

## BRICKBATS

◆ The British government has generously opened up over 4 million acres of mountain and moor land to hikers. Private owners must allow so-called rambles access to their land without compensation.

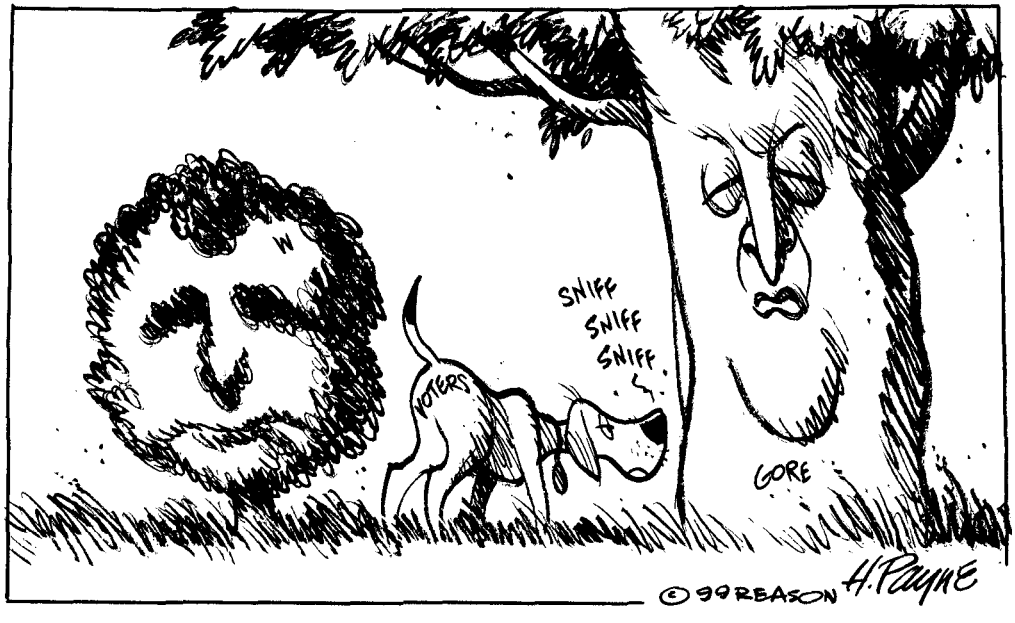
◆ Lee Williams doesn't know how to spell *villain*, so he's suing Eternal Tattoos. Williams, a student at Michigan's Wayne State University, wanted to have the word tattooed on his forearm. The tattooist asked him how to spell the word, and that's how he wound up with *villian* on his arm. Williams wouldn't even have been aware of the misspelling but for a brighter friend who made fun of the tattoo. Now he wants \$25,000 to have the word removed.

◆ Those working in the fingerprint and photo unit of the Seattle Police Department have to go through special training. They are taught to properly sit in a chair. "Take hold of the arms and get control of the chair before sitting down," read department instructions. The course was added after several employees fell out of their rolling chairs. The department says it may also add a course on how to open cabinet drawers.

◆ Al Gore might want to keep this one in mind. Norway has banned the construction of new shopping centers outside city centers. The ban is aimed at reviving downtowns, cutting sprawl, and reducing auto use.

Henry Payne

## CHOICE 2000: BUSH OR TREE



permission from the owner.

Lawyers for the defendants argue that the injunction sets the men up for constant police harassment. As one attorney told a local Venice newspaper, the order means that if the 35 men "step out of the door, they're going to get arrested."

The case has attracted organized opposition from black community groups such as the Nation of Islam—



the men named in the order are African American. While claims of racism and unconstitutionality didn't stop the injunction, they did bring early publicity to a practice that will become more controversial if and when it becomes more widespread.

## Killer Weed

By Jacob Sullum

A recent report from the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, the prohibitionist propaganda mill headed by former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Joseph Califano, is titled "Non-Medical Marijuana: Rite of Passage or Russian Roulette?"

The use of the awkward adjective *non-medical* is supposed to reassure you that Califano is not the sort of extremist who would deny cannabis to cancer or AIDS patients. But he is the sort of extremist who would compare pot smoking to a game in which players face a one-in-six chance of sudden death.

In a statement released along with the report, Califano declared that "teens who smoke marijuana are playing a dangerous game of Russian roulette." This grim sport is not limited to kids, according to Califano, who continued, "Parents who mistake the

absence of proof for the proof of absence are playing Russian roulette with their children's lives."

So you can avoid this error, here is a clue for telling the two apart: The *absence of proof* is the problem with the CASA report, while the *proof of absence* is the wild rhetoric that indicates a lack of scientific seriousness.

## Knife Fight

By Jesse Walker

Supporters of the Second Amendment have often suggested that gun control boosters will not rest until the private possession of guns is completely banned. They may be wrong: If recent events in Australia are any guide, the government won't stop there.

Last year, the state of New South Wales made it illegal to sell knives or knife blades to anyone under 16. Plastic knives are still acceptable. Everything else, though—from cake slicers to cutlery—

# Same As It Ever Was

By Nick Gillespie and Michael W. Lynch

Were the Littleton, Colorado, school shootings on April 20, a "defining moment in public opinion" regarding gun control, as *USA Today* has put it? Not really, write analysts for Statistical Assessment Service, a Washington, D.C.-based group that tracks the use of statistics in public policy debates, in the group's July newsletter. "The Columbine tragedy merely returned public opinion to the levels of the early '90s," they say, "after a drop in support of stricter laws to 60 percent in February 1999." They point out that significant majorities have long favored tighter controls and that the pro-control proportion correlates most closely with the nation's murder rate: "The murder

rate has varied between about 8 and 10 per 100,000 throughout the '80s and '90s. The high poll numbers favoring gun-control in the early part of the period correlate to a high murder rate, while the low figures in the mid-'80s match a lower rate, followed by higher numbers as the rate moved up once more in the early '90s. The low figures reported before Columbine may reflect the recent substantial drop in the murder rate to under 7 per 100,000."

## RESPONSES TO GALLUP POLL QUESTION:

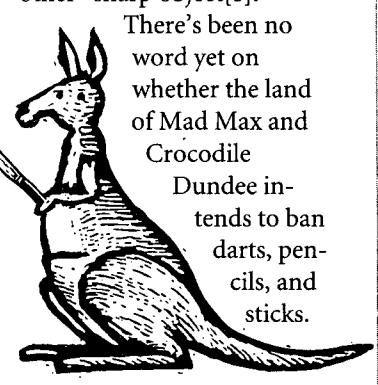
"In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of handguns should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?"

Date	More Strict	Less Strict	Kept As Now	No Opinion
April 26-27, 1999	68%	6%	25%	1%
1993	72	5	22	1
1988	64	6	27	3
1986	60	8	30	2
1981	65	3	30	2
1980	59	3	30	2
1975	69	3	24	4

Sources: Gallup Poll, Statistical Assessment Service

is off-limits. In Queensland, a new law prohibits carrying a knife in public without a "reasonable" excuse—a loophole that, the police minister stressed, did not include self-defense. With those two models in place, other states and territories have adopted, or at least considered, similar anti-knife rules of their own.

On the federal level, the Australian government announced earlier this year that it will crack down harder on illegal knives, thanks to a report by the Australian Institute of Criminology that revealed a rise in the percentage of murders committed with knives and—ominously—other "sharp object[s]."



## Boxed In

By Jonathan Block

**D**aniel Pink, a Washington, D.C.-based writer who works out of his home, receives his mail like millions of self-employed Americans and small-business owners: He rents a private mail box (PMB) at a local Mail Boxes Etc. Pink, the author of a forthcoming book on the rise of the independent contractor, likes the convenience of using the address of the Wisconsin Avenue store on all of his correspondence. But thanks to a new U.S. Postal Service rule, Pink will be forced to use the phrase PMB, rather than "Box," "Suite," or "#," before his box number

on all correspondence starting in April 2000. That rule, he says, "symbolizes that you are not part of the legitimate economy."

Indeed, that seems to be the USPS position. Spokesman Norm Scherstrom says the policy change is necessary to protect consumers from fraud schemes that often involve private mailboxes (Scherstrom also pooh-poohs the widely held feeling that the Postal Service is trying to undercut competition for P.O. box customers). One major problem with PMBs, according to Scherstrom, is identity theft, which happens when someone obtains an-

other person's vital information, uses the information to rent a mailbox, and then uses the address to secure credit cards.

Pink sees things differently. He claims that all PMB owners are now being treated like criminals because of the actions of "a few bad apples." He resents the expense and inconvenience of printing new stationery and the loss of

a simple street address. He also sees it as an attack on new ways of making a living. Says Pink: "The USPS is a large bureaucracy imposing its will. This change delegitimizes a new way of working."

## Equal Slime

By RiShawn Biddle

**A** scandal broke last May when WGBH-TV, the Boston affiliate of the Public Broadcasting Service, admitted to sharing donor lists—a common nonprofit practice—with the Democratic National Committee. The scandal grew after a series of exposés by *The Boston Globe*

