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Bringing needy families a 'Bright and Shining Christmas' P.44

INSIGHT

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HEALTH
CARE
REFORM

P.30

Dangling by a thread

As Christmas approaches, are we getting nearer or farther from a bill in the Senate?

12 days before Christmas

Eight views of health care reform



MACK MCLARTY

Chief of staff to President Bill Clinton, 1993-94



DOUGLAS E. SCHOEN

Democratic pollster and author

A plan to let people over 55 buy into Medicare, heralded as a breakthrough in the Senate health care debate, has run into resistance from Senators who can make or break efforts to reshape the nation's health insurance system.

Independent Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut declared the early Medicare buy-in a bad deal for taxpayers and the deficit. He pleaded with Democrats to start subtracting expensive proposals from the health care reform bill, saying, "We don't need to keep adding onto the back of this horse or we're going to break the horse's back and get nothing done."

The early Medicare buy-in was part of a compromise reached last week when Senate Democrats dropped the idea of setting up a federal health insurance plan to compete with private insurers. Only a few moderates have come out against the Medicare plan. But the Democrats need all 60 votes in their caucus.

"I think it's going to pass out of the Senate before Christmas," President Barack Obama told the CBS program "60 Minutes" in an interview that aired last Sunday night. But Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell said no way.

"With the American people as overwhelmingly opposed to this bill as they are, for the Democrats to basically arrogantly take the position that we're going to ignore public opinion and jam this through before Christmas, I think that's really a stretch," McConnell said.

Will health care legislation pass the Senate before Christmas?

Is the Senate's health-care bill getting better or worse? On the next few pages, we bring you the thoughts of a variety of Democrat and Republican strategists.

MACK MCLARTY

The Senate is in the very middle of making sausage. Many progressives are distressed at the loss of a robust public option. Many fiscal conservatives are disheartened that the bill does not do more to control costs. But having seen this movie before, I know that the only thing worse than a distressing bill is a needed and good bill that goes unpassed.

The Senate is engaging in tortuous compromise with a practical goal: 60 votes. Many of the compromises taking place are bipartisan, innovative and cost-effective. Some are not. But the main thing is ensuring access to insurance for tens of millions of citizens who need it. Exactly how we get there is more or less a detail.

I believe in bipartisanship (even though now it feels a bit like believing in the tooth fairy), because I believe that is how you reach most Americans. A bill that tries to appeal across party lines and that a broad range of Americans will embrace no doubt fits my definition of a "better" bill.

But an important and good bill that can actually pass more than meets my criteria of legislation that should move forward, and I believe the Senate will do precisely that in the days ahead.

DOUGLAS E. SCHOEN

The Senate health-care bill appears to be improving, if only because the so-called public option

appears, for the time being, to be dead.

Until recently, the public option was the main stumbling block to reaching an agreement. With the apparent willingness of liberals and moderate Democrats to agree to drop any formal role for the government in administering a government-run health insurance scheme, a major step forward seemingly has been taken.

Further, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi indicating, however tentatively, that she believes agreement can be reached in a conference committee to reconcile the House and Senate proposals, we now have the first indication that this will not ultimately be a deal-breaker. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

This is not the end of the story. In the place of the public option, a number of possible deal-breakers have emerged, including the new plan to allow 55-to-64-year-olds to buy into Medicare, as well as the issues of abortion funding, drug importation and immigration.

In the end, everything hinges on the Congressional Budget Office's forthcoming score of the new Democratic proposal. If the price tag comes in at under \$1 trillion, and ideally under \$900 billion, offering some amount of deficit reduction in future years, the new plan will be seen as a huge step forward.

And if the new proposal is ultimately seen as too expensive and offering little in the way of deficit re-

duction, the Democrats will most likely be back to square one.

MICHAEL O. LEAVITT

For four successive years as a trustee of the Medicare trust fund, I listened to reports from the government actuary of the system's impending insolvency.

When the next report comes out in the spring, I predict, based on recent economic conditions, an announcement that Medicare is within a presidential term of bankruptcy. The Senate proposal to add millions of people to Medicare will accelerate the program's collapse.

Premiums for 55- to 64-year-olds would be high. Mostly the sick will apply. Separate provisions of the bill ensure that others can buy insurance after they get sick. In a short time, Congress will succumb to pressure to subsidize the premiums with tax dollars.

The representation that only a narrow group would be eligible is an illusion. The program will quickly experience the same eligibility creep every other government health insurance program has experienced.

Expanding Medicare will hurt hospitals, drive doctors from participating in Medicare and drive up the budget deficit. Medicare's fatally flawed fee-for-service system underlies the ruinous path we are on. Congress should fundamentally restructure Medicare rather than blindly add to its task.



MICHAEL O. LEAVITT

Secretary of Health and Human Services, 2005-09



ED ROGERS

White House staffer to Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush



AL FROM

Founder of the Democratic Leadership Council

ED ROGERS

The Democratic ideas for Americans' health care have gone from a ridiculous over-reach of government control in the House to just ridiculous in the Senate.

It appears that there was a meeting in the Senate majority leader's office, and the question under consideration changed from "how do we reform health care?" to "how do we drive up health-care costs and diminish health-care quality for the greatest number of people?" Answer: "Well, we could radically increase participation in the struggling Medicare system."

Someone said "Great idea!" and Harry Reid was out the door and in front of the cameras announcing this plan, which no one has dared to propose in years for fear of ridicule.

The saddest part is that some real bipartisan reform is still possible. If Reid would abandon the Christmas deadline, lock himself in a room with Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.) and a few others, a real bipartisan consensus would emerge.

AL FROM

Real health-care reform requires that good intentions be accompanied by tough actions. The potential compromise in the Senate seems heavier on the former than the latter. As a result, it's likely to fall short of President Obama's objectives of expanding coverage, lowering costs and improving quality -- without adding to the federal deficit.

Replacing the public option with a plan modeled after the Federal Employees Health Plan -- an exchange offering a choice of private insurance plans -- is a positive step.

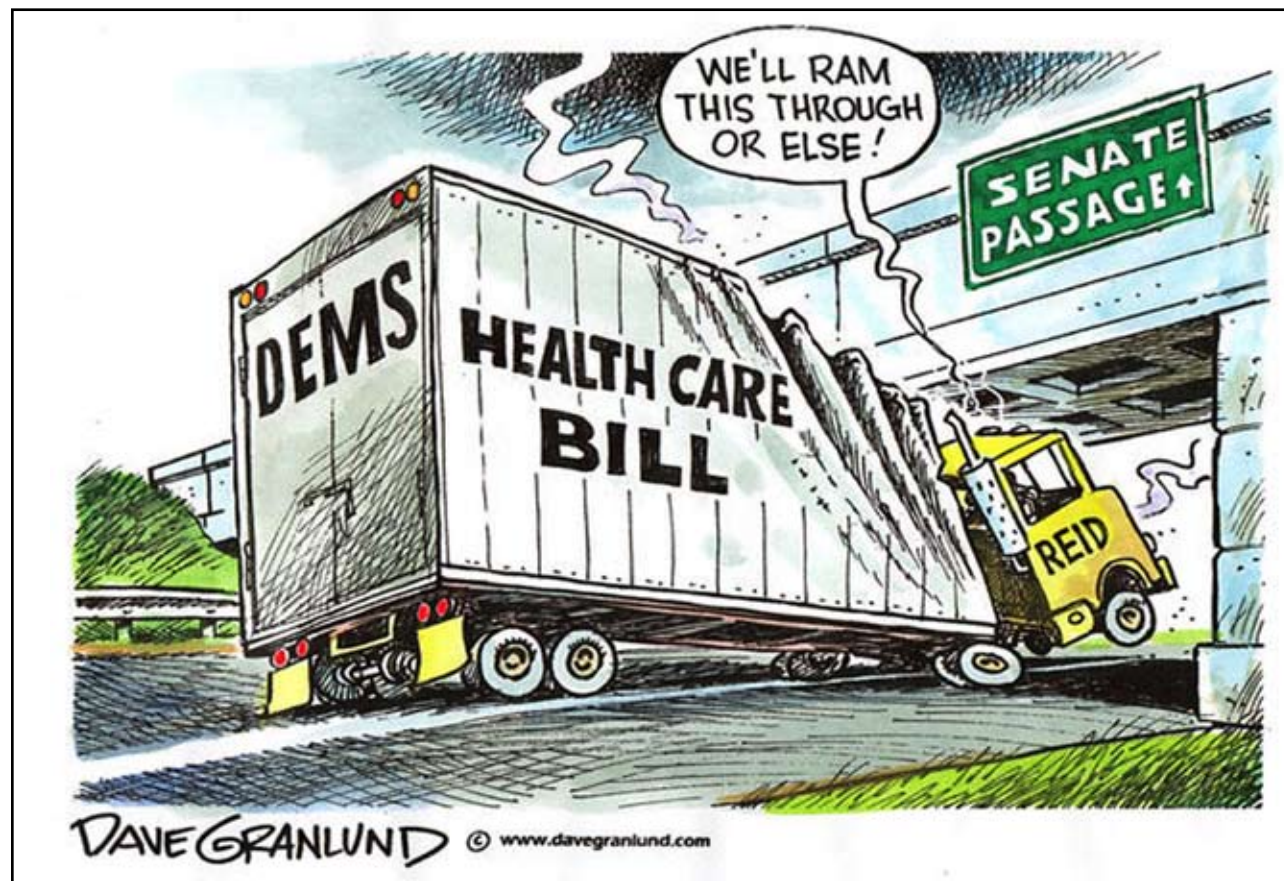
But allowing 55- to 64-year-olds to buy into Medicare undercuts that by expanding a costly public plan that is fast going broke. Doing so could also shift costs to the privately insured because Medicare pays providers less than private insurance.

To subsidize insurance for the uninsured and cover people who have preexisting conditions without breaking the bank, such a plan needs to include a strong mandate that requires everyone to buy insur-

ance; incentives to replace fee-for-service payments with more efficient models; fees on "Cadillac plans"; and limits on abuses in malpractice suits.

That's why, contrary to conventional wisdom, the president's best allies are the centrist Democratic senators insisting on an honest plan that jettisons the

isolation's ability to control costs and improve quality. They (1) ensure that all providers will be rewarded for value, not volume; (2) broaden the scope of an Independent Advisory Board to include recommendations for the whole health-care system; and (3) call for the immediate review and timely removal of legal



public option and contains such reforms. They should continue to stand firm -- even if it means the Senate does not finish health reform this year.

LEN NICHOLS

The Senate bill is getting better in three ways: First, a large group of freshman senators introduced package of amendments that enhance the Senate leg-

and regulatory barriers to new payment models that would improve quality and efficiency of all physicians, hospitals and payers.

Second, Sens. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) will offer a bipartisan free-choice amendment that encourages insurer competition by giving workers and employers the range of choices all Americans deserve.



LEN NICHOLS

Director of New America Foundation's Health Policy Program; senior adviser for health policy in the Office of Management and Budget, 1993-94



KARL ROVE

White House deputy chief of staff and senior adviser to George W. Bush



TERRY O'NEILL

President, National Organization for Women

Finally, a team of 10 Democratic senators with diverse perspectives is working on the last details of a package that includes the long-awaited public-option denouement.

These leaders are creating consensus and balance among the compelling goals of expanding consumer choice, intensifying insurer competition, and maintaining access to high-quality providers for current and future Medicare beneficiaries. This bill is moving in the right direction, toward the right outcome: law.

KARL ROVE

The sketchy outline of Sen. Harry Reid's latest "deal" is progress all right, but only for those who want a single-payer system, full-speed ahead and damn the fiscal torpedoes.

Opening Medicare to everyone ages 55 to 64 is expanding government-run health care. Government sets the payment rates. This price-fixing means hospitals and doctors get paid much less than they would be paid by insurance companies. Government decides whether patient claims are allowed: Medicare's refusal rate is twice the average of insurance companies.

And does it really make sense to expand a Medicare program that's already going to be broke by 2017, when its revenue is projected to be less than its annual outlays?

The Reid bill does expand coverage by roughly 31 million people, but 15 million of them get coverage by being dropped into Medicaid, which is second-class health care and is already busting most state governments' budgets.

New numbers from the Joint Committee on Taxation show 11 percent of middle-class Americans will be better off through a combination of subsidies and tax changes, but 41 percent will be worse off, suffering premium and tax increases.

No wonder public opinion continues swinging against proposals being shoved through Congress.

TERRY O'NEILL

The health-care reform being assembled in the Senate is a crazy quilt of ideas. Some are good, but others endanger the health of women -- and since negotiations are ongoing, it might get decidedly worse if the wrong deals are struck.

On the plus side is the amendment sponsored

by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) guaranteeing mammogram coverage for women. Also, the expansion of Medicare will greatly assist women ages 55 to 64. But the Senate hasn't eliminated age-rating by insurance companies, which will force middle-aged women to pay sky-high rates.

Even worse, the attempt to eliminate coverage of abortion care did not truly end with the defeat of the highly restrictive Nelson amendment. There must be no backroom deals designed to lure Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) and others back into the fold by including any elements of the amendments that abortion foes such as Nelson favor.

There also must be no deals to drop the public option. This is the only way the government can negotiate rates with insurance companies and keep costs under control. Further, if states wish to pursue their own public or single-payer options, they must be allowed to do so.

If health reform is to pass, it should not trade off the rights and needs of some women to benefit others.

If the health reform bill codifies a history-making rollback of abortion rights, it is not real reform. ●



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Now is the time for Americans to get real on health care

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON, WASHINGTON POST

We are now witnessing a determined counterattack by the Obama administration and its political allies on the matter of health care costs. Many critics (including me) have argued that President Obama's "reform" agenda wouldn't control rapidly rising health spending and might speed it up.

The logic is simple. People with insurance use more health services than those without. If government insures 30 million or more Americans, health spending will rise. Greater demand will press on limited supply; prices will increase. The best policy: Control spending first; then expand coverage.

But the administration insists it can insure most of the uninsured and tackle runaway health spending simultaneously. There's so much waste in today's health care system that both goals can be pursued together, Peter Orszag, head of the Office of Management and Budget, has said.

Two new reports by liberal advocacy groups echo that claim. The first, from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, contends that lower Medicare reimbursement rates to hospitals and other providers can pay for about half of the \$900 billion or so government cost over a decade of expanded health benefits.

Critics (again, including me) have said that Congress would put the Medicare cuts in today and might repeal some or all in the future. Nonsense, says the study.

Even more upbeat is a joint report from the Center for American Progress Action Fund (CAP) and the Commonwealth Fund arguing that savings from the bills' cost-cutting provisions have been underestimated.

One measure would push hospitals to reduce readmission rates; some "bundled payments" between doctors and hospitals would encourage coordinated care; taxes on gold-plated insurance plans would deter overspending.

Health costs would be lower than expected: Medicare "savings" would total \$576 billion over a decade (about \$200 billion more than estimated by the Congressional Budget Office, which mostly counted lower reimbursement rates); the federal deficit would drop up to \$459 billion over a decade; and health care "savings" for typical families would total about \$2,500 by 2019.

Who's right? Let's start with the numbers. Unfortunately, the word "savings" is used misleadingly. It doesn't mean (as is usual) actual reductions; it signifies smaller future increases. There's a big difference.

In 2009, national health spending will total an estimated \$2.5 trillion, or 17.7 percent of gross domestic product. By 2019, it's projected to rise to \$4.67 trillion under present policies, or 22.1 percent of GDP. With CAP's "savings," it rises a little less sharply to \$4.49 trillion, or 21.3 percent of GDP, according to Harvard economist David Cutler, the study's co-author who provided these figures.

Similarly, family health insurance premiums rise from 19 percent of median family income in 2009 to 25 percent in 2019 under present policies and 23 percent with CAP's "savings."

The point is simple: Even with highly optimistic assumptions, health spending remains out of control. It absorbs more of government, business and family budgets.

Richard Foster, the chief actuary of the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, doubts the cost-saving provisions touted by CAP would save much money. He's also skeptical that Congress, facing complaints from hospitals and a squeeze on services, would allow all the Medicare reimbursement cuts to take effect.

True, Congress has permitted some reimbursement reductions to occur but has repeatedly blocked the Sustainable Growth Rate adjustment for doctors. Health cost increases might spontaneously recede, but history suggests skepticism.

The relentless advances reflect an open-ended insurance and delivery system that gives neither patients nor providers any reason to restrain spending.

To attack costs first would be politically challenging. It would require admitting that all good things are not possible simultaneously and that the uninsured already receive much medical care. It would require genuine bipartisanship, not just a scramble for a few Republican votes. And it would require stronger measures to dismantle a fee-for-service delivery system that now rewards more, not better, care.

That's a demanding and realistic approach; Obama's is wishful thinking. ●

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Fighting a pre-existing condition: greed

BY STEVE LOPEZ, LOS ANGELES TIMES

Growing old, particularly in this economy, is not for sissies. Just ask Bob and Roselee Packham.

Bob, 63, recently lost his job with a company that does audiovisual work at conferences and meetings. That left them with the small salary Roselee, also 63, earns in a part-time position. Bob continues his search for work.

Light a candle for them and others like them, if you're so inclined.

Not that the Packhams are broke, or anywhere near the edge of the cliff. That's what's so scary about this recession. As usual, the poorest among us are taking the biggest hit, but this one is hammering the solidly middle class as well.

In the case of the Packhams, they're dipping into the nest egg they built for retirement to pay the mortgage on their town house, and what's more, they are trapped in our nation's enduring, made-in-America hell of medical insurance lunacy.

You know the hell I'm talking about -- the one in which you find your blurred vision further clouded by the language of COBRA, which will cost one or more limbs but might keep you covered until you find your next job, where of course you'll be denied health care insurance because you had asthma in eighth grade.

What, you've got a minor case of Crohn's disease, and you expect our company to insure you?

That's what Roselee ran into with the AARP insurance program.

Hey, wait a minute. Wasn't that once the American Association of Retired Persons? If anybody would understand the health insurance needs of people in the September of their lives, wouldn't it be the AARP?

"I had breast cancer," said Roselee, but that wasn't the hang-up. It was the Crohn's, despite the fact that she has a mild, effectively managed case of the inflammatory disease of the intestines.

So when Bob lost his job in October, they signed up for COBRA, the program that temporarily allows continued group coverage for people who lose their jobs. But the premiums are punishing and the coverage minimal, so they're watching closely and with rising blood pressure as the health care reform debate plays out in Washington, D.C.

Before I went to visit the Packhams, I got a letter

from Bob that laid out his beef and his call for Congress to "make health care more reasonable for both patients and the medical industry and less of a gold mine for (the) medical insurance industry."

Bob wrote: "During 2009, my medical insurance company will pocket approximately \$975 a month from me and my wife," as well as from his former employer, which bills a temporary federal program for two-thirds of that \$975 COBRA payment for Bob and Roselee's extended coverage.



"That's \$11,700 a year for a plan with a \$9,800 deductible. As December begins, I have not yet hit the deductible," wrote Bob. He and his wife have been pretty healthy, but they're still paying out co-pays and prescription costs, in addition to the COBRA payments. So for the year, Bob and Roselee's medical coverage will have cost \$20,000, and their insurance company will have paid "exactly \$0.00 in benefits."

The \$20,000, Bob said, "is more than I will pay for my mortgage, more than I paid last year in federal and state income taxes, more than groceries,

auto insurance, religious dues. In fact, it is the most expensive item in my budget."

Bear with him for a moment, because Bob's got just a bit more to unload.

"I understand that for 2010, the insurance company is going to increase the premium to more than \$1,100 per month. For that kind of money, I could lease two Cadillacs and have money left over for the gas."

Yes, he's a little worked up, and understandably so.

The Packhams, like so many others who've been knocked around by this economy, never imagined they'd be hanging by their fingernails to the bottom rungs of the middle class.

"I'm scared," Roselee admitted at her kitchen table, wondering what they'll have to give up and how they'll get by if things don't turn around soon.

They're scared -- and angry too -- at how crippling health care costs can be, even if you're not sick.

The Packhams count themselves lucky their two adult children are off the payroll, and Roselee's dad lives with them, kicking \$500 a month into the family kitty. Roselee started collecting Social Security a bit on the early side, and even if Bob keeps striking out on the job market, the Packhams think they can scrape by until they turn 65 and switch to Medicare.

Last week, their spirits lifted when lawmakers floated proposals to lower the Medicare eligibility age to 55 in some cases and to replace the dead-on-arrival public option with a nonprofit option.

Bob said it sounds good. But he wants more details on the cost, and he fears that even if it adds up, he may be close to 65 before the change kicks in.

Any system, though, that puts more money into patient care and less into corporate profit will make Bob healthier and happier.

"I believe that most of the money I have paid to the medical insurance company is profit," he wrote me in his e-mail, a small masterpiece of moral indignation.

"I believe that some of that profit is used to lobby our Congress and to stir up the public with TV advertising, radio blowhards and political action in order to perpetuate this outrageous financial scheme which so enriches them."

I think I've got a solution to Bob's unemployment problem:

Bob for Congress. ●

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Too big to fail?

BY JIM HOAGLAND, WASHINGTON POST

In the streets of Tehran, young Iranians shout "Death to the Dictator" instead of "Death to America." Across the border, Iraqis worry that new violence after months of relative calm will undermine the political process they adopted under U.S. pressure. But they also voice renewed determination to repel the sadists and killers who once dominated their land.

In Pakistan, a weak and unsavory civilian president, Asif Ali Zardari, seems with U.S. help to be prodding his duplicitous military to abandon its complicity with al-Qaeda and the Taliban and fight them as an existential threat to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

None of these developments is a cause for victory celebrations. They are still tentative. But when measured against the conventional wisdom of a few years ago about the likely results of foreign intervention in a region that has been locked in turmoil and despotism for centuries, these events represent at least temporary progress.

They help underline President Obama's defense of his Afghan policy in his Nobel Peace Prize speech as a watershed event.

In four decades -- a blink of history's eye -- Americans have gone from the national certitude

that there should be no U.S. combat troops stationed in what was once called the "arc of crisis" -- the view of the expert community (and my own) when I lived and worked in the Middle East and Persian Gulf in the 1970s -- to broadly accepting the notion that it is possible to devise an optimal U.S. military presence there.

It was once certain that empires came to die in the belt of mostly impoverished, mostly Islamic lands stretching from North Africa into Central Asia. Back then, we believed that nothing could be worse than Western military intervention in this zone of zealotry.

Neither the oil embargo of 1973 nor the 1979 Iranian revolution and seizure of U.S. diplomats as hostages provoked decisions to put American boots on the ground to prevent what would clearly come next. Some policymakers advocated the atavistic step of grabbing the oil fields or bombing Tehran, but they lost the argument.

Today we are told by no less than a presidential Nobel laureate that there are in fact worse things than waging war in this region and we must fight in even the most unpromising circumstances to prevent them. History suggests that President Obama is right in principle but will see much go wrong in practice.

This proved true of the nonintervention policy of the past as well as the recent U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

We wind up without control of the oil fields, which have created ruinous transfers of oceans of money to corrupt Middle East regimes and terror-

ist organizations and with Iran seeking a nuclear weapon that will cause a regionwide atomic arms race -- while America bears the burden of two wars that may serve as laboratories for future conflicts.

The chain of decisions that led to this situation stretches back to 1967, when British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf and Israel's conquest of Arab territories propelled the United States into an explosive vacuum for which it was ill prepared.

Only by understanding how all administrations since 1967 -- not just the calamitous George W. Bush presidency -- share responsibility for the current mix of progress and peril can we work our way out of the looming quagmire in Afghanistan and the region at large.

The U.S. would benefit from an independent, broad-ranging examination of its interests and policies in the Middle East undertaken by a presidential commission of former officials and academics.

It would at least remind us that history does not march in a straight predictable line. It zigs and zags, causing even mighty empires to fall when they overextend themselves.

In Oslo and earlier this month at West Point, Obama sketched the stakes of the U.S. war on fanaticism centered now in Afghanistan. He is challenging the world to assess the global consequences of permitting the United States to fail there without significant help.

In the end, the international community should decide that the United States is too big -- and too important to global stability -- to fail. ●

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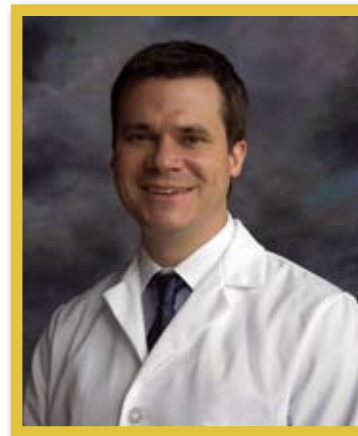
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BY DOYLE MCMANUS, LOS ANGELES TIMES, PHOTO: EPA

OBAMA DOCTRINE EMERGES IN OSLO SPEECH

The headlines on President Obama accepting the Nobel Peace Prize last week focused on the apparent irony: A man who had just ordered 30,000 more troops into war was snagging a trophy as the world's leading champion of peace. Obama tackled the paradox head-on in his Oslo speech. "Evil does exist in the world," he said. "War is sometimes necessary."

But the president's speech was about much more than the regrettable necessity of war. It also contained the fullest exposition so far of Obama's evolving approach to global diplomacy, including his attempts at "engagement" with hostile regimes in places such as Iran, North Korea and Sudan -- in other words, the emerging Obama doctrine.

"I know that engagement with repressive regimes lacks the satisfying purity of indignation," he said. "But I also know that . . . no repressive regime can move down a new path unless it has the choice of an open door."

And when diplomacy fails, Obama said, the United States and other big powers must apply serious sanctions against rogue regimes -- "alternatives to violence that are tough enough to actually change behavior."

There are two propositions there -- engagement and sanctions -- and neither one has been proved to work yet. Turning them into practical action will be the test of whether the Obama doctrine works.

First, engagement. One of Obama's main foreign policy promises in last year's presidential campaign was that unlike George W. Bush, he wouldn't threat-

en hostile countries with regime change; he'd talk to them instead. In his first months, Obama opened more-direct talks with Iran and North Korea over their nuclear arsenals and with Sudan and Myanmar over human rights.

At the same time, Obama downplayed public criticism of repressive governments whose help he needed on diplomatic issues. He ducked a meeting with the Dalai Lama to avoid offending China. He called Egypt's president for life, Hosni Mubarak, "a force for stability and good." He sent a special envoy to Sudan who tried to deal gently with a regime that has waged genocide in Darfur.

All that courtesy toward dictators alarmed human rights activists, who worried that Obama was taking U.S. diplomacy back toward what they consider the



President Barack Obama looking at the Nobel Peace Prize medal at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo, Norway, on 10 December 2009. Obama is the first chief executive to collect the storied award so early in his tenure.

JORDAN'S ACE OF SPIES

BY DAVID IGNATIUS, WASHINGTON POST

When the spy movie ends, the suave intelligence chief -- having outsmarted his enemies -- dusts off the lapels of his perfectly tailored suit and disappears into his world of illusion and control.

That's not how it ended in real life, alas, for Gen. Saad Kheir, the brilliant but emotionally wounded spymaster who headed Jordan's General Intelligence Department (GID) from 2000 to 2005. He died in a hotel room in Vienna last week of a heart attack, the official Jordanian news agency reported. He was just 56.

Kheir at his best was among the greatest Arab intelligence officers of his generation. He ran a series of masterful penetration operations against Palestinian extremist groups and, later, al-Qaeda. "He set the standard for how we do it," said one former CIA officer who worked closely with him.

I got to know Kheir five years ago when I was researching a novel about the Middle East called "Body of Lies," which was later made into a movie that starred Leonardo DiCaprio.

Kheir was the model for my fictional Jordanian intelligence chief, "Hani Salaam." Like all GID chiefs, Kheir was addressed by the Ottoman honorific of "pasha," so I gave the sobriquet of "Hani Pasha" to my fictional version.

Hani Pasha (played in the movie by British actor Mark Strong) stole the show, and for a simple reason -- he was based on a true master of the game. My character's tradecraft, manners, even his wardrobe were all modeled on those of the real pasha.

It was George Tenet, then director of the CIA, who first described to me Kheir's brilliance as an operator. I asked Tenet in 2003 if any foreign intelligence services had been especially helpful against al-Qaeda, and he answered instantly, "The Jordanians," and continued with Tenetian enthusiasm,

"Their guy Saad Kheir is a superstar!"

So the next time I was in Amman, I asked the royal palace if I could meet the legendary intelligence chief. I was driven to the GID's fearsome headquarters, past its black flag bearing the ominous warning in Arabic "Justice Has Come" and escorted upstairs to the pasha's office.

Kheir had a rough, boozy charm -- somewhere between Humphrey Bogart and Omar Sharif. He was dressed elegantly, as always -- in this case, a cashmere blazer, a knit tie and a pair of what looked to be handmade English shoes.

The pasha told me a few stories, and others filled in details: He made his name penetrating Palestinian extremist groups, such as the Abu Nidal organization. Once he had burrowed into the terrorists' lair, he was able to plant rumors and disinformation that set the group's members fighting among themselves. Before long, Abu Nidal's fraternity of killers had imploded in a frenzy of suspicion and self-destruction.

Kheir researched his targets so thoroughly that he got inside their lives. A former CIA officer told me about one sublime pitch: Kheir tracked a jihadist to an apartment in Eastern Europe and handed him a cellphone, saying: "Talk to your mother." The man's mom was actually on the line, telling him he was a wonderful son for buying her a new TV and a couch and sending her money.

"The spoken message was, 'We can do good things for you.' The unspoken message was, 'We can hurt you,'" explained the CIA officer. I took that scene, too, verbatim.

Kheir ran afoul of his boss, King Abdullah, when he began pushing into politics and business. He was sacked in 2005. His dismissal took a cruel toll: Kheir could be seen carousing late at night at his favorite restaurant in Amman.

But in his prime, Kheir was a genius, and it's hard to think of a foreigner who helped save more American lives than Saad Pasha. ●

In Oslo, Obama said it was time "to insist that nations like Iran and North Korea do not game the system. Those who claim to respect international law cannot avert their eyes when those laws are flouted.

"When there is genocide in Darfur, systematic rape in Congo, repression in Burma, there must be consequences. Yes, there will be engagement; yes, there will be diplomacy; but there must be consequences when these things fail."

But this approach can't guarantee results either. The history of international sanctions lists more failures than successes. It's hard to design sanctions that can change a regime's behavior, hard to enlist other countries to participate, and hard to enforce the measures once they're in place.

To take three important cases Obama mentioned:

The United Nations has imposed tough sanctions on North Korea, but the Pyongyang regime is already so isolated that it seems almost indifferent to the pressure.

The U.N. has imposed sanctions on Sudan too, but China -- which has nurtured a lucrative oil busi-

ness relationship with the Khartoum regime -- has blocked attempts to make them tougher.

And on Iran, Obama is about to mount a drive for what Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton once called "crippling sanctions" to punish the Tehran regime for producing enriched uranium that could be used for nuclear weapons. But diplomats warn that the road to imposing sanctions will be long and hard, and there's no guarantee that the measures will ever get close to crippling.

In two major foreign policy speeches in the last two weeks, Obama has added more details to his evolving foreign policy blueprint.

At West Point, he explained why he was escalating the war in Afghanistan, but he called it a unique case and said the United States didn't have the resources to use military force everywhere in the world.

At Oslo, he offered the rest of the world a bargain: The United States will engage diplomatically and act multilaterally, but it needs the help of others to make it work.

But the test of the Obama doctrine -- as its author says himself -- will be whether it gets results. ●

amoral "realism" of Henry Kissinger and the Cold War.

"Engagement without pressure is read by authoritarian governments as capitulation," Human Rights Watch's executive director, Kenneth Roth, said in an interview. Jamie Rubin, a former State Department spokesman in the Clinton administration, huffed: "There was a time when presidents gained political strength from upholding democratic values."

The Obama administration's response boils down to one word: patience. "This isn't a disagreement over values; it's a disagreement over means," an Obama aide told me. "Chest-thumping hasn't made people's lives better at the end of the day. . . . Give us some time."

But so far, engagement hasn't yielded much in the way of tangible results. And that's where sanctions come in under the Obama doctrine.

THANKS AND MERRY CHRISTMAS



This issue concludes **Vero Beach 32963's** first full year as the barrier island's community newspaper. Next week, we will skip a week so our staff and contributors can turn their attention to getting ready for Christmas. Our next edition – the first of 40 that we will publish in 2010 – will appear in your mailbox on New Year's Eve.

A year ago at this time, **Vero Beach 32963** was a 48-page paper, and we were wondering if we dared increase it to 64 pages during the season. What a difference a year makes. This fall, we have been publishing an 80-page newspaper. This is the final size we had hoped to ultimately reach when we launched the paper in 2008. We had imagined it might happen in 2011 – not two years earlier.

For those who have trouble each week getting through all there is to read before the next issue arrives, rest easy. We have no intention of expanding further.

When we went up to 80 pages in October, we added the **32963 Insight** section where you now find the editorial pages – a sort of weekly magazine within our weekly newspaper offering commentary and perspective on a variety of local and global issues and ideas.

While we get the occasional email complaining this section is either too liberal or too conservative (charges of being too conservative currently hold a slight lead), we try to present points of view that we think are at least worth a couple of moments of thought. We do not agree with everything written in these pages, and hardly expect you to.

But one of the things we most like about publishing in a literate community is many 32963 readers are interested in pondering something more important than

whether the Tiger body count is now 11 or 17. Selecting thought-provoking articles, and offering them for your consideration, is far more rewarding than publishing a lowest-common-denominator newspaper that can't compete with trash TV and web gossip sites anyway.

That's not to say everything about publishing **Vero Beach 32963** is an unvarnished source of joy. Every issue, unfortunately, contains errors – most of them tiny, niggling errors, misspelled names and the like. Mistakes of any magnitude drive us crazy. We vow each time to do better, but the last-minute flurry of activity involved in getting the newspaper out the door each week suggests we are never going to publish a perfect paper.

Some of our mistakes are bigger ones – errors of judgment for which I take sole responsibility. We have made a few of those this year -- a photo that some readers found offensive, a clause here and an article that may have been a bit over the top. In the spirit of the season, I offer sincere apologies to those offended.

But we do not apologize for the fact that the newspaper is trying its best – in its news and editorial columns – to bring into the public light things that are absolutely wrong about the way municipal government in this area has recently functioned.

We believe, for example, that the secretive manner in which decisions have been made regarding the Vero Beach electric utility – decisions that have cost electric rate payers millions of dollars -- is a scandal. We have no really good fix yet on how vigorous an effort the State Attorney's office is making to get beneath the surface, but our reporting suggests this to be a classic case of where there's smoke, there's fire.

Gratifyingly, we have had strong support from our advertisers for bringing our community reporting that goes beyond fluffy features. Nearly all of the 27 companies and institutions who advertised in our first preview issue are still with us today, and over 130 more have joined them since.

To each and every one of our advertisers, a heartfelt thanks for backing a type of journalism that is new to the area. We pledge to continue trying to make **Vero Beach 32963** a publication beachside residents are eager to read; not simply something to glance at and toss.

And to our readers, our deepest thanks for your interest and backing – and our warmest wishes for a joyous Christmas holiday season. ●

-- Milton R. Benjamin, Publisher



Update: Still time to shop and win

Three weeks ago, in an effort to encourage our readers to do more of their Christmas shopping right here in our beachside community, we unveiled the **First Annual Vero Beach 32963 Holiday Contest**. There will be two prizes.

Prize Number One: \$500 in beachside dining will go to the person who buys *Christmas gifts from the greatest number of beachside retailers.* (In other words, buying from the most beachside shops.)

Prize Number Two: \$500 in oceanside dining will go to the person who buys *the greatest number of Christmas gifts from beachside retailers.* (In other words, buying the most total gifts.)

You can win in either of two ways – and neither requires spending a lot of money. Total spending is *not* a factor in winning either prize (though if you can afford it, we would love to encourage you to buy big gifts).

To enter our contest, **save your sales receipts**. You will need sales receipts to win. Once you have finished your shopping (but no later than Christmas Eve, when all our beachside shops will be closed anyway), email us (contest@verobeach32963.com).

If you are competing for Prize Number One, tell us in your email how many beachside shops you bought gifts from in the four week run-up to December 24th.

If you are competing for Prize Number Two, tell us in your email how many total gifts you bought from 32963 shops in the days between Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve.

If you are the winner, we will contact you on December 28th and ask you to bring your sales receipts to our office so we can verify your purchases. Names and photos of the winners will appear in our December 31 edition.

VERO BEACH
32963

Getting the Vero Beach barrier island
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The coming debt panic

IT'S TIME to stop worrying about the deficit -- and start panicking about the debt. To put it another way, short-term deficits aren't the real problem. The punishing hangover of borrowed money is.

The ballooning national debt once looked like a long-term problem. Now, the long-term has become the middle-term, fast-forwarded by the cratering economy and the unavoidable and immense spending in the service of saving it.

Consider: In the space of a single fiscal year, 2009, the debt soared from 41 percent of the gross domestic product to 53 percent. By way of comparison, the average for the past half-century has been 37 percent.

This sum, which does not include what the government has borrowed from its own trust funds, is on track to rise to a crushing 85 percent of the economy by 2018.

Getting the debt back down to a reasonable level will require extraordinary, almost unimaginable, fiscal discipline and political cooperation. Failing to do so will lower the national standard of living and ultimately threaten America's economic stability.

The fiscal situation was serious before the recession. It is now dire.

An important proposal released Monday by the Peterson-Pew Commission on Budget Reform urges Congress and the White House to commit immediately to stabilizing the debt at 60 percent of GDP by 2018; come up with a credible plan for getting there; and begin phasing in the necessary policy changes in 2012, once the recovery is fully underway.

Warnings about fiscal danger may sound familiar, but one reflection of the current circumstances comes in the composition of the group that signed on to this report and agreed that both tax increases and spending cuts would be required. They range from a liberal former chair of the House Budget Committee, William H. Gray III of Pennsylvania, to a conservative former chair, Jim Nussle of Iowa.

The recommendations envision annual benchmarks, enforceable by a debt trigger that would impose spending cuts and a surtax if the specified reductions were not achieved. Once the debt is stabilized in 2018, the goal would be to set it on a glide path to further reduction, closer to the historical average of below 40 percent.

The concept of setting specific goals with automatic and serious consequences for non-performance is in-

triguing. Gauzy promises to cut the deficit in half in five years are both unconvincing and inadequate; stronger medicine is required, and it will have to be more skillfully designed than previous doses have been.

As the report notes, "Past automatic policy changes failed in part because so many programs were ex-

Gregg (R-N.H.) introduced a new version of their proposal to create a "fiscal task force" to recommend a package of tax and spending changes. Marrying the notion of enforceable debt levels to a commission that could come up with ways to achieve these goals would be an interesting, and potentially productive, union.



empt from the trigger and it was so easy to bypass the restrictions. A debt trigger should be punitive enough to cause lawmakers to act but realistic enough that it can be enacted as a last resort if policymakers fail to act or select policies fall short of the goal."

Last week Sens. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) and Judd

Both concepts are premised on the notion, sadly correct, that the fiscal picture is too daunting and too politically sensitive to be addressed under the regular order. As the Peterson-Pew report grimly underscores, time is running out to come to grips with that unpleasant fact. ●

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If you or someone you know living on the barrier island is not receiving Vero Beach 32963 by mail, please contact us so that we can immediately make arrangements for you to enjoy what has fast become the most widely read newspaper serving the barrier island.

While Vero Beach 32963 is increasingly widely available in the clubhouses of Grand Harbor, Oak Harbor, Regency Park and other communities on the mainland, a growing number of readers who do not live in zip

code 32963 have asked if it can be mailed to their homes. We will be happy to mail each issue of Vero Beach 32963 to you anywhere in Florida for a one-time payment of \$59.95 (which doesn't even cover our postage and handling).

You can subscribe by either (1) mailing the address you would like the paper to be mailed to and your full credit card information (including three-digit access code and zip code to subscribe@verobeach32963.com, or stopping by our office at 4855 North A1A. Your copies of Vero Beach 32963 will come every week until May 13th 2010, when we resume publishing bi-weekly. For more information, please call us.

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ACER ASPIRE ONE

Disappointing netbook computers: A good idea in search of good implementation

Netbooks are a bright idea suffering from dim imaginations.

In theory, if you took a compact laptop, removed its DVD drive, shrank its keyboard and screen a little, switched to a power-efficient processor, and stripped down its software to the minimum necessary for Web work, you'd have a cheap, light machine well suited to everyday errands.

In practice, too many netbook manufacturers can't resist shipping models with typo-inducing keyboard layouts, too-small screens and inadequate memory.

Yet the basic concept of the netbook is

sound enough that people have kept on buying the things. Computer firms, in turn, have learned from some of their early errors. And with the release of Microsoft's streamlined Windows 7 two months ago, netbook users can finally run a new version of Windows instead of the aging Windows XP. (Some netbooks ship with the free, open-source Linux operating system, but many users unwisely rule out that option.)

So has the netbook been perfected yet? Sorry, no.

Three new netbooks — two running Win 7 Starter, the third making use of 7's Home

Premium edition — showed signs of progress but also old and new mistakes.

The cheapest of the bunch, the \$379.99 Acer Aspire One D250-1584, is the least evolved from the netbook as we've known it. Its keyboard is cramped, but the computer is more than portable enough (2.7 pounds, plus 0.7 pounds for the power brick).

The tested model included an extended-capacity battery that lasted about 4.5 and 5.5 hours in consecutive tests of playing a loop of digital music while constantly reloading two Web sites.

But as with most makers of desktop and



NOKIA BOOKLET 3G

HP MINI 311

laptop PCs, Acer undoes much of its hardware's appeal with a mediocre software bundle of trial copies of Microsoft Office and Norton and McAfee utilities.

The Aspire's scant 1 gigabyte of memory, meanwhile, left it struggling to catch up.

A second Win 7 Starter netbook comes from a relative newcomer to the PC business, Nokia. Its trim Booklet 3G, with its clean looks, integrated 3G wireless modem and GPS, seven-hour battery life, and roomy keyboard, could be the kind of netbook Apple might build — right down to its \$599.99 price tag.

But the 2.7-pound Booklet's glossy lid soon started picking up scratches, while on the inside its trial-ware bundle was barely more creative than Acer's. And with the same inadequate 1 GB of memory as the Aspire, the Booklet twice complained about "insufficient system resources."

Why would manufacturers deprive their customers of something as cheap as memory?

Blame Microsoft and its passive-aggressive rules governing Win 7 Starter. The Redmond, Wash., company will license this edition for sale only on computers with 1 GB or less of memory and a screen no larger than 10.2 inches.

Microsoft won't explain those and other restrictions or even confirm outside reports of them, although computer vendors had no problem reciting the details.

Nor does Microsoft feel obligated to tell users what they give up with the Starter Edition. Its list of Windows 7 editions doesn't mention features left out of Starter; its only clear guidance comes in a blog post explaining that the Starter Edition drops such Win 7 ingredients as Aero visual effects, Media Center software and — don't ask me to ex-

plain this — the ability to change the desktop picture.

Microsoft obviously wants to push netbook users to its more expensive Home Premium edition of Win 7. But to judge from a third netbook, Hewlett-Packard's Mini 311, you may want to decline that invitation.

This was the heaviest machine of the bunch, at 3.3 pounds plus half a pound for the power adapter, and offered the worst battery life, at just over four hours. At \$479.99 in its tested configuration, it approached prices for conventional laptops.

The HP's larger, 11.6-inch screen helped, as did its nearly full-size keyboard. But Win 7 Home Premium's greater hardware requirements left this computer feeling little faster than the other two, even with twice as much memory. You'd want to dump most of HP's weak software bundle to get this machine in shape. ●

In the frenetic pace leading up to the holidays, the true reason for the season, whatever the faith, is sometimes forgotten. But fortunately there are also some who quietly go about making the world a better place, one child at a time.

Last year, Brian Gilbert of Pearl Restaurant chose five charities that he thought could use a little help: Habitat for Humanity, Hibiscus Children's Center, Homeless Family Center, Gifford Youth Activity Center and Youth Guidance. He liked what the charities were doing, and realized that they were hurting.

"I've got four kids, two that I adopted at 6 and 7, who are all grown now and I wanted to give something back to the community," said Gilbert. "I've been able to provide for my kids all their lives, but there are many who can't." Gilbert's 35 year-old son is currently serving in the National Guard in Iraq.

Pearl's Bright and Shining Christmas was fashioned last season with some help from friends, volunteers at the charities and members of the Elks Lodge. Ultimately, more than 450 dinners were served to families affiliated with the charities and each and every child was presented, by Santa himself, with a gift and a photo taken with Santa.

"It was the most rewarding thing I've ever seen in my life," said Gilbert. His voice choking with emotion, Gilbert related the story of one little boy who received one of the more expensive bikes (won in a drawing). "He wheeled it back and said, 'I already have a bike.' He walked over to the table and picked up one of the less expensive gifts. He got what we were doing; he realized that the whole idea was the act of giving."

Santa, who is Tom Danaher of Statewide Insurance, donates his time as does photographer Jay Andrews and a host of volunteers from the Elks Lodge and the charities, who give up their Christmas Day to help set up and serve all the meals. Homeless Family Center families are feted at the shelter, and all the other charities celebrate the festivities at the Elks Lodge, which donates the space.

To prepare meals for that many people, Gilbert and his chefs begin cooking the huge spread - prime rib, turkey, ham and all the yummy side dishes, including some kid-friendly mac & cheese, on Dec. 23. Mind you, they're doing this all while still keeping the restaurant open on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and whatever the restaurant makes on Christmas Day is donated back to the charities.



BY MARY SCHENKEL, COLUMNIST

Pearl's hopes to bring needy

They're currently collecting gifts and donations at Pearl and anticipate feeding approximately 600 people this year. Napa Auto Parts of Vero Beach and Jarvis Construction and Emergency Services have made generous donations of bikes and toys, and others have contributed, but more are needed to make this a truly memorable holiday for everyone.

You can stop by Pearl Restaurant at Portales de Vero at any time to drop off a gift card, unwrapped gift for boys and girls of all ages, or make a donation. All donations are given immediately to the charities so that they can purchase age-appropriate gifts for the children.

You can also enter into a raffle for magnums of wine, a play station, an electric keyboard and other high-end items, for a donation of \$5 per ticket, which

also goes to the charities. The drawing takes place on Christmas Eve. And, on Sunday, Dec. 20 from 2 to 5 p.m. bring in an unwrapped gift or donation and enjoy complimentary hors d'oeuvres and a photo with Santa.

As Gilbert reminds us, "This is all about making someone else's life better on Christmas Day." ●

PHOTO CAPTIONS

TOP LEFT: Santa and Brian Gilbert.
TOP CENTER: Faye and Freddie Woolfork, of Gifford Youth Activity Center with Jerome Davis III.
TOP RIGHT: Santa visits with Hailey Malando and Juliana, Justin and Jenna Lee Francisco.

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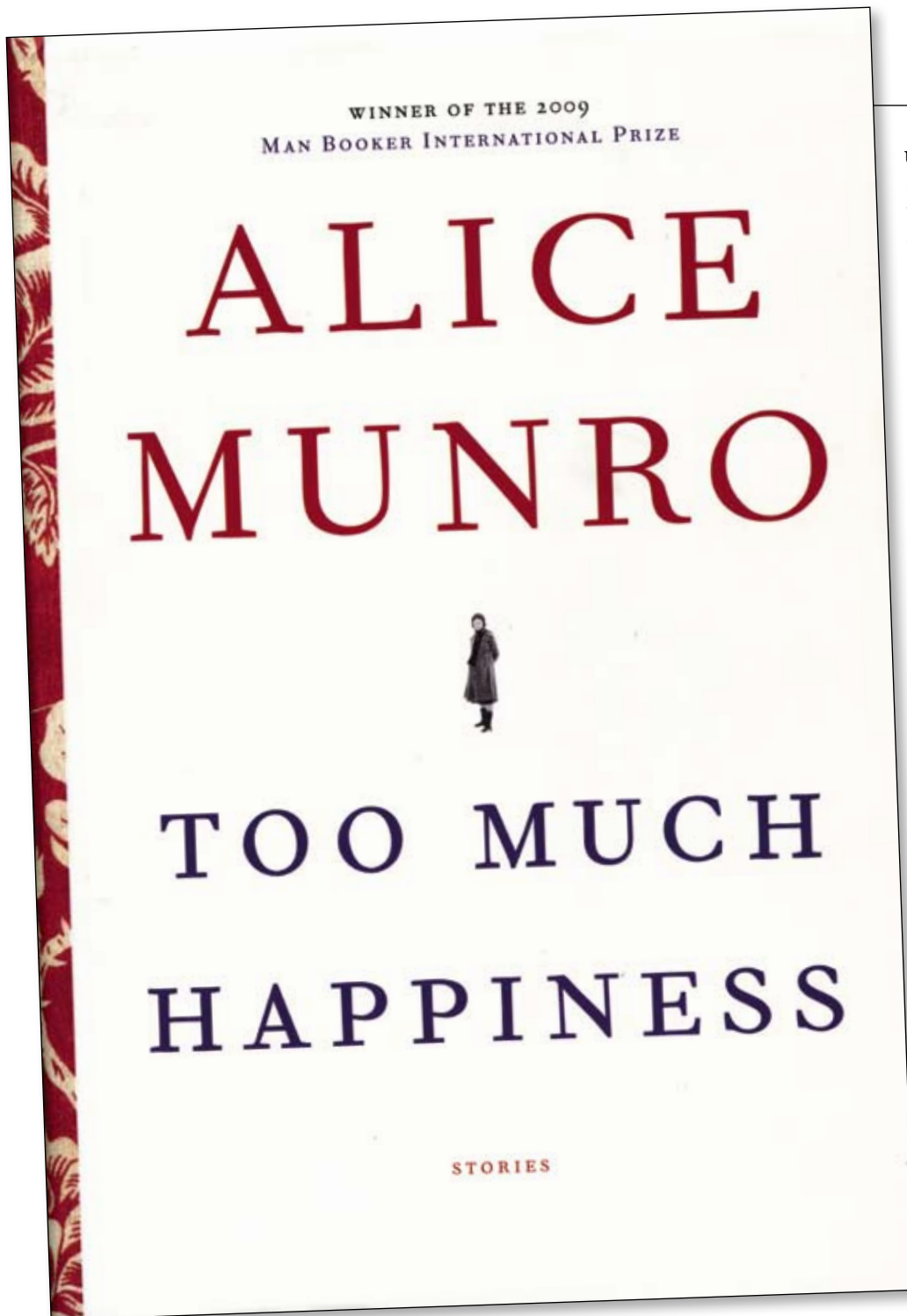
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us in their world but short enough to absorb in a single sitting or commute. Her prose is spare without feeling rushed or cryptic, at once lucid and subtle.

Yet Munro works in a genre so maligned that she playfully has a character in her new collection, *Too Much Happiness*, parrot the habitual jabs leveled at her beloved form. When a music teacher named Joyce, the protagonist of the richly layered story, "Fiction," comes across a former student's first book, she reacts negatively: "How Are We to Live" is the book's title.

A collection of stories, not a novel. This in itself is a disappointment. It seems to diminish the book's authority, making the author seem like somebody who is just hanging on to the gates of Literature, rather than safely inside."

Of course Munro, who has won Canada's top literary awards multiple times and recently won the Man Booker International Prize, clearly stands firmly parked well inside the pearliest gates of Literature. As for her character's disparagement of short stories, it is quickly mitigated by "Kindertotenlieder," a story-within-a-story about a young girl who gradually realizes that the music teacher she adores – clearly based on Joyce – is the displaced wife of the woodworker she and her mother have moved in with.

The girl is filled with bitterness at the realization that the teacher has been giving her special attention only to gain access to her estranged husband.

Joyce relates deeply with the girl's conclusion: "It almost seemed as if there

must be some random and of course unfair thrift in the emotional housekeeping of the world, if the great happiness – however temporary, however flimsy – of one person could come out of the great unhappiness of another."

But in having Joyce try – and fail – to connect in person with her former student, Munro takes this complex, bipartite tale to another level: a commentary on the nature of fiction and the relationship between reader and writer.

The key word in the quote above is "random." Unfathomable randomness is at the heart of many of these stories, many of which involve small flare-ups of violence. Several feature unloving fathers or controlling husbands, but there are also children who behave cruelly.

One of the most powerful stories is "Dimensions," previously published in *The New Yorker*, about a young woman recovering from devastating loss. It's a chilling portrait of submission, need, and abuse, evoked with painful lines like this: "She was even allowed to laugh with him, as long as she wasn't the one who started the laughing."

The subtleties in Munro's stories are myriad, making us marvel repeatedly at how much she manages to convey with so few words, including back stories for her characters.

On one level, "Free Radicals" is a tense page-turner about a recently widowed woman who fends off a violent nighttime intruder with quick wit. But the woman's diagnosis of terminal liver cancer, which preceded her older husband's sudden death, adds multiple dimensions to the story.

Munro writes, "The fact that she was going to die within a year refused to cancel out the fact that she might die now." The false confession she invents to save herself hints at deeper guilt over having stolen her husband from his first wife.

Munro ventures into quasi-historical fiction in the long title story, a somewhat uncomfortable fit for her and as close as this masterful writer comes to a misstep.

"Too Much Happiness" follows Sophia Kovalesky, a late 19th-century Russian mathematics professor and novelist, on what turns out to be her final, wintry journey through Europe before returning, ill, to Sweden – the only country that will hire a female mathematician.

Although "Too Much Happiness" shares Munro's pet themes of women's rights, the tug between marriage and independence, and the often inexplicable events that shape a life, it feels more reported and less immediate than her customary, more contemporary, small-town Canadian fare.

Munro is often compared to Chekhov, not because she writes about Russians but because of her ability to gracefully illuminate the way people grapple not just with difficulties but with the difficult question posed in "Fiction": How are we to live?

Munro has written 14 extraordinary books to date showing that although there are no easy answers, it's a question worth asking nonetheless. ●

Too Much Happiness
Alice Munro, Knopf, 309 pp., \$25.95
Reviewed by Heller McAlpin
Christian Science Monitor

If there's a better short story writer working today than Alice Munro, I haven't read her. In story after story, Munro manages to compress whole lives and emotional arcs into 20 or so shapely pages, long enough to engage

er International Prize, clearly stands firmly parked well inside the pearliest gates of Literature.

As for her character's disparagement of short stories, it is quickly mitigated by "Kindertotenlieder," a story-within-a-story about a young girl who gradually realizes that the music teacher she adores – clearly based on Joyce – is the displaced wife of the woodworker she and her mother have moved in with.

BOOK REVIEWS

“She was a horrible human being,” recalls Otto Penzler, one of her publishers. It’s an apt eulogy for a novelist whom Graham Greene, rather more charitably, dubbed “the poet of apprehension,” a 20th century demiurge whose “world we enter each time with a sense of personal danger, with the head half turned over the shoulder.”

The first words of Joan Schenkar’s splendid, sinewy new biography, “The Talented Miss Highsmith: The Secret Life and Serious Art of Patricia Highsmith,” concede the point: “She wasn’t nice,” Schenkar admits; “She was rarely polite.” Yet the “toxic brilliance of [her] trail goes on glowing” 15 years after her death in 1995 -- when “she drove a last, devoted visitor from her hospital room and then died unobserved.”

She, of course, is crime novelist Patricia Highsmith, born in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1921, later creator of Tom Ripley -- whose exploits, chronicled in the five-volume “Ripliad,” have inspired numerous films, including Anthony Minghella’s 1999 poisoned Venetian valentine “The Talented Mr. Ripley” -- and author of “Strangers on a Train,” which Hitchcock adapted in 1951.

Misanthropy seeped through her work like blood into terrazzo (one short-story collection even features homicidal pets exacting lethal vengeance on their masters); she hated Jews with rancid fervor; she “seemed to be the sole curator of a Museum of Twentieth-Century American maladies,” suggests Schenkar.

But throughout 22 novels and dozens of short stories (if not her improbable children’s book, “Miranda the Panda Is on the Veranda”), Highsmith revolutionized the field of suspense fiction, perverting and inverting a genre once synonymous with moral education and civic virtue.

Her output rebuked the essentially wholesome stories of Chandler and Hammett, in which detectives punish felons, restore order and admonish readers; “Nothing,” Schenkar argues, “could have been more American” than the scenarios Highsmith fashioned in turn: “two men bound together psychologically by the stalker-like fixation of one upon the other.”

Greene noted that Highsmith’s “characters are irrational, and they leap to life in their very lack of reason; suddenly we realize how unbelievably rational most fictional characters are as they lead their lives from A to Z, like commuters always taking the same train.”

Biography, too, tends to trundle along settled tracks, departing from the childhood platform, admitting and ejecting passengers at intervals, finally arriving at the terminus of legacy and legend -- a linear transit in many ways ill-suited to the reversals and revisions of subjects’ lives. Dispensing with the familiar acorn-to-oak approach, Schenkar instead declares that “[o]bsession . . . will be the organizing principle of this work,” and exhumes Highsmith via a taxonomy of neuroses.

There is family, of course; Highsmith hated her stepfather, whose surname she adopted, and for years swapped impassioned Oedipal correspondence with her mother, both of them writing “with the venom and energy of disappointed lovers.” There is romance: Highsmith, both a lesbian and, confoundingly, a virulent misogynist, never sustained a rela-

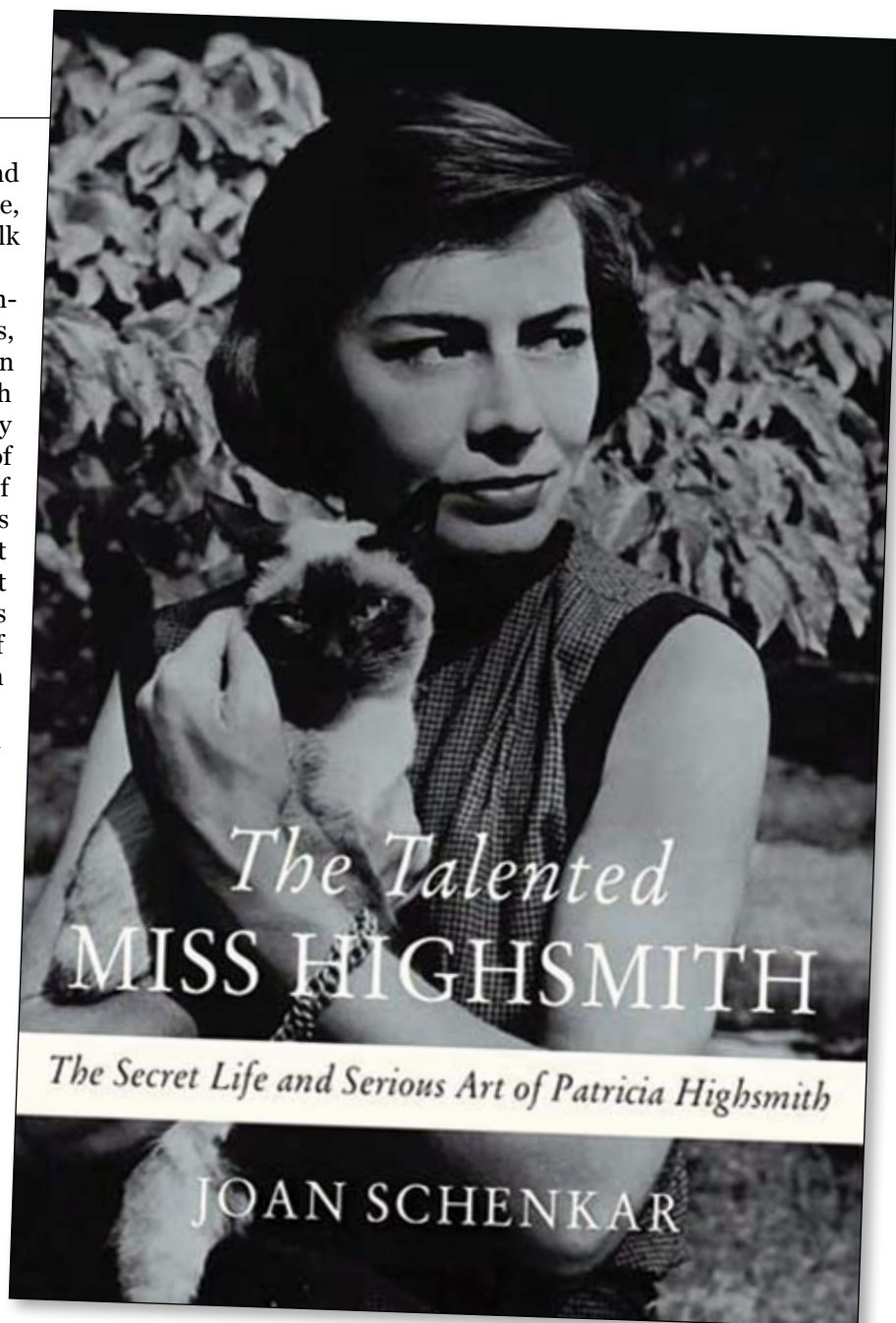
tionship beyond a few years. And there is work -- that evil oeuvre, “probably the longest perp walk in American literary history.”

Schenkar has raided Highsmith’s voluminous archives, including more than three dozen “cahiers” -- notebooks in which the author documented story ideas -- and an assortment of diaries: “eight thousand pages of work . . . she set down her states of mind, the color of her current lover’s hair, the quality of a past relationship, the cost of a Paris hotel breakfast, the number of rejections she received from publishers, the fees, the fears, the falsehoods.” (Highsmith maintained these records with scrupulous attention and ceaseless paranoia: “From her very first entries, Pat flogged herself into double duty by keeping her notebooks and diaries in five languages.”)

Schenkar, too, seizes on minute details -- Highsmith’s breasts, for example, “too small to conceal anything” (in a typically peculiar anecdote, Highsmith claims to have smuggled snails into France beneath her diminutive bosom), and her preferred brands of cigarette (Gauloise) and beer (Valstar), and her many real-estate transactions; elsewhere, Schenkar writes like a woman besotted, extolling “the marmoreal beauty” of the young Highsmith, “with her bowed-down head and piercing dark-eyed glance darting up and out from under the fringe of hair.”

But the effect is electric. Throughout nearly 700 pages of lustrous text, Schenkar’s prose is as supple and shapely as Highsmith’s was flat and functional. She exposes Highsmith’s stint as a comic-book writer -- a seven-year episode virtually expunged from the archives -- and reminds us that she “did the same things over and over again” in her writing, which never “‘matured’ or ‘developed.’” (Schenkar nods to Wilde, who claimed that “[o]nly mediocrities progress.”)

“The Talented Miss Highsmith” is both dazzling and definitive -- the latter nearly by default; it’s only the second life of Highsmith, following Andrew Wilson’s sturdy



“Beautiful Shadow” (2003). Its scope and scholarship are unassailable, and its vigor indefatigable.

It’s a volume as original as its contemptible, miserable, irresistible subject. ●

The Talented Miss Highsmith
Joan Schenkar, St. Martin’s, 704 pp, \$35
Reviewed by Daniel Mallory
Los Angeles Times

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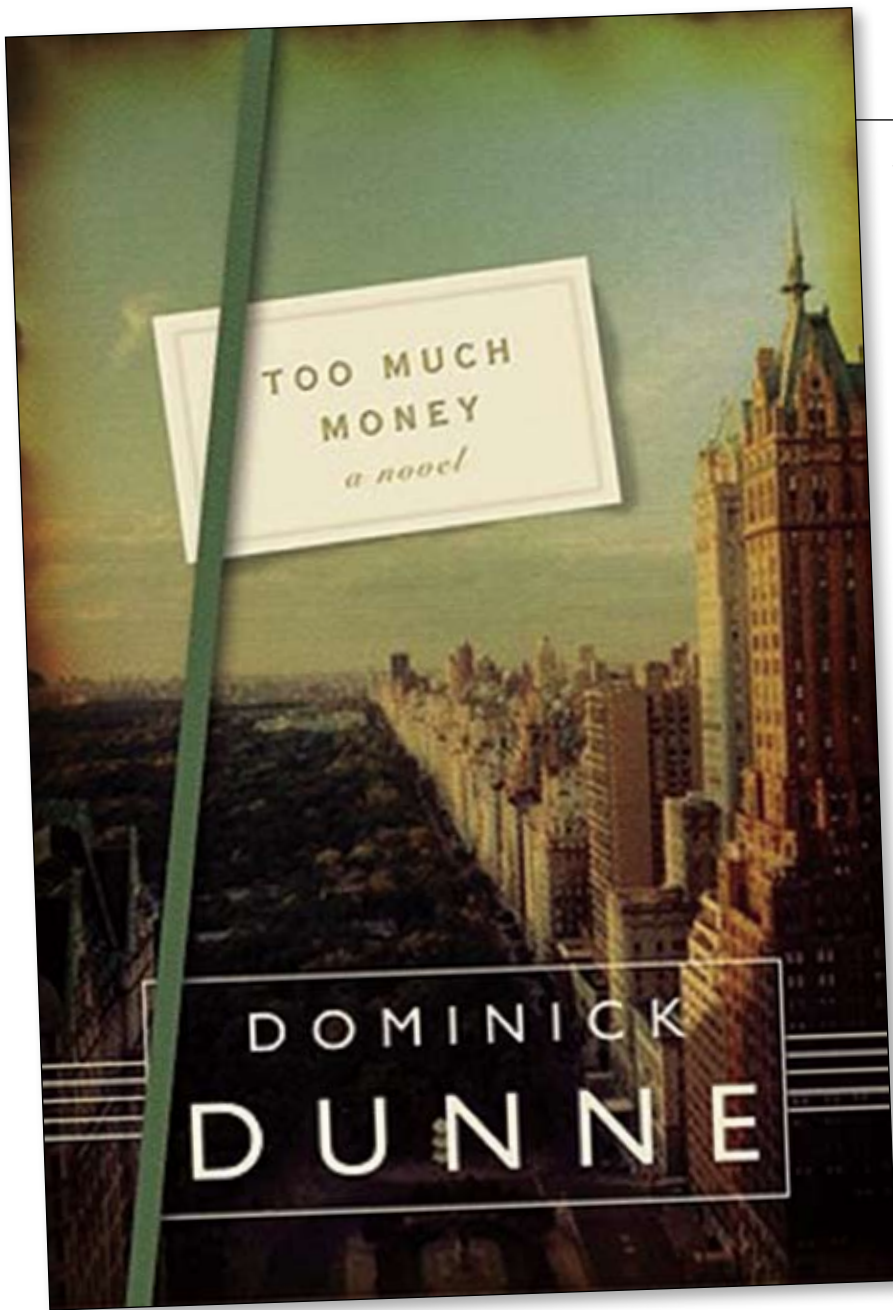
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he partied his way out of Hollywood and his marriage.

He wound up mired in alcohol and more, divorced, broke and struggling in New York in 1982 when his daughter Dominique, a promising actress, was slain by her ex-boyfriend. In an almost unbelievable twist, after talk about his decision to attend the trial, a new career began: He became a professional court-watcher at the behest of Tina Brown, the new editor of *Vanity Fair*.

In a handful of novels, Augustus "Gus" Bailey appears as Dunne's alter ego, and his life had the kind of drama you might find in fiction. Like Dunne, Bailey writes for a glossy magazine. As Dunne's friendship with the children of heiress Sunny von Bülow gave him intimate access to her home, so did Bailey's with the children of the fictional Antonia von Rautbord.

When Dunne was sued by Gary Condit for saying that the congressman knew more about the Chandra Levy case than he was letting on, Bailey was sued by the fictional Kyle Cramden over insinuations about the disappearance and death of Dian-dra Lomax -- and so on.

Exactly where the two diverge will be the focus of the buzz around this book. Whispers about Dunne's sexuality dogged him: The *Advocate's* obituary noted Dunne was "long rumored to be gay." Maybe people talked because he'd never remarried, he'd produced the gay-focused 1970 film "The Boys in the Band," told the stories of the gay men who circulated through New York society and was himself a "walker," accompanying wealthy divorcees and widows to public events.

In this book, Dunne's alter ego Bailey confronts the gossip. "Probably true, whatever you've heard," Gus added as casually as he could.

"Heard?" Peter inquired.

"Oh you know, that I'm deep within the closet...Well, maybe I am... in the closet. So what... I feel quite relieved having said it. I'm beyond 80, you know. Mustn't have any more secrets. Can't die with a secret, you know."

Is Bailey's coming out solely fiction, or is he meant to speak for the writer himself? Dunne's fiction is filled with real-life dopple-gängers: In this book,

Kit Jones is clearly Liz Smith, Christine Saunders is Barbara Walters, and Adele Harcourt, the Manhattan doyenne who lives past 100, is Mary Astor. He drops pseudonyms like bread crumbs. With all the nods to real people, it will be tempting to conclude that Dunne is revealing a secret about himself, that Gus' eleventh-hour confession is Dunne's own.

At its most interesting, "Too Much Money" deals with final legacies and death. Dunne has always trafficked in the comings and goings of New York society; in this book, that society dwells in the shadows of the grim reaper, from octogenarian parties to A-list funerals.

The plot moves forward, slowly, as arrivistes Ruby and Elias Renthal strategize a return to society pages after Elias' prison stint for fraud. Meanwhile, a few elderly society ladies move to maintain their beach-heads of real estate and prestige, while gay companions smile handsomely and gossip.

Along the way, Gus Bailey tries to ignore a cancer diagnosis while working on a book about the third-richest woman in the world, Perla Zacharias, who may or may not be sending Mossad agents to track him.

The writing lacks the wit that Dunne was known for. Instead, it reads like an episode of "Knot's Landing," repeating information for readers who might have not been paying enough attention between paragraphs, as if they were separated by commercial breaks. Characters get the same description each time they come up, no matter the context. Over and over, we read that Ruby has a suit with sable cuffs, that Perla's husband died in a fire -- not just any fire, but a fire at his villa in Biarritz.

The repetition, like Homeric epithets, creates an array of uninvestigated, one-dimensional characters. Inevitably, the good people look fabulous, while the evil are plastic surgery disasters. The sentences can be excruciating, particularly Dunne's five-name, two-location specialty: "The Lelands have had to put the Southampton house up for sale," said Dinkie Winthrop to Addison Kent at Matilda Clark's dinner for Odmolu Webb's birthday in the back room of Swifty's."

What's most puzzling is that this used to mean something. Dunne has lost none of his adoration of the wealthy social elite of New York, but the rest of us have. Inherited names may still be boldface, but now they run beside the latest Disney teen sensations. A society pedigree means little when a geek in Seattle can become a billionaire philanthropist. Power no longer is as simple as a once-vaunted family line.

This sense of shift is absent from "Too Much Money," despite the fact that so many of its characters are at the end of their lives. Their world remains intact, and it's the worse for it. At best, the book reads like an anachronism; at worst, it's insular and boring.

When "Too Much Money" gets cooking in its final pages, it shows what Dunne could do when he heated up. It's juicy high-society soap opera, complete with conflict, redemption and a post-funeral bathroom showdown. It seems that Dunne, who succumbed to cancer during the final editing of the novel, saves his intensity -- and, perhaps his secrets -- for the end. ●

Too Much Money
Dominick Dunne, Crown, 288 pp., \$26.00
Reviewed by Carolyn Kellogg
Los Angeles Times

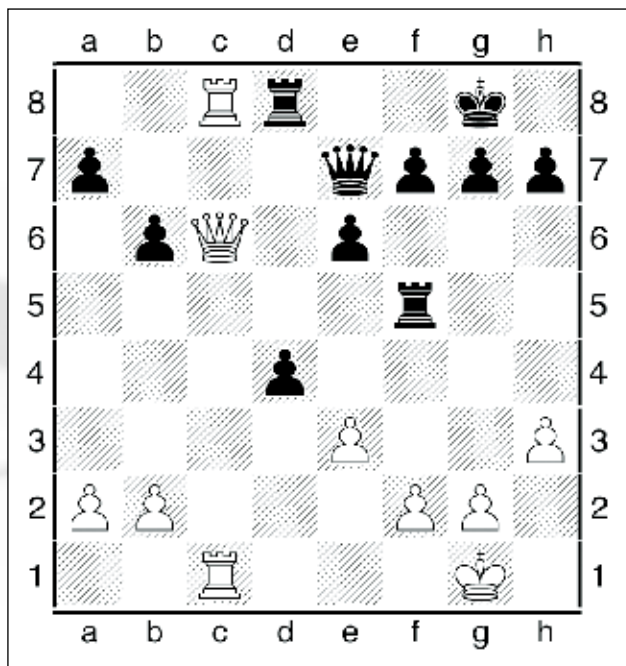
If Dominick Dunne's posthumous novel, "Too Much Money," will get people talking about him, that's probably exactly what he would have wanted.

Dunne was something of an outsider who became a trusted chronicler of the lifestyles and trials of the privileged. He became a brand of his own -- white-haired, owl-eyed, patrician -- on cable television. Connecticut-born, Dunne was an early TV producer in New York who moved to L.A. to produce films. He had a few successes and enjoyed moving among elites, until

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FOR THE LOVE OF CHESS BY HUMBERTO CRUZ - CHESS COLUMNIST



Many chess tactics interact in a single winning move

The position in the diagram to the left, which occurred during a game at the Indian River County Chess Club with White to move, illustrates several common tactical themes, including deflection, clearance and pins.

Here is how the player with the White pieces described his train of thought:

"I have control of the c file and I see the Black King may be susceptible to back-rank mate. If the Black Queen on e7 did not protect the Rook on d8, I could play Rxd8 and it would be mate. So, how can I deflect the Queen on e7 so it no longer protects the Rook on d8?"

The answer – a move that at first seems illogical – suggests itself: Qb7!, attacking the Black Queen. Black of course would be checkmated if he captures the White Queen on b7.

By moving to b7, the White Queen also clears the way for the Rook on c1 to join the attack. So, if Black answers Qb7 with ...Rxc8.

White would not continue with Qxe7, which allows ...Rxc1 check, but would move Rxc8 check first, forcing ...Qf8 and winning easily after Qb8.

If Black answers Qb7 with ...Qf6 or other Queen move that continues to protect the Rook on d8, White plays Rxd8 check first, and after ...Qxd8, Rc8 pins and wins Black's Queen. Finally, if Black's answer to Qb7 is ...Kf8, White also wins with Rxd8 check.

In the actual game, Black played ...Rc5 and resigned after R(1)xc5.

A move that at first seems illogical decided game in White's favor.

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

Flustered Flo was in desperate straits after a recent four-person Swiss team format tournament in which she and her three partners had placed dead last.

One of the key hands that made the difference was the deal diagrammed below, in which Smug Sam and his opposing team had found the right 3 No-Trump contract, which Flo had failed to reach. Flo and her partner had wound up in 3 Clubs, making 4 for a plus-130 score, but at the other table, Sam the eternal nemesis had bid and made 3 NT for a plus-600 score and huge swing of more than 10 International Master Points.

The reason Flo was driven to despair was that she heard from her teammates at the other table that Sam had arrived at the 3NT contract with a precision bidding system. She had resisted learning those new-fangled systems for a long time.

Here's the critical deal (All vulnerable; South dealer):

The bidding:	South	West	North	East
	1 Club	Pass	3 Clubs	Pass
	Pass	Pass		

Opening lead: Five of Diamonds

Flustered Flo was North and her partner, Loyal Larry, was South.

Loyal Larry opened 1 Club; West passed and as North Flo raised to 3 Clubs. East passed and, based on what information he had available to him, Larry decided he had to pass as well.

Larry made 4 Clubs, but lost out to the Game contract at the other table for a negative score of 11 IMPs, the biggest loss in the round.

"Please tell me this doesn't mean that I have to learn precision bidding now," Flo asked Larry afterwards. "I might have to quit playing."

"Calm down," urged Larry. "I think there was another way to get to the right contract. It's all about your second bid as North, Flo. You have 12 points. You know I opened and have at least 13 -- that makes at least 25 points between the two of us, and that's the standard for making 3 No-Trump. Since 5 Clubs is more difficult to make than 3 NT, you might have at least explored a possible 3 NT contract with a jump bid to 2NT, since 1NT would be too weak.

"As South I'd bite on the invitation to NT and raise to 3, and we make game the old-fashioned way," Larry concluded.

Flo didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. Maybe she didn't have to learn precision bidding – yet – but she'd still lost the round and the tournament.

More than one way to skin a cat

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

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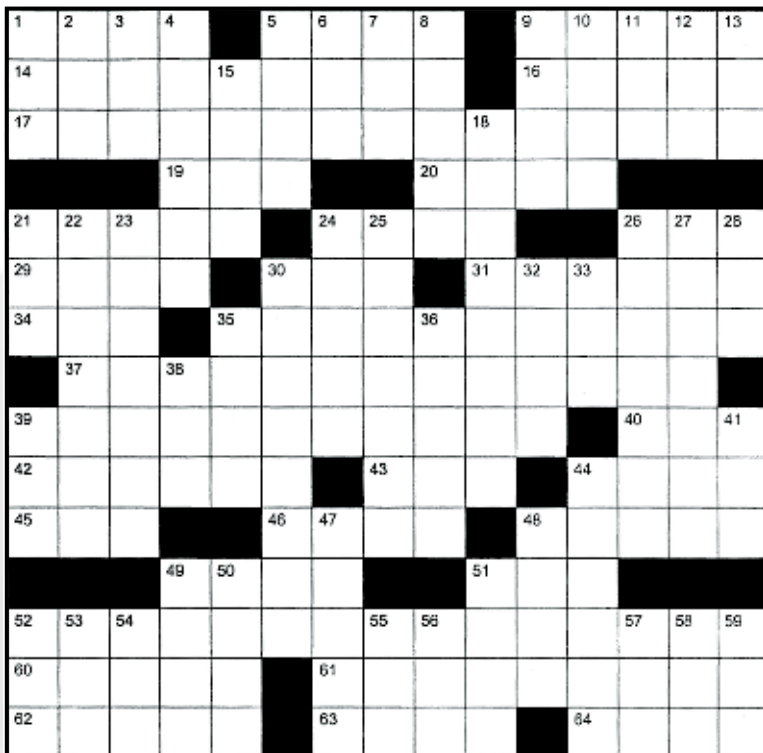
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Crossword

SOLUTIONS TO LAST ISSUE ON PAGE 75

FINANCES



The Christian Science Monitor | By Jay Engle | Edited by Charles Preston

ACROSS

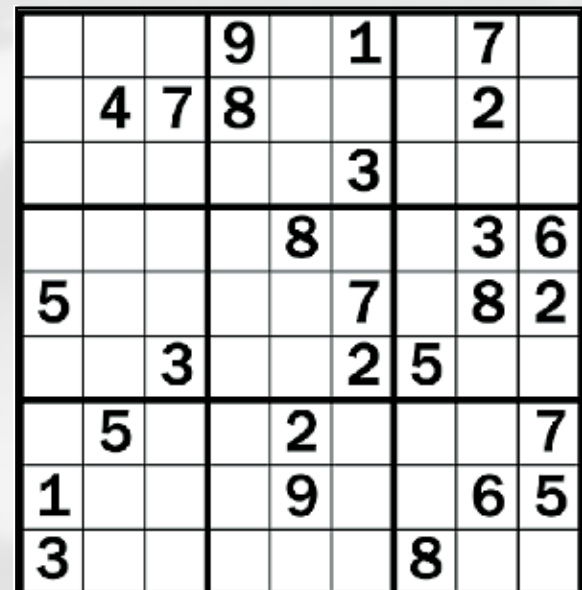
- 1 Small bills
- 5 In-fight
- 9 Yards
- 14 All one's holdings
- 16 Yo Yo's instrument
- 17 Odd as a ___
- 19 Airport abbreviation
- 20 Different kind of market
- 21 Burning
- 24 Break-in sound
- 26 ___ now, Dow-Jones?
- 29 Truckloads
- 30 Soul, in St. Malo
- 31 Play ___
- 34 NYSE purchase
- 35 Bond issue span
- 37 Up-and-down syndrome
- 39 Capital items
- 40 Profit
- 42 "We ___ amused"
- 43 Scotland's longest river
- 44 A juicy fruit
- 45 Tel. listing
- 46 Like ___ not
- 48 Gloria ___
- 49 Amerind
- 51 Lad

- 52 Broker-dealer tally sheet
- 60 Kind of price
- 61 Independent broker, at times
- 62 Trading plus
- 63 For Pete's ___
- 64 "Don't throw bouquets ___"

DOWN

- 1 Make a choice
- 2 Japanese dance drama
- 3 Do wrong
- 4 Guides
- 5 Root beer
- 6 Arafat's org.
- 7 Bother
- 8 Red ___, ex-Yankee
- 9 Piece of land
- 10 Singer McEntire
- 11 Yalie
- 12 ___ or none
- 13 The sun
- 15 Honor
- 18 Deity or dollar
- 21 From ___ Z
- 22 This Gun ___
- 23 Cost-of-living levels
- 24 Prayer endings
- 25 "___ You, Jackie Robinson"
- 26 Snood
- 27 Recession
- 28 Tiny
- 30 Da Vinci dream
- 32 Arnie's holders
- 33 ___-mo: replay technique
- 35 Actor Ray
- 36 On ___: in a rage
- 38 Chess pieces
- 39 Distant
- 41 Before state or partite
- 44 1950s airwave problem
- 47 Tryouts
- 48 Somewhat: mus.
- 49 Good-till-canceled
- 50 Koppel, et al.
- 51 Alphabet run
- 52 Slacken
- 53 Made in ___
- 54 Go downhill?
- 55 Honolulu suburb
- 56 Right on!
- 57 Prior month, briefly
- 58 Asian land, for short
- 59 Three, at Trevi

Sudoku



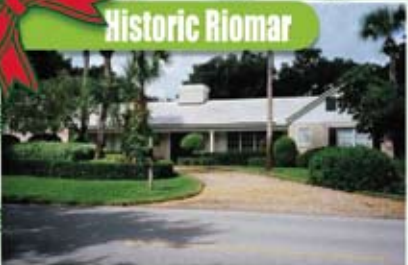
By Ben Arnoldy The Christian Science Monitor

☆☆☆☆☆

How to do Sudoku:

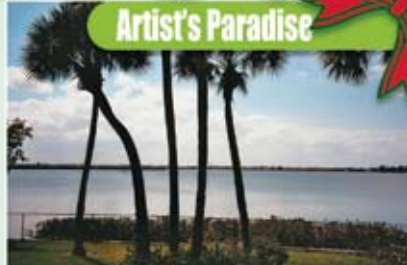
Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row and three-by-three square. See example (right).

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NOTE: Two HOs have been placed in some answers with care, in hopes that a third HO will lead you there. (Merry solving!)

ACROSS

- 1 They may mature in one yr.
- 7 Type of spray
- 11 Axolotl's cousin
- 14 What a weather-map arrow might indicate
- 15 Zenith
- 16 Paper name, briefly
- 18 HOt car's destination
- 19 Whitman's HOund
- 22 Patriotic soc.
- 23 Hanks's last line in "Saving Private Ryan," "___ this"
- 24 Magnate's nickname
- 25 Horned goddess
- 26 Feathery accessory
- 28 Terminal term
- 30 Oxford HOnoree
- 33 Chute and sHOot
- 37 Black or green stuff
- 38 Fade, as a snowman
- 39 Actor Carroll
- 40 Milky-white stone
- 41 Fun, for short
- 43 Greek letter
- 45 Exult annoyingly
- 47 Audience sHOot
- 53 Big sHOt
- 55 Half a ring
- 56 Sweet finish
- 57 Bit of December mail
- 58 Overthrow first, for example
- 59 Like some cHOres
- 61 Caught in ___
- 62 Singer Jim
- 65 "El Paso" singer Robbins

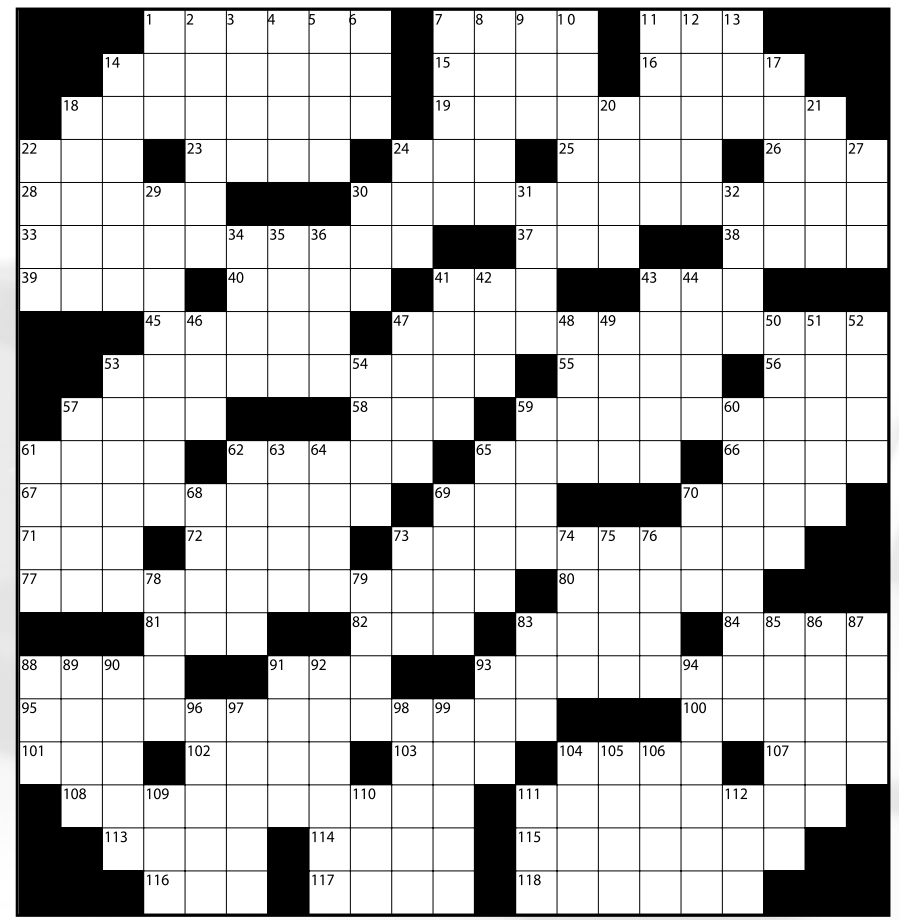
- 66 Roman poet
- 67 Plant with sHOw flowers
- 69 Got the pot
- 70 British gun
- 71 QB's try: abbr.
- 72 Marco Polo's heading
- 73 It's luminous withHOt heat
- 77 A cHOice individual?
- 80 Confrontation
- 81 Bard's before
- 82 Pilot's announcement: abbr.
- 83 At sea
- 84 Extinct bird
- 88 Ambiance
- 91 Wine factor
- 93 Do (something) tHOroughly
- 95 IdaHO's "Niagara of the West"
- 100 Vine-shaded area
- 101 Wassailing place
- 102 Mr. Rubik
- 103 Brief personal history?
- 104 Easy win
- 107 Gold container, perhaps
- 108 With 111 Across, a seasonal tHOught
- 111 See 108 Across
- 113 Uproar
- 114 Continue
- 115 Prose pros
- 116 Compass pt.
- 117 Piercing sites
- 118 Go back

DOWN

- 1 "___ much!"
- 2 Nursery rhyme girl
- 3 Rick and Victor's love

- 4 Garland co-star, 1939
- 5 Garland co-star's role, 1939
- 6 Mfr.'s recommended amt.
- 7 Large opening?
- 8 Plant pest
- 9 Bus. boss
- 10 ___ tax
- 11 Credo
- 12 First-year types
- 13 As late as
- 14 Some intro?
- 17 Where Ruth is
- 18 Lake rental
- 20 Bones
- 21 Stocking stuffer?
- 22 Wonka's creator
- 24 Satisfied sounds
- 27 Blakey of jazz
- 29 Worse verse?
- 30 Akin: abbr.
- 31 Impress deeply
- 32 Forget
- 34 Ornament's place?
- 35 Colorful fish
- 36 Western alliance
- 41 German industrial center
- 42 WWII arena: abbr.
- 43 Type of violet
- 44 Extremely popular
- 46 Huck or Tom, for example
- 47 Parcel unit
- 48 Emanation of a sort
- 49 Trouncing
- 50 Reindeer tootsies
- 51 K.T. of country music
- 52 Demond's 1970s co-star
- 53 "___ the Chief"
- 54 Guitar part
- 57 Terry, e.g.
- 59 Franz's "pump you up" pal on "SNL"

- 60 ___ the collar
- 61 At the drop of ___
- 62 Action climax, often
- 63 ___ Hashana
- 64 Prefix for the square root of this clue
- 65 Unification Church head
- 68 Wine factor
- 69 "Awesome!"
- 70 Hindu title
- 73 Walla Walla's winter hrs.
- 74 Part of a ship
- 75 "Quiet now"
- 76 Not fooled by
- 78 Ft. or yd., e.g.
- 79 Bone to pick
- 83 Part of UCLA
- 85 Stephen Foster tune, "___ Carry Me 'Long"
- 86 Wreath sites, often
- 87 Fairy-tale character
- 88 Pharaoh's symbol
- 89 "Nope"
- 90 The iron giant in "The Iron Giant"
- 91 Part of A.D.
- 92 "It's A Wonderful Life" lead character ___ Bailey
- 93 Day-___
- 94 Porta-pooch?
- 96 Doesn't ignore
- 97 "Friend ___?"
- 98 Detest
- 99 Property claims
- 104 Went by sleigh
- 105 Actress Lena
- 106 Tick, for one
- 109 Bar owner on "The Simpsons"
- 110 ___ degree
- 111 That boat
- 112 "... of Orient ___"

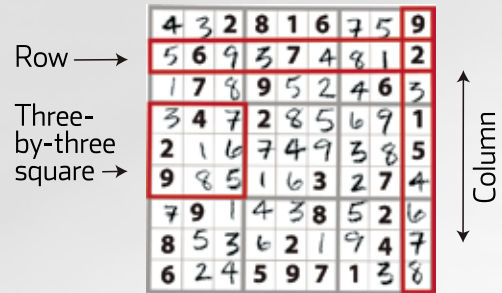


HO HO HO!
By Merl Reagle

Puzzle by telegraph.co.uk

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	3	8				6	2	

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3D OR NOT 3D by Jay McNamara

Here's a question for you movie lovers out there. What is the name of the most expensive movie ever? Times up. It's a bit of a trick question because the movie has yet to appear in theaters. Its cost, yet to be fully determined because marketing expenses are mounting by the day, is in the neighborhood of half a billion dollars. Man, that is larger than my electric bill.

The name of the movie is Avatar and in my opinion it is going to be a milestone in the history of movies, whether the movie itself ever pays for itself or whether it is a success among a large group of theater goers. This is because it is becoming apparent that the world of 3D movies and events is finally upon us. Movie watching will be changed forever after Avatar.

As for the movie, it is a two hour and thirty minute science fiction extravaganza, rated PG-13, with according to the promo materials "warfare, language, some smoking, and sensuality." I am hard put to decipher those adjectives, words not normally part of movie descriptions. "Some smoking," I guess means that someone is smoking a cigarette. Wow, we have come a long way since Bogart and Bacall were lighting up at least once in every scene.

The main man behind Avatar is James Cameron, who has done some dazzling and hugely successful movies, such as Titanic. There are stars such as Sam Worthington, Sigourney Weaver and Zoe Saldora. To give you an idea of the splash this movie is already making, there were 176 million Google hits the last time I checked.

I can't give away the story since I haven't seen the movie, but you can guess what is going to happen when it is determined that earthlings, who are in very bad shape, send a group to another planet to seek out some magic substance that can make life better. Of course, there are aliens on the planet who don't take kindly to these invasive characters.

An avatar in the context of the movie is an alternative bodily form, which is necessary since the hero is a banged up Marine who needs this kind of other being to get the job done. There is a very attractive alien girl whom he falls for. Right away, you can see there is a potential conflict of interest between his mission to exploit the aliens and his love for the girl. Hence, the warfare, with the final battle scene lasting 20 minutes, if you can imagine that.

There will be all kinds of Avatar dolls and Avatar video games and you would not be going out on a limb to say there will be one or more Avatar sequels.

I don't imagine that many of you are raring to race out and see this flick, but if you are there is a 11:59 showing tonight, Thursday, December 17 at the Majestic. Do not call me after the showing as I will have been asleep for four hours at least.

Shows in 3D have been around forever and have always been a joke. This is about to change. It costs a bundle to make these movies and requires a large loan by the theater owner for the equipment to show them, so you can expect quite a few 3D movies coming down the pike. And, in the near future you will be able to watch these without the use of special glasses.

The opportunity for 3D is especially large in sports. Already, arrangements are being made to show soccer's World Cup next year. There is nothing in sports to compare with the World Cup. I happened to be in Europe one summer when the Cup was being played. To watch a game in a local bistro while the home country is playing is an experience.

I was in a London pub when the English team went down to defeat. The pub and the whole city went into cardiac arrest. If they could throw objects at a 2D TV screen, I can't imagine what they will do with a 3D one.

In real life, soccer players and referees are endangered species when their teams lose. Now, these are people who could benefit from having an avatar.