

# KeyOpinion

## Ostriches and Politicians

**Richard L. Hershatter**  
Contributing Columnist

*A beautiful bird is the ostrich,  
Except when its head's in the sand,  
For it buries its beak  
So it can't sneak a peek  
At the facts which are clearly at hand.*

The largest of all living birds, the ostrich can grow to a height of nine feet and weigh as much as 345 pounds.

It can run like crazy, attaining speeds of 43 miles per hour, but with tiny, vestigial wings, it cannot emulate the Wright brothers and fly even a few feet off the ground.

Long established myth holds that when it senses danger, the ostrich buries its head in the sand, in the belief that if it cannot see a predator, the predator cannot see it. In other words, a problem unseen does not exist, and if it does exist, it will fade away by itself.

Actually, ostriches do not really bury their heads. If an ostrich senses danger that it cannot outrun, it will lay its long neck along the ground and thus, it thinks, will become less visible.

Unfortunately, with a 300-plus pound rear end sticking up in the air, it doesn't really matter whether the head is visible, the problem is just not going to dissipate all by itself.

All of which leads to a discussion of the foibles of politicians.

There are many similarities between politicians and the big, flightless bird.

Both are capable of laying the largest eggs in the world, and although each species can run madly in all directions, they cannot hide.

On a national level, Washington's functionaries are quite capable of emulating the ostrich, ignoring unpleasant facts, while hoping that they will disappear or magically self-correct.

They see no civil war between the Sunnis and Shia in Iraq and are quite certain that all the killing will dis-

sipate and order will be restored as soon as an all-Iraqi army can be trained to replace American soldiers.

Ignored are the occasions when newly trained Iraqi soldiers are ordered into battle away from their home villages, and their response is to shed their uniforms and melt back into the civilian population.

Also disregarded are the numerous instances of Iraqi Shiite soldiers utilizing their weapons and training as vigilante gangs, killing and torturing Sunni Moslems for having so long oppressed them when Saddam was in power.

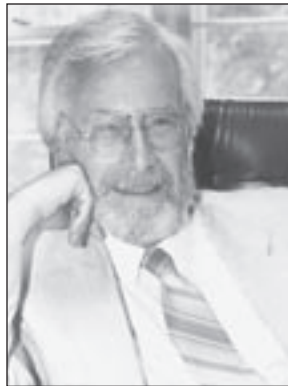
But who knows? If Washington keeps its collective head in the sand long enough, perhaps peace will settle upon the region and the problem, if there really is one, will go away.

Local politicians are also prey to the ostrich syndrome.

Longboat Key is a thirteen-and-a-half-long barrier island whose north to south axis protects the coasts of both Manatee and Sarasota Counties from storms emanating out of the Gulf of Mexico. That protection, however, is only as good as the structural integrity of the island itself.

To that end, Longboat's Town Commissioners have literally spent tens of millions of taxpayer dollars in renourishing beaches and devising methods of slowing down or preventing erosion to begin with. The process works well, except for several "hot spots" that, owing to the vagaries of Mother Nature, tend to erode almost as fast as renourishment can replenish the disappearing sand.

The appropriate remedy is the strategic placement of groins, or jetties, which are structures erected perpen-



dicular to the beaches, designed to deflect ocean currents and slow down or trap drifting sands.

For nearly a dozen years, the town has debated and studied the efficacy and placement of such structures, with an expenditure of tens of thousands of dollars, culminating with a plan presented to the State of Florida early this year calling for a number of solid groins, at a cost of over a million dollars.

The state refused a permit, calling instead for permeable, or semi-permeable structures, so as not to starve down drift areas of a share of sand. The Town Commission's response was to send its representatives back with requests for reconsideration.

On August 16, the town manager and staff, in the company of the town's hired experts, met with officials of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in Tallahassee, to seek clarification of its ruling and guidance as to the next step.

Although the state agency refused to re-write the town's permit application for it, the representatives did make it clear that it would not approve any solution that did not embody some type of permeability.

At its last workshop on Sept. 21, Longboat Commissioners continued to dither and failed to take any real action, in the apparent hope that if it continued to do nothing, the problem would somehow resolve itself.

All hail the flightless ostrich. It is not alone in its habits.

*Time and tide both do their work  
And nothing goes as planned;  
When leadership its duties shirk,  
Heads buried in the sand.*

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## Are We Really the Bad Guys?

**Tom Burgum**  
Contributing Columnist

The world-wide anti-American rant reached new levels last week as Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez entertained the amorphous mass of authoritarians who pass for the U.N. General Assembly with his grade school rendition of "it's all Bush's or America's fault."

Many in this country were upset that Chavez said the things he did and that he received a rousing reception, as opposed to the tepid one accorded Bush. You have to remember that of the 190 nations in the U.N. between 70 and 88 are actual democracies, depending on which survey you believe. That means that between 102 and 120 are dictatorships.

Most of the representatives from the dictatorships are not the sharpest knives in their national drawer. Many only have the job because they are the brother-in-law of the Dictator for Life of Goofbanistan, or some such backwater oligarchy. Of course they don't like Bush. He is pushing democracy, which for many delegates is a code word meaning "unemployment" or "back to herding goats."

Some Americans like what Chavez says. They applaud when he says he — along with Cuba, Iran and the nonaligned countries — will save the world from imperialist doom. Chavez even had the temerity to hold up Noam Chomsky's dreary, unreadable book, "Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance." It says something unpleasant about America and the book is now popular because the fat, little tyrant held it up on TV.

It is a good thing for those who wish to register disapproval of America or our government policies that they do not live in Venezuela. According to the New York Post, "Francisco Uson — a former minister in Chavez's own



cabinet — recently drew a six-year term for expressing an opinion on television. Carlos Ortega, the president of Venezuela's affiliated federation of workers, got a 16-year sentence for instigating a legal strike despite protests by the International Labor Organization of this unspeakable violation of human rights." (And some Democrats think Wal-Mart is tough on unions.) Chavez makes it clear he is no fan of democracy. He has praised Libya, North Korea and Cuba as ideal forms of government — countries where rulers, accountable to no one, torture, imprison and murder their opponents.

Noam Chomsky is considered a key intellectual figure of the left, which tells you what a sorry group it has become. Like many of that ilk, he is a one-trick pony. The trick is to take whatever the subject and turn it into his socialist rant or at least to something he thinks he understands. In an interview in the "Asheville Global Report," he simplified the question of why we are fighting the war on terror. Chomsky in his own words: "It is very important for the Bush administration to get people frightened. The last thing they want is for the people of the U.S. to pay attention to what the Bush administration is doing to them, to the fact that it is working on a very substantial transfer of wealth from poor to rich. That is what the tax cuts are about..." Now we understand. It is not about 9/11: it is about tax cuts. Give Chomsky this: it is remarkable how easily he managed to move the subject from 9/11 and the war on terror to tax cuts.

Chomsky also simplifies American history. None of this John Ford and John Wayne business about the brave pioneers settling the West. He simplifies our history by saying, "Just establishing [America] was a brutal, murderous affair." It must be hell for Chomsky to live in a country whose history he views as a 400-year-old horror story.

Chomsky is certainly not alone in the intellectual wilderness. His friend Howard Zimm, another leading leftist, has an equally strange view of the world. Nikita Khrushchev once described the Korean War as one of the three defeats of communism; the other two were

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