

32963

Robert Gates and the Afghan War decision. P.34

# INSIGHT

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P.30  
**Eyes *off*  
the road**



# Texting while driving: the new drunk driving?

BY STEPHANIE HANES, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR  
PHOTOS BY TOM MCCARTHY JR.  
VB 32963 staff writer Alina Lambiet contributed to this story.

**Texting and driving – and using gadgets like iPod devices – are a public safety epidemic.**

**J**ennifer Smith, a real estate agent, remembers when she considered her car an office, her cellphone a professional lifeline. If it rang, she picked it up. If she thought of information to share, she dialed. She knew that it wasn't the best idea to chat while driving, of course, but it wasn't illegal, and she didn't want to lose clients. Besides, she figured, she was careful.

But then, in September last year, a driver using a cellphone plowed through a red light and slammed into Ms. Smith's mother's mini-SUV. Linda Doyle, who'd been on her way to pick up cat food for the Central Oklahoma Humane Society, where she was a regular volunteer, died the next morning.

During the excruciating months that followed, Smith couldn't shake the feeling that something about the crash didn't make sense. The driver who killed her mother was a sober, churchgoing 20-year-old who'd never even had a speeding ticket. He had been on the phone for less than a minute. Visibility on the road was excellent.

But the police report said that when a trooper asked him what color the traffic light had been, the distraught young man responded that he never saw it. He'd crashed into the driver's side of Ms. Doyle's car at nearly 50 m.p.h.; there weren't even skid marks at the scene.

"He's a good kid," Smith says. "He is you and I. He is not just a teenager who doesn't care. I didn't understand how someone like that could just drive through a light without seeing it. So I started researching."

The more she found, the angrier she became.

Study upon study showed that talking on a cellphone while driving was far more dangerous than she'd realized – that a driver on a phone had the same reaction speed as someone legally intoxicated, that those talking on a phone behind the wheel are four times as likely to crash, that texting while driving is even more dangerous. And studies repeatedly showed that hands-free headsets – sometimes advertised as safer – were no less dangerous.

"People need to understand that what is going on in your brain while you are holding a conversation about a business deal, or relationship problems," said Indian River County Sheriff Deryl Loar. "Sometimes they get so frustrated they aren't thinking about their driving pattern. What we've seen is that they're not paying attention to red lights, or they're driving recklessly."

"The brain can only take in so much before this multi-tasking thing is way out of hand," added Lt. Tim Frith of the Florida Highway Patrol.

Frith said the FHP is seeing more single occupant crashes that happen for no apparent reason – clear day, no obstructions in the road -- and expressed frustration that legally his department can't pull phone records to see if drivers were on the phone at the time of the accident.

"We really don't have a clear picture of how bad it is," said Frith of distracted drivers. "It's not like people are going to admit it."

The public-safety movement has for years lobbied state legislatures to change driving laws, working with schools and student groups, and pressuring the federal government and industries to set new cellphone regulations. But momentum has picked up recently

with some high-profile fatal crashes, including a number involving teens texting while driving.

And last month, in what many saw as a coming of age for the movement, the US Department of Transportation hosted a distracted driving summit, where Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood called for action against what he termed a "deadly epidemic."

"Distracted driving is a menace to society. And it seems to be getting worse every year," he said.

But he and others say that the fight against distracted driving could be much harder than other public-safety efforts, including the anti-drunken-driving movement that swept the country in the 1980s.

Far more people talk on their cellphones and use other electronic gadgets in the car than drive drunk, safety officials say. A generation of text-happy teenagers are getting their driver's licenses, and established drivers are increasingly buying smart phones that allow for distracting activity beyond just texting and talking – GPS and entertainment devices, too, pull eyes and mental focus off the road.

And even public safety officials like Indian River County's Loar don't totally buy into the idea that texting while driving is as bad as drunken driving.

"Although it is egregious to be doing other things, I don't think being distracted rises to the same level of being drunk or under the influence of drugs," Loar said.

And even where hand-held phone use in cars is banned – as it is in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and a number of other states, but not Florida – enforcement is difficult. One study observing New York drivers, for instance, showed that the

law did little to reduce the number of drivers with phones to ears.

While dozens of countries – from Australia to Zimbabwe – take a harsh view of this behavior and have banned hand-held phones in cars, there is little social stigma in the US.

Moreover, some research suggests that Americans are actually addicted to their phones. Harvard University psychiatrist John Ratey and other researchers have found that the brain receives a rush when it processes a text message or ring – the same high a gambler feels when hitting the jackpot.

“It is a complex problem,” says David Strayer, who studies cellphones and driving at the University of Utah. “We may have gotten ourselves into an addiction that we might not be able to get out of.”

‘DISTRACTED DRIVING’ IS A CATCHALL TERM that can include all sorts of behavior behind the wheel, from eating to applying makeup to texting. A distracted driver has what psychologists call “inattention blindness” – the brain does not process what is physically within eyesight, such as a red light.

The movement against distracted driving has increasingly focused on what it considers a deadly mix of two American passions: the automobile and new technology.

“There are always going to be distractions,” says David Teater, senior director of transportation strategic initiatives at the National Safety Council, whose 12-year-old son was killed in a crash caused by a driver on a cellphone. “But the advent of mobile electronic communication devices has really changed the game because they’ve become so phenomenally prolific in such a short period of time. We’ve been talking on the phone for 80 years. We’ve been driving 100 years. It’s only recently that we’ve tried to combine the two.”

Most drivers say they’re not happy about sharing the road with others trying the new technology.

A 2009 AAA Foundation study found that 91.5 percent of drivers considered talking on the phone while driving a serious threat to their safety; 97 percent said it was completely unacceptable to send a text or e-mail while driving. But two-thirds of those people admitted talking on their own phones while driving, and 1 in 7 have texted while driving.

Similarly, a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study, in which data collectors observed drivers, estimated that 6 percent of drivers at any time are on the phone.

At the University of Utah’s Applied Cognition Laboratory, Professor Strayer has been testing this do-as-I-say theory for a decade. Using neuroimaging and a drive simulator, he and his colleagues have watched what happens when drivers – including those who claim to be able to text, tweet, and talk safely at the wheel – mix cellphones and cars.

The results are stark: Almost nobody multiprocesses the way they think they can. For 98 percent of the population, regardless of age, the likelihood of a crash while on a cellphone increases fourfold; the reaction to simulated traffic lights, pedestrians, and vehicles is comparable to that of someone legally intoxicated.

Although some critics claim that the simulator isn’t real enough, studies of real-life driving in Canada and Australia had similar findings.

Strayer also found little difference between those using hand-held cellphones and those on hands-free headsets. The disruption, he says, is cognitive. Unlike a conversation with a passenger shar-

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ing the same physical space of the car, the electronic conversation takes a driver into a virtual space away from the road.

“We record brain activity,” Strayer says, “and we can show that it’s suppressed from the cellphone conversation.”

**BUT WHERE, CELLPHONE PROPONENTS ASK,** are the crashes? While the number of cellphone subscribers has rocketed to 270 million in the US – the number of auto fatalities has remained stable, at about 40,000 deaths a year. The US Department of Transportation estimates that 6,000 of those are the result of distracted driving, but it has no specific statistics for phone-related deaths. The number of crashes has also remained steady.

“There have been some suggestions by researchers that the risk [of crash] is increased exponentially due to talking on the cellphone,” says John Walls, spokesman for CTIA-The Wireless Association, which represents the cellphone industry. “Yet, for whatever reason, we haven’t seen that play out in the number of accidents that occur. Although I would never suggest that that means to talk more in the car.”

He says that his group does not take a stance on phoning-while-driving legislation.

“This is one of the key questions we’re trying to unravel,” says Russ Rader, spokesman for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Mr. Rader says his group is studying how much the fatality rate should have dropped, given increased safety measures – such as better road construction and improved braking systems – as a way to gauge the real impact of cellphone use.

Another explanation for the statistics, safety experts say, is that people tend to lie about their phone use in crashes. And without a subpoena for cellphone records, there’s no way to check. There’s often no box on the police report to check if the driver admits cellphone use.

“Unless it is a fatality, it is not handled like a criminal investigation, where we can get phone records,” Frith said.

The lack of solid statistics means that advocates are constantly explaining themselves and often face an uphill battle in convincing legislatures to enact new cellphone laws.

But recently, the legislative tide has started to turn – thanks, in large part, to text messaging.

Texting drivers are easy to spot. Like drunken drivers, they’re the ones going too slow or too fast, or weaving, says Gregory Massak, the police chief of



Shirley, Mass. “They’re concentrating more on [the phone] than on driving.”

On this topic, Frith’s stories come fast and furious. The kids he sees starting to text with one hand on the wheel, but eventually, no hands on the wheel; the driver in the single car accident who says he doesn’t know what happened to make him lose control of his car, but admits that just before the accident, he “looked up.”

“Well, why did he look up,” Frith. What was that driver doing?

Swayed in part by a number of highly publicized texting-while-driving deaths, 18 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws banning texting while driving; nine additional states prohibit teenagers from texting behind the wheel.

A Sarasota lawmaker, Doug Holder, has for three years introduced a bill in the Florida House to ban text messaging while driving. Twice his bills have died, but he’s optimistic that this legislative session will be different.

Holder’s bill, HB 41, would let a police officer stop motorists for driving “a moving motor vehicle while reading, manually writing or typing, or sending a message on an electronic wireless communications device.” The fine would be \$30.

This summer, Sen. Charles Schumer of New York introduced legislation that would withhold 25 percent of federal highway funding to states that don’t institute some sort of texting ban. And last month, President Obama signed an executive order banning federal employees from sending texts in government cars.

Texting is a “perfect storm” of distraction, with cognitive, manual, and visual elements, says Strayer. “And it’s primarily teenagers who are doing it. To become a proficient driver takes a few years, so it’s the worst combination – a novice driver multitasking in a way [that takes] their eyes off the road.”

To those who don’t text regularly, these dangers might seem obvious. But for many teens, and a growing number of adults, texting is a central way of communicating – a virtual conversation that doesn’t stop in the car. Even with the growing restrictions, 73 percent of teens admit to texting while driving, according to a Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) study.

“Some of them say that they’re good at typing without looking at the screen; others say they hold it up by their eyes as they text,” says Stephen Wallace, national chairman and CEO of SADD.

Heather Barrett, a college student in Ohio, says

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she probably receives and sends more than 500 messages a day: "I prefer to text and drive rather than talk and drive. I can put the phone down in the middle of the text if something is going on."

She says that she has caught herself swerving while texting – "but only on backcountry lanes, and never in traffic."

JOSHUA WELLER, A SCIENTIST with Decision Research, has studied the perception of risk associated with distracted driving. His preliminary findings suggest a multilayered understanding of risk, similar to the way someone might internalize warnings against smoking. Those with a deeper appreciation of the risks of texting or talking on the phone – people who understand, for instance, that texting while driving 55 m.p.h. is similar to driving the length of a football field with one's eyes closed – are less likely to do it.

But establishing a widespread social understanding of risk is difficult. So is enforcement. It's hard to catch a texting driver, and it's too early to know the impact of texting laws.

Some safety advocates, then, are placing hope in technology to fight technology. Mr. Teater says there are systems in development that block incoming texts when a phone is in a car, responding with an automatic, "Sorry, I'm driving" message.

"We've got to rush technology to the market," he says. "There are a lot of people who will choose to not use phones while driving if there's a way not to do it but also stay in touch with people. We're going to have a nightmare on our hands if we don't get ahead of it." ●

## While texting and driving, I ran off the highway

A veteran texter faces facts in a texting and driving simulator.



BY HANNAH OWEN  
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

If there was one thing I knew, it was that I could text and drive just fine. The new laws were for other people. That was before I "ran off the highway" five times and hit another car – at 65 m.p.h.

Fortunately for me and other drivers, my DWT (driving while texting) violations occurred in a simulator, safely stationary at the University of Utah's Applied Cognition Laboratory.

I felt confident I'd be able to pull it off. As a charter member of Generation Y, I've been texting for years and knew that I had plenty of real-life practice. But in the simulator, I put the car into drive and found myself zipping down a freeway.

Going 65 m.p.h. in traffic and through curves made me realize I wasn't as good as I thought. Thus the off-roading and final collision. My diminished texting ability while driving was evident in the message I sent my editor: "hey how'd ut goig I am in the simulator it is garz!"

I know it's bad, yet I've still found myself texting while driving, walking, and in class. Driving,

I rationalize: "I'm on a straight stretch of road with plenty of space, there isn't any danger, and besides, this text message is important."

All this despite the memory of a popular fellow student who was killed two years ago after her car was hit by a texting driver.

Her life was taken in an instant because someone else also had "important" texting to do. It's a sobering thought, especially when I remember how shocked I was by her death, promising myself and others that my driving-while-texting days were over.

Following my simulated near-death experience, I've been especially alert while driving. Riding with a friend who is texting, I notice her attentiveness to the road decreasing while working an iPod, a phone, etc. I tense as we approach other cars, wondering if we're about to collide, or rolling my eyes when my friend fails to accelerate at normal speed, causing irritated drivers behind us to dangerously hug our back bumper. But it's not just my friends.

I lose count daily of how many people I see chatting away on their cellphones, looking down to send a quick text, or holding iPods up to change songs.

At least my wrecks were virtual.

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President Obama reaches out to shake hands with Defense Secretary Robert Gates (L) after signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 which includes funding to increase military personnel and support the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

# Afghanistan war decision: How Robert Gates thinks

BY GORDON LUBOLD, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, PHOTOS: EPA

## Pentagon chief Robert Gates: The swing vote in Obama's decision on the Afghanistan war.

**O**n one of Bob Gates's first trips to the Iraq war theater after accepting the job as Defense secretary in 2006, he walked a dusty "boneyard" in Kuwait filled with row upon row of the remains of military trucks damaged by roadside bombs and seemed to hear the ghosts of the soldiers the trucks had failed to protect.

The vehicles, recalls a senior adviser who accompanied Mr. Gates, "looked like they'd been mangled by the hand of a giant child." The shredded metal seemed to be a reminder of the billions the Pentagon was spending on the war while failing to adequately protect its own troops – and Gates was intensely moved. Mary Beth Long, the official accompanying him that day, jotted down just two words about her boss: "silent" and "determined."

The episode reinforced for the secretary what had to be done. He went home resolved to put life-saving, bomb-resistant trucks in the hands of troops within months. And he did, in record time, by overhauling the Pentagon's byzantine acquisition process. Within five months, the Pentagon had sent nearly 1,200 of the new trucks to Iraq, thanks to an expedited acquisition program that shaved years off the process.

That moment of silent determination reflects the essential Gates – a reserved former Eagle Scout who has established impressive management muscle working his way through the ranks of the United States security establishment.

He has changed a Defense Department steeped in its own inefficiency one \$400 Pentagon hammer at a time – even one general at a time, firing them when necessary. And that low-key but powerful style is now on display in the Washington debate over what strategy President Obama should take to win the war in Afghanistan.

Indeed, Gates – a former intelligence analyst-turned-CIA director, a Sovietologist with an instinct for reading signs, a consummate Washington insider unstained by party ideology – is the man of the hour, considered the bridge between the Pentagon brass and the Democratic White House.

The Defense secretary's role in shaping Mr. Obama's policy in Afghanistan is seen as a swing vote among the president's counselors on the question at hand: Whether to send a surge of tens of thousands more troops to support the current counterinsurgency against the Taliban or to overhaul the mission entirely.

Gates as of last week almost certainly had made up his mind. But unlike his predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld, who telegraphed his decisionmaking process through bluster and ideology, Gates remained true to his spycraft roots, discreetly looking for signals to find the right way to play his hand with a divided White House.

**FRIENDS AND FORMER EMPLOYEES** make much of that contrast with Mr. Rumsfeld – whom Gates replaced during President Bush's first term. While Rumsfeld relied on a cadre of aides, Gates keeps more of his own counsel and has an enduring hunger for information. And that helped stoke the suspense surrounding Obama's protracted decisionmaking.

Gates is a good example of the oft-cited Washington truism: The ones who talk, don't know; the ones who don't talk, do know.

But Gates, who declined a request for a Monitor interview, has talked some about Afghanistan. In the past, he has expressed concern about the size of the American "footprint" – worried that too many forces could look a lot like an occupation.

Yet he has also said that the long-term needs of Afghanistan – good governance, economic opportu-

nity, and a strong indigenous force – won't magically appear without the help of the US military stabilizing the country. In the run up to President Obama's decision, he dodged questions about just what the noises in his head were saying.

Asked by a reporter on a plane with him to Asia late last month "where he was" on the troop surge idea, Gates talked about the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Two days later, asked the same question after a meeting of NATO defense ministers, Gates wriggled: "I was in a listening mode."

It's not that he's slippery, just self-disciplined, say those who know him.

"He's been inside the Beltway his entire life and he knows how to play the cards and when to play them, and he will only telegraph to the decider," says one retired senior officer who served under Gates. "Rummy had his circle of good buddies who were easy to identify. Don't know that about Gates."

The Defense chief is not given to snap decisions, recalls Rob McKee, who served with Gates on the corporate board of Parker Drilling Company before he was named Defense secretary. But he says Gates does act decisively after a genuine effort to get as many facts as possible. And, adds Mr. McKee, who served as an adviser to the Iraqi oil ministry between 2003 and 2004, Gates – a registered Republican – takes pains never to show his politics.

"Who he is, his track record, his style, his intelligence, his bipartisanship, his experience and his proven low-key leadership style all would argue that he would be a much more credible broker than just about anyone," McKee wrote in an e-mail.

And sharing that conclusion with the president, he had have great sway, says Sen. Carl Levin (D) of Michigan, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and an admirer of Gates: "He has the confidence of the president, he has the confidence of Congress, and he has an extraordinarily important position in this decision."

**LITTLE ABOUT GATES ON THE OUTSIDE** betrays the astute student and dealmaker on the inside. By all appearances, he's as vanilla as they come: Stout and round-faced with precision-parted hair and a preference for white shirts, he has a nasal twang from his native Kansas. He goes in for jigsaw puzzles over sports, and has a strong taste for meat and potatoes sometimes even in the most exotic locales.

His other ravenous appetite, say aides, is for information – and he sets aside time every day to read (right now, says Gates, he's into Douglas Brinkley's "The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America"). He has a weakness for low-end escapist movies – such as "Iron Man" and "Wolverine" – but also recently saw and liked the more realistic "The Hurt Locker," about a US Army bomb squad in Iraq.

Gates himself jokes about the unassuming figure he cuts – once saying he was more like Austin Powers than James Bond when he flopped as a young spy and was funneled instead to the less glamorous toils of an intelligence analyst.

So inoffensive is his personality that even his political enemies seem to find no purchase for personal attack.

But it wasn't always that way. Earlier in his Washington career, Gates was thought to have played an active role in the Iran-contra affair, derailing his first confirmation as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. But an independent investigation cleared him, and President George H.W. Bush renominated him in 1991.

Cracks in Gates's bland facade often reveal the emotional complexity that makes him tick. He's so intensely compassionate that he can easily become choked up or cry. He's not without ego, say those who work with him, and they notice that when he's loosened up – notably after his iron-clad rituals of predinner cocktail and postdinner "cigar walk" – he enjoys holding forth among groups of people, telling jokes or stories from his illustrious career, less interested in a conversational give-and-take than in his own thoughts. And his temper, while usually contained verbally, can come out in fierce glares.

It's not that Gates never makes mistakes. As a member of the national security team in the late 1980s, he was in part responsible for the US withdrawal from Afghanistan that, it could be argued, led to it becoming a haven for Al Qaeda. But he'll admit to his mistakes, as in a speech last year when he acknowledged the US failing – and his role in it.

"The voice of Bob Gates is not the voice of God – and Bob Gates is the first to acknowledge that," says one Hill staffer.

His career arc also is full of that complexity. The Defense secretary now overseeing two war theaters not only served in the Air Force during the

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Vietnam War but also protested that war in a 1970 march against the Cambodia offensive.

Gates has served under eight presidents and turned down President George W. Bush's offers to run the Department of Homeland Security and later to be director of National Intelligence. He cited a reluctance to return to public life, but probably was awaiting a more important call.

He soon got it. After a bruising midterm election in 2006, Mr. Bush concluded that Defense Secretary Rumsfeld had to go, and Gates was wooed away from his post as president of Texas A&M University to replace Rumsfeld.

He portrayed himself as a reluctant hero – wrenched from what he called the best job he'd ever had. He often referred to the stopwatch a deputy gave him that counted backward to the day when the Bush term would end and he'd be free to retire once again, to drive his SUV in the mountains and wooded groves of the Pacific Northwest, where he and his wife, Becky, own two homes and have two grown children living nearby.

But herein lies a contradiction about Gates. As much as he says he loathes Beltway politics and society, it's what defines him. He often jokes that the first six months in Washington you wonder how you got there, the second six months you wonder how everyone else got there, and the next six months you spend trying to get out of there.

Funny when he tells it in the right crowd, it sometimes falls flat with military audiences. Either way, it's pure Gates shtick: making a show of despising Washington, while quietly working the city as few can.

At the same time, he shows genuine feeling for the troops. He personally handwrites letters to each family of those killed overseas. Like the episode in the Kuwait "boneyard," the secretary is frequently moved when speaking about the sacrifices of troops – whom he sometimes refers to as the "kids."

Ms. Long, a former assistant secretary of Defense, says Gates's leadership is unique in her experience: "He was not only a master of anticipating what the bureaucracy will do in a given situation, but on several occasions when, on a personal level, others were suffering, he expressed real sympathy and empathy."

There's much similar gushing across the capital about his abilities. Rumsfeld had so poisoned the well that Congress fell all over itself praising the new Defense secretary for his candor, integ-

## Career arc of a Pentagon chief

- Born 1943, Wichita, Kansas
- BA in history, 1965, The College of William & Mary; Master's in history, Indiana University, 1966; Doctorate in Russian and Soviet history, Georgetown University, 1974
- Air Force, 1967-68
- CIA Soviet analyst, 1968-74
- National Security Council staff under Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, 1974-79
- CIA deputy director, 1982
- Deputy national security adviser to President George H.W. Bush (1989-91)
- CIA director under President George H.W. Bush, 1991-93
- Interim dean of the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, 1999-2001
- President of Texas A&M University, 2002-06
- Secretary of Defense (2006-present) for Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama

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riety, and lack of combativeness. Though Gates may loathe Congress's lack of civility.

The Obama campaign liked what it saw and, after the election last year, the president-elect summoned Gates to a secret meeting at a fire station near Ronald Reagan National Airport to "re-up" the secretary. Accepting, Gates became the first Defense secretary in US history to be asked to stay on by a new administration.

Obama had promised during the campaign to draw down forces in Iraq and to fix Afghanistan.

But if Bush turned to Gates as Iraq's "Mr. Fix-it," then Obama was turning to him to change the equation in Afghanistan.

Put simply, there are two poles in Washington: the counterinsurgency experts, or COIN-istas, who believe Afghanistan's deteriorating security can only be reversed by adding tens of thousands of troops – perhaps as many as 80,000; and those who believe US interests in Afghanistan are few, and the best way to keep it on a low simmer is to employ a counterterrorism-like model – using drones, bombs,

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and special forces teams to keep Al Qaeda at bay. The debate became protracted, with military commanders like Gen. Stanley McChrystal politely urging the commander in chief to make a decision soon.

**GATES'S SIGNAL TO THE DECIDER** – Obama – was expected to be decisive, say observers, his position informed by his own political instinct for timing, but also by his impeccably thorough listening process.

Richard Haass, a former senior director on the National Security Council, remembers Gates's knack for running a meeting. In his book "War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars," Mr. Haass, now president of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote about Gates's leadership skills and noted that he would allow people to be heard – but not to filibuster.

"Bob Gates ran a meeting as well as anyone I've ever worked with," says Haass, reading directly from a page in his book.

But Gates is fussy about preparation, demanding that his staff cancel a briefing if he hasn't been provided the right reading materials beforehand, says one senior officer who worked closely with Gates. "It would make him crazy."

It's not the highest compliment ever paid to an individual, but in the world of Washington bureaucracy, it's high praise. And for Bob Gates, it fits.

One of his chief roles is to demand accountability in a building peopled by career bureaucrats who know instinctively that they will outlast any civilian overseer – unless he beats them to the punch.

Gates has famously removed more than a half-dozen senior officers and civilian secretaries for underwhelming performance or just plain arrogance. Just ask Fran Harvey, the former Army secretary whom Gates fired over a Washington Post exposé of the squalid conditions of soldiers recovering from war wounds at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Harder for even some of Gates's most die-hard fans was the summary firing of Gen. David McKiernan. Gates handpicked him to be the top commander in Afghanistan. By all accounts a fabulous officer with skill, intellect, and integrity, McKiernan was an armor officer by trade, and Gates concluded that he lacked the knack for counterinsurgency and had to go. Few dispute that the mission needed a new kind of blood – but Pentagon brass watched in horror in their E-ring offices as Gates announced McKiernan's firing on live TV.

More often, Gates's style of accountability is far more mundane. Last year, for example, he sent a memo to the Army secretary's office and when he hadn't heard anything back by the deadline he'd directed, Gates sent the memo again. This time it had a message handwritten across the top that couldn't have been plainer: "Pete," Gates scrawled in black ink, "Why hasn't this been answered yet?" A staffer who worked in the office recalled the startled reaction: "It was like a grenade went off inside the office."

Gates wanted answers and he didn't expect to have to wait for them.

That instinct has won him friends and enemies on Capitol Hill after he pushed through a \$534 bil-

lion reform budget this year that cut many sacred cows (the presidential helicopter with a kitchen) and forced the services to add other programs that weren't seen as critical (dramatic expansion of the drone program).

Gates has marketed his brand of reform with a message that resonates: Buy stuff to support the two wars in which the US is engaged – particularly for troops fighting in the field – and ease up on the massive spending the Pentagon has allowed for rainy-day wars, like one with China.

His ending the production of the \$140-million-a-copy F-22 Raptor stealth fighter was an oft-cited case in point. Arguing that the US didn't need more than 187 planes to fight a notional war when, with limited resources, the Pentagon should be spending money to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Gates's version of common sense prevailed and he has – so far – successfully ended the program.

Instead he has focused the Pentagon's budget on things that many believe it more apparently needs – like those bomb-resistant trucks he wanted that day in Kuwait.

At a recent Washington conference, former Republican Congressman John McHugh, Obama's pick as secretary of the Army, cracked a joke to introduce Gates: "When Bob Gates changes a light bulb at the Pentagon, it's the building that rotates."

Inside, Gates may have felt the joke rather apt. At the podium, he accepted the characterization without apology. ●

# Two more challenges for Vero's Council mavericks

**N**ow that Vero Beach has put a couple of mavericks onto the City Council, perhaps our elected officials will take a long-overdue look at two subjects near-and-dear (and we do mean dear) to the hearts of municipal employees: pensions and paid-time-off.

While these two expense lines in the city budget have not gotten the attention of electric rates, they are a huge cost to taxpayers.

This year alone, the city had to come up with \$4.45 million – one-fifth of the total budget for running the city – to bridge the gap left by lower investment returns from the portfolio that funds Vero's employee-defined-benefit plan. And this was not a uniquely bad year. The city had to come up with \$3.7 million to supplement the employee pensions last year, and \$3.1 million the year before.

Vero's municipal retirees – who by the way make no contribution to the retirement system during their working years -- currently receive pensions based on a formula involving salary and years of service, and they get that sum regardless.

This is unlike a defined-contribution plan, in which the employer contributes a fixed amount each year, and the ultimate pension is dependent on the economic conditions and the markets.

In the private sector, fewer than 20 percent of U.S. businesses still offer defined-benefit plans. The reason: the costs were killing employers. But Vero City Councils have shown little interest in the past in replacing defined benefits with defined contributions, and goodness knows Vero city officials have no incentive to take the lead.

These defined-benefit plans provide a mighty nice retirement for city officials. When City Clerk Tammy Vock retires, she will get a check each month for \$4,604.53. City Attorney Charles Vitunac will have to make due on a monthly retirement check of \$4,288.12.

At a time when a horrific number of Vero Beach residents are unemployed, the retirement checks for Vock and Vitunac will be about double the average pay of Indian River County residents who are working. The word that comes to mind is obscene.

But until the City Council steps up to the challenge and changes the way the city's retirement plan

works, the defined benefit system will continue, municipal employees will gladly accept their checks, and taxpayers will be on the hook for ever increasing millions of dollars.

Another subject the new, improved City Council might look at is the city's paid-time-off policy for municipal employees.

time off to city employees who are sick (who wants to have a sick city employee coughing on you in this season of swine flu), employees should be congratulated – but not rewarded – if they are fortunate enough to stay well.

Many employees, unfortunately, have come over the years to view sick time as in effect vacation time. If



To explain in shorthand, employees of Vero Beach can accumulate unused sick and vacation time from year to year, and then cash it all in for a lump sum bonus when they quit or retire.

They do not, as is generally the case in private business, lose whatever sick time and vacation time they have not used at the end of each year. Instead, they get to "bank" it.

Does this amount to much money?

Well, Scripps recently reported that "in Vero Beach, the long-term liability for paid time off -- \$6.7 million – is more than its electric utility is expected to contribute to the city this year."

What's wrong with this picture?

While we are totally in favor of providing paid

you don't spend this "vacation time," you ultimately get cash for it. So in the years ahead, taxpayers will need to pay millions of dollars to Vero Beach municipal employees for *not* being sick.

Should Vero Beach City Councils have addressed these problems years ago? Obviously. And there is no way Council members can lay the blame off on city management. It is not reasonable to expect the foxes to propose new rules for tightening up security at the hen house.

But while the failures of the past will cost Vero Beach millions in the future, the damage will continue to compound until someone calls a halt! The electric issue is important, but we're hoping the new mavericks of the City Council up to multi-tasking? ●

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The United States has invested heavily in promoting free elections around the world, with the expectation that they in turn will promote legitimate governments and democratic ideals. It hasn't always worked out that way — not in Iraq, not in the Palestinian territories and not, most recently, in Afghanistan. Dispelling some common myths about what elections can and cannot do in emerging democracies will help us face more realistically the difference between a ballot box and a magic bullet.

**1. Elections usually produce legitimate governments.**

After the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, elections became an emblem of modernization: Dictators everywhere agreed to hold them. A few, such as President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, were ousted in honest elections, having believed their own propaganda about their popularity. But many realized it was possible to adhere to form without substance. When my colleague Anke Hoeffler and I studied data on 786 elections in 155 countries from 1974 to 2004, we found that fraud may have affected the results in 41 percent of them. Incumbent politicians who cheat to get reelected stay in office 2.5 times longer than they would have playing it fair and square. These sham elections do not fool the citizens, who view the resulting governments as illegitimate and do not hold the "elected" officials accountable.

**2. The democratic process promotes peace.**

Unfortunately, the effect of democracy on the risk of political violence depends on a country's income. Above \$2,700 per capita, democracies are less prone to violence than are autocracies. But in countries where income is far below that threshold, democracy is associated with a greater risk of bloodshed.

In recent years, elections have served as a de facto exit strategy for peacekeepers after a conflict has ended. The theory has evidently been that by establishing a legitimate and accountable government, a democratic election reduces the likelihood of continuing turmoil. But my research found that, although the risk of violence falls in the year before an election, it rises in the year after. This makes sense, because in the run-up to balloting, efforts to gain power are diverted into politics; after a vote, the winner no longer feels pressure to govern inclusively and the loser regards the outcome as fraudulent.

**3. Fair elections can happen everywhere.**

The apparent success of democratization in post-Soviet Eastern Europe helped persuade the international community that elections would work anywhere if only the dictators were toppled. But evidence of stolen elections among the new democracies challenged that assumption. My research shows



that election misconduct tends to be concentrated in countries that have low per capita incomes, small populations, rich natural resources and a lack of institutional checks and balances. Eastern Europe didn't fit this picture because its population was already in the middle-income range, it was not resource-rich,

and it had the advantage of prior democratic experience. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, however, have all the characteristics that undermine elections, giving them a mere 3 percent chance of an honest vote, according to my calculations. By this measure, electoral misconduct in Afghanistan was almost inevitable.

**4. Elections compel new democratic governments to overspend, worsening economic policies and performance.**

In investigating elections' effect on economic policy in newly democratic countries, I found that populist pressure does cause policies to deteriorate somewhat in the year before an election, as in Ghana in 2008. But governments that face frequent elections have significantly better economic policies when they are averaged over the political cycle, and governments that become subject to elections improve their policies.

Unfortunately, there is a caveat: Elections in which there is misconduct have, at best, no effect on economic policy because governments are off the hook of accountability. For example, President Robert Mugabe chose to wreck the Zimbabwean economy precisely when he was facing contested elections. His policies were not even populist; he simply relied on fraud and intimidation to establish policies that benefited only a tiny political elite.

**5. We can't do anything about electoral misconduct.**

If 41 percent of elections aren't conducted fairly, disconnecting governments from true accountability, there is a problem. But the international community can help solve it. Incumbents often steal elections through patronage financed by looting the public purse, as President Daniel arap Moi did in Kenya. So countries, such as the United States, that finance democratic elections should make their aid conditional upon the government's being both transparent and accountable to its citizens in its budget processes.

Supporting governments can provide high-powered incentives for incumbents to keep elections honest. What incumbents fear most is not losing an election but being overthrown by their own military. When the international community can protect a government from such a threat, it should do so, conditional upon the election being properly conducted. For example, last year's ousting of the properly elected president of Madagascar in a coup could have been averted by prompt international military action. Ultimately, transparent budgets and security guarantees might be enough to nudge these elections closer to our democratic ideal. ●

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Exclusively John's Island

# Listen to the dissidents

BY JIM HOAGLAND, WASHINGTON POST

**B**arack Obama's extended hand was whacked across the knuckles by the leaders of Iran, Syria and assorted other thuggeries last week. But the Obama administration did manage a good demonstration in Burma of how its brand of engagement can and should work.

Kurt Campbell, the State Department's top Asia official, traveled to the isolated military dictatorship to talk with its corrupt junta. But Campbell also insisted on having a highly visible meeting with the leader of the country's democracy movement, Aung San Suu Kyi, and then publicly called on her persecutors to grant her party more freedoms.

This is the balance that has been missing in Obama's outreach to other authoritarian states. Demonstrators on the streets of Tehran underlined the president's missing link Wednesday by chanting: "Obama, Obama -- either you're with them or you're with us," as Iranian police beat them, according to news accounts. Obama and his advisers need to take the dissidents' message to heart.

The dissident -- a hero and catalyst for enormous change in the Soviet empire, China, the Philippines and elsewhere only two decades ago -- has become a largely neglected and absent figure in this administration's diplomacy. Media coverage of political protest globally also seems to have waned since the end of the Cold War.

True, Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have made symbolic gestures toward the politically oppressed on their travels and in pro forma statements. But, as the president's coming visit to China will again show, dissident political movements have not been incorporated into his strategy for changing the world.

The president believes so strongly in his powers of persuasion that the transformative work once done by Lech Walesa, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Corazon Aquino, Wei Jingsheng and others



PHOTO: EPA

**Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi (R) meets with US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell (L)**

now falls largely on his shoulders. Campbell's meeting with Suu Kyi provided a useful corrective, for one country at least, to this tendency.

George W. Bush proved that it is possible to overdo support for dissident movements and the vilification of their tormentors, just as his father demonstrated that it can be underdone (see Bush 41's effort to keep the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia from disintegrating).

The Bush 43 administration, in fact, bears some of the responsibility for the eclipse of the dissident in the public mind. The focus of many

journalists and political activists has recently been on U.S. human rights abuses rather than those of much more brutal foreign regimes.

So Obama's decision to reach out and encourage hostile regimes to relax their grip internally made initial tactical sense, especially in Iran. The administration deserves some credit for the current political fluidity there. Removing the United States as a heavy-handed, threatening enemy helped expose President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's manifest failures of governance and helped meaningful dissent to surface and spread.

But the extended-hand tactic may have run its course there. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's highest authority, used inflammatory language to denounce Obama and the U.S.-originated proposal on uranium reprocessing given to Iran on Oct. 1 in Geneva.

Even though U.S. officials claimed at the time that Iran had "accepted" the proposal -- which effectively drops the long-standing U.S. demand for Iran to suspend its enrichment of uranium as a condition for negotiations -- Khamenei said that its terms were unacceptable.


Meanwhile, protesters were voicing concern that Obama's single-minded pursuit of a nuclear deal is conveying legitimacy to Khamenei and Ahmadinejad -- at the dissidents' expense.

They did not seem to have been impressed by the general words of support contained in a message issued by Obama to mark not this political uprising but the 30th anniversary of the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, an event celebrated in Iran but not here.

Syria also served notice that its priorities have not been influenced by Team Obama's repeated blandishments for better relations.

Israel intercepted a major clandestine Iranian arms shipment destined for Syria and the Hezbollah guerrillas it supports in Lebanon. And As-Safir, a Syrian-controlled newspaper in Beirut, launched a vitriolic, sexist attack on Michele Sison, the able U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, that concluded by calling on its readers to "silence this chatterbox" -- an ominous statement in a country where U.S. and European diplomats have been murdered.

Friendly, principled engagement is a useful tool -- up to a point. It is probably worth exploring in Burma with new steps. But there also has to be a workable Plan B -- something Obama will now have to demonstrate that he has developed for Iran and Syria. ●



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# Iran's 'Great Satan' addiction

BY DAVID IGNATIUS, WASHINGTON POST,  
PHOTO: EPA



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks next to the picture of Iran Supreme leader Ali Khamenei, at the shrine of the late leader of the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in southern Tehran

**T**he Iranians have a word they use to describe a political impasse. They speak of it as a *bombast*, which means a dead-end street, or a knot that can't be untied.

That's a good description of the deadlocked debate in Tehran over the nuclear issue.

It has been more than a month since what was touted as a breakthrough meeting with the Iranians in Geneva over their nuclear program. But the Iranians now seem to be backpedaling -- disavowing the tentative agreement that their own negotiators had signaled they supported.

"The feeling now is that the Iranians are unable to decide," says a senior European diplomat involved in the talks. Abbas Milani, a Stanford professor who closely follows events in Iran, agrees: "They clearly want to back out of the deal."

It's a measure of the political turmoil in Tehran that the chief proponent of engagement with the United States over the past month has been the hard-line president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He has been attacked for his supposed willingness to make concessions to the West, including by some of the "green movement" reformers who defied him in the June presidential election.

The diplomatic stalemate is a setback for the Obama administration, which had made engagement with Iran one of its signature issues.

As the administration is discovering, getting to "yes" with Tehran for now seems all but impossible. This reversal follows the breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the other issue on which Presi-

dent Obama had attempted a bold new start, only to be enveloped by the bitter legacy of the past.

What comes next with Iran, if the negotiating impasse continues, is a new pressure campaign. First will be a debate over further U.N. sanctions. The crucial voices here will be Russia and China, which could veto any new punitive Security Council resolution. Both have publicly expressed their wariness about more sanctions.

Scrolling back to the Oct. 1 meeting in Geneva, it's clear that the Iranians were hedging their bets. Initial reports had it that Iran had agreed to allow inspection of a previously secret nuclear facility at Qom, agreed to ship most of its stock of low-enriched uranium to Russia for further processing and agreed to continue broader talks about the nuclear program and other issues.

Of those three, only the first -- the inspection of Qom -- had taken place by Oct. 31, as expected. And it turns out that what the Iranians actually promised at Geneva was that they would not contradict the West's announcement of the breakthrough, which isn't the same thing as publicly endorsing it.

The prospect of a deal with the Great Satan produced a political frisson in Tehran. For the first several days after the Geneva meeting, the press was silent, seemingly waiting for a cue.

Then the attacks began, and they intensified after an Oct. 21 meeting in Vienna that was supposed to hammer out details for the transfer of Iran's uranium to Russia. Critics chided Ahmadinejad for giving away the nuclear store.

The most important criticism came from Ali Lari-

jani, the speaker of parliament and formerly Iran's top nuclear negotiator. "The Westerners are insisting on some kind of deception," he said. Larijani wouldn't have launched this assault unless he was confident of the backing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's supreme leader.

And sure enough, Khamenei joined in the attacks last week, warning that negotiating with America would be "naive and perverted." The leader was implicitly criticizing Ahmadinejad, who had characterized the Geneva deal as an Iranian victory.

Perhaps this is all an elaborate negotiating ploy, intended to enhance Tehran's bargaining position. But reading the Iranian press, you get the sense that for Iran's ruling elite, engagement with America remains a bridge too far. "America is still the Great Satan. Negotiations are meaningless," thundered the hard-line weekly *Ya-Lesarat*.

Rather than speak up for dialogue with the United States, many of the reformists gathered around former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi decided instead to score political points against Ahmadinejad.

The past month has been a reminder that the very existence and legitimacy of Khamenei's regime are interwoven with a defiant anti-Americanism. This legacy infects even the reformers who protest against Khamenei.

The challenge for President Obama, notes Karim Sadjadpour of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is how to reach an accommodation with an Iran that needs America as an adversary. And how can Obama do that without betraying the opposition that promises Iran's best hope for change? ●

# Warning: The next economic bubble

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON, WASHINGTON POST

**W**hen Nouriel Roubini talks, the world listens. Roubini is, of course, the once-obscure New York University economist whose dire warnings about a financial crisis proved depressingly prophetic. Last week, Roubini was shouting.

Writing in the *Financial Times*, Roubini warned that the Federal Reserve and other government central banks are fueling a massive new asset “bubble” that -- while not in imminent danger of bursting -- will someday do so with calamitous consequences.

Here is Roubini’s argument: The Fed is holding short-term interest rates near zero. Investors and speculators borrow dollars cheaply and use them to

China and India) has doubled from its recent low.

Oil, now around \$80 a barrel, has increased 150 percent from its recent low of \$31. Gold is near an all-time high, around \$1,090 an ounce. Meanwhile, the dollar has dropped against many currencies. Half of Roubini’s story resonates.

But the other half is less convincing: that prices, driven by cheap loans, have reached speculative levels. Remember that the economy seemed in a free-fall early this year. Terrified consumers and cautious companies hoarded cash, cut spending and dumped stocks.

Since then, the mood and economic indicators have improved. Higher stock and commodity prices have mostly recovered the big losses of those panicky

investors became less fearful, they moved funds from cash into other markets, pushing up prices. He cites outflows this year from money market mutual funds exceeding \$300 billion.

Indeed, that’s what the Fed wants, argues economist Drew Matus of Bank of America. Low interest rates on money market funds and checking accounts are “trying to force you to do something with” the money -- either spend it or invest it. Depression prevention means supporting consumption and asset markets.

So, Roubini’s new bubble remains unproved. But this doesn’t invalidate his warning. We’ve learned that there’s a thin line between promoting economic expansion and fostering bubbles. With



Nouriel Roubini, Professor,  
Stern School of Business,  
New York University Chairman

buy various assets -- stocks, bonds, gold, oil, minerals, foreign currencies. Prices rise. Huge profits can be made.

But this can’t last, Roubini warns. The Fed will eventually raise interest rates. Or outside events (a confrontation with Iran, fear of a double-dip recession) will change market psychology. Then investors will rush to lock in profits, and the sell-off will trigger a crash. Stock, bond and commodity prices will plunge. Losses will mount, confidence will fall and the real economy will suffer.

“The Fed and other policymakers seem unaware of the monster bubble they are creating,” writes Roubini. “The longer they remain blind, the harder the markets will fall.” Haven’t we seen this movie before? Well, maybe.

Like home values a few years ago, asset prices have risen spectacularly. Since its March 9 low, the Standard & Poor’s 500-stock index has gained more than 50 percent. An index of stocks for 22 “emerging-market” countries (including Brazil,

months. Today’s prices are usually below previous peaks. Oil’s peak was nearly \$150 a barrel.

Similarly, the S&P 500, now around 1065, is a third lower than its peak on Oct. 9, 2007 (1565.15), and roughly where it was on Election Day 2008 (1005.75). By historical price-to-earnings ratios -- the ratio of stock prices to per-share profits -- these levels can be justified, *if the economic recovery continues*. With massive layoffs, business costs have been cut sharply.

“The hope is that when consumers and companies start spending, the added sales will drop quickly to the bottom line [profits],” says S&P’s Howard Silverblatt.

Nor is it clear that cheap dollar loans are promoting speculation. “In the United States and Europe, banks are reducing lending,” says economist Hung Tran of the Institute of International Finance, a research organization of financial institutions. “You see hedge funds taking on less leverage [borrowed money] than in 2007.”

What actually happened, he says, is that as in-

hindsight, lax Fed policies contributed to both the “tech” bubble of the late 1990s and the recent housing bubble, though how much is debated.

The most worrying signs of speculative excesses, says Tran, involve some Asian and Latin American developing countries. They’ve received sizable capital inflows (money from abroad). These have boosted local stock markets and reflect disaffection with the dollar.

Their central banks -- imitating the Fed -- have also kept local interest rates low, fueling rapid credit growth. Some of their stock markets have exceeded previous highs. These countries face a dilemma. Raising rates may attract more “hot” foreign capital; keeping them low may encourage speculative borrowing in local currency.

But the dilemma arises from the Fed’s low interest rates and the weak dollar. The conclusion: how deftly the Fed navigates from its present policy matters for the world as well as the United States. If it’s too fast, it may kill the economic recovery; if it’s too slow, it may spawn bubbles -- and kill the recovery. ●



# New local lawn company goes eco-friendly

BY JULIE TARASOVIC, CORRESPONDENT

**G**oing green – it’s not just a color these days but a movement.

Locals going green contribute in some way to reduce environmental footprints by recycling, conserving water and energy.

“People want to do their part in supporting this green movement,” said John Garrett, co-founder of Eco-Friendly Lawn & Garden. “In addition to green practices at home, people can also help the environment by using green products and services.”

Eco-Friendly Lawn & Garden is capitalizing on a national trend of environmental stewardship.

Five months in business, the company opened its doors with the idea of offering green lawn care and products to residents and businesses.

Jon Knopp had always been an environmentalist and Garrett had been in the indoor air quality industry. The two decided a green lawn business was a no brainer.

“I had a lawn and landscape business in the late 90s in Vero Beach, sold it to pursue other areas, and 12 years later, nothing had changed,” said Knopp, co-founder and president of the company. “It was still a dirty, noisy anti-green industry.”

So how are they green? The equipment they use is powered by propane instead of gasoline, and the products they use are organic, naturally based and gentler on the environment.

“The fertilizers and pesticides are so clean, you could lick the grass,” chuckled Garrett. “And our costs are the same or lower than all the rest of the lawn and landscape companies here in town.”

And they take their business seriously.

The equipment is less noisy (“the lowest possible decibel noise level,” says Knopp) and don’t ask them to mess up any natural habitats, either.

“We are so in-tuned to the environment and natural habitats, if there are baby birds nesting in a hedge, we just won’t cut it,” Knopp said.

According to the EPA, propane reduces toxins 70 to 80 percent. It’s 12,000 times cleaner than gasoline. “It really is amazing to think that using a regular gas-powered push mower for one hour pollutes the environment as much as 40 late model cars do (in one hour),” said Garrett.

In addition, lawn equipment users inadvertently add to the problem by spilling 17 million gallons of fuel each year while refilling equipment. “Propane is kept in sealed containers,” said Knopp, “and if it escapes, it quickly and harmlessly dissipates.”

Keeping pets and children healthy and safe in their environment is also very important to Garrett and Knopp.

“The EPA has stats that say the majority of harmful pesticides found in homes are tracked in by people and pets,” said Knopp. “Why wouldn’t you want to use pesticides and fertilizers that are safe and effective?”

Garrett and Knopp are so passionate about being green and changing the current landscape industry’s practices, that they sought out a couple of certifying organizations that would designate Eco-Friendly as a true green business.

“Anyone can say they implement green practices in their business but we wanted to make it official,” said Garrett. “So we submitted our paperwork, our goals and all the other steps we take to be environmentally responsible to the American Environmental Council who certifies companies in the service industry for following green practices.”

“They audit once every two years and you don’t know when, so you better make sure you keep all your records and receipts up to date,” said Knopp.

And, they are endorsed by Keep Indian River Beautiful.

Garret and Knopp believe in being green wholeheartedly and only employ those who share their same passion for taking care of the environment. “We put our employees through a rigorous training program based on our mission of being an ecologically sound business. They have to follow protocol and genuinely care about the environment. It’s not just about getting a paycheck,” said Knopp.

“We live in an ecologically fragile and delicate ecosystem,” said Knopp, “and we need to do what is necessary to preserve it.” ●



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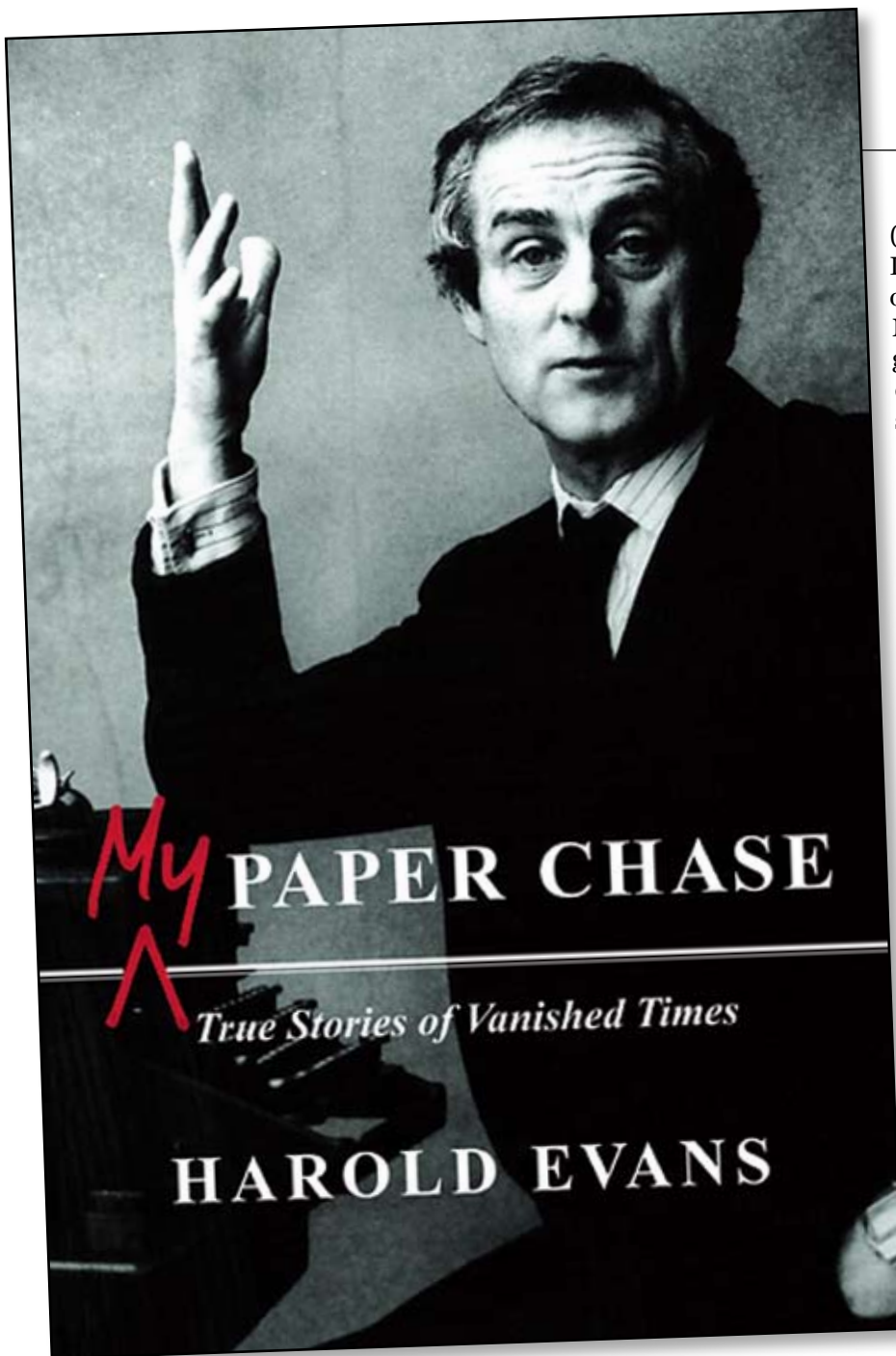


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Columnists spill ink weekly (well, not at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, which has moved online, or the Denver's Rocky Mountain News, which has gone dark) bemoaning the bad economy, Craigslist, the microscopic attention span of Millennials – anything that will explain their industry's woes without reference to its fear of innovation. News itself is depressing enough. Must we now suffer down-in-the-mouth news about the news?

If anyone could be expected to join this existential journalists' chorus, it's Harold Evans. Mercifully, **My Paper Chase**, a refreshing memoir by the venerated editor of London's Sunday Times and champion of pre-Thatcher British investigative journalism, jettisons hand-wringing over the "vanished times" of its melancholy subtitle for one man's unquenchable enthusiasm for his life's work.

"I never conceived this memoir as a valedictory to a vanishing world," Evans, now 81, writes – for this son of a middle-class railroad man, the importance of unbiased, responsible, free-flowing reportage is self-evident. If it's not self-sustainable, that's a problem for the accountants.

Not that Evans doesn't wax poetic about "hot metal" typesetting, the old-fashioned, PC-free process by which metal slugs, filled with ink and pressed on paper, became the daily newspaper. Consider the author's first encounter with Linotype machines: "[T]he floor was filled with long lines of iron monsters, each seven feet high, five feet wide, decked out with an incomprehensible array of moving parts – gears, pulleys, camshafts, levers, and bars. A man crouched in communion at the foot of each contraption."

If "communion" sounds religious, it is – Evans, a self-starter who battled British education's stodgy promotion system, Oxbridge classism, and Northern England's dodgy bus schedule to land his first newspaper job, is an acolyte of "the aromatic urgency of hot metal marinated with printer's ink." Why would a man who ma-

cheted his way to the top of Fleet Street – home to London's "quality papers" for much of the 20th century – write about his calling with less-than-ecclesiastical fervor?

"My Paper Chase" is the Gospel of Evans, and the gospel makes juicy copy. After a start covering weddings and funerals for the tiny Ashton-under-Lyne Reporter, Evans served time at regional papers and as a reporter in America and India before landing the top spot at the Sunday Times in 1967. His 15-year tenure brought a lot of news fit to print: Evans's "Insight" investigative team broke the Kim Philby spy scandal, pursued settlements for limbless thalidomide victims (and shone a light on Britain's glacial civil courts), and, in the face of a libel suit, pushed Northern Ireland's IRA "troubles" under the noses of an indifferent public.

"A newspaper is an argument on the way to a deadline," Evans writes of his muckracking, side-taking, "straightforward" editorial style. "If there isn't any argument, there's not much of a newspaper."

But if the power of the press should start arguments, it doesn't guarantee winning. Evans was pushed out of the Times in 1982 after spats over editorial independence with uberpublisher Rupert Murdoch, journalism's once-and-future bogeyman. If the dismissed editor, who nearsightedly sided with Murdoch's guerrilla campaign against press unions, really thinks "every British newspaperman is in [Murdoch's] debt," it's a disappointing case of a dog not biting the hand that beats it.

Exiled to Manhattan, Evans served as founding editor of Conde Nast Traveler, then ran Random House, where he published William Styron's "Darkness Visible," Colin Powell's "My American Journey," and a memoir by "a community organizer named Barack Obama."

But this dazzling "second act" can't hide Evans's newspaper jones. "[A]n opportunity to return to journalism on the scale of the Sunday Times," Evans writes of his Random House entrée – a curious comment about one of the world's largest book publishers from the writer of seven books himself. This man just can't see the forest or the trees, but the newspapers they could become – Evans devotes 500 pages to his life before and during his Times editorship, but less than 50 to his life after it.

Still, even if he'd rather be sweating it out with a copy editor five minutes to deadline than reminiscing with the president about the meager advance for "Dreams from My Father," Evans remains upbeat. "What we have to find is a way to sustain truth seeking," he writes. "If we evolve the right financial model, we will enter a golden age of journalism." "Will enter" – not "entered," or "could have entered," or "should have entered." What daily's editorial page dares write with such optimism? While not short on war stories, "My Paper Chase" refuses nostalgia. Tomorrow is, after all, another day, and brings a new edition. ●

*My Paper Chase: True Stories of Vanished Times, Harold Evans, Little, Brown and Company, 592 pp., \$27.99*  
 Reviewed by Justin Moyer  
 Christian Science Monitor

**T**he energetic memoir of Harold Evans, a newspaperman who refuses to sing the blues.

Read any good newspapers lately? Read any newspapers lately? If not, here's the scoop: blogs, not banner headlines, swarm the digital frontier's horizon, and the fourth estate has its pixels in a bunch over the future of print media.



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## BOOK REVIEWS

**L**arry Bird and Magic Johnson look back on the era when they ruled -- and transformed -- the NBA.

In the spring of 1979, Earvin "Magic" Johnson and his Michigan State team faced off against Larry Bird and his undefeated Indiana State squad to decide the collegiate basketball championship. Johnson and the Spartans prevailed in a game that introduced much of the nation to two sublime players and, not so incidentally, paved the way for the multibillion-dollar television contract that March Madness now commands.

Such is the influence of the Johnson-Bird rivalry, a nexus that continued after they entered the NBA together and rekindled a dormant, bicoastal feud. Johnson led the Lakers to five titles during L.A.'s "Showtime" era, as Bird was reviving Boston Celtic pride with three rings. Their presence, along with the marketing prowess of commissioner David Stern and an influx of superior talent (Michael Jordan, Hakeem Olajuwon), lifted a league beset by drug scandal and abysmal TV ratings to international renown.

In "When the Game Was Ours," veteran Boston-based sportswriter Jackie MacMullan collaborates with Johnson and Bird to tell the story of a relationship that changed from bitter enmity to respectful friendship. The premise of the book is intriguing: With the exception of Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell, it's nearly impossible to find two opposing superstars in team sports whose careers became so irrevocably intertwined. (Of course, Chamberlain and Russell didn't compete against each other in college.)

Johnson was a pass-first visionary. A 6-foot-9 point guard, he summoned magic nightly at the Fabulous Forum alongside Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, James Worthy and a pool of complementary talent. He also courted his share of controversy. In his third season, his complaints brought about the firing of head coach Paul Westhead. He preferred to socialize with owner Jerry Buss, which some teammates resented, and in 1991 announced that he had contracted HIV.

Bird was a sniper from the perimeter who intimidated opponents (and teammates) with a combination of arrogance and brilliance. His unique

court awareness transformed a corps of excellent players -- Robert Parish, Kevin McHale -- into hall of famers. Until injuries curtailed his career, he had succeeded in resurrecting a fallen franchise. MacMullan, who previously co-wrote Bird's autobiography, notes that this notoriously private man endured his father's suicide and, to his lasting shame, severed relations with his daughter from a failed marriage.

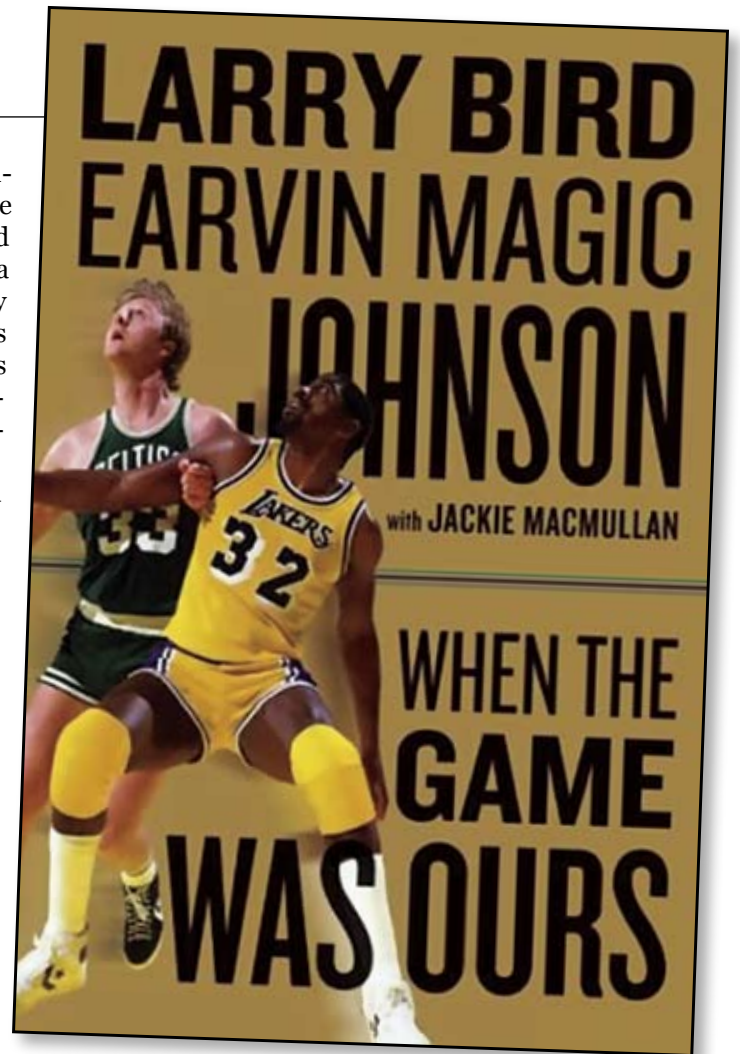
According to MacMullan, Johnson and Bird shared an inextinguishable competitive fervor. Both remember defeat more vividly than victory; both used the other's success as motivation. They were also savvy enough to realize that each brought out the other's best. (During the 1992 Olympics, Johnson scolded Michael Jordan because Jordan did not have a comparable rival. "Who do you measure yourself against?" Johnson asked.) Off the court, they were nothing alike. "Magic was effusive, emotional, and engaging," MacMullan writes. "Bird was stoic, reserved, and enigmatic. There was also one undeniable difference between the two: the color of their skin."

Indeed, in a league dominated by African American players, Bird was often championed as the NBA's great white hope. He rejected this label, even as others (the Detroit Pistons' Isiah Thomas, most infamously) complained that he was overrated precisely because of his color.

Curiously, the most controversial parts of the book revolve around Thomas. Magic says that he and others campaigned to exclude Thomas, a one-time buddy, from the 1992 Olympic "Dream Team," although Thomas deserved the honor.

Johnson also charges Thomas with raising questions about his sexual orientation after the HIV admission. (Thomas has refuted this and other accusations.)

With "When the Game Was Ours," MacMullan has written dual authorized biographies that occasionally intersect. That's the major flaw of the book; the story, told exclusively in the third person, rebounds from L.A. to Boston and back. By contrast, "When March Went Mad," a book written this year by reporter Seth Davis (no relation to



this author), focused on the 1979 contest between Michigan State and Indiana State. That approach brought crisp purpose to the narrative.

It's worth recalling that Johnson's Lakers and Bird's Celtics clashed exactly three times in the NBA Finals. In effect, their rivalry existed as much in their psyche -- and among fans and the media -- as on the hardwood. That doesn't diminish its importance, but capturing such an ephemeral experience is surely as difficult as registering a triple-double. ●

*When the Game Was Ours*  
Larry Bird, Earvin Johnson Jr.,  
and Jackie MacMullan,  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 352 pp., \$26  
Reviewed by David Davis  
*Los Angeles Times*

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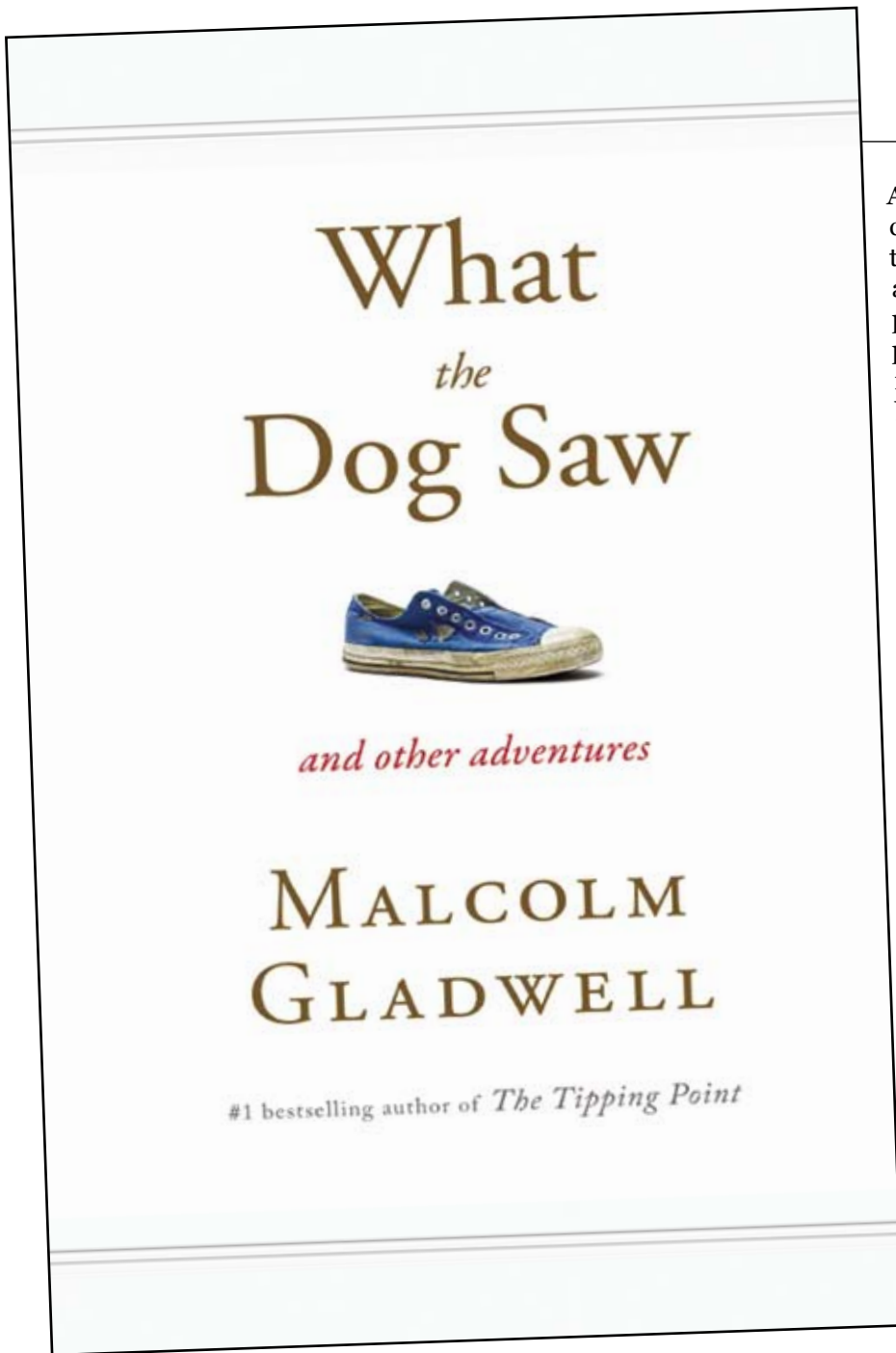


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America's intelligence services could easily have "connected the dots" and foiled the 9/11 attacks; and predictions people make (about crime, job applicants, pets) that may seem reasonable at first glance, but which aren't grounded in Gladwellian reality.

The author, who wrote "The Tipping Point" and two other bestselling books, examines, for example, whether pit bulls are inherently dangerous. (Not particularly, unless we humans put them up to it.)

Then there's the "Ketchup Conundrum."

Ever wonder why ketchup is just plain ketchup, while mustard, which once was just plain yellow mustard, has morphed into Grey Poupon and myriad other shades, textures, and flavors?

Wonder no more: Gladwell is on the case, having delved in great detail into the five fundamental tastes in the human palate, not to mention the arcane nooks and crannies of food marketing.

The author also tackles Enron's collapse, whether novice pilot John F. Kennedy Jr. choked or panicked

(there's a big difference), and why pictures sometimes lie.

In his preface, Gladwell confesses that his first career choice was advertising, and it shows. "The Pitchman," which won a National Magazine Award, is a delightfully rich account of the immigrant American clan who concocted and sold such household icons as the Veg-O-Matic and the Ronco Showtime Rotisserie.

In another market-driven piece, the author follows the careers of women who had a powerful impact on both what we bought and how we thought about ourselves.

In the 1950s, copywriter Shirley Polykoff penned this memorable line for Clairol's Nice 'n Easy hair-coloring brand: "Does she or doesn't she? Only her hairdresser knows for sure." When the ad debuted, 7 percent of American women dyed their hair.

By the 1970s, when Ilon Specht wrote the more assertive "Because I'm worth it" tag line for Preference by L'Oréal, 40 percent of females were coloring.

At times, Gladwell works too hard at being the devil's advocate. In "Open Secrets" he doesn't exonerate Enron exactly, but he points out that the company's deteriorating condition could have been deduced from a careful reading of its quarterly filings and other public documents – and that in 1998 a group of six business students at Cornell University did just that. They posted their report on the school's website.

So was Enron really hiding anything? Gladwell seems to be implying that too much information is not always useful. Yet he neglects to emphasize that top company officials were asserting right up to the implosion that all was hunky-dory, small print notwithstanding.

Likewise, Gladwell goes to great lengths to let America's intelligence services off the hook for not "connecting the dots" that led to 9/11. Intelligence failures are a dime a dozen, and he cites several. One wonders from his relentless advocacy why we would bother having an FBI and a CIA at all given the vagaries of sleuthing.

When he avoids pontificating, Gladwell is at his best. His profile of "dog whisperer" Cesar Millan mesmerizes, even though he describes his subject as being "built like a soccer player" – as if all are made from the same mold. ●

*What the Dog Saw,*  
Malcolm Gladwell,  
Little Brown, 410 pp., \$27.99  
Reviewed by David Holohan  
Christian Science Monitor

**N**ew Yorker writer Malcolm Gladwell delves into everything from Enron to 9/11 to pit bulls.

A collection of pieces Malcolm Gladwell has written for The New Yorker magazine since 1996, titled **What the Dog Saw**, is a mixed bag of quirky profiles; thoughtful and contrarian analyses of commonly embraced theories, such as the belief that

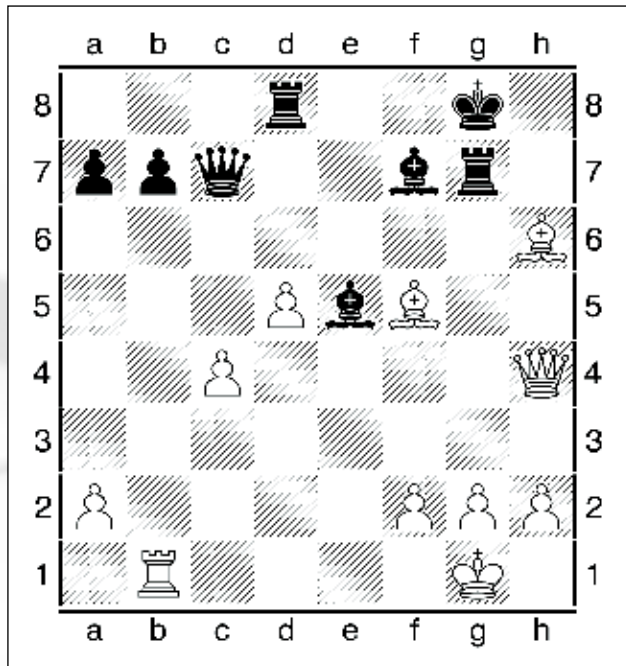
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## FOR THE LOVE OF CHESS BY HUMBERTO CRUZ - CHESS COLUMNIST



White's next move was decisive.  
See column at right.

### Site sought for major tournament in area

As far as I know, Vero Beach – or the Treasure Coast, period – has never hosted a major chess tournament. Now we have a chance.

The Florida Chess Association, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting chess as art and recreation, has announced plans to become more “pro-active,” including organizing major tournaments in areas that have never had one.

With nearly \$32,000 in reserves, the FCA has the resources to be the official organizer of major events, including future state championships. That way, local organizers are spared the risk of putting together a tournament and losing a bundle if not enough players show up so the entry fees can cover the cost of the event, including contracts with hotels or other playing sites.

“It’s a tough job and many organizers have given up, especially in Florida,” said Harvey Lerman, president of the association. Working with him, directors at the Indian River County Chess Club are looking for sites that could accommodate a tournament for an estimated 175 players such as a state championship. For suggestions or to offer a site, please e-mail me at the address below.

Today’s diagram is from a game in this year’s state championship in Miami. The tournament winner, Grandmaster Julio Becerra, played 28. Rxb7! and won quickly after 28...Qa5 (the Queen must keep guarding the Rook on d8) 29.g3 Rxd5 30.Bxg7 Rd1+ 31.Kg2 Bxg7 32.Bh7+ Kf8 33.Qe7#.

Humberto Cruz is a United States Chess Federation correspondence chess master and certified tournament director. He can be reached at askhumberto@aol.com.

## THE BRIDGE COLUMN BY PIETER VANBENNEKOM - BRIDGE COLUMNIST

### STEALING A BID

Stealing a bid – and making it – when the opponents obviously have the majority of high-card points is one of the most satisfying experiences a bridge player can have.

Some small partial score would be great, but making game in that situation is usually a distant dream. Nevertheless, it happened at a recent “friendly” get-together involving our friends Flustered Flo, playing the strong East hand, and Smug Sam, who’s been known to gloat and point out others’ foibles, especially Flo’s.

Even though Smug Sam and his partner, Loyal Larry, had only 16 high-card points between them, to their opponents’ 24, they managed to “steal” a 5 clubs game contract. Here’s how: East-West vulnerable; North is the Dealer.

The bidding (East-West had agreed – and disclosed to their opponents – that they were playing “old-style” strong 2 bids, indicating 19-21 points):

North	East	South	West
Pass	2 D	3 C	3 D
4 C	4 D	5 C	all Pass

Opening lead: 8 of Diamonds

The actual playing of the hand was fairly uneventful and straight forward. East took the first trick with a top Diamond and the second top Diamond lead was ruffed in Declarer’s hand. Declarer then drew two rounds of trumps ending up in the dummy with the Ace and led a small a Heart.

East cashed his Heart King and shifted to a Spade, which was ruffed in Declarer’s hand. He led a small Heart to dummy’s Ace and claimed the 11 tricks for his contract with all his good trumps and Hearts.

While the playing was uneventful, the bidding certainly wasn’t. How could Flo, with all that power, let the bid get stolen? Smug Sam was happy to point out that she should have bid her Spades first. Never mind all those honors in Diamonds – with two 5-card suits, bid the major first.

“In the end I was just a coward,” Flo said afterwards. “I guess I got flustered again by all that bidding against me. I could have made either 5 Diamonds or 5 Spades. I hate to let a Game get away from us on a hand like that.”

“I got news for you,” replied Sam. “I wouldn’t have let you make your Game in 5 Diamonds or Spades anyway. I sacrifice in 6 Clubs and even if you double, all you get is 100 points, not 450.”

NORTH		
♠ 8 7 6	♥ A 8 5	♦ 10 9 7 3
♣ A 7 3	♠ A 5 4 3 2	♥ K J
WEST		
♠ K Q J 10 9	♥ 7 4 2	♦ 8 6 5
♣ 10 5	♠ ---	♥ Q 10 9 6 3
	♦ 2	♣ 4
	♠ K Q J 9 8 6 2	

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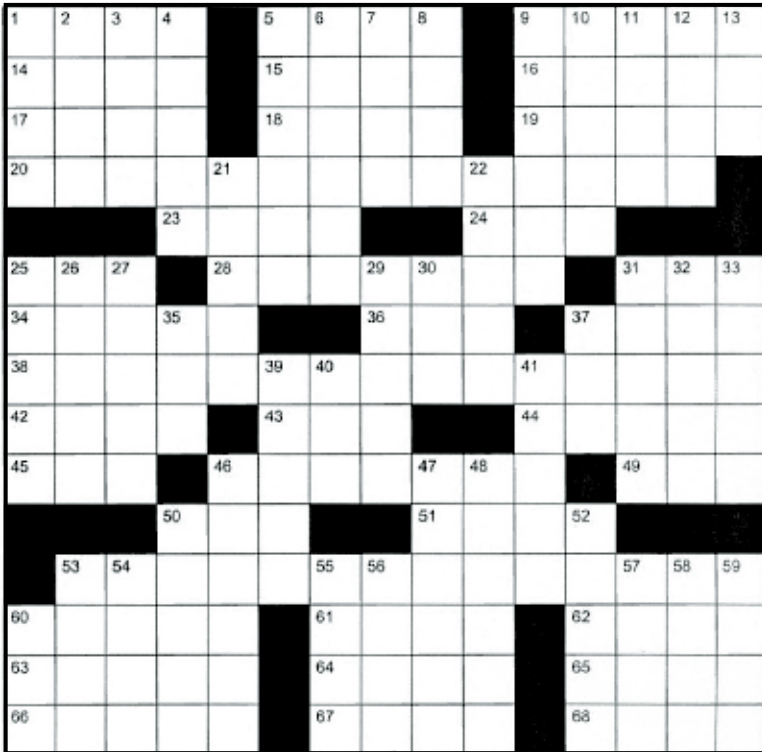
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# Crossword

## OATH OF OFFICE



The Christian Science Monitor | By Gregory E. Paul | Edited by Charles Preston

### ACROSS

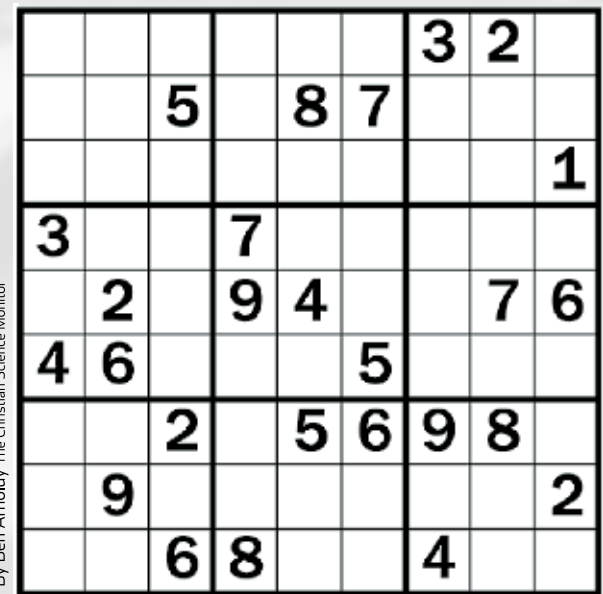
- 1 San \_\_\_ Obispo, CA
- 5 Unit of matter
- 9 Heron's home
- 14 Food stamp agency: abbr.
- 15 Famous fish
- 16 Handy
- 17 Pell-\_\_\_
- 18 Wilderness, for one
- 19 Zero in on
- 20 January 20th display
- 23 Top guns
- 24 Not up to snuff
- 25 Restorative resort
- 28 Brainstorm
- 31 Deface
- 34 "\_\_\_ of Athens"
- 36 Cellular letters
- 37 Sonoma's neighbor
- 38 January 20th
- 42 In case
- 43 Domino dot
- 44 Calmness of heart
- 45 Keyboard key
- 46 Cobblestone alternative
- 49 Ancient roman sea: abbr.
- 50 Pitchblende, e.g.

- 51 Six, south of the border
- 53 January 20th song
- 60 Georgia peach
- 61 Surface-to-surface missile
- 62 Head start
- 63 One of the Fearsome Foursome
- 64 Parable plant
- 65 "Maid of the Mist", e.g.
- 66 Love, Italian style
- 67 Took out a mortgage
- 68 He played Pierce

### DOWN

- 1 Coal unit
- 2 Manipulative one
- 3 On strike
- 4 Some like it hot
- 5 Boston Marathon award
- 6 Singer Brewer
- 7 Premonition
- 8 Fortress feature
- 9 Make obscure
- 10 Wake Island, e.g.
- 11 Villa \_\_\_, Ga.
- 12 Spent bullet
- 13 Tom, Dick, and Harry, e.g.
- 21 Cake mate
- 22 Camel region
- 25 Token taker
- 26 Knotty trees
- 27 Garner
- 29 Seminar adjunct
- 30 S&L profit
- 31 Palindromic woman
- 32 Briskly
- 33 Like a daisy
- 35 Three strikes
- 37 Anchorage-to-Fairbanks dir.
- 39 Capsize
- 40 Type of tide
- 41 Visual
- 46 \_\_\_ Francis
- 47 On liberty
- 48 Eyed lasciviously
- 50 Flames are his foe
- 52 Yemen, once
- 53 Quartermaster's post
- 54 To boot
- 55 Beetle Bailey dog
- 56 Spring event
- 57 Baal, e.g.
- 58 Holy moly!
- 59 Salad mate
- 60 Fluffy scarf

# Sudoku



By Ben Arnoldy The Christian Science Monitor

★★★★☆

### How to do Sudoku:

Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row and three-by-three square. See example to the right.

SOLUTIONS TO LAST ISSUE ON PAGE 75



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**ACROSS**

- 1 Paper name, briefly
- 5 "The Nightmare Before Christmas" hostage
- 10 "Band of Gold" singer Payne
- 15 Four-legged William Powell co-star
- 19 Quickie divorce city
- 20 Puccini pieces
- 21 Better equipped
- 22 Windows alternative
- 23 Jazz guitarist's admission?
- 26 Agatha title
- 27 More, to Mario
- 28 Visibility hindrance
- 29 Musical Mama
- 30 Tear at the same spot
- 32 Sell in a hurry
- 34 Shindig or wingding
- 35 Window shopper's buy?
- 36 Word oft-repeated in "96 Tears"
- 39 Bike and bridle, e.g.
- 40 What lifelong jazz musicians are?
- 43 Fish delicacy
- 44 "Boom-de-ay" opener
- 46 Fork site
- 47 Mo or Stew of 6 Down
- 49 Sphere preceder
- 52 Mtn. stats
- 54 A kinder, gentler notion
- 55 Sgt. Friday's intro
- 56 Name for a jazz club?
- 59 City near Hackensack
- 61 "10" piece
- 62 Gull's nesting place, often
- 64 Sandwich on toast
- 65 Big name in skis and snowboards
- 68 Hand communication: abbr.
- 69 Play clarinet?
- 74 Jeff Lynne's grp.

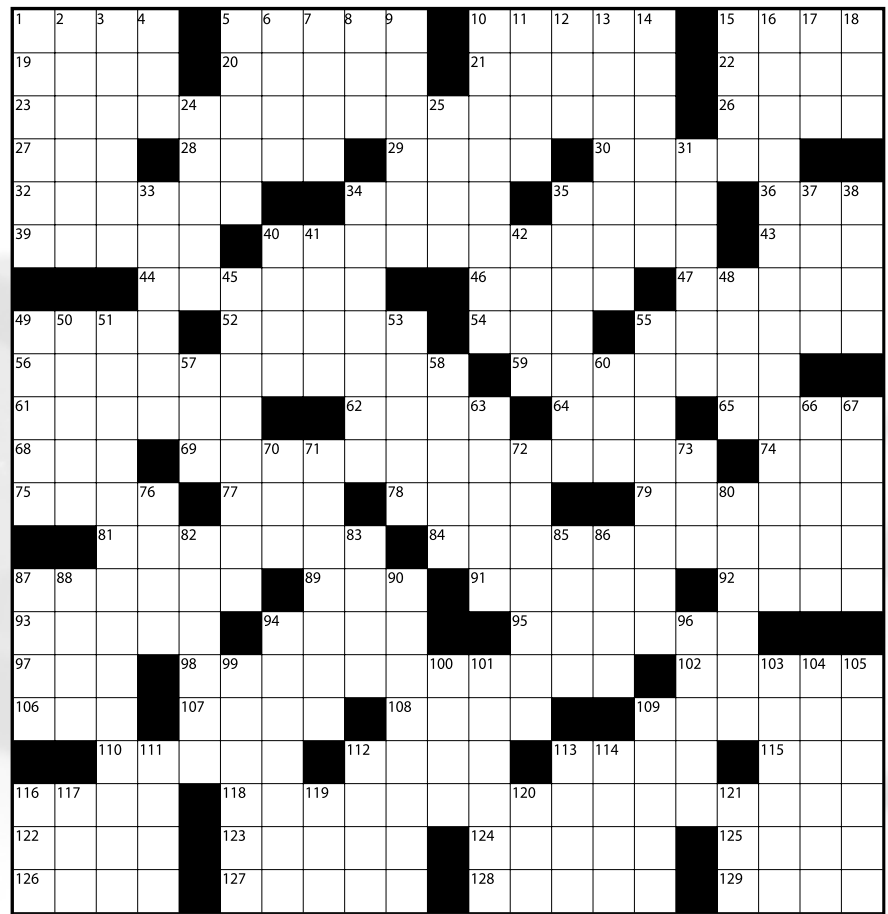
- 75 Hot-foot cry
- 77 "Everybody knows that!"
- 78 The Fates, e.g.
- 79 Walk or talk aimlessly
- 81 Surveillance option
- 84 Jazz crooner?
- 87 Large evergreen, ironically
- 89 Bus. card datum
- 91 Poker move
- 92 Units with a mgr.
- 93 Hatch's first
- 94 The Auld Sod
- 95 Hit hard
- 97 Org. involved in the healthcare debate
- 98 Where to buy jazz instruments?
- 102 Awaken rudely
- 106 Barnyard butter
- 107 New Haven alumni
- 108 Headed for overtime
- 109 Dorm sharer
- 110 Books review
- 112 Tomato variety
- 113 Lose traction
- 115 Author Deighton
- 116 Smoker's discard
- 118 Our jazziest president?
- 122 Where most people live
- 123 Ancient mariners
- 124 "\_\_\_ elected"
- 125 Sandy hill
- 126 Ernst of sound-barrier fame
- 127 "Solemnly" follower
- 128 Apply, as pressure
- 129 LeBron or Leonardo, e.g.

**DOWN**

- 1 Catch in a lie, e.g.
- 2 Site of rods and cones
- 3 Compliment's converse

- 4 Feather \_\_\_
- 5 Light lunch
- 6 Home of the Hopis: abbr.
- 7 Perfect square
- 8 Make lace
- 9 Refuse holder
- 10 Well below, with "of"
- 11 Results of key hits
- 12 Employee of 5 Across
- 13 Scam
- 14 Gentleman thief Lupin of fiction
- 15 BMW rival
- 16 Name for a jazz revue?
- 17 Heisman winner Tebow
- 18 Dismiss summarily
- 24 Tibet's capital
- 25 Down \_\_\_ (Maine)
- 31 Go on
- 33 "\_\_\_ in England ..."
- 34 Obvious trait of William Tell's son
- 35 Control substance?
- 37 Hershey candy
- 38 Canine complaint
- 40 Danse events
- 41 City near Provo
- 42 Door securer
- 45 Fuse again, in a way
- 48 Fish made of vitamins?
- 49 Cornered
- 50 "Who are \_\_\_ guys?"
- 51 Like jazz movies?
- 53 Slangy nose
- 55 Place to surf
- 57 Wall St. fig.
- 58 Competition: abbr.
- 60 30,000 ft., e.g.
- 63 Order member
- 66 Set aside
- 67 Coward et al.
- 70 Not safe
- 71 Hypothetical questions

- 72 Words before idea or guess
- 73 Move south?
- 76 Kind of computer connection
- 80 WWI Treasury secretary William
- 82 Finished the dishes
- 83 Gilpin of "Frasier"
- 85 Capital near Chernobyl
- 86 Cruise stop
- 87 Niagara Falls sound
- 88 Humorist Bombeck
- 90 Remaining
- 94 Seating by the door, on planes
- 96 Dwindle
- 99 "... and Jupiter \_\_\_ with Mars"
- 100 "Put your pencils down"
- 101 "Attention, colonists!"
- 103 German mark
- 104 "Burnt" shade
- 105 Part of 54 Across
- 109 Rosie's fastener
- 111 93 Across's home
- 112 Parks of Montgomery
- 113 Turn on an axis
- 114 Lancaster's surf-embrace partner
- 116 Emeril catchword
- 117 "Surfin' \_\_\_"
- 119 Result of a vein search?
- 120 "Friends" actress
- 121 Church with elders: abbr.



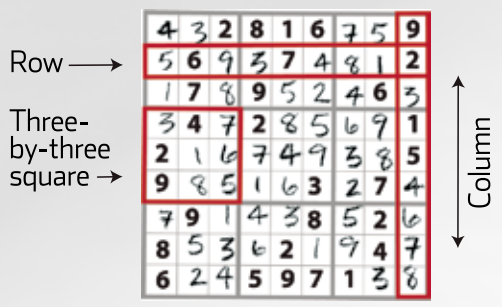
**LIKE, TOTALLY JAZZED**

By Merl Reagle

	6		1	3	5			
9	7							
5								1
		9					8	3
	5			2			4	
3	1					6	9	
7								5
							6	8
			8	4	6		1	

Puzzle by telegraph.co.uk

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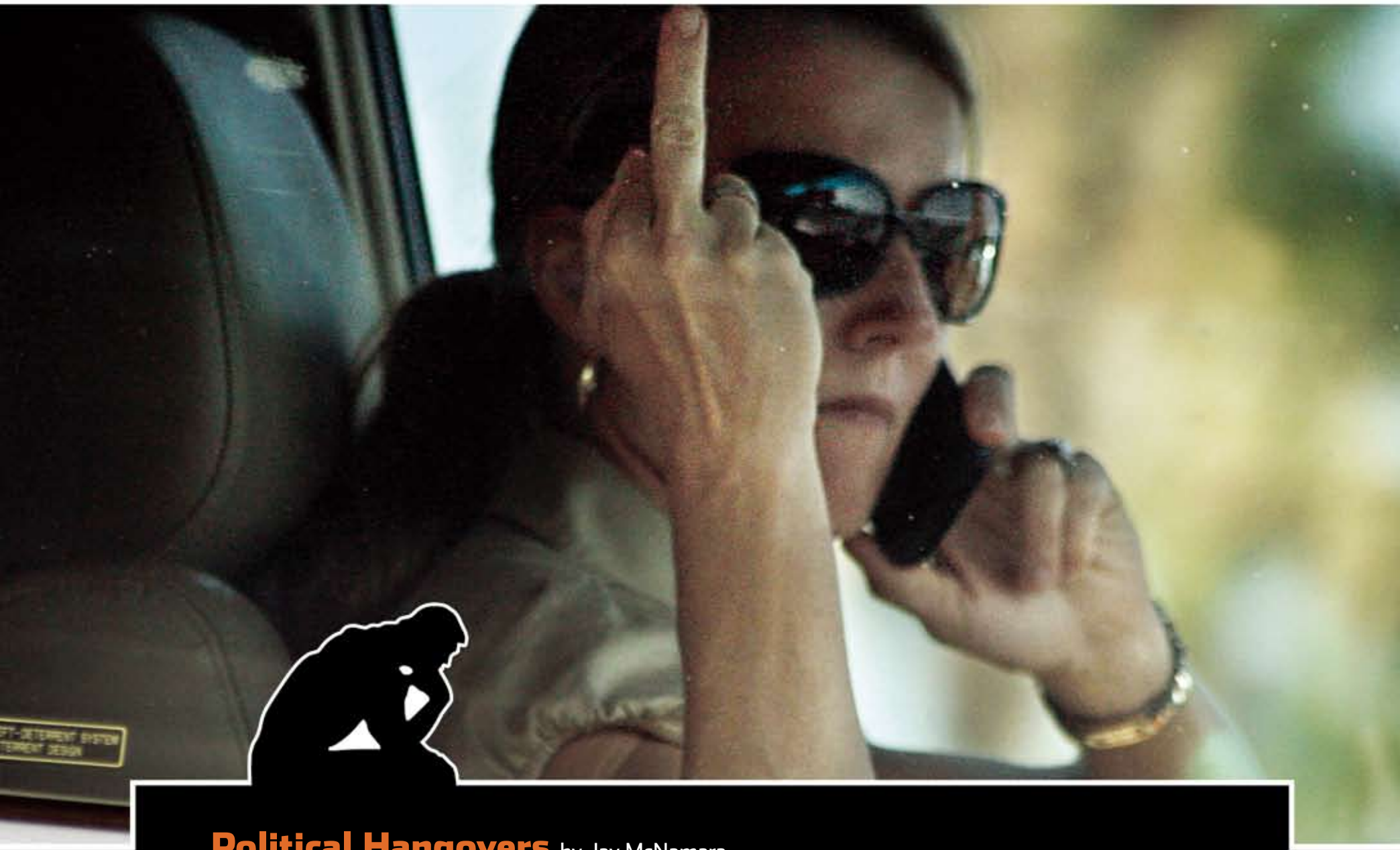
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## Political Hangovers by Jay McNamara

It's that time of the year, after the elections, when politicians have hangovers. Some of them are temporary and the result of victory parties. Others are more lasting. These are resultant from promises made and the realities of fulfillment.

Every politician makes promises to get votes. Some might tell an audience one night that they are in favor of x, since that is what the audience wants to hear. Then, the next night with a different audience it might be more vote-getting to be against x.

It's intoxicating to make great promises in the excitement of a race. Who knew that there would be people at your door the day after the election demanding that you deliver?

I have firsthand experience in this realm, having served in seven different elected capacities in a small place up north. None of them generated any salary. I suspect my constituents thought it was a fair bargain.

At one point, running for mayor, I was invited to some friends for a fund raiser. There wasn't much required as a campaign kitty since I enjoyed the comfort of one-party dominance. No one was running in opposition. So, it was amusing when I was asked to speak to the gathering. After a brief noncommittal opening statement I asked for questions.

A lady unknown to me asked me what my plans were for the community. This was rather startling in that no one had asked that question before. I thought to myself that the hallmarks of my reign would be lower taxes and shorter meetings, especially the public ones.

In our comfortable community there were no sunshine laws and no TV cameras. The important business was conducted in a back room and at cocktail parties. Public meetings were for announcing decisions, never for discussion.

There was a lone beat reporter for the local paper, a man whom I had gotten to know from visits to local watering holes after our meetings. He was as interested in short meetings as I was.

As I struggled to provide the lady with a meaningful answer, my brain suggested a wild idea, so I went with it. I told her that my main focus would be in building a large wall around the town, something similar to the Great Wall of China.

Instead of generating the laugh from her that I expected, I was faced with a series of further questions since she thought a wall was just what we needed to keep out what she termed the "riffraff."

And so, discussion of the elements of the wall ensued, including where and how many entrances there would be and what means of identification would be required by the inhabitants. The lady went away pleased with the hope of the new order I would bring.

Fortunately, I didn't come across her until more than a year later. She stopped me in a supermarket and asked me when the great wall would be built. I told her we had people studying the situation in China, but that we were confident of completing the project. Fortunately, my term expired before I saw her again.

Politicians make promises. Some believe them. Hope springs eternal.