

# OPINION PACKAGES

## OUR VIEW

### Speaking out Clinton is learning talk's not so cheap

Mother Nature and the White House doctors have done what the Republican party has been trying to do for more than five years — get President Clinton to stop talking.

After a fiber optic examination of the president's throat, doctors in Washington told him the same thing his own White House doctor told him earlier this week: "Shut yer trap," as they say in Arkansas.

According to The Associated Press, Mike McCurry, the president's mouthpiece, er, spokesman, said the doctors found no other symptoms or complicating factors and recommended he not speak for three or four days.

"The doctors say, 'No more yak,'" McCurry said. "The president has lost his voice. It is Missing In Action."

Clinton's condition has nagged him since his long trip to the Far East just before Thanksgiving.

And here's the funny part: The doctors blamed talking too much as the cause — overuse at the end of the campaign season, an overseas trip to the Far East and dry air on Air Force One.

There is a lesson that all of Washington could learn. Too much talk and not enough action has real consequences.

Imagine what must be going through the minds of Washington insiders on the GOP side. "You mean I can criticize the president and he can't hit back?" some GOP talker is probably thinking.

Thank the stars Washington, however childish it may get, really isn't a kindergarten class. We'd have to listen to Trent Lott and Newt Gingrich telling the media Clinton's mom wore combat boots and his cat is ugly.

But a more pressing concern to the nation is how the inner workings of the presidency are going to be taken care of. Are presidential aides going to have to carry notebooks and pens with them so the president can answer them?

Can Clinton type? Are cabinet meetings going to be conducted in Internet chat rooms? Is Clinton going to ask what has been done on campaign finance reform only to have some freak with the screen name "WebWeirdo" tap into the conference and respond that he has always had a crush on Wilma from the Flintstones?

Should Vice President Al Gore take the reigns of power? Is that worse than a mute Clinton? Or is the president's mutability even a problem for our country?

If we band together and remain calm, we can all get through this time of crisis. Quietly.

"The doctors say, 'No more yak.' The president has lost his voice. It is Missing In Action."

## MEHSLING'S VIEW



## GUEST VIEW

### Reconciliation is only hope on death row

**Editor's note:** This column was written and submitted by Michael Ross, who has been on death row in Connecticut for eight and a half years.

When most people think of death row inmates, I'm the one they think of. I'm the worst of the worst: a man who has raped and murdered eight women, assaulted several others, and stalked and frightened many more.

When I am finally executed, the vast majority of the people of this state will celebrate my death. Sometimes, when I close my eyes, I can see the hundreds of people who will gather outside the prison gates on the night of my execution. I can see them waving placards, drinking and rejoicing.

As I await my execution, I live in an 8-by-10-foot concrete cell for 23 hours a day — 24 hours a day on weekends. I come out for an hour of "recreation" five days a week. Other than that, the only other times that I come out are a 15-minute shower five days a week, and an occasional visit (one half-hour, through glass, on a telephone).

I eat all of my meals in my cell. They are brought to me in a Styrofoam box three times a day. I live in a single cell, so I live alone — and since I can only talk to the two people in the neighboring cells, I often feel quite alone.

One of the results of this almost total isolation is that, after a while, a person is forced to look at himself. I'm not talking about the cursory, superficial manner in which most people look at themselves, but rather a quite painful, unrelenting search of one's soul.

Many inmates in prison, and many of those on death row, are able to lie convincingly to themselves, to see themselves as basically good people who are the innocent victims of a corrupt judicial system or of an unfair and uncaring society in general. Sometimes it is very difficult to honestly see ourselves as we truly are, and much easier to blame others

as justification for our actions. I know this to be true because, for years, that was what I did.

I was angry — angry at everyone and everything except for the one person I should have been angry with: myself. It took a very long time — years in fact — for this anger to subside and for me to begin to accept who I was and what I had become, and even longer before I was ready and willing to accept responsibility for my actions.

My transformation began when I was diagnosed with a paraphiliac mental disorder for which I now receive medication. The drug, Depo-Lupron, clears my mind of the vile and noxious thoughts of rape and murder that plagued me for so long, and it eliminates the previously uncontrollable urges that drove me to commit the crimes that put me here on death row.

That monster still lives in my head, but the medication has chained him and has banished him to the back of my mind. And while he is still able to mock me, he can no longer control me. I control him; I am human again.

You cannot begin to imagine what a milestone this was in my life. Try to imagine experiencing filthy and despicable urges, desires and fantasies of the degradation, rape and murder of innocent women. Day in and day out. They fill your thoughts and fantasies when you are awake. They are in your dreams when you sleep. Imagine trying to control the urges, day by day, hour by hour. And try to imagine the self-hatred, loathing and abhorrence that you develop toward yourself when you fail.

Only when you have experienced what I have lived with can you begin to understand the true blessing that this medication was to me. It gave me back my mind — a clear mind, free of the malevolent thoughts and urges. And it allowed my humanity to awaken — giving me back something that I thought I had lost forever.

It was like a spotlight was shined down on me, burning away the mist, exposing every shadow of my being. I began to see things as they really were. I began to see things I didn't like, and that brought me great anguish.

I saw how weak and afraid I really was — I had always thought I was strong and confident. I saw how I had allowed the monster in my mind to take control of me. And worst of all, I saw the pain that I had brought to so many — such great and unceasing pain. I began to feel the terrible agony and distress that I had brought to my victims, their families, their friends, and my own family.

I saw the truth of what I had become and what I had done, and I began to feel the awesome weight of my responsibility for my actions and of my responsibility to the people whom I have harmed. And finally, I felt a profound sense of guilt — an intense, overwhelming and pervasive guilt that surrounds my very soul with dark, tormented clouds filled with a mixture of self-hatred, remorse, regrets and sorrow.

All of this leaves me with a deep desire to make amends and achieve reconciliation — a reconciliation with the spirit of my victims, with all the people I have harmed, with myself and with my God. Under the circumstances, this seems all but impossible. This will be the final, and undoubtedly the most difficult, part of my transformation.

If it is God's will, I will achieve that reconciliation that I so desire, and hopefully be transformed into one who is worthy of redemption and forgiveness.

My journey is still far from over, but at least now I can see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. May God give me strength, perseverance and moral fortitude to complete my journey before I am finally executed.

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