

# The Box City Bulletin

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>Science Page</i>	2
<i>Poetry Page</i>	3
<i>A Tender Furry Tale</i>	4
<i>Word Origins</i>	5
<i>Editorial</i>	6
<i>Why We Say It</i>	7
<i>A Wise Man Tells You</i>	7
<i>Joke of The Month</i>	8

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If you would like to receive this publication please write to:

Howard Suer, Editor  
The Box City Bulletin  
P.O. Box 7069  
Van Nuys, CA 91409-7069  
Phone - (818) 780-4032  
Fax: (818) 780-2607

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We have opinions, . . .but no agenda and will print all opposing points of view concerning any issue we editorialize.

## The History of The St. Patrick's Day Parade



**S**t. Patrick's Day is celebrated on March 17, his religious feast day and the anniversary of his death in the fifth century. The Irish have observed this day as a religious holiday for over a thousand years.

On St. Patrick's Day, which falls during the Christian season of Lent, Irish families would traditionally attend church in the morning and celebrate in the afternoon. Lenten prohibitions against the consumption of meat were waived and people would dance, drink and feast—on the traditional meal of Irish bacon and cabbage.

The first St. Patrick's Day parade took place not in Ireland, but in the United States. Irish soldiers serving in the English military marched through New York City on March 17, 1762. Along with their music, the parade helped the soldiers to reconnect with their Irish roots, as well as fellow Irishmen serving in the English army.

Over the next thirty-five years, Irish patriotism among American immigrants flourished, prompting the rise of so-called "Irish Aid" societies, like the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and Hibernian Society. Each group would hold annual parades featuring bagpipes (which actually first became popular in the Scottish and English armies) and drums.

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, most Irish immigrants in America were members of the Protestant

middle class. When the Great Potato Famine hit Ireland in 1845, close to a million poor, uneducated, Catholic Irish began to pour into America to escape starvation. Despised for their religious beliefs and funny accents by the American Protestant majority, the immigrants had trouble finding even menial job. When Irish Americans in the Country's cities took to the streets on St. Patrick's Day to celebrate their heritage, newspapers portrayed them in cartoons as drunk, violent monkeys.

However, the Irish soon began to realize that their great numbers endowed them with political powers that had yet to be exploited. They started to organize, and their voting block, known as the "green machine", became an important swing vote for hopefuls. Suddenly, annual St. Patrick's Day parades became a show of strength for Irish-Americans, as well as a must-attend event for a slew of political candidates. In 1948, President Truman attended New York City's St. Patrick Day parade, a proud moment for the many Irish whose ancestors had to fight stereotypes and racial prejudices in America.

Today, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated by people of all backgrounds in the United States, Canada and Australia. Although North America is home to the largest productions, St. Patrick's Day has been celebrated in other locations far from Ireland, including Japan, Singapore and Russia.

In modern-day Ireland, St. Patrick's Day has traditionally been a religious occasion. In fact, up until the 1970s, Irish laws mandated that pubs be closed on March 17. Beginning in 1995, however, the Irish government began a national campaign to use St. Patrick's Day as an opportunity to expand tourism and showcase Ireland to the rest of the world. Last year, close to one million people took part in Ireland's St. Patrick's Day festival in Dublin.

# The Box City Science Page

## The Age of Electric Rockets -WOW!

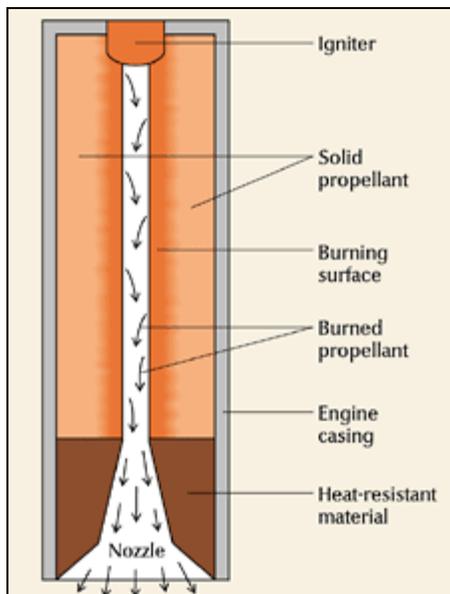
By Howard Suer

**D**o you remember Buck Rogers? He was the space traveler who rocketed to outer space from 1928 through the 1950s. His rocket ship always had a long flaming trail as it soared through space seeking new horizons.



Before we go further, let's discuss exactly what a rocket engine is. Rocket engines generate thrust by putting a gas under pressure. The pressure forces the gas out the end of the rocket. The gas escaping the rocket is called exhaust. As it escapes, the exhaust produces thrust according to the laws of motion developed by the English scientist Isaac Newton. Newton's third law of motion states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Thus, as the rocket pushes the exhaust backward, the exhaust pushes the rocket forward. (Thus the long flaming trail behind the rocket ship.)

Below is an illustration of a solid propellant rocket engine.



Today, in the cosmic blackness, NASA'S Dawn space probe is speeding past the orbit of Mars toward the asteroid belt. The robotic spacecraft is on its way to study two asteroids. It is believed that these asteroids are the largest remnants of planet embryos that collided 4.57 million years ago to form the planets that now orbit around the star that we call "sun".

Dawn, which was launched in September, 2007, is powered by a different space propulsion technology that will make longer distance space missions possible. . . . A Plasma Rocket Engine also called electric or ion rocket engines.

Plasma rocket engines generate thrust by electrically producing and manipulating ionized gas propellants rather than burning liquid or solid chemical fuels. This rocket system is highly efficient, and requires only one tenth of the fuel that a chemical rocket engine would need for the same trip.

Yes, electric rockets, are quickly becoming the best option for sending space probes to far-off targets. These plasma engines have also provided propulsion for an asteroid landing by the Japanese Hayabusa probe, and a trip to the moon by the European agency's Smart-1 spacecraft.

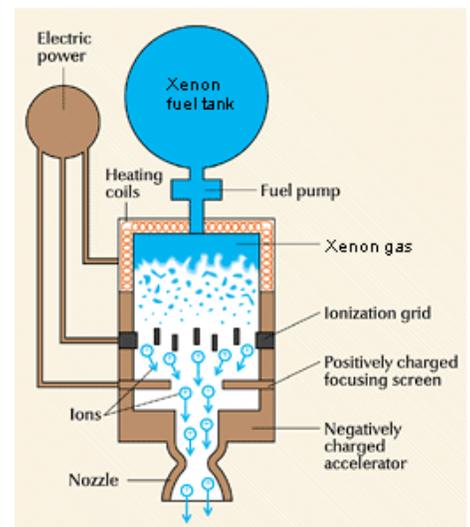
The technology for this breakthrough has been in development for quite some time. As early as 1915, rocket pioneers speculated about using electricity to power spacecraft. The late Ernst Stuhlinger—a member of Werner von Braun's legendary team of German rocket scientists that spearheaded the U.S. space program, finally turned the concept into a practical technology in the mid 1950's. A few years later, NASA engineers built the first operating electric rocket. That engine made a sub-orbital flight in 1964, operating for half an hour before it fell back to Earth.

As you have probably gathered by now,

the main advantage of the electric rocket over the chemical rocket is the amount of fuel required for launching, as well as the trip. For example, a trip to Mars would require that two thirds of the space craft's mass be chemical fuel. That doesn't leave much space for other hardware or useful payloads.

Ion engines are able to achieve exhaust velocities ranging from 20 to 50 kh/s. The ion engine gets its electric power from photovoltaic panels. Inside is a cylinder about the size of a bucket containing xenon gas from the propellant tank. This gas flows into an ionization chamber where an electromagnetic field tears electrons off the xenon gas atoms to create plasma. The plasma's positive ions are then extracted and accelerated to high speeds through the action of an electric field. Each positive ion in the field feels the strong tug of the aft-mounted, negatively charged electrode and therefore accelerates rearward.

Yes . . . We are racing toward the time when real, manned space travel is going to become a reality.



**Editor's Note:** This article was inspired by and contains excerpts from an article in Scientific American Feb. 2009

# The Box City Poetry Corner

## *The White Knight's Song*

I'll tell you everything I can;  
There's little to relate.  
I saw an aged, aged man,  
A-sitting on a gate.  
'Who are you, aged man?' I said,  
'And how is it you live?'  
And his answer trickled through my head  
Like water through a sieve.

He said 'I look for butterflies  
That sleep among the wheat;  
I make them into mutton -pies,  
And sell them in the street.  
I sell them unto men,' he said,  
'Who sail on stormy seas;  
Ant that's the way I get my bread—  
A trifle if you please.'

But I was thinking of a plan  
To dye one's whiskers green.  
And always use so large a fan  
That they could not be seen.  
So having no reply to give  
To what the old man said,  
I cried 'Come tell me how you live!'  
And thumped him on the head.

His accents mild took up the tale;  
He said, 'I go my ways,  
And when I find a mountain-rill,  
I set it in a blaze;  
And thence they make a stuff they call  
Rowland's Macassar-Oul—  
Yet two pence-halfpenny is all  
They give me for my toil.'

But I was thinking of a way  
To feed oneself on batter,  
And so go on from day to day  
Getting a little fatter.  
I shook him well from side to side,  
Until his face was blue:  
'Come tell me how you live,' I cried,  
'And what it is you do!'

He said, 'I hunt for haddocks' eyes  
Among the heather bright,  
And work them into waistcoat-buttons  
In the silent night.  
And these I do not sell for gold  
Or coin of silvery shine,  
But for a copper halfpenny,  
And that will purchase nine.

'I sometimes dig for buttered rolls,  
Or set limed twigs for crabs;  
I sometimes search for grassy knolls  
For wheels of Hansom-cabs.  
And that's the way' (he gave a wink)  
'By which I get my wealth—  
And very gladly will I drink  
Your honour's noble health.'

I heard him then, for I had just  
Completed my design  
To keep the Menai bridge from rust  
By boiling it in wine.  
I thanked him much for telling me  
The way he got his wealth,  
But chiefly for his wish that he  
Might drink my noble health.

And now, if e'er by chance I put  
My fingers into glue,  
Or madly squeeze a right hand foot  
Into a left hand shoe,  
Or if I drop upon my toe  
A very heavy weight.  
I weep, for it reminds me so  
Of that old man I used to know—  
Whose look was mild, whose speech was slow,  
Whose hair was whiter than the snow,  
Whose face was very like a crow,  
With eyes like cylinders, all aglow,  
Who seemed distracted with his woe,  
Who rocked his body to and fro,  
And muttered mumbly and low,  
As if his mouth were full of dough,  
Who snorted like a buffalo—  
That summer evening long ago  
A-sitting on a gate.



**Lewis Carroll**  
(1832-1898)

# Box City Furry Tales

## GIFT EXCHANGE

By Mary Bucher Fisher

My favorite Christmas custom is placing reminders of special people or events on my tree. It's only a tiny artificial tree, but it's loaded with mementos. Many were never intended to be ornaments: intricately whorled cross sections of pink seashells from Florida; several small hand carved olivewood crosses from my trip to the Holy Land. A few traditional ornaments, such as a deep blue hand blown ball well over a century old, given to me by an "adopted aunt," bring to mind people I love. Two antique stars are family heirlooms. But the ornament I save to put on last, most honored at the very top, came to me in a most unusual way.

It started late one autumn, a chilly evening in 1980, when I got home from work. I happened to glance up at the crooked old apple tree next to the apartment garage, and a squirrel caught my eye. His patchy coat looked unhealthy, and his tail downright bedraggled. He looked hungry as well as sick. I watched as he climbed the tree, but he couldn't climb very fast. I felt sorry for him. He looked as forlorn as an old bachelor with no one to love or look after him.



I went inside and found an old sack of pecans. Then I placed one on the open cement porch, went back inside and

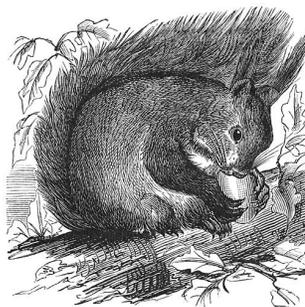
peeked between the red-and-white checked door curtains. "Come on down, Old Batch," I thought.

But the squirrel stayed in the tree. I was too tired and hungry to keep vigil so I fixed supper and forgot about the nut. Next morning it was gone, and I put another in its place before leaving for work. That evening it was gone too, so I put out a couple more. This became a daily ritual even though I seldom saw Old Batch.

About a week later, I was surprised to be welcomed home by a cautious old squirrel, who approached to within three feet of me on the sidewalk, obviously ready to back off if I made even one wrong move. I spoke softly, and slowly climbed the steps: "I'm glad you can use the nuts," I said. "Let me get another one."

When I returned with it, I stooped to place it in the accustomed spot. Then I went inside, gently closing the glass storm door, Old Batch could see me, but he must have known that I could not get near him. I waited excitedly, hoping to watch him eat this time.

Sure enough, the aging squirrel hopped up my steps. But old Batch ignored my nut. Instead, he inched his way to the brick planter next to the porch, hopped in, rummaged around and quickly pulled out a whitened fragment of a bone from his hiding place beneath the dead leaves. Holding it in his paws, he seemed to be using it as a tool, as if he was sharpening his teeth. His bright eyes watched me all the while. Then he dropped the bone and picked up the nut. He held it near his mouth but made no attempt to crack it with



Écureuil commun d'Europe (Sciurus vulgaris).  
© iStockphoto.com

his teeth. Dropping the nut, he hopped down my steps one by one, turned and cocked his head, and waited on the sidewalk. His silent message came through loud and clear: this old squirrel was too decrepit to crack hard old shells without breaking his teeth! He must still be hungry.

I found my nutcracker, cracked three nuts and slowly opened the door. I placed the meal on the porch and retreated back in a flash. Old Batch ate two nuts, nibbling away as he held each one in his tiny paws. He took the third nut with him. From then on, I put out only cracked nuts, several at a time. I continued to put cracked pecans out until mid-January, when the nuts went untouched. I never saw Old Batch again. But he left behind vivid memories and something else.

The day after I began cracking the pecans, in exactly the spot where I had left them, I found a glittering, many faceted amber glass bead, about half an inch long. I wondered where the mysterious gem had come from. Maybe Old Batch had scavenged it from a trash sack, or picked it up after someone had dropped it in the alley. Had he held it in his tiny paws, turning his treasure around as the sun sparkled on it? I like to believe that he left it just for me, as his only way of thanking me for understanding his need.



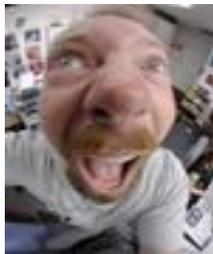
I was so moved that I sent the bead to a Florida cousin, a jeweler who created a metal holder for my trinket. I carefully sewed it in the center of a miniature white star made of starched hand-crocheted lace. And at Christmas time, the squirrel's sparkly gift is always the topmost ornament on my memory tree.

For me it is a beautiful reminder that I must never take for granted all the incomprehensible wonders of nature or forget that even the apparently voiceless can communicate very clearly if you pay attention when they feel moved to say "God bless you."

# Interesting Word Origins

## PECULIAR

The story of the word *peculiar* has a “peculiar” history. In the beginning of Rome, when there were as yet no minted coins, cattle, called *pecus* in Latin, took the place of money. From *pecus* the word *peculium* was formed, and it meant “private property.” This grew into the word *peculiaris*, which applied to possessions which were “one’s own.” The term entered Old French as *peculiar* and English as *peculiar*, with the meaning of property belonging exclusively to someone and not owned by others, or it often could refer to characteristics that were quite distinct from those of other individuals. As the poet Robert Browning said: “Yes, this in him was the *peculiar* grace.” Now, more and more, *peculiar* has taken on the meaning of characteristics that are odd and queer.



## PEDIGREE

Perhaps you take just pride in your family tree. Like a thoroughbred horse, you are proud of your *pedigree*. However, you may not know that when you boast of your *pedigree*, you are really speaking of a crane’s foot, for *pedigree* seems to have been our way of pronouncing the French phrase *ped de grue* which means “the foot of a crane.” In those very old documents that recorded a family tree, the three-line graph of lineal descent looked for all the world like the imprints of a crane’s foot, and thus suggested the picturesque name. The Latin ancestors of the word *pedigree* are *pes*, “foot,” *de*, “of,” and *grus*, “crane.”



Photo by Marcus Martin

## CAPITAL

The word *capital* in the sense of wealth comes ultimately from the Latin *caput*, “head.” The Latin root of *caput* appears in scores of English words in various forms, depending on whether it came to us through French or directly from the Latin. Both of our words *capital* and *cattle*, for example, are from *caput*, for in the earliest days a man’s wealth, or *capital*, was reckoned in *cattle*, and we still speak of a herd of a thousand “head.” A *chattel* mortgage is really a “cattle” mortgage, and up to the 16th century, the English spoke of “goods and cattals,” instead of “goods and chattels.”



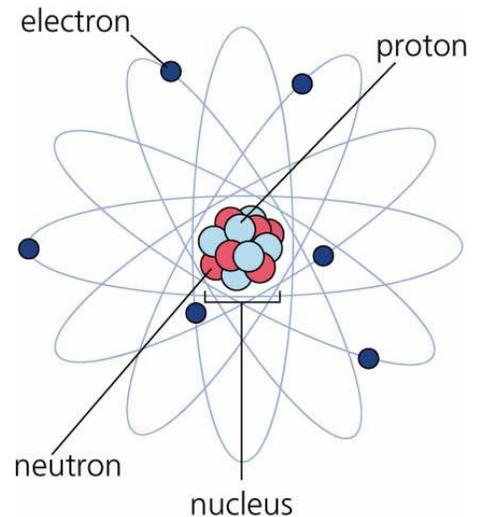
# Breaking Down The Atom

The New Zealand-born physicist Ernest Rutherford (1871-1937) was the first to show that the atom is not the smallest unit of matter. He proved this in the early 1900s with an ingeniously simple particle detector that he built himself in his laboratory in Manchester, England. The instrument allowed him to observe the flashes of what he termed alpha particles, one form of the radiation produced by radioactive decay.

By counting the flashes, Rutherford found that the particles could be deflected, nearly reversed, by a thin metal sheet placed in their

path. This astonished Rutherford. It was as if bullets were bouncing back from a piece of tissue paper.

In 1911, Rutherford concluded that all atoms must have a central, positively charged nucleus. It was these nuclei that were massive enough to repel the positively charged alpha particles hitting the metal sheet. The nucleus, he also concluded, was surrounded by negatively charged electrons, circling the nucleus in the way that planets orbit the sun. For these and other discoveries, Rutherford has been called the father of nuclear science.



Academy Artworks

# Editorial

## A House Divided Against Itself -

By Howard Suer

**F**or the past five decades, I have observed with sadness a much divided America.

During the Korean war there were demonstrations in the streets against American involvement. We were led to believe we were fighting the world's evil — “communism.” perhaps we were, I still am not sure.

During the Vietnam War there were once again demonstrations in the streets against American involvement and policies. Young men were fleeing the country in order to avoid going to fight this unpopular war. I'm not going to discuss the merits of the situation, I just want to discuss the fact that in contrast to the spirit of '76, Americans were not all inspired behind a common cause. (Well, in retrospect, I guess even during the Revolutionary war, there were many who were loyal to King George).

Having been a teenager during WWII, I am accustomed to being a patriotic American. I was accustomed to getting goose bumps when I heard the National Anthem, or the Marine Hymn, or the Air Force song. We were proud to be Americans and we were fighting an evil that everyone hated. We were so united in a way that was almost unstoppable. It was a horrendous war, but, after tremendous battles in the Pacific theatre and the European theatre, with the loss of millions of lives, we finally won it hands down.

Our surviving soldiers returned to a heroes' welcome, and we settled down to a time of peace.

I'm not sure when our recent differences became so volatile. However, today there are major differences be-

tween Americans. (Democrat v Republican — Conservative v Liberal, etc.) . . . And the differences are passionate differences.

Recently, I lost a long time friend (of over 30 years) because of a derogatory remark I made about George W. Bush. We were having lunch, when the subject came up. I said something which he perceived to be disrespectful of our outgoing president. He rose from the table, threw the money for his lunch on the floor, and walked out of the restaurant.

I think about 50 percent of our adult citizens were in favor of Bush's presidential policies while the other 50 percent were not - with varying degrees of both passion and indifference on both sides .

I was personally delighted when we elected Barack Obama as our new president. Aside from the fact that our America was feared and despised by much of the world, I felt that our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were terribly costly in human lives, and accomplishing nothing. That was my opinion. Yes, another bone of contention amongst my Conservative friends.

I enjoy discussing politics, particularly with people who disagree with me, because sometimes I learn something that will change my opinion. I find it stimulating to hear ideas that differ from my own. Yet, I have another dear friend who has such a disdain for my political views that his face turned red and a vein bulged in his forehead when we spoke politics. He was a childhood friend who no longer speaks with me.

It appears that we are becoming a nation of political and religious fanatics. I believe that fanaticism is the worst enemy of mankind. Wars are fought because of fanatic passion for or against a principle. During the Christian Crusades, which went on for hundreds of years, countless millions were murdered over religious fanaticism. People have been killed by sports fanatics at sporting events for cheering for the wrong team.

(The term *sports fan* is an abbreviation for “*sports fanatic*”.)

### "A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand"



In 1858, a young attorney was nominated to run as the Republican candidate for senator from Chicago, Illinois.

On June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln gave his famous acceptance speech which contained the profound words, “*A house divided against itself cannot stand.*”

At that time the division was between the North and the South over slavery, and let me tell you, fanaticism reared its ugly head.

Ultimately, a bitter war that lasted from 1861 to 1865 was fought over the differences. . . . And our house (the United States of America) almost didn't stand.

Today, we have a new senator from Chicago, Illinois with fresh ideas of how to start solving our problems.

I say to you, let's stand together and give our new president the support he needs in the hopes that we will recover from our current despair, and once again become the beacon of light for the free world.

# Why We Say It — (Phrase Origins)

## OVER A BARREL

**T**oday, to have a person *over a barrel* implies that the person in in the other person's power or at his mercy. In the days before mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and other modern methods of lifesaving, lifeguards placed a drowning victim over a barrel, which was rolled back and forth while the lifeguard tried to revive them. Victims were certainly in the lifeguard's power, and the process is the origin of the Americanism *to have someone over a barrel*.



## A MISS IS AS GOOD AS A MILE

**C**harlemagne's faithful warriors Amis and Amile shared many things in common, even their martyrdom—but they are not the inspiration for this old saying. The expression is really meaningless unless you study its original form. "*An inch in a miss is as good as an ell.*" In the nineteenth century the phrase was shortened by Sir Walter Scott who also substituted the alliterative *mile* for "ell,"

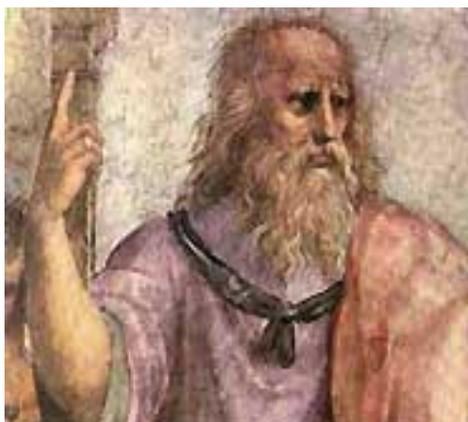


## LET GEORGE DO IT

**W**e say this satirically today when there is work to be avoided, but France's Louis XII was serious when he said, "*Let George do it.*" He referred to his brilliant advisor Cardinal Georges d'Ambrose (1460-1510). He entrusted important affairs of state to him so often that the phrase "Let Georges do it; he's the man of the age", became proverbial, eventually losing its *s* and becoming "*let George do it*", bestowing more glory on the cardinal man than his magnificent tomb in the Rouen Cathedral.

Louis' minister of state, a prodigy who became bishop when only 14, was truly "the man of the age," a Renaissance man who excelled in everything he did, from literature to science.

# A WISE MAN TELLS YOU



**Editor's Note:** You've seen these before. They seem so appropriate again today.

*"A government big enough to give you everything you want, is strong enough to take everything you have."*

—Thomas Jefferson, 1743-1826

*"There is no distinctly Native American Criminal class . . . Save Congress."*

—Mark Train, 1835-1910

*"The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of the blessings. The inherent vice of socialism is the equal sharing of misery."*

—Winston Churchill, 1874-1965

*"Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys."*

—P. J. O'Rourke, 1947-

*"Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner."*

—James Bouvard, 1956-

*"Foreign aid might be defined as a transfer of money from poor people in rich countries to rich people in poor countries."*

—Douglas Casey,

*"No man's life, liberty or property is safe while the legislature is in session."*

—Mark Twain, 1835-1910

*"The government is like a baby's alimentary canal, with a healthy appetite at one end and no responsibility at the other."*

—Ronald Reagan, 1911-2004

*"If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed, if you do read the newspaper you are misinformed."*

—Mark Twain, 1835-1910

*"I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle."*

—Winston Churchill, 1874-1965

