

try. Will General Motors be next? The federal government did what it had to do to help salvage a world economy on the brink of disaster. However, the actions have resurrected words like "greed" that were applied in the 1980s to bond daddies and the savings and loan crisis. Businesses are going to pay a hefty price for this, especially now that the developments have become the central issue of the presidential campaign. Our tax dollars are paying for

We'll have to argue that government isn't even capable of enforcement, considering that all these financial institutions and brokerage firms allegedly are among the most regulated entities. It's becoming clear that just because regulatory agencies and procedures are in place, they aren't necessarily effective or useful. Regulators spend an inordinate amount of time and money on small banks and investment firms

prices and rates they were willing to pay. The world economy needs major investment banking firms like Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers and Goldman Sach to facilitate major transactions. The world economy doesn't need insolvent financial institutions that carry too much risk, not enough capital and too much debt. I suppose we have to trust that the likes of Bank of America, which is acquiring Merrill Lynch, can maintain

good opportunities for smaller firms like theirs. For now, we're left to wonder what other surprises may be lurking in the financial sector and how much more help Daddy Government is willing — or able — to provide before saying enough is enough. ■

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Commentary

BY STEVE WEINTZ

Burning Bodies on Bowman

STEPHEN KING WOULD APPRECIATE the incongruity of human corpses being burned at the busy west Little Rock intersection of Bowman and Kanis roads.

Secretly tucked behind the Bowman Beverage Center and adjacent to the Arkansas Skatium's ice and roller skating rinks is Arkansas Central Mortuary Service at 1219 S. Bowman Road. Across the street are Cuff's Dry Cleaning and Kris & Sam's Cookie Store. Wal-Mart and Pier 1 are just up the street.

Bowman, a rural road when ACMS was incorporated 20 years ago, is today a main thoroughfare for a commercial and residential neighborhood in transition. A quick Google Earth search shows the density of commercial and residential rooftops bordering Bowman. But just to the west, there are still vast tracts of undeveloped land.

People are in such a rush to get to where they need to be, I imagine they miss the letters "ACMS" painted in blue on an aging sign on the east side of South Bowman Road. The weathered sign marks the entrance to a black asphalt driveway that runs several hundred feet back to a parking area and a nondescript metal warehouse running perpendicular to Bowman. This is where they burn the bodies.

There are usually two or three white Ford Club vans in the parking lot. Business must be good. The vans have no identifying marks and no windows. The passengers in these vans don't care for worldly views, much less the nearby eating establishments like the Tropical Smoothie Café & Deli or Alley Oops. The shrieks of laughter and chatter of children as they gather for birthday parties at the Skatium are unheard by the dead.

When I became the proud owner of a home in a new neighborhood in the area, I passed the crematory several times each day without even knowing of its existence. Then one day, when I was telling a friend about my new home, he said, "Oh, so you're not far at all from where they burn the bodies!"

My friend, who grew up in Little Rock, remembers sneaking through the woods next to the skating rink and hiding behind the crematory. "It didn't always happen, but now and then we'd see them take a body inside. Then if you waited, you could see the smoke coming out of the smokestack."

From that day on, I couldn't help myself. I had to look down the drive of ACMS as I drove by. Finally, as I stopped my car full of hungry kids at the traffic light at Bowman and Kanis, I saw what I had been looking for.

"Can we go to McDonald's?" "I want to go to Pizza Hut."

I glanced down the long, narrow drive and saw a white van parked at ACMS. The van doors suddenly popped open. Two men jumped out, reached into the van and pulled out a body wrapped in plastic.

"What about Burger King? Can we go to Burger King?"

The men placed the body on a gurney. I could see the distinct shape of the corpse underneath an opaque plastic shroud held in place by duct tape. The deceased was once a massive individual, and the men struggled to keep

the body on the cart. Quickly, they wheeled the body across the parking lot and through the garage door into the crematory. The doors rolled shut.

The car behind me honked. "You've got a green light," said one of the kids. "So can we go to McDonald's?" I managed to put my foot on the accelerator and turn my attention to the road. The kids, preoccupied with toys and each other, had not noticed what I had been staring at.

We did go to McDonald's, but I didn't eat. On the return trip, I looked again at ACMS. The old smokestack that my friend had noticed as a child was rusted; next to it there was a newer, more modern smokestack. Waves of intense heat radiated from the steel chimney.

I assume ACMS does a good job and that its owners are solid citizens. Still, despite all the ice hockey I played and the beer I drank in my younger days, I would not choose to have my body incinerated in back of a liquor store and next to an ice hockey rink. To me, ACMS is an odd sign of a neighborhood in transition. Once appropriately located in a rural, secluded area, it is now caught in a web of urban development — a lot like the half-dozen deer I recently saw grazing in an open meadow a few yards from the busy traffic along Bowman Road. ■

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