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## None Dare Call It Treason Nuclear Revival?

By Morton S. Skorodin

They're back.

The session of the state Legislature is upon us. Bills have been presented, in both Senate [SB 831] and House [HB 1320], to re-introduce the nuclear power business to Oklahoma.

This will, if the sponsors and their backers prevail, bring jobs and cancer to our state.

We've got a problem. We humans interpret the world and have survived by our five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. They have served us well; they guide our behavior, and this is all obvious as we look around.

During the 20th Century and beyond, we have seen new things and new types of events, in defiance of the old saying: "There is nothing new under the sun." Most important was the development of man made nuclear radiation.

We haven't had hundreds or thousands of years to adapt to this new and insanely dangerous phenomenon. We cannot see, hear, feel, smell or taste nuclear radiation.

The danger of nuclear power is as great as our ability to perceive it is small.

We have to adapt, and pronto. We have to use our brains, to reason, without benefit of sensory input. This does not come naturally, but we have to do it anyway.

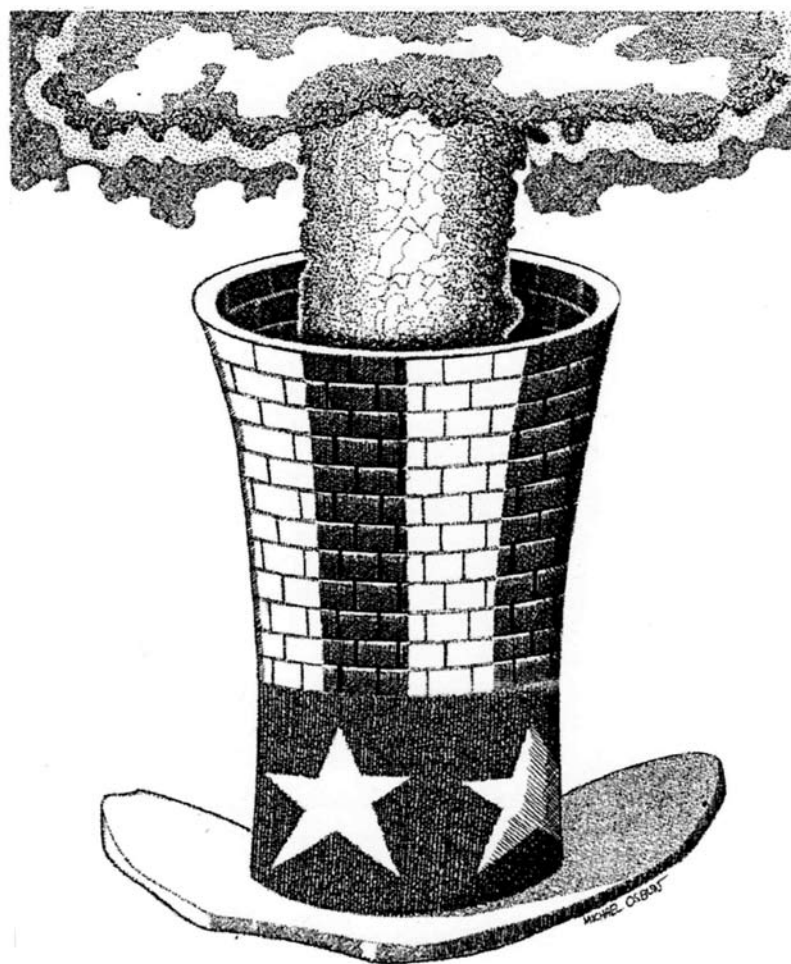
To compound this problem, many facts about nuclear power and nuclear munitions are not widely known. Additionally, many problems and potential problems have not been made public.

Remember, it is a business. It is the legally binding responsibility of top management of all firms involved in this business to make as much money as possible.

Ugly facts would get in the way of this Prime Directive. Thus the impulse to hide unpleasant information is overwhelming. Monkey see no evil, hear no evil, tell no evil.

We, the people, have to do the heavy digging. We have no other choice. Like a putrid abscess this abomination must be eliminated by exposure to fresh air and sunlight.

Back to Oklahoma. If you've stayed with me so far, I have information that



just might wake you up.

Remember the nuclear accident at Gore back in 1986?

No? Hmmm. Well, neither do I. You probably remember the Chernobyl disaster and the Three Mile Island accident as do I.

On Jan 6, 1986, a gigantic cylinder of nuclear material burst after being improperly heated at a Kerr-McGee plant at Gore, Oklahoma, USA. One worker died, 100 were hospitalized. The local police had had no heads up on dealing with this. In fact, the irresponsible owners and management appear to have had no safety plan whatsoever.

This whopper of a cylinder contained more than 27,500 pounds of gaseous radioactive Uranium [fancy name: Uranium hexafluoride]. Now it's spread to the four winds. To date I have been unable to find out the long-

term health effects in the Gore area.

Get ready to be outraged. This disaster was big, about as big as Three Mile Island. Like you, I never heard about it until two weeks ago, when I luckily came across a study in the medical literature by Prof. Doug Brugge and colleagues [American Journal of Public Health, 2007, Vol. 97[9], 1595-1600].

They also discuss another calamity, unknown to the public and actually larger than the Three Mile Island accident, which occurred at Church Rock, NM, in 1979.

The point of their article was that these disasters are not known to the public. They view that fact itself as a public health problem and I certainly agree. They speculated that these accidents were easy to hide because they occurred on sparsely populated Indian land.

As horrible as these relatively rare accidents are, perhaps even worse is the "normal" day-to-day operation of all nuclear plants. They all release radioactive material into the atmosphere daily! State regulatory agencies know this and allow it and you can find the relevant documents online, though they don't shout it out.

People with a monetary interest in nuclear power and their fellow travelers will tell you that nuclear power plants don't affect human health much. Don't believe them; they are lying.

Radiation causes cancer, especially breast cancer. Being reminded of this makes a shudder go through me. My dear sister, of blessed memory, died a very agonizing and painful death from this at a young age - the first case of this in our family. I remember her last days well. Doctors have psychological mechanisms to not be overwhelmed by their patients' suffering. These didn't work well for me. In fact, understanding what was going on in her body made her pain more vivid to me.

She looked small and her skin had changed to an unnatural brown. The pain was intense and wasn't phased by massive amounts of morphine. She was short of breath and her doctors and nurses appeared to be unaware of it. Her rib cage, especially the left side, was riddled with spread of the breast tumor. Cancer in bone is one of the most painful conditions. Every breath hurt. Every breath was inefficient - that left ribcage collapsed inward, rather than expanding outward to bring in air, which is the normal action. Her chest was half-filled with water so she couldn't breathe well even if her ribs had been working properly. Her face was always set in an expression of unrelieved pain, even when she dozed off briefly. There was too much pain and breathlessness for her to rest at all. Finally, when she passed, it was a relief.

Her painful death was tragically foretold by the nine previous years of living with this painful disease, which ground on relentlessly despite surgery and radiation and which she knew would do her in. She lived her

See NUCLEAR Page 19

# Observations

## Glass House

Non-stop blowhard Frank Keating was granted space in the Daily Disappointment to hold forth on the need for today's kids being taught values.

Coming from him, we whooped when we read it. He says children must be taught to tell the truth and have respect for others. Keating's public career has been the reverse.

Keating on ethics? How about that \$250,000 he took from a Wall Street baron. He claimed he returned the money when Newsweek broke the story but he refused to produce the cancelled check.

Remember when he called public school teachers slugs? We know – we were at the press conference.

How about leaving his successor as governor, Brad Henry, a \$10 million hot check on the dome – which he claimed would be strictly financed by the private sector?

We know Keating is hot to trot for elective office again. Since he left office he's been an insurance lobbyist in Washington.

No doubt some kids need lecturing today but for Frank Keating to do it is the moral equivalent of leaving a house of prostitution saying "I didn't feel loved."

## Neovouchers

The political cannibals have found a back door to promote vouchers by any other name.

Tax-credit-supported "scholarships" appear to be outpacing vouchers as a state-policy tool for promoting private school choice.

Prof. Kevin G. Welner of the University of Colorado at Boulder has written a book on the topic, using the term "neovouchers" to describe state policies that grant tax credits to individuals or businesses for donations they make to organizations that provide students with financial aid for private schools.

In other words, it's still tax dollars funding private education.

That sneak attack was killed in

the Oklahoma House last year after the Senate passed it. A north Tulsa church had planned to open a voucher school.

Neovouchers are unproven, largely unstudied, and largely beyond the reach of solid evaluation.

The idea of tuition tax credits is that a state offers individuals and, in some cases, businesses, a credit for donating money to nonprofit, privately run voucher programs.

Currently, six states have such policies in place: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. So far 100,000 students are being funded.

The program will reach Gov. Brad Henry's desk this year now that Republicans control both houses. Pray that he vetoes it.

## Pro-Union

Note to anti-union Catholics: Pope Benedict XVI said labor unions have an important role to play in finding a way out of the global financial crisis and establishing a new culture of solidarity and responsibility in the marketplace.

"In this regard, union organizations can make a significant contribution," the pope told directors of the Confederation of Italian Labor Unions.

The pope emphasized that the inalienable dignity of the worker has been a cornerstone of the church's social teaching in the modern age, and said this teaching has helped the movement toward fair wages, improvement of working conditions and protection of vulnerable categories of employees.

Workers are facing particular risks in the current economic crisis, and unions must be part of the solution, he said.

He had a few words for the right-to-work crowd.

"It is necessary to overcome the interests of particular groups and sectors, in order to face together and in a united way the problems that are



affecting every area of society, especially the world of labor," he said.

Labor, he said, is a key component in social questions, with unions being an indispensable element of social life in modern industrial nations.

Believe it or not, there is more to Catholic social justice than abortion or homosexuality.

## Fox News?

Thanks to an online petition, over 600,000 people of every color across the country are demanding that Fox stop the racist attacks on the Obama family and on black America.

Fox poisons this country every time they air racist propaganda and try to call it news.

Boxes with more than 600,000 anti-Fox News signatures were delivered to the network's headquarters.

Fox News hates the first family, and black people in general. This cesspool has spewed, propagated and transmitted the most repugnant lies ever heard about President Barack Obama, his family and his background.

Fox News first put out the lie that Obama was schooled in a madrassa – leaving the inference that it is akin to one blemished with the mark of the beast.

Certain blacks [and non-blacks] who have the intellect, poise and emotional stability to withstand the sophistry of its anchors are verbally abused and disrespected on the air.

African-American Juan Williams is Fox's Uncle Tom who claims he finds it very hard to dissent from Fox News' unregulated hatred of black people.

Speaking with Bill O'Reilly, Williams said that Michelle Obama is a cause of concern for President Obama, characterizing her as "Stokely Carmichael in a designer-dress."

Williams said Michelle Obama's "instinct is to start with this blame America, I'm the victim attitude."

Spewing hatred will continue until and unless the Fairness Doctrine is restored.

## Radical Right

President Obama bluntly told GOP members at a meeting that they need to stop listening to hate radio host Rush Limbaugh if Congress is to accomplish anything.

"You can't just listen to Rush Limbaugh and get things done," Obama told Republican leaders.

His scolding of the far right came days after Limbaugh notoriously de-

clared, "I hope he fails," referring to Obama.

In this time of crisis, the country needs a strong economic recovery package. Given that Limbaugh carries tremendous sway over the congressional GOP, will they break away from him on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act?

Once again, recovering drug addict Limbaugh proves he is no patriot, perfectly content in saying that he wants the President to fail at reviving the economy. The comment also underscores just how radical Limbaugh is.

Even fellow conservative Bill Bennett hinted at disagreement, stating, "The locution 'I want him to fail' is not what you say the first week the man's been inaugurated."

Limbaugh also remarked, "We are being told that we have to hope he succeeds, that we have to bend over, grab the ankles, bend over forward, backward, whichever, because his father was black, because this is the first black president."

Despite his radical views, Limbaugh has held considerable influence on the actions of the congressional GOP.

He infamously referred to U.S. soldiers in Iraq who were critical of the war as "phony soldiers" – this from a lying draft dodger.

## Old Crooks

Believe it or not, the Japanese are struggling with a crime problem among older people – not as victims, but as perpetrators.

While the 65-plus population in Japan has doubled in the last two decades, the number of crimes committed by those over 65 has increased fivefold.

Often, loneliness is to blame when older residents commit petty crimes like shoplifting, which are largely responsible for the spike, experts say.

The problem is likely to creep into the United States as the population here ages, says Tod Burke, a professor of criminal justice at Radford University in Virginia.

Many older Americans feel isolated if their family moves away and their friends die. They end up stealing, not because they need the item but because they're bored.

If they get caught, they will be communicating with someone, even if it's the police. The percentage of arrests for Americans age 50-plus remained steady between 1997 and 2000. Many petty thefts, particularly those committed by older people, are never reported.

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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

Oh no! Not again! Sen. Clark Jolley, R-Edmond, is pushing legislation to spend up to \$1 million to audit the State Department of Education. The Republican leadership has yet to put in place recommendations resulting from an \$800,000 Corrections Department audit.

**Dart:** To Rep. Mike Ritze, R-Broken Arrow, for his bill to allow everybody to carry a weapon – unconcealed. He's also willing to donate \$10,000 for a Ten Commandments display. In his case, Oklahoma doesn't have a prayer.

The handful of critics of our report on the misuse of federal grant money by the Oklahoma Mental Health Department should read the Feb. 9 issue of Newsweek [page 52] on the voodoo science of brain imaging.

**Laurel:** To MSNBC, flashing a picture of Sen. Jim Inhofe and naming him one of the biggest hypocrites in Congress. If you're going to talk the talk, you should walk the walk.

Rather than operating speed traps, every law enforcement agency in Oklahoma ought to run roadblocks to snare the one in four drivers without insurance. Oklahoma ranks fourth in the nation for such scofflaws.

**Dart:** To Gov. Brad Henry for his proposal to tap millions in Rainy Day Fund interest and state investment interest all for business – this when 3,700 seriously mentally ill are on a waiting list.

Look for the Republican Legislature to opt for 1,000 private prison beds rather than adequately funding the Corrections Department.

**Laurel:** To the Oklahoma Department of Health, holding a series of meetings across the state to hear from minority Oklahomans on their health concerns. They are innumerable.

No wonder OKC's Devon Energy is a superb company to work for. Average annual pay for salaried employees is \$186,882. Hourly workers average \$89,690. [Fortune, Feb. 2]

**Dart:** To Rep. John Trebilcock, R-Broken Arrow, who said if the voter ID requirement becomes law, it would be a good thing to lower the Democratic election turnout.

President Barack Obama is pushing a \$500 million plan to require merit pay and more charter schools. Educators knew a disaster loomed when he named Arne Duncan Secretary of Education.

**Laurel:** To Sen. Jay Paul Gumm for his never-say-die campaign to win insurance coverage of autism. Unfortunately, GOP legislative leaders are a wholly owned subsidiary of the insurance industry.

Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, said Oklahoma would be targeted by terrorists if Guantanamo prisoners are relocated here. Then comes a swarm of black helicopters and flying saucers.

**Dart:** To what passes for an Oklahoma congressional delegation, all voting against the equal pay for women bill [S. 81]. It passed big time and has been signed into law by the President.

We are not now and never have been anti-business. Consider that New York financial companies lost \$35 billion in 2008 but passed out \$18.4 billion in year-end bonuses.

**Laurel:** To Tulsa's Ken Moss, retiring from American Airlines in Tulsa after 42 years on the job. He started at \$3.25 an hour and never missed a day's work.

Thanks to AP's Ron Jenkins reporting, we know Republican state House and Senate leaders now make 601 appointments to boards, agencies and commissions – a clear infringement on the executive branch of government.

**Dart:** To GOP House Speaker Chris Benge, claiming in a Tulsa World op-ed that Republicans have maintained vital state services. What about public education, mental health, corrections and teachers retirement?



Know why American voters are so uninformed? They are the victims of misinformation by 91% of radio talk shows, including druggie Rush Limbaugh and Michael Savage who routinely slurs blacks and gays.

**Laurel:** To new GOP Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, opposed to Rep. Sally Kern's phony bill claiming to protect religious freedom for public school students. It is another attempt to Christianize public education.

You realize how much trouble newspapers are in when the Oklahoman and the Tulsa World start sharing photos, news and selected stories. A mere 14% of Americans now say they get their news from newspapers, while 60% say their source is TV news. [CBS/New York Times Poll]

**Dart:** To the State Chamber of Commerce, still bashing public education and endorsing so-called merit pay. No wonder the chamber represents only 2,000 businesses. There are 1,890 large businesses and 70,973 small ones in Oklahoma. [Small Business Administration]

Barack Obama is only one example of progress in the black community. Those living in poverty have shrunk from 70% to 46%, the black middle class have expanded to 37%, including those earning over \$107,000 a year – up to 17%. – Newsweek [Jan. 26]

**Laurel:** To the hundreds of Tulsa municipal workers who dug down in their own pockets to pay for a full page Tulsa World ad praising U.S. Attorney David O'Meiliea for uncovered corruption in city government.

Too bad the banking lobby is so potent at the Capitol. There were 1,076,612 Oklahoma payday loans from July '07 to June '08. Average borrower took out 9.2 loans, with interest rates up to 500%.

**Dart:** To Senate Education Committee chairman, Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, who says the way Oklahoma handles homeschooling is "perfectly fine." Tell that to the 8-year-old homeschooler who spent a week with his dead mother's body in their apartment.

You want to throw up when Oklahoma Republican leaders say they have improved the lives of working folk. In fact, poverty is up from 12.5% of Oklahomans to 16.6%.

**Laurel:** To President Barack Obama, pledging to halt repeal of the inheritance tax. There is no tax up to \$3.5 million. How hard did Paris Hilton work for that \$55 million?

Talk about a firestorm! Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa, authors SB 430, eliminating the state's 4.5% sales tax exemption for newspapers.

**Dart:** To the lack of real sex education in the public schools. As a result of Frank Keating's abstinence only, the teen birthrate is up 10% from 2005, now ranking fifth nationally – 60 teen births per 1,000 births. [Centers for Disease Control]

Oklahoma County DA David Prater has received the Keith Leftwich Distinguished Service Award from the Fifth District Democratic Party. He has done a remarkable job.

**Laurel:** To the Tulsa World for revealing the cost of being unable to raise taxes in Oklahoma. Fees, permits and licenses have skyrocketed to an annual bite of more than \$62 million.

Oklahoma's Hispanic population continues to soar, with 3,400 more Hispanic students enrolled in public education – now totaling 67,652. Blacks total 69,906, Indians 124,118 and whites 369,447.

**Dart:** To House Speaker Chris Benge and Senate Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, praising a fake report by the Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition. They quote anonymous sources saying Oklahoma tests are skewed. Name one!

The number of American adults who have quit smoking is below 20% for the first time – 19.8 million puffing away. Oklahomans – both young and old – far exceed the national average.

**Laurel:** To the Oklahoma Dental Association, selecting 500 kids from poor families for free fillings, cleanings and crowns.

Santa may still be in the North Pole but his Republican and Democratic elves are busy sprinkling tax cut exemptions across the board – despite a \$900 million budget shortfall. Pure pandering.

Sen. Tom Adelson, D-Tulsa, may run for attorney general. If personality were money, he would be one of the truly needy.

**THE OKLAHOMA Observer**


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# Letters

Editor, The Observer

Just wanted to tell you about something that happened [on Martin Luther King's birthday]:

We were gathering for our production meeting and a few of us were in the room. The boss came through saying he was going out on the production floor to get the stragglers and that one guy, a black guy, wouldn't be here today because he takes off for MLKing Day.

When he left, a couple of guys started "joking" about how there are going to be a lot more holidays just for blacks because of Obama. And how whites would have to work and blacks could stay home with pay. It went on for maybe 15 seconds.

I asked, do you know what tomorrow is going to be? They were all ready for another racist remark.

I said, "It's National Tell a Bigot to Shut the Hell Up Day."

They chuckled until the words caught up to their thought pattern. And it was followed by 45 seconds of total silence.

Oh, well ... if it sticks ... it stinks.

Paul Maxwell  
Choctaw

Editor, The Observer:

Most everyone wants to curtail or prevent abortions. What seems missing is accurate information about what works. Nowhere in the world are abortions prevented by anti-abortion laws. For example, abortions in Mexico are illegal, but Mexico's abortion rate is about twice the rate in the U.S.

Abortions result pretty much exclusively from unplanned pregnancies. Thus, abortions are best prevented by preventing unplanned pregnancies. It's fine for religious denominations and issue groups to decry abortions from their moral perspectives. But why not work hand-in-hand with groups trying to make every pregnancy a planned pregnancy?

If that goal were achieved, every birth would be welcomed, and there would be virtually no abortions.

Nathaniel Batchelder  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

How are your taxes Sen. Tom Coburn, Sen. Jim Inhofe and Rep. Tom Cole?

I think we need to start auditing every congressman's taxes and all those that don't add up, kick them out. In 1984 George Herbert Walker Bush didn't put the sale of his house as income on his taxes and still got elected VP. Ed Meese didn't include his wife's

income on their joint filing and still got to be attorney general.

I wonder if Dick Cheney has paid all his taxes and no one seemed concerned about how much he made at Haliburton after leaving the defense department. Can we investigate Bush's Harken stock sale again?

While we are at it, let's go after George W. Bush retroactively for doing a Blago and giving jobs to completely unqualified contributors.

Karen Webb  
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

I know the U.S. government is really busy trying to clean up the mess that's been made but if something isn't done soon the Medicare fund will be completely looted because they can't negotiate sensible prices.

If anyone doesn't believe the rip-off is going on, they need to see my \$20 C-Pap filter. It's one square inch of filter material not worth 20 cents.

Al Engel  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Jesus House, the only local shelter that provides services exclusively for the mentally ill homeless, is in dire financial straits. Their usual Christmas donations are down by 75% and they can't pay their bills. Lately, 150 people per night have been sheltered.

Visit the shelter located at 1335 W. Sheridan [about five blocks west of Western, just to the north of I-40] to get an idea of what they do. Food and clothing are always welcome. Money is needed more than ever. State operated institutions have drastically reduced aid for the mentally ill so many of them are turned out to the streets without money, adequate clothing or shelter. Cruel.

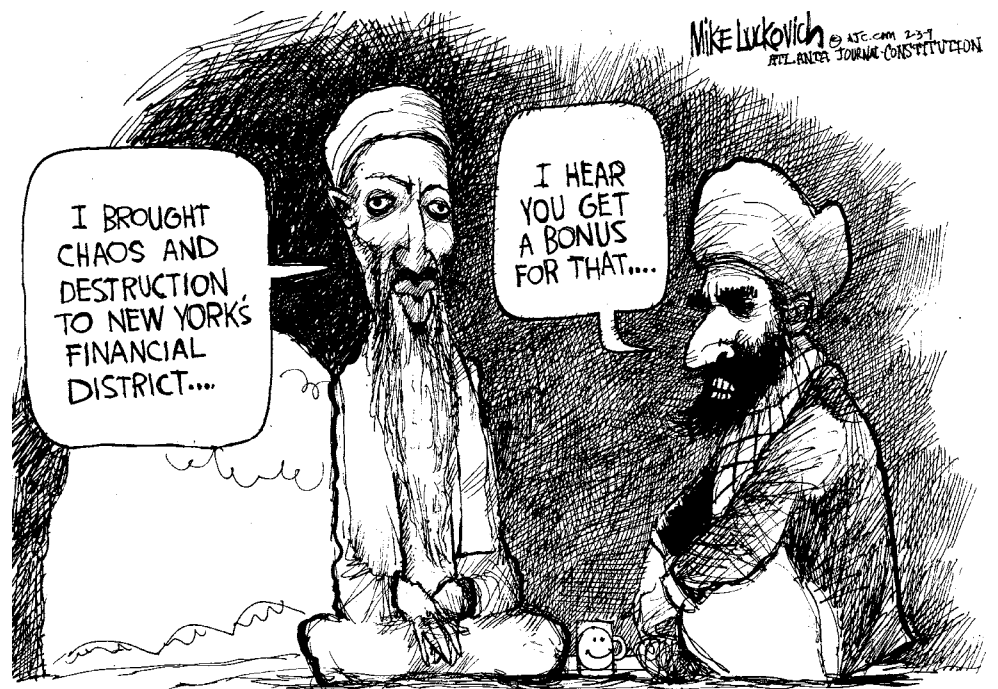
Please mail a check today to The Jesus House, PO Box 60369, OKC, OK 73146 or drop it off at the address above. More information can be found on the web at [Jesushouseokc.org](http://Jesushouseokc.org). You can phone them at 405.232.7164.

Do what you can. Forward this to friends. Small donations are welcome. Call your city councilman/woman to ask for city help. Don't let this shelter fail. Please.

Frank Silovsky  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

So your house is on fire, and instead of calling 911 to summon a fire truck, you call Conoco and ask them to send a gas truck. That's the new wisdom of the Republican Party.



They started one week by whining about not being heard, so President Obama met with them and made concessions on the stimulus bill. Then before the measure could even come up for a vote, the GOP leadership routed a memo instructing all their members to vote against it. They did - 100% of them voted against America and established themselves as a total party-first crowd. There's also the not-too-bright strategy of alienating the White House and the majority in Congress and the Senate. But they're Republicans so they don't think in a logical fashion.

Then they ended the week with another great moment. The GOP is in such a sorry state, no significant members would consider becoming the RNC chairman. They took ballot after ballot, and wound up with Michael Steele. He's Sarah Palin with a tan.

The party that's now shrunk to a trailer park base - that just like Oklahoma couldn't possibly consider supporting an African-American - appointed a black man to head the RNC.

That'll play well.

A few more weeks like that one and the GOP will be well down the path to becoming the modern day Whig Party.

Kenny Belford  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I'm no expert, but I'm having a hard time believing it's the cotton-pickin' - or rather FRUIT pickin' - immigrants who've caused the state of California's finances to go South. I suspect there were larger systemic problems involved.

If it had anything to do with immigrants and healthcare, then how much of the illness had to do with the pesticides to which the immigrants were exposed? Has anyone who is unbiased tried to calculate this figure? I suspect the immigrants are being made into scapegoats for California's economic problems.

Also I suspect there is a whole climate and attitude of exorbitant lifestyle involved, including taking advantage of others and thinking nothing of it. This is just a rumor, but I once heard of a hair stylist who did the hair of movie stars for pictures, and according to what I heard, the guy he was working under was the one who got the credit for his work.

My suspicion is that in our soci-

ety, we've got a legacy of slavery still going on. Whether it is for the sport of it or just what is anyone's guess. Whatever happened to the personal peace of knowing that one has truly earned their keep? If one has and owns what they've personally worked for and paid for, then likely they've also developed the proper priorities and sense of responsibility over it as well, more so than if they've just pilaged or usurped it from someone or somewhere.

Stephanie Hershberger  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

When I first received my notice that it was time to renew my subscription, my first impulse was to let it lapse. Like everyone else these days, I am looking for ways to save money. After all we moved away from Oklahoma over three years ago partly because the state had gone so terribly far to the right in its politics.

My mother whom we moved up here with us recently died, and she was the one who really wanted me to continue subscribing to your paper. But today I was looking through a book of memorabilia that I had put together after my father, Sherman Buckner, died.

In it was a letter from a college journalism instructor at Seminole Junior College [as it was called then] written to my mother. He had gotten acquainted with Dad because my Dad audited some of his classes. It was a very complimentary letter and rather long, but one thing he referred to was a time when Frosty went to the school - I'm guessing to speak in front of his class.

He talked about how Frosty shook Dad's hand warmly and thanked him several times for the support Dad had given him back in the days when he was starting The Observer. Dad placed advertisements with the paper regularly for the insurance company he represented and was a faithful subscriber.

It occurred to me that Dad would be pleased to know that I in some small way helped keep your paper and its progressive writings in Oklahoma even if only a small percentage of the population pay it any heed. I am assuming this must be true based on the returns from Oklahoma during the last election. But it is still my home state, and if my \$40 will help the light of truth burning there, here it is.

Brynda McCoy  
East Alton, IL

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## Frosty's Notebook

# Tsunami

Thanks to a profligate Republican Legislature and a disconnected Democratic governor, Oklahoma is bracing for an economic tsunami.

The Oklahoma Tax Commission has revealed that Gov. Brad Henry and the Legislature face an horrific \$900 million shortfall out of a budget of barely \$7 trillion.

At first the figure was \$309 million. Then the governor said it may be upwards of \$600 million. That's when the bubble burst and the Tax Commission put state government on notice.

Both Democrats and Republicans have lived high on the hog, wallowing in more than \$720 million in tax cuts, constantly bragging that Oklahoma is a shining exception to the national financial meltdown.

While Henry and the Republican Legislature continually ignored the truth, the backlog of vital programs went begging.

You can bet Henry won't lose any sleep, and legislators averaging \$54,000 a year won't be sacrificing.

The brunt will be borne by those least able to cope with program cuts – from education and corrections to welfare and mental health.

Consider just one facet – health. Oklahoma's health care workforce is aging. Currently, 36% of Oklahoma's RNs are aged 50 or over, with a shortage today of 3,000.

Today Oklahoma ranks 44th in the nation in terms of RNs per capita and demand is greater than the size of the health care current workforce.

The elderly consume up to three times more health care than younger age groups and benefit greatly from Department of Human Services programs – from nutrition to residential services.

Oklahomans aged 65 and over will increase by 63% by 2030, requiring more state services at a time when budgets are frozen or slashed.

In 2004, physical therapist jobs exceeded the number of active licensed physical therapists by 16%.

If current trends continue, by 2012 Oklahoma is expected to have a shortage of more than 3,000 nurses, 600 lab technicians, 400 physical therapists, 300 surgical technologists and nearly 200 occupational therapists.

In 2005, Oklahoma's nursing and allied health programs reported 11% of their faculty positions were vacant.

Findings were released by the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development [GCWED].

The Health Care Industry Analysis Report, first of a series of selected industries, assesses supply and demand and provides a gap analysis of the current and future workforce needs of Oklahoma's health care industry.

Repeated attempts to warn the governor and legislative leaders of the folly of their fiscal decisions were ignored. Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, spoke out on the Senate floor and in committee to no avail.

The health care industry study surveyed Oklahoma's hospitals, ambulatory care facilities, residential nursing homes, home health providers and the Oklahoma State Department of Health to determine patterns of demand, along with expected trends over the next five to 10 years.

At the same time, health care educators were surveyed to determine how many new health care workers are graduated each year and to identify barriers to further growth.

As one of Oklahoma's most important programs, health care continues to be a key element in the state's ability to recruit and retain new and expanding businesses.

As new companies and families consider moving to or staying in Oklahoma, they look carefully at the education, health care, safety and economic environ-

## Public Schools

You don't build up Catholic education by tearing down public schools – as Tom Waken did in the Sooner Catholic. Rather than correct his facts and his grammar, I share a few positive facts about public schools [where most Catholic children attend].

- According to the U.S. Department of Education, the United States has 50.1 million students attending public schools.

- Our communities and nation support 87,125 schools in 14,471 school districts.

- Six million children in the public schools are disabled and enrolled in special education. However, many get a fair chance based on whatever gifts they bring to school.

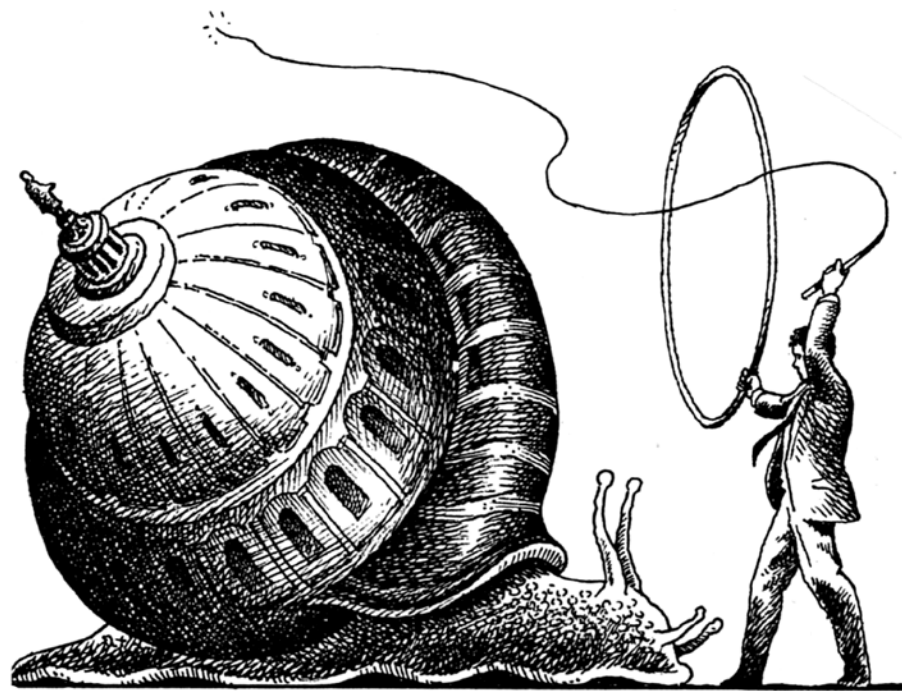
- Special education students are educated at an average cost of \$13,900, nearly twice the average spent on other students.

- More than 9.2 million students are limited in their English proficiency. Two million students speak no English at all.

- Two million students are "latchkey" children. They go home to an empty house.

- More than half a million children are homeless, coming from no permanent address. Many school districts make it difficult for homeless children to register for school when they lack a "legal" address.

- Nearly two million children are abused and neglected. An estimated million children suffer from the effects of lead poisoning, a leading cause of learning disabilities.



ment before committing.

Providing education and health care attuned to the needs of each community across the state is essential to this commitment.

In 2004, health care was the second largest employing industry in Oklahoma, comprising 14% of the state's total employment. Health care provides \$6.5 billion in direct contributions to Oklahoma's Gross State Product.

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education reports that there were more than 11,619 applicants to 113 post-secondary education programs in nursing and allied health.

While 79% [9,193] of those applicants were deemed qualified, only 57% were actually admitted because of limitations in the education system capacity.

"Current health care worker shortages are projected to steadily worsen unless steps are taken today to greatly increase the number of nurses, therapists, and technicians entering health care professions in Oklahoma," according to Phil Berkenbile, state director of Career and Technology Education.

Nobody in state government is talking about the disappearing family practitioner that children and senior citizens are most dependent on for medical care.

The shortage projections included in the report are most likely understated since they do not adjust for:

- 1] the higher demand for health care services needed by aging Baby Boomers,
- 2] the reduced supply of workers due to anticipated retirements from the current health care workforce, or
- 3] the existing need to improve the overall health status of Oklahomans.

Higher education institutions are currently at the limit of their capacity when it comes to producing health care professionals that the state needs.

There is no shortage of applicants to earn degrees, but how do you bring more resources to the table so that we can expand the number of students we can accept into our programs, when the Legislature is cutting budgets?

Oklahoma's health care industry and its educational and economic development partners must develop new and innovative programs to recruit and retain a sufficient number of highly-trained health care workers.

Expanding the health care education pipeline by allocating education funds to solve faculty shortages, and increasing the number of clinical training sites were identified as key to increasing the number of health care workers needed in the state. Fat chance.

## Commandments Of Good Business

1. Never underestimate the importance of money ... It's how business people keep score!

2. Never overestimate the value of money ... cash is important, but sometimes not as important as respect, thanks, integrity, or the thrill of a job well done.

3. You can never have too many friends in business ... Given a choice always do business with a friend. It's the best way to leverage your success.

4. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know" ... People will respect you much more and will always place more weight on what you do say ... because they know you're right.

5. Speak less ... No one ever put their foot in their mouth when they were not speaking. Worse, if you are speaking, you can't be listening, and we always learn much more from listening.

6. Keep your promises, the big ones and the little ones ... both the starting point and the staying point in any business relationship is trust ... not suspicion. Someone who does what he says he will do will always succeed over a person who doesn't keep his word.

7. Every transaction has a life of its own ... Some need tender loving care, some need to be hurried away.

8. Commit yourself to quality from day one ... It's better to do nothing at all than to do something badly.

9. Be nice to people ... nice gets nice, and all things being equal, courtesy can be very persuasive.

10. Don't hog the credit ... share it. People will work with you and for you if they are recognized. They will also work against you if they are not.

– Thanks to Mark McCormack for this jewel

# Kern's Religious Bill Is Bad For Schools

*Editor's Note: This analysis of HB 1001, the Religious Viewpoints Anti-discrimination Act authored by Republican Reps. Sally Kern and Mike Reynolds, was provided by the legal staff of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.*

HB 1001 would lead to lawsuits against school districts, interfere with school administration, and harm students' religious liberty.

The bill is unnecessary to protect student expression of religious viewpoints, because most of the provisions of the bill already exist in current law.

It sets forth rights already guaranteed by the U.S. and Oklahoma Constitutions and federal and Oklahoma state law, as well as recommendations made in federal guidelines.

## CONFUSING AND CONTROVERSIAL

HB 1001 is confusing, controversial, and irresponsible. Because so much of the bill restates current law, it may seem innocuous.

The bill, however, is far from innocuous. Section 3 of the bill and Articles II and III of the Model Policy will likely create enormous problems for schools.

Charles Stafford, president of the Denton, TX, school board said, "What I really think is the truth here – the Legislature kind of handed the school districts a hand grenade with the pin pulled ... It doesn't matter which way you throw the thing, someone is going to get hurt."

Douglas Laycock, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School and one of the foremost First Amendment scholars in the United States, said, "This is so irresponsible ... it's going to cause legal problems for districts across the state, and they're going to be stuck with the lawsuits."

## WHAT THE SCHOOLS MUST DO

According to the Model Policy set forth in Section 7 of the bill, schools will:

- Decide at which official school functions students will speak;
- Determine the eligible speakers and set a policy to select student speakers from among those eligible;
- Set the time limit for the speaker;
- Dictate the subject matter for the student speaker;
- Declare that some types of speech are forbidden.

Section 7 also says that schools will disclaim endorsement and sponsorship of students' speech.

This disclaimer, however, won't work. Any reasonable observer – aware of the broad context of the policy [including the disclaimer], of the official school events where students speak, and of the schools' intimate involvement in what the students say – would easily conclude that the students' speech should be attributed to the school.

The bill states that if a school were to adopt the Model Policy, the school would



be in compliance with this law. Adopting the Model Policy, however, would not shield the school from lawsuits brought under the Constitution.

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits schools from taking any action that has the effect of endorsing religion and they may not coerce anyone to participate in religious exercise.

Because everything students say under the Model Policy would be deemed to be sponsored by schools, when students pray, proselytize, or quote the Bible, the school will have violated the Establishment Clause.

Since students are required to attend school and school events, the rest of the student body becomes a captive audience to whatever the student speaker says – and therefore if the student speaker prays, the rest of the students will be coerced to participate in religious exercise.

## ALL STUDENTS ARE TO BE PROTECTED

Schools have a responsibility to protect all students' religious liberties – not just those who hold "positions of honor" and are chosen to speak.

If a chosen speaker concludes the morning announcements with a prayer to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, how will Jewish, Hindu, or Muslim students feel? As important, how will their parents react? Will they sue the school?

What if a Wiccan student gets elected to be student council secretary and he

See **SCHOOLS** Page 12

# Gay Minister Touches Off Capitol Firestorm

*Editor's Note: These remarks were delivered at a State Capitol press conference after an incidence of bigotry in the House of Representatives erupted over whether a gay preacher's remarks would be printed in the House journal.*

My name is Robin Meyers, and I am the minister of Mayflower UCC Church in Oklahoma City, and I speak today on behalf of my colleague in the ministry, Scott Jones – who is a gifted and outstanding minister of the gospel.

I find what happened in this House to be not just disturbing, but appalling. It is also exactly the kind of national publicity that continues to render a verdict on Oklahoma that makes us the object of shame and the butt of jokes in the eyes of people who might otherwise consider living here and working here.

To his credit, Scott Jones did not hide his sexual orientation from the elected officials that he was praying for. This was not "don't ask don't tell," and yet there would have been no vote taken on whether to accept this prayer for the record if Scott had merely kept the fact that he is a gay man a secret. Perhaps he did not do this because the Bible commands us not to bear false witness.

## A VERY MOVING PRAYER

His prayer was very moving, especially when you consider that it was delivered by someone who has been the object of discrimination and homophobia all his life.

His prayer was not specifically Christian, but he knew that he was offering it on behalf of a House that is overwhelming Christian – and must know, therefore, that Jesus had a reputation for speaking truth to power on behalf of those who have been left out, forgotten or marginalized.

One can only wonder what might happen if Jesus offered a prayer in this House, an itinerant unmarried Jewish man who was hardly a poster child for family values.

That this prayer should have been questioned because of what someone thinks of the person offering it moves us into strange and dangerous waters.

## PUT PRAYER TO A VOTE IN THE FUTURE?

Shall we vote on all subsequent prayers based on what we think we know about the one offering it, or shall we, in humility, leave that up to God?

Just imagine, for example, what would have happened if any of the 20 legisla-

See **FIRESTORM** Page 7

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# Bipartisan Support For Grocery Relief

Two bipartisan bills for the 2009 legislative session would provide financial relief from the rising cost of groceries for families in Oklahoma that are struggling.

HB 2204, sponsored by Rep. John Trebilcock, R-Broken Arrow, and SB 567, sponsored by Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, would help hard-pressed Oklahoma families by increasing the state's Sales Tax Relief credit, an existing tax credit intended to offset the sales tax on groceries for low- and moderate-income households. The credit is commonly referred to as the grocery tax credit.

## WHAT THE BILLS WOULD DO

The bills, as introduced, would accomplish three things:

- Increase the amount of the Sales Tax Relief credit from \$40 to \$60 per household member for those who are currently eligible for the credit [households up to \$50,000 for tax filers claiming a dependent child, senior, or person with disability status, or \$20,000 for others];
- Expand eligibility for a partial credit of \$30 per household member for households with income between current eligibility;
- Expand eligibility levels of \$60,000 or \$30,000, depending on household status; and
- Index eligibility levels annually to inflation beginning in 2011.

## FOOD INSECURITY RATE HIGH

Oklahoma has among the nation's highest rates of food insecurity. In spite of that, Oklahoma is one of only 16 states to levy a tax on groceries.

Since low and moderate income families spend a greater share of their income on groceries than do wealthier families, taxing groceries is considered regressive.

Some legislators, including Trebilcock, have previously fought to fully repeal the sales tax on groceries. But this year, in the face of tough economic times, he is proposing a targeted way to help Oklahomans most in need.

"Each year I have filed bills to repeal the grocery sales tax. However, given this year's difficult budget situation, it is not practical to take that revenue source away from the state," Trebilcock said.

"Increasing the grocery tax credit is the best available way of providing for Oklahomans who need it most."

## FOOD PRICES SOARING

Food prices have risen more than 6% in the past year alone. This at the same time that people are feeling the pinch of the national recession.

"The current economic downturn has placed growing demands on food pantries and other social assistance providers," Rice said.



"In a time when so many families are struggling, increasing the grocery tax credit is one thing we can do to help those in greatest need."

A growing coalition of organizations and individuals representing the faith community, social service providers, seniors and others have joined together to promote a boost in the grocery tax credit.

"We know this will be a tough budget year and there will be competing demands on scarce resources," said Matt Guillory, executive director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, a member of the coalition.

"To the extent that targeted tax cuts are part of the discussions during the upcoming session, we fervently hope that increasing the amount of the grocery tax credit and raising eligibility will be a priority."

The amount of the credit has been unchanged at \$40 since it was enacted in 1990, and eligibility was last expanded more than a decade ago.

For more information, contact Lindsay Lancaster at the Oklahoma Policy Institute via e-mail [Lancaster@okpolicy.org](mailto:Lancaster@okpolicy.org) or by calling 405.365.7273

# Let Me Tell About The John Young I Knew

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

I'm responding to the item in the Feb. 10 Observerscope which said: "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."

Yes, I remember John Young. He was one of the state Senate's strongest opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment. So the Oklahoma Women's Political Caucus thought a singing telegram delivered by a woman dressed as a Playboy bunny might do the trick.

On the day before the Senate ERA vote in 1982, the singing bunny went to Young's office and to the tune of *Bye, Bye Blackbird*, sang:

*We've packed our bags,  
We're on our way,  
Since we don't have the ERA  
It's 'hello, John Young.'  
We know you love us one and all*

*Thin or fat  
Short or tall  
We know you John.  
We are here to say,  
'We Understand.'  
Still there's one more thing  
We want to hand you:  
If you won't let us earn our way  
We'll live with you and share your pay.  
'Hello, John Young.'*

Young left his office immediately, but the Associated Press printed the song and the world "heard" it.

- The author, a former Democratic state representative [1986-96], lives in Oklahoma City

# FIRESTORM

From Page 6

tors who voted to reject this prayer, and the 17 who abstained because they are taking cover, had been asked by Scott Jones to pray at his church?

Whereupon, after the prayer, someone in Scott's congregation, which is predominantly gay, called for a vote on whether to accept the prayer since the one offering it was a heterosexual, and thus in the minority, not to mention a symbol of a culture dominated by homophobia and acts of violence against the gay community. Who are we to reject one another's prayers?

## A VIOLATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

What the state did was to set itself up as the arbiter of the "approved prayer," and in so doing violated the separation of church and state in the most obvious possible manner - by voting!

My sense is that there is not a lot of love lost on the ACLU around here, but you could not have given them a more open and shut case of the state interfering in the free exercise of religion.

That is not the job of an elected official, and you were hired by us to do the people's business, not God's business.

Years ago, a Baptist minister in Moore, Oklahoma claimed that, "God does not

hear the prayers of a Jew." Which one can only assume would also include Jesus the Jew.

## THEOLOGICAL BACKWARDNESS

That comment has been repeated, published, and used countless times as an example of theological backwardness, much to the shame of Oklahoma.

And now we have done it again. We have proved once more that there are some among us who continue to believe that there is something endearing about ignorance.

I call upon someone in authority in this House to apologize to my colleague, Scott Jones, and to the people of Oklahoma, who have been insulted once again.

We live in uncertain and difficult times. Oklahomans are losing their jobs and are fearful about the future. I, for one, don't want my elected officials spending another moment debating the efficacy of a prayer offered on their behalf as they go about the job we sent them here to do - serving the people of Oklahoma who elected them - and that means all the people. We are all Oklahomans, so ...

Judge not, lest you be judged. Thank you.

# **What To Do About A Legislature Run Amok?**

**By Darla Reynolds-Sparks**

Do you think the useless inhabitants of our state Legislature lie awake nights creating new ways to punish us for residing in their land?

Perhaps it's the publicity they receive in the publications around our country every time the gavel goes down on a new session.

State Rep. Sally Kern and her pistols – not to mention her idiotic ranting and raving – is always worth a notice in national publications ... usually by the cartoonists.

What a wonderful picture that presents to the readers across the country and sometimes the world.

## **PADLOCKING THE COURTHOUSE**

Now, those politicians are promoting another tort bill to protect the attorneys, most of whom have nine ways to Sunday to protect themselves while many of them scalp the little guys with so-called tort laws.

Do you know anyone lately who had a legitimate reason for being reimbursed for some illegal, unwarranted and/or harmful event, bringing suit in this state?

We already have dozens of laws protecting the BIGGIES and precious few rights left for an injured little person in this society, so here they go again with their nonsense, adding to an already bloated tome of laws.

## **WHAT VOTER FRAUD?**

Then, there is the other idiotic piece of flotsam trying to pass for reasonable governing: the introduction of voter ID requirements to offset all the voter fraud being perpetrated in the minds of those neanderthal Repugs.

Would someone please name that guy that voted twice? I'd like to meet him/

# **Dear Sen. Inhofe, The Earth Really Is Round**

*An Open Letter To Sen. Jim Inhofe:*

Your calling President Obama's EPA policy "thuggery" in his giving states' rights to California to protect its air quality might not help Oklahoma receive its fair share of his stimulus plan package. Now is the time to firmly put hand over mouth.

Cool the hot partisan blasts. Explain to the president that Oklahoma is 48th to 50th in categories ranging from spending on public education, roads and bridges to many public health categories such as infant mortality, life expectancy, incarceration rates [federal funds for treatment programs], lowest per capita physician ratio, an F in tobacco prevention, high smoking death rates, an alarming number of youths smoking/drinking and meth use.

Since Oklahoma obviously needs help, ask the president to weigh Oklahoma's humanitarian needs in deciding which states get how much per capita of the stimulus plan package.

All your public service life, many have appreciated your primary missions: Guns, God, anti-Gays, Prayer in Public Schools, Cut Taxes, Cut Taxes and grow the economy [and the rich] ... give it all a break for now.

Get all of Oklahoma's congressional delegation, and go ask the president very nicely to forgive the \$20 million to \$30 million the state owes the federal government for Sardis Lake – a small drop in his federal stimulus bucket.

And ask the president to require Oklahoma's biggest delinquent payers of 'fees

her. Would someone also explain to me why he/she wasn't prosecuted for fraud – if, indeed, there was a case [or rampant cases] of fraudulent voting? Who, in our justice system, didn't do their duty by bringing this criminal to answer for that crime?

This is a farce and the legislators supporting this idea are not even trying to put a decent face on their true intentions.

They simply want to make it more difficult for the poor, for the homeless, for the elderly, for the minorities to obtain an ID, thus keeping them from the voting booth.

It's an old, old ploy that needs to be buried and we should run those culprits out of the governing body.

## **THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE**

May I suggest that if their unwarranted ideas keep making it into actual law we form volunteers to see that every citizen that needs an ID gets one with our help?

Also, every citizen that is barred from our courts by reasons of ridiculous laws without substance of proof could have access to financial support from donations of \$1-\$2 to obtain their fair day in court?

If I had any power I would use it to tar and feather those Cretins and run them out of town on a rail – if the Oklahoma Department of Transportation wasn't still living in the days of the muscle cars and highway construction minus maintenance funds and if we had a user-friendly rail system like other states have!

*– The author lives in Yukon*

legally owed in lieu of property taxes' to pay up. Yes, ask the President of the United States to order the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Department of Defense to pay up years of past-due, hundreds of millions that could be used to help Oklahoma's broken bridges, crumbling schools and poor counties.

All Corps of Engineer's lakes and reservoirs and military base lands were taken off needy counties property tax rolls when built, but promised fees never were paid in full.

Senator, get productive for Oklahoma: Open this long overdue can of worms – have the Government Accountability Office audit all Southwest Power Administration contacts.

This hasn't been done in over 50 years – Oklahoma-produced hydroelectric power is being given away to special interests, according to whistler-blowers at the Southwest Power Administration.

"Sweetheart deals" are wasting our water resources.

And explain to me how all us unpatriotic, no-values liberals caused unnecessary war, a \$10 trillion national debt, torture, unemployment, looting by Wall Street, taxpayers' buying a \$36,000 commode and bad peanut butter!

Please reply.

*Sincerely,*

*Bob Jackman, Tulsa*

P.S.: The earth is round and global warming is real.

# **There's Something [Unbelievable] About Mary**

**By Wanda Jo Stapleton**

U.S. Rep. Mary Fallin's latest column documents her "pro-life" stance by telling how she campaigned for elective office during pregnancy, had a baby, and won an election, all at the same time. Bravo!

What concerns me is the contrast between her dedication to honor the unborn and her votes against children already born and against their families.

For example, Fallin voted against expanding health insurance coverage to 55,000 low-income children in Oklahoma and four million nationwide, according to Families USA.

She said "no" to expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP] and called the expansion "a poorly disguised step toward socialized medicine." Apparently she doesn't know the difference between "socialized medicine" and single-payer insurance.

## **WEALTH CONCENTRATION, NOT SOCIALISM**

Actually, in this country, we have just the opposite of socialism. It's called wealth concentration at the top of the wage scale.

According to IRS data, from 1971 to 2008 income tax rates for the lowest wage bracket fell only 4%, from 14% to 10%. But rates for the highest wage bracket fell from 70% to 35%, a 50% drop during the same period.

Yet, on Jan. 10, 2007, Fallin voted "no" on raising the minimum wage above \$5.15 per hour, where it had been since 1997.

## **OPPOSED EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN**

In addition, Fallin voted "no" against the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the first bill President Obama signed into law with these words:

"Lilly Ledbetter didn't set out to be a trailblazer or a household name. She was just a hard worker who did her job – and did it well – for nearly two decades before discovering that for years, she was paid less than her male colleagues for

the very same work. Over the course of her career, she lost more than \$200,000 in salary, and even more in pension and Social Security benefits – losses she still feels today ... but equal pay is by no means a woman's issue. It's a family issue."

This Act became necessary because of a recent Supreme Court decision that said Ledbetter could not collect back pay because she didn't report it when it first occurred, even though she didn't learn about it for two decades.

## **FALLIN CEDED POWER TO BIG PHARMA**

Finally, Fallin voted against our elders when she opposed giving Medicare the authority to negotiate with drug manufacturers for lower prices, just as the Veterans Administration does.

That means that Congress turned pricing of prescription drugs over to the pharmaceutical companies and ordered Medicare to pay whatever was asked.

In my opinion, the abortion issue discussed in Fallin's latest column is a "wedge" issue – an issue used to stir up our emotions and turn our attention away from votes that harm our children, their parents, and grandparents.

*– The author, a former Democratic state representative [1986-96], lives in Oklahoma City*

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# **Time To Eliminate Oil And Gas Rebates**

*Editor's Note: The following remarks were made by Tulsa multi-billionaire George Kaiser at a rebate hearing held by the state House Appropriations and Budget Committee.*

I'm George Kaiser. I was born in Oklahoma and have lived here two-thirds of a century, which means almost two-thirds of the state's existence. [I suspect that there are few in this room who can make that statement.]

I have been active in the oil and gas exploration and production business for more than 40 years.

As will become abundantly clear, however, I am not here today representing KaiserFrancis Oil Co. In fact, I may lose my day job as a result of my testimony.

Instead, I'm here representing the George Kaiser Family Foundation and the struggling Oklahomans that foundation serves, and indirectly all Oklahoma taxpayers who see their taxes rise because of special interest handouts.

## **THREE PRIMARY QUESTIONS**

It seems to me that there are three primary questions you are attempting to address in considering the validity of this public policy:

1) Does the tax rebate truly stimulate a significant amount of economic activity in the state that would not otherwise occur?

2) Who pays for the tax rebate and who receives it? Is that an appropriate transfer payment for state government – what was called during the Presidential campaign “income redistribution.”

3) Are there alternate uses for these monies – tax cuts or expenditures – which would better serve the taxpayers of Oklahoma?

We will discuss those three issues in our brief presentation today and will reserve time to respond to your questions afterward.

## **REFUSING REBATE IS A NOVELTY**

Perhaps the first question on your mind is ... Why is a beneficiary of this government program speaking in opposition? That must be a novelty. You don't hear very often, “please take back your gift.”

I think I am the only one speaking here today in opposition to my own financial self-interest.

I am speaking in opposition because it seems very clear to me, as a reasonably good business analyst, and someone who makes these decisions every day of the week, that the tax rebates we are considering cause almost no wells to be drilled in Oklahoma that would not otherwise be drilled.

This is particularly disturbing because Oklahoma has allowed many serious statewide problems to fester for lack of funding.

## **MULTIPLIER EFFECT OF ELIMINATION**

Right now, more than ever, an additional dollar of state funding could gain a multiplier effect from federal matches for infrastructure or healthcare or education and private matches for higher education.

Right now, people are hurting and the people most hurting are not oil and gas producers.

Unlike many oil and gas producers, people at lower income levels live in Oklahoma and spend all of their money here and that money multiplies its way through the economy faster and more effectively than subsidies to more advantaged people or to shareholders of corporations who may live elsewhere.

But the first question is whether the handout even accomplishes its purpose of stimulating additional economic activity in the state.

## **REBATE HAS NO IMPACT ON DRILLING**

I think that Professor Agee made a very persuasive case, based both in economic theory and through the results of his survey to oil and gas producers, that the \$100 million dollars or so per year that the state has been giving to oilmen has had little or no impact on drilling in our state.

As an oil and gas producer myself and as sponsor of several other companies, I can say unequivocally that the rebates in this legislation have never influenced our decision to drill or rework or restore any well in this state or the many other states in which we operate.

And the reason isn't that we do not understand the benefit from the rebate; we are happy to file for and receive the gift, and we do so.

## **INCOME STREAM UNAFFECTED**

The problem is that the rebate amounts to only about 3% or less of the present value of the income stream from any new well or workover. Yet the variables that make a difference in that decision have a range of error that is 10 to 100 times as large.

As compared to the tax rebate of 6%, that lasts for about two to four years, or about 2% to 3% of the present value of the project, our oil and gas reserve estimates have a range of error of 100% or more, costs could be 20% or 30% higher or lower and oil and gas prices have been 250% to 300% as high, just six months ago.

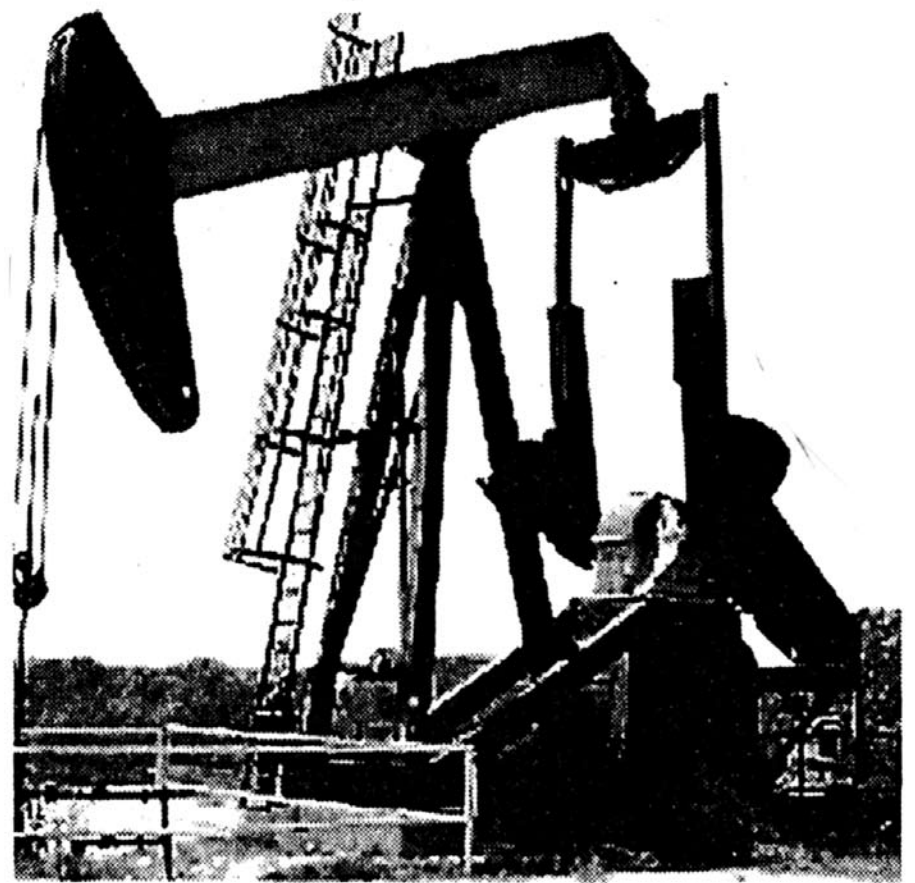
Those factors and others control the decision to drill, not a 3% present value tax saving. Any producer who tells you differently is being disingenuous.

## **WHAT IT TAKES TO DRILL A WELL**

As another way to think about it – to justify drilling a well, you have to expect to recover 200% to 300% of your drilling cost to pay for operating costs, risk, return on investment and so forth.

The finding and development cost for the two largest Oklahoma-based oil and gas companies was last reported at \$1.94 and \$2.33 per mcf, respectively, and that cost has gone down recently.

They can hedge their gas sales in the commodity futures market at about \$7



per mcf or about 300% of cost. Three percent just doesn't move the needle one way or the other.

During the current credit crisis, it is even clearer that this tax rebate does not incentivize any wells to be drilled that would not otherwise be drilled. The true constraint on drilling is the availability of funding. Oil companies have plenty of additional attractive prospects to drill.

## **TAX REBATES NOT THE PROBLEM**

The lack of credit and the glut of gas supplies are suppressing drilling, not the existence or lack of a tax rebate that increases their margin by a few percent.

Who pays for this handout? All of your constituents, the taxpayers of Oklahoma.

And who receives it? Even the most hardscrabble oil and gas producer or working interest owner is in far better shape right now than the average taxpayer in the state.

And even among people who have interests in oil and gas, this subsidy goes to the top end:

- Royalty owners don't participate; they are excluded from the program altogether.
- Small producers don't get help because they have been excluded from the program in recent years by the price cap.
- It doesn't go to the operators who restore wells or work over wells because they have been excluded by the price cap.
- The vast majority of the money goes to the upper end of the income spectrum, including especially out of state passive investors, rather than small Oklahoma independent producers.

Why are we making this gift from our taxpayers to out of state investors?

This is truly a Robin Hood bill – it takes from the poor and gives to the rich.

Are there higher and better uses for the \$300 million we have given to oil and gas producers over the past four years – either tax cuts to other taxpayers, stimulation of other business activity or funding of high priority state needs?

## **REBATE GIFT COULD BETTER BE SPENT**

Oklahoma ranks in the bottom 10 among states in most areas of economic development and government services. Clearly we need to spend our money wisely; is this the highest and best use of a state resource?

Through federal and private matching funds, we could make this \$75 million per year worth more than \$200 million, especially through Medicaid federal matching funds, and then the saved money could either be reinvested in healthcare or used for tax cuts or other state purposes.

Using it for tax cuts or services for the middle class and working poor will do more for our economy than giving tax cuts to producers and out of state investors.

What could these monies pay for?

- About a quarter of this year's projected budget deficit; or
- A corporate income tax rate cut of about 1.3%; or
- A personal income tax rate cut of about .4%; or
- Tuition reduction of about \$600 for the average college student or more than enough for full funding of this year's Oklahoma Promise program increase; or
- Healthcare for more than 125,000 children who do not now have insurance coverage; or
- A pay raise for school teachers of \$1,300 each; or
- Government matching funds for up to 150 of the new professorships at our colleges and universities which have pending private contributions that can be withdrawn if not matched; or
- It could be used to fund more than the entire cost of the Child Support division at the Department of Human Services, which takes care of foster children who have been abandoned or are at risk of abuse, or it could more than double the size of that program; or

See REBATES Page 10

## BOOKS

# How Single Women Helped Conquer The West

By Mike Nobles

### STAKING HER CLAIM

*Women Homesteading the West*  
By Marcia Meredith Hensley  
High Plains Press  
303 pages, \$19.95

This is a unique book for at least two reasons. First, it is one of the first well-researched, highly-readable accounts of the perseverance and courage of single women homesteaders at the beginning of the 20th Century in what was viewed as the less desirable agricultural areas in the West: Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, Idaho, Utah, North Dakota and South Dakota.

There is a plethora of books about married women accompanying their husbands west but a scant few dealing with single women.

Second, it is unique in that it's written by a former Oklahoman who still has strong ties in the state. More about that later.

### SCANT MATERIAL ON SINGLE WOMEN

I have long been a student of western history and an admirer of the homesteaders that moved west to begin a new life. I have read numerous accounts of the women who accompanied their husbands on the trek and made substantial contributions to the effort in less than ideal circumstances.

However, I must admit I did not know about the amazing stories of single women homesteaders and their almost unbelievable experiences and accomplishments in a world dominated by men.

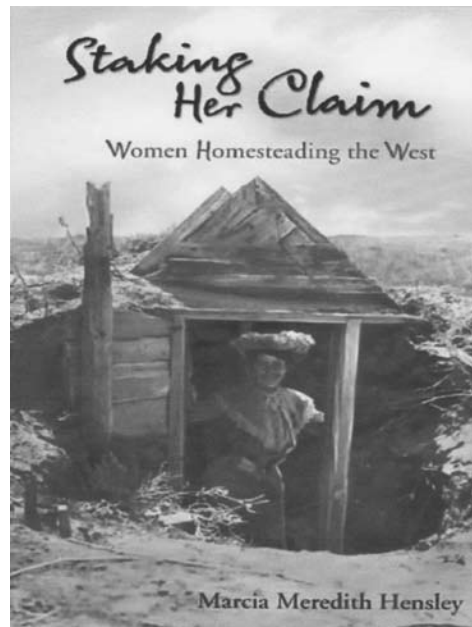
This book is an anthology of the stories of 24 single women homesteaders who largely have gone unnoticed in the literature of the era.

The author did not find one diary written by single women homesteaders but through diligent research did find their stories in long forgotten, out-of-print books, musty periodicals, local histories maintained by small communities, and written and oral histories maintained by libraries and individuals.

### MORE THAN A 'MAN'S' WORLD

The writings date from the early 1900s to the late 1960s and the book includes chapters on magazine articles, memoirs, personal correspondence, and historical accounts that together provide an amazing story of the courage, perseverance, and contributions of these little known, single women pioneers.

The book helps dispel the traditional, myth-inspired image of the West being a "man's" world and highlights the indispensable role of single women in the



development of the region.

This book will be the standard by which future books on the subject, and there will be more, is judged. It will make you proud, male or female, of the accomplishments of these true settlers of the West.

### AUTHOR'S OKLAHOMA ROOTS

Now, a bit about the author. Marcia Meredith Hensley attended Tulsa Public Schools, graduating from Edison High School in 1960. She attended both the University of Tulsa and the University of Oklahoma, earning a B.A. in English from TU in 1964. She earned an MA in American and English Literature from TU in 1966.

She taught English at Edison High School as well as adult education for Tulsa Public Schools.

From 1975 until 1983 she taught English-related courses at Oral Roberts University.

She is an excellent example of the highly talented writers that have roots in Oklahoma. I have said before, and reiterate here, that I believe Oklahoma has produced some writing talent equal to any in the world.

They may not always get the recognition deserved but that does not take away from the talent evident to any discerning reader. Marcia Hensley is exhibit A in such a crowd.

This book will make you proud.

- The author, cofounder of A Gathering of Writers, lives in Tulsa

## REBATES

From Page 9

- This liberated funding could put 3,500 additional slashers, rapists and investment bankers in jail to protect society;

- Or how many other purposes can we all think of that are more appropriate uses of government resources than this tax rebate?

### MEDICAID DOLLARS COULD BE TRIPLED

From a pure yield standpoint, the highest and best of these possible uses would be to better fund Medicaid because that funding would be almost tripled to \$214 million, through federal government matching funds.

The question seems pretty simple: Would your constituents who are not in this room prefer that this state money be given to us oil and gas producers and out-of-state investors, with little or no additional economic activity occurring in Oklahoma?

Or would they prefer lower taxes, better healthcare for them and their kids, reduction in college tuition, higher pay for school teachers and more criminals behind bars?

I said at the beginning that we would restrict our comments to the three central questions but we'd be perfectly willing to respond to questions on some of the other related issues that have sometimes been raised, such as:

Does this tax subsidy interfere with normal market forces?

Are taxes in other states lower - when you add gross production tax rates to ad valorem tax rates - and does that influence budget allocations or do companies instead invest where the drilling opportunities are best?

### MORE COULD GO TO SMALL PRODUCERS

Are there ways to modify the statute so that it is better focused on stimulating economic activity that would not otherwise occur and more of it would go to Oklahoma small producers?


But, for now, let me just restate the conclusions that seem obvious to us from our consideration of the matter.

This oil and gas gross production tax rebate does not stimulate a significant amount of economic activity in the state that would not otherwise occur.

The rebate is by all of the taxpayers of Oklahoma and the benefit is received by investors in oil companies, many of whom are out-of-state shareholders in large corporations.

The amount of money saved by eliminating or restricting this tax rebate could better benefit Oklahomans through general tax cuts or could be matched with federal or private dollars and meet some very pressing needs in this state during the worst depression in even my long lifetime.

People are hurting. Let's give the taxpayer a break during these difficult times and eliminate or limit this government largesse.



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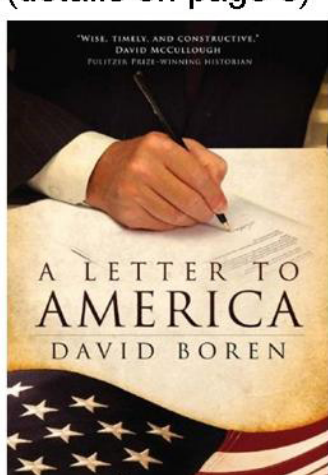
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# GOP: 'Poor Losers' Or 'Proper Guardians'?

By Danny M. Adkison

The British publication *The Economist*, which seems to always know what is going on in America before Americans do, noted recently that in spite of the inaugural love-in, it was already "politics as usual" in Washington, DC.

That assessment was based partially on the obvious: the initial vote in the House of Representatives on President Obama's stimulus package. Every Republican in the House [along with 11 Democrats] voted against the package. The only reasonable explanation for that vote was if Republicans were instructed by their party leaders to vote against the Obama proposal.

Obama made *The Economist's* description official when, just a few days later, he took the gloves off. The President did this by making the case that his rather decisive win over Republican Sen. John McCain amounted to a mandate.

## DOES OBAMA HAVE A MANDATE?

Is the President's assertion that he has a mandate accurate?

Simply put, a mandate occurs when one candidate runs on the platform of doing "this" while the other runs on the pledge of doing "that." The election decides not only who wins, but also what is to be done by the winner.

The Framers actually asserted that the system they designed would work because of the notion of politicians carrying out voter mandates. Here's how:

First, the Framers argued that only "distinguished" individuals could win election. This type of individual would be the type that would want to follow through on the promises he made during the campaign.

Second, the winner of an election would feel gratitude to the voters for the majority having placed their trust in him. Thus, out of gratitude for this trust the winner would want to fulfill his promises.

## PRIDE, VANITY PART OF EQUATION

The third reason the Framers believed politicians would fulfill their promises relied on what might be called the "dark side" of human nature. Winners of elections would want to do what they promised because of pride and vanity. Politicians like being members of their exclusive club.

Even "bad" types will behave if it keeps them in office [or, if you're a former governor of Illinois and your last name is Blagojevich, that you won't get caught], enjoying the attention and trappings the office provides.

The fourth reason is what the Framers considered to be the primary check on politicians: elections. Terms of office are like probation. As long as politicians do what they should, they get to stay; otherwise, there are usually plenty of people wanting to take their place.

Finally, politicians have to live under the same conditions as voters. They don't want to foul up since they and their families live under the government they create.

The French political theorist Robert Michels thought that in any organization [including government] those in a position of leadership would eventually be out of step with those they were representing. His theory has come to be known as

# Partisan Divide: The Disloyal Opposition

By Froma Harrop

Barack Obama never guaranteed he would end partisan rancor in Washington. He said he'd try.

The assumption was that Republicans might want to work with Democrats to reach shared goals. Passing a stimulus plan to stop the economic freefall would seem an easy place to start.

Wrong, wrong, wrong. Although Republicans surely understand the urgency of slapping paddles on the economy's stopped heart, they would like to go out for a smoke first and score some partisan points.

Thus, Senate Republicans recently spent the weekend poisoning the public's feelings toward the stimulus package and offering the same economic snake oil that drove the economy into the gutter.

## MORE CORPORATE TAX BREAKS?

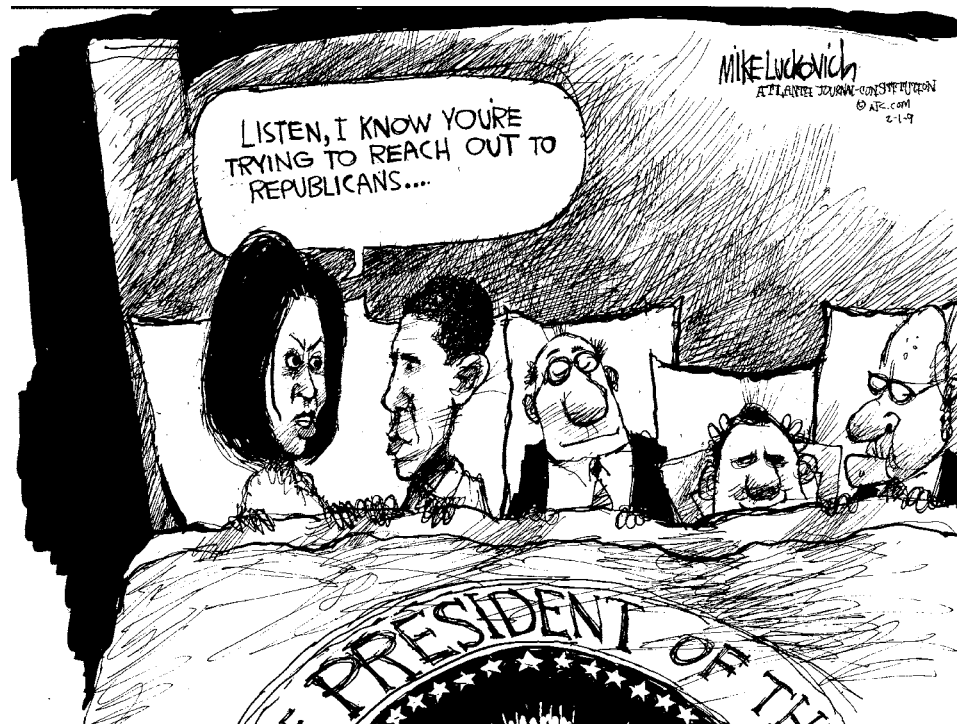
Yeah, what we need is another tax break for American companies that take their business overseas. So insisted Rep. Mike Pence, an Indiana Republican, on NBC's Meet the Press.

On the same program, Republican Sen. John Ensign of Nevada noted that Japan passed six stimulus bills, "none of which brought their economy out of the severe recession that it was in." The real flaw in Japan's approach was canceling out the stimulus by raising taxes at the same time. The current stimulus plan cuts taxes.

Unhappy that states might get a big chunk of stimulus money, Ensign wags his finger at their "bloated" spending. He seems to forget that unlike Washington, states have to balance their budgets. And so when there's a shortfall, they can't issue Treasury bills and print the money to repay them. They have to fire police and-or raise taxes, which is de-stimulating.

## MAVERICK MISSES POINT AGAIN

On CBS' Face the Nation, Arizona Sen. John McCain called the legislation "generational theft." He went on, "I know America needs a stimulus, we need tax cuts, we need to spend money on infrastructure and other programs that will put people to work."



the "iron law of oligarchy."

## THE MYTH OF MANDATES?

He would not have much faith in political mandates. Neither did the Anti-Federalists, those who opposed ratification of the proposed Constitution of 1787. They argued that while the few [aristoi] never sleep, the many [demos] are seldom awake. If that were the case, mandates would be mostly myth.

Most political scientists think that mandates in American politics are rare. They are not, however, extinct. Since ratification of the Twenty-Second Amendment limiting an elected president to being re-elected once, only two elected presidents seeking re-election lost to challengers: Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush.

Carter ran for office in 1976 with two primary themes – ethics ["I'll never lie to you"] and efficiency; yet, several of his closest advisors [Ham Jordan and Bert Lance] tarnished his high ethical standards. As for efficiency, all you have to know is how great an ex-president Carter has made to have a sense of how efficient he was as president.

## WHEN PROMISES AREN'T KEPT

The one comment most memorable when Bush senior was running for office was, "Read my lips, no new taxes." The voters clearly thought his pledge was violated when electing Clinton in 1992.

What about Obama? He made it clear during his campaign that if taxes were raised it should be on those who can afford it, and there would have to be a great influx of spending [in the style of FDR's New Deal] to stimulate the economy. [His views on the major foreign policy – what to do in Iraq – ended up taking a backseat to domestic issues.]

The voters will decide in 2012 if the Republicans are being "poor losers" or "proper guardians." If things get bad enough, the voters may send a signal in the 2010 congressional elections.

In the end, demos will get what demos wants.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

# Can Public Find The Political Truth?

By Jeanette Mendez

The amount of political information available to the public has skyrocketed, as have the amount of attacks waged against both major political parties, from the politicians, the parties themselves, media and outside groups.

With all of this information – or misinformation – available, how does the public find the truth within the messages?

The politicians, media and the public can disguise the truth. For example, speechwriters carefully craft messages that are political in nature, allowing for sound bites to be picked out and reported by the media.

It then becomes subjective as to where the truth might be within these messages. The downside to this is that the public generally only hears these sound bites, not the full speech.

## LIBERAL MEDIA BIAS?

Claims of media bias and distortions of truth are rampant. Some evidence suggests a liberal media bias, owing to journalists self-reporting a liberal ideology.

At the same time, the corporate media ownership favors conservative bias, with a bias toward stories intended to reflect the company's well-being.

And lastly, many studies have shown when story content is dissected, the journalistic norms of objectivity are achieved.

Beyond possible bias, media have the ability to set the agenda and pay attention to some issues at the expense of others. The public follows the cues of media and comes to find these issues as important.

## PUBLIC HAS CHOICES

The rise in media outlets allows the public to selectively choose the message that supports prior viewpoints. This selectivity can distort the truth.

When exposed to messages that run counter to these beliefs, the person enters a state of internal conflict and needs to rectify the disconnect between the conflicting information and prior beliefs.

If the person were truly searching for the truth within the message, all messages would be examined and evaluated objectively. But we are “cognitive misers” in that we want to make a decision without exerting tremendous effort.

Since we do not have the time or memory capabilities to evaluate all messages, we opt for the easier route and ignore the conflicting information.

Further, in selectively choosing supportive media content, the public tends to



assume a bias exists against their side. This “hostile media effect” can be applied to other aspects of life.

## IT IS A MINDSET

Take for example the sports fan who believes all referees make calls against his favorite team or the child who feels his parents always take the side of his sibling.

Selectivity and the hostile media effect should not be taken as a solution to avoid finding the truth in messages. Instead, the public needs to avoid these tendencies and search for the truth.

This might mean turning on a channel or surfing the Internet to find information previously discredited or avoided. This means actively listening to both sides of the debate and avoiding internal tendencies to discredit the opposition.

In short, the burden lies with the public to find the truth. And in doing so, the public needs to be able to move beyond the predispositions and move to objectively weighing the arguments accumulated from multiple sources.

– The author is an assistant professor of political science at Oklahoma State University who teaches courses in American political behavior and specializes in elections, campaigns and the media. She received her PhD in 2003 from Indiana University and is OSU's 2008 recipient of the Arts and Sciences Junior Faculty Award for Scholarly Excellence. This essay first appeared in *State*, the magazine of OSU.

# SCHOOLS

From Page 6

asks the Mother Goddess to watch over the school, concluding with “Blessed be.” How will most of the students feel? Again, how will their parents react? And what if these students go beyond prayer to proselytizing?

What if the Christian student says that unless all students accept Jesus Christ they will burn in hell?

## LEGAL PROBLEMS JUST STARTING

But problems for schools do not end with the popularly elected students professing their religious beliefs over the loudspeaker during morning announcements.

Schools that create limited public forums can designate certain topics to be discussed – but cannot limit the viewpoints that students may express.

Students could include defamatory or hate speech in their remarks. Parents of students offended or harassed by these remarks could seek recourse by suing the school.

Students may also feel so uncomfortable because of the tone of statements made by the chosen speakers that they would avoid participating in school events.

When participation in these events is required, opting out based on harassment will negatively impact these students' grades. And even when declining to attend school events that are voluntary, students' educational opportunities and experiences will be harmed.

## FACULTY AND STAFF ALSO AFFECTED

Non-chosen students are not the only people injured: Faculty and staff of schools would also be compelled to listen to student speech that may be religious, hateful, or derogatory. Any of the people harmed by what the chosen speakers say could take the schools to court to rightly hold them accountable.

The sponsor of an identical bill, HB 2211, considered last year, said that its “only purpose” is to “protect the First Amendment rights of students.”

This is inaccurate. The bill would only protect the free-speech rights of popularly elected students. And worse, it would harm the religious liberties of the rest of the student body.

The Model Policy says that only students holding “positions of honor” are eligible to use the limited public forums and gives examples of “positions of honor:” student council officers, class officers, captains of the football team, homecoming kings and queens, prom kings and queens, and ranked in the top three of the graduating class.

These non-chosen students will lose out on educational opportunities that public speaking can provide. Moreover, students can sometimes do things just to stir up trouble.

HB 1001 would interfere with school and classroom administration. HB 1001 and the Model Policy would infringe upon schools' autonomy to set their own

policies and would enhance confusion about what students may say in classrooms.

Under this bill, schools would lose their otherwise substantial discretion to impose rules of order and other restrictions on some popularly elected students' speech.

These rules and restrictions enable schools to foster a sound learning environment for all students. Teachers and administrators would no longer be able to intercede to stop student speech that harasses another student or a group of students.

The Model Policy would compel schools to allow students to speak at designated events, even though existing school policies may not have these occasions set aside for speeches, let alone speeches given by students.

## THE BILL MAKES NO DIFFERENCE IN GRADES

The policy makes no distinction between elementary schools, junior highs, and high schools. Does this mean that elementary students will be given the opportunity to speak and say whatever they want, the same as high-school seniors?

Teachers may be afraid to curtail student comments in class, that though made under the guise of religion, are just hateful, speech intended to defame or harass other students or groups.

In a discussion about current events in Iraq, a student could say, for example, that she believes Muslims “are crazed fanatics ... motivated by demonic power” [quoting Pat Robertson].

When learning about the civil rights movement, if a student was a member of the Kingdom Identity Ministries, he could say that “segregation from all non-white races,” is required, because “race-mixing is an abomination in the sight of Almighty God, a satanic attempt meant to destroy the chosen seedline, and is strictly forbidden by His commandments” [quoting the Ministries' doctrinal statement].

The bill would require the State Attorney General to defend any school district facing a lawsuit.

# A Senior Moment

“WHERE is my SUNDAY paper?” the irate customer calling the newspaper office loudly demanded, wanting to know where her Sunday edition was.

“Ma'am,” said the newspaper employee, “Today is Saturday. The Sunday paper is not delivered until tomorrow, on Sunday.”

There was quite a long pause on the other end of the phone, followed by a ray of recognition, as she was heard to mutter, “Well, s--- ... so that's why no one was at church today.”

# Patchwork Health Care System Fails

By Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello

As Americans respond to President Barack Obama's call for town hall meetings on reform of the American health care system, an understanding of how that system came to be the way it is can be crucial for figuring out how to fix it.

The American health care system is unique because, for most of us, it is tied to our jobs rather than to our government.

For many Americans, the system seems natural, but few know that it originated not as a well-thought-out plan to provide for Americans' health, but as a way to circumvent a quirk in wartime wage regulations that had nothing to do with health.

## GROUP HEALTH PLANS ARE OLD STUFF

As far back as the 1920s, a few big employers had offered health insurance plans to some of their workers. But only a few. By 1935, only about two million people were covered by private health insurance, and on the eve of World War II, there were only 48 job-based health plans in the entire country.

The rise of unions in the 1930s and 1940s led to the first great expansion of health care for Americans. But ironically, it did not produce a national plan providing health care to all, like those in virtually all other developed countries. Instead, the special conditions of World War II produced the system of job-based health benefits we know today.

## FRINGE BENEFITS BECOME SUBSIDY

In 1942, the United States set up a National War Labor Board. It had the power to set a cap on all wage increases. But it let employers circumvent the cap by offering "fringe benefits" – notably, health insurance.

The fringe benefits created a huge tax subsidy; they were treated as tax-deductible expenses for corporations, but not as taxable income for workers.

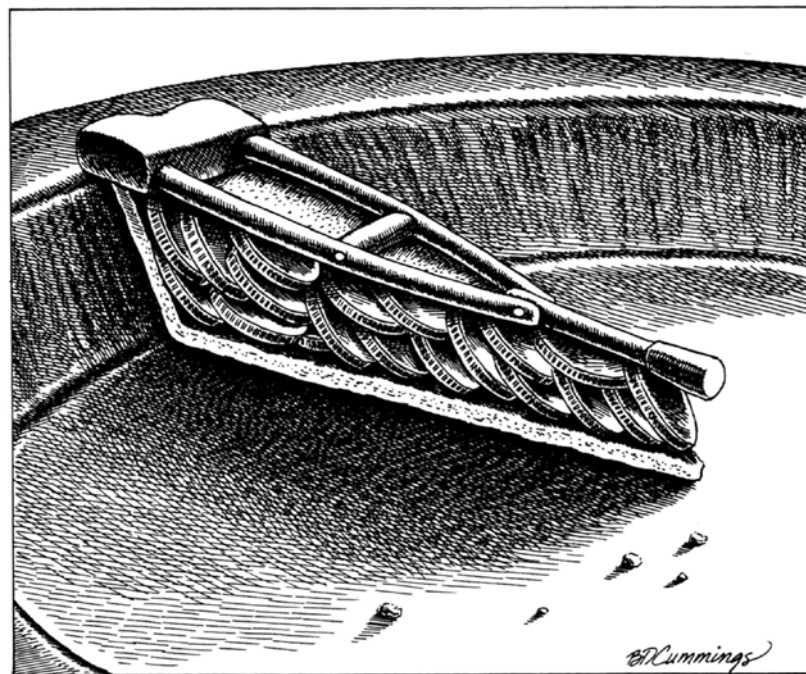
The result was revolutionary. Companies and unions quickly negotiated new health insurance plans. Some were run by Blue Cross, Blue Shield and private insurance companies.

## RUN JOINTLY

Others were "Taft-Hartley funds," run jointly by management and unions. By 1950, half of all companies with fewer than 250 workers and two-thirds of all companies with more than 250 workers offered health insurance of one kind or another.

By 1965, nearly three-quarters of the population was covered by some kind of private health insurance.

This private, job-based insurance covered millions of workers who had never



had health care insurance before. But this victory also set patterns that are responsible for many of the problems the health care system faces today.

## MILLIONS WITH NO COVERAGE

Because this private system was tied to employment, millions of people outside the workforce were without coverage. Those most likely to be covered were salaried or unionized white men in Northern industrial states.

Two-thirds of those with incomes under \$2,000 a year were not covered, nor were nearly half of nonwhites and those over 65 years old.

Employer-based plans tied workers to their jobs – something that benefited employers but not workers or the economy as a whole. The quality of the coverage was spotty – some plans were excellent, others completely inadequate.

## NO PUBLIC CONTROL OVER COSTS

Doctors accepted this revolution because it didn't challenge their power, but as a result, the system provided no public control over medical costs.

This revolution had a subtle political effect as well. By giving much of the workforce health benefits, it reduced the incentive for them to pursue a system of universal care.

And it gave unions a stake in the private, employer-based health care system. One opponent of publicly financed health care said the greatest bulwark against the socialization of medicine was furthering the progress already made by voluntary health insurance plans.

Since then, many layers have been laid on top of employer-based health care.

See PATCHWORK Page 18

# Wall Street's Melody Full Of Whine

By Jim Hightower

Listen intently, and you can hear the faint music of the band coming from over the hills. Their drums are pounding out a steady cadence, the bagpipes are wheezing mournfully, and the fifes are trilling plaintively. Coming straight at you, it's The Musicales Marching Pity Corps from Wall Street!

This big banker band – including a line of baton-twirling lobbyists and a chorus of right-wing talk show yakkers – is on the march because Obama and other dastardly Democrats have proposed to cap the outrageous pay, bonuses and perks that bailed-out Wall Streeters keep grabbing for themselves.

The band's whining refrain [note: You might want to reach for your hankie before reading this] is that these princes of high finance are being picked on.

Yes, trumpet the bankers, we make a lot of money, but we deserve it, and the system cannot function without such rewards for us. Indeed, sniffs a Wall Street consultant, "taxpayers should want banks to retain the cream of the crop."

## WASN'T THAT THE CREW RESPONSIBLE ...

Uh, sir – wouldn't that be the same cream that has soured America's entire financial system?

Well, they snap, you riff-raffers just don't get it. "The pay scale for Wall Street is different [than] the pay scale for America," explained the chief lobbyist for the Financial Services Roundtable in an ABC News interview this month. "So these numbers look large, but the market value for these executives – there's a very small talent pool of individuals that have the education, experience and knowledge to operate a global, international services firm in this day and age."

The lobbyist then tried tugging at our heartstrings: "I don't think the issue is a dollar amount. It's being paid what you're worth. Would you be willing to work for less than what you think you're worth?" he asked.

If ignorance is bliss, this guy must be ecstatic. Most Americans are working for less than they think they're worth! Ask a schoolteacher.

## CALAMITY WITHOUT BONUSES

In a January New York Times op-ed, one investment banker conceded that there have been excesses in pay, but that the system itself is sound. "Without those bonuses," he wrote, "firms simply couldn't attract the best and the brightest."

Apparently, he counts himself as one of the B&Bs, noting that the yearly "euphoria" of bonus cash that he received was what "justified the days on end of working into the wee hours, the months on end without a single day off."

Sheesh. Do they not look around and see that millions of us [from schoolteachers to farmers] are working the same long hours at a fraction of their pay?

Do they actually think that "best and brightest" is measured in dollars?

His op-ed drew a number of sharp responses from readers, including one who noted that he, too, has a job with "days on end of working into the wee hours," yet – no bonus. "I am what is called a physician," he revealed.

Mark Twain said it well years ago, "I am opposed to millionaires, but it would be dangerous to offer me the position."

## GREED IS THE PROBLEM

Americans are not against making money, even great big wads of it. We're against greed. That's why there is broad public support for Obama's proposal.

As he rightly said when announcing the pay cap, the bankers' shameful grab for their own enrichment in the midst of a national economic collapse is "exactly the kind of disregard for the costs and consequences of their actions that brought about this crisis – a culture of narrow self-interest and short-term gain at the expense of everything else."

The only problem with the president's compensation cap is that it has too many loopholes [it doesn't apply, for example, to the outsized paychecks going to the honchos of Citigroup, Bank of America and other giants that have already ripped us off for hundreds of billions of dollars in bailout money].

Congress should toughen it. But at least it finally lays an ethical marker that can begin to reverse the corporate culture of greed that has so severely harmed our country.

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# Memo To Press: Never Forget

"Many journalists today have a keen appreciation of the national press' failure in the run-up to the war in Iraq, and they are determined not to let it happen again. The real test, though, will come when we once again have a strong president operating in a time of national crisis.

"I can easily imagine a situation in which the American people feel under attack, and the government takes advantage of such a climate to grossly manipulate and distort the truth, and the press dutifully goes along.

"If such a situation does again arise, we will at least have people out there warning how journalists are in danger of repeating the press' failure prior to the Iraq War, and perhaps that will serve as an effective tonic." – Michael Massing, author. Now They Tell Us: The American Press and Iraq

# Recession Is Deadly For Domestic Abuse

By Mary R. Lauby

The ripple effect of the economic crisis has multiplied in ways that many could never imagine: banks folding, stock markets diving, and an astronomical government bailout.

For victims of domestic violence, the impact of this downward economic spiral could be deadly. Economic stresses often lead to more frequent abuse, more violent abuse, and more dangerous abuse when domestic violence already exists.

Domestic violence programs report that victims experience an increase in abuse in part because out-of-work abusers have more opportunity to batter.

## FELONY LEVEL DOMESTIC ABUSE

Rhode Island, for example, has recently seen a 25% increase in felony-level domestic violence crimes. Victims end up with fewer opportunities to contact programs for help, attend support groups, or get away from the batterer.

Oklahoma has the highest rate of domestic abuse in the country.

Compounding the problem, domestic violence programs face a trio of economic factors – cuts in federal funding, increased demand for services, and decreased private donations as people lose their jobs or see a downturn in their personal finances.

These budget constraints make it more difficult for local programs to meet the needs of their communities.

## REFUGE IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS

In 2007, the National Network to End Domestic Violence conducted its second annual 24-hour census of domestic violence shelters and programs across the nation.

The census report found that in one day, more than 53,000 women, men, and children across the country received services from domestic violence programs. Over 25,000 of those individuals – more than half were children – found refuge in emergency domestic violence shelters or transitional housing.

Tragically, on that same day, more than 7,700 victims who sought services from their local domestic violence programs were not served because the programs didn't have enough funding and resources.

## CRITICAL FUND AND STAFF SHORTAGES

Researcher Jaclyn Campbell has identified two key risk factors in relation to domestic violence homicides: limited access to services for victims and unemployment for batterers. This situation existed before the current economic crisis.

So while the focus has been on the financial crisis, we must also plan for how we are going to protect victims of domestic violence.

On the federal level, two key funding sources to serve millions of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes must be restored. In 2008, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act budget was slashed by \$2.1 million by President Bush. Congress has capped the Victims of Crime Act, a federal grant program funded entirely by fines and penalties paid by offenders without any taxpayer dollars.

## HOW TO REACH VICTIMS

President Barack Obama and the Congress should increase funding levels for both programs.

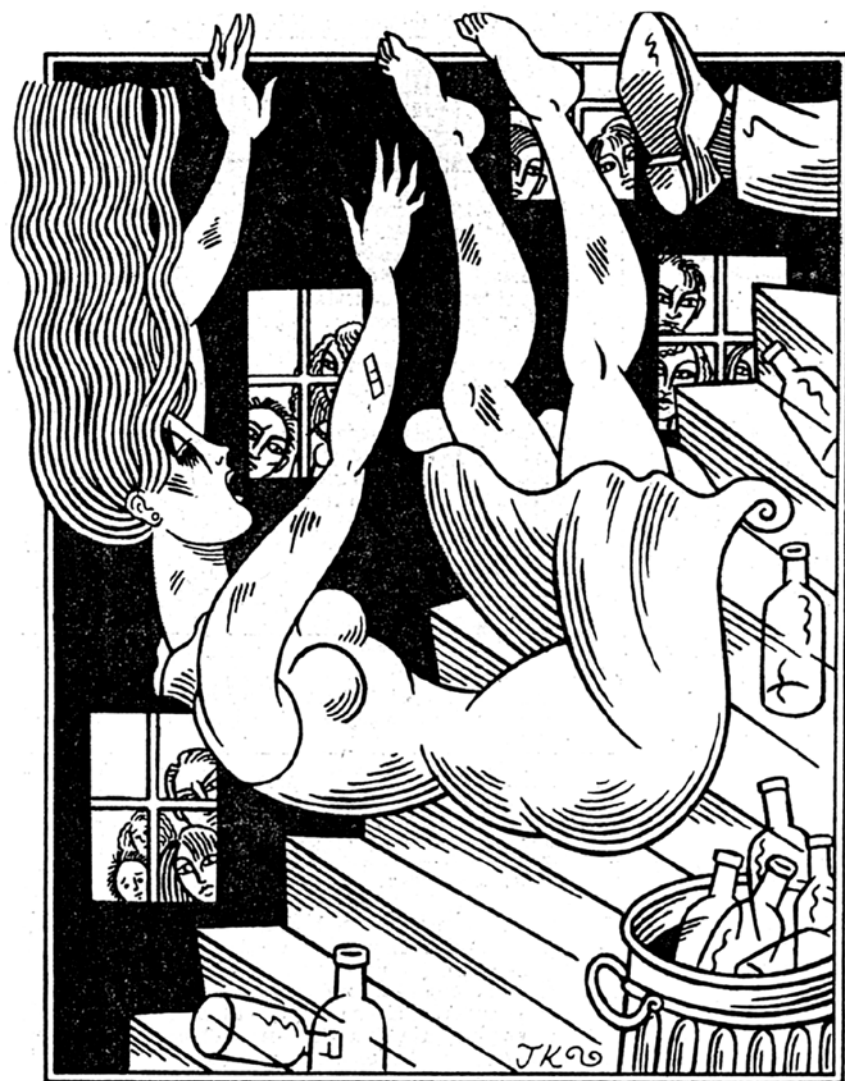


ILLUSTRATION BY JILL KARLA SCHWARZ FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Meanwhile, both the federal and state governments can look to Massachusetts for an example on how to reach victims. A recent public service announcement features Diane Patrick talking about domestic violence.

It was produced by Jane Doe Inc. with funding from the Commonwealth's Department of Public Health – an effective private/public collaboration that can be replicated across the country.

Gov. Deval Patrick opted not to cut any funding from the sexual assault and domestic violence line items in his recent budget cuts.

This continued investment in both intervention services and prevention efforts offers short- and long-term savings for the Commonwealth in terms of both financial costs and lives saved. Already these efforts are proving their worth: despite the worsening economy, there has not been domestic violence homicide in Massachusetts since the end of September.

We must provide services for every victim in every community, but non-profit organizations and the government cannot do it without a robust investment of private philanthropy and volunteerism. This crisis affects each of us – and requires each of us to take action.

– The author is executive director of Jane Doe Inc.

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## Financial Crisis Leading To Suicide

The body count is still rising. For months on end, marked by bankruptcies, foreclosures, evictions, and layoffs, the economic meltdown has taken a heavy toll on Americans. In response, a range of extreme acts including suicide, self-inflicted injury, murder, and arson have hit the local news.

Analysis of press reports nationwide indicated that an epidemic of tragedies spurred by the financial crisis had already spread from Pasadena, CA to Midwest City, OK.

On Dec. 9, 59-year-old Thomas Garrett of Midwest City murdered his wife.

According to Midwest City Police Chief Brandon Clabes, "Garrett told officers he shot his wife because he didn't know how to explain that they were evicted from their home while she was in the hospital."

He apparently planned to kill himself, too, but was stopped by the police.

## TULSA BANKS HIT

Bank robberies are also soaring. Tulsa has registered nine bank robberies, an unprecedented number.

"We've certainly seen a rise in bank robberies across the country particularly in our metropolitan areas," FBI Special Agent Scott Wilson recently pointed out. "The bank robbery rate has risen dramatically."

A growing number of the world's rich have garnered headlines for high profile, financially-motivated suicides. Take the New Zealand-born "millionaire financier" who leapt in front of an express train in Great Britain or the "German tycoon" who did much the same in his homeland.

These have with increasing regularity hit front pages around the world.

## ANOTHER MADOFF VICTIM

An example would be New York-based money manager Rene de la Villehuchet, who slashed his wrists after he "lost more than \$1 billion of client money, including much, if not all, of his own family's fortune."

In the end, he was yet another victim of financial swindler Bernard Madoff's \$50 billion Ponzi scheme.

An unknown but rising number of less wealthy but distinctly well-off workers in the financial field have also killed themselves as a result of the economic crisis – with less press coverage.

Beverly Hills clinical psychologist Leslie Sepia told Forbes magazine that this was "the first time in her 18-year career that businessmen are calling her with suicidal impulses over their financial state."

In the last three months alone, she has intervened in at least 14 cases of men seriously considering taking their lives.

Sepia offered this observation: "They feel guilt and shame because they think they should have known what was coming with the market or they should have pulled out faster."

## UNTHINKABLE EXTREMES

Still, it's mostly on Main Street, not Wall Street, that people are being driven to once unthinkable extremes.

As a result, reports of people driven to everything from armed robbery to financially motivated suicide in response to new fiscal realities continue to bubble to the surface.

Last year, according to the New York City Police Department, bank robberies in that city jumped to more than 430, a 54% rise over 2007.

Not surprisingly, the economic meltdown has also strained marriages and, according to experts, is contributing to a rise in domestic violence.

Retha Fielding, a spokeswoman for the National Domestic Violence Hotline, notes that calls increased 18% between October 2007 and October 2008 and attributes the spike to the poor economy.

"It is bringing increased stress and violence into the home. Domestic violence is about control. If you lose your job, that's control you don't have, so you may want to have more control at home."

The tragic fact is that this may be only the beginning as America's economy continues to disintegrate.

# Unions A Solution Not The Problem

By Marie Cocco

When Congress and the White House lurched toward approval of a loan package for the crippled auto industry, there was more union bashing.

Note well that we did not hear any such tirades when vastly larger sums of taxpayer money – with fewer strings attached – were lavished upon the banks and financial industry wizards who created the credit crisis.

Put aside for a moment the misinformation and outright untruths that characterize conservative attacks on the autoworkers' unions. No one should be allowed to cast blame on workers who want nothing more than to maintain a middle-class life.

The biggest canard circulated by anti-union motormouths such as Rush Limbaugh was that UAW workers average \$70 an hour. In fact, they make \$28 an hour plus benefits.

## CREATING A VIABLE MIDDLE CLASS

Unions aren't the problem. They are the solution.

Creating a viable middle class has been the goal of organized labor since labor first became organized. It is this goal that was abandoned outright by American political and business leaders as they did all they could over the past three decades to encourage a relentless race to the bottom in wages and benefits.

Strip away the financial mumbo jumbo and the credit crisis comes down to this: For decades, as wages and benefits for working and middle-class people stagnated or fell, the only way for them to purchase the goods that make the economy hum was through credit.

This was true whether the item purchased was a home, a car – or all the unnecessary gizmos that retailers have been more than happy to tell consumers were the must-haves of the day.

## WE'RE IN THE MIDST OF TWO CRISES

Until we understand that we are in the midst of two crises – one the short-term credit crisis and one the longer-term crisis in the failure to pay workers what they need to sustain themselves – we are doomed to repeat this horror.

"If you are a man with only a high school education your chances of making a wage or salary as good as what your father was making in the late 1970s are not good," says Gary Gerstle, a Vanderbilt University historian.

"We are looking at a deterioration in their life opportunities and living standards, at the same time that an enormous amount of wealth has accumulated at the top of the income ladder."

It is true that some individuals were reckless in taking on debt. But it is equally valid that American workers simply haven't been paid what it takes for them to spend enough to keep the American economy growing.

"The economy needed levels of expenditure and consumption that most Americans literally could not afford," Gerstle said.

## AVERAGE ABOUT \$200 MORE A WEEK

What do unions have to do with this? To start with, unionized workers make



about \$200 more per week than do nonunion workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The great expansion of the American middle class and an unprecedented rise in living standards occurred between the end of World War II and the 1970s when unions were far more common and powerful than they are today.

Beginning in the 1980s, an ideology of deregulation and anti-unionism took hold, with free-market capitalists arguing that no intervention in the markets – including labor's intervention – was ever beneficial.

"The promise of deregulation was that this would create so much energy and dynamism at the top that it would all trickle down," Gerstle said.

## TRICKLE DOWN WAS SUPPOSED TO WORK

"Not only would people on Wall Street make all kinds of money, but people on Main Street would find that there would be more dynamism in their lives, more opportunity, more wages."

Well, people on Wall Street did make all kinds of money. People on Main Street got depressed wages, the demise of guaranteed pensions and 401[k]s that crashed with the stock market. They got health insurance that is barely affordable, if they've got insurance at all.

We are engulfed by an economic morass that holds the prospect of being the deepest and broadest downturn of the post-World War II era.

It is no coincidence that the percentage of private-sector workers in unions – about 7% – is roughly the same as what it was before the Great Depression.

Historically, Gerstle says, social movements have needed direct and often unsettling action to capture the public's imagination and take hold.

This is why we can only hope that recent events such as the peaceful occupation of a Chicago window factory by its laid-off workers was the start of something much, much bigger.

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# Rescue The System, Not Those Who Wrecked It

By Jim Hightower

Bankers have never been much loved, but gollies, this Wall Street bunch seems hell-bent on being loathed.

As a consequence of their avaricious grab for outrageous personal enrichment during the past decade, these arrogant titans of financial gimmickry have caused a vast economic collapse that is presently costing millions of Americans their homes, jobs, pensions and dreams – while also bringing down the banks themselves.

As you would expect, the Wall Streeters who did this to us are now humbled and filled with deep remorse. HA! Just kidding.

Instead, the perpetrators keep grasping for all they can get, taking no responsibility for the damage they've done. Obtuse? Self-indulgent? Narcissistic? What's with these people? A few examples of their bloated sense of entitlement:

- While Merrill Lynch was imploding last year, requiring a \$25 billion salvage job from us taxpayers, CEO John Thain was merrily spending \$1.2 million to redecorate his office, including buying a \$13,000 "custom" coffee table, a \$1,400 wastebasket and a \$35,000 antique commode [add your own toilet joke here].

In such tough times, why didn't he just make do with the perfectly luxurious office of his predecessor?

"Well ... his office was very different than the ... the general decor of Merrill's offices," Thain told a CNBC interviewer. "It really would have been ... very difficult ... for ... me to use it in the form it was in."

- Citigroup, which lost \$28 billion in the past 15 months, has now received a \$345 billion bailout from Washington. Time to cut nonessential spending, right? Yes – as long as "essential" includes a new \$50 million Dassault Falcon 7X jet for top executives.

Never mind that the bank already has five executive jets in its fleet. It took a public expression of outrage from President Obama to get Citigroup's honchos to back off this extravagance, and it's said that they're still sulking about it.

- Despite their historically disastrous year in 2008, Wall Street investment bankers awarded themselves a total of \$18.4 billion in bonuses – the sixth largest payout on record! Shouldn't they be embarrassed, you ask? Of course, but a

January poll of the bankers found that 46% of them felt they deserved a bigger bonus.

By the way, the Street's rationalization for such giveaways is that top bankers must be showered with treasure in order to keep them hitched to the corporate plow. "Retention bonuses," they're called. Merrill Lynch's Thain, for example, doled out \$4 billion in bonuses last fall while the firm was awaiting its bailout check, explaining that it's essential to "pay your best people," or they'll leave.

Shouldn't he have to wear a clown costume when saying silly stuff like that? Leave to where? The whole Street is on fire. Besides, these are the geniuses who lit the match – who would want them?

Which brings us to the "Obama stage" of the banker bailout. At its core, his plan looks like more of the same. The government [you and I] will buy the bad loans now held by the banks, paying an inflated value for them. This gift will make us by far the biggest investor in Wall Street – yet, even though we're putting up the capital, Obama's team does not require a commensurate decision-making role for the public.

One decision in particular needs our say-so: Who's going to manage the money? Under Obama's plan, the same old obtuse, self-indulgent, narcissistic – and failed – bankers would keep their jobs and control the bailout.

It seems the president's top economic advisors, Timothy Geithner and Lawrence Summers, don't have the stomach for the real housecleaning needed to set Wall Street right. Instead, they cower behind knee-jerk ideological platitudes, scoffing that "governments make poor bank managers."

Hello? It's hard to be a poorer manager of America's financial system than the current group of greed-headed "free marketers." They lost hundreds of billions of dollars in bank assets during the past year or so, wrecking our economy in the process, and now they want to be rescued.

Rescue the system, yes. But not those who wrecked it. Wall Street's culture of excess should not be rewarded, and any bailout should begin by insisting that all of those who did this to America be fired.

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# 'Justice' Hardest On Black Females

By James Wright

If one were to see Shawn Mallory or Jennifer Gaskins in public, they could easily be indistinguishable. Not because they are invisible, for they are attractive, self-assured women, but because their demeanors would not draw attention to themselves.

Mallory, a light-skinned woman with a full-figured face, could be a co-worker, a singer in the church choir or a frequent customer at clubs such as Love's or The Chateau.

Gaskins could be your neighborhood association president, your child's teacher or the saleswoman at a department store.

These women are neither. Despite their non-threatening personas, it would be a shock to some to find that Mallory, 39 and Gaskins, 55, are veterans of the criminal justice system.

Mallory was sent to prison in the early 1990s for aiding and abetting a sale of crack cocaine to a minor and Gaskins was sentenced in 2001 to prison for attempted distribution of crack along with a violation of probation.

## **BOTH WOMEN SERVED TIME**

Both women served time in the DC jail and the women's federal prison in Alderson, WV. They are in various states of probation, where they must submit a urine sample for drug testing and report to an officer on a weekly basis for verification.

Mallory and Gaskins have admitted that they have used illegal drugs and, in the former's case, resorted to prostitution as a means of making a living.

Adult women are the fastest growing group in regards to incarceration. The number of female prisoners rose at a faster rate [4.8%] than the number of male prisoners [2.7%], according to a study, *Prison and Jail Inmates*, conducted by the Department of Justice, Bureau of Statistics [BJS] in 2006.

In that report, the BJS said that there were 111,400 female prisoners in federal and state prisons. Oklahoma leads the nation in the percentage of women in prison.

## **RATE TWICE THAT OF MEN**

The report noted that the percent increase in female prisoners was almost twice that of male prisoners. Black women make up a larger share of their gender incarcerated than in any other group.

According to research conducted by Pew Public Safety Performance Project, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, one in every 279 black women is incarcerated compared with one in every 1,064 white women and one in every 658 Latinos.

For ages 35 to 39, one in every 100 black women are in jail or prison – the highest proportionally of any female group.



Mallory said that being in the criminal justice system was very traumatic.

## **SHE WAS RAPED IN DC JAIL**

"I helped some young boys sell drugs on the streets and that is how I got caught," she said. "I was sent to DC Jail and it was really, really tough there. I remember one time I was put in a cell with a bunch of dykes and they raped me.

"I'll never forget the time I was being transported to Superior Court for a hearing and a U.S. Marshal raped me behind the judge's chambers.

"The people who did those things to me were punished, but it still has an effect on me."

Mallory's experiences in the DC Jail are not uncommon. In a survey released by the BJS on Feb. 28, 2007, more than 50% of women in jail said they have been physically or sexually abused in the past, compared to more than 10% of the men.

## **DIRE CONSEQUENCES FOR WOMEN**

This behavior can have dire consequences for women inmates. A BJS study, *HIV in Prisons*, conducted in 2004, reported that 2.6% of all female state prison inmates were HIV positive, compared to 1.8% of males.

Mallory decided to use the system to her advantage. While in DC Jail, she got her GED and took classes in street law, women's law, and parenting and had sessions with a psychiatrist.

She continued to educate herself while at Alderson because she saw it as a means of self-improvement.

Gaskins said that doing time was "hard" but she was determined to be an exception to the rule.

See JUSTICE Page 19

# Hitler, Religious Right And Today's America

By Harley E. Venters

In 1933, the year Adolph Hitler came to power in Germany, Franklin D. Roosevelt became president of the United States. Roosevelt remained president for the next 12 years, virtually to the end of the Third Reich and the death of Hitler by suicide in April 1945.

During the 12-year existence of the Third Reich, Adolph Hitler, the most murderous tyrant of modern times, was the "darling" of the Christian Clergy in Germany, both Catholic and Protestant. Many of the right wing clergy taught that Hitler had been sent by God to save and to restore a Christian Germany. Some Lutheran clergy taught that Martin Luther was "John the Baptist" to Adolph Hitler.

Delusional and immoral religious thinking bottomed on personal and professional greed consumed the German Clergy. Early after Hitler came to power in 1933, church attendance increased and stayed on an upswing during the existence of the Third Reich. Churches and clergy prospered.

In Germany the democratic principle of separation of church and state was missing. Under Hitler, tax subsidies to the churches and the clergy increased five-fold during the 12 years of the Third Reich's existence.

Unlike Hitler in Germany, President Roosevelt did not have the "adoration" or even the support of the Religious Right in the United States. On the contrary, U.S. right-wing clergy in their sermons painted President Roosevelt as "the beast" as in the "mark of the beast" spoken of in the Biblical book of Revelation.

It was another religious delusion of right-wing clergy, who were similar to many clergy of the Christian Coalition today. They would have preferred a religious fanatic leader like Hitler in the United States during the 1930's.

If the voters in the United States had followed the preachings of the right wing clergy in 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt would not have been re-elected. Franklin Roosevelt was a Christian but not the right-wing clergy type. He was not a Jew-baiter or a book-burner, a white supremacist, or a religious fanatic like Hitler.

However, in 1933 as president he assumed the mantle of leadership of a Republic in the depths of an economic depression and its citizens in spiritual despair and convinced the citizens that "all they had to fear was fear itself."

A physically challenged person himself, President Roosevelt worked tirelessly to establish a democratic Republic that had true Christian compassion and concern for the welfare of all citizens without regard to economic status, race, reli-

gion or national origin.

During his 12 years in office, Franklin Roosevelt brought into existence Social Security, unemployment compensation, farm supports, federal aid to education, aid to the handicapped and dependent children, and created the beneficial Rural Electrification Administration.

He rescued the stock market in 1933 with passage of the Securities and Exchange Act and, at the same time, made possible free labor unions under the Wagner Labor Relations Act.

Franklin Roosevelt's program of a compassionate government based on Christian principles for the benefit and welfare of all citizens is in stark contrast to the political agenda of the Religious Right and the Christian Coalition today. The clergy of the Christian Coalition and other right-wing clergy have a political program of harsh deprivation for the needy and handicapped and supporting measures to transfer wealth from the middle class to the wealthiest citizens.

The political agenda of the Religious Right and the Christian Coalition include efforts to undermine the democratic principle of separation of church and state and provide tax money for religious schools, similar to the right-wing clergy of the Third Reich in the 1930's. The right-wing clergy in the United States today are greedy seekers of political power and wealth without regard to Christian values of morality.

By his courage and dedication to right and justice, Franklin Roosevelt engineered and brought about the destruction of the barbaric and immoral Third Reich with its fanatic religious leader, Adolph Hitler, and his cohorts, the Religious Right.

By 1945, only 12 years from a rather dismal beginning in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt had led the United States to greatness. In 1945, the United States was the most powerful nation in the world [and in the history of the world] industrially, economically, militarily. Also, the United States was the moral leader of the free world.

*Editor's Note: Harley E. Venters, a West Point graduate and Oklahoma City attorney, first wrote this essay in July 1995, but its message remains salient today, given the Religious Right's non-stop assault on the separation of church and state and the brazen pulpitering, especially in Oklahoma, on behalf of George W. Bush and John McCain.*

# International Test Comparisons Bogus

By Gerald N. Tirozzi

The national spotlight can't seem to avoid international test score comparisons. After all, pundits argue, they reflect our country's ability to compete in the global economy, especially against growing techno-juggernauts China and India.

These countries outscore us on international tests, so we can expect they outperform us in the global marketplace, observers conclude.

Yet, as is often the case with simple conclusions, this conclusion is inconveniently wrong. George Washington University researcher Iris Rotberg, who has done a great deal of comparative study of education systems worldwide, reached this conclusion:

"The fact is that test-score comparisons tell us little about the quality of education in any country ... The fact that we can't interpret these test-score comparisons has not deterred us from concluding that a country's international competitiveness can be predicted from its ranking on international tests." [Education Week, June 11, 2008]

## ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

Why do international test results tell us so little? Any reasonable comparison would have to factor in the following questions:

- Which schools and students are selected to participate, and after selection, which ones choose to participate?
- Which regions of the country are represented?
- Are vocational schools included?
- To what extent have children from low-income families dropped out of school before the test was administered?
- Are children with disabilities tested?
- Are language minority children tested?

## CHINA AND INDIA COMPARISONS IMPOSSIBLE

The more selective the sample, the higher the country's average. In China, for instance, less than one-half of the upper-secondary age group is enrolled in school, and in India, less than one-third is enrolled.

These nations, in fact, do not even participate in the Program for International Student Assessment [PISA] because so large a proportion of children are no longer in school at age 15 when the test is administered.

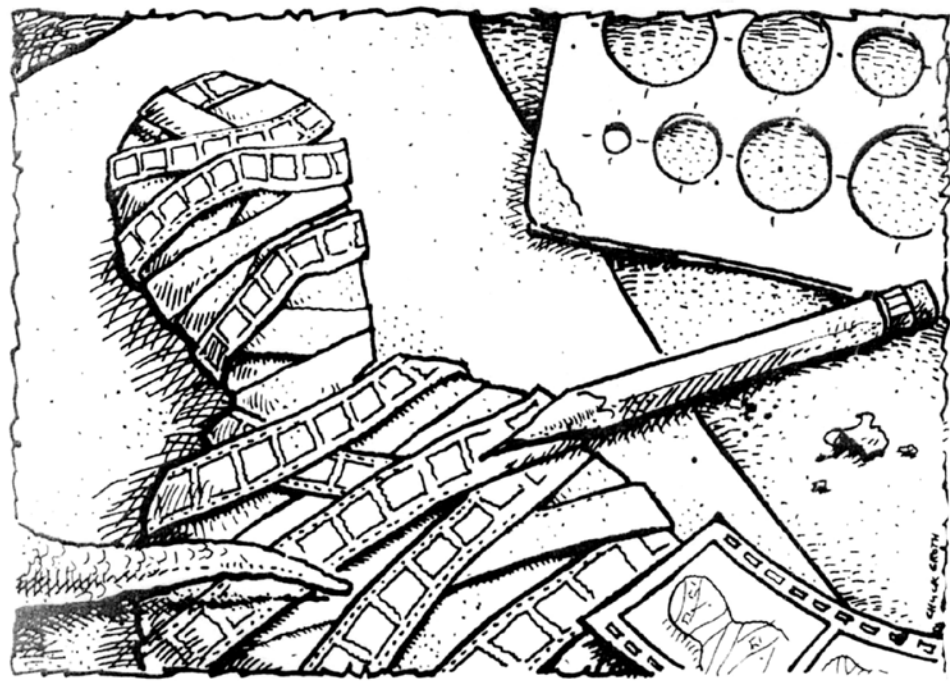
Yet, Rotberg's research does tell us conclusively that the United States ranks high on two international competitions that we would prefer not to win – we have one of the largest income and wealth gaps between rich and poor communities, when compared with other industrialized countries, and our system of school finance is also one of the most unfair.

## SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS KEY

She notes that a family's socioeconomic status is the most significant problem in all countries and accounts for about three quarters of the variance in student performance among U.S. schools.

"There is a myth that we can fix our schools without addressing the problems of poverty," Rotberg says. "We can't."

There are clear implications for international testing here. A country with relatively high child poverty, but that encourages low-income children to stay in



school, will be at a disadvantage in the test score comparisons.

I would add that while the United States may be at such a disadvantage, the moral resolve of our national commitment to educate all children is its own advantage.

## EDUCATION FOR ALL THE CHILDREN

Unlike the majority of the countries with which we are compared, we strive to ensure that all children receive a high-quality education. Such a commitment makes us proud!

Alas, our critics who are so fine-tuned in their caustic use of international comparisons are silent and removed from addressing the concomitant causes of poverty: unemployment, poor housing, lack of health care, compromised child welfare, the unequal distribution of resources between rich and poor communities, and income inequality.

I would suggest several questions that educators may pose to the critics who draw on international comparisons to lambaste public education for our nation's economic condition.

## WHY ARE THE JOBS EXPORTED?

Are more U.S. jobs going to other countries because of their educational systems or rather because such countries [India and Mexico] have low wages, no workers' benefits, and no labor unions?

Do we truly believe that our problems in economic competitiveness will be solved, or even alleviated, if our students answer a few more questions correctly on international assessments?

Do we really believe that we can address the serious and complex economic issues of our time by having a myopic focus on school improvement alone?

Do we really believe that U.S. trade deficits are related to what happens in our nation's classrooms?

## COMPARISONS ARE A DISTRACTION

The dispute over international comparisons has had the unfortunate effect of distracting everyone away from the greater need for collaboration and cooperation among countries around what works in school reform.

The focus on international comparisons and readiness to be successful in a

See TESTS Page 18

# Lawsuit: Halliburton, KBR Sickened Base

A Georgia man has filed a lawsuit against contractor KBR and its former parent company, Halliburton, saying the companies exposed everyone at Joint Base Balad in Iraq to unsafe water, food and hazardous fumes from the burn pit there.

Joshua Eller, who worked as a civilian computer-aided drafting technician with the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, said military personnel, contractors and third-country nationals may have been sickened by contamination at the largest U.S. installation in Iraq, home to more than 30,000 service members, Defense Department civilians and contractors.

"Defendants promised the United States government that they would supply safe water for hygienic and recreational uses, safe food supplies and properly operate base incinerators to dispose of medical waste safely," according to the lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas.

## HALLIBURTON DENIES INVOLVEMENT

Diana Gabriel, spokeswoman for Halliburton, said her company is "improperly named" in the lawsuit.

"As such, we expect Halliburton to be dismissed from the action as Halliburton has no responsibility, legal or otherwise, for the actions alleged," Gabriel said.

Halliburton announced in April 2007 that it had dissolved its ties with KBR, which had been its contracting, engineering and construction unit since the 1960s.

KBR offered no public comment when the lawsuit was filed.

Eller filed his claim after he deployed in February 2006 for 10 months. The lawsuit claims he developed skin lesions that subsequently spread, filled with fluid and burst. He said they went away, then reappeared, followed by blisters on his feet that made it painful for him to walk.

## SYMPTOMS KEPT RETURNING

He said they healed, but continue to return every three to four months.

Then, Eller said he experienced vomiting, cramping and diarrhea, and continues to suffer severe abdominal pain.

"Plaintiff witnessed the open air burn pit in operation at Balad Air Force Base," the lawsuit states. "On one occasion, he witnessed a wild dog running around base with a human arm in its mouth. The human arm had been dumped on the open air burn pit by KBR."

Eller said he still has nightmares and has been diagnosed with adjustment disorder.

The lawsuit states that KBR was required to comply with military standards for clean water, and monitor it. Eller accused KBR of not performing water quality tests and of not properly treating or chlorinating water, and said an audit by the Defense Department backs up his claim.

The lawsuit states there was no formalized training for KBR employees in proper water operations, and the company maintained insufficient documentation about water safety.

© Army Times

# The Power Of Acts 2:38

A woman had just returned to her home from an evening of church services when she was startled by an intruder. She caught the man in the act of robbing her home of its valuables and yelled: "Stop! Acts 2:38!" [Repent and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven.]

The burglar stopped in his tracks. The woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done.

As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar: "Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was yell a scripture to you."

"Scripture?" replied the burglar. "She said she had an Ax and Two .38s!"

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## Gipper's Deregulation

# Reagan Brought American To Ruin

Ronald Reagan's 98th birthday is celebrated this year at a time that should be a cause for soul searching among his admirers.

The conservative revolution that Reagan unleashed upon the nation and much of the world lay in ashes, and Washington is embarking on a new epoch of government intervention to eradicate the excesses of free-market purism.

One would expect liberals to be out in the streets looking for statues of the Gipper to topple from their pedestals.

But nothing of the kind is happening. While George W. Bush is now the bane even of many conservatives, a Marine Corps contingent laid a wreath at Reagan's gravesite, safe in the knowledge that much of the nation holds his memory in a warm embrace.

### HISTORICAL CONUNDRUM

Historians may one day view this as an odd historical conundrum, since Reagan's legacy is so clearly imprinted on the myriad of forces that have vitiated the American dream for millions of working people and brought wreckage to the world economy.

The continuing fallout from Reagan's policies – the meltdown of the financial sector, widening income inequality, the emergence of lockdown America, the obscene inflation of CEO compensation, the end of locally owned media, market crashes, blackouts, drug-company scandals, rampant greed and materialism – is all around us.

As D.H. Lawrence once wrote in another context, "The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins."

### THE ROOTS OF CHAOS

The subprime mortgage crisis, the root of the chaos in the financial sector, is a case in point. Its antecedents clearly lay within the Reagan Administration, beginning with an appearance by Donald T. Regan, Reagan's first treasury secretary, before the Senate Banking Committee in early 1981, when he laid out a detailed vision for near-complete deregulation of the financial industry.

On Regan's behalf, Richard Pratt, Reagan's first chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, drafted the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act of 1982, which included a provision, Title VIII, that enabled lenders for the first time to issue adjustable-rate mortgages and other exotic loans, such as those requiring interest-only payments.

### PRECISELY WRONG KIND OF LOANS

The provision was aimed at helping rescue the savings and loan industry by allowing thrifts to respond to the volatility in interest rates that prevailed in the early 1980s, but it would be precisely these types of loans that brought about foreclosures on hundreds of thousands of home mortgages in 2007 and 2008.

Even more significant for the future of the American economy was the decision by Reagan's appointees at the Federal Reserve in 1987 to allow large bank holding companies to handle the underwriting of mortgage-backed securities.

This measure was one of several aspects of financial deregulation in the 1980s and afterward that promoted banks' headlong rush into the securitization of mortgages, with the dire results that now engulf our nation.

### SMART MANAGEMENT ENDS

Through an explosion of good government groups, through the 1970s the av-

## PATCHWORK

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Medicare and Medicaid provided government-funded health insurance for the elderly and impoverished.

### THE RESULT OF MANAGED CARE

The "managed care revolution" led to the takeover of 90% of employer-based health care by HMOs, most of them driven by profit rather than health concerns. But most people continue to get their health care through their employer.

Many of the problems of American health care grow out of this history. The system is so complex that even experts – let alone ordinary people trying to find care for themselves and their loved ones – are unable to fully understand it.

The system spends one-third of its cost on paperwork, waste and profit over and above the cost of actually providing health care. Yet, nearly one-third of Americans are without health insurance over the course of a year.

### OTHER COUNTRIES COVER MOST CITIZENS

In all other developed countries, more than 85% of citizens have health coverage under public programs.

The American health care system is full of inequalities: People who work for one company may have high quality insurance, while those who work for a similar company have none.

All of these problems are due at least in part to an employer-based system, the original intent of which was not to provide quality health care to all, but to circumvent wartime wage regulations.

As we begin to debate how to reform health care, we should keep in mind that the American health care system was not created to express American values or to meet Americans' health care needs.

Knowing that, we should not be afraid to change the system if we can come up with a better one.

– This is excerpted from Doctor Wall Street: How the American Health Care System Got So Sick



erage citizen began playing a greater role in public policy. Progressivism also spawned the concepts of business ethics and labor relations, the recognition that tending to the morale and working conditions of employees was smart management.

Reagan stood against everything that had been achieved in this age of reform. His constant attacks on the inefficiency of government, a rallying cry taken up by legions of conservative politicians across the country, became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The more money taken away from government programs, the more ineffective they became, and the more ineffective they became, the more ridiculous government bureaucrats came to be seen in the public eye.

Gradually government, and the broader realm of public service, came to seem disreputable, disdained by the best and brightest college students planning their careers.

### PUBLIC OFFICE A WAY TO RICHES

The image of government was dragged down even further by the behavior of politicians, who, imbued with the same exaltation of self-interest that is the essence of Reaganism, increasingly treat public office as a vehicle toward their own enrichment.

Reagan's brand of conservatism rippled across our society as thoroughly as did Progressivism. He disenfranchised the average citizen by inventing the soft-money machine that made large corporations the real power in Washington.

He empowered corporate executives to abandon the concept of loyalty to employees, shareholders and communities, and weakened the bargaining power of labor.

He presided over the slow creep of commercial values into virtually every sphere of American life. Commercialism has invaded realms where it was once verboten – the non-profit sector, law, health care, politics, public schools, public radio and public television.

Instead of public policy influencing the corporation to fit the needs of society, society is shaped to fit the needs of the corporation.

### CORPORATE WELFARE WAS BORN

The evil of stagflation and the decline of our manufacturing sector in the 1970s did require forceful leadership and renewed investment in the productive capacity of our nation, but not the corporate welfare and abandonment of working people that was the essence of Reaganism.

If America is serious about regaining its economic standing in the world, it is essential that we have a full public debate of what and who led us down the wrong path.

Reagan should no longer be exempt from the scrutiny that his legacy so richly deserves.

*Editor's Note: Reagan's administration was marred by the most felony convictions in history. He romanced the religious right but seldom attended church and launched the hatred of government that endures to this day.*

– Adapted from William Kleinknecht's new book, *The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan, and the Betrayal of Main Street America*, to be published by Nation Books

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## TESTS

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global economy has to move away from a "shame and blame" mentality.

Rather our time and energy need to be devoted to interpreting international tests scores to: understand the complex realities which impact schools everywhere, assess results to build on successes and learn from weaknesses, and move toward a more internationally accepted agenda of school improvement practices.

The time has come to refocus our efforts in a positive way allowing our students to develop the requisite skills which will serve them well in the rapidly changing world of the future.

The time has come for educators to emulate Peter Finch and throw open their windows and shout, "We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore!"

– The author is executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals

# NUCLEAR

From Page One

whole life in an area of the country ringed by a number of nuclear power plants. She was also exposed to chemical pollutants.

There appears to be more public awareness of the dangers of non-radioactive chemical pollutants than of the radioactive and it is evident that more than one factor goes to making cancer. What serious investigators fear is that radiation [nuclear] pollution interacts with chemical poisons to magnify the problem. By itself, Uranium interacts with the body's estrogen hormone system, disrupting it as do a number of other pollutants. It can do its dirty work even if present at tiny amounts – amounts lower than current federal EPA standards for this poison.

Recently there has been a great deal of publicity about the hereditary predisposition to breast cancer, but that does not explain the fact that the prevalence of this horror has gone, in recent years, from 1 in 11 women to 1 in 8. Meanwhile the nuclear power plants are chugging along and our new president's wealthy backers want 81 new [and even double- and quadruple-sized] plants.

Fact: Close down a reactor and the

rate of childhood cancer in the surrounding area drops.

Fact: Radiation causes death of fetuses, preferentially male fetuses.

Wait a second. It's the unborn. State Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, and state Sen. Brian Bingman, R-Sapulpa who entered these bills, HB1320 and SB831, claim to be "pro-life," meaning anti-abortion. But they are OK with death of the pre-born if it's profitable for someone.

Other "public servants" at the statehouse who are backing this are Rep. Scott Martin, R-Norman, and Oklahoma House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa.

After knowing all this, reading these bills made me nauseated; they are all about who gets what loot and how quickly, along with untrue assertions about nuclear power being "emission-free" and renewable. Much of the juice to be generated will be sold out of state. [Not for domestic consumption.] Not a single word about health and safety. Take a look for yourself. They are available online.

We Okies and we Americans like to be nice and easygoing and usually have a live and let live attitude. But this is too much of an outrage.

Fact: Though we Americans are treated as expendable by the nuclear profiteers, we do not feel that way about ourselves.

These guys, I'll bet, all wear American flags in their lapels. That doesn't make them patriots. Remember where you will find the devil at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning – in church sitting in the first row [or delivering the sermon] ...

No. It must be said: It is treason!

And premeditated murder of men, women and children. The physical destruction of America for private gain, and starting with our DNA.

As legislators, that is exactly what they are deciding on. They had better bother to educate themselves, change course and do the right thing.

We can't see the little fiends, the ones that are called Alpha particles, Gamma rays, and Beta particles and they come in vast and continuous swarms. You may be able to picture what these silent, odorless, tasteless, invisible demons do to your little cells. Picture what a 50-caliber Uranium bullet could do to a toddler. On a smaller scale, one Alpha particle can tear through and destroy hundreds of cells. Gamma rays and Beta particles

have a smaller punch but make up for it with a greater range.

If it was with a bullet in a gun, we would all know what to do; what is the difference if the bullets are Alpha, Beta and Gamma caliber nuclear munitions? None, actually. Dead is still dead – and forever.

The decision is simple. No nukes.

Big, important fact: There is only one place on Earth where a nuclear power plant was prevented from being built due to popular pressure: Oklahoma.

The struggle to prevent the Black Fox facility from being built signaled the end of new nuclear power plants anywhere in the U.S. for a generation. Carrie Barefoot Dickerson, who spearheaded the struggle, passed away recently. They barely waited until her corpse was cold to try to rehabilitate this nonsense.

The businessmen and legislators backing the nuclear abomination a second time around are behaving treasonously and picked the wrong folks to mess with.

We will stop them again!

– The author is a physician living in Stillwater

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# JUSTICE

From Page 16

"When I got out, I made sure that I had clean urine and if I had an appointment with my probation officer, I went to it," she said. "I had a goal to get back into society and be a good citizen."

## MANY HURDLES FOR BLACK WOMEN

Black women offenders face a number of hurdles when they want to leave a life of crime. Brenda Smith, professor at the American University Washington College of Law and a consultant with the National Women's Center Women in Prison project, said that black women offenders face systemic challenges that their white counterparts don't deal with.

"Black women in prison generally have a lack of family and community support," said Smith, who authored a pamphlet, *An End to Silence: A Prisoner's Handbook on Identifying and Addressing Sexual Misconduct*, for women offenders.

"There are issues of poverty because they are less able to afford mental health and substance abuse treatment to divert them from jail or prison. They then end up committing crimes to support a habit."

## CRACK COCAINE LAWS UNFAIR

Nkechi Taifa, a senior policy associate at the Open Society Institute, said that crack cocaine laws have increased the number of black women in prison unfairly.

"Black women are caught in the net," Taifa said. "Black women disproportionately are caught up in the criminal justice system because of these bad crack cocaine laws. They are caught up with what I call the 'girlfriend problem.'"

"Many of these women date or have relationships with these men and they get charged along with them to harsh sentences. Basically, they are the wrong person at the wrong time."

Both Mallory and Gaskins said that supporting men with criminal tendencies brings women into a life of crime. Smith said that women would like to break free from these men but don't find it so easy to do.

"The man may be the actor but the woman is prosecuted as well," Smith said. "Often women have little information to bargain for a better plea and end up serving long sentences. Also, women are afraid the men will hurt them, their children or their families if they 'snitch' on them."

## PROBLEMS MULTIPLY WITH FAMILY

Taifa and Smith said that women have additional problems if they have a family.

"When women are incarcerated, they have very little contact with the family and especially the children," Smith said. "They are often single parents and when they go to prison, they may lose custody of their children to family members who are angry with them and therefore may face a legal termination of parental rights."

Taifa said that when a woman gets through serving a prison term, she will have problems finding a job or getting basic social services because of her record.

"It no secret that a woman, especially a black woman, will have a harder time getting a job and established than a white woman," she said.

## SELF-ESTEEM, ANGER, MENTAL ILLNESS

The main hurdle that women offenders face in and out of prison is psychological. THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, FEBRUARY 25, 2009, PAGE 19

cal. Dr. Wilma Butler acknowledges that and has formed a group in DC, WINCA (Women in Control Again) that focuses on female offenders and putting them on the right track.

"Women who are in the criminal justice system have to deal with issues of low self esteem, anger and, in some cases, mental illness," Butler said. "We try to deal with it in a holistic way, trying to keep the body and the mind sound. If the body is out of sync, the mind also can be out of sync, too."

Smith said that many women offenders take on the role of victim.

"The history of sexual and physical victimization puts them at risk for criminal involvement and poor decision-making," she said.

In another BJS report, *Prior Abuse Reported by Inmates and Probationers*, nearly 6 in 10 women in state prisons had experienced physical or sexual abuse in the past. The report said that 69% of the affected group said an assault occurred before the age of 18.

In contrast, only 16% of the male inmates surveyed confirmed physical or sexual abuse before incarceration.

## SEXUALLY ABUSED BY FAMILY, LOVERS

Mallory and Gaskins admitted candidly that they had been sexually abused by family members and lovers.

Gaskins is close to finishing her probation because she is clean and met her responsibilities. Still, there are temptations.

"When I go to the store I see the crack addicts that I used to hang with," she said, "and I admit that a side of me wants to go over there and do what they are doing. But I fight that because I want a better life."

Mallory is in a living environment where she is verbally abused by her housemates for staying away from drugs.

"Oh, I get called all kinds of names and it is tempting but I have better goals for myself," she said. Mallory works with an organization, HIPS [Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive], which helps prostitutes get off the street and provides them with counseling and social services.

"After you get out of prison, it is not easy, but it can be done with the help of the Lord and determination."

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