

Follow the Money: Is that my phone?

In Congress, as in grammar school, it's important to look and act busy. Onlookers will be impressed. In school, this might nail an A-for-effort. On Capitol Hill, the stakes are higher: Campaign buckaroos.

Take, for example, the case of U.S. House Commerce Committee members, whose walk-up chatter on upcoming telecommunications deliberations perked up the ears of — who else? — bigwigs in the telecommunications industry. This triggered a simple matter of free speech, expressed through five or six figures chasing a dollar sign.

Like, say, \$61,859 for California's U.S. Representative **James E. Rogan**, a Republican from Glendale and, yes, a member of the House Commerce Committee. This generous gift earned Rogan a ranking on the Top Ten recipients of telecommunications PAC & individual contributions in the 1997-98 election cycle. The list was compiled for Capital Eye, a Center for Responsive Politics newsletter that placed Rogan just \$3,220 shy of what House Speaker Dennis Hastert received from the industry.

Rogan — more so than Hastert — is going to need the extra lift. After his role as a House prosecutor of President Bill Clinton, he'll need all the help he can get to hang onto his wobbly Congressional seat.

On the House Commerce Committee, Rogan joins GOP members who vow to stamp their mark on the 1996 law that deregulated the telecommunications industry with the as-yet-unfilled promise of lower

phone and cable rates for consumers. Several are tossing around an idea to spur cable competition by making it easier for satellite providers to enter the market.

Lobbyist Brian Moir told Capital Eye: "Do these lawmakers have a genuine interest to work on the telecom bill or are they merely conducting philosophical discussion and looking engaged to gather additional sources of campaign cash?" Something to think about.

— Cynthia H. Craft



Laughline: Lighten up, will you?

Let's face it, the voting public — and especially the non-voting public — finds modern political gamesmanship a turn-off. It's too rabid, too rigid, too mean, and too wicked. What a downer. What a bummer. Give us something uplifting. Something new. Put a smile on our faces, for gawdsakes.

A mom-and-pop outfit up in Ponderay, Idaho, may have just the ticket: It's an order form, actually. Fill it out and you'll get a shipment of political toys just in time for that 2000 campaign. At www.netw.com/~amptoy, SAL Industries Inc. peddles desktop toys ranging from dancing figures (customizable with the head of your favorite pol) to pull-toys with *Your-slogan!-Your-face!* here. Just think of all the votes (and \$\$\$, too?) a little light creativity can bring.



Even Dan Lungren couldn't blow this one. After all, it worked for Jesse Ventura.

— Cynthia H. Craft

Quotables.....

"I'd love to have a backspace key on my tongue."

— Assembly Minority Leader Rod Pacheco, who got heat for calling three colleagues (fellow GOP Assemblymen Bill Leonard, Bruce Thompson and Roy Ashburn) "the three stooges" in a *New York Times* article.

Excerpts: From the Bookshelf

The invisible line

Bordertown

Barry Gifford & David Perry

Chronicle Books, 1998

The border between the United States and Mexico runs from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean; from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, California, on the U.S. side; from Matamoros, Tamaulipas, to Tijuana, Baja California Norte, on the Mexican side. Half that border is

clearly defined by a geographic barrier—the Rio Grande River, which joins it at El Paso/Ciudad Juarez and flows to the Gulf. The other half shoots a mostly straight line from El Paso/Ciudad Juarez to the Pacific, traveling through the rugged deserts that separate New Mexico from

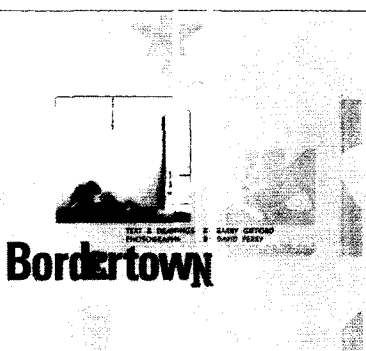
Chihuahua, Arizona from Sonora, California from Baja.

The 1990s have been marked by the gradual erosion of that border as a state of mind, as those from the south pour into the north in a desperate attempt to escape the grinding poverty of their Latin American homelands. As attention is focused on the wide spaces of borderland where illegals slip through the night to the promise of the United States, too little attention is paid to the bordertowns — on both sides — where dreams are hatched or die, where violence too often is a slice of the daily pastiche, where traffic in human lives is important to the local economy.

Bay Area novelist and screenwriter Barry Gifford and photographer David Perry traveled this invisible line in 1997 and 1998. The result is a provocative visual and prosaic tour of the outposts that often provide the hopeful and courageous with their last look at the familiar face of Mexico and their first raw glimpse of the promised land.

Some of the images are stark and unnerving, especially photographs taken in the aftermath of border violence. Others are, in turn, poignant, gaudy or sad. The text is intensely personal. But both image and prose cast an unsparing eye on the unique world of the bordertown.

— A.G. Block



By the numbers

Rankings: California NOW's 1998 Legislative Report Card

106% Top score given by NOW — to Assemblywoman Shiela Kuehl (D-Santa Monica).

102% Top score given by NOW to male Assembly members — Wally Knox (D-Los Angeles) and Kevin Murray (D-Los Angeles).

12% Lowest score in the Assembly, earned by former member Nao Takasugi (R-Oxnard).

16% Second-lowest score in the Assembly, earned by member Rico Oller (R-San Andreas).

80% Top score given to Assembly Republicans — earned by Jim Cunneen (R-San Jose) and former member Jim Morrissey (R-Santa Ana).

102% Top score in the state Senate, won by Dede Alpert (D-San Diego), Hilda Solis (D-El Monte) and Mike Thompson (D-Napa).

20 Number of bills NOW tracked for scoring purposes, counting every vote for or against.

Source: California NOW's 1998 Legislative Report Card, available at www.canow.org

Frank McCulloch: Asking the Questions

Frank McCulloch was a legend in Vietnam. . . He covered Vietnam with great energy and style and courage, and he left the country a deeply disillusioned and disappointed man. . . He came to see what the generals could not see, that it could not be done, that the price was too high.

— David Halberstam
The Powers That Be, 1979

When Frank McCulloch left the Saigon bureau of *Time* magazine in 1966, he may not have known that his already stellar journalistic career was less than half over, that he would go on to become a top editor at two more California dailies, *The Sacramento Bee* (1975-85) and the *San Francisco Examiner* (1985-92) — having already been managing editor of the *Los Angeles Times* in the early 1960s. But in 1966, the tragedy of the Vietnam War — and his belief that he had failed in his efforts to unmask the tragedy in a magazine whose publisher, Henry Luce, was an insistent hawk — had shaken this toughness of journalists to his core.

He returned to the United States, continued to work for *Time-Life* as an editor and bureau chief in Washington, D.C., and New York, then acted on a lifelong interest in education coverage when he founded *Learning* magazine in 1972. Three years later, at 55 and with a journalistic career of awesome proportions already behind him, he took on the McClatchy newspaper dynasty, changing *The Bee*, that stodgy but influential Gray Lady of the West, into a dynamic, award-winning showcase for his first journalistic love, investigative reporting. "Actually," he told his young reporters, "I've never liked the term, 'investigative reporter.' All reporters should be good investigators." It was vintage McCulloch — unpretentious, hard-nosed, direct and wise.

His staff at *The Bee*, many numbed by years of traditional, often uninspired reporting — saturation coverage of the annual Camellia Festival and the State Fair were popular venues for *Bee* reporters when I joined the paper in 1969 — adored him. Thirty years later, it is a measure of the iron loyalty he inspired in his reporting staff, wherever he went, that many of us came to Sacramento from all over the state March 4 to honor McCulloch as he received the first Lifetime Achievement Award at the fifth annual California Journalism Awards sponsored by the Center for California Studies at

California State University-Sacramento.

McCulloch received not one, but two, standing ovations as he made his way through the crowd in the dimly lit restaurant that night. Walking a little more stiffly at 79, robbed of much of his sight by a series of small strokes, but standing tall and straight like the Marine drill sergeant he once was, he spoke to the crowd of 230-plus, without notes, typically self-deprecating, still funny and razor-sharp.

It was entirely fitting that two of the award recipients — *Bee* Political Editor John Jacobs and Lance Williams of the *Examiner* — are McCulloch proteges. The list of reporters and editors who consider McCulloch their mentor — or as Jacobs so aptly put it, their "spiritual father" — is long and distinguished. Doug Hope, senior editor at the *San Diego Union-Tribune* and a former assistant managing editor at *The Bee*, perhaps said it best: "There are many times over the years that I would stop and think, 'How would Frank handle this?'"

McCulloch shepherded to publication many a project that other editors might have abandoned or, more likely, never undertaken. His

example shines in this age of tabloid sensationalism, with its instant, continuous, mind-numbing web sites and cable programs masquerading as "news," where serious journalism must compete with the likes of the *Drudge Report*, and screaming pundits drive coverage of — what? The creative use of cigars?

The night before the McCulloch award, the world was treated to a two-hour interview with "that woman," and we journalists watched it and talked about it and wondered, is this what it's come to? And if it's so awful, why are we watching? Tough questions, McCulloch says, often with no clear answers.

"If we continue to inspect every one of those warts and blemishes that people in public office have, can they ever govern?" he asks. "Will democracy work? Where do we draw the line? When I get angry and discouraged and upset with the press, as I do, I remember that there ain't no second best. It's all we've got. But there are a whole bunch of serious questions we have to ask ourselves." 🏠

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by Sigrid
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