

commentary

from other pens...

U.S. undaunted by drug war setbacks

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — There were smiles around the State Department a while back when the latest CIA estimates on coca production in Colombia were disclosed. It was not a production drop that generated the upbeat mood, only a slowdown in the rate of increase.

Instead of the customary 20-plus percent jump in production, the coca crop was up by a "mere" 11 percent, the result of an eradication effort that, however ambitious, failed to keep pace with new coca plantings.

Nobody ever said the war on drugs would be easy. Officials have cautioned it may be 2005 before the sharp acceleration in U.S. counternarcotics assistance to Colombia produces results.

One of the bright spots on the horizon has been a CIA-sponsored program under which U.S. surveillance planes track suspected drug flights, then alert the Peruvian or Colombian air force, as appropriate. Under the rules of engagement, the suspect flight can be shot down by host country fighters if certain conditions are met.

In the past six years, 30 drug flights over Peru have been shot down, leaving narcotraffickers discouraged and contributing to a two-thirds decline in coca production in that country. Finding Peru inhospitable, many traffickers moved next door to Colombia.

Now even the surveillance program has fallen on hard times, at least over the short term. It has been shelved in the aftermath of the tragic downing Friday of an American missionary flight that Peruvian authorities, notified by the CIA's airborne sleuths, mistook for a drug flight. A U.S. missionary and her daughter were killed.

U.S. and Peruvian officials will try to sort out what happened and then resume the flights after a hiatus, according to current estimates, of a few weeks, during which the two sides will discuss measures to ensure there is no repetition of the incident.

That tragedy will fade from public consciousness but doubts about the wisdom of the overall U.S. drug campaign are expected to linger.

There are complaints that drug crop eradication in Colombia and elsewhere in the Andes has produced little effect on the price or availability of cocaine in the United States, and that chemical and manual eradication programs have pushed growers deeper into the jungle where they level virgin forests to grow their crops.

"Our national and international drug control strategy is not working," a coalition of 39 religious and other groups said in a letter to President Bush in February.

Meanwhile, the civil war in Colombia appears to be worsening. Rightist paramilitary units, aided by chain saws, hammers, stones and machetes, have been massacring innocent villagers in remote areas lately.

"We have returned to the most barbaric era," Colombian Ombudsman Eduardo Cifuentes said after a massacre left dozens dead.

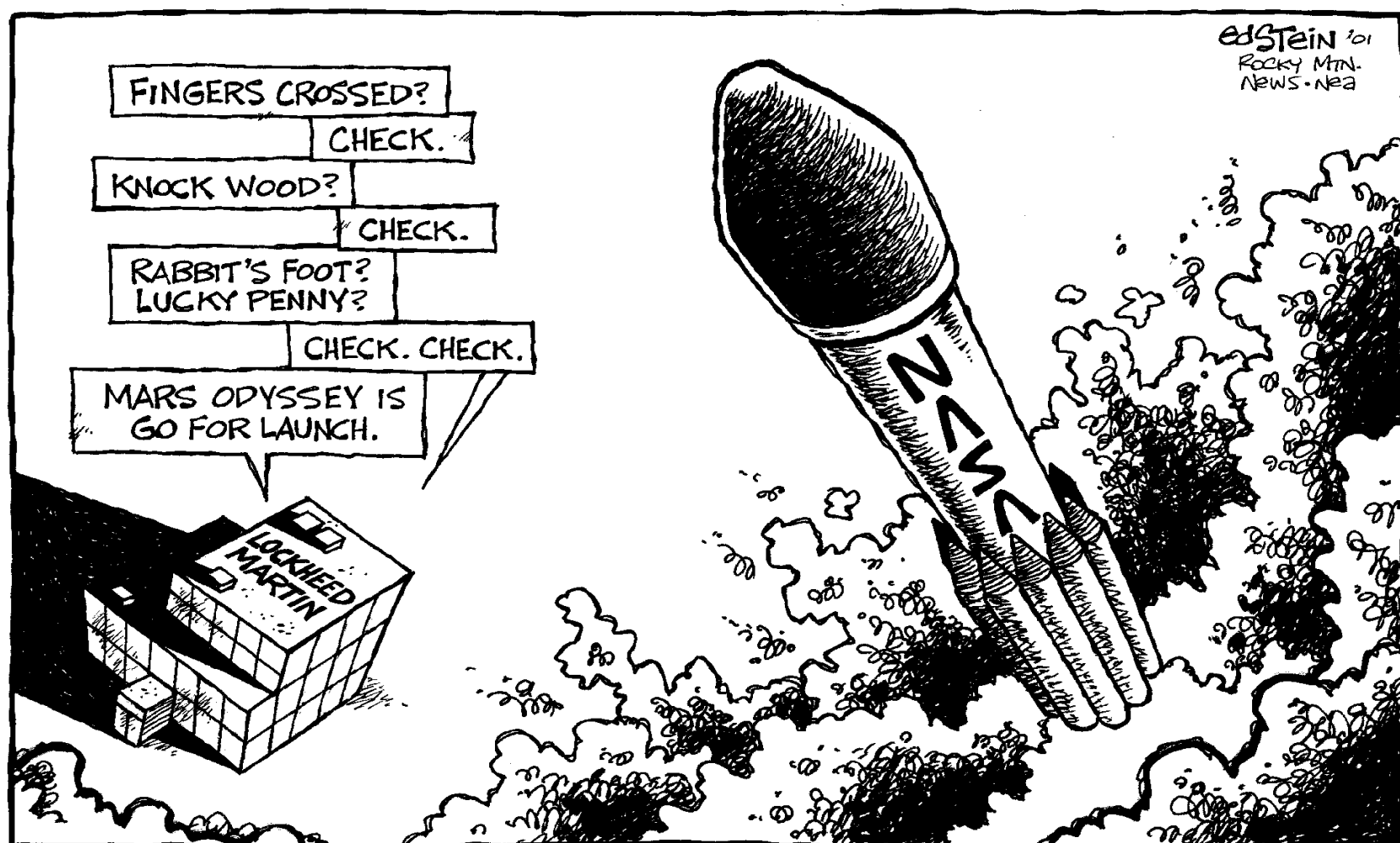
The Bush administration is calling for patience, saying that helping Colombians eradicate their drug crop has a direct impact on guerrillas of both sides because of their reliance on drug money for operations.

And officials say the anti-drug fight is just beginning. Deliveries of U.S. Black Hawk helicopters for Colombia's anti-narcotics battalions and its national police will begin later this year. The two security services also are on tap to receive 34 Huey-2s in the coming months. Also in the works is a shipment of five additional spray planes for police use.

Recognizing Colombia's problems extend well beyond narcotrafficking and civil war, the United States is assisting in a number of other areas, especially law enforcement.

In contrast to other issues, Bush seems to have no problem in picking up on Colombia policy where President Clinton left it. He has said the U.S. goal is to help the Colombian government "protect its people, fight the drug trade, halt the momentum of the guerrillas and bring about a sensible and peaceful resolution" to Colombia's long civil war.

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.



Kansas celebrity lists her 'rules of the road'

Not many of us have a movie made about our lives.

If we think about it, most of us wouldn't want someone to put all our warts and eccentricities before the whole world.

Erin Brockovich is not one of those people. She allowed the world to look at her life — failed relationships, hardheadedness and a style of dressing my Mama used to call 'trailer trash.'

Of course, the Academy-Award-winning movie also showed her better side: Her thirst for knowledge and justice. Her patience and persistence. Her empathy with those who are suffering.

And she's a Kansas girl.

On Friday, she spoke at the Kansas Press Convention and offered her rules of the road, which she said were based on the values she learned from her parents while growing up in Lawrence. For much of her life, she said, she forgot them, but she's come back to them:

1. Don't lie.

As a teen, she said, she learned the value of truth when caught in a lie to her father.

She still has a letter he wrote her at the time explaining why she was being grounded and how lies tore up the fabric of her family.



cynthia haynes

• open season

2. Have sticktoitiveness. As a dyslexic, Erin said, she had to struggle all through school, but her parents would not let her give up.

Her determination helped her to build her phenomenal memory and taught her how to skim material for what she needed.

3. Never be afraid to be who you are. As a single mother it was hard, she said, but she stuck to her principles and forged ahead to do what she had to do.

4. Because you have to. When she was young and wouldn't eat her broccoli, her mother told her, she would "because you have to."

When her brother died and she was sitting beside her father at the funeral, she whispered to him that she couldn't do this. Her father replied that she

would — because she had to.

Sometime, she said, you do things not because you want to but "because you have to."

5. Tough s**t. Life is not fair, she said. Get over it.

6. Stand up for what's right. If something is wrong, don't try to sweep it under the rug. If a bully is hogging all the toys, say so. If a big corporation is doing something bad, say so.

In Hinkley, Calif., the power company told the folks that they had nothing to worry about, that their water supply was fine.

In reality, the water was contaminated and the people were sick with nose bleeds, cancer, miscarriages and chronic fatigue.

Only through the efforts of Erin and the law firm she worked for (she is not a lawyer) were the water problems brought out and the company made to pay for the misery it caused.

Now she's on a lecture tour and when she returns to California, she will go back to work to ferret out environmental problems that big firms have tried to sweep under the carpet.

Only by allowing open access to public records can people find out what they need to know, she said. That, and it takes sticktoitiveness.

Arsenic and old arguments

WASHINGTON — George W. Bush is asking the American people to take a dose of arsenic in their drinking water.

Imagine if he'd said this in the campaign. "Vote Bush! A little arsenic never killed anybody."

That would have saved us from all that chatter about chads and dimples down in Florida. Against the "Arsenic Candidate," Al Gore could have somersaulted to his way to Pennsylvania Avenue.

Maybe he will next time.

This is how Bush's arsenic decision has sharpened and shifted the debate: Before he addressed the Clinton-imposed standards on how much of this poison gets into our water, the fight was between "environmentalists" and "industry." Now it's a battle between our health and anyone — politician, polluter or simply partisan Republican — who dares endanger it.

If I were Bush, that would be a fight I'd want to skip.

If I were an activist in the environmental movement, that's precisely the fight I'd want to wage.

The reasons arise from human nature. People care more about a toothache than they about the starving in Ethiopia. They care more about getting emphysema than the Alaskan caribou losing their favorite trail. They worry more about skin cancer than global warming in the year 2020.

In fact, they get downright angry. The reason Julia Roberts won that Oscar for standing up to the



chris matthews

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polluters is that kids from the neighborhood were getting sick. We rooted for "Erin Brockovich" because she was a working-class hero who stood up, not for some high-minded "environmentalism," but to a health menace threatening people just like her.

This is why "arsenic" is a killer to people who don't take such issues seriously. It's why the environmental movement can and should exploit its lesson: Don't deal with the global questions when you can point to the local danger; don't focus on the future when you can talk about now. Don't say "environmental" when you exploit the more powerful word "health."

Never discount the power of lingo. If you said "arsenic" to me a few weeks ago, I would have thought "Arsenic and Old Lace," the movie. I would have thought of Cary Grant and those nice old ladies who buried their victims under the window seat. I'd have thought "murder."

You say arsenic today and I think "George W. Bush." I think political mayhem. I think "What a

windfall for the environmentalists!"

This is like the Reagan budget-cutters declaring that ketchup qualified as a "vegetable" for school lunches.

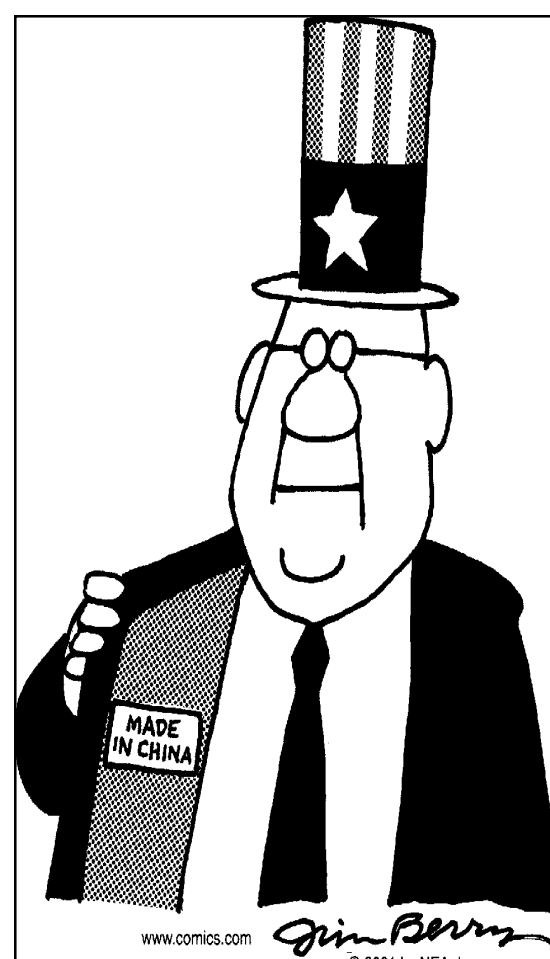
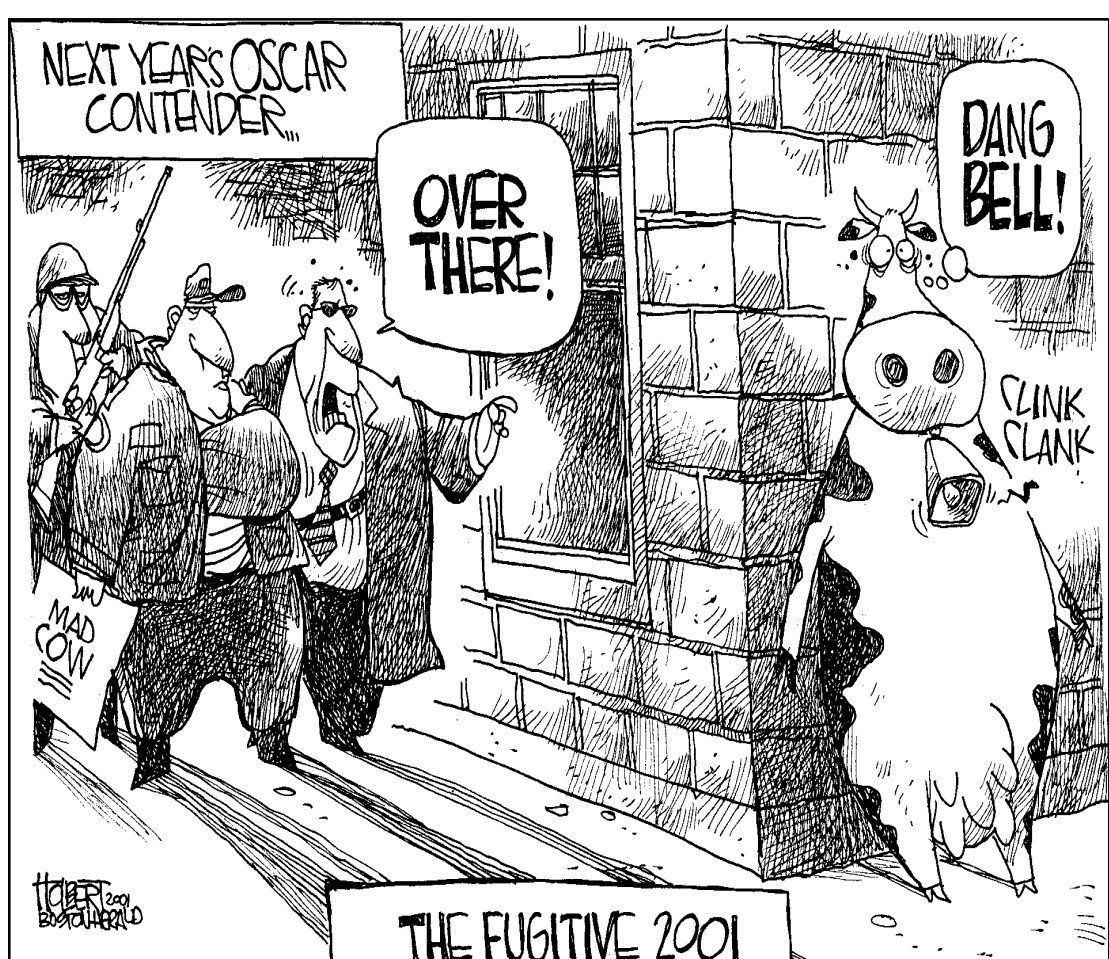
Naming Gale Norton to head Interior was a political payoff to the Rocky Mountains. It was the price the pro-Gore environmental lobby paid for putting their money on the wrong pony. It didn't affect people's immediate well-being. Neither did the question of Alaskan oil and gas or the decision to undo Clinton's 11th-hour call to conserve huge areas of wilderness.

It was only when the talk turned to "arsenic," which causes lung and bladder cancer — and screams "POISON!" — that the public took hard notice.

Remember: It wasn't the organized lefties who turned public opinion against the horror. It was LBJ killing the college deferral. That's when an issue of grand global defense strategy was suddenly a near and present danger to that kid in the upstairs bedroom.

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