

F I R E D

WHEN THE HIT HITS THE FAN REAL NEWS EDITION
© 2003 pindermedia.com, inc. @ skirealnews.com

Unemployment Claims Rise Personal Bankruptcies Hit New Record Highs company announces layoff of another 7,000 workers leaders debate extending unemployment benefits average debt balance soars States now carry \$100 billion deficits economic growth slows experts fear Japanese-type recession

THE NEW P.O.W.



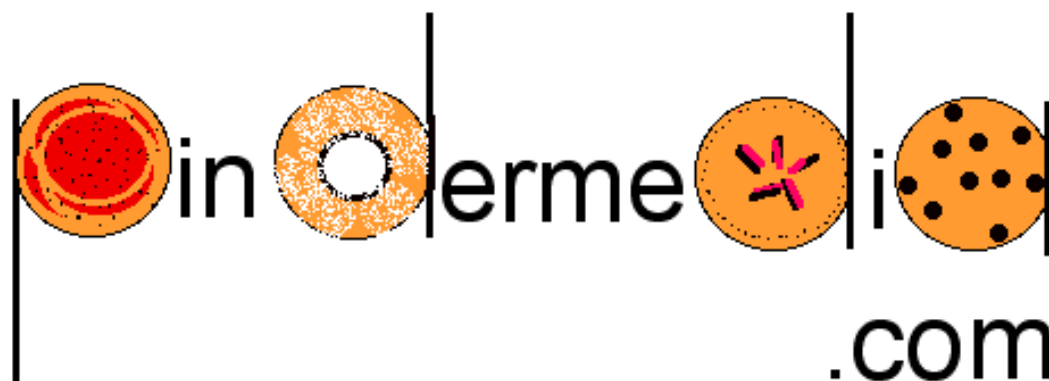
Sometimes it is good to **BARF**.



HUMOR SATIRE CARTOONS OPINION
STORIES LIFE ENDORPHIN RUSH
RANDOM ELECTRONS REAL NEWS ESSAYS

www.skirealnews.com

THE REAL NEWS WIRE SERVICE
USED BRAIN MATTER POP QUIZ ON LIFE
BACHELOR SURF SOCIAL COMMENTARY



Street Life for the Mind

F

I

R

E

D

WHEN THE HIT HITS THE FAN REAL NEWS EDITION
© 2003 pindermedia.com, inc. @ skirealnews.com

THE NEW P.O.W.

It's Not What You Think



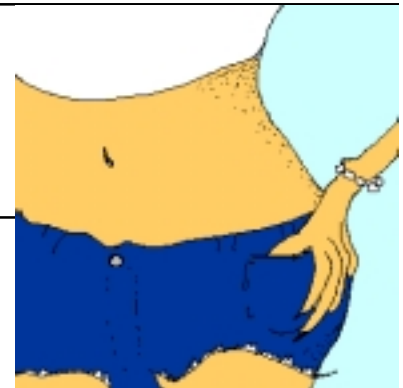
POLITRICKS

Number Crunchers Who Lie

432\$123M4 ME

CONSUMERISM

The Placebo Mantra



ONLY THE GOOD RETIRE YOUNG

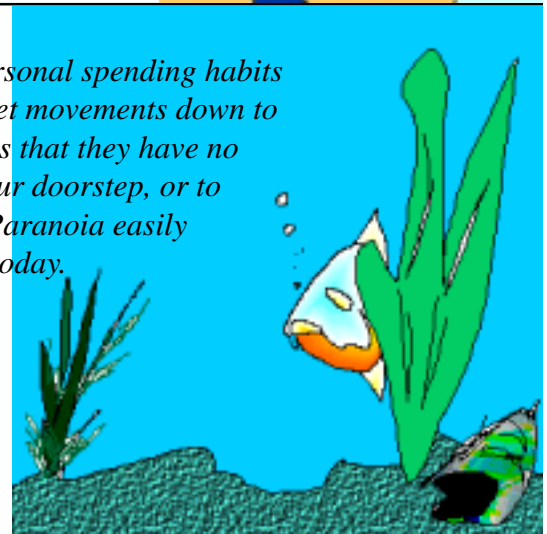
Vultures Surround the Nest Egg

We live in a fish tank. Companies have data mined our personal spending habits and government spying programs can recreate your internet movements down to the minute; privacy policy statements are merely statements that they have no policy to protect, just to cross-market sales literature to your doorstep, or to your email account. When times get tough, the Fear and Paranoia easily spooks even the biggest fish in the aquarium. And so it is today.

Everything is for sale yet the buyers are wary of biting on any hook. Our service economy is in survival mode.

The Real News examines the state of the currents on this economic tank.

*All essays and artwork ©2003 Paul C. Pinderski.
All Rights Reserved Worldwide.*



THE NEW P.O.W.

Many Americans are being held hostage. They are P.O.W.s in an undeclared war against their personal survival. They are Prisoners of Work.

Their job is like a listing life raft from a dysentery infected cruise liner taking on water on the choppy sea. They are trapped in their corporate cubicle just waiting for the Human Relations departments inhuman memorandum announcing the next division-wide axe. In a two-income family maxxed to their credit limits, the axe would have a bloody toll. If one is lucky to avoid it, the next immediate thought in one's head is "when is the next memo?" Such insecurity breeds paranoia. Productivity slips. Lottery ticket sales climb. There has got to be a better way.

So they sit behind their radiating terminal screens waiting for the next atomic shoe to drop. A stock market screen ticker constantly flashes across the bottom of their page. The company stock price has hit another 52 week low. Your stock options are worthless. Your 401(k) plan has been butterflied open to reveal the meat of the portfolio as maggot infested rot not fit for retirement consumption.

So they sit behind their radiating terminal screens waiting for their supervisor to assign a new project. They come slower from above. They take longer to accomplish because one has to look busy in case management stops by the cell-block. Rumors of asset sales,

product line reduction or Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing poison the water cooler. One looks over their shoulder like rats at a garbage can find when sneaking to make extra copies of their resumes on the floor copy machine. There is a sudden, gripping fear that you will be the last one left; that your last duty is to turn out the lights on the company. The terminated co-workers before you would have new jobs--- your new job, and you would be screwed.



CBS does not have to take a team to the Amazon with fake games to see how people interact under stress. All the producers would have to do is to film a documentary at any Fortune 500 company as its workers deal with the prospects of falling margins, import competition, slacking demand and gut-busting personal debt juggling. The real Darwinism is occurring not in the board rooms but on the loading docks and back offices.

Workers with multiple skill sets are likely to stay employed longer because they can move from position to position within a company structure. New workers, hired at lower cost, are no longer guaranteed to keep their job beyond the new hire probationary period. Finding a job in your career choice is becoming more of a pipe dream than a reality. Once laid off, you become only one of a thousand applicants applying for a similar job title, vying for the opportunity to go back to work at less pay.

In the good times, the go-go 1990s, when people were riding the crest of the internet boom, personal debt rocketed to the top with their unvested stock option wealth. Americans averaged more than \$15,000 in credit card debt alone. "Leverage" was a good word, a personal business plan: buy the largest house with the biggest mortgage; buy the sleekest car with the highest sticker price; invest on margin because the stock market only goes up. The massive tech spending to cover the Y2K chaos event dried up quickly. Capital spending on anything vanished like the mirage of Y2K. All that was left from that drunken spending party was the bloody hangover of massive consumer debt.

The good ship American Economy is still being bailed by consumer spending; mortgage interest rates plummeted to historic lows and people with jobs refinanced quickly to save a few hundred dollars a month, which was quickly burned away by the growing monthly minimum balances due on the 18% credit card bills. The new economic cycle is not about business: it is about the worker's personal struggle to keep his job and to pay his bills while captured in his cubicle cell.

POLITRICKS

Those who lie in wait for the little old ladies to come out of the bank are not common thieves but career politicians. The bogeyman is the Tax Man; remember, he even got Al Capone.

Put the fear out in the mind of the public that you have to pay. Then put the sweet whisper of a free ride in their ears that you don't have to pay for a government service like health care, retirement or prescription drugs. Steal their hearts, mess with their minds, buy their votes; keep power.

It is a nasty little trick that has been employed since America was founded by disenfranchised Europeans seeking the opportunity to obtain great wealth from government patronage and public dollars. With the longevity of most members of Congress, America has slowly reverted into the feudalistic monarchy that our forefathers fled to start the Bay Colony. When the pink slips are handed out, Congress exempts itself from the pain. In fact, it spends more on itself.

Pass a balanced budget, but overspend through the actual appropriations (or spending) bills. Sell more revenue bonds, but allocate the proceeds to fatten legislative perks, pensions and salaries. Run massive deficits, but keep your paychecks free from deductions. This is the playbook of the career politician.

This disease has crept down from the federals, through state, regional and local government bodies. A citizen's call for accountability falls upon deaf ears (because of alleged staff cut-backs or the bigger picture that is preoccupying the elected officials). It is tough coming up with bigger and better promises for the electorate without a corresponding huge increase in revenue sources.

There is a simple litmus test to tell whether an elected official is sincere in upholding the public trust. Ask him or her whether they would change the law on their public salary and pension so that they would only be covered under Social Security just like the rest of the working American. If not, give them a pink slip at the next election.

With a constipated smile, George Ryan commuted all the death sentences in Illinois prisons. It was his final act as governor. He has been under a cloud of scandal since his days as Illinois Secretary of State. Licenses for Bribes scandal has slowly worked its way to the doormat of the governor's office. The backlash was so great that he had to concede he was unelectable. The electorate essentially fired him from public office. His sole revenge, whether intentional or not, was to destroy his own Republican state party, which lost all but one statewide office in the last election.

Abraham Lincoln joined the upstart Republican party and slowly gravitated toward the issue of freedom from slavery. He emancipated, but also divided a nation in the process. Gov. Ryan let the death row convicts free from the ultimate sentence, proclaiming that innocent men have been executed wrongly and that the system was broken. Except in the self righteous indignation, Ryan blamed everyone but himself. He voted for the death penalty on many an occasion. He ran on a strong law and order platform. He was elected on this platform. In his last political act, he renounced his entire political career ideas for a national television martyrdom. The liberal media was now his best friend. The laurels were thrown at him like flowers on a visiting Roman emperor.



His hounddog jowls cannot conceal his glee with torpedoing the young bucks that were looking to take his place. He left the party in ruins. But he has no regrets. His old party members have no use for him; they will no longer pour money into his campaign coffers for political favors because he has no votes to sell. He said that he would look at each case individually, but in the end did the blanket, easy way out. He did not intellectually examine the evidence of each case because that is not the profitable way to proceed in attempting to salvage a legacy. The victim families stories being retold in the media destroyed the election for all Republicans. The backlash is still strong. They all curse him because the Democrats now control the entire state patronage system.

Only Ryan's new liberal friends take him under the wing as the new champion for prison reform. He needs them to support his soon to be expensive defense fund when indicted. He will then blame his old law and order Republicans as trying to get back at him by the trials of his petty scandals for his Big prisoner release. And the Democrats will rally beside their reformer. Whether the new defense dollars will follow is speculation at this point. That is why Ryan is looking for that million dollar prize of the Nobel.

ONLY THE GOOD RETIRE YOUNG

When the stock market was roaring north past Neptune, and pension and IRA accounts cruised toward seven figures, it was fashionable to retire early. There was plenty of money in the bank to support one's new luxurious, travel and country club retirement lifestyle. With the paper wealth of a silicon IPO, there were new found paper millionaires who retired before their parents or grandparents. It was the second Gilded Age, with a little guilt thrown in the mix.

It was easy money. One did little as their investments made more money seemingly by magic. The short term gains made long term planning obsolete.

When the market crashed, those without restricted shares got out and breathed a sigh of relief as their balances were cut in half. Those with restricted shares were trapped like rowers on a slave ship in the Dutch West Indies as their retirement plan took on water; eventually sinking with corporate bankruptcies, financial scandals, and a harsh recession that dried up IT and telecom spending.

Many companies were firing their masses in terms of thousands at a time to shore up the balance sheets for the next wave of Wall Street analyst expectations. Good severance packages during the upswing dried up to a few weeks and a security guard escort out the door. Middle management got caught the worst in the last few layoff waves. The problem is that these employees are too young to retire and too old to easily change careers. They now compete with thousands of resumes, including recent grads who will work for half the salary of an experienced applicant.

Those who did not return to the job market, the early retirees, found their oasis balance sheet also getting whacked. The safe investments of treasuries, bonds and money market funds sank to interest rates below lowly savings accounts.

Government studies say inflation is tame, but real shoppers know that the price of groceries is up, as well as insurance and gasoline prices. With only a percent interest income on savings, and inflation at three times that amount, even the most conservative retiree is losing value every month.

Then there are two other undercurrents that are being to take affect in this climate. One is that



the retirees' children want to preserve their parent's money (their inheritance) because they already spent it on huge mansions, lush vacations, stock speculation and \$100K sports car utes. The other is that tapped retirees are going back to their own children to replenish their lost and spent nest eggs. The Me-Generation retiring with their hands out; the Me-Generation's children spending with their hands out. It is the clash of the give-me tribes. But neither one has the legal obligation to support the other; it is the moral pocketbook stress.

So even when one is comfortably asleep, one eye is open on watch for the Vultures; the spending children, the inflation ghost or the vanishing bank accounts.

The only ones who sleep well are the megaCEOs who cashed in their double gold parachutes, avoided costly divorces, and live the high life in private cabin on their private island.

“WOULD YOU LIKE FRIES WITH THAT ORDER?”

What does a new college graduate have in common with his former high school graduate? They are probably both working a BurgerLand; however, the high school grad is probably the shift manager and the new college grad working the french fryer.

More than half of the current college degrees are for physical education. Phys Ed degrees are double the amount of grads for math and science. The stress of big time athletics in college, and the illusion of professional sports megadollars, has distorted the job landscape. The largest employer in America today is the fast food-restaurant industry. It is an industry that based upon the large minimum wage work force, of unskilled labor, and subsidized with federal education and training grants. The industry sucks in high schoolers who need spending cash for the malls. Afterward, they employ those who can't find a better job. Turnover of employees is high, but there are always new takers, especially in a recession. A few are induced to become management trainees at slightly higher hourly wage.

The longer the American economy sits in a recession soup bowl, the more frustrated worker will suddenly find their Burger manager status as a career path instead of a temporary job. The forces of supply and demand are neutral in their vicious consequences. There are much more supply of job seekers than new job openings. And as the internet taught business managers, having suppliers cut their costs or find a new supplier who will, has compounded the unemployment problem because smaller companies can only really control the cost of labor. And that means axe employees to save labor costs in order to save the shrinking margins their customers demand. Economists will not speak of deflation because that has the Japanese Black Death taint to a nation's forecast.



Instead, economists boast of the American consumer driving the economy forward. However, the logic is odd. They claim the great benefits of the 1990s from consumer spending like drunken sailors. Now, they claim consumers will continue to spend us out of the recession. There is only so many televisions one can buy, there are only so many cars one person can drive, and most of all, there is only so much credit one can handle without going bankrupt. Personal bankruptcies hit another record level in 2002. Consumerism is not the answer. It is the growth in new business. However, banks, stung by own scandalous lending practices, won't lend. New small business start-ups need capital; who wants to risk their savings in a ma and pa storefront that can't compete with the megabox department stores.



In February, 2003, 308,000 people lost their jobs, a figure that staggered the markets who were expecting an 8,000 employment gain. The figures also state that more than a third of unemployed have been out of work for more than 6 months. Under the old administration, those chronic unemployed were dropped from the count as being “unemployable.” Now, a clear picture, coupled with the second consecutive year of record bankruptcy filings, emerges. It is not a pretty picture.

It is not the low wage, unskilled worker that is sitting on the sidelines. Middle class, mid to upper level managers have been hit hard in the perpetual cycle of layoffs. Challenger reported 138,000 pink slips were released in February, a 5% increase over January. The rising red tide has not been fully factored into the final numbers. The sought-after first half recovery will not take place under the crushing pressure of pared workforces.

State governments and school districts are now reeling toward default. Sales tax, income tax and corporate taxes have dropped dramatically. Government spent like drunken sailors in the 1990s, even though most of the huge revenue gains was from inflated stock options, which now are faded timebombs of the accounting scandal bubble.

But recently reviewing *the Real News: The Lost Words*, it becomes full circle. We are re-living 1988 all over again. Huge federal deficits. The investigation of a NASA shuttle disaster. Palestine-Israel carnage. Out of control health costs. A major conflict in the Middle East oil fields. A Bush in the White House. And the Democrats jockeying for their party’s nomination, including 1988 players like Biden, Hart, Gephardt and Gore, have returned like a backed-up toilet.

Either our collective memory has been bulk-erased by food additives or some other chemical imbalance, or we have hit rock bottom on Apathy Mountain. I thought the pub-



lic FIRED those Presidential wannabees in 1988. Well, they also would come to FIRE Bush (Sr.), too, because of the poor economy outvoted the good Gulf War victory. But all government actors never FIRE themselves when they legislate fat pensions that immediately vest. They have appointed themselves to micromanage our lives without taking any blame or sharing any pain.

