



HOME OF THE **SUPERAWOS**®

Wondering what *really* happened at Potomac in December?... *“The truth shall set you free”*

ARE YOU CURIOUS? Have you been wondering what *really* happened at Potomac in December? What was *really* behind those vague stories about ‘security concerns?’ Were you afraid my newsletters might change? *Well, let’s just see.....*

First, let me ask *you* some questions:

...Have you noticed security agencies suddenly taking a moment to...

- *Pause, in their otherwise unbounded enthusiasm for endless rulemakings?*
- *Re-evaluate whether what they are doing is even slightly effective?*
- *Consider the economic impact of their various actions?*
- *Ask whether their actions are justified?*

...Maybe it’s all related
...Maybe it’s not related

...Then again, maybe it is...

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a little boy at a movie theater eating popcorn and watching a good flying story. The story was about freedom; about good people taking on and overcoming great challenges. Most of all, it was about the inevitable truth that good always triumphs over all, *eventually*.

Suddenly, some really nasty kids high up in the balcony started throwing peanuts at the audience; making most of the audience furious. In a rage they stormed into the manager’s office demanding ‘*Something must be done!*’

But what could the manager do? The nasty kids who threw the peanuts weren’t

going to follow any more rules; they had already ignored signs in the lobby that clearly said, “*No Throwing Peanuts.*”

Since there was nothing the manager *could* really do, the movie-goers left in a huff; and then marched over to their elected officials, demanding ‘*Something must be done about peanuts!*’

Suddenly, the peanut threat became headline news; the potential peanut ‘issue’ could no longer be ignored.

SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE!

Politicians had no choice but to respond to their constituents: They knew that nasty kids who were likely to throw peanuts would also ignore the rules. So instead they looked at what they **COULD** do, they imposed more laws over law-abiding citizens, making serving peanuts in a movie theater illegal.

“That’ll stop the peanut throwing!”

Of course, that’s when the trouble began

It was obvious to anyone that stopped for a minute to think about it, that trying to prevent peanuts from being thrown by regulating the peanut industry was going to be entirely ineffective. ***But that’s all they could do, so that’s what they did.***

Because the peanut threat remained unsolvable, a bunch of well-meaning Government agencies also got involved; each determined to do “everything within their power” to keep peanuts from ever being thrown again.

The only thing they could do was to write more rules governing law-abiding citizens; so that’s what they did. They kept writing more rules.

With the best of intentions the politicians created a specialized ‘Peanut Police.’ This was to reassure the general public that something was being done, and was also their way of doing *something*.

But still, no matter what they did, no matter how many rules they wrote; *it was obvious to everyone that in the wrong hands, peanuts could still be thrown.*

THEN IT REALLY GOT OUT OF HAND

As the jails swelled with innocent people caught still eating peanuts, the courts had to find a way to clear from their dockets the most absurd cases; so the debate began over the finer points of the peanut-control laws: ‘*Was carrying peanuts a crime, or did one have to eat a peanut before a crime had been committed?*’ ‘*If peanuts were a crime, then peanut butter needed to be outlawed.*’ ‘*Where there is peanut butter...there is also jelly.*’

Once people started worrying about peanuts, everything associated with peanuts came under suspicion; the possibilities were endless. Soon jelly, marmalade, and even whole wheat seven-grain bread came under suspicion. Not a sandwich was safe.

THEN IT BEGAN TO GET EXPENSIVE

Unable to effectively prevent peanuts from ever being thrown, the agencies tasked with peanut control kept going

back to the taxpayers for ever more appropriations. No matter how hard they tried, no matter how much they spent, the *possibility* remained.

Other Government agencies that had been suffering severe budget cutbacks for years, began to notice that anyone claiming to having anything to do with 'peanut control' could get untold billions in appropriations, from almost anyone, without any questions.

Tired of counting their paper clips, soon nearly every branch of Government was enthusiastically analyzing how they too could help address the growing crisis, and share in the unchallenged appropriations.

No one could ever do *enough* about the looming peanut menace.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS NO FOOL

Private industry saw huge profits to be made. Realizing it had become a bottomless government-subsidized work program, they focused their efforts on products and services that 'addressed the peanut crisis.' Spending billions, one remarkable new system *could detect a single peanut over a mile away!*

Because it was so often seen with peanut butter, jelly was under suspicion. People stopped making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for fear of getting caught. Jelly sales dropped off, making the jelly makers frantic. A top jelly executive suggested, "*Let's market jelly beans as the replacement for peanuts!*"

Realizing that every peanut that could be stopped was another potential jelly bean to be sold, the jelly industry chimed in with their '*grave concerns about peanuts.*'

Try as they could, jelly sales continued to drop. Everyone knew, marmalade would be next.

RUNNING FULL SPEED TO NOWHERE

The many agencies now involved in the peanut crisis were all in turmoil. As each new staffer would get assigned 'the peanut desk,' within a few days they would realize their efforts were almost pointless; *so they would request an immediate transfer.* People were changing jobs so fast that they wrote their business cards *in pencil.*

After a while no one had any idea what they were doing any more, or even why. Those that understood what was happening dared not speak out for fear of conflicting with their agency's public policy

position on peanuts, regardless of how nutty.

Having forgotten their objectives, without other guidance, they began to think their rules *were* the objectives: "*The rules say no peanuts, so no peanuts. It's the law!*"

Unable to demonstrate results, all they could do was to keep trying to do 'more' of whatever it was they knew how to do, regardless of whether it did anything effective. ...That left a great deal yet to be done.

DEFEAT ADMITS OF NO FAILURE

Having spent billions on peanuts, with nothing to show for their efforts, as the money spent over peanuts continued to grow, it became increasingly awkward to admit that it had all been so much folly. At any point, someone might ask, "*Who wrote those rules?*" "*Why did we waste so much money?*" Worst of all, "*Who was responsible for this fiasco?*"

Desperately searching for some way to keep embarrassing questions from ever being asked, without admitting it out loud, they realized that by "*classifying*" their own actions "*for reasons of national security,*" that no one could ever question what they had done, nor even what they might do: The wasted dollars would never be counted; the questionable decisions would never be questioned. In other words, *it was the perfect solution!*

And so the nuttiest policies and funniest procedures became "*classified.*"

ONE SMALL, DETERMINED VOICE...

Watching this unfold was the same little boy who had been deeply involved with it all from the very beginning. Because he knew better than most what freedom was. He had seen how easily it could be lost; **for the many,** he knew he had to do all he could to fix the situation.

He appreciated that people weren't bad, or evil, they were just trying to figure out *what to do next.* The problem was that no one knew what they *could* do, even if they knew what *to* do. It was all very confusing. **Without outside guidance and real objectives, they would remain doomed to keep chasing innocent people over peanuts, until they could be shown a reasonable alternative.**

SOMETIMES FIXING SOMETHING REQUIRES TOSSING IN A WRENCH

Knowing policy makers had been watching his shenanigans from the beginning, and that they, like everyone else, wanted to do the right thing; **one day, in front of everybody, the little boy walked into a movie theater with a bag of peanuts.**

With great alarm, *and with even greater reluctance,* this forced the peanut police to follow their nuttiest rules to the letter, applying them even to their trusted friend. **Everyone knew there was no real threat, but it took someone from outside to make that obvious.**

As the boy quietly munched his peanuts, for the first time in a very long time the agencies began to take the measure of their actions, and started to ask, "**What are we doing? This is nuts!**"

Of course, what they actually did was far worse than throwing peanuts.

But then again, it's just a story...

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David Wartofsky - March 2006

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