Uncle Sam's sloppy record-keeping

JAMES GLASSMAN

ASHINGTON — Imagine that a top accounting firm performs its annual audit of a giant corporation. It finds the books in such a horrific state that it is forced to write in its official transmittal letter: "We are unable to, and we do not, express an opinion on the accompanying financial statements."

Consequences would be swift and dire. The stock of the giant corporation would plummet, its bond rating would fall, the Securities and Exchange Commission would investigate, the CEO might be forced out and the story would be smeared all over the newspapers.

Now imagine that it's not a giant corporation being audited but the federal government. Consequences? Next to zero.

Last year, for the first time in history, the federal government prepared consolidated financial statements that were subjected to an independent audit by the General Accounting Office. The results were an unmitigated disaster.

In a letter to Congress on March 31, James F. Hinchman, who, as acting comptroller general, heads the GAO, wrote, "In summary, significant financial-systems weaknesses, problems with fundamental record-keeping, incomplete documentation, and weak internal controls, including computer controls, prevent the government from accurately reporting a large portion of its assets, liabilities, and costs."

Hinchman said the government

Taxpayers send \$1.6 trillion a year to Washington, but the people entrusted with this money don't know what happens to much of it.

could not account for "billions of dollars of property, equipment and supplies." It couldn't "accurately report major portions of the net costs of government operations." It couldn't even calculate the loans that were payable to it or the loans it had guaranteed.

In other words, taxpayers send \$1.6 trillion a year to Washington, but the people entrusted with this money don't know what happens to much of it.

The GAO revealed some of the worst abuses a few days ago at a House subcommittee hearing that focused on the Pentagon. Only the conscientious chairman, Rep. Steve Horn, R-Calif., and freshman Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, attended. Kucinich found it "mind-boggling."

James Warren, one of the few to report the hearings, said the GAO findings "dwarf previous claims of federal ineptitude or stupidity."

Eleanor Hill, the Pentagon's inspector general, told the panel that "financial statement data for most DOD funds remain unreliable and essentially not in condition for audit." And, she added, they "cannot produce an audit trail of information."

The results? Well, for one thing, there were more than \$10 billion in "problem disbursements" that can't be matched against contracts. Also chilling is that the Pentagon doesn't know the whereabouts of much of its \$636 billion in property, plant and equipment.

Kucinich asked if any of the missing military equipment was classified and if the CIA had been involved in figuring out where it ended up. "The answer," said another GAO official, "would be yes."

Horn found these results of the audit particularly "appalling": Housing and Urban Development is making \$900 million a year in overpayments on rent subsidies, and the Health Care Financing Administration is making \$23 billion in overpayments on Medicare.

In order to get the federal books to balance, the GAO had to plug in \$12 billion in "unreconciled transactions." And that's a net figure. In fact, there were more than \$100 billion worth of such dealings — in positive and negative amounts. Try this technique if you're Ford or General Electric and investors will take your stock down 20 percent or so.

Anyone who runs a business knows that the first rule is to keep honest, clean and complete records. To do less is unethical, and often criminal. Gore and Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin owe that much to America's citizens.

Glassman is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

O Special to the Washington Post

ing tormer a Whistle-blower now fig

By Tom Lowry USA TODAY

Description of Merena thought he would be able to call a government fraud hot line, report alleged improper billing by his employer. SmithKline Beecham, and then re-He says he had never heard the READING, Pa. turn to his quiet suburban life here. term whistle-blower.

That was in 1993. Today Merena remains locked in a legal battle but not with the obvious opponent. SmithKline Beecham Clinical Labmillion, the largest award ever in a oratories settled with the Justice Department in February 1997 for \$325 Instead, Merena is at war with Jus-

tice Department lawyers, who are fighting a judge's decision to award Merena and two other whistle-blow-rers 52 million. Merena once believed department officials were his allies. He now says they have betrayed him and turned a well-in-tentioned act of coming forward into whistle-blower case.

money fighting me than they did on fighting. Says Merena, 36. "In 1993, my lawyer warned me my kids would be in college by the time this was over. I laughed. But now I'm not so sure. His daughter is "I see these guys spending more 13; his son 9.

defrauding the government, pay a high price emotionally, financially uals who accuse their companies of That is one reason Congress said

Whistle-blowers, typically individ-

they should receive generous awards - up to 30% of what the government

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-lowa, who helped write the whistle-blower law. But the dispute over Nerena's pay could inhibit others from coming for ward with evidence of fraud, whistleshould be treated as patriots, says "Whistle-blowers are the eves and the ears of the government. They

This case has sent chills through out the community of whistle-blow blower advocates say.

oilling fraud. Merena and his family "have been through helt," Grassley says. Justice should "pay him what he deserves." ers and their lawyers," says Lisa Hovelson, head of Taxpayers Against Fraud, a nonprofit group that sup-

officials declined to comment. In court papers filed Friday. lustice says it plans to argue on ap

peal that Merena and the others do not deserve so much money because

Mhistle-blower. Roo Merena's life has yet to return to normal

they provided was limited.

amount

Roadmap of fraud

government a roadmap into alleged Kline and then with FBI and other government agents to provide the But Merena says he worked hundreds of hours undercover at Smith

Merena, a computer billing analyst n SmithKine's U.S. headquarters in ollegeville, Pa. alleged SmithKline had billed Medicare and other govemment programs for tests not perornied, granted discounts as kick

backs to doctors who did business with SmithKline and altered test

When Merena called the govern-He met with the head of the office's ment fraud hot line, he was referred to the U.S. Attorney in Philadelphia codes to ensure it would be paid.

Such lawsuits are sealed by the court until a judge orders them opened. Merena continued to work at SmithKline, providing information to his lawyer, Marc Raspanti, who then passed it to the U.S. Attorney, Raspanti Says. Merena was a nervous

rom a pay phone and say 'A bunch of executives just went into a meeting. I think they found out about me. I'd say 'Relax, Rob. Executives have meetings, "Raspanti says.
Merena worked undercover for 18 "Sometimes, he'd call me

months before a court document was insealed, revealing that he was gathering information for the government. In March 1995, SmithKline's lawyers asked Merena to leave the company. He negotiated a severance package of 16 months pay.

After leaving the company, Mere-na went to work at the government's fielding constant questions from agents who worked in tiny offices arwar room," a small office the government rented in suburban Phila-Jelphia where agents reviewed boxof subpoenaed documents and computer files. Merena acted as an nterpreter and computer consultant, rayed around his desk

Emotional, financial toll

port his wife, a homemaker, and children. Taxpayers Against Fraud loaned him \$25,000 to get through a deing a whistle-blower has taken dream position. At times, he was deeply in debt and barely able to suptoll. Merena says. He left 60,000-a-year job he says

would turn away from hum when they spotted him in stones. Sworn to riends from SmithKline secrecy, Merena and his wife, Daina, told family members Merena had eft the company to work as a con-

vanic attacks and would have to pull his car to the side of the road because was hyperventilating Raspanti says Daina once told him she would right. Then she would roll over and For a while, Merena suffered from calm her husband at night by telling him everything was going to be all cry herself to sleep.

When Justice announced the Smithkline settlement, Merena and Robinson, a former SmithKline lab wo other whistle-blowers - Charles medical director, and his lawyer, Glenn Grossenbacher - were praised as heroes. Smithkline ner-

But when Merena and the others asked for their share of the settle-ment under the federal False Claims her confirmed nor denied the allega-Act. Justice balked Officials argued hat Merena wasn't as helpful as he civil fraud division for several hours, then hired a lawyer and filed a whis tle-blower lawsuit alleging the fraud

noted that the media had reported about subpoenas being served at SmithKline before Merena came for-

In April, U.S. District Court Judge Donald VanArtsdalen ruled that Meernment to pay the whistle-blowers a total of \$52 million from the settle-ment, or about 16%. The average whistle-blower award is 18%. rena and the other whistle-blowers provided very valuable and subtantial assistance to the government in bringing these actions to a success-'ul settlement." He ordered the gov-

The whistle-blowers already have been paid \$9.7 million. The Justice

off between top civil fraud lawyers in Washington and the FBI agents and the U.S. Attorney in Philadelphia, Department is disputing the remain Justice's challenge has caused who worked closely with Merena. ng \$42.3 million.

James Sheehan, head of the civil division in the U.S. Attorney's office in Philadelphia and a respected prosecutor of health care fraud, is known

Rick McAdams, an FBI agent, now retired, who spent more than two years on the case, says Merena has paid a high price. "You're out of the to disagree with Justice's position.

industry you've worked hard to get ahead in — suddenly you're gone. He's lost friends and he's still seen as a pariah. That's tough." de-blowers being paid when he first came forward. "Most whistle-blowers The irony, Raspanu says, is that Merena didn't even know about whis-

come in and ask, "What do think this case is worth?" Raspant says. John Clark, the lawyer for the two other whistle-blowers in the case, says. "This reminds me of one of those Dickens tales where parties are born into and die out of cases."

the Justice Department. "I have a long connection to Justice, but this is Clark, the former U.S. Attorney in san Antonio, says he has soured on very disappointing.

His clients Robinson and Grossen

Merena says he's had trouble find bacher declined comment

ng a job because prospective emsloyers ask him why he left Smith-Kline. Merena tells them and never And his dreams for the future are gets a call back.

relatively modest given that he now is a millionaire and might receive

ice bockey rink for kids.

When asked if he has any regrets,
Merena takes his time: 'No. I want to millions more. He wants to own an ee this through to the end now. I'm

thankful, though, that I didn't know the process going into this

believes he was and that he brought information late to an investigation hat was already ongoing Justice

case among the biggest SmithKline

sulted in the biggest payments to the federal government. Whistle-blower cases that

Who paid: SmithKline

cham Clinical Laboratories

clinical laboratories division paid kickbacks to doctors, billed Medi-care for lab tests nobody ordered using phony diagnosis codes.
Whistle-blower share: \$52 and submitted bills for lab tests Megations: The company's How much: \$325 million hen: February 1997

ment is appealing \$42.3 million of Who paid: United Technolmillion, but the Justice Depart

Megations: The company How much: \$150 million When: March 1994

formed on its helicopter contract turely billed for work not yet pe Sikorsky Aircraft Division prem with the U.S. military.

Whistle-blower share: \$22.

Who paid: Health Care Service How much: \$140 million

hen: July 1998

and Michigan, shredded claims and concealed evidence of poor company Medicare contractor for Illinois performance in processing Med Allegations: The care claims.

Whistle-blower share: at leas

Who paid: Lucas Western How much: \$88 million

Wegations: The company parts to the Navy. Army and A ailed to test military parts proper ly and knowingly sold defect When: October 1995

Whistle-blower share: \$18.5

Who paid: Teledyne Industries How much: \$85 million hen: April 1994

Allegations: The company's Telecorne Relays Division falsely certified that relay switches sold to the U.S. military for use in a variety of weapons and satellite system. tems met testing requirements

Whistle-blower share: \$18.5

Whistle-blowers fina ng back at DO

By Peter Eisler
USA TODAY

were silenced by almost any means they were called "the crazies." They ty to do their jobs. bally threatened, denied the author-It's never been easy for shuffled to backwater offices, ver-WASHINGTON Secretary Hazel O'Leary says

> as they left to go home. to do their jobs. lost the security clearances required And she explains how employees

opposition or any questioning. trouble in that it could not hear any "This withdrawal of security was used as a reprisal," she says. "I thought the government was in deep Two years ago, largely

it has received without le-gal action. It has cut DOE complaints. That office handle whistle-blower court costs by 30%, or Employee Concerns to tablished an Office O'Leary's behest, DOE the 1,000 or so complaints has resolved about 80% of 01

who handle most of the depart ployees of DOE contraccomplaints lodged by emgetting more involved in The department also

ment's operations. tion," says Bill Lewis, who heads the "We're moving in the right direc-

suits filed nationwide by an array of

DOE and its contractors face law

own - in court.

a little retaliating of their whistle-blowers are doing

court today Carson: Case

5

tion's nuclear weapons and maintains the na-

Energy (DOE) develops where the Department of

Although illegal, retalia-

tion was a constant risk.

But these days,

DOE

sular plants and labs cerns in the secretive, in health and safety conwhistle-blowers to

raise

management study contractor suppressed findings on ra-Office of Employee Concerns, Enerdioactive contamination in a Cornett after he charged that the remain a priority." made it pretty clear that these issues payment to the contractor that fired injunction ordering DOE to freeze Among the cases pending Secretary Federico Larry Cornett is seeking a feder-

suing until January 1996, is emerging

unsafe working conditions.

In a remarkable turn of events

plained about bad management or

le-blowers' careers after they com-

dies for alleged damage to the whis back pay, damages and other reme whistle-blowers. The suits — no one

tracks how many there are - seel

talks of the "hostile relationships" be day in the Joe Carson case, O'Leary sworn, videotaped testimony to air to as a key witness for their side. In O'Leary, who ran the agency they're

tween whistle-blowers and the DOE

O'Leary says she became aware of

ing their cars forced off the road and

of threats whispered into their ears

Testimony's impact, 1A

department in January

blowers soon after taking over the

retaliatory actions

against whistle-

is awaiting action on a complaint altransports nuclear material for DOE

▶ James Bailey, a courier

leging that he was forced out of his

ob for raising concerns about radia

Carson's lawyer, of Project The DOE says Carson is a LAW, a group that represents disgruntled worker who was whistle-blowers. "You've got a properly disciplined for violat-Cabinet secretary testifying un-

ny could be used in every whistle-blower case against DOE." It is rare for a former Cabinet secretary to testify against

der oath that the DOE ... sys-

tematically violates the rights

of its employees. This testimo-

his or her own agency. gal hoist and a welder died unnecessarily in a fire.

ing reporting procedures and harassing colleagues. O'Leary, Energy secretary

from 1993-96, initiated reforms to protect whistle-blowers. DOE officials say they've made great progress in ad-

dressing a culture of reprisal. But O'Leary, in an interview, says problems remain. "These are important issues that deserve the light of day," she says of her testimony. "The old way, I suspect, is slipping back."

O'Leary admits whistle-blowers face reprisal By Peter Eisler Federal law bars retaliation USA TODAY

WASHINGTON - In a remarkable, videotaped deposition to air today in federal court, former Energy secretary Hazel O'Leary says workers who expose flaws at nuclear weapons plants and labs regularly are harassed and undermined by their bosses.

There "has been a practice of repeated and long-term reprisal that visits (a whistleblower) in the place he or she is most vulnerable" by "questioning the employee's competence," O'Leary testifies.

against whistle-blowers, and the Department of Energy and its contractors face a spate of

suits alleging violations. O'Leary's testimony, obtained by USA TODAY, has implications beyond the case for which it was given - a suit by Joseph Carson, a DOE safety inspector who says his career was ruined by raising concerns about the Oak Ridge nuclear weapons site in Tennessee.

O'Leary's testimony offers high-level corroboration for whistle-blowers' complaints.

"This takes the genie out of the bottle," says Robert Seldon,

Carson says DOE managers cut his duties and ordered his transfer after he alleged. among other things, that a worker was crushed by an ille-

▶ Whistle-blower suits, 7A

FBI whistle-blower feels vindicated

■ Scientist spent decade complaining about lab's. rush to judgment before probe found deficiencies.

> By Carol D. Leonnig KNIGHT-RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

WASHINGTON - Many times in his career as the FBI's top explosives expert. Frederic Whitehurst found himself torn between the science he cherished and the criminal convictions his bosses

Always. Whitehurst said, he

stoot by the science.

Even when his tests failed to show a clear answer, or when they hinted that the bureau's suspect might be the wrong person. Even; he said, when his bosses at the FBI's respected crime laboratory got angry that his reports weren't helping put bad guys in jail:

One guy told me. You either rewrite that report or we'll get a bright college student in here to replace you. Whitehurst re-

His love for the precision of science turned Whitehurst into the bureau's albatross.

For 10 years, he complained to each rung of the Justice Department's management, searching for someone to address his concern that the lab was rushing to judgment in such major cases as the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings. His supervisors considered Whitehurst a rigid know-it-all whose standards were impossibly high.

Now, with an inspector general's report supporting his complaints of seriously flawed lab reports. Whitehurst has become a

whistle-blower's hero.

FBI Deputy Director William Esposito said the bureau plans to hire an outside scientist to run the lab and have an outside review team monitor the creation of new lab procedures.

"I'm elated." said Whitehurst, a 49-year-old Greenville, N.C., native with a doctorate in chemistry from Duke University. "They chose to attack me and not seriously look at the problem (before).

Now they have to look."

His judgment questioned

But Whitehurst has not been completely vindicated. While the report upheld some of Whitehurst's important allegations, it also found that many of his serious charges that former lab colleagues engaged in perjury, fabri-



Frederic Whitehurst's love for the precision of . science turned him into the FBI's albatross.

cation of evidence and conspiracy were groundless.

The inspector general also raised questions about Whitehurst. Calling Whitehurst a "complex" person, the inspector general said Whitehurst "lacks the judgment and common sense necessary for a forensic examiner. notwithstanding his own stated commitment to objective and valid scientific analysis.

Nevertheless, the systemic flaws that Whitehurst helped uncover at the lab - many stemming from reports that he passed along for dozens of colleagues will probably throw into question thousands of past, current and future cases.

The entire justice system of America has been compromised, said Bill Moffett of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. "One man stood up

alone, against enormous pressure . . . to show us the cover-up.

Whitehurst said the FBI will need to review tens of thousands of cases. "This is the minor tip of the iceberg," he says.

That kind of demand is just like Whitehurst, an exacting man who wants a full picture, no matter how intricate the details, or how costly or time-consuming the search.

What might be surprising is that Whitehurst wants more than anything to return to his job at the crime lab. He was put on administrative leave with pay in late January, after the inspector general's preliminary report suggested his whistle-blowing had some merit. His wife, Cheryl, still works at the

"I will return to that lab," he said. "I best served my country in that lab.

Whether he'll be able to return appears doubtful, however. The inspector general said it was virtually impossible for Whitehurst to come back to the lab because of the "considerable harm" he has caused to the reputations of innocent people.

In a recent three-hour interview in his lawyer's Washington office, Whitehurst talked of his excitement before joining the FBI in 1982. An agent friend gave him a tour through the crime lab.

"It was a dream." Whitehurst said. They had every piece of equipment you could ever want."

Whitehurst had just finished his doctorate. Earlier, he served three combat tours in Vietnam.

He immediately loved the lab challenge - digging for things you can't see."

He noticed the lab was sloppy. though, and was surprised to find that agents with English degrees - not scientists were interpreting data in court.

The inspector's report said Whitehurst appears difficult to work with and unable to compromise on inconsequential matters.

"I will not work well with a man who points a finger in my face and suggests I lie in a court of law." Whitehurst said. "I don't think anybody would fault me for that."

N.Y. police named in brothel scandal

Precinct praised for Times Square rebound had

THE NEW YORK TIMES

By Dan Berry

officers who patronized prostitutes, Giuliani says.

ous locations within their Manhattan precinct, investigators say. At least one visit was memorialized by tering the establishment and de-They say that the film footage is the parlor's video-surveillance camera, which filmed police officers enmanding sex, say investigators. NEW YORK — For as long as 15 years, New York City police officers at the precinct responsible for eradcating much of the tawdriness from Times Square frequented a

their badges and guns confiscated, nave been confined to desk duty, have been reassigned. the brothel's madam became so concerned about having a uniformed presence among her clients duty officers from the Midtown South precinct relaxed, had sex After a while, investigators say, able to those carrying police badg-There, investigators say, onthat she made her apartment avail officials acknowledged Friday.

the Manhattan district attorney's Midtown South, with headquarters at 357 West 35th St., and the on administrative charges that they frequented the brothel, officials visors, including the commanding ment's internal affairs bureau and office are investigating the possible criminal links between officers from said. Three other precinct superofficer and the executive officer, In addition, the police depart

> with prostitutes and made tele-Some officers from Midtown South also patronized a massage

ohone calls to their homes.

parlor that tended to move to vari

brothel, which until a year ago op-

that investigators would continue involved. The investigation is going affairs operation and maintained trying to identify all of the officers Investigators said that the implicated police officers could face feloto be aggressive and pursued inensively, he said. erated just four blocks away, above

- as well as official misconduct, a ny charges of falsifying records and bribery - for receiving a sex act in exchange for not enforcing the law nisdemeanor. fir revealed details of the case at a late-night news conference Thursday, because, he said, a newspaper was about to publish a story about it. "And I thought it was much more important to the public and to the department that we get our message out very clearly, unfiltered Police Commissioner Howard Sa a store at 355 West 39th St.

Several investigators said Friday and unedited," he said Friday.

from the Midtown South precinct

So far, 19 officers and a sergeant

now in their custody.

neighborhood brothel — in uniform Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and police

and while on duty - for free sex

conference at City Hall on Friday sought to emphasize what they said were the positive aspects of afternoon, that they were disappointed by the decision to go public. They said that the investigation was on the cusp of expanding, thanks to a re-

Saffr

Giullani and

During a sometimes-testy news

"How far does it go? Were there other crimes being committed? Were higher-ups involved?" asked one investigator, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "Now we'll nevation of at least one of the implicat cent break in the case: the cooper ed police officers.

the last 10 to 15 years in finding There is a business called reout about this.

lation," Giuliani said. "We caught

This is a 10- to 15-year-old sit-

t. About the only thing you can

honestly say is this administration did a better job than was done in lexive, knee-jerk criticism, and you

can do that if you want," the mayor

But Robert Morgenthau, the

district attorney,

Manhattan

praised the department's internal-

CBS prepares for full-scale war

BS and Dan Rather were caught Friday in a "Wag the Dog" moment, and the mass media hardly even blinked. Since the movie came out, it seems we've blinded ourselves even more to the difference between fiction and real news. Aliens could attack, and we'd think it was a "War of the Worlds" broadcast. A White House intern could make unsubstantiated charges against the president, and we'd take it as gospel. Perhaps we're so cynical we don't even care to discern the difference anymore.

Here are the basics — CBS, in testing a closed-circuit link between its Washington and New York bureaus, accidentally broadcasted a "rehearsal" between anchor Rather and Pentagon correspondent David Martin to a communications satellite. News stations and people with access to Satellite G4 saw what they thought was a war with Iraq. complete with "live footage" of an attack on Baghdad. CBS wowed the lucky viewers with 3-D graphics showing cruise missiles and their routes and targets. Rather reported it was not known how many casualties there were. A CBS staffer admitted in the Los Angeles Times, "If I'd seen the report, I would have thought we were at war."

Perhaps this was a foreshadowing of what is to come — a viewer said Rather assured viewers could now get back to the Grammys — which won't air until the Feb. 25 — and CBS would return with updates.

Unless CBS has an inside source in the government and knows something we don't, just what does it think it was doing? CBS spokeswoman Kerri Weitzberg claimed it was simply testing new graphics and theme music just in case a war occurred. How reassuring. Do we even get an anthem as they did in "Wag the Dog?"

An event such as Rather being caught "practicing" for a war cries for some serious media criticism. Doesn't it bother anyone that CBS already has computer graphics and theme music for a war that doesn't exist? The mass media simply had a good laugh about CBS' "embarrassment" and essentially said "whoops!" No one seemed to question the disturbing premise that CBS is ready with pre-made graphics, and Rather is ready with a

solemn voice to deliver pre-written news to the gullible public.

Maybe we shouldn't be surprised. According to "Unreliable Sources," a book by Martin Lee and Norm Solomon, CBS was exposed in 1989 for having aired fake combat footage and false news reports about the war in Afghanistan a few years earlier. It had staged scenes of guerrilla warfare and turned footage of a Pakistani jet on a training run into a Soviet plane bombing villages. Seriously — who's wagging who here? Is the government manipulating the media? Are the media manipulating us? Why is the headline "U.S. Prepares for Air Strikes" next to "Peace Talks Continue in Iraq" on The Associated Press wires? Are we aiming for war or peace? Is it a mass conspiracy to "deceive, inveigle and obfuscate," as Agent Scully once theorized?

The government is obviously playing off lazy journalists, our collective amnesia and our lack of critical thinking skills to spin the news. In an interview with an Italian journal about Iraq, Noam Chomsky pointed out Saddam Hussein was grossly abusing his citizens when he was our favored ally and trading partner. After the Gulf War, we silently watched him crush the Iraqi democratic rebellion. Chomsky remarked we've been flagrantly ignoring U.N. resolutions since the 1970s, when we outwardly condemned the genocide in East Timor as we secretly sent arms to the Indonesian killers. He quotes from the memoirs of U.N. ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in which he gleefully recalls he rendered the United Nations "utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook."

In "Wag the Dog," Robert DeNiro and Dustin Hoffman repeatedly remark their media-created war must be real because they're watching it on television. If we see Rather listing American war casualties in Iraq and CBS' "live footage" of military action on television, is it real? How can we tell the difference anymore in the intellectually infantile, visually slick propaganda machine we call the media?

The fact is we have no clue what is real and what isn't nowadays, so turn off your television and expand your mind.



► LAURA TAFLINGER is a senior studying journalism and gender studies.