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## Hope, not cynicism, in El Salvador

Whatever level of U.S. involvement the Bush administration attempts to sustain in Central America, it should employ American power, money and leverage to promote peace, justice and self-determination for Central Americans.

That piety seems self-evident, and Washington policymakers would contend that just such a goal has guided them during the 1980s. But, they might add, the means to that end are infinitely more complex than they might appear, and may include tolerating knaves in the meantime.

Yes and no. It is true that the U.S. would not get far by dealing only with the perfumed gentlemen of the world, but in Central America this country has lain down with enough skunks to make its policies seem almost irredeemably malodorous.

In El Salvador, the U.S. has paid out more than \$3 billion this decade to prop up the economy and bankroll a Salvadoran military brutally insensitive to the rights of the citizens it ostensibly serves by combating anti-government rebels. Efforts to prosecute military officers accused of attacking and killing innocents have been unavailing, feeding a sense of cynicism and futility about so-called democracy building there.

So a great deal of skepticism attends the news that two officers and seven soldiers are to stand trial in the massacre of 10 unarmed civilians in September. The Salvadoran military acknowledged responsibility after first claiming guerrillas did the killing, and on Wednesday a Salvadoran judge indicted the officers, a major

and a lieutenant, and the soldiers on murder charges. "This is a breakthrough," said U.S. Ambassador William Walker when the military changed its story. "It's indicative that they might approach these cases in a different way in the future." The indictments are an even stronger indication of a new approach.

Although the Salvadoran army has been implicated in many civilian murders, no officer has ever been tried and convicted. Eight soldiers have been convicted of abuses, and six of those for killing Americans.

This comes in the context of human-rights group charges that the army is stepping up abuses, of renewed fear of death-squad attacks should the Arena party win Sunday's presidential elections, and of rising rebel activity meant to intimidate voters. Guerrillas fired grenades and homemade bombs at the presidential palace Wednesday, and gunmen killed a right-wing academic in downtown San Salvador.

Vice President Dan Quayle last month carried a reminder to El Salvador of the human-rights tune the U.S. piper wants called—a variation on a similar warning from Vice President Bush in 1983.

The message still applies. Unless the United States, rejecting cynicism and embracing hope, keeps the pressure on El Salvador to respect human rights, it betrays its own ideals, disregards the security of Salvadorans and erodes the justification for its continuing involvement. The indictments this week are a new reason to believe that such pressure works and that this time justice might be done.

## The college football scandal (cont.)

College football has become a giant cartel of educational institutions arrayed against the interests of the young men who do the actual playing. The ongoing Chicago trial of two sports agents accused of inducing players to violate NCAA rules is a daily expose of the sordid nature of the system. But there are signs that this pious fraud is beginning to unravel.

Agents Lloyd Bloom and Norby Walters of World Sports & Entertainment Inc. have been charged with several counts of extortion, mail fraud, racketeering and other crimes. Federal prosecutors say they signed athletes to representation contracts before their college eligibility had expired—and thus defrauded the universities that had given them athletic scholarships.

They may or may not be convicted. But the system is certainly guilty. Most players sacrifice enormous amounts of time and sweat for the gridiron glory and financial gain of State U. and get little in return but the remote chance of a pro career.

The education they're supposed to get is often a pathetic parody of the real thing. Ronnie Harmon, a former client of Bloom and Walters who was a running back for lowa, was allowed to take courses in bowling and billiards. During his first three years, he took exactly one course in his major, computer science. The university, however, says he met its eligibili-

ty requirements. Harmon, like two out of every three major college football players, never got a degree.

Colleges have kept their costs down by agreeing among themselves to forbid players to be paid like the professionals they are. The National Football League has helped by keeping hands off college players until their eligibility is up.

But neither the NCAA nor the NFL apparently has the power to stop players from turning pro when they choose. A few players have realized that and are taking advantage of it. At least five have applied for inclusion in the upcoming NFL draft even though they could play another year in college. Another, Heisman Trophy winner Barry Sanders of Oklahoma State, is expected to follow suit. The NFL disapproves, but goes along rather than risk losing a landmark lawsuit.

This trend won't help college players who lack the talent to make the pros, which is most of them. But it's a welcome step toward dismantling the unsavory system now prevailing.

Ending the charade means either that schools will have to start paying players or that they will have to stop awarding athletic scholarships, emulating the many schools that treat academics with the proper scriousness. Either approach would end the chronic scandals of the status quo and improve the sorry lot of the college athlete.

## Still a Titanic of a state

Foes of South Africa's wicked apartheid system have little to cheer about in the ruling National Party's struggles to replace a fiercely reluctant President P.W. Botha with a younger leader.

Don't expect a bold change of course under new party leader F.W. de Klerk. He rose in the ranks as an outspoken opponent of Botha's relatively mild reforms, such as relaxing residential segregation laws.

A national education minister and a regional party leader, de Klerk replaced Botha in February as the party's chief and has since been designated to replace him as president. His big asset seems to be his ability to appease nervous conservatives.

Optimists find hope in a recent address he gave to party leaders in which he declared what for most of the world is quite obvious: Racism is bad, and 5 million whites cannot expect to dominate 30 million blacks much longer.

Sounds good, but talk has proved cheap for South Africa's white-minority leaders. They have no reason to expect respect from the rest of the world until they take at least three decisive steps: Abolish apartheid, legally recognize black opposition leaders and start negotiating with them.

Botha took tentative baby steps toward the first by whittling away some of the republic's most egregious—and difficult-to-enforce—racial segregation laws. But, while giving lip service to racial progress, he actually backed away from black political empowerment by imposing the worst political repression the republic has seen since the National Party came to power 41 years ago.

At 53, de Klerk is 20 years younger than Botha, but he has done little to suggest that he belongs to a new generation willing to challenge the prevailing foolishness that has made his country a pariah of the world. South Africa remains a Titanic among ships of state, floating serenely, shifting course with agonizing slug-

gishness, in a sea of thickening icebergs. Considering the dime's worth of difference between them, P.W. Botha's celebrated struggle with his rising rival appears to be more personal and political than substantive and promising. The apartheid regime has yet to come to its senses, judging by the signals de Klerk has sent so far. He is welcome to prove the world wrong.

### Voice of the people

## Fairness must guide product liability

CHICAGO—A laboratory supply manufacturer in suburban Chicago halts production of a line of hot and cold chemical packs, laying off six workers. In Decatur, a manufacturer of grain handling machinery drops industrial manlifts from its product line. A Rockford industrial heating manufacturer absorbs extra production costs not faced by foreign competitors.

These are all examples of how the Illinois economy is being chilled by the uncertainties of our product liability system. It is far too unpredictable. Businesses have no way of knowing when they will be sued, on what grounds, which government regulatory approvals count in the courtroom, and the extent to which they will be held accountable for the actions of others.

While the direct financial consequences of product liability lawsuits are substantial, including insurance and defense costs, the indirect costs are even more harmful.

These indirect costs are based on the fear of unknown consequences. A 1988 survey of the nation's chief executive officers found that onethird of the companies questioned said they had halted the introduction of new products because of fears over liability lawsuits. These products, according to the Conference Board survey, range from airplanes and antipollution devices to drugs and health-care equipment.

This problem is especially serious in Illinois, with its large industrial base and vulnerability to overseas competitors who do not have to factor unchecked product liability laws into their planning. That is why more than 50 corporations and trade associations have banded together as the Illinois Product Liability Project to advocate reforms in this session of the General Assembly.

We recognize the responsibility of corporations to make sure products are safe and reliable. Reasonable product liability laws help make products safer. But the unchecked spread of product liability over the past two decades has imposed a significant cost on economic well-being.

This cost is measured in lost job opportunities, diminished industrial growth, decreased development of safe and useful new technologies and products, and an uneven playing field with foreign industrial competitors.

We are not launching an assault on the rights of injured people to recover where there is fault or products are unreasonably dangerous. Nor are we trying to limit the ability of their legal counsel to represent them effectively. Instead, we seek greater predictability and balance in the system through reasonable and fair steps that will thaw some of its chilling effects on business productivity:

 There should be common-sense recognition of federal and state product safety standards, so that manufacturers will not find themselves held liable in the future for products made in accordance with existing government rules. If the rules need to be changed through legislative or administrative action, they should be changed. It is extremely expensive, however, to produce and market a product if managers cannot predict what the rules will be at different times in different courtrooms.

 Explicit and detailed product warnings voluntarily provided by the manufacturer or required by the government should be sufficient if given to likely users or those supervising them. Nor should there be liability for failure to warn if the danger was either unknown at the time the product was made, or was obvious to the user.

 Businesses should not be second-guessed on designs or technologies that represented the state of the art when the product was made.

 Punitive damages should bear a rational relationship to the injury caused. These damages fluctuate greatly, and often go well beyond punishment and deterrence.

We believe these are fair and balanced reforms that will help restore predictability to the system while preserving the rights of injured people. Ideally, these are the kind of reforms that ultimately will be embraced by the U.S. Congress, given the national scope of this problem. But in the meantime, we can help restore the competitive edge for Illinois industry through their enactment by the General Assembly.

> Malcolm Chester Director of public affairs, Pepsi-Cola General Bottlers

#### Heirens case

WILMETTE-I am appalled at the possibility that William Heirens could be released from prison. This man should be incarcerated for the rest of his life without any possibility of parole. Although I have only been following the Heirens case since I moved to Illinois six years ago, I firmly believe the intent of his sentence in 1946 was for this murderer to serve his life in prison. He should have been sentenced to the electric chair.

Brian E. McAuliffe

### 'Don't free Heirens'

WESTCHESTER—I was extremely saddened by the article "43 years a prisoner."

The report of growing support to set William Heirens free shows that attempts at the manipulation of our justice system take place every day. The fact that Mr. Heirens pleaded guilty to three brutal murders and plea-bargained for three consecutive life sentences to avoid the death penalty should eliminate any chance for parole or clemency. It is of no matter that he has been a "model prisoner" for most of his 43 years in jail.

Eugene J. Belmonte

#### 'I can't forget'

GLENVIEW—I couldn't believe the article about William Heirens in the Tempo section, nor can I believe there is a group formed to seek executive clemency.

Besides the two nurses he killed, he killed Suzanne Degnan, a 6-year-old child dismembered the body and scattered the pieces in sewers and catch basins. His fingerprint was found on the ransom note and he admitted to all the

Because the laws of the '80s have changed, does this mean that anyone incarcerated from the '40s, '50s, '60s and '70s will get executive clemency, too?

Every generation remembers certain killers. Today's generation remembers Gacy, my daughter's generation remembers Richard Speck and my generation remembers William Heirens. I was a child at the time, but I had first-hand information, because my father was a policeman at the Rogers Park station. I can never forget

**Barbara Simmons** 

### News of harmony

RIVER FOREST-Once in a while one reads something really, really special in the newspapers that gives a warm feeling. I am referring to Ann Marie Lipinski's article on harmony reigning as a black church welcomed a Jewish congregation. I am neither black nor Jewish, but I wish I had been there to share their camaraderie.

All of the news about Tower, Khomeini and Rushdie is becoming tiresome. The harmony piece was most welcome.

Lois Haas



#### Exploited bunnies

HIGHLAND PARK—As rabbit commercialism reaches its peak during this holiday season, it is time for humans to increase our awareness of the plight of these most exploited of animals.

Easter rabbit merchandise should only serve to heighten our awareness of the inexplicable cruelty that humans constantly inflict on rabbits. Millions of bunnies are blinded and killed each year by the cosmetic industry's needless irritancy tests; people continue to buy rabbit-fur coats even though man-made material will provide the same amount of warmth; rabbits' feet are sold in gumball machines; and Oregon State University is working with rabbit breeders to produce factory farms for rabbit meat as a preliminary step to the introduction of "bunny burgers" at fast-food restaurants.

There is no rational relationship between our adoration of rabbits during Easter and our complete exploitation of these animals the rest of the year. During the upcoming holiday, all of us need to increase our awareness of rabbit suffering, doing what we can to stop this inhumane treatment from spreading

Mark Lichtenfeld

## 'Gouging elderly'

WESTCHESTER—Jim Edgar's plan to have the elderly beginning at 81 take the road test every two years, and every year starting at 87, is supposed to reduce the fatal accident rate caused by the elderly.

There is more to this than safety on the streets. The politicians want more money and this is how they propose to

At the present time it costs the elderly \$5 to secure a driver's license for four years. By having them take the test every two years it will cost two times \$5, or \$10. And later, every year will cost four times \$5, or \$20.

What will they think of next on how to gouge the elderly? James Kudrna

We invite our readers to share their ideas in these columns. Please write as at Voice of the people, Chicag Fribune. Chicago, Ill. 60011. include your name and address. The more concise the letter, the less we will have to edit it to fit our space.

### Lottery profits

CHICAGO—In response to a letter from Helen Huley, I would like to explain the disposition of lottery profits and clarify our role in supporting education.

The lottery is the fourth largest revenue generator in the state and contributes more than \$500 million annually to the State of Illinois. The state legislature dictates how these funds are allocated and, since legislation passed in 1985, all lottery proceeds (approximately 40 cents of every lottery dollar) are transferred directly to the Common School Fund budget.

Lottery profits do not increase or enhance the state's funding of education but, rather, serve as a part of the state money provided to aid local school districts. Last year, the Common School Fund totaled \$2.03 billion and lottery profits accounted for more than 25 percent of that fund.

If the lottery were not in place, the state would need \$500 million in additional revenues to meet current appropriation levels. In other words, without lottery revenues, either taxpayers would be expected to contribute another \$500 million annually or other important state programs would suffer budget

> Sharon Sharp Director, Illinois State Lottery

#### Lottery 'lies'

WHEATON—It is regretful your newspaper has joined with local radio and television outlets to support the mendaciousness of the Illinois State Lottery.

If some television announcer isn't gushing about the "new Illinois multimillionaires," there will be a hyped-up photograph on your pages showing the happy winner clutching an oversized photo-prop check. The impression given is of big bucks

That's a flat-out lie and you should know it and act accordingly to stop shuckingand-jiving your readers.

Unless the total jackpot is past \$22 million, no one winner is an instant "multimillionaire." Break down a prize into 20 yearly payments, rip off the governmental grab in taxes and, while the final amount is nice to be receiving, it is no "multimillion" to take home. James Brescoll

#### 'Good behavior'

CHICAGO—My wife watched the news today, and as we readied for dinner, she gently told me of another woman who was murdered by a prisoner released on a work furlough.

I hurt at the thought of yet another woman killed so senselessly. I lost a friend in September to the same ruthless circumstances. While getting her car in Scattle, she was

kidnaped, raped and then stabbed to death. Her killer was "fit" to return

to society, his violent crimes somehow washed cleaner by spurious periods of "good behavior."

Kevin Woelfel