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GOP Takes Aim At Democrats **Permanent Power**

By Arnold Hamilton

As usual, the pre-legislative session rhetoric was at times lofty.

House Speaker Chris Benge promised an agenda that “promotes ideas to move our state forward.” Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee vowed to “deliver a new brand of government in Oklahoma.”

Their carefully-crafted, broad-brush blueprints, however, belied an unmistakable, overarching goal of the Republican leadership that now controls both the House and Senate: permanent political power.

As the 2009 session opens with lawmakers facing at least a \$600 million budget shortfall, GOP strategists are pursuing an age-old, zero-sum political game aimed at consolidating their control of state government by crippling Democrats for generations.

Republicans began successfully attacking the Democratic coalition in 2001 when they persuaded state voters to embrace the anti-union right-to-work measure, delivering a knee-buckling blow to organized labor, already on the ropes in Oklahoma.

In the four elections since, the GOP marched steadily toward dominance of state government, seizing control of the House in 2004 and expanding its advantage to 61-40 in the session that opens Feb. 2.

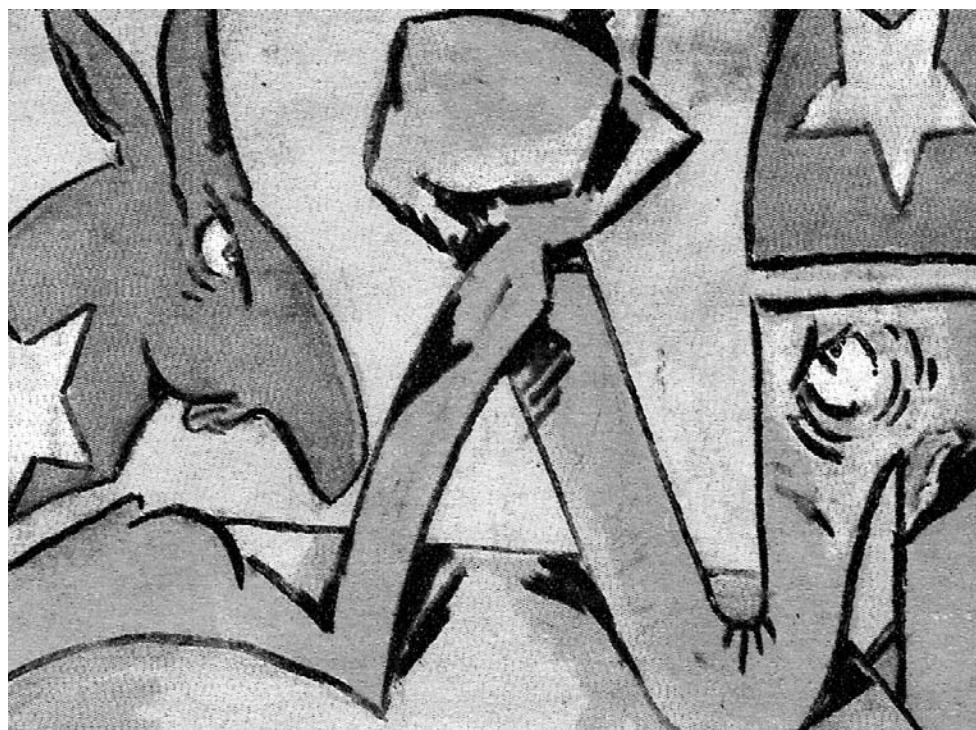
After two years deadlocked at 24-24, Senate Republicans now own a 26-22 edge, with the critically important Census and legislative redistricting looming.

The Republicans aren't finished: Next in their crosshairs are three key Democratic constituencies – trial lawyers, teachers unions and the poor/elderly.

Goal No. 1: Enacting so-called “tort reform,” which primarily is aimed at cutting off the money supply to the Democrats' biggest donors, trial lawyers.

Goal No. 2: Adopting controversial education reforms such as “deregulation” and “performance pay” that are designed to pit school boards, administrators and teachers against each other, splintering another of the Democrats' core support groups.

Goal No. 3: Requiring all voters to obtain and present a state-issued ID card at the polls, a standard that can



be especially difficult hurdle for society's least affluent [poor] and least mobile [elderly], attacking yet another Democratic bloc.

At least two other proposals fit the Total Dominance strategy perfectly: term limits for secondary statewide elected offices [the GOP has been mostly unsuccessful in these races, save the Corporation Commission] and requiring parties to pay for their own presidential primaries [Democratic coffers are more often than not empty].

It's a brilliant blueprint that only can be thwarted if a lame-duck Democratic governor, Brad Henry, and reeling Democratic legislative minorities can unite – and remain united – in opposition to the GOP power play.

“Our job,” says House Minority Leader Danny Morgan, D-Prague, “is to pull the pin and toss.”

It's not rocket science. It's the model perfected by former GOP Gov. Frank Keating, at a time when Republicans were a distinct minority in both houses: Every time Keating vetoed a bill, GOP lawmakers closed ranks and upheld it. That gave Keating and Republican legislators influence beyond their numbers.

So far, Henry's vetoes have been

overridden only once in his six years in office – a 2008 bill that tightened restrictions on abortion, including a requirement that women undergo an ultrasound before undergoing the pregnancy-ending procedure.

It was the first override of a governor's veto in Oklahoma since 1994 when Democrat David Walters was in office.

With the session [at press time] less than two weeks away, Democratic leaders in the House and Senate still had not been able to meet with Henry to discuss strategy – a bad sign for those hoping the governor intends to take the lead in thwarting legislation aimed at destroying his party.

Of course, nice-guy Henry rarely has displayed the stomach for the kind of hardball politics that seemed to so delight Keating. Moreover, Henry has made clear his approach to party politics: “My focus is on building a great state, not building a political party. I'll leave that to others.”

GOP leaders in both the House and Senate put “tort reform” atop their agendas, even though there is no credible evidence of a lawsuit epidemic in Oklahoma, much less of runaway juries delivering jackpot justice.

Indeed, a survey two years ago of

state district judges failed to turn up significant problems with frivolous lawsuits or overblown jury awards.

Even so, Benge, Coffee and GOP legislative leaders are working to devise a plan that would cut contingency fees for trial lawyers – Coffee suggests possibly capping them at 25%. Henry vetoed a tort reform package in 2007 that would have capped non-economic damages [pain and suffering awards] at \$300,000.

In a throwback to the anti-union, right-to-work campaign, Republican leaders proclaim tort reform would throw open Oklahoma's doors to business.

So what exactly did right-to-work produce? A few new lower paying jobs – distribution and call centers come to mind – but not the good-paying manufacturing jobs that historically were held by union members.

For Republicans, overhauling the civil justice system also carries favor with their prime donors – big business – by padlocking courthouse doors so they can operate with impunity.

The effort to turn off the spigot of trial lawyer contributions to Democrats would give the GOP an insurmountable advantage. The state Democratic Party spent much of last year mired in debt, dependent on the national party to pay worker salaries. Even Chairman Ivan Holmes didn't draw a paycheck.

Holmes wants one of the party's biggest rainmakers, Oklahoma City attorney Reggie Whitten, to take the party chairmanship. This is catastrophic news for the GOP's strategy: They know Whitten has the credibility, and the financial contacts, to get Democrats back in the game.

Indeed, the prospect is so alarming that even the rabidly rightwing Daily Oklahoman editorial page found the need to attack Whitten – even though he's the antithesis of the stereotypical high-profile, camera-mugging, egocentric trial lawyer. [See Observations, page 2]

No doubt, there are important, substantive bills among the 2,509 pre-filed for this year's session. In the end, all may be nothing more than a sideshow to the GOP's quest for Total Dominance.

Observations

Gagged

Fresh from the takeover of the Legislature for the first time in history, Republican leaders wasted no time gagging the Democratic minority.

Sen. Glenn Coffee, Republican president pro tem, made conciliatory opening remarks, then proceeded to contradict virtually everything he said.

This was no accident. TV cameras from across the state were rolling but by the time it came for adoption of rules, only OETA was still in the press gallery.

The gag is so thorough, members will have to clear any amendment or motion with majority leader Todd Lamb, R-Edmond.

Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, was so angry he said the new Republican majority were "hiding behind cowardly rules." Ten consecutive Democratic amendments were tabled on motions by Lamb.

Don't count on filibusters. Under the new rules, the majority leader can call a halt to any proceeding.

Coffee reminded the protesting Democrats that four years earlier when Democrats were putting forth new rules, every amendment offered by Sen. Jim Williamson, R-Tulsa, was tabled.

Based on opening remarks, the session getting underway Feb. 2 will feature so-called tort reform, vouchers, more right to life legislation and prayer in public schools.

Republicans would cut taxes again but that isn't likely since the Legislature faces a cut in revenue totaling \$600 million.

Any hope that the two parties could work together was dashed by Republicans. To the victor go the spoils.

The only hope Democrats have is that Democratic Gov. Brad Henry uses his veto because enough Democrats could sustain it.

Time will tell.

Cheap Shot

Few people outside of the Democratic Party have ever heard of Reggie

Whitten, an Oklahoma City attorney who is one of the angels who rescued the party.

Thanks to a do-nothing governor ["it's not my job to build a party"] Democrats were about to lose their headquarters building when Whitten joined ex-Gov. David Walters and George Krumme in paying off the mortgage.

The Daily Disappointment has trashed Whitten because he is a trial lawyer who gave \$25,000 for the Obama inauguration.

They made no mention of T. Boone Pickens and Aubrey McClendon supplying millions so the Swift Boat liars could spend \$30 million defaming John Kerry.

Statehouse corruption under the GOP is limitless - from pay-for-play bills to then-Speaker Lance Cargill's cabal siphoning \$31,000 from the state party. Try looking up the details in the worst newspaper in America.

How cheap was the shot? The Whitten editorial tried to scare off any prospective Whitten legal clients.

Chief Disappointment editorial writer J.E. McReynolds isn't worthy of shining Reggie Whitten's shoes when it comes to honesty and integrity.

Playing Counts

A new article from the Alliance for Childhood discusses the benefits of play, as children really do need to run, jump and allow their active imaginations to run wild.

This is one more reason why Gov. Brad Henry touted the new law moving from 60 hours of exercise a week to 120 hours in the elementary grades.

It is no accident that Oklahoma's kids rank fifth in the nation for obesity and seventh in diabetes.

Decades of research demonstrates that play is more than just fun and games because it boosts healthy development across a broad spectrum of critical areas [intellectual, social, emotional and physical]. Yet in spite of this, more and more children are



not engaging in the right sort of play.

Education Week had an article on the subject. In Germany, each weekday, rain or shine, a group of children, ages three to six, walk into a forest outside Frankfurt to sing songs, build fires and roll around in the mud.

To relax, they kick back on a giant "sofa" made of tree stumps and twigs, reports Mike Esterl for the Wall Street Journal. Germany has about 700 "Waldkindergartens," or "forest kindergartens," in which children spend their days outdoors no matter the weather or what the calendar says.

The schools are a throwback to the ideas of Friedrich Froebel, who opened the first kindergarten more than 150 years ago. Froebel counseled that young children should play in nature, and be cordoned off from too many numbers and letters.

Academic studies of the impact of these schools are still in their infancy, but some researchers believe Waldkindergarten kids exercise their imaginations more and are better at concentrating and communicating.

However, other studies indicate their writing skills are less developed and they are less adept at distinguishing colors, forms and sizes. Still, even though they mess around in the muck and the mud, the children appear to be sick less often.

Lawyers

If you read nothing else in this issue, read the story of pro bono attorneys assisting veterans deprived of benefits accorded their brethren in previous conflicts.

We are sick of the chronic defamation of the legal profession. Yes, it was a sad day when the U.S. Supreme Court let them advertise, but that's a tiny fraction of the profession.

From Legal Aid to the National Veterans Legal Service Program, lawyers provide tremendous service to those in need.

Read *A Man For All Seasons* by Robert Bolt for a genuine definition of the rule of law and the importance of legal representation.

Thomas More is talking to William Roper who is mocking the rule of law.

More: "What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?"

Roper: "I'd cut down every law in England to do that!"

More: "And when the last law is down, the Devil turned around on you - where would you hide Roper, the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws from coast to coast - man's law, not God's - if you cut them down - and you're just the man to do it - d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow? Yes, I'd give the Devil the benefit of law for my own safety's sake."

It is especially galling when members of the media defame lawyers when the media do so little to protect the rights and responsibilities of all Americans - not a favored few.

It seems as though everyone hates lawyers - until they need one.

World Cop

We will put our patriotism up against anybody but we believe it's long since time to put the brakes on runaway spending by the Pentagon.

Journalist Tom Engelheart dug into the sordid mess - including billions lost to graft and contractor overcharges.

Hard to believe it, but America has 761 military bases across the globe. This at a time when millions of Americans are without health insurance, the infrastructure is falling apart and three million people have lost their jobs in the last year.

There are 194 nations in the world with 39 of them having large U.S. military bases. More than 106 are in Iraq - where Bush said we should stay. [Please, somebody throw another shoe at him.]

Why are we the policeman of the planet when other nations yawn when we ask them to lend a hand?

America has six million military stationed abroad - 124 bases in Japan, 38 on the small island of Okinawa and 87 in South Korea. These are nations able to pay for their own defense.

Engelheart notes that at the height of the Roman Empire, the Romans had an estimated 37 major military bases scattered around their dominions.

At the height of the British Empire, the British had 36 of them planet-wide.

By creating a global empire we have plunged our economy to its lowest point since the Great Depression. We think we can't lose this country. Check what happened to the Roman and British empires.

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OUR MOTTO: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO: So then to all their chance, to all their shining golden opportunity. To all the right to love, to live, to work, to be themselves, and to become whatever thing their vision and humanity can combine to make them. This seeker, is the promise of America.

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Who says there is no Santa Claus? OU football coach Bob Stoops drew \$6.11 million in 2008 – including a \$3 million bonus for staying 10 years.

Laurel: To Oklahoma Gazette Publisher Bill Bleakley, criticizing action by OKC School Supt. Karl Springer and Board Chairman Kirk Humphreys for putting an unnecessary hold on \$196 million in school bonds.

Homicide – much of it gang related – is the leading cause of death for black males 16-34. Oklahoma has more than 10,000 gang members of all races, many infecting inner city public schools.

Dart: To Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, back again with his English Only constitutional amendment. If pandering were an album, Terrill would go platinum.

When ex-Gov. Frank Keating speaks, a village somewhere is missing its idiot. He urges the GOP Legislature to eliminate the income tax – but no suggestion how to replace more than \$2 billion out of a \$6.9 billion state budget.

Laurel: To Mark Y.A. Davies. Out of a field of 50 applicants, he was named the new dean of the Petree College of Arts and Sciences at Oklahoma City University.

One of the casualties under the Republicans is HB 1017 reforms. More than 19% of Oklahoma teachers are teaching classes that are not their major or they have no certification in the subject. [Education Week]

Dart: To OKC Attorney Jason Reese for his continuing attempts in the Oklahoma Gazette to paint ex-Gov. Frank Keating as a reform role model. Hey, Jason, how about Keating's \$240,000 from Dreyfus? Reese, a Republican, is running for labor commissioner.

Thanks partly to having more smokers than any other state, half of all Oklahomans will develop cancer and one in four will die from it. – OU Cancer Institute

Laurel: To the fearless Wal-Mart employees who were fed up with being cheated at the pay window. The firm has agreed to pay \$352 million to settle claims in 63 wage and hour lawsuits.

We applaud the city of Oklahoma City for forking over funds to provide vaccinations for all animals going through the municipal shelter.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment for an editorial urging the new Republican legislative leadership to run state government like a business. Such as Enron or those Wall Street heavies who collapsed the American economy?

Federal OKC DA John C. Richter raised a whopping \$15 million by going after people who failed to pay victims or owed the government.

Laurel: To the 34,238 brave souls who have moved to Oklahoma in the past decade, ranking Oklahoma 19th in state growth. Present population: 3,642,361.

Quick! Name one other profession that ponies up money due to losses caused by its members. The Oklahoma Bar Association paid out \$174,000 to 23 former clients cheated by their attorneys.

Dart: To America's so-called criminal justice system. With 1/25th of the world's population we have one-fifth of the world's incarcerated offenders.

If there are to be state government cutbacks due to a \$600 million shortfall, legislators and the governor ought to volunteer for pay cuts, not just the real people who make government work.

Laurel: To UCO Graduate Elspeth Brown, winning national honors from the Association of University Interior Designers.

AG Drew Edmondson and wife Linda spent the past year raising \$700,000 for Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma – attorneys for the poor in need of representation.



Dart: To the Bush Administration for killing Bill Clinton's 100,000 cops on the streets initiative that cut crime dramatically. Now it's soaring, none worse than in Tulsa.

OG&E and other utilities are pouring cold water on the GOP House plan to build a nuclear plant in Oklahoma. As OG&E said, it's far too expensive. Remember the Black Fox disaster?

Laurel: To The Hill, newspaper of the nation's Capitol, blowing the whistle on so-called "tort reform" pressed by American Tort Reform Association. Among its members: the American Medical Association, National Association of Insurance Companies and others who would lock the courthouse door.

Be careful when driving or walking in Tulsa. The minimum fine for speeding has been raised to \$150, for jaywalking \$50.

Dart: To Gov. Henry and the Legislature for doing nothing about the continuing multi-million dollar ripoff of taxpayers via the Quality Jobs program. Bankrupt SemGroup Energy Partners executives drew \$1 million in bonuses, after getting \$1,212,543 from Quality Jobs last year.

OKC College student Susan Mills, 23, pitched a tent on the State Capitol steps to protest the huge business bailouts and lack of pay equity for women in America. Nice to know an Okie is that passionate about something beside gays and abortion.

Laurel: To Blue Cross & Blue Shield, volunteering to begin some coverage of autism, shaming the Republican legislature which killed a bill requiring coverage.

A majority of Oklahoma CPA's told the 2009 Oklahoma Economic Outlook poll that the state's economy has bleak prospects. Republicans running the Legislature ought to quit whistling past the cemetery.

Dart: To Oklahoma Democratic Congressman Dan Boren, meeting with the Daily Disappointment editorial board, pledging anew to vote against repealing the Bush tax cuts for the super rich.

For years the National Education Association claimed it was a professional organization. The federal courts ruled that it is a union. Comes now the Association of Professional Oklahoma Educators – 4,300 members who claim they are a professional group. A rose by any other name.

Laurel: To 60% of Americans polled by Zogby who said they would support an openly gay candidate for president. Our motto: Stay out of other people's bedrooms!

The hunger for manpower is so bad that the military services have been taking skinheads, Hammerskins, Neo-Nazis and other extremists. The Southern Poverty Law Center is asking the Pentagon to stop enlisting them.

Dart: To ex-GOP Rep. Ernest Istook, fined \$14,600 by the Federal Election Commission for illegal contributions and other infractions in his 2003-04 campaign. He's now working for the Heritage Foundation.

Democratic Gov. Brad Henry signed more than \$720 million in tax cuts. Now that the boom is over, he wants state agencies to tighten their belts. Public health, mental health and corrections are already badly underfunded. Tragic leadership.

Laurel: To Catholic Charities of the OKC archdiocese for a second consecutive four-star rating for fiscal management by Charity Navigator, which reports on 5,300 charities in the U.S.

Sixty-four percent of students [both private and public] have cheated on a test in the past year; 38% did so twice. A whopping 30% have stolen from a store. [Josephson Institute national survey]

Dart: To the way the national title in football is awarded. Utah defeated Alabama and finished as the only unbeaten team but thanks to the screwy system, it wasn't considered for the crown.

Laurel: To The Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation's Kathy Moser and Patrick Gaffney, recipients of the Merrick Award for Outstanding Research.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

We will never be allowed to prosecute another country for torture if we have given our own people a pass.

You can't take the high road and say we do not torture when we do not punish torturers.

We will be laughed out of the UN and any other international organizations.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

My nuclear/uranium files are so fat I have no place left to store them yet we are in more danger now than when I first began trying to help educate our nation's citizens against this deadly direction our country keeps going.

My disappointment in Obama's support for nuclear knows no bounds. My disappointment in officials, who know what I've learned and much more, but keep promoting such folly is unfathomable!

What reasons could be touted for such a disastrous course of action? The only two I can believe is arrogance and ignorance. God help us!

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

I wholeheartedly support the idea that ARROGANCE partly explains the Obama-Chu support for nuclear energy.

Stalwart Obama campaign contributor John Rowe's call for 81 new nuclear reactors to heat boric acid to make steam for electricity generation only added to the mess.

Bob Nichols
San Francisco

Editor, The Observer:

Palestinians are convinced that Israeli political leaders are trying through harassment to force an exodus of Muslims and Christians from the occupied territories. They claim that any manufactured goods or farm products were not permitted to be sold in Israel if they competed with Israeli produce, so any surplus had to be given away, dumped or exported to Jordan.

The fruit, flowers and perishable vegetables of the more activist families were often held at the Allenby Bridge until they spoiled, and in some areas the farmers were not permitted to replace fruit trees that died in their orchards. Their most anguished complaints were about many thousands of ancient olive trees that were being cut down by the Israelis.

Access to water was a persistent issue. Each Israeli settler uses five times as much water as a Palestinian neighbor, who must pay four times as much per gallon. There are photographs of Israeli swimming pools adjacent to Palestinian villages where drinking water had to be hauled in on tanker trucks and dispensed by the bucketful. Most of the hilltop Israeli settlements are on small areas of land, so untreated sewage is discharged into the surrounding fields and villages.

Is being a democracy and U.S. ally an excuse for horrendous treatment of humans?

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

I can understand former Gov. David Walters' frustration at Oklahoma's vote so opposite the national trend. We seem obsessed with the old Bush coalition. Big Defense, Big Religion, and Big Oil. But all three are changing if you look ahead.

Take Defense: Last I checked, Oklahoma ranked about 12th in Defense spending. In the next round of base closings, some of the approximately 24,000 personnel at work in our state may find their jobs on the chopping block compared with the old days.

Big Religion? It may have had fun, during the Bush years, with its hand in the taxpayers' cookie jar, forgetting what it's like to be out of favor. Now that we have 6 million Islamics in the U.S., who will want their share of faith-based initiatives in a world of faith-based antagonisms, the Separation of Church [or Mosque] and State will start to look awfully important and smart once again.

Big Oil is also evolving into "The Energy Industry" as it discovers that wind power by the strangest coincidence is centered in what used to be called "Tornado Alley." I mean, tornadoes are windy! But we need big investment in the power grid to carry that energy from remote wind farms to the urban centers where it will be needed. So we need the cooperation of urban liberals in Congress to help us develop this ...

But wait! Did we shoot ourselves in the foot? No, both feet. And one wing, too.

Harry Compton
Bartlesville

Editor, The Observer:

There is an important story about the history of Social Security. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was criticized for including payroll contributions in his Social Security plan.



A lot of liberal economists thought it should simply be funded through public taxation.

Roosevelt understood the politics of the matter, though. He knew if people thought they were contributing part of their paychecks to Social Security, they would feel like the benefits were "theirs." They would know that it was not a handout, but a fair reward for years of contributions.

FDR quote: "Those taxes were never a problem of economics. They are political all the way through. We put those payroll contributions there so as to give the contributors a legal, moral, and political right to collect their pensions and their unemployment benefits. With those taxes in there, no damn politician can ever scrap my social security program." [Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, William E. Leuchtenburg]

The Social Security model may well be a solution to the objection to a single-payer universal health care plan. If people perceive that they have personally contributed through their monthly paychecks, in return for a tangible benefit they would feel they have "a legal, moral, and political right" to that benefit. They would in effect "own it." It is that attitude that makes Social Security the "third rail" of American politics [don't touch it!]

A similar psychology, in our view, could protect single-payer [public] universal health care from attack and tampering by conservative "in the box" thinkers.

Ron du Bois
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

Re: The worthless Legislature on rural ambulance service [Observer-scope, 12.10.08]:

Do you think this may be a result of the unwise vote for term limits that took the power away from our rural legislators? Do you remember when seniority was the power in the Legislature and not the population of Tulsa and Oklahoma area counties?

John Kennedy
Lawton

Editor, The Observer:

I recently had occasion to read your publication [12.10.08]. In your editorial Stay Tuned, you mention that cutting taxes to grow businesses and industry is a discredited theory. You don't cite the studies that discredit this observation but I am sure there are probably studies that support

both sides of that issue.

I don't read your publication often enough to know if you ever print views opposing yours, but I am sending this in hopes that your readers may see how some might respectfully take a different view of the above.

I am not an economist, but I am a person who has worked very hard to reap the benefits of the American dream. Taxes are important to sustain the services we need to carry on our daily lives. I understand I have benefited from the services our government supplies to help me get to where I am today.

I suppose you could call me greedy. I would like to keep as much as possible of what I earn. I do give to my church and other organizations, I volunteer regularly to provide free care to those who can't afford it. I have traveled to many foreign countries on medical mission trips. But I suspect in the scheme of things I am still considered a fairly affluent greedy American.

What do people who have money do with it? They spend it, or save it. That saved is invested. Spending money creates jobs, investing money allows others to create jobs. It seems pretty simple to me.

In a free enterprise system I am led to understand the harder one works the greater chance that person has of increasing his income. In our present system the more one makes the greater percentage the government takes. It seems to me that the rule of diminishing returns applies here. Why would one want to work harder if it means some government entity is going to take more of it. At some point it discourages what we call the American work ethic.

If I make \$100 and the government takes \$50 it means I have \$50 less to spend to "stimulate the economy." The government has \$50 more to "stimulate the economy." It is a wash. The difference is I get to decide how the money is spent if I keep it. That may be greed but it is money that I earned and I would like to control it.

I am not smart enough to argue macroeconomics with anyone but in my small world I can't understand how increasing my taxes improves our economy. It may redistribute the wealth against my will but it does not improve the economy any better than me spending it would. Either the government spends it or I spend it.

Jerry Childs Jr.
Edmond

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Republican B.S.

Put lipstick on a pig and it still isn't Miss America, no more than painting a kind face on stupid decisions makes for statesmanship.

House Republican leaders assure us that "conservative fiscal policies" currently in place will help Oklahoma withstand a budget shortfall next fiscal year.

The state Board of Equalization certified that the Legislature will have \$309.6 million less to spend in fiscal year 2010 compared to the current fiscal year, or a 4.4% drop.

"There are many states in the country that face financial shortfalls larger than Oklahoma's entire \$7 billion budget; this is no time for panic," said House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa.

Tell that to more than 3,700 seriously mentally ill patients on a waiting list. Tell that to Henry Bellmon, who bled for HB 1017 education reform – all wiped out by the current Republican legislative leadership.

House Budget Chairman Ken Miller noted that while individual income tax collections are predicted to drop by \$104 million, or 4.8%, "the static numbers do not tell the whole picture."

Tell that to the Corrections Department, yet to be adequately funded. Or whisper it to the Oklahoma Health Department where lack of funds ranks us as fifth unhealthiest state in the Union.

Miller notes that the state sales tax is estimated to grow by \$84 million, or a 5% increase. Of course, it's the most regressive tax of them all, paid disproportionately by the poor and lower income Oklahomans.

Rep. Miller said allowing taxpayers to keep more of their hard-earned dollars has resulted in Oklahoma families spending the money as they see fit, which has helped sales tax collections and employment.

Oh, really? Tell that to Oklahoma's beleaguered Child Welfare workers – 157 short, carrying 10 times the national average caseload.

"Tax cuts are a fiscal stimulus and Washington would do well to follow Oklahoma's lead during these tough times," said Miller, R-Edmond.

Hogwash! Doofus George Bush and a willing Republican majority have plunged America into nothing short of a recession – three million out of work in just



2008.

Lean budget years are also a good time to look for additional efficiencies within government, said Rep. Scott Martin, vice-chairman of the House Appropriations and Budget Committee.

Say what? The House just replaced all perfectly good office furniture on a no-bid contract and the House employee budget is \$300,000 more than it was under Democrats.

If this is "conservative" we'll pass. Just spare us any more tired explanations as to why Oklahoma has come to be almost dead last on any indicator measuring the quality of life.

Catholics Come Home

I am proud of a majority of my Catholic brothers and sisters for ignoring elements of the hierarchy who "ordered" the faithful not to vote for Barack Obama.

Catholics overwhelmed John McCain, giving their vote 54% to 45% to Obama. [The Oklahoma Catholic vote is unknown but probably for McCain.]

American Catholics are 27% of the electorate and have supported every winning presidential candidate since 1972.

A member of the hierarchy ordered his pastor not to give Holy Communion to Joe Biden – a lifelong practicing Catholic.

Several bishops and two cardinals [Francis George of Chicago and Justin Rigali of Philadelphia] attacked House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Biden for saying that Catholics hold a variety of views on abortion and related "life" issues.

The two Oklahoma bishops counseled the flock to beware of candidates soft on abortion. The Sooner Catholic, OKC diocesan paper, printed several ugly articles.

I am glad most bishops remained neutral during the presidential race, but those who did not stressed the abortion issue, saying it was non-negotiable and overshadowed other issues stressed by Catholic social doctrine.

Bless the fearless National Catholic Reporter for criticizing such actions in an editorial, saying, "Another presidential election cycle is nearly ended, and once again the Catholic bishops in the United States have sadly distinguished themselves for the narrowness and, in too many cases, barely concealed partisanship of their political views."

With George Bush gone, President Obama is expected to nullify some of the more extreme Bush initiatives – such as providing family planning for the poor in Africa.

What about the rest of the Catholic agenda – unjust war, capital punishment, health care for all, poverty, and justice for immigrants?

Thomas Reese, S.J., former editor of America, the Jesuit weekly, now a fellow at Georgetown's Woodstock Theological Center, wrote that abortion would never be outlawed in the U.S. so policies should be adopted to reduce its incidence – such as better health care and reduction of poverty among young and unmarried women.

Pro-Obama Catholics such as myself emphasized broad social programs to alleviate poverty, inadequate health care and declining jobs, educational opportunities among the disadvantaged and an end to an unjust war.

The hierarchy is gung-ho for fetuses but what about Bush's killing war? What about the poor? The prisoners? These are biblical priorities – not Johnny-one-note abortion.

How many of those unwanted children have been adopted by bishops and priests or the nattering nabobs of the Right to Life movement? Don't even think about criticizing me. My wife and I adopted two wonderful children via Catholic charities. We support a home for unwed mothers.

One Catholic conservative, Douglas Kmiec, a professor at Pepperdine University's School of Law and one-time head of President Reagan's Office of Legal Counsel, broke with his party and endorsed Obama.

In a book written to explain why Catholic conservatives can and should support Obama, Kmiec wrote, "It certainly does not mean that Catholic voters cannot make candidate choices that can reasonably be thought to establish social justice policies that advance the culture of life."

Kmiec was denounced from the pulpit for his actions, just as I was when I campaigned editorially for family planning. [A priest denounced me as a secular humanist.]

CatholicVote.com, a project of the rightwing Fidelis Center for Law and Policy, stressed abortion as the issue of supreme importance. So did the Knights of Columbus, a century-old fraternal organization that once stayed out of partisan politics.

Supreme Knight Carl Anderson openly criticized Joe Biden's pro-choice positions, yet Anderson is hardly non-partisan, having worked in the Reagan White House from 1983 to 1987.

Imagine the number of abortions that would be unnecessary if the Catholic Church abandoned its absurd position against family planning.

One of the wonderful results of Obama's victory – the Catholic hierarchy will no longer have a stranglehold on the White House.

Bush Lie After Lie

Discussing Iraq in his 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush infamously declared that "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

The White House later repudiated the statement after former Ambassador Joseph Wilson blew the whistle on the claim.

As part of an investigation into pre-war intelligence claims, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence asked the White House to provide examples of times that the CIA had cleared such uranium references for use in speeches.

On Jan. 6, 2004, then-White House counsel Alberto Gonzales sent a letter to Sen. John D. Rockefeller, D-WV, on behalf of then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice that claimed the CIA had "orally cleared" the uranium claim for two of Bush's speeches.

But in a new memo, House Oversight Committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-CA, says that he has found evidence contradicting Gonzales.

"Contrary to Mr. Gonzales's assertions, the Committee has received evidence that the CIA objected to the uranium claim in both speeches, resulting in its deletion from the President's remarks," writes Waxman.

When White House speech writers tried to put the uranium claim into Bush's Sept. 12, 2002 speech to the United Nations, the CIA rejected it because it was "not sufficiently reliable to include it in the speech."

When National Security Council staff refused to take the uranium claim out of Bush's Sept. 26, 2002 speech, Jami Miscik, the Deputy Director of Intelligence at the CIA, called Rice personally to request it be removed.

Anti-Tax Mentality Creating Backward State

By Edwin E. Vineyard

The report of a national commission studying the condition and needs of America's highway and bridge system was released recently. The findings were fairly simple: America's roads and bridges are in a poorly maintained condition, and a 50% increase in the highway fuel tax is needed to pay for necessary improvements.

Oh, what a howl we have heard from the tax-dodgers - excuse me, the big spender/tax-cutter crowd.

When there is so obvious a need, and such a direct relationship of a user tax with its expenditure, why is it that the conservative crowd does not want to pay the piper?

The no-tax position makes no sense, except politically.

SAD STATE OF IGNORANCE

It is a terribly sorry state of affairs when most Americans are so ignorant of practical governance needs and problems that they will vote against politicians who enact taxes, however worthy and needed.

Three years ago, Oklahoma voted down miserly increases of a few cents in fuel taxes to bring them up almost to the level of surrounding states. Neal McCaleb, a former highway director under Henry Bellmon and a Republican, led an organized movement involving Enid's own former senator to bring our taxes up to pay for more matching money for improvements to our deteriorating roads and bridges.

We have become so dead set against taxes that it matters not who brings them

State Higher Ed Costs At Bottom Of Big 12

Oklahoma's public colleges and universities are keeping tuition and mandatory fees below posted legislative peer limits as specified by state law, according to a higher education report.

Information contained in the "2008-09 Tuition Impact Analysis Report," a detailed report compiled by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, shows that Oklahoma residents pay an average of \$740 less in tuition and mandatory fees for an undergraduate education than their peers in other states.

"We are pleased that a college education in Oklahoma is still one of the most affordable in the nation," said Chancellor Glen D. Johnson. "It's extremely important that all students have an opportunity for a college education and that we help them discover all sources of available financial aid, as well as keep our costs as low as possible.

"The State Regents and our state system institutions are committed to engaging in efforts that address college accessibility, affordability and accountability so that our graduates will be prepared for the global marketplace."

The tuition impact report reveals that students who enrolled in 30 credit hours at the state's research institutions - Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma - pay an average of \$6,347 in tuition and mandatory fees, compared to \$6,858 at peer institutions. OU and OSU continue to be ranked among the lowest of the Big 12 for undergraduate resident tuition and mandatory fees.

Students enrolled at the state's regional universities pay an average of \$4,181 for resident undergraduate tuition and mandatory fees compared to \$4,718 at peer institutions.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE GAP

The widest gap is in the community college tier, where Oklahoma students pay an average of \$2,622 for 30 credit hours compared to \$3,582 at peer institutions.

Tuition and mandatory fee increases for the 2008-09 year, which amount to about \$34 a month for a full-time resident student, have had minimal impact on students' ability to pay for college, according to the report.

Institutions have increased the amount of financial aid available to students to help offset the 9.1% average tuition and mandatory fee increase.

Resident tuition waivers increased this year throughout the state system by \$5.8 million, or 11.9%. Institutions have also implemented other strategies to help students and their families, including creating or expanding tuition scholarship programs for low to middle income students, providing additional funds for on-campus jobs and providing alternative payment options throughout the year.

GUARANTEED TUITION RATE

Beginning this year, students in the state who are entering a four-year university for the first time will have the opportunity to take advantage of a guaranteed tuition rate.

This means a student will lock in a tuition rate not exceeding 115% of the institution's non-guaranteed resident tuition rate. The rate will be guaranteed for four years or the normal time to complete certain programs.

The State Regents recently received more than \$915,000 from the U.S. Department of Education for the College Access Challenge Grant to provide up to 620 scholarships to students who are near completion of a college degree and have demonstrated a need for financial aid.

The State Regents continue to provide funding for concurrent enrollment waivers to encourage high school seniors to attend college. Due to a permanent funding source from the Legislature, those students eligible for the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program will continue to have the tuition portion of any increase covered.

forward or for what reason.

Just recently, in discussing the national proposal, McCaleb said, "It's dead on arrival." When asked why, he said, "Because any politician who votes for a tax increase will be voted out of office."

WHERE ARE THE STATESMEN?

How sad! We have lots of politicians of all stripes, but few statesmen willing to stand up and do what is right.

While supporting both state and federal fuel tax increases, this writer thinks that another look should be given to putting a tariff of perhaps \$10 or \$20 a barrel on imported oil.

This idea was first broached nationally by former U.S. Sen. Don Nickles, an Oklahoma Republican who asked unsuccessfully for a \$5 tariff.

While this might increase gasoline prices slightly, it would be a boon to the oil-related economy of our state and the country. It would also hasten the development of alternative fuels and more efficient cars, which has slowed lately with lower gas prices.

ROB PETER TO PAY PAUL

Some Oklahoma sources keep talking about augmenting highway funds by taking the auto license money away from schools or the state general fund. This is an obvious "rob Peter to pay Paul" idea, putting interests in one class of state services over the welfare of another.

Those who have done their own federal taxes for a while will remember deduction of the auto license fee is based upon its history as an "in lieu" tax. That is, the auto license fee is "in lieu" of property taxes on the vehicle. Most property taxes go to schools, so the auto license tax went to the schools because of its nature and historical definition.

So there is a history and a logic to this tax dedication, although most people [and legislators] have forgotten this or have never studied the background.

Our ill-advised enactment of term limits has led to terrible gaps in the institutional memory of the Legislature, as well as the deteriorated quality and experience of its leadership.

Our disdain for taxes to pay for state services is making us a debtor state. It is also making us a backward state. Our national disdain for paying taxes has led to our being a debtor nation.

It may soon lead us from second- to third-class status in quality of services to our people.

- The author, AKA The Militant Moderate, lives in Enid

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Dropout Recovery Saves State Millions

Oklahoma has created a nationally-recognized model for statewide alternative education. Since the Statewide Alternative Education Academy Program was initiated, Oklahoma's dropout rate has steadily declined, from an annual rate of 5.5% in 1998 to 3.2% in 2007.

This year, Statewide Academies had higher implementation ratings, more appropriate numbers of IEP students, an increase in the number of "positive exits" for students, pre-post increases on all of the student outcome variables, and improvement on End of Instruction test scores.

Using the conservative figure of \$200,000 per dropout, the benefits to the state of Oklahoma and federal government for just this subgroup were estimated.

SAVINGS ARE ENORMOUS

Multiplying the estimated savings [\$200,000] by the number of recovered dropouts with a positive exit status [896], the cost benefit of the alternative education program was estimated at \$179.2 million.

Oklahoma's nationally-recognized model continues to adapt to changing populations, increase resources for teachers, and enhance the implementation of alternative education to improve student outcomes.

The Oklahoma Technical and Assistance Center Field Coordinators conducted 1,140 site visits to Statewide Alternative Education programs during the 2007-08 school year, an average of more than four visits to each program.

At the end of each school year, the programs were rated against the 17 criteria established in Oklahoma school law.

17 CRITERIA USED FOR RATINGS

More than half of the programs [52.2%] were rated as satisfactory or better on all criteria and 15 programs earned notable ratings on all 17 criteria.

Enrollment in alternative education increased as grade level increased. Of the students served, 87.3% were in high school; seniors comprised the largest group.

The alternative education population as a whole was more than one year over-age for grade.

Students were referred to alternative programs for a variety of reasons, both academic and behavioral. As in previous years, the principal reason for referring students to alternative education was academic deficiency. A larger proportion of this year's students were former dropouts.

ENROLLMENT MADE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

Once students were enrolled in an alternative education program, they were absent less often, made higher grades, failed fewer classes, earned a greater number of credits, were referred less often for disciplinary problems, and improved their scores on tests of basic skills.

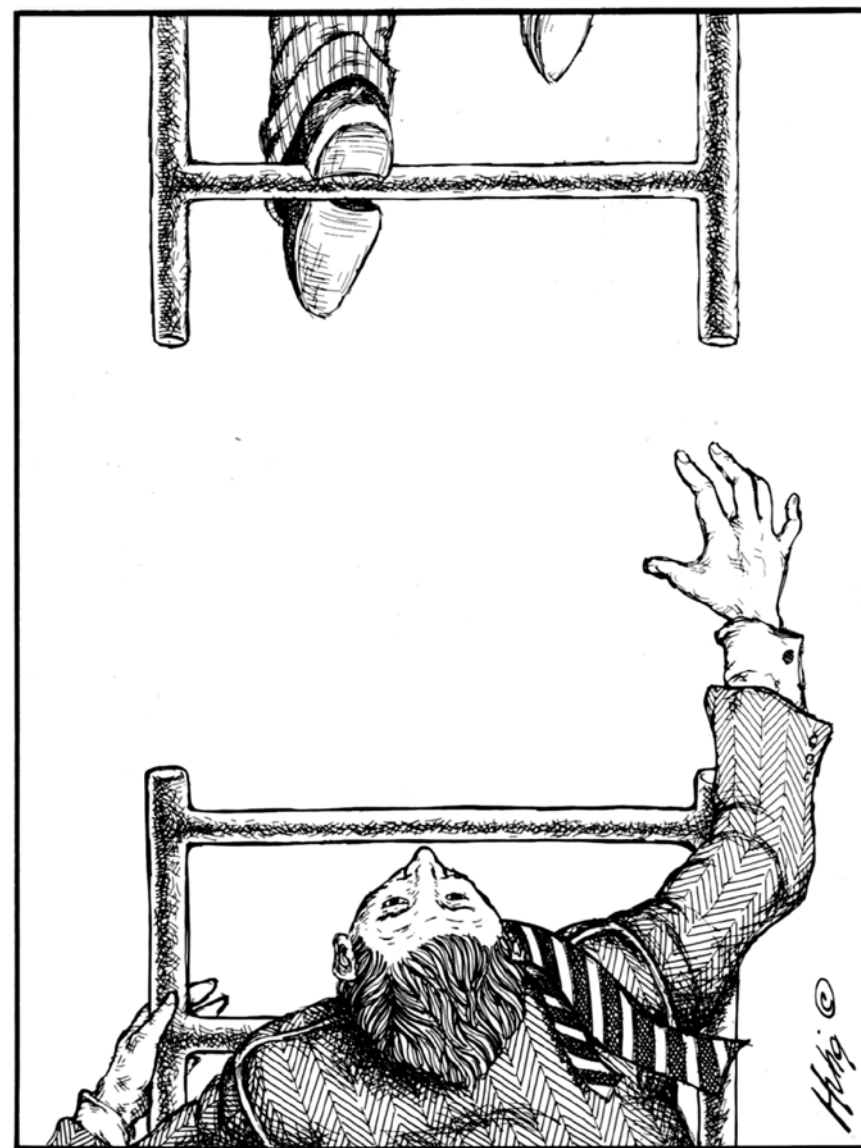
When the outcomes of alternative education students were compared to a comparison group of students [those on waiting lists], alternative education students showed improvement on each of the variables while the comparison students' performance declined.

These findings have been consistent each year that the program has been evaluated.

SKILL DEFICIT NOTED

Alternative education students' scores on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests were lower than those of traditional education students. This was most likely due to skill deficits they brought with them when they entered the alternative program.

Substantial improvement has been noted in the proportion of alternative stu-



dents scoring as Satisfactory or Advanced over the last two years.

Student surveys were administered to 4,727 participants. Eighty-nine percent of survey respondents reported positive perceptions of alternative education.

Most of the positive comments focused on improved academic performance which included helpful teachers, self-paced learning, smaller classes, and safer academic environments that allowed them to focus on and understand the work more easily than in traditional classroom settings.

MEDIAN COST PER STUDENT

The median state cost per student per year in alternative education was \$1,800; the mean was \$2,087. Local funds often supplemented the state dollars.

OTAC calculated conservative estimates of cost effectiveness. One analysis looked only at the students who were former dropouts.

A total of 1,257 students in the evaluation database were recovered dropouts. Of these, 443 graduated this year and a total of 896 [71.28%] had a positive exit status.

Positive outcomes were graduating, continuing in the alternative program, returning to traditional school, or earning a GED.

The potential savings of \$179.2 million to the state and federal social services, which accrued just from successfully recovering 896 former dropouts, was more than ten times greater than the entire state budget for the Alternative Education Academy program for 2007-08.

2008 Banner Year For State's Public Schools

By Sandy Garrett

Before closing the chapter on 2008, let's look back on the progress made by schools amid the economic challenges that affect us all.

We began the year with the release of the annual "Quality Counts" report by Education Week. Oklahoma again ranked 10th nationally in teacher quality and 13th best in academic, testing and accountability standards.

January also brought news of nearly 1,750 teachers from 63 schools receiving bonus checks ranging from \$500 to \$3,000 as part of the Academic Achievement Awards program, funded by the state Legislature and based on Academic Performance Index [API] scores for each school.

NO. 1 IN PRE-K PROGRAM

In March, Oklahoma was again ranked No. 1 in the nation for its pre-kindergarten programs by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

The state also reached a milestone in 2008 by being the only state to offer voluntary, universal pre-kindergarten programs for its four-year-olds for a decade.

During the spring, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education reported the second-lowest college-remediation rate of high school graduates in the past 10 years.

This means progress is being made in better preparing students for college and the world of work.

Further proof came when we had a record number of high schools students achieve the status of "Oklahoma Academic Scholar."

TEST SCORES IMPROVED

This year brought the highest number of scholars since the standards for this honor were placed in state law in 1986. Test scores improved again this year, and

the state average API score increased 27 points compared to 2007.

This was 279 points higher than it was in the benchmark year of 2002.

In May, "The Nation's Report Card" released the details of a study that documented the success of Oklahoma's American Indian students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP]. Once again we saw that Oklahoma's Native American students rank above their peers in other states.

HELPING TEACHERS HELP STUDENTS

This summer, I presented my annual State of Education Address on quality instructional time and technology to engage students as key components to improving Oklahoma schools.

These two efforts increase each educator's ability to raise student achievement and, at the same time, raise graduation rates. In December our state gained 324 new National Board Certified teachers.

Oklahoma is now ranked 5th in the nation for the percentage of its teaching force - nearly 6% - that are nationally certified. Our state is 10th nationally in the total number of teachers with this prestigious credential.

Education is certainly the foundation of our democracy and still plays a critical role in the economic development of our state and America. While much has changed in this system over the years, the importance and need to educate every person remains the same.

Thanks to the hard work and determination of students, their families and school faculties, Oklahoma schools made progress in 2008. We look forward to even more success in 2009.

- The author is state superintendent for public instruction

It's A Moral Duty To Help Others

Editor's Note: With this issue we conclude our series on social workers at the Department of Human Services in their own words.

• I believe we have a moral duty to try to help others and working in Family Support as an intake worker [food stamps, short-term medical and daycare] allows me to do this.

I believe people should be treated with respect, kindness and fairness. That is why the services we provide are so important – food stamps and medical benefits meet some of the most basic needs of people and lives can be changed when those needs are met.

If people are not fed, if they are so ill they cannot function, it does not matter what educational opportunities are available because they cannot make use of those opportunities.

At this point, I have two children in college that my husband and I are trying to help as much as we can.

Today, in processing reviews for food stamp and medical eligibility, I found that one client made \$15 an hour working at Gatorade in Pryor and another working for First Staff made \$13.20 an hour.

They are essentially making the same and more than I do. My job requires a college degree, theirs does not. My job does not pay overtime. They are paid for their overtime.

My job does not reward workers for good work as there are not any step increases, and my job does not offer yearly cost of living increases.

We all know that in the past year, gas prices, the costs of food, medical costs and insurances have all increased, but not my pay!

I find it more difficult now to help two of my children than several years ago when all four of my children were at home as my paycheck just does not go as far as it did.

PASS ON BEING A DHS WORKER

• If the past few years are an indication of what a state employee should expect, I would not encourage anyone to want this realm of public service as a career.

We have been told over and over that the good feeling we get from helping others is a reward in itself. One needs to have another source of support if that is all the reward we are to have.

The huge turnover in our agency, the lack of experienced workers, the deadlines that we are to meet at every turn, the constant interruptions and demands made on our time while we are trying to serve, make our job very difficult.

The lack of a living wage may make it impossible! I feel like quitting my job every single day. And I am a helper, a service person, a human service person – it is basically all I have ever done.

But this job sucks every bit of life out of me, leaves me feeling like I have failed, and like I have not corrected or made anything better. And I sure didn't get those 12 investigations done this month, either.

BEING A SPOUSE OF DHS WORKER

• What is it like to be the spouse of a DHS worker, or the parents of a DHS worker? They all carry the stress with me.

I cannot tell you the number of times I have cried all the way home either due to a case I was working on [normally one I had taken custody of], or the stupid politics in the office.

My family has to deal with my being upset. I don't just magically transform into the wife and mom, who is listening to what is going on with her family, able to help emotionally.

One In Four Kids Miss A Daily Meal

By Jacklyn Brink-Rosen

Since the late 1990's, with incidents of child neglect ever increasing, efforts to better understand the reasons for this unacceptable trend have gained traction.

As a part of past efforts, a citizen's task force was established to answer questions specific to nutrition. The Malnutrition Coalition began meeting with an agenda that focused on both ends of the issue: malnutrition and obesity in children, which are not mutually exclusive.

In those early days, childhood obesity was just beginning to reveal itself as a pending epidemic [Oklahoma ranks 43rd in child obesity].

As that threat loomed, Oklahoma also struggled to deal with children who were missing meals on a regular basis.

IT HAPPENS IN EVERY COUNTY

The children making headlines then and now not only consume too many empty calories but one in four miss at least one meal a day in every county within the state.

After reviewing available nutrition data, MC began to ask the obvious questions, such as, "Is it access or availability to good food that most impacts Oklahoma's children?"

The sad fact is members could not break through to a reliable finding because the available data was not specific. Unbelievably, that remains the case today, with the exception of efforts presently underway by research scientists from OU who are involved in BMI [body mass index] screening of children from within the Anadarko school system.

MORE CHILDREN ENTERING INTO POVERTY

We know previous studies have shown that malnutrition is more likely the



When a person comes to DHS to work and serve they generally come with a desire to help people help themselves. The case manager inevitably turns to another line of work.

A possible solution could be to lower the caseload and hire more case managers to adequately serve the needs of the public.

I have seen almost 20 or more employees throw up their hands and state, "I can't do this work anymore, it's too stressful." This is an area that can no longer go ignored.

To keep good qualified people the system must somehow address the reality of the responsibilities and the measures by which employees are evaluated.

Realistic expectations with the required tools will increase productivity and make the small incentives given more meaningful.

Most of the long-time employees really aren't in the business of social work for the money, they are there to serve because they care.

DOES THE PUBLIC UNDERSTAND?

• I don't think people truly understand the life of a Child Welfare Specialist. I have been in my county for almost six years. I have seen many people come and go.

Since my employment there are only three workers that I originally was hired to work with who are still employed in Child Welfare. Granted two of those three have moved to foster care or left and then come back.

I have missed many activities that my children have participated in due to long hours at the office. I am a single parent and often have to juggle my work and home, with work often getting more of my time.

I have had to find sitters in the middle of the night to come sit with my children so that I can "do the job thing."

I have spent the night at DHS sleeping on the concrete floor due to there not being any placement for children who were removed.

I have spent the night sitting with children at the hospital.

I have cried myself to sleep at night after working a difficult case.

I have received phone calls in the middle of the night from foster parents or parents, whom I have removed their children.

I have had to be a mentor to new workers, carry my caseload, and do supervisor

See SOCIAL WORKERS Page 10

cause of poverty than poverty the cause of malnutrition.

We also know that at one point in our recent past children were entering poverty 56 times faster in Oklahoma than any other U.S. state.

We have 849,000 children in Oklahoma. By 2008, to not know where, and specifically to whom, we should direct education and relief services is unconscionable.

The researchers presently conducting efforts in Anadarko stand behind BMI data collected and analyzed over the last few years in 11 U.S. states that indicate, among other things, 70% of all young people presently applying to serve in our military are being turned down because of affects related to diet.

BMI IS NECESSARY TO TARGET PREVENTION

These applicants may have reached a level of physical fitness, i.e., flexibility, strength and stamina, but they are not healthy and we are unable to target prevention tools without BMI.

We cannot allow ourselves to be afraid of taking on the work to accomplish annual BMI screening for every child in Oklahoma. Not only is it a moral imperative but it is a matter of national security.

There are groundbreaking pieces of legislation now in force that set up perfect follow-through vehicles for testing and establishing outcomes based on this information, specifically SB 519, put forth by the Fit Kids Coalition, and SB 1186 that mandate increases in Physical Education.

BMI is an idea whose time has come.

– The author is founder of the Malnutrition Coalition

PUBLIC FORUM

Ex-Sen. Joe Johnson Is Changing Lives

By Robert Flynn

I nominate 78-year-old retired state Sen. Joe Johnson of Heavener for Teacher Of The Year.

Born and raised in Leflore County, father of four, husband of 15 years to Peggy after nearly 50 years before with the mother of his children before she left this material existence; journalist and state representative.

He has taught the New Directions class for 15 years at Jim E. Hamilton Correctional Center, 10 miles south of Hodgen in the Oklahoma Mountains. He is a true friend to everyone he meets – truly the spirit of Will Rogers.

He teaches a new group of 20 men every seven weeks who volunteer to study and find a way to stay out of prison and establish new relationships with five advisors when they get out and to re-establish old relationships that many times have been dormant for years.

CONNECTING WITH ESTRANGED FAMILIES

Recently a man who had not heard from his family for seven years was able to make contact through Johnson and is again now communicating with his family.

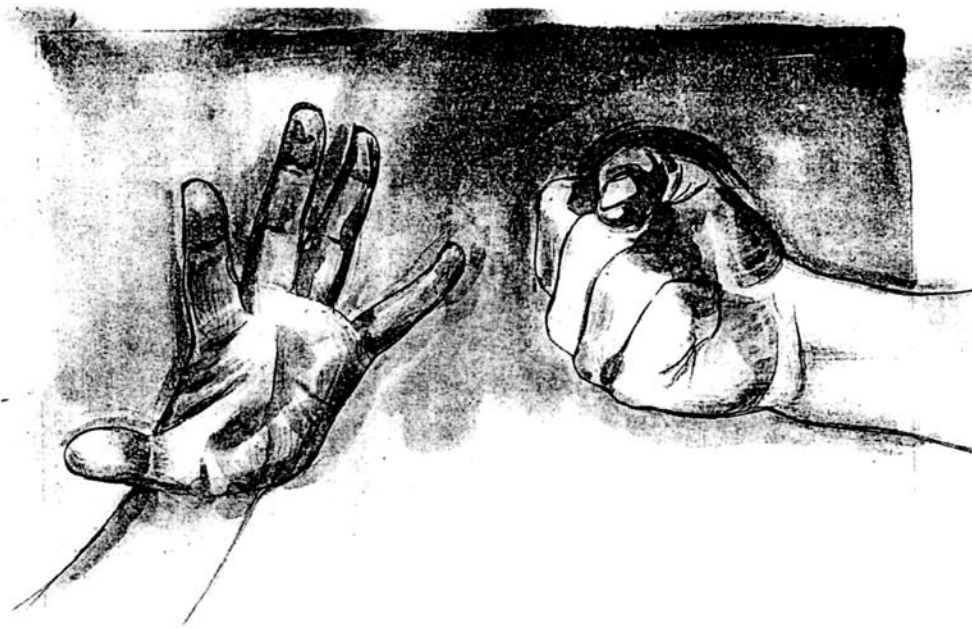
Joe has truly changed the lives of over 2,000 men coming out of prison – given them more than \$50 and a bus ticket that the state supplies.

Mr. J, as he is known by his graduates, many of whom are prospering. Jimmy Ivey graduated over 10 years ago and now leads the re-entry program for the Chickasaw Nation and handles a large responsibility of management.

Mr. J truly helps change the hearts and minds of men and women, helping them to have someone waiting on them when they get out. He teaches the fundamentals of life – submit to authority and take responsibility for your own actions

LIVING BY A UNIVERSAL MANTRA

Joe lives his life with a mantra that rings around the world as the most univer-



sal truth of all philosophies and religions – “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Joe hands out Golden Rule marbles, and has been the driving force behind a new kind of socially responsible corporation – The Golden Rule Coop.

It will help rebuild main streets of small towns by practicing the Golden Rule and providing jobs and part ownership of the band of brothers that he teaches and still goes to visit all over the state.

If fortunate to receive a Golden Rule Marble from Mr. J, he will always ask you when he next sees you if you have lost your marble. If you don't have it he asks that you go to church and put an extra dollar in the offering the next Sunday.

He always says that people can do as they like but that church seems to have a civilizing effect on the folks he has known.

Please consider making this one-of-a-kind teacher the winner of a well-deserved award – Teacher Of The Year.

– The author lives in Tulsa

GOP Senate Means New Private Prisons

By Frank Smith

An effect of the Republican takeover of the state Senate will be even more apparent than the Oklahoma State University Medical Center issues. The R's have served notice that they want to see more prison privatization.

The two largest U.S. for-profit corporations operating in Oklahoma have worked very hard to write laws – despite their denials – to insure that more people are sentenced to prison for longer terms.

Efforts to pass Jessica's Law in Kansas and Corrections Corporation of America efforts to defeat Proposition 5 in California are clear examples of their lobbying and political advocacy to create more and more market share by locking up more people.

[Editor's Note: In 1980 there were fewer than 5,000 prisoners in Oklahoma. Today it's 24,000-plus.]

ALEC IS PUSHING FOR PRISONS

They've been doing this covertly for many years in the American Legislative Exchange Council where their machinations remain hidden from public view, but they seem to be more willing to do it openly now that the advocacy community has responded so feebly.

These prisons, as many OK CURE members are aware, are more dangerous to staff, prisoners and the public than are state operated prisons, and cost more to operate despite the atrocious pay and extremely marginal benefits.

They are paying from a little over \$9 to under \$13 an hour for poorly trained,

high-turnover guards while the president of CCA, for instance, made \$22.5 million in 2006 in salary and stock awards.

Food and medical care, contracted out, are even more atrocious. They have over-billed states by millions of dollars – CCA and GEO over-billing the state of Florida by a combined total of over \$12 million

CORRUPTED OFFICIALS AT ALL LEVELS

They have corrupted officials in federal, state and municipal governments around the country in their insatiable quest for profits.

Please write me should you want more details, and check our Private Corrections Institute website at www.privateci.org.

We have been fighting the for-profits for a dozen years as individuals and almost five years as a tiny non-profit.

I have been involved in stopping the expansion of these GEO prisons in Oklahoma – Spavinaw last year, and Stroud and Lawton this year – though GEO slipped a second site by with no public input in Lawton.

I also successfully organized against the siting of a Detention Solutions prison in Warner this year.

I've been working for the past year to halt the siting of a proposed CEC/CiviGenics prison in Lindsay.

– The author is a field organizer for Private Corrections Institute. He may be reached at fs-smith@kanokla.net

Beating The Religious Drum For Political Gain

By James Nimmo

At the website of Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education [OESE, <http://www.oklascience.org/>], there is a professional analysis of the latest resurrection of Rep. Sally Kern's bill that would allow for the recitation of Bible verses as “facts” and “evidence” in math and science classes in Oklahoma schools with the teachers forced to accept such balderdash as legitimate answers.

Though this bill was vetoed by Gov. Henry last year, the subject of religious intolerance is dear to Kern as she worries it like a dog with its favorite bone.

According to the analysis, with other states that have passed these bills, the result has been expensive legal situations and confusion in the classrooms resulting in the lowering of educational standards.

Introduced by religiously repellent people like the Kern Krew, these divisive bills turn public schools into Sunday schools five days a week and restate already existing laws and court precedents. It would seem the purpose of the bills is to provide for the invention of another drum for the Kern Krew to beat.

REPETITION, FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES

It's the same tactic they use when introducing and passing Constitutional amendments that prevent marriage equality in states having legislatively passed laws that already do the same thing.

This rabid reiterating POV of the Kern Krew, the lack of ability to know when enough is enough, leaves me wondering why they don't do something similar

with the death penalty.

After all, the prisoner only has one life to lose and when executed, that's it.

Wouldn't it serve the Kern Krew's self-displayed sense of “justice” more if the condemned prisoner could be tortured for a period of time prior to the coup de grace, such as was common practice in medieval times with drawing and quartering, disemboweling, and partial amputations taking place before the actual demise with beheading?

A COLLECTION OF PEEPING TOMS

You might have realized, and are perhaps too shy to say, the Kern Krew is a sad collection of some very sick puppies that relish the pain of others in order to exorcise the demons that inhabit their own little bit of skull space.

They've never matured to an adult level of acceptance of sexual or religious privacy.

Kern's Krew is a collection of Peeping Toms, looking for what arouses them, be it sacred or secular.

Kern's Krew prefers to act out in public, with their victims and topics as proxy, the kinds of things they find titillating and arousing but keep suppressed and bubbling just below the surface of their puny, piddling religious scum of consciousness.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

Time For Gay Marriage

Why Civil Unions Don't Cut It

By Barbara Santee

It seems that then-President-Elect Barack Obama's decision to have the evangelical minister, Rick Warren, present the invocation for the inaugural ceremonies caused a firestorm among supporters of gay rights, specifically the right to same-sex marriage.

Warren has said that same-sex marriage is the same as an incestuous marriage, a marriage between a child and an adult, or a polygamous marriage. Proponents of same-sex marriage argue that being able to marry the person you love is a basic civil right given to heterosexuals but now denied to gay couples, and they liken this battle to the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

One political analyst was disgusted at this analogy arguing that blacks were beaten and killed in that struggle, and they were fighting for basic civil rights that all whites already enjoyed.

REMEMBER HARVEY MILK, OTHERS

I guess this analyst has never heard of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man to win public office who was assassinated, or of Matthew Shepard who was brutally beaten and left to die strapped to a wooden fence in Wyoming, or to the thousands of gays who are beaten or killed every year simply because they are gay.

He has forgotten about Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American from Chicago, who was murdered in a small town in Mississippi. Till had been beaten and his eye had been gouged out, before he was shot through the head and thrown into the Tallahatchie River with a 75-pound cotton gin fan tied to his neck with barbed wire.

His transgression? Wolf whistling at a white woman in Mississippi.

That political pundit also seemed to forget that before the civil rights movement of the 1960's, a black could not marry a white in most states, particularly in the South, and those who dared to travel as husband and wife took their lives in their own hands.

WHEN INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE WAS PROHIBITED

If the bigots would slaughter a young black man for whistling at a white woman, imagine what they would do to a black man who dared to marry a white woman!

This is what happened when an interracial couple decided to do just that in the 1960s.

Richard Loving, a white man, and Mildred Jeter, a black woman, left their home state of Virginia, where intermarriage was illegal, to get married in Washington, DC. When they returned to Virginia they were arrested and sentenced to one year in prison.

However, the judge suspended the sentence on the condition that the couple leave Virginia and not return for 25 years. The Lovings appealed the decision in a state court, but the ruling was upheld based on a previous case, in order for the state to "preserve the racial integrity of its citizens" and prevent "the obliteration of racial pride."

The argument that interracial marriages were unnatural and deviant was heavily reliant upon "scientific" assertions about the genetic and biological hierarchy of the "races."

Finally, the decision was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the ruling was overturned. The historic 1967 Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Loving v. Virginia* changed the legal landscape of intermarriage permanently.

EARLY SIMILAR ARGUMENTS TODAY

The current arguments against gay marriage have an eerie echo of those argu-

Coal Permit Punted To Obama Decision

The fate of scores of new coal-burning power plants is now in limbo over whether to regulate heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

The uncertainty resulted when an Environmental Protection Agency appeals panel rejected a federal permit for a Utah plant, leaving the issue for the Obama Administration to resolve.

[The Oklahoma Corporation Commission has turned down plans for a new coal-fired plant in western Oklahoma.]

The panel said the EPA's Denver office failed to adequately support its decision to issue a permit for the Bonanza plant without requiring controls on carbon dioxide, the leading pollutant linked to global warming.

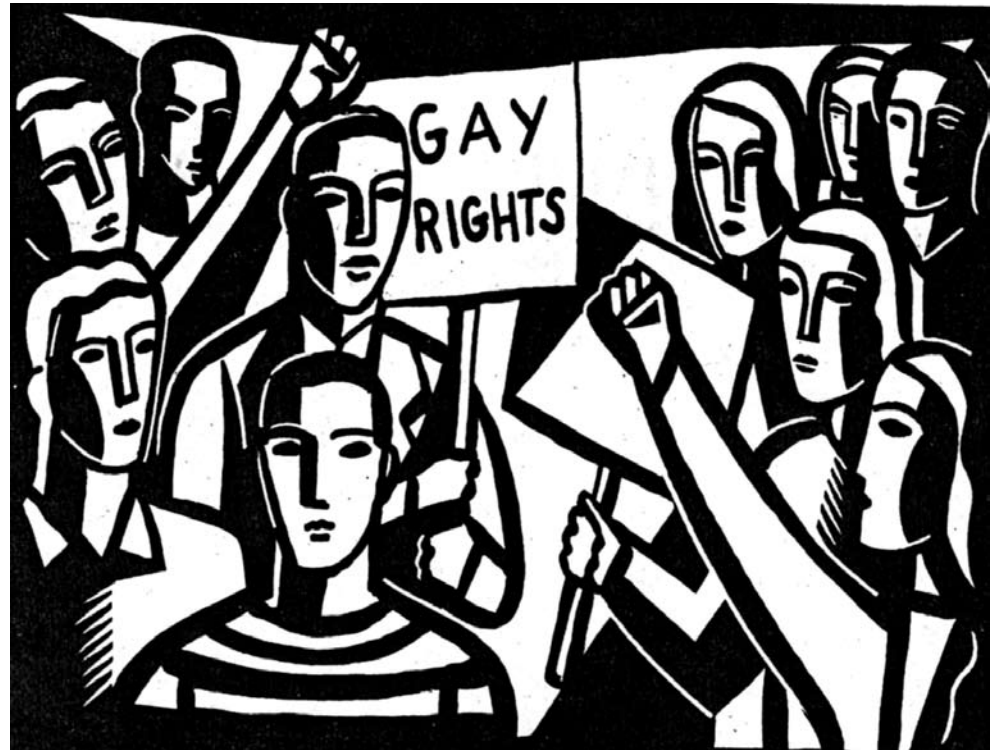
The matter was sent back to that office, which must better explain why it failed to order limits on carbon dioxide. This is "an issue of national scope that has implications far beyond this individual permitting process," the panel said.

EPA spokesman Jonathan Shrader said the agency was reviewing the ruling by the appeals panel, which traditionally gives great deference to agency decisions.

Environmentalists and lawyers representing industry groups said the ruling puts in question permits - some being considered, others approved but under appeal - of perhaps as many as 100 coal plants.

"It's going to stop everything while EPA mulls over what to do next" about how the federal Clean Air Act is to be used to control carbon dioxide, said David Bookbinder of the Sierra Club.

Bookbinder led the group's efforts to block the attempt by Deseret Power, a group of six electric cooperatives, to build a second coal-burning generating unit



ments used in fighting racial intermarriage over 40 years ago. [An interesting footnote: Mildred Jeter Loving just passed away in December.]

It cannot be denied that marriage does give certain legal rights to the partners that they don't have if they simply live together or even have a civil ceremony. Civil ceremonies are legal in only a few states, and not recognized when the couple goes to another state.

However, marriage gives them the right to work-related benefits such as health insurance, life insurance, and pensions to mention a few. But also the right to determine how, when and where to put the spousal's remains. Also, the right to make medical decisions for the partner, and to be able to visit the partner in the hospital, without the interference of the partner's extended family, is a basic right. And, of course, rights of inheritance.

If a couple has not made legal arrangements for the disposal of their estates upon their deaths, then the state steps in and distributes the estate according to state law.

OKLAHOMA LAW DOESN'T HELP

Oklahoma probate law protects heterosexual partners, but does not protect same-sex partners. A gay couple may live together for 30 years, and if they have not made legal arrangements, then at the time of death, the surviving person can lose everything to his/her partner's family, including their home, cars, furniture, all bank accounts and investments, and so forth.

So same-sex marriage may be a "moral" problem for Rick Warren, but it is a really serious financial problem for same-sex partners.

Should the partners make sure they are protected by signing legal documents granting these rights to each other should one of them predecease the other? Yes. Will they do it? Probably not. Most straight people don't do it, so it's not realistic to think that gays will.

Firstly, it is expensive to have all of the documents drawn up by an attorney. Secondly, without a doubt, in most situations the documents will be challenged in court by the extended family to further add to the expense and heartbreak of the surviving partner.

The way to protect same-sex partners is to grant them the full rights and responsibilities of a marriage that is recognized as legal, regardless of which state they live in or travel to.

How people can interpret this simple act of love and commitment as a threat to heterosexual marriage is beyond me!

- The author lives in Tulsa

at the Bonanza facility on the Uintah and Ouray Indian reservation in Utah.

Deseret Power had no comment about the EPA developments.

"In essence this is a punt to the Obama Administration ... All permits in the pipeline are now stymied," said Jason Hutt, a lawyer who represents a number of utilities, merchant energy developers and refineries seeking permits. He said it also would affect permits for oil refinery expansion.

President George W. Bush had made clear that he believes the Clean Air Act should not be used in permitting new plants to control greenhouse gases.

The Utah case has attracted wide interest because of its broader implications.

Toying With The Ticket-Writer

I went to the store the other day, and I was in there for only about five minutes. When I came out there was a motorcycle cop writing a parking ticket. So I went up to him and said, "Come on, buddy, how about giving a girl a break?"

He ignored me and continued writing the ticket. So I called him a pencil-necked Nazi. He glared at me and started writing another ticket for worn tires!

So I called him a piece of horse manure. He finished the second ticket and put it on the windshield with the first. Then he started writing a third ticket!

This went on for about 20 minutes ... the more I abused him, the more tickets he wrote. I didn't care. My car was parked around the corner.

I try to have a little fun each day. It's important.

PUBLIC FORUM

An Open Letter To President Obama

By John Bowen

At this point in history you stand at a nexus in time where the path of the United States could go in two very clear, and very different directions. It is up to you to choose which path this country will follow.

There will be great opposition to each path, but no future of our country, at present, will be without opposition. Each path will also affect the entire world in two very different ways, and the future of our planet will also hang in the balance of this decision.

I will not mince words in the following descriptions in order to soften the affront to ingrained sensibilities – that is for you to do when you choose.

DECADES PURSUING GLOBAL DOMINATION

The first path is the one chosen by the present administration, and indeed is the one that the United States has followed since the end of World War II. This is the path of regional and global economic domination that has favored the wealthy and the corporation, and indeed has made this country very rich, with a rich, though hierarchical and very uneven distribution of the “American Dream.”

We have allowed our businessmen to make predatory demands on the “lesser” countries of the world for raw materials that our country determined to take, and in the process of what really amounts to our looting of their resources for the benefit of first those companies and individuals who perpetrated this, most Americans benefited by an elevated standard of living.

Our military has followed up when the predatory business interests fail. The latest neo-colonial effort includes the occupations of the Middle Eastern countries, including the on-going efforts against Iran in order to control the largest and last sources of petroleum in the world.

This path has led to great wealth for about 1% of the U.S. population, and with it, most of the decisions of the United States are made by this small number of people, and not by the greater number of the citizens of the nation.

PUTTING AMERICA'S WELFARE IN FOREIGN HANDS

The previous administration, in order to achieve the short term goal of having no enforceable regulations to protect the people of this nation from the decisions of the corporations that now basically own the government have bankrupted it.

This has had the consequence of putting the welfare of our nation in the hands of bankers in China, Japan and other nations, not our own.

Our productivity has been sacrificed to the short-term goals of the decision makers to enrich themselves as fast as possible in what has amounted to a “free fraud” time period at the expense of our nation to create real wealth and a sustainable economy.

The common people of the United States have seen this and we don't like it. You were elected by this swell of resentment.

DANGERS OF STAYING THE COURSE

The future of this path is really very clear. In order to stay on this path of global domination, our nation has to gamble on several bad choices. The first gamble is that our now very stressed military will be able to control the resources of an entire planet. This path will require that we run the world as a police state, including our nation.

Most people and most other nations when confronted with the fact of American control over the diminishing resources of the planet will oppose us, and this will inevitably lead to a world at war, with our country playing the part of Nazi Germany and the other nations of the European Union, India, China and Russia



playing the allies.

In order to sustain the highly uneven distribution of wealth, our nation must also become a police state in the Fascist model in order to control the anger and disenfranchisement of the greater number of our people.

This process has already been prepared through the little publicized sections of the Patriot Act, and the decision to do away with the posse comitatus act. Indeed, it is this very groundswell of people that led to your landslide victory in the election.

WHAT OTHERS COULD DO WITH U.S. DOLLAR

The second gamble is that these other nations will not cash in all their U.S. dollars for another currency, causing the loss of the status of the USD as the world's preferred currency, an action that will lead to national insolvency in a minute.

Additionally – and if the above were not enough – the top 1%, who incidentally everyone knows have funded your campaign as well, are committed to the continuing use of petroleum and coal resources as they will continue to enrich themselves at ever greater rates as these resources become more and more scarce.

This means that nothing will be done to curtail the global climate disaster that will take them down as well as the rest of us.

Further, there has been no interest in our nation or anywhere else on the planet in the fact that potable clean water is becoming a very scarce item in a world overpopulated with people that need it to live. Even now, business interests are trying to corner the market on water resources here and abroad as they see this as a huge source of easy money.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND IMMIGRATION

The world of this climate disaster will include huge migrations of refugees from the tropical parts of the world – that our nation has incidentally provoked – like Latin America, toward the perceived better conditions of the temperate zones, one of which is our nation.

Food and water will become scarce and the civilization will ultimately collapse. Perhaps the wealthy 1% may survive in special enclaves, but the rest of us will not.

In short, the future of the United States on this path is one of unrelenting global warfare started by our nation, with perhaps a few allies against the rest of the world, fighting for the last of the resources left on a polluted and dying planet.

See LETTER Page 13

Obama 'Gets It' On Medicare Advantage

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

My heart sang recently when I heard then-President-Elect Barack Obama say, during an interview, “... we've got to eliminate programs that don't work. And I'll give you an example in the health care area.”

Then Obama named the Medicare Advantage program because insurance companies are getting “subsidies to accept Medicare recipients” without making them any healthier than they would be on traditional Medicare programs.

He concluded that “we can potentially save \$200 billion out of the health care system that we're currently spending” and use that money “in ways that are actually going to make people healthier and improve quality.”

When Congress passed the Medicare Prescription Drug Act in 2003, we experienced a radical departure from traditional Medicare, which was a government program offering uniform benefits to the elderly as defined in the law. But the Prescription Drug Act requires that Medicare-provided drugs must be sold and administered by private insurers in connection with another private plan called Medicare Advantage for health insurance.

PADDING THEIR POCKETS WITH TAX DOLLARS

Those who choose not to accept the Medicare prescription drug plan can stay on traditional Medicare but get their prescription drugs through a private plan other than Medicare. Traditional Medicare is prohibited from negotiating for lower drug prices, but the Veterans Administration has no such restriction.

Obviously, the insurance and pharmaceutical companies, in a pure power play allowed by Congress, have taken control and are apparently padding their pock-

ets with an estimated \$200 billion cited by Obama.

The Governmental Accounting Office, in a recent report, says that “in 2008, Medicare paid about 17% more for beneficiaries in private fee-for-service plans than if they were in traditional Medicare fee for-service plans.”

WASHINGTON'S CULTURE OF CORRUPTION

Nancy Pelosi, Democratic leader in 2003, called the Medicare Prescription Drug Act “a product of the culture of corruption that has infected Washington.” In her January 25, 2006 request to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, she asked a second time for an investigation of “serious irregularities in the process” of enacting this bill.

Pelosi said, “The vote was held open for three hours in the dead of night: H.R. 1 was brought before the House for final passage at 3 a.m. on Saturday, November 22, 2003. Instead of the 15 minutes usually reserved for roll call votes, the House Republican leadership held open the vote for an unprecedented three hours while pressuring Republican members to change their votes. During the vote, the Republican leadership abandoned the traditions of the House by permitting a member of the President's cabinet, HHS Secretary Thompson, to be present on the floor to persuade members.”

In conclusion, then-Oklahoma Congressman Ernest Istook was among those who got his arm twisted and reluctantly voted “yes.”

– The author, a former Democratic state representative, lives in Oklahoma City

Union Measure Early Test Of 'Change' Era

By Jim Hightower

Unions. Who needs 'em? They're so passe, so 1930s.

This is the frantic argument being pushed by corporate lobbyists who're worried by the recent resurgence in union organizing, political punch and public support.

Sure, say these corporatists, unions were needed back in the bad ol' Depression days, when rich executives and investors treated workers with all the respect that a Kleenex gets – use 'em up, toss 'em out.

But, hey, Bucko, that was last century! We're all in the modern global economy today, where cooperation – not confrontation – is the key. Workers are now called "associates," and we deal with each of them as individuals in a flexible workforce willing to help top executives cut labor costs. Unions just get in the way of this, don't you see?

This line of "thinking" was expressed recently by John Engler, the former Michigan politician who's now chief lobbyist and noted labor theorist for the National Association of Manufacturers: "In the sophisticated workplaces of the 21st Century, you see management and labor often work closely together to beat the competition. When they're doing that, the need for unions is obviated. And when management and unions are not working together, unions are not likely to succeed and not likely to survive."

What Professor Engler is telling us is that, *ergo, ipso facto and ad absurdum*, he's a gooberhead.

WORLD OF DOWNSIZINGS AND OFFSHORINGS

The need for unions is hardly obviated when worker productivity keeps rising, only to be rewarded by declining wages, elimination of health care benefits and cancellation of pensions. Meanwhile, downsizings and offshorings of American jobs are rampant, and part-time work is the new norm.

Yet, as CEOs energetically apply the ax to workers, they have lavished pay on themselves. It's a scream to hear corporate chieftains bemoan union wages while unabashedly paying themselves \$10,000-an-hour, plus getting luxury-level bennies. Top execs are getting so rich they could afford to air-condition hell – and some ought to be setting some money aside for that project.

Not only are unions needed, there is a widespread yearning for them today. A 2006 poll of the general public found that 68% of us believe that labor unions are necessary to protect working families. In that same year, a survey of workers by Peter D. Hart Research Associates found that 60 million Americans would join a union tomorrow if they could.

RULES RIGGED AGAINST UNIONS

So, why don't they?

Because the rules have been deliberately rigged during the past 30 years by corporate lobbyists to make union organizing next to impossible.

Want to organize your workplace? Of those who try, 20% get fired. If an orga-



nizing campaign is launched, union representatives are not allowed inside the business to talk to employees, but every employee can be forced to attend intimidating, one-on-one meetings with corporate supervisors who at least imply that supporting the union would be bad for their future at the company.

And, even against these odds, if a majority of employees say "yes" to a union, the executives can simply ignore them, refusing to negotiate a contract.

UNIONS' DEATH GREATLY EXAGGERATED

Corporate interests are fond of saying that unions are dying, as though it's the passing of some old loved one whose time has simply come. Hogwash and horsehockey. This is no natural passing, but a roughhouse mugging by guys in Armani suits.

But their rigged game could be up. The Employee Free Choice Act would make union organizing campaigns more fair. If a majority of workers in an office, factory or other place sign cards to form a union, the corporation would have to recognize this reality and negotiate in good faith.

Corporate lobbyists, congressional Republicans and a handful of corporate Democrats are desperate to block this effort to provide a touch of economic democracy in our country.

President Barack Obama backed the Free Choice Act in his campaign – but will he now have the stuff to stand forcefully against the recalcitrant corporate powers and actually push for its enactment?

This will be an early measure of how much of his "change agenda" is real.

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LETTER

From Page 12

The opposition of the common people to the raw deal that we will be getting may well spell the end of the United States as a republic, but we are headed in that direction right now.

The common people that have worked so hard for change that you promised will turn on you and may bring your administration down. We are now well used to seeing behind the spin that is now so common in the last eight years.

STANDING UP TO THE 1%

The other path is equally hard, but in a different way. This different path is to somehow go against the wishes of the 1%, and the majority of the big corporations, to do something completely different.

If the United States can spend the money that it takes to recover our economy, something that you seem to be committed to anyway, not only on infrastructure, but on a "Moon Race"-like effort to achieve an economy not based on petroleum and coal, but one based on some variation of the "Hydrogen Economy" idea.

After all, it is similar to the highly successful and highly popular Moon Race of President Kennedy – just an engineering problem.

HISTORY OF TACKLING HUGE CHALLENGES

Yes, there are huge problems, and tough obstacles, to overcome, but these intellectual challenges are the very things that America is still good at, though in a generation, we will have lost this edge to other nations.

The approach would have to be in a series of layers, starting with forcing Detroit, which now wants to be bailed out anyway, to make and sell fleets of hybrid cars, and developing drop-in retrofit hybrid or electric engines based on the venerable diesel train engine that will significantly decrease our need for petroleum, and our need to control the Middle East.

This would have to be followed by a second layer consisting of improving, rethinking and popularizing mass transportation, especially in the megalopolis areas of the country. It is well known that it is cheaper and far more energy efficient to move people in some kind of train than in any other way.

Another layer, even now being implemented, is to work with a replacement for coal as a source of electricity. Wind energy is a perfect solution, though more advances in solar collection could also provide vast amounts of power. A related

layer would have to include a re-working of the power grid for our nation.

FINANCING THE FUTURE

How to fund this all? First of all, the future is a huge security challenge for our nation. The path we have been following for the last 20 years, the first path above, is leading to more and more threats against the welfare of our nation. As a security threat, the budget of the Pentagon needs to be re-tooled to fund the second path.

Further, the rich, who have basically ruined our country for their private benefit, will need to contribute, and to my mind contribute a lot, to this fund.

Additionally, you have already decided to spend a vast amount of borrowed money to restart the national economy by improving the infrastructure anyway, and this path would be the equivalent of a new Works Progress act that would lead our nation to not only become independent, but also would lead the world away from war, and ourselves away from a police state.

It will lead to our nation's domination in Science and Technology again. And it will start us on the path to solving the climate crises, and the energy crisis that we will simply wallow in otherwise.

LESS CONFLICT AND WAR

The future of our nation on this path will be one of less conflict, less war, and one where the United States will be an exporter of this new technology to the rest of the world.

One disadvantage is that the technology for all the layers is not there yet, though you would be surprised at the amount of material there is to start it. The greater disadvantage will be that you will have the extreme opposition of the richest and most powerful people in the world.

There will likely be even physical danger to your person when you go down this path that will separate them from their power and source of wealth. The little people of the United States will be behind you, as they were behind President Kennedy, but this may be of little comfort to your person. However, this future, at least to me, is far brighter than the self-destructive path that we now follow.

– The author is executive director, High Plains Outdoor Institute, High Adventure/Educational Guide Service

Rather's Big Lawsuit Blow To Bush Legacy

As George W Bush leaves the White House, at least one unpleasant episode from his unpopular presidency is threatening to follow him into retirement.

A \$70 million lawsuit filed by Dan Rather, veteran former anchor for CBS Evening News, against his old network is reopening the debate over alleged favorable treatment that Bush received when he served in the Texas Air National Guard during the Vietnam War.

Bush had hoped that this controversy had been dealt with once and for all during the 2004 election.

Eight weeks before the 2004 presidential poll, Rather broadcast a story based on newly discovered documents which appeared to show that Bush, whose service in the Texas Air National Guard ensured that he did not have to fight in Vietnam, had barely turned up even for basic duty.

CBS RETRACTS, FIRES RATHER

After an outcry from the White House and conservative bloggers who claimed that the report had been based on falsified documents, CBS retracted the story, saying that the documents' authenticity could not be verified.

Rather, who had been with CBS for decades and was one of the most familiar faces in American journalism, was fired by the network the day after the 2004 election.

He claims breach of contract against CBS. He has already spent \$2 million on his case, which is likely to go to court early this year.

Rather contends not only that his report was true, "What the documents stated has never been denied, by the president or anyone around him," he said.

CBS CATERED TO THE FAR RIGHT

He said CBS succumbed to political pressure from conservatives to get the report discredited and to have him fired. He also claims that a panel set up by CBS to investigate the story was packed with conservatives in an effort to placate the White House.

Part of the reason for that, he suggests, was that Viacom, a sister company of CBS, knew that it would have important broadcasting regulatory issues to deal with during Bush's second term.

Among those CBS considered for the panel to investigate Rather's report were far-right broadcasters Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter.

"CBS broke with long-standing tradition at CBS News and elsewhere of standing up to political pressure," says Rather.

WHY THEY CAVED IN

"And, there's no joy in saying it, they caved in an effort to placate their regulators in Washington."

Rather's lawsuit makes other serious allegations about CBS succumbing to political pressure in an attempt to suppress important news stories. In particu-



lar, he says that his bosses at CBS tried to stop him reporting evidence of torture at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

According to Rather's lawsuit, "for weeks they refused to grant permission to air the story" and "continued to raise the goal posts, insisting on additional substantiation."

CBS FORCED TO GO WITH THE STORY

Rather also claims that Gen. Richard Meyers, then head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top military official in the U.S., called him at home and asked him not to broadcast the story, saying that it would "endanger national security."

Rather says that CBS only agreed to allow him to broadcast the story when it found out that Seymour Hersh would be writing about it in the New Yorker magazine. Even then, Rather claims, CBS tried to bury it.

"CBS imposed the unusual restrictions that the story would be aired only once, that it would not be preceded by on-air promotion, and that it would not be referenced on the CBS Evening News," he says.

Charges outlined in Rather's lawsuit will cast a further shadow over the Bush legacy. He recently expressed regret for the "failed intelligence" which led to the invasion of Iraq and has received heavy criticism over the scale and depth of the economic downturn in the United States.

The [U.K.] Guardian

Respecting The President Is Two-Way Street

By Susan Estrich

I don't hate George Bush. I never have.

I voted against him twice. I disagreed with him, sometimes passionately. I think the country is in worse shape now than it was eight years ago, and that history will not be kind to him.

I think America's standing in the world has dropped precipitately, and that it isn't just the elites who think so. I think his administration's failures in dealing with Hurricane Katrina were not limited to the question of whether to land Air Force One in Baton Rouge, and that the slogan "Mission Accomplished" on the aircraft carrier was the least of it when it comes to the mishandling of Iraq.

I am glad he is gone from office. I won't miss him. But I don't hate him.

'HATE' LIST DOESN'T INCLUDE BUSH

I hate Hamas and its leaders, who would rather see their children die than let Israeli children live in peace. I hate al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden for what they did on 9/11. I hate serial murderers and pedophiles and people who abuse their children.

Four years ago, when John Kerry was running, some Hollywood liberals who get respect because of what's in their wallets, not their brains, made a lot of noise about having "We Hate Bush" events. It was not only tasteless, but stupid and self-defeating.

Americans don't hate the president, and you don't win their votes by telling them that you do.

Shortly after Newt Gingrich swept into the Speaker's chair in 1994, he was invited to keynote an event at the Ronald Reagan Library, which is not far from where I live. A panel was scheduled after his speech, and the night before, the one woman on the panel had to cancel. The library's director called me and asked if I would take her place, and I was happy to oblige.

IT'S OK TO RESPECTFULLY DISAGREE

The first question posed to me was something about President Reagan's strengths, comparing him to FDR, the sort of question that was an invitation to extol the former president, a softball if tossed to anyone on the panel but me.

I answered respectfully. In fact, that was what my answer was about.

I talked about respecting President Reagan because of the office held, even though I didn't agree with him, about having differences with the president on the issues, yet not questioning his motives or patriotism.

I said I was there because I believed these were fundamentally American val-

ues, part and parcel of how we do our politics, and I hoped that the same respect would be accorded to the man who was then in the White House.

NANCY REAGAN DISAPPROVED

The audience booed. Loudly. Not the whole audience, mind you. Nancy Reagan was in the front row with various notable members of the library's board, and they applauded, respectfully. The booing started in the second row.

Mrs. Reagan apologized to me afterward and sent flowers the next day.

The boos did themselves no good, no more than the Hollywood Bush-haters. The event was on C-Span. I got a lot of mail. People watching were appalled.

Who were these people who would boo the idea of respecting the president? Two years later, President Clinton won re-election handily. Gingrich's revolution petered out.

I cringe when I hear my liberal friends - not to mention some of the loudmouths who get paid for it - behaving the way the audience did that day. President Bush's last days in office produced too much invective for my taste.

GIVING LICENSE TO LOUDMOUTHS

Yes, I am happy his term is over. No, I don't agree with his assessment of his legacy. But if we can't show some civility toward him, if we don't respect the presidency, what will we say when the loudmouths on the other side start their chant?

Barack Obama faces unprecedented challenges. If he doesn't make some missteps, especially in the early days, he will be the first president ever to avoid them.

He needs breathing room, space to find his way and respect while he does.

If we aren't willing to show it for President Bush as he leaves office, what basis will we have to demand it for President Obama?

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Idiot Signal

The stoplight on the corner chirps when it's safe to cross the street. I was crossing with an intellectually-challenged co-worker when he asked if I knew what the chirping was for. I explained that it signalled blind people when the light is red. Appalled, he responded, "What on earth are blind people doing driving?"

Letting Off Steam

You Say: 'Teach!' I Answer: 'When?'

By Debbie Hickerson

You told me to look at Balanced Literacy and many other programs with an open mind and welcome change. I did, of course.

You said I'd be a better teacher if I taught children to read with meaning, do poetry, improve their reading level, and work on basic comprehension. I did. What now?

You told me to highlight students' scores as proficient, non-proficient and advanced.

You told me to make colored graphs so administrators could see areas that need to be strengthened, and then, create strategies to bring up those scores. "It will only take a minute," you said. I did. What now?

ANSWER TO OUR WOES?

Portfolios are the answer to our system's woes! Do running records, assess several times a year, pre- and post-test each math chapter, do three writing samples, test, test, test, and report. It won't take long ... so I did. What now?

Phonics! We need that, too. Find the time! It won't take long. I did, now what?

Writing prompts will help with creative writing. Do this once a week. Find the time. You can. I did, although it was difficult to find the time. What now?

You told me to check state frameworks and standards for lesson planning, to differentiate and individualize for each student, to plan for any parent helper or aide. It won't take much more time. I did. What now?

THINGS TO DO IN SPARE TIME

Be sure to attend family nights, back-to-school events, basketball games [by the way, volunteer to take tickets or do concessions].

Then there are PTA, faculty and committee meetings, clean-up days, children's sporting events, not to mention home and church activities. I try to cover all of them. So what now? I am running out of energy and time.

Oh, our system is low on science and social studies. But lots of time is taken up with Balanced Literacy and other activities. Your solution for me - fold those subjects into reading and language arts. But, don't let those scores slip. I tried. I do. I can hardly fit all this into a day. What now?

DO IT DURING PLANNING TIME

Math scores seem low. We can't have that, either! Plan interventions, search out new ideas and pull from the Internet. You can do that on your planning time. I did; what now?

Assess your children some more! Get baselines. Listen to them read, count their words, mark the phonics sounds they miss, take another passage and repeat. Now get a story and have them circle correct words, do another spelling assessment and record any sounds they miss. Can they re-tell the story? I did all of this. Now what?

Workshops! Do more than the [required] 12 hours on your own time. A "professional" earns more than 12 hours. I tried and I did. What now? I can't seem to do it all with a clear mind and an eager heart.

ANOTHER ASSIGNMENT

Host college students in your classroom. You did not ask for them but you are a "professional." Oh, did we mention that you have to plan for them and assess them? You can find time.



Work around any distractions! Host a student teacher, but don't let your scores drop. Find the time to do it all well, I did, I think. What now?

Oh, your planning time! We forgot to mention that you need to meet with the principal and your colleagues, grade papers, clean your room, call parents and keep your web site up to date, your newsletter current and attend IEP and other meetings; learn new computer skills on your own, maintain close communication with parents by telephone, e-mail and regular mail.

THE TEACHER'S PROBLEM

Be sure to document communication. Oh, yes, and meet with your literacy coach, too. Then write a few grants. No time to finish all of this? You say that that is my own problem. Coping with low morale and pressure are my own responsibility. What now?

I say: Please, just let me teach! I know my students without color-coding pretty charts for you. I know my students without documenting and checking off every word or sound they don't know.

I know my students without spending hours and hours documenting for you, and then creating another set for myself.

My request is that you trust me to do my job!

MAKE EVERYONE HAPPY!

A happy teacher makes a happy student. A happy student makes a happy parent. A happy parent makes a happy administration, and a happy administration lets me do my job.

We are missing the boat as educators! No Child Left Behind was never meant to be about testing, documenting and taking up valuable teaching and interaction time with children. It was meant to give every child an equal shot at good education.

As teachers, we have no problem with being accountable. But we do have a large problem with being spread so thin that there is no time to teach.

We know we must give the children time to learn, time to be children, and time to think, discover new things and to be inspired by a happy teacher.

You say: "Teach." I say: "Yes, it's about time!"

- The author is president of the Murfreesboro, TN, Education Association. Her article appeared in *Teach*, newsletter of the Tennessee Education Association

How Conservatives And Liberals Evolved

Humans originally existed as members of small bands of nomadic hunters/gatherers. They lived on beer in the mountains during the summer and would go to the coast and live on fish and lobster in the winter.

The two most important events in all of history were the invention of beer and the invention of the wheel. The wheel was invented to get man to the beer.

These were the foundation of modern civilization and together were the catalyst for the splitting of humanity into two distinct subgroups: liberals and conservatives.

Once beer was discovered, it required grain and that was the beginning of agriculture. Neither the glass bottle nor aluminum can were invented yet so while our early humans were sitting around waiting for them to be invented, they just stayed close to the brewery. That's how villages were formed.

LIBERALS INVENTED THE BBQ

Some men spent their days tracking and killing animals to barbecue at night while they were drinking beer. This was the beginning of what is known as the liberal movement.

Other men who were weaker and less skilled at hunting learned to live off the liberals by showing up for the nightly barbecues and doing the sewing, fetching, and hair dressing.

This was the beginning of the conservative movement. Some of these conservative men eventually evolved into women. The rest became known as "girlie men."

Some noteworthy liberal achievements include the domestication of cats, the invention of group therapy, group hugs, and the concept of Democratic voting to decide how to divide the meat and beer.

ANIMAL SYMBOLS

Over the years conservatives came to be symbolized by the largest, pooping land animal on earth, the elephant. Liberals were symbolized by the jackass, an

animal that always pulls its weight.

Modern conservatives like light beer [sometimes with lime added], but most prefer white wine or imported bottled water. They eat raw fish but like their beef well done. Sushi, tofu, and French food are standard liberal fare.

Another interesting evolutionary side note - most conservative women have higher testosterone levels than their men. For proof, check any Sarah Palin speech footage.

WHAT LIBERALS BECOME

Most social workers, personal injury attorneys, journalists, dreamers in Hollywood and group therapists are liberals.

Liberals tend to drink micro brew beer. They also eat red meat and still provide for their women and families - no corporate welfare.

Conservatives are big-game hunters medical doctors, dentists, police officers, corporate executives, athletes, Marines, and generally anyone who believes in the free market and favors trade with our enemies.

Liberals who own companies hire other liberals who want to work for a living. Conservatives produce mostly corporate corruption but don't go to jail because they can afford liberal lawyers.

CONSERVATIVES WANT TO BE BOSS

Conservatives like to govern the producers and decide what to do with the production, often stowing huge profits in off-shore accounts.

Liberals believe Europeans are more enlightened than Americans. That is why the worst of the conservatives remained in Europe when liberals were coming to America.

Conservatives crept in after the Wild West was tamed and created a business of trying to get more for nothing, causing the Depression of '29 and the recession of '08.

Thus ends today's lesson in world history.

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ON THE
36TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE LANDMARK
ROE v. WADE
SUPREME COURT DECISION
JANUARY 22, 1973

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American Civil Liberties Union
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Oklahoma Congregations of Southwestern Unitarian Universalist Conference
Pastors for Peace
Peace House (Tulsa)
Planned Parenthood of Arkansas and Eastern Oklahoma, Inc.
Planned Parenthood of Central Oklahoma
Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO)
Reproductive Services
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Pro Bono Lawyers Helping Veterans

Legal eagles are descending into the emerging healthcare crisis over how injured and disabled veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are treated through a new program called Lawyers Serving Warriors.

Organized by the National Veterans Legal Services Program [NVLSLP], Lawyers Serving Warriors offers free legal help to active duty personnel who served in Iraq or Afghanistan and are facing administrative separation, or going through a mental or physical evaluation board.

They also help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have received an inappropriate discharge or disability rating, or are having difficulty with a claim with the VA for disability compensation, or a claim for Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance benefits.

CASES ARE ALREADY UNDERWAY

With several cases already underway, Lawyers Serving Warriors is planning to amplify its efforts over the next year and expects to assign hundreds of cases to attorneys from high-dollar law firms wanting to help for free.

Attorneys wanting to participate in the project attended a satellite broadcast training in 15 locations around the country, learning the ins and outs of the military disability and discharge system, and how to work with their active duty and veteran clients.

Many of the veterans are suffering from mental health injuries and in dire need of better healthcare than a strained and antiquated VA can provide thanks to underfunding by the Bush Administration.

VA OPERATES IN SLOW MOTION

The VA takes an average of 177 days to decide a benefits claim. But if the claim is initially denied and the veteran appeals, it can take years to resolve the appeal.

Meanwhile, the veteran waits, without benefits. In February 2008, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that some 392,000 claims were pending before the VA.

"Lawyers Serving Warriors is designed to ensure that our nation keeps its pact to care for its active duty personnel and veterans when they are injured and disabled due to their military service in Operation Iraqi Freedom [OIF] and Operation Enduring Freedom [OEF]," said Bart Stichman, co-executive director of NVLSLP.

WOUNDED NEED A LAWYER

"A wounded service member being evaluated through a mental or physical evaluation board will be well-served by having an attorney at his or her side who can advocate for healthcare and monetary benefits."

In several cases, noted Stichman, he has been contacted by OEF/OIF veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] who have been administratively separated from the military, instead of being treated for PTSD.

This means they receive no military disability benefits, and no military healthcare for the rest of their lives.

200,000 Vets Are Homeless, Hungry

By Aaron Glantz

Roy Lee Brantley shivers in the cold December morning as he waits in line for food outside the Ark of Refuge mission, which sits amid warehouses and artists lofts a stone's throw from the skyscrapers of downtown San Francisco.

Brantley's beard is long, white and unkempt. The African-American man's skin is wrinkled beyond his 62 years. He lives in squalor in a dingy residential hotel room with the bathroom down the hall.

In some ways, his current situation marks an improvement. "I've slept in parks," he says, "and on the sidewalk. Now at least I have a room."

Like the hundreds of others in line for food, Brantley has worn the military uniform. Most, like Brantley, carry their service IDs and red, white and blue cards from the Department of Veterans Affairs in their wallets or around their necks.

DECORATED VETERAN OF VIETNAM

In 1967, he deployed to Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division of the U.S. Army. By the time he left the military five years later, Brantley had attained the rank of sergeant and been decorated for his valor and for the wounds he sustained in combat.

"I risked my life for this democracy and got a Bronze Star," he says. "I shed blood for this country and got the Purple Heart after a mortar blast sent shrapnel into my face and leg.

"But when I came back home from Vietnam I was having problems. I tried to hurt my wife because she was Filipino. Every time I looked at her I thought I was in Vietnam again. So we broke up."

DENIED HIS CLAIM FIVE TIMES

In 1973, Brantley filed a disability claim with the federal government for mental wounds sustained in combat overseas. Over the years, the Department of Veterans Affairs has denied his claim five separate times.

"You go over there and risk your life for America and your mind's all messed up, America should take care of you, right," he says, knowing that for him and the other veterans in line for free food that promise has not been kept.

On any given night 200,000 U.S. veterans sleep homeless on the streets of America. One out of every four people – and one out of every three men – sleeping in a car, in front of a shop door, or under a freeway overpass, has worn a military



"In effect, these veterans are being kicked to the curb and abandoned by the country they swore an oath to protect and defend. That is unconscionable and unacceptable," Stichman said.

300,000 ARE IN NEED OF HELP

One in five veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD or major depression, according to a study by the RAND Corporation announced in April 2008. With 20% of returning military service members affected, that amounts to 300,000 people needing help, yet only a little more than half have sought treatment.

OIF and OEF veterans seeking help from Lawyers Serving Warriors are urged to visit the website www.lawyerservingwarriors.com and submit information through the "Request Free Legal Help" button on the left side of the screen.

More information is available at www.lawyerservingwarriors.com.

WHO ARE THEY?

The National Veterans Legal Services Program [NVLSLP] is an independent, non-profit veterans service organization that has been serving active duty personnel and veterans since 1980.

NVLSLP strives to ensure our nation honors its commitment to the nation's 25 million veterans and active duty personnel by providing them the federal benefits they have earned through their service to our country.

NVLSLP offers training for attorneys and other advocates, connects veterans and active duty personnel with pro-bono legal help, publishes the nation's definitive guide on veteran's benefits, and represents and litigates for veterans and their families before the VA, military discharge review agencies, and federal courts. For

uniform.

Some like Brantley have been on the streets for years. Others are young and women returning home wounded from Iraq and Afghanistan, quickly slipping through the cracks.

For each of these homeless veterans, America's promise to "Support the Troops" ended the moment he or she took off the uniform and tried to make the difficult transition to civilian life.

There, they encountered a hostile and cumbersome bureaucracy set up by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In a best-case scenario, a wounded veteran must wait six months to hear back from the VA. Those who appeal a denial have to wait an average of 4½ years for their answer.

DYING WHILE WAITING

In the six months leading up to March 31, 2008, nearly 1,500 veterans died waiting to learn if their disability claims would be approved by the government.

There are patriotic Americans trying to solve this problem. Recently, two veterans' organizations, Vietnam Veterans of America and Veterans of Modern Warfare, filed suit in federal court demanding the government decide disability claims brought by wounded soldiers within three months.

Predictably, however, the VA is trying to block the effort. On December 17, their lawyers convinced Reggie Walton, a judge appointed by President Bush, who ruled that imposing a quicker deadline for payment of benefits was a task for Congress and the president – not the courts.

President Barack Obama has the power to end this national disgrace. He has the power to streamline the VA bureaucracy so it helps rather than fights those who have been wounded in the line of duty.

Obama can ensure that this latest generation of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan does not receive the bum rap the Vietnam generation got.

Let 2008 be the last year thousands of homeless veterans stand in line for free food during the holiday season. Let it be the last year hundreds of thousands sleep homeless on the street.

© Alternet

A Last Look At 2008

The P.U.-Litzer Prizes For 2008 Announced

By Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon

Now in their 17th year, the P.U.-litzer Prizes recognize some of the nation's stinkiest media performances.

HOT FOR OBAMA PRIZE – MSNBC's Chris Matthews. This award sparked fierce competition, but the cinch came on the day Obama swept the Potomac primary in February – when Chris Matthews spoke of “the feeling most people get when they hear Barack Obama's speech. My, I felt this thrill going up my leg. I mean, I don't have that too often.”

BEYOND PARODY PRIZE – Fox News. In August, a FoxNews.com teaser for the “O'Reilly Factor” program said: “Obama bombarded by personal attacks. Are they legit? Ann Coulter comments.”

UPSIDE DOWN “ELITIST” AWARD – New York Times columnist David Brooks. For months, high-paid Beltway journalists competed with each other in advising candidate Obama on how to mingle with working class folks.

Ubiquitous pundit Brooks won the prize for his wisdom on reaching “less educated people, downscale people,” offered on MSNBC in June: “Obama's problem is he doesn't seem like the kind of guy who could go into an Applebee's salad bar and people think he fits in naturally there. And so he's had to change to try to be more like that Applebee's guy.”

It would indeed be hard for Obama to fit in naturally at an Applebee's salad bar. Applebee's restaurants don't have salad bars.

GUTTER BALL PUNDITRY AWARD – Chris Matthews of MSNBC's “Hardball.” In program after program during the spring, Matthews repeatedly questioned whether Obama could connect with “regular” voters – “regular” meaning voters who are white or “who actually do know how to bowl.”

He once said of Obama: “This gets very ethnic, but the fact that he's good at basketball doesn't surprise anybody. But the fact that he's that terrible at bowling does make you wonder.”

STRAIGHT SKINNY PRIZE – Wall Street Journal reporter Amy Chozick. In August, the Journal's Chozick went beyond the standard elitist charge to offer yet another reason that average voters might be wary of Obama.

Below the headline “Too Fit to Be President?” she wrote of Obama: “Despite his visits to waffle houses, ice-cream parlors and greasy-spoon diners around the country, his slim physique might have some Americans wondering whether he is truly like them.”

Chozick asked: “In a nation in which 66% of the voting-age population is overweight and 32% is obese, could Sen. Obama's skinniness be a liability?” To support her argument, she quoted Hillary Clinton supporters.

One said: “He needs to put some meat on his bones.” Another, prodded by Chozick, wrote on a Yahoo bulletin board: “I won't vote for any beanpole guy.”

“OUR CENTER-RIGHT NATION” AWARD – Newsweek editor Jon Meacham. With Democrats in the process of winning big in 2008 as they had in 2006, a media chorus erupted warning Democratic politicians away from their promises of change.

Behind the warnings was the repeated claim that America is essentially a con-



servative country. In an election eve Newsweek cover story with the sub-headline “America remains a center-right nation – a fact that a President Obama would forget at his peril,” Meacham argued that the liberalism of even “repeatedly re-elected FDR offended voters.” And the editor claimed that a leftward trend in election results and issues polling means little – as would Obama's victory after months of charges that he stood for radical change.

Evidence seemed to lose out to journalists' fears that campaign promises might actually be kept.

BAILOUT BLUSTER AWARD – Pundit David Brooks. On Sept. 30, just after the House defeated the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout measure, Brooks' column in the New York Times denounced the balking House members for their failure to heed “the collected expertise of the Treasury and Fed.”

But a week later, after the House approved a bailout – and with the credit crunch unabated and stock market still plunging – Brooks wrote: “At these moments, central bankers and Treasury officials leap in to try to make the traders feel better. Officials pretend they're coming up with policy responses, but much of what they do is political theater.”

Now he tells us.

“STATUS QUO CENTRISTS CAN'T BE IDEOLOGUES” AWARD – Too many to name. In late November, corporate media outlets began to credit Barack Obama with making supposedly nonideological cabinet picks.

The New York Times's front page reported that his choices “suggest that Mr. Obama is planning to govern from the center-right of his party, surrounding himself with pragmatists rather than ideologues.”

Conservative Times columnist David Brooks praised the picks as “not ideological” and the economic nominees as “moderate and thoughtful Democrats.”

USA Today reported that Obama's selections had “records that display more pragmatism than ideology.”

In media speak, if you thought invading Iraq and signing the NAFTA trade pact

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Top 10 Church-State Stories Of 2008

The role of religion in the presidential campaign tops the 2008 “Top 10” list of top church/state stories, according to the editors of Church & State.

The monthly magazine, published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, is the nation's only news periodical devoted exclusively to the intersection of religion and government.

Said Church & State publisher Barry W. Lynn, “It was a wild and crazy year. To tell you the truth ... I'm hopeful 2009 will be a lot better.”

After studying the past 12 months of news, the editors selected the following 10 stories as the most important and most interesting church-state developments for the year:

1. **The Role of Religion in the Presidential Campaign:** Not since 1960 when John F. Kennedy – the first Roman Catholic president – was elected, has religion played such a large role in a presidential campaign.

News media representatives grilled candidates on what sins they had committed and what their favorite Bible verses were. Barack Obama fought false rumors that he is secretly a Muslim, and Mitt Romney's Mormonism became a controversial topic.

2. **The Resurgence of the Religious Right:** While pundits and progressives have proclaimed the demise of the Religious Right, the fundamentalist political movement remained extraordinarily powerful. Republican John McCain found it necessary to name evangelical Sarah Palin as his running mate to mollify the GOP's restive religious base, and Religious Right forces rammed through bans on same-sex marriage in California, Florida and Arizona.

3. **The Battle Over Gay Marriage:** Bans on same-sex marriage were approved in California, Florida and Arizona with conservative religious forces leading the drive. California's approval of Proposition 8, with massive funding from members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was particularly contentious. The Mormons, joined by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and evangelical Protestant congregations, were successful in passing a constitutional amendment that

takes away the right of same-sex couples to marry and reflects church doctrine in civil law. The issue now moves back to the state Supreme Court.

4. **The Ascendancy of Rick Warren:** Once known primarily as a Southern Baptist mega-church pastor and best-selling author [*The Purpose Driven Life*], Warren rapidly moved into position as the nation's most prominent preacher, despite rightwing views on reproductive freedom, gay rights and church-state separation. After hosting a presidential debate stacked toward John McCain and being asked to give the invocation at Barack Obama's inauguration, many think Warren seems destined to be the new Billy Graham.

5. **Religious Right Influence at Justice Department:** Religious Right influence at the U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ] was exposed. According to an internal DOJ investigation reported in the media in July, senior aides in the department used religious and political criteria to hire staff members for non-political positions.

6. **Battles Over Creationism in Public Schools:** New battles have erupted over the teaching of evolution in public schools. Over the heated objections of educators, scientists and civil liberties activists, the Louisiana Legislature approved an “academic freedom” law encouraging such instruction in the state's schools. Now the Texas State Board of Education is debating a similar proposal as part of its 10-year review of science standards.

7. **Church Politicking Plot:** The Religious Right's dream of building a fundamentalist church-based political machine took a big step forward in 2008 when more than 30 pastors used their pulpits to endorse Republican political candidates, acting at the behest of the Alliance Defense Fund [ADF], a wealthy Religious Right legal outfit that wants to challenge the federal tax law ban on partisan politicking by tax-exempt groups.

8. **Defeat of Jeb Bush Referenda:** Florida Gov. Jeb Bush saw his school voucher subsidies for religious and other private schools overturned by the state Su-

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Rape, Violence Hit New American High

A new government report showing huge increases in the incidences of domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault over a two-year period in the United States deserves immediate attention from lawmakers and the new administration.

Latest statistics show a 42% increase in reported domestic violence and a 25% increase in the reported incidence of rape and sexual assault.

The National Crime Victimization Survey, based on projections from a national sample survey, says that at least 248,300 individuals were raped or sexually assaulted in 2007, up from 190,600 in 2005, the last year the survey was conducted.

The study surveyed 73,600 individuals in 41,500 households. Among all violent crimes, domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault showed the largest increases.

OTHER CRIMES SHOWED DECLINE

Except for simple assault, which increased by 3%, the incidence of every other crime surveyed decreased.

Oklahoma leads the nation in domestic violence.

"The numbers in this survey show an alarmingly high rate of sexual violence in this country," said Sarah Tofte, researcher for the U.S. Program at Human Rights Watch. "This should serve as a wake-up call that more must be done to address the problem in the U.S."

The projected number of violent crimes committed by intimate partners against women increased from 389,100 in 2005 to 554,260 in the 2007 report. By comparison, the number of violent crimes against men by intimate partners went down.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFTEN HIDDEN

"Domestic violence is often a hidden crime, and these numbers are a stark reminder of how serious and widespread this problem is," said Tofte.

"The Obama-Biden Administration should make prevention and protection against all forms of domestic and sexual violence a top priority."

The National Crime Victimization Survey is conducted every two years, with data gathered in phone calls made to a sample of households across the United States.

Due to criticism from experts in the subject, the survey's methodology was adjusted in 2007 to capture more accurately the incidence of gender-based violence.

"The new numbers indicate that previously, the government significantly underestimated the number of individuals affected by domestic and sexual violence in this country," said Tofte.

AUTHORITIES SHOULD MAKE IT A PRIORITY

"Authorities should urgently adjust public policies, law enforcement, and provision of support services accordingly."

Human Rights Watch is currently investigating and monitoring the criminal justice response to sexual-violence.

The organization's recent work includes investigating the backlog in untested DNA evidence collected in rape cases in the U.S.

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preme Court in 2006. Undeterred, the now former governor's allies on an obscure tax commission engineered two measures onto the November 2008 ballot that would have repealed the state Constitution's ban on public funding of religion as well as diluted its provision for a strong system of public schools. To Bush's dismay, the state Supreme Court on Sept. 3 struck the referenda from the ballot, derailing the scheme.

9. *Blocking of 'Christian' License Plate:* The South Carolina Legislature unanimously approved a special "Christian" license plate featuring a bright yellow cross, a stained-glass church window and the words "I Believe." Backed by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, four local clergy and two minority faith groups challenged the government favoritism toward one faith. On Dec. 11, a federal district court blocked issuance of the plates. The judge's action may forestall similar sectarian plates under consideration in other states.

10. *The Christmas Wars:* It has become an annual holiday tradition - Religious Right groups and their allies in the rightwing media launch a yearly crusade to stop the alleged secularization of Christmas and to pressure government to include Christian symbols in the holiday mix.



In Los Angeles City and County alone, there is a combined total of at least 13,000 untested sets of evidence, known as rape kits, sitting in storage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Human Rights Watch's national recommendations include:

- The Obama Administration should appoint a special adviser on violence against women in the U.S.
- Congress should restore full funding to the Office on Violence Against Women that a Republican Congress had cut.
- The Department of Justice, through the National Institute of Justice, should authorize comprehensive studies that more accurately track sexual and domestic violence in the U.S, especially among individuals who are least likely to be surveyed by the National Crime Victimization Survey.
- Congress should increase funding for sexual and domestic violence prevention, intervention, and treatment programs.
- Congress should amend the federal Debbie Smith Act, a grant program designed to eliminate the rape kit backlog, but that states can and have used for other kinds of DNA backlogs.
- The U.S. should ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], which obligates states to prevent, protect against, and punish violence against women. Bush declined to support it.

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were good ideas, you're a pragmatist. If not, you're an ideologue.

"WHO WOULD HAVE PREDICTED?" AWARD - The New York Times. The Times op-ed page marked the fifth anniversary of the Iraq invasion in March by choosing "nine experts on military and foreign affairs" to write on "the one aspect of the war that most surprised them or that they wish they had considered in the prewar debate."

None of the experts selected had opposed the invasion. That kind of exclusion made possible a bizarre claim by Times correspondent John Burns in the same day's paper:

"Only the most prescient could have guessed ... that the toll would include tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians killed, as well as nearly 4,000 American troops; or that America's financial costs by some recent estimates, would rise above \$650 billion by 2008."

Those who'd warned of such disastrous results were not only prescient, but were routinely excluded from mainstream coverage.

IMPERIALLY EMBEDDED PRIZE - John Burns, The New York Times. Described as "the longest-serving foreign correspondent in New York Times history," Burns seemed less a skeptical reporter than a channeler of Henry Kissinger when he offered his world view to PBS's Charlie Rose in April:

"The United States and its predominant economic, political and military power in the world have been the single greatest force for stability in the world, such as it is now, certainly since the Second World War.

"If the outcome in Iraq were to destroy the credibility of American power, to destroy America's willingness to use its power in the world to achieve good, to fight back against totalitarianism, authoritarianism, gross human rights abuses, it would be a very dark day."

Ouch!

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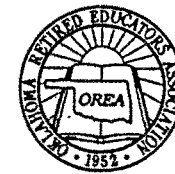
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