

commentary

from other pens...

Columbia makes shift to law and order chief

WASHINGTON (AP) — Not much went right for Colombia — or U.S. policy — during the four-year presidency of Andres Pastrana. The Bush administration is hopeful better days lie ahead under Alvaro Uribe, who was being sworn in Wednesday as Pastrana's elected successor.

Aside from Mexico, it's hard to imagine a Latin American country more important to U.S. interests than Colombia.

It is the source of 80 percent of the world's cocaine, much of it U.S.-bound. American policy since 2000 has been to help Colombia soften up leftist guerrillas by eradicating narcotics plants, their prime source of income.

The theory was that drying up their financing would force them to negotiate a peace settlement with the government.

That hasn't come close to happening. Indeed, Pastrana's failure even to get a peace process going has been his biggest disappointment. He ceded a Switzerland-sized area in southern Colombia to the leftist FARC rebels in hopes of creating an environment for negotiations, but the bid failed.

American officials backed his effort publicly for years while expressing doubt privately that it would go very far. Pastrana gave up the plan in February, and his fed up countrymen turned to Uribe in the May presidential elections, attracted by his promise of a "firm hand, big heart" law and order administration.

As Uribe took office at a ceremony attended by a delegation of VIP foreigners that included U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, there is not a glimmering of a peace process.

Colombian frustration with the scant results under Pastrana is matched by Washington's. With strong support from the Bush administration, Congress recently gave the Colombian armed forces the right to use U.S.-supplied military equipment against the rebels; previously it could be used only for counternarcotics operations.

The FARC alienated many in Washington, not to mention in Colombia, by targeting the civilian infrastructure this year, blowing up hundreds of electricity pylons and dozens of bridges.

Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue said it is important for the United States and Colombia to develop, with sustained high-level U.S. support, a joint strategy for coping with the new situation. He said even the most optimistic scenario foresees an increase in violence over the short term.

"The question is whether it will create conditions for a political settlement," Shifter said.

Some liberal groups wonder whether Uribe's accession could mean more violence without steps toward a negotiated settlement.

Lisa Hugaard of the Washington-based Latin America Working Group said, "After 40 years and thousands of civilian deaths, a negotiated peace seems the only solution. Uribe's proposals for an escalated war could pull Colombia into further violence, and the U.S. along with it."

The FARC is but one of the armed groups with which Uribe will have to concern himself. The others are the ELN, a smaller leftist group; and a rightist paramilitary group, the AUC.

All are on the State Department list of foreign terrorist organizations. The combined civilian-military death toll last year was 3,500. And the war forced an estimated 300,000 to flee their homes.

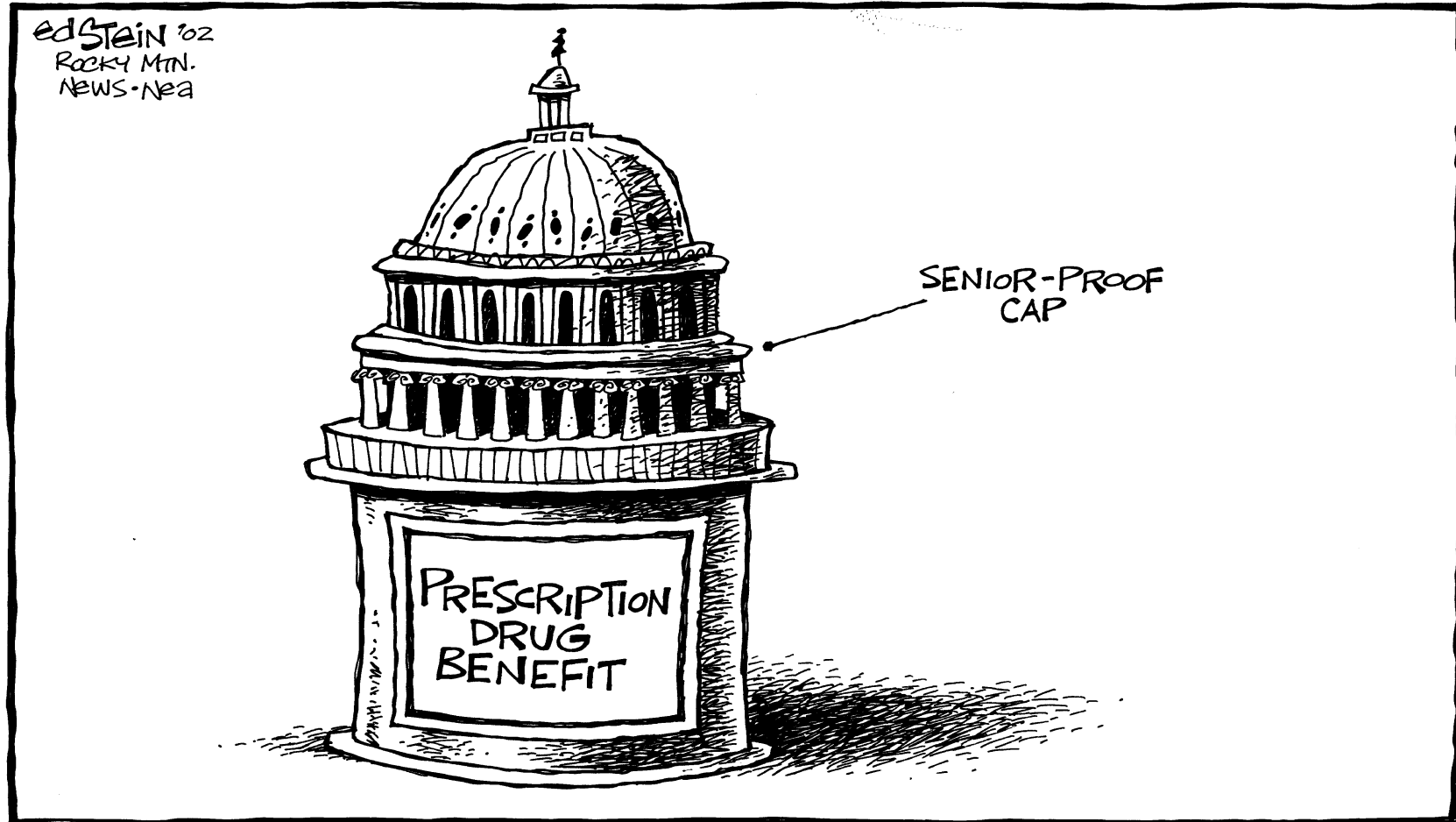
For all the challenges that Colombia and the economically stricken countries to the south pose, the administration can at least boast that the centerpiece of its overall trade policy is finally in place.

President Bush signed a bill Tuesday that gives him the authority to negotiate trade agreements, including one that is supposed to lead to a hemispheric trade pact by 2005.

It also renews a program of low tariffs with four Andean countries designed to help their economies while making them less reliant on narcotics trade.

One of the four is Colombia.

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



Jesus' death better story than modern novels

In my last six columns, I have been counting down the top 10 reasons everyone should read the Bible. No. 10 was the Bible's story of earth's creation; no. 9 was the Bible can move hearts; no. 8 was it is the only guide to religious truth; no. 7 was it's a guidebook for living and teaches lessons about life; no. 6 was it chronicles the formation of the Christian congregation; and no. 5 was the Bible's stories of the trials and triumphs of men and women of faith are examples for us.

This week, we are at the no. 4 reason everyone should read the Bible: Jesus' death in behalf of mankind is a better story than any modern book tells.

Book stores and libraries are packed full of books on every subject imaginable. An especially popular type of book today is the novel. Many people enjoy reading novels, including myself, and may find touching stories of human kindness, bravery, love and loyalty in the pages.

I have yet to find a modern book that contains a true-life story of someone who suffered nearly unendurable pain to save the lives of not only his friends and relatives but also millions of people he had never met and billions of people who were not yet born.

The Bible's account of Jesus' sacrifice in behalf of mankind is unique in this aspect, and the story is told beautifully.

John chapter 18 tells of Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, his appearance before the high priest Caiaphas and the chief priest Annas, his followers' denials of knowing him and his appearance before the Roman governor Pilate.

The chapter ends with Pilate giving the Jews who took Jesus to him the chance to release him, but they chose instead to release Barabbas, a robber.

The beginning of John chapter 19, tells of some of the torture Jesus endured and of people making fun of him. Verses 1-3 say, "Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him with a purple outer garment; and they began com-



sharon corcoran

• use it or lose it

ing up to him and saying: 'Good day, you King of the Jews!' Also, they would give him slaps in the face."

Scourging was not an ordinary beating. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* describes the Roman practice of scourging: "The usual instrument was a short whip with several single or braided leather thongs of variable lengths, in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of sheep bones were tied at intervals. . . . As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh."

Most of us in such a situation would do anything in our power to stop such abuse, but Jesus just took it. Was he powerless to stop these people who beat him and made fun of him?

No, he was not. Matthew 26:53, 54 says, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father to supply me at this moment with twelve legions of angels? In that case, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must take place this way?"

Jesus had the power of Almighty God behind him as well as the power of at least 12 legions, or armies, of angels. That would certainly be more than enough power to stop these people from abusing and laughing at Jesus and putting him to death.

But God had prophesied and had recorded in the Bible in advance the circumstances of Jesus' death in behalf of mankind. Stopping this mistreatment would have made those words false, and Jesus was more concerned about doing his Father's will than

about how he was treated.

John 19:16-18 tells us the familiar story about how Jesus was put to death: "At that time, therefore, he (Pilate) handed him (Jesus) over to them to be impaled. Then they took charge of Jesus. And, bearing the torture stake for himself, he went out to the so-called Skull Place. . . . And there they impaled him, and two other men with him."

Impaling involved driving nails through Jesus' hands and feet to hold him on the stake. He was still alive and hung on the stake for several hours. The scourging sounded bad enough to me, but this could be even more painful. If forced to make a choice, I doubt anyone could choose one or the other for his punishment for a crime, but Jesus endured both and had not done anything wrong.

Jesus endured such torture to fulfill the prophecies concerning his death and to give mankind the opportunity for forgiveness of sins and to have everlasting life.

Hebrews 9:22, 26 says of his sacrifice, "Yes, nearly all things are cleansed with blood according to the Law, and unless blood is poured out no forgiveness takes place. . . . But now he has manifested himself once for all time at the conclusion of the systems of things to put sin away through the sacrifice of himself."

The Mosaic Law allowed for forgiveness of sins through animal sacrifices, but the people had to regularly take animals to the high priest to be sacrificed, and they could not gain everlasting life through those sacrifices.

Romans 5:21 says of Jesus' sacrifice, "To what end? That just as sin ruled as king with death, likewise also undeserved kindness might rule as king through righteousness with everlasting life in view through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Mankind has a marvelous everlasting future to look forward to because Jesus was willing to endure such pain in order to fulfill Bible prophecy, do his Father's will and provide the sacrifice of his life for all of us. The heroes in modern novels pale in comparison.

The lie of accounting accountability

Don't be frightened by what today's column is about, and please don't fall asleep. Today's topic is: accounting, and specifically "dynamic scoring."

I know your pulse is now racing like a cat eyeing an open bird cage door. But you must calm yourself so we can discuss how our beloved government calculates the impact of taxes.

Let's talk dynamic scoring. With all the talk on Capitol Hill about how Congress will clean-up shoddy accounting practices that led to Global Crossing, Enron, and the like, shouldn't they our elected representatives use accurate numbers when they are figuring the government's budget? If it's good for the goose, it's good for Congress too. First some background.

In the 1920s, Congress established the Joint Committee on Taxation to estimate the revenue effects of tax changes. Historically, accountants using adding machines made these calculations. They simply looked at the most recent year for which tax data existed, and recalculated revenues as if a proposed tax bill had been in effect at the time. This is an example of "static" scoring.

They assumed no changes whatsoever in the economy or taxpayer behavior. Translation: Using static scoring, increasing federal taxes to a Soviet level of 100 percent would do no economic harm. Static scoring also assumes tax relief will cause the government to lose money with no benefit coming to the economy. Estimators have always known static estimates produced inaccurate calculations of how tax changes really affect federal revenues. Obviously, people will alter their behavior if their tax situation changes, and the overall economy may be affected as well.

But to defend our legislators for a moment, it wasn't until the 1970s, that the tools to be more accurate actually existed. Thanks to computers it became possible to begin incorporating the economic effects of tax changes into revenue estimates. However, the committee resisted changing its methodology and stuck with the old ways, even though the tools now existed to improve the accuracy of their projections.

Why would the people responsible for spending our money, our honorable elected representatives,



mitch hixson

• soundgarden

intentionally compute tax figures wrong? Well in one word its "duplicitous." Democrats controlled Congress during this period of time and opposed dynamic scoring because they feared it would make it harder to raise taxes and easier to reduce them. Since static scoring ignores the higher growth resulting from tax reductions and the lower growth from tax hikes, it systematically overestimates revenue losses from the former and increases from the latter. Translation: it makes tax increases appear to be the end of the civilized world.

When Republicans took control of Congress in 1995, they were in a position to change the overtly fraudulent accounting practices of Democrats, and switch to more accurate dynamic scoring.

Unfortunately for overtaxed payers, Republicans caved to political needs and wasted the opportunity. Members of the Republican leadership didn't want to use dynamic scoring, because they wanted the revenue loss from tax reductions to appear as large as possible. Since they planned to pay for tax reductions by reducing the federal budget, they thought this would lead to larger budget reductions, and hence a smaller federal government, than would be the case with dynamic scoring.

As a consequence, static scoring was left untouched. Hence inaccurate information kept flowing from the committee. These same Republican leaders also organized a joint hearing between the House and Senate budget committees, whose only purpose was to trash dynamic scoring. Although its supporters were able to amend House rules to allow for it, this rule has never once been invoked. Not once. Republicans should be ashamed.

Now a new effort is being made to institute dynamic scoring. But obstructionist snake oil salespeople still abound in our Congress. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D., S.D.) and Senate

Budget Committee chairman Kent Conrad (D., N.D.) have responded by writing to the committee chief of staff warning her to avoid making any improvements in estimating procedures. House Ways and Means Committee chairman Bill Thomas (R., Calif.) countered by sending her a letter saying she should go ahead and use dynamic scoring. Heavy-weight economists have also joined the fight. The chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers has testified in favor of dynamic scoring, while the director of the Congressional Budget Office has testified against it, even though he is a Republican appointee.

How can anyone in Congress justify consciously and intentionally using inaccurate data for important legislative decisions when more accurate data is easily available?

The real problem is that analysts have missed their accounting projections by such a wide margin for so long that no one expects them to be right anymore. But still the politicians on both sides trot out numbers they know are inaccurate to try to prove this tax increase, or this tax reduction is justified. How about just telling us the truth?

Oh I forgot, that these are professional politicians we're talking about. They have nothing in common with you and me. But if our elected representatives are going to hold the accounting industry accountable for their wall-street projections, they should be accountable for theirs as well.

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