

AT MATTER IN THE NORTHWEST

TO FLINCH



PAUL LACHINE/NEWSART

TIK OF WHO'S IN CHARGE, GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Other pillar of the relative peace of the Cold War, the U.S., is slipping, while new powers such as China and India are unready and unwilling to fill the void. There will be no breakdown on our part, as the United States, unlike the Soviets, is sturdily maintained by economic and political freedom. America's ability to bring a modicum of order to the world is fading in slow motion.

The U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency are just as our diplomacy is hobbled by wide-ranging security threats that are specific to an age of electronic communication and hostile to imperial rule.

The U.S. is America's military power. Armies win wars, but in the theater of conflict is global, navies and air forces curate registers of national might. (Any attack on Iran, would be a sea and air campaign.) The U.S. Navy has nearly 600 warships in the Reagan era to fewer than 300 in the navies of China and India grow apace. Such trends are with the defense cuts that are surely coming in order to save America from its fiscal crisis. The United States still dominates the seas and the air, and will do so for years ahead, but the competition between it and other nations is narrowing.

Conflicts, ethnic atrocities, the yearning after horrible weapons, the disclosure of secret cables are the work of individuals who escape their own moral responsibility. But the headlines are written in a specific context — that of one desire that used to be the world's pre-eminent land power, the world's pre-eminent sea power, that finds itself affected by events than ever before, even as it is less sure than ever of the course toward which it struggles.

Please see **IMPERIALISM**, Page E2

DICK ALEXANDER



DAVID SARASOHN

Promoting Head Start as business proposition

You could say that Dick Alexander got to the issue of early childhood education from the other direction.

At the beginning, it wasn't that he was drawn, as a number of Head Start supporters are, by the vision of 4-year-olds entitled to a better shot, and warm images of picture books with cookies and milk.

He started out way down the line from that.

Alexander, a conservative Republican businessman, started out on the Citizens Crime Commission, wondering "why we were locking up so many young people in Oregon." After several months of research, he remembers, "In our judgment, the best way to reverse the likelihood was through early childhood education."

It's actually not a unique insight; it's why 5,000 law enforcement professionals across the country belong to Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, arguing to their local governments that crime-fighting is not just a matter of more cells and bigger guns, but has a lot to do with teaching kids to count before counting becomes a matter of 20 years to life.

"We think about this being a children's issue," Alexander says. "But it's actually about the kind of adults they become."

And Alexander, retired founder of Viking Industries and former chairman of Associated Oregon Industries, the state business federation, has been spending a lot of time working on the kind of adults that kids become. For the past several sessions of the Legislature, as part of a group called the Leaders Panel, he's been going down to Salem to lobby for Head Start, to make the kinds of arguments that advocates with finger-painting stains on their outfits don't usually make.

"Our mission is not to pound on desks," he says. "It's simply to share the research."

"We've got to do something, regardless of the economy, or at the other end, the social-costs end, it will just get too big."

Alexander and the Leaders Panel have had some success in making their case. They had a successful session in 2001, with the once and future Gov. John Kitzhaber — although in the following five special sessions their gains were gutted. In 2007, Head Start picked up \$30 million in new state funding, and in the 2009 session — when every program director and every legis-

Please see **SARASOHN**, Page E2



Alexander
"Magnificent"
advocate

ALL HAIL, CAPITAL GAINS

I cost the rich some sleep, a social parasite confesses

By JAIME O'NEILL

From what I read on right-wing blogs these days, it turns out I'm married to a social parasite. My wife has worked for both the state and federal governments.

In the eyes of lots of tea party types, that makes her yet another of those unproductive leeches who are swelling the deficit, sapping American initiative, turning us all into socialists and making it ever more difficult for the wealthy to sleep in peace without worrying over the persistent threat of raids on their capital gains, money the Democrats want to steal from them so it can be channeled to the dregs of society.

As if all that weren't bad enough, it turns out I'm a social parasite, too, having spent much of my life feeding at the public trough as a teacher who helped drain the treasury of two West Coast states while attempting to improve the writing skills of equally parasitic college students.

People like us are the root of the current national malaise, if what I've been hearing of late is true. And surely it must be true because what possible motivation could there be for the folks on talk

radio or Fox "News" to tell us lies?

Besides, even the president seems to feel that the cancer at the heart of America is traceable to public employees. Late last month, he came out calling for a freeze on the salaries of federal employees, all in the spirit of shared sacrifice, of course, though he suggested no other specific category of people who might join with federal workers as sacrificial lambs.

And, virtually in the next breath, the White House signaled its willingness to cave on the idea that the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans should be asked to sacrifice just a few percentage points of taxation to help ease the burden of our ever-swelling national debt. And now that President Barack Obama has conceded those tax cuts, the wealthy are getting their Christmas present a few weeks early.

Tycoons labor for us

So, since even the POTUS thinks the first place to go to address our budgetary problems is the cubicle-bound drones who make the federal machinery run, I guess it's time for people like my wife and me to confess our com-

plicity in bringing down this once-great nation while commanding the lordly salaries we've siphoned from the hard-working private sector types, especially those corporate execs and Wall Street tycoons who labor so tirelessly on behalf of us ungrateful wretches who benefit from their entrepreneurial zeal.

But, before my own *mea culpa*, I want to take a moment to insist that my wife is the far greater culprit. For a long time, she worked as a Child Protective Services parasite, going into the homes of mostly poor and uneducated people who, for a variety of reasons, often mistreated their useless whelps. Had my wife not engaged in such wasteful activity, many of those kids would surely have perished, thus saving the nation a bundle, and saving the children themselves from untold additional suffering and deprivation. The money my wife was paid to do this difficult, wrenching and sometimes dangerous work enabled us to live pretty darn high on the hog, too, during those years she was trying to protect abused and/or neglected children. If memory serves, she was pillaging the state coffers to the tune of about 18 grand a year, before taxes. And

that was a couple of decades ago, when 18 grand was some serious money.

When even that kind of lavish money no longer satisfied her insatiable greed, she moved on to become an analyst for the federal Department of Agriculture, where she worked as a minion in the food stamp program, rendering lawmakers' arcane language into something that could be implemented to bring nourishment to needy ne'er-dowells and their litters of young'uns.

Jet fighters before kids

It was an orgy of waste and misguided priorities. For what it cost to feed a few million kids for a year, we could have added a fighter jet or two to our arsenal. Or paid a few more billion in protection money to the Pakistani government in the hopes they would whisper a few words of discouragement to their more volatile terrorist elements.

Unlike my wife, I wasn't complicit in such high-profile pillaging on behalf of the truly unworthy, though I did manage to soak up a lot of taxpayer money while grading thousands upon thousands of pages of execrable student prose, wasting time and money cor-

recting sentence fragments and comma splices to no discernible purpose. So, the only decent thing left for me to do is to apologize on behalf of my wife, myself, and the millions of other sponges who have brought us to the deplorable state in which we now find ourselves.

And now, thanks to the unerring sense of priority shown by our president, we can at last get serious about solving the nation's fiscal problems.

Freezing federal worker salaries is but a first step. Once those staffs are cut, and salaries slashed, we can turn to state workers, and county employees throughout the land — the janitors, the DMV clerks, the firefighters and the road maintenance workers — all in the spirit of shared sacrifice the president has asked of us.

With enough freezing and cutting, it may be possible to drop the tax rate on the top 2 percent of Americans even further. After all, they've suffered enough. And besides, where else are the jobs going to come from if the wealthy can't afford to create 'em?

Jaime O'Neill is a freelance writer in Magalia, Calif.

PERSEVERANCE AND HOPE

Christmas spirit reveals itself at Grandma's Tree Lot

By BOB BALMER

One year my wife and I decided to drive up the Clackamas River to look for a Christmas tree in a U-cut lot. We like more natural-looking trees, a tree more uniform than a Charlie Brown tree, but not a tree that looks oddly flawless. Farm after farm we stopped. All the trees seemed the same, perfectly pruned and perfectly unnatural, and then we saw a sign that said Grandma's Tree Lot.

Grandma is such a sweet moniker. One that connotes kindly and doting. A sentimental name for a tree lot, though I wondered if Grandma existed at all. Perhaps there was no Grandma, just a burly man named Biff brandishing a

was tall, almost elegant, and she wore a long flowing purple coat, her white hair piled on top of her head, her face as withered as the crimson apples still clinging to the gnarled trees dappling her yard.

So you're Grandma, we said. Yes, I'm Grandma, she replied. It turned out her husband and she had owned the tree farm for decades, and though he had died earlier that year, she was going to keep the lot open. Her son, who lived nearby, had driven over to help her. Grandma wanted us to see her peacocks patrolling her side yard. Go watch them spread their feathers before you find a tree. They're beautiful. Her pipes had frozen, she added, but that wouldn't stop her from her Christmas rituals.

Sarasohn: Advocate's grasp of issue likened to Bill Clinton's

Continued from Page E1

lator were looking under the cushions for spare change — the Legislature actually found another \$1 million for Early Head Start, a program to prepare younger kids.

Head Start people think Alexander's advocacy has had something to do with that.

"He has been crucial," says Ron Hornon, head of Albina Head Start in Portland and board chairman of the National Head Start Association. "The only word I can use to describe

him and his advocacy for Head Start is 'magnificent.' I was shocked to see how effective he was in session after session, and he never quits.

"I told him I've only seen one other person outside the early childhood community who has mastered the literature and could talk about it that way: Bill Clinton."

In the Head Start world, praise can be written in no brighter crayon.

Last month, the Oregon Head Start Association created a scholarship in honor of Alexander, a \$2,000 award for higher education to the parent of an Early Head Start student. The Associated Oregon Industries foundation will decide soon on joining the effort.

The commendation marks an educational process that Alexander has experienced himself.

"When I first went down (to Salem) several years ago, I would run into members who said — and that was my position a few years ago — it

was the parents' responsibility," Alexander recalls. "I say I agree, but when the parents fail, society pays for it."

"In many homes, where children have little stimulation and few books read to them, they come out of that preparation way behind. Unless we focus more on that child zero to five, we're missing a wonderful opportunity to change the way that child develops."

And even if you start out with the likely crime forecasts and social-cost projections, eventually you get back to the kids, partly because watching a Head Start session is invariably more heartening than watching a legislative session.

"I'm always inspired," Alexander says. "I'm so impressed with the kids. You realize why you're doing this."

That, and, of course, the research.

David Sarasohn, associate editor, can be reached at 503-221-8523 or dsarasohn@oregonian.com. See other writing at oregonlive.com/sarasohn/

Edwards:

She would have

essentially lying to voters about his character and judgment in the name of their joint electoral ambitions. She was decidedly less than graceful when

entire planet. He ran for president and lost. She got sick. He cheated. She got sick again. He lost again. Their dirty laundry came tumbling out for every-