

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

HEY KIDS! IT'S TOM TOMORROW'S GUIDE TO HOLIDAY PUNDITRY

INSIGHTFUL OBSERVATIONS TO WATCH FOR DURING THIS SEASON OF CELEBRATION AND JOY!

1) ENDLESS COMMENTARY FROM RIGHT-WINGERS DENOUNCING THE IMAGINARY "WAR ON CHRISTMAS." THE SECULAR PROGRESSIVES CAN SEND THEIR SO-CALLED "HOLIDAY GREETINGS" TO THEIR BUDDIES IN AL QAEDA! IN THIS COUNTRY, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS--LIKE IT OR NOT!



2) THE GUEST COMMENTARY ON THE LOCAL NEWS IN WHICH A CONCERNED CITIZEN EXPLAINS THAT THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS JUST TOO DARNED COMMERCIAL!



3) THE "HOLIDAY TRAVEL IS A NIGHTMARE" COMMENTARY. --AND THEN I HAD TO SPEND TWO DAYS IN A HOTEL ROOM IN BOISE UNTIL THEY COULD FIND ME ANOTHER FLIGHT!



4) THE NEWS STORY ABOUT THE HOT NEW TOY WHICH EVERYONE WANTS, BUT WHICH IS IN SHORT SUPPLY.

--AND PARENTS HAVE BEEN WAITING SINCE SIX A.M. FOR A CHANCE TO BUY THE NEW "TALKING THOMAS FRIEDMAN" DOLL!



5) AND OF COURSE, SMARTASS META-COMMENTARY ON HOLIDAY PUNDITRY ITSELF...

IT TURNS OUT THAT THESE HOLIDAY-THEMED COMMENTARIES ARE ACTUALLY QUITE BANAL!

WHAT KEEN INSIGHT THAT CARTOONIST MUST POSSESS! I THINK HIS LATEST BOOK WOULD BE THE BEST HOLIDAY PRESENT ANYONE COULD HOPE FOR!



TOM TOMORROW/2006

news Briefs

COURTHOUSE QUIRKS

Advocates for the disabled scored a major victory when they forced the federal government to install a ramp for the less able bodies at the shiny new federal courthouse in Eugene.

U.S. Judge Michael Hogan and GSA regional chief Jon Kvistad showed up alterabled at a media tour of the building Nov. 29. Kvistad limped with a cane after a severe ankle injury from stepping wrong off a landed border patrol helicopter near Canada. Hogan was maneuvering an electric scooter after hip replacement surgery. But after joking about the potential for an ironic photo op, both skipped the ramp. "I'll take the elevator," said Hogan.

Here are some other quirk courthouse tidbits from the tour:

- The big new building echoes with not many people. The building has 270,000 gross sq. ft. for about 240 people. That comes to 1,125 sq. ft. per person, more than many family homes. However, this is a building planned for the future with more federal judges and their staffs.

- The courthouse expects relatively few jury trials with even fewer trials in the future as more cases are settled by cheaper negotiation. Some of the building's five judges spend considerable time at their other federal courthouses in Medford and in Portland, where at least one has another office and staff.

- For such a large building, the courtrooms appear even smaller than in the old federal courthouse. "There are very few proceedings where there are lots of spectators," Hogan explained. But reporters pointed out that just the week before they were turned away from an overstuffed hearing on eco-arsonists.

- Hanging over the courtrooms are metallic light fixtures that critics have said look like a guillotine. "I fine people a quarter apiece that use the word guillotine," Hogan jokes. The judge said he likes how the fixture orders the courtroom by dividing the opposing sides.

- The U.S. Constitution guarantees the "right of trial by jury." But in the courthouse the jury is relegated to the side in an alcove while the whole room curves to focus on the judge — like a "sun god," as the *Oregonian's* architecture critic put it. Judge Hogan says he sees the focus as appropriate as the judge needs to "keep a hand on the tiller" in the courtroom.

- The courthouse boasts a record \$1.2 million in public art. But although Eugene prides itself on being the "World's Greatest City for the Arts and Outdoors" and has legions of starving artists, none of the art was made here.

- In Judge Hogan's chambers, paintings



- A city of Eugene ordinance regarding the new independent police auditor goes before the City Council Monday evening, Dec. 11, and deserves our attention. Voters approved the auditor position a year ago, and the city is finally nailing down the devilish details. Three councilors, Solomon, Papé and Polling, tried unsuccessfully to gut the independence of the police auditor at a council work session recently. Expect more fireworks as these conservative councilors join with the city attorney, city manager and police union to try to derail the will of the voters. The auditor function is already watered down and could easily get submerged in secrecy and lack of accountability (see Alan Pittman's news story, 11/22). The proposed ordinance, available at the city's website, has some disturbing language: *To the extent permitted by the Oregon Public Records Law, the auditor's office and any investigators or consultants it may employ shall maintain the confidentiality of records and information in accordance with applicable federal, state and local law and other applicable city policies and collective bargaining agreements.* The last half-dozen words give the city manager and even the police union too much power to keep in the dark what should be an open process of truth-seeking regarding alleged police misconduct. The city manager, city attorney and police union have been staunch opponents of independent police review in the past, and we imagine they are still working to see this whole process marginalized.

- David Kelly's time on the Eugene City Council is running out as the year comes to a close, and a large group of friends and colleagues gathered last weekend in appreciation of his eight years of dedicated and effective work on the council and before that in his environmental work through his neighborhood association. Mary O'Brien says it all in her "Natural Resistance" column this week:



KEVIN MATTHEWS

"For the past eight years, David has been wholly present at the governing table." We hope Kelly finds the time to stay involved in Eugene politics and perhaps run again for elected office at the local or state level.

- A long and pricey poll crackled over Eugene phones this week, clearly setting the stage for local 2008 elections. Funded by the right, the poll opens with, "Do you think Eugene is going in the right direction?" All the response choices fall into the familiar categories: favorable, very favorable, unfavorable, very unfavorable.

Mayor Kitty Piercy was a repeat subject with several questions about her, showing what Eugene progressives already know: Conservatives are sharpening their knives and saving their pennies for the mayoral race. Other categories included all the city councilors, even outgoing members, Pete Sorenson and Bobby Green on the County Commission, McKenzie-Willamette Triad hospital (both new location and quality of service), PeaceHealth (same topics), the Eugene Public Library, *Eugene Weekly* and *The Register-Guard*. We hear that the defeat of Jim Torrey by Vicki Walker is triggering some serious conservative churning. We suspect that this polling is a part of it.

- Are we having a moment here? Last week, when the UO men's basketball team beat 18th-ranked Georgetown, it felt a teensy bit like a sea change. After two less-than-stellar seasons, this season's early, fiery win over Rice (mostly thanks to senior-and-playing-like-it Aaron Brooks) seemed to give the Duck men a much-needed kick in the pants — one that carried them over Georgetown, 57-50. If we're being honest, the Ducks didn't exactly play like winners: 38.9 percent field goal shooting? C'mon, boys. Don't get us wrong; we're rooting for a winning season. Still, perhaps we could refrain from using useless facts to prop up the idea that this season might be better than last? Post-Georgetown, we can't count the number of times we've heard this silly statistic: It was the first UO men's basketball team win over a ranked opponent in the Eastern time zone. Um, what? Frankly, we don't care. We'd rather cross fingers for a more interesting happening over the next few weeks: How's about the Duck men starting the Pac-10 season undefeated? Now *that's* a statistic we could get behind.

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519, editor@eugeneweekly.com