurant owners — hundreds of people from a range of businesses and organizations signed a statement backing the minimum wage hike.

The Business Owners and Executives for a Higher Minimum Wage was distributed across Capitol Hill prior to last Wednesday's Senate vote.

"States that have raised their minimum wages above the inadequate \$5.15 federal level have had better employment and small business trends than the other states," said the statement. "Minimum wage workers

have less buying power than minimum wage workers had half a century ago. We cannot build a strong 21st century economy on a 1950s' wage floor."

Annan Durrani, president of Condor Ventures in Stamford, Conn. and venture partner in Blue Chip Venture Capital, said Congress should know the facts on the benefits of increasing the minimum wage.

"I have found that without exception in the successful ventures we've backed, providing sustainable living wages yielded direct increases in productivity, job satisfaction and brand loyalty from customers, all contributing to higher returns for investors and employers," he said.

The Business Owners and

INFO www.businessforafairminimumwage.org

Executives for a Higher Minimum Wage statement is a project of Business for Shared Prosperity in partnership with the Let Justice Roll campaign to raise the minimum wage (www.letjusticeroll.org).

To add your business in support of this endeavor, visit the website for Business for a Fair Minimum Wage.

Election Workers Convicted Of Rigging Recount Of 2004 Presidential Election

CLEVELAND — Two election workers were convicted last week of rigging a recount of the 2004 presidential election.

Jacqueline Maiden, elections coordinator of the Cuyahoga County Elections Board, and ballot manager Kathleen Dreamer each were convicted of a felony count of negligent misconduct of an elections employee. T

The two women were also convicted of one misdemeanor count each of failure of elections employees to perform their duty.

Prosecutors had accused Maiden and

Dreamer of secretly reviewing preselected ballots before a public recount on Dec. 16, 2004, as they worked behind closed doors for three days to pick ballots they knew would not cause discrepancies when checked by hand.

A swing state, Ohio gave President Bush the electoral votes he needed to defeat Democratic Sen. John Kerry in the close election.

The two convicted election workers face a possible sentence of six to 18 months for the felony conviction.

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THE LONE STAR ICONOCLAST

CODEPINK Urges Americans To Shut Down Guantanamo Prison

GUANTANAMO, Cuba — A contingency of 14 individuals concerned about the inhumanity that they say defines the Guantanamo Bay detention center, traveled to Guantanamo, Cuba earlier this month to demand the closing of the U.S. detention camp that began operations five years ago.

Their mission was accompanied by demonstrations throughout the world on that anniversary date calling for the camp's closure.

Among those making the trek to Cuba was Jodie Evans, a co-founder of CODEPINK, who told *THE ICONOCLAST*, "It was horribly sad to be there with a mother whose son is still there and she hasn't spoken to him in over 4½ years, and come from a country that would do that. It was a sickening experience."

Anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan, whose son died in Iraq in 2004, accompanied the contingency that was stopped by Cuban officials outside the Cuban military territory from entering as the demonstrators attempted to reach the main gate of the U.S. base.

The group fastened bouquets of yellow and pink wildflowers to the barbed-wire fence and carried a banner that said, "Women say NO to torture."

The mother of British detainee Omar Deghaves, was among those protesting. Zohra Zewawi traveled from the United Arab Emirates with another son, Taher Deghayes, saying that her imprisoned son had been tortured and blinded in one eye since his imprisonment in 2002 and is yet to be charged.

Evans said that one member of the contingency, Asif Iqbal, 25, a British Muslim, had spent 2½ years in the prison before finally gaining release. "It was good to see the humanity of this young man who did not harbor any ill feelings," Evans said. "He was butchered."

Evans noted that detainee Deghaves, one of the prisoners still being held, "is blind in one eye from being pepper-sprayed."

The U.S. military continues to hold about 395 men on suspicion of links to al-Qaeda or the Taliban, which includes about 85 who have been cleared to be released or transferred to other countries.

Evans said that the indefinite incarcerations are an affront to democratic values.



The activists who marched to the security fence in eastern Cuba chanted, "Guantanamo prison, place of shame, no more torture in our name."

"If dogs were treated like this in my country, there would be an uprising," Sheehan said.

Since its opening, 770 detainees have been held at Guantanamo, with 10 of these

having been charged with crimes.

The prison facility, which is fully endorsed by the Bush Administration, has been internationally criticized for its use of torture and holding individuals without a timetable for trial and without charges levied against them.

Evans told *THE ICONOCLAST* that the Cuban government

does not approve of the prison and that the people that live in Guantanamo "have become ashamed of where they live. They used to be proud of where they live, but now they are ashamed of how their city is regarded."

The contingency included several members of CODEPINK, Women for Peace, and Global Exchange, who are

taking their cause to Washington, London, and other key points to raise public awareness of what they perceive as a stain on democracy.

The protest also included the screening of the award-winning docudrama *Road to Guantanamo*, featuring post-show dialogue from the film's co-producer Mat Whitecross and former prisoner Asif Iqbal.

Central America Topic Of Lecture Series

STEPHENVILLE — Fain Lecture Hall of the Science Building at Tarleton State University will be the site of a lecture series, "Central America: A Nation Divided," beginning Jan. 30, at 7 p.m., with remaining lectures scheduled for Feb. 27, March 20, and April 17.

The free series will be conducted by Ralph Lee Woodward who recently received the Joe and Teresa Long Endowed Chair in Social Sciences.

The lecture series focuses on Central American history with an emphasis on its relation to the larger world, especially the

United States.

Woodward received his Ph.D. from Tulane University and has since established himself as an expert in Central and South American history. His teaching career has spanned more than 40 years, including time spent at the University of North Carolina

at Chapel Hill and Tulane, where he is a Professor Emeritus.

His long list of works published include 20 books that he authored, edited or compiled; and more than 100 articles, encyclopedia articles and book chapters.

Gov. Perry Emphasizes Need For Additional Border Security

McALLEN — Gov. Rick Perry recently encouraged the Texas Legislature to support a \$100 million border security package to be proposed this session. Gov. Perry made this announcement at a press conference about the recent launch of Operation Wrangler, a statewide expansion of highly successful border security surge operations.

"We have launched a statewide operation this week, Operation Wrangler, to send a message to drug traffickers, human smugglers and criminal operatives that their efforts to exploit our international border will come at a great cost," Perry said. "In order to continuously fund surge operations like this one in the future, I am asking the legislature to join

me in supporting a \$100 million investment in border security."

Operation Wrangler is a coordinated interagency law enforcement surge effort intended to prevent and disrupt all crime, including illegal international drug and human trafficking. It is the second phase of Operation Rio Grande, launched February 2006, which reduced all crime by an average of 60 percent in sheriff-patrolled areas of border counties during five surge operations last year.

"There can be no safe haven for drug traffickers and human smugglers anywhere in Texas," Perry said. "If legislators pass my \$100 million border security package, we can take back our streets, neighborhoods, and private

ranches from the criminal scourge that currently jeopardizes them."

Operation Wrangler will involve federal, state, and local ground, air, and water-borne assets, including more than 6,800 personnel, 2,200 vehicles, 48 helicopters, 33 fixed wing aircraft and 35 patrol ships. Up to 90 sheriffs' offices and 133 police departments are participating, as well as 604 Texas Army National Guard (TANG) troops activated by Perry. These TANG troops comprise 12 armed security platoons that will deploy to various traffic crossovers along the Rio Grande River and will be accompanied by a Border Patrol agent and a local police officer.

Local, state and federal agen-

cies involved in Operation Wrangler include the Texas Department of Public Safety; the Texas Department of Transportation; the National Park Service; the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the Texas Civil Air Patrol; the Texas Cattleman's Association; Texas Military Forces; Texas Task Force 1; the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency; the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the Railroad Police; the U.S. Transportation Security Agency; the U.S. Postal Service; the U.S. Coast Guard; and the University of Texas Center for Space Research.

Hugo Chavez and The Devil's Recipe

BY ALDO VIDALI
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

A different language is a different vision of life. Federico Fellini

To understand the connection between Hugo Chavez, the most progressive living head of state and Federico Fellini, the greatest film director who left this lunatic planet at the end of the 20th Century, we must be aware that the world's mass media — controlled by a self-serving, cunning, and therefore unintelligent elite — has managed to cover up the scheme for hegemony, oppression, and pillage of humanity. Fellini and Chavez have pierced the veil and trumped the evil ones: Fellini using cinema-magic; and Chavez using showmanship woven with temerity, vision, and concern for humanity.

Federico Fellini saw right through the false front of elite owned media. He nullified idiotic opinions and criticism as "empty noise" by showing his love for humanity through his amazing films. Audiences knew Fellini was sincere, modest, and exuberant with imagination. The similarity between Fellini and Hugo Chavez is not only in terms of courage, imagination, and historical perception, but also in their accurate understanding of human suffering in their time. Fellini changed the culture with the power of his art, demolishing fascist images by exposing the mindless greed and arrogance of the rich. Similarly, although in a different milieu, Hugo does not compromise with injustice. With penetrating eloquence, he speaks truth to the world.

Fellini's Dantesque voyage in the other world, where he conceived the most famous, never produced film script, left hopeful answers to the troubling questions of our time. I had the privilege of sharing the early stages of that strange voyage. In his last film, "The Voice of the Moon," Fellini shows humanity's lunacy and again points a way to redemption and sanity.

The remarkable President of Venezuela lays bare the lies of imperialism and warns the world against the consolidation of a diabolical global dictator-

GUEST COMMENTARY



Aldo Vidali

ship. Chavez' power, like Fellini's, flows from his love of the people, which was proven to be mutual when, in 2002, millions of Venezuelans rushed to his defense from a deadly U.S.-sponsored coup.

H u g o ' s Fellinesque talent was artfully demonstrated in the manner in which he spoke before the UN General Assembly on January 20, 2007. From that pulpit, he appropriately called the President of the U.S. "the Devil" and dramatized the danger of America's imper-

alist aggression. His comments on Bush's speech before that body, i.e., "as if he were the owner of the world" included a suggestion for an eloquent title to the U.S.'s Alfred Hitchcock-style horror agenda for world domination: "The Devil's Recipe." The ovation that followed from the representatives of most nations will be remembered with the same delight one feels when revisiting Fellini's great scenes in *La Dolce Vita* or *The Clowns*.

I downloaded the speech from the UN archive to show friends who might have missed Hugo's great performance. **Just as Fellini is to cinema what Shakespeare is to the theater; so Chavez is to neo-colonialist U.S. oppressors what Simon Bolivar was to imperialist Spain.** To understand Chavez's dream, one must know more about Bolivar.

In the early 1800's, Simon Bolivar, the George Washington of South America, cut the chains of the brutal Spanish imperial domination and opened independence to Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Bolivia. Like Bolivar, El Liberador, Hugo Chavez is dedicated to liberating Latin America from its new oppressor. He recognizes that neo-colonialism, under cover of "free trade," is devouring the world for the profit of a greedy few who hide behind corporate veils and operate by secret agreements. Indeed, if every country consumed what America consumes, it would take seven planets like our Earth to meet

this level of consumption. Chavez's new compact of non-aligned nations, free from the strings of the World Bank and the WTO, seeks to create a different world, one in which the Commonwealth and public communication networks are restored.

When it comes to public communications networks, capitalist-fascists not only want to control all means of communication (including the Internet), but they go so far as to deliberately distort language by projecting deceitful frames through the mass media they control. To combat this sinister propaganda and to protect Democracy, progressives must constantly expose and neutralize these lies as fast as they are fabricated.

American constitutional values have always been liberal and progressive, however, the Republican-controlled media in America has succeeded over the past four decades in subverting the meaning of many words. "Liberal," for example, has been debased by repetition of false frames like: "tax and spend liberal," "limousine liberal," "latte liberal," "liberal elite," "immoral liberal," and other nasty metaphors intended to smear liberals in the public mind.

A second example is the world "socialism," distorted by propaganda for over half century to evoke the "Soviet Bolshevik" image of a dictatorship that confiscates private property without compensation and changes the ideal of equal rights into a red-fascist nightmare — which by the way, was financed by Western capitalists, including Standard Oil, IBM, Krupp, and the likes of Bush's grandfather Prescott.

The reaction of tyrants is quick, so when Chavez said: "Socialism is Love!" the lurid U.S. press immediately called him a wannabe Castro communist. The fact that Chavez is doing business with Cuba is trumped as proof of that lie. Tellingly, no American media whore seems to notice that the U.S. is doing business with Communist China, while isolating Cuba for over 50 years — no matter how much our embargo may hurt the Cuban people — to avenge the interests of sugar and gambling industries. "Socialism is Love!" These three words speak volumes about Chavez's heart and about Latin America's peaceful revolution for unity, justice, and freedom.

For the sake of brainwashed



God-given rights. Every human soul is entitled to a just share of the fruits of this earth and to equality of opportunity. Predictably, the fascist media will call this last statement "communist."

The Venezuelan revolution is creating a new kind of Democratic Socialism where freedom and justice are real, not just empty words recited by dreamers.

Not like the words of a pledge of allegiance to a flag that no longer stands for constitutional government, let alone freedom and justice. The flag of a nation the deluded believe is the only nation under God. Every nation must be under God to exist — this escapes their sectarian concept of God. Sadly, there is no end to idiocy among fanatics and pseudo-patriotic fascists.

Hugo Chavez is right: Democratic Socialism is indeed Love! It is love for those who had no food and now can eat. It is love for children who had no doctor and now are taken care of. It is love for fathers who had no work and now can earn a living for their families. It is love for the natives of the Orinoco River region now protected by their brother Hugo from the brutality of foreign oil companies. It is love for all who love justice.

With his proclamation of love for the people Hugo Chavez makes it clear that the ultimate aim of the Bolivarian Revolution is to end centuries of imperialist abuse, exploitation, and killings in the Americas and open that rich southern continent to the vivifying wind of economic opportunity, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all its people.

That revolutionary wind will — with the support of civilized people everywhere — sweep across the Americas into one great union and restore dignity and human rights to all souls. And if Hugo's vision is correct, that wind will renew this planet into a new age of real civilization. The time has come for good people everywhere to rush to the aid of Hugo Chavez and the other champions of justice so that the revolutionary spirit may sweep across the earth and wash away the stench of torture chambers, the assassins School of the Americas (renamed Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation or WHINSEC), the mass graves created by the CONDOR murder operation — with which South American dictators like Pinochet, supported by U.S. neo-

Continued On Next Page

Hugo Chavez and The Devil's Recipe

From Previous Page

fascists like Kissinger and the School of the Americas, spread terrorism with death squads. That blessed wind may soon blow with hurricane force to end unregulated exploitation and privatization of our endangered planet. We who believe in life and liberty are called upon to help create a real civilization together.

Simon Bolivar admired George Washington and our Founding Fathers and dreamed of a great South American continental federation equivalent to the United States. The nine years between 1821 and 1830 found him struggling to defeat the selfishness of landowners — the same kind of corruption of democracy that plagues America now. Bolivar's writings show that he believed in limited government, separation of powers, freedom of religion, responsible and regulated property rights, and the rule of law.

Chavez shares that philosophy: To own property should not give anyone the right to harm the environment or to violate the rights of others to find sustenance upon the planet. Ownership implies responsible guardianship.

Ending oppression and restoring the commonwealth for the common good are as much a Bolivarian dream as they are a part of the unfulfilled American Dream. Hugo Chavez stands on the same high ground as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Martin Luther King.

The recent crescendo of calumnies hissed by fascist media snakes against the President of Venezuela has been pulverized by Chavez's massive 63% reelection landslide. Clearly, the people love Chavez because he kept his promises.

Thomas Paine, one of this country's greatest Founding Fathers, wrote: "He who dares not offend cannot be honest." Hence, it can be said that to call Bush "the Devil," as Chavez did, was a moderate insult. Just as Satan challenged Job's fidelity, maybe BushDevil asked God to test the U.S.'s fidelity to its principles of justice for all and we miserably failed?

We offer here the wisdom of the wise carpenter from Nazareth — an honest man if ever there was one and, as Chavez sees him, the greatest loving socialist in all of history. We refer to Jesus' words regarding the right (and obligation?) of the abused to insult oppressors and hypocrites, just as he did, according to Scripture, when he called the reactionary rightwing conservative extremists of his

time, the Pharisees, "whitened sepulchers!"

Think about it: being compared to the stench of decaying corpses is a far stronger insult than Chavez calling Bush "the Devil" (while making the protective sign of the cross). Bravo, Hugo! Your honesty puts most current politicians to shame. Keep it up. (We were also amused when you called Condoleeza Rice: "Little girl!")

Talking of phony politicians, let us point the finger at another Democrat in the new Congress: Nancy Pelosi, who, in a knee jerk reaction to Chavez's exposing Bush's diabolical nature, opened her silly mouth to call Chavez a "thug." This merely proves that Michael Moore was accurate when he said that "Republicans are gangsters and Democrats are pimps." Any Democrat who opposes impeaching the worst criminal president in our history makes a mockery of America's claim to be a country of laws and becomes a de facto accomplice in all of Bush's crimes.

Impeachment is an absolute imperative for self-respecting Democrats if this nation is to ever hold its head high again. Unfortunately, sanity may prove impossible in a nation where power shifts between gangsters and pimps.

Something Went Wrong

In 2002, something went wrong in Venezuela when Big Oil (BO) tried to steal the world largest petroleum reserve. BO's obedient puppet in the White House went to work setting up one more CIA coup, with all the usual trimmings, including a military kidnapping and planned murder to quickly remove democratically elected president Hugo Chavez, but this time, it didn't work.

Not like it had in 1973 against Salvador Allende in Chile, and in 2004, with the kidnapping of Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide.

The White House hides much coagulated blood under its carpets. Nothing new.

Hundreds of thousands of peasants and other Central American citizens massacred in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Numbers alone never tell the full horror of these blood baths, which our "free press" concealed.

The horrid 1954 slaughter in Quiche Province, where the U.S. supported the death squad murder of an entire village's population. Men decapitated, women raped and killed, children's skulls crushed with stones.

Nor did scum-pundit Tom Brokaw from his NBC pulpit

ever tell the American people about the 1989 Panama Massacre during the office of scum-prez Bush, Sr.

5000 civilians murdered by surprise bombing of crowded neighborhoods, using the lame excuse that the U.S. was trying to rein in Noriega's money laundering operation.

All these horror stories and many more our media never told us.

What is hidden shall be revealed. Documents, once swept under the rug, are now surfacing.

Yes, something went terribly wrong for Washington in 2002.

In Caracas people got wind of the coup in time to take to the streets and save their democracy and their President from a gringo fascist plot.

Hugo Chavez was rescued by his own people because he is a true revolutionary leader, as defined by master educator Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), because he is united with his people at the heart. The oppressed, working with a great leader, represent the one hope for humanity's ultimate liberation from greed, despotism, and terror. As Freire has written, "True solidarity is found only in the pleni-

tude of this act of love ... dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and its people." Fellini expressed the same principle when answering a priest who asked if he was a Christian: "If by Christian you mean love toward one's neighbor, yes, all my films revolve around that idea."

So, Godspeed, great New Lib-

erator of Latin America. Free men and women everywhere stand with you, believing that a different world is possible.

Aldo Vidali is an Italian documentary film director who lives in Northern California and teaches at the Fellini-Antonioni Acting Studio. Vidali is an outspoken champion of individual rights

Edwards Supports Stripping Pensions For Federal Crimes

WASHINGTON — Representative Chet Edwards recently strongly supported H.R. 476, the Pension Forfeiture Act, which will strip the Congressional pension of Members who commit any of a number of federal crimes during their time in office. The bill passed 431 to 0 with four members not voting.

"The American people have demanded that Congress set higher standards for congressional ethics, bipartisanship, and civility," said Edwards. "The fact that corrupt politicians are still eligible to receive taxpayer-funded pensions for their service in Congress, even if they are convicted of serious abuses of power is simply wrong. Revoking pensions for Members of Congress who violate the public trust is a common sense step that is long overdue."

In 2006, after several high profile investigations forced one member of Congress into retirement and now two others into prison, the American public spoke loudly that they wanted reform of the ethics and lobbying practices in Washington.

Current federal law only strips pensions in cases of treason and certain espionage-related offenses. The Pension Forfeiture Act would add to this list the bribery of public officials and witnesses; wrongfully acting as agents of foreign interests to influence U.S. policy; conspiracy to commit one of the offenses listed above; conspiracy to violate the post-employment prohibitions on lobbying and influencing lobbyist hiring and practices; and perjury and inducing perjury in falsely denying committing one of these crimes.

Rep. Dunnam Files Bill To Restore CHIP Program

AUSTIN — State Representative Jim Dunnam (D-Waco) joined other Texas House Democrats committed to restoring funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), filing House Bill 729. The bill will restore health coverage for hundreds of thousands of children in Texas.

"There is no easier budgetary decision than to choose to invest in the health and well-being of our children," Rep. Dunnam said. "Sick children have trouble learning or socializing at the most critical time in their lives. We Democrats are going to change that by repealing restrictive policies that have needlessly dropped children from the CHIP program."

In 2003, the Republican-controlled Texas Legislature reduced state funding for CHIP and passed House Bill 2292, which significantly increased the difficulty for enrollment. Since the restrictive policies were enacted in 2003, almost two hundred thousand children have lost their health coverage.

Rep. Dunnam's bill restores the program. Under the 2003 changes, eligibility was based on gross family income. Rep. Dunnam's bill would return to the pre-2003 requirements, making eligibility based on net family income after adjusting for expenses such as child care and work-related expenses. In addition, the bill eliminates waiting periods and requires re-enrollment only once a year rather than every six months.

Restoring the CHIP program to the enrollment levels that existed before 2003 would not cost the state any extra money. According to data collected from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), during the 2006 budget year, the State of Texas left unspent \$400 million in state funds dedicated for CHIP and Medicaid. Those dollars could easily cover every child that has lost CHIP coverage since 2003.

"If the justification for cutting CHIP in the first place was the budget deficit, then it stands to reason that we can find the funding for this most important program somewhere in the \$14 billion surplus or in the unspent \$400 million," Rep. Dunnam said. "The state has the money—there's no question about that. The only question is if the legislature has the will."

Rep. Dunnam joined dozens of other House members today to advocate and raise awareness for the repealing of the restrictive CHIP policies. The members were united in their criticism of a system of bureaucratic red tape that limits the number of people who enroll in CHIP, even if they are eligible.

"Common sense policies - like reducing paperwork, deducting child care costs when determining eligibility and not counting families' savings against them - will ensure that more of our kids have health care," Rep. Dunnam said. "Our children should not lose health coverage because of bureaucratic red tape."

New Brand Emerges In The Naked City

As Uncle Hugh used to say, "It's an ill wind that blows from the outhouse."

Them some UGLY white kids.

Yes, I just returned from my cyber-trip to the Tarleton State LCA party celebrating America's longest holiday, Slain Civil Rights Leader Doctor

Martin Luther King Junior's Birthday.

These kids paid to have friends that lame?

They could have volunteered down at the homeless shelter and associated with a better class of people for a bottle of wine.

For the last time, stop worrying about stupidity, re Ted Nugent.

By the way, did you read Ted's frothing in the Waco Trib?

Any more questions about why I own lots of firearms?

But back to Rodeo U.

If these kids' parents didn't have money, they'd be diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome.

Actually, some good could come from all this; look through the pictures at www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/years/2007/0125071mlk1.html.

I couldn't think of a better ad campaign for Planned Parenthood.

Speaking of which, the City of New York is issuing an official condom.

With colors and a logo.

There's a suggestion that the wrapper be printed with a subway map.

Which promises to lend a whole new perspective on public transportation in the Big Cobble.

And gives a unique meaning to the Flushing Line.

But then you'll get an imprint of Grand Central circled on your wallet.

"Brands work, and people use branded items more than they use non-branded items, whether it's a cola or a medicine, even," Health Commissioner Thomas Frieden told the Associated Press.

I don't think the target consumer here is concerned with whether the *brand* works.

And those who buy Cokes or Advil have a vastly different agenda.

This whole idea needs a slogan.

How about, "Get screwed in New York!"

Or maybe, "What happens here goes in here!"

OK, got it! "I (heart) NY, But I'm not IN (heart) with NY."

It seems the boys downtown spend about \$720,000 per annum on prophylactics.

Yeah, but how much do they spend on handing out free condoms?

A million-five free French letters are handed out every month.

And, let's see, there are eight million stories in the naked city

...

THE LONE STAR
ICONOCLAST

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To The Editor:

WAR ON IRAN

It is clear to me as of today, that an attack by Bush on Iran has been decided on. I have warned against it for almost two years. Remarks over the weekend by Nick Burns, #3 man at the State Dept., spoken at the Herzileah Conference in Israel mean war. An unnatural silence among the media and the evident yet unstated support of Congress as Bush escalated his rhetoric against Iran again in the State of the Union speech are further dead giveaways. It is coming.

The attack will not be small or surgical or designed to remove Iran's nuclear facilities only, though that is how it will be sold. Currently in favor of hitting Iran are the Bush Administration, John McCain, Hillary Clinton, Howard Dean, Bernie Sanders. I expect Peter Welch and Pat Leahy will join them but I lack evidence as to the position of these two. I would be amazed if U.S. military leaders were not opposed.

The attack will be broad-based and deeply devastating. It will be launched against a nation of some 75 million souls that has done nothing to deserve it and has attacked no one, but does possess huge reserves of oil, as does Iraq, and uranium. There is ZERO evidence on record that Iran has done anything in their pursuit of nuclear energy that they don't have a perfect right to do under the nonproliferation treaty signed by us.

The attack will be carried out by us alone or in league with Israel, whose interests it serves. The attack will come I think by late February. It will be done without a Congressional Declaration of War, as has become habitual, but most of our honorable Congressmen will support it.

I don't support it.

Dennis Morrisseau, West Pawlet, VT

Letter To The Editor:

We can admire those from among us that step into harm's way in defense of all of the rest of us.

We need not admire those that twist support for our brave troops into justification for their questionable actions—particularly when what is proposed mires our service men and women in a place of grave danger.

These magnificent members of our military stand and fight and do not hide behind anyone; the man that has sent them there should not try to hide behind them.

Sam Osborne, West Branch, IA

To The Editor:

Presidential Library

President Bush, having stated a preference for Southern Methodist University (SMU) as the site for his presidential library, might want to reconsider that choice.

Now that petitions are being circulated around the country by Methodists who do not want any Methodist association with the library, I'd suggest another location — St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Prior to the president's State of the Union address, Minnesota's 6th District congresswoman, Michelle Bachmann, was fawning all over the president.

Congresswoman Bachmann certainly could have some influence in bringing the library to her district.

In recognition of the president's scholarly pursuits and credentials, it seems to me that the voters in her district would be overjoyed to have the library in their district and would be willing to pay for it.

Everybody's a winner; the president gets his library, Bachmann gets the credit, and voters in her district get to fund the project.

Paul G. Jaehnert, Vadnais Hts., MN



Call To Mind

By Don M. Fisher

Which means about 19 percent of those couldn't be shown on television.

Finally, on the subject of Yankees and other third world inhabitants:

Whether the hamburger was invented in Athens, Texas, is irrelevant.

Yankees still haven't discovered the hamburger.

First, they put ketchup on hamburgers.

Let's not talk about eggs here; it ain't polite to embarrass the ignernt.

Second, it is permissible to put mayonnaise or salad dressing on a hamburger only if you

can demonstrate at least a two-generation genealogy of brush gougers.

Otherwise, you are a Yankee and do not have permission to talk about food south of Lexington Avenue.

And if you don't know what a brush gouger is, stick to club sandwiches.

Brush gougers are those employed to drag the excess limbs and brush away from the sawyers who are clearing land or cutting lumber. It's dangerous as handling snakes, but then it doesn't require a lot of heavy mental endeavor.

Hey! Where else can you learn this stuff?

Finally, a hamburger costs 25 cents. 35 for a cheeseburger and four bits for a basket.

If it ain't bigger than a saucer, shoot the cook.

And quit voting Republican.

EDITORIAL

Close Guantanamo!

What does it take for Congress and the White House to do the right thing?

For five long and sickening years, both bodies have turned their backs on the U.S.-imposed affront to civility, dignity, and humanity known as Guantanamo.

Is it not terrorism to imprison an innocent person, subject him to torture — some of it permanent, such putting out eyes — deny him any kind of legal process while not charging him with anything, and extracting from him productive years of his life without contact with his loved ones?

Deviants, who start their careers firecracking toads and then move on to chickens and dogs, are known to graduate, sooner or later, to human subjects. In the case of Guantanamo, the U.S. Congress has sanctioned such torture and continues to do so. Its members care not if the person is innocent or guilty, whether any kind of due process is in place, whether the guy gulping for air, shrieking in pain, and being robbed of all personal dignity deserves punishment.

Their answer is, "Walk the plank."

But if they did care — if they truly believed in justice — Guantanamo would never have happened.

Not one — from Hillary Clinton to John McCain — has made this an issue. They are too busy positioning for political power and deciding which major corporation will be next to own a part of the federal government.

There are, however, Americans who still believe in due process and the values that made our country great.

Millions of them.

They could be seen in great number this weekend in Washington, demanding that elected employees of our federal government grow some backbone and destroy the Rovian insanity that has infected Congress.

A revolution is brewing and the masses have placed the American flag on the mast of their fleet.

The Jolly Roger in Washington is going down.

— W. Leon Smith

All Children Left Behind

Lady or gentleman, the story you are about to read is true. Only the names have been deleted to protect the author.

Dum-da-dum-dum... Dum-da-dum-dum-daaa.

This is the town.

It's not big by today's standards — some 46,000 and growing. Pretty fair size.

There's a state university and a couple of community colleges. Four high schools, three middle schools, and an ever-increasing number of elementary schools.

The Mitsubishi Motors North America complex takes up a sizeable chunk of the west side; they even built their own motorway.

You could stand pretty much anywhere, throw a stone in practically any direction and hit a church.

This is a good place to raise your children. There's one Christian ethos or another oozing out of every pore.

If it's a synagogue or mosque you're looking for, better go to the next town over.

The only bars (all two of them) are located within walking distance of the university; most of those that existed just a few years ago were forced into the Land of Nod as a result of downtown reformation projects.

Crime is low, gangism is virtually non-existent, median wage exceeds the national and state averages by double digits (skewed due to the area's three largest employers: State Farm Insurance Corporate and Regional Headquarters; Country Companies Corporate HQ; the aforementioned Mitsubishi).

Of course, the schools are good. Not just good, very good. Excellent, some might say.

Are they really all that?

(Round these parts, the schools was damned excellent back in the day, when Bill Clinton were our President.)

I'm in and out of the local schools all the time. I get a first-person look at what parents never see because they either haven't the opportunities, or simply aren't concerned enough.

I carry a license. I'm a sub... Monday, November 6, 2006.

It was drizzling lightly and overcast, yet unusually warm for early November in Central Illinois. The District called me in to teach sixth grade Community Relations at one of the middle schools.

Thinking it might be too warm inside an unfamiliar classroom for a long-sleeved shirt, I wore one with short sleeves.



Out Of The Blue

By Jerry Tenuto

It was a good thing I did; the temperature eventually exceeded 70 degrees that day.

From experience I've learned that Civics teachers usually have class subscriptions for the local paper, and the bundles are dropped in the teachers' lounge. Upon locating the appropriate bundle I headed to my assigned classroom.

I placed the newspapers in the classroom common use area, keeping one aside for myself. A large portion of substitute "teaching" is merely babysitting, and the crossword puzzle would keep me occupied for 10-20 minutes at some point.

After nearly 10 years as a sub, there are certain givens I've always come to expect. One of them is that no junior high or high school teacher will ever provide me with enough work to keep a class occupied for the entire period. Invariably, we will have five to 15 minutes of "fill" time to share.

Venture forth into that classroom without a Plan B to occupy the 12- to 14-year-old brain (high schoolers will find work on their own) when a void occurs in the daily busy cycle and pandemonium shall ensue.

Over the years I've taken the advice of Deputy Barney Fife to nip this particular eventuality in the proverbial bud. At the top of the class period I tell the students a little about myself.

Part of the reason for doing this is many of the youths exhibit a fair amount of enmity toward their regular teachers — especially the women. Throughout the course of a year the educators come off as tyrants, martinets who make little or no effort to connect with their wards.

To my great dismay, some teachers have expressed to me a deep contempt and loathing for their students.

I wonder what these women would do in a hardcore school district?

The little dears have been known to appear even more disdainful of subs, who often cause themselves to be seen as powerless, clueless ninnies.

By letting them know the guy up front is a father, veteran, and (they really like this) a former rock disc jockey, I not only hu-

manize myself but also show that teachers can be people who know the score. One thing I always impress upon the students is that they can never get enough education.

Being up front and open with the student lets them know I'm not the enemy, that I am approachable and accessible. Quite regularly the students' reaction to me is that they hope I'll sub for them again; kids often approach me on the street and in stores to say "Hi!"

The class plans for Nov. 6 indicated this day would be no different from most other sub assignments, so I began periods one and two with my usual self-introductory spiel.

After each class had finished its work, I utilized my wit to keep them occupied and quiet during the remaining 10 minutes or so.

With each different class I inquired as to the significance of what was to occur the next day. The response left me aghast — no more than two students per class knew that an election was about to take place. Approximately eight out of 125 students, or 6.4%.

There I was, in a 21st Century classroom, in the most modern of schools, in a district that considers itself top shelf — and the very day preceding a major election that could, and would, completely put a new face on our Federal Government, scores upon scores of junior high school students were completely ignorant of the events being shaped around them.

And this was a Community Relations class!

Never mind that it would be the single most important midterm vote in decades, possibly in U.S. history, a vote that could affect whether these very youngsters wind up with money for college or as more fodder for Bush and Cheney's cannon.

Sadly, in order to stay on track within guidelines of the George W. Bush-mandated "No Child Left Behind" policy, wherein everyone must achieve sufficient scores on the standardized tests for the good of the District, hundreds of our next generation in just this one school are being forced to read about events that transpired centuries ago. To make that particular exercise worse, those doing the teaching, the books selected as texts, and the methodology being used are all as boring as watching golf in superslo-mo.

Multiply that number by three (junior highs) and we

have a pandemic of under-educated teens — year in, year out — just in this single community.

How many schools around the Nation are forced to leave students blithering ignoramuses in the pursuit of nominal test scores to secure Federal funding?

I've got a tidbit of news about nationwide testing: Our British pals, a much smaller nation and more homogeneous people, have been screwing around with this standardized testing tripe, too. It's not working for them, either.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with the study of history. However, logic and a common sense approach should demand that junior high students be clued in on issues affecting our Nation at least, if not the World, during their own lifetime.

Why did my generation take such an interest in public policies during the '60s and '70s? Simple — current events were openly discussed in schools, even in my Catholic elementary and junior high. We changed the course of human events!

By putting such excessive emphasis on the NCLB standardized tests, scaring the bejesus out of school administrators and board members with loss of funding lest their students don't cut the mustard, the White House Fascisti have literally guaranteed the perpetuation of unsound teaching practices.

Wait. I've not gotten to the best part yet.

Numerous times in grade six and higher settings I use the time allotted to me to explain a good newspaper to the local sheltered youth. Always sure to include the disclaimer that as a former employee of the local Right-wing publication I have the benefit of an insider's knowledge, my opinion is that "compared to most newspapers this one sucks."

I don't make an unfair apples-to-oranges contrast; my conviction is based upon having read newspapers of all sizes from all over the Planet. This is something that I make clear as crystal.

The floor is always open for anyone to voice his or her opinion.

Not once since being licensed as a substitute teacher has a student ever lodged a complaint against me.

Between second and third periods a woman walked into the classroom and introduced herself as *the Principal*. She

Continued On Next Page

Pop Musical Set Saturday In Waco

WACO — The Waco Performing Arts Company will present the national tour of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" as part of its Broadway Season on Saturday, Feb. 3, at the Waco Hippodrome Theatre. The performance will begin at 7:30 p.m.

The pop musical is a rendition of the Biblical story of Joseph, and was the first major work by the renowned Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber. Webber is also credited with creating "Evita" and "Phantom of the Opera."

"Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" is one of the five Broadway shows that the Waco Performing Arts Company will present this season.

Tickets range from \$22 to \$47, and can be purchased at the Waco Hippodrome box office Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, contact the box office at (254) 752-9797.

Drought Aid Will Still Be An Issue In '07

CLIFTON — A rainy day proved rare in Texas as the first 11 months of 2006 ranked as the 31st-driest January to November duration since 1895, according to the National Weather Service.

"Texas farmers significantly suffered from drought damage in 2006 and will suffer even more if adequate aid isn't received in early 2007," said Bosque County Farm Bureau President Alan Day.

The Texas Farm Bureau will present four priority water issues to the 2007 session of the Texas Legislature. The issues include:

- Opposing any attempt to mandate conservation measures for agriculture.
- Opposing the complete repeal of the Junior Water Rights provision on inter-basin transfers of surface water.
- Opposing any recommendation to address the in-stream flows issue that negatively impacts agricultural producers.
- Opposing any changes to the authority of groundwater conservation districts that negatively impact the rights of landowners or rural areas.

Laughing At Cows Can Be Dangerous, Especially When Playing Bingo

Florida is once again in the national spotlight, this time over the highly controversial subject of...You guessed it: Cow Patty Bingo. For those who might not be familiar with this activity for reasons of sanity, we'll just take a moment to cover the basics.

First, you need a cow.

Second, you need a REALLY BIG bingo card.

Okay, I was just kidding about the card. But you really do need a cow, preferably one that has just eaten a lot of fiber — like, say...a 55-gallon drum of granola. Next, you need a large field or yard (such as a neighbor's) that can be divided into numbered grids. Once you have the cow and the grid, it's



Life Is A
Funny Place

By Ned Hickson

Siuslaw News

time to start selling squares. This requires finding people who find poop entertaining. My suggestion would be to start with anyone who regularly watched "America's Got Talent."

The rules to Cow-Patty Bingo are simple. Each square is numbered and sold for \$5 each, and you can buy as many squares as you like. Keep in mind, however, that the more money you spend on squares

the less you can spend on beer, which is something you'll need a lot of in order to cloud any memory of yourself standing in the bleachers screaming "POOP IN MY SQUARE!"

It's also important to note that, in order for a "drop" to qualify, it must be deemed "clearly visible" by the judges. This is actually a lot harder than it sounds. That's because, in order to prepare for this level of scrutiny, judges, on average, consume twice as much beer as spectators at these events.

Okay, now that we've covered the basics, it's time to talk controversy. According to an article sent to me by Lynette Bowerman of Paso Robles, Ca-

lif, a recent Cow-Patty Bingo fund-raiser held at Florida Southern College became the target of protests from PETA which said, and I quote: "Cows are adversely affected by laughter."

(I should clarify that PETA was referring to human laughter, and not cows getting laughed at by other cows. I should further clarify that, as far as cows are concerned, the poop thing just isn't that funny anymore.)

Furthermore, Amy Rhodes, a caseworker for PETA, strongly denounced the college's participation in Cow-Patty Bingo, saying that it was "A dangerous message to send to kids."

I completely agree with this,

and can see how prolonged exposure to this type of activity starting at an early age could eventually lead to retirement and REAL bingo.

Probably somewhere in Florida.

While there are certainly no easy solutions to the growing controversy over Cow-Patty Bingo, I think finding some common ground would be a good place to start. From there, we can finally move forward.

Just as long as everyone watches where they step.

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

TENUTO ... From Previous Page

told me that two students had told another teacher, and the unnamed teacher had subsequently reported to her, that I said in class the local paper "sucked."

My response was that I may have said that, but I really had no distinct recollection of precisely what word or words were used.

The Principal instructed me not to use the word "suck" in class anymore.

Now, the first problem I had with this was despite having subbed at that school on numerous occasions I had never met this Principal prior to that moment.

Second, I had no idea whom these students or the teacher were.

The overriding rule concerning tattling is as follows: If a student or very small number of students point an accusatory finger at another student, but a teacher or another adult did not witness the transgression, there's little or nothing to be done about it.

Apparently, this particular Principal doesn't hold such a standard to err on the side of caution for teachers.

At the end of the day I voluntarily went to see the Principal, on my own time, to see if we couldn't rectify this misunderstanding.

I explained my philosophy of making myself more human to the students. She came back with, "That's not your job."

I explained that I minored in Curriculum and Instruction in graduate school, and was taught to reach the class members. Is communication not my job?

When informed about my having an advanced degree plus knowledge and experience of

how to reach teens, the Principal seemed to back off a little, admitting that the District does need quality substitutes.

Yet, despite the facts that I'm a communications major and a writer, she insisted that the word "suck" is inappropriate in a classroom.

This is what it boiled down to: This Principal didn't care if other principals allowed it in their schools; she wasn't going to allow it in hers.

That's how the woman put it — selective use of the English language in school by her edict.

Although I apologized and readily acceded to her wish, all the while my brain was rolling around thoughts like, "How in hell does a person with such a narrow view of language get put in charge of a junior high? What the hell politically correct seminar did she just come from?"

We suck lollipops. They're more commonly called suckers.

A greedy fool gets sucked into a shady financial swindle. He's a sucker, too.

The vacuum cleaner sucks. Black holes suck everything into their voids.

Plumbing, when properly installed, sucks water down the drainpipes.

You tell someone to go suck eggs.

Most folks like to suck on a Popsicle.

Technically, we couldn't remain on Planet Earth if it didn't suck.

Honestly — would you want this or any other Principal deciding which words should or shouldn't be used in your child's school?

There are reasonably obvious words that should not be used in the classroom setting, but

"suck?"

I guess George Carlin's just going to have to expand his list to eight words.

That this "complaint" ever went to the Principal is ridiculous. The teacher should have come directly to me with her concerns.

That the teacher even found the use of "suck" so egregious is scary on a number of levels.

That there was a breakdown in the accepted tattletale chain, especially when being used against a licensed teacher, could open up a Pandora's Box of students falsifying charges for insignificant or non-existent breeches.

I would really hate to think that the teacher who ratted on me was the same one who relieved me for seventh period and began class, even before the specified time, by screaming at the students to shut up.

Now, there we have an example of a technique that's extremely conducive to harmonious classroom decorum. I can see how it would endear any teacher to a group of youngsters, while inspiring the students to work hard and do well.

The next day the District sent me to spend the day with a class of second graders. What a wonderfully heart lifting experience!

While chatting with some of the elementary teachers I mentioned my previous day at middle school. They couldn't believe the reaction of the two girls, or that a teacher would have been so petty as to have taken it to the principal. It also seemed ludicrous to them that the Principal had such a hang-up over the word "suck."

"Good gosh, isn't it part of all sixth graders' everyday vernacular?" one teacher asked.

We need to supervise what's

going on in our schools. Many parents would freak if they spent even two periods observing real day activity in a junior high or high school classroom.

And it's not the students' behavior that concerns me.

We must assess how the personal moral codes of those placed in charge have been detrimental to quality teaching practices.

There's a frighteningly high level of learning that's not being accomplished in our public schools.

The first thing we need to do is scrap the No Child Left Behind initiative in its current form, because it certainly ain't

what Ted Kennedy envisioned, and go back to the drawing board.

Shalom.

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

Foundation Formed To Preserve Historic Kimball

MERIDIAN — The Lone Star Chisholm Trail Foundation — a newly-formed organization devoted to the preservation and development of the Kimball historic site, where the Chisholm Trail crossed the Brazos River, in Eastern Bosque County — will hold an informational meeting Feb. 6, in the Meridian Civic Center. The meeting kicks off with introductions at 6 p.m., followed by the actual meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Travelers can view the ruins of the old Kimball Academy and other structures in the ghost town of Kimball, located just off of Hwy. 174 near the Kimball Bend Bridge on Lake Whitney. The frontier town was alive with activity in the 1870s, when drovers passed through with Longhorn cattle herds en route to Kansas and the railroads to Chicago.

Thus, the Foundation, a 501(c) non-profit organization whose charter and by-laws have been

filed in the Bosque County courthouse, derives its name from the legendary Chisholm Trail.

"I've never seen an area more rich in Texas history," stated local historian Ron Carlisle of Kopperl, whose ancestors lived at Kimball.

"To not make an attempt to save this regional treasure would be unthinkable, and a great loss to generations to come.

"There are a few of us that can't let the dream die," Carlisle continued. "The Lone Star Chisholm Trail Foundation affords us a vehicle that will enable us to get the job done. We have a great working relationship with the Corps of Engineers and they are making every effort to accommodate and work with us."

For more information, come to the meeting or contact Ron Carlisle at 254-889-3894 or Mel Robinson at 817-641-8500 or 817-573-9033.

The State Of The Union, Precarious: What Matters And What Doesn't

By MELINDA PILLSBURY-FOSTER
SPECIAL TO THE ICONOCLAST

(A little bird in Karl Rove's Office might have heard this)

Mr. President, have you read over the speech? (pause) I know. It doesn't matter if Congress believes it. (pause) Of course the public will swallow it. (pause) Your friends will understand that you have to say you support alternative energy. Anyway, you already have the donations in for the Library. (pause) Health care is an issue, try to read those briefing papers. (pause) I do think it is a nice piece of work, yeah, I like the new typeface. Just make sure you don't say her name that way Tuesday night. (pause) Keep working at it. If you find any other words you don't understand just call back.

Tuesday night a man got up and gave a speech. The focus of the world was on every word he uttered even though they knew what he was going to say. Today a rally is taking place in Arkansas. One event matters, the other does not in the long run.

Wording of the Equal Rights Amendment

Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Today all of the Constitutional officers for the State of Arkansas, mostly in office for the first time, attended a rally held at the State Capitol along with two hundred enthusiastic supporters for the ERA. Mike Beebe, the new governor, stepped up to the podium to announce his support of a measure that, pro and con, was one of the dividing points in the gubernatorial election last November, according to Zack Wright, Communications Coordinator for the Governor. Wright added that Beebe's position is that ratification is long overdue.

A few months ago the widow and children of Marjorie Rudolph called Lindsley Smith, Representative for the 92nd District of Arkansas, at her office and put into her hands the ERA bracelet their wife and mother had cherished since 1972. Marjorie, they said, had always hoped the ERA would be ratified. They asked Ms. Smith if she would accept the bracelet since she had introduced the ERA for ratification in their home state of Arkansas. Ms. Smith accepted; she told them she would be wearing the bracelet when she dropped the bill in the box and when it is passed. Ms. Smith expects this will happen very soon, perhaps in just a matter of days.

After the rally Ms Smith said,

GUEST COMMENTARY

"It was wonderful; people were crowded into the Rotunda and hallways. I knew that we were taking a stand; doing the right thing — acting on principle. Knowing that was happening here, in Arkansas, made me proud."

America's women have waited since July 1788. When the Declaration of Independence was read aloud to those assembled in July of 1776 it said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." In this way the mission statement for America was established. All are equal; the rights exercised come not from government, but from God. Women believed and labored mightily in the cause of freedom, as they would in all the wars that followed.

Women poured their lives into activism. Generations of women have died waiting to know that their rights were affirmed under the Constitution. As women talk today they share the stories of mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and great-great-grandmothers, who fought for their freedom and died knowing they had failed. It is a sad heritage for a country founded on the idea of individual freedom.

In 2000, 212 years after the Constitution was ratified and women were excluded as people, a retired executive, Dr. Jennifer Macleod, gave a presentation to a group of Girl Scouts on the Equal Rights Amendment. The excited girls asked if Dr. Macleod could help them do a project on the ERA. The Doctor, an expert in survey research, prepared a simple poll and showed the girls how to conduct it. Later, Macleod would admit that she expected that the poll would reflect mixed opinions to the idea of equality for women. She was wrong.

There were three questions. Jennifer expected the Girl Scouts, polling their classmates, teachers, and parents, to find a range of opinions on equality for women. Instead, they found close to unanimous support for the idea that all of us are born possessed of inherent rights, as recognized in the Declaration of Independence. Dumbfounded, Jennifer Macleod arranged for a national survey professionally con-

ducted in July 2001, among American adults all across the country. The findings? 96% answered "yes" to the question, "In your opinion, should male and female citizens of the United States have equal rights?"; 88% answered "yes" to the question, "In your opinion, should the Constitution make it clear that male and female citizens are supposed to have equal rights?"; and, demonstrating a public lack of knowledge, 72% mistakenly answered "yes" to the question, "As far as you know, does the Constitution of the United States make it clear that male and female citizens are supposed to have equal rights?" The results were similar for both men and women, and in all age groups, educational levels, regions of the country, racial categories, and household composition. The results were the same. While the legislatures of 15 states had refused to ratify the ERA Americans had done so in their hearts and minds.

In this way a new wave of activism for ratification began, erasing the sense of hopelessness left in the wake of the failure of the 70s. In Arkansas today women wept tears of joy. At this moment Representative Smith says that the measure has 67 co-sponsors in the House, including the Speaker, Benny C. Petrus.

When the newly passed ERA was sent to the states from Congress in 1972 everyone believed that it would be ratified by the required 38 states quickly but instead it became a political football linked to issues that have nothing to do with simple equality. Women like Phyllis Schlafly have made careers of opposing the equality that was promised to all Americans in 1776. The final blow to the effort came when Ronald Reagan took the ERA out of the Republican Platform, despite the pleas of scores of Republican Women, including his own daughter, Maureen. For women, the promise of equality receded into the distance.

Instead women were forced to rely on a series of laws that assert 'fairness', many passed on the state level. Such laws can be rescinded by simple legislation.

Today women still hang their trust that their rights are protected on privileges conferred by legislators. Without the clear and specific backing of the federal Constitution all laws improving women's rights and opportunities can be overturned. For women in America freedom is provisional. If you ever doubted the need for rati-

fication the crew just booted from Congress should have demonstrated to you just how fragile these rights can be. Consider the present make up of the Supreme Court; Consider the moral fiber demonstrated by an Administration that rescinded the 4th Amendment and used torture and deceit. Simple justice long overdue is also desperately needed. Securing it need not be difficult.

Three State Strategy

The Constitution, in setting forth how amendments can be made, said NOTHING about any time limits on ratification by the states — although, as was the case for several amendments, a time limit can if desired be included in the body of a proposed amendment. The 1972 Congress, in passing the ERA — which, fully intentionally, contains no mention of any time limit — chose to attach a 7-year ratification time limit separate from the amendment itself. Then, when the 1978 Congress extended the time limit by 3 years, that set the precedent such that any Congress can legitimately vote to change such a time limit.

How could equality ever fail to be relevant? In an era when women are serving in the military in roles that expose them to combat, the arguments that they are frail and must be protected fail to persuade Americans. It was not women's weaknesses that moved men to deny them their inherent rights, it was the habit of control.

In addition to Arkansas, vig-

orous ratification drives are well underway in Illinois (which came very close to ratification in 2004), Florida and Missouri, while many of the other not-yet-ratified states, including Arizona, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, and Georgia are building support for their own ratification drives. Perhaps the legislators in three of these states now understand just how important our rights are. Now that we have seen a Congress and President commit the treason of negating the 4th Amendment the time to be patient is over. Now we can demand action from Democrats and the Republicans who are now distancing themselves from the corrupt Bush Administration.

The states that are not yet ratified are: *Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia.*

By the time you read this Arkansas may proudly be the 36th State to ratify.

Two events took place this week. One man talked; a coalition of women and men, united in defense of real freedom, took action. It is doing the right thing that matters, no matter how long it takes.

Melinda Pillsbury-Foster is a prominent activist, author, poet, commentator, and critic. She is founder and president of the Arthur C. Pillsbury Foundation and hosts a radio talk-show program, The Spiritual Politician, at <BBSRadio.com>.

Child Passenger Safety Week Will Be Observed Feb. 11-17th

COLLEGE STATION — Showing your love on Valentine's Day doesn't always involve flowers and heart-shaped boxes of candy, said a Texas Cooperative Extension expert.

One way parents show their love for their children is to make sure they are seated in proper restraint systems every time they ride in a vehicle, said Bev Kellner, Extension program coordinator for passenger safety.

That's why each February, during the week that includes Valentine's Day, Child Passenger Safety Week is observed, she said. This year that's Feb. 11-17.

"This year's focus is on the milestone reached in saving children's lives through the use of child safety seats," Kellner said. "From 1975 to 2005, 7,500 children (nation-

wide) have been saved by the correct use of child safety seats."

Choosing a safety seat for children isn't as simple as going into a store and buying one, Kellner said. The child's height, weight, and age must also be taken into consideration.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's "4 Steps for Kids," lists four different types of child safety seating for children of different ages and sizes.

Proper use of a child's safety seat is not as easy as it sounds.

"Nationally the misuse rate of child safety seats is reported as 85 percent," Kellner said. "The Passenger Safety Project at Texas Cooperative Extension has seen a 99-percent misuse rate in the over 7,600 inspections that the program has overseen since 1999."

What Our Leaders Are Really Like

Recently, I saw Al Gore's movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," about global warming. Whether you are someone who believes in global warming or someone who has the equally legitimate position that global warming is actually a rumor started by polar bears who want more land, it would be impossible for you to avoid noticing that the Al Gore in the movie seems like a much different person from the Al Gore who ran for President.

He's not as stiff or cold or pompous as he was. He's more, well, human. This personality change is quite common among people after their political careers are over. (And I'm sure that Al Gore will return to his robotic persona if he resumes his political career). After politics, politicians don't have to weigh every word. Everything they say and do is no longer motivated by trying to please as many people as possible.

While they were in office, who would have ever predicted that Bill Clinton and the first President Bush would say nice things about each other, would respect each other, and actually become friends? Many people feel that Jimmy Carter has done his best work after his unexceptional



Modern Times

By Lloyd Garver

Presidency. So it will be interesting to see what the current crop of politicians are like after the pressure is off — after they no longer have to be concerned about their popularity. If I were to interview them sometime in the future, they may sound something like this:

HILLARY CLINTON: "Let's get what you're really interested in out of the way first. So, let me just say that I have a cordial relationship with my ex-husband. However, it's obvious that at that infamous time of our marriage, he had all the self-control of a mosquito in a blood bank.

I've enjoyed being retired and, since you've caught me here in Rome, it's obvious that I love to travel. However, I am getting the political itch once again. So I'm considering declaring myself a resident, and running for President of Italy."

JOHN MCCAIN: "Out of all the distasteful things that I did in my political career, I guess pretending to like George W. Bush was the worst. Embracing him was torture for me, and I know torture. But that was in the past, and I like to live in the present. I'm thoroughly enjoying my job as Baseball Commissioner, and I assure you that we will get to the bottom of this steroid issue any day now."

DICK CHENEY: "I have to admit that it's been a little lonely since I retired. For some reason, nobody wants to go hunting with me."

HOWARD DEAN: "Was I bitter because I lost the chance of ever being President just because I got carried away that one night? I was for a while. But I got over it. I realized that I could help the country in other ways. By being the head of the Democratic Party, I was able to accomplish a great deal working behind the scenes. Maybe I wasn't in that big house in Washington, D.C., but you know something? You know something? I got to work in New Hampshire, South Carolina, Arizona, Oklahoma, North Dakota, CALIFORNIA,

AND MICHIGAN! YEAH!"

GEORGE W. BUSH: "Being president was indubitably a hoot for me. The most enjoyable aspect of my octet of years in that position was, of course, *la grande charade*: I loved posing as a rube from Texas instead of presenting myself in the context of my true identity as someone born to a well-ensconced Eastern establishment family. At first, I was surprised that so much of the public was taken in,

but I guess some of my classmates at Yale and Harvard were right — we of the elite class can get away with just about anything.

I don't want to be accused of verbosity, but before you go, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Karl Rove for finding that little loophole last year. Let's face it, without it, I don't think I ever would have seen my twins, Jenna and Barbara,

elected Co-Presidents of the United States."

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 can be reached at lloydgarver@yahoo.com

MEDICARE Rx DRUG PLAN:

The BEAST In Sheep's Clothing

What's the point of having a plan that doesn't work?

The new Medicare Prescription (Rx) Drug Plan was devised and implemented last year by Congress and the Health Care Industry to provide lower cost prescription medication to Seniors and the Disabled who qualify for Medicare and/or financial assistance.

In addition, if certain people are below average income they may qualify for additional assistance with the drug plan premiums. Some may qualify for 100-percent assistance; however, the percentage stated is a placebo statement because 100-percent assistance has a maximum government assistance payment of only \$26.90, which is below what most drug plans now charge as a premium.

For example, one plan — Medicare Blue Rx (Blue Cross/Blue Shield) last year had no additional premium costs over the government assistance of \$26.90 per month; however, as of January of 2007 the plan now charges an additional monthly premium out-of-pocket expense of \$2.70, which most Medicare Rx recipients — especially those getting additional assistance — cannot afford to pay.

In fact, some plans will charge additional premiums as high as \$20 per month more than the 100-percent government assistance amount, which will become an out-of-pocket expense for recipients in the plan.

Next year Medicare projects some additional out-of-pocket costs for premiums of up to \$50 per month more, depending on the plan, than the current government assistance amount allowed.

Another issue is that some plans will increase premiums



Texas Commentary

By Peter Stern

while reducing coverage either by limiting the amount of months per year a plan will cover certain medications or whether specific meds will continue to be covered at all.

Interestingly enough, Medicare did NOT apply a yearly *cost of living* adjustment in the legislation for the assistance program to help those in need. Consequently, soon fewer recipients will be able to afford their Rx plans and will have to drop them. The only other choice then for those Seniors and Disabled on fixed income will be to apply for Medicaid assistance. However, state governments (e.g., in Texas) soon will be approving legislation that will make it harder for those in need to receive Medicaid services. So, it's a "Catch-22" and we may see more of this population living on our city and town streets because they will have no where to go to live or to access affordable health care.

Furthermore, when an applicant first is eligible for membership in a Medicare Rx Plan he/she contacts Medicare who will help determine which plan is best suited for the individual based mostly on what Rx medications the individual needs and which are covered by various plans. Not all plans cover all medications and not all plans are serviced by local pharmacies.

In addition, the providers of Medicare Rx Plans have the legal right to drop coverage of any and all medications whenever

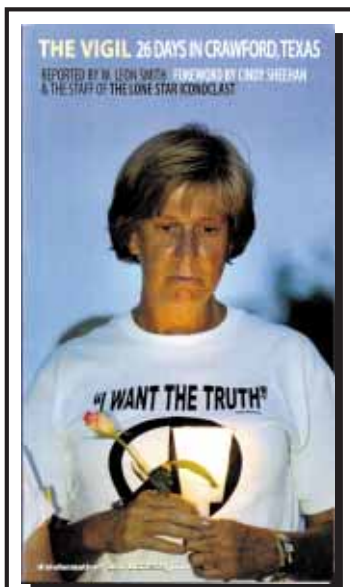
they want to. So, just because a drug plan covers a certain medication at the time a person signs up does NOT mean the plan will always cover the medication. In fact, the provider may opt to cover the medication only for several months of the year and thus forces the member to pay out-of-pocket expenses to continue to purchase the Rx medication. Therefore, a recipient must scrutinize the plan every year to ensure the plan still covers all medications needed and that the costs remain affordable.

What is even more interesting and tragically ironic is that Congress recognized the need to develop a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan and did so, but now the plan is becoming unaffordable to the target population it was developed for.

Congress quickly must recognize the insensibility and weaknesses of the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan and move expeditiously to work with health care providers to develop a more practical and less greedy system to provide more and consistently affordable prescription medications to those in financial need.

Otherwise, it's only a matter of time before taxpayers will have to pay much more in tax dollars to provide reality-based assistance to this needy target population. Despite what anyone may believe, there is no escaping this social responsibility.

Peter Stern of Driftwood, Texas, <pstern@austin.rr.com>, a former Director of Information Services, university professor and public school administrator, is a political writer well-known and published frequently throughout the Texas community and nationwide. He is a Disabled Vietnam Veteran and holds three post-graduate degrees.



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Scandalous Sculptress Texas' First World-Famous Artist

At the state capitol on Jan. 19, 1903, Elizabeth Ney unveiled her magnificent statues of Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston, marvelous massive figures that a century later serve as permanent tribute to the talent of Texas' first world famous artist.

As a little girl in Germany, Elizabeth took a precocious interest in her father's trade, the sculpting of religious icons and tombstones, and announced her intention to follow in his footsteps. Confident their daughter would outgrow the masculine daydream, her parents dismissed her ambition as childhood fantasy.

But Elizabeth's desire only grew with age, and at 18 she revealed her plan to study art. After overcoming the elder Neys' objections with a threatened hunger strike, the headstrong teenager moved to Munich where she was accepted as the sole female student at a prestigious academy.

During her first term, Elizabeth met the romantic Scottish radical destined to be her companion for the next half century. Edmund Montgomery was a dashing young veteran of the street battles that rocked Germany in the uprising of 1848. Purged of his revolutionary zeal, Edmund concentrated on his medical studies while Elizabeth's artistic promise began to bloom.

Although the couple shared a defiant nonconformism, Edmund was traditional on matters of the heart. But his repeated proposals of marriage were rejected by Elizabeth, an outspoken opponent of the institution of marriage. At her insistence, they lived together outside the bounds of matrimony.

In 1863, the tenth year of their relationship, Edmund finally talked Elizabeth into marrying him. She consented on the unusual condition that their marital status remain a secret. For over 40 years, Elizabeth delighted in the deception that she had given birth to two children out of wedlock while living in sin with their father.

By the early 1860s, Elizabeth was the most sought after sculptor in Europe. Royalty, politicians, and intellectuals paid dearly to be the subjects of her expensive talent. Then it all came crashing down.

The details of the couple's abrupt exodus in 1867 never came to light, but amateurish dabbling in European intrigue evidently got them into very hot water. Forced to flee for their lives, they wandered the world for six long years.

After a short stopover at a

German commune in Georgia, the exiles traveled as far north as Minnesota and south into Central America. Finally, in 1873 they followed the example of thousands of their fellow countrymen and settled in Texas.

Instead of the German communities in the state's midsection, Elizabeth and Edmund bought an historic home in Waller County near Hempstead. Liendo was the two-story, 16-room centerpiece of the plantation once owned by Leonard Groce, one of the wealthiest early Texans.

Predictably the eccentric foreigner, who had hobnobbed with crowned heads and aristocrats, did not mix well with her rural neighbors. Knee-length gowns that daringly displayed her ankles and Edmund's habit of addressing her as "Miss Ney" violated the strict moral code of the times. The inevitable result was mutual scorn and suspicion.

A strange episode in the summer of 1873 made an already bad situation much worse. Three-year-old Arthur died of diphtheria, and in her grief Elizabeth cremated the tiny corpse in the fireplace. Wild rumors prompted a posse of townspeople to demand an explanation of the child's death, which the mother angrily issued along with an order to depart the premises.

For two decades the mysterious residents of Liendo lived in nearly total isolation. Edmund was preoccupied with his medical research, while the lady of the house tended to domestic duties and allowed her creative genius to gather dust.

At the urging of a former governor, Elizabeth molded a bust of Stephen F. Austin for an 1893 exhibition in Chicago. Overnight she was a highly acclaimed sensation.

Encouraged by the unexpected reaction, Elizabeth moved to Austin, where she opened a studio and immediately became the city's resident artist. Her advanced age and long layoff proved no handicaps, as she produced a series of lavishly praised busts and statues.

Meanwhile, Edmund found a place for himself in the affairs of Waller County. He played an active part in local politics and was instrumental in the founding of a black college which evolved into present-day Prairie View A&M. He also helped to organize the Texas Academy of Science.

Four years to the day after the 1903 unveiling of her celebrated

capitol statues of Austin and Houston, Elizabeth Ney passed away in Austin at the age of 74. Marble dust had aggravated a bronchial condition putting a fatal strain on her weak heart.

The scandalous sculptress with the magic touch was laid to rest on the grounds of secluded

This Week In Texas History

By Barte Haile



Liendo, and the devoted doctor

took his place beside her in 1911.

"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 online at www.twith.com.

Big Bag Strikes Again

Living on a ranch, one is surrounded by animals of all sizes, both domestic and not so. Like most people with pets, we enjoy the antics of all these creatures. Sometimes they cause us problems, but we try to laugh about it later. Any other response raises blood pressure.

Lately, we thought Big Bag the cow had been strangely well behaved, so we've been anticipating her next move like the proverbial shoe that's bound to drop. When she's good for long periods, we've found it to be an ominous sign. She's either plotting something awful or waiting for just the right moment to do the worst thing she can think of, impromptu. Either way, it's only a matter of time.

When one particular calf started appearing in the yard earlier this month, we figured Big Bag was being naughty by proxy, training another apprentice. (She's done this before). We never did figure out where that calf was breaking in, a sure sign that Big Bag was behind the mischief. She's a master of deception, that one.

The big girl finally made her own move a couple of

Rustic Ramblings

By Dr. Gene Ellis



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

days ago. She must be getting old, though, because it wasn't as horrible as usual. And the timing wasn't excruciating either. She tired of waiting for me to open the gate to a bale of hay, one that I had been actually hoping to save for the next day. The way things have been during this drought, we've had to conserve the hay as much as possible. (It isn't like three years ago when everyone had plenty to feed and the herds were fat).

So a hungry Big Bag opened a gate to the barn at the cow lot and led the herd right on in. (We still aren't sure how she did it). With cold weather approaching, I had half a mind to let them in early anyway and give them access to the shelter of the barn as well as full stomachs.

This time Big Bag didn't do anything I probably wouldn't have done myself. In fact, she saved me the trouble of slosh-

ing around in the mud to open the gates. She just did it a little early. The joke may be on her, though, because our old tractor doesn't kick over below a certain temperature. We had left a certain number of bales of hay in the locked (or so we thought) areas of the lot to correspond with the expected days of below-freezing weather. If the tractor wouldn't start, I'd just open a gate to a bale of hay. Now we'll probably come up one day short.

In desperation, we'll probably throw down from the hayloft some of the old square bales that are now at least a quarter of a century old. Last time we were in this kind of fix, the cows weren't too picky about their cuisine. I expect they'll make do in this instance as well. When the square bales are gone, the weather should be warm enough for the tractor to start again. And with the recent rains, our little wheat field is growing and should provide a few days of grazing.

The good news is, that whether it's rain, freezing rain, sleet, ice, or snow, it's wet. And after two years of drought, it's very, very welcome.

New Brazos Trail Region Website Offers Free Trips

CLIFTON — The Texas Brazos Trail, a regional tourism organization, has partnered with 12 communities and attractions to offer a chance to win a trip across the Texas Brazos Trail Region. The special website promotion began on Jan. 1, and ends on May 30.

Visitors to the site <www.TexasBrazosTrail.com/Trip> can enter to win the grand prize of a six-night trip through the region. Additionally, two runners-up will be awarded a weekend trip.

"The Texas Brazos Trail website is a fantastic tool for people interested in visiting the area. We have information on communities, counties, attractions, and events in an 18-county region," said Emily Lutz, regional coordinator for the Texas Brazos Trail Region.

The grand prize winner will enjoy a week-long trip with overnight accommodations in Bryan/College Station, Clifton, Georgetown, Navasota, Round Rock, and Waco. In addition to the accommodations, the winner will receive passes to the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station, a family pass to the Mayborn Museum in Waco, Round Rock Express minor league baseball tickets, as well as free entrance to other attractions, restaurant discounts, and shopping coupons.

Two runner-up prizes will also be awarded. One winner will receive a trip across Bastrop County, encompassing Bastrop, Elgin, and Smithville. The other winner will be awarded a trip across Bell County and enjoy overnight stays in Belton, Temple, and Salado.

For more information, call (254) 749-5256.



When mom or dad smokes, the whole family smokes.

Smoking Restrictions Placed On Foster Parents

SAN MARCOS, Texas — The Hays Caldwell Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (HCCADA) reminds foster parents that Texas law prohibits them from smoking in their homes if children live there. Foster parents are also not allowed to smoke in their cars if the children are inside.

“This is a positive step toward ensuring the health and

safety of Texas children,” says HCCADA Tobacco Educator Kim Fry. “Studies show that a person who breathes secondhand smoke is exposed to the same tar, nitrosamines, benzene, cyanide, arsenic, methane, carbon monoxide and other cancer-causing chemicals as the person smoking the cigarette. Children’s lungs aren’t completely developed, making them more susceptible to the effects of secondhand smoke than adults.”

Fry says today’s announcement that the city of Bangor, Maine has prohibited smoking in cars if children are present is further proof that people are finally starting to comprehend the dangers posed by secondhand smoke. The ordinance passed by the Bangor, Maine City Council prohibits any-

one – not just foster parents – from smoking in cars where children under the age of 18 are present.

“When a smoker lights up, he or she inhales only about 15 percent of the smoke,” Fry explains. “The other 85 percent becomes secondhand smoke and those near the smoker inhale the same carcinogens they would ingest if they, themselves actually smoked.”

Fry says while smokers have the right to choose to smoke, they do not have the right to choose for those around them.

Tobacco educator Kim Fry is available to do presentations for community groups, organizations and schools throughout central Texas. To schedule a presentation, call Fry at 512.396.7695 or email <kimfry@hayscaldwellcouncil.org>.

Diebold Voting Machine Key Copied From Photo

PRINCETON, N.J. — It was revealed in the course of last summer’s landmark virus hack of a Diebold touch-screen voting system at Princeton University that the company uses the same key to open every machine. It’s also an easy key to buy at any office supply store since it’s used for filing cabinets and hotel mini-bars, says a report on BradBlog, who broke the story last week.

The Princeton Diebold virus hack found that a single person with 60 seconds of unsupervised access to the system, who either picked the lock (easy in 10 seconds) or had a key, could slip a vote-swapping virus onto a single machine which could then undetectably affect every other machine in the county to steal an entire election, noted

BradBlog.

“But the folks at Princeton who discovered the hack (after VelvetRevolution.us, gave them the Diebold touch-screen machine on which to perform their tests) had resisted showing exactly what the key looked like in order to hold on to *some* semblance of security for Diebold’s Disposable Touch-Screen Voting Systems,” noted Brad Friedman, who explained that the company has had a photograph of the key sitting on their own website’s online store.

“Of course, they’ll only sell such keys to ‘Diebold account holders’ apparently — or so they claim — but that’s hardly a problem,” said Friedman. “J. Alex Halderman, one of the folks who worked on the Princeton Hack and tried to

keep the design of the key secret for obvious reasons, revealed Tuesday that a friend of his had found the photo of the key on Diebold’s website and discovered that was all he needed to create a working copy.”

As Halderman writes...

“I bought three blank keys from Ace. Then a drill vise and three cabinet locks that used a different type of key from Lowes. I hoped that the spacing and depths on the cabinet locks’ keys would be similar to those on the voting machine key. With some files I had I then made three keys to look like the key in the picture.”

He noted that two of the three keys “can open the locks on the Diebold machine we used in our study.”

Sheehan Withdraws Lawsuit Over Right-of-Way Access

WACO — An outspoken critic of the U.S. occupation of Iraq last week withdrew her lawsuit against the county in which President George W. Bush’s vacation ranch lies.

Cindy Sheehan’s lawsuit had challenged McLennan County’s ordinances banning camping and parking along the right-of-ways near the president’s private property.

The lawsuit was removed in light of an appeal of the convictions of two protesters related to another case.

“We will get a resolution faster” this way, said David Broiles the Fort Worth attorney representing Sheehan’s partners.

A jury convicted two protesters last month on misdemeanor charges for obstructing a road near the president’s ranch.

The two protesters – an Oklahoman and an Austinite – have submitted appeals to Waco’s 10th Court of Appeals.

Former Hico Officials Arrested For Licensing Scheme

HICO, Texas — A former Building Code Enforcement Officer for the city of Hico has been charged with three counts of tampering with a government record for providing false documentation that allowed three unqualified individuals to receive state electrical licenses.

Raul Chavez, 915 Kirk St. in Hico, was arrested on January 18, 2007, by deputies from the Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office based on a complaint filed by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR).

Chavez is accused of concocting a scheme to allow unqualified individuals to receive state electrical licenses by setting up a Hico municipal electrical licensing program, which included a training course and a

licensing exam provided by Chavez. He is accused of helping the individuals to use their Hico-issued licenses as the basis for obtaining a state electrical license, including providing them with falsified experience verification forms attested to by Chavez.

TDLR has identified 17 individuals who participated in Chavez’ scheme and received state licenses. Three of those individuals already have surrendered their state-issued licenses and the TDLR is seeking to revoke the remaining 14 licenses, including Chavez’.

While serving in 2003 as Building Code Enforcement Officer for Hico, a town of 1,300 about 70 miles southwest of Fort Worth, Chavez convinced city officials to allow him to set up a

municipal electrical licensing program. The 78th Texas Legislature had passed House Bill 1487, the Electrical Safety and Licensing Act, mandating that all individuals performing electrical work in Texas must have either a state or local electrician’s license. There was no electrical licensing program in Hico then, so many individuals who were performing electrical work in that area held no license.

The law also provided for a grandfathering period, during which electricians who held a local or regional license could obtain a state license without passing a test by proving they had sufficient experience and by using their local license as the basis for their state license. They were required to have held their local license for a spe-

cific period of time and were also required to provide experience verification forms, signed by a master electrician, demonstrating that they had worked for the statutorily required amount of time under the supervision of a master electrician.

The law provided an avenue to electrical licensure for qualified and experienced individuals who worked in areas without licensing, but the law made it much easier to qualify for a state license if the applicant already held a local license.

The local licensing program Chavez set up required electricians to undergo two weeks of training and then pass a test administered by Chavez. Chavez also granted himself a master electrician’s license, although he had no training as an

electrician.

Chavez then assisted the members of his class when they filled out their state electrician license application. Since state law required applicants to hold a local electrical license for at least a year to qualify for a state license without testing, each applicant falsely claimed to have held their local licenses for at least a year, even though the Hico program had not at the time existed for a year. In addition, Chavez used the master electrician’s license he had issued to himself to sign experience verification forms for class participants, allowing them to become licensed.

TDLR became aware of the scheme when it was contacted by a Hico city official after Chavez left his job with the city.