

RiverOpinion



Let's all march on Time Magazine

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**Let's all march on Time Magazine
And protest to the editor's staff.
It was once a fine magazine,
Separating the wheat from the chaff.
It should concentrate on news of the day,
Politics and national leeches,
Cover what pundits and experts may say,
But avoid knocking Florida's beaches.**

Last month the editorial staff of Time Magazine devoted five closely printed pages of criticism toward the state of Florida, re-labeling it as a "dysfunctional Sunset State" and describing its beaches as polluted by algae and fertilizer runoff.

In an egregious example of wholesale slander, the magazine charges that Florida has become a "Paradise Lost," beset by hurricanes, ruinous insurance rates, inept government, mortgage fraud, a water crisis, declining crops, failing public schools, a housing bust, a budget crunch and environmental crises threatening to inundate the state with salt water and flood the cities.

The unremittingly bleak and dire description of the current status of events rivals anything seen on the planet since the Old Testament's tale of the Almighty's visitations upon the communities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Where on earth can Time have garnered such cockeyed notions?

True, the writers have attempted to justify their calumny with selective quotes from Gov. Charlie Crist, novelist Carl Hiaasen and the late Groucho Marx, but a close examination of the entire context from which the bits were taken reveals a slanted and narrow-minded view that is easily refuted by the facts.

Note, this is not the first time that Time Magazine has attempted to paint the state with gloom and doom. The

last such effort was in 1981, prior to an epic boom in the area.

Take the current criticism about hurricanes.

Hurricanes have been with us from time immemorial, and the state has neither washed nor blown away. We have taken a few hits here and there, but so have other states abutting the Gulf of Mexico, and the fury of such wind events has been known to visit other areas all the way up the east coast.

But we don't have earthquakes. That's a plus that the magazine doesn't even deign to mention.

"Ruinous insurance rates?" Tallahassee has taken care of that by creating a last-resort carrier, in the form of a Citizens Insurance entity, to provide a competitive mirror to the private companies, as well as a fallback re-insurance hedge. The charge is made that taxpayers will be ultimately responsible, but isn't that true with all activities of government, including warfare?

The claim of inept government is equally ludicrous.

Florida's chief executive is highly popular Republican Charlie Crist, aided and abetted by 40 wannabe governors in the State Senate and 120 wannabe governors in the House. Since the legislature is dominated by members of the governor's own party, what could go wrong in state government?

Besides, why pick on Florida? On the issue of ineptitude, has Time Magazine had a look at Washington lately?

The question of a "water crisis" is equally problematic. True, Carl Hiaasen has said that Floridians will be concerned when "saltwater comes out of their faucets," but there is no recordable instance of that having actually happened.

More likely, the threat exists as an incentive to make



citizens conserve, and if a shortage really occurs, authorities will build reverse osmosis plants to create fresh water out of seawater, with the excess salt utilized to turn Hiaasen into a pillar.

On the issue of declining crops, agricultural "experts" have been forecasting catastrophe for years. Sometimes it is the supply of oranges that is threatened with extinction, but the orange groves always manage to bounce back.

Most recently the tomato crop was suspected of subversion, but it turned out to be Mexican red peppers, and Florida's farmers can't be held responsible for that.

As far as the charge of failing public schools is concerned, once again the problem is not confined to the Sunshine State. Education is in a crisis nationwide, and until the country gets its priorities straight, we are likely to be outdone by the student populations of Europe and Asia.

The same is true of mortgage fraud, housing busts, budget crunches and environmental crises. These are nationwide issues, affecting all 50 states and the island of Puerto Rico.

If the environment falls victim to the predictions of Al Gore, the island of Manhattan will sink beneath the sea just as readily as the peninsula of Florida, so why highlight the latter as though it stands alone?

In the final analysis, Gov. Crist insists that there is no more beautiful place on the planet than the state of Florida, which is why he probably didn't leave it to run for vice president.

As for Groucho Marx, anyone who takes him or Karl Marx seriously will only end up on the dustbin of history.

Time owes us an apology.

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Around the world in 800 words — more or less

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Democratic National Convention

The Democrats met in Denver this week to nominate Sen. Barack Obama for the office of president of the United States and Sen. Joe Biden of Delaware as vice president. This gives the Democrats probably the most liberal ticket since Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey carried the flag in 1964.

Hope is the theme of the Obama campaign. We hope for a new approach to government. We hope for a new foreign policy. Most of all, we hope for a government with a unity of purpose rather than one divided by partisan rancor.

As to the last, I must confess that I agree with H.L. Mencken, the sage of Baltimore, who believed "Hope is a pathological belief in the occurrence of the impossible." Obama isn't going to end partisan bickering, of course, neither is McCain.

Obama finally settled on Sen. Biden in the VP slot in the hopes of adding experience to the ticket. Talk about experience. Biden has been around so long he can tell personal Nixon stories. The name "Hillary" still haunts Obama as many wonder why he picked Biden who got 9,000 votes and ignored Hillary who got 18 million.

At this point, Obama must wonder if he will ever be free of the Clintons. Hillary and Bill disappeared for a time and then, suddenly, the Democratic Convention became the Hillary and Bill show. Then the decision was made to put Hillary's name in nomination so her 1,900 or so delegates actually get to vote for her. Obama has to wonder if he isn't living the movie "Carrie," with Hillary's hand reaching out of the grave, trying to grab him by the throat.

One word of caution to Mr. Obama. He was recently quoted saying, "Everybody's watching what's going on in Beijing right now and the Olympics. Think about the amount of money that China has spent on infrastructure. Their ports, their train systems, their airports are all vastly superior to us now, which means if you're a cor-

poration deciding where to do business, you're starting to think, Beijing looks like a pretty good option."

Obama's conjecture about the appeal of China is just silly. While it is certainly true that many of their facilities are new, it may be because we have had ours for more than 30 years. Construction in China is also a bit less complicated than in the United States. Chinese contractors don't have to worry about unions, OSHA safety regulations, environmental concerns or construction standards. Then there is the government. When it comes to human rights, Dick Cheney is a regular Mother Teresa compared to Hu Jintao.

Pelosi and the troops

Seems that Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., put up a poster in the corridor outside his office showing the names and pictures of service members of Camp Lejeune who had been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. For reasons somewhat difficult to understand, Speaker Pelosi took umbrage. She issued a decree that there should be no "display of flags and the placing or storing of any items within a hallway exit access, exit or stairwell of the House Office Buildings." She claims this was done to further compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and, in accordance with her orders, the architect of the Capitol removed the posters.

This is exactly the type of unqualified stupidity that has kept the Democratic Party from regaining control of the government. Why Madam Speaker goes out of her way to anger voters who wish to honor those who have made the supreme sacrifice is a question I can't answer. If Barack Obama does not win the presidency this year, it will be at least in part because of tone-deaf actions like this.

It is good that Obama is an optimist because as Will Rogers observed in his time, "You've got to be [an] optimist to be a Democrat, and you've got to be a humorist



to stay one." Sen. Biden has a great sense of humor so you can say we have a balanced ticket on the Democratic side. This ticket can win if the Nancy Pelosi wing of the party quiets down.

Environmental busybodies

Komodo dragons and the residents of Kampung Komodo, Indonesia, have traditionally gotten along. This is a truly good idea as a Komodo dragon is the world's largest lizard. It reaches 10 feet in length, feeds on buffaloes, deer and recently added an occasional human to the diet. Natives, according to the Wall Street Journal, say, the once-friendly dragons have turned into vicious man-eaters. And they blame policies drafted by American-funded environmentalists for this unfortunate turn of events.

Seems the local folks had been feeding the dragons for centuries, and it was taboo to hunt the big lizards. The result was peace between dragon and native.

It is peace no longer. American environmentalists, in conjunction with the local variety, decreed that feeding the Komodo dragon might domesticate the lizard. That, of course, would be a crime against nature. The dragon did not take at all kindly to dietary change and, according to the Journal article, a dragon recently killed a young boy it found crouching behind a bush.

Officials at the Nature Conservancy's Indonesian headquarters reject any native claim they are responsible for the boy's death. According to the Journal, an environmental representative, one Marcus Matthew-Sawyer said, "The boy shouldn't have crouched like a prey species in a place where dragons live."

You just have to love American environmentalists. They convince a native population to change an age-old relationship with the Komodo dragon. When this change of policy results in the dragon adding people to the food chain, they reject any responsibility and simply advise the locals not to act like food.

I guess an American environmentalist has to look at the big picture and ignore the small things — things like small children.