

A Misinformed Public

Corporate media vs. democracy

Below are selected comments on media made by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. at the UO March 1. He and Vandana Shiva were keynote speakers opening the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference.

Barry Goldwater said corporations are designed to plunder, and if we let them anywhere near our government, they are going to plunder the American people.

The domination of government by business is called fascism, and our job is to walk that narrow trail in between, which is free market capitalism and democracy. We need an informed public that is able to recognize all the milestones of tyranny. We need an aggressive and vigorous and independent press that is willing to stand up and speak truth to power, and we no longer have that in the United States of America.



Ronald Reagan abolished the Fairness Doctrine in 1988 as a favor to the Christian right, which was already plotting to take over talk radio, and as a favor to the big studio heads who helped him get elected and were already plotting to take over all media. And today, as a direct result, there are five giant multinational corporations that control all 14,000 radio stations in America, all 5,000 television stations, 80 percent of our newspapers, all of our billboards and most of the large Internet content providers. There are five guys who are deciding what American hears now. News departments have become corporate profit centers. They have gotten rid of their investigative reporters, the people who can connect the dots between the children who have asthma, the money that the president took from the coal company and the rollbacks that were engineered as a result.

Eighty percent of investigative reporters have lost their jobs over the past 15 years. Newspapers also abolished their foreign news bureaus, which is why you cannot get foreign news in the U.S. unless you go to the BBC, which is why Americans accepted the neo-con fantasy that we were going to be met in the streets [of Iraq] with rose petals. They have no obligation to serve the public interest — their only obligation is to their share-holders — and they serve that obligation not by telling us about the difficult issues we need to understand to make rational decisions in a democracy — about Social Security and the national debt, how we got into this war in Iraq, what happened to the \$18 billion that disappeared — but by entertaining us, by appealing to the prurient interests that all of us have in the reptilian core of our brains for sex and celebrity gossip.

How many of you have heard of Anna Nicole Smith? Was that a complete waste of time? Molly Ivins died, one of the great progressives, and that news did not make a single national news report, and we saw Anna Nicole Smith and we saw Britney shaved her head. Americans today know about Michael Jackson, Kobe Bryant, Lacy Peterson — it's just selling pornography. What you see on the news, that decision is no longer being made by a news director but by a bean counter in the accounting office in the General Electric company.

In the old days [under the Fairness Doctrine], you would have had to tell the American people about global warming whether they wanted to know about it or not, or you'd lose your license to broadcast. We had to forcibly inform the American public, and that's what Jefferson recognized.

When we had the 13 colonies, Jefferson wanted a universal mandate, and Hamilton and Adams wanted the vote to go only to the landed gentry, not because they were snobs, but because they thought the mob could be easily misled to give up their own civil rights; and Jefferson himself said an uninformed mob would trade a hundred years they had fought for civil rights for half an hour of welfare or the first demagogue or religious fanatic or tyrant who comes along and promises a \$300 tax rebate. But Jefferson said the remedy for that was not to deprive the public of their power, but rather forcibly inform them, whether they want to be informed or not. That's why 13 colonies did something that had never been done before in history, which is to require mandatory education.

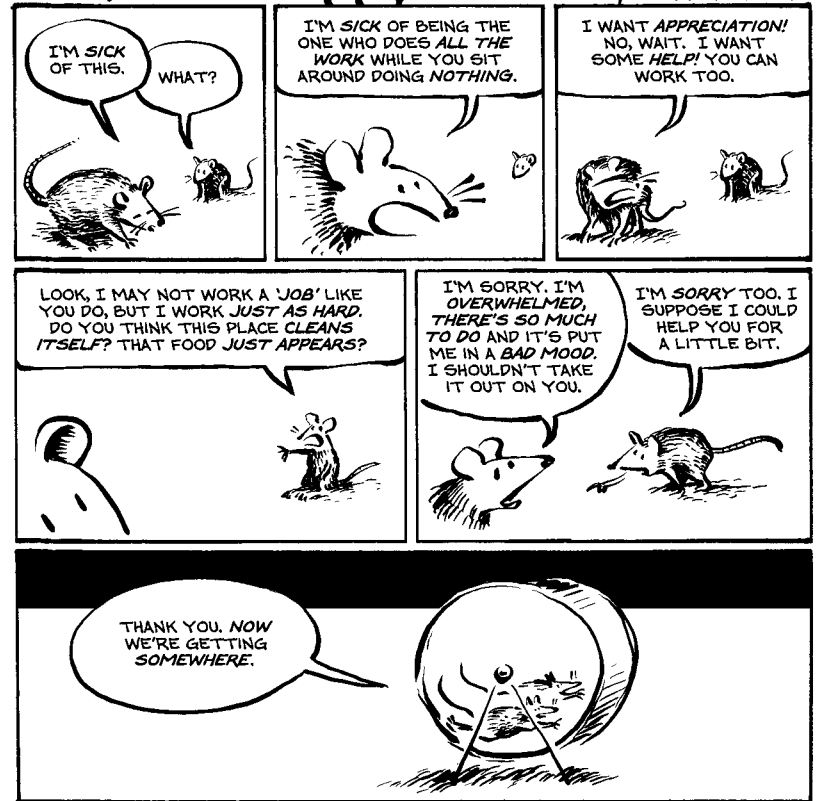
Jefferson said democracy cannot survive without an informed public. Then when radio was created in 1928, all of Congress, Republican and Democrat, realized this was going to be the new place where the public got its information. They said radio's primary obligation must be to inform the public, whether they want to be informed or not. Reagan abolished that, and now we are the best entertained and least informed people on the face of the earth.

And it's very easy for us to be led by the nose by politicians who know the only thing we're paying attention to is Tom and Kate and Brad and J-Lo and Janet.

Kennedy has given variations on this speech around the country. One complete transcript, including comments on the environment and religion, is at www.truthout.org/docs_2005/091705Z.shtml

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JUST A TOY

When I saw the cover of this week's *EW* (3/8), I could almost see 1940's era pre-teens hawking: "Extra! Extra! New Electric Car will save Oregon from Global Warming!" The article was a positively glowing report, almost an infomercial, for the BugE. Yes, it's a cool gizmo. It's non-polluting, it's electric, it's mostly local, it's do-it-yourself fun! But in the quest for solutions to global warming, pollution, and war in the middle east, the BugE is — like its predecessor the Gizmo — is irrelevant.

It's an electric scooter with a cool shell. It won't carry the kids to school. It won't carry my wife and me to the library. It may be great for the trip down to the grocery store, but since its cargo capacity is so limited, it's not useful for any significant shopping trips. The uses the BugE is good for are basically the same that a bicycle or electric scooter is good for. Yet it carries a car-sized price tag. At \$5,000 for a really fancy bike kit, the BugE is hardly "a battle cry against human-caused global heating and a practical design for affordable and efficient personal urban transportation" as article author Nicole Fancher says.

The BugE is a toy for those with enough disposable income and time. Meanwhile, I'll pull on a rain jacket and head downtown on my \$400, 0-cents-a-mile bicycle, while my wife picks up the kids from school in the VW.

Max Schwankamp
Eugene

ADVICE FOR PERVERTS

I am writing in response to all the hoopla that surrounds the now controversial *EW* (formerly *What's Happening*) which includes: foul language, advertising for escorts ("duh," prostitutes), porn, "girly shows," kinky alternative singles ads, that disturbing "Red Meat" cartoon and that lascivious trash written by Dan Savage.

I absolutely love it! I applaud the editors, staff and crew for including a column that offers advice for confused perverts (like my-

self) who began reading *Penthouse* magazine in the fourth grade and haven't looked back since! As a faithful reader I fully support uncertainty, surprise, insecurity, disorder, unlawfulness, promiscuity, bad taste and all things ugly that go "bump" in the night. I realize that not all readers share my opinions, but isn't that what a diverse community is all about?

If there are "naughty bits" of *EW* that you disagree with, you can choose to simply not read those. There ARE people who are not offended by Dan's column and are seeking non-judgmental advice on topics much of the local public seems to be uncomfortable with. Dan Savage offers frank, sincere answers to those folks who were brave enough to ask.

Fred Van Vactor
Eugene

TAX NECESSARY

Alan Pittman's article (3/1) attacking the county commissioners for enacting the income tax failed to include a single example of a conversation with anyone on local law enforcement to explain why the tax is needed. The Lane County jail is notorious and widely considered the worst in the state for releasing prisoners held here on felony warrants from other counties before they can be transported to face trial. Police and victims of crime are frustrated by the lack of funding for our local jail.

We live in a lower-income neighborhood in Springfield. Such neighborhoods benefit from police services more than most. Protection from the violent and thieves is why peaceful, law-abiding people organized government in the first place during pioneer days. There's nothing wrong with lower-income people paying for a service that benefits us all. When this measure was voted on in November, it passed in Springfield and west Eugene. I was dismayed to see you attacking the measure. You could have performed a public service if you talked to our police departments and informed yourselves on the desperate need for this money.