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SEPT. 28-OCT. 4, 2005

A Weak Constitution

UW law professor Kristin Stilt finds U.S. push for "democracy" undermines Iraq's constitution

By ROSETTE ROYALE
 Staff Reporter



Kristin Stilt doesn't look on the potential ratification of Iraq's first constitution on Oct. 15 with a rosy-hued worldview. Instead, Stilt, an assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Law who specializes in Islamic law, sees the constitution, and the process leading up to its creation, from a less prismatic perspective. And the view, she finds, doesn't paint the United States with the loveliest of brushstrokes.

"I think we have a naive view that everyone wants to live in a democratic country," says Stilt.

This naiveté, believes Stilt, is borne out in the oft-repeated concern of whether Islam and democracy are compatible. This concern is myopic, says Stilt, since "one could also ask: Is democracy compatible with Christianity?"

Noting that Islam is a religion whose origins stem back to the seventh century, she finds trying to impose current models of democracy on an ancient text to be misguided. Instead, she counters, consideration should be given to how the history of the country has shaped it and the Iraqi people.

In a cursory explanation, she points to the country, then known as Mesopotamia, or "the land between the rivers," coming under the mandate of British rule in 1920, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The British renamed the country Iraq. But the British, she says, never invested much time in trying to comprehend the workings of the newly christened country before Iraq gained independence in 1932. The U.S. appears to be following a similar trajectory, she finds, in its zeal to transform Iraq into a star of its own making, one referred to as the first democratic country in the Islamic world.

"The word 'democracy,'" states Stilt, "is very complex and loaded. We think

SEATTLE TRIAL ATTORNEY KAREN KOEHLER SAYS THERE'S NO NEED FOR INITIATIVE 330: "LAWSUITS HAVE NOT GONE UP AND PAYOUTS HAVE STAYED THE SAME. THERE'S NO MEDICAL MALPRACTICE CRISIS." PHOTO BY SUZANNA FINLEY.

Dead Ringer

Initiative 330 would close the door on victims of malpractice

By CYDNEY GILLIS
 Staff Reporter

Bob and Linda Guile sold the Tacoma home where Linda once tended roses. It was just too painful for her to garden any more, or get up and down the stairs.

In 1999, after a fall in her garden, Linda Guile had back surgery at Valley Medical Center in Renton. Afterward, the surgeon, Britt Borden, told the couple that he had nicked the "dura" or, covering of the spine cord but that Linda would be fine.

She wasn't. Her lower body and left leg were numb. Six days after the surgery, while Dr. Borden was on vacation, another surgeon operated on her and discovered a three-quarter inch tear in her spinal cord that has left Linda a walking paraplegic.

Bob Guile says his wife, 58, has to catheterize herself to urinate and use an enema every other day. She has a claw foot and pain so bad in her pelvis that she takes the same painkiller given to injured soldiers in Iraq.

It wasn't Dr. Borden's first or last injury. Guile says the doctor has dropped the drill on three other patients' spines since his wife's operation. That puts Borden in a tiny but troubling category: Just 4 percent of Washington's doctors caused nearly half of all malpractice claims in the state from 1990 to 2005, according to a new report from Public Citizen, a national consumer lobbying group that has crunched the state's claim numbers.

Rather than discipline Borden or doctors like him, however, the Washington State Medical Association wants to take away people's right to sue — something Bob Guile says would be a travesty.

That's what could happen if voters pass Initiative 330 on Nov. 8. Drug, hospital and insurance interests are pouring millions of dollars into passing the initiative, which would cap non-economic "pain and suffering" damages at

ELECTION



2005

VOTER BURNOUT

When voters shun the polls, hopes for democracy grow dim.

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Add Votes and Stir

Seattle's declining election turnout is damaging democracy

By KNOLL LOWNEY
Guest Writer

A "perfect" voter (i.e., who votes in every election) living in Wallingford gets barraged by campaign mail and calls. A less-frequent voter in the Rainier Valley might receive few or no contacts from campaigns. The result is a circular decline in voter participation, especially among demographic groups and in geographic areas that already have lower turnout.

We in Seattle have a serious case of rollercoaster voting.

The city can get out the vote for presidential elections, as we saw in 2004, when 84 percent of Seattle registered voters turned out.

But turnout is decreasing in non-presidential elections. In this year's primary, the city had an abysmal turnout of 27.5 percent of registered voters, and we'll be lucky to reach 50 percent on Nov. 8.

This is a simmering crisis that demands a significant response. In every local election since 1997, fewer Seattle voters have participated. By 2003, Seattle had lost 64,000 voters.

Sixty-four thousand fewer Seattle voters in a state where every vote counts. Senator Cantwell ousted Slade Gorton by a mere 1,500 votes, and our governor was elected by a 129-vote margin.

Turning out Seattle voters in non-presidential elections is critical to our state's politics and our local democracy.

Some of the most important ballot measures are decided in these off-year elections, when Seattle barely votes. For example, only 50 percent of registered Seattle voters turned out in 1999 to vote on Tim Eyman's I-695, and our 41 percent turnout in 2001 secured passage of Eyman's I-747. These initiatives have crippled our schools, infrastructure, and human services. In 2003, 190,000 Seattle voters skipped the election — twice the margin of victory of I-841, which rolled back workplace safety standards.

Our rollercoaster voting pattern also negatively impacts our local

democracy and civic participation. Voting in local elections is a gateway act: a critical first step in becoming an involved citizen. A person who doesn't vote in local races is not going to feel empowered to lobby local officials or to hold them accountable. The end result is a City Hall that increasingly reflects the interests of developers and professional lobbyists, not of ordinary citizens.

This trend must be reversed, and it can be reversed with concerted effort on the local level.

We know what is not working: the status quo, in which the City of Seattle does nothing to increase voter participation. Instead, virtually all of the publicity for local elections is left to the candidates themselves, who direct their efforts almost exclusively at likely voters in select precincts. A "perfect" voter (i.e., who votes in every election) living in Wallingford gets barraged by campaign mail and calls. A less-frequent voter in the Rainier Valley might receive few or no contacts from campaigns. The result is a circular decline in voter participation, especially among demographic groups and in geographic areas that already have lower turnout.

There is no single solution to these problems, but there are obvious steps that everyone can take.

What should Seattle do? City officials must recognize that declining voter participation threatens the city's interests and its local democracy. We should follow the lead of other major cities and adopt programs to boost voter participation. For example:

- create a Voter Assistance Commission to coordinate governmental and private efforts to register and

turn out voters. It should begin by evaluating the problem and identifying solutions that have proven successful in other cities.

- institute an agency-based voter registration and information system, where existing contacts between city agencies and citizens are used to increase voter registration and participation.

What should King County do? We must move to all vote-by-mail elections. Vote by mail is proven to boost voter participation and decrease costs. By 2006, 30 of Washington's 39 counties will be voting by mail. The strength of King County's vote in statewide elections will inevitably decline if we fail to follow suit.

But for now, you need to vote on November 8. Whether or not you care about local races, you need to vote on critical ballot issues:

- Initiative 330 contains 20 pages of fine print written by the insurance and pharmaceutical companies. Its passage would repeal the Patients Bill of Rights and allow hospitals, ambulances and nursing homes to require patients to waive their legal rights as a condition of receiving services.

- Eyman's Initiative 900 would divert revenue from existing services to a redundant performance audit system.

- Initiative 901 would expand the Clean Indoor Air Act.

- Initiative 912 would roll back the gas tax and halt critical safety upgrades to our transportation system.

You can still register for the November 8 election, by mail until October 8 or in person until October 24. Call 206-296-VOTE or visit www.metrokc.gov/elections. ■

Knoll Lowney is an attorney at Smith & Lowney PLLC, a public interest law firm. He is also co-chair of Yes for Seattle, which works on environmental and other progressive issues. He can be reached at knoll@igc.org.



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Real Change vendors receive 65% of the \$1.00 paid for this paper.

Mission Statement:

Real Change exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.

The Real Change Homeless Empowerment Project is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Programs include the Real Change newspaper, the StreetWrites peer support group for homeless writers, the Homeless Speakers Bureau, and the First things First organizing project. All donations support these programs and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

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Change

Rev. Leroy Hedman is concerned with the soul. And also with the soil.

Along with the pulpit, the sacred workings of his ministry are fluorescent bulbs, garden seeds, rain barrels, and red-wiggler worms.

For about a decade, as head of the Georgetown Gospel Chapel, Rev. Hedman has been in the vanguard of the Christian movement for "Creation care" — a concept synonymous with environmentalism, but easier on the ears of conservatives.

The chapel's conservation measures earned it the first Energy Star awarded to a religious facility. Hedman gives free light bulbs to renters seeking to lower their utility bills. Zucchini and tomatoes for public consumption grow in the chapel garden.

A Master Gardener/Composter raised among Midwestern farmers, Hedman trains religious leaders to follow his lead. Though they might not agree on abortion or same-sex marriage, on this particular moral value, he finds liberals and conservatives can usually agree. To him, Christians focused on the Second Coming miss out on the here and now.

"Let the Lord take care of that," he says; "let's take care of what we have."

—Adam Hyla



Up to The Minutemen

Border "Defense Corps" moves in to western Washington

"People of color are going to be endangered by these [Minutemen]."

—Rosalinda Guillen, farm worker advocate

By ADAM HYLA
Editor

Tom Williams is the friendly face of Northern-Border vigilantism.

Williams is the Washington state leader of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps. Come Oct. 1, he and several dozen fellow volunteers will be manning "static positions" — sitting in cars on lawn chairs — along a 25-mile stretch of the 49th Parallel.

From Blaine to Sumas, the 60 to 100 volunteers will be equipped with cell phones, radios, handwarmers, layered clothing—and a concealed firearm. Their role, Williams says, is strictly to act as the eyes and ears of the authorities: to call in anyone who's walked across the border into the U.S. without authorization.

Unlike the Arizona border this spring, where the former Marine interrupted his Jeep-driving vacation to join the Minutemen at the invitation of an ex-military buddy, Williams doesn't anticipate a lot of action.

He says the Border Patrol estimates that 20 individuals cross the international boundary illegally each month, compared to "thousands" in Arizona. "Most Canadians are too polite to cross illegally."

The violations themselves are not the sole reason for the stakeouts. The Minuteman project is a kind of civil action to petition the federal government for stepped-up enforcement on U.S. borderlands.

"Our secondary concern is visibility," says Williams. "The whole purpose of this thing is to get the attention of our national legislators" to make sure that "the Border Patrol gets what they need to do the job properly."

The Minutemen have had a fair amount of cooperation from law enforcement agencies and the Border Patrol. Williams says he's talked with both the Sumas and Blaine police chiefs, the head of border security, and the Whatcom County Sheriff.

Public officials in the area have not yet addressed the vigilantes imminent arrival.

The Bellingham City Council will take up a resolution against the Minutemen at an Oct. 10 meeting. Blaine city mayor John Liebert says the City Council only got wind of citizen concern for the stakeouts at a Sept. 26 meeting. He says that during a public comment period, one speaker asked city officials to take a stand against the vigilante effort. "The citizen's view was we're not in favor of this," says Liebert, "but that's not necessarily anyone else's."

But it is the view of the Whatcom County Coalition for Professional Law and Border Enforcement, a group representing business, churches, the county Democratic Party, and the human rights task force. They organized this spring in response to the Minuteman Corps' stated intention to come north. County Democrats passed a resolution against the vigilantes shortly after that. And in mid-September, the Washington State Democratic Central Committee condemned the Minutemen and asked Gov. Christine Gregoire to do the same. Gregoire has yet to respond.

"What we want are highly trained professional US Border Patrol agents, not armed vigilantes," says coalition member Sharon Monteiro. "The volunteers 'don't know how hard we work for tolerance and understanding, and how we value diversity.'"

Farm worker advocate Rosalinda Guillen says she fears for the safety of the Sikh community, Native Americans, and Latino farm workers in the area. "People of color are going to be endangered by these men," she says.

Regardless of the Minuteman leaders' statements rejecting racism, the Arizona stakeout attracted neo-Nazis—extremists whose presence was documented by eyewitnesses from the Southern Poverty Law Center. Williams says that he ejected two of them from the encampment.

But then, arms-bearing volunteers with far-right views may form splinter groups and take action into their own hands, says Monteiro.

"The more people feel they have the right to come into our county and do this, the less accountable it gets." ■

Just Heard ...

A vote for both

Now that the King County Council has put a tax levy on the Nov. 8 ballot to fund both veterans' and other human services, the King County Alliance of Human Services is telling voters to support it.

The alliance had opposed a previous veterans-only measure because the group had been working to get a broad human services levy on the ballot in 2006. On Sept. 12, the King County Council compromised and voted for a combination measure. If voters approve it, property taxes will go up five cents for each \$1,000 of assessed value to raise an annual \$13.3 million that will be evenly split between veterans' and other services for six years.

"The November 8 levy is a much-needed first step to address critical needs in our communities," the alliance's Julia Sterkovsky said in a statement. But it's only temporary. "We must continue to work together to establish long-term, stable, adequate, dedicated funding to strengthen our communities."

SHA grants time

The Seattle Housing Authority has granted a tenants coalition an extra two weeks to comment on a plan to convert 21 of the city's low-income buildings to private ownership next year.

SHA originally set a deadline of Oct. 6 to comment on the deal, which involves selling the 21 high-rises to private investors for tax purposes ("Future Imperfect," *Real Change*, 9/21/05). In exchange for providing the money to renovate the buildings, which date back to the late '60s, the investors will get 10 years' worth of tax credits.

The agency says contacts with the investors will leave SHA in charge, with the buildings to remain low income for 40 years. All the same, the residents' group is looking for an attorney to help them sort through the fine print.

—Cydney Gillis

PLN on the inside

Newspapers and magazines critical of the prison system will now get through the mailrooms of the state's correctional institutions. So says an August settlement between *Prison Legal News* and the state Attorney General's office.

PLN's suit arose from prison personnel throwing copies of the Seattle-based non-profit magazine away before they ever reached incarcerated subscribers — an arbitrary and unconstitutional act of censorship, ruled U.S. District Court Judge Robert Lasnik. It won't happen again, says Attorney General spokesman Dan Judge: the DOC "continues to be in compliance with the District Court's directive." In addition to attorneys' fees, PLN also got \$100,000 in damages.

—Adam Hyla

[Resource]

For information about the Oct. 1 vigil, call (360) 756-2330.

Exodus

Zimbabwe's repressive government has Seattle impact

[Event]
By KIMBURLY ERVIN
Contributing Writer

Zimbabwean musician Andy Brown plays at 8 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 29 at Café Ibex, off MLK and Rainier Ave S. It's a good opportunity to talk with local Zimbabweans and support the country's culture. Tickets are \$15/\$20 day of show; call Café Ibex (206)721-7537 or go to www.sadza.com.

It is a country with many problems. Between the yearly droughts that keep the nation in a constant struggle to sustain itself with enough food and water and the HIV/Aids pandemic, Zimbabwe has problems that could cripple any country, making it hard to meet even the most minimal health and economic standards.

But instead of looking out for their citizens suffering from economic failings and disease, the autocratic government is actively working against its citizens to keep itself in power.

In May 2005 the president Robert Mugabe launched Operation Murambatsvina ("Drive out Filth"). The operation, according to the government, is meant to be an attempt to stop crime and clean up the city streets by sending individuals out into the rural areas. But there was no plan set up for how to handle those affected. Since the operation started, hundreds of thousands of patients have had their businesses and homes demolished, creating mass homelessness and a massive exodus.

"Because the formal job market was pretty much non-existent, people were trying to find any way to survive," explains Peter Masundire, President of the Zimbabwe Association, a Seattle group whose aim is to bring the local Zimbabwean community together. "Now that they have gone through and destroyed their homes and businesses, there is no way for people to support themselves."

An estimated 4.8 million people, out of a population of 12 million, have fled to neighboring countries like Botswana and South Africa, as well as to Europe and the U.S. Masundire estimates that around 500 Zimbabweans currently reside in the Pacific Northwest, maybe more after accounting for those who do not admit they are refugees for fear of stigmatization.

Jon, a refugee who lives in Seattle with his wife and children, like many has struggled with trying to get officially recognized as a refugee.

"I don't blame the U.S. government [for not granting a blanket refugee status], because with the Zimbabwean government, you never know where they stand," explains Jon. "They change the rules overnight. But - I wish the ego in Washington D.C. could be torn down, where they look at the people and actually say 'Ok, there are people being affected there.' We just can't wait until there is a civil war to give Zimbabweans refugee status."

Zimbabweans have faced devastating economic hardships since 2000, when the Mugabe government lost key positions to the opposing party. After the loss, the government decided to strip the deeds of over 4,000 commercial farmers, most of whom were white, and redistribute them to Black Zimbabwean businessmen with little farming experience, crippling the Zimbabwean agricultural industry.

Also, proponents of the opposition found themselves subject to government intimidation. According to Masundire, there has been use of aid to intimidate the opposition and even deaths attributed to speaking out against the reigning government.

"With the economic mismanagement, commercial farming is non-existent now, the drought after drought, and the HIV/Aids epidemic, it's only by God's grace that people are still alive over there," he adds.

Chances are, the non-democratic status of Zimbabwean government will keep any relief from reaching the people of Zimbabwe. Instead, the monetary relief will have to come from those who have fled the country in search of better opportunity.

"I'd rather take a chance, get someone who would smuggle the money and trade it on the black market, and get more Zimbabwean dollars for my family. The government will never be able to get rid of the black market because the black market is caused by desperation. The only way to get rid of the desperation is to help the people," says Jon. "If it weren't for people sending money to Zimbabwe, it would have collapsed a long time ago."

Peter Masundire, below, President of the Zimbabwe Association, estimates close 500 Zimbabweans currently reside in the Pacific Northwest, maybe more, after accounting for those who do not admit they are refugees for fear of stigmatization.

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Bait and Switch

Trickle-down economic insecurity hits the middle class

Interview by TIMOTHY HARRIS
Staff Writer

"One of the things that really struck me is that it is more straightforward in the blue-collar world. When you're hired to be a waitress, you get the food to the table or you don't. In the white-collar world, there seems to be less emphasis on 'What can you do?' and more on 'Are you likeable?' Are you somebody other people 'want on their team'? I don't get it. Too many mind games."

Occasionally, the right book gets written at the right time and the national debate shifts. One thinks of Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring*, or Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Barbara Ehrenreich's recent *Nickel and Dime* was one of those books. That exploration of the world of low-wage work was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 90 weeks and brought new visibility to the plight of the working poor.

Ehrenreich's latest book, *Bait and Switch*, examines the diminished prospects of the white-collar worker by going undercover to experience the humiliations of the corporate world firsthand. While Ehrenreich never actually finds a job, she discovers that all is not well with the educated and middle-class. As corporations churn their workforces in search of greater short-term profit, the professional class is very much feeling the pinch. We spoke with the author last week when she was in Seattle.

Real Change: I remember reading *Commute to Nowhere* — the story about the \$300,000 a year tech executive who winds up selling clothes at The Gap — in *The New York Times Magazine* a couple of years ago, and my assumption was that this case was too extreme to be representative. I mean, you hear anecdotes about unemployed professionals, but there isn't a lot of statistical data about declining prospects for white-collar workers. What's your sense of what the reality is out there?

Barbara Ehrenreich: As a result of *Nickel and Dime*, I got a lot of letters

from people who were in a Nickel and Dime kind of situation. A surprising number of them were coming from people who had college educations and Master's degrees, even, who had once held good white-collar jobs. To tell you the truth, I had not done a lot of thinking about white-collar working people as a constituency in need of my journalistic concern. But that got me thinking, "What's happening here?"

I did some reading and discovered that the white-collar corporate work world had become chronically insecure. That the relationship of mutual loyalty between white-collar workers and the corporation is gone — gone forever. That's what the book *Who Moved My Cheese?* is really about. It's a mega-bestseller. Corporations buy it, force their employees to read it and discuss it, and its message is "You're gonna be jerked around. You're going to be jerked around all the time, so just get used to it. Be like a mouse. Scramble for the next cheese source."

In terms of statistics, 44 percent of the long-term unemployed are now

white-collar. The job search now averages about six months for these folks. Unemployment numbers are not so useful because, for one thing, they don't count those who sort of give up: who say, "All right, I'm not looking anymore, I'm a 'consultant.'" And there's no measure of the underemployed: the people who have high-tech training or some managerial skills who are now working some place like Circuit City for \$8 an hour.

RC: Tell me what happens when professionals look for work and don't find it. Is there a fairly typical downward trajectory?

Ehrenreich: Yeah. The first thing, obviously, is cutting expenses. There are all these newspaper articles that tell you how to go about this. It may mean selling a house. For single people it often means moving back in with parents — middle-age single people too — trying to hold on to whatever savings you have. An awful lot of people, even those who are middle-class, don't have any savings. They have debt. And the new bankruptcy bill of

Switch Hitting: Barbara Ehrenreich forgoes the blue-collar world for the white-collar, in her new book, Bait and Switch. Photo by Sigrid Estrada.



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Continued from Previous Page

course forecloses the option of starting fresh. You're in debt forever.

At some point, most people say, "Well, I've gotta go out and get a job as a waitperson," or "I've got to go get a job at Walmart," or wherever. You know, take whatever. Once they get there, it's very hard to get back out. One, because you can't get time off for interviews or job search activity, and two, because that can't go on your résumé.

RC: Then you get The Gap.

Ehrenreich: Yes. The Gap. No gaps are allowed. But there are some nasty catch-22s along the way. You're not gonna have health insurance when you lose your job, because we have this strange American system of having health insurance tied to a job. So you might have some medical bills you can't pay on time, and your credit rating is going to take a hit. More and more employers today want a perfect credit rating as a condition for hiring. Catch-22, again. The deeper catch-22 is that the longer you're unemployed, the less likely you are to ever get a job.

RC: In *Fear of Falling* you wrote about some of the common anxieties of the middle class. It seems like these anxieties are becoming more and more justified.

Ehrenreich: Yeah. Well, in *Fear of Falling* I was thinking more about the intergenerational anxiety: how you don't have a lot to pass on in terms of wealth to your children, so how are you going to get them into the best college, get them the best education so they can also be professionals and managers? There's a lot of anxiety over reproducing the class. But now, there's anxiety right within one's own generation: how can you hang on?

RC: You talk in your book about how being a desirable white-collar worker often depends upon exhibiting a sort of cheerful docility at all times. Is this something that goes back to (Sinclair Lewis') *Babbitt*, or are we seeing something new here?

Ehrenreich: I think there's an old American theme — and I don't think there's any equivalent in any other culture — of this kind of mind-over-matter philosophy. That you control everything with your mind. Mary Baker Eddy,

Norman Vincent Peale, Dale Carnegie, EST in the '70s. And it's going strong. And I think that it's very flattering to the people at the top. Like, "I'm at the top because I'm wonderful, and I'm in touch with the universe." And it's very debilitating to people who are down.

RC: I get the sense that, despite your distance from all of this as a writer and someone who is quite successful, your ego took more of a beating here than in your last book. How was it different this time?

Ehrenreich: Well, this was harder, there's no question. I mean, for one thing, in *Nickel and Dimed* I was actually working. I liked the camaraderie of the places I worked in — my fellow workers were very generous to me. But one of the things that really struck me is that it is more straightforward in the blue-collar world. When you're hired to be a waitress, you get the food to the table or you don't. In the white-collar world, there seems to be less emphasis on "What can you do?" and more on "Are you likeable?" Are you somebody other people "want on their team"? I don't get it. Too many mind games.

RC: What did you find out new about yourself?

Ehrenreich: I found some aspects of myself that were not too likable [laughs]. I surprised myself when I went to that public relations seminar so I could network with actually employed people, and we were given this problem to solve about a company that's facing sexual harassment charges, and some national feminist organization has moved in on the scene.

Someone in our little group was saying that the first thing to do is buy them off. I found myself getting into kind of a mini-rage: "I am these people, they don't take bribes!" But then, the part that was sort of sickening was that I said, "Here's how you do it: We set up an independent investigation and put them on it...." It went on from there. And I thought, "What am I doing here? What am I saying?"

RC: [laughs] It's like the Stanford prison guard experiment!

Ehrenreich: I know! How evil can I be? But even worse, it was also stupid, because I should have been just smiling and get-

ting along. Instead of saying, "Your ideas are fucked," I should have said, "No, that's a good plan." If I wanted a job.

RC: Why do you think professionals working in corporations have so little bargaining power?

Ehrenreich: They have no sense of solidarity, no sense of collective action. Some white-collar people do. Teachers are unionized, right up to the college level, nurses, doctors, all sorts of people. But I would say that is one of the biggest sources of a lack of power. A lot of them, in fact, are management: they are set against the other people around them. So what can they do?

RC: The jobs that you're eventually offered are jobs that have no benefits. There's no office. In the beginning, you pay them. In many senses, they're not really jobs at all. Are these sorts of pseudo-jobs becoming more common?

Ehrenreich: Oh yeah. Big change. More and more, white-collar people are in what can broadly be called contingent relationships to companies. Like being a direct sales person where you don't have any pay, just a commission. That's what was offered to me. You have no pay, you have no office, you have no benefits: you're on your own. Or, some of the people I talked to when I was working on the book, said, "Oh yeah, I have a job now, but it's a contract job." It may be their old job, but now they're on a contract for, say, six weeks. No

benefits. And people go from one of those to another.

Gradually, the corporation sheds its responsibilities or its connection to anybody. First the blue-collar people got tossed out in the '80s due to outsourcing of manufacturing. And then in the '90s and '00s, it's the downsizing through mergers and acquisitions and outsourcing.

RC: You talk about the need for universal health insurance and more extended unemployment benefits as some of the things that would help. What's stopping middle-class unemployed people from doing the sort of organizing that you advocate?

Ehrenreich: I don't know. It hasn't been happening, but I'm going to do my best to stir it up. To help stir it up. I'm not an organizer, but I have a website — a shiny website that the publishing company set up — called *BarbaraEhrenreich.com*. And I will be putting out more resources on it. More ways to get involved, and especially posting people's letters about what they're doing, what they think. ■

[Resource]

Executive pay jumped 571 percent between 1990 and 2000, with CEOs of firms that led in layoffs claiming some of the largest salary increases. See the report from the Institute for Policy Studies and United for a Fair Economy: www.ips-dc.org/projects/execexcess2001.htm

it's a wonderful day in the neighborhood

where am i?

sounds of hammers and saws
echo the pride of home dwellers
crafting their living spaces

fragrant tomatoes and zucchinis
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(while being tenderly transplanted)
that those residents enjoy blessing the earth

and healthy cats and dogs
(plus a few inquisitive kittens)
approvingly walk territory
busy with daily routine

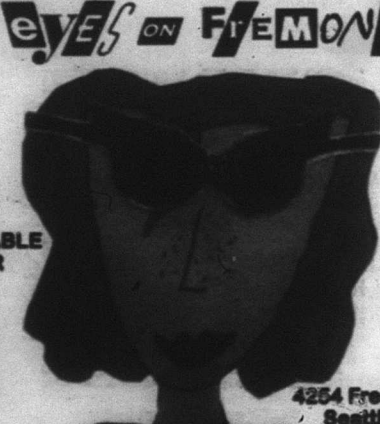
as i look around me
bar-b-que grills seem to whisper
stay for dinner

where am i?

a sub-division in the City of Roses
they call Dignity Village

—JO MEEKS

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Father and Son, Lost, Together

Poet Nick Flynn's Joycean memoir of coming to terms with a homeless father is, like the sprawling *Ulysses*, an unforgettable prose poem about reluctant father/son rapprochement.

Another Bullshit Night in Suck City: A Memoir

By Nick Flynn
Norton, 2005

Paperback, 288 pages, \$13.95

Review by TIMOTHY HARRIS
Staff Writer

The homeless memoir is an obscure but growing literary genre that probably shouldn't exist at all. Until now, Lars Eighner's *Travels with Lizbeth* was as good as it got. Literary, funny, and painfully intense, this tale of a homeless man and his dog surviving the arid hell of rural Texas echoed Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*: lonely disaffiliated writer (in Eighner's case, the genre was gay porn) endures deprivation of body and soul in the pursuit of art.

Hamsun's book took the 1920 Nobel Prize for literature, but, perhaps due more to his own political missteps than anything else (he gave his Nobel to Hermann Goering as a token of admiration), almost no one reads Hamsun anymore. *Hunger* is one of the world's greatest unread novels. *Travels with Lizbeth* now shares that status. After just one decade, the one-time bestseller is out of regular print.

It seems that memoirs about poverty have a fairly limited shelf life.

Another Bullshit Night in Suck City, recently released in paperback, might be the exception. Poet Nick Flynn's Joycean memoir of coming to terms with a homeless father is, like the sprawling *Ulysses*, an unforgettable prose poem about reluctant father/son rapprochement. And, just as *Ulysses* is about much more than a guy who eats a sandwich, attends a funeral, and pees in his backyard before going to bed, Flynn transforms the bare bones of his emotional life into an everyman's tale of loss, discovery, and redemption.

Nick Flynn stood toward the edge of my own circle of friends in the late '80s and early '90s. Reaganism had taken its toll, and the many, many homeless we saw were fresh evidence of a world gone badly wrong. We staged housing takeovers, held mock funerals for the dead, and organized tent cities on the Boston Common. Our crowd was mostly young, hip, and — truth be told — drawn to the work because, for each of us, it somehow mirrored our own dysfunctions. I remember Nick as a quietly intense black-leather jacketed poet who worked at the Pine Street Inn homeless shelter and lived in a low-rent artists' loft in the Combat

Zone. Nick's father, we all knew, was a regular at Pine Street. Nick preferred not to talk about it.

Another Bullshit Night traces two lives that misconnect in parallel. Flynn's father, an alcoholic con man who lies as reflexively as he breathes, abandons a wife and two sons while Flynn is still an infant. Outside of one brief meeting, Flynn and his father remain complete strangers. His heroic but troubled mother is unable to cope, and after her death Flynn becomes increasingly estranged from himself and others. Heavy drinking and regular drug use keep his life in a hazy, emotionally unavailable, well-intentioned sort of limbo.

His father, Jon, lives in Boston in one of those rooms you hear about that have trails running through the trash. Like a character in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, Flynn senior has fancied himself a writer throughout his long, alcoholic, wreck of a life. He's been working on a book for about 40 years. It's a literary masterpiece. No one has seen it. When Flynn and his father finally meet, Jon Flynn rises naked to greet him from a tin tub in the center of the room. The author compares his

See BULLSHIT, Continued on Page 10

Twist of Fate

Oliver Twist

Directed by Roman Polanski
Running Time: 75 minutes
Opens in theaters Sept. 30.

By LESTER GRAY
Arts Editor

Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens' second novel, was originally serialized in newspapers. As such it presents an unfolding life-on-a-precipice drama that kept the reader coming back. This durable and timeless story has inspired films, plays, and musicals. It is not one of Dickens most critically acclaimed works, but audiences love it. They continue to find its themes of crime and social injustice resonant and its characters sympathetic.

Its popularity notwithstanding, the only obvious reason for a director to remake something so often revisited is to demonstrate eccentricity or mastery. With Roman Polanski it's the latter: his expertise evident in every aspect of this film, from set design to dialog, seamlessly imbricate. You could enjoy this rendition even without the audio track, the characters drawn effectively against a tableau of blended and muted hues, the fabric of the society faded even in its brightest moments.

The titular Oliver (Barney Clark) is a nine-year-old orphan with a penury so profound he has to borrow his name. Consigned to a workhouse, from which he is demoted to indentured servitude with an undertaker, our young Mr. Twist escapes and heads for what he hopes is a better life in London. Hungry and uninitiated in the ways of the city, he proves the perfect recruit for a band of young thieves.

Fagin (Ben Kingsley), a fence for stolen goods, serves as mentor and supervisor to these puerile pickpockets for whom he provides shelter. Now grown decrepit, there are hints that at one time he knew of a better life. Now his survival depends on the manipulation of young minds and their conviction that without him, they would be left vulnerable in a predatory world.

Fagin sends Oliver out on the streets of London, to observe the old man's journeymen fingers apply their

trade. Showing off for the apprentice, they get sloppy. Detected in their thievery, they hightail it and Oliver, although innocent, is arrested. In a "twist" of fate he is exonerated by the testimony of the victim. In an act of philanthropy, the young orphan is taken by this prosperous citizen to live in a luxurious home, the likes of which our young vagabond has never imagined. Subsequently in a battle of good and evil, both improbable and predictable, the young man's soul hangs in a melodramatic but nonetheless delightful balance.

But it is Fagin, brought fully alive through Kingsley, and to a lesser extent The Artful Dodger and Nancy the prostitute, that offer us full characters: conflicted souls in which conscience has given way to lives of crime. There are mild suggestions that these lives were not of choice, but likely if not inevitable consequences of poverty.

On the other hand, Oliver is a two-dimensional cherub, curious not only to the audience but to the film's other characters. The latter are alternately attracted and repulsed by his angelic countenance and befuddled by his naiveté. While young Twist is no doubt virtuous, his rags-to-riches journey is portrayed more as providential than due to any practice of the Protestant ethic.

Dickens' story, when it was written, foreshadowed the country-to-ghetto pilgrimage that was to become a staple of industrialization: journeys undertaken against odds made favorable only in comparison to the alternative of staying put. One hundred and eighty years after the first publication of the book, the story, on a global stage, remains contemporary.

Polanski, superb in his craft and possessing a first-hand knowledge of life on the streets, knows of what he speaks. He revisits this story, obviously feeling that he can tell it as well or better than most. He's correct. ■

Can I have some more, sir? Ben Kingsley, as Fagin, and Barney Clark, as the "out-dacious" Oliver, star in the remake of Oliver Twist.



Adventures
in Irony



Dr. Wes Browning

We are all one
big happy family,
we and our cops.
I've always said,
there's nobody I
like having be my
friend more than
a Seattle cop.
Always said that.

The LAPD is saying that police from at least four suburban cities have been spotted dropping homeless people in downtown Los Angeles. This annoys the LAPD, because not only is it a human rights violation, but it also makes more work for everybody. Heck, now they have to shove them all in a wagon and drive them back. What a pain.

Meanwhile, I don't know of any claims that suburban police are dumping their homeless here in Emerald City. We have it so good. We don't have any problems, our own police are wonderful and so are their colleagues in our neighboring cities. We are all one big happy family, we and our cops. I've always said, there's nobody I like having be my friend more than a Seattle cop. Always said that.

That's why I'm not happy to mention a little something that's been going on outside my window once or twice a week every week for the last — oh I don't know, maybe eight or nine weeks. It hasn't been too long, no, I'm not complaining, really, I don't need the sleep, really I don't. A little something involving Seattle cops. Did I mention that I love cops? Everyone who's ever been homeless loves cops. Please don't hurt me.

So, there've been rumors for some time now that a homeless woman was found in a Seattle alley almost decapitated. I haven't been able to confirm this rumor. But I am absolutely positive that the police care about the safety of all of Seattle's homeless and relate to their fears.

So anyway, there were these rumors, and subsequently large numbers of homeless people started sleeping together, evidently for self-protection: out on the sidewalk, under my window, every night.

One Big Happy Family

Here's a shock: the LAPD is reporting police abuses!

Not their own, of course. That'll happen the same day pigs fly out my butt and put on a military air show over the city with nobody watching.

But I'm still impressed.

So, then, our beloved Seattle police, please don't hurt me for saying this, started driving by in their big-ass cruisers and announcing over their bullhorns that those people had to disperse, because residents of my building (that would be me and people like me) didn't want them there — even though they weren't bothering me, and I understood why they were there, and I hadn't complained. Even though it's legal to sleep on Seattle sidewalks after nine o'clock at night, and this was happening after midnight.

OK, I guess the cops heard a different drummer, as they say. I don't know if it's allowed for cops to listen to that different a drummer, but, like I say, we love our cops, and they always do us up right. Yay. Please don't hurt me for saying the thing about the drummers.

But then a week ago last Saturday I was woken up by the bullhorns I didn't ask for and I heard, apparently in answer to the question, "Where are we supposed to sleep?" the words "I'm not concerned about that, I'm concerned about the sidewalk."

The sidewalk? They're concerned about the sidewalk? Nobody's decapitated a sidewalk. That was very confusing for me. Please don't hurt me for being confused.

Finally, a few days later, I was woken up at 1:30 a.m. by this piece of advice by bullhorn: "If you people WANT to sleep outdoors, go to one of the parks, like [he suggested one here], and sleep there."

At that I was really confused, because it IS illegal to sleep in the parks at night. Were our police trying to entrap people by ordering them to commit an illegal act so that they could then arrest them and deny having given the order? That would be wrong. But what else would induce police officers, WHO CARE ABOUT THE LAW, to order people to break it?

Well? Any answers? I'd appreciate hearing from Kerlikowske, the minute he can think of one. ■



Saturday, Sept. 10, 9:48 p.m., 1100 block First Ave. / Post Alley. Officers were dispatched to a miscellaneous call, and upon arrival spoke to the subject, a transient Black male aged 44. He was camped out under the stairwell in the 1100 block between 1st Ave and Post Alley. A routine name check showed he was under active Department of Corrections supervision, and he was placed into custody and transported to the West Precinct. At the Precinct, subject signed a stipulated agreement with the DOC for work release. He was interviewed by a DOC officer and released.

Sunday, Sept. 11, 5:12 a.m., Dexter Ave. N / Thomas St. Officers saw suspect, a transient white female aged 17, speaking to a male pedestrian at approximately 4:30 a.m. They continued their patrol and noticed her again at Dexter and Thomas, talking to a male in a dark SUV. At 5:12 they saw her still standing on the corner of Dexter and Thomas. She was alone this time, so they stopped to investigate her activities. She gave them a name, but officers could find no record of that name with the DOC or the Department of Licensing. Based on their observations they arrested her for Prostitution Loitering. She was taken to King County Jail, where the officers were informed that she was under 18; they were also provided with her real name. Suspect has no parents or foster parents, and stated that she wanted to be released to a "friend." Officers suspected that the "friend" was her pimp, and instead they took her to the Youth Services Center at Spruce Street and left her in their care.

Saturday, Sept. 17, 8:03 p.m., Fourth Ave. and Dilling Way, Courthouse Park. Officers observed five subjects sleeping on bedding on the south side lawn of Courthouse Park. Posted approximately 15 feet away was a "No Camping in the Park" sign. Officers made contact with the subjects, and ID'd one of them, a transient Black male aged 47. A name check revealed he had been previously trespassed from all city parks for one year on 5/31/05. He was arrested and booked into King County Jail for trespass.

Saturday, Sept. 17, 8:29 p.m., Third Ave., Courthouse Park. Suspect, a transient Black male aged 41, was contacted for camping in Courthouse Park. Suspect had laid out cardboard and had put his bedding on the top. His backpack was next to his sleeping site. A name check showed that he had been previously trespassed for one year on July 1. A search turned up a metal pipe, which suspect stated was a marijuana pipe. He was arrested and booked into King County Jail for trespass; officer requested additional charges for narcotics paraphernalia, if applicable.

Compiled from incident reports of the Seattle Police Department by Emma Quinn. Got your own experience to relate? Call us at (206) 441-3247 ext. 207 and we'll get the scoop.

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— Gloria Steinem

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BULLSHIT, Continued from Page 8

father, shitfaced and overcome with the pain of existence, to Noah, and wonders if he the son, like Ham, is now and forever cursed.

It seems the more the son tries to avoid the father, the more inevitably their lives converge. When the father loses his room and winds up at Pine Street, he turns out to be the antisocial sort of drunk who doesn't do well in institutional settings. The vote to bar Flynn the Elder is 9-1, with an abstention. Nick says he'd like to think he abstained, but he doesn't remember. "It's just as likely that I voted to bar my father, in support of my coworkers."

By this time, Nick has worked at Pine Street for three years, long enough to be an old-timer, and has opted for outreach van duty to steer clear of additional father-son reunions. Ironically, the bar once again puts Flynn senior within the circuit of the son. Eventually, Flynn discovers that in shunning his father, he's avoiding himself, and that his own flaws and history cannot be so easily ignored. Flynn writes:

"Some part of me knew that he would show up, that if I stood in one place long enough he would find me, like you're taught to do when you're lost. But they never taught us what to do if both of you are lost, and you both end up in the same place, waiting."

In the end, 40 pages of his father's novel, *The Button Man*, arrive in Nick's mailbox. It falls upon the son to complete the dream and become, ironically, his father's ghostwriter and publisher. It is a musical.

Clink/Clank/Clunk

I think that I am drunk.

Clunk/Clank/Clunk

I really need a drink.

When Flynn considers his father's terrors — of success, of being a writer, of being a father — the answers, even, to some extent, the questions, elude him. By laying bare his father's esteem-salvaging pipedream of literary greatness, Flynn reluctantly becomes the Iceman who can't go back. He is the bearer of hard truth, the expositor and author of the unknown consequence, the destroyer of the fantasy.

Flynn's darkly funny white trash anthem reminds us that the essence of humor is two parts cruelty to one part kindness. This is the sort of book that makes you gulp the words in great gasping runs, pausing every few hours to breathe until, too quickly, it is done. Ready or not, there it is. You really couldn't make this shit up. ■



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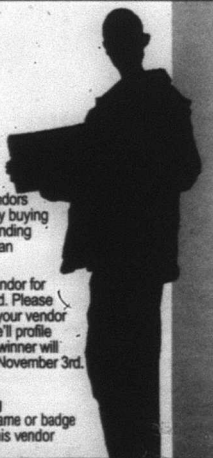
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Letters

editor@realchangenews.org

The kids are all right

Dear Real Change,

Thank you for your personal recognition and announcement of the Mockingbird Society receiving the prestigious Angels in Adoption Award for 2005. Mockingbird Society has established several innovative programs that address and solve current problems in the child welfare system, as well as give youth who have experienced foster care and/or homelessness a voice and forum to discuss accessing state services. I traveled to Washington D.C. to personally accept the award; unfortunately, because there was no compensation for the cost of travel, youth from the Mockingbird Society/Mockingbird Times were unable to accompany me.

However, on Nov. 12, youth will travel with me to Baltimore for the "It's My Life" conference sponsored by Casey Family Programs. They will present workshops related to their involvement with our Youth LEAD (Leadership, Employment/Education and Advocacy Development) program, which includes the *Mockingbird Times*, our Youth Speakers Panel, and ASK-Y (Advocates for System Kids and Youth), our youth advocacy coalition. This is one of

many opportunities where youth from Mockingbird Society are able to share their voice and their expertise toward advancing our mission to improve the lives of marginalized youth throughout the nation. The youth directly involved in Mockingbird Society play a leadership role in educating communities and individuals of the current trends and issues that youth who have experienced foster care and/or homelessness face.

Thank you again for your work and for the partnership shared between Real Change and Mockingbird Society.

Jim Theofelis

**Founder & Executive Director
Mockingbird Society**

Note from a guest writer:

[The use of the word "refugee" to describe African Americans whose lives were disrupted by Hurricane Katrina was in "gross error" for one reader, who wrote us to say: "We are not refugees, we are 'American citizens.'" —Ed.]

I would like to publicly acknowledge and apologize for my misuse of the word "refugee" in my opinion piece ["Behind the Section 8 Ball," Sept. 7]. A more appropriate phrase, "displaced people," avoids any implications of "otherness" or second-class citizenship to the African American community in New Orleans.

**Emily Paddison, Section 8
Community Organizer
Tenants Union of Washington**

Real Change welcomes letters to the editor of up to 250 words in length. Please include name, address, phone number, and email for author verification. Letters should be addressed to Editor at Real Change, 2129 2nd Ave., Seattle, WA, 98121, or emailed to editor@realchangenews.org.



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Calendar

This Week's Top Ten

Wednesday 9/28

If John G. Roberts becomes a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, he will vote on pertinent issues such as abortion, affirmative action, and Title IX, which could place the rights of women and girls in jeopardy. Seattle NOW presents a panel discussion on the state of the nomination, what is at risk, and what you can do. 6:30 p.m., Jackson St. Center, 306 23rd Ave. S., Suite 200, www.nouseattle.org.

Wednesday 9/28

The documentary *Get Up, Stand Up: The Story of Pop and Protest* investigates and celebrates the power of music to convey social dissatisfaction and political protest by tracing its origins in the labor movement to the baby boomer generation during the Vietnam War. 9 p.m., KCTS. Check your local listing: www.kcts.org.

Should we consider environmental factors when building? University of Washington professor David Miller discusses the contemporary movements in construction and the benefits of green design in his book *Toward a New Regionalism: Environmental Architecture in the Pacific Northwest*. Advanced registration required due to limited seating: (206) 667-9184. 5 p.m., Rainier Square, Atrium, 1333 Fifth Ave., Suite 300.

Thursday 9/29

The Phinney Ecovillage presents a class on living simply, slowly, and leaving a smaller ecological footprint. Class fee: \$5. 7:30 p.m., Phinney Neighborhood Center, 6532 Phinney Ave. N.

Friday 9/30

After the devastation of civil war and genocide, Rwanda must recover and rebuild. With a population that is seventy percent female, the women of Rwanda are the central force leading the country. The documentary *Ladies First: The Role of Women in Rwanda's Nation Building* explores the challenges they face. Free, but donations appreciated. 7 p.m., Keystone Church, 5019 Keystone Place. Info: wncp@bridgins.org.

Friday 9/30

A film that breaks down the barrier between fact and fiction, *Close-up*, from Iranian directors Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf, tells the true story of a man arrested for impersonating the great Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. The actors in the film are the real people from the true story, and the film features actual footage from the imposter's trial. Tickets: \$8 general, \$6 seniors and students, \$5 members. 7 p.m., Northwest Film Forum, 1515 12th Ave., www.nwfilmforum.org.

Saturday 10/1 & Sunday 10/2

Ustav 2005 is the second annual festival of Indian performing arts, featuring local and visiting artists, a tabla demonstration, music, performances, and authentic snacks. Tickets: \$8-\$10. Saturday 11 a.m. - 8 p.m., Sunday noon-7, Town Hall, 1119 Eighth Avenue. Info: www.ragamala.org.

Sunday 10/2

Seattle Public Library's September Project presents a staged reading of Mark Jenkins' play, *All Powers Necessary and Convenient*, a dramatization of the Washington State Legislature's 1948 Canwell Committee hearings that smeared the University of Washington faculty and staff along with local artists and activists

as communists. 2 p.m., Central Library, 1000 Fourth Ave., (206) 386-4636, www.spl.org.

Wednesday 10/5

Midwood, Brooklyn (also called Little Pakistan) has seen 20,000 residents leave since the 9/11 attacks. Tram Nguyen's book, *We Are All Suspects Now: Untold Stories from Immigrant America After 9/11*, shows that for many Muslims and Arabs, the American dream has become a nightmare, and she suggests proactive steps towards fighting the growing climate of xenophobia and intimidation. 7 p.m., University Bookstore, 4326 University Way NE, (206) 634-3400, www.bookstore.washington.edu.

Director's Corner

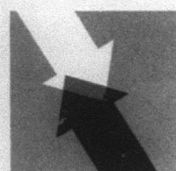


It seems we've turned a corner. *Real Change* is hearing more and more from those who say we've sold out, become incompetent, or otherwise ignored this or that pet cause. It's nice to know people care.

Fourth place runner-up City Council Candidate Angel Bolaños, for example, tells us he will never again buy *Real Change* for as long as he lives in Seattle because we didn't deliver the coverage he thought he deserved. "I spent at least half an hour talking with your reporter and what did I get? Disrespect, discrimination and the feeling that your reporter wasted my time." Earth to Bolaños: if you want coverage, make some news. What do we look like? The Free Ride Zone?

Last week we ran a fairly neutral article about how Pike Place Market vendors were upset about a Mayoral appointment to the Market's governing council. The article quoted two critics and two supporters of the decision, and called the Mayor's appointment controversial at best. Still, one caller compared us derisively to *The Seattle Weekly* and found it sad that *Real Change*, the paper of the underdog, could be so unfair and incompetent.

Here's the deal. We're your activist community newspaper, here to support progressive causes wherever we find them. But that doesn't mean we're brain-dead party-liners. So keep the letters coming. And we'll do our best to call things as we see them.



First things First

Get Involved • Take Action

City Budget: Tell Council What You Think

Issue: This week, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels released his 2006 Proposed Budget. This budget was initially presented last year. Now it is time for the City Council to formally adopt it.

Background: As he presented the proposed budget to the City Council, Mayor Nickels stated that "We can move beyond managing homelessness and help people live in health and with dignity. In the wake of Katrina, we will rededicate ourselves to improving the lives of our own neighbors who live in poverty and pain."

The 2006 Proposed Budget contains several initiatives to support Seattle's most vulnerable populations: children, the poor, the homeless, and the hungry:

- In the first major step toward implementing the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness, \$1 million is earmarked for the new homeless hygiene center located at the Morrison Hotel on Third Avenue. Called Connections, the place will provide homeless people with what they need to reconnect with the community: meals, showers, a place to wash their clothes, a safe place to be during the day, plus services and referrals they need to get healthy, find jobs, access long-term housing, and ultimately to live independently. This will help 3,000 people a year start to break the cycle of homelessness.
- \$294,000 will go to improve services for residents of South Park to address gang prevention, services to overcome addictions, academic needs of children, parenting education, the creation of a place for young people to go for help, Community Learning Centers, preschool classrooms for four-year-olds, and training for childcare providers.
- The Fleets and Facilities Department also receives \$30,000 for operation of an emergency, severe-weather shelter in City Hall.
- About \$2.4 million is provided for the Office of Housing to support construction of low-income housing in the South Lake Union neighborhood.
- In addition, Seattle will hire 15 more firefighters and 25 more police officers and improve their equipment.

The Seattle City Council will host a public Town Hall Budget Meeting on Thurs., Sept. 29, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, located at 1634 19th Avenue. This is an informal opportunity for the public to share their ideas and concerns regarding the city's 2006 Proposed Budget.

"We want to hear from citizens what they think should be the city's priorities regarding the city's budget," says Councilmember Richard McIver. "Hopefully, the economic upturn will allow the city to restore some of the services that were eliminated or reduced when money was unavailable."

Action: Support the most vulnerable members of Seattle by providing input on the budget. Be aware of these key opportunities:

Thursday, Sept. 29: Town Hall Budget Meeting at Mt. Zion 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Oct. 12: Public Hearing at Council Chambers 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Nov. 3: Public Hearing at Council Chambers 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Or contact Budget Committee chair Richard McIver: richard.mciver@seattle.gov / (206) 684-8800.

IRAQ, Continued from Page 1

democracy can be turned on, that it's something that, if people want it, it can happen overnight. I think it's more of a long-term process."

If there's something Stilt understands, it's a long-term process. In college, at the University of Texas, she recalls that a "plethora of classes" on the Middle East piqued her interest in the region. Sensing that knowledge of this largely misunderstood part of the world would be important to America, she studied Turkish and Arabic. Stilt spent a year working in Kuwait in '89 and '90, leaving one month before the country was invaded by its larger northern neighbor, Iraq. Her time spent there revealed Islam's strong legal component. Back in the U.S., she pursued law to increase her understanding of Islamic law.

Her knowledge of the Middle East, visible in numerous articles printed in legal journals, attracted the attention of the U.S. government. She was recently contacted by what she will only identify as "governmental sources" to assist in the drafting of Iraq's constitution. Initial reservations about the process, she claims, kept her from accepting.

"The writing of the Iraqi constitution cannot be a U.S. process," she asserts. "And I feared that that was the case."

The "swift race to a constitution, she finds, is shortsighted. "There are democracies in the world that don't even have written constitutions," she notes, pointing to both Israel, and Britain, which has a series of laws that can be changed by its parliament.

"I would have said the constitution is not the most important document for

Iraq right now," continues Stilt, "but to work out the on-the-ground, piece-by-piece legislation. And then you build up to a point where a constitution is possible. What we have now, as we all know, is an Oct. 15 deadline, and if it's not accepted, then Iraq has lost all of that time and energy, and they have to start again, because we said so."

This doesn't leave Stilt with high hopes. "I'm not really optimistic. I'm not hiding that," she admits.

Still, Stilt says there is something that can be done.

"I think at this point, the best thing that we can do is to have a greater level of education in the military of Iraqi society." Learning how Iraq is live would help the armed forces in their struggle that

has left more than 20,000 Iraqis and almost 2,000 U.S. military personnel dead. "Then they can start to come in and be partners, and not be occupiers."

A similar responsibility resides with U.S. citizens. "The most important thing that Americans can do is to be more educated about what's going on in Iraq." Being the most powerful nation in the world, she says, demands education, and she notes that with Iraq seeming so far away, national attention has been focused, understandably, on Hurricane Katrina. But, Stilt says, we have little choice but to be informed of what happens inside, as well as outside, of our borders.

"We have to be educated about both and stay on top of both, and call the administration to account on what we are doing." ■

[Resource]

A draft of the Iraqi Constitution can be found at www.nytimes.com/2005/08/28/international/iraqtext_new.html.



UW LAW PROFESSOR KRISTIN STILT, LOOKING WITH A WARY EYE TOWARD THE POTENTIAL RATIFICATION OF IRAQ'S CONSTITUTION NEXT MONTH. PHOTO BY BROOKE KEMPNER.

330, Continued from Page 1

\$350,000, or \$1,050,000 tops if a doctor, hospital and insurer all lose in a single case — that is, if the case ever makes it to court.

To stop lawsuits altogether, I-330 would introduce a waiver form that doctors could use to make patients accept binding arbitration. Before getting medical treatment, drugs, or even

"Imagine having an asthma attack and an ambulance arrives, but before treatment they require you to sign your legal rights away. It's very serious."

— Barb Flye, chair of the No on I-330 campaign

"Imagine having an asthma attack and an ambulance arrives, but before treatment they require you to sign your legal rights away," says Barb Flye, chair of the No on I-330 campaign. "It's very serious."

Neurologist, Ken Isaacs, president of the state medical association, says I-330 is necessary to curb the type of runaway million-dollar settlements that have jacked up malpractice insurance to crisis proportions. His premium, for instance, is \$24,000 a year. Other specialists, he says, pay as much as \$100,000.

By capping non-economic damages and, with them, the fees of trial lawyers (who typically get paid after the fact by taking a cut of the settlement), I-330 "keeps the costs under more sensible control so patients have the opportunity for access to care," Isaacs says.

Public Citizen and members of the Washington State Trial Lawyers Association, which is backing a competing measure, Initiative 336, to curb bad doctors rather than lawsuits, say million-dollar malpractice settlements are the exception — and on the decline. Since 1991, Public Citizen says, the number of payments has dropped 6.1 percent. Since 2002, the amounts paid

are down 30.6 percent, with only two million-dollar payouts made last year — the same as in 1991.

"Lawsuits have not gone up and payouts have stayed the same. There's no medical malpractice crisis," says Karen Koehler, a Seattle trial attorney and WSTLA officer.

Flye and Koehler say the people whom I-330 would hurt most are the poor and those who don't work, such as women and children. When a jury adds up economic damages such as medical bills and lost earnings (something I-330 would not affect), homemakers and the homeless get far less than, say, a CEO of a company, something juries make up for today with a higher award for pain and suffering.

"Putting a cap on non-economic damages is incredibly discriminatory to low wage-earners," Flye says.

What's more, Koehler says, a \$350,000 cap makes it nearly impossible for lawyers to take malpractice cases, because they cost a lot of money up-front to investigate.

In the Guiles' case, the investigation cost \$50,000 — money Bob Guile, a former claims adjuster, says he and his wife couldn't have paid their lawyer, who took the case on contingency.

In the wake of Linda's 10 surgeries and lost wages (she had to pull back to part-time work as a teacher certification specialist), Guile says the couple was out \$2.3 million but settled for \$1.2 million. After paying the lawyer and reimbursing Linda's insurance carrier for her medical care, Guile says they have \$400,000 left, which is nothing for the life they once enjoyed.

If Linda gets to the point of needing assisted care, Guile says, "that \$400,000 will be gone in a heartbeat."

"The doctors say pain and suffering is winning the lottery," Guile says. But "that is money to survive on. God." ■

The vendor told you the paper works. So does Real Change.

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