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■ Guest commentary

RiverBend hospital asking for a future flood disaster

It is a pre-dawn morning during the winter of 2008. It has been raining heavily for a week straight. All the dams are filled to capacity. The McKenzie and Willamette rivers are flowing over their banks. At the new Sacred Heart Hospital along the McKenzie River, rising floodwaters have cut off vehicle access.

As in 1996, residents throughout Lane County are waking to find they are stranded and in need of help. Many have been injured and some are missing. Unfortunately, most regional rescue efforts must remain focused on hospital evacuation. Water over two feet surrounds the hospital and evacuation is hazardous. News reports air that the new McKenzie Willamette Hospital at the EWEB site is also facing rising floodwaters.

Most of Sacred Heart's adjacent buildings, housing and nearby commercial outlets suffer major damage; several buildings have been destroyed which were stocked with medical supplies and hazardous materials. Moreover, due to the displaced floodwaters from all these buildings, every nearby residence suffers extensive flood damage. Homes are inundated and victims are trapped on roofs. More deaths around Lane County occur because of the strain on rescue personnel which remain tied up with hospital evacuation.

Any part of this scenario is possible and plausible! Something went wrong in the hospital planning process for the new hospital at RiverBend. They knew most of the RiverBend site is really a flood plain.

Yet they plow forward with their so-called experts to counter serious issues raised in the planning process. They can elevate the roadways and hospital itself, and build a dike to protect it from rising floodwaters, but a hospital threatened by a flood will still command use of every available resource and rescue personnel while taking away from other countywide needs. Just where do this giant flood-protected hospital and dozens of other buildings force all the displaced

floodwaters? To the upstream, downstream and adjacent properties.

Their experts cast aside very crucial issues in assessing flood risk. Now they know that if and when the river does change course, which it will some day, they will be held accountable. Rule No. 1: Communities don't build any emergency services (or museums) and especially hospitals, in areas prone to flooding!

The Sacred Heart hospital is being planned next to a river meander. They were right in naming it RiverBend. The Mathews' house was also located adjacent to a meander. These wide turns are where the river is most likely to change course when it cuts across the neck of a U-shaped turn, leaving only an "oxbow lake" where the channel used to be, and can substantially reshape the river just upstream and downstream.

Responding at the public meeting on the loss of the Mathews' property on Feb. 4, 2004, Lane County Commissioner Bobby Green stated, "We need to learn from this." But this community, so far, hasn't learned anything. For this community to consider putting not just one, but two hospitals, in areas at risk of flood danger could be the most irresponsible, arrogant and idiotic decisions this community's leaders have ever made. Knowing we could be without a hospital when we need it most, during a catastrophic flood, is unfathomable. It is negligent to build emergency services in areas at any risk of flood. McKenzie-Willamette better take a second look as well.

Please understand, it is not so important that our hospital rooms have a nice river view.

David Rodriguez lives in Springfield, just upstream from where the Mathews' house once stood, and has been involved with river-related issues since the mid-1990s

■ Guest commentary

Alberto Gonzales loyal only to Bush, not law

(U-WIRE) NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Back in 2002, Attorney General John Ashcroft ordered the semi-nude "Spirit of Justice" statue to be covered, at a cost of about \$8,000 to American taxpayers. With President Bush's nomination of Alberto Gonzales to replace Ashcroft, Americans should spring for another \$8,000 to cover the poor lady's eyes, too. Justice, and anyone interested in her preservation, isn't going to like Gonzales very much.

Gonzales' story is compelling. He is a child of immigrants and a Harvard Law graduate. He has served in the Air Force, the Texas Supreme Court and the White House. But this record of achievement obscures a crucial fact: Gonzales also has a record of dispensing incredibly bad advice.

His most famous mispractice came in 2002 when he advised Bush that "the war on terrorism renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitation on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders some of its provisions quaint." In other memoranda, he argued that Geneva and other statutes covering war crimes should be ignored completely at the president's discretion. Gonzales' arguments contributed significantly to the culture that produced the Abu Ghraib scandal. The resulting human rights violations punctured American

moral exceptionalism and set the campaign to win Iraqi "hearts and minds" back by decades.

It will be interesting to watch Senator John McCain, who was imprisoned in a Vietnamese torture camp for five years, vote to confirm a man who views Geneva protections the way most people view the warnings on mattress tags.

Gonzales has had practice when it comes to obviating human rights concerns. Throughout the '90s, when then-Governor Bush was setting a record for executions, he asked then-Justice Gonzales to review each death row inmate on the morning of his scheduled demise. Gonzales took the duty less than seriously. According to legal analyst Alan Berlow, "A close examination of the Gonzales memoranda suggests that Governor Bush frequently approved executions based on only the most cursory briefings on the issues in dispute. In fact, in these documents, Gonzales repeatedly failed to apprise the governor of crucial issues in the cases at hand."

The casual observer might conclude that Gonzales has declared a personal jihad on human rights. But this conclusion is wrong: Gonzales is no ideologue. On the Texas Supreme Court, he was moderate in

opinion and temperament. Indeed, it is commonly believed that he was nominated for attorney general because Bush's far-right base found him insufficiently conservative to make a viable Supreme Court nominee. But progressives who might be tempted to celebrate Gonzales' moderation should keep that champagne on ice. Gonzales signals an alarming trend in the second Bush Administration: the replacement of experienced ideologues with partisan hacks who willingly place Bush's preferences over the dictates of law.

Bush took office in 2001 as a lightweight. His 2000 campaign was premised on the idea that, at least on foreign policy matters, experts like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell would be in charge. Bush comes off of the 2004 election in a very different position. He won based largely on a foreign policy vision that he has made very much his own. He no longer desires tutoring by his father's friends or Clinton-era holdovers. Bush has earned some personal capital.

The effect of this change first became apparent when Bush appointed Porter Goss, a Florida congressman and Bush's point man on intelligence issues. He now heads the CIA, and The New York

Times recently reported that Goss' loyalty to the White House has thrown the agency into "turmoil."

In Gonzales, Bush has found another Goss: a man who is willing, if not eager, to put aside law and custom to accommodate the president's agenda. In any other administration, this might not be terrible; cabinet officials often advocate the president's positions. But Gonzales would exacerbate Bush's most glaring failures as a leader. Bush is ineffective at extracting unvarnished opinions from subordinates, and is notoriously unable to adjudicate disputes among them. When you add to this mix people like Gonzales, who seek to justify Bush's decisions rather than inform them, the result is a complete perversion of the decision-making process.

In John Ashcroft, Americans had an attorney general who could competently steer the vehicle of state, albeit often in the wrong direction. In Alberto Gonzales, Americans have one whose loyalty to an incompetent navigator will consistently supersede his own judgment. America's next destination on the legal landscape is now anybody's guess.

Daniel Munz writes for the Yale Herald

■ Editorial

White House skirts moral high ground by holding terrorists

The Bush Administration is currently contemplating holding certain suspected terrorists in custody for their entire lives, despite a lack of evidence against them, according to the Washington Post.

This shouldn't come as too much of a surprise. White House staff have never let little things like a lack of evidence, international law or the Constitution stop them from waging war on terror in the past.

Nor have they let themselves be handicapped by trying to maintain the moral high ground while prosecuting the war on terror — just ask the prisoners at Abu Ghraib. We have been perfectly happy to be known throughout the world as more moral than Saddam Hussein and the murderous insurgents. Why set the bar too high? Morality is a national security risk. Lowering the world's expectations is simply part of protecting ourselves.

But detaining innocent people without judicial review until they die seems too horrific even for this White House to contemplate. One option under review involves transferring the detainees from Guantanamo Bay to U.S.-style prisons in their home countries, according to the Post.

In another proposal, the Defense Department would ask Congress for \$25 million to build a more comfortable prison for the detainees, called Camp 6. This facility would hold around 200

inmates that are no longer useful from an intelligence standpoint but cannot go through a military tribunal because the government lacks evidence against them. Here the inmates would live a more comfortable existence and be allowed to socialize with other inmates. Think of it as a suspected terrorist retirement village.

Not everyone is loving these plans. Republican Sen. Richard G. Lugar, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, called the proposal a "bad idea." Democratic Sen. Carl Levin, on the Senate Armed Services Committee, questioned the proposal's constitutionality. "There must be some modicum, some semblance of due process," he said. One CIA officer quoted in the Post called the practice "kidnapping."

It is time that we abandon this barbaric form of justice popularized by right wing pundits and country music singers. It is time for real American justice to reach the detainees. If the government has evidence of their links to terrorism, then they should be brought before a court of law. If there is not enough evidence, then they should be freed.

We are a strong and secure superpower. We do not need to lower ourselves to the terrorists' level in order to protect ourselves. We can have both security and liberty. Anybody who says otherwise is giving the terrorists too much credit.