

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### What can \$190 billion buy?

On September 26, CNN.com ran a story about Defense Secretary Robert Gates asking for nearly \$190 billion from Congress to help fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

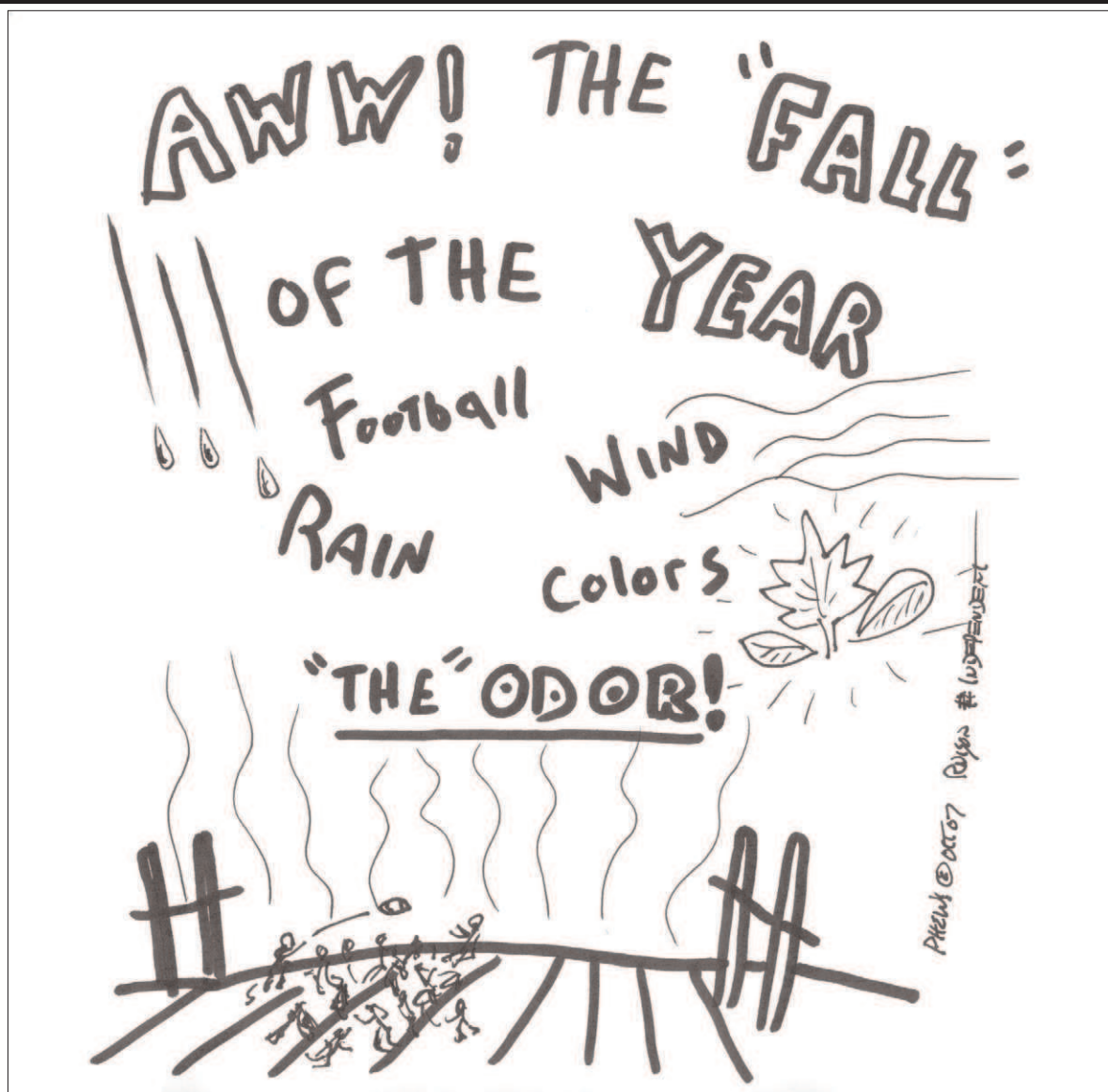
Gates originally asked for \$141.7 billion in February, telling Congress the amount would only cover ongoing war costs and would probably go up. Gates upped the amount by \$5.3 billion more in July to buy 1,520 "mine resistant ambush protected" vehicles. The rest of the billions requested is to be used for training, base consolidation, and more vehicles designed to withstand bombings.

Who can argue with better protection for our soldiers? There has been a need for better equipment from the get-go and it's about time. No argument on that from this quarter.

What did set minds to wondering was the amount. \$190 billion is a mind boggling amount. Who can fathom numbers like that, other than mathematicians? Here is a sampling of what \$190 billion can buy;

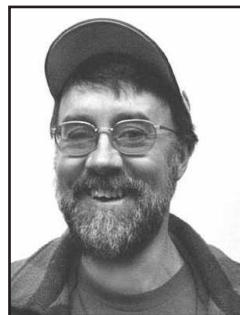
- 31.7 million of the 47 million uninsured Americans could have premium health insurance (at \$500 per month) for one year.
- 23,750 communities could have new \$8 million sewer systems like the one Vernonia is told it needs.
- Each of the 49,560 people in Columbia County (based on 2006 population estimates) could have \$3.83 million. Yes, that's right, we would all be millionaires three times over.
- 1.9 million houses costing \$100,000 to build could be completed. That's 38 such houses for each person (that 49,560 population) in Columbia County.
- Vernonia Cares could feed the same number of people it feeds now for 9,500 years or 9,500 food banks the same size as Vernonia Cares could feed people for one year.
- 19,000 projects costing \$10 million (such as replacement of the green steel bridge or the Staley's Junction interchange) could be completed.

The part about Columbia County millionaires and house barons is just daydreaming. The real point is that there is a need for the U.S. government to spend money on our infrastructure and one place that money is currently being spent is on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. How do you think that \$190 billion would best be spent?



### Ike Says . . .

By Dale Webb, member  
Nehalem Valley Chapter, Izaak Walton League



We are in the midst of hunting season around Vernonia, so if you are going to be out in the great outdoors, remember that and wear some bright colors so you are easily seen. So what can the local hunters expect this year?

Well, bow hunters just finished up and they had a good year on elk. Local timber companies all had their lands open to walk-in travel the whole season, which doesn't happen very often due to fire danger. I will predict that the hunting stats will show a larger bow elk harvest this year, as more access coupled with better weather conditions should have produced more elk being taken. The trade off from this is that the rifle hunters may find a few less elk to harvest, but again most hunting season success is dictated by access and weather, so if the rifle hunters get the right weather the harvest could still be good.

What about deer? We actually set a record last year! Yep, we officially killed the fewest buck deer in the Saddle Mountain Unit since 1971 (the earliest records that I have). Last year in Saddle Mountain Unit sportsmen took only 315 bucks during the general season. For the 2822 hunters that hunted in this unit that works out to an 11 percent success rate. In 2005, 416 bucks were

taken during the general season hunt. The last peak harvest for Saddle Mountain Unit occurred in 1997 (during the antlerless harvest moratorium) and was 1,050 bucks during the general season. The all-time harvest for bucks during the general season was back in 1979, with 1,606 bucks harvested, which I believe was the first year of the hunters' choice hunts. It appears that, since the last peak in 1997, the buck harvest is sliding downward about 80 bucks per year average. The alarming part about last year's all time low harvest is that the weather for hunting was probably some of the best in the last ten years.

Our neighboring Scappoose Unit also showed a dramatic drop in buck harvest during the general season. In 2005 the buck harvest was 607 and last year's harvest was 334. It would be my opinion that Hair Loss Syndrome, predation (more cougars) and antlerless harvest are finally showing their effects in the Scappoose Unit which, up to last year, had not followed the decline as closely as that which was occurring in the Saddle Mountain Unit.

Bull elk harvest was also down in both units last year in comparison to the 2005 season. The Saddle Mountain Unit had 468 bulls harvested during the two rifle hunts in '05, versus 387 in '06. The Scappoose Unit had a harvest of 200 bulls during the rifle seasons in '05 and 156 in '06. Archery harvest on bulls was only slightly higher in the Saddle Mountain Unit in '06, with 157 bulls being taken. The harvest in the Scap-

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