

opinion

Commission to study hunger in America

Government invents new wheel to spin

by Arnold Sawislak

WASHINGTON — With the exception of "waste, fraud and abuse" and its own red tape, it is hard to think of a subject has been studied more often by the government than hunger.

So when President Reagan announced recently he had appointed a new commission to study hunger in the United States, it came like a breath of used air for anyone who has been watching Washington for any length of time.

Starting with John Kennedy, almost every president has ordered up studies of hunger, poverty, welfare dependency or some other problem that amounts to the same thing under another name.

(The different labels affixed to these studies is similar to another Washington

practice: trying to mute criticism of foreign aid by changing the name of the program or the agency that doles out the money.)

In any case, all of those commissions,

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committees and task forces eventually reached conclusions, the White House usually announced that the problem was being addressed, and in a few cases even declared it was on the way to solution.

If all goes as expected, the new group eventually will report to the president,

and the same old procedure will ensue.

At this point, it may be asked, to mix a couple of metaphors, whether the administration is not just inventing a new wheel to spin.

The answer is "no" if the political justification for all these studies of the same general subject is understood.

To begin, the government is not as dumb as it sometimes seems. Almost surely, it already knows how much hunger exists in the United States.

With a couple of telephone calls to the Agriculture and the Health and Human Services departments, the president should be able to get a pretty good picture of the situation along with a list of possible solutions.

But information isn't always what presidents want from study commissions.

First, they want to demonstrate con-

cern with a problem that affects voters. In this case, the sympathetic well-fed as well as the hungry. There is nothing like appointment of a blue-ribbon, non-partisan, distinguished panel of experts to show that the president is aware of a problem.

Secondly, they usually try to pick commission members who will arrive at

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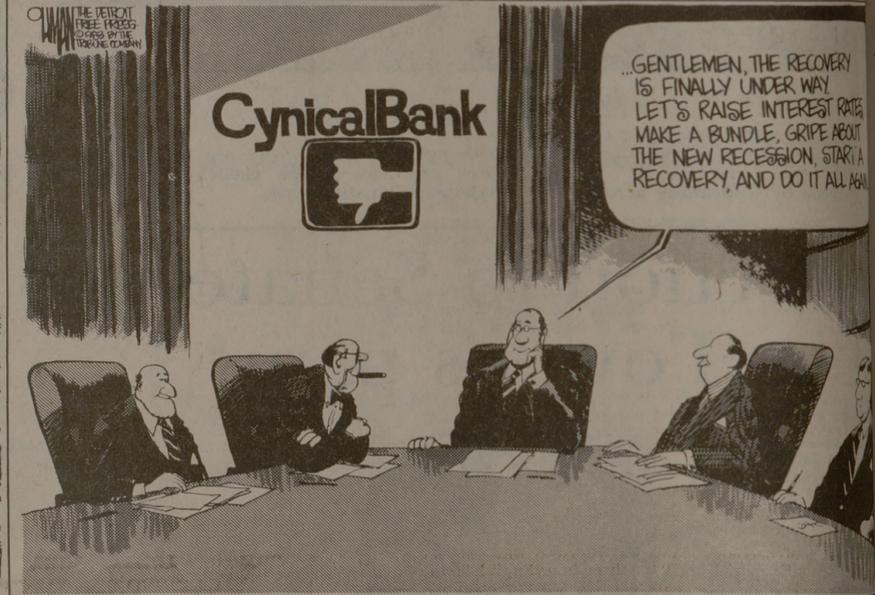
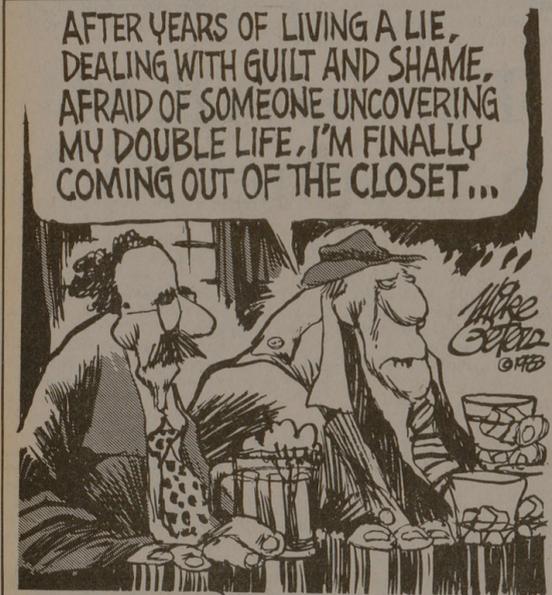
political scientists call "political truth" — conclusions that coincide with the president's views on the subject.

In these cases, one of the purposes of the commission is to provide an "impartial" outside source of recommendations to the president.

The report, by the way, need not be the best one that can be done. It can call for a radical measure, if that is what the president has decided is needed.

Finally, a study commission to the president from the initial report, its recommendations just in case the results outrage the public, or worse, the president.

If the report is what the president wants and isn't being pelted with eggs, there is plenty of time and opportunity for the White House to make the whole project appear to be a brilliant idea. Guess who.



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It takes guts to reduce the deficit

by Mary Beth Franklin
United Press International

WASHINGTON — When members of Congress left town Aug. 4 for an extended summer recess, they left a number of unanswered questions to haunt the halls of the Capitol Hill in their absence.

The biggest one is what to do about the federal deficit that is projected to top a record \$200 billion this year, and remain near that level for at least the next three years.

Everyone knows how to do it: cut spending and raise taxes.

But Congress and the White House are playing a game of chicken over the issue, each daring the other to make the first move. No one seems to have the guts for the challenge in the dawn of a presidential election season.

President Reagan had an idea. Although he opposed any tax increases in 1984 or 1985, he has proposed a \$46 billion revenue increase in 1986 by imposing a surtax on income and a \$5 a barrel oil import fee. But his White House and Treasury Department lieutenants never pursued the issue.

In June, Congress took the first step to minimize the deficit by passing a budget resolution calling for \$73 billion in unspecified taxes and \$12.3 in spending cuts over the next three years.

But the resolution was merely a blueprint, and meaningless unless Congress approves implementing legislation, which it has not.

Despite the better-than-expected economic news in recent months, interest

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rates remain high and could choke off recovery. The result would be even higher deficits and possibly a reversal of the downward trend in unemployment and inflation.

The most vulnerable sections of the

economy are the ones acutely affected by interest rates, like housing. Big deficits means the government must crowd out private borrowers in the credit markets to finance its red-ink spending.

Consequently, the nation's homebuilders are scared and are mobilizing their members during the recess to lobby members of Congress on their home turf.

In an emergency mailing to its members Aug. 8, the National Association of Home Builders said, "It is vitally important that you contact both of you U.S. senators and your U.S. representative and the president during the August congressional recess demanding that they reduce government spending to reduce the federal deficit in order to lower mortgage interest rates."

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Robert Dole, R-Kan., has repeatedly expressed his frustration with his congressional colleagues' propensity for dumping the burden of reducing the deficit on his taxwriting committee.

In the Democratic-controlled House,

Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski, D-Ill., faces a quandary. He believes Reagan should make the first move to reduce his high budget deficit.

To demonstrate the extent of the problem, Rostenkowski held a hearing July 20 to determine if there was support for tax increases.

The general consensus on the White House and at the Federal Reserve Board is that we cannot serve \$200 billion deficits — the revenues must be increased, and spending must be reduced," he said at the start of the hearing.

"The political facts, however, are different story. Bucking the forces of — beginning with the president — take an extraordinary act of courage from Congress."

Congress returns to work Sept. 12. Prospects for decisive action on the deficit are meager.

Only a combination of public and escalating interest rates will force the lawmakers to do their duty.

Getting ahead in media world still depends upon good looks

by Dick West
United Press International

WASHINGTON — One of the nice things about print journalism is that a typewriter has no video capability.

Even with the video display terminals now widely used in newsrooms, make-up is superfluous.

Those of us who have nothing much going for us except our good looks are quickly written off as just another pretty face.

In theory, at least. In practice, it doesn't always work out that way.

I'll be frank to say I have never known an attractive young woman to join the Washington press corps without new career opportunities soon opening up for her.

I'm not saying it there has never been a professional failure with sex appeal. I'm just saying I am unaware of any exceptions to the rule.

And meteoric rises have been common enough to lead to the conclusion that some of the reaction to the Christine Craft case comes under the heading of pious posturing.

Ms. Craft, I should explain for the benefit of readers who may have had their heads in the sand this summer, won a \$500,000 judgment against her employer on grounds she was deemed unsuitable to continue as a television anchorperson because of age and appearance.

(The term "anchorperson," incidentally, is almost always female in gender. Male leads on TV news shows usually are "anchormen." Women occupying comparable positions are identified as "anchorpersons.")

(So much for sexist terminology. Now back to you, Chris.)

Life, as John Kennedy once observed, is basically unfair. In particular, it is unfair to homely reporters.

One can, without having a patrician profile or noble brow, enjoy a certain success as a TV weatherman. (Or, as in the case of distaff performers, weatherpersons.)

But there simply is no getting around the fact that where so-called hard news is concerned, beauty usually is a valuable adjunct to brains.

And that condition prevails in the

print, as well as the electronic, medium.

I'm not implying that looks are everything. Even a Miss America might have trouble landing a job as a cub reporter if she were totally vacuous upstairs.

Furthermore, it is possible to write, or report, so well that one's words will be printed even though one has crooked teeth or some other physical blemish that diminishes one's attractiveness.

When it comes to push and shove, however, and all other things being approximately equal, a person who has something to offer besides raw talent is more likely to get ahead — anchor, weather or otherwise.

That is the way it has always been, and that is the way it is likely to remain.

Although one's employer may be strictly unisexual, news sources likely are not.

I once asked a fetching young colleague if her sex was helpful to her in getting news stories on Capitol Hill.

"Sure," she replied, brightly and forthrightly. "Isn't yours?"

Anyway, my advice to a homely individual of either sex seeking a career in journalism is to consider another line of work.

Either that, or hire a good lawyer.

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