

commentary

from other pens...

New lake good idea with cost sharing

The Hutchinson News on new dam:
The Pawnee Watershed district sees great recreational potential for a lake proposed for a site eight miles west of Jetmore.
But the project's price tag could cause a case of sticker shock for Kansas taxpayers.
The district has contracted to buy 1,540 acres of land where it wants to build a 35-foot high dam across Buckner Creek in Hodgeman County's Horseshief Canyon. Eventually, the water would back up to create a 450-acre lake with a maximum depth of 50 feet.
While that's more than five times the size of Meade Lake's 80 acres, it's less than half of Scott Lake's 1,180 acres and considerably smaller than 3,500-acre Kanopolis Lake or 9,500-acre Cheney Reservoir.
Construction costs would run an estimated \$4 million...
While the watershed district supports the lake project, it hopes Kansas taxpayers will foot the bill. It has applied for funding through the State Conservation Commission's Multipurpose Small Lakes program.
That program provides state financial assistance to governmental and other entities for the construction or renovation of a dam for flood control, water supply and recreation purposes.
Last year, the program funded three projects costing more than \$2.8 million. So building a dam on Buckner Creek would cost at least 40 percent more than all three projects funded through the small lakes program last year.
If the watershed district wants the lake to become a reality, perhaps it should commit to match state funds, dollar for dollar.

The Hays Daily News on conserving water:
Whether it will actually help conserve Kansas' water resources remains to be seen, but in concept a proposed water banking plan is a step in the right direction.
Both the House and Senate have approved preliminary versions of the bill. It would allow holders of water rights to save unused water by depositing rights tot hat water into an account for up to five years.
One of the reasons Kansas is seeing its groundwater supplies slowly dry up is water rights that are treated as virtually untouchable. Except that holders of these rights must use their water or lose their rights.
The use-it-or-lose-it philosophy obviously encourages waste, to the point of irrigating during a rainstorm.
The water bank idea might curtail some of this wasteful water usage. Irrigators, who use the vast majority of water in Kansas, could save water they don't need or lease unused water rights for a profit...
Movement on this coincides with separate legislation that would impose stricter enforcement of water usage and impose fines on irrigators who use more water than allowed...
Gov. Bill Graves has backed a 20-year deadline to achieve zero depletion, which means the state would be taking no more water from its aquifers than is replenished regularly...
The goal is reasonable and responsible, but if the state is going to accomplish it, it is going to have to start now the process of changing its ways.

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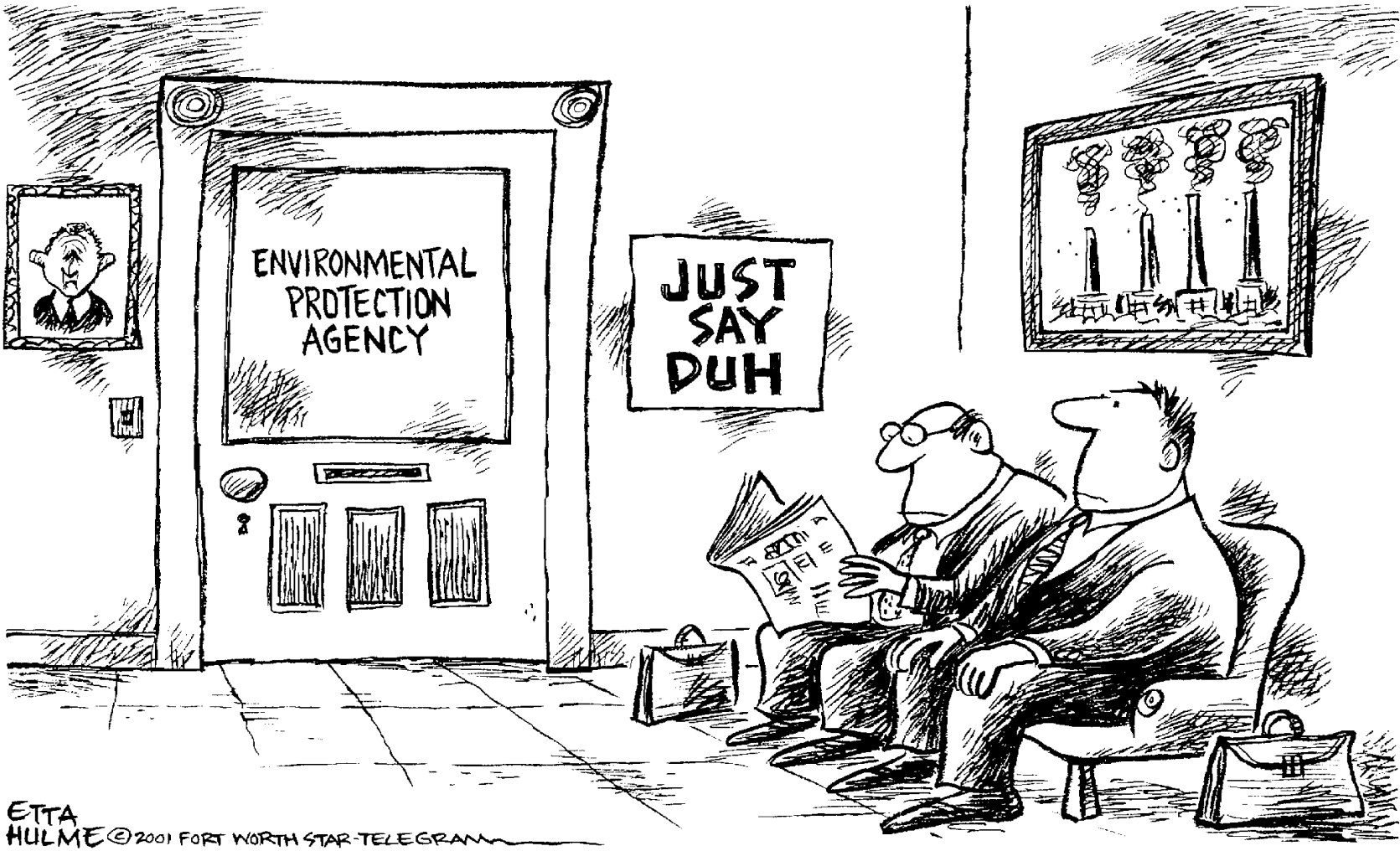
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Plenty to worry about the next four years

I wonder if Al Gore, like a losing coach, keeps running the final few months of 2000 in his head as if it were a videotape, freeze-framing certain moments, fast-forwarding to others, calling in Tipper from the garden to look at details he never noticed that could have made all the difference.
I wonder if he agrees now that perhaps he was just a bit overzealous in adopting every consultant's suggestion, so that he ended up looking less like a presidential candidate than an eager starlet on a round of auditions. Does he now think that distancing himself not only from Bill Clinton, but also from the accomplishments of the administration left the American public with little on which to judge him?
Maybe Gore has folded up the last year like a winter sweater and put it away. But certainly many of his supporters haven't, and I understand the impulse, believe me. When I see in the paper that President Bush is fighting against reducing arsenic in our drinking water, and that he reversed his pledge to limit carbon dioxide emissions, and that he is disturbingly cavalier about the separation of church and state, I find myself thinking back to those long, uncertain weeks in Florida and cursing the combination of circumstances that screwed Gore out of his rightful place in the White House.
Then along comes this USA Today/Knight-Ridder study this week on the Florida recount. The



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study sought to answer the question: Who would have won had the U.S. Supreme Court not stepped in and halted the recount in Florida, thus handing the presidency to Bush?
Remember, this was our main complaint — that Bush stole the election because a Bush-leaning Supreme Court prevented the democratic process from taking its course. Had the votes been counted, we said, our man would have been parading down Pennsylvania Avenue in January instead of George W.
Now we know with a fair amount of certainty that this is not the case.
Using the fairly liberal recount standards Gore advocated — and the Florida Supreme Court mandated — Bush would have stretched his lead over Gore to 1,665 votes, the study said.
Here's the irony: Had the votes been tallied in the way many Republicans wanted, which was to count ballots only if a hole was cleanly punched, Gore would have won by three votes, at least according

to this study.
Yes, we can still argue that many African Americans in Miami were prevented from voting because of registration foul-ups and that Palm Beach County's confusing "butterfly ballot" caused some Gore supporters to vote for Pat Buchanan by mistake.
But the bottom line is a winner had to be declared. Bush was that winner, and no follow-up study so far has shown that decision was in error. George W. is in the White House with a four-year lease. There is no getting around it.
There comes a time in all contests when the defeated need to accept defeat and move on. I don't know if Al Gore has, but I know that we no longer have a choice. We can deny Bush's right to the presidency all we want, but we can't deny him the power of it. So the more energy we devote to fighting the legitimacy of Bush's presidency, the less we have to fight his threats against our water and air, a woman's right to control of her own body and the separation of church and state.
We can't afford to be worrying about what happened in Florida last year. We need to be worrying about what's happening right now, right here.
Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

Bush must explain his foreign policy



morton kondracke
• commentary

When the China spy-plane drama is over, President Bush needs to explain his foreign policy because it's confusing people — allies, experts and adversaries — and exposing him to tough criticism.
While China deserves blame for failing to release the crew of a U.S. surveillance plane — and Bush is seen so far as handling the crisis well — much of the rest of his foreign policy is causing widespread consternation.
What one former top Clinton administration official refers to as Bush's "sloppy start" in foreign policy could be attributed simply to a new administration's growing pains, particularly common when a governor and foreign policy novice is at the helm.
However, others see it as the product of a conflict between Cold War-minded or "unilateralist" ideologues at the Pentagon and pragmatists at the State Department, with Bush taking sides on an ad hoc basis.
The rough spots are legion. For instance, despite his campaign promise that "help is on the way" for the military, Bush failed to inform Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld after he decided not to seek more Pentagon funding.
Later, he undercut Secretary of State Colin Powell and South Korean President Kim Dae Jung by reversing Clinton's policy on negotiating with North Korea. And recently, he shocked U.S. allies by renouncing the Kyoto agreement on global warming.

curity mediator between the Palestinians and Israelis.
It's unclear whether the administration will allow the United States to continue playing the central role in Middle East diplomacy, much to the dismay of Arab heads of state. France may step into the void, probably with mischievous intentions.
One thing that is clear is that the administration wants to move as fast as possible with a national missile-defense system, but that objective has Europeans, Russians, Chinese — and some Democrats — convinced that the United States is reverting to a Cold War mentality, or to "fortress America" unilateralism.
Even top military officials at the Pentagon are said to be worried that Rumsfeld's comprehensive defense review will lead to deep reductions in ships, troops and planes in favor of "smart" weapons that can be fired at targets from long distances.
Under such a strategy, U.S. personnel would be out of harm's way, but they wouldn't be present — or "forward deployed" — to exert influence and keep the peace.
As one former Clinton administration official reminded me, it's common for ex-governors to have rocky foreign policy beginnings. In 1977, Jimmy Carter wanted to pull U.S. forces out of South Korea, but he was dissuaded. Ronald Reagan mistakenly sent U.S. forces into the middle of Lebanon's civil war. Clinton initially planned to wage a trade war with Japan.
An added factor, according to a former top Clinton official, is that "the Bushies want to show they

are hard-nosed realists — tough compared to what they regard as the undisciplined, woolly-headed internationalists of the Clinton administration. But the effect of what they are doing is exactly the opposite of what they intend," the official continued. "They are coming across as unilateralists — a word they hate — and as arrogant toward other countries."
This official also believes that "there's an enduring battle for the soul of American foreign policy" underway between an ideological "Team Rumsfeld" at the Pentagon, with Vice President Cheney as an ally, and "Team Powell" at the State Department, with Powell in danger of being isolated as the voice of moderates, foreigners and career diplomats.
Bush, this official said, is a "captain of the ship who only occasionally visits the bridge," with the result being "an extraordinary repudiation of America's international role," as exercised by Bush's own father.
This evaluation is a harsh and undoubtedly partisan one of Bush's early foreign policy. But it will gain currency unless Bush refutes it by explaining clearly to the world what his "distinctly American" foreign policy is all about.
Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

berry's world



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