

## KeyOpinion



# The Case of the Purloined Groins

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Contributing Columnist

**One hates to bear "I told you so,"  
It sounds so juvenile,  
But look at groins today, and know  
The truth hurts for awhile.**

Way back in November of last year, we penned a column entitled "Pain in the Groin," which took up the cudgels on behalf of "Makepeace" permeable groins, instead of the solid T-head groins then being propounded by Longboat Key's outside experts.

It was not some false sense of technical knowledge that impelled our conclusions. We were operating on the thesis that where a choice must be made between the opinion of outside, paid theorists versus the decades-long experience of a local, hard-headed businessman, greater weight should be given to the latter.

The column's position was not predicated on disrespect for experts, but as stated then: "All of us have seen equally qualified and educated 'experts' appear in court and testify in diametrically opposite fashion on both sides of a case. One psychiatrist says the defendant is crazy; the other attests that he is as sane as anyone in the courtroom. It is up to the Judge (or jury) to decide which of the 'experts' is right."

Dr. Murray "Murf" Klauber, the owner of the Colony Beach Club, made several dramatic appearances at that time before the Town Commission, seeking a solution that would alleviate the beach erosion problems at the neighboring Islander Club, without damaging the integrity of his own beach.

He claimed that the permeable groin in place at the Colony had preserved the beach, without negatively impacting the littoral drift of sand to beaches further south. He even punctuated his logic with a physical demonstration of the actions of water splashing against a solid object.

Alas, our Commissioners are a conservative bunch.

The company hired by the town had never built a Makepiece groin. In this regard, the engineers' attitude was reminiscent of the old rhyme that says: "I've never seen a purple cow; I never hope to see one; but if there

is a purple cow, I'd rather see, than be one."

They'd rather see a solid T-head groin — six of them, in fact — at a cost of millions, and they were "eighty-five per cent sure" they would do the trick.

That's another way of saying they were fifteen per cent sure they wouldn't work.

So as not to be accused of leaving any stone unturned, our intrepid Commission elected to spend 57,000 additional tax dollars for a three-dimensional computer analysis from a Dutch firm called Delft, which purported to know everything there is to know about how to control water, from sticking a finger in the dike to planting solid T-heads in the sea.

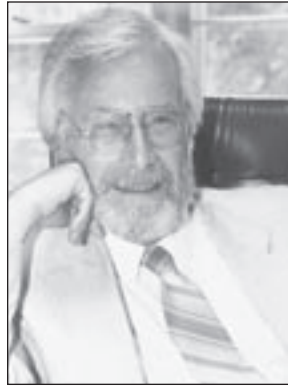
The Dutch were not asked to look into the feasibility of permeable groins — just the effect of the solid kind. Our Commissioners theorized that any finding would constitute "insurance," in the event that the project caused damage to Murf Klauber's Colony Beach & Tennis Club. The defense would then be that they had done every study possible.

When the lengthy report ultimately came in, it endorsed the T-heads, but concluded that all bets were off in the event of "severe wave conditions" or active, "stormy hurricane seasons."

As our fellow columnist, Jim Brown, observed in so many words in Sarasota's daily newspaper, one of the Dutch firm's hands giveth, but the other hand taketh away.

Not to be deterred or dissuaded, the Town Commission directed Town Manager St. Denis to proceed to apply for the requisite state permits with alacrity.

Lo and behold, it came to pass that the state's permitting entities, the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council and the Florida Department of Environmental Permitting Bureau of Beaches and Coastal Systems (one presumes that their employees' pay status is consonant



with the length of their titles) denied the permits on the ground that T-head groins were "regionally significant and inconsistent with regional goals, policies and objectives." (That last phrase had to have come from reading the entrails of a goat sacrificed at the oracle of Delphi.)

Needless to say, the town's leaders (who evidently had not read our November advice) were surprised and taken aback. Rumors of a vast anti-T-head groin conspiracy abounded.

Suspecting that the town had been Klaubered — uh, clobbered — the town fathers unleashed Town Attorney David Persson who, as attorneys are wont to do, promptly made formal demand that the State produce all data, written, oral or unshredded, of every kind and dimension, together with the names, birthdays and hair color of each and every individual participating in the decision to reject the permits.

There has not been, as yet, a demand for warrantless telephone taps under Homeland Security, but if such a demand is made, the President has the power to grant it because we are at war in Iraq.

It would seem that the future holds two possible scenarios.

One is a protracted, extremely expensive legal dogfight with a dubious outcome.

The other is to accept the wisdom of the permitting agency and proceed to the design and installation of a permeable groin.

Stay tuned.

**Oh the winds will blow, and the sands will shift  
And the politicians shout;  
One can only hope they will catch our drift:  
Turn the ship of state about.**

**For it's not a sin; Change the course we're in,  
As experience now teaches.  
The town should join the more favored groin  
To protect our sandy beaches.**

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# Captain Bush Rearranges the Deck Chairs

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This last week saw the President move to make changes in the palace guards. Joshua B. Bolten, formerly head of the Office of Management and Budget, was appointed chief of staff to replace Andrew Card; Rep. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) replaced acting director Clay Johnson III at the Office of Management and Budget; Scott McClellan announced he is leaving his post as press secretary; and this week it was announced that Karl Rove, the president's senior adviser, will no longer be overseeing day-to-day policy operations at the White House so he can focus exclusively on his political portfolio. The press is now mulling over the changes but one can't avoid the feeling Bush is only rearranging the deck chairs on the USS Republican Disaster.

Few question the need for some changes in the Bush administration. The President's poll numbers have dipped to a 33% approval rating, O.J. Simpson has higher approval ratings than Vice President Cheney, and the Democrats no longer think that retaking Congress is a "Bridge to Far." The administration is beset by problems, only some of which are of their own making. Iraq, of course, is the key problem. It is Bush's war and, whatever the verdict of history, over 60% of the American people now think invading Iraq was not a good idea. Gas prices are now inching over three dollars a gallon and the nation has no energy policy worthy of the name. Bush is given bad marks on the economy even though the stock market has reached new highs, unemployment is at a new low, and the economy seems to routinely achieve a growth rate of between 3% and 4%.

The most important move in the reorganization is Karl Rove returning to strictly political duties. There are two instinctive geniuses in American politics. James Carville on the Democratic side and Rove on the Republican

side. Rove's new role is a signal that the President understands his chief domestic fight this year is survival of the Republican majorities in the Congress. As E.J. Dionne

Jr. wrote in the Washington Post, "As one outside adviser to the administration said, the danger of a Democratic takeover of at least one house of Congress looms large and would carry huge penalties for Bush. The administration fears investigations of everything by congressional committees and the possibility of a forced withdrawal from Iraq through legislative action." The only good news for the Republicans in all this is the Democrats are keeping Carville on the sidelines.

Carville or no Carville, Rove has a hard row to hoe. Bush has an approval rating above 50% in just four states — Utah, Idaho, Wyoming and Nebraska. A Democratic takeover of the Senate is now possible but Rove has a chance to stop the bleeding. The Top-10 Senate races seem to break so as to keep the Republicans in control even though the Democrats could gain two seats. New Jersey will stay Democratic with incumbent Bob Menendez outraging state Sen. Tom Kean Jr. The Democrats could even lose one in Nebraska. Maryland is a tossup with the possibility of fielding two African American senate candidates in the fall. One of the most intriguing races features Rep. Harold Ford, Jr. (D-Tenn.) with a chance to win the open Senate seat in Tennessee. Ford is a moderate and his success, or lack of it, will go along way in proving the viability of the Clintonista wing of the party. Republicans still have the edge but



Ford is a bright, energetic candidate who has a chance to be the first African-American candidate elected in the South since reconstruction.

The Missouri Senate seat should stay in the Republican column because the Democrats cannot come up with a truly convincing reason why the voters should fire Jim Talent (R-Mo.). The Democratic tilt in Minnesota combined with the national political climate will probably keep that seat for the Democrats. Sen. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) was thought to be vulnerable but the leading opponent, State Auditor John Morrison, has acknowledged that three years after engaging in an extramarital affair, his office investigated the woman's fiancé. Montanans are a generally forgiving bunch and will tolerate a little sin on the side but they damn well dislike people who investigate people.

Sen. Mike DeWine (R-Ohio) is thought to be in some trouble. But an Ohioan at the Longboat Key Tennis Center declared that his opponent, Rep. Sherrod Brown will likely destroy himself as he has done in the past. Go with the wise man from Ohio and keep Ohio in the Republican column. Someone should beat Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.) and right now it looks like a gain for the Democrats. Finally, Bob Casey, Jr. continues to lead Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Penn.) by double digits. Color this one Democratic. All this adds up to a two or three seat gain for the Democrats — good but not yet enough.

Rove must wonder how the Republicans missed the chance to unseat Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.). Katherine Harris is running such a disastrous campaign there is some doubt she can even carry her own campaign headquarters — presuming there will be anyone still working there in November. The Republican National Committee still holds out hope she might leave the race but time may now be too short for a new candidate to

**Burgum, Page 10A**