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What Would Jesus Think?

One Nation, Divisible

By Frosty Troy

When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in a flag and carrying a cross. – Sinclair Lewis

I was the Washington correspondent for the Tulsa Tribune, living in Arlington, VA, when a colleague wanted to know if I would accompany him to an Oral Roberts' crusade a few miles from my condo.

This event came to mind when I saw that there is a new fundamentalist sect promising to bring "Christ's rule over America."

My friend, who worked for a wire service, was assigned to do a story on Oral Roberts' traveling tent show – casting out devils, healing the sick and the dying.

The latest high-powered fundamentalist healer is Toddy Bentley, 32, a heavily tattooed, body-pierced, shaved-head Canadian who has been leading a continuous "supernatural healing revival" in America.

To contain the 10,000-plus crowds flocking to his venue, Bentley rents baseball stadiums, arenas and airport hangars.

His audience is not unlike those who attended the tent crusades of Oral Roberts. Many fundamentalist pastors believe Bentley is a prophet – the same way many Pentecostal preachers believed about Oral Roberts.

Followers don't bat an eye when Bentley tells them he's seen King David and spoken with the Apostle Paul in heaven.

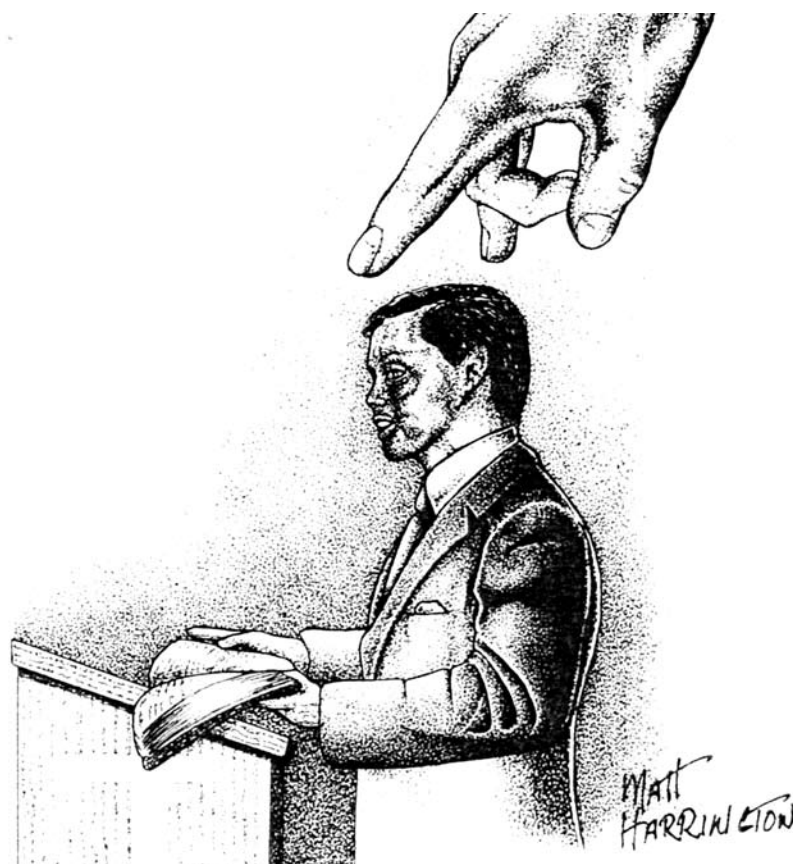
"He was looking very Jewish," Bentley notes. No kidding?

The power of prayer has been documented. Serious studies have shown that holistic medicine can make a difference.

There is a vast void between those who use spiritual means to aid the ill or dying and those who do it to rake in huge fortunes – jet planes and mansions.

I watched on TV as Pastor John Hagee told a huge audience that if they give only dimes to him, they would reap dimes. If they give dollars God would shower them with multiplied dollars.

T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen and others have followed in Oral Roberts' tracks,



pushing a "prosperity gospel" – send money and you will be financially blessed.

Ultra-conservative Tulsa is overflowing with faith healers, rivaling Colorado Springs as a nesting ground for religious fakirs – today's equivalent of witch doctors.

Radio and TV preachers such as Pat Robertson, Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, Jimmy Swaggert and their ilk begin every other sentence with "and God told me," and "I spoke to God and He said ..."

The truth? When you pray, you are speaking to God. When you hear God, that's paranoia.

Millions fall for this kind of preaching – some estimates reach to 30 million. I guess I am a latter-day Apostle John – I will believe in faith healers when the healers work their "miracles" on an external wound, cancer or disfigurement. Seeing is believing.

Not all fundamentalists are involved in partisan politics such as Pat Robertson or James Dobson. For decades

the Southern Baptist Convention eschewed politics, but not any more.

The SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission has teamed up with Oklahoma U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe to oppose climate change legislation. This cabal terms global warming as "speculative," yet solid science backs it.

Tattooed across Bentley's sternum are military dog tags that read "Joel's Army." This rapidly growing apocalyptic movement has gone largely unnoticed by watchdogs of the theocratic right.

In the case of Oral Roberts, there were two tents. The first was one in which he worked his "healing."

He commanded believers to rise out of their wheel chairs and walk – which they did – to the joyous amazement of the assembled throng. He healed internal disease and afflictions, and he cast out demons.

The second tent was for those with visible afflictions – desperately sick people.

Two stocky fellows denied us entry

but we slipped around the side and got a peek at people on cots and in wheelchairs.

Of course Oral Roberts prayed over them, but they were kept out of sight for an obvious reason – no visible healing took place.

Oral Roberts was a fake, along with Benny Hinn and that ilk who prey on the ill and dying who clutch at any straw.

Son Richard Roberts and his wife were ousted from their lucrative perch atop Oral Roberts University. They departed with \$450,000.

Their TV show was awesome – seeing through the ether into some poor soul's cancerous gallbladder, infected lungs and, yes, ousting old Lucifer himself.

The fact that they looted the university shows the extent of their greed. They were already doing quite well, but too much is never enough for some people.

Whistle-blowing staffers at Oral Roberts University have settled a wrongful dismissal lawsuit out of court after being fired for telling the truth about the Roberts' extravagant lifestyle.

Bentley and a handful of other preachers are advancing the same sick agenda – not to mention the big money that comes their way.

Bentley's Army is prophesied to become an Armageddon-ready military force of people with a divine mandate

See DOMINIONISTS Page 19

THE TERRIBLE TEN

**Ten bad, bad bills on the
2009 legislative agenda
that should keep you
awake at night.**

- Page 6

Observations

Privatizing

If you invite a nutcase to make recommendations on how to reform state government, don't be surprised if the end product is nutty.

That's what happened at an "historic" joint meeting of Oklahoma House and Senate budget leaders.

Leonard Gilroy, the Reason Foundation's director of government reform, told the meeting state services could be turned over to private business in information technology, road maintenance, motor pool operations, state mail services, park operations and maintenance, printing, corrections, state psychiatric services, lottery operations and public university construction.

We have no objection to outsourcing where the private sector could do it better, but Gilroy's recommendations come from a government-hating foundation on the far, far right. They pushed the so-called Taxpayer Bill Of Rights [TABOR].

Anybody remember when private business took over highway maintenance here? During an ice storm, not one road was cleared and the contract was canceled.

Check private prisons introduced by then Gov. Frank Keating. Their charge per inmate could bankrupt Oklahoma.

If the Legislature wants to make improvements in productivity, it should track appropriations to make certain taxpayers are getting their money's worth.

Outsource psychiatric services? Outsource Corrections? Not only is it ludicrous, but it's also a path to destroying state government – a goal of libertarians everywhere.

Little wonder that the public ranks Congress and state legislatures lower than used car salesmen.

Single Women

Many of the nation's 31 million women who live on their own face serious financial conditions that could

worsen. President Barack Obama promises to work to change that.

Households headed by women reported about half the median income of all households, \$22,592 versus \$43,130, according to a study by the Consumer Federation of America.

Their overall net worth was only about one-third of all households – \$32,850 compared with \$93,001. The study analyzed Federal Reserve Board data collected in 2004.

Another finding was that women who lived on their own following divorce, separation or the death of a spouse, or those who never married, had more trouble saving for the future.

About 33% said they didn't sock money away, compared with 24% of all households that reported the same. Cindy Hounsell, president of the Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement in Washington, says it's especially important for women who live on their own to save during tough economic times.

Her advice: Pay down debt, eliminate credit card spending, find bargains and improve credit scores to get the best rates on car insurance and other products.

Without Hope

Nowhere is the disintegration of the family more evident than among today's young people.

One in 10 young people today believe life is not worth living or is meaningless.

A survey of 16- to 25-year-olds by London-based Prince's Trust found a "significant core" for whom life had little or no purpose, especially for those not in education, work or training.

Oklahoma has its share of young suicides, vicious gang members and those without family support.

The poll of over 2,000 showed that more than a quarter felt depressed and were less happy than when they were younger.



Almost half said they were regularly stressed and many did not have anything to look forward to or someone they could talk to about problems.

The trust, which aims to help vulnerable young people, said its study revealed an increasingly vulnerable generation.

Young people say that family is key to their happiness, yet too often we find they don't have this crucial support. Divorce, domestic abuse and gangs are rampant in Oklahoma.

The survey, described as the first large scale study of its kind, showed that young people who had left school but did not have a job or a place on a training course, were twice as likely to feel that their life had no purpose.

We note this with bitterness since the Republican Legislature went after CareerTech. Last year more than 700 high school dropouts sought CareerTech training but lack of funding turned them away – along with 3,000 in-school students.

The Bush Administration killed the after-school program, despite its huge success.

It's bad enough that our kids languish in poverty and obesity but who cares? Certainly not what passes for leadership in Oklahoma's political establishment.

Hurting Vets

The Bush Administration's deplorable treatment of veterans assures that George W. Bush's name will live in infamy.

Consider the case of Marine Cpl. James Dixon, 27, who was on his third tour of duty in Iraq in September 2006 when the vehicle he was riding in hit an explosive device.

He received the Purple Heart and still suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions.

When he received his military medical discharge, he was told his injuries were not combat related! He would receive half the severance pay he expected.

Plus, he would not get any disability payments from Veterans Affairs until he went without the payments long enough to equal the severance amount.

The Pentagon determined last March that enhanced benefits offered under a new law would apply only to those meeting a more narrow defini-

tion of combat-related injury.

It reduced benefits available to thousands of recent veterans. The Pentagon is just trying to cut costs. Dixon stayed after the military and eventually got his status changed to combat-related.

But, he says, "If they could turn me down and I have a Purple Heart, then they could do it to just about anybody."

So much for the trashing of heroes by the coward from Crawford.

Poor Kids

Flash! The brains of children who are living in poverty function differently from those living in better circumstances. Any teacher knows that.

A study by researchers at the University of California-Berkeley makes it official: the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain that is active in problem-solving, reasoning, and creativity – responds differently in normal 9- and 10-year-olds who differ only by their socioeconomic status.

The study involved 26 children. Half of them were from poor families, and half were from high-income households.

Measuring electrical activity in the brain with an electroencephalograph, researchers found response levels were lower in the brains of the children from low-income families when they were viewing a series of pictures of triangles that were then mixed with other images, such as a puppy or Mickey Mouse.

It's not just that these kids are poor and more likely to have health problems, but they might actually not be getting full brain development from the stressful and relatively impoverished environment associated with low socioeconomic status: fewer books, less reading, fewer games, fewer visits to museums.

Work is under way at the university to reverse the brain differences by developing games that improve this area of brain function.

The study has been accepted for publication in the August issue of the Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience.

Next they will be telling us that poor kids are most likely to come to school hungry, join gangs, do drugs and go to prison.

Somebody pass this on to the 2009 Legislature.

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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

Dart: To Bill Bleakley, Oklahoma Gazette publisher, who lost columnist Robin Meyers when Bleakley insisted that Meyers clear his topics in advance. Sickening censorship.

We have no idea what Rep. Charles Key, R-OKC, is smoking, but his bill requiring political parties to fund primary elections [\$3 million] is in the lead for the dumbest bill of 2009.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry, for committing the truth – the state is \$600 million short this year. Why? The blame rests with Henry and legislators who voted for \$720 million in tax cuts in an already low tax state.

The Marines report 41 suicides last year, the Army 115, almost all due to repeated tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dart: To G.W. Bush whose last official act was to let any health care worker decline care they find objectionable – even druggists. Seven states and two family planning organizations have filed a lawsuit in Connecticut.

“I think the Democratic Party in Oklahoma in the short term is going to be fairly bleak.” – Congressman Dan Boren.

Laurel: To the media for support of the campaign “Crystal Darkness” to battle meth addiction. The hotline number to call is 211 for recovery help or a tip on dealers and users.

Number one show-off in Congress, Sen. Tom Coburn, R-OK, experienced what a new Democratic majority means – they cut off his objection 73-21 to a bill to set aside two million acres in nine states as wilderness. Even Republicans are sick of him.

Dart: To Oklahoma House staffer Sharon Brown, using the House e-mail to push religious messages. One more time, said House Chief of Staff Chad Warmington, and she’s history.

Reader Dennis Rogers reminds us that a village in Texas has found its missing idiot.

Dart: To State Rep. Ken Miller, R-Edmond, for badgering the Ethics Commission’s executive director, Marilyn Hughes. Her crime? The Commission approved performance pay raises for the small staff – first in 10 years.

More than 1,100 state vehicles have been equipped with new technology that tracks vehicles every minute and alerts drivers if they are speeding. Big Brother?

Laurel: To the Norman Transcript, commenting on Rep. Scott Martin’s pro-nuclear remarks: “Rep. Martin did not say where in District 46 he would like the nuclear plant to be built.”

One of the benefits of ridding America of the Bush Administration is the demise of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings. Her speech at the state Capitol criticizing CareerTech was beneath contempt.

Dart: To Sen. Anthony Sykes, R-Moore, for a press release that claims making English the official language of Oklahoma is “the humane” thing to do.

Deliver us from micromanaging legislators in the field of education. Latest is Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, who wants to waste your tax dollars with an outside audit of the State Department of Education. We have a state auditor.

Laurel: To Rep. Charlie Joyner, R-Midwest City, for HB 1577 requiring funeral directors to notify the state election Board of all deaths so the voter rolls can be expunged.

In his first week, President Barack Obama rejected three recommendations from American Catholic bishops: letting health care providers that oppose legal abortion to opt out, international funds for family planning and embryonic stem cell research.

Dart: To Republican Sens. Glenn Coffee and Clark Jolley for praising a report by the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition that is bogus. Even the usually docile State Board of Education blasted it.



Ouch! House and Senate members filed a whopping 2,597 bills and joint resolutions. Many of them are wholly unnecessary and repetitive which is why bringing back the Legislative Council would be great.

Laurel: To Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, for his bill to track home-schooled children and their academic progress. Naturally, the Daily Disappointment insulted the public by criticizing Wilson.

Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, praises Democrat Sen. Judy Eason-McIntyre for joining in the GOP drive for vouchers – a move that would cripple public education.

Dart: To Sen. Cliff Branan, R-OKC, for his bill raising the homestead exemption from \$1,000 to \$2,500. Why? Oklahoma is 47th in property tax. This is more pandering.

In the 27 years since the AIDS pandemic began, more than 25 million have died from the disease, 33 million live with it.

Laurel: To the Tulsa World for breaking the incredible story that one arm of the feds is evacuating the Picher Superfund site while another arm is moving families right back in the emptied houses.

Not another mandate for the teachers! Rep. Dennis Johnson, R-Duncan, authors HB 1829 requiring teachers to report suspected gang activity to the superintendent who would then have to notify the authorities.

Dart: To the hundreds who continue to park in handicapped slots – some with fake handicap placards. More than 400 tickets were written in December in OKC’s Bricktown and downtown.

Sixteen of 35 lakes in southeastern Oklahoma contain mercury above acceptable levels. The state’s Department of Environmental Quality will finish testing and report the names of the lakes in May.

Laurel: To OSU regents for rejecting another tuition hike. These are times for belt tightening.

Oklahoma now has 77,000 citizens suffering from Alzheimer’s disease. That figure is expected to double in the near future.

Dart: To the Oklahoma Industrial Authority, squandering \$32 million in financing Quartz Mountain Aerospace in Altus. It has fired most of its employees and has yet to produce an aircraft.

“The Tulsa World lays off 26 news-room staffers. Well, that’s one way to make liberal reporters understand the free enterprise system.” – Web quote by Brandon Dutcher of the virulent rightwing Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. [Twitter Jan. 7]

Laurel: To Tulsa oilman George Kaiser for his recommendation to stop oil and gas incentives because they are nothing more than corporate welfare. Naturally the Daily Disappointment criticized him as a liberal Democrat.

Was it your good fortune to know John Young? The Sapulpa attorney served 22 years in the state Senate, a truly bright and colorful member. Death claimed him at 85.

Dart: To Don Smith of Yukon, calling for the elimination of lobbyists. The need is for regulation, not elimination. Lobbyists play a critical role in governing.

Republicans are again pushing a constitutional amendment to make English the official language for Oklahoma governments at all levels. Indian leaders are furious. Their only hope is for a veto.

Laurel: To Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, honored by the Sierra Club with its Outstanding Public Servant award for his exemplary record of promoting conservation and environment protections.

Brain Freeze: It was former Gov. David Walters who joined with George Krumme and Jim Frazier to save the state Democratic Party headquarters.

Dart: To the folks now running American Airlines, failing to make the Top 10 best domestic airlines by Travel/Leisure magazine. We are passionate AA fliers but enough mismanagement is enough.

Oklahoma has 112,000 children without health insurance – ranking 16th nationally. The number will increase unless the Obama Administration cracks the whip. Bush spent billions for war but little for 8.6 million children without health care.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer


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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Praise the Lord and pass the hypocrisy!!

All of a sudden the Republicans in the House and Senate have gotten religion about deficit spending. They stood by like the buffoons they are while George W. Bush squandered the Clinton surplus and ran up over \$1 trillion in debt on a misguided, unnecessary war, and tax breaks for the rich. Not a word of protest!

Now, they can only find fault with President Obama's economic recovery plan. They have no ideas, just negativity and complaints. And John Boehner has the nerve to say he is concerned about the debt we are leaving for future generations!

Give me a break! He should have thought of that about six years ago.

I can only assume the Republicans are afraid President Obama will spend money to help poor people. We all know how they hate that! Plenty of money for war and rich Republicans, but nothing for ordinary Americans.

This has to stop!

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

No more jail without trial or attorney – done.

No more spying on American citizens, torturing people in Eastern Europe – torturing under the American flag AT ALL, no more intelligence manipulation and/or failures per GOBama and Admiral Dennis Blair.

No more corporate lobbyist-turned-White House staff-turned-corporate lobbyist for ALL EIGHT YEARS of GOBama.

Iraq, 16 months AND WE ARE OUT.

Afghanistan, to find bin Laden.

Anybody got one to add?

Such joy, I cry every day when I read the paper ...

Allison Lynn Weaver
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

With the Oklahoma Legislature's history of poor legislation the odds are that Voter ID will just be added to the long list. The expense associated with confronting such legislation by a class action suit falls upon our taxpayers yet the Repugs now in control do not give a fig what it costs. They just want to extend their control every which way they can and will stop at nothing to do so.

We need to stop this discriminatory action before it has to go to the Supreme Court by publicizing in letters

to editors and in our other circles so that the people most affected by this lousy plan will know they are about to be disenfranchised by the hooligans on NE 23rd Street.

We need to alert all our own families' elders, disabled, uneducated and/or those with meager budgets – everyone who would or could be robbed of their chance to cast ballots – they need to write a postcard to our governor to veto such a bill if it should appear on his desk.

Pass the word! Shine the light! These guys hate to have their plans brought to the light of the average citizen. They love doing these things in the cover of dark, back rooms.

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

On Monday, January 19, our nation observed a national holiday, commonly referred to as MLK, in honor of Martin Luther King.

Mid-afternoon on Tuesday, as the networks aired a live video I've yearned to see for years, it suddenly occurred to me we need another national holiday. The live broadcast showed Air Force One lifting off and gaining altitude. Aboard the plane, headed for Midland, TX was George W. Bush.

It was a glorious, breathtaking sight. At long last it was really happening. To commemorate that event, I think we need to declare January 20 as a new national holiday.

We can simply label it NMB [No More Bush].

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Handbook Rules For A Non-Union Company [1.10.09]:

I found the above attempt at satire pretty unsatisfactory. You run this article on the same page as one for child labor and on the page following one on Wal-Mart's activity.

As a small business owner for 25 years, I didn't find it funny or amusing. Absolutely nothing describes the attitude I have toward my employees, nor the attitude of any small business owner I know. I struggle each and every day to make payroll and provide some level of benefits and a safe work place – all without any government help or "bailout."

Sometimes you make it a little hard to know when the serious work you do ends and where you begin some fairly feeble attempts at anti-business humor. Are you guys unionized?



Enjoy your work – and have for a long time. But this one widely missed the mark.

Bill Vogle
Tulsa

set it up].

Not revenge – the rule of "law," justice.

Sweet, sweet justice.

GlennaMae Hendricks
Alva

Editor, The Observer:

I made the suggestion [to President Obama] that to save drug companies money so they can cut prices we should eliminate all advertising of prescription drugs on TV, Radio or magazines. If I can't buy it then don't advertise it. Send all advertising to doctors. Me telling my doctor what I need based on what drug companies tell me is stupid.

I sent something like this to all of my representatives in Congress and the Legislature. If we all send this maybe someone will pay attention.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

SINCE, Bush/Cheney grabbed so much power and used it against the American People and against the country.

AND SINCE, there is a great deal of argument for "moving forward" and not looking back. Mostly, I think from people who are trying to cover their own asses, but nevertheless.

AND SINCE, we will have no investigations, no trials, no ability to claim executive privilege or hide behind "issues of national security."

RESOLVED, with the powers GW instituted to meet his own insidious ends, Obama can simply declare GW, Cheney, Rove, Rumsfeld, Rice, Wolfowitz, Gonzales, Tom Delay – oh, come on, I know there's more of them – are you ready?

"ENEMY COMBATANTS"

They certainly "combated" this country. Almost destroyed it, that certainly makes them "enemies." They have made no secret of their contempt for the rule of law so cherished by all who revel in the uniqueness of that concept in this country. They set up the system, they must certainly approve of it. Let's "ye-use" it.

Problem solved: goes "forward" without looking back, can be done immediately, no grand jury, no special prosecutor, no gathering of evidence, just executive order. Then: no civil rights to worry about, no access to lawyers, no trial necessary, "detainment" until whenever, vile conditions, torture [I mean, seems only fair, they

Editor, The Observer:

Barack Obama's skin color is similar to that of many Latinos yet we don't call Latinos "black." The skin tone of Native Americans can be pretty dark yet we don't call Native Americans "black." Koreans have a tan skin color, yet we don't call them "black."

Strangely, the term "black" is reserved for anyone whose racial origin is in the smallest degree African. Surely this is linguistic racism embedded at the deepest level.

The part any society occupies on the cultural spectrum dictates the words it uses. Those words in turn rule our attitudes and thinking. Isn't our cultural bias expressed with terms like "black" to describe anyone with the smallest amount of African blood?

What does "Black-American" mean? Doesn't this term dupe us into believing that persons of various degrees of African-Caucasian ancestry and a wide range of skin color are all "black?" Isn't "black" a dishonest description of skin color that may range from light to medium brown? Doesn't "black" negate optical truth by insisting that anyone with African features and light skin is "black?"

Doesn't it express a kind of racist disrespect? Doesn't it say that for African-Americans there's no need to bother about distinctions of skin color? Doesn't language tell us that for those with any degree of African ancestry we need not believe the evidence of our eyes?

Let's invent new terms to accurately describe blends of races and skin color. They will have the power to change our thinking and our attitudes.

Until then maybe the best we can do is to call Barack Obama a "Kansas-Kenyan American."

Ron du Bois
Stillwater

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Frosty's Notebook

Changing Hats

I was honored to be speaking to the Alabama Education Association in Birmingham. As was my custom, I went to the convention hall early to scope out the hall and test the mic.

I was startled to see a riser in front of the podium so I asked one of the AEA staff why it was there.

"We have a special guest who is in a wheelchair," he said. "That's so he can be pushed up to the mic."

As the minutes passed I peaked out from behind the curtain, I wasn't surprised to see mostly black faces. Busing had decimated Alabama public schools, leaving primarily black teachers.

I was not prepared for what happened next. Several men came in, began checking out the stage. It was then I noticed the wheelchair coming.

I caught my breath. No, it couldn't be George Wallace! No. No. No. It was. He greeted the folks backstage, including shaking my hand. What the hell was going on?

We dignitaries were seated and the curtain was opened to scattered applause. A prayer, flag salute, then former Gov. Wallace was wheeled in and pushed up the riser to the podium.

I was about to experience one of the most emotional moments of my life. He began with a history of Alabama public education and what he had done as governor and what his wife Luraleen was attempting to do.

He made one of the most soulful apologies I have ever heard, choking up several times. He was interrupted by applause but he forged on.

When he finished, the standing ovation was thunderous. I scanned the audi-



ence, tears rolling down teachers' faces, many clapping their hands.

Those of us seated on the stage swarmed him for handshakes. In a moment he was gone.

I hope as the keynoter I made a good speech but I have no idea. I was caught up in the moment. I'm Irish and I admit I had teared up.

I remember what a wise politician told me when I apologized to him for misjudging his change of heart.

"That's the problem with you, Frosty, and all of the media," he said. "You're so busy putting black hats on public figures, you don't see that someone can change hats."

As associate editor of the Tulsa Tribune I had written the editorial concerning Wallace's appearance in Tulsa. I distinctly remember the headline: "Armies Of The Night." We lost many angry subscribers.

My publisher Jenkin Lloyd Jones was out of town during the episode and when he returned he called me in.

"I understand why you wrote what you did," he said. "But next time remember to use a stiletto and not a meat ax. You didn't leave the readers anything to think about, you just made them mad."

Ignoring The Mentally Ill

Oklahoma has the nation's highest percentage of persons with severe mental illness, 13.3%, according to the National Survey on Drug Use & Health.

Despite the crying need for adequate funding, the Legislature consistently turns a deaf ear to full state funding of programs that work.

The Department of Corrections reports that 11,739 offenders have a mental health need. Of the 2,112 female offenders, 1,665 [79%] have mental health needs. Of the 21,900 male offenders, 10,074 [46%].

More than 57% of inmates diagnosed with a mental illness were incarcerated for non-violent offenses.

The Oklahoma County jail has as many as 500 persons with mental illnesses at any given time. The Tulsa County jail has 200 persons with mental illnesses at any given time.

Two rationales underlie the therapeutic court approach. First, to protect the public by addressing the mental illness that contributed to the non-violent criminal act, thereby reducing recidivism.

Second, to recognize that criminal sanctions, whether intended as punishments or deterrents, are not effective when mental illness is a significant cause of the criminal act.

Trashing Kids

A fallacious report that Oklahoma student test results may be skewed was immediately blistered by the normally docile State Board of Education as nothing less than false.

Without the slightest hint of checking the "facts" in the report by a fat cat organization known as the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition, House Speaker Chris Benge praised it.

The report said that the vast majority of public school students are ranked proficient in subjects on Oklahoma's state-mandated tests "but very few achieve the same rating on comparable national tests such as the National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP]."

The report said State Superintendent Sandy Garrett ought to turn the testing issue over to another source. Since none of the media carried the State Board's refutation, read it here:

"There are so many errors, innuendoes and unproved research in this report, it is unproductive to comment extensively. The document appears to have been put together in a hurried manner and it relies on unnamed sources and findings.

"Its authors admit there is no data to prove that their study's recommendations would be effective changes for Oklahoma.

"It is impossible to ascertain whether those interviewed had hidden agendas or were even the most appropriate or knowledgeable people to provide commentary because all sources are anonymous.

"Education Week annually analyzes state accountability systems and policies, and is nationally recognized for doing so, and came up with far different conclusions about Oklahoma standards and accountability just one week ago.

"The ACT is also a valid, external benchmark for student achievement and is highly correlated to our Algebra I End-of-Instruction exam. In general, state ACT results mirror the scores of Oklahoma's other EOI exams.

"We know economics have changed in Oklahoma amid this painful national recession. We know there will likely be little if no additional support sent to schools this year, as like last year, despite record enrollment.

The goals of mental health courts are:

- Break the cycle of worsening mental illness and criminal behavior.
- Provide effective treatment options instead of the usual criminal sanctions for offenders with mental illnesses.
- Mental Health Court participants are on a separate docket that reports for supervision frequently at the beginning.
- As participants progress through the program supervision gradually decreases until graduation from the program is achieved.
- Eligible defendants have a mental illness, a current criminal offense [or are facing revocation] and no prior violent charges.

Mental Health Court is a voluntary program in which defendants are given an option of taking their case through the normal channels of the criminal justice system or pleading into the Mental Health Court program.

Participants are actively engaged in treatment, while they work toward reestablishing community and family ties.

For more information about this program or to speak with someone about starting a program in your county, contact Nisha Wilson at 405.522.3856 or via e-mail at nwilson@odmhsas.org.

"Yet adding more bureaucracy and special interests in the schooling of our young people isn't the answer to these times; joining together to provide innovative support to them and their schools is," the State Board's blast ended.

The Coalition reads like a Who's Who in big oil, big media and big business. The Coalition had to go out of state to find two authors to write a wholly false report.

Motive? The Oklahoma powers-that-be have long demeaned teachers' unions in hopes of producing vouchers – a so-called magic bullet that would supposedly take the place of adequate funding. Oklahoma is 47th in what it spends per pupil and 48th in teacher salaries.

This is the first time they have attacked Garrett, who doubtless would be delighted to meet the authors face to face. Why anonymous sources? Why create another level of education bureaucracy? Can you prove that Oklahoma ACT and state-mandated tests are invalid measurements?

Anybody surprised that a big shot from the Daily Disappointment is on the executive committee? Or the Tulsa Chamber and State Chamber are on the board – two mindless critics of public education?

Anyone connected to the coalition ought to hang their head in shame.



The Terrible Ten

Bills Suited For The Stone Age, Not The 21st Century

State lawmakers are fond of saying “the devil is in the details” – meaning a bill that at first glance seems perfectly acceptable actually may be chock full of hidden mischief known as “wooley-boogers.”

At other times, there is no disguising lousy legislation destined to yield poor public policy.

With Republicans cementing control of both houses of the Oklahoma Legislature, the previous two-party, check-and-balance on bad bills is gone. It's left to Gov. Brad Henry's veto pen and an ever-shrinking Democratic minority to protect Oklahoma from the worst of the Red State excesses.

Out of nearly 2,600 bills and joint resolutions filed in advance of the 2009 session that began Feb. 2, we've identified 10 of the most egregious.

Sadly, the list doesn't pretend to be exhaustive. Wooley-boogers lurk everywhere. But these Terrible Ten are enough to keep progressive, thinking Oklahomans awake at night, fearing what their state will look like if right-wing extremists rule the day.

In no particular order, 2009's Terrible Ten:

VOTER ID

Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, has filed SB 4 that would require voters to show photo identification or a state-issued voter ID card before casting ballots in Oklahoma elections. Republicans bleat incessantly that proof of identity is necessary to ensure the integrity of the voting process. They point to allegations of voter registration fraud in several states in the most recent national elections.

This is a classic legislative case of a solution in search of a problem. Voter ID supporters are unable to produce any evidence of fraudulent voting in Oklahoma. Indeed, state officials uncovered only six instances out of 1.4 million votes cast Nov. 4 where a voter arrived to find signatures already next to their names. In all six cases, it turned out the first voter simply signed on the wrong line.

What this is really about is voter suppression – specifically, Republicans working to reduce Democratic voter turnout. How? Obtaining a Voter ID card will be no small challenge for many poor and elderly – two groups that tend to be more sympathetic to Democrats. Even if only a small percentage of these folks simply give up, frustrated by new obstacles to voting, it might be enough to swing some close elections to the GOP.

CARRY ON CAMPUS

State Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, wants to turn Oklahoma's college campuses into a modern-day OK Corral. HB 1803 would permit anyone who holds a concealed handgun permit and completes state certification training to carry concealed weapons at public colleges.

This is Murphey's second attempt to publicly plant a slobbery kiss on the National Rifle Association's derriere.

The state's university and college presidents are adamantly opposed to the measure. So are the state's regents. And so is law enforcement – worried that if Oklahoma were confronted with a Virginia Tech-style crisis, police may not be able to immediately judge the bad guys from the good.

Think Oklahoma's campuses will be safer by unleashing untold numbers of gun-toting students and faculty – the vast majority of whom aren't trained for emergency situations like this? Murphey's status as a Grand Champion of the flying-saucer, black-helicopter crowd will be etched in stone the first time police shoot and kill an innocent student.

TEN COMMANDMENTS

Rookie Rep. Mike Ritze, R-Broken Arrow, has launched his campaign to become the state's newest Theocrat-in-Chief. Ritze wants to erect a Ten Commandments monument on the state Capitol grounds.

This is an especially important legislative initiative at a time when Oklahoma faces a \$600 million budget shortfall, prisons are overcrowded and crumbling, highways and bridges are in widespread disrepair, thousands are on waiting lists to get into CareerTech programs, schools are cutting bus routes and cramming more students into classes, the mentally ill are going untreated, 600,000 children are without health insurance ...

Oh, well, the monument would be privately funded. And its supporters no doubt would sleep better at night knowing it graces the Capitol grounds in a state with one of the nation's highest rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and imprisonment.

ENGLISH ONLY

State Reps. Randy Terrill, George Faught and Mike Christian, and state Sen. Anthony Sykes, Republican wingnuts all, are establishing Oklahoma as a hotbed of xenophobia with their quest to designate English as the state's official language.

In concert with last year's spiteful HB 1804 immigration “reform” package – another Terrill special – the English-only initiative [HB 2254 is one version] would send an unmistakable message that Oklahoma is insular and unwelcoming, viewing outsiders with suspicion. [See Voter ID, page 7]

Nashville got it right. Voters in the Tennessee capital resoundingly rejected a similar proposal recently, fearing it would damage their town's reputation as a warm, multi-cultural melting pot. Opposition to the initiative produced a rare alliance of groups ranging from the conservative Chamber of Commerce to the liberal Green Party.

ETHICS

Last year, the State Ethics Commission adopted a rule that reduced from \$300 to \$100 the annual amount of gifts that lobbyists can give to elected state officials. Lawmakers grumbled, but didn't want to challenge the rule in an election year.

Now, with the next elections more than 20 months away, Sen. Brian Crain, R-Tulsa, has introduced a measure [SB 6] that would overturn the Ethics Commission's rule, making it easier for special interests with the deepest pockets to wine-and-dine lawmakers, provide them with tickets to the big game or underwrite golf outings.

Here's a novel idea: Dutch treat. Some Ethics Commission members want to eliminate lobbyists' gifts altogether, but they backed off the proposal last month. It's worth noting that legislative budget-writers can barely conceal their contempt for the agency and its executive director.

TAX-FREE GUNS AND AMMO

State Rep. Eric Proctor, D-Tulsa, wants to eliminate the sales tax on guns and ammunition. Seriously? When the state still taxes mothers buying milk for their babies?

In past sessions, Proctor has fought to eliminate the state sales tax on groceries. He claims his latest proposal [HB 1041] has helped refocus public attention on the grocery tax issue.

A less convoluted, more believable explanation? It was a bouquet to the NRA, a sure sign that some Democrats think a “Republican lite” strategy will help stem the Red State hemorrhage.

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

State Rep. Charles Key, R-OKC, is proposing the equivalent of a modern-day poll tax: He wants political parties to pay for their own presidential primaries in Oklahoma, rather than the taxpayers.

Key's HB 1340 is an example of GOP group-think that envisions a world in which fewer voters go to the polls. After all, if you can control who votes, you can better control the outcome.

See **TERRIBLE TEN** Page 8

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Beware Voter ID Proposal

Anti-Immigration Bill's Impact On My Family

By Tamya Cox

Let me begin by pointing out that the ACLU team and I worked hard to fight against the sweeping anti-immigration reform law commonly known as HB 1804. Since its passage, I have received several letters of personal stories about how this law has negatively impacted several families, but I did not know its true effects until I had to deal with it personally.

My 85-year-old grandfather recently moved in with my parents from Iowa. Back in October, the family and I went on vacation. As we were going through security in the Tulsa airport, the TSA agent informed us that my grandfather's Iowa driver's license was about to expire. Unfortunately, we would still be out of town the day it expired [key point].

I thought nothing of it because we knew he would not be renewing a driver's license; he just needed to get a state ID. When we returned from our vacation, I took him to the tag agency stating we needed a state ID. The employee explained to us that because his license had expired he must go to the Department of Public Safety and provide proof of citizenship before he could get one.

STATE DEMANDED BIRTH CERTIFICATE

My grandfather did not have a certified copy of his birth certificate, so my mother contacted the DPS asking what would suffice for proof of citizenship if we did not have a birth certificate. The employee stated that we would have to contact the Department of Vital Statistics in Mississippi [where he was born] and have them search for a birth certificate at a cost to us.

My grandfather was born in 1923, in a tiny old slave town in Mississippi most likely delivered by a mid-wife in a house. Mississippi sent us a record showing what we already knew – that there was no record of his birth on file. Strike one.

With this new information, my mom contacted the Oklahoma DPS informing them no record was found. The employee said we must then contact the Social Security office and get a copy of the application of when he applied for a Social Security card. The first Social Security card was issued in 1936, when my grandfather was 3.

My mom contacted the Social Security office and the employee actually laughed at her, stating that their records do not go back that far. Strike two.

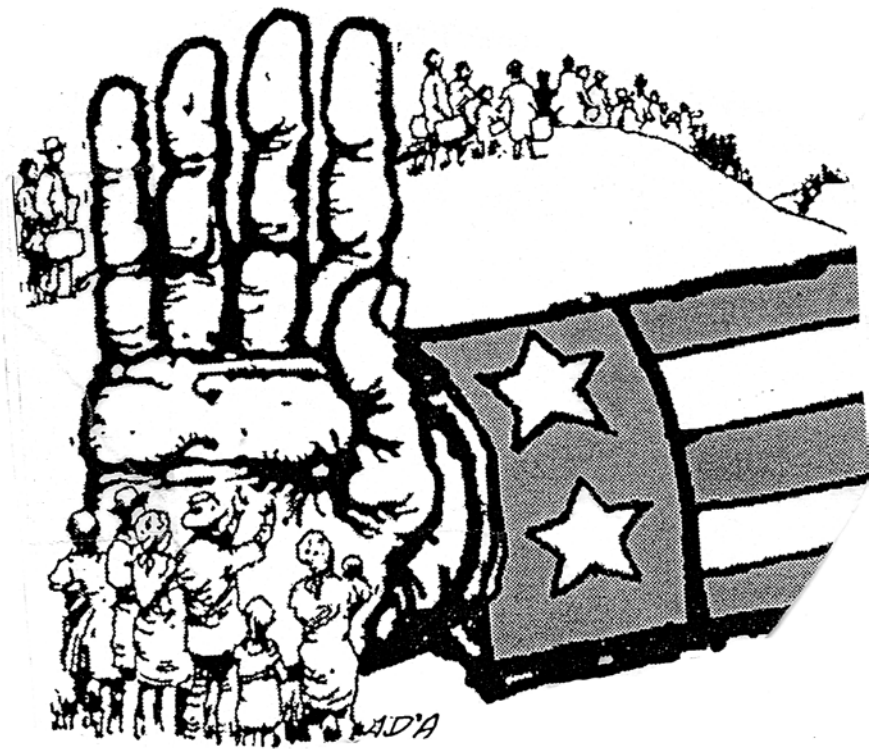
OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS PROVED ELUSIVE

She then contacted DPS again and told them of her latest development. The employee asked if my grandfather had any school records. He did not get past elementary school. Did he serve in the military? No. It is difficult to fight for a country that did not recognize the basic rights of a black man back then. Did he have a passport? No. The first time he had flown was less than a week ago. Does he have a child's birth certificate with his name on it? No. My grandmother's divorce was not final when my mom was born, so they put my grandmother's first husband in the father category even though he was not the biological dad. Strikes three, four, five, and six.

At this point my mom, feeling defeated, called me to see what I could do. I contacted the DPS and explained our dilemma. I spoke to a supervisor and he asked the same questions regarding birth certificate, military service, and a passport. Even he seemed perplexed on what the next move should be.

At this point, I too was defeated. According to the state of Oklahoma, my grandfather was an illegal immigrant.

The supervisor ultimately called me back and asked if we could meet in per-



son. I took everything I had thought would be significant. My grandfather's expired driver's license, his Social Security card, and the documents showing no birth certificate to be found from Mississippi.

THANKFULLY, A SYMPATHETIC SUPERVISOR

The supervisor looked at me and said in situations like this, all we can do is try to help people. The next week my grandfather had a brand new state ID.

At no point in the conversations with any official did I mention that I was an attorney or that I worked for the ACLU. I have learned from experience that by stating one or the other or both can cause one of two reactions. Either I get an immediate response, or I get completely shut out. Usually it is the latter of the two.

However, absentmindedly, I gave the DPS supervisor my work number and of course we answer the phones here with, "ACLU of Oklahoma." So the supervisor knew where I worked when he invited me to his office.

By no means am I stating that my office had any influence whatsoever in the outcome, but I do find it odd that I took the exact same steps as my mother but with a completely different result.

NO LONGER AN ABSTRACT PROBLEM

The moral of the story is I shamefully admit that I truly didn't understand the frustration many Oklahomans have experienced. It had to happen to my family before it pulled at my heartstrings.

I wonder if I were a Latina or had a foreign last name, would that have further complicated things?

The idea that for three weeks, according to the state of Oklahoma, my grandfather had no legal status was unnerving. He only wanted a state ID. He needed a valid ID to board an airplane and if the Voter ID bill passes, he would need one to vote.

I have to believe the Legislature did not intend for situations like this; I have to believe the Legislature did not mean for undisputed citizens to face these types of hurdles.

Still, these unintended consequences could have cost my grandfather more than just a plastic ID card.

- The author is program director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma. This column first appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of the ACLU's Liberty newsletter.

Facing The Truth About Incarceration

The Oklahoma Academy has studied the criminal justice system, the process by which justice is maintained and administered.

Is this system, in a word, "just?" It is a fair question.

Will the 2009 Legislature address needed reforms and adequately fund corrections in a state that incarcerates women at the highest rate in the world?

Do we impartially adjust the competing claims of education, healthcare, transportation, and so on, by locking up those whom we "are mad at?"

The tendency is to incarcerate rather than treat the addicted or mentally ill.

INCARCERATION RATE UP 500%

This is a system whereby a prison population exploded by 500% in just 30 years.

Is being "tough on crime" fair for children whose school systems are inadequately funded at the expense of corrections?

Is Oklahoma truly being tough on crime by incarcerating those whose issue is really drug addiction or mental illness? Is a system where political expedience demands imprisonment versus more appropriate sentencing just, impartial and fair?

It is the aspiration of the Academy, founded by Gov. Henry Bellmon, to conform to truth, fact and reason.

THE TRUTH ABOUT OKLAHOMA

At the Academy's Ardmore Town Hall, they were confronted with the truth that Oklahomans have the highest rates of mental illness in the country, the truth that our rate of incarceration is fourth in the country and the truth that we must find real solutions other than building more prisons and incarcerating more of our citizens.

The overload on the Oklahoma corrections system is the direct result of conscious decisions made by Oklahoma elected officials. Without corrective action, Oklahoma is surely on a collision course with a federal court intervention and/or a major "crowd out" of tax dollars for other state functions.

ADMIT THE TRUTH AND FIX THE SYSTEM

There is a third way. That is to forthrightly recognize the root causes of this situation – and correct them.

A decade ago, Oklahoma considered a modernizing sentencing reform package that included a definitive sentencing matrix articulated with an "85% rule" that assured sentencing discipline.

At the last moment, the matrix was discarded but the "85% rule" remained. That rule, requiring a felon with a second and subsequent felony to serve 85% of the sentence.

Standing alone the 85% rule has proven toxic. The recent DOC audit flatly declared that this rule would be the sole cause for the increase in our inmate population in the future.

THOSE IN CHARGE KNOW WHAT TO DO

The presence of the rule without the sentencing matrix is like nitro without glycerine, peanut butter without jelly, and ham without eggs. It just doesn't work as well. Oklahoma policy makers know what to do.

We chickened out 10 years ago. It is now time to stand up and do this right. Either introduce the matrix or eliminate the rule.

There are additional recommendations to create formal work groups to analyze and make specific recommendations concerning several key sentencing re-

See TRUTH Page 9

Director's Summary

Welfare Agency Is Stretching Dollars

By Howard Hendrick

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services' priorities are to protect the most vulnerable of society and to identify and address social conditions that lead to the abuse and neglect of these individuals. Work has proven a somewhat successful strategy for many of these challenges.

Fifteen years ago more than 43,000 adults received cash assistance through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program. Today less than 3,200 adults receive those payments through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.

The wages paid, however, have not kept pace even with inflation. Supplemental services for food, health care and childcare remain extremely high.

MORE THAN 900,000 RECEIVE AID

In fact, more than 900,000 different Oklahomans were certified last year for either food benefits, Medicaid or both. Among the food benefits participants, almost 80% are either children or individuals with income.

The demand for such services has outpaced the funding necessary to meet all the needs of these growing target populations.

OKDHS will continue monitoring these trends and recommend strategies to manage the challenges facing the programs and services designed to meet the needs of vulnerable Oklahomans.

Based on the agency's environmental scan the demand for some of these services is expected to continue increasing as a result of the aging population, increased health care costs, the nation's poor economic performance and increased fuel costs.

MINIMUM WAGE HAS IMPACT

Other immediate challenges facing the delivery of OKDHS services are the impact of the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007 on the operating budgets of the agencies with whom OKDHS contracts to deliver many services, and the corresponding pressure such increases place on the OKDHS budget.

The wage increases for workers will ultimately result in a reduction in the demand for services. But funding the increases, deciding what services will no longer be delivered or both are challenges to be faced.

Further the inevitable loss of tacit knowledge possessed by the aging workforce on the verge of retirement is a significant emerging challenge.

Unprecedented growth in the nation's aging population is expected to place increased demands on aging services and the already expensive cost of long-term care. Increased health care costs continue to exacerbate access to health care.

LONG TERM CARE COST CHALLENGING

The increased cost of long-term care, however, is particularly challenging for an increasingly aging nation. In anticipation of the projected growth of this demographic area, OKDHS continues to advocate to expand its cost-effective Advantage Waiver program.

To meet the projected demand for services the program delivers home health services to vulnerable seniors.

The nation's economic performance is projected to remain flat in the coming years, placing additional constraints on the federal revenue stream.

The nation's debt now exceeds \$9 trillion. It cannot be viewed as a long-term viable source of funding the inflationary costs of food fuel and health care expe-



rienced by these vulnerable populations.

OKLAHOMA PROVES THE EXCEPTION

While Oklahoma's economic performance has been comparatively stronger than other states, Oklahoma is not impervious to the global economic strife.

Consequently, state appropriations are not anticipated to be available to offset substantial reductions in the Medicaid and Title IV-E federal revenue stream.

OKDHS continues to actively seek solutions to reduce the cost of service delivery without diminishing service quality.

Rising fuel prices have led to the increased cost of goods products and services. These increases place increased demands on the already depleted resources of Oklahoma's most vulnerable individuals and families.

Exacerbating these problems is the cost associated with service accessibility incurred by service recipients and providers.

SERVICE DELIVERY IS MORE COSTLY

Also, OKDHS incurs the increased service delivery expenses for contracted and fee related services as a result of the most recent minimum wage increase on July 24, 2008 and the next scheduled increase on July 24, 2009.

OKDHS will continue exploring strategies to mitigate the impact of these rising service accessibility and delivery costs.

Thirty-six percent of the agency's workforce is eligible for retirement before the end of state fiscal year 2014. Knowledge transfer efforts are an ongoing part of OKDHS operations.

OKDHS continually reviews resource levels and plans accordingly to replenish the human capital of the agency.

The financial health of the agency is but one of the critical factors in OKDHS ability to not only meet current demands but also forecast plan and prepare for future needs.

In order to meet the dynamic needs of Oklahomans OKDHS must maintain strategic and operational agility that is facilitated through the agency's financial performance and human capital.

- The author is director of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and a former state senator

TERRIBLE TEN

From Page 6

This is another shot at a weakened, poorly-funded Democratic Party in Oklahoma. Which party do you think would have a more difficult time financing such a primary election?

TORT 'REFORM'

Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, and House Speaker Chris Bengtson, R-Tulsa, both list lawsuit reform as a high priority. They want to cut contingency fees for lawyers, cap pain and suffering awards and all but padlock the courthouse door - in order to make Oklahoma more "business friendly."

It's a ruse. There is no lawsuit epidemic in Oklahoma. There is no evidence of runaway juries delivering jackpot justice. This is pure politics. This is all about neutering the state's trial lawyers, the Democrats' biggest donors.

Gov. Brad Henry and legislative Democrats thwarted the GOP power-play last year. Can they reunite and do the same this year? More importantly, will rank-and-file Oklahomans finally face the frightening reality that their access to the civil justice system is about to be severely restricted? That state lawmakers are on the verge of unleashing corporate Oklahoma - the GOP's biggest donors - to operate with impunity?

TERM LIMITS

Sen. Randy Brogdon is reviving a key element of the GOP playbook: If you can't beat your opponents, term limit them. Brogdon's SJR 12 proposes a constitutional amendment to extend term limits to all statewide elected officials.

Despite dwindling numbers in the Legislature, Democrats have hung onto statewide elective offices - except the Corporation Commission. Unable to beat them at the ballot box, Republicans want to knock out the likes of Attorney General Drew Edmondson and School Superintendent Sandy Garrett by imposing a

limit of two four-year terms.

Oklahoma already has "term limits" - voters can decide if and when they want to limit an elected official's term. Term limits eliminate voters' choices. If you need an example of what term limits hath wrought, look no further than the Oklahoma Legislature - now, more than ever, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the state's most powerful corporate interests.

Lawmakers come and go, now by an artificial clock - but lobbyists return year after year after year, giving the un-elected increasing power.

CREATIONISM

With SB 320 and HB 1001, Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, and Reps. Sally Kern and Mike Reynolds, both R-OKC, are working overtime to force the biblical account of creationism into Oklahoma's classrooms - and to undermine science.

They refuse to keep science and faith separate, forever attacking evolution, climate change and stem cell research. They won't be satisfied until Oklahoma is a full-fledged Christian theocracy in which teachers are forced to impart biblical "truths" in place of scientific "theories."

Their religious zealotry threatens to leave Oklahoma mired in costly lawsuits and its public school children confused and poorly-prepared to compete in a global economy that recognizes the importance of science.

Editor's Note: In upcoming editions, *The Oklahoma Observer* will offer more in-depth analysis on these and many other key issues being debated in the 2009 Oklahoma Legislature. We also invite our readers to visit our redesigned web site, www.okobserver.net, for up-to-the-minute developments, including analysis and commentary that cannot be found anywhere else.

State Fails To Tackle Causes Of Drug Use

By Morton S. Skorodin

Like many other Oklahomans I watched a widely-publicized TV program on Jan. 13, Crystal Darkness, which dramatized the problem of methamphetamine [meth] use. Clearly, it is a serious problem. The medical complications of this drug as depicted are real and I can attest to that since I saw patients with strokes, high blood pressure, and brain and kidney damage as a result of use of this substance as early as 1970.

The program narrative claimed it was Oklahoma's worst problem. This is an exaggeration, considering Oklahoma's low wages, poor housing, spotty medical and dental care and inadequate education. [Twenty percent of adult Oklahomans can not read or write.]

Additionally the federal government claims that meth use has declined 80% in Oklahoma in recent years and less than 1% of Oklahomans use meth. This wasn't mentioned in the documentary.

This program was carried by a number of local stations and it was presaged by a letter to the editor of our local newspaper, the Stillwater NewsPress, from the district attorney as well as a long article about the dangers of meth and the importance of the upcoming TV program. The publicity was statewide. Even the governor got in the act. The program covered the medical and technical aspects of meth production, trafficking, and abuse fairly well, although briefly.

WHY WAS METH USE SO COMMON?

Unfortunately it was seriously lacking in other areas. Most importantly there was no discussion of the causes of this problem. But to develop an appropriate solution to it we have to figure out the factors that bring it about and make it so prevalent. Why was it, at one time, so common in Oklahoma?

Meth is an upper. It is used as [inappropriate] self-medication for depression. Problems don't come about without cause. The methamphetamine problem didn't drop out of the sky. There are biological and social causes of meth abuse and they need to be fully discussed by an informed citizenry. Here's why.

The principal tool that's been used to deal with methamphetamine abuse over the years has been law enforcement, prisons and county jails. No other possible solutions were discussed. Instead there were frightening and sad dramatizations of real life tragedies, and there was no attempt to give the viewer any perspective.

Seeing that would tend to make the average parent feel fearful and perhaps even helpless. The film goes on to recommend that parents involve school/police authorities at a very early stage. Why is this approach being promoted and in such a particularly loud way?

Now, I'm sure that members of the police and judicial establishments sincerely



believe in their approach. But I'm like Ronald Reagan: "Trust, but verify!"

COULD IT BE CORPORATE PROFITS?

Prisons are very profitable. There are private prisons nowadays. The people that own them have, as their mission, first and foremost, the making of money. They need as many people as possible in prison to maximize their profits. They also need to spend as little as possible on the inmates and staff. Thus, America has over 2.3 million people incarcerated; more than any other country. Sounds like "socialism" for the rich, and an unnecessary tax burden on the "lower" 80%, the "we" that actually pays taxes, and most importantly the waste of the hours of the lives of the prisoners and their guards. This is particularly tragic, since half of all prisoners are in for nonviolent offenses.

ADVANCES IN BRAIN SCIENCE

But there is still more to consider – brain science. The amazing advances of neuroscience are fascinating and have yielded significant information about many emotional and physical states of the brain, including substance abuse. Various substances, including meth, affect brain chemistry in specific ways and in specific areas.

Here is where it gets interesting. The brain response to greed is similar to its response to cocaine, a drug similar to meth. We come full circle and find that

See DRUGS Page 18

Oklahoma Health Care Planning Launched

The Obama-Biden Transition Project came to Oklahoma recently, with two health care focus groups held in Oklahoma City designed to come up with recommendations for the new administration.

It won't be a moment too soon for Oklahoma, one of the five most unhealthy states in the Union. Oklahomans rank 47th in life expectancy.

President Barack Obama believes that every American should have high quality and affordable health care, and to reach this goal, America must modernize its health care system in order to:

- Improve health care quality and cut costs;

TRUTH

From Page 7

lated issues.

It is in the best interests of all Oklahomans that the volumes of incarceration be intelligently reduced. The Academy wholly supports full funding of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse "Smart on Crime" proposal, and further recommends that the Legislature create or designate a well credentialed oversight and monitor process.

PRIMARY CAUSE IS NO SECRET

The Town Hall demonstrated once again that the major contributing cause of incarceration is related to substance abuse and mental health issues. This is not arguable.

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse has crafted a "Smart on Crime" proposal that will cost \$30 million per year. Some are skeptical that the proposal can be effective.

The Oklahoma Academy believes that the proposal is sound and is more than worthy of funding – and trying to do something different.

Drug courts should be a front-end system. First time non-violent offenders and non-violent offenders with one previous felony conviction should be given an alternative to incarceration [specialty courts: drug, veterans, mental health, etc.]

Due to disparity in population and resources between the state's rural and urban areas, regional alternative providing access to drug and mental health courts in every county. Another possibility would be to mandate these alternative programs through existing judicial districts.

- Expand coverage and access; and
- Increase the emphasis on primary care and prevention.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

Health insurance premiums have doubled in the past eight years, accompanied by increasing co-pays and deductibles that threaten access to care.

Large medical bills have contributed to half of bankruptcies and foreclosures.

Rising health care costs place a burden on American businesses, as they try to balance health benefit costs with job growth and competitiveness.

American manufacturers are paying more than twice as much on health benefits as most of their foreign competitors [measured in cost per hour].

Problems with health care quality and administrative "waste" contribute to these costs.

Medical errors result in as many as 100,000 deaths per year in U.S. hospitals.

SPENDING MORE, DELIVERING LESS

On average, American adults received just 55% of recommended care for the leading causes of death and disability. The U.S. spent \$412 per capita on health care administration and insurance in 2003 – nearly six times as much as other developed countries.

Over 45 million Americans have no health insurance. Nearly 160 million Americans have job-based insurance, but many are just a pink slip away from joining the ranks of the uninsured.

For every percentage point increase in the unemployment rate, over one million people become uninsured. Being uninsured leads to delayed care – late diagnoses for cancer when it is harder and more expensive to treat, and preventable complications due to untreated diabetes.

KIDS SUFFER FOR LACK OF COVERAGE

It also leads to denied care – a child without health insurance is less likely to receive medical attention for recurrent ear infections or for asthma.

Uninsured trauma victims are less likely to be admitted to the hospital and are 37% more likely to die of injuries.

Even people with coverage are increasingly finding that it is insufficient or simply not there when needed. Nearly one in five Americans either delay care or have unmet needs despite having health insurance.

Our nation's investment in prevention and public health is inadequate, leading

See HEALTH Page 18

BOOKS

American Politics: Truly Post-Racial?

By Scott Martelle

THE BREAKTHROUGH

Politics And Race In The Age Of Obama

By Gwen Ifill

Doubleday Publishing

277 pages, \$24.95

WHAT OBAMA MEANS

For Our Culture, Our Politics, Our Future

By Jabari Asim

HarperCollins Publishers

224 pages, \$21.99

In the year since Barack Obama's remarkable surge to the head of the pack of Democratic presidential candidates, we've been hearing a lot about the nation's new "post-racial" politics. The basic concept is this: Obama's acceptance by the white mainstream means African-Americans have arrived politically – or at least attained something like electoral equality.

Bull Connor is dead; the 1960s are over.

Two new books explore the moment, from two decidedly different tacks – the political and the cultural.

In *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*, journalist Gwen Ifill argues that there's nothing really "post-racial" about Obama's election. Race still matters, as do gender and class, and they can be crippling hurdles for a politician whose success depends on broad demographic appeal.

Obama's election showed how to bridge those fissures not only in an electorate sick of the incumbent party [even Michael Dukakis might have won this one], but also in local and regional elections where the legacies of race and place can be harder to overcome.

A large part of Obama's appeal is his embodiment of a new multiracial generation and of a long history of black "cool," the hipness that has given us Miles Davis, Sidney Poitier and Jay-Z, argues Jabari Asim in *What Obama Means*.

Asim, editor of the NAACP's *The Crisis* and author of *The N Word: Who Can Say It, Who Shouldn't, and Why*, offers the weaker of the two books, an unfocused rumination on race and culture.

His core argument seems to be that Obama's election is part of a continuum of crossover success that includes Poitier's 1963 Academy Award for *Lilies of the Field*, Michael Jackson's all-time top-selling pop album *Thriller* in 1982 and Michael Jordan's single-handed revival of the NBA in the 1980s and 1990s.

Asim understands that Obama's win was a function of time, place and conditions, but then he loads his book with a mishmash of African-American influences on popular culture as though that was the battering ram. It's unconvincing.

Obama's win had more to do with the erosion of racial political resistance among whites.

Though it can be hard to separate culture from politics, it's one thing for young white adults to download a hip-hop album and something else entirely for white culture to hand the keys of power to a black man.

Ultimately, that happened because of massive demographic shifts that are still in motion, and because of the decimation of the middle class. Add in an unpopular war and a demoralized consumer economy, and the stage is set.

Obama was selling hope and optimism to an electorate hungering for both. In politics, it's all about the timing – what Obama accomplished in 2008 probably wouldn't have happened in 2004, when the cultural crossover was just as strong.

We've already heard something of Ifill's book. You might recall a brief kerfuffle from the right wing before the October vice presidential debate. The spin was that Ifill, a black broadcast journalist, couldn't be an impartial moderator of the debate between Joe Biden and Sarah Palin because she was working on a book about the generational shift among African-American politicians. The debate went on anyway, and the controversy vanished.

While Ifill's admiration of Obama's achievement is clear, it is not based on racial identity, as the spin had it. Ifill, a former staff writer for the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, is taken with how Obama and his campaign advisors minimized Obama's race for most of white America.

But Obama is not the only black politician to have done so, and Ifill tells several stories, from Deval Patrick's successful rise to the Massachusetts governor's mansion, to U.S. Rep. Artur Davis' dream of becoming the first black person elected governor of Alabama.

Ifill devotes an entire chapter to "legacy politics," exploring the generational tensions within several African-American political families, including the Jacksons of Chicago, the Fords of Memphis, the Patersons of Harlem and the Clays of St. Louis.

In each case, politics became the family business – much as it has for the Kennedys, Bushes and, to a lesser extent, the Gores.

Yet this is more than a book of connected profiles and narratives. Ifill bores at varying depths into race, class, gender and generational change. "Sandpaper politics," Ifill calls it, and there is friction aplenty.

Upstarts who were born after the big civil rights battles reject elders' admonitions to wait their turn. Well-educated, suburban blacks face skepticism from inner-city African-Americans over the extent of their "blackness."

And always gender. Ifill adroitly lays out the conflict at the heart of the fight for the Democratic nomination between Obama and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton as "a struggle for two historically disadvantaged groups to grab for the same brass ring at precisely the same moment."

Ultimately, someone had to lose the nomination, and in a fight weighted with that much history, bitterness was inevitable.

This is a strongly reported book, with some broad conclusions drawn from scores of interviews and peppered with interesting, revealing profiles [though there's a bit too much about Alabama].

But it tends to give too little weight to the prevalence of economic class in many of these cross currents.

Ifill argues that Obama achieved success by portraying himself, in essence, as the antithesis of the "angry black man." The new black politics isn't built on marching and protesting but through the Internet and networking. That's an easier sell to white voters who "are more comfortable with black candidates who do not have that anger."


She's right. Obama's political message delivered by the late Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton would have gone nowhere. Obama managed to simultaneously overcome suspicions among black voters that he wasn't really one of them and reassure white America that he is, indeed, Harvard-educated and not about to throw bombs.

And his presentation of radical change from the last eight years – in race, politics and message – was his strongest attribute.

At the end of his book, Asim plucked a quote from a *New York Times* article in which Tina Davis, a white political figure in Pennsylvania, summed up the political, social and cultural convergence that gave the United States its first black president:

"White voters 'had to ask themselves if they wanted a really smart young black guy, or a stodgy old white guy from the same crowd who put us in this hole.' "

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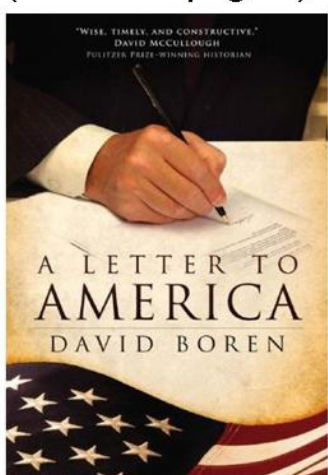

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The New Administration

GOP Strategy: Protect Rich, Vilify Immigrants

By Susan Estrich

This is the Republicans' big contribution to our economic recovery: They want to make sure that undocumented immigrants who pay taxes using tax identification numbers don't get a cent of their tax money back in the refunds enacted by Congress. Oh, yes, and they want rich people to get tax refunds.

Anything else to contribute?

Republicans, rejecting all pretense of putting country before party, much less trying to participate in the solution instead of continuing to be the problem, voted to a person against the economic stimulus plan. Last time I tuned in to their rants against illegal immigrants, they were stealing jobs from Americans and not paying taxes, thus robbing the U.S. Treasury – even though, for their tax dollars, they are excluded from receiving most benefits the rest of us can get.

HOW DARE THEY?

Now the major moan seems to be that those darn immigrants are actually paying their taxes and, therefore, like every other taxpayer, are entitled to a refund for having paid more than their share. How dare they?

Then, of course, there are the familiar rants that the top 5% [which I assume includes every one of the ranters] should receive a bigger share of the tax relief [they already got the biggest share under the Bush plan] because, after all, who else is going to stimulate the economy by buying designer shoes and ball gowns?

This should be a moment for Republicans to look in the mirror and realize they need to reinvent themselves.

GOP PRESIDED OVER MELTDOWN

Having presided [yes, it was a Republican in the White House] over the biggest economic meltdown in our lifetimes, brought on by [I will be honest enough to admit] the bipartisan embrace of their hands-off/deregulation/market-madness theory of the free enterprise system, and then having responded [yes, they were still in charge] with a big government bailout that conflicted with all those once cherished tenets, you might think that at least a few of the Republicans in Congress would realize it's too late to "just say no," and that they need a new song and dance.

A tune you can hum. An approach to the problem that goes beyond demanding more for the wealthy and blaming immigrants for the rest.

Apparently not.

HEADS PLANTED FIRMLY IN SAND

The country wants bipartisanship, but it's hard to be bipartisan with people whose heads are firmly planted in the sand. All you can do is walk around them and wait for them to dig themselves out. Sooner or later. Or maybe never.

Democrats, for sure, don't have all the answers. Mistakes will be made. Maybe the Republican theory is to do nothing so that anything that does go wrong won't



be their fault. But hoping for the worst and playing the blame game is precisely the kind of politics that almost everyone – regardless of race, age, class or even political party – agrees is useless, hopeless and just plain insulting.

During the Reagan years, they used to call the Democrats the party of "doom and gloom," focused on what's wrong, or would go wrong, or had been done wrong. It is fair to say that it was not an effective strategy. The 1980s were a wasteland for the Democratic Party.

Better to try and fail than to sit on your hands. Or stick your head in the sand. Or scream about how the rich should get more and immigrants should pay more.

If that's the best Republicans can do, they'll be stuck in place for quite some time.

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The Troubling Ethics Of Tim Geithner

By Jim Hightower

In describing a suspicious character who had visited his home, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons."

Average Americans today might need to be counting their spoons, because President Obama and the Congress have visited Timothy Geithner upon us. He's the new treasury secretary, our nation's top financial official, whose duties include handling the ongoing Wall Street debacle.

Not only has Geithner felt it necessary to talk insistently about his honor, but Obama and assorted members of Congress have also felt compelled to assure us that Tim really is an honest guy. It's a bit like hanging a sign on the Treasury building declaring, "Honest Tim's Used Bailouts."

What forced this rash of testimonials to Geithner's integrity is that, in a 2006 audit, the IRS found that he had failed to pay his Social Security and Medicare taxes for 2003 and 2004. Oops, my bad, said Geithner at the time, ponying up \$16,732 for back taxes and interest.

DODGED EARLIER TAXES, TOO

But – oops, again – when he was being vetted for the Treasury job last November, it turns out he'd also dodged these same payroll taxes in 2001 and 2002. He conveniently failed to volunteer these earlier violations to the auditors in 2006. Nailed by the presidential vettors, Geithner sheepishly rushed out another belated payment to the IRS, this one totaling \$25,970.

"It was an innocent mistake," Obama quickly asserted when the transgression became public: "Careless and avoidable, but unintentional," insisted the perpetrator himself. "A lot to do about nothing," said Sen. Judd Gregg, dismissively.

Well, plenty of people do make mistakes on their tax forms, or even occasionally try to scoot by Uncle Sam without paying the full due bill. But none of these folks was nominated to run the agency that includes the IRS! And none of them has worked in key positions at the Treasury under three presidents, been a major official at the International Monetary Fund or headed the Federal Reserve Bank of New York for the past five years, as has Geithner.

WHERE'S THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY?

What we have here is a treasury secretary with what The New York Times called "a cavalier attitude" toward paying his own taxes, thus tainting his ability to command respect from us hoi polloi.

Yet the White House and Congress, which talk ceaselessly about the ethic of

personal responsibility, mostly averted their eyes. Why? Because he's one of the ultimate insiders – a "trustee" of Wall Street, which has never let ethics get in the way of grabbing another dollar bill.

The whole system rallied round, touting Tim's expertise and insisting that in today's treacherous financial currents, he was the one to guide us through. "He's a very, very competent guy," attested Sen. Orrin Hatch. "He isn't merely the best choice," gushed Sen. Charles Grassley, "he's the only choice."

And these are the Republicans!

WALL STREET BACKS GEITHNER

Grassley then delivered the ultimate endorsement of Geithner, declaring, "He fits in." This embrace was seconded by the lobbyist for Wall Street's biggest firms, who said, "The industry is very supportive" of the appointment.

I'll bet! After all, Geithner spent his time at the New York Fed as a backer of the disastrous financial deregulation policy that, at first, wildly profited big banks and speculators, before inevitably leading to the collapse that is now crushing our nation's economy. Since the crash, he's been a chief architect of the failed bailout scam that has shoved trillions of our tax dollars into the hands of the very banking hotshots who made this mess.

And now, as treasury secretary, Geithner is pushing Obama to pursue a second bailout scheme that would take all of the bad investments that Wall Street made and "give" them to the government [i.e., us taxpayers] to manage.

His scheme would clean up the ledgers of the banks, making them solvent at our expense, while leaving the same old bankers and their major investors in charge, suffering no penalty for the enormous damage they wreaked on us.

Count your spoons. This is not the "change" that so many of us voted for. It's the deliberate perpetuation of Wall Street's ethic of greed.

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Weddings and Funerals

Old aunts use to come up to me at weddings, poking me in the ribs and cackling, telling me: "You're next."

They stopped after I started doing the same thing to them at funerals.

The New Administration

An Action Plan For All Americans

By Claudia Hatfield

Everything that our government does affects you and your family – everything.

I am often amazed at how much destruction has been done over the past eight years. More amazed at the number of people who did nothing while it was happening.

We take our freedom and rights for granted. We have become lazy and uninformed about the very core beliefs of our country.

No one knows what any President will do once he is elected. We can do more than hope and pray that Barack Obama will do the right thing, yes we can do something about it.

We have to be involved in our government. That is the only way we can make sure he can make changes and bring us back to the America we love and other countries look up to and envy.

AMERICA IS BASED ON THE PEOPLE

Really it is easy. Contact your representatives and tell them when you see an injustice or that they are failing us. America is based on “the people” not the senators and representatives ... not the President either.

They are to work for us. We are not to work for greed in government and pay-offs to big corporations [\$400 billion in no-bid contracts to the private sector under George W. Bush].

We, and our children, will be paying for this deficit/bailout for years – \$11.3 trillion.

We will be paying for not only an unneeded war in Iraq that has killed or maimed our treasured troops but for all the greed of the corporations. Corporations that walked away with millions/billions of dollars while we pay their debts.

SILENCE IN THE FACE OF BAD LEADERSHIP

Why? We have ourselves to blame. Whether apathy, or stupidity, or blind ego we followed bad leaders and said nothing.

The blindness to a political party, or bad leaders in churches, that told us what to do politically has destroyed many a country. Just ask the Germans.

Americans must take the time to re-educate themselves about what our country was founded on. Read The Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, habeas corpus, etc.

Do not, and I mean do not, put your faith in a subjective church leader who is preaching politics instead of God's word. You will know them by their prejudice, hate, condoning war and torture, and telling you who to vote for.

All leaders are fallible.

OPEN YOUR EYES TO MEDIA LIES

Get educated, get involved, take action. Listen to the hidden messages in news stations like FOX. Open your eyes and see the hate, lies and propaganda of media outlets and newspapers run by rich corporations that are draining the middle class dry.

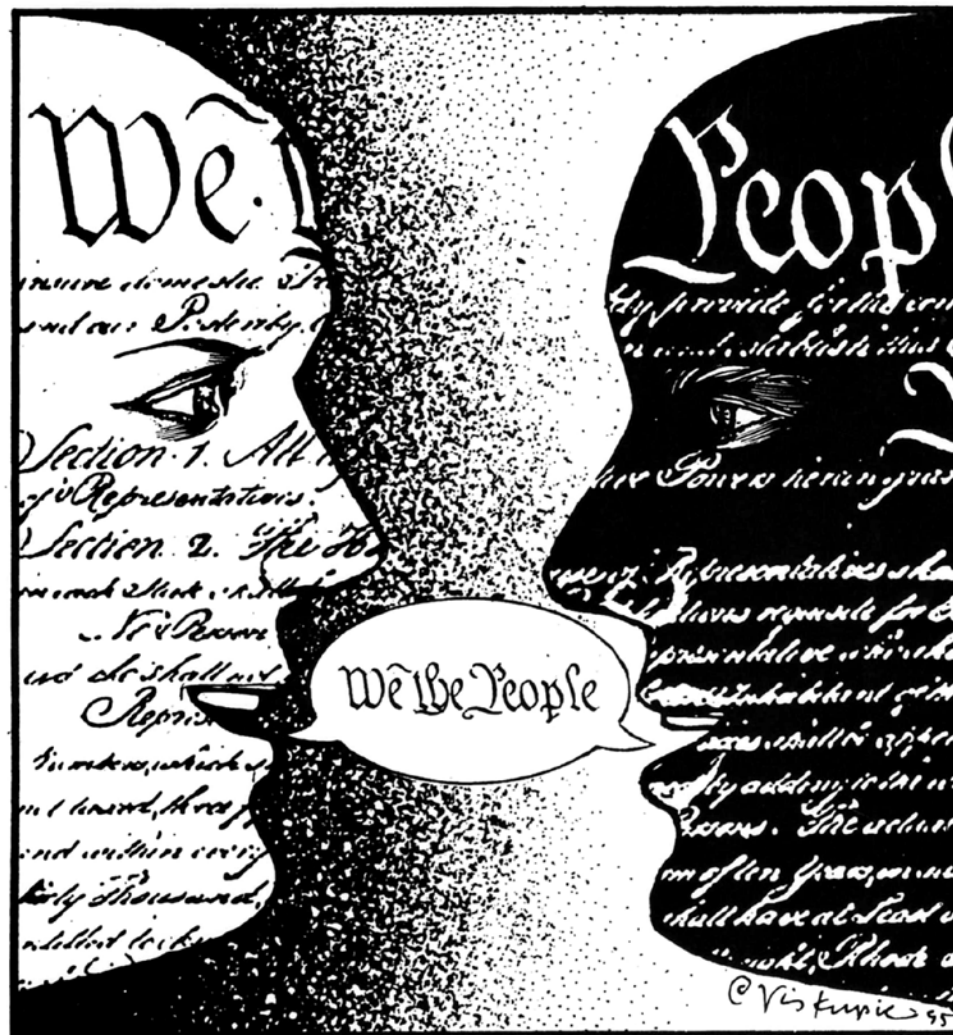
What can you do besides the above? Take time to write your representatives. When you see a wrong [like the dangerous products coming into our country from China], complain to your representatives and demand that they take action.

Join a group that fights for our rights. It can be an animal welfare group, a political group, a consumer group, a labor group, a legal group, etc.

We are on the brink. Even if Obama is the best president in the world, no president can act alone. He has a hell of a mess to clean up, too.

A COUNTRY ON THE RIGHT PATH

It is time to get rid of the people who sold us out. Yes, if Obama sells us out,



vote him out, too. We have to come together to keep our country on the right path.

Get involved. The first thing you can do is admit when we have had a bad president. Denial only serves to make things worse.

Politicians are people, people make mistakes, let's help correct the errors. We are all fallible.

Time is running out. Contrary to what you hear, the only thing you should fear is apathy and uninformed people here in the U.S.A. We can do anything if we just do something!

Remember the saying that pride goes before a fall? Pride in a bad leader from any political party or church or military, etc. will destroy us all.

Think, educate yourself, act. Do it for your loved ones.

www.peoplepc.com

The Constitutional Crisis That Wasn't

By Danny M. Adkison

Barack Obama can't speak without a teleprompter. That was the first reaction I encountered on the Internet following the botched oath on Inauguration day.

With that kind of response is it any wonder that Obama repeated the oath privately the next evening?

In most instances the event would have gone mostly unnoticed, but on a day approached with such anticipation and which will be written about in all the history books, the botched oath seemed more like a constitutional crisis than a mere stumbling over words.

What exactly happened and how important was it?

CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT

The U.S. Constitution stipulates that the executive shall take an oath and even stipulates the words in Article II. This received almost no debate during the drafting of the Constitution. In fact, the only comments made about it were from James Wilson of Pennsylvania who thought it was unnecessary [his mentor, James Madison, in an unusual move disagreed with him].

The Constitution doesn't say who will administer the oath [it is almost always the chief justice of the Supreme Court], and does not stipulate that the president will place his hand on the Bible or end with the words “so help me God” [the precedent for both was established by President Washington].

THE BUNGLED OATH

Here is the exchange that occurred between President Obama and Chief Justice Roberts:

Roberts: “I, Barack Hussein Obama ...”

Obama: “I, Barack ...”

Roberts: “do solemnly swear ...”

Obama: “I, Barak Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear ...”

Roberts: “that I will execute the office of president to the United States faithfully ...”

Obama: “that I will execute ...”

Roberts: “faithfully the office of president of the United States ...”

Obama: “the office of president of the United States faithfully ...”

Roberts: “and will to the best of my ability ...”

Obama: “and will to the best of my ability ...”

The rest of the oath was stated by Roberts and repeated by Obama without incident.

ROBERTS MISSTATED OATH THREE TIMES

Most have pointed out that if there was anyone botching the oath here it was the chief justice. He misquoted the oath that appears in the Constitution in three times.

First, he incorrectly stated “to the United States” rather than “of the United States.” No big deal. But the chief justice's second error is the one that apparently threw Obama off course.

The actual oath goes, “that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States.” Roberts moved “faithfully” to the end of the sentence. Obama paused, as if waiting for Roberts to correct the error. Roberts then corrected

See CRISIS Page 13

The New Administration

What Would Molly Ivins Think?

By Betsy Moon

Editor's Note: Our friend and columnist Molly Ivins died on Jan. 31, 2007. On the two-year anniversary of her death, her former longtime assistant and "chief of staff" muses about how Molly would view the political world today.

The question I have been asked most often during the last two years is, "What would Molly think about this?"

Molly Ivins would have loved this election. She would have loved the beautiful sight of "We the People" finally stepping up to become the *real deciders*.

She would have loved the drama, the comedy and the characters.

We miss her regular twice-weekly comments and insights, and hearing her dissect, slice and dice, and make fun of the events and revelations of the week. No one could do it like she did. She made us feel like we weren't alone. She made us want to be our better selves and stand up and use our power. She would be so proud that we finally woke up and worked to make this happen.

WHINING IS UNACCEPTABLE

In many of her lectures, she would exhort her audience to believe in their power. She'd say: "I hear people whine: 'I can't do anything. I'm just one person.'" Then she'd lift her head high and quote from the Declaration of Independence in her Barbara Jordon voice, and remind them, "As a U.S. citizen, you have more political power than most humans who've ever lived on this earth."

In fact, we know how she would have felt, because she was as prescient about this election before her death two years ago as she was about all the other tragedies of the Bush years.

Carlton Carl, CEO/publisher at Molly's beloved Texas Observer, recalls her saying after Obama's 2004 speech at the Democratic convention, "You know ... that young man could be president someday."

Before Barack Obama announced his candidacy, Chicago Magazine asked a number of luminaries if they thought he should run. Opinions varied. Molly was succinct and direct, and with her usual wit and certainty said: "Yes, he should run. He's the only Democrat with any Elvis to him."

And, in her column on Jan. 20, 2006, she said: "It's about political courage and heroes, and when a country is desperate for leadership. There are times when regular politics will not do, and this is one of those times. There are times a country is so tired of bull that only the truth can provide relief. If no one in conventional-wisdom politics has the courage to speak up and say what needs to be said, then you go out and find some obscure junior senator ... with the guts to do it."

She was speaking about Gene McCarthy then, but it might as well have been Barack Obama.

CONSTITUTION IN SAFER HANDS

She'd be so happy that her beloved Constitution [she donated one speech a month to groups working to preserve and maintain the First Amendment] is in safer hands – that some of the worst things ever done in our name are over.

himself [although he left out the word "execute," but in the awkwardness of the moment, Obama proceeded to repeat Roberts' error.

Steven Pinker, a psychologist who is an expert on language, has written a great book *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. He argues that Roberts, who tried to administer the oath from memory, let his education get the best of him.

MEMORY CAN BE TRICKY

Relying on his memory Roberts was incapable of making the grammatical error the Framers made and moved the word "faithfully" to the end so that "will execute" would be uninterrupted. Obama, just as sensitive to grammar, decided to follow Roberts' lead.

Well, that's interesting even if it does sound like the kind of over-analysis one would expect from a psychologist whose specialty is language.

Another explanation is so simple it is almost an under-analysis: it states that this was the chief justice's first time to administer the oath and given the historic moment it presented, he messed up.

It was merely a rookie's mistake.

POLITICAL INTRIGUE OF THE MOMENT

Not so fast. In addition to the historic "first" on everyone's mind as Obama repeated the oath, there was another not so well known "first" occurring. This was the first time a chief justice was administering the oath to a president who voted against him.

That's right – it has been suggested that Roberts purposely did not read the oath as a pretext for later explaining his intentional mixing up of the words, and thereby throwing Obama a curve [resulting in The Botch].

Those making this case seem to have forgotten how Roberts didn't even use notes in the many hours of grilling he took from the Senate Judiciary Committee during his hearings in which hundreds of Supreme Court cases were discussed.

It just so happens that a fair reading of the Constitution indicates that Obama had been president about five minutes when The Botch occurred.

OFFICIALLY PRESIDENT AT NOON

According to the Constitution, who is required to take the oath given in Article II? The answer is the president. Federal law determines when the president-elect

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She'd love that Barack Obama began his community organizing knowing that power lies in all of us united and that he continues to remind us that *we* are the *deciders*.

I saw and heard many interviews after Nov. 4 and during inaugural celebrations with people who all said they wished their mother or father or grandmother or friend had been here to witness this history in the making. Tens of thousands of us wished that Molly could have been here to see it.

I choose to believe she and all of them did see it because they live on in our hearts, minds and actions. Molly is honored with awards, lectures and scholarships in her name. Many of her readers formed "Pots & Pans" Brigades, following the advice in her final two columns to take to the streets and demand an end to the Iraq war. She always signed her books and her letters with "Raise more hell," and you can make her live on by doing just that.

MOLLY LIVES ON IN US

She lives in everyone who took courage in who they are and what

they thought when they read her columns and books, and knew they weren't alone and weren't crazy.

She lives on in The Texas Observer [Texasobserver.org] and the ACLU [aclu.org], to whom she left a large portion of her estate.

In a letter for the ACLU, she says: "I don't have any children, so I've decided to claim all the future freedom-fighters and hell-raisers as my kin. I figure freedom and justice beat having my name in marble any day. Besides, if there is another life after this one, think how much we'll get to laugh watching it all."

Ken Bunting, an old friend of Molly's who's now associate publisher of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, said of Molly on Election Day, "I'm not much of a believer, but I think our friend is looking down and smiling right along with Barack's grandma."

You know, I think he is right.

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CRISIS

From Page 12

becomes president.

After all, federal law in 1789 stipulated the Father of our Country would be inaugurated on March 4, 1789 even though President Washington didn't take the oath until the last day of April [the 20th Amendment moved inauguration to noon on January 20].

Given the "alternate reality" the Internet now allows some to create – by repeating a falsehood to those who want to believe it – Obama was well advised, out of an "abundance of caution," to repeat the oath even if it was unnecessary.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

Let The Sun Shine In

There's a famous line from National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy: "If you guard your toothbrushes and your diamonds with equal zeal, you'll lose fewer toothbrushes and more diamonds."

Right now all the resources are in classification and we need to get back into the declassification business, because that's American history. And it's also accountability. It isn't just dusty stuff. If all these guys think that nothing is gonna come out for 100 years, they're going to act a whole lot more boldly.

And it's not going to be simply a matter of flipping a switch to undo it. This default position to operating in the shadows is going to be somewhat appealing to whomever inherits that office.

Even when [House Speaker Nancy] Pelosi came into power and the Democrats assumed the majority in both houses, there was a predisposition toward secrecy. You're going to have to bring in people dedicated to transparency, and you have to demonstrate that there are rewards for candor.

We have to restore the protections of whistleblowers and also the encouragement and rewards. It shouldn't just be that they don't get crucified; it should be that they are again folk heroes, as opposed to traitors." – Ted Gup, author, *Nation of Secrets*

The New Administration

Limbaugh's World Portends An Irrelevant GOP

By Joe Conason

How fortunate for Barack Obama that Rush Limbaugh, big radio personality and leader of the instinctual far right, has yet to retire to a sunny island with his bottles of pills. At a moment when Republicans on Capitol Hill feel they must pretend to negotiate with the popular new president over spending to revive the economy, he blurted out what they really feel.

Speaking on his daily broadcast and later on Fox News Channel about the president's prospects, Limbaugh said forthrightly, "I hope he fails."

With those words, he turned his ample silhouette into the rhetorical target of choice for Obama, who warned the Republican leadership that they "can't listen to Rush Limbaugh" and expect to accomplish anything useful.

Hoping to preserve the spirit of bipartisan goodwill that attended his inauguration, the president is offering politicians on the other side of the aisle a stark choice. They can work with him, or they can join the radio extremist who wants him to fail – and could not care less about the consequences for America.

LIMBAUGH NEEDS NEW MATERIAL

As always, Limbaugh articulates his opposition to the stimulus plan in the ideological jargon favored by his party. Evidently he fears that if the United States spends more money on highways, railroads and modernizing our electrical grid, we will shortly come to resemble the old Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China or even Cuba.

Improving schools and expanding health coverage is just more "socialism" – and why would any right-thinking Republican hope for that to succeed?

But while he flatters himself as a "thinker," the sad fact is that Mr. Limbaugh often sounds as if he's motivated more by resentment than philosophy. During an interview with his soulmate, Sean Hannity, on Fox, he revealed that in this time of national distress, he is obsessing over an old grudge.

"I disagree fervently with the people on our side of the aisle who have caved and who say, 'Well, I hope [Obama] succeeds. We've got to give him a chance.' Why? They didn't give Bush a chance in 2000. Before he was inaugurated, the search-and-destroy mission had begun."

DEMOCRATS CAVED FOR KING GEORGE

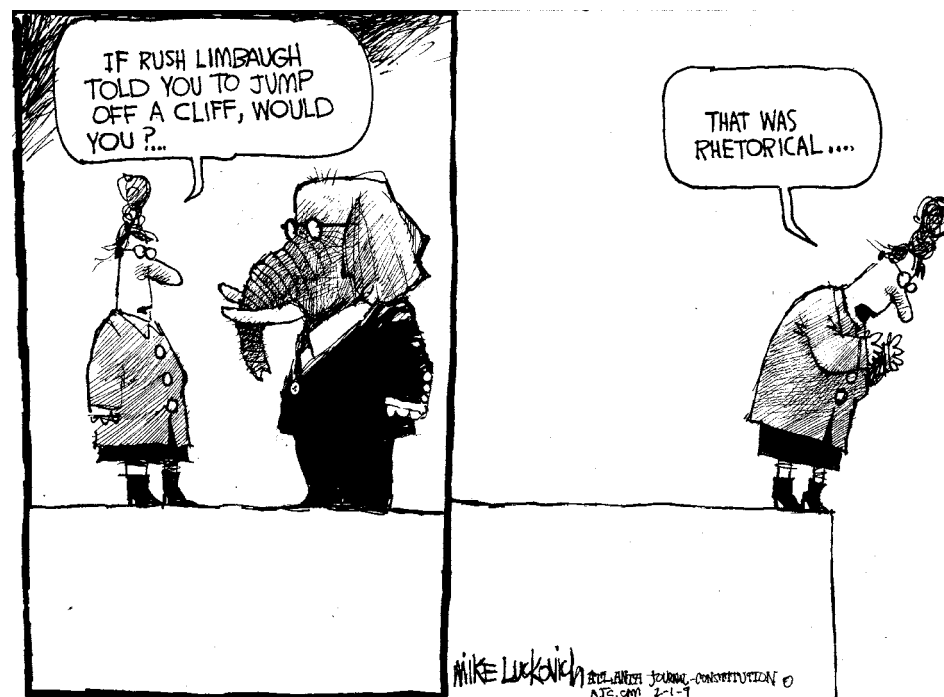
In reality, the Democrats displayed little appetite for obstructing George W. Bush, who lost the popular vote but got his way on tax cuts in the summer of 2001. The Democratic Congressional leaders and the entire country rallied to the side of the president after 9/11 – and the Democrats were rewarded with savage assaults on their patriotism in the following year's midterm election.

Even now, Limbaugh remains deaf to the bipartisan appeals of the Obama White House, which has tried, perhaps too hard, to change the tone in Washington.

"I never hear Democrats talking about walking across the aisle," he complained to Mr. Hannity. "I never see any of them praise each other or brag about the fact that they do it. They brag about the Republicans that they destroy."

What all this inane ranting proves is how remote Rush and his imitators are from the urgent concerns of the American public, including not only Democrats and independents but a growing number of Republicans, too.

According to current polling data, the Limbaugh line is potentially perilous for



any politician outside a firmly right-leaning district.

As thousands of jobs disappear every week, as the security and aspirations of millions of families evaporate, most Americans hope fervently that the Obama stimulus plan will succeed.

THE GOP'S SAME OLD REFRAIN

They hear nothing from the Republicans except demands for new tax breaks that will chiefly benefit the same privileged people who have made out so well during the past few decades – and who now take taxpayer money and spend millions on private jets and fancy office furniture.

When President Obama considers how much of his stimulus spending to apportion to tax cuts in a vain attempt to appease the opposition, he ought to remember how Limbaugh described the hidden attitude of Republican leaders.

"I know what our [G.O.P.] strategy is. They're hoping he fails, so that they can go back and say, 'We wanted him to succeed. We gave it everything we got. We worked with him, but ...'"

So perhaps the best course is not to worry too much about winning Republican votes in the Senate or about what they're saying on talk radio, but to simply do what will work best for the country – and let the Limbaughs whine on, as they always do.

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Today's GOP Defined: Petulant, Pusillanimous

By Edwin E. Vineyard

This writer was 17, going on 18, years of age when he first heard the word "pusillanimous." This was as an apprentice seaman in a sea of white uniforms, 30,000 strong, standing at parade rest on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Training Station in San Diego. It was in the midst of World War II.

We were marched onto the parade ground in units and lined up in precision fashion in front of a reviewing stand, and allowed to assume the formal position called "parade rest" while a program ensued.

During a part of this ceremony and many others like it later, an officer would step to the microphone of a public address system and read to us the Articles of the Code of Conduct for the U.S. Navy. One of those to which we pledged was that as long as we were still able to fight we would "never surrender nor pusillanimously cry for quarter."

I did not know the meaning of that term "pusillanimous," but I knew it was bad. I suspected that it meant cowardly.

HINDERING A NATION IN CRISIS

I find now that it does indeed mean that. It also means "dastardly" or "mean-spirited."

This is why the adjective seems to apply to the conduct of some hard-shell Republicans in Congress now. Since "pusillanimous" is one of the worst words I know, I believe it applies to some of the worst people I know – those Republicans who deliberately choose to obstruct, delay, and otherwise hinder the conduct of the business of the nation in crisis.

Another word which has been high on this writer's list of bad words is "petulant."

He believes that this word also applies to those obstructionist Republicans who loudly and consistently criticize everything being proposed.

AGAINST ANY DEMOCRATIC PROPOSAL

We find that "petulant" means "cranky, puckish, ill-tempered, peevish, fretful, and contemptuous." Obviously then, "petulant" is a good term to apply to that group of Republicans who are vociferously against everything any Democrat proposes.

This group defies its own more moderate party members and leaders who are willing to move toward the middle and try to make the government work to get something good done for the country.

Unfortunately there are a number of Republicans in congress who choose not align themselves with party moderates, but follow the most cantankerous right wingers in their party. It is sad that these petulant senators and congressmen behave so in expectation of greater political popularity within their own party base.

It is quite clear that the new president has been reaching across the aisle, trying to create bridges for discussion and an exchange of views. If his bi-partisan efforts fail, then it is equally clear who has chosen that path of dissension, disruption, and obstruction that the American people have rejected.

GOP RULED BY CYNICAL FANATICS

If the opposition party expects to stay within the mainstream of national politics, rather than be sidelined as a group of cynical fanatics, then they really need to reject that petulant element within their party and move toward a more cooperative, participative, middle stance.

This nation desperately needs some quick, thoughtful, and logical actions taken to pull it away from the abyss – away from the brink of economic disaster. The new president has gathered the best economic minds in the world, including Nobel prize-winners, to make recommendations. A plan has been put together from that base.

Republicans may have correctly found a few flaws in certain details of the plan, but their repetitive, obsessive notions of relying entirely on further tax cuts, especially for business and the wealthy as versus the middle and lower income levels, will not work.

To abrasively and stubbornly insist on their way only, while the economic ship sinks, is to become petulant and pusillanimous.

No one knows for sure what exactly will work. But the plan is the best that the brightest can derive. We have to try most of it.

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

Unregulated Market Mugged By Reality

By Edward Hadas

The writer Arthur Koestler once called communism “the God that failed.” The newest fallen divinity is sometimes known by its enemies as “free-market fundamentalism,” but that is a misnomer.

Most free markets are working quite well, albeit with extensive guidance from regulators and policy makers.

It was the belief that largely free financial markets – in old-fashioned banking; newfangled investments, and international trade – could deliver steady and rapid growth.

Under this creed, governments weren’t exactly considered diabolical, but their relationship with markets was supposed to be distant and supportive, not controlling.

DISASTROUS INNOVATIONS

The hands-off approach to bankers and traders spawned disastrous financial innovations such as negative-amortization mortgages and collateralized debt obligations.

It also encouraged regulators to ignore fast-rising mountains of leverage, and central bankers to watch from the sidelines as asset price bubbles grew and grew.

The confidence in cross-border financial freedom proved at least as misguided. The conventional wisdom was that free global financial markets could absorb whatever cash that trade surpluses generated. That proved as valid as the White Star Line’s trust in the unsinkable Titanic.

Now the world is in recession, banks are on government life support, and financiers are in the doghouse. The idolizing of free-market finance has been thoroughly discredited.

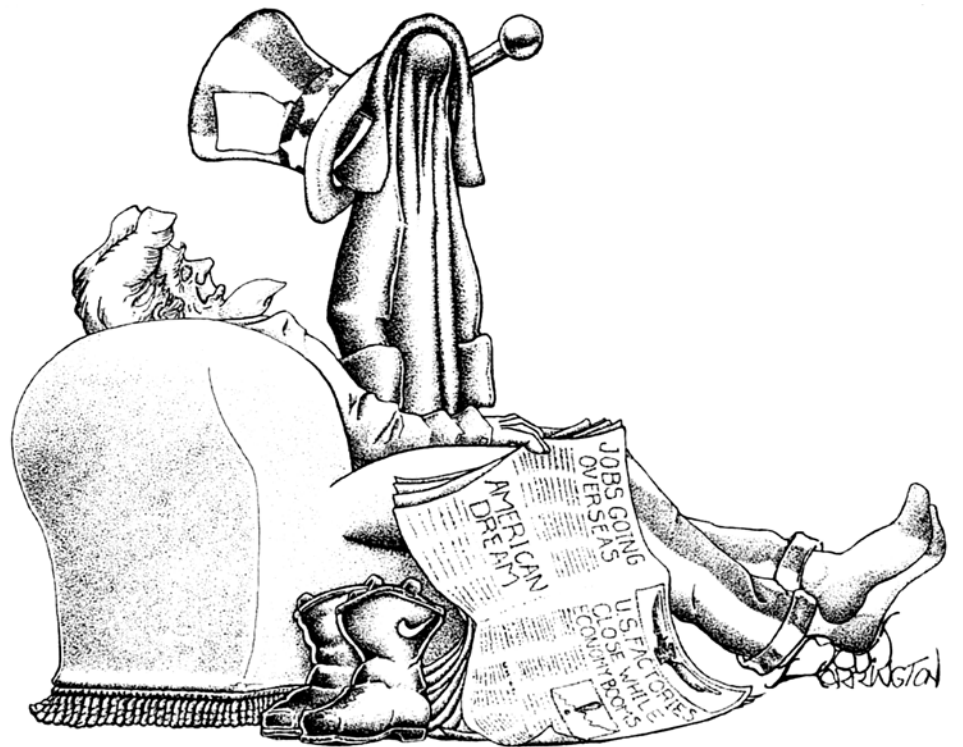
ECONOMISTS MUGGED BY REALITY

Old believers – a group that includes Alan Greenspan and almost all other economists who study money and credit – have been mugged by reality.

Failure has led few of them to start looking for completely new ideas. Instead, they have just dusted off some old ones.

John Maynard Keynes is now the name to invoke. According to the swelling band of acolytes of the early-20th-Century British economist, the answer to an implosion of private debt is an explosion of public debt.

No matter that similar but less extreme policies in the 1960s led to unacceptably high inflation. Or that almost two decades of Keynesian therapy have hardly



brought lasting vitality to the Japanese economy.

Keynesianism might be the best package currently available in the intellectual inventory, but economists should have made a collective 2009 New Year’s resolution: Find truly new ideas.

THREE WAYS TO GET THE BALL ROLLING

Here are three suggestions to get the ball rolling.

First, financial economists need to value balance at least as much as freedom. When it comes to debts, growth, trade, and asset prices, moderation should rule. Whenever free markets start to produce extremes, economists should encourage authorities to slow growth before a bubble builds.

Second, freedom in finance is particularly likely to turn into dangerous license. Investors who want to turn their nest eggs into fortunes often throw reason out the window. Ask any of Bernard Madoff’s clients.

Governments sometimes think their power to print money freely allows economic problems to be solved painlessly. Financial rules and policies should encourage responsibility and punish excessively wishful thinking.

Finally, economists should study philosophy. The risks that come with freedom – political, intellectual, and emotional – have worried thinkers from Plato onward. Financial freedom should be no exception. A new philosophy of money and credit based on the human inability to act virtuously could well be the key to a healthier financial future.

Six Reasons Why Nukes Are Bad News

The following is an excerpt from *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependence to Local Resilience* by Rob Hopkins. Those following events at the State Capitol know that House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, is pushing for a nuclear plant in Oklahoma – with the editorial support of the *Daily Disappointment*.

1. Length of time to come on stream: Commissioning and building new plants is a time-consuming business [at least 20 years], so they would have little or no impact on cutting emissions over the next 20 years, nor build any resilience in the face of peak oil.

2. Insurance: The insurance industry refuses to underwrite nuclear power, a gap it looks like the government will have to fill, resulting in a huge invisible subsidy for nuclear power.

3. Waste: Nuclear waste is a huge problem. The UK alone has 10,000 tons of nuclear waste, a pile which will increase 25-fold when the existing plants are decommissioned, with no solution in sight other than deep burial.

The disposal of nuclear waste requires a great deal of embodied energy, including that in the materials used to maintain the disposal facilities [i.e., concrete and steel].

It is often said that nuclear waste has a half-life of 100,000 years but it is worth remembering that Stonehenge was built only 4,000 years ago.

A society in energy descent, dependent on local, lower embodied energy build-

ing materials, will struggle to maintain nuclear waste sites with cob blocks and straw bales.

4. Cost: A new program of nuclear power would be staggeringly expensive. Amory Lovins has calculated that 10 cents invested in nuclear energy could generate 1 kwh of nuclear energy, 1.2- 1.7kwh wind-power, 2.2-6.5 kwh small co-generation, or 10 kwh of energy efficiency.

Also, having sufficient money to invest so unwisely assumes an economy which is still growing, an increasingly unlikely prospect. [Initial cost of a proposed Oklahoma plant: \$6 billion.]

5. Peak Uranium: At the moment, there are about 60 years’ worth of uranium left. However, if electricity generation from nuclear grows steadily, this figure will fall, to the point where if all the world’s electricity were generated with nuclear, we’d have around three years supply left.

6. Carbon Emissions: Nuclear is often said to be a carbon-free way of generating electricity. While that may be true for the actual generation, it is not when the entire process is looked at.

The mining, processing, enrichment, treatment and disposal all have significant impacts, equivalent to around one-third those of a conventional-sized gas-fired generating plant.

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Soldier Smoking Has The Military Worried

About 50% of soldiers deployed to Iraq return addicted to tobacco. About half will die prematurely from smoking-related disease if they are unable to break free of tobacco addiction.

On average, the use of tobacco will deprive those soldiers of 10 to 14 years of life and for many, poor health will compromise the quality of those years.

“Soldiers are going to war zones in Iraq,” says Dr. Michael Fiore, head of the Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

“God willing, they survive the imminent risks of that deployment. But they often return addicted to tobacco – a powerful addiction that puts them at risk of collateral damage for the rest of their lives.”

ARMY FURNISHED SMOKES IN THE PAST

A veteran of the United States Army Reserves himself, Fiore says that soldiers and smokes were chummy for years.

In the past, troops received cigarettes with meal rations and cheap tobacco was sold on bases. Military culture saw tobacco use as a soldier’s right – something to “take the edge” off the rigors of duty.

But by the mid-’70s, the military recognized that tobacco use was taking the edge off something else: military readiness.

Recruits who used tobacco didn’t perform as well on tests of athletic fitness; they got hurt more often, and more recruits were falling basic training.

“Tobacco use is a leading contributor to acute infections – bronchitis and pneumonia, among others,” says Fiore.

SMOKING HAMPERS BREATHING

“Smokers get out of breath faster. Their allergies get worse. All of these can take the edge off a soldier who needs to be at his or her best.”

Over time, the military quit offering cigarettes with rations; banned indoor tobacco use on bases; required that recruits abstain from tobacco during basic training; and started offering smoking-cessation programs to soldiers.

The policy changes, plus the general social trend against smoking, did help decrease smoking.

A 2007 study in *Addiction* found that smoking rates in the military dropped from more than 50% in 1980, then increased markedly starting in the late ‘90s.

See **SOLDIERS** Page 16

Wanted: New Science And Math Teachers

By Jeremy Woods

Public school officials are praying that financial and training incentives will help fill the need for 200,000 new teachers.

Jeremy Kennefick and Geoffrey Galley are both new science teachers, one a career-changer, the other fresh out of graduate school.

Both are teaching in high-poverty Massachusetts districts where the needs are greatest. Both are surrounded by a rare level of support – financial incentives, mentors, and groups of other new teachers to consult with as they grow in the profession.

It's no easy task to recruit people with proclivities for science into schools and to keep them long enough to nurture a talent for teaching.

WANTED WITHIN 10 YEARS

Over the next decade, schools will need 200,000 or more new teachers in science and math, according to estimates by such groups as the Business-Higher Education Forum in Washington.

Already, many districts face shortages: In at least 10 states, fewer than six out of 10 middle-school science teachers were certified when the Council of Chief School Officers compiled a report last year.

"We desperately need more qualified science and math teachers, because of retirement, overcrowded classrooms and people teaching out of their field," says Angelo Collins, executive director of the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation [KSTF] in Moorestown, NJ, which offers fellowships for teachers in these fields.

OKLAHOMA HAS PROBLEMS, TOO

Twenty-five percent of Oklahoma teachers teaching math did not major in that subject.

The United States is not only facing a dearth of future homegrown scientists and engineers, she and others say, but increasingly, everyday citizens need science literacy.

The programs supporting Galley and Kennefick are small, but their approach is likely to reach a much larger scale if President Barack Obama is able to carry out his education proposals.

He wants 40,000 scholarships to draw undergraduates and career changers into high-needs schools. He would put special emphasis on science and math teaching. He's praised teacher-preparation programs that offer a high degree of mentoring.

SCHOLARSHIP MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

A former mortgage loan officer, Kennefick majored in psychology and has coached youth basketball leagues. He's receiving a \$5,000 scholarship funded by a federal grant in exchange for teaching in the district for at least three years.

Twice a week, he takes classes with a group of 20 who will earn their teaching licenses within a year.

"It's a heavy load," says Karen O'Connor, who oversees several such programs at the University of Massachusetts' Center for University, School, and Community Partnerships.

The principals needed math and science teachers right away, and the new teachers have told her, "I wouldn't trade it for anything, because I could apply



exactly what I was learning the very next day in my classroom."

MENTORING CONTINUES

They continue to receive mentoring in their second and third years. It's "100% different" from his first week of teaching, he says. "I came in thinking I would teach the same way I was taught – by lecturing."

Now, he's learning how to reach students who learn visually or through hands-on work.

Principal Jeanne Bonneau sees the benefit of Kennefick's "real world" experience. In addition to his love of science and of kids, "he has a great work ethic and good organizational skills," she says.

Most teachers who leave the profession do so not because of pay primarily, Collins says, but because they feel isolated, or the working conditions in their school are poor, or they start to see it as a professional dead end.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

In addition to tuition assistance and summer stipends, the fellowship tries to address those issues in its extra professional development support for new teachers like Geoffrey Galley.

He arrived at The Engineering School, a high school in Boston, with a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in teaching from Cornell University. But classroom management in his biotechnology classes has been the biggest learning curve, as it usually is at the start.

Now he's reflecting on how to improve the labs to keep students focused. He can tap peers and mentors for ideas.

The fellowships can be renewed for up to five years and \$150,000. Out of 128 awarded since 2002, fewer than 20 individuals have left teaching, Collins says. By comparison, about a third of new science and math teachers typically leave the profession within three years.

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An Open Letter To Ann Coulter

By Sharon Martin

The problems facing the United States all come down to one thing, according to you, Ann: single mothers.

I agree that children need a family, but there have always been widows and orphans and children without two parents. Remember the Orphan Trains and the problem they sought to fix?

I agree that it takes a family to raise a child. But blaming single mothers for the problems of America is like blaming the rash for measles. Single parents are a symptom of the problem.

The disease that's killing us is poverty and lack of opportunity.

UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES DAMAGING

Unequal educational opportunities, uneven job markets, a cultural divide, generations of dependents all play their part in making the patient sick.

If you give one group of kids all the advantages and deny them to another group, can you complain when many of the denied children don't grow up to be productive? If you hire two employees to run an assembly line, train one, and gripe that the other doesn't know what he's doing, you have a pretty fair picture of our education system.

Many schools in poor neighborhoods perform miracles out of little more than hard work and good wishes.

If there are no jobs available in an area, does everyone move out of that area to find work? Yes, if they can. What do you do with the ones who don't have the means, education, and cultural background to get out and move up?

LAWMAKERS' UNREALITY

What if the only job you can get pays \$8, more than some members of Congress feel an employer should have to pay? What if you take the job, but you can't afford health care? What if the government says that you make too much money to access the Medicaid program? Do you live without health care or do you quit your job so that you and your children are covered.

Of course, the same legislators who feel that employers shouldn't have to pay

employees any more than they can get away with also believe that providing health care costs too much. How much does lost productivity cost?

Remember when one parent stayed at home and raised the kids while the other earned a living? How many families do you know that can get by on one salary?

SOLUTION? ENDING POVERTY

There are many societal problems that can be fixed by repairing the American family. Of course, being a liberal, I believe two women; two men; a man and a woman; and a grandmother, mother, and aunt are all legitimate forms of family.

Whatever form your family takes, the first medicine toward fixing its problems is to end poverty. To end poverty, we must provide education and job opportunities that include preventive health care. To stop teen pregnancies that often start single parent families, we need education and contraception.

America has problems that need fixing. Let's start with the causes. You don't cure a measles epidemic with calamine lotion, and you don't fix society's ills by pointing fingers at those who have paid for bad legislative decisions.

– The author lives in Oilton

SOLDIERS

From Page 15

By 2005, about 33% of those in the military smoked.

Today, with U.S. soldiers fighting two wars in the Middle East, deployments are up and multiple deployments are common. While fully recognizing the dangers of fighting a stubborn insurgency, Fiore has a longer-term worry.

"What used to be an equal-opportunity killer is increasingly a concern in subgroups of the population," he says. "Young soldiers are especially vulnerable to the risks of tobacco. While smoking prevalence overall among adults has fallen to less than 20%, it is far higher in military personnel."

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College Loan Slavery Is Way Out Of Hand

By Nan Mooney

Raya Golden thought she was handling college in a responsible way. She didn't apply until she felt ready to dedicate herself to her studies. She spread her schooling across five years so she could work part-time throughout.

She checked that her school, the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, had a high post-graduate employment rate. But there were two things she hadn't counted on.

The first was the \$75,000 in non-subsidized federal student loans she'd have to take out for tuition and those living expenses her part-time jobs selling hot-dogs and making lattes couldn't cover.

The second was that she'd graduate into a workforce teetering on the edge of the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression.

OKLAHOMA INCREASES LARGE

In Oklahoma recent tuition increases at OU and OSU have almost reached double digits.

"All of a sudden the work just dried up," says Golden, who got her degree in traditional illustration.

"I've sent out probably a hundred resumes from L.A. to Canada, but I haven't had a single response. Experienced people are getting laid off, so why would anyone take a chance on a college grad?"

Shortly after graduating this past January, Golden moved from San Francisco to Los Angeles hoping there would be more work available, only to find hiring freezes at most of the production studios and animation houses.

SLEEPING ON A FRIEND'S COUCH

She has looked into fields ranging from children's book publishing to T-shirt design, but no one is hiring. For now, she's doing her best to get by working part-time as a barista at Starbucks and sleeping on a friend's couch.

Golden has taken a three-month hardship deference on her student loans but is well aware that the longer she pushes off payments, the higher the interest will climb.

She had hoped to consolidate her loans, which are now at \$112,000, but every place she called either no longer handles consolidations or turned down Golden because she was not employed full-time.

BROKERS TEMPORARY REDUCTION

Since there's no way Golden could possibly make her \$1,400-a-month payments on a part-time barista's salary, she brokered a temporarily reduced payment of \$650.

"It doesn't even cover the interest," says Golden, "If I pay that for two years I'll wind up owing \$150,000. But I can't see that I have any other choice."

"My timing couldn't have been worse," she says, voice brimming with frustration. "I'm doing the exact same thing I was doing before I went to school, only now I have all this debt to carry around, too."

The economy these days looks frightening for just about everyone. Who would want to be a retiree with little to no earning potential, or a young family grappling with mortgage and child care payments while facing the possibility, or reality, of job loss?



How are college graduates supposed to juggle student loan payments with the realities of an imploding job market and family members too caught up in their own financial turmoil to help out?

With all the attention focused on failing banks and government bailouts, the very legitimate panic felt by such graduates risks getting lost in the shuffle.

"Most of the recent graduates I hear from are petrified," says Alan Collinge, founder of Student Loan Justice, an organization that fights for student loan reform, and author of an upcoming book about the student loan industry.

"They have yet to find real jobs in their field, so they're out there slinging hash to make ends meet. And then their loan payments come due."

STUDENTS FEEL PETRIFIED

Graduates like Golden are right to feel petrified. According to a recent College Board report, about 60% of 2007 college graduates had student debt, each taking out an average of \$22,700 in loans.

Graduates are expected to begin repaying within six months, healthy job market or no. Loans can be deferred, but never erased [unless you die or are permanently disabled].

When those payments do come due, many will face the prospect of paying back not only fixed-rate federal loans but also high interest private loans.

The private loan industry is now responsible for 24 of student lending.

Before the economic crisis hit, it was the fastest-growing sector of the student loan industry.

FAT CATS BAILED OUT BUT NOT STUDENTS

Though the \$700 billion bailout bill includes provisions to enable the U.S. Treasury to buy troubled assets, including private loans, from student loan providers, it provides no relief for the students who have taken out such high interest loans.

Collinge sees the proliferation of costly private loans and the abysmal job market as a potentially toxic mix, one that could result in a wave of bad loans echoing what has already happened in the housing industry.

"Attention needs to shift from welfare of the banks to welfare of the students," he said. "Otherwise, I wouldn't be at all surprised to see a dramatic spike in the number of people defaulting on their private loans."

America is the only country in the world that considers education an expense instead of an investment.

Across The Border, Machine Guns And Snipers

By Norm Rourke

Mexican border towns are not the best examples of the country. But for many of us, they are the best we can do on limited budgets. They offer tourists an opportunity to at least say they've been to a foreign country.

Commerce is no more intense than it is in a Mexican border town. Shopkeepers, street vendors and even pricey boutiques are all crammed into the few blocks of a main street that runs from the border entry.

A recent visit to Progreso, Mexico reminded me of past visits. The sights, sounds and smells of border town Mexico awakened memories. Old hangouts, restaurants, shops and landmarks were recalled. The cacophony of Spanish and English speaking hawkers, traffic, police whistles and music had not changed over the years when we had visited the city before.

A new reality was unexpected although often reported on the evening news. Soldiers were positioned in the middle of the street where it divided between those walking or driving across the border and those leaving.

SNIPERS, MACHINE GUNS

An armored vehicle manned by a machine gunner on top looked down the choked street. Off to the side of the vehicle and its gunner was a machine gun bunker manned by a soldier in full battle gear. Watching from the second story balconies of several buildings were snipers.

This is now Mexico's life shared – or controlled – by drug cartels. Across the border at Brownsville [25 miles southeast of Progreso], Matamoros has experienced street gun battles between rival cartels in turf battles. Not long ago one threatened to spill over into Brownsville.

Progreso has become the border town of choice for visitors because of the violence, kidnapping and other cartel wars in Matamoros. But even this smaller town has not gone untouched by the growing problem of cartel control.

A Progreso businessman told me that a few months earlier one of the drug cartel's people told every business if they paid the cartel, they would be safe and

have no need for government protection.

This sounds like something from The Godfather. Instead, the military moved in and established a presence giving an appearance of being in control. Unfortunately the history of corruption in the Mexican government and military do not reassure the Mexican business people.

A SAD REALITY OF TODAY'S WORLD

All this is an unfortunate part of the times in which we [and the Mexicans] live. The Mexican people are gracious, friendly, appreciative of the tourists and patient with those of us with limited Spanish language skills. They are hard working, creative artisans and craftsmen. Many have contributed to the creative arts.

It is sad they are so poorly governed and the richness of the land and people are squandered. Perhaps this is why Mexico has had frequent revolutions and upheavals. The people eventually tire of being taken advantage of and kept abysmally poor.

I will return to Progreso again if only to enjoy the food and hospitality of Auro's and Angels. I will return to Progreso in order to remind myself of the importance of being a courteous guest in a foreign country. I have never been ill treated by these good people and I hope I will never treat them badly.

It is a reminder that we are all part of a shrinking world.

– The author lives in Beggs



America's Lagging, Costly Healthcare

By Daniel Zhou

The Constitution protects the basic inalienable rights given to the people of the United States. What is lacking from the basic rights is healthcare. Healthcare is a necessity for every human being. It is the only thing that will decide whether a person will live or die.

The United States is supposed to help every person in need, but insurance companies limit the care that a person can receive from facilities like hospitals.

As the United States is moving from a manufacturing economy toward a service economy, healthcare insurance is becoming less stable. Due to rising premiums, companies often are unable to afford healthcare programs.

Therefore, they either drop coverage completely or force their employees to pay an excessive extra share for their healthcare plan. As a result, many people are unable to keep their plans.

LACK OF CARE EQUALS DEATH

There are nearly 50 million people uninsured in the United States, and experts calculate that 18,000 Americans will die simply because they are uninsured.

Though the United States spends more on healthcare than any other wealthy, industrialized country in the world, it is the only one that does not ensure that all its citizens have insurance. The new president must take immediate action toward fixing the corrupt healthcare system.

My father was diagnosed with a brain tumor. In September 2007, he had his first surgery at a nationally renowned hospital. The doctor who treated my father is also nationally renowned.

NO PREPARATION FOR SURGERY

With the tumor at a very dangerous position, the surgery was considered to be major. Without any prehospitalized care, my dad was forced to arrive at the hospital very early in the morning the day of the surgery.

The surgery took an unusually long 10 hours, with only one surgeon. After being put in the intensive care unit, my father was released from the hospital two days later.

There was a minimum amount of care for my father after his surgery, and the hospital practically forced him to leave two days later.

A few days after arriving home, with my father still in need of care and rest, we received multiple phone calls from the hospital billing center, which demanded money right away.

The total cost of the surgery, including help from the insurance company, was about \$200,000. Unfortunately, the surgery was unsuccessful. The only words that the doctor gave my dad before leaving the hospital were "Rest, or call 911."

With no help at all from the healthcare system, my father was forced to look for a second chance for surgery elsewhere. With extreme limitations on his coverage, he decided to try his home country. After arriving in China, the doctors spent a whole week just running tests and having discussions.

Before the surgery, the hospital asked for an \$8,000 deposit. Unlike in the states, a team of surgeons worked together during his second surgery.

After a difficult nine hours, the tumor was 100% removed, and my dad was asked to stay for at least 10 days under hospital supervision.

NURSES CHECKED UP ON HIM AT HOME

After leaving the hospital, the nurses called him every day for a week, just to make sure he was taking the correct amount of medicine and that there were no complications, and to remind him when to return to the hospital for checkups and tests.

The total cost of this surgery was \$6,500, of which the hospital returned \$1,500 of the original deposit.

Today in the United States, healthcare has become so unreliable and expensive that lots of people cannot afford it, which is what President Obama needs to fix immediately.

HEALTHCARE ELSEWHERE IS FREE

Healthcare coverage is usually guaranteed through employers, but as changes in insurance company policies occur, people have become less dependent on them. Free healthcare has been utilized in all the developed countries besides the United States.

Although the United States should not be compared with developing countries such as China, China still has proven to have a better and more affordable healthcare system than that of the United States.

My story depicts only one case, but it represents the voices of those who agree with me. We see our great country deteriorating day by day, and we hope President Obama will step in and take some actions to justify our healthcare system.

This is the basic, moral human need.

- The author is a junior attending Shaker Heights High School in Ohio

HEALTH

From Page 9

to rapid spread of chronic diseases, many of which could be prevented entirely or managed.

One in three Americans - or 133 million - has a chronic condition. Five chronic diseases - heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and diabetes - cause over two-thirds of all deaths.

Approximately one in three children born today will develop diabetes in their lifetime.

Only four cents out of every health care dollar is spent on prevention and public health.

OBAMA'S HEALTH CARE PLAN

Obama has outlined a framework for health reform to achieve these goals:

Modernize the health care system to improve quality and reduce costs.

Invest in a national health information technology system that will allow us

DRUGS

From Page 9

purveyors of private prisons and their entourages are also addicts. Likewise, both greedheads and drug addicts tend to need higher doses of their preferred "substances" as time goes on.

It is important to think more about the social causes of substance abuse. One good measure to take would be to create an atmosphere of respect. Firstly, all double standards based on class and race must be eliminated at once. It is common knowledge that this exists. Secondly, police, judges, lawyers and businessmen are enjoined to deal respectfully with everyone.

The children of Oklahoma need clean air and water, wholesome food, access without hassles to medical and dental care, education that encourages their curiosity and inventiveness, and opportunities for wholesome entertainment. Then we will see how much of a residual drug problem there is. If that sounds like socialism, so be it. We've had "socialism" for the rich long enough.

WHAT IS ROLE OF PARENTS?

Parents, please think and consider carefully before referring your children for drug use investigation. It is clear that the program was framed to make you feel frightened and helpless. Stop and think. Be adult and take responsibility to guide your child yourself. You sure care more about the kid than the Prison-Industrial Complex does. Once the child gets started down that road, the authorities will be happy to track him/her for the rest of his/her life. The current Nanny State wants to take away your adult responsibilities and make you into a helpless infant. Don't assist them!

- The author is a physician who lives in Stillwater

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to coordinate care, measure quality, reduce medical errors, and save billions of dollars.

Reward health providers that provide high quality care and coordinated care.

Expand disease management programs and self-management training to help patients.

Lower drug costs by increasing the use of generic drugs in public programs, and taking on drug companies that block cheaper generic medicines from the market.

Require hospitals and providers to collect and report health care cost and quality data. Build upon and strengthen employer coverage.

HEALTH INSURANCE EXCHANGE

Allow people to keep the coverage that they have and maintain patients' choice of doctor.

Establish a National Health Insurance Exchange that offers a range of private insurance options as well as a new public plan option.

Require insurance companies to cover pre-existing conditions so all Americans regardless of their health status or history can get comprehensive benefits at fair and stable premiums.

Expand Medicaid and SCHIP and provide sliding-scale premium assistance for low-income people.

Require coverage of clinical preventive services such as tobacco cessation services and cancer screenings, in public programs and private health plans.

Invest in community-based prevention that will lead to healthier schools, worksites, and communities.

Tackle the health and public health workforce shortage and bolster the public health infrastructure.

PREVENTIVE SCREENINGS

Screening Mammography: All of the major professional societies that make recommendations about breast cancer screening recommend that women by age 50 and older get a routine annual screening mammography for breast cancer. Many of these societies recommend that women should undergo such screening at age 40.

Yet, only 71.8% of women age 50-64 and 63.8% of women 65 or older received a screening mammogram in 2005.

Flu Shots: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all adults over the age of 50 receive an annual vaccine against influenza. Yet, in 2006, only 45.9% of adults over the age of 50 received a flu shot.

Cholesterol Screening: The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that doctors routinely screen men ages 35 years and older and women ages 45 years and older for high cholesterol.

Yet, according to data from 2007, only 74.9% of adults in the U.S. had their cholesterol checked within the past five years.

Retirement Savings Loss Hits \$2 Trillion

The stock market's prolonged tumble has wiped out about \$2 trillion in Americans' retirement savings in the past 15 months, a blow that could force workers to stay on the job longer than planned, rein in spending and possibly further stall an economy reliant on consumer dollars.

For many Americans, pensions and 401[k] plans are their only form of savings. The dwindling of these assets – about a 20% decline overall – is another setback just as many people are grappling with higher gas and food prices, more credit card debt, declining home values and less access to loans.

"Unlike Wall Street executives, American families don't have a golden parachute to fall back on," said Rep. George Miller, D-CA, chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor.

GREATEST CASUALTY

"It's clear that Americans' retirement security may be one of the greatest casualties of this financial crisis."

Even traditional pension plans, which are formally known as defined-benefit plans and are widely considered more stable, have been hit hard by the stock market's volatility, losing 15% of their assets over the past year, Peter R. Orszag, director of the Congressional Budget Office, told the House panel.

Despite the losses, companies will still be obligated to pay out the same pensions promised to employees but will have to recoup the extra costs in other ways, Orszag said.

"When pension assets decline in 401[k] plans, the burden is on the workers," he said. "When pension plan assets decline in defined-benefit plans, the burden is on the firm to make up the difference. The firm will have to pass those costs on to their workers, to their shareholders or to consumers."

DEFINED BENEFIT PLANS

Defined-benefit plans are company-sponsored programs that provide retirement payouts based on an employee's salary and tenure. The company shoulders the bulk of the investment decisions and risk. Defined-contribution plans, such as 401[k]s, turn those tasks over to the worker and are subject to the whims of the stock market.

Increasingly, employers have switched workers into defined-contribution plans. The federal government has also pushed 401[k] plans heavily, approving a law that makes it easier for employers to automatically enroll their employees in

DOMINIONISTS

From Page One

to physically impose Christian "dominion" on non-believers.

"An end-time army has one common purpose – to aggressively take America for the kingdom of God under the authority of Jesus Christ," Bentley once declared on the website for his ministry school in British Columbia, Canada.

Bentley created "Joel's Army" – consisting of many teenagers and young adults – who now believe they're members of the final generation to come of age before the end of the world, breaking away in droves from mainline Pentecostal churches.

Bentley, who resigned in late January from his ministry amid allegations of marital infidelity, has a Charles Manson-esque magnetism.

Joel's Army bases their beliefs on an esoteric reading of the second chapter of the Old Testament book of Joel, in which an avenging swarm of locusts attacks Israel. In their view, the locusts are a metaphor for Joel's Army.

Among this kind of flock is Sarah Palin who told a Pentecostal audience that the war in Iraq "is God's will. Those soldiers were sent by God."

This band of wingnuts believe that Islam is a false religion spreading a spiritual disease. War is the only way to stop it.

Joel's Army critics are mostly conservative Christians, either neo-Pentecostals who quit in disgust or evangelical ministers who fear that such preachers are stealing their flocks.

Believers are hard-core Christian dominionists, meaning they believe that America, along with the rest of the world, should be governed by rightwing Christians and a conservative Christian interpretation of biblical law. There is no room in their doctrine for democracy or pluralism.

Dominionism's original branch is Christian Reconstructionism, a grim, Calvinist call to theocracy.

They are notorious for endorsing the public execution by stoning of homosexuals and adulterers – something still going on by fanatics in the Middle East.

In today's America, some people snort cocaine, others snort religion – dancing, shouting, gyrating, speaking in tongues and other forms of ecstatic release.

Surely Jesus weeps.

them and other similar retirement plans.

Defined-contribution plans tend to be more heavily weighted in stocks, either through individual holdings or mutual funds. As a result, said Orszag, "the value of assets in defined-contribution plans may have declined by slightly more than that of assets in defined-benefit plans."

LOSSES THROUGH SEPTEMBER

Through September, the percentage loss for the year in average account balances among 401[k] participants was between 7.2% and 11.2%, according to the Employee Benefit Research Institute's analysis of more than two million plans.

Employees between the ages of 56 and 65 who had the fewest years on the job were the least affected, while those 36 to 45 years old with the longest tenures suffered the steepest declines, said Jack L. VanDerhei, research director for the DC-based institute.

Younger workers tend to have more stocks in their portfolios while older employees move toward safer investments such as bonds, VanDerhei said.

The findings exacerbate a complaint among many workers and academics about 401[k] and similar plans that are heavily tied to the stock market. Are they really the best retirement vehicles for workers?

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

"The loss of retirement security is a reversal of fortune and the result of very specific flawed governmental policies that have been biased toward 401[k] plans, rather than the result of technological change or the logical consequences of global economic trends," Teresa Ghilarducci, a professor of Economic Policy Analysis at the New School for Social Research, testified before the committee.

Other academics and analysts say 401[k] plans allow employees to take control of their retirements.

Jerry Bramlett, president of consulting firm BenefitStreet, said 401[k] participants should resist the urge to pull money out of stocks because that would lock in their losses.

REMEMBER TO THINK LONG TERM

"Markets do go up and down, and 401[k] participants must try to remember to think long-term," he said.

Many investors have been buying low-yield Treasury bills in recent months because they are considered less volatile. Bramlett cautioned against that because it would leave them vulnerable to inflation.

That said, 401[k] participants should evaluate their portfolios to make sure their money is spread among stock and fixed-income investments.

They should also make sure they do not have too much of their own company's stock.

Public pensions also have suffered. The assets held by state and local governments' pension plans declined by more than \$300 billion between the second quarter of 2007 and the second quarter of 2008, according to the Federal Reserve.

About 60% of public pension funds are invested in stocks, 30% in domestic fixed-income securities, 5% in real estate, and the remaining 5% in other products.

CATASTROPHIC FOR MIDDLE CLASS

Miller called the findings "very cataclysmic for middle-class families."

Several analysts who testified at the hearing said the most vulnerable workers are those who are nearing retirement and have large balances in their retirement plans that are now shrinking.

Tighter household budgets are also crimping workers' retirement savings. According to a survey released by AARP, 20% of baby boomers stopped contributing to their retirement plans in the past year because they have had trouble making ends meet.

Already, more and more workers are delaying retirement, a trend that analysts and economists expect to accelerate because of the distressed economy. The people age 55 and older working full time grew from about 22% in 1990 to nearly 30% in 2007, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

By 2016, the bureau predicts, the number of workers age 65 and over will soar by more than 80%, and they will make up 6.1% of the labor force. In 2006, they accounted for 3.6% of active workers.

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