

'Stupidity is far more important than conspiracy.'

Molly Ivins on the lessons of history. See her column below.

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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'Let the people have the truth and the freedom to discuss it and all will go well.'
William T. Ewjan, 1892-1970, founding editor and publisher

Kasten sided with deficits

With the general election campaign for U.S. Senate just getting under way, prognosticating at this stage is risky business. But one thing seems clear enough:

If President Bush is in trouble in Wisconsin, as he appears to be, then so is Republican Sen. Bob Kasten, whose career in the Senate spans Bush's career as vice president under Ronald Reagan and then president.



Kasten was swept into office on the Reagan-Bush coat-tails in 1980, and remained steadfastly loyal to both. Having been happy to be identified with their initial popularity, he now will have a difficult time escaping the public's disillusionment and disgust with the direction the country has taken under their reign, particularly with the economy.

Kasten signaled last week that in his race against Democrat Russ Feingold, he'll try to put some distance between himself and Bush. He pointed proudly to the one major issue on which he parted from the president: Bush's signing of a major tax increase in 1990.

The trouble with that tactic is, the tax hike was the only act of political courage that Bush has displayed in his four years — the one responsible thing Bush has done to try to address the mounting federal debt that is strangling the economy. The budget deficit this year, already close to \$400 billion, would be vastly higher without the extra revenues and the spending limits that were part of the agreement between Bush and Congress. Kasten voted against it.

Signing that agreement was political poison for Bush, because he'd assured the electorate in no uncertain terms ("Read my lips") that no tax increase would be needed. That was dishonest, and he's paying the price now.

Kasten, who backed every deficit-laden budget submitted by Reagan and Bush, now seeks to evade responsibility by pointing out that he voted against a measure needed to ameliorate the damage. He'll have to do better than that.

A champion of the people

If ever there was one person who epitomized what honesty and integrity are supposed to mean, Harland Everson was that man.

Mr. Everson died Friday at the age of 75, leaving the thousands of people who knew him with a deep sense of personal loss.



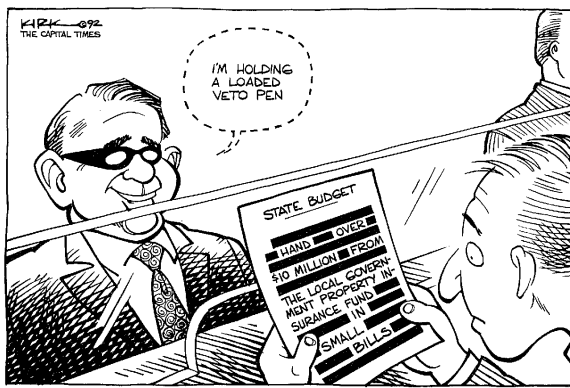
Everson

During his 75 years, he made an enormous mark on local and state government. His farm in southeastern Dane County was the love of his life and the struggles that family farmers must endure were a major reason that he decided to run for the Legislature back in 1970.

During his 12 years in the Assembly, Mr. Everson became a consistent voice for rural concerns and he worked to achieve several law changes that have served to help the family farmer and other small-business people throughout Wisconsin.

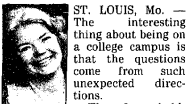
He was also a newspaperman and a darn good one at that. He and his wife Helen and, in more recent years, daughter Diane built the Edgerton Reporter into one of the most respected weekly papers in the state. He was also behind Diane's forays into new newspaper-related ventures that put their Edgerton business on the cutting edge of the industry.

Our heartfelt sympathies go out to his widow Helen and daughters Diane and Carol. While their husband and father will be terribly missed, they can be forever proud of the contributions he made.



MOLLY IVINS

Face it: Buck stops at Bush



Ivins

There I was holding forth on the sorry litany concerning the current state of the economy. I talked about the whole disaster of the '80s —

trebling the national debt, cutting taxes on riches while spending \$2 trillion on the military, the concentration of wealth at the top, the squeezing of the middle class, the increase in poverty, the decline of family income, the deficit, the loopholes bought with campaign contributions, the savings and loan debacle, the pending banking crisis, the decline in savings, the trade deficit, the interest payments.

You name it. I deplored it. All I instructed, the unintended consequences of the folly of voodoo economics.

Whereupon, some bright kid in the audience hopped to his feet and proceeded to demand why I didn't think the people in charge knew exactly what they were doing that they intended all of this to happen — drive down wages around the world, destroy unions, concentrate wealth, etc. In sum, wasn't it all a conspiracy?

Noam Chomsky figured in there somewhere, a sure sign we were not talking conspiracy — not a scenario in which the Bavarian Illuminati or the Trilateral Commission or some group with a secret handshake controls the world.

Nope, this is the sophisticated conspiracy theory (sometimes hard to tell from certain lefty analyses) in which a class of people, united by economic self-interest, acts in concert to shaft the rest of us.

I wish I did believe that. It would be such a relief to think the people in charge knew what they were doing, even if they were bent on mischief. But it

seems to me one of the chief lessons of history is that stupidity is far more important than conspiracy in determining man's fate. Simple dumbness, along with luck, chance and accident, runs well ahead of conspiracy in the causation category.

Take you S&L mess, unleashed by the Garn-St. Germain bill. Now former Rep. Bernard St. Germain was on the take from the S&Ls, and Sen. Jake Garn was in their pocket. But did they expect their little deregulatory bill to wreak the havoc it did? Of course not.

The froak believed that if we would only get the dread government regulations off the back of the S&Ls, the free market would work its magic, and all would be well. The editorial page of the Wall Street Journal (which was part of the self-named "cabal" that foisted supply-side economics on an unsuspecting nation) memorably endorsed the Garn-St. Germain bill as "the cheapest solution" to the S&L problem.

So did the S&L lobby, while agitating for deregulation in 1981, plan to stick the taxpayers with a half-trillion dollars' worth of bad debt? Of course not — they too were stupid enough to think their only problem was government regulation.

One of the interesting things about people who have real power is that they too feel helplessness in the control of larger forces. Lyndon Johnson, president of the United States, genuinely felt powerless to end the war in Vietnam. (Which brings to mind the answer given by the then-senator from Vermont to the classic question: How do we get out of Vietnam? "In buses.")

Remember Harry Truman's gleeful prediction when Eisenhower took office: "Poor Joe, he's going to snap out an order and actually expect something to happen." Presidents always feel cribbed, cabined and confined by contradictory political forces can't move too fast on this, or that will happen; can't do this because that backlash will develop.

Well, if guys in positions like that feel helpless, who the hell is actually running things? They are. History has to hold those with power accountable for how they use it, or history makes no sense at all. Lyndon Johnson may indeed have felt beleaguered — surrounded by resentful Kennedy holdovers, snotty Eastern intellectuals, generals who lied to him, people who kept telling him there was light at the end of the tunnel.

But history says that was Lyndon's war, and history holds him accountable for it. One acquits the man of malign intent — ignorance, insecurity and bad information were enough — but the 58,000 Americans who died in vain in Nam are just as dead as if Johnson had been a wicked man.

Before we all sink into gloom over the burdens of history, let us review the recent risks and jollifications brought to us by our political theater. Lo, the splendid sight of George Bush posing as Harry Truman.

Bush, outlining the similarities, claims they were both small businessmen. Oh barf. Harry Truman went broke in the haberdashery business; George Bush came to Texas with a \$200,000 loan from his family, mostly his daddy, who worked for the Rockefellers. With the \$200K and Hugh Liedtke for a partner, Bush built Zapata Oil, which he sold in '65 for \$6 million, which was not small bizness in the mid-'60s. Give us a break.

Those heavily addicted to irony are also relishing Bush's denunciations of Clinton as a "straddler" who "tries to have it both ways on the issues." How many issues can you name on which George Bush has straddled or is straddling now?

Molly Ivins is a columnist for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

Plain Talk DAVE ZWEIFEL

Some center foes don't want a fair fight

The "Sound Off" caller last week said it better than anyone.

He or she pointed out that County Supervisor Tammy Baldwin, the winner of the Democratic primary in the 78th Assembly District, and Independent Mary Kay Baum are both against the Frank Lloyd Wright Monona Terrace convention center and will be facing each other in the general election come November.

(The caller forgot to mention that the Republican primary winner, Patricia Hevener, is also staunchly opposed to the plan, which means that the center won't be an issue in the Assembly race anyhow — as if it ever should have been in the first place.)

"In your face, Dave Zweifel," the caller roared, proving again that for many of the anti-center folks it's really only a political game and has

absolutely nothing to do with the merits or demerits of the proposed structure.

As I said in an earlier column that accused Baldwin of cynically using the convention center as an issue in her Assembly campaign, I respect and fully understand that there are legitimate arguments against building the Wright structure.

What rankles me, though, is the deceit and often outright lies that some of the anti-Monona Terrace people feel obliged to use in their zeal to kill the project.

There's local lawyer Ana Fleischl, for example, who delights in spreading rumors in her unique "enormous way" that the center will eventually sink into the lake.

Fleischl, who has a history in this community of opposing any project, is obviously unaware that Frank Lloyd Wright is famous for designing the first earthquake-proof building in the world. I think his de-

sign can withstand the evil winds and waves that frequent our own Lake Monona.

And then there's Baldwin herself, who in a reply to my original column said she couldn't justify the state putting \$21 million into the project when there are so many hungry people and other needs facing society today.

Indeed there are countless needs that must be addressed and no one knows that better than those of us at The Capital Times.

But Baldwin surely knows that the state money earmarked for the convention center cannot be used for other purposes. First, the bulk of it isn't really being "spent" by the state at all. It is up-front money that will build the parking facilities and eventually be repaid by those who park there.

The remainder, about \$3 million, is money that is restricted for improving municipal parks around the state. If Madison decides not to use

Sound Off!

RECYCLING "Last Thursday I had a bad experience with a recycling crew. This happened in the Sunset Village area on the west side. I heard the truck and looked out to see they hadn't taken our bag. They were only at the next house so I grabbed the bag and went chasing after. The man who was collecting the bags saw me and grinned, but jumped back in the truck and it speeded off. The same thing happened at four more houses, the truck speeding off just as I reached them. Finally I got so frustrated and angry I aimed the bag at the open side of the truck and threw and fortunately it went in. These young punks need to be reminded that ordinary people like me pay their salaries and if they can't do their jobs right I'm sure there are many ready and willing to take their place."

INSURANCE "Persons in jobs who are supported by our tax monies receive competitive wages and in many cases above average wages. Therefore, I think they should pay their own health insurance or at least part of it and that includes teachers and school administrators. I think that would help alleviate the runaway taxes that we're experiencing right now."

"State employees do not get health insurance for nothing. I am a state employee and I pay my fair share of my premium."

TRAFFIC JAM "I, too, am a commuter on West Badger Road Monday through Friday and have experienced the traffic jam in the Somerset area. One day there were seven school buses on both sides of the street, namely Mayflower, Evergreen, Verona, HeadStart, MetroLide, MetroSchool for high school kids and the poor regular Metro bus trying to pick up regular passengers. I was held up for 20 minutes as were the rest of us. I feel the school buses should be stopping at the crossing where crossing guards have control of the traffic. It's a wonder a child has not been hit by a car when I see them running in all directions back and forth across the street with no regard for safety."

POLICE "I'm getting sick and tired of hearing about the overworked Madison Police Department. I woke up at 3 a.m. one morning last week and saw some subjects hiding in my back yard behind some bushes. When I called the police, they said someone would be right. I turned on my police scanner to see what would happen and when the dispatcher gave out the call, the officer said since no description was given they would not be responding. I don't like this callous attitude that the Madison Police Department has and I don't even feel safe in my own home anymore."

SQUIRRELS "I love the squirrels and I like to watch them eat. I've seen them eat God gave the world squirrels and he also provided food for the squirrels. Some of these people that set traps for the squirrels are taking away the enjoyment that other people have in watching the squirrels and feeding them corn and peanuts and such stuff for them to eat. I think it's a very cruel and mean thing for these people that set these traps."

SCHOOLS "I'd like to see a lot more attention being paid to our schools in the media. We've got gang activity on the Prairie side of the county, we've got gang activity on the Middleton side of the county and I don't want Monona, Madison or Dane County to turn into another Milwaukee or Milwaukee County. That seems to be the way we're heading."

TOBACCO "The person that called and said they ought to make it a law to stop growing tobacco in Wisconsin, well, use your brains. What do you wanna do with growing potatoes, tomatoes and what have you?"

If you want to comment about a current issue, just call "Sound Off" at 252-6434 and tell us what you think. Please speak clearly when leaving your message. Comments must be brief and kept to a single topic.

Dave Zweifel is the editor of The Capital Times.

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