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# LETTERS

## Coked up

I was, of course, pleased with John Shelton Reed's review ["Cokelore," June] of my new book, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*. I am writing only to correct an error which slipped through in the galley proofs upon which he based his review. Reed wrote: "A \$200 share of 1892 stock, with dividends reinvested, would be worth \$500 million today." In fact, it was \$100 for that 1892 share, and it would be worth—no kidding—\$2.5 billion today.

MARK PENDERGRAST  
Stowe, VT

## Press sore

My heartfelt thanks to you for writing the article "The Bad News Bearers" [Christopher Georges, July/August]. I have read it and reread it, taking comfort from the knowledge that I am not alone in thinking that Bill Clinton has been unjustly pilloried by the press.

LUCILE D. GREENWOOD  
Sedgwick, ME

The media's treatment of a president may be inversely related to its coverage of the president as a candidate for office. The easier the media is on a presidential candidate during the campaign, the harder it will be once the candidate has become president. Many well-documented studies validate the general disparity in the "favorable" and "unfavorable" coverage given to the major presidential candidates during the 1992 primary and general elections. A recent study of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, by Emily Bach at the University of California, Irvine, shows that 75 percent of the coverage received by Bush in these three news weeklies was negative, whereas 60 percent of Clinton's and 49 percent of Perot's was positive. The "mugging" of President Clinton during his first four months in office illustrates the possibility of this hypothesis. Conversely, harsher treatment by the media of a presidential candidate may precipitate a much longer honeymoon with the media for the new president. What we've yet to understand is why the media may overreact, positively or negatively, as Georges shows it has with Bill Clinton.

MARK P. PETRACCA  
Professor of political science, University of California  
Irvine, CA

## Gray natter

While Jon Meacham ["Myth Information," July/August] is intent on seeing that affluent senior citizens' Social Security gets taxed, he forgets that such a program is on a slippery slope that will eventually end up as welfare for lower income people. While the new law will tax 85 percent of the benefits, up from 50 percent, that affluent senior citizens

receive, the next step will be to tax 100 percent. Future steps will be to take away Social Security from more and more people in the upper middle class, eventually making it only for lower middle class and lower income citizens.

Mr. Meacham also omits that many affluent seniors land way behind the eightball on Social Security while super-wealthy younger people pay at lower tax rates. As a person who worked between ages 65 and 70, I did not receive the over \$20,000 per year that I would have had I stopped working. That saved the Social Security system \$100,000-plus. In addition, I and the company I work for paid about \$7,500 per year for five years' Social Security. Since I will continue to work after age 70, the net result will be that I will receive less than \$700 per year in Social Security as long as I continue to work.

JERRY STEINMAN  
West Nyack, NY

## How D.A.R.E. you

I am writing to express concern and dismay over the recent article, "Just Say Nonsense" [Jeff Elliot, May]. While I wholeheartedly support the thesis that drug prevention programs need to be held accountable, I have grave concerns about factual inaccuracies and oversights in this piece relative to D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) specifically and drug prevention programs in general.

A recent Gallup survey of D.A.R.E. graduates in all 50 states conducted just last month shows over 90 percent of students indicated that D.A.R.E. has helped them avoid drugs and alcohol. I believe we owe it to our kids to work together to develop programs that meet their very real needs.

GLENN A. LEVANT  
Executive director Worldwide, D.A.R.E.  
Los Angeles, CA

## The author replies:

Since Mr. Levant offers no specific instances of "factual inaccuracies and oversights," I can only point out that success in drug prevention programs is proven in longitudinal studies, not one-shot deals taken immediately after a program. Without this kind of research, you cannot truthfully claim that a program produces meaningful reductions in the use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol by children, which was the point of my argument.

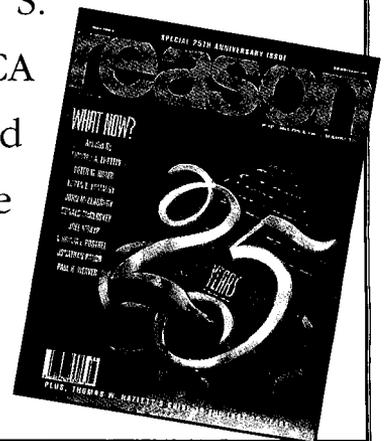
## Plante's punch

Reporter Dan Cogan ["More Champagne, Ms. Mitchell?" July/August] didn't do his homework.

Cogan suggests that the press uproar over the firing of the seven-person White House travel office was the whining of reporters with a vested interest in the people who enable them to lead a life of luxury on the road. It never seems to

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occur to him that journalists might be upset that seven people who did their jobs well were summarily dismissed without any kind of due process, their reputations anonymously tarnished by White House staff members whispering allegations of criminal wrongdoing.

As the White House report on the incident clearly showed, White House staff members who argued for the dismissal of the travel staffers had myriad ulterior motives. This was apparent during the uproar which followed the dismissal—and a further reason for the reporters' outrage.

The travel office—contrary to Cogan's assertion—does not exist solely to feed and care for the press. It also arranges travel for the Executive Office of the President.

On presidential trips, the first priority of the travel office is not the press, but the White House staff traveling with the President. Press baggage is indeed dropped in one's hotel room by the porter, for a porter's fee tacked onto the bill.

About those "first class hotel suites": For reporters and all but the highest-level White House staffers, they are ordinary single rooms (often in very ordinary hotels) at a rate negotiated by the travel office—always substantially less than the posted, or "rack," rate. Ground transportation pre-arranged? Of course. By bus. How else to move staff and press from event to event to cover the President?

Laundry and dry cleaning "taken care of"? How silly! The only thing the travel office ever did about reporters' dirty laundry was convince a hotel to take it in and return it during a five or six hour overnight turnaround.

And how about the charge that the travel office helped reporters evade customs duties—whisking their baggage "past customs agents"? On overseas trips, a U.S. Customs officer always travels on the press plane. Customs forms are handed out, and just as on regular international flights, the declaration is each person's responsibility. The Customs officer on board has the same authority to question the declaration as he or she would have if the traveler was passing through the "Nothing to Declare" lane at a commercial airport.

Now—to the real point. Just whose money is being spent for all of the amenities discussed above? Mr. Cogan never tells us—but it's all paid by news organizations: the press plane, the ground transportation, the filing room, the reporters' hotel rooms—yes, even their laundry.

Cogan does raise some good questions. Does the retinue of reporters following the President make journalistic sense? Do the pay and perks of Washington reporters alter our perspective? But if he's going to make those arguments, he should first get his facts straight.

BILL PLANTE  
White House correspondent, CBS News  
Washington, D.C.

#### *The author replies:*

My point is that in their stories about the firings, White House reporters repeatedly failed to explain the stake they had in the existing arrangement. In fact, even after Vincent Foster Jr.'s last note said "The press is covering up the illegal benefits they received from the travel staff," the major media glossed over the allegation so that readers were unclear what Foster was talking about.

About those "ordinary" rooms: During President Bush's trips to Houston, the press corps stayed in the four star Four Seasons Hotel. In Paris, reporters stayed at the equal-

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ly comfortable Intercontinental. As for baggage, most people don't have the choice of sticking a bellhop tab on a bill that someone else pays.

There is a Customs officer on board the press plane, but there seems to be a good deal worked out: Reporters don't declare, and the Customs official doesn't ask. No reporter I spoke to denied that their colleagues have smuggled stuff in from overseas.

It's true that news organizations pay for these perks and more. So reporters, in not writing about \$100 flat fares for family members to go along to Santa Barbara or Kennebunkport, aren't swindling taxpayers. They're swindling their bosses, who are charged excessive fares for the reporters in order to subsidize the bargain rates for spouses and kids. But a swindle's a swindle.

## Out of service

That Charlie Peters continues to press for national service is no surprise, but even he should know better than to argue that "it may be the only way we can afford to do what needs doing in health, education" ["Tilting at Windmills," July/August]. National service shifts rather than eliminates costs. Thus, Peters is really arguing that a burden too expensive for the entire society to bear should be borne by *young people alone*. If saving money is the key, perhaps we should conscript postal employees, cops, supermarket clerks, and magazine editors. Think how much money we could save then!

DOUG BANDOW  
Senior Fellow, Cato Institute  
Washington, D.C.

### *The editor replies:*

I hope the burden will be voluntarily shared by men and women of Doug Bandow's generation, all the people who came of age after service went out of style in the late sixties and who have not performed any service at all, especially those libertarians and conservatives who argue that service should be voluntary but who never seem to volunteer.

## Class dissed

I was disgusted when reading Jonathan Schorr's disparaging comments about Teach For America ["Class Action,"

June] and sickened that anyone reading his article could be misled into believing that Teach For America corps members are as ineffective as he suggests. Like Mr. Schorr, I was also a charter corps member of Teach For America, but unlike Mr. Schorr, I was an outstanding and successful teacher my first year in the under-resourced school where I was placed. I was voted teacher of the year by the veteran faculty of the school where I taught. I aided my students in doubling their standardized test scores. I was able to instill a sense of self-worth within my students that they lacked when I began my year with them.

My list of outstanding accomplishments goes on, but without belaboring my accomplishments, the fact is that I, along with hundreds of other corps members, experienced success with the same training as Mr. Schorr.

JOHN DARBY  
Teach For America  
New York, NY

### *The author replies:*

I am sorry that Mr. Darby misunderstands the intention of my piece, which concludes that "there is much to work with" in TFA. Bringing energetic, well-educated young people into teaching is a good idea. However, the fact that fully one-third of the corps quit teaching before completing their two-year commitment suggests that my experience was not unique and that corps members could be better prepared.

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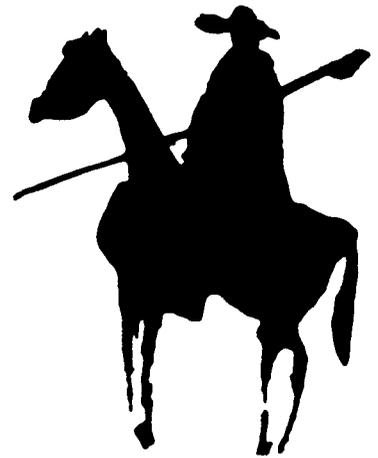
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*Nora Pouillon, Chef/Owner  
Restaurant Nora, City Cafe*

# TILTING AT WINDMILLS



**T**he American Medical Association is distributing leaflets in its members' waiting rooms that ask "Is the Clinton proposal for health reform good for you and your family? You need to think about these 10 questions." Heading the list is "Will I be able to see my own doctor?" My guess is that this will prove to be an effective tactic.

Clinton could have avoided the problem by adopting the Canadian plan which, of course, lets patients choose their own doctor. Ironically, the insurance companies, the fear of whose wrath apparently led the Clintons not to go for the Canadian plan, are also now planning to use the "you can't choose your own doctor" argument against the very plan the Clinton administration adopted to avoid making them angry.

The AMA used another clever lobbying ploy when it hosted a three-day weekend at the Greenbrier for congressional staffers who will help shape the health legislation. "Interest groups often use posh getaways to woo senators and representatives, but," points out *The Wall Street Journal's* Timothy Noah, "the lavishness of the Greenbrier [minimum rate \$425 per night] as a setting to court congressional staff is extravagant even by Washington's somewhat jaded standards. Its use in this case points up not only congressional staffers' importance in affecting legislation, but also the enormous stakes in the

coming health-care debate."

It appears that the lobbies against health care reform are covering every base. They've even hired Paul Tsongas, the man who gave Clinton the most trouble in last year's Democratic primaries. The opposition is so strong that the only hope I see for the cause of reform is for the media to do a good enough job reporting the case for change to balance the propaganda that will flow from the AMA and the insurance and pharmaceutical companies. And the chances that the media will do that are slim indeed. [See "Dead On Arrival," by Tom Hamburger and Ted Marmor, in this issue.] . . .

If you want to see the tip of a federal iceberg, consider the U.S. Embassy in Grenada. For three American employees, there are six cars, six blenders, nine toasters, 29 tables, and 49 chairs. Multiply that by all the military

and diplomatic posts we maintain abroad and you get some idea of how the U.S. Treasury might benefit by putting in a call to Sonny's Surplus. . . .

**A**nd if you want to get an idea of the efficiency with which all these posts operate, consider the case of Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, the Muslim cleric with the predisposition for befriending people who like to plant explosive devices in public places. To begin with, the State Department failed to add his name to its suspected terrorist list for seven years after his proclivities had been clearly manifested. Even after his name was added to the list, the Sheik made seven applications for visas, only one of which was rejected on security grounds. On that occasion, the State Department did notify the INS, but the INS failed to catch Rahman either entering or leaving the country. He received at least two other visas to the United States after his name was on both the State Department and INS lists. Finally, while the INS office in New York was trying to deport the Sheik, another INS office in New Jersey was giving him permanent residence status

Incidentally, on all six occasions when the U.S. consulates failed to spot the Sheik on the terrorist list,

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