

Letters

A Quick Fix

I read your May article on Medicare and Medicaid fraud with particular interest. As a trial judge who has sat on a dozen or more Medicaid fraud cases in New York state, I have observed numerous ways that have been devised to cheat the system. I would say the cases I have tried during the past six years involved the loss of more than \$20 million to the state and federal government.

The solution to cutting down on fraud may not be as difficult as was postulated by the authors of the article. There is one glaring defect in the system: The government agency that approves and makes payments does not send a copy of the medical provider's invoices to the patient. In most of the cases before me, the patient was unaware of the fraud being committed. As incentive for people to contact the appropriate agency so that fraud can be detected, we could offer the patient (who is generally indigent) a reward—such as 5 to 10 percent of the money saved or recovered. A simple procedure such as this could stop fraud in its early stages.

HERBERT A. POSNER
Jamaica, NY

Just Another Dis?

I have never declined a request for an interview, and I would have been more than happy to discuss *The Washington Times* (May 1997) with Nurith Aizenman. The errors concerning my tenure could easily have been avoided with a simple phone call.

Bill Cheshire staged his walkout not for the reasons you mention. He had been led to believe he would get the job I was offered and had been gunning for me from day one. I was in charge of editorial policy as well as news coverage, and not once did I receive a hint of a whisper from any representative of the owners as to what

our editorial line should be on an issue.

The reporter who was trying to start a Guild unit at that time circulated a petition protesting my Contra editorial. He got 27, not 55, reporters to sign. Some were recent hires and several told me privately that abusive threats were part of the pressure tactics. When he couldn't get more than 27 to sign, the matter was dropped.

I have been in this business 51 years. Do you really think I am dumb enough to ask someone how he/she voted in "the last election?"

Your piece concludes that *The Washington Times* is "not just that Moonie paper anymore." The *Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, in lengthy front page stories, reached that conclusion in 1986.

By and large yours was a fair story. It could have been a lot meatier if someone had bothered calling me.

ARNAUD DE BORCHGRAVE
Washington, DC

One comment on the *Monthly's* article on *The Washington Times*. The next time one of your reporters writes a paragraph that calls me obsessive, denigrates 10 years of defense reporting, and attacks my professional competence, I think the least the reporter should do is call me so I can defend myself. To me, that's Journalism 101.

ROWAN SCARBOROUGH
Washington, DC

Nurith Aizenman responds:

Although I interviewed 20 current and former Washington Times employees for my piece, I regret not contacting Arnaud de Borchgrave and Rowan Scarborough.

Regarding Bill Cheshire's resignation, I noted that "de Borchgrave vehemently denied...that the Times did not enjoy total editorial independence." Nonetheless, Cheshire's allegations of owner meddling contributed to the "rumors of Moon's influence" that plagued the paper in its early years—the situation I was using this episode to describe.

Numerous press accounts of the petition protesting Mr. de Borchgrave's editorial announcing the Times-sponsored "Nicaraguan Freedom Fund" listed the number of signatories at 55; whatever the correct figure, the fact remains that

a significant group of Times reporters registered their objection.

The reporter who told me that at his job interview Mr. de Borchgrave asked him how he had voted in the last election is a veteran journalist in whose reliability I have great confidence.

As for Rowan Scarborough's complaint, the paragraph in question criticized the Times as a whole for its fixation with the feminization of the military. Scarborough was mentioned only in passing as the author of an article I used to illustrate my point.

Your report fell far short of being an interesting account of *The Washington Times's* process from what you describe as its early days as *persona non grata* among the D.C. press corps to something of a useful curiosity. I can only speculate whether folks at the paper would consider the piece just another "dis" by a journalistic grandstander. But I can say emphatically that this report went to every length to disregard the Reverend Moon and to perpetuate a culture of contempt toward the Unification Church. How else to interpret the repeated use of the pejorative term, "Moonies"? How else to interpret the tone of contempt toward the Reverend Moon? How else to interpret gratuitous commendations of journalists accompanied by back-handed references to their choice of faith?

"Dis" a newspaper if you will. But don't succumb to the lowest form of bigotry and disparage an entire religious community in the process.

PETER D. ROSS, ESQ.
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE HOLY SPIRIT ASSOCIATION
FOR THE UNIFICATION OF
WORLD CHRISTIANITY
New York, NY

The Bigger Picture

Curtis Gans's jeremiad against "phony campaign commercials" ("Stop the Madness!" May 1997) certainly has a point, but Gans is wrong to pin all the blame for the rising cost of campaigns and declining voter turnout on the increased use of TV advertising. Analysis by the Campaign Study Group has shown that—contrary to

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public perceptions—the proportion of the average congressional candidate's budget spent on broadcast advertising has remained fairly constant. From 1990 to 1994, House incumbents spent about 25 percent of their money on TV and radio. The average Senate incumbent spent about one-third. (Final totals for 1996 are not yet available.) Indeed, Gans's own data suggests there has not been that big a leap in the importance of TV advertising to campaigns. From 1976 to 1994, if we are to use his numbers, advertising has gone from consuming just under half of a candidate's budget to six-tenths.

As one of the leading experts on voting behavior, Gans is to be heeded when he warns us about declining voter turnout. But the core problem with this system is candidates' dependence on private money to pay for their campaigns. Until we change that, we're just nibbling around the edges.

MICAH L. SIFRY
PUBLIC CAMPAIGN
Washington, DC

As much as I admire Curtis Gans's powerful case against televised political advertising, I fear that his range of solutions may not be equal to the emergency. Without the brightest of bright-line rules against them, TV ads will go on undermining the foundations of popular government. The constitution should be amended to forbid, simply and clearly, the purchase of televised advertising in political campaigns.

HAL RIEDL
Baltimore, MD

Apocalypse When?

Mr. Easterbrook takes me to task ("Apocalypse Later," May 1997) for including in my book a large number of recent record-setting extreme weather events around the world. Regrettably, he fails to acknowledge my explicit caveat that these weather events become significant only when they are added to four other compelling bodies of evidence of climatic instability: the warming-driven spread of infectious diseases, the weather-related losses by the world's property insurers (which are

rising by orders of magnitudes), the consensus findings of the world's leading 2,000 scientists, and a series of troubling and rapid changes to the Earth's oceans, glaciers, forests, and mountains.

Are my concerns overinflated? The truth is that neither Mr. Easterbrook nor I nor the best of the world's scientists know the answer. While the science regarding rates of future change is uncertain, that uncertainty cuts both ways. The reality could be far worse than the science is currently able to determine. Research indicates that prehistoric climate changes have occurred as abrupt shifts rather than gradual transitions and that small changes have precipitated catastrophic outcomes.

ROSS GELBSPAN
Brookline, MA

Firing Back

In his April article "A New Breed of Hired Gun," Preston Lerner seriously misleads his readers. He refers to my early college grades and first few jobs, but never tells you that was back in the 1955-1964 era. He attempts to falsely portray me as "new" and inexperienced, but never mentions anything about my extensive work in auto safety since 1965...as if the past 30 years somehow don't exist!

But during these past 30 years, the courts have repeatedly ruled that my hands-on evaluation of accident vehicles and exemplar vehicles, plus extensive studies of crash tests and other efforts, has qualified me as an auto safety expert in product-liability trials coast-to-coast. While he criticizes the *Mistich* case as his leading "no brainer" example, Mr. Lerner conveniently fails to note that in January of 1996, the Louisiana Supreme Court affirmed the original *Mistich v. VW* plaintiff verdict and also the trial judge's ruling of my expertise. Where did Mr. Lerner get the expertise to condemn the trial testimony, the judge's verdict, and the Louisiana Supreme Court?

Mr. Lerner also ignored a most basic rule of journalistic integrity, since he never called me to check my version of his illusory story.

BYRON BLOCH
Potomac, MD



Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

Rampant Rottweilers • Cheap Coke • Cheap Chic •

Credit-Crazed Juveniles • Yogi Lawyers

SHOULDN'T PAULA JONES HAVE sued Trooper Ferguson, *The American Spectator*, and the *Los Angeles Times* instead of Bill Clinton? There is no evidence that she was sufficiently angered by Clinton's alleged effort to "get to know her" in the Little Rock hotel room to even consider the possibility of legal action—until a year later when Trooper Ferguson was quoted in the *Spectator* and the *Times* as saying a certain "Paula" had told him after leaving the hotel room that she was available as a permanent girlfriend for the governor. That was what made her mad. Bill Clinton didn't say it. Trooper Ferguson did, or so the *Spectator* and the *Times* reported.

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ONE OF THE WEIRDER EXCESSES OF the *Bonfire of the Vanities* era was dressing children in designer clothes. Now the fad appears to be returning. The biggest names in the field are Versace and Moschino. Beth Jaffe, a New Jersey lawyer, buys outfits from both for her four-year old daughter. "It's an extension of the way I like to dress," she told *The Wall Street Journal*, "and I like to think I dress well."

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ANOTHER TREND TOWARD EXCESS is in the credit-card debt of college students. Sixty-five percent of them carry plastic. The amount they owe nearly doubled between 1990 and 1995. One factor in this may be that, according to Joshua Wolf Shenk of *U.S. News & World Report*, "78 percent of college juniors and seniors don't know that the best way to figure out the cost of a loan is to look at the interest rate." But even more important, Shenk suspects, is the tendency of today's young people to think they

have to emulate the "pretty cushy" lifestyle of Courtney Cox's character in TV's *Friends*. And for most young people that means going into debt.

In the early 1990s, we seemed to be entering an era of cheap chic, which I applauded in an article I wrote for this magazine in June 1990. Chic is always silly. But the cheap kind is better than the expensive because it does not get people into debt or cause them to choose occupations on the basis of money. But even if cheap is no longer chic, at least the trend lasted for a few years—which is a lot better than the era of New Idealism which I predicted at the onset of the '80s and which was strangled in its crib by the greed that dominated that decade.

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SPEAKING OF DIS-maying trends, how about this one—the Rottweiler is now the second most popular dog in America. I'm not kidding; I got it straight from the AP. Does this mean we're becoming more vicious—or are we just more afraid? Whatever the implications for the national psyche may be, one thing is clear—we're more likely to get bitten. Dog bites, the same Associated Press story reports, have increased from 585,000 in 1986 to 800,000.

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IN THE MIDST OF ALL THESE trends in the wrong direction, I find

one that delights me. It seems that some e-mail is getting there later than letters delivered by the postal service. For years, my friends with computers have chided me for not getting with the computer revolution so that we could share the joy of almost instant communication through e-mail. One English user complained to *The Wall Street Journal*, "Frankly, a clod horse could move between Kensington and Hampstead faster than [e-mail]. The technology we boast is going to liberate us from offices isn't dependable." Sweet music to the ears of the computer-challenged.

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A COUPLE OF YEARS ago, we printed some figures demonstrating how the bureaucrats at the Washington headquarters of various federal agencies had managed to protect their own jobs while sacrificing to the ax those employees in the field who are often doing the real work. A similar phenomenon has been

taking place in the military. A Navy source recently told Matthew Miller, a former OMB official who is now a columnist, that for the first time in history more than half the Navy's officers are in support functions. And an Army source revealed that of over 495,000 active duty soldiers, only 120,000 man the 10 fighting divisions, with another 80,000 providing essential logistics for the fighting men—

Too many universities ignore teaching ability, hiring solely on the basis of degrees and publications. The result has been too many students who are too bored to learn.