

Delicious Ironies

Blackberry Pie Society ponders political peculiarities.

Happy first birthday, Blackberrians! I hope you spend it banefully bashing Bush's bad behavior. However, as a former nattering nabob of negativism myself, let me propose to you that there is a tiny silver lining around Katrina's penumbra.



Yeah, yeah, I know many of you cynics out there are pointing out the obvious:

- We were no more ready for disaster after 9/11 than before.
- You better not be black and poor in a flood plain.
- You probably shouldn't appoint political cronies to FEMA: The *Washington Post* reported that "[f]ive of eight top Federal Emergency Management Agency officials came to their posts with virtually no experience in handling disasters." The top three officials – Brown, Chief of Staff Patrick J. Rhode and Deputy Chief of Staff Brooks D. Altshuler – "arrived with ties to President Bush's 2000 campaign or to the White House advance operation."
- You should've bought stock in Halliburton. More than \$500 million a day is being spent already, much of it on Iraq-style no-bid contracts, since normal federal contracting rules were "largely suspended" in the days following Katrina's landfall. "This is very painful," says Danielle Brian, director of the Project on Government Oversight, a nonprofit government spending watchdog group. "You are likely to see the equivalent of war profiteering – disaster profiteering."
- Joe Allbaugh made it to Louisiana before most FEMA officials. By Aug. 31, Allbaugh (the manager of the 2000 Bush-Cheney campaign and the Bush administration's first FEMA director) was on the ground "helping coordinate the private-sector response to the storm."
- It only took Bush 11 days after Katrina to dump the Davis-Bacon Act, which requires federal contractors to pay workers the prevailing wages in their communities. So contractors that come in can pay minimum wage.
- Even President Bush's cultural conservative base was rewarded. FEMA designated Pat Robertson's group Operation Blessing "as the No. 2 charity for donations in the wake of Hurricane Katrina," despite the fact that the group "gave more than half of its yearly allocation of cash donations, \$885,000, to the Christian Broadcasting Network," according to its most recent tax filings.

Other than that, how did you enjoy the play, Mrs. Lincoln?

But I think that one lesson, which writers from Molly Ivins to Paul Krugman have pointed out, is the most important one: Americans are slowly becoming aware that there's a reason for "government," there is a reason for the "commons," and it took a crisis to make that fact apparent. Remember the Great Depression? Our nation healed through the formation of large government projects like the WPA and the CCC, through Social Security, and ultimately Medicare and Medicaid. Big government wasn't all that bad then. It only became bad as a target of political and financial benefit to the wealthy.

So, as we watch Bush's botched response, and Halliburton's sleazy opportunism, think back to why you Blackberrians formed a year ago. Think about the Bushes, and the Sizemores, and their anti-government rants. Any jackass can kick down a barn; it takes a carpenter to build one.

Blackberrians understood that when they formed to support good government. At its most basic, good government means adequate public services, whether it's public education, human services, public health, mental health, senior services, disability services, public roads, or, in this case, emergency management.

So thank you, Blackberrians, for forming to protect the "commons." Keep an eye on the bad guys, but never forget it's the good guys like you who keep them from getting away with murder. Literally. Non illigitimati carborundum!

The Cottage Grove Blackberry Pie Society is "dedicated to promoting good politics and great people in east Lane County, and having fun while doing it." The BPS celebrates its first birthday this month. Former state Sen. Tony Corcoran was instrumental in the creation of the first recipes and currently serves as chief taster. Contact blackberrypie@gmail.com or drop by the BPS office Mondays from 4 to 5:30 pm at the Cottage Grove Hotel.

Weaver to Oregon senator and presently Lane County commissioner, Sorenson has spent half his professional life in government. As a lawyer in the private sector, he observed the functioning of government from outside the political arena, thus giving his leadership a balanced approach.

Sorenson will work to insure that corporations doing business in Oregon pay their fair share of taxes. With this increased revenue, funds will be available to pay for much needed improvement in public education, health care and social services. From protecting civil liberties and civil rights to bringing the Oregon National Guard home where they are so desperately needed, Sorenson is the right man at the right time.

How does the public get a fair chance to evaluate and choose? Sorenson deserves equal access to Democratic events, full press coverage and debates with his Democratic opponents. How do we put honor and integrity back into politics? The race should be about issues, not money nor incumbency. Join me in supporting Sorenson's bid to serve all Oregonians.

Kathleen Epstein
Eugene

CIRCLING THE DRAIN

President Bush's speech from Jackson Square pledging a major federal role in post-Hurricane Katrina Gulf Coast rebuilding sounded good; too good. When the water settles, it will become clear that this effort is just one more reverse-Robin Hood transfer of wealth. Two clues: suspension of prevailing wage protection for workers, and letting of no-bid contracts to corporate profiteers like Halliburton.

Upon reflection, the one thing that rings true from his speech is Bush's promise of a larger military role in future disasters.

The Bush administration and its supporters have successfully "starved the beast" of American government (as prominent conservative Grover Norquist describes the strategy) through aggressive tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy and by the Republican-controlled budgeting process which favors the same. Underfunded and undermanaged by unqualified political hacks and Bush cronies, government agencies are no longer able to function to serve and protect the citizenry, as witnessed by the Gulf Coast debacle.

The military, on the other hand, has this administration's full support and may be the only government entity still capable of a response — unless it isn't otherwise occupied (or occupying). Speaking of which, the \$200+ billion spent thus far on the Iraq debacle would certainly have been useful in recovering from our own. Wake up

Americans, and smell the stench! It's our country circling the drain.

Benton Elliott
Eugene

BURNING ISSUES

I was reading Kera Abraham's commentary about Burning Man (9-15) and was struck with the lack of concern and outright hypocrisy the gathering has come to represent, knowingly or not. In the piece, Abraham says, "burners torched just about everything flammable — pouring gasoline on the bigger sculptures to get them sparkin'." Later on she sites "leave no trace" as a "near religious commandment."

I am struck by three things when reading this:

- Pouring gasoline, which contains benzene, octane, xylene, and assorted other additives, and does not chemically break down completely at the temperatures involved in simple combustion, is not a good thing. Gasoline does burn, but in doing so releases a complex mix of semi-combusted hydrocarbons which float downwind and are deposited on stretches of desert, not to mention the large amounts which volatilize in-situ or remain as spills on the ground.

- The burning of sculptures made of plastics or even wood, and decorated by paints such as latex, oil based or even "non-toxic" acrylics, causes great amounts of compounds ranging from hydrochloric acid to cyanide arsenic, cadmium, and various forms of dioxins and furans to be released into the atmosphere and to be deposited downwind.

- Large gatherings of people trampling the desert, going to the bathroom, consuming water, and generally being human, are not "leaving no trace" in any way. At best, the gathering does represent a mindset that would try to shake convention and try a different social consciousness.

Playing advocate here, it seems Abraham also sees what I am saying and tries to elucidate it. People need to look holistically at all their environmental impacts, not just at the convenient ones.

Drew Higgins
Eugene

GARBAGE BOY

I had occasion to pop into the Burrito Boy on West 11th last week, and while waiting for my lunch I purchased a bottle of soda. After pouring my soda into a cup, I glanced around in vain for a recycling bin for my empty bottle. The next best thing would be to hand the empty bottle back to the nice young lady at the counter for her to put in their recycling, right? Wrong! Upon my request, I was told, "We just put it in the

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