


OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. - The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

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	Penn State Erie, The Behrend College Reed Union Building 4701 College Drive, Erie PA 16563 Room 10H Telephone: (814) 898-6488 Fax: (814) 898-6019	

Where has the Christmas spirit gone?

By Aeriale Cooksey-Kramer
staff writer
aak5101@psu.edu

While at the mall with friends this weekend, I got the chance to people-watch, and being a writer, what better aspect of life is there while waiting in line to buy a gift or a pretzel? So while shopping and meandering around the busy mall on Saturday, that's exactly what I did.

My eyes lingered as a middle-aged man sat on a bench, his stare as blank as the non-existent expression on his face, as a woman held her three-year old tightly by the hand, not bothering to look back to make sure the child's feet weren't off the ground. I witnessed parents in line waiting to get their kids' picture taken with Santa, yelling at them to behave and quit calling each other names, or else Santa wouldn't bring them any toys this year. As I recall those people in the mall

were arguing, yelling at their kids' behavior, not at all joyous to be celebrating that moment with each other. I was half-tempted to tell them that next year, the kids probably won't believe in Santa anymore and will be too cool to get their picture taken with him, anyway. That will be their loss.

Call me a silly optimist, but goodness people, where has the spirit gone? We are down to about three weeks before the glorious holiday; the one where nowadays, smiles are scarce and family is becoming such a burden.

The purpose of Christmas is to love, to share, to smile, to laugh with those around you. To show an ounce of friendliness to that person who looks too sad to smile, to lend a hand to those in need. So often do we push people away, arguing, getting under each other's skin because we can during this holiday season that it becomes such a hassle to celebrate. What have we, as a country, come to?
As I look around this campus, I tend



that Saturday morning, I now know what was missing from our silent encounters. Spirit, or to be more precise, Christmas spirit. The man sitting sadly on the bench seemed tired, worn. The woman hauling her child through the crowd was grimacing, as if she couldn't wait to hand the kid off to her father. The parents standing in line waiting for that picture with Santa

to see the same patterns as I did at the mall: complaints about the snowy weather, tense arguments between roommates and friends, and a spreading unhappiness in general. Talk about spirit. As for me, I

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plan to bundle up in my heavy winter coat and my favorite hat, walk to class in the blustery winter wind, and I might even smile at the people passing me by. I'm not going to complain about the snow because I'm a Floridian who's still new to any weather below 50 degrees. I'm the kind of person who wakes up at eight in the morning, starry-eyed by this white fluff, and walk to class catching snowflakes on my tongue. This season only lasts for a little while, so why not break out the cafeteria trays while there is snow to celebrate in, forget about upcoming finals for an hour, and laugh with your friends while trying to dodge the trees on the way down. Be merry, because there is surely so much to be merry about.

Same old tricks with intelligence report on Iran

By Christopher Brown
opinion editor
cmb5313@psu.edu

The federal government released its latest National Intelligence Estimate on Iran last week. The unclassified portion, approximately nine pages long, estimated that Iran stopped doing research on the production of nuclear weapons in the fall of 2003. According to the report, Iran stopped its "nuclear weapon design and weaponization work and covert uranium conversion-related and uranium enrichment-related work."

This contradicts a previous report from 2005 that estimated Iran had been actively pursuing the capability to detonate a nuclear weapon. Now intelligence officials admit that certain inaccuracies existed in its previous estimation of Iran's capability and desire to produce nuclear weapons.

In the days following the releases of the NIE report the neoconservative machine went into spin cycle trying to undo the damage caused by the report. This NIE undercuts the case for attacks that many in the White House, including Vice President Dick Cheney, have been pushing the president to proceed with. In a press conference following the release of the report, the National Security Advisor Steven Hadley, said "It confirms that we were right to be worried about Iran seeking to develop nuclear weapons. It tells us that we have made progress in trying to ensure that this does not happen."

However, this statement misses the point of the most recent NIE...the last one was completely wrong about Iran's intention and capability to develop nuclear weapons. Hadley and the White House assume that America's intelligence estimates in the past.

It is interesting to see how quick the administration discounts intelligence reports or facts that do not fit into its plans. Hadley discounted the recent estimate when asked about it and said, "Iran is one of a handful of the hardest intelligence targets going. They are very good at this business of keeping secrets." But in 2005, when the NIE said Iran was

actively pursuing nuclear weapons the administration sang a different tune. President Bush quickly seized on the previous, and now disproven, 2005 NIE to rally support for using an increasingly belligerent posture towards Iran.

This is just the latest attempt by the White House to fit intelligence contradicting its stance on international issues to conform to its preconceived notions of the way the world works; it did the same thing with intelligence in Iraq.

Maybe now democrats and others pushing for a more diplomatic approach in opening up Iran could use this report to justify their stance. This assumption of mine may be little more than wishful thinking because it is not entirely clear if congress members read these reports to base their decisions. Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.) the vice-chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee in

the fall of 2002, said that only six Senators read the NIE report on the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein before they gave Bush the O.K. to go to war, perhaps one of the most important actions taken by congress for my generation. If they had read it, they would have noticed some of its footnotes and caveats in its judgments on Iraq's attempt to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program. For example it stated that the intelligence community "Lack[ed] persuasive evidence that Baghdad has launched a coherent effort to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program." Unfortunately they didn't...and my fellow classmates always thought doing the assigned reading wasn't all that important.

Perhaps the bigger point to be made with this latest intelligence finding is the fact that intelligence can be wrong. National Intelligence Estimates are just that - estimates. Educated guesses at best. Nothing is definite in the world of international espionage. Hadley may be correct, it is very difficult to gain reliable knowledge in Iran, but now if the administration would admit that when the facts point the other direction, they cannot have it both ways. Intelligence is not accurate only when it is politically convenient.

We assess with high confidence that until fall 2003, Iranian military entities were working under government direction to develop nuclear weapons.

- National Intelligence Estimate
November 2007



Quote of the Week

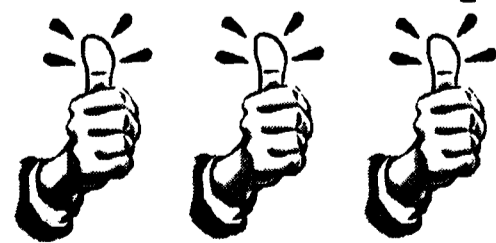
"Perhaps I made a mistake in the timing of my proposals, that could be, that we are not politically mature enough."

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on the defeat of his referendum to change the constitution

Are you interested in writing?

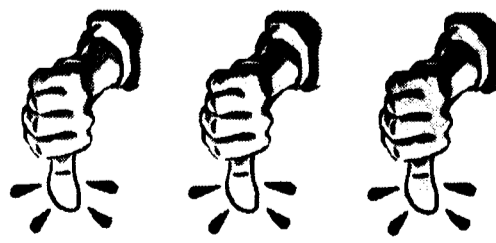
Want to change opinions on campus? Then write for the Behrend Beacon and receive credit for it too. For more information e-mail Chris LaFuria at esl5005@psu.edu

Beacon Thumbs Up



- Canceled classes
- PennDOT for clearing roads
- Holiday cookies
- Parental unit care packages

Beacon Thumbs Down



- Power outages
- Flatulence
- Bad snow drivers
- Black ice

Submission Guidelines

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Please include your major, faculty, or administration position and semester standing. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue.

The Behrend Beacon reserves the right to edit any submissions prior to publication.

Please keep complaints as specific as possible. Email submissions to cmb5313@psu.edu or drop them off at the Beacon office.