

# Playing God a role not suitable for human beings

GREENVILLE, NC - At a service in the small town of Louisburg, family, friends and strangers honored a young woman who likes Spanish soap operas and shopping at Wal-Mart. They shed tears and shared stories and to some extent, said goodbye to someone they knew and loved or simply read about.

For Jessica Santillan, the struggle of life is over and the questions about what happened to her at Duke Medical Center and what should have happened are left to others.

But the failure that cost her life pricks the nation's consciousness. We have come to expect miracles from places like Duke. Yet miracles must pass through human

hands. "As Jessica's surgeon I had hoped that ... Jessica would be one of those lucky few that we would be able to prolong and improve her life ...," said Dr. James Jagers, transplant surgeon at Duke.

Jagers' hands were the ones that delivered a new heart and lungs to the critically ill 17-year-old on Feb. 7. But he put organs of the wrong blood type into Jessica's body. A second transplant did not come in time. The tragedy caught everyone's heart, and startled a culture accustomed to perfection from medicine as a matter of course.

The questions have come hard and fast.

How could this happen at a top medical center? Who



MARY SCHULKEN

failed to do what they were required to do? Where did the system fall down?

Those details are important. They must be unraveled, and unraveled publicly, for that is the only way to resolve the doubt that has been cast over a respected and established procedure and the life-saving process of organ donation.

Yet this should be a coming down to earth.

The services offered inside

the white-front towers of Duke Hospital, and other places like it, are not sought by patients who have a lot of options. They are sought, in most instances, by those without much hope. Jessica was one of those.

She was born in Jalisco, Mexico, with a defect that kept her heart from pumping enough oxygen into her lungs. Her parents sent a smuggler to lead them across the border. They wanted to go somewhere they could expect a miracle.

Amazing things go on with every day regularity in the medical centers of this nation. Worn-out bodies are given new life. Babies not fully formed are nurtured until their lungs can sustain a lusty cry. Groundbreaking

surgery mends crushed marrow.

Yet by its nature, such spectacular work requires ordinary human beings to take extraordinary risks. To defy the odds. To push the envelope.

To play God. But just as there are bounds to flesh and blood, there are margins to working with a net. Medicine is not a practice without limits.

That does not excuse either Jagers or Duke - or the next place - from employing ironclad checks that protect against human error. Nor does it relieve them of blame for a dreadful error. It just means the burden is that much heavier.

"In each step there is an

individual, and individuals can make mistakes," Jagers said in a videotaped statement released after Jessica's death. "As Jessica's surgeon, I take responsibility for those errors. I take responsibility for the entire team."

The suffering of Jessica Santillan has come to an end. But for a doctor who made a mistake, a medical center that trades in miracles, and for each person who has signed an organ donor card, the questions about what happened will go on.

(Mary Schulken is senior associate editor and editorial page editor for The Daily Reflector in Greenville, NC. E-mail her at mschulken@coxnews.com.)

## This one isn't your dad's war

Saddam Hussein will fight an American military many times more lethal than the one that drove his troops out of Kuwait a dozen years ago.

Commander in Chief George W. Bush controls military power a quantum leap ahead of that commanded by his father during the Persian Gulf War.

The upside to overpowering American lethality is that it makes wars easier to win.

The down side is exactly the same. Wars will be easier to win - an intoxicant that threatens exaggerated self-confidence and more wars.

An analysis of America's technological revolution in the military by Washington Post writers Thomas E. Ricks and Vernon Loeb found that U.S. military commanders "are confident almost to the point of cockiness."

There is good reason to be confident. The first war with Iraq was analog. The next war with Iraq will be digital.

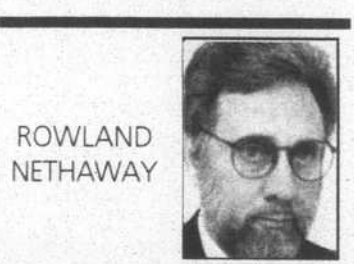
Smart-bomb technology has progressed further and faster than Bush the elder, then Joint Chiefs Chairman Colin Powell or Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf could have imagined in the conflict that Saddam Hussein predicted would be the mother of all wars.

In Bush the younger's war (does anyone doubt it?), Americans will employ bombs guided by lasers or a new generation of smart bombs guided by satellites.

America's bombers ranging from the B-1, the B-2 and the old reliable B-52 will carry multiple JDAM bombs that can be individually programmed with coordinates for different targets.

America's new generation of cruise missiles now can be rapidly programmed with coordinates and guided by on-board GPS satellite receivers.

Also according to the analysis of Ricks and Loeb, the Army's Apache Longbow helicopter gunships have vastly improved technologies that can detect and identify 128 battlefield targets from five miles away and fire radar-guided Hellfire missiles



ROWLAND NETHAWAY

that will lock onto and track the targets similar to air-to-air missiles. This new helicopter technology is considered 400 percent more lethal than in the Gulf War and 720 percent more capable of surviving combat.

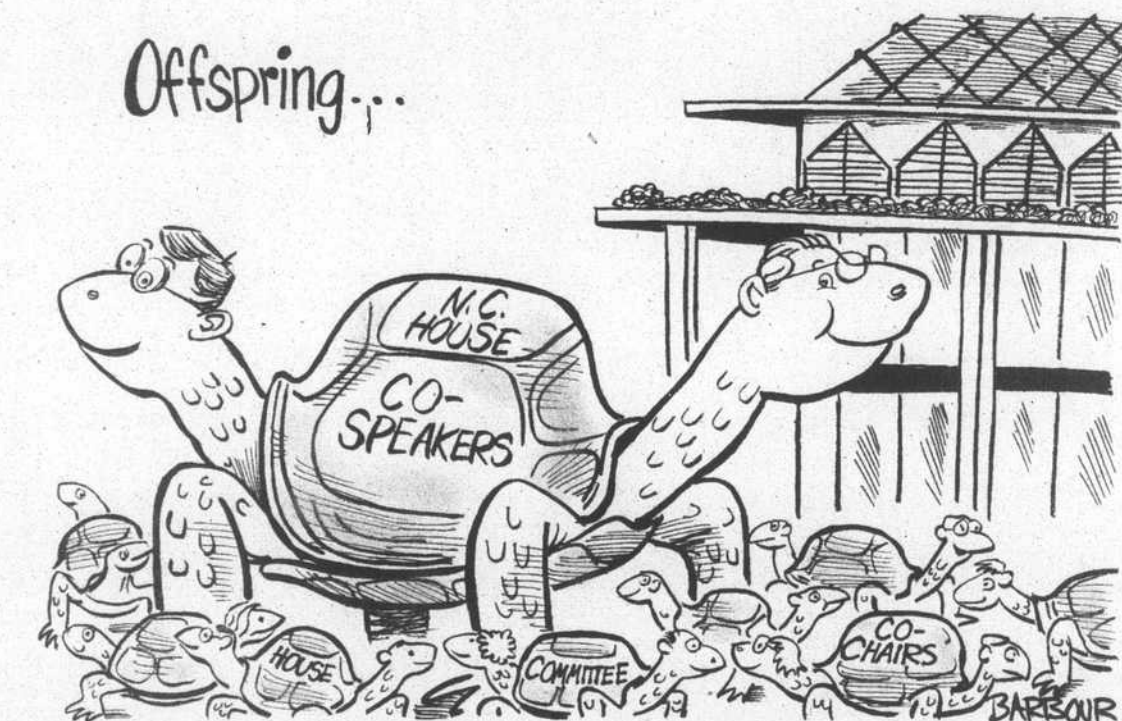
Since the Gulf War, the United States has developed the Predator pilotless aircraft that can be used for both reconnaissance and combat. These drones can stay aloft for extended periods and be directed to fire Hellfire laser-guided missiles at targets that its own sensors identify and guide.

All the air power, including five carrier groups steaming within strike range of Iraq, to the tanks and infantry troops on the ground will be coordinated in digital real time by computerized command centers that beam information instantly and simultaneously throughout the battlefield and back to Washington, D.C.

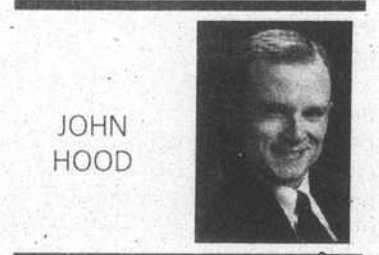
This war also could introduce a new high-power microwave weapon that converts high explosives into a burst of electromagnetic energy capable of frying electronic circuitry of everything from cell phones to computers to communications systems. All weapons, vehicles, planes, missiles or communications systems that rely on electronics would be disabled with these futuristic weapons. Ricks and Loeb report that U.S. commanders are so confident that they do not want to fight alongside allies who will only slow them down.

It sounds easy. Too easy. To paraphrase warnings from the Bible to Shakespeare, pride goes before the fall.

(Rowland Nethaway is senior editor of the Waco Tribune-Herald.)



## Tale of Golden Fleece



JOHN HOOD

RALEIGH - Just before the November 2002 elections, I wrote a column warning that by creating a host of tax incentives and subsidy programs for "economic development," North Carolina was risking its reputation as a "good government state" and inviting unprecedented corruption.

Little did I know that the seeds of this corruption had already been planted, and that the ensuing three months would generate credible allegations of graft, malfeasance, campaign irregularities, and political extortion that, according to a recently filed legal proceeding, reach to "the highest levels of state government."

Let me sum up the revelations at this writing (late February) and group them into two interconnected categories. As a mnemonic device, I'll call them the Golden Fleece scandal and the Jackpot Dome scandal.

The former centers on the Golden LEAF Foundation, a nominally private organization created by the legislature in 1999 to spend half of the state's share of the national tobacco settlement. Stating as its mission the rejuvenation of "tobacco-dependent communities," Golden LEAF quickly devolved into a piggyback for the state's political class who wish to initiate "economic development" projects without having to go directly to the elected, and fiscally challenged, General Assembly.

Reporting by Carolina Journal as well as other media has revealed that: 1) elected officials such as Gov. Mike Easley and State Senate leader Marc Basnight exercise significant influence over the grantmaking of this "independent" foundation; 2) Golden LEAF dollars have gone to marginally beneficial, but politically charged, projects such as tobacco processing plants, horse parks, and grocery stores; 3) LEAF "investments" of tens of millions of dollars in biotechnology ventures connected to political activists were approved without even rudimentary business plans; and 4) LEAF subsidies have been used to benefit businesses associated with board members and to harm at least two private alternative-fuels companies

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## Calling off war with Iraq: is it too late to try now?

If President Bush decided that it was in the national interest not to have a war with Iraq at this time, how would you advise him to avoid the "unintended consequences" that would come from such an action?

I mustered up the courage to ask this question to two experts on the Middle East who visited North Carolina last week - Thomas Friedman, the highly respected New York Times foreign affairs columnist, and Wyche Fowler, a former United States senator and the ambassador to Saudi Arabia during the Clinton administration.

I will tell you the answer they gave me in a minute. But first I'll explain why I asked the question.

Actually, there are several reasons. First, the support of the American people for a war against Iraq is withering away. Friedman supports a war to bring down Saddam Hussein under certain circumstances. But, in his travels throughout the United States, he says that he is always confronted by skepticism and questions about the war and, almost never, expressions of support.

What about the polls that show a majority of Americans still support the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, even if it takes a war? As I read these polls, that majority is dependent upon the broad-based international coalition of support and United Nations sanction.

If the American people are not ready to support an American invasion and long-term occupation of Iraq, President Bush's advisers must be telling him that he will be risking his reelection chances by moving forward.

Secondly, the President's hard-nosed efforts to build an international coalition are creating a host of problems. By pushing countries in the region,



One on One  
D.G. MARTIN

like Turkey and Pakistan, to support an American invasion, we have inflamed the overwhelming majority of their citizens against their governments and us. We have done much the same thing to the governments in Europe that support us - Britain, Spain, and Italy.

This is not to mention our old friends Germany and France, whose friendships have already been sacrificed on the altar of the war against Iraq, since it is not politically correct to mention those countries at all anymore.

The "friendly" governments of Saudi Arabia and Egypt continue to urge us not to go to war with Iraq. Their pleas can no longer be explained by saying that their leaders are privately urging us to go forward. The people in those countries are almost unanimously in opposing our war.

The only real coalition that we are building is one that is uniting the people of the world against our country's policies - and against us.

Surely, the President's diplomatic advisers are explaining to him the long-term consequences that will come from the loss of our well-earned position as the "moral leader" of the world community.

Finally, the President must be dealing with the hard responsibilities that will come from the expected military success in Iraq. Governing this diverse country, composed of warring factions and peoples, is hard enough for a brutal dictator like Saddam Hussein, who has no reluctance to eliminate dissent

by torture, murder, and widespread repression. Even if we had broad-based support from other countries and the United Nations, trying to impose peace and democracy on Iraq would drain the financial and spiritual resources of our country. Without that international help, the President must be beginning to understand that he may be committing us to a "Vietnam-type" enterprise, one that will keep us from other important tasks to keep our country safe and healthy.

All of this is why I thought the President must be giving second thoughts about giving the order to invade Iraq.

But "backing off" from war at this stage has its own set of unintended consequences. We have made scores of promises - to the Kurds, the Kuwaitis, the Turks, the Pakistanis, and the Iraqi dissidents, just to name a few. We have told them, "This time we mean business. This time we are really going to get rid of Saddam Hussein."

So, I asked Friedman and Fowler, how they would advise President Bush to minimize these negative consequences, if he determines it is in our best national interests to "back away" from this war?

Each of them told me that the process would probably have to begin in the United Nations, working out a compromise with France, China, and Russia that would result in stronger international participation in the real disarmament of Iraq in return for an agreement by the United States to let the process go forward peacefully - at least for the time being.

But, both of them told me, it is not going to happen. Even though these men know what they are talking about, I am hoping that this one time they are wrong.

(D.G. Martin hosts UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which will return to the air in April on Sundays at 5 p.m.)

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