

OUR VIEW

Pardon Me

The unexpected happened on Monday and somehow it seemed rather expected. President Bush commuted the 30-month sentence of I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, former aide to Vice President Dick Cheney, for his role in CIA perjury and obstruction of justice case. Bush kept in place Libby's \$250,000 fine and two years probation.

"I have said throughout this process that it would not be appropriate to comment or intervene in this case until Mr. Libby's appeals have been exhausted. But with the denial of bail being upheld and incarceration imminent, I believe it is now important to react to that decision," Bush said in a statement. "From the very beginning of the investigation into the leaking of [former CIA agent] Valerie Plame's name [her full name is Valerie Plame Wilson], I made it clear to the White House staff and anyone serving in my administration that I expected full cooperation with the Justice Department. Dozens of White House staff and administration officials dutifully cooperated. After the investigation was under way, the Justice Department appointed United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois Patrick Fitzgerald as a special counsel in charge of the case. Mr. Fitzgerald is a highly qualified, professional prosecutor who carried out his responsibilities as charged. ...

"Both critics and defenders of this investigation have made important points. I have made my own evaluation. In preparing for the decision I am announcing today, I have carefully weighed these arguments and the circumstances surrounding this case. ...

"I respect the jury's verdict. But I have concluded that the prison sentence given to Mr. Libby is excessive; therefore, I am commuting the portion of Mr. Libby's sentence that required him to spend 30 months in prison."

Let the ballyhooing and bellyaching begin.

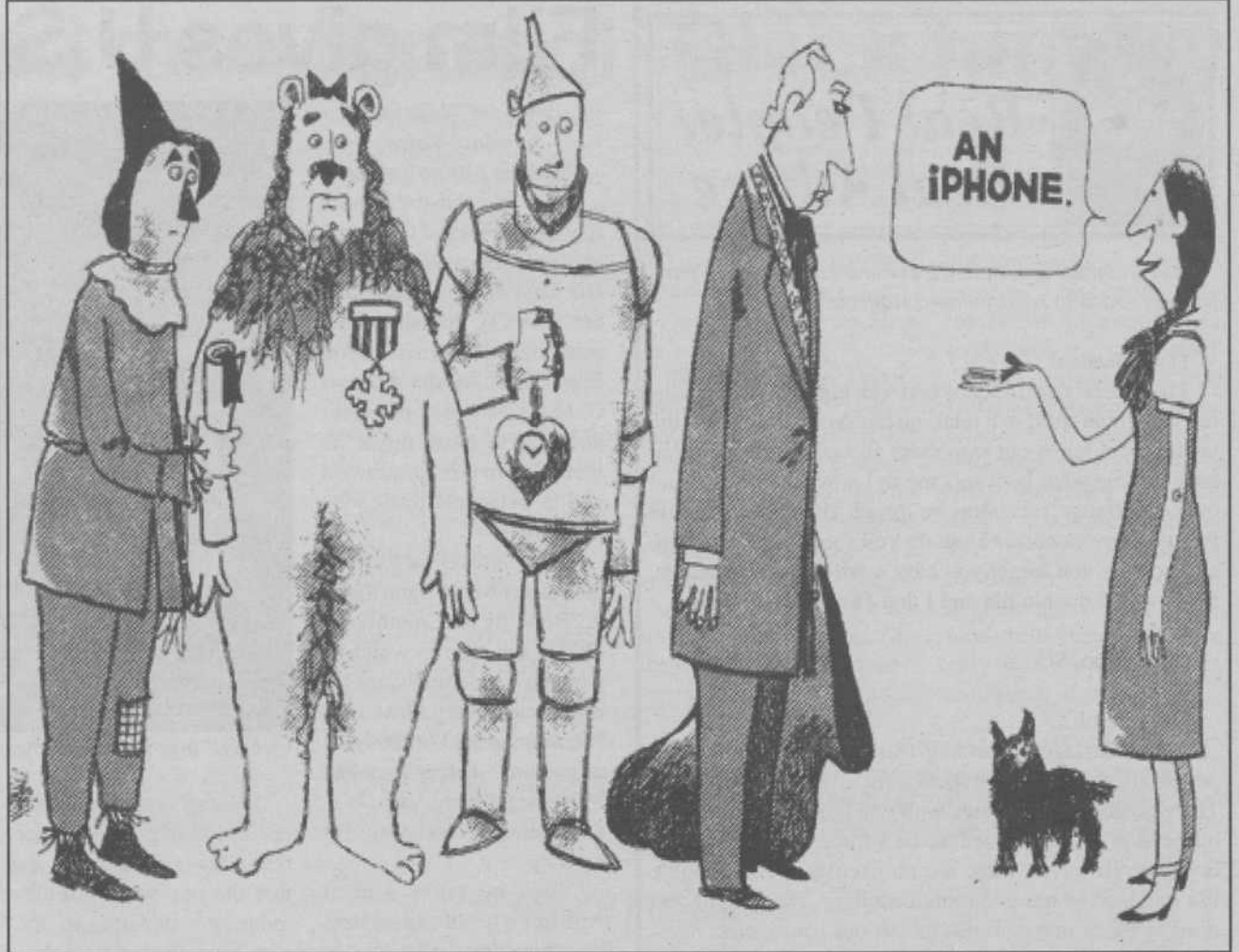
Editors of the *National Review Online* praised the verdict. The headline on its main story: "Libby gets what he deserves—Freedom." The subhead: "A full pardon is ideal, but Bush's commutation is praiseworthy."

On the liberal side of the fence, the rebukes are coming harsh and swift. In a story by Michael Roston for *Raw Story*, Wilson's representative blasts the decision.

"First, President Bush said any person who leaked would no longer work in his administration. Nonetheless, Scooter Libby didn't leave office until he was indicted and Karl Rove works in the White House even today," Melanie Sloan said in a statement. She's executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington and is representing Wilson and her husband Ambassador Joe Wilson in a civil suit against Libby and other Bush administration officials. "More recently, the vice president ignored an executive order protecting classified information, claiming he isn't really part of the executive branch. Clearly, this is an administration that believes leaking classified information for political ends is justified and that the law is what applies to other people."

One important thing to remember is that Bush's commutation doesn't free Libby from the criminality of his actions. He remains a felon, guilty of perjury, obstruction of justice, and making false statements in the federal investigation of the outing of covert CIA agent Valerie Plame Wilson. Commuting his sentence has the effect of a pardon—so why didn't Bush do just that? It would've been more audacious, sure, but at least it would've been a more decisive move, a bold gesture to his supporters that they're darn near Teflon and a stern kiss-off to Democrats who wanted Libby's head on a platter. Instead, Bush chose to appease all sides, a spineless move.

Libby is a criminal whose infractions rise above normal crimes precisely because of who he was. The Bush administration, led by Cheney, has made national security an uncompromising priority. Suspected terrorists are tortured in the name of it. People have been detained at airports because of it. Yet Libby compromises it and gets off nearly scot-free. Justice wasn't served. It was denied. The president of the United States ruled against reason and the law—juries and judges are finders of fact, not presidents—and chose treasonous partisanship. Pardon us, Mr. President, but you've done us a disservice.



U.S. healthcare in the tank

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I am not in the habit of doing movie reviews. But I recommend everyone see Michael Moore's documentary "SiCKO" about our healthcare system, which leaves 45 million Americans uninsured, including 9 million children. The film shows how sick people and taxpayers are victimized by powerful corporate interests guided by profits rather than preventing and curing health problems.

"SiCKO" puts human faces on our national healthcare crisis. A grieving mother's 2-year-old daughter had a high fever and was gripped by a seizure and rushed to the nearest hospital but was turned away because the hospital wasn't in her HMO's network.

She was told the child had to be moved and that any care provided by the receiving hospital would not be covered. Leaving that hospital denied the child vital emergency care. She slipped into a coma and died on the way to the HMO facility.

There's the middle-age couple, both professionals with health insurance, who were bankrupted when their insurance company stopped providing health coverage after her bout with cancer and his heart attacks. They were forced to sell their home and



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move into their daughter's storage room.

We see a 22-year-old single mother and cancer survivor from Michigan who drives to Canada and poses as the common-law wife of a friend to get free clinical care in that country. And we experience disoriented, indigent patients pushed out of hospitals, put in taxis and dumped — still wearing their clinical gowns — on the streets of Los Angeles' Skid Row.

Moore exposes how far some insurance companies go to avoid paying for medical costs and the voluminous list of ailments insurance companies call "pre-existing conditions" to deny treatment, cancel policies or demand repayment for already received medical services.

He presents how doctors and other employees of insurance companies and HMOs are promoted and given bonuses based on the number of medical procedures denied to sick people.

In one case, a young woman with cancer was denied medical treatment because she once had a yeast infection, which the company claimed was a pre-existing condition.

Moore takes us to Britain and France, which have had universal healthcare since the 1940s. No child or adult would be denied care in those countries because they had a pre-existing condition or because necessary care was "too expensive."

When he asks patients how much they are being charged for the care they receive, they laugh and say there is no charge because everybody is included in the National Health Service.

France, in addition to universal healthcare, maintains a 24-hour medical care service staffed by doctors who make house calls. When is the last time any of us had a doctor come to our home?

"SiCKO" explores some of the myths about healthcare in other industrialized democracies, including supposed long waits for care and underpaid doctors.

One of the most dramatic segments of the film involves three first responders to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center who are suffering from severe respiratory diseases and a host of other ailments from exposure to dust and debris at Ground Zero. Moore took them to the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to get the same free, top-notch healthcare that the U.S. military claims it is providing to "enemy combatants."

After he failed to enter the base, he took them to a Havana hospital where they received extensive free diagnostic tests and treatment and medication for which they paid nominal sums.

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