

Three Strikes and You're Out

April 2005 will mark the third mayoral election since I arrived in Rockford at the end of 1995. In that first election in April 1997, Rockford's first (and, so far, only) black mayor, Democrat Charles Box, was running for his third term. For eight years, the city had been under a federal court order to desegregate its schools; the school board had imposed taxation without a popular referendum (later declared illegal by the Illinois Supreme Court) to pay for the lawsuit, which ultimately cost Rockford's taxpayers a third of a billion dollars; and the city's residential neighborhoods were crumbling under the highest property-tax rates in the nation.

The protest against the illegal tax, led by the redoubtable Mary Hitchcock and the indefatigable Barb Dent and fought *pro bono* in the courts by the heroic Michael O'Brien, was at its peak; The Rockford Institute turned out over 700 people on a cold, snowy, and icy night in February for a rally against judicial tyranny; and all Mayor Box could bring himself to do was to advise the taxpayers of Rockford to "belly up to the bar."

Black families were having their homes taken from them through eminent domain in order to build palatial "magnet schools" (equipped with planetaria and Olympic-sized swimming pools) that were somehow supposed to rectify discrimination against those same black families; allegations of corruption against Box and his administration (including collusion with public-works contractors who had financed Box's mayoral campaigns and for whom, after he left office, he would go to work) were widespread; and, when the dust had settled, Box had been reelected to his third term.

Four years later, Mayor Box having announced his retirement, the Democratic mantle passed to Doug Scott, who had served as city legal director under Box before moving up to the state legislature, backed by the same public-works contractors who had funded Box. As a state representative, Scott's most-important legislative initiative was a bill that would have legalized euthanasia, not exactly a popular measure in this staid Midwestern town. Publicly identified with Box's

stand on the school-desegregation lawsuit (Scott had consistently refused to take any action against the illegal taxation imposed by the school board), Scott was also widely criticized for having sponsored legislation allowing Winnebago County to employ "Quick Take," a particularly virulent form of eminent domain that allows a governmental body to seize private property first and negotiate a price later. (Traditionally, under eminent domain, the owner retains control of the property until he has been paid, which allows him, if he can afford a competent lawyer, to negotiate something close to a just price. Under "Quick Take," however, government has no need to play fair, since the property is transferred at the beginning of the process.) Blind veteran Tom Ditzler had lost over half of his rural homestead west of Rockford in a "Quick Take" action that made the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* when a local activist tried to chain himself to a tree to prevent its destruction by a bulldozer.

And, when the dust had settled, Doug Scott was elected mayor of Rockford in April 2001.

Why, in a city routinely described (at least until recently) as Republican have the Democrats won six mayoral elections straight? (Democrat John McNamara was in office for two terms in the 1980's before handing the mantle over to his city legal director, Charles Box, and returning to the "private sector" to become president of the parent company of the public-works contractor that backed McNamara, Box, and Scott.) Partly, it can be attributed to the dynastic effect that we see at work in national elections as well; and, partly, well, the times, they are a-changin'. The erosion of Rockford's manufacturing base, whose owners and workers have traditionally voted Republican; white and middle-class flight during the 13 years of the federal desegregation lawsuit; and increased immigration (Rockford's Hispanic population grew from around two percent of the total population in 1990 to just under ten percent in 2000) have combined to tip the political balance. Today, Rockford is either evenly split (as the city council, in fact, is) or trending Democratic. By no means, how-



ever, should the mayor's office be out of play for the Republicans.

Still, come April 5, Doug Scott will be reelected for his second term, despite a lackluster first term that has satisfied neither his critics nor his supporters. Rockford's downtown, though arguably no worse off than when Scott took office, has not experienced the revival he promised; over 11,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost over the past four years; minor-league sports teams and important new business ventures have been snapped up by surrounding cities and counties. Over the last six months, the city has engaged in a frenzy of road projects, presumably to provide Scott with one accomplishment he can point to in his reelection campaign; the main effect, however, has been to anger drivers (some of whom do vote), who have found crosstown trips doubling or tripling in time (if, indeed, they can even get there from here).

So why am I certain that Mayor Scott will win reelection? Because, for the third time in a row, the local Republicans have put up a losing candidate. In 1997, they nominated W. Timothy Simms, a former state legislator and Rockford alderman who had, over the years, turned off many older Rockfordians with his imperious, self-righteous attitude. Sick as people were of the Box regime, Simms' campaign did not lack for volunteers, but the campaign managers made very poor use of them, calling the same Republican voters as many as five times during the campaign to ask them whether they intended to vote for Simms. Caught up in conspiracy theories about the connections and past actions of Box's financial supporters, Simms and his cronies refused to address the question of the influence of public-works contractors directly; the closest they dared come was a cute little commercial, which ran a few times only days before

the election, showing a remote-control car crashing into a pothole.

(Several years after his loss, Simms was elected to the county board, where he is now the Republican majority leader. His actions there, including spearheading the effort to acquire St. Mary's Oratory in downtown Rockford to make room for the new Winnebago County jail, have made even some of his former supporters — myself included — conclude that, as bad as the Box regime was, the city may have dodged a bullet when Box was reelected.)

By 2001, the political landscape had changed somewhat. With Box departing, the field was wide open, and Larry Morrissey, a lawyer in his early 30's whose family has long been Democratic, announced his candidacy as an independent. While Morrissey was able to take advantage of some of the anti-establishment groundswell generated by the desegregation lawsuit and the Ditzler "Quick Take," he refused to take a strong public stance on either issue and had trouble articulating an agenda other than the revitalization of downtown, which happens to be where most of his family's real-estate investments lie. Doug Scott, however, also promised to focus on downtown and, during his campaign, wisely distanced himself from those who had funded his career in the legislature.

Rather than turning to one of their leaders on the city council, the Republicans chose Denny Johnson, a businessman, Republican financier, and evangelical Christian whose commitment to the latter was called into question by his service on the board of directors of Swedish-American Hospital, which not only employed Richard Ragsdale, the only abortionist in Rockford, but had made him head of obstetrics. Because of his position with Swedish-American, Johnson had supported Mayor Box's last major initiative, which involved the use of public funds to tear down dozens of homes and reroute Charles Street south of the hospital so that Swedish-American, a private business, could expand dramatically. Indeed, Johnson's main campaign promise was that he would turn Rockford into the "Mayo Clinic of northern Illinois."

And Doug Scott's former backers, from whom he was actively distancing himself? They showed up as donors in Denny Johnson's campaign-finance disclosure forms, and Johnson chose Mayor Box's campaign-finance chairman to perform

the same function for him.

It's no surprise, then, that Johnson was not only unable to excite much of the Republican base but actually lost some of the more diehard activists to Morrissey, who put in a strong third-place showing. Even so, Morrissey seems to have drawn more votes from the Democrats than from the Republicans, which indicates the fundamental weakness of Johnson's candidacy. (That weakness was illustrated as well by the rather successful attempts of some Republicans to spread the rumor that the unmarried Morrissey is a homosexual.)

Which brings us back to the current race, though that term is a bit of an overstatement to describe an election in which the Republican candidate, two-and-a-half months before the election, has made no visible sign of her candidacy. In fact, I wasn't even aware the Republicans had finally settled on a candidate until about three weeks after Gloria Cardenas Cudia, a former Rockford school-board member and failed candidate for state legislature, formally announced in early December. There had been rumors that some prominent Republicans had argued that the party should unofficially support Larry Morrissey, who is running as an independent once more, by not fielding a candidate. In a two-man race, Morrissey might well have a chance at beating Doug Scott; in a three-person race, however, Scott will return to the mayor's office.

There is an argument to be made that the local Republican Party, in order to remain viable in future mayoral elections, had to field a candidate in this one — even a candidate that no Republican leader seriously expects to win. But there are candidates, and then there are candidates, as Alan Keyes proved in his recent "run" for U.S. Senate here in Illinois. Gloria does not have the drawbacks that Keyes had — she is calm, charming, polite, helpful — but neither does she have Keyes' fire. As a school-board member, she did not offer much aid and comfort to those of us who opposed the desegregation lawsuit, but she wasn't the worst of the lot, either. In the end, she's simply a nice, civic-minded, Christian woman who reminds Hispanics that they are allowed to vote Republican, too.

What the Republicans really needed was a strong, energetic, and preferably young candidate who understands the manufacturing crisis in Rockford, could present cogently and coherently the failure of Mayor Scott to address the

issue, and could offer a viable alternative. While Scott has pledged \$50,000 in city funds to help get the Manufacturing Alliance of the Rock River Valley ("a non-profit organization directed to bring manufacturing contracts into the region that individual companies couldn't bring in on their own") off the ground, he has been strangely nonchalant while other cities, such as Nashville, have successfully courted long-time Rockford manufacturers.

In the current campaign, Morrissey is still focused on downtown; he not only seems uninterested in manufacturing but has failed to attend manufacturing-related events that a mayoral candidate should have had on the top of his daily calendar. In the end, Morrissey suffers from a certain failure of vision: A revitalized downtown will not turn manufacturing in Rockford around; a revived manufacturing sector, however, might also revive downtown.

A Republican candidate with strong credentials in manufacturing would have been able to marginalize Morrissey and put Scott on the defensive — someone like Eric Anderberg, a contemporary of Larry Morrissey and general manager of Dial Machine, who has testified before Congress on the manufacturing crisis in Rockford and has been featured in numerous national articles on the topic.

Local Republicans, however, regard such people as outsiders (unless, like Denny Johnson, they have given enormous sums to local politicians), and they would rather go with an active party loyalist such as Cardenas Cudia, even if that means losing the election. In trying to protect the party, however, they may ultimately have destroyed its chances at ever recapturing City Hall. When the votes are counted on April 5, the Republican Party will likely become the third party in Rockford, with Morrissey coming within striking distance of Mayor Scott and Cardenas Cudia trailing Morrissey significantly at the polls. And with the Republicans safely out of the picture, Larry Morrissey may find that, in 2009, the third time's the charm. c



Letter From the Netherlands

by Alberto Carosa

From Mercy Killing to Euthanasia



In late 2000, the Netherlands became the first country to legalize euthanasia. Under the law, passed by the lower house of the Dutch Parliament 104-40, a child as young as 12 can request to be put to death, provided he has at least one parent's consent.

In 1999 alone, according to the Associated Press (July 13, 2000), 2,216 Netherlanders died from euthanasia or "physician-assisted suicide," usually through lethal injection. The new law simply formalized the guidelines that had been in place since 1994, requiring that patients must be suffering unbearable pain, be told of all available options, and make the request to die of their own accord, unprompted by a doctor. Doctors must also obtain a second opinion and report each case.

The NVVE (Nederlandse Vereniging voor een Vrijwillig Levensende, the Dutch Voluntary Euthanasia Society) boldly proclaimed that the new law would be a step toward public acceptance of the "right to die"—not just for patients at late stages of serious illness but for anyone

who expected "not to be able to die [in a dignified [manner]." The society argued that it was simply defending a "human basic right—if you can choose what kind of house you're going to live in and things like that, why can you not choose what death? It's an individual choice . . . your life."

Even without resorting to religious or philosophical tenets and convictions, this argument can be easily rebutted by common sense and experience. If we accept that individual choice and autonomy has been elevated above all other values, where are we going to place the goalposts? And who will decide? Once the right to life is placed in jeopardy, all kinds of abuses ensue, as the abortion saga has amply shown.

The alleged "right to die with dignity" has become the "right to be killed." Euthanasia advocates are demanding that doctors become killers, transforming those who save life into dispensers of death. And this is precisely what is happening in the Netherlands, where the distinction between stopping useless medical treatment and the administering of lethal injections is being blurred by the promoters of euthanasia.

This distinction is very important. If a patient has advanced cancer, he does not have to undergo painful operations that are not really going to prolong life. He can say: "I have had enough, the medical treatment or operations must cease." And medical personnel can then give the patient only food and water and pain-relief treatment. Euthanasia, however, is not letting a patient die but killing a patient who is not dying—or is not dying on the timetable those who anticipate his death would prefer.

Earlier this year, the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that, in a number of cases of euthanasia in the Netherlands, death had not always occurred in a dignified manner. The journal cited instances of vomiting and convulsions, a lengthy interval between the administration of the lethal drug and death, failure to induce a coma, and patients awakening out of an induced coma.

Once euthanasia is legalized, even in limited circumstances, the practice soon spreads. The "right to be killed" will quickly become the "duty to die"—especially in the case of older people, who

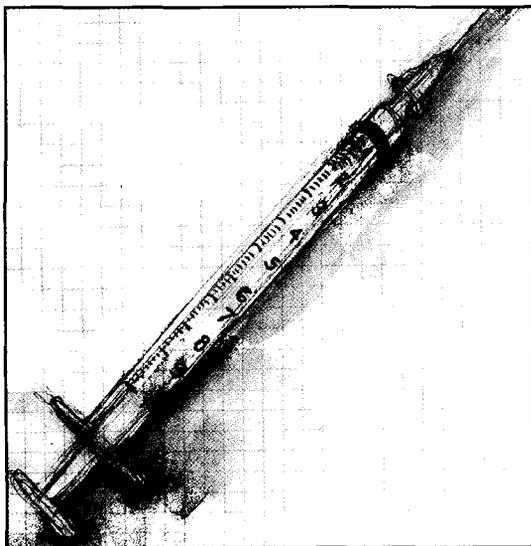
feel that they are a burden on their families or on the national health service. And today, infants are often thought to be a burden in the Netherlands: As many as eight percent of infant deaths have been reported to be infanticides performed by medical staff.

On average, according to a December 21, 2004, report in the *Guardian*, once a month somewhere in the Netherlands, a doctor injects a newborn baby with a lethal cocktail of morphine and sedatives. Within a few hours, the baby is dead. The agonizing decision is often made because the newborn has a life-threatening illness or disability with little or no prospect of successful treatment or recovery. Routinely, the killings are carried out in secret, and the cause of death is covered up. Death certificates are falsified in order to render the doctors immune to prosecution for murder.

The Groningen Academic Hospital admitted to engaging in such practices with three babies in 2003. This is the very hospital that spearheaded the cause of euthanasia by striking, last fall, an accord with the judiciary that its doctors would not be prosecuted and asking the Dutch government to approve guidelines legalizing euthanasia of newborns enduring "unbearable suffering" and with "no hope of a future." A health-ministry official has said that the government is expected to present a relevant bill to parliament in early 2005. This bill is also being supported by the Netherlands' eight teaching hospitals. Ten to 15 cases of child euthanasia occur in the Netherlands each year, and there are an estimated 600 instances worldwide.

On December 10, Groningen pediatric chief Dr. A. Verhagen attempted to justify this legislation, stating that the law is merely aimed at bringing into the open a practice that is already being conducted in secret. "Worldwide, the U.S. included, many deaths among newborns are based on end-of-life decisions, after physicians reached the conclusion that there was no quality of life," Verhagen claimed.

It is in the interest of newborns who have to endure unbearable suffering that we draw up a nationwide protocol that allows each pediatrician to treat this delicate



Elizabeth Wolf