

Letters to the Editor for Saturday,  
January 28, 2006

### **Westminster should rethink partnership**

Editor:

Thank you for John Westerman's Jan. 21 article on Estonia and its recent refusal to prosecute Harry Mannil.

I have been troubled by Westminster's strong association with Estonia for several years for another reason. Disturbing to me is the fact that the financing of our municipality's partnership program with that country is kept from the public record.

Since the Westminster/Estonia Partnership's money is handled by a powerful local non-profit, financial records like donor lists and expenditures abroad are unavailable for public examination. Yet Westminster City Hall employees, on city time, travel there. Any taxpayers' questions about costs at city council meetings I have been present at have not been well received or explained. We have recently seen in the news the possibly problematic relationship between government and non-profits.

Now we are facing some troubling international news about the justice system in Estonia.

To understand the hunt for Mannil, one has to understand who his hunter is and who Evald Mikson was. Dr. Efraim Zuroff is director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, a world respected human rights organization, and he is its coordinator on Nazi War Crimes Research.

Zuroff considers Mannil to be one of the top 10 Nazi war criminals left living. It was while investigating another Estonian, Evald Mikson, Mannil's unit leader, that Mannil's name first surfaced.

Briefly, Mikson had served as deputy chief of the Estonian Political Police in Tallinn and as leader of the fascist Omakaitse vigilante squads in the Vonnu district during World War II.

Zuroff wrote in his 1998 paper, "anti-Semitism in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia," that "These units assisted the Nazi invasion in July 1941 and helped round up and slaughter Jews. In January 1942 the Nazi leadership reported that Estonia was judenfrei."

Zuroff discovered Mikson living in Iceland. The evidence he presented convinced the Icelandic Justice Ministry to seek a criminal murder case against Mikson, but Mikson died before he could be tried in Reykjavik. But before his death, Mikson revealed the Venezuelan whereabouts of former squad member Mannil.

It must be also considered that Mannil has grown extremely wealthy in the auto parts business in South America, where he fled in 1943 and where he still lives. He is a heavy monetary contributor to his homeland, Estonia. His financial success is considered a source of pride by the Estonian government. He is listed in the current Famous People of Estonia as "policeman and philanthropist." However, our own Justice Department doesn't allow him to walk on U.S. soil.

Perhaps it is time for our mayor and city council to examine the cost to all taxpayers of the city's four-year entanglement with Estonia. After reading the Mannil saga, I believe even more strongly that it is time for our city elected officials to do some important soul searching.

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