

## Junk-news overshadows important stories in mainstream media

By JAMIE METRICK | STAFF WRITER

The word on the street is that the Freedom of Information Act may no longer apply to the Pentagon, Federal whistleblowers are going the way of the dodos, and the Internet may soon be government-regulated. If these events do not sound familiar, relax; chances are, no one else knows either.

It is most likely because these are several news stories listed in the Tucson Weekly's "Censored Stories: The 10 stories the nation's mainstream news media ignored, neglected, or missed last year."

The Tucson Weekly takes a lead from Project Censored, the longest-running media censorship project in the nation, which reports news that slips through the cracks of corporate media. Since 1993 they have criticized what is called "junk food news" — stories that are blown out of proportion and saturate mainstream media in place of important information.

Most of the articles mentioned in 'Censored Stories' are from independent news sources, mostly Web sites. Sometimes news magazines like The New Yorker and Mother Jones pick up the scraps and report less glamorous issues, but as sociologist Carl Jensen told the Tucson: "What's known to some isn't known to everyone. Not everyone reads The New Yorker."

For example, here are three intriguing news stories from the Tucson's list that went unnoticed in 2005 and what the media was reporting at that time:

### "Halliburton secretly doing business with key members of Iran's nuclear team"

Halliburton — the infamous energy company — sold the private Iranian oil company, Oriental Oil Kish, key nuclear reactor components.

Reported by the Centre for Research on Globalization, this story is fascinating because U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, president of Halliburton in the mid-'90s, may have presided over these dealings. Now he advocates stopping Iran's nuclear program.

Jason Leopold, the article's author, cites close but anonymous sources for the business dealings of Kish and Halliburton.

However, in August 2005 most American news was consumed with coverage of Hurricane Katrina. While New Orleans was one of the biggest disasters in American history and the conduct of FEMA was reprehensible, the reports of Katrina did not subside for months. By the time the media attention died down, the Halliburton-Kish story was months old.

### "New report released shows increase in urban hunger, homelessness"

As the number of Americans living in poverty increases, the current administration is refusing to deal with the issue.

According to OneWorld, the 2007 proposed budget calls for the cutting of an important survey that causes great embarrassment for Bush: the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation. The survey tracks American families' use of programs like Social Security, child care, temporary assistance for needy families and Medicaid, among others.

The survey highlights a serious yet mortifying problem in the United States, and is critical to improving the system.

The story was published in The New Standard in December 2005, while most of America was preoccupied with the escalating murder trial of Scott Peterson. Peterson was the main suspect in the disappearance and death of his pregnant wife, Laci Peterson. The story received major attention for months as the trial slowly proceeded and real news went unreported.

### "Tracing the Trail of Torture: embedding torture as a policy from Guantanamo to Iraq"

U.S. operatives in Iraq and Afghanistan have used torture on detainees, to the point of death. Forty-four death reports and autopsies from U.S. facilities released by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reveal that 21 of the deaths were homicides and eight were possibly the results of abusive torture techniques.

Even though these are not the first reports of torture by the United States, the findings imply that the American military uses torture as a policy. Acts of torture include sleep deprivation, strangulation, beatings, gagging, hoods and extreme environmental conditions.

These findings were published on the ACLU's Web site as early as October 2005, and TomDispatch.com published its own article in March 2005.

Meanwhile, the Karl Rove scandal was breaking in Washington, D.C. News media outlets were buzzing with Rove's outing of secret CIA operative Valerie Plame. Once Plame's cover blew, thanks in part to the international media, everyone in the world knew who she was and what she did.

Of course these were not the only mainstream news stories covered in 2005; it was a good year for junk-food news. We gorged ourselves on the trials of Michael Jackson and Terri Schiavo. We indulged in the White House scandals of Karl Rove and Tom DeLay. We slurped up Hollywood gossip to the point of bursting.

As Peter Phillips, the current director of Project Censored told the Tucson: "It's like selling drugs. But (advocacy groups) don't tolerate the drug dealer on the corner. ... To just give people entertainment news is an abdication of the First Amendment."

Unfortunately, as 2006 comes to a close we have added yet another notch to America's media belt. The problem is not getting better, thanks to increased media monopolization. Next year the nation needs to go on a low-fat news diet, with only lean cuts of vital information.

## RAs Staff Editorial

There are three types of resident advisors at this school: the power trippers with a Napoleon complex, the RAs who complacently follow the rules, and the outlaw RAs who understand the true meaning of their job. None of these RAs deserve scorn for what they do. They are all products of their circumstances, the rules and guidelines set by Campus Life.

There is an extraordinary amount of pressure placed on the RAs. They have to go out amongst their peers and "bust." These are students that RAs see every day in the cafeteria and in class. Students see the RAs that follow protocol as the enemy, an extension of Public Safety and Campus Life instead of a source of help.

The job of a resident advisor should be to assist their residents in need. In order for that to happen, trust needs to be built between residents and RAs. If an RA is known for indiscriminately writing people up with zeal and glee, their residents won't go to them for help. A student's fear of getting written up supercedes their fear of alcohol poisoning. This is twisted and dangerous.

There are shining examples of good RAs out there. They ignore the enormous pressures of Campus Life to write-up students without using thought or free will. They are willing to turn a blind eye to the minor infractions like having a drink in your dorm room. In turn they are rewarded.

Their residents trust and respect them and, most importantly, come to them with their serious problems. There is no debate. It is more important for RAs to handle issues of sexual assault, alcohol poisoning and drug overdose than noise violations and underage drinking. With the current set-up this is impossible.

Campus Life should encourage RAs to give warnings instead of citations. Write-ups are effective in stopping drinking like jail time is effective in stopping crime. If RAs work to be friends with their residents, establish real friendships with real trust, a safer, healthier campus environment will develop. Disasters like alcohol poisoning, depression and sexual assault won't have to fall through the cracks of non-communication like they do so often right now.

## Death count in Iraq increases

*Recent report claims more than half a million dead*

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The Hopkins report, with its margin of error, estimates between 400,000 and 900,000 deaths since March 2003. According to The Washington Post, the researchers are 95 percent certain of the estimate. But because it is significantly higher than any others, and since its release coincides with midterm elections, it became instantly controversial.

So far, no one has been able to disprove or discredit them. All crit-

ics can do is compare the figures to lower estimates, and argue that the survey's findings are "unlikely."

Speaking in December 2005, U.S. President George W. Bush estimated that 30,000 civilians had died since the war began in March of 2003. If the Hopkins report is valid, then Bush's estimate is 20-times too low and covers just two months of the war.

Other estimates are probably more valid than the extremes from Hopkins and Bush. According to

an editorial in The Washington Post: "The independent British organization Iraq Body Count reports 44,000-49,000 deaths, which is probably too low. President Bush's "about 30,000" in December was obviously too low. The Iraqi group Iraqiyun reported 128,000 between the invasion and July 2005, which is probably closer to the mark. Extrapolated to the present, the figure would be in the high 100,000s or low 200,000s. But nearly 400,000 couldn't possibly be the answer."

William A. Arkin of The Washington Post used a recent United Nations survey to show the faults of the Hopkins figure. For August 2006, the U.N. identified 3,009 casualties, or roughly 100 a day, and, according to Arkin, the violence in Iraq at present is widely considered to be at its peak. Yet the Hopkins report claims an average of 500 deaths for every day since March of 2003.

Arkin asks, "Is it possible that the U.N. is not seeing four out of every five Iraqis who is dying, even today?"

It is possible. But it is not likely."

The large figures have sparked a very necessary discussion, not just about statistical validity, but about a much more serious topic.

Whether 30, 50, 100, 200, 400, 600, or 900 thousand have died in Iraq, the number is unacceptable.

According to recent public opinion polls from WorldPublicOpinion.org, a majority of Iraqis favor U.S. withdrawal, and nearly half approve of the insurgent attacks upon U.S.-led forces.