



**Your ~~on~~ off the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Heard off the Street
Articles 9 – 20**

Heard off the Street

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Heard off the Street (V)

September 08, 2008

I've been out-of-pocket, and off-the-streets while writing reports about a trip to Europe. Thus far, I've filed columns on London and the Senior British Open, with reports still to come on several others. But as the international stage changes, as dramatic events take place around the globe, these travelogue reports must be interleaved with scoops of even greater importance.

(Comments in italics are my observations.)

Report 9: 7-Eleven Store Robbed of 10 Boxes of Condoms by Man in a Wheelchair¹ Dallas, Texas.

A robber rolled into a Dallas convenience store armed with a bat and a knife. He left with condoms and an energy drink.

Detectives deduced the robber decided to take the energy drink after he made his selection of several dozen condoms.

Dallas police Cpl. Kevin Janse said a man in a wheelchair entered a Dallas 7-Eleven Wednesday afternoon, rolled straight to a cash register and beat it with a baseball bat until it opened. But he didn't grab any cash. Instead, police say he stole 10 boxes of condoms and an energy drink.

Which prompted the store manager to ask the rubber robber as he made his exit, "Hey man, looks like you're spending the night. You might need more than just one of those energy drinks!"

A follow up investigation will try to answer why the robber attacked the cash register for the condoms and not the drug counter. Upon the thief grabbing 10 boxes of condoms, and opting for an energy drink instead of Viagra, they suspect he probably wasn't thinking straight.

Janse says the suspect may have been homeless and was likely intoxicated at the time of the robbery.

Readers of this news release are looking forward to a follow up report.

Report 10: Close the Ports!

London, England.

A report in *The Times* (London)² states the pride of England's Henry VIII's navy, the *Mary Rose*, sank because the crew did not understand English, and not because of a battle with a French frigate.

¹ Dallas (AP), "Man in wheelchair robs Texas 7-Eleven of Condoms," *The Press*, September 6, 2008.

² Ben Quinn, "Que? Spanish Crew's Lack of English Sank Mary Rose," *The Times*, August 1, 2008.

With permission of the Mary Rose Trust, skulls of 18 crew members were examined to determine where they had lived. It was discovered over 60 per cent were of southern European origin (and thus, did not speak the exalted Mother Tongue).

How did the scientists know the skulls did not belong to the ship's officers? The researchers assumed a "low-life" Spanish or Italian could never attain the lofty rank of a British Navy Officer.

Back in those inspiring navy days, ordinary crew members had more cavities than teeth and the aristocratic officers had more teeth than cavities. The reason: The crew ate more gruel than limes; whereas, the officers ate more limes than gruel. The photos of the 18 skull samples clearly show a high ratio of no-teeth to teeth. So, one can conclude these sailors took orders but did not give them.

During the preparation for battle with the French ship, the gun ports to the British guns were open. As maneuvering commenced, history tells us the sharp turns of the ship caused water to flood into the open ports on the side that was keeling-over. According to this study, "...foreign crewmen could not understand quickly enough the command to close them."

- Captain, "Mr.Houser, 40 degrees to the starboard. Now!"
- Mr. Houser, "40 degrees to the starboard. Aye, sir!"
- The order is relayed to the helmsman, the sailsmen, then trickles down to the lower forms of life in the lower decks of the ship, "Men, close the gun ports. Now!"
- From this forensic fantasy, the scientists have concluded 40 percent of the men who likely spoke English, simply ignored the orders---as below-deck hands are wont to do--- not knowing they were risking their lives. The others likely responded:
- Men," No comprendo."
- Deck officer, "God Damn it, cerrado el gun ports!"
- As water begins to flow onto the ship's decks, a crew members asks, "Que pasa?"
- To which one of his shipmates respond, "Agua pasa." ...As the Mary Rose begins her trip to Davy Jones' Locker.

I remain amazed by the scope and breadth of the studies we humans do about our past. I'm a history buff, so I benefit and gain pleasure from them. But sometimes, they seem over the top? How much did this study project cost? Who paid for it?

More to the point, what is its point? If any of our readers can successfully explain the point of this study to your reporter (and I promise to keep a semi-open mind about the matter), I will reward you with untold numbers of dollar bills. (Please note the word "untold" in the preceding announcement.)

OK, I suppose the report was fun to read, and we did have some fun with it. But if you think this one was fun. Read the next one.

Report 11: Fat People Got Every Reason to Dance!³

London, England.

A report in *The Times* (London)⁴ starts: “A nightclub (the Havana Club) that barred fat women has backed down after international protests and claims that it was guilty of discrimination.” The photo in Figure 1 accompanies this article.



Figure 1. The object of the disbarment.

There were many protests from women. One said to a reporter, “The bouncers told us we were not allowed because we were too big.”

Miss Mason, a bank worker said, “I told them not to be ridiculous and asked to speak to the manager.” (*Reporter’s note: the manager had recently flunked-out of the nearby Fletcher School of Diplomacy*).

Miss Mason continued, “He would not look at me directly but said that they had received many complaints about fat people, and he told me, ‘Go and lose some weight before you can come in--fat people are bad for business.’ “

Hm. That depends on how many bottles and meals the fat people are drinking and eating. If most of the customers sport large waist-lines, then the manager (Martin Sayers) is missing a big marketing opportunity. No casting of aspersions, but if you ran a club making its income on selling food and drink,

³ As before, non-italics are taken from the sources. Comments in italics are deductions and associated exaggerations from your reporter. Also, the title of this report is an alteration of a Randy Newman song.

⁴ David Brown, “Club Backs Down over Ban on Fat Women,” *The Times*, July 30, 2008.

- Hacker Bravo, “Sorry, ace, Ms. Kim doesn’t speak English. I found out she was our pro partner and tried to opt out of the tournament, but no deal.”
- Hacker Alpha, “Doesn’t speak English! What’s the point of me forking out \$4,000 to play 18 holes of golf with a foreigner who can’t talk to me? For our foursome, that’s \$16,000!”
- Hacker Bravo, “Eh, not speaking English would be one definition of a foreigner. Anyway, I was told Ms. Kim knows a few words of English. She can say, ‘Thanks for the check’ pretty well.”
- Thus, Hacker Alpha, Hacker Bravo, Hacker Charlie, and Hacker Delta spend over \$200 per hole (not including golf cart rentals, and the loss of ½ gross of golf balls). Hitting an average of 110 shots per player, our golfers heard Ms. Kim utter “Nice Shot!” 440 times, including the putts.

I will wager an untold sum of dollars against your told sum of dollars that at least 90% of the foreign golfers, *given losing the LPGA to that of learning English*, will opt for learning English.

OK, maybe not. So to get to the bottom of things, here is a solution: The LPGA moves all its operations to South Korea. Here, the SKLPGA takes over the helm, including finding sponsors, golf courses for each week’s TV coverage, sponsor tents, overhead dirigibles, sycophantic commentators, and willing amateur players for the PRO-AM.

The only requirement of the participants: All pro players must speak Korean.

Heard off the Street (VI)

April 22, 2009

Back by semi-popular demand, here are two more “Heard off the Street” reports.

Report 13: Air Fives Replace High Fives¹ Schools in America.

An interview of a school teacher at one of America’s elementary public schools reveals the extent to which our country is sinking into wimpy, distant, cold, spineless, stupid, silly, indifferent, irresponsibility-shirking political correctness. Not to mention, dependence on laws instead of common sense.

The children in this school are not only forbidden to hug one another (or their teacher), they are not allowed to touch one another. They cannot do high fives to celebrate making a score in a dodge ball game because (a) they are not allowed to touch hands and (b) they are not allowed to play dodge ball.

High fives can lead to injury, promiscuity, or both; which can lead to lawsuits. Therefore, the schools take the legal road to keep from being sued: forbid a high five. If it happens, the school can censure the prurient little brat, maybe kick him or her out of school. In any case, the school is safe from harm, and the children are safe from any demonstration of affection and enthusiasm.

In place of a high five, the children are allowed to execute an **Air Five**. They can simulate a high five, just as long as they do not make any contact with their hands.

In addition, dodge ball can lead to serious injury. One can’t risk a sting to the skin, which might result in lawsuits. One can’t risk the degradation of the human spirit because a kid will get smacked with a soft ball and suffer the humiliation of defeat.

So what to do during recess? The teachers have substituted **Shadow Ball** to replace dodge ball. The children chase each other around the playground attempting to step on each others’ shadows. (In Portland, Oregon, where the sun seldom shines, shadow ball is replaced with **Virtual Shadow Ball**: The children pretend they have shadows and thus pretend to step on them.)

If a child succeeds in stepping on another child’s shadow, the rules require both kids Air Five each other to make sure neither feels downtrodden about the outcome.

In the event of a really stupendous shadow capture, the children are not allowed to hug. That would constitute exhibiting a trait that has been part of human nature since we were humans.

¹ Sourced from a television show. In keeping with my practice of making careful attributions, I’ve forgotten the name of the program, the time it was on, or the station I was tuned to. I do, however, recall that the date of the airing was between March 28 or 29 and April 20 or 21. And I am not making up this story, but I have invented the names for the games this children must now play.

What are they allowed to do? They are allowed to do an **Air Hug**. Yep, they can wrap their arms around each other as long as none of their skin makes physical contact.

What's next? Bumping violations because our kids stumble into classmates in the cafeteria line? Self-abuse taboos because our children have their hands in their pockets?

Write your Congressperson about this silly situation. But make sure you don't send it, as that would constitute physical contact.

Report 14:² The Bobbles of John Wayne and Lorena Bobbitt

Suburbs of America.

To bring you up-to-date, fifteen years ago, Lorena Bobbitt cut-off her husband's penis while he was sleeping---giving a new meaning to erectile dysfunction. She later explained that her husband John Wayne was abusive and had come home that night and assaulted her.

When John Wayne barged into the house, Lorena had been playing that country hit song, "Don't Come Home A Drinking With Loving On Your Mind," but she had made the mistake of placing the CD in the pause mode.

After the assault, Lorena went to the kitchen, retrieved a butcher knife, returned to the bedroom and proceeded to sever John's john. Later, while taking a drive to clear her head---with John's head in her hand---she threw parts of John's john into a nearby pasture. Then, realizing the implications of John Wayne losing his john---if only the most strategic part of it, the head---she regained her head---but not John's--- and dialed 911:

- 9/11, "Your *emergency* call is important to us. We'll be with you in about 60 minutes---give or take an hour. Press 1 if you would like to hear music accompanying your associated trauma. Press 2 if you would like the music played by a Mariachi band. Otherwise, stay on the line for our voice-emergency voice-mail service---a guaranteed response within 24 hours."
- Lorena, "Hello! Look, I've just cut-off my husband's cock. I tossed it into a field near our house."

(Let's play a game. As a 9/11 operator, how would you respond? Feel confident about your opinions? Fine, send them to cock-sure.org.)

Anyway, after the severance of their relationship, so to speak, Wayne and Lorena went through a lot of trauma. Wayne attempted a come-back...again, so to speak. He formed a band called "The Severed Parts" but it never caught on...so to speak. (Why write fiction?)

Oprah had Lorena on her show this week.³ Lorena offered:

"Time heals."

² Oprah show, AOL (April 24, 2009).

³ With my dialogue inserted.

“I’ve evolved.”

Oprah has not yet had John Wayne Bobbitt on her show. Perhaps it’s not relevant. We can just assume he makes the same comments as his former wife:

“Time heals.”

“I’ve evolved.”

To which Oprah might reply, “Really? How so?”

Heard off the Street (VII)

August 26, 2009

The “Heard off the Street” reporter has been absent for the past few weeks. I’ve been involved in the unusual activity of writing something of substance. Back to form with more off the wall... eh, off the street reports.

This past weekend, we had the pleasure of having our ten-year old niece and her friend stay with us. These reports pertain to the visit. For the first report, we went to a movie which brought back memories:

Report 15: *Bambi and G-Force*

Scene: A movie theater in Lovington, New Mexico.

Date: 1947

Movie playing: *Bambi*

Movie theme: A deer lives in a forest. He is surrounded by trees as well as noble skunks and rabbits, but evil humans as well. Later, the deer develops a love for another deer but must confront a contending deer for the affections of his dear. The hero triumphs over its contender. Later, man intervenes to burn-up the forest and loose his deadly dogs onto the deer and his dear. Eventually, all issues are resolved. The movie ends happily as the hero deer becomes the father of twins.

Box office: 25 cents for an adult; 10 cents each for two children. Total: 45 cents.

Concession stand: Three Cokes (no sizes); three popcorns (no sizes); three Milk Duds (no sizes). Total: 45 cents.

Summary: Sixty-two years ago, one adult and two children watch an animated movie at a theater, while pigging-out on assorted treats, all for 95 cents.

Scene: A movie theater in Hayden, Idaho.

Date: 2009

Movie playing: *G Force*

Movie theme: A genetically modified gerbil/hamster lives in a pet store, surrounded by other DNA altered animals, but evil humans as well. Later, this modern day marvel develops a love for another creature in the cage, but must confront a contending genetically-transmogrified rodent for her affections. The hero never triumphs over its contender and remains in angst because of the impasse. Later, man intervenes to place evil Intel chips into home appliances, which are transformed into sharp-bladed monsters and loosed into an unwary world. (Okay, the Intel chips are not evil, but the software is.) The personal issues are never settled, as the animalistic love triangle remains unresolved. But the movie ends happily: The hero hamster and his colleagues defeat the Intel chips and the transformed toasters and blenders. As a climax to the climax, the animals discover that they are not victims of genetic engineering, but genuine rodents.

Box office: Matinee, one price for adult and children. Total: Nine dollars.

Concession stand: Three (small size) Cokes; three (small size) popcorns; two (one size) Milk Duds and one (one size) Raisinettes. Total: 31 dollars.

Summary: Yesterday, one adult and two children watched an animated movie at a theater, while pigging-out on assorted treats for 40 dollars.

A forty-fold increase in prices over fifty years. Granted, there was more Coke in the cups and candy in the boxes today than in the past. Anyway, I preferred *Bambi* to *G Force* because the deer plot was easier to follow than the DNA and transformation themes of *G Force*. Nonetheless, I take my hat off to the people doing computer-generated movies.

Report 16: Make the Punishment fit the Crime TV Lands.

With few opportunities to spend time around young people, Holly and I are out-of-the-loop on what they like or dislike, as well as the culture in which they live. For one evening, we discovered we had almost no DVD movies for anyone under 60 years of age. *Children, would you like to watch The Sands of Iwo Jima?*

We ended-up watching *Mama Mia*, which brings us to the second report of our niece's stay with us.

I read recently that America has pioneered some of the harshest and most unjust sex laws "of any rich democracy."¹ I wondered why the distinction was made about a rich democracy, as most democracies are not poor, because they are democracies in the first place. I also wondered what kind of law could be considered too harsh for someone who preys on, say, children?

The article states, "674,000 Americans are on sex-offender registries---more than the population of Vermont, North Dakota, or Wyoming." I wondered why this fact was cited, other than the notion that theoretically, a state could be populated entirely with sex offenders. Which would be a solution to the problem: move them to one location and let them offend one another.

I'm tolerant toward some forms of so-called deviant behavior. I don't care who has sex with whom, or in what position, as long as the participants are willing partners, leave no stains or odors in the hotel rooms where I stay, and are not minors. I don't even care if they whip each other. Different strokes (so to speak) for different folks.

But I do care if the partner is unwilling and/or not of age. Preying on the helpless is the worst form of human depravity. Because of my beliefs, I was puzzled (initially) by a report, which was the cover subject of *The Economist* (August 8, 2009). The theme of the article: Many laws in America result in the caging-up of people who are in no way close to being sex offenders:

- In 1996 a 17-year old girl in Georgia performed oral sex in a darkened (movie showing) classroom on a boy---who made the suggestion in the first place. The boy was apparently too young for the experience (three weeks shy of being 16), but not too young to enjoy it, and therefore not too young to make the suggestion. The girl was arrested and charged with sodomy. To this day, even after Georgia struck down its sodomy laws in 1996, the (now)

¹ *The Economist*, August 8, 2009, 9.

woman is stuck on a register of sex offenders. As such, she is barred from living within 1,000 feet of anywhere children may congregate. When a nearby church began day-care services, she was evicted from her home. She's marked forever, the scarlet brand of social ostracism.

- Several states register men into a sex offenders' data base if they are caught visiting prostitutes. Some communities publish the names and photos of men caught with their pants down. (For clarification, the picture is of the man's face.)
- A 19-year old man (boy?) was convicted of having consensual sex with his girlfriend (uh oh, she was 15). Fair enough, he used poor judgment. Four years is a big difference for teenagers. But he was registered in a sex offenders' data base, alongside depraved predators. He was later murdered by an anti-sex offender zealot who tracked him down through the sex offenders' list.
- From local news: some communities (for example, up here in North Idaho) are policing newsstands and publishing names of vendors who have magazines on the stand that show the navel of a human. Down the street from the magazine store is a hotel swimming pool, where *live* navels are on display. The local Citizens Against Prurient Navels have not decided how to handle this situation.
- From Internet news: A young mother was called-on by the local child-care Mafia because an anonymous crime solver had informed on her. The crime: She took photos of her young children frolicking in the bathtub and downloaded the pictures on the Net to relatives. The problem was not the bath tub, the children were naked (in a bath tub no less). As well, the pictures were rendered in a professional manner. The excellence of the photos alerted the authorities: high quality pornography. The mom was forced to explain she had no ulterior motives regarding sexual exploitation. She said she was a photographer and was plying her trade, as well as making pictures for the family album. She got away with a warning. We can only wonder if she is now in a database?

It is difficult to examine the sex offender records and discern the dangerous from the harmless. As the number of registrants increase, police are having problems keeping track of the people who are unsafe to our society.

We can make at least some distinctions and react accordingly. For example, it is well-known that some offenders---such as men who rape boys---are extremely difficult to treat. Lock'um up! If they are set free, make sure they are registered and subject to distance restrictions from any child. Give them no quarter. They gave none to helpless, trusting children.

But for consensual sex between teenagers? For indiscretions that are embarrassing but harmless? Sure, if an age difference is there, make for some restitution and punishment. But for the sake of decency and fairness, these laws should not ruin the person's life.

I shudder to think how many of my high school, college classmates, and I could have been placed on a sex offenders' registry for doing nothing more than expressing our passions and exploring the sexual unknown with girls who were just as passionate and inquisitive as we.

As mentioned, I showed the movie *Mama Mia* to my ten-year and twelve-year-old guests. The film has one scene in which a naked bottom of a male is flashed (ha) on the screen for a second or so. I had forgotten about this shot. The movie also shows three women engaged in a dancing and singing routine in which they use brushes and hair blowers to pantomime sex acts. I had forgotten about this scene as well. Or more likely, when I first saw the movie, I viewed it through non-censoring eyes, not thinking I might someday show it to children. Besides, the movie had the word Mama in its title. What could be more wholesome?

Later, I inadvertently surfed to a channel where we heard several four letter words spoken so quickly I hardly had time to hit the change channel button. I apologized to my guests. My niece's friend said not to worry. My niece (two years younger) had no clue about my apology.

Yet I thought about the young mother who took pictures of her nude children. I thought of the magazine vendor who sold health magazines with people displaying their healthy stomachs and navels.

I took photos of my son when he was an infant. I've a couple of him buck naked. I wonder if I would get into trouble by uploading a photo of Tommy in his birthday suit?

Could Holly and I be candidates for ostracism because we showed some video clips of nudity and profanity to pre-teenagers? In certain circumstances, the answer is yes. Just look at the example of the photographer mother; of the 16-year-old girl in Georgia; of the seller of health and body fitness magazines.

I'm thankful for sex offender laws, but our sexual predator net is being cast too wide.

Report 17: "Facebook" for Kids The Internet.

You learn a lot, and fast, by being around someone who is sixty years younger than you. When she visits, my niece teaches me new things on the computer. Last week-end she showed me one of her favorite Web sites: Little Pet Shop (www.hasbro.com). It's similar to Facebook with some of its public posting features. Each child has her own page. She can configure rooms in a house with furniture, the garden with plants, and so on. She can send messages to other Little Pet Shop little people. She can also receive them. Others can comment on her room decorations and garden designs.

The site also has a variety of games. Some test memory skills, others test dexterity. Some test a combination of the two. My niece aced all of them. I failed every single one. Even after several attempts of hitting the space and arrows keys on the computer, I could not get a frigging frog to jump over a pond.

- After acknowledging my defeat, I asked my niece, "Can I send a message?"
- Niece, "Yes," as she brought up the comments screen.
- At the bottom of the screen was a place for entering comments. I tried to key-in my comment, but nothing happened.
- My niece noticed my error, "Uncle U, you can't enter anything from the keyboard. See that list above the box? You have to click one of those. If you do, your comment will be sent."
- They were all nice comments: "Your room is pretty!""Your garden is pretty!" and so on.
- "That's not what I had in mind."

I had wanted to enter my opinion about the frog game, but I clicked on one of the nice comments and off it went into the netherworld of the Internet.

Heard off the Street (VIII)

October 25, 2009

This report begins with a look at the travails of Harvard, its shrinking multibillion dollar endowment, and its beleaguered students.

(I have offered some thoughts on this subject. They are in italics.)

Report 18: Harvard Students are Suffering from Malnutrition¹

Harvard University.

With these difficult times, with the massive loss of home ownership, long unemployment queues, and food-stamp enrollment at one of the all time highs, the students at Harvard are piqued and resentful about the downgrading of their food fare. As aptly put by the student president of the Undergraduate Council, “Students generally feel that if you come to Harvard, for what you are paying, you should probably have the right to a hot breakfast.”

*Over 50 percent of Harvard’s students receive some sort of assistance from others than their families. The remaining students are affluent enough to afford the \$48,868 annual cost to attend this school, including their paying for their daily scrambled eggs. All seem to be complaining about...not the taking away of their breakfasts, but the taking away of their **hot** breakfasts.*

Another non-populist school, Stanford, is fearful the financial meltdown might lead to the cancellation of its annual Mausoleum Party, a Halloween affair at the Stanford burial site. Times are also tough for the Stanford folks.

The free pastries at Harvard’s Widener Library have been cancelled. And...oh no!...at the upcoming faculty meetings, professors will now be denied free cookies.

But as a solace to the hurt feelings of these non-jocks, varsity athletes are no longer guaranteed free sweat suits. We can hear the academics now: “Quid pro quo, baby!”

To make matters worse, some bus services on the campus have been closed, thus requiring students to get out of bed 15 minutes earlier to **walk** to their destination.

We could place a good bet that most of these students spend more than this amount of time working out at the Malkin Athletic Center but do not consider walking on the campus as a fitting substitute...which:

Leads to intra-student disharmony, because the Malkin Athletic Center now closes earlier on weeknights...which:

¹ Abby Goodnough, “Hard Times at Harvard are Making Inroads into Student’s Lives,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2009, A12.

Means the Harvard Tae-kwondo Team will have to share practice with the Crimson Dance Team: One Two Three, KICK! One Two Three, PUNCH! Let's all do the Tae-kwondo waltz!...Just don't yell.

Nonetheless, the Harvard students are rising to the occasion. An “idea bank”---in the nether world outside of Harvard, known as a “suggestion box”--- has been created for the students to submit suggestions to help Harvard save against its 2009 \$26,000,000,000 endowment and diffuse this crisis. Thus far, 170 suggestions have been deposited into this bank. As two examples:

In a supreme act of presumption and hubris, one suggestion was to charge a fee for tour groups to enter Harvard Yard.

In a supreme act of mental constipation, another suggestion offered, “having students clean up their own bathrooms instead of paying other students to do it under a work program.”

Report 19: Airports from Nowhere to Nowhere²

America's airports.

Conversation between two people about building a “general-aviation” airport (an airport with no commercial flights and for private planes):

“Say, fellow Congressman, it's taking me an extra hour to drive to the public airport. Then, I've got to go through all those lines and wait for god knows how long on the runway for take-off. At the receiving end, it takes me too much time to get away from all those people trying to get out of the airport.”

Commercial airports are now experiencing the worst airline delays in history, principally because funding is not available for upgrades. Where is the money going? Read on.

“Yes, fellow Congressman, I have the same problem. Why don't we pork barrel a few million dollars into our districts to build two airports close to our homes?”

*There are 2,834 general-aviation airports, **all with no scheduled flights**. Thus far, Congress has allocated \$15 billion for these places. Half of these airports are within **20 miles** of a private-aviation airport (one that has scheduled flights).*

“Close to our homes? Too damn noisy!”

“Not so. They won't be used by many people but us, a few lobbyists, a few hobbyists, and one or two well-heeled Gulfstream airplane owners.”

In a survey of seven states, USA TODAY reveals: of the 312 general-aviation airports examined, more than half operate at less than 10 percent of capacity. Nearly 90 percent operate at less than one-third of capacity.

² Thomas Frank, “Little Used Airports Cost Taxpayers Big Money,” *USA TODAY*, September 17, 2009, 1A – 2A.

A little known federal program raises billions of dollars a year through taxes on commercial airline ticket sales to fund the building and maintenance of what are private, under-used airports. The taxes for this idea add up to about 15 percent of our ticket to fly into and out of congested, ill-run underfunded airports, places in dire need of infrastructure upgrades. Underfunded to the extent they can't expand runways and services, leading to delay and congestion.

That's right readers. Most of us are paying a large chunk of our ticket price for airports we will never use. Some of these airports sit idle most of the day, with an occasional flight from a small plane or big spender in a Gulfstream V. (A big spender for planes and a big spender for political campaign contributions.)

Supporters say these airports are important for the town (or countryside) in which they are located. Really? Studies show 66 percent of all private flights are for personal/recreational use. 6 percent are for flight instruction for future personal/recreational use. Only 16 percent are for business purposes.

Nothing can compare to the excess of our Congress---unless it's the self-generated (in concert with the boards of directors) pay packages of Wall Street executives. I'm reminded of that confusing, obscure quote, "Nothing exceeds like excess." I'm not sure what the quote means, but we could make it less obtuse with, "Nothing exceeds like Congress."

Report 20: Divorce, American Style

America's courts.

Horace and Mildred, in their 80s, have decided to get a divorce. They love each other and wish to remain married, but they have too many financial assets to stay together. Horace is in bad shape. Mildred is spry-enough, but can no longer take care of her husband, so he must move from their home into assisted living. The trouble is, as "well-off" as they are, they cannot afford the assisted living expenses. But they cannot continue the present arrangement.

What are these folks' assets? They own their home and have a modest savings account. Both are on social security and Medicare. That's it. They no longer drive. Local volunteers provide their mobility needs.

Irony in action. They could avail themselves of Medicaid, a plan that takes care of all their needs. But in order to do so, *the family assets must be worth less than \$2,000*. So, they sell their house and liquidate the proceeds, along with their savings. But where does Mildred live? Horace is ensconced in the Make Merry If You Can old folks' home. Mildred is homeless.

A divorce solves the problem. They split-up. The assets are assigned to Mildred. Horace is now destitute and eligible for Medicaid and the Make Merry residence. Mildred visits Horace when she is able to. But it just isn't the same. ...Divorce, American style.