

EDITORIAL: A STOP Sign in Arthurdale, Oregon

In a provocative piece in last month's *Wall Street Journal* entitled, "Stop! Is Not an Option In the New World," columnist Daniel Henninger makes the case for globalization.

Henninger writes:

"Mr. Bush is at the border's edge of a presidential campaign that will require him and a Democrat to traipse around the country, nipping and tucking big national issues to smooth local sensibilities. Trouble is, many of the day's biggest issues are no longer containable inside the U.S. landmass. Like it or not, other nations are increasingly casting a "vote" on issues, such as jobs "outsourcing," which drive our politics.

*A few years ago, for example, we spent our evenings watching cable's soundbiters fight over Mr. Bush's proposed ban on the science of human embryo cloning for any purpose. But 15 days ago we woke up to read that South Korean scientists, led by Hwang Woo-suk, had cloned a human embryo, publishing the results in the journal *Science* for a global scientific community which admitted, yup, they've done it. South Korea? Till that moment, most of us thought South Korea exported cars with hard-to-recall names."*

Henninger goes on to argue that the easiest things to stop in the 21st century world of "proliferation" may be "Weapons of Mass Destruction." Harder, perhaps impossible, to stop is the spread of ideas, and the culture that emanates from those ideas. He concludes by saying "This is not a veiled call for global government. Local traditions matter. It is a call for abandoning the last century's solutions. 'Stop' won't work."

So what does this column have to do with Oregon, and especially its largest city, Portland? Well...almost everything. The intent of the "planning agenda" sponsored by the city (Katz) and the region's leaders over the last 20 years has been to create a state and metropolitan region where "things look different here." How different? Well, if you live here, you know the mantra—all too well.

And so it goes: Oregon is the only state in the nation with a centralized European land-use system ...one of only a couple of states with no sales tax ...one of just a handful of states with a non-centralized higher education system ...and Portland ...Portland is the only metropolitan region with an aggressive utopian regulatory climate that numerous homegrown companies continue to flee ...Portland is the only major American city that wouldn't take part in the "war on terrorism" ...and Portland is the only major city to actively make war on the automobile.

But, of course, things do look different here. Translated: A Big STOP sign from Portland to the new century of globalization.

Now, following Henninger's argument, that big STOP sign might have worked in the last century. In the last century an isolated oasis away from "the maddening crowd" might have survived—although, maybe not even then.

Case study: In 1933, Eleanor Roosevelt, a proponent of public ownership, convinced her husband, the president, to create a town in America that was communally owned. One year later, Eleanor Roosevelt created the town of Arthurdale, West Virginia with 165 new homes on 1200 acres to be inhabited almost exclusively by government workers. “Things were supposed to look different in Arthurdale.” Years later social critics would call Arthurdale the worst run city in America and its residents would beg to be freed from “communal” living—and Franklin would direct a mild ironic eyebrow of “I told you so” disdain Eleanor’s way.

If a region or a state couldn’t really go its own way in the last century, now in the new “global” century there is no forgiveness for putting up STOP signs to economic progress. Why? Because as many important decisions that will affect the future vitality of our region are being made in Asia and in Europe as are being made in Portland’s City Hall.

Governor Kulongoski can depart on an ambitious sales trip to Europe to convince German companies to expand their production in Oregon, but, at the end of the day, German business leaders will only decide to do business in our state if “Things Don’t Actually Look Different Here.” That STOP sign that Portland and Oregon have erected against globalization is not one-way. It’s two-way. And world business leaders know it.

Henninger writes of the disruption globalization can and will cause:

In India, U.S. jobs arrive at Bangalore call-centers, and after 20 paychecks, young Indians act and sound like Americanized yuppies, enraging their parents. Everywhere, newly arriving Africans, Latins and Asians disturb ‘local’ cultures already beset by invasions of mass-market culture, most of it exported from the U.S. China attempts to control the alien ideas pouring in through Web portals, even as its pirates copy American movies, CDs, and financial software.

Painful? Sure. But what Henninger knows is that just putting up a STOP sign against globalization won’t cut it. He writes, “The Just Go Away School of politics is becoming a formula for losing.” In the last generation, Oregon, and Portland especially, have attracted a class of immigrants to the region who have hoped to keep Portland beyond the reach of world issues and global pressures. The STOP signs erected in the path of businesses have turned Portland into the new Arthurdale, dragging the state’s economy down with it.

The returns of that philosophy are in. The “planners” have been routed. As each new day of the new century passes, the power of “globalization” gets stronger. To not be on board, to not compete, means getting left behind, and that means being poor. Portland and Oregon could have a better future.