

## Palouse Pundit Celebrates First Year of Broadcasting

This is Nick Gier, the Palouse Pundit, looking back at 2006 and also forward into the new year. One year ago I started this commentary on KRFP, Radio Free Moscow, 92.5 FM. I'm grateful to both station manager Leigh Robartes and Nancy Casey for this great opportunity. The name "Palouse Pundit" was actually Nancy's idea.

Iraq was at the top of the news nearly every day. 2006 may be the worst year for this country since Mongol and Christian armies sacked Baghdad in 1258. Thousands of Baghdadis are leaving the capital every day because of the violence. Over 2.3 million Iraqis have left their country since the war began.

Baghdad must produce its own power, because seven out of the nine transmission lines supplying the capital are currently down because of insurgent attacks. Before the war residents used to get 16-24 hours of service, but now they get 6.6 hours of electricity.

It looks as if Bush will be doing the "surge," sending 20,000 additional troops to secure Baghdad and Anbar Province. Local military officials have already declared Anbar lost, so it difficult to see how anything can be achieved there, except the loss of more American lives. More soldiers lost their lives this past year (857 as of Dec. 26) than any previous year of the war. The number killed in Iraq has now surpassed the 9/11 dead.

The U.S. has already tried a "surge" in Baghdad, but sectarian violence has only increased, and the Iraqi troops assigned to the mission either failed to show up or refused to go on patrol. Bush keeps talking about victory over the "enemy," but who can that be when most experts now say that we find ourselves in the midst of a civil war between Sunni and Shiite factions. Will the Iraqi soldiers that we are training fight a common enemy or will they kill each other?

Bush and Cheney managed to fool many Americans by linking the war in Iraq with the battle against Al Qaeda, but their deception and failed policies essentially gave the Congress to the Democrats on November 7. One study showed 29 percent of evangelicals voted for Democrats (a five percent increase over 2004), and these votes may have won the Senate for them.

This may signal the demise of the coalition between traditional conservatives, free marketeers and social libertarians, and the Religious Right, who want to control our private lives. These strange bedfellows were destined to have a falling out. Personally, I'm going to declare the coalition dead when Mary Cheney has her baby.

Bush's call for an increase in military forces to fight terrorism is also misguided. The Europeans have refused to call this problem a war, and former Senator Gary Hart agrees with them that thorough police work and more funds for homeland security is the answer, not military intervention.

Egged on by the Bush administration, Israel invaded Lebanon assuming that it could solve its problems by military shock and awe. Once again, this regional superpower was humbled by clever insurgents who know very well how to deliver severe wounds to the feet of giants.

The Atlantic hurricane season was a mild one, but Asian typhoons set records in terms of intensity and destruction. Europe continues to set records for summer temperatures, and some predict that European ski areas below 5,000 feet will longer operate in 20 years.

The Arctic permafrost is melting and the peat bogs are releasing tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the air. Polar bears are dying because they have fewer places to eat, rest, and birth their young. As a board member of the Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute, I have been delinquent in commenting on environmental issues and I promise to make up for that in the new year.

I also feel bad that I've said nothing about the genocide in Dafur, about which I feel more helpless than Iraq. There is now a glimmer of hope as the Sudanese government finally agreed to a scaled down UN peace keeping force. President Bush was the first world leader to declare the situation a genocide, but the disaster in Iraq has diminished our credibility and prevented the U.S. from participating in more constructive projects around the world.

The death of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet on December 7 raised the issue of torture in Latin America and Abu Ghraib. A CIA memo admitted that Pinochet's

interrogation techniques were "out of the Spanish Inquisition," but they appear to be no different, except for the Spanish names, from those used by the CIA in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A German judge is now considering a case against Donald Rumsfeld brought by 12 detainees, who, as German citizens, charge that they were tortured in U. S. custody. Col. Janis Garpinski, former commander of Abu Ghraib, is prepared to testify that the "alternative" interrogation techniques used at that infamous prison were approved by the Pentagon.

One bright spot has been civic activism on the Palouse. The Latah Trail is almost finished, and Bill Parks of Northwest River Supplies bought up the asphalt ground off Washington Street and had it spread on the last section of the Paradise Trail. He is also responsible for the sign that directs people to historic downtown Moscow.

A neighborhood group managed to reach a compromise with the City of Moscow about a huge ball field complex on Palouse River Drive, and a group of area citizens managed to keep open the therapy pool at Latah Care Center. They are now organizing a yes vote for Gritman Hospital's bid to make the building into a Wellness Center.

This local activism is America at its best, and I have been inspired by my neighbor's efforts. America has great potential to do good in the world, and a change in leadership at the top in 2008 will make this possible.

This is Nick Gier, the Palouse Pundit, wishing you all the best for the new year. You can still send your comments to [nickgier@adelphia.net](mailto:nickgier@adelphia.net) or check out my website at [www.NickGier.com](http://www.NickGier.com).