

**FOOLING THE MASSES**

In any war, truth is the first victim. Lies of the invaders are intended to build support for illegal and murderous actions. They fool the gullible, and there are many gullible.

I see it in my hometown Illinois newspaper, which now carries near its front page masthead the red-white-and-blue statement: "Project Iraqi Liberation." That lie is matched by those who describe the killing of a young woman from neighboring Washington by an Israeli bulldozer as an accident.

I mourn for innocent Israelis killed by retaliatory suicide bombings. I mourn for destitute Palestinians whose homes are demolished and their lives taken by land-grabbing Israeli military. I mourn for obedient U.S. troops who die in the sands of Iraq. I mourn for Iraqi civilians who die in urban bombings by a U.S. technology whose shots too often go awry.

All of us are victims of our leaders' conspiracy to kill. No one is innocent. We all become killers when we blindly refuse to mourn death of the truth.

*George Beres  
Eugene*

**THE INTERSECTION**

America now stands at the intersection of restoration and decline, and the choice before us in the 2004 presidential election is which street we wish to cross. The enormity of our decision cannot be overlooked.

The signs of decline are easy to see. Though we are a nation still generous at heart, we've become distracted in mind by celebrities and sports, wealth and possessions. For many, reality television and home video games have insidiously replaced living.

Our malady of mindlessness is further diagnosed by the fact that a majority of American adults polled admit to not having read a book in

their adult life. The prophecy of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is being fulfilled: We are, in essence, burning our books by simply not reading them.

Hope for our restoration lies in rescuing our indignation from many years of indifference and indulgence. We must then withdraw our time from the banks of Hollywood and Sony, and reinvest it toward active citizenship.

We must become inspectors for America, seeking out and destroying our own weapons of mass destruction: hunger and disease, poverty and joblessness, homelessness and hopelessness. Our search must be constant, our dedication complete, and our deadline infinite.

We must begin to acquaint ourselves with those who've chosen to contend for the presidency. We forget so easily; we must remember the poor choices given to us in 2000 and work now to assure at least one better choice in 2004. There is just too much at stake.

*Dr. Todd Huffman  
Eugene*

**SALES TAX REVISITED**

The state legislators are once again talking about a sales tax for the state. The Democrats have a different plan to solve the state's problems, but they don't have a majority to work with.

I have been a lifelong opponent of a sales tax, but lately I'm having second thoughts about it. A sales tax dedicated to education could be a solution to our economic problems, guarantee excellent funding for our future education needs, and help a little with the crazy buying spree that most of us indulge in.

A sales tax going into the general budget would be absolutely idiocy. It would just be used to give other tax breaks for the rich, not fund education sufficiently, and provide more money to be given back as a "kicker." The legis-

**TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN** BY SHANNON WHEELER



lators have a proven track record in this area.

Surplus money from the sales tax would be used to build a rainy day fund and expand the state's reputation as an "education state." The legislators would be done with this ongoing dispute and could settle down to argue about covering other needs or giving tax relief. We should settle the education problem first, and argue about the rest later.

*Bob Cassidy  
Eugene*

**MOLESTING CITIZENS**

This Interagency Narcotic Enforcement Task Force appears to be indulging in that childish arrogance we call "being spoiled." Perhaps they have too much time on their hands, deploying 59 officers and the National Guard to stop a victimless crime that was not even committed. Oops! Intelligence anyone? Is this how we want our police relating to us? We are paying them for this civil fiasco!

This sort of authoritarian belligerence leads

**INSIDER BASEBALL** BY TONY CORCORAN



**PERS Strings**

Painful remedies are unavoidable.

**P**ERS is killin' me. Ginny Burdick, our sturdy senator from Portland, tells me I'm no fun anymore: "You just meander mindlessly muttering about DC's and DB's, risks, replacement ratios, 6 percent pick-ups, 8 percent guarantees – and lawsuits – and what the hell is an actuary, anyway?"

There's been huge pressure in the capitol for a PERS solution since January; if there's no new plan by the first week of May, there will be no savings for the next calendar year – because the actuaries, those griffins of monopoly capital, have to know by May in order to defog their crystal balls by July.

We've completed the easier stuff: the 8 percent cap, the new mortality tables, the new PERS board. We just can't agree on the successor plan; conservative House Republicans are demanding a vote on an insufficient "defined contribution" (DC) plan, instead of a more stable "defined benefit" (DB) plan. We had a meeting with the governor and all the leaders; Teddy tells House Majority Leader Tim Knopp at least three times: A DC plan won't cut it. Tim decides to run it out anyway. (It's this kind of partisan thinking that got Kitzhaber his 150 vetoes when both chambers were Republican – might not work as well this session.)

The longest debate has been over current savings. The dam broke last Thursday with a compromise plan from the governor's office to the House PERS Committee. Players in the discussions and negotiations leading to this plan included:

- Tim Knopp, House PERS Committee chair,
- An *ad hoc* group made up of local government and school employers, and their lobbyists (headed up by Jim Green of the school boards),
- This employer group was joined by some of the "progressive" business types – the Portland Business Alliance and the Oregon Business Alliance. This entire group was represented by Bill Gary of Harrang Long (my all-time favorite name of a law firm), a guy who's been around the PERS scene for a while.
- The PERS Coalition: teachers, police, firefighters, social workers, librarians, school employees, higher ed classified staff and faculty – the actual workers, as they're known – rep-

- resented by another seasoned veteran of the PERS scene, Greg Hartman,
- Margaret Hallock, the governor's labor staff, former head of LERC and a former economist for the state,
- Freshman Representative Greg McPherson, the man I call "Synchronicity." Think about it: We have the biggest PERS catastrophe in history and along comes a smart Democrat corporate pension lawyer. Although he's a rookie, Greg has a unique insight on Salem: His father, Hector MacPherson (a Republican farmer who created our original land use laws) and his grandfather, also Hector, served in the Oregon House. In all our discussions, Greg has the unfair advantage of being the only one who has actually written a retirement plan, except for,
- David Hendrickx, our vowel-impaired legislative counsel, who has done nothing this session but write retirement plans. (A special provision of any new retirement plan gives Dave free room-and-board on any ward at the Oregon State Hospital in perpetuity), and finally,
- Me, because I chair the senate committee dealing with PERS.

**T**he hearing room was packed last Thursday; Margaret walked the committee through the proposed changes to SB2003. The plan creates huge current savings but at a cost to current PERS members and even to some folks who retired after 1999. The plan goes beyond what the PERS Coalition believes could survive court challenge – they're in shock. After her testimony, I walk up to the microphone: "This is a huge hit to people in the system now and folks who just got out of the system. ... having said that, it's the right thing to do." I'm firmly convinced.

Margaret and Greg and I, none of us had any authority to speak for the employees; but we felt we were there on their behalf, protecting their interests as well as we could, because they could not move. The system was in crisis and had to be fixed; but many public employees – who've seen their wages, their benefits, their very jobs, relentlessly attacked by the conservatives for years – viewed this as simply another part of an ongoing ideological war. It wasn't. But I'm still getting the stink-eye from union lobbyists and even some former co-workers, and it hurts. I knew it would happen. It's killin' me.

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