

Holiday break fails to barricade news flow

Sometimes it's hard to remember that although school may end, the world still goes on. During this past vacation, however, events near and far conspired to remind us that there indeed is life after finals.

Good news and bad—and some that just didn't make sense—filled the academic interim along with, we presume, large doses of holiday cheer.

On the whole, the bad news seems to have won out, but then that assessment has recurred persistently ever since we quit eating at our parents' table on a regular basis.

The news view seems rosier the further afield we cast our glance, with the greatest glow (like the legendary star) emanating from the Orient where President Carter (and through him the U.S. government and people) recognized the People's Republic of China.

The explanation of how the world's most populous nation managed to escape official American detection for nearly 30 years will probably be buried beneath a pile of ebullient proclamations and trade contracts. We only note that the vision of our government sharpened considerably as U.S. businesses focused on mainland China's billion-person market.

The "boldness" of Carter's move was also diminished by the reciprocal and substantial changes in style, personnel and policies of China's leadership since Mao Tse-Tung's death in 1976.

Those changes, including increasingly internationalist economic and political attitudes, announced liberalization of civil rights and capitalist incentives, have dismayed supporters of China's home-grown version of communist purity, but have apparently received considerable, if tentative, approval by mainland Chinese themselves.

Meanwhile, the Taiwanese govern-

ment and its American supporters seem to believe Carter has prematurely inaugurated the Year of the Rat, selling out an autocratic Nationalist ally for a flood of Coca Cola.

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A promise of continued American aid and cultural contacts with the Taiwanese, however, gives the lie to that assessment. Moreover, Peking's announced policy of negotiations with

the regime on China's island province suggests the probability of a peaceful, if still distant, resolution of internal difference.

Elsewhere, we note the continued deterioration in the position of Iran's Shah Rezi Pahlevi. A civilian government—labelled collaborationist by the less-than-normal opposition—may be able to put together the pieces long enough to allow the shah vacation abroad without a return ticket.

Protest strikes in the oil industry and public services sector appear to be having more political success than the weapons of the shah's faltering army and secret police.

The growing anti-Americanism of the shah's opponents would be more distressing if we did not recall that U.S. involvement in Iran's oil industry and politics has helped obstruct the Iranian people's access to their economic resources and civil rights.

Closer to home, things often seemed less than bright.

An innocent verdict reached last week by a Salem jury in the nation's first case of rape charges brought by a wife against the husband with whom she was living has probably imperiled

women's recourse to the law as an ally of sexual equality.

Evidence of sexual assault in the testimony of the wife, Greta Rideout, and other witnesses including the examining physician, apparently counted for less than traditional attitudes about a husband's sexual "prerogatives" and the defense's rather irrelevant examination of Greta Rideout's personal history.

In Eugene, efforts to legislate control over transporting nuclear wastes probably received their coup de grace with a second "postponement for further study" by the Lane County Board of Commissioners.

That gloomy conclusion stems from the subsequent arrival of three conservative commissioners on the county's newly expanded governing board. Together with holdover Commissioner Archie Weinstein, they represent a bloc of officials whose political views seem to treat the environment as a resource to be exploited rather than protected.

But, perhaps we're starting off too pessimistically. After all, it's 1979: a brand new year and welcome to it.

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Need letter tricks

Your amusing, but in my opinion somewhat misleading, comments (ODE, Dec. 5) about Mark Hatfield's automated letter writing procedures prompt me to hark back to my two terms in the House of Representatives about 20 years ago and say a few words in his defense.

One of the old adages they inflicted on freshmen congressmen when I started out, and probably still do, is "Take care of your mail and it will take care of you." It went a long way with the other one I never quite got the hang of: "Get along, go along."

When I was in high school and the paper I edited won first at the State, out of the blue came a letter of congratulations from Earl Snell, then Secretary of State. This modest man later was elected Governor and those truly personal letters were supposed to have played a part in his advancement.

No prominent public official, as representative, senator, governor, could possibly dictate personal answers to each letter he or she receives. Nor should this be done. Much of the mail is generated by some lobby and only deserves, at most, a responsive acknowledgement. Form replies for form letters are fair.

We had three principal form letters when I was in Congress. The "agree" letter, the "disagree" letter (which confined itself to thanking the correspondent for expressing his opinion and hoping he would continue to do so), and the "appreciation" letters to those who sent in letters of praise. We only got about 100 letters a day but of course I had a much smaller staff than is provided these days.

I even signed all my mail, even

the form letters, but I don't see how it would be practical for any member of Congress to attempt to do that today.

Letters posing substantive problems for an official should get careful attention and a substantive reply. That's what the official is elected for and that's why he's provided with a staff. On that score, I think Mark Hatfield, on the basis of my personal experience, does a good job. So does Jim Weaver.

It would be a rash Member of Congress who would dare eschew robo letters and autopen signatures.

No doubt the interests of candor and economy would be served if, for the bulk of the constituent mail, he or she simply sent postcards acknowledging receipt and having some staff member check whether the member agreed, disagreed, was undecided or was simply delighted that the constituent took the trouble to send him those kind words.

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Hiding behind words

When the possible use of closed circuit TV for arraignments within Oregon courts comes to a vote, which it should, people ought to remember that the recent Emerald editorial was not talking about the use of a closed circuit TV system for security surveillance within the confines of the new jail.

Instead, the Emerald was talking about such a system devised to save the "county" the expense of "paying" for the constitutional right of a citizen to appear in person before his accusers, to hear in person the charges placed against him and to contest those



charges in person — not electronically.

It's easy to lose one's grasp on reality when one hears county officials refer to an incarcerated person, a jailed citizen, charged with a crime as an "inmate," a "prisoner," or a "resident." The words mean you and I and they refer directly to us — the public.

County officials cannot say to you: "We're locking up the public." It just won't get them re-elected. So, they tend to obscure reality with the use of such euphemistic words.

The natural right of a citizen to appear personally within a court of law, whether for arraignment or for trial, ought not to be measured in dollars. As a citizen, I'd rather my tax-dollars went for fair and just trials in our own land than to supply arms to foreign lands.

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Prison abolitionist

Lorraine Nelson wrote a thoughtful article, "Reformers Oppose Prison for Non-violent Offenders," in the Nov. 28 Emerald. Much to my dismay, however, I found a garbled quote attributed to me. Those familiar with my work and writing have gleefully teased me about the quote since they recognize it as a distortion of my position.

To clarify matters, I would like to state clearly that I am a prison abolitionist. We have the ability to design alternate justice forms which do not violate human rights by keeping people in captivity. We can have people-serving justice without jeopardizing the safety of the community.

We now have barbaric institutions which are designed to "punish." These institutions are a grand historical mistake. We lock up the young in kids' prisons,

the old in "homes," the ill in asylums and those who err in dungeons. We exploit the labor of the captives and assault their human dignity. It's time for change.

Prison abolition is very different from prison reform. It is understandable that Ms. Nelson misperceived my position. I did offer her a copy of my article on prison abolition, but perhaps the idea is too novel for her to digest and incorporate into her understanding as a journalist. Or, perhaps under the pressure of meeting deadlines, she had no time to read.

Anyone who would like to pursue this topic is most welcome to contact me. I will gladly recommend further reading on the topic and will gladly discuss reasonable alternatives to our present inhumane practices.

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