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Ethics Commission Under Fire

Muzzling The Watchdog

By Arnold Hamilton

In the nearly two decades since state voters bestowed constitutional status on the Oklahoma Ethics Commission, the public's watchdog over campaign finance laws and special interests has made enemies on both sides of the political divide.

It prosecuted former Republican Gov. Frank Keating for alleged political use of a state airplane. Its investigation of ex-Democratic Auditor Jeff McMahan led to his federal prosecution and conviction. And its inquiry into a campaign finance shell game factored into the demise of former GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill.

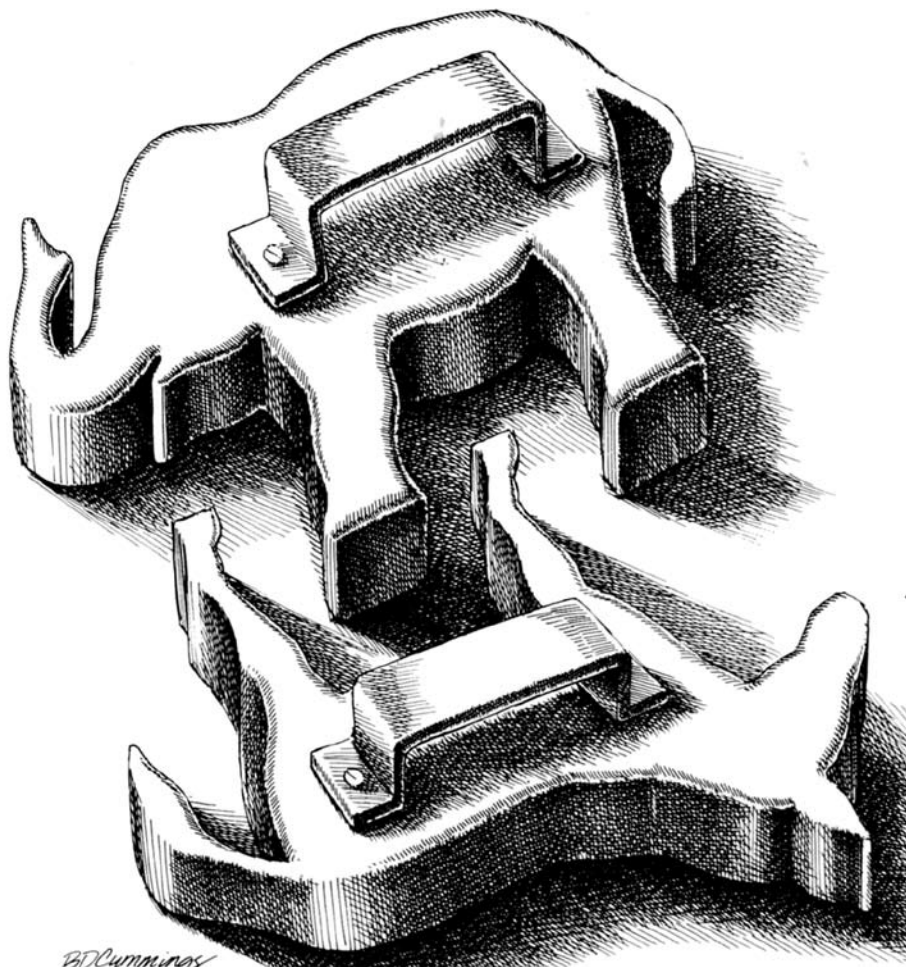
Now, with public attention diverted by a \$900 million budget gap and other pressing issues, state lawmakers may have found the perfect moment to execute a scheme they've long dreamed of – not only to muzzle permanently the public's watchdog, but also to depose its hard-nosed, independent executive director, Marilyn Hughes.

By summer's end, powerful forces that prefer the illusion, rather than the reality, of a strong, independent watchdog may have enough votes on the five-member Ethics Commission to remove Hughes, raising the specter that a political hack could be installed to protect incumbents or do the majority party's dirty work. Can you say "witch hunts"?

Republicans and Democrats alike grouse privately about Hughes and the commission, especially miffed that commissioners last year reduced from \$300 to \$100 the amount lobbyists may spend annually on each lawmaker.

GOP legislative leaders were further angered that the commission opposed a \$50,000 appropriation last year to purchase new campaign finance software that the agency said it neither needed nor wanted. Gov. Brad Henry thwarted the mandate, enabling the agency to re-deploy the proceeds to award its staff their first pay raises in more than a decade – igniting rounds of indignant chest-thumping from one of the nation's highest-paid Legislatures.

In the last two years, Republicans have fired a series of legislative vol-



leys at the agency in what can only be described as thinly-veiled attempts to bully the commission, and Hughes, into submission.

Among the frat-boy-esque hijinks was a proposal by House Appropriations Committee Chairman Ken Miller, R-Edmond, to make the executive director a gubernatorial appointee [a sure-fire method of eliminating politics from public corruption cases!].

Even more insipid: Rep. Rex Duncan, R-Sand Springs, recently overhauled HB 1903 in order to propose the Ethics Commission's name be changed to the Oklahoma Elections and Campaign Reporting Commission. As a lawyer, surely Duncan knows you can't statutorily order such a change in a constitutionally-created agency. It requires a statewide vote.

More likely: He's just messing with the commission. Why? Maybe it has

something to do with the fact the agency's investigator inquired last year about the sale of the lawmaker's home – for a lucrative price – to a Sand Springs landfill company. A real estate agent told the Tulsa World he believes Duncan received special treatment after he threatened to oppose the landfill company's proposed expansion.

The Ethics Commission isn't going to win many popularity contests at the state Capitol, no matter which party controls the Legislature. Democrats starved the agency when they had House and Senate majorities. Republicans have followed suit.

How bad is it? Even though the agency estimates its workload has jumped five-fold, state lawmakers have refused to increase the seven-member staff it has had since its inception as a statutory agency [1986].

Neither the executive director, the commission counselor nor the chief investigator has an assistant or secretary. Each does their own typing, copying, filing and mailing.

In fact, the agency's finances were so tight in recent years that it resorted to borrowing paper from other state agencies – the equivalent of school teachers being forced to buy supplies from their own pockets.

Even worse: The agency is so short-handed and underfunded it cannot prosecute civil penalties in district court, leaving the agency with no alternative but to slap an offender's wrist by issuing a reprimand. Indeed, the agency has pursued only one case in court in 18 years [against Keating].

The bull's-eye painted on Hughes is reminiscent of a case two years ago when GOP powers-that-be, led by Senate President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee decided the director of the Criminal Justice Resource Center had to go. K.C. Moon's sin was that he spoke truthfully – in public – about the state's prison crowding issues. He resigned early last year.

Hughes' sin is that she won't play politics with ethics investigations. She won't back off high-profile cases. And she remains an indefatigable advocate for her agency and its overworked staff.

But Hughes works at the pleasure of the Ethics Commission, and its makeup could change significantly by this summer. Coffee, for example, recently appointed Claremore banker Robert McKinney to fill one vacancy. GOP House Speaker Chris Bengé will make another appointment when Tulsa attorney Don Bingham's term expires this summer.

That will give the current Republican legislative leadership responsibility for two of the five seats. All they would need is one more vote to end Hughes' 22-year tenure with the agency.

The threat to the Ethics Commission's independence is real. If the agency is turned into a political arm of the Legislature's majority party, Oklahoma will be the real loser.

Observations

GOP Myths

From talk radio and TV motor-mouths to editorial pages and word of mouth, lies about the Obama stimulus plan are endless.

Do some of the Republican claims you've heard about the stimulus bill sound too awful to be true? We find a few that are wildly exaggerated or downright false.

Factcheck.com, an excellent non-partisan source, has exploded most of the myths.

It's not true that the bill contains spending for "golf carts." It has \$300 million to buy fuel-efficient vehicles, some of which may be electric cart-like utility vehicles.

Money claimed to be for "remodeled federal offices" is mostly designated for upgrading buildings to "green" status through such things as thicker insulation and highly efficient lighting, not new drapes or paneling.

A widely repeated claim that \$8 billion is set aside for a "levitating train" to Disneyland is untrue. That total is for unspecified high-speed rail projects, and some of it may or may not end up going to a proposed 300-mph "maglev" train connecting Anaheim, CA, with Las Vegas.

There's no money in the bill specified for butterfly parks, Frisbee golf courses or water slides, despite a GOP congressman's claim that the bill "will fund" those projects.

Don't look to us to defend any particular item in the bill, or to criticize it. We will, however, call out politicians for delivering trumped-up descriptions of the bill's contents.

Ouch!

You can bet when Fox scored the first interview with Bristol Palin they didn't expect the bombshell she dropped.

"I think abstinence is, I don't know how to put it - like, the main - everyone should be abstinent or whatever, but it's not realistic at all," the new, unwed mother told Greta Van Sus-

teren.

Bristol's teen pregnancy made headlines last year just as her mother, Gov. Sarah Palin, kicked off her vice presidential bid.

Bristol Palin told the truth - abstinence is not realistic for young people, even if it should be what everyone strives for.

Honesty was too much for Fox News. As soon as Bristol said what everyone already knew, Sarah Palin hustled on stage to contradict her.

Here's Oklahoma, one of the top states for teen pregnancy, thanks to then-Gov. Frank Keating who groveled to Washington for abstinence-only money, ending responsible sex education.

Public Cares

Despite politicians who believe the American people don't understand or care about the nation's nearly \$11 trillion federal debt, the public is surprisingly concerned with the country's fiscal problems and how they could be fixed.

That is just one of several important findings from the first phase of research by Public Agenda and four partner organizations.

When the magnitude and implications of growing public debt are presented to them, Americans quickly grasp the severity of the problem and that something - or indeed many things - needs to be done.

Americans are concerned about government mismanagement of their taxpayer dollars. They are profoundly worried about their children's, their grandchildren's, and their nation's future.

They are deeply cynical about Washington leaders doing anything to resolve the problems of Social Security, Medicare, other federal spending and taxes.

Once they begin to focus on the problem, however, the American people are strikingly ready and will-

ing to compromise - even if it might mean personal sacrifice in the form of higher taxes or reduced government benefits.

In more substantive discussions, in which people are given a range of options to consider, Americans are refreshingly and pragmatically open to making changes in entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security, as well as in other spending and taxation.

In short, Capitol Hill and White House perceptions are wrong about Americans being unwilling to face up to the fiscal problems relating to national debt.

The people of the United States generally want their government to live responsibly and within its means.

When they are asked what should be done to address the country's budgetary challenges, most are willing to make sacrifices for future generations and for their nation.

They want their leaders to take constructive action to stop the nation's fiscal hemorrhaging.

Report Card

New Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has weighed in on the No Child Left Behind Act, signature education law of the Bush years.

Why won't Obama abandon this sorry, unfunded mandate? We understand his support for charter schools but we question his so-called merit pay for teachers.

Duncan said that he supports the focus on accountability for student achievement but wants to make the law less punitive.

He also insists that states adopt academic standards that are more rigorous and aligned with each other and with those of other leading nations.

He is concerned about over-testing, and feels that fewer, better tests would be more effective. He wants to develop better data management systems to help teachers track individual student progress in real-time.

This would enable teachers and parents to assess and monitor student strengths and weaknesses.

Duncan said he is open to ideas for renaming the law. What he ought to be pushing is the elimination of NCLB or, at minimum, fund this grossly underfunded mandate.



Minority Rule

When Congress reached agreement on a \$789 billion economic stimulus bill they needed three Senate Republican votes, and thus did education take hefty cuts.

In order to win those three crucial Republican votes, Democrats had to yield to partisan demands.

Despite intense lobbying by governors around the country, the final deal slashed \$25 billion from a state fiscal stabilization fund that would have provided fiscal relief to states to prevent cuts to education and other priorities.

Eliminated was a \$16 billion line item for school construction. A third of public school buildings range from inadequate to unsafe.

Oklahoma's public education will receive \$287 million for special education and Title I that serves needy students.

Our Weenies in Washington had no input. Only Democrat Dan Boren voted for the final bill, proving anew that Oklahoma has the weakest delegation of any state.

Schools Suffer

A new report from the Center on Re-inventing Public Education finds that states will probably cut an estimated 18.5% of spending over the next three years.

That's an \$80 billion drop that could eliminate 574,000 publicly funded jobs and severely impact public education.

The projection doesn't account for the effect of stimulus money, but the cuts are drastic, since the stimulus package doesn't include shortfalls in local funding.

Projections of the report, State Budget Shortfalls on K-12 Public Education Spending and Job Loss, estimate an 8.7% drop in total public education spending.

That's \$54 billion less on public K-12 education during the 2009 and 2010 calendar years than if spending remained at budgeted FY '09 levels.

We are greatly disappointed that the Obama Administration seems to be walking away from real education funding and repeal of that sorry NCLB law.

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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

The new defacto head of the Republican Party is Rush Limbaugh, thrice married ex-drug addict. He makes Obama converts every time he opens his mouth.

Dart: To Brandon Dutcher, rightwing mouthpiece, for hoping the state gets some "Reaganesque" leadership. You mean like adding a trillion dollars to the national debt? Like the most administration members indicted in history? No thanks.

Republican Mary Fallin makes it official. She will give up her congressional seat to run for governor. Next GOP candidate is expected to be Congressman Tom Cole.

Laurel: To the Obama Administration for reversing Bush's last minute order that all health care workers could opt out of any treatment with which they disagree.

Radio's Tulsa-born Paul Harvey has died at 90. He was the early version of motormouth Rush Limbaugh until the Vietnam War, which he vigorously opposed.

This year's Cow Chip Throwing Contest will be April 11-19 in Beaver. Republican legislators are not eligible because it's only for amateurs.

Dart: To Rep. Joe Dorman, D-Rush Springs, for hopping aboard the Rep. Sally Kern Express in her drive to authorize religion in the public schools. Luckily, the Senate killed it.

In his inaugural speech, Barack Obama is the first president to acknowledge that there are atheists among us - 16% of the population.

Laurel: To fired board members of Feed The Children, reinstated by judicial order and set to dump founder Larry Jones. We've tried to warn Oklahomans for years about this troubled charity.

Gov. Brad Henry has to be the luckiest politician alive. Facing a \$900 million shortfall he helped create, he may be saved by \$2.6 billion in Obama stimulus money.

Dart: To Rep. Todd Thomson, R-Ada, decrying Chancellor Glen Johnson's \$10,000 pay raise. Will he now criticize Senate Leader Glenn Coffee's staff raises up to \$15,000 a year?

Legislative Republicans are determined to politicize Oklahoma's judiciary, proposing to change the Constitution to allow the State Senate to confirm Workers' Comp judges. Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, is leading the charge.

Laurel: To Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK, only member of the Oklahoma delegation to vote for the SCHIP bill bringing health care to 44,000 Oklahoma poor kids.

More than 69% of Oklahoma third graders have experienced tooth decay and 40% have untreated decay, leading the nation in that category. - Oklahoma Health Department

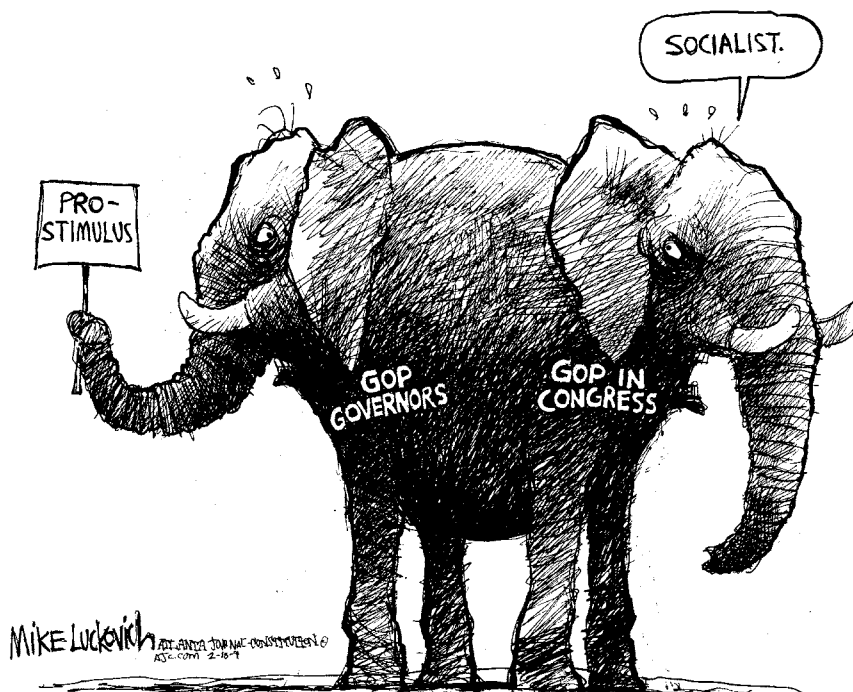
Dart: To Sen. Tom Ivester, D-Elk City, who proposes a fool's errand by letting voters decide whether prayer should be allowed in public schools. Somebody bring him up to speed. It's illegal.

Seventy percent of black children in the U.S. are born to single mothers. President Obama said the issue will be addressed by his administration. - New York Times

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Baptist University Student Senate for creating a United Students of Color organization to foment racial, religious, cultural and political diversity.

A Tulsa World survey revealed that the highest paid Public Information Officer is the governor's press secretary, Paul Sund, at \$98,500. If he drew his pay by the number of press conferences held, he would be earning the minimum wage.

Dart: To Tom Loy, chairman of an OKC company, claiming in an op-ed in the Daily Disappointment that English teachers aren't doing their jobs, resulting in sloppy e-mails, resumes, business plans and other written documents.



Little wonder that the Mexican government encourages out-migration. Last year Mexican migrant workers sent \$25 billion home, second largest source of foreign income after oil.

Laurel: To power company AES for dropping plans to build a second coal-fired generating plant at Shady Point. There is no such thing as clean coal.

In a burst of candor, ConocoPhillips' CEO told a London audience that oil companies have lost their influence because they have acquired a poor public image. Maybe Congress will rescind \$18 billion in tax breaks - it's pure pork.

Dart: To pandering politicians hellbent on making English the official state language. Does that include speaking Okie?

In easily the nastiest attack on public school teachers, Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville, is author of SB 834 that includes eliminating collective bargaining. Let's hope the governor kills it if it reaches his desk.

Dart: To Senate Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC for failing to come clean about Senate staff raises. GOP employees got them but not one Democrat.

Do a little homework. Oklahoma's prison system houses 511 illegal aliens, including 166 eligible for deportation. If HB 2245 by Rep. Randy Terrill passes, it saves taxpayers \$3 million.

Laurel: To legislative Democrats for creating such a stink that Sen. John Ford gutted his voter ID bill. The voter registration card will be sufficient.

Federal authorities said health care in 2009 will cost every man, woman and child \$8,160 - up \$356 over last year. When will Americans rebel?

Oklahoma's Corrections Department reports that 11,739 of the nearly 25,000 in prison are mentally ill. Fifty-seven percent were incarcerated for nonviolent crimes. Of the total, 79% of women and 46% of men are suffering some form of mental illness.

Dart: To Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, authoring SJR 12. If approved by the voters, it would mandate term limits on most statewide elected officials.

The AP Award from the College Board Southwest Region has gone to Assistant Superintendent Katherine Hughes of the Mid-Del schools. She has worked hard to bring more Advanced Placement classes to the district.

Laurel: To the Senate Education Committee for killing SB 320, a bill that would allow creationism to be taught in public schools. Brogdon was the author.

Rep. Dan Boren has introduced federal legislation to outlaw foreign-made American flags.

Dart: To the nine dim lights on the Senate Finance Committee for approving a bill that would set a flat tax rate of 3.4%. And how would they replace the lost millions? Oops!

Laurel: To America's women voters, giving Barack Obama a 15-point advantage over John McCain. Eleven pro-choice women were elected to the U.S. House, two to the U.S. Senate.

Boy, are we breathing easier. The State Senate voted 44-0 for Sen. Jay Paul Gumm's "In God We Trust" license plate. Will it solve our lack of leadership in Oklahoma? God help us.

Dart: To the House leadership for sitting on \$6.9 million slush fund. Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, said it should be used to aid the Norman Veterans Center which is seriously underfunded.

Alaska's Sarah Palin is mired in another scandal - she has been hit with a bill for \$7,000 for trips she illegally authorized for her children.

Laurel: To legislative Democrats for pointing out that insurance companies that cover erectile dysfunction won't cover autism.

We have no idea why it took so long to induct Tulsan Roy Clark into the Country Music Hall of Fame. His banjo playing is second to none.

Dart: To the Oklahoma House voting 89-11 for a resolution by Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, containing a flat lie that President Obama favors forcing doctors to perform abortions. No wonder legislators rank below used car salesmen.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

In reference to "Nuclear Revival?" by Morton S. Skorodin, which The Observer chose to feature as its lead article in the Feb. 25 issue, please consider the following points.

We are repeatedly told to check it out on the Internet. While the Internet is a vast source of wonderful information, it is also a source of garbage. Without knowing the source being referenced, one can only wonder about the value of the information.

When the tone of an article borders on hysterical and inflammatory, without obviously being said with a sense of humor, then red flags go up saying that the points being made can't stand on their own merit; therefore, I must use this tone to persuade you anyway.

I, for one, would rather live next door to a nuclear power plant than a coal-fired plant. Of course, my first choice would be for the plant to be in Mr. Skorodin's back yard, but isn't that the way we all are.

Lee Matthiesen
Grove

Editor, The Observer:

I heard on the news that Elliott's Hardware in Dallas has offered George W. a job as a door greeter. Very interesting. Finally, a job he's qualified for.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

Re: House Bill 1332, the so-called "puppy mill" legislation:

Shame on you for falling for this bad piece of legislation! This bill will cause even more animal deaths and more starving animals to roam the rural streets where I live because it will greatly and negatively impact legitimate rescue organizations for both cats and dogs. It isn't just about puppy mills. As currently drafted its overly broad terms would cover even veterinary hospitals [a ridiculous result]. We need better cruelty definitions and more enforcement of current laws, not sweeping regulations.

Yes, I know there is a problem with unregulated commercial-level breeders who lack ethics and people with psychological collector syndromes who claim to be rescuing pets, but this bill will drive away people who might serve as foster homes for legitimate groups because it will subject them to the loss of privacy in their homes via the unannounced, warrantless searches provided for in this bill. The costs of both yearly licensing and

meeting the requirement for micro-chipping every placed animal [even those given away, not sold] will sink many rescue organizations [and feral cat programs] since they typically operate on extremely thin budgets.

We need help for cats and dogs in bad situations, but this bill isn't it.

Beth Alonso
Luther

Editor, The Observer:

One minute the Oklahoma GOP is deciding whose prayer is all right at the Capitol and the next minute one of their own is arrested for lewd molestation of a minor.

The former chair of the Republican Party of Pottawatomie County was arrested for "knowingly and intentionally looking upon, touching and feeling the body or private parts of the young girl between June 1, 2005 and June 31, 2008, charges allege. He also is accused of causing the child to look and touch the private parts of his person, the court documents allege." [http://www.news-star.com/localnews/x1848778135/Earlsboroman-charged-with-lewd-acts]

And it is another heterosexual pervert and he is arrested the same day the Oklahoma GOP is tossing out prayers for content. Was he chair while he was doing this and what does he do for a living?

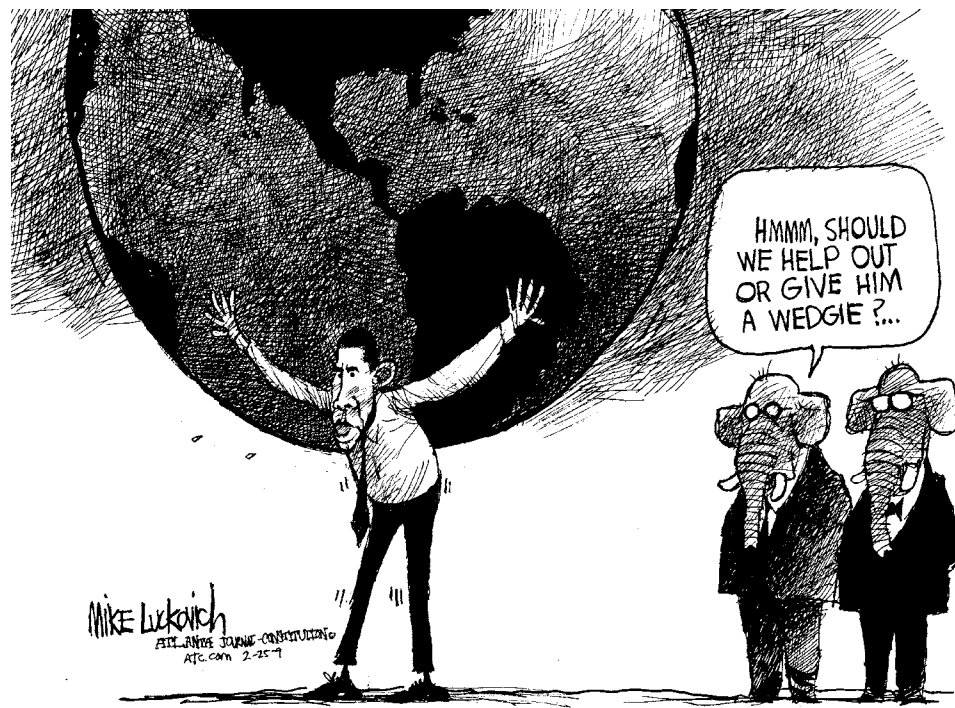
Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

The U.S. Army is investigating a stunning spike in veteran suicides this past January. The count is likely to surpass the number of combat deaths reported by all service branches. The armed forces members seem unable to maintain an internal balance - a peace amongst raging emotions.

The concept of Homeostasis, as defined by W. B. Cannon in 1929, *Dynamic Self Regulation*: "The condition of a system when it is able to maintain its essential variables within limits acceptable to its own structure in the face of unexpected disturbances." Ergo, the human system is balanced.

The armed services have recruited under-qualified members, and veterans have done three or four tours - it adds up to an unusual number of family relationship problems, symptoms of depression, and PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. The Army says suicides have risen steadily each year since 2004. Each year, there are reports like these: "As many as 121 soldiers committed suicide in 2007, a



jump of some 20% over the previous year." "120 war vets commit suicide each week." This includes vets of all wars; surely many were from personal problems. The war in Afghanistan is in its seventh year. Some say the Afghan mess is America's new Vietnam - for another decade.

The science of military technology has far out-paced the Art of Peace. In the course of human events, nations are at war quickly; peace comes slowly. Warfare has developed a state-of-the-art quickness. Peacemakers' plans are nebulous and move slowly. West Point, Annapolis, and Quantico are places to train soldiers, sailors, and Marines.

There is no National Academy of Peace for young people, funded by Uncle Sam, is there?

The solons and supers [the reps and execs], while battling the budget of bailouts, should remember and consider who's doing the real fighting.

Cecil Acuff
Perkins

Editor, The Observer:

A report by the Public Interest Research Group reveals that polluters are using America's waters as their dumping ground. It shows that between July 2003 and December 2004, 62% of industrial and municipal facilities across the country discharged pollution into U.S. waterways at rates above limits established by the Clean Water Act.

The average facility discharged pollution in excess of its permitted limits by over 275%, nearly four times the legal limit. Today more than 40% of U.S. waterways are unsafe for swimming and fishing, and, as the PIRG study shows, industrial pollution of the nation's waterways persists.

One reason for these ongoing failures was the Bush Administration's consistent efforts to shortchange the Environmental Protection Agency's budget and to gut the Clean Water Act. Hopefully, the Obama Administration will follow the rule of law and stop this threat to the nation's health.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

The late Jan Eric Cartwright, Oklahoma's last great attorney general, said, "The most powerful force in our society is a lawyer with a conscience."

Unfortunately for Oklahoma, our two-term governor, "Blue Dog" Brad Henry, is an unconscionable lawyer.

If he had a conscience, he would not choose to do the following:

1. Support an unconstitutional death penalty law that would have killed seven innocent men who were freed from Henry's death row by DNA evidence. Nationally, DNA has freed more than 100 from death rows.

That's a strong case for clearing all death rows like Oklahoma's second governor, Lee Cruce, did and commuted all death sentences to life in prison.

"I realize that I will call down upon my head the indignation and criticism of tens of thousands of the best citizens of this state, but I am doing what my conscience tells me should be done," said Cruce.

2. Keep his feet on the necks of women by refusing to back raising Oklahoma's minimum wage law of \$6.55 an hour. Most minimum wage workers are women and Oklahoma is second only to Louisiana in minimum wage workers. Federal law allows states to pass a more generous minimum wage than the \$6.55 an hour. But Henry is not about to kick sand in the face of work hour-cutting chambers of commerce, and demand a living wage of \$10 an hour.

3. Continue to send Oklahoma Air and Army National Guard troops to George W. Bush's unwinnable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Okie actor James Garner, playing a Navy officer, says in the 1964 Americanization of Emily, "We shall never end wars by blaming it on ministers and generals or war-mongering imperialists. It's the rest of us who build statues to those generals and name boulevards after those ministers. It's the rest of us who make heroes of our dead and shrines to our battlefields. We wear our widow's weeds like nuns, and perpetuate war by exalting its sacrifices."

Our sleeping children will fight and die in future wars as long as we let old men like Sens. Inhofe and Coburn send them to battle with bombs instead of settling problems with brains and ideas.

4. Deny retraining to poor laid-off workers. With the state having a \$6.5 billion budget, and sitting on a \$600 million "rainy day" fund, there is enough tax money to give laid-off workers a tuition-free course or courses at the state's community colleges or CareerTech centers.

There is no colder "rainy day" than the one in which you are a victim of workforce reduction.

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Frosty's Notebook

Lawyers

The Oklahoma Senate Appropriations Committee in a party-line vote passed SB 997 that would make membership in the Oklahoma Bar Association voluntary.

Say what? The Oklahoma Bar Association was created in 1939 by order of the Oklahoma Supreme Court and is part of the third branch of government.

When the constitutionality of the bill was brought up, President Pro Tempore Glenn Coffee scoffed.

He claims the OBA has lobbied on inappropriate issues such as abortion. That's a damned lie but Coffee won't correct it. OBA Delegates have never even discussed it.

OBA President Jon Parsley said the association bylaws are clear on the matters that can be placed on the legislative agenda.

This is the latest in a series of vicious attacks on attorneys by Republican legislators. The attempt to micro-manage the legal profession is another giant step by the GOP to enlarge state government.

Here are some of the measures considered in this year's legislative session:

HJR 1028 – Constitutional amendment requiring the OBA to submit rules for approval by the Legislature.

HB 1602 – Constitutional amendment limiting contingency fees. [Bill has passed the full House.]

HB 1603 – Requires affidavit of an expert to be filed in tort actions, limits non-economic damages, new standard of review for class actions, allows periodic payments of damages in tort claims, allows evidence of tax consequences of damages, appoints independent counsel in class action cases, changes appeal bond requirements, modifies the definition of frivolous.

SB 1121 strikes the words "Oklahoma Bar Association" from several statutes. Ceases the requirement that mediator training be approved by OBA Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Commission.

Removes the requirement that the title standards be those of the OBA. Removes the OBA executive director from the list of individuals who receive papers of proceedings before the Court on the Judiciary and removes the OBA president from the Board of Medicolegal Investigations.

Moment Of Silence

I doff my cap to no one when it comes to defending the separation of church and state but there are times when either side goes too far.

In political correctness run amok, a Chicago federal judge has ruled that a state law requiring a moment of silence in public schools is unconstitutional, saying it crosses the line separating church and state.

"The stature is a subtle effort to force students at impressionable ages to contemplate religion," U.S. District Judge Robert W. Gettleman said in his ruling.

Our children had a moment of silence at Ridgecrest Elementary in Midwest City and there were no complaints from parents, teachers or students.

One of their teachers told me it was great because it immediately brought order to her classroom. She was not concerned about anybody praying.

The Chicago lawsuit was filed by talk show host Rob Sherman, an outspoken atheist, and his daughter, Dawn, a high school student.

As passed by the Illinois General Assembly, the law allows students to reflect on the day's activities rather than pray if that is their choice and defenders have said it therefore doesn't force religion on anyone.

But Gettleman backed critics such as the American Civil Liberties Union, which said the law is a thinly disguised effort to bring religion into the schools.

The "teacher is required to instruct her pupils, especially in the lower grades,

Crime & Punishment

For two decades Oklahoma politicians in both parties have worked hard to polish their tough-on-crime credentials.

Oklahoma's prison population is skyrocketing. In 1980 there were fewer than 5,000 in state prisons. Today it's nearly 25,000.

It is not because of crime – which is down. It is the result of sentencing laws – the Legislature and Gov. Brad Henry keep enhancing sentences, including half a dozen in the 2008 session.

Oklahomans should start to rethink one of the toughest crime reforms from the 1980s – mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.

In a new national poll, 60% of respondents opposed mandatory minimums for nonviolent crimes, including a majority of both Democrats and Republicans.

Nearly 80% said the courts are best qualified to determine sentences for crimes, and nearly 60% said they'd be likely to vote for a politician who opposed mandatory minimum sentences.

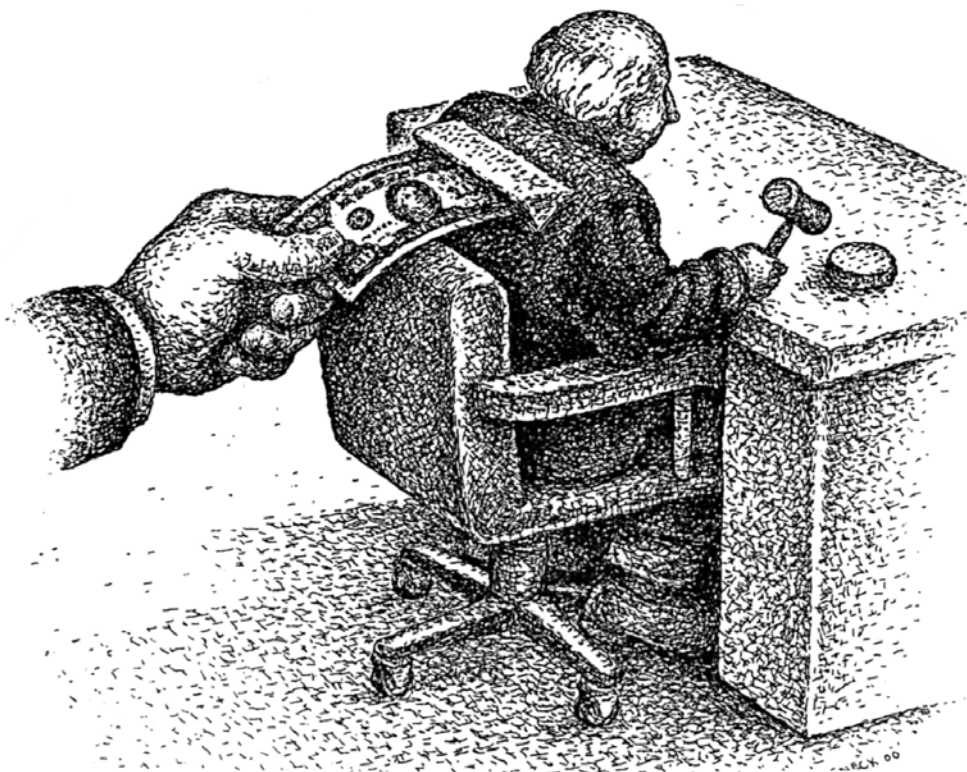
This is a case of the public being ahead of the politicians.

The current spate of mandatory minimums has its root in the crime wave of the 1980s, when fears about crack cocaine, in particular, led lawmakers to draft tougher measures to deter dealers.

Much attention in recent years has focused on the disparity between the minimums meted out for crack cocaine – often connected with African-American offenders.

The state Sentencing Commission sought to tell the Legislature the truth but

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, MARCH 10, 2009, PAGE 5



SJR 39 amends Constitution to change composition of Judicial Nominating Commission and makes judicial appointments subject to the consent of the State Senate. This horror would put the appellate courts back into partisan politics.

SB 664 – Oklahoma Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. Requires attorneys who seek to collect debts of their clients to register and be licensed with the Commission on Consumer Credit as debt collectors.

There are others but you get the drift – Republicans not only would eliminate a superb independent Bar Association, they would take over the judiciary.

It is not extreme to say if this kind of attack is successful the courthouse door will be locked for average Oklahomans.

These are not Henry Bellmon-Dewey Bartlett Republicans. They represent the far right and the John Birch wings of the Grand Old Party. Today's GOP leadership is a wholly owned subsidiary of corporate Oklahoma.

Pray that Gov. Brad Henry has his veto pen at the ready.

about prayer and its meaning as well as the limitations on their 'reflection,'" Gettleman said.

"The plain language of the statute, therefore, suggests an intent to force the introduction of the concept of prayer into the schools," he said.

It remained unclear if Gettleman's decision would end the dispute or merely signal a fresh battle in a federal appeals court.

State Sen. Kimberly Lightford, D-Chicago, the chief sponsor of the legislation, said she hoped Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan would appeal.

"I strongly feel and I still believe that children should have a moment of silence at the beginning of the school day," she said in a telephone interview from Washington, DC, where she celebrated the inauguration of President Obama.

Last year, a federal court threw out a challenge to a 2003 Texas law that allows children to "reflect, pray, meditate or engage in any other silent activities" for one minute at the beginning of each school day.

U.S. District Judge Barbara Lynn upheld the constitutionality of that law, concluding that "the primary effect of the statute is to institute a moment of silence, not to advance or inhibit religion."

Amen.

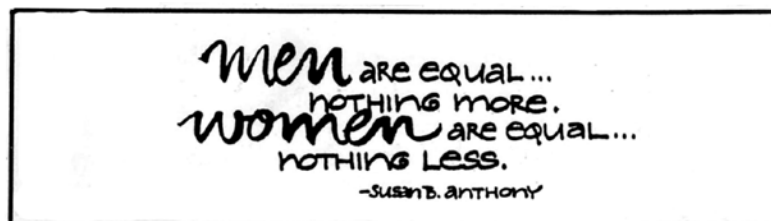
they responded by getting rid of the executive director.

Last year, the U.S. Sentencing Commission got a reduction of some sentencing guidelines for crack cocaine, sparking a controversy about crack offenders made eligible for release, but the minimums remain the same.

Ceding the power to judges makes sense because they know the law and the criminal justice system.

Mandatory minimums take away discretion from the person best able to weigh punishment. The judge has all the facts about an individual case, whereas the Legislature is setting the sentence guidelines in a vacuum.

The state has taken baby steps by creating drug and mental health courts. The irony is that both Democratic and Republican legislators have declined to adequately fund the corrections system. How hypocritical.



DHS Audit Prompts Massive Overhaul

Oklahoma children are removed from their homes at twice the national average, putting a strain on both the state system and the children and families themselves.

This was a finding of fact contained in a \$400,000 outside audit of the Department of Human Services.

The audit comes after five months of extensive study by the independent auditing firm Hornby Zeller Associates, which has helped lead changes in states like Arkansas and Georgia following similar audits.

The audit focused on the children and families services division, field operations division and family support services division of the agency.

If the recommendations are implemented they could protect more Oklahoma children from harm.

FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

"We have to work to find the right balance between keeping children in their homes when at all possible and knowing when a child needs to be taken out of a dangerous situation," said Rep. Ron Peters, R-Tulsa, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services.

"We will be working to intensify our safety and risk assessment training of DHS workers so they can know the difference between a family who could use improved parenting skills versus one knowingly harming their child."

House Speaker Chris Benge requested the audit last legislative session and formed a bipartisan working group to study the issue.

"It is my hope that everyone involved in this process will put the well-being of Oklahoma children first. I would like to thank department officials, especially agency director Howard Hendrick, for their willingness to work with the Legislature," said Benge, R-Tulsa.

HELPING THE ABUSED AND NEGLECTED

"There will always be a certain level of tragedy when dealing with neglected and abused children, but we must do all we can as a state to minimize those risks."

The audit recommends streamlining several functions of the agency to eliminate duplication and help families know where they need to go for services.

A centralized hotline needs to be established for all reports of abuse and neglect of children. The department's licensing processes also need to be more efficient.

A single process needs to be developed for all in-home services, whether that is day care, foster care or adoptive screenings.

PROVIDING DETAILS ONLINE

DHS should also develop a Passport Program similar to that in Texas, which allows information about a child's physical and behavioral health and educational needs to be available electronically.

The need for additional training for DHS workers was also cited several times in the audit, and DHS Director Hendrick has said the department is already in the process of implementing more stringent and thorough instruction for both new and current employees.

DHS has limped along on a limited budget for several years, including a huge turnover of social workers - lowest paid in the nation.

"Having the proper training in place for our child welfare workers has to be a priority, and we must constantly work to make sure DHS employees have the most up-to-date training and skills when it comes to dealing with vulnerable children," said Peters.

KEEPING MORE CHILDREN IN THE HOME

Another audit recommendation would aim to reduce the number of children in the state system by increasing the number of in-home services available to families.

"The majority of children are removed from their home because of neglect, not willful abuse," said Peters. "This change would help teach parents how to properly care for their children while keeping them at home and safe under the more stringent court supervision of in-home services."

Though additional in-home services may come with a price tag, Peters said the state would save money in the long run with an increased focus on in-home services that would help keep children out of costly state care.

"Many parents in Oklahoma want to be able to take care of their children, but aren't adequately equipped to do so," he said.

One of the critical recommendations, if enacted, would ensure that a DHS case-worker is directly involved in the removal of a child from their home.

COPS' AUTHORITY TO BE LIMITED

Currently, law enforcement can remove a child from the home and place the child in DHS custody without the involvement of a child welfare worker.

The change would help to prevent children from being removed from the home needlessly, which puts undue burdens on the child and the system itself.

In Oklahoma, the audit shows that 20% of children removed from their homes are returned within one week of removal.

In the Tulsa area, 40% of children removed are returned home in that same time frame.

The audit proposes some structural reorganization of the Oklahoma and Tulsa county offices. Additionally, the audit says the department's adoption workers need to be integrated into the agency's local offices.

SPEAKER PROMISES OVERSIGHT

Benge said that an oversight component - to ensure the changes made are ef-



fective - would be included in the reform legislation.

"All of these recommendations will not be able to be implemented overnight, but we will be aggressive in pursuing as many reforms as possible," said Benge.

"Protecting Oklahoma's children is one of the utmost responsibilities of government and we will work this year and in subsequent years to make sure the state's child welfare system is the best it can be."

Since 1988, Hornby Zeller Associates Inc. has provided evaluation and consulting services to public and private organizations in over 30 states and the District of Columbia.

One of the firm's founders, Dr. Dennis Zeller, grew up in Oklahoma and is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma.

Legislation seeking to implement many of the audit recommendations is wending its way through the Legislature.

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While none of us think that this is a holiday in a broad, a really unnecessary controversy.

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State Oblivious To National Trends

Land Of The Red Voter
By Fred Beckwith

The state's political leadership has been so focused on the state's economic problems that it has been oblivious to the national trends that are shaping the future of the state. The state's political leadership has been so focused on the state's economic problems that it has been oblivious to the national trends that are shaping the future of the state.

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GOP's 'Tort Reform'

Call It What It Is: Corporate Immunity

Editor's Note: This is a response by State Democratic Party Chairman Ivan Holmes to an editorial attack by the Daily Disappointment. Naturally, they refused to print it.

By Ivan Holmes

The biggest issue facing Oklahomans during 2009 is going to be the so-called "tort reform" issue.

The Republican Party has made "tort reform" their No. 1 issue and the Democratic Party will make it our No. 1 issue.

It is going to come down to which is really the "bad guy" – lawyers or insurance companies. We are going to prove that it is the insurance companies who are the villains when it comes to so-called "tort reform."

Lawyers are hired by citizens to help them fight for their individual rights. Insurance companies have one goal – to make as much profit as possible at the expense of the policyholders.

PROFITS INTO THE BILLIONS

The Consumer Federation of America released a study on the profitability of the insurance industry that showed a profit of \$157 billion over three years.

One of the reasons for their record profits, according to the CFA, is that insurance companies require victims of injury or sickness to pay more and at the same time they limit their payouts.

Insurance companies limit what they are willing to pay but have not put any limit on the profit they make. Insurance companies are making billions in profits each year at the expense of policyholders.

EDUCATING OKLAHOMA VOTERS

We plan on educating Oklahoma voters that "tort reform" is aimed at reducing compensation for injured Oklahomans.

The Republican Party tries to make Oklahomans believe frivolous lawsuits cause citizens to pay more for their insurance.

But the real truth is that there are very few "frivolous" lawsuits in Oklahoma. In fact, in a letter from State Farm Insurance Co. to the Kansas Insurance Department they stated, "We believe the effect of tort reform on our book of business would be small."

INSURANCE COMPANIES RESPOND

Allstate Insurance Co. told the Seattle Times that premium rates "would not be measurably affected by the tort reform legislation."

It is a myth that there are too many tort lawsuits. Only about 2% of people injured by a physician's negligence ever file a lawsuit, according to the New England Journal of Medicine.

What this boils down to is that Republican lawmakers are trying to take away

ODOT Targeted In Discrimination Complaint

The legislative Black Caucus insists that all communities must be included in the first round of \$340 million stimulus funding for Oklahoma, proportionately and in accordance with the spirit and intent of Title VI.

The Caucus has filed a formal complaint with the U.S. Secretary of Transportation.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation has awarded no bids to black contractors in the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program since October 2007.

"It is incumbent upon the Department of Transportation to remove barriers to minority participation in the contracting process, and the agency has simply failed in this regard," said Sen. Constance Johnson, D-OKC.

"The agency lacks an effective, enforceable non-discrimination program. In order to genuinely level the playing field, ODOT must make a firm commitment to utilizing minority businesses."

ODOT Director Gary Ridley has agreed to address the problem.

Specifically, the complaint relates to ODOT's performance in relation to Title

Dental Hygienists Trained At Western

Western Technology Center and the University of Oklahoma School of Dental Hygiene have partnered to provide educational opportunities to rural western Oklahoma students seeking a career as a dental hygienist.

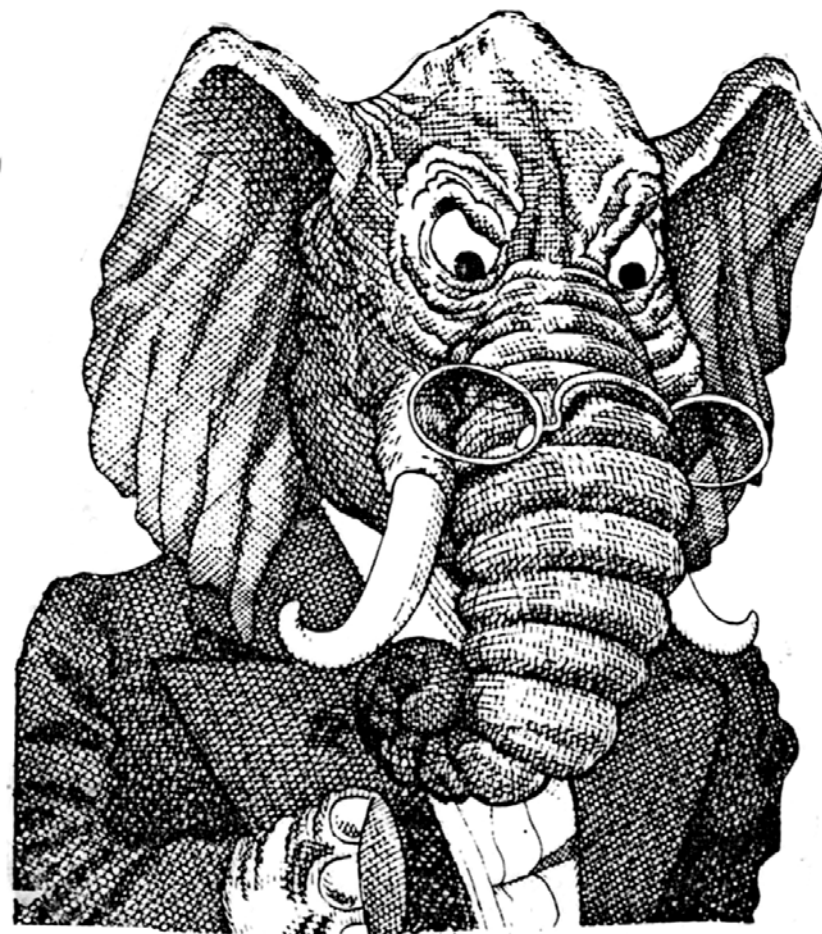
"This program at Western Tech Center is positioned to meet the high demand for dental hygienists in the rural communities," said Dr. Steve Young, Dean of the OU School of Dentistry. "It is an exciting partnership."

Last year, administrators from Western Tech Center along with the University of Oklahoma School of Dentistry formally dedicated the new WTC/OU Dental Hygiene program.

This program is located at the Western Tech Center Dental Building in Weatherford that also houses the WTC Dental Assisting program.

According to WTC Superintendent Gene Orsack, Western Tech spent a year renovating an unused building to house both the WTC Dental Assistance Program and the new OU Dental Hygiene Program.

Labor statistics project that employment in the dental hygiene profession will



the freedom of Oklahomans to make their own decisions. The questions Oklahomans must answer are:

QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERS

- How important is it to you to have the freedom to select your doctor rather than having insurance companies determine your doctor?
- How important is it for your doctor to have the freedom to determine your treatment rather than the insurance companies?
- How important is it for you to have the freedom to hire a lawyer of your choice to represent you when you feel an injustice as been done?
- How important is it for you to have a judge or jury determine the extent of damages you deserve rather than politicians?
- How important is it for you to have the Oklahoma House and Senate debate both Republican and Democratic bills rather than vote only on bills written by the Republican Party?

If you are willing to give away your freedom on these issues, then support "tort reform." However, if you want to make these decisions, tell the politicians to leave our legal system as it is.

VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Based on data supplied by ODOT, the complaint addresses the fact that ODOT contracted with no African-American firms in FY 2007-08, and disproportionately low numbers of other ethnic minorities via the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program [DBE] in achieving its highly touted "exceeded the goal" performance.

The lawmakers have requested that all federal funding targeted for public sector projects in Oklahoma be withheld until either a disparity study is completed, or an independent body is appointed to oversee ODOT's selection and contract awards processes.

ODOT's contracting process has long "been dominated by a business-as-usual attitude, which makes it difficult for minority businesses to successfully participate," Johnson said.

"It's time for us to establish accountability for what has been a continuing pattern of failure on the part of ODOT to utilize minority contractors.

"The agency must ensure fairness in the process by researching and adopting measures to improve minority access in contracting," she said.

grow faster than average through the end of the decade and dental hygienists should continue to be in the Top 10 growth careers in the health care profession.

The OU dental hygiene students at Western Tech have to meet certain requirements and apply for entrance through the OU Dental School in Oklahoma City.

A dental hygienist is a licensed health care professional, oral health educator and clinician who, as a co-therapist with the dentist, provides preventative, educational, and beneficial services supporting total health for the control of oral diseases and the promotion of oral health.

A minimum of 60 semester hours is required from an accredited college or university. These college hours can be earned at Southwestern Oklahoma State University's campuses located in Weatherford or Sayre.

"The students' lecture portions are provided by interactive videoconference directly from their professors at the OU Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City

See DENTAL Page 8

Behold The Pistol-Packin' Profs Six-Gun Scholarship At The Campus Corral

Editor's Note: State Rep. Jason Murphey's guns-on-campus bill thankfully stalled in committee, the second year it has failed to gain legislative approval. Don't think Murphey, an NRA toady, won't resurrect it in the future, perhaps even attempting to fold some of the language into another bill.

By William W. Savage Jr.

One wishes that state Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, had put a little more thought into HB 1083, a bit of proposed legislation I like to call "The Pistol-Packin' Prof Prescript."

Should HB 1083 ever become law, it would allow people like me to carry heat in college classrooms.

Murphey's idea, I guess, is that gun-toting faculty could discourage terrorists and other demented folk from shooting up the campus and inflicting bodily injury upon students, staff, and unarmed PhDs.

Trouble is, the legislation as introduced had more holes in it than John Dillinger's corpse.

For starters, what's with all this concealed carry business? Were I an official Pistol-Packin' Prof, why would I want to carry my hardware concealed? What kind of deterrent is a weapon nobody can see? Concealing stuff is just the sort of thing the bad guys do, I opine.

THE BILL IS FULL OF, UH, HOLES

And then there is the problem of a weapon's caliber. Murphey's bill specified none. Nor did it say a word about the kind of ammunition one should employ.

I'd want to have both of those holes plugged [so to speak] for the sake of innocent bystanders. Lots of college classrooms contain innocent bystanders. They could get shot, you know.

See, what you want in a shootout with evildoers in tight places full of innocent bystanders is a large-bore gun that fires a heavy, slow-moving bullet that stays inside the human body it enters. You go blazing away with some sort of high-velocity piece loaded with some kind of jacketed ammo, and you could bring down two or three people with a single shot, which is fine if they're bad guys standing in a line.

The odds, however, are against convenient placement of malefactors. In the event of a through-and-through, you're more likely to hit a student.

HOW ABOUT A .45 WITH HOLLOW-POINT LOADS?

So, I'm thinking a .45 with hollow-point loads is what you'd want. And not just any .45, either. A semi-automatic [commonly but erroneously called an automatic] will hold seven [or, if you wish to risk becoming the next Plaxico Burress by leaving one in the pipe, eight] shells; and it's fast and easy to reload if you carry a couple of spare clips. But it can jam on you, and that's not a good thing in a firefight.

For reliability, therefore, you need a solid, old-fashioned single-action revolver – the kind they used to call an equalizer. I advocate an Old West, frontier-type thumb-buster, so called because you have to cock the hammer before you can fire it, and sometimes that ain't easy on the opposable digit.

Semi-automatics allow you to shoot before you think. A thumb-buster won't permit such behavior.

Kind of bulky, though. Good luck trying to conceal something like that beneath items from the average professorial wardrobe.

JUST THE WAY GOD, THE DUKE INTENDED

Besides, you ought to wear a thumb-buster in a holster on your hip, the way God and John Wayne intended. Undeniably, wearing it on your hip on a regular basis for long periods of time will cause a certain degree of lopsidedness. Remember how the Duke walked. He was definitely leaning to the right, toward his gun hand.

And his politics, come to think of it.

But let us forget politics and stick to important things. You'll want to prevent lopsidedness, and the best way to do it is to even-out the burden by carrying another thumb-buster on your other hip.

Some faculty – and here I mean no offense to any gender, age, or condition – may be oddly shaped; and the added weight of a couple of roscoes might result



in dangerous sagging in the area of the pants.

RED SUSPENDERS LIKE ALFALFA BILL

To avoid the possibility of unfortunate [if not indecent] exposure, official Pistol-Packin' Profs would be well-advised to wear sturdy suspenders. Red ones might be appropriate. Alfalfa Bill Murray, Oklahoma's ninth governor, said red suspenders were the sign of a real he-man. Indeed, when it comes to denoting real he-men [and maybe real he-women] red suspenders and firearms are pretty much an unbeatable combination.

Two revolvers and a pair of red suspenders would readily identify the authentic Pistol-Packin' Prof to police, who might reasonably be expected to respond to an emergency involving flying lead. The profs would need something to identify them, or they might be mistaken for villains.

On second thought, maybe that's the whole idea. From time to time, state legislators complain about tenure. Too many lazy intellectuals hanging around our campuses, don't you know. If you could manage to shoot a few, it'd help with the budget deficit.

So would closing some of our many, many state-supported institutions of higher learning, but you can't have that. Every politico in Oklahoma wants at least a junior college in his or her district, even if it's a crappy one that churns out associate's degrees like salmonella bacteria from a Georgia peanut plant.

TENURE REVOCATION BY COP?

Suicide-by-cop is a well-known pastime among the hopeless. Is it time for tenure-revocation-by-cop among the hapless?

Yup, we faculty need red suspenders and a brace of shootin' irons. And HB 1083 should make the wearing of same by all faculty members mandatory, even if it creates liability issues, e.g., "I was forced to tote these gats against my will, and just look what happened" or "My child took a class from an unarmed professor and look what happened."

The remaining question is, who gets sued, and how often?

One wonders if Rep. Murphey ever thought about that. Were he scheduled to be in the line of fire, maybe he would.

– The author is a professor of history at the University of Oklahoma

DENTAL

From Page 7

to the WTC's classroom and clinical site," Orsack said.

Orsack also pointed out that WTC/OU students practice the skills they learn at the on-site clinic/classroom on the Weatherford campus. Students work in the clinic under the direction of dental hygienist instructors and an onsite dentist.

"The clinic benefits both students and area residents," said Orsack. "These students will put into practice the skills they have developed through classroom studies and clinical participation with screened patients from the area."

Another plus, Orsack added, is that this partnership provides the opportunity for community residents to obtain preventative dental care.

OU currently partners with two other Oklahoma CareerTechs – Tri-County Technology Center in Bartlesville and Southern Oklahoma Technology Center in Ardmore.

"This program is very unique to CareerTech and a great example of CareerTech's

ability to partner with higher education to keep young people and jobs in western Oklahoma," said Oklahoma State Department of Career & Technology State Director Phil Berkenbile.

"This is another opportunity to grow jobs in this part of the state."

Is You Stupid?

A man spoke frantically into the phone, "My wife is pregnant and her contractions are only two minutes apart!"

"Is this her first child?" the doctor asked.

"No!" the man shouted. "This is her husband!"

Obama's Bipartisan Habits Will Work

By David Boren

History demonstrates that bipartisanship is not an impractical, romantic notion. But it doesn't happen automatically: It requires support and structure.

President Obama should remember that when he addresses Congress and the nation, and more broadly as his administration goes forward.

Many have been urging the president to give up on his efforts to work across party lines. Those people forget that bipartisanship has been critical to our nation's success.

The Marshall Plan and the doctrine of containment that served as a consistent blueprint for victory in the Cold War would not have been possible without bipartisan cooperation. Major progress in civil rights was the result of bipartisan efforts.

THEY DECIDED TO MEET OFTEN

When I went to the U.S. Senate in 1979, a dozen of the new senators, an equal number of Democrats and Republicans, decided to meet often.

With our spouses we gathered regularly for informal dinners at each other's homes. We became friends. Friends find ways to work together. Today, though, new members of Congress rarely get to know members of the other party.

In the early part of the 20th Century, party caucuses seldom met in the Senate. By the 1950s they began meeting monthly; by the 1970s they met weekly and now sometimes meet even more often. Usually, the agenda is finding ways to score points on the other party.

Partisan agendas have crowded out the national interest, and partisanship has been institutionalized. In Washington today, there are no offsetting forces to promote bipartisanship.

IT WILL REQUIRE PATIENCE

If President Obama wants to realize his goal of revitalizing bipartisanship, he must help to create these forces. This will require patience. Excessive partisanship cannot be displaced overnight.

To start, the president should immediately create four or five small bipartisan working groups of key members of Congress and members of the Cabinet.

There could be, for example, a working group on the economy and another on national security. Obama himself should join them as often as possible.

It is important that such groups meet regularly so that personal bonds are strengthened and working relationships are established. These groups would help dilute the partisanship of party caucuses and help prevent party leaders from being held captive by the most extreme elements of their constituencies.

While the president meets regularly with party leaders, it would be a mistake for him to use them as his main instrument of communication with other members of Congress.

PERSONAL TOUCH REQUIRED

Governing requires the president to devote large amounts of time to personal negotiations with key members of Congress. The kind of personal involvement required of a president is symbolized by photographs of President Lyndon Johnson, who not infrequently was seen with his arm extended around a senator, effectively holding him captive, while he whispered a proposal to get the senator's vote.

No White House staffer or Cabinet member can be as successful as the president in creating bipartisan solutions in small-group settings or sometimes even in one-on-one meetings.

Yes, there may be times of crisis when the president is forced to act urgently with the support of only his party. But giving up on the revitalization of biparti-

True Patriotism Isn't Flag-Waving Nationalism

By Sharon Martin

English Only rears its ugly head again.

In Oklahoma there is a lot to fear these days, especially ignorance and intolerance. Some politicians peddle fear to advance their own agenda. They utter racist rhetoric in the name of national security.

Recently, in Tulsa, my husband and I purchased building materials. Not a single employee offered to help us load heavy sheets of plywood, but two young customers did.

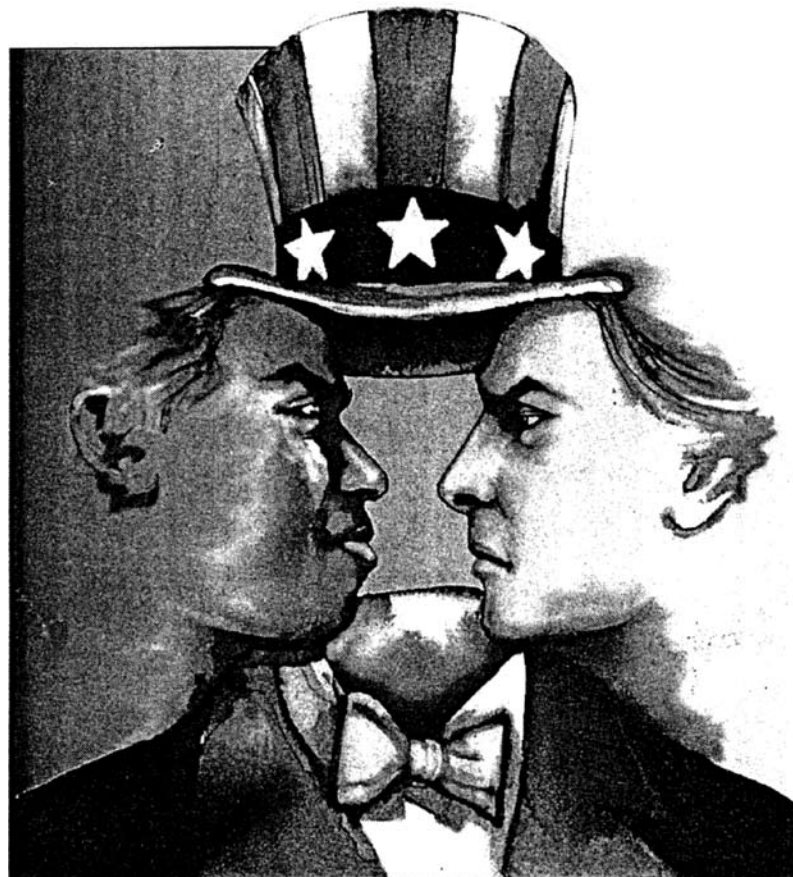
One, who spoke limited English, helped my husband lift the plywood onto our cart. Another, a young Hispanic, helped my husband load the plywood into our truck. This is reality versus rhetoric.

BEWARE THE SUPER PATRIOTS

I believe in secure borders, but most of the time it isn't the immigrants I fear nearly as much as those citizens I call the super patriots. They promote fear and nationalism, and few things are as destructive.

The people who fly flags in their front yards, plaster flags on their bumpers, and proclaim loudest about patriotism are akin to those people who pray loudly in the temple. Real patriotism is quiet and hardworking and it serves to make America a stronger, better place to live. Most soldiers are patriots, but fighting in a foreign war isn't the only path to patriotism.

My friend, Dan Hart, was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on Ash Wednesday, 2008. He served three tours of duty in Vietnam and was awarded a slew of medals because he would fly his helicopter in under fire to retrieve wounded



sanship as a major goal would undermine our future as a nation.

MODERATES PLAY A KEY ROLE

Members of Congress also have a responsibility to enhance bipartisanship. Lawmakers, especially the moderates in each party, should create a "bipartisan caucus."

Those who want to work for bipartisan approaches in the House or Senate should make efforts to get together regularly. Participation, of course, may shift, depending on the issue. But senators of centrist beliefs often held such meetings in the past.

Congress should also bring back what was known as the "Mansfield rule;" it held that a senator should not campaign against a sitting member of the other party.

When members of Congress campaign against each other, working together after the election becomes even more difficult.

VOTERS SICK OF PARTISANSHIP

Throughout 2008, poll after poll indicated that the American people were fed up with partisan bickering. Eighty percent of respondents to one Zogby survey felt that it was very important for the next president to be able to unite the country.

Another poll found that 83% of the public believed that the nation was so polarized between Democrats and Republicans that Washington could not make progress on solving major problems.

To rebuild the belief of Americans in their own government and to create an environment of trust that is needed to restore economic stability, we must first rebuild bipartisan cooperation.

Building unity across the aisle will take more than visits to caucuses of both parties. President Obama must find ways to institutionalize bipartisanship. By continuing this quest, he will help give us a future worthy of our past.

- The author is president of the University of Oklahoma. He served as a Democratic U.S. senator from Oklahoma from 1979 to 1994. This essay was published on the day President Obama gave his first address to a joint session of Congress.

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soldiers. In the last few years of his life, however, he donated his time to my alternative education students, teaching them to cook. One of his final acts of patriotism was to steer a troubled teen toward a career as a chef.

REFUSING TO BECOME ENEMIES

In Gaza and Israel, the finest acts of patriotism I noted were from those who risked their lives to maintain friendships across the checkpoints. While listening to one such account, I grabbed on to an empowering phrase: "We refuse to be enemies."

What if all of us chose friendship over enmity, cooperation over power-grabbing, charity over greed?

Patriots defend home and family, community and country. They defend a righteous way of life. They protect our borders from those who would harm us, but they do not spoil for a fight. Peace is patriotic. Rescuing citizens during a tornado or flood is patriotic. If it doesn't keep us safe and free, it is not patriotism.

Feeding the hungry is an act of patriotism. Giving young people an education that allows them real life choices is, too. Paying taxes to provide for the needs of the citizens is patriotic. Wearing a honking flag pin while hiding money in offshore bank accounts is not. In fact, I'd call that treason.

SPEAKING AGAINST INJUSTICE

Patriotism isn't just about sending our sons and daughters into harm's way. It is about speaking out when we see injustice. It is about tolerance. It is Buddhists

See PATRIOTISM Page 19

BOOKS

Reagan Betrayed Conservatism, Main Street

By Allen Barra

THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD

Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street

By William Kleinknecht

Avalon Publishing Group

324 pages, \$26.95

"The aftermath of Reagan's presidency," Garry Wills wrote in a famous introduction to his 1987 book *Reagan's America*, "has proved, over and over, that Reaganism without Reagan is unsustainable." In the two decades since Wills' book was published, a significant portion of the press and public seems to have forgotten that.

William Kleinknecht is on a mission: In *The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street America*, he is out to demonstrate that Reaganism with Reagan never worked.

Kleinknecht, a veteran crime correspondent for the Newark Star-Ledger and the New York Daily News and an American Society of Professional Journalists award winner, is angry. But unlike many writers who have taken scatter shots at the Reagan legacy, Kleinknecht hasn't lost his temper – in Henry James' words, he has found it.

MYTH OF REAGAN'S PRESIDENCY

In a fiery and lucid introduction he writes, "This book is born of annoyance: a great bewilderment over the myth that continues to surround the presidency of Ronald Reagan. It gives voice to a vast swath of psychically disenfranchised Americans, millions of them, lumped most thickly in the urban areas on either coast, who never understood Reagan's appeal."

Kleinknecht's thesis is nothing less than that Reagan was the "obvious enemy of the common people he claimed to represent, this empty suit who believed in flying saucers and allowed an astrologer to guide his presidential scheduling. ..."

The great conundrum "is this: none of [the] unmistakable harbingers of American decline is being laid where it belongs—at the door of Ronald Reagan" [emphasis Kleinknecht's].

In the tradition of most previous Reagan critics, Kleinknecht doesn't try to draw a bead on Reagan from an ivory tower. He goes after Reagan from the blue collar on up: "He enacted policies that helped wipe out the high-paying jobs for the working class that were the real backbone of the country. ... His legacy – merg-

Crude's Crude Dudes

By Don Wilkey

THE BIG RICH

The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes

By Bryan Burrough

Penguin Group USA

480 pages, \$29.95

In 1962 the Nation Magazine stated that "virtually every Radical Right movement of the postwar era has been propped up by Texas oil millionaires." The political movement that eventually led to the election of the Bushes and people like Tom DeLay was set into motion by Texas oil in the 1930s.

From Franklin Roosevelt to the Bush family, just about every major political influence in the nation had connections to Texas oil. William Buckley, Haliburton, Secretary of State Baker, LBJ, and legislative decisions have the dark stain and smell of Texas crude.

Author Burrough writes about the crude men who had much in common, the men he calls the big four: Roy Cullen, H.L. Hunt, Clint Murchison, and Sid Richardson. These men and their descendents impacted culture all the way from the Dallas Cowboys to 501c3 tax exemptions.

In 1938, W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel won the governorship running on the Ten Commandments and segregation. His election was a direct result of Texas oil. The early oil men were mostly undereducated and just before getting into oil knew little about the oil industry.

They mostly had in common card-playing, risk-taking, wild-living and right-wing politics. They despised the New Deal, integration, New York Jews, and unions. Houston was a center for much of the group. In 1954, one of the big four was the largest contributor to political campaigns in the nation.

President Eisenhower said of the group, "Their number is negligible and they are stupid."

What did them in, and diminished their influence, was the big four's endorsement of Joseph McCarthy. They had wanted McCarthy to run for president. The connection to McCarthy proved to be their undoing and the nation rejected their strange politics.

The Kennedy assassination was the final blow to a movement that sought to lay claim to mainstream American politics.

Big oil money is still around today finding favor with a religious right movement that believes global warming is a myth.

– The author is pastor of First Baptist Church, Onalaska, TX

ers, deregulation, tax cuts for the wealthy, privatization, globalization – helped weaken the family and eradicate small-town life and sense of community."

REAGANOMICS CRIPPLED POOR, WORKING CLASS

Reaganomics did create fortunes, but mostly for those at the top of the economic ladder; it also brought "a reversal in the slow gains that the working class and the poor had made in the previous two decades."

During a month when Republicans dug in against Barack Obama's stimulus plan, Kleinknecht's words, written last year before the economic crash, ring clear. "Reaganism replaced Enlightenment thinking with the corrupted Romanticism that portrays free-market purism as an article of religious faith that is the real meaning of America. The answer to any of the economic challenges of the 21st Century is to do nothing. Cut taxes, eviscerate all regulation of private enterprise, and trust the market to guide our fates."


If this sounds like hyperbole, then you weren't listening to the Republican response to President Obama's bailout proposal.

'BIG GOVERNMENT WAS NOT STRIPPED AWAY'

The Man Who Sold America has much in common with another recent scathing indictment of the Reagan Administration, Will Bunch's *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics and Haunts Our Future*.

Both books cover much of the same territory: Contrary to the nearly two decades of idolatry from the right, Reagan was no more popular than numerous other modern presidents [as Kleinknecht notes, just 27% of eligible voters elected him in 1980, a year which saw a record-low turnout at the polls], the legacy of the famous 1980 tax cut was an era of deregulation that spawned CEO and Wall Street greed, and, most important, the Reagan revolution did not do what it set out to do, namely to reduce the size of government ["Big government," writes Kleinknecht, "was not stripped away in the Reagan years; it was just redirected to the needs of private enterprise"].

See REAGAN Page 14




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Will Obama Extend Hand To The Poor?

This essay was one of five finalists in The Nation's Third Annual Student Writing Contest.

By Natalia Thompson

A Harvard Law School diploma or two decades of service in the Senate are impressive qualifications for those who seek the presidency of the United States, but the most important prerequisite for assuming office cannot be fulfilled in the marble hallways of the nation's elite institutions.

Rather, it requires an experience devoid of privilege and power. The gulf between rich and poor is rapidly accelerating, yet few Americans have ever come face to face with the staggering inequalities that the majority of the world's citizens confront each day.

In recent years, increasing numbers of the socially conscious have joined the battle against global poverty. Only a tiny fraction of Americans, however, have ever lived in the humiliating poverty that more than half the world endures daily.

AMERICANS EMBRACE DENIAL

Even as the price at the pump skyrockets and global warming looms ominously on the horizon, Americans continue to pathologically embrace denial.

Propelled by self-delusion, we refuse to forgo the greedy over-consumption that our nation has institutionalized. More than anywhere else in the world, selfishness is a social disorder. Materialism has reached a fever pitch.

Meanwhile, we ignore the burden placed on the other 95% of the world's inhabitants. While our over-consumption depletes the world's resources, sparks geopolitical meltdowns on the scale of Iraq and breeds resentment and anger around the world, the majority of Americans take for granted our comparatively luxurious lifestyles.

AMERICAN REALITY CHECK

Indeed, gaining a window into the lives of those who suffer the consequences of our greed is an important reality check for any American.

Nevertheless, few U.S. citizens – not to mention presidents – have ever seen the world from the perspective of the nearly three billion people who survive on less than \$2 a day.

Although I've never endured such hardship, I have watched too many struggle with levels of poverty unknowable to most Americans.

When I was 4, my family moved to rural Chile. There, I attended a kindergarten where students sharpened pencils with a kitchen knife for lack of a pencil sharpener, 30 kids fought over one dilapidated swing and paper of any form was virtually nonexistent.

INEQUALITIES DISTURBING

The clear-cut inequalities between the lives of my friends at home in the United States and those of my Chilean peers were disturbing to me, even at such a

Ending Culture Of Executive Entitlement

By Jim Hightower

I don't mind losing when we lose, but I hate losing when we win.

One big reason that Barack Obama now occupies the big chair in the Oval Office is that he embraced the public's rising indignation at the blatant greed of Wall Street bankers, striking the proper populist tone in last year's presidential election. After all, these slick financial elites crashed our economy, yet they kept enriching and pampering themselves, even as taxpayers were being forced to throw hundreds of billions of dollars at their failing institutions.

Having won and taken office, Obama proceeded to rip right into the bankers' shameless avarice, denouncing their "culture of narrow self-interest and short-term gain at the expense of everything else."

Great stuff! Go get 'em, Barack!

BARK TURNS TO WHIMPER

A week later, however, the president's treasury chief, Timothy Geithner, rolled out the administration's plan to add more than a trillion dollars to the ongoing Wall Street bailout, and – Holy William Jennings Bryan – Obama's populist bark had been reduced to a puppy whimper!

It seems that Geithner and Obama's top economic advisor, Lawrence Summers – both of whom have long been cozy with the very same greed-headed bankers who caused the financial mess we're in – had been cooing into the president's ears about the "danger" of "harshly" punishing executives and "spooking" private investors.

Thanks to them, even though populist politics won, populist policy lost. Gone from Obama's proposal is the idea that top managers of the failed banks – the executives who made the foolhardy investments that brought the system down – should be ousted [if not tarred and feathered]. Instead, our trillion-plus bucks are to be put right into those same hands!

If ignorance is bliss, Geithner and Summers must be ecstatic.

SOFT-ON-WALL-STREET BOYS

The Soft-on-Wall Street boys also prevailed over those who pushed to impose strict limits on the pay of top executives whose banks are getting our bailout money.

While Obama's team did put a \$500,000 annual cap on cash paid to the CEO,



young age.

Later, my sense of injustice morphed into the anger I directed toward the Washington power brokers whose policies exploited families throughout the developing world, like those I met in Chile.

In middle school, my Mexican-American mother took me to live in central Mexico, where I saw girls my age with babies strapped to their backs. Homeless children who had likely never been inside a classroom tugged at my sleeve, peddling gum and cheap trinkets.

MEXICAN MEN HEAD NORTH

Traveling across Mexico, I heard of village after village deserted by all the men who had gone north to find work. As I met those left behind, I began to understand why NAFTA left so many desperate for wages. In light of these realities, U.S. immigration policies seemed risibly hypocritical.

See POOR Page 18

the restriction does not apply to Citigroup, Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase and about 350 other banks that've already grabbed bailout funds. It only applies to those taking money in the next phase of the giveaway. Also, the executives who do fall under the cash cap can receive unlimited bonuses in the form of stock payments.

The worst part of this political cave-in is not in the details, but in the principle that was abandoned. Obama hit it on the head when he denounced "the culture" of executive entitlement that has infested America's corporate world.

In the past couple of decades, the ethical notion that business leaders should be trustees for the enterprise – with responsibilities to future shareholders, employees and the larger society – has been displaced by a singular focus on amassing short-term wealth for the few by driving up the stock price, no matter what shortcuts must be taken to achieve that soulless goal.

CEOs who can jack up those prices, by hook or crook, are hailed as geniuses and treated as royalty, no matter how much damage they're doing to their company or our country.

MANIPULATED WEALTH, CORPORATE FICTION

This celebration of manipulated wealth has even fostered an absurd bit of conventional wisdom that we can't get competent executive talent for a mere \$500,000 a year. This stems from the prevailing [and pernicious] corporate fiction that the best are, by definition, the ones who're paid the most.

Yet 500K is 25% more than our country's president makes, more than our top-rated non-profit leaders receive, more than most community bankers take and way more than America's finest teachers are paid.

Wall Street conveniently equates compensation with value – and since CEOs compensate themselves extravagantly, they've come to assume that they are America's most valuable people. Indispensable, even.

It is this self-aggrandizing corporate culture that must be changed. Sadly, Geithner, Summers – and Obama – have instead advanced that culture by failing to hold some of its worst practitioners accountable for their enormously destructive actions.

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For Americans, A Cost To Playing By Rules

By Susan Estrich

The president deserves the high marks he is getting from the public for his first month in office. Most presidents get to spend their first month putting up the draperies. This one had to spend his picking up the pieces of a collapsing economy. When the Republicans decided to just say no, he pushed ahead and got going without them.

That the country is more united in its support for the president than is the Congress is not a surprise: Those who are not professional politicians find it easier to put politics aside.

Nonetheless, we are not all similarly situated with respect to this economic crisis, and if the numbers right now obscure that, the divisions are still looming.

The critical divide is not, as in Washington, between Republicans and Democrats, but between those who are looking for or have received a government bailout and those who haven't. And that divide is defined, at least in part, by those who played by the rules and those who didn't, which is why there is real anger in America, as well as a desire for unity and action.

ECONOMIC FREEFALL AFFECTS ALL

Everyone is affected by this economic freefall, even if you don't work for an automaker or a failing financial institution, even if you're still employed and didn't buy a house you couldn't afford, even if you're still paying your bills and putting food on the table.

I know lots of people who thought they'd retire in the not-so-distant future, and now they can't. "Safe" investments turned out not to be so safe after all, and money set aside for kids to go to college or for health care costs just isn't there. Seniors who thought they would be fine aren't. Kids who thought they'd have money for college don't. People whose biggest investment is their house – and that's the case for most of us – have seen the value of that investment plummet. In other words, no one is untouched by this crisis.

But some people are obviously in worse shape than others, and among those, some are more responsible for their dire straits than others.

It's true that both parties share the blame for the deregulation of financial institutions that allowed people to buy homes they couldn't afford, and then allowed those mortgages to be packaged into what became toxic packages. But just because you are free to do something stupid and risky doesn't mean you aren't to blame for doing it.

'MAD? DAMN RIGHT'

No one forced anyone to buy a house they couldn't afford. No one forced banks and financial institutions to seek ever higher profits without regard to risk. Some people have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, because of decisions made by others. But many others are unemployed because of their own greed and the greed of their companies – after years of being overpaid based on "profits" that really weren't.

We may have to bail them out, but we don't have to be happy about it. The notion that they should continue to make more money than the president does is ludicrous. The idea that they need to be told that it's not a good time to buy a new

GOP Keeps Avoiding Its 'Fiscal Principles'

By Froma Harrop

How big should government be? The answer is: As big as it has to be – and for small-government types, no bigger than it has to be.

The whole debate about the proper size of government is a blind alley leading into a dead end. Government must grow at times of war or collapsing economy. It grows when there are lots of schoolchildren, elderly people or natural disasters. Government provides necessities that the private sector can't. We can argue over what constitutes a necessity.

There was no joy in President Obama's discussion of the expensive economic-recovery plan. He told a joint session of Congress that he asked for it, "not because I believe in bigger government – I don't." It was because "a failure to act would have worsened our long-term deficit by assuring weak economic growth for years."

JINDAL DISCONNECTED FROM REALITY

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal's Republican response to the speech showed a stunning disconnect from reality. First he called for a pile of new tax cuts, then warned that Democrats would "saddle future generations with debt."

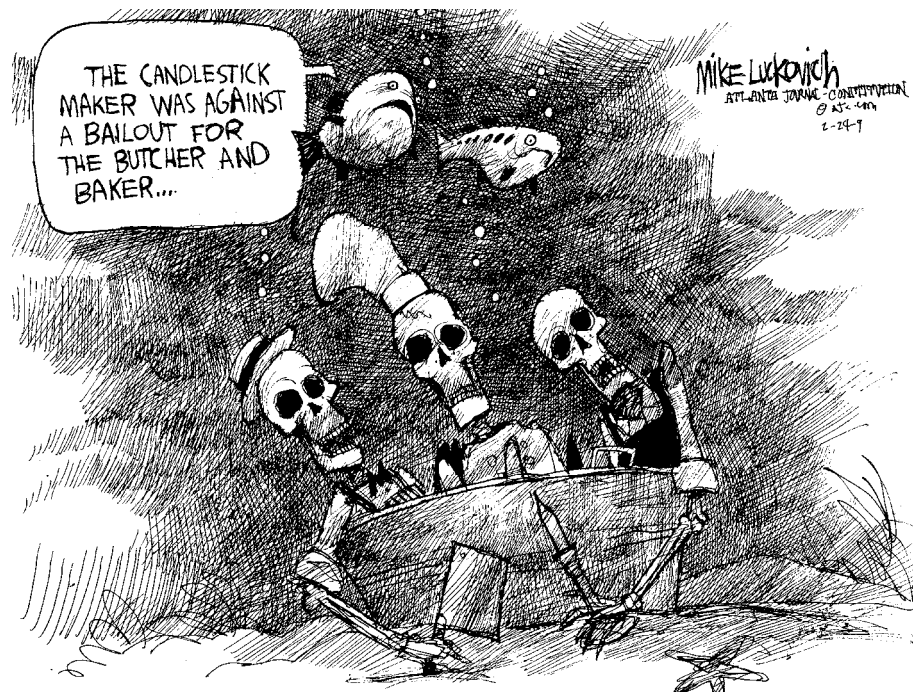
Future generations are saddled with debt precisely because of reckless Republican tax cuts – and spending. Obama repeated his vow to cut the deficit in half, once the crisis has passed. And he spoke in real-world specifics of tax loopholes to be ended and higher levies on the richest 2%.

Well, what about spending? There are fiscally righteous Republicans who fervently believe in small government and have the courage to vote against popular programs. They are but a handful.

George W. Bush, working with a Republican Congress, embarked on the biggest spending spree since Lyndon Johnson, even excluding money allocated to defense and homeland security.

A PATTERN OF FORGOTTEN PRINCIPLES

A current Republican talking point, repeated by Jindal, holds that "our party got away from its principles." Sadly, the party gets away from its principles most every time it's in power.



corporate jet is insulting. Mad? Damn right.

Bill Clinton used to make a point of talking about Americans who "played by the rules," which in the 1980s and 1990s was a sort of code for those who weren't claiming any special entitlement based on identity politics, who weren't asking the government to pay their bills or put them at the head of the line. The idea was that people who work hard and play by the rules should come first, not last.

Clinton's understanding of the extent to which the Democratic Party was perceived to have strayed from that notion is one of the main reasons he won the presidency and every other Democrat during that period didn't.

There are a good many Americans – thankfully, still the majority – who get up every morning and work one or two jobs they may not love in order to pay the mortgage for the house that may not be their dream house but is the one they could afford, in order to pay off the credit card bills and live within their means. It's harder now than it was before, but most of us still do it. We're willing to help those who need help, but we're not willing to be taken for fools, or taken to the cleaners.

SHARING THE PAIN

If the country is to remain united, it will be necessary for those who got us into this mess to bear their fair share of the pain it is causing, and by that I mean the highly paid decision makers who, freed from government regulation, made incredibly stupid decisions, as well as those who took advantage of the free lunch that wasn't free.

I'm not saying people should be booted from their houses, but eventually, they should pay for them.

As for how hard it is for financial executives used to seven-figure incomes to live on a mere \$500,000 a year – the limit proposed by the president for employees of companies that take TARP funds – the more you hear such complaints, the angrier the rest of America is likely to be.

Staying together as we go through this crisis will be even more difficult than coming together, and it depends on the president being able to convince people who played by the rules that they aren't going to have to pay the price for those who didn't.

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Bush wasn't a special case. Under Ronald Reagan, the U.S. government consumed the highest percentage of gross domestic product in American history, except for during World War II.

In his first address before Congress, in 1981, Reagan made shocked reference to the nearly \$1 trillion in debt his administration had inherited. He called the number "incomprehensible." But Reagan's rhetoric had no bearing on subsequent policy. By the time he left office, the national debt had more than doubled, to over \$2 trillion.

The national debt almost doubled under George W. Bush, from just under \$6 trillion to nearly \$10 trillion.

The one fiscally honest Republican president in recent decades was the much-maligned George H.W. Bush. Deciding that the time had come for America to start paying its bills, the elder Bush broke his "no new taxes" pledge. For that gutsy move, his party's tax-phobes reviled him.

Their barbs multiplied for Bush's successor, Democrat Bill Clinton, who backed higher taxes for some upper-income Americans. That helped create budget surpluses – a fiscal Eden from which America was ejected soon after.

PUBLIC DEMANDS GOP HELP OBAMA, DEMOCRATS

A recent New York Times-CBS News poll asked Americans whether it's more important for Republicans to stick to GOP policies or work with Obama and the Democrats. Only 17% preferred that Republicans stick to their policies. That's not much of a thumbs-up for the Republican way.

Nobody likes the deficits being run up. Everybody gripes about some of the ways the money's being spent. But at the moment, only government can pull us out of the economic swamp.

If Obama succeeds in cutting the deficit in half, he will have presided over a very big government followed by a much shrunken one. Both versions will have been right for their times. Clearly, there's no "one-size-fits-all" circumstances for government.

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Afghanistan History Belies 'Graveyard'

By John C. Lowerison

Fundamentally, British imperial policy in Afghanistan was a success. Genghis Khan's Mongols lost one battle in the area; Alexander the Great did not lose any. If we are to learn from history, then we must learn some history.

Central Asia is back in the news. Barack Obama is sending more U.S. military personnel there. Not surprisingly then, we are hearing more about "the graveyard of empires." Defense Secretary Robert Gates used the phrase during testimony recently.

At antiwar.com, Justin Raimondo warned that special envoy Robert Holbrooke is "apt to run up against the same brick wall that has stymied would-be conquerors for 2,000 years, including the Soviets, the British, and Genghis Khan's Golden Horde."

Raimondo's comment about Genghis Khan is way off base, as are similar comments on Alexander. The Soviets did, in fact, lose in Afghanistan.

The "graveyard" image, though, originated from accounts of what happened to English armies, and these accounts are misleading at best.

PHD NOT REQUIRED

I spent two years in Afghanistan, and I learned a bit about the place. I do not claim to be an historian or a military expert, but the matter is not terribly complex. It does not require a PhD or extensive battlefield experience to shed some light on the pop history and pop analysis that one too often encounters when talking about what our policies should be in the region.

The main point is this: In the 19th Century, the Brits wanted a buffer zone between India and the tsarist lands to the north. In Afghanistan, what they got was a buffer zone between India and the tsarist lands to the north.

This could have been accomplished with less blood and treasure than was actually expended. Nevertheless, it was accomplished.

The vivid picture of great columns of red-coated soldiers marching through the Khyber Pass and into the land of the Hindu Kush Mountains – there to be defeated and forced into full retreat – is quite false.

THE GREAT GAME

Space does not permit a full discussion of what is often called "The Great Game," the protracted struggle in central and western Asia between the British and Russian empires.

The main events of interest to us took place during the Second Anglo-Afghan War. There was an Anglo-Indian army in Kabul and second one in western Afghanistan. This second army suffered a serious defeat at the hands of forces loyal to Sardar Ayub Khan, a claimant to the throne in Kabul.

At about the same time, another claimant, Abdur Rahman, entered Afghanistan from the north. This was a significant development. For one thing, he arrived from enemy lands – Russian-held territory. For another, he was a southerner, a Pushtun, but the first people to rally to his banner were the northerners, Tajiks



and Uzbeks.

Rahman's forces did not fight with the British. The two sides negotiated and worked out a deal. In August of 1880, Gen. Frederick Roberts marched a British army from Kabul to a battleground near the city of Kandahar, and there inflicted a crushing defeat on Ayub Khan's men. Soon after this, the imperial soldiers were able to leave Afghan territory in good order.

Later, Abdur Rahman won a decisive victory over Khan, captured the western city of Herat, and cemented his place as amir [ruler] of the country.

LEARNING FROM HISTORY

That, very briefly, is the true story. What can be concluded from it? A bit, but perhaps not much more than a bit.

The fact that the amir rallied the northern tribesmen first is a matter of note. Those who maintain that Afghanistan never was a country, and is only a collection of quarreling ethnic groups, should pay some attention to it.

"Paying attention," however, is not the same thing as "being convinced." That was then and this is now. Our people have been in Afghanistan much longer than were the British soldiers, and things aren't going too well these days. Furthermore, a president does not rule from a throne, and Hamid Karzai is not Abdur Rahman.

Most reports indicate that the current government in Kabul is not at all popular. In this struggle, popularity is important, and it is not clear what President Karzai can or will do to regain his.

Afghans are not wild people, determined to drive all foreigners from their land at any cost. They are human beings, much like human beings anywhere else. Exactly how much we can learn from their history, or from English history for that matter, is questionable.

In the 19th Century, the Afghans and the British were able to set modest goals they could agree on [albeit after a lot of struggle not detailed here]. The goals this time are different.

We face some difficult decisions. It is not too much to ask that we should face them with accurate information.

– The author lives in Tulsa

In Afghanistan, Escalate First, Think Later?

By Jim Hightower

Excuse me for being impolitic, but why the ---- is America "surging" so unquestioningly into Afghanistan?

Not for nothing is that country called "the burial ground of empires," "a guerilla's paradise" and "the theme park of problems." Yet, President Obama insists that America must act now to "stabilize" Afghanistan and its dizzyingly disparate, ethnically fractious, heavily armed tribal factions.

Actually, our military has already been trying to do this for more than seven years. Despite having 36,000 U.S. troops on the ground and spending \$2 billion a month, the current situation there is described by our intelligence agencies as in a "downward spiral."

WAR MACHINE'S USUAL RESPONSE

Instead of a whole new approach, however, the president's advisors are giving him the only answer ever offered by the war machine: more. They intend to double the number of soldiers in what now will become Obama's war. Why? As one advice-giver put it: What we need are more troops in Afghanistan because we need security, and eventually we will get a strategy.

Eventually??? That pretty well defines "bassackwards," doesn't it?

In fairness, I should note that the CIA did develop an innovative strategy last year for winning the hearts and minds of some Afghan tribal leaders. An agent in the country's southern region was seeking the help of a 60-something-year-old chieftain, but no go – until he learned that the man, who has four younger wives, was having performance problems. "Take one of these," said the agent, discreetly offering Viagra pills.

Days later, the agent returned to the village to find the old man wreathed in a glowing grin that only sex can induce. "You are a great man," exuded the happy chieftain, who subsequently became a useful source for the agency. It gives new meaning to the old bumper-sticker, "Make love, not war."

ASKING TOUGH QUESTIONS

Why are we letting Obama and Co. plunge our troops, our treasury and our nation's good name – as well as Obama's otherwise promising presidency – into what will certainly be a horrific war?

As Sen. Russ Feingold so sensibly puts it: "We need to ask tough questions

before deploying our brave service members – and we need to be suspicious of Washington 'group think.' Otherwise, we are setting ourselves up for failure."

Among the questions that need asking are these: Why is it our mission to remake Afghanistan? What is our national interest, our plan, our "victory," our exit point?

Instead of addressing these basics [and, indeed, instead of consulting the American people at all], however, Obama and team are simply telling us that the surge is on. How's that different from the way Bush-Cheney treated us?

Once again, we're getting a rush job, and it would serve us well to ponder a few realities. First, it will be a nightmare of futility to try stabilizing Afghanistan by force. Ask the Brits and the old Soviets – both countries tried mightily to do it and failed spectacularly. Independent analysts estimate that it would take hundreds of thousands of troops and up to 30 years to subjugate the country.

BEST PRESCRIPTION: A REGIONAL COALITION

Second, Afghan stability has to be a diplomatic task undertaken by a regional coalition that should include Iran, China, Russia, India and Pakistan. Even this effort will be iffy, but it'll be doomed if it has American fingerprints on it. This is because we are widely perceived as the enemy by Afghans. From the corrupt and despised puppet government imposed on them by the Bushites to our endless killings of civilians [including up to 500 a month – mostly children – murdered by our cluster bombs], the United States is hardly seen as a stabilizing force. More American troops mean more civilian deaths – and more resistance.

Third, Afghanistan's remote mountainous regions are not the place where terrorists train for sophisticated attacks on urban America [the 9-11 extremists, for example, were not Afghans, and they trained mostly in Germany and Florida]. Also, our military action in Afghanistan has merely pushed the extremists into neighboring Pakistan, where they are now destabilizing that fragile, nuclear-armed government – a huge problem that will worsen with Obama's escalation.

Just because Obama's team is drumming up a war doesn't mean we should go along. For more information and action suggestions, contact Win Without War, a broad coalition of grassroots groups opposing escalation in Afghanistan: www.standupcongress.org.

Catholic Priest Is To Be Excommunicated

By Stephanie Salter

The place: Heaven's gate.

The time: Around 2028, give or take a few mortal years.

The scene: A large crowd of newly dead, not yet liberated from their earthly forms, is trying to maintain order despite a cluster of men who shout, wag their fingers and, occasionally, shove.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! For pity's sake, please!" one of the non-combative people in the crowd cries out. "What in God's name has you behaving in such an unholy way?"

A man whose body is of average size, but whose essence emanates a royal purple aura, whirls around with a contemptuous look. Pointing to another man, also of ordinary physical dimension, but whose aura seems made of sunlight, the angry man barks:

"What is he doing here? He has no right whatsoever to stand among us at the gates of heaven. Don't you know? He was excommunicated!"

HE IS DENIED THE SACRAMENTS

"You mean he's Roman Catholic, and he so offended the church leadership that he was officially denied the sacrament of Communion?" the gentle man asks.

"Correct!" booms the purple-aura man.

"What did he do?" the quiet man asks. "Was he among the thousands of mentally sick Catholic clergy who sexually abused children?"

"Was he among the hierarchy who knew of these men's illness but, in the name of protecting the church, continued to assign them to parishes and contact with more children?"

The purple-aura man grows more purple. In a low voice, heavy with fury, he responds: "He was indeed a priest. His name is Roy Bourgeois. But his excommunication had nothing to do with that unfortunate subject."

HE EMBRACES BOURGEOIS

The non-combative man smiles broadly and embraces Bourgeois.

"Father Roy!" he exclaims. "I know of you. Your tireless efforts to bring peace and justice to the oppressed of Latin America are legendary among good people of many faiths. Your courage in non-violent protest of the military training facility known as the School of the Americas is much admired."

Bourgeois bows his head.

"Thank you," he says, humbly. "I became a Maryknoll priest in 1972 after I was in combat in Vietnam. I served for 36 years until ..."

The quiet man asks, "What did you do to warrant the ultimate deprivation of Christ's body and blood in Communion?"

WHAT HE DID AND WHY HE DID IT

Father Roy sighs and answers, "I concelebrated a religious ceremony with a woman priest. I publicly advocated the ordination of women priests. I refused to recant my belief that God calls women and men to priesthood and that Catholic teaching to the contrary was wrong and unsupported by Scripture."

At this, the purple-aura man explodes: "I am a cardinal, the head of the Vatican



office that warned Roy Bourgeois in 2008 to recant or face excommunication!"

"You were," the thin, non-combative man says.

"Were what?" the purple-aura man snaps.

"You were a cardinal and the head of an important Vatican office," the quiet man says. "Your earthly life is over. You're just another soul here, waiting to pass through the gates of heaven."

DEEDS RULE NOT JOB TITLES

"All wait regardless of their mortal status: Catholic popes, Anglican archbishops and Episcopal bishops, directors of the mighty Southern Baptist Convention, television evangelists, pastors of megachurches. And the admission criteria are deeds, not job titles."

A man who hasn't spoken but who had been among the arguing, shoving cluster steps toward the thin, androgynous man. He, too, emits a purplish aura, but it is more violet than royal.

"What do you know about Anglicans?" he says, with noticeable irritation.

"I know some of them in the Episcopal province of the church pulled away from the Anglican Communion about the same time Father Roy got into trouble," the quiet man says.

FORMED THEIR OWN PROVINCE

"Four bishops in the United States and thousands of U.S. and Canadian lay persons, formed their own province, the Anglican Church of North America. Their objections centered around ordination of homosexuals and church blessings of same sex unions."

The quiet man continues: "As I recall, two of the bishops also shared the Catholic hierarchy's prohibitive view of women priests, even though the Episcopalian Church had been ordaining women since 1976."

"Funny, if only Father Roy had been Episcopalian. He would have been cel-

See **PRIEST** Page 15

REAGAN

From Page 10

However, Bunch sees Reagan primarily as a pragmatist whose image has been hijacked by a neoconservative cabal while Kleinknecht sees Reagan himself as the betrayer of what once was regarded as genuine conservatism.

Reagan's early backers "were not Burkean conservatives or acolytes of the John Birch Society. They had little interest in social issues. ... Most were not even particularly passionate in their anticommunism. They viewed Reagan quite simply as a potential liberator for the entrepreneurial class."

They were men who simply "wanted deep cuts in their taxes and government regulators out of the way."

Many seminal thinkers of 20th Century American conservatism – Kleinknecht cites Russell Kirk, Richard Weaver and German-born émigré Friedrich A. Hayek, to whose names I would add G.K. Chesterton – regarded large corporations as "a threat to folkways and small-scale private property. It was, after all, not government but big corporations that did so much to wipe out agrarian culture. The former machinist or farmer now bagging groceries at Wal-Mart is not exactly a conservative icon."

REAGAN PROMOTED SELF-INTEREST

This is interesting because Kleinknecht's case against Reagan isn't based on the former actor's adherence to traditional conservative values but on his disregard of them.

There are two enemies of a real conservative society, thought Chesterton; one of them "is State Socialism and the other is Big Business." In other words, the enemy is bigness, no matter on which side of the political spectrum it originates.

Hayek, quoted by Kleinknecht, wrote something similar in his highly influential book *The Road to Serfdom* [1944]: "... [T]he movement toward totalitarianism comes from two great vested interests: organized capital and organized labor. Probably the greatest menace of all is that the politics of these two most powerful groups point in the same direction."

Such sentiments, Kleinknecht writes, "were swept out of Washington in the 1980s. Relief from government regulation was one of a handful of core beliefs

that really mattered to Reagan and his business supporters, and anything that stood in the way of the natural consolidation of the nation's productive forces was a barrier to be removed."

Or as Reagan's good friend whom he appointed attorney general, William French Smith, put it, "Bigness doesn't necessarily mean badness."

The Man Who Sold the World is the most concise and well-thought-out argument against Reagan. Kleinknecht is no poet; he too often writes at the top of his voice. Nonetheless, if he is guilty of occasional pamphleteering, there's never any doubt as to his meaning, and many of his phrases linger after one has closed the book.

"By discrediting government as a legitimate and meaningful presence in the lives of Americans," he writes in his final chapter, *The Second-Rate Society*, "Reagan repudiated the very concept of national leadership. By exhorting Americans to place self-interest above all, he undermined the spirit of sacrifice and the possibility of a common effort to solve our most pressing national problems."

Kleinknecht isn't just writing to be heard by liberal Democrats: His challenge to conservatives is nothing less than to once again be conservative.

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Fridays With Frosty

Join Oklahoma Observer Founding Editor Frosty Troy for commentary every Friday at 7:35 a.m. and 4:44 p.m. on *Oklahoma's Public Radio*. Neva Hill's commentary airs Thursdays at the same times.

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Six Boys Raised The Iwo Jima Flag

By Michael T. Powers

Each year I am hired to go to Washington, DC, with the eighth grade class from Clinton, WI, where I grew up, to videotape their trip. I greatly enjoy visiting our nation's capital, and each year I take some special memories back with me. This fall's trip was especially memorable.

On the last night of our trip, we stopped at the Iwo Jima memorial. This memorial is the largest bronze statue in the world and depicts one of the most famous photographs in history – that of the six brave soldiers raising the American Flag at the top of a rocky hill on the island of Iwo Jima, Japan, during World War II.

A SOLITARY FIGURE

Over 100 students and chaperones piled off the buses and headed towards the memorial. I noticed a solitary figure at the base of the statue, and as I got closer he asked, "Where are you guys from?"

I told him that we were from Wisconsin. "Hey, I'm a cheesehead, too! Come gather around, cheeseheads, and I will tell you a story."

James Bradley just happened to be in Washington to speak at the memorial the following day. He was there that night to say goodbye to his dad, who had passed away.

REMARKS WERE VIDEOTAPED

He was just about to leave when he saw the buses pull up. I videotaped him as he spoke to us, and received his permission to share what he said from my videotape.

It is one thing to tour the incredible monuments filled with history in Washington, DC, but it is quite another to get the kind of insight we received that night.

When all had gathered around, he reverently began to speak. Here are his words that night:

AUTHOR TELLS THEIR STORY

"My name is James Bradley and I'm from Antigo, WI. My dad is on that statue, and I just wrote a book called *Flags of Our Fathers* which is No. 5 on the New York Times Best-Seller list right now. It is the story of the six boys you see behind me.

"Six boys raised the flag. The first guy putting the pole in the ground is Harlon Block. Harlon was an all-state football player. He enlisted in the Marine Corps with all the senior members of his football team.

"They were off to play another type of game. A game called 'war.' But it didn't turn out to be a game. Harlon, at the age of 21, died with his intestines in his hands.

THERE IS NO GLORY IN WAR

"I don't say that to gross you out, I say that because there are people who stand in front of this statue and talk about the glory of war.

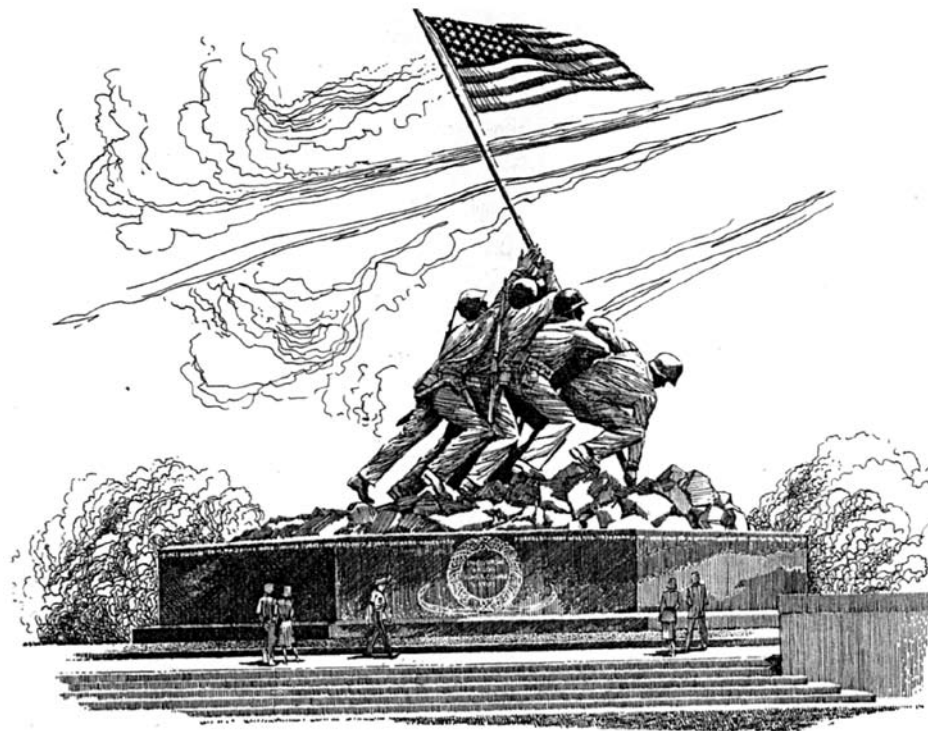
"You guys need to know that most of the boys in Iwo Jima were 17, 18, and 19 years old – and it was so hard that the ones who did make it home never even would talk to their families about it.

"He pointed to the statue. You see this next guy? That's Rene Gagnon from New Hampshire. If you took Rene's helmet off at the moment this photo was taken and looked in the webbing of that helmet, you would find a photograph ... a photograph of his girlfriend.

BOYS FOUGHT AND WON AT IWO JIMA

"Rene put that in there for protection because he was scared. He was 18 years old. It was just boys who won the battle of Iwo Jima. Boys. Not old men.

"The next guy here, the third guy in this tableau, was Sgt. Mike Strank. Mike is my hero. He was the hero of all these guys. They called him the 'old man' because he was so old. He was already 24.



"When Mike would motivate his boys in training camp. He didn't say, 'Let's go kill some Japanese' or 'Let's die for our country.' He knew he was talking to little boys. Instead he would say, 'You do what I say, and I'll get you home to your mothers.'

IRA HAYES, PIMA INDIAN

"The last guy on this side of the statue is Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian from Arizona. Ira Hayes was one who walked off Iwo Jima.

"He went into the White House with my dad. President Truman told him, 'You're a hero.'

"He told reporters, 'How can I feel like a hero when 250 of my buddies hit the island with me and only 27 of us walked off alive?'

"So you take your class at school, 250 of you spending a year together having fun, doing everything together. Then all 250 of you hit the beach, but only 27 of your classmates walk off alive. That was Ira Hayes.

"He had images of horror in his mind. Ira Hayes carried the pain home with him and eventually died dead drunk, face down at the age of 32 [10 years after this picture was taken].

"The next guy, going around the statue, is Franklin Soursley from Hilltop, KY. A fun-lovin' hillbilly boy.

PLAYING A PRACTICAL JOKE

"His best friend, who is now 70, told me, 'Yeah, you know, we took two cows up on the porch of the Hilltop General Store. Then we strung wire across the stairs so the cows couldn't get down. Then we fed them Epsom salts. Those cows crapped all night.'

"Yes, he was a funlovin' hillbilly boy. Franklin died on Iwo Jima at the age of 19.

"When the telegram came to tell his mother that he was dead, it went to the Hilltop General Store. A barefoot boy ran that telegram up to his mother's farm. The neighbors could hear her scream all night and into the morning. Those neighbors lived a quarter of a mile away.

HE SHUNNED THE MEDIA

"The next guy, as we continue to go around the statue, is my dad, John Bradley from Antigo, WI, where I was raised. My dad lived until 1994, but he would never give interviews.

"When Walter Cronkite's producers or the New York Times would call, we were trained as little kids to say 'No, I'm sorry, sir, my dad's not here. He is in Canada fishing. No, there is no phone there, sir. No, we don't know when he is coming back.'

"My dad never fished or even went to Canada. Usually, he was sitting there

See IWO JIMA Page 18

PRIEST

From Page 14

celebrated by most of his church instead of excommunicated. Aren't religious rules fascinating?"

The violet-Aura man looks as if he's been slapped.

RULES? IT'S MORALITY AT ISSUE

"Rules?" he fumes. "We are talking about morality. God's will. How dare you trivialize that by calling it rules."

The thin quiet man raises his hand in reconciliation. "I'm sorry," he says. "I meant no offense. By chance, were you one of the dissenting bishops?"

The violet-aura man nods.

"Did you also agree with some of your fellow dissenters that women never should have been ordained in the Episcopal Church?" the quiet man asks.

"No, I did not. The bishop who presided over the entire U.S. Episcopal Church in 2008 was a woman. She did a perfectly fine job."

The thin, gentle man mumbles, "rules," turns back to Bourgeois and asks, "Father Roy, what did YOU tell the Vatican when you were given 30 days to recant?"

THE LETTER HE WROTE IN ANSWER

Bourgeois pulls three sheets of paper from the breast pocket of his coat and says, "This is my letter."

The quiet man takes them and begins to read to himself. Tears well in his eyes. He says to the crowd. "Listen," and reads aloud.

He quotes Bourgeois' citation of a 1976 report, commissioned by the Vatican

and conducted by Scripture scholars who found "there is no justification in the Bible for excluding women from the priesthood."

He reads Bourgeois' question: "Who are we, as men, to say to women, 'Our call is valid, but yours is not?' Who are we to tamper with God's call?"

His voice rising, the thin, gentle man reads on: "Sexism, like racism, is a sin. And no matter how hard or how long we may try to justify discrimination, in the end, it is always immoral."

NO JUSTICE UNTIL WOMEN ARE ORDAINED

The recitation continues, of Bourgeois' process of "prayer, reflection and discernment," the compulsion of his conscience "to do the right thing," and of the realization through his social justice struggles that there "will never be justice in the Catholic Church until women can be ordained."

The thin, quiet man finishes reading, presses Bourgeois' letter to his own heart, and hands it back to the former priest.

"Look," he says, pointing to the gates. "They open for you, Father Roy."

Bourgeois seems overwhelmed. He moves toward heaven, then stops abruptly.

"Wait a minute," he says. "I just realized. There are only men in this crowd. Please, don't tell me heaven is as sexist as mortal life?"

The thin, quiet man actually chuckles. "No, no. Father Roy," he says. "Most of the women are already inside."

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Is The GED More Valuable Than PhD?

By Kay Mass

For six years, Rebekah slaved at Boston University for her PhD in American Studies. Her plan: work in New York as a museum curator.

She pictured chatty, engrossing interviews with like-minded creative types. "Everyone would be so pleased" with her PhD, she thought.

Yet eight months after graduating, Rebekah is unemployed and considering a gig at a public library that requires only a GED.

The demand for humanities PhDs has long been tight – for four decades, the number of jobs requiring them hasn't kept pace with the number of people earning them.

By all indications, recent university hiring freezes and evaporating grant money have reduced the world's most elite degree to junk-bond status.

JOB POSTINGS IN HUGE DECLINE

On the Modern Language Association's Job Information List, a bellwether for PhD employment trends, the number of job postings is down 21%, steepest decline in the list's 34-year history.

One attendee at the annual MLA convention in San Francisco, where doctorate graduates can score interviews for tenure-track professorships, found the event rendered "somber" by the scarcity of opportunities.

The same air permeated the American Historical Association conference. "Job candidates who a year ago had goals of four or five interviews here were thrilled to have one," reported InsideHigherEd.com.

LARGEST DIP ON RECORD

"This is certainly the largest dip in jobs we've seen, percentage-wise, since we began tracking in the 1970s," says Rosemary Feal, executive director of the MLA. "It really is disheartening to see so many well-prepared people in search of so few jobs."

Rebekah could be a poster child for the current PhD despondency. She's written more than 100 networking and cover letters during her eight-month job search, and trolls 44 employment websites on a daily basis.

Three jobs that fit her specialty recently opened – then two of them were canceled when grant money dried up.

U.S. Students Versus Chinese Students

American college freshmen know fewer facts about science than do their Chinese counterparts, according to a new study, but both groups have a comparably poor ability to reason scientifically.

The original research, published in *Science*, suggests that educators in both countries must not simply change what they teach in the classroom but how they teach it if they hope to improve their students' ability to reason.

Lei Bao, the study's lead author and director of Ohio State University's Physics Education Research Group, said this runs contrary to the commonly held belief that reasoning skills develop as students are "rigorously taught the facts."

CHECKED TEST SCORES OF 6,000

The study compiled the test scores of almost 6,000 incoming freshmen majoring in science and engineering – prior to receiving college-level instruction – from four American and three Chinese institutions.

After taking the Force Concept Inventory – which tests basic knowledge of mechanics – the Chinese students had an average score of nearly 86%, and the American students had an average score of around 49%.

Although the Chinese students had a relatively narrow distribution of scores near the upper end of the grading spectrum, the American students had a greater distribution in the "medium score range" from 25% to 75%.

U.S. PHYSICS EDUCATION SCATTERED

Bao said he believes this is reflective of the American system of secondary education, in which students have varying exposure to physics.

The study notes that only a third of American students take a physics course in high school. In China, students take physics courses from the 8th through the 12th grades.

After taking the Brief Electricity and Magnetism Assessment – testing more theoretical and complicated concepts – Chinese students had an average score of almost 66%, and the American students averaged nearly 27%.

Bao noted that the American students performed so poorly that their average score is just better than the "chance level" of 20%, as if they had chosen their answers at random.

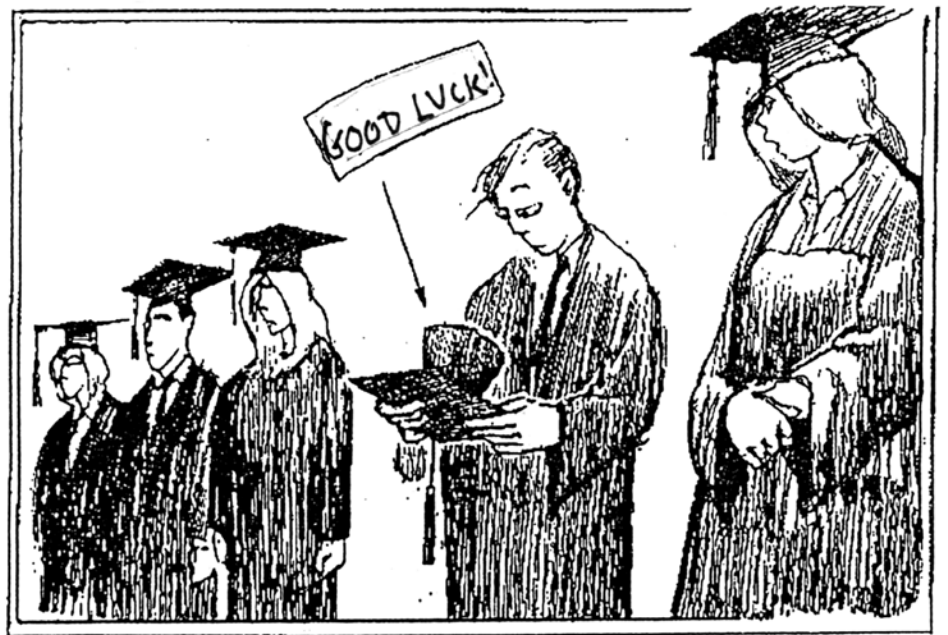
"It was a bit unfair to give the American students that test," said Bao, noting that the even the Chinese students under-performed in the magnetism assessment relative to their knowledge of mechanics.

NO RIGOR FOR AMERICAN STUDENTS

"It's all about how those kids were educated, and most American middle and high schools do not emphasize the rigorous training and learning associated with those relatively abstract concepts."

Following these two tests of physics knowledge, the participants were given the Lawson Classroom Test of Scientific Reasoning, in which they consider scientific hypotheses and propose a solution using deductive reasoning.

The Chinese students had an average score of nearly 75%, and the American students averaged about 74%. The distributions of their scores were also quite similar.



"I went in for the interviews, then got word that the searches had stopped," Rebekah says. "I do have moments of regretting [getting a PhD] because now I'm applying for assistant curator jobs that I could've gotten beforehand."

She even applied for a job as an archivist for the Girl Scouts of America.

Some new PhDs, especially those saddled with debt, are considering junking their degrees altogether.

According to former George Washington University President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, the downward spiral began when Harvard's president, Drew Faust, announced that the troubled economy had forced the university to take "a hard look at hiring."

COPYCATING HARVARD'S EXPERIENCE

So every other college president in America could then say, "If this is going on at Harvard, you can understand that we, too, need to be more cautious."

State schools with smaller budgets have always been a tougher nut for PhDs to crack. "But what's unusual is how private schools are saying the same thing," says Robert Townsend, assistant director for research and publications at the American Historical Association.

Those not giving up entirely are taking whatever they can get. Liz, like many PhDs, says she feels like she's taking a step back by working as a teacher's assistant, a position typically held by students who just got their bachelor's degrees.

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Boa said American and Chinese educators alike should be concerned by this finding. While the systems of education are radically different in their focus on the sciences, neither is particularly effective at helping students acquire reasoning skills.

Boa argues these skills are essential in today's ever-changing world.

THE OLD WAY WON'T WORK ANYMORE

"In the past, life was a bit more stable and it might have been all right to always do the same old thing," he said.

"In the current global economy, everyone is competing with one another every day. Things are suddenly emerging left and right and there will often be no text to tell you how to do these things. The next generation of students needs to have a high ability to be creative and possess open-ended reasoning skills."

Boa believes this study should encourage educators to embed more "inquiry based" learning into their classroom instruction, both at the high school and college levels, to improve these figures.

He suggested methods such as encouraging students to design their own research, openly question their professors and work more in group settings.

In the physics department at Ohio State, Boa is championing such techniques as using student-response technology ["clickers"] and "virtual reality physics simulations" in large lectures.

"It all depends on what kind of future you want to have," Boa said of designing tomorrow's science curriculum. "We should strive for a more practical and balanced method of instruction."

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Students Issue Own Grades

Despite intensive efforts to improve test scores in recent years, the grade point average high schoolers assigned their schools this year is 2.7, the same as it was in 2001.

As for their own grades, the proportion of students reporting that they got mostly B's or better on their latest report cards has fluctuated – from 61% in 2001 to 70% in 2004 to 67% this year.

The proportion of students planning on postsecondary education remains high, although slightly fewer students plan to attend four-year colleges or universities.

In this year's report, 70% of respondents said they were headed to bachelor's-level institutions, down six percentage points from 2005.

Over that same time span, the proportion of students reporting plans to attend a community or technical college after high school rose five percentage points to 23%.

Surveyed teenagers reported spending more than 13 hours online per week communicating with friends and entertaining themselves, compared with not quite five hours per week online for homework.

How To Avoid Being A Hospital Mistake

There are ways you can keep from being one of the 100,000 patients killed annually by hospital mistakes.

These are recommended by experts in the field as well as patients who have been maltreated or misdiagnosed. Copy them and keep them handy because you never know when they could save your life or the life of a loved one.

INSIST ON HAND-WASHING

Before you're touched, the first question should be, "Did you wash your hands?" stresses Peter Pronovost, MD, of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore. It's a must before any provider puts in or removes an IV or a catheter, gives you medication, or changes a dressing.

FIND A HOSPITAL THAT'S HIGH-TECH

See if your hospital is investing in technology that cuts error rates, says David Bates, MD, from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Things to look for: the use of a CPOE – computerized physician order entry – system, which reduces drug errors; bar codes on drugs to lower dispensing mistakes; and smart IV pumps for delivering intravenous medication accurately. Also, check to see if the intensive care unit has a computer that alerts staff when help is needed.

DO A BACKGROUND CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

Find out if your hospital ranks high in safety with The Leapfrog Group [www.leapfroggroup.org/cp] and Hospital Compare ratings [www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov]. Conduct your own survey of friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors, too, so you can find out what they think of area hospitals.

MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR HOSPITALIST

The majority of hospital patients in the United States are no longer cared for by their primary care doctors, but by hospitalists. She should act as your advocate and coordinator of care in the hospital, says Robert Wachter of the University of California-San Francisco. [If you aren't assigned one, ask your primary care doctor to play that role.] It's a good sign if your hospital also assigns you a nocturnist; these MD's specialize in caring for patients at night, when hospitals have skeleton staffs, which increases the risk of errors and treatment delays.

BE FRIENDLY – BUT NOT TOO FRIENDLY

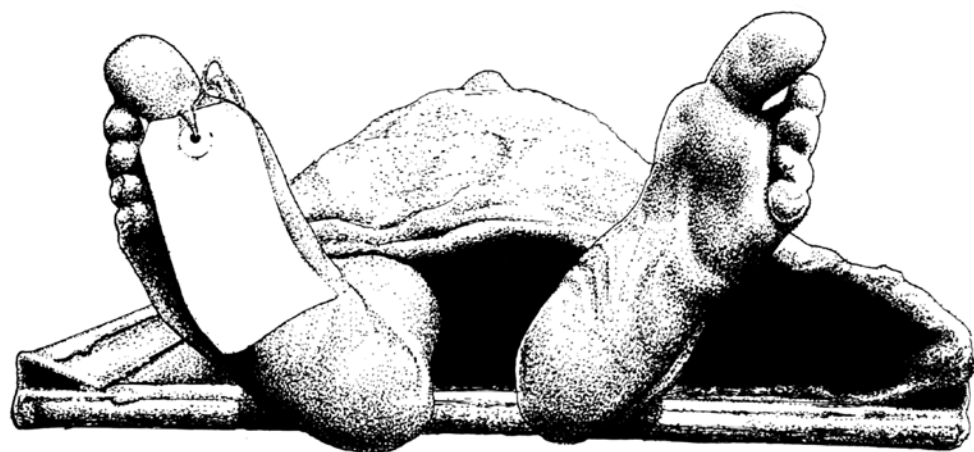
Stay congenial, but save the chitchat until after the staff has administered meds or checked your vitals. Even little interruptions can be distracting enough to cause a slipup.

INSERT YOURSELF IN THE LOOP

Anytime something's being done to you – a nurse hanging medication [for an IV], an orderly wheeling you out for a test – you should understand why, Pronovost says. If you don't, ask to speak with a physician.

ASK WHAT HAPPENED

In an ideal world, you'd get a prompt explanation. The reality, though, is that open discussion of a medical mistake, along with an apology, remains uncom-



mon. Still, some hospitals – like Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore – are working toward more openness.

GET A COPY OF YOUR MEDICAL RECORDS

It's your right to see your file – but you may not get your complete records, says Bruce G. Fagel, MD, an ER physician-turned-medical malpractice lawyer in Beverly Hills, CA. In a birth-injury case, for instance, one of the most crucial documents is the fetal-monitoring strip, but it won't be in your file unless you ask for it.

START KEEPING YOUR OWN NOTES

Write down everything, including dates, procedures, medications, and the names of health-care staffers who cared for you. If you opt to sue, your own record may be an effective tool against the usually vague notations in most patients' charts. "Doctors are constantly told what kinds of things not to put in medical records" Fagel says.

SPEAK TO A HIGHER-UP

If you don't get a satisfactory answer from the physician, talk to someone at a higher level. Also, ask to speak with an ombudsman and a patient advocate.

FILE A COMPLAINT

If you're still not satisfied, complain to your state or local health department, as well as to the Joint Commission [www.jointcommission.org/GeneralPublic/Complaint]. Patients who've experienced an error usually want to make sure the same mistake never happens to anyone else; lodging a complaint is one of the best ways to do that.

CONSULT A LAWYER

If you don't get an acceptable answer from the hospital, you may want to consult a lawyer. If you decide to sue, a good medical-malpractice attorney can help you navigate the Byzantine world of state and local laws.

INSIDER TIP

If your child needs a procedure, seek out a children's hospital. At a truly dedicated children's hospital, there won't be potential dangers like adult medications and adult devices around. When kids and adults are together, the chance of mixing up the two goes up.

Plus, in a kid-specific facility, it's more likely that a whole team – not just the surgeon but the anesthesiologists and nurses, too – will be trained in the unique challenges of pediatric care.

Hundreds Of Cases Are Wrong Surgery

Out of 4,817 serious problems tracked over the past 12 years by the Joint Commission, the chief accrediting organization for hospitals reports that 625 were wrong-site surgeries.

A Long Island, NY, woman in her 30s who never had cancer received an unnecessary double mastectomy – then died the following day of complications from the procedure.

A man in a Brooklyn hospital had his healthy kidney removed – instead of his cancerous one.

In a perfect world, a surgeon would never remove a healthy breast or kidney, because the surgical team would follow the Joint Commission's three-step pre-surgery protocol:

Check two pieces of identification [to make sure they have the right patient]; mark the site to be operated on; and take a short time-out before starting to make sure everyone agrees that nothing is amiss.

Trouble is, not everyone does this safety check. According to recent Joint Commission data, 22% of its hospitals reported failing to take a time-out on at least one occasion.

Right now, there's a serious chance of getting a hospital acquired infection – pneumonia or diarrhea illnesses passed from one patient to the next.

When a healthy 43-year-old checked into a top Los Angeles hospital in August 2006 for a routine surgery to remove uterine fibroids, she thought she was in for a two-day stay.

"But on the second day, instead of going home, my fever went up to 103.6," Alicia Cole says. "They said it was nothing to be alarmed about."

But Cole's fever continued to spike as her body swelled from a size 6 to a size 14 and her abdomen grew rigid.

A tiny black dot on her belly, first noticed by Cole's mother, turned out to be a harbinger of a devastating infection: necrotizing fasciitis, better known as flesh-

eating bacteria.

Two months later – after a month in the ICU, six surgeries, a 25-pound weight loss, and near-amputation of her left leg – doctors finally got the fierce infection under control enough for Cole to go home.

Two years later, she still receives daily treatments to close and heal her wound.

Quaid's Nightmare

It was a new parent's worst nightmare: In November 2007, the 12-day-old twins of Dennis Quaid and his wife, Kimberly, along with a third baby, were twice given thousandfold overdoses of the blood thinner Heparin at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

According to the hospital, pharmacy technicians and nurses failed to ensure that they were giving the right concentration of the drug.

As with other "look-alike" drugs, the two versions of Heparin – the 10-units-per-milliliter Hep-Lock, which the Quaid babies should have received, and the 10,000-units-per-milliliter-strength Heparin, which they got instead – came in the same-size vial and had similar labels.

The drugmaker, Baxter Healthcare, added a red tear-off label to keep providers from confusing the two, but the company hadn't recalled the old versions until February 2008.

The babies all recovered, but in 2006 three preemies at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis died from the same error.

"These mistakes that occurred to us are not unique," Quaid told 60 Minutes. "They happen in every hospital, in every state in this country."

Find out more at www.thequaidfoundation.org.

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Unionization Raises Overall Rate In 2008

By Ben Zipperer

Union membership increased significantly in 2008, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] annual union membership report.

The unionized share of the U.S. workforce climbed to 12.4% last year from 12.1% in 2007, an addition to union rolls of more than 420,000 members.

While the gains were broadly shared across demographic lines and occupations, growth was strongest in the public sector, among Hispanics, and in western states, driving the largest membership increase in more than a quarter of a century.

The bulk of the overall membership rise in 2008 originated in public-sector unions, which added members faster than government employment expanded.

PRIVATE-SECTOR UNIONIZATION UP

Public-sector unionization last year grew to 36.8% from 35.9% in 2007. This increase of about 275,000 members came largely through gains in local and state government, where unionization in 2008 reached 42.2% and 31.6%, respectively.

While overall employment in the private sector shrank in 2008, few major industries or occupations saw unionization rates decline.

Small drops in unionization in financial and business services and in mining were more than offset by membership gains in education, health, and hospitality services. As a result, private-sector unionization rose from 7.5% in 2007 to 7.6% in 2008.

Since the late 1970s, unions have consistently represented more than one-third of the public-sector workforce, but over the same period private-sector union membership has been falling sharply.

ORGANIZING CAN RESULT IN FIRING

About one-in-five private sector workers were union members in the late 1970s, compared to about one-in-13 in 2008.

Organizing drives can be difficult in the private sector, where employers may often fire workers without cause.

Through employment contracts and legislation, public-sector employees typically have greater protection against dismissals.

Union membership in manufacturing remained essentially unchanged at 11.4% in 2008, compared to 11.3% in 2007.

Once considered the bulwark of the labor movement, manufacturing workers are now less likely than workers in the rest of the economy to be union members.

WHERE UNIONIZATION IS HAPPENING

A union job in the private sector today is most likely to be in transportation and utilities [22.2%] or telecommunications [19.3%].

Although the union membership rate among construction workers rose to 15.6% from 13.9% in 2007, the rise primarily reflects the industry's massive contraction over 2008.

As the housing crisis elicited sharp declines in the largely non-unionized resi-

POOR

From Page 11

Overwhelmed by the economic injustices for which American policies are largely responsible, I began to wonder: if the president of the United States understood the hardships of the millions battling to overcome the challenges of NAFTA and other U.S. trade deals, would immigration reform finally take on new meaning?

If our next president watched a mother die in childbirth, as one in 10 women do in many African countries, or saw a child perish of starvation, as 15 million do each year, would ending global poverty finally be a serious item on the national agenda? Would the United States begin spending more than 0.15% of its GNP on foreign aid?

WILL HE ADDRESS OVER-CONSUMPTION

If our president lived amid the havoc that America's insatiable hunger for oil has wreaked upon the Middle East, would he uphold an economy driven by consumption rates 32 times higher than those in the developing world?

Ultimately, neither the United States nor the rest of the world can afford the toxic blend of materialism and militarism that has bubbled to the surface of our domestic and foreign policies.

Our cultural neocolonialism has made the materialist American Dream ever more present in the developing world – and ever more elusive.

As the rest of the world strives to catch up to our unsustainable levels of consumption, the suffering induced by the U.S. policies that zealously protect the resources to which we claim entitlement will only be amplified.

Before even stepping foot in the Oval Office, President-elect Obama talked about those whose footsteps he is walking in – those who have struggled every step of the way to get him to where he is. Let's hope he remembers those folks.

– The author is a 17-year-old student at West High School in Madison, WI, by day and a feminist writer and community activist by night. She is founder of Madison SOS [Speak Out, Sister!], a forum uniting high school young women in leadership and action on the issues that most matter to them. The initiative has received national recognition for its efforts to engage youth in the struggle for social change.



dential construction sector, the level of union membership within the overall construction industry remained the same, at about 1.2 million workers.

More than 120,000 Hispanics became union members in 2008, with their membership rate rising to 10.6% from 9.8% in 2007.

AFRICAN-AMERICANS BARELY INCREASE

Membership among African-Americans increased from 14.3% to 14.5%. Among whites, unionization rose from 11.8% to 12.2%.

The overall female and male membership rates rose by less than half a percentage point each, to 11.4% and 3.4%, respectively.

Unionization also increased in Midwestern states, from 13.8% to 14.3% yet failed to match the rapid pace of expansion in the West, where unionization grew from 14.7% to 15.7%.

Since 2006, unionization has surged in western states. California alone added about 266,000 union members last year, raising its unionization rate to 18.4% from 16.7% in 2007.

Over the last three years, union membership in the South has remained at 5.9%, less than half of the national average.

SURVIVING WORST RECESSION

In 2008, union employment successfully weathered the beginning of what may be the most severe recession in the post-World War II period.

Compared to the historical trend of U.S. union membership, even in times of labor market strength, the membership gains in 2008 stand out.

The statistically significant rise from 12.1% to 12.4%, approaching nearly half a million members, is the largest on record since 1983, the first year for which comparable data are available.

Except for last year's increase and a small uptick in 2007, union membership has otherwise fallen or stagnated annually from 20.1% in 1983.

– The author is a senior research associate of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC

IWO JIMA

From Page 15

right at the table eating his Campbell's soup. But we had to tell the press that he was out fishing. He didn't want to talk to the press.

HIS DAD WAS A MEDIC

"You see, like Ira Hayes, my dad didn't see himself as a hero. Everyone thinks these guys are heroes because they are in a photo and on a monument.

"My dad knew better. He was a medic. John Bradley from Wisconsin was a caregiver. In Iwo Jima he probably held over 200 boys as they died. And then boys died in Iwo Jima, they writhed and screamed, without any medication or help with the pain.

"When I was a little boy, my third grade teacher told me that my dad was a hero. When I went home and told my dad that, he looked at me and said, 'I want you always to remember that the heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who did not come back. Did NOT come back.'

SIX NICE YOUNG BOYS

"So that's the story about six nice young boys. Three died on Iwo Jima, and three came back as national heroes. Overall, 7,000 boys died on Iwo Jima in the worst battle in the history of the Marine Corps. My voice is giving out, so I will end here. Thank you for your time."

Suddenly, the monument wasn't just a big old piece of metal with a flag sticking out of the top. It came to life before our eyes with the heartfelt words of a son who did indeed have a father who was a hero. Maybe not a hero for the reasons most people would believe, but a hero nonetheless.

– We checked with Snopes to verify the authenticity of these remarks

Grandpa And God

My grandson was visiting one day when he asked, "Grandpa, do you know how and you God are alike?" I mentally polished my halo while I asked, "No, how are we alike?"

"You're both old," he replied.

Abstinence Only Wasteful Programs

By Jodi Jacobson

The majority of Americans agree with President Obama on comprehensive sex education programming.

According to a study by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, originally published in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, the majority of American adults [80.4%] favor a balanced approach to sex education in schools, regardless of their political leanings.

The survey gauged strong support for teaching children about both abstinence and other ways of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Support for the stimulus package polled 20 points higher among 18- to 24-year-olds than the rest of the population, indicating the very high level of political support among young adult voters for "doing the right thing."

WASTING YOUR TAX DOLLARS

And here is where it gets a little complicated. First of all, under the Bush Administration, funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs rose from \$97.5 million in 2000 to \$215 million in 2008.

The abstinence programs retain strong support from powerful organizations like the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and from a wide array of conservative evangelical groups receiving federal funds to promote abstinence-only.

Second, there is no line item for comprehensive sexual health education in the federal budget, and bills proactively supporting these programs have yet to be passed. Related programs also desperately need additional funding. According to Bill Smith, vice president for public policy at the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States [SIECUS].

IT REMAINS A BOONDOGGLE

Abstinence-only remains a boondoggle and a dangerous one at that. Originally reported by Joe Sonka on Amplify, an Advocates for Youth site, and then on RH Reality Check, one such program supported by \$800,000 of your tax dollars pays a clown with dubious credentials [OK, I admit I do not know the full curriculum at clown school] to teach adolescents about "saving sex for marriage."

Clearly the content of this program was embarrassing enough that once exposed, both the clown, and Elizabeth's New Life Center, lucky recipient of all these funds, removed information regarding the program from their respective web sites.

TEENS IN ROLE PLAYING

Another program uncovered by Amplify, again in Ohio, involved a video role-play of four teens at a party, one of whom, a female, offers to drive her drunk [male] friend home.

When he rapes her, the role-play blames her for "putting herself in a risky situation" and for "having a reputation," suggesting her claims of rape are suspect.

So this program actually blames the victim for the rape, and dismisses the guy's behavior as a "boys will be boys" escapade.

Apparently strength of conviction by the organization running this program about the video dissipated as fast as you could say "blog post," because once again, the video got changed right after the program was exposed.

Reinforcement of prejudicial attitudes, bias and discrimination based on race and sexual identity also are rife within these programs, many of which are subject to little if any oversight for content.

PUTTING OUT FALSE INFORMATION

A report by Legal Momentum, for example, found that many federally funded abstinence-only programs discourage condom use, distort reproductive health information, and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes.

"Many programs also perpetuate sexist and racist stereotypes about women of color," adds the report.

One example is "The Choice Game" – a Midwest School version "that features 95% white students" and an Urban School version "featuring 55% African-American actors, 24% Hispanic actors" and the rest Caucasian.

The urban version contains stereotypes of African-American women as sexually aggressive, and as drug users, and of African-American men as likely to end up in jail.

REPORTING SIMILAR FINDINGS

In sharp contrast, the Midwest materials depict white students working to



maintain their "traditional values."

Reports by Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union reveal similar findings.

A 2004 report by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform found that "over 80% of the abstinence-only curricula, used by over two-thirds of grantees reviewed in 2003, contain false, misleading, or distorted information about reproductive health."

In short, the programs reviewed by the committee took an industrial-size eraser to the line between separation of church and state, relying on heavy doses of proselytizing and religious content to get their ineffective messages across.

Finally, a report by Douglas Kirby, a senior research scientist at ETR Associates, conducted for the National Campaign to Reduce Teen Pregnancy, stated that:

WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE?

"At present, there does not exist any evidence that any abstinence program delays the initiation of sex, hastens the return to abstinence, or reduces the number of sexual partners."

There is strong evidence from multiple randomized trials demonstrating that some abstinence programs chosen for evaluation because they were believed to be promising actually had no impact on teen sexual behavior.

We have a Democratic president who has pledged to get rid of this spending. We have a majority of Democrats in Congress who have publicly stated opposition to this funding, and we have a Republican Party on the hunt for wasteful spending. It seems like an easy decision.

It should be easy. But to be honest, given this situation, if we can't mobilize enough grassroots strength to ensure the President and Congress get rid of these funds, bring back the clown because the joke is on us.

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PATRIOTISM

From Page 9

and Hindus and Christians and Muslims and Jews and Wiccans able to worship without fear of reprisal. It's allowing atheists and gays and the disabled a seat at the table, and I mean the same table.

It is about providing health care and other essential services to all citizens. It is about caring for those who can't care for themselves. A patriot believes each citizen should reap the benefits of his labors, no matter how unappealing or ordinary the job. Patriots build strong, free countries.

Long live America. For America to prosper takes more than lip service and nationalistic laws. It requires action from its citizens, from stocking the soup kitchen to marching on the mall. It is not just for a chosen few; it is a labor of love for all of us.

– The author lives in Oilton

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