

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OTHER VIEWS

## Press failed its duty; nation went to war

In the prelude to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, President George W. Bush and his administration unleashed a full-scale propaganda campaign, seeking to convince the American people that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and that war was necessary.



JIM VAN  
NOSTRAND  
Comment

The claims weren't true. There were no WMDs. The U.S. had no evidence of them. The American press swallowed the lies, failed to ask tough questions and abrogated its duty to determine the truth, except for a few determined reporters at Knight Ridder Newspapers.

"Shock and Awe," a movie that opened in July, tells the story of those journalists — Jonathan Landay, Warren Strobel, Joe Galloway and John Walcott. It dramatizes an ugly chapter in the history of journalism.

### Voices lost in the tumult

It's impossible to fully describe the herd mentality that gripped the media in the year and a half between the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003.

I had a front-row seat to witness that history. I was a web editor for Knight Ridder Digital who was called to D.C. to manage the company's online coverage of a war that seemed to be preordained.

President Bush had proclaimed to the world after Sept. 11, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." The leading newspapers and cable networks took that mantra to heart.

They breathlessly parroted every morsel and scrap of disinformation fed to them by the government spin masters. They jostled for seats in the administration's coveted inner sanctum and served as dutiful stenographers for every dubious claim. Judith Miller of the *New York Times* was



AP Photo/Jerome Delay

**A government building burns March 21, 2003, during heavy bombardment of Baghdad by U.S.-led forces. The phrase 'shock and awe' described the Pentagon's strategy of hitting the Iraqis hard enough to stun them into quick surrender.**

a notorious culprit. Vice President Dick Cheney and the other neoconservatives in the administration would spoon-feed her "scoops," then cite her stories at press conferences and on the cable talk shows.

Those who questioned the administration's WMD claims — as Landay, Strobel, Galloway and Walcott did — were branded as unpatriotic or worse, by both the public and their peers. Their voices were drowned out by a growing crescendo of war drums in newsprint and on the airwaves.

Some of Knight Ridder's own newspapers refused to run their stories. When questioned, editors expressed disbelief in their reporting, often with some lame variation of "*The New York Times* isn't saying that." In one telling scene from the movie, Walcott asks one of those editors,

"The truth doesn't sell papers anymore?"

### Fabricating the evidence

We knew that President Bush ordered the Pentagon to begin drawing up plans for the Iraq invasion in early 2001, shortly after he took office. The attacks later that year on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon provided a convenient pretext for toppling Saddam, who had remained in power despite his 1991 defeat in Operation Desert Storm by Bush's father, President George H.W. Bush.

We knew that professional government analysts saw no evidence of WMDs — our reporters, with decades of contacts in the intelligence community, were talking to them.

And we knew that officials in power were blatantly lying to the American

people. Somewhere between the analysts and the White House, evidence was fabricated or cherry-picked to support the administration's campaign, led by Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, to oust Saddam and plant a democracy in the Middle East. To this day, Bush's defenders insist he was the victim of bad intelligence. A more accurate description would be bad fiction.

The result? An unnecessary war that has killed more than 4,400 Americans and wounded almost 32,000. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi dead and millions displaced. An entire region destabilized, with Iran and ISIS left free to run amok. And it's not over — 11 U.S. soldiers have died there this year.

### A hard lesson

In an historic mea culpa, the *New York Times* later apologized to readers for its prewar Iraq coverage and disavowed Miller's reporting — much too late to avert the tragedy. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell has said he was duped into making the case for the war in front of the United Nations.

But many Americans still believe that Saddam had nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs, though none has ever been found.

The movie underscores the importance of fearless journalists who are willing to tell truth to power. They are part of the checks and balances on which this country was built.

"Today the press is under attack like never before, and democracy cannot survive without a free and independent press," said Rob Reiner, the movie's director, who portrays Walcott. "I hope Shock and Awe can serve as a cautionary tale of what's at stake for the survival of self-governance."

Jim Van Nostrand is editor of *The Daily Astorian*.

## OTHER VIEWS

## A Trump turn on trade?

Washington thinking on trade has reached a consensus that China poses a serious economic challenge to the United States. From key business groups to trade lawyers to the full spectrum of Washington think tanks, there is no longer a willingness to allow intellectual property theft or other Chinese trade practices.

In a bold use of tariffs, President Trump has succeeded in putting the world on notice that there is a new sheriff in town. At the same time, the President and his trade team have discovered two important trade lessons: complicated supply chains now connect the world and trading partners will respond by applying tariffs of their own.

In looking back over the past few months, it is clear that Europe and China targeted their retaliatory tariffs at states and parts of the country that had supported President Trump's election. China took advantage of being a major market for U.S. agricultural exports. Their tariffs already hurt. Europe added a special twist by imposing tariffs on Kentucky bourbon, thus targeting Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the senior senator from Kentucky.

Rather than tariffs, many trade advisors have advocated working with the other industrial countries. European and Japanese investors in China face the same pressures to share technology as American companies. They are subject to the same regulatory uncertainties and a legal system that can follow Communist Party Rules rather than predictable legal norms. Yet in meeting with the G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the United States), President Trump mixed criticism with a focus on trade deficits.

Just after the G7 gathering, he met in Helsinki with Russian President Vladimir Putin. His following press conference



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was widely criticized — James Clapper, former director of the CIA, called it treasonous. Even the generally supportive *Wall Street Journal* portrayed the President as "beseeching" Putin. The President raised added hackles when he referred to the European Union and Russia as "enemies." Why the EU? The EU has a significant trade surplus with the United States.

More recently, he met with Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission. The President emerged from the meeting talking about the U.S.-EU working together for the elimination of all tariffs, including those on agricultural exports. Days later, Larry Kudlow, Director of the National Economic Council, said that he would start immediately on trade negotiations to secure greater access to European markets for American farmers.

Is the President adopting a new approach to the EU and, by implication, the G7? Might he forge a G7 alliance in responding to the China challenge? Maybe. But, it may also be his response to the trade pressures on U.S. farmers, many of whom supported his candidacy. He has already promised

\$12 billion in farm purchases by the Commodity Credit Corporation. Success in actually gaining greater access to the large, protected European market certainly would be boon to American farmers.

The President might want to re-think his reluctance to work with the other industrial powers. Maybe some his staff might want to remind him that when Yul Brynner headed across the Mexican border to save a small village from bandits, he took experienced, like-minded gunmen with him. Working with the other industrial powers just might add up to a second "Magnificent Seven."

Kent Hughes is a public policy fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. He is a 1958 graduate of Pendleton High School.

## Constitution is for all people, not just the powerful ones

When you look at our United States Constitution, our Founders' message is clear: "We the People." Those words are deliberately written larger than everything else — large enough that you can read them from across the room.

And at the core of the "We the People" vision is a strong, independent judiciary.

As I look at the United States Supreme Court now, I see a stolen seat filled by a nominee who was approved by the Senate after an unprecedented political power grab by the majority party. I see an upcoming nominee who would act as President Trump's get-out-of-jail-free card, who says that presidents should not be subject to America's laws. I see a political yes-man for the privileged and powerful, not a free and fair stalwart ensuring we remain a nation "of the people, by the people, for the people."

A woman at a recent town hall in Eastern Oregon asked me if this nomination makes me fear for our democracy. My answer is yes, yes it does.

First, the president is being investigated for possible collusion with a foreign power. As such, it is a massive conflict of interest for him to nominate a justice who could end up being the deciding vote in rulings on whether he can end the investigation into his campaign, or even whether he can pardon himself.

Second, Brett Kavanaugh has extreme views that are fit for a king in a kingdom, not for a president in a republic. Kavanaugh says that a president should not have to enforce laws he claims are unconstitutional, even if they've been upheld by the courts. He has argued that sitting presidents should be immune from prosecution; immune from indictment; and immune from investigation. He even argues that a president should have the sole power to appoint and fire special prosecutors at will. With this nomination, President Trump is striving to print his own get-out-of-jail-free card.

Third, Senate Republicans are working overtime to block access to Brett Kavanaugh's full record of service in George W. Bush's White House. What are they



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trying to hide? When President Obama nominated Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court, Republicans insisted that reviewing her full record as a White House staffer was essential for the Senate to fulfill its advice and consent responsibility. Democrats fully cooperated with their request. But now, Republican senators are abandoning the standard of transparency they insisted on for Kagan, covering up the records

from when Kavanaugh served in the White House. This is unacceptable. If Republicans are so afraid of the secrets they're working to hide, the president should withdraw the nomination.

Even without the White House records, we already know that Brett Kavanaugh has extreme views. He has argued in favor of bosses overriding women's access to birth control. He has signaled that he wants to roll back women's constitutional rights, including access to safe, legal abortion. He dissented from the D.C. Circuit Court opinion supporting the power of the Affordable Care Act to provide coverage for Americans with preexisting conditions. His record to date is anti-worker, anti-consumer, and anti-equality.

In summary, Kavanaugh's view is that the Constitution is all about "by and for the powerful," not "by and for the people."

The individual who fills Justice Kennedy's vacancy on the Supreme Court will shape the laws of our country for a generation. That means we are in a fight for the soul of our democracy. Now is the time: We must be fierce in the fight, and to insist only on a nominee who believes in the "We the People" vision of our constitution. Calls to my office are running against Kavanaugh's nomination, and I urge all Oregonians to keep making their voices heard. And importantly, encourage friends and family across the nation to make their voices heard, as well. I know that together, we can build a more prosperous, powerful, and successful America.

Jeff Merkley is Oregon's U.S. senator. Reach his Pendleton office at 541-278-1129 or his D.C. office at 202-224-3753.

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