

#166 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 13, 2010

The Swami is asked to serve

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—The phone rang at 5:30 a.m. Either the cattle were in the road or the cat was out of the bag and I was under arrest for intellectual vagrancy.

“Is this Swami Seltzer?” The male voice carried an edge honed on the cold, unforgiving stone of law enforcement.

“Well, my swami thing has been up on blocks for several years.”

“Our records show that you predicted the price of oil would rise, and that apple blossoms would produce apples. You said the world would not end on January 1, 2000.”

“I’ve hit a couple of homers, but customers for my swaminess vanished after I predicted in 2008 that Sarah Palin would have a voice-change operation before speaking in public anywhere in the continental United States. Missed that by a mile.”

“You were making a good living,” he said.

“Oh, so you’re the IRS. This is my position: I declare income when I earn it from looking into my crystal ball, but I don’t report if I’m just predicting earnings to my wife to keep her spirits up. Why is the IRS calling me?”

“I’m not the IRS. This is Leon Panetta, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. I need to talk to you.”

“I deny showing the Iranians how to build a nuclear weapon; I can’t even explain why water boils. I’m not smuggling American lollipops into Cuba. And I’m not the money behind WikiLeaks.”

“Calm down. We know all about you. Your dossier is three-inches thick.”

“So, I’ve slacked off in recent years,” I confessed under his browbeating.

“*Everybody’s* dossier is three-inches thick these days,” he said.

“That worries me. It should worry you.”

“It does. But let me cut to the chase. We want you to help America,” Panetta said.

“You bet. Ask not twice what I can do for my country. Which regime do you want me to change? North Korea? California? FEMA? Should I black out the Super Bowl and blame it on the Taliban? Want me to waterboard the GEICO gecko?”

“You have an active imagination,” Panetta chuckled. “We just want a little information. Actually, we just need for you to give us a simple yes or no.”

“But, sir, you know I’ve hung up the old crystal ball.”

“We know everything. But we’re not always up to speed on understanding what we know. Is your technology still operational?”

“It’s old, but it still works. I’ll need four, fresh Size-D batteries. I suppose you want me to spring for them.”

“I could write you a purchase order for \$5, but it would take nine months to process. Why don’t you just deduct them as a business expense?”

“If I did that, I would have to file a Schedule C for Swami Seltzer’s Ultra-Light Clairvoyant Services, which would show deductions but no income. This is a red flag to the IRS. I’ll be audited.”

“Oh for goodness sake! I’ll send you five out of my own pocket.”

“I’ll still have to classify it as something—income, gift or reimbursement. You can’t be too honest with the IRS.”

“Don’t declare it as anything! Just get four batteries that work!”

I got the crystal ball from under the kitchen sink and robbed batteries from a flashlight. This left me even further in the morning’s dark than usual. “OK, it’s up, but weak.”

Panetta cleared his throat. “What do you know about the Maya?”

“Feisty folk, down in Southern Mexico and Central America,” I said. “Built those steep stepped pyramids that scare American tourists into seated descents. Had writing and math. Kept their gods happy by human sacrifice. They were the first to do open-heart surgery. That’s about it.”

“The Maya developed something called the Long Count Calendar. You don’t need to know the details. A big cycle ends next year. Some are saying this means the final curtain will drop at that time.”

“Is there a trip to a warm place in this for me? Say in a week or so. I accept in advance, and I’ll even forget the five bucks for the batteries.”

“Swami Seltzer, your country needs to know if the world is going to end on December 21, 2012. If so, I need to memo the White House asap. We’ll have to set up a bipartisan task force. FEMA will take the lead. The end of the world will have political fall out.”

“I suppose,” I said, “a question or two would probably come up in the elections next year.” (When you work with the CIA, you have to hedge all statements, qualify every generalization.)

“Republicans would blame the President if the world ended on his watch,” Panetta said.

“Independents would gripe, too,” I said.

“Maybe, we could lay it off on Wall Street.”

“Their plate’s pretty full as it is.”

“They will if you eliminate the estate-tax exemption, even though that would solve all our deficit and budget problems in one year. Tell me this. The CIA has world-class data-gathering systems and intelligence analysts. Why do you need my answer?”

“Our guys won’t say this publicly, but they like your technology better than their own.”

“What if I tell you the world will not end, and it does? Then I’m really in hot water...with all the wings of both parties. And if I tell you it will end but it doesn’t, I’ll never be able to swami again.”

“Which means you need to get it right.”

“OK, I’ll give it a shot.” I looked into the ball, into the future.

“I better not tell you this over the phone,” I said. “You never know who’s listening in these days.”

“The answer! Yes the world will end, or no it won’t. Quick!”

“Which answer are you rooting for?”

“The CIA tries to be objective on such matters.” Then Director Panetta didn’t say anything for a minute. “OK, how much do you want?”

The Dude finally gets the private sector, I thought. What's one more non-competitive, sole-source, guaranteed-overflow, cost-plus contract?

"It's like this," I said. "I need eight batteries. Four for the crystal ball, which blanked on me before I got the full answer, and four for the flashlight."

"I'll send an invisible chopper out with them this morning."

"And one more thing," I added. "I don't want any trouble with the IRS about this... arrangement."

"I'll make a call. We are a government of many checks and few balances," Panetta offered and hung up.

I was back in the prediction business. It looks promising for years to come, as long as I steer clear of trying to predict what Sarah Palin will say or how she will say it.

Curtis Seltzer is a land consultant who works with buyers and helps sellers with marketing plans. He is author of How To Be a DIRT-SMART Buyer of Country Property at www.curtis-seltzer.com where his weekly columns are posted.

Contact: Curtis Seltzer, Ph.D.
Land Consultant
1467 Wimer Mountain Road
Blue Grass, VA 24413-2307
540-474-3297
curtisseltzer@htcnet.org
www.curtis-seltzer.com