

commentary

from other pens...

Iran-Contra figures find jobs with Bush

In the 1980s it was the biggest scandal of the Reagan administration, a covert arms-for-hostages overture to Iran — more popularly known as “Iran-Contra.”

Today, a half-dozen alumni of that episode have found prominent jobs in the Bush administration.

The most recent is former National Security Adviser John Poindexter, 65. The retired admiral took over a new Pentagon counterterrorism office last month.

Poindexter was convicted in 1990 on five felony charges of conspiracy, making false statements to Congress and obstructing congressional inquiries. He was sentenced to six months in prison, time he never served.

An appellate court overturned the convictions in 1991, as well as similar ones against former White House aide Oliver North, the Marine lieutenant colonel who ran the illegal operation. The court ruled their testimony to Congress, for which they had been given immunity from prosecution, had been improperly used against them.

The Iran-Contra scandal is scarcely mentioned today. But it brought near political paralysis to the closing days of the Reagan presidency.

“It involved wrongdoing,” said GOP consultant Charles Black. “People didn’t serve the president well, and a lot of them paid a price for that.”

Another former Iran-Contra defendant is Elliott Abrams. He now serves as Bush’s special White House assistant for democracy and human rights. An assistant secretary of state under Reagan, Abrams pleaded guilty to withholding information from Congress, then was pardoned by the first President Bush.

One of the most outspoken Iran-Contra figures is Otto Reich, the State Department’s top official for Latin America, who migrated to the United States shortly after the 1959 revolution in Cuba. In his first speech since joining the department in January, Reich said the United States can speed a democratic transition in Cuba by “not throwing a lifeline to a failed, corrupt, dictatorial, murderous regime.”

Reich led a State Department office accused of a covert domestic-propaganda effort against Nicaragua’s leftist Sandinista government.

Others given jobs by Bush:

—Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. Questions linger over the former Defense Department official’s 1986 contacts with Israel on the Iran arms sales.

—U.N. Ambassador John Negroponte. His service in the 1980s as ambassador to Honduras, which the U.S.-supported Contra rebels used as a base, has drawn criticism.

Senate Democrats raised Iran-Contra objections last year, particularly over the Reich and Negroponte nominations. The appointments of Abrams, and now Poindexter, drew little open criticism. Neither post is subject to Senate confirmation.

After their convictions were set aside, North made an unsuccessful run for the Senate, then began a career as a syndicated radio talk show host. Poindexter went into business as a private defense consultant.

Poindexter rejected an interview request.

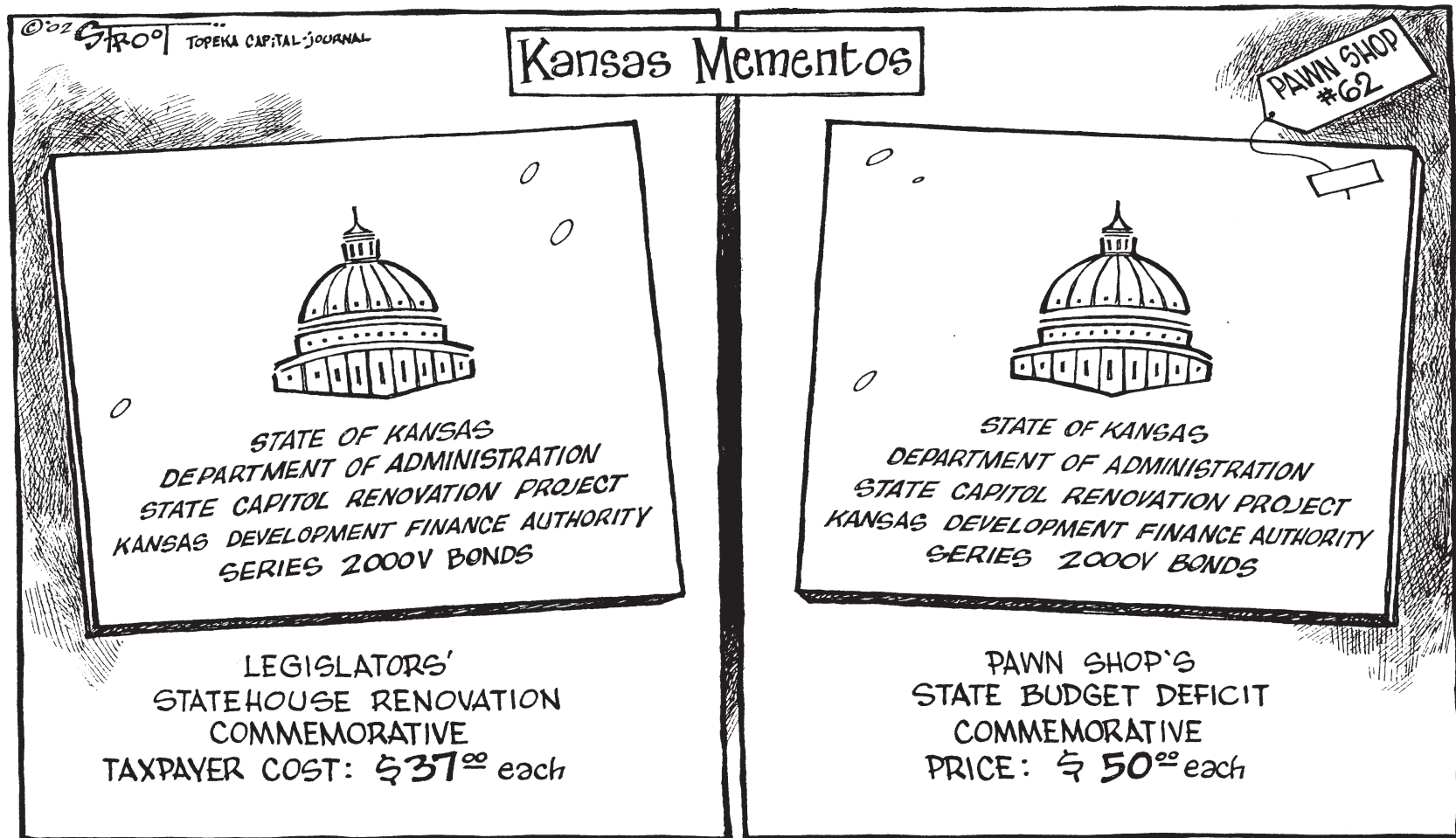
White House press secretary Ari Fleischer called him “an outstanding American and an outstanding citizen. ... The president thinks Admiral Poindexter has served our nation very well.”

Secretary of State Colin Powell, Reagan’s last national security adviser, described Poindexter in his 1995 autobiography as “brilliant, but in a narrow, technical sense” and not up to the top National Security Council post. Under Poindexter, “the NSC had gone off the rails,” Powell wrote.

An administration critic, Thomas Blanton, director of the private National Security Archive, said Poindexter has a daunting intellect and deep computer-systems expertise.

He suggested political payback is at work in appointments of so many Iran-Contra figures. “They were good soldiers. They fell on their swords. Good soldiers get rewards — at least in this administration,” Blanton said.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Tom Raum has covered national affairs for *The Associated Press* since 1973.



Losing a cat is hard on everyone

Thanks to everyone for keeping an eye out for the cat.

We haven’t found him yet, and I doubt that we will see him again.

One friend suggested that he might be trying to return to my son. Since in the nine months Lacy had the cat, the two of them lived in three houses in two states, it seems unlikely Pomeroy would know where to return to if he did decide to hit the road.

Besides, he had a good thing here. He got free access to all the cat food he wanted and a spot on the bed. He got to go in and out whenever he wanted to. And he’d been here since fall.

The only drawback was Molly the Monster, Queen of the House and Top Cat. She took after him every chance she got, but we had a kitten here when he left. She had been more concerned with the little monster and left Pomeroy alone most of



cynthia haynes

• open season

the time.

We haven’t had too many calls, but we did get a couple from folks who saw a white-and-gray cat out in a wooded, vacant lot or in an old shed. We went to those spots and called, “kitty, kitty, kitty,” to no avail.

I think the sound of our car approaching would have brought him out of hiding if he had been in either the vacant lot or the abandoned shed.

I was a little worried. I tried the shed in the middle of a snow storm and only got a minor case of frost bite.

I got the call on the vacant lot when I got home one night and immediately headed for the spot. As I stood in the dark with my headlights shining out into a dead-end and yelled my head off, I noticed people peeking out the nearby houses. I left before the police arrived.

I don’t know what has happened to Pomeroy, but I’m pretty sure he won’t be back. Losing the cat will cost me. My son has already forgiven us for losing his cat. But I know that he will be showing up on my doorstep one of these days with a new kitten. A kitten that will need to be neutered and declawed and have its shots. A kitten, which will eat its weight in cat food, which I will end up buying.

I really hate losing cats. It’s so hard on everyone, the animal shelter lady has a whole litter ready to go and three friends have offered me their cats in various stages of kittenhood. Thanks folks, maybe later.

St. Paddy’s Day brings out the corned beef

The first observance of St. Patrick’s Day was a parade in the streets of Boston in 1737. Although the tradition started amongst the Irish immigrants people of all backgrounds celebrate with the “wearing of the green”. The later custom of “wearing of the green” is intended to hail the arrival of spring.

One of the dishes associated with St. Patrick’s Day is corned beef. Originally barreled or corned beef was packed in brine and salt petre. The cut of meat gets its name from the “corns” or coarse grains of salt traditionally used.

The corned beef that is found in the grocery in the sealed bag is really spiced corned beef. Spiced corn beef is made in the same manner as corned beef except that pickling spices, garlic and onion are added to the brine.

Beer or ales are very popular in Ireland. Irish red ales, porter beer and stout beer are varieties thought to be developed by the English and Irish. Porter beer is a dry, dark brown beer with the sharp taste of chocolate and black malt. Stout was originally considered to be a variety of porter but has turned



pat schiefen

• postscript

into its own variety. Dry stout or Irish stout is a darker beer with a roasted flavor with a slightly bitter taste. The following is a recipe from the National Beer Wholesalers Association.

Stout Beer Braised Beef with Onions

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil, divided
- 1 1/2 pounds beef sirloin, cut into cubes
- 1 1/2 cups Stout Beer, divided
- 3 onions, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/4 cup flour
- 1 cup chicken or beef broth
- 2 teaspoons mustard seeds
- 1 tablespoon juniper berries (optional)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon pepper
3 potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
1 tablespoon parsley, chopped (optional)
2 teaspoons grated lemon zest (optional)
In saucpan over high heat, warm half of oil. Add half of the beef cubes and brown on both sides. Remove and set aside. Repeat with remaining oil and cubed beef. Remove beef and reduce heat to medium-low; stir in 1/4 cu beer, scraping the bottom of the pan to lift off brown bits.

Add onion and garlic to pan. Cook until very wilted and beginning to brown, about 4 minutes. Whisk in flour. Gradually stir in remaining beer and broth. Return beef to the pan. Add mustard seeds and juniper berries. Stir in salt and pepper.

Cover pan; bring stew to simmer by reducing heat. Simmer over very low heat for 45 minutes. Stir in potatoes; simmer for 15 minutes or until potatoes are tender.

Before serving, top stew with parsley and lemon zest if desired.

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Alvin Spencer works for the U.S. Postal Service in San Mateo County, just as his father did. But Spencer’s life is nothing like his father’s. The elder Spencer owned his home back in the 1960s. But Spencer, after 24 years on the job, is still renting, moving from one East Palo Alto house to the next as rising rents continue to take larger bites of his paycheck. He jokes dryly about moving to Arkansas, where his mother grew up. At least there, a postman’s salary might be worth something.

Spencer is among a dwindling population in the urban corridor of the Bay Area: the middle class. The poor stay here because they can get public housing.

The rich stay because they can afford three-bedroom homes that now often cost \$1 million and up. But the middle class is like the kid left standing in musical chairs. There is no place for them anymore.

If we don’t figure out how to create affordable housing, the Bay Area could become the first metropolis in the United States without teachers, firefighters, nurses, bus drivers, pediatricians, police officers, construction workers, pharmacists, cooks and mechanics.

“The workforce is leaving. The housing crisis here is truly a crisis,” said San Mateo County Supervisor Mike Nevin, a former San Francisco police officer. “It’s the most important problem we face right now.”

Nevin’s sons, also San Francisco cops, have had to move to Petaluma to find homes they could afford.

A lot of metropolitan areas around the country face shortages of affordable housing. But the gap between wages and housing costs is especially wide in the Bay Area. Low-income families that, in another time and place, would have moved into the middle class are stuck where they are. From 1993 to 2000, household incomes for the lowest 20 percent of the nation’s workforce rose by 15 percent. But in Santa Clara County, for example, incomes in the lowest 20 percent increased by less than 1 percent when adjusted for inflation and the significant increase in the local cost of living.

Now, the recession and layoffs are quickening



joan ryan

• commentary

the exodus of the middle class and those aspiring to it. The Trejo family has lived for five years in a one-bedroom apartment in East Palo Alto for \$990 a month. Two daughters sleep in the bedroom. Two sons sleep on futons in the living room. Jose and his wife sleep next to them on the floor. Jose was working full time in construction, so he saved a little each week in hopes of someday buying a home. Six months ago, the work dried up.

“We can live on our savings for another four months if we are very strong,” he said. “But in the last few months, I have seen many families leaving because they no longer can pay the rent.”

Last Tuesday, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to add \$2 million to its housing trust fund, which it began last year with \$1 million. Santa Clara County has a housing trust fund of \$20 million. The money subsidizes new construction and helps first-time homebuyers with down payments and loans.

But the housing-fund allocations are one-time deals with no guarantees of future funding. Without government and community help, the middle class is as good as gone. “The market is not going to take care of this and get wages and housing back in balance,” said Lisa Milton, a housing advocate with Peninsula Interfaith Action.

So Milton, Trejo and Spencer planned to join an expected crowd of 1,200 others last night at the Fox Theater in Redwood City to rally support for affordable housing. The gathering brought together politicians, community activists and members of 25 local congregations.

Leonard Goldberg is a retired doctor with an expensive home in Los Altos Hills. But he expected to attend the rally last night with members of his

Endangered species

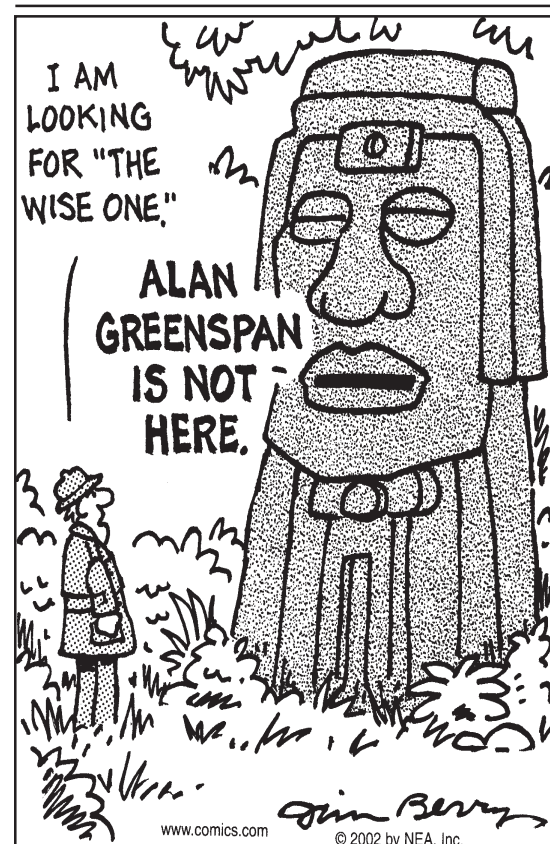
synagogue.

“The housing crunch is happening all over,” Goldberg said. “But we have been at the vortex of the cone from the beginning of the high-tech revolution. This is directly affecting the middle class, but we’re all suffering for it. Our children can’t afford to live near us. Our parents can’t afford to move closer to us in their old age.”

“If we don’t do something, we’ll be even more fractured as a community than we already are.”

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

berry’s world



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