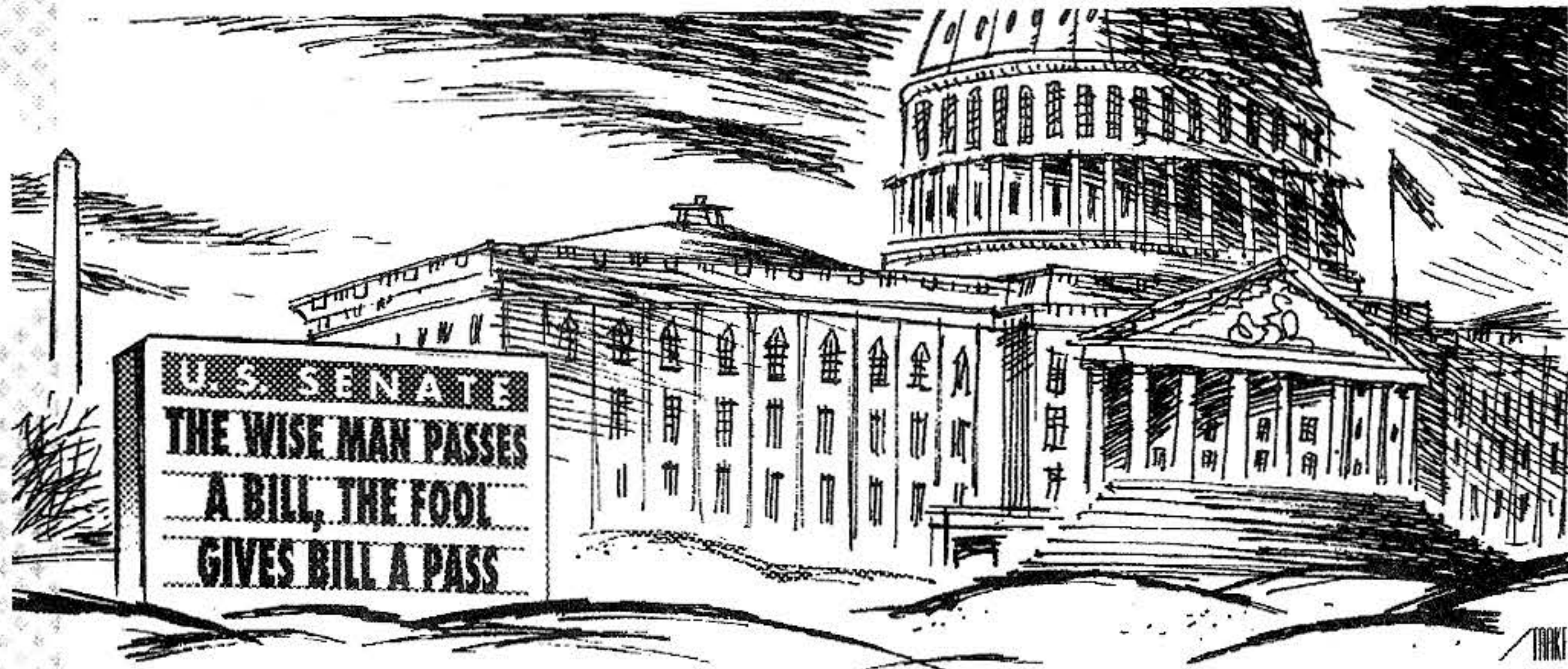


The Style Invitational

WEEK 304: TIME OF THE SIGNS

OPEN YOUR MEAL WITH A PRAYER RATHER THAN A CAN OPENER.
 DON'T PUT A PERIOD WHERE GOD PUTS A COMMA.
 DON'T LET YOUR RESOLUTIONS GO IN ONE YEAR AND OUT THE OTHER.



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This week's contest was suggested by Thomas Templeton of Bethesda, who wins a hard-boiled egg. Thomas informed us about the North Bethesda United Methodist Church on Old Georgetown Road, which displays a different inspirational message every week, such as the ones above. Your challenge is to come up with similarly appropriate philosophical signage to appear outside any business or retail establishment in the Washington area, including government offices. Specify the name or nature of the business. First-prize winner gets one of the great prizes of all time, a copy of the Sept.

20, 1995, issue of Playboy magazine, in Braille. (No, there are no pictures. It occurs to us that blind men are the only people on Earth who are telling the truth when they say they read Playboy for the articles alone.) This prize was donated to The Style Invitational by Elden Carnahan of Laurel, who wins "The Curious Sofa" by Edward Gorey, a small, lushly illustrated Victorian sitting-room drama that contains not a single naughty word or racy picture or overtly sexual scene but still somehow manages to be relentlessly pornographic.

First runner-up gets the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up receive the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries to the Style Invitational, Week 304, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071; fax them to 202-334-4312; or submit them via Internet to this address: losers@washpost.com. Internet users: Please indicate the week number in the "subject" field. Also, please do not append "attachments," which tend not to be read. Entries must be received on or before Monday, Jan. 18. Important: Please include your postal address and phone number. Winners will be announced three weeks from today. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, humor or appropriateness. No purchase necessary. Today's Ear No One Reads was written by Tom Shroder of Vienna. Employees of The Washington Post and members of their immediate families are not eligible for prizes.

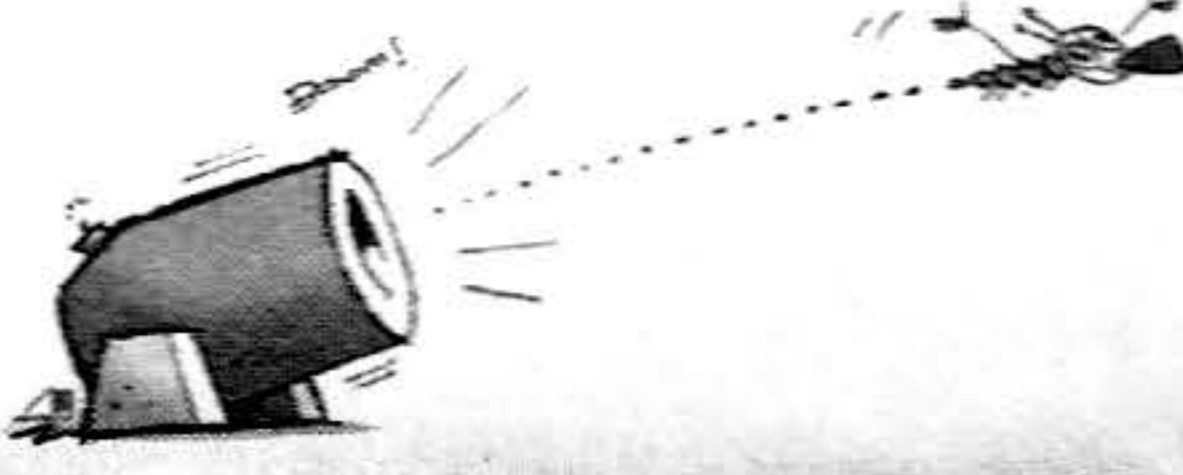
REPORT FROM WEEK 301,

in which we asked you to write captions to any of eight cartoons we supplied.

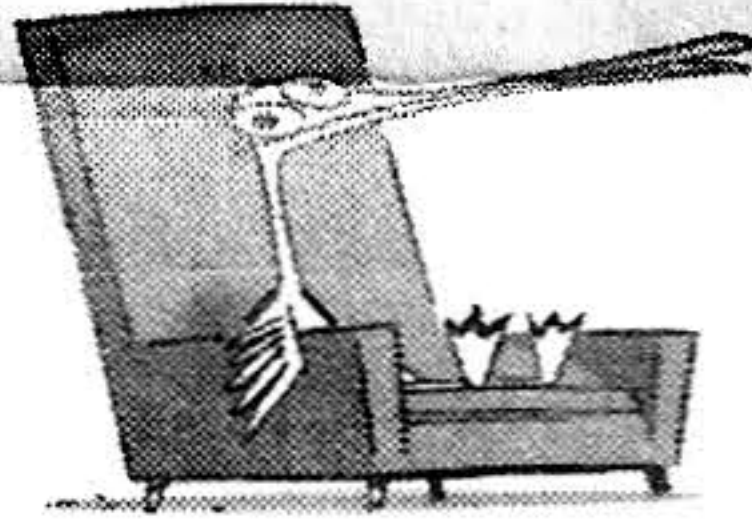
◆ Third Runner-Up:
 (Cartoon F)
Modern witches avoid errors in their incantations by consulting an automatic "spell checker."
 (Russ Beland, Springfield)



◆ Second Runner-Up:
 (Cartoon A) **The Gnatzis fire their dreaded Bee-2 rocket.**
 (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)



◆ First Runner-Up:
 (Cartoon B)
Jonathan Livingroom Seagull.
 (Sandra Hull, Arlington)



◆ And the winner of the William Wegman book:
 (Cartoon C)

The EconoLodge tried to put a positive spin on its roach infestation problem.
 (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)



◆ Honorable Mentions:

Cartoon A:

The famous mortar and pest you've always heard about.
 (Brian Broadus, Charlottesville)

A flea circus enlarged 10,000 times.
 (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Iraq is still working out the bugs in its air defense system. (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Doug ordered bug repellent, but was shipped bug propellant by mistake.
 (Mike Genz, La Plata)

The origin of the expression "Bee me up, Scotty." (Barry Blyveis, Columbia)

Cartoon B:

After delivering Nkem Chukwu's babies, the stork went on disability with a herniated disk.
 (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge; Mike Genz, La Plata)

A drinking duck is caught resting overnight, proving there is no such thing as perpetual motion. (Robert Hershey, Washington)

After his insurance carrier refused to cover the experimental plastic surgery, Lars was stuck with a huge bill. (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

The night before he starts his new job at the shooting range, Clayton Pigeon can't sleep.
 (Brian Broadus, Charlottesville)

Cartoon C:

Czech-out is at midnight.
 (Bernie Harris, Woodbridge; Ralph Scott, Washington)

Where the bellhops are swaybacked, because everyone carries too much baggage.
 (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

The misspelling didn't help Mohel Kafka's business. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge; Sue Lin Chong, Washington)

Cartoon E:

Someone has evidently slipped the doorman a couple of fins.
 (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

Stan auditioned for the glee club after he heard they needed a bass. (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

Canada's Maritime Provinces have their own little-known branch of the Mounties.
 (Brian Broadus, Charlottesville)

Cartoon F:

A classic misinterpretation of the use of the word "cursor." (Niels Hoven, Silver Spring)

Few people are aware that "www" means Wicked Witch of the West. (Bill Clark, Kensington)

"I am a svelte blonde who likes to go to the beach ..." (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Hazel wasn't worried about anyone hacking into her computer, because, of course, she used a hexadecimal system. (Bill Erwin, Woodbridge)

Cartoon G:

Harry went for the new low-priced long-distance company, but only got a can and a string. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

It's unwise to buy a Christmas tree on Dec. 24.
 (Brian Broadus, Charlottesville)

When Bob asked Tom to drop him a line, he had no idea the moron would take him literally.
 (Dave Ferry, Leesburg)

A letter bomb with a hair trigger.
 (Barry Blyveis, Columbia)

Beware of gifts with strings attached. (Jessica L. Mathews, Arlington)

Despite being married to Rapunzel for 10 years, Ed still hadn't gotten used to finding a hair in his soup. (John DiFazio, Alexandria)

Next Week: Unstated Truths