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What \$3,000 Raise? Teachers Still Waiting

By Arnold Hamilton

The next time you hear legislative leaders bragging about “extraordinary” teacher pay hikes the last two years, remember the Midwest City-Del City, Okmulgee, Edmond and Harrah faculties.

They are still waiting to be paid in full.

Teachers in those districts are among thousands across Oklahoma who did not receive all of the much-ballyhooed \$3,000 raise ordered in a contentious 2006 legislative special session.

They are being short-changed because their administrators and school boards contend that districts already paying above the state-minimum in salaries are not legally required to provide each teacher a \$3,000 boost.

An attorney general’s opinion says otherwise – but some districts still refuse.

Now teachers are turning to state courts and the state Department of Labor in a two-pronged fight to claim what they are convinced is theirs.

It’s another sad chapter in Oklahoma’s embarrassing decades-long failure to put its money where its mouth is on public education.

School funding as a percentage of the state budget is steadily declining. Teacher salaries are 47th nationally. And teachers and school districts – natural allies in the quest to improve public education – are left to fight over the scraps.

“It’s the principle,” says Jamie McCoy, president of the Mid-Del Association of Classroom Teachers. “We’re feeling bashed because we expect professional wages and instead we’re touted as money grubbers.”

Senate Appropriations Committee Co-Chairman Johnnie Crutchfield, D-Ardmore, says he worried from the outset that SB 2XX – the bill authorizing the \$3,000 pay raise – was written in such a way that it could be open to different interpretations.

“As a former teacher, I’ve always wanted that if we were going to give a raise, then the teachers get all the raise,” he says.

Attorney General Drew Edmondson made clear his view of the Legislature’s intent in his February opinion: Each teacher was to receive a \$3,000

raise, plus a one-step jump on the state’s minimum salary schedule. Edmondson also insisted that districts could not substitute non-salary benefits – such as health or retirement premiums – for the legislatively-mandated wage hikes.

It’s unclear how many teachers are affected by the dispute, though the Oklahoma Education Association estimates 76% work in districts that pay above the state-minimum salary schedule.

Even though the two sides disagree over the \$3,000 pay raise, teachers say they are not unsympathetic to administrators and school boards.

They know that districts across Oklahoma are under-funded, leaving superintendents and boards to search for savings that could offset ever-escalating fixed costs, including transportation and utilities, as well as unfunded state and federal mandates.

In this case, however, districts are nickel-and-diming teachers: In Mid-Del, for example, the cost to fully fund the \$3,000 raise is estimated at only about \$280,000. In Edmond, the fig-

ure is believed to be about \$115,000.

What teachers are being shorted each year doesn’t at first glance seem like much: Mostly between about \$20 [the cost of a hamburger and movie] and \$300 [a half-dozen gasoline fill-ups or a couple of months’ utility bills], depending on the teacher’s training and experience.

But when considered in context – the 47th lowest salaries in the country; teachers spend an average \$500-plus each year out of their own pockets for supplies and other classroom necessities – the tightfistedness is unconscionable.

“It’s the feeling we have to beg for nickels,” says Mid-Del’s McCoy, a 26-year elementary school teacher. “They [teachers] feel things are being done to them, rather than for them or with them.”

That sentiment can be traced directly to the state Capitol.

Even when Democrats were in charge of both houses, lawmakers perennially talked of their commitment to public education, but all-too-often failed to give schools and teachers the

funding necessary to make real, lasting improvements.

[Consider, for example, what’s left of Gov. Henry Bellmon’s marvelous HB 1017 reforms, enacted in 1990.]

But problems worsened under the current reign-of-Republican-error, led [?] by former House Speaker Todd Hiett and current House Speaker Lance Cargill.

In a time of plenty, rather than investing in Oklahoma’s future, legislative leaders stooped to political pandering, ramming through \$700 million in tax cuts. More are on the horizon.

Then, another insult: Though legislative leaders and Gov. Brad Henry pledged in recent years to boost teacher salaries to the regional average, Cargill now insists on merit pay, rather than across-the-board salary increases.

“I just cringe when I hear that as a teacher,” says Crutchfield. “You’re not talking about tires. Everybody’s different. Kids aren’t all the same” when it comes to learning.

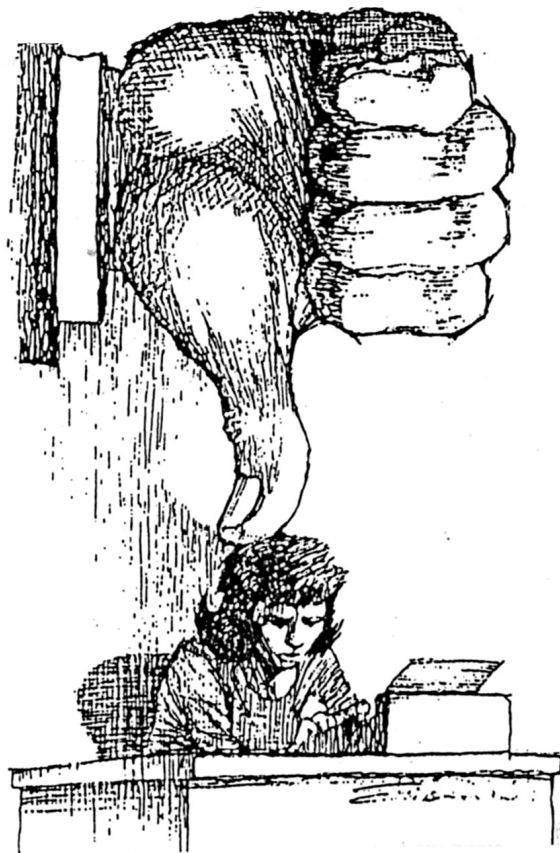
Teachers are left not only to be concerned about the future, but also about recouping what they believe is rightfully theirs.

The Mid-Del, Okmulgee and Harrah lawsuits – involving members of the Oklahoma Education Association – are in the beginning stages. Some of Edmond’s OEA member teachers lodged complaints with the state Department of Labor over their district’s failure to pay the full \$3,000.

They began receiving certified letters the weekend of Oct. 20 that the labor department had ruled in their favor. The school district could appeal, however – first seeking an administrative hearing and later mounting a district court challenge.

If Edmondson’s opinion holds up in court, districts across Oklahoma will pay up – eventually. Some already have: According to the OEA, Sand Springs, Deer Creek-Edmond, Bethany, Crutch and Jones have given each teacher the full \$3,000 raise.

But if Oklahoma lawmakers don’t stand up and finance public schools adequately, all Oklahomans will eventually pay – with less economic opportunity and a severely diminished quality of life.



Observations

Hello?

Republican Speaker Lance Cargill says Oklahoma deserves a "modern government" and one way to accomplish that goal is to get rid of many of the state's ABCs – agencies, boards and commissions.

Hello? What happened to the state's Sunset Law that is still on the books? Where has Cargill been since taking his oath of office?

Yes, there are too many ABCs – most of them defunct deadletters on the statute books. But if the Legislature – under both Democrats and Republicans – had been paying attention, there would be no need for a massive Cargill "crusade."

Did we tell you that Cargill himself has created a new state program – one that is "faith based"?

This is more campaign fodder in his race for governor. And wouldn't you know it – he chose the Disappointment editorial page to express his outrage. And did they check? Hey, he's a Republican – they don't get checked.

Sick Okies

Here we go again – more bad news about Oklahomans and their habits. We have one of the highest rates of seven chronic diseases in the country.

Oklahoma ranks 10th as the lowest healthy state in the Union, obvious to anyone who ever watched Okies fill their plates or tax themselves for the treatment of mental illness.

Nearly 2.2 million cases of seven chronic diseases – cancers, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, stroke, mental disorders and pulmonary conditions – were reported in Oklahoma, according to a study conducted by the Miliken Institute.

Chronic diseases are not cheap – even for taxpayers who eat right and exercise. The total economic cost of those chronic diseases on Oklahoma's economy, including treatment expenditures and lost productivity, was \$17.1 billion.

On its current path of self-destruct-

tion, the cost could balloon to \$47.8 billion by 2023.

As a nation, the cost of treating chronic illness was \$277 billion, while lost productivity was estimated at \$1.047 trillion, the study shows.

The cost of chronic illness treatment in Oklahoma in 2003 was \$3.3 billion, with lost productivity at \$13.8 billion.

This is a chronic form of suicide in Oklahoma.

Homeless

It was at the stoplight intersection of I-35 and NE 10 Street in Oklahoma City that a scraggy, stooped young man in fatigues was bumming money.

A dollar bill lighted his dirty face.

"You a veteran?"

"Yeah, Iraq. They shot the s--- out of my back."

"Don't you qualify for disability?"

His smile froze. He thrust the dollar back and took off at a crippled trot.

The U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs [VA] says the nation's homeless veterans are mostly males [4% are females]. The vast majority are single, 45% suffer from mental illness, and half have substance abuse problems.

America's homeless veterans have served in World War II, Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or the military's anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America.

How many homeless veterans are there?

Although accurate numbers are impossible to come by – our government deliberately fails to keep records on homeless veterans – the VA estimates that 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night.

One out of every three homeless men are sleeping in a doorway, begging on street corners or living in boxes. They won't seek the help they need because they are paranoid about



the government. They account for 23% of all homeless people in America.

It breaks your heart for two reasons – the veterans and the cowardly President who needlessly put so many of our best and brightest in harm's way.

Farce

The Republican 100 Ideas farce continues – aided and comforted by too many in the media. The latest meeting was held at the MetroTech Center Big Dipper room in Oklahoma City.

It was paid for by the Oklahoma Alliance for Public Transportation, a front group for other state organizations.

The bottom of the invitation carried a return address of a state employee! Someone asked, "Who is paying for this [the 100 Ideas and meeting]?"

Dana Shadid, director of the Oklahoma Community Institute, which passes on the \$150,000 from Oklahoma Department of Commerce to partner with the 100 Ideas, stated that the group was "privately funded."

Oh, really!

Old Felons

The biggest ongoing political scandal in Oklahoma is not the Republican ethics debacle but the refusal of the Legislature to deal with the prison crisis.

Razor wire topping the fences seems almost a joke at the Oklahoma prisons where more than 2,500 inmates are slumped in wheelchairs, or leaning on walkers or canes.

Time and again the Department of Corrections has pleaded with the Legislature to deal with geriatric inmates spending their waning days behind bars. The soaring number of aging inmates is now outpacing the prison growth as a whole.

The Legislature's answer? More tough sentencing laws fueling an explosion in inmate health costs for a cash-strapped department – 25,000 prisoners and counting.

Critics are howling that 30 or more geriatric inmates are in nursing homes. Do they ever ask why?

Justice Department statistics show that the number of inmates in federal and state prisons age 55 and older shot up 33% from 2000 to 2005, the most recent year for which the data was available. That's faster than the 9% growth overall.

The trend is particularly pronounced in the South, which has some of the nation's toughest sentencing laws. In 16 Southern states, the growth rate has escalated by an average of 145%

since 1997, according to the Southern Legislative Conference.

The GOP-controlled Legislature not only ignored the Department's plea for help, but also voted for \$800,000 for an "audit" of the department, passing an appropriations bill that is about \$40 million short of minimum needs.

Suit Revived

Justice was served when the Oklahoma Supreme Court restored a lawsuit accusing state officials of fraudulently giving nearly \$5 million to Phillips Petroleum Co., now ConocoPhillips.

The court reversed a decision in the District Court of Oklahoma County, which had dismissed the lawsuit on procedural issues.

In 2004, two former employees of the Oklahoma Corporation Commission filed a lawsuit against the state on behalf of state taxpayers.

It was filed by Charles W. Wright, who had served as senior attorney and deputy general counsel for the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, and Rachel Lawrence Mor, former Oklahoma assistant attorney general who had served as both an administrative law judge and deputy general counsel for the commission.

The lawsuit centers on a 2003 settlement agreement the commission reached with Phillips, which had filed more than 45 claims for reimbursement from the Petroleum Storage Tank Release Environmental Cleanup Indemnity Fund.

Despite the state auditor's findings, the commission agreed to pay Phillips an additional \$3.6 million from the indemnity fund in monthly installments.

The truth will be sought in a fair trial.

Crowded?

There will be 125 million births in the world this year.

By the time this group is ready to start school, there will have been another 625 million births.

Every 20 minutes, the human population grows by another 3,000.

At the same time another plant or animal becomes extinct [27,000 each year].

The population of the U.S. tripled during the 20th Century.

These numbers may not make the case for birth control and family planning, but they will have to do until someone can come up with a different scenario.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau

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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

OU President David Boren is expected to retire next year and Gov. Brad Henry is expected to be named his replacement. Former Ambassador James R. Jones was interested, but was told Henry's the choice.

Laurel: To the OU Law School, now boasting of a record 52 Native Americans – 10% of the school's enrollment. Why OU? The faculty is expert in Indian law.

Ex-OSU President James Halligan is being wooed by the GOP to run for the Stillwater Senate seat being vacated by Democrat [?] Mike Morgan. Is Halligan, who has switched to the GOP, up to the challenge?

Dart: To lackluster voters in Oklahoma City, turning out a mere 10% eligible to vote in the massive \$248.3 million school bond issue.

Sen. Jeff Rabon, D-Hugo, ought to get himself into rehab – his second DUI, this time twice the legal limit. He's a bright young man who needs to put himself and his family first.

Laurel: To western artist Merle Haggard ["Okie From Muskogee"] for his early endorsement of Hillary Clinton. He voted for Bush but told Time magazine that Bush has been a dud.

State Rep. Mike Shelton, D-OKC, has formed the "Decline To Sign" Coalition to urge Oklahomans not to sign an anti-affirmative action initiative petition.

Dart: To Oklahoma's Republican members for voting to uphold Bush's veto of the SCHIP bill. New Rep. Mary Fallin is making an ass of herself in decrying "socialized medicine" when it is not – it's a public-private partnership program.

Oops! While the number of Oklahoma physicians has increased 9%, the legal job market in Oklahoma is shrinking – the opposite of what the so-called "tort reform" folk are claiming.

Laurel: To female attorneys Renee Demoss, Donita Bourns Douglas, Melanie Jester, Linda Scoggins and Phyllis Zimmerman, 2007 Oklahoma Bar winners of the Monda Salyer Labird Spotlight Award for distinguished service.

The Centers for Disease Control's latest report shows 27.9% of Oklahoma men and 25.1% of women have quit smoking. Bravo for them! It's a tough chore.

Dart: To those who claim we have to "quit throwing money at public education." Latest international report shows American public school teachers are 12th lowest paid in the industrial world. [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development]

When Michigan was facing a shutdown due to a recalcitrant GOP Legislature, legislators cut state workers' health care benefits but made sure state legislators' benefits would not be touched.

Laurel: To the State Board of Education for finally admitting they need legal authority when a local school board goes out-of-control, isn't following the law or is too slow in reacting to serious school problems.

Will Wal-Mart ever get it straight? They have settled a class action lawsuit for working employees off the clock – \$78.5 million in back pay plus \$62 million in damages. That was only in Pennsylvania.

Dart: To those complaining about illegal immigration but unwilling to support a guest worker program. Tell that to California, with 2.8 million illegals, Texas with 1.6 million, etc. [Forbes, 10.1.07]

We are delighted to note that payday loan companies are refusing to honor a new federal law requiring them to charge the military no more than an APR 36% interest – compared to their average of 521%.



Laurel: To Charlotte Edwards, ex-Sen. Ted Fisher, Mike Stephens, Ron Wilkerson and Elmer "Tex" Williamson, named to the CareerTech Hall of Fame.

Property owners are protesting at the Grand River Dam Authority, claiming GRDA is keeping the lake at a high level for lake property owners' benefit while causing flooding down stream. Stop it!

Dart: To State Sen. Randy Brogdon, defending the three TABOR initiative petition organizers indicted for conspiracy. This legislative joke was a prime mover in the ill-fated Taxpayer Bill of Rights campaign.

"As of yesterday's positive [NCLB] report card shows, childrens do learn when standards are high and results are measured." – George Bush, adding to his legendary ignorance.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Heart Hospital of Oklahoma City, adding a \$30 million addition. There is no better cardiac care in the state – they have never turned down a person showing up in the emergency room regardless of ability to pay.

American prisons are holding 630,000 illegal immigrants in prisons and jails costing taxpayers \$180 million a year. Governors, such as Oklahoma's Brad Henry, refuse to deport them. [U.S. News & World Report]

Dart: To Sooner legislators for attending the plush events by the American Legislative Exchange Council [ALEC] – a rightwing business front promoting new nuclear plants.

The political rumor mill is grinding out the story that Rudy Giuliani's third wife is considering divorce. While they were pitching woo, he cried out the names of his first two wives and one of the gays he lived with for a year.

Laurel: To the new law going into effect Nov. 1 that protects doctors from lawsuits when they donate their time to practice free in a free health clinic.

Oklahoma is 10th nationally in women murdered by men – 33 in 2005, due mainly to drugs and economic pressures.

Dart: To Little Rock's Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, once a premier newspaper, now with an editorial page worse than the Daily Disappointment. Latest screed: trashing Gen. Wesley Clark.

U.S. News and World Report calculates that the current presidential election will reach \$5 billion, an obscenity caused by a U.S. Supreme Court that legalized buying and selling politicians.

Laurel: To State Superintendent Sandy Garrett for her frank assessment that it would cost upwards of \$100 million to lengthen the school day and year – sending shudders through the reigning legislative GOP.

Oklahoma, with 86 executions, claims another notch in the law-'n-order belt, second only to Texas [405].

Dart: To the far right Americans for Prosperity, imported by House Republicans to tout more business tax cuts. Their goals, if reached, would turn America into a plutocracy.

Occasionally even a blind squirrel can happen across an acorn in the forest. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, authored the bill helping private landowners restore fish and wildlife habitat.

Laurel: To AARP for trumpeting the fact that 750,000 sick and disabled Americans applying for Social Security disability are waiting an average of 520 days before their claims are processed.

Tulsa leaders will return to the drawing board after the crushing defeat of a tax hike to develop the Arkansas River front. Oklahoma City residents overwhelmingly approved a huge school bond issue.

Dart: To the Legislature continually cutting taxes while the truck weigh stations are closed for lack of decent funding. Rep. Danny Morgan, D-Prague, is fighting to fix that sorry situation.

More than two-thirds of all black births last year were to unwed mothers, showing a 17% further decline in black marriages. [Census Bureau]

Laurel: To the Legislature for a law requiring motorists to stop 15 feet from a visually impaired person with a white cane and a seeing-eye dog. The law was three feet.

State Rep. Randy Terrill, R-OKC, is opposed to a moratorium on tax cuts, despite more than \$600 million in the past three years. He uses statistics like a drunk uses lamp posts – support rather than illumination.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Wouldn't you like to thank your Congressmen - Boren, Cole, Lucas, and Sullivan - for voting against the bill that would have made illegal transportation of fighting dogs [like Michael Vick pleaded guilty to] a felony and not a misdemeanor? [The Federal Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act]

Don't you feel safer with their trying to keep those dogs fighting and dying for entertainment, fun, profit, and gambling. Sounds like a family, Christian value to me.

Take your family to watch the blood lust where dogs slaughter each other by being pulled apart in pieces! Didn't some once feed the Christians to the lions for fun and entertainment?

Humane organizations and 400 law enforcement agencies across the country supported this federal bill. It passed without these "Neanderthals" with a vote of 368 to 39 in the House and then passed unanimously in the U. S. Senate. [Humane Society Legislative Fund, 7.24.07]

If that doesn't make you proud, remember our U. S. senator [Coburn] who wants to make it possible for mental patients to buy guns with no hindrances. Not being an M.D., I surely don't understand the full meaning of that professional designation, but I do recall "Hawkeye" on M*A*S*H* years ago saying his M.D. might stand for Manic Depressive or Mentally Defective.

Sounds like there might be some more around that would fit that designation!

Is this a state with great representation or what?

Max Edgar
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Richard Roberts says he is praying for his accusers. But get this. The accusers say Roberts is preying on them! We may have to go to court to understand which vowel is right!

Greg Scroggins
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

After 21 years of teaching in the classrooms of public schools in Oklahoma and after 17 years of working with public school employees across the state, I was almost left speechless, although not quite, upon learning that the Legislative Compensation Board had decided that Oklahoma's legislators deserved the same health insurance benefits as state employees!

I don't begrudge our poor legislators for wanting and deserving better health insurance benefits, and when one of the reasons given by Compens-

sation Board member James Farris for the increase is that many legislators' wives had called about the differences [although none of the wives were named], I wondered how many teachers and support professionals in Oklahoma had called the legislators and asked for the same benefit that they now can look forward to having?

That request usually falls on deaf ears at the Oklahoma State Legislature where they rank 13th in the nation in legislative pay and receive a \$122 per diem.

Oklahoma's outstanding public school employees deserve the same health insurance benefit that legislators are proposed to receive.

Public school employees who read the Oklahoma Observer should contact their state legislators and demand the same health insurance benefits that state employees receive and that now are being proposed for state legislators.

No questions about whether they deserve the benefits, they do. No questions about cost. Farris was quoted as saying that he had no idea how much it would cost to provide this increased health benefit allowance to legislators. NO QUESTIONS!!!

It's time that the long suffering public school employees of Oklahoma had the monkey on their backs of high health insurance premiums removed. IT'S TIME!!!

Bruce Treadaway
Minco

Editor, The Observer:

I have been taking The Oklahoma Observer on and off for many years. Someone recently gave me a gift subscription to the paper and I've enjoyed receiving and reading it again. However, I was quite disturbed with the noose hanging from the letter "L" on page 14 of the Oct. 10th edition. The use of that sort of clip art seems quite cavalier and did very little to illustrate the accompanying article.

We may think that the noose is a thing of our past, but it is has been cropping up in the present in many places lately. Here's one case. An African-American Columbia University education professor recently found a hangman's noose hanging from her office door. Police have no suspects yet.

Of course, we are all probably more aware of the incident in Jena, LA, about a year ago when some white students hung a noose from a tree under which African-American students sat. Jena has been in racial turmoil ever since. More recently, two young men were arrested for taunting protesters in Jena while dangling nooses from the bed of their pick-up.



Symbols carry meaning and whether or not we want to admit it, we are still dealing with this hateful symbol in the United States. I am appalled that you would propagate it on the pages of your fine newspaper and I hope you will not use that symbol again.

Derrek Belase
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

My sister-in-law in Enid subscribes to your wonderful paper for us. My wife and I haven't lived in Oklahoma since graduating from Phillips University in 1957 and enjoy being kept up to date on progressive politics in your lovely state. I've just read Karen Webb's "It's A Mad, Mad Primary World." I mean no disrespect because I don't know anything about Ms. Webb, but she sounds to me like a reincarnated Molly Ivins. I mean that with all respect for the late distinguished writer who punctured balloons of the pompous and skewered the hypocrites who exist among us [most of us?] Does she get published anyplace except The Oklahoma Observer? Is the Progressive aware of her talent? Congratulations for publishing her, and please pass along to her my admiration.

Wayne Moss
Indianapolis, IN

Editor, The Observer:

While you give a laurel to David Boren for his asking for an end to tax cutting, you need to remind others that he is partially responsible for previous tax cuts. Certainly Boren's appeal to stop the hemorrhage of public funds through continued tax cuts is sensible.

The problem is that Boren endorsed Randy Terrill, mister tax cut, and his sidekick, Thad Balkman, during the last election. So the suggestion that we listen to Boren should contain the caveat "for this time."

There is a good chance that if Moore had followed our District 45 lead and booted out Terrill as we did Balkman, we would not be concerned with a shortfall that not only continues to erode state support for universities, but prevents much of what else we expect the state to supply. Just remember, Terrill and Balkman are the proteges of Grover Norquist who advocated starving government until it could be drowned in a bathtub.

Chadwick Cox
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

I wrote the following letter to my Congressperson, Mary Fallin:

I received and responded to your "Senior Survey." I was pleased to see your interest in senior citizen's issues, as they will affect me directly

before your first term of office is over. However, Question No. 3 is a loaded question. It implies that funding for programs affecting children's health can only be accomplished by cutting Medicare funding.

The deplorable irony is that a nation so rich and powerful that it can afford to spend \$453 billion so far or \$200 million per day for the Iraq War, continues to provide less than adequate healthcare for our children and senior citizens. Is Universal Healthcare out of the question?

I understand partisan politics and party loyalty, but the state of this nation and our critical relationship with the rest of our world will demand courage from our elected officials. Some will have to rise above politics and demonstrate statesmanship and courage that has not been apparent in recent years. I hope you remember your decisions will affect our nation and world for generations to come.

Ron Wasson
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights sternly rebuked the United States government for civil and human rights violations against the Western Shoshone nation.

In the first United Nations decision to specifically target United States policy toward Native Americans, the United States government was urged to halt any plans to appropriate Western Shoshone territory for private development or environmentally destructive government projects.

The disputed territory is not only viewed as prime real estate for the mining industry and geothermal energy development, but is also the site of over 1,000 nuclear bomb tests. It also contains Yucca Mountain, where the Department of Energy intends to build the highly controversial nuclear waste repository.

The U.S. Congress should stop this callous Bush Administration from favoring corporations for there should be no nuclear garbage on Native American land.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

Re: House fails to override veto of children's health bill.

Time to impeach the whole damn Congress.

What a bunch of spineless flotsam which are unfit to govern, unfit to lead.

Makes the dark ages look bright.
GAG!!!

Darla Sparks
Yukon

Frosty Troy's

Commencement Address

Students and their parents need to hear an up-beat send-off. No politics. A word portait about this wonderful state

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Frosty's Notebook

Union Twilight

Historians of the future will have the sad duty of chronicling the decline and fall of America as an industrial power, a disaster that includes unprecedented debt and a battered dollar.

Only two great empires have existed on Earth, and both fell from within when they quit making things and started buying things. That's America today.

The loss of labor unions has also cost the country its top paying jobs that built an unrivaled middle class. Live it up Wal-Mart shoppers. Your day is coming.

Oklahoma is no exception – from 19% of the workforce unionized two decades ago to 6% today. For a reality check, look what the GM plant closing cost Oklahoma.

You don't feel sorry for the union members laid off? How about the direct results of the shutdown – 13,400 indirect jobs gone. Lost labor per year: \$113 million.

The critics point to union corruption, but it's rare and a mere fraction of the corruption in corporate America where the mega-rich steal endlessly from their employees and shareholders.

Today's union workforce is moving to white-collar jobs at considerably lower pay and benefits. Even those attempting to unionize have to fight the corporate media and the business elite. Add to that the hostile Bush Administration's handpicked appointees.

Undermining the right to organize is a key component of a Republican Administration that has presided over declining home ownership, declining wages and a negative national savings rate.

The National Labor Relations Board [NLRB], once a champion of honest union elections, is now playing an opposite role, impacting workers' ability to exercise their legal right to form unions.

Illegal employer interference, characterized by the comprehensive use of various legal and illegal anti-union campaigns, is both pervasive and effective. Among employers faced with organizing campaigns:

- 30% fired workers when they engaged in union activities.
- 49% threatened to close or relocate all or part of the business if workers elected to form a union.
- 82% used consultants to design and coordinate their anti-union campaigns.

The impact of employer anti-union campaigns on the success of union organizing drives has been substantial. In nearly all of the cases, when petitions were filed, the majority of workers indicated they supported unionization before the election process began.

In several cases, unions demonstrated more than 80% support. However,

Bellmon's Bill 1017

Note: Oklahoma's first Republican governor also happens to be the best governor on public education in the state's history. He is obviously tired of hearing misguided or uninformed people mischaracterize House Bill 1017. Here he sets the record straight:

Education has become a central issue in several of the Oklahoma political campaigns this year. Much of the discussion involves House Bill 1017, the Education Reform Bill, passed in 1990 during my term as governor.

In listening to the debates, it is obvious that HB 1017 is not fully or correctly understood by many who were not involved in its development and passage. This is an effort to set the record straight.

HB 1017 was about much more than money. It was the most comprehensive education reform act passed and funded by any state up to that time.

It is true that Tennessee and Kentucky passed similar legislation, but neither state provided funds to implement the necessary reforms. Among other changes were these:

- The number of school districts was reduced by 64;
- More curriculum standards were established;

Bush's Big Numbers

The Bush Administration has thus far squandered nearly \$700 billion in a no-win war in Iraq, but how many Americans grasp just how much a billion dollars is?

Consider that the population of China is more than 1.32 billion, or about one-fifth of the world's population.

A billion is a big number, no matter what you're talking about. Most of us can't begin to comprehend just how much a billion is, but a friend sent me some statistics to put it into perspective:

- A billion seconds ago it was 1975 [1,000,000,000 seconds; about 31.7 years].
- A billion minutes ago it was 100 A.D. [1,000,000,000 minutes; 1,902.5 years].
- A billion hours ago our ancestors were living in the Stone Age [1,000,000,000 hours; about 114,155 years].
- A billion days ago nobody walked on the Earth – at least on two feet [1,000,000,000 days; 2,739,726 years].

The Bush Administration inherited a Clinton surplus and now gives America a \$7 trillion national debt. If it's tough to think in terms of a billion, think about your grandchildren grappling with a "trillion" in Republican debt.



unions were victorious in only 31% of these campaigns.

At some point after workers petitioned for union representation, pro-union workers lost their majority status. Know why?

- Employers frequently delay the NLRB election process, creating additional opportunities to execute anti-union campaigns.
- Penalties under the law for employers who violate workers' rights to organize are too weak to effectively deter misconduct.
- The NLRB has failed to regulate employer conduct in a way that would ensure a fair election process.

The decline of union membership across the country must be understood in the context of employer interference and the failure of labor law to protect workers' rights.

Estimates from data provided by the NLRB indicate that there is a sound basis to charge that employers routinely violate workers' right to organize.

Employers, such as Hobby Lobby, are savvy in their anti-union activities, devising ways to pressure employees into voting no in representation elections. Some of these tactics fall within the bounds of illegality.

Many others exist in the gray areas of the law, making charges difficult, if not impossible, for unions to substantiate. These include veiled threats of layoffs made during union organizing campaigns, as well as bogus warnings of plant closings and retribution should unions be victorious.

We will pay a price for the corporate greed and political corruption that brought America to her knees.

- Mandated tests of those standards were implemented;
- Kindergarten was required in all school districts;
- Statutory limits on class size were set;
- Education statutes and regulations were simplified and deregulated to provide flexibility and opportunities for local innovation;
- An Academic Performance Index for school accountability was initiated;
- Beginning teacher's salaries were increased from \$15,600 to \$25,000 per year;
- Oklahoma's high school curriculum was revised and strengthened to world-class standards.

Oklahoma has been fortunate to have Sandy Garrett as state superintendent during the years since the passage of HB 1017.

Sandy played a major leadership role in the creation of this legislation and has provided a steady and strong leadership in the implementation of the bill's requirements.

– Bellmon served twice as governor, from 1963-67 and 1987-91.

Will Rogers' Wit

A long time ago, Oklahoma's most beloved son, Will Rogers, gave the country good advice. It's worth repeating:

Don't squat with your spurs on.

Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.

If you're ridin' ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then to make sure it's still there.

If you get to thinkin' you're a person of some influence, try orderin' somebody else's dog around.

After eating an entire bull, a mountain lion felt so good he started roaring. He kept it up until a hunter came along and shot him ... The moral: When you're full of bull, keep your mouth shut.

Never kick a cow chip on a hot day.

There's two theories to arguin' with a woman. Neither one works.

If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is to stop diggin'.

Never slap a man who's chewin' tobacco.

It don't take a genius to spot a goat in a flock of sheep.

Always drink upstream from the herd.

When you give a lesson in meanness to a critter or a person, don't be surprised if they learn their lesson.

Black Cherokees Fight For Heritage

By Lois Hatton

A group of Americans who are not fully black or fully Indian are fighting for the survival of their identity, culture, history and economic future. Life for these black Indians can be difficult, no matter their tribal affiliation.

Lynn Hart, a black Yankton Sioux, says he regularly experiences racism. "When I go to the reservation people see me as black. When I walk among blacks they see me as Indian."

But black Cherokees, commonly called Cherokee Freedmen, have recently been dealt a crueler blow.

In March, Cherokee tribal members voted to remove members who had African-American heritage – a total of 2,800 people. Why now? Money seems to be a motivating factor. Members receive health care, education and housing benefits.

Each also has voting rights in tribal elections. But more important, each member has a stake in growing casino revenue.

READ THE TREATY OF 1866

The Freedmen point to a 1866 treaty that has linked them to Cherokee Nation for generations. The treaty says, "All the Cherokees and freed persons who were formerly slaves to any Cherokee, and all free Negroes not having been such slaves" were given full Cherokee citizenship.

To motivate the Cherokees to rescind what many consider to be a racist action, Rep. Diane Watson D-CA, with the support of the Congressional Black Caucus, wants to deny the Cherokee Nation all federal funding of \$300 million for education, health care and housing, as well as to deprive them of their casino and oil revenue until the issue is resolved by the tribe or the courts.

Cherokees and African-Americans have a shared history of mistreatment. Many escaped slaves found refuge with Indians; others married into the tribe and still



others were slaves of Cherokees.

THEY WALKED THE TRAIL OF TEARS TOGETHER

In 1838, thousands of armed US. troops forced the Cherokee Nation to relocate to Oklahoma. Together, the Cherokee and black Freedman walked what became known as the Trail of Tears – a 2,000-mile trek from their Georgia home to Oklahoma. Of the 16,000 people who started the journey, more than 4,000 died along the way.

Around the turn of the century, the Dawes Commission was established to determine land distribution to Cherokees who were relocated in Oklahoma.

Over time, the census-like tally it conducted became the official document to verify Native American bloodlines.

Some black Indians with Native American parents were not listed on the Dawes rolls. Based solely on their skin color, they were listed as Freedmen.

The Cherokees are disenfranchising the Freedmen in the same way they were forcibly removed from their land. When we do not learn the lessons of history, we are inclined to repeat the errors.

– The author is a writer and columnist in Brookings, SD

Avoid The Hook Of 'Phishing' Trips

By Joe Sweeden

Identity theft is our country's fastest growing crime. The Federal Trade Commission [FTC] says it's the No. 1 concern of consumers and businesses today. Every day more Americans are falling victims as thieves drain their bank accounts, run up their charge cards and leave their credit in shambles.

The FTC estimates that as many as nine million Americans are victims of this type of crime every year and I was almost among them.

Recently, I received an e-mail from my bank, a large national chain, asking me to fill out a questionnaire.

It looked authentic so being a good customer I started answering the questions, but then was asked for my social security and credit card numbers.

THE ALARM BELLS SOUNDED

Knowing that my bank already had this information, I realized there'd be no need in them asking for it again and there was no reason for them to have my credit card numbers.

The bank assured me it was not from them and that they were looking into it as others had inquired about the email as well.

I'm glad to say that this was my first brush with this type of scam known as Internet "phishing."

Others aren't so lucky though. Some people receive these types of emails on a regular basis.

ONE OF MOST COMMON SCAMS

Perhaps you've received one of those infamous e-mails relaying a sad story from a person, usually from a foreign country, whose wealthy relative has met with an unfortunate death.

The scammer is looking for a "kind, trusting person" with a bank account in which the distraught family member can deposit the multi-million dollar family

fortune.

For that kind act [and a few hundred or thousand dollars for transactions fees and the family members' travel expenses to come collect their money], the account holder will get a percentage of the inheritance.

The IRS has also recently issued consumer warnings about emails appearing to be from the agency for member satisfaction surveys or a number of tax-related emails that are scams.

TOO MANY GET SUCKERED

Most recognize these as schemes playing to the "get quick rich" mentality of some people, but research has found that thousands do fall for these types of scams.

Identity theft can happen through the Internet, by mail and over the phone. It's a crime that can't easily be solved and tends to leave the victim with financial scars.

Those who fall for the scams can suffer for years trying to get their financial records straightened out.

During that time, they may endure a number of hardships including harassment from debt collectors, loan rejection, banking problems, insurance and credit card fees, inability to find a job, higher interest rates, utility cutoffs and stressful battles with collection agencies and issuers who refuse to clear records despite proof of the crime.

There have even been cases where victims have been arrested mistakenly for identity thief's other crimes.

The bottom line is none of us can afford to let our guard down.

– The author, a Pawhuska Democrat, represents District 10 in the state Senate

Tulsa's Search For Spanish Teachers

With explosive growth in the number of Hispanic students in public schools in Oklahoma, school districts are searching for more bilingual teachers and classroom assistants.

In a 10-year period from 1996 to 2006, the population of students in pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade in public Oklahoma schools went up 2.8%, while the Hispanic portion of that population jumped 135.5%, according to U.S. Department of Education statistics.

To teach students the English language, school districts need a growing number of professionals who speak Spanish. The problem is, there aren't enough Oklahomans graduating from the public universities to fill those spots.

Some school districts are turning to other countries for help. Representatives from Tulsa Public Schools flew to Puerto Rico to offer contracts on-the-spot to December graduates of the University of Puerto Rico.

TWO RECRUITING TRIPS TO PUERTO RICO

In March, they went back to lure some of the May graduates, according to John Harris, director of human resources for the district.

"It's kind of like the NFL. If you need a player, you try to get them in their junior year," Harris said. "You snooze, you lose."

The district has offered about 15 contracts to Puerto Ricans in the past two

years, he said.

Tulsa also recruits teachers from 33 universities in five states, he said, but there are a limited number of Spanish-speaking education majors and a lot of competition for them.

The Oklahoma City school district hasn't made the offshore trip yet. But school board member Wilfredo Santos Rivera, the District 7 representative and a native of Puerto Rico, said he suggested the idea to some colleagues a while back.

"Puerto Ricans are already citizens, so you get that off the table right there, so you don't have to do a lot of paperwork. And their universities are bilingual, so it's a win-win situation."



Announcing the all new...

Observer Blog

Taking the Oklahoma Observer to new heights.

Same Song, Second Verse

Roberts Seeds Political And Financial Power

By Don Wilkey

Recent allegations against Oral Roberts University in the press have raised a larger issue concerning the influence the university has around the nation.

Three former ORU professors filed a lawsuit claiming they were fired for blowing the whistle on alleged improper spending. But claims that Richard and his second wife lived a life of excess at the expense of donor money are nothing new.

Patty, Richard's first wife, claimed the same almost three decades ago in her book about the Tulsa school. She wrote of golf trips her husband took and her mother-in-law's elaborate shopping sprees using jets to fly them around the nation for such.

Don't look for any decrease in giving from the faithful followers, though. Patty's claims caused little impact on the huge amount of money flowing into the programs – estimated, in some accounts, at around \$75 million annually.

SUPPORTERS DON'T SEEM TO CARE

The fact that the Roberts' used this to qualify for Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous brought little concern from seed-faith followers.

These congregants adhere to Oral's view of the Bible that God wants His followers to be rich. Oral has written that Jesus was wealthy in His day and this justifies the opulence.

The wife of former student Joel Olsteen has gotten the message. She is the famous Houston lady who faces charges for slapping an airline stewardess who didn't clean her first class seat properly.

ORU Graduate Ted Haggard spared no expense to make his now famous contacts with a gay lover in an exclusive hotel. Haggard was said to have spoken weekly to President Bush. One wonders what theological views Ted held about taxation of the wealthy?

Patty says that Oral advised Richard to divorce her when she became concerned about fund-raising among people living in poverty in the name of helping poor students attend the school. Meanwhile, the Roberts' enjoyed the luxury that few Tulsans knew about.

FOX GUARDING HEN HOUSE?

Some suggest that allowing trustee John Hagee, the San Antonio minister, to investigate this saga is like asking the fox to guard the hen house.

Like Richard, Hagee is on his second wife, abandoning the first for a much younger model.

PBS's Bill Moyers raised some recent concern about the impact Hagee is having on the nation. Hagee is pushing the nation to go to war against Iran. He often announces on TV that President Bush is God's man and Christians need to support his foreign policy.

According to PBS, Hagee implied God sent Hurricane Katrina to America because we forced Israel to give up occupied territory. Hagee has raised millions to support efforts to allow Israel to occupy ancient Biblical lands. He has held rallies in Washington with powerful GOP leaders in attendance at his pro-Israel rallies.

THE MELDING OF CHURCH AND STATE

The allegations against Roberts are wrapped in the original complaint from ORU professors that students were used in political campaigns in Colorado and Tulsa.

The suit claims violations of 501c3 regulations. The document claims ORU used its tax-exempt collections to engage in secular GOP campaigns. Richard is

A Christian Nation's Indifference To The Poor

By Bob Bearden

We finally have an increase in the minimum wage, for the first time in 10 years. Once, an increase in the minimum wage meant that low-wage workers would be able to make a living wage. These days the minimum wage will only afford them that luxury if they work at more than one job.

Yet, we have economists, like one who spoke at a living wage forum here in Oklahoma City recently, who profess the belief that there are some workers in today's economy who don't deserve to receive a living wage.

Obviously, this is a person who has never had to actually toil for a living. Sadly, we have a lot of people in the corporate world who share those sentiments.

Jesus said, "A worker should be worthy of his hire." If that be true, should it not follow that a worker be paid a wage that speaks to their worth?

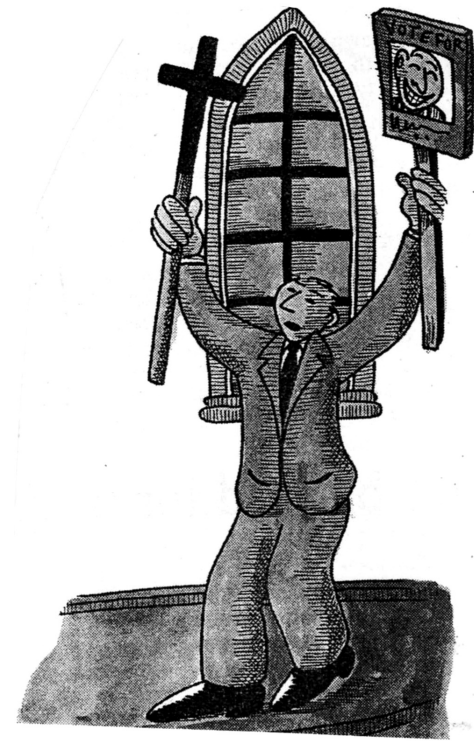
POOR NEED TO BECOME BETTER MONEY MANAGERS?

Then we have politicians such as the state representative who believed low-wage workers didn't need the minimum wage raised. They just needed to be taught how to manage the money they made at \$5.15 per hour more effectively.

And how was she able to become an instant expert on managing a household on \$5.15 an hour? From her many years of experience managing her allowance as a child? As to whether or not her allowance qualified her as a low-wage worker, we can only speculate?

In what alternate universe do people exist who have so little compassion and consideration for their fellow human beings?

I will concede, that at my age, I may have finally stood on one picket line too



alleged to have used school resources to try to get a candidate elected as mayor of Tulsa.

This issue smells of the influence of the university's most famous graduate, math major David Barton.

Barton is the point man for the Religious Right to correct the nation about the "Myth of Separation of Church and State." He advises churches to engage in election activity and suggests that political parties that aren't with him are against free speech in the church.

BARTON REVISES BLACK HISTORY

He leads black history rallies showing a cartoon of a black man with large lips standing shivering between two white men holding guns to his head telling him who to vote for. The white men are Democrats and Barton says blacks should be Republicans because Democrats voted against civil rights and lynching laws.

Barton's revision of black history was so controversial that Lufkin, TX, a city that had invited him to speak, sent out an apology to all the area churches.

To Barton, Hagee and Richard's followers, the use of the church to engage in secular politics is not prohibited, but a Biblical mandate. If anything, the disclosure of Richard's activity with GOP candidates in Tulsa will only hasten the frenzy to send more money.

Oral Roberts' recent legacy of claiming that God was going to kill him if he didn't raise another million will continue to haunt him. The money was to be raised for a hospital. When the money came in, the hospital folded in a short while. Which might raise some question about the revelations that Oral gets.

SOWING SEEDS OF APOCALYPTIC POLITICS

Though Oral's theology of God as a hit man might be the fodder for late night comedians, Hagee's revelations might not be so funny.

Some from the left accused the administration of going to war through the influence of Tim LaHaye-type end-of-times theories. Most considered too far-fetched the idea of the nation's foreign policy being based on someone's theories about the Second Coming of Christ.

The charges that Richard Robert's wife has cell phone access to several young males on campus might not be as interesting as the other access the university has to seats of power through its graduates and contacts.

After all, Oral always taught the seed theory. Sowing seeds into government power might bring a harvest the nation doesn't want. One wonders if much attention will even be paid to the investigations?

Or will the story fade into the past much like Patty's earlier revelations?

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

Where Oklahoma Ranks

The Tax Truth Hurts Greedy Rightwingers

Editor's Note: The Observer has a well-earned reputation for setting the record straight. Herewith an antidote to Bill Pitts' column in the Journal Record as refuted by the Alliance For Oklahoma's Future:

Oklahomans pay just under 10 cents of every dollar we earn in state and local taxes. Oklahomans' taxes are 43rd in the nation per capita and 35th as a share of personal income [2004].

Nearly \$4 of every \$10 at the state level comes from the income tax. The sales tax is the second largest revenue source for both state and local government [behind the income tax and property taxes, respectively].

Oklahoma's property taxes are among the lowest in the nation – 47th. The average Texan paid 2.5 times more than Oklahomans in property taxes in 2002.

RICH GET RICHER IN THE TAXES

Low and moderate income Oklahomans pay a greater share of their income in state and local taxes than do upper-income Oklahomans. In fact, the bottom three-fifths of taxpayers pay 11 cents of every dollar, on average, in state and local taxes, compared to less than nine cents of every dollar for the wealthiest 5%. This is because sales taxes hit low- and moderate-income families hardest.

Recent tax cuts are eroding state revenue collections. The Legislature responded to the state's recent energy-fueled economic surge by enacting permanent tax cuts with a fiscal impact in excess of \$550 million in FY '08.

As a result, despite a continuing healthy economy, state revenue growth is projected at below 2% for this year and next – far less than what is needed to address basic cost increases in areas like health care and corrections and to make key public investments where Oklahoma lags behind.

IMPACT OF PERSONAL INCOME TAXES ON BUSINESS

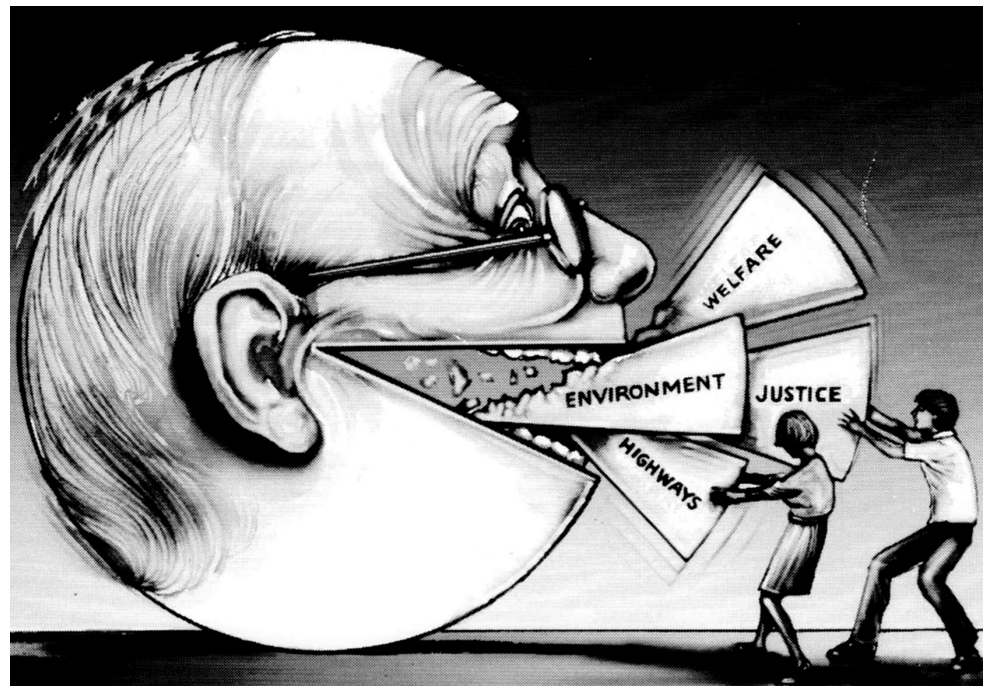
Cutting taxes is not an efficient way to grow the state economy. Substantial research shows that state personal income tax rates have a minimal impact in spurring business investment or individual migration.

Since Oklahoma is already a low tax state, further tax cuts risk diverting resources from the investments in physical and human capital that our economy needs.

Government spending in Oklahoma, per capita, is 20.5% below the national average. Total state and local expenditures per capita in Oklahoma are 50th in the nation [2004].

About 9/10th of Oklahoma's annual state budget is spent by the 10 largest agencies. The state budget is spent overwhelmingly on education, health care, social services, transportation and public safety.

All 77 other state agencies that address public needs – such as consumer safety, economic development, environmental protection, and other general gov-



ernment operations – spend just over \$500 million combined.

CONSTITUTIONAL LIMITS SLOW SPENDING

State spending has been growing less rapidly over time than the state economy. In 2006, about 5.6 cents of every \$100 in state personal income went to state appropriations. This is less than the 25-year average of 5.9%.

Oklahoma has one of the country's strictest systems of constitutional tax and spending limits. Constitutional limits put stringent controls on the Legislature's ability to raise taxes and caps local property taxes. Oklahoma must balance its budget each year and put surplus funds aside into a rainy day fund.

The state faces serious fiscal challenges in the years ahead. With an aging population, rapidly rising health care costs, unfunded pension obligations and an outdated tax system, Oklahoma will struggle to provide adequate levels of funding for basic public services – even without state policies that make the situation more difficult.

– *The Alliance for Oklahoma's Future is a non-partisan, broad-based alliance of organizations and individuals who have pledged to work together to educate their respective members, policy makers, and the public about tax and budget issues and the need for policies that ensure adequate investment in public services in Oklahoma.*

For more information, visit the web site, www.okbudgetalliance.org, or call 918.382.3228 or 405.615.2880.

How Stupid Can We Be On Tax Cuts?

By Karen Webb

I was wondering who might suffer from another Oklahoma State Tax Cut. I know they say we have some sort of a surplus or that the economy of Oklahoma is OK enough for more tax cuts. Last year they finally gave teachers a pay raise, but only after a lot of kicking and screaming from the GOP. Oklahoma is still very close to the bottom in the amount of money they spend on school children and teachers.

After watching KFOR [Oklahoma City's Channel 4] this morning, I am getting a clearer picture of what they think maybe could use a little slicing and dicing. They introduced the story yesterday and maybe had an online poll or telephone poll on the issue.

The story showed pictures of dented vehicles with busted windows. There weren't any tornadoes or hail storms this week in Oklahoma so I was waiting, with baited breath, for the reason for all this damage.

It turns out these vehicles had been parked in parking lots under the I-40 Crosstown and pieces of the Crosstown were crashing into vehicles and could have been crashing into Oklahomans, themselves.

PLEASE ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

You might think that since the stories were breaking at the same time as the story about the proposed tax cut, Channel 4 might have polled the taxpayers to ask if they would rather have the bridges and roads fixed [we have had severe damage from the rains this year and the freezes last winter] or would they like to have their taxes cut on what limited overtime is available.

But Noooooo!!!!!! Channel 4 announced that 50% of the Oklahomans they polled would rather have EDUCATION cut to pay for the roads.

Why in the world would Channel 4 think the only possible choice for funding cuts would be education? What universe do these idiots live in?

The Oklahoma Legislature loves to cut corporate taxes and guess who does most of the non-weather related damage to the state's roadways? Guess who benefits from those tax cuts?

OKIES' AVERSION TO MASS TRANSIT

Of course, it could help if fewer cars were on the road, but Oklahomans are not interested in meeting their fellow Okies on some sort of public transportation. Heavens no, they prefer to drive their own cars, park them under what could collapse at any second and cut education for children and teachers in a state that

spends way too little on education as it is.

The speaker of the House is trying to force merit pay for teachers on teachers with not much health care or pay, when he should be pushing merit pay for himself because he would be getting docked.

Thousands of Oklahoma's working poor have little or no health care so Oklahomans will likely want to cut that to fix the roads as well.

Folks, I am willing to bite the bullet and we are feeling it with gas prices, but I think the people using the roads should have to pay and not the children. Raise that gas tax and stop giving welfare to corporations and tax them for every truck they put on our highways.

DON'T ACCEPT THE FALSE CHOICES

Call the Channel 4 Rant today and tell them you think cutting education to pay for road repair is stupid and cutting taxes is also stupid. Then call Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, and Rep. Glen Bud Smithson, D-Sallisaw, and tell them to forget tax cuts and fix the roads and don't do it on the backs of Oklahoma children.

Anyone who thinks I give a pass to Democrats would be wrong. I have already called.

– *The author lives in Moore*

MINIMUM WAGE

From Page 7

Jesus Do?

Why is it then, in a country where some keep insisting we are a Christian Nation, many of our elected officials, who run on tickets espousing faith and family, continually turn their backs on the poor and disadvantaged?

Chastise them for being poor? Insist that they are in their situation because they don't try hard enough? Admonish them for not being able to make ends meet on \$5.15 an hour and tell them they don't deserve to receive a living wage?

If they truly believe we are a Christian Nation, why then can they not have at least a small measure of Christian charity for those who find themselves in less fortunate circumstances?

– *The author is a member of the Central Oklahoma Community Forum and a trustee with the Central Oklahoma Labor Federation*

Immigration Bill Consequences

'Reform' Stirs Animosity, Hostility

By Charles Chastain

Immigration control is one of the most important and divisive issue's facing our country today. How we meet this challenge will define us as a nation for generations to come. Will it be with jingoistic emotion, or by standing fast with our founding principles and in line with our best economic interests?

Prior to the Great Depression, the U.S. could enjoy the benefits of free immigration and open borders without regard to economic costs, as a social safety net did not exist.

Today's governmental programs render uncontrolled immigration untenable. Our social safety net is set in place to care for those who are unable to afford care for themselves.

Our current immigration system creates a sub-class that unfairly stigmatizes a valuable segment of our workforce and limits its deployment in an efficient, market driven manner. We do this at our own peril.

HISPANIC WORKERS 'RELIABLE AND DEPENDABLE'

Our Hispanic population contributes significant value to our economy. The skill level and work place behavior of Hispanic workers has resulted in their ability to command market wages and benefits. Local employers indicate that Hispanic employees are reliable and dependable. Indeed, employers welcome this pool of labor, as it possesses the characteristics necessary for a business to succeed.

The inability of our legislative leaders to effectively deal with the effects of globalization on our economy has resulted in poorly crafted public policy initiatives such as Oklahoma House Bill 1804.

This bill, curiously called the Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act of 2007, places the burden of enforcing failed national policies on Oklahoma's business community.

Its provisions are tantamount to hiring private contractors to provide for the common defense of our nation's borders. Our tax averse Legislature has, in effect, imposed a new tax on Oklahoma businesses.

Efficient labor markets require that populations be free to move to where the jobs are. To the extent that policies inhibit this flow, costs equivalent to a tax come into existence lowering the lifestyle of the countries in which they exist.

IMPLICATIONS OF STATE'S IMMIGRATION 'REFORM'

This tax is of the most sinister type. It subtracts from the wealth of a nation by raising costs while adding nothing in return. Those advocating expulsion of undocumented workers within our states are effectively arguing for a diminished American quality of life and a tax on our income.

What should we do? First, create a streamlined process for moving undocumented workers into our system in order to capture lost income and payroll taxes.



Second, update the naturalization process to allow tax-paying members of our work force and their families to become full-fledged citizens after the filing of their fifth tax return.

Third, secure our borders by building a structure that pushes immigrants through selected entry portals that requires them to register and begin the naturalization process.

Those persons found to be felons or who commit felonies once here, prior to becoming citizens, should be deported to their country of origin. As Mexico and other Central American and South American nations become more Americanized, the reasons for migration will cease to exist.

WHOSE LIST OF SHARED AMERICAN VALUES?

Some argue that there is more to becoming a citizen than paying taxes. This is true. New arrivals must add value to the economy, must be law abiding and contribute positively to our cultural ideals.

Those who advocate conformity to "American Values" for immigrants have yet to put forward a list of just what those universally shared values are. A love for a country is developed by people who are stakeholders in its future. Artificial barriers protect us from nothing and generate animosity and hostility. What we do share are universal desires for a better future for our families and ourselves.

The positions filled by Hispanic immigrants are not done at the expense of others seeking similar jobs. Those who advocate continuation of our quota-based system live in a world where no trade skills are needed. Not everything can be accomplished with the push of a button.

Removal of 12 million to 18 million people from our work force will push wages upward and force consumer prices higher. Economic growth will suffer and we will all be poorer for the effort.

- The author lives in Tulsa

An Open Letter To The Oklahoma City Council

Where Is Your Social Conscience?

By Jim Cox

My name is Jim Cox - yes, the same one who filed for possession of the Lake Atoka property called Area III a few years ago to protect the area from abuse and destruction driven by shortsighted, power-hungry, money-motivated people.

Don't we as a people have a moral obligation to put back at least as much as we take out?

Oklahoma City has taken more than its share out of southeastern Oklahoma and can only think about MORE! The shameful disparity between standards of living between Oklahoma County and southeastern Oklahoma counties will continue to widen because of your "nothing in return" thinking.

Our forefathers created a policy known as "manifest destiny," which means that the biggest make up the rules of life, right or wrong. If we want what someone else has, we take it and say it's OK because the doctrine of manifest destiny says it's OK!

Look at the footprints of Oklahoma City in Atoka and Coal counties of Oklahoma and see if it fits - everything taken and nothing put back [unless you count the \$\$\$ that have been sent to the city of Atoka under the guise of providing policing of the area].

OKLAHOMA CITY GETS WHATEVER IT WANTS

Atoka city officials serving on Lake Atoka and McGee Creek Boards are merely rubber stamps for Oklahoma City.

The "City of Atoka" does not represent the citizenry of Atoka and Coal counties; that was another trick used to obtain lands under the doctrine mentioned above - get one of the minor chiefs of a native nation drunk with alcohol or flattery and then appoint him as the person in charge ... ego is a dangerous thing.

Southeastern Oklahoma has been fighting to stop the sale of water to Texas, while all the time, the enemy is our own state Capitol and Oklahoma City. What a joke!

Southeastern Oklahoma has been held in social and economic poverty from

poor governance and will continue to be until you recognize its entitlement to utilize rightful control over our most precious natural resource [water].

LIVING WAGE JOBS AT STAKE

If you argue with that, try to drink some oil or gas! Oklahoma City's trickle down theory will not create livable wage jobs in southeastern Oklahoma - never has, never will.

You have seized control of our water, but you pay zero property taxes to support our children's public schools, and yet you won't relinquish the privilege to properly oversee and develop the watershed of Atoka Lake to representative citizenry!

This could be an ongoing economic boom to both Coal and Atoka counties. You know [or at least you should] that Atoka is not the only city that is affected by the misuse of the watershed; the cities of Stringtown, Coalgate, Kiowa and Lehigh are extremely affected, not to mention the rural residents of both counties.

Oklahoma City commits a major corporate mismanagement practice of treating a critical resource provider as an inferior. Is it any wonder we're upset?

Where is your social conscience?

- The author lives in Coalgate



State's Nutrition Needs Addressed

By Maura McDermot

You're doin' fine, Oklahoma!

This declaration caps the chorus of Oklahoma! title song of the Broadway musical and Oklahoma's state song. It's a simple statement that Oklahomans sing proudly, even fervently.

Unfortunately, as the state approaches its centennial, Oklahomans are really not doing so fine when it comes to health.

Oklahoma ranks dead last in the nation in the percentage of adults who eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

Over one-third of Oklahoma adults are overweight; one-quarter are obese. About a quarter of high school students are overweight or obese.

Only one other state outranks Oklahoma in deaths from heart disease, a condition associated with overweight. We have high rates of diabetes and stroke, conditions also related to overweight and ultimately to not "living [or eating] right."

More of us are poor in Oklahoma than in 41 other states. Ironically, poverty, too, is associated with being overweight.

THE MOST TROUBLING STATISTIC

The most troubling statistic of all is that far too many of us don't know if we will have money to buy enough groceries next week, or worse, are downright hungry today. Oklahoma in 2004 ranked first among the states in the percentage of households with people who are going hungry.

These stunning facts are all related to food. It is clear that in Oklahoma our health is not as good as it could be and that this is partly because of the food we eat.

Which brings up an important question: Can Oklahomans eat better? In other words, do Oklahomans understand what good food is and do they have access to it?

FARM FAMILIES MOVE TO URBAN CENTERS

We know we belong to the land.

If taken to heart, this simple statement points the way to a healthier Oklahoma.

In story and song, Oklahoma is forever associated with the joys and tragedies of life on the land. The Grapes of Wrath, Woody Guthrie's Dust Bowl ballads, and the Broadway musical Oklahoma! have made Oklahoma and the family farm inseparable in the public mind, even as Oklahoma has slowly but surely become more urban.

Today only about a third of Oklahomans live in rural areas. About 10% of the

McDaniel Fighting To Help Adoptees

More than five million adult adoptees are denied rights to their original birth records, leaving them vulnerable to health risks and prompting state Rep. Jeanie McDaniel to begin seeking solutions to the issue.

McDaniel, D-Tulsa, conducted an interim study to offer an opportunity for individuals and legislators to study and share concerns about today's sealed records in Oklahoma and how this has negatively impacted many adoptees' lives.

She was originally rebuffed but hasn't given up the fight – a fight any decent Oklahoman hopes she will win, despite a few loons in the Legislature.

"I have been meeting with adoptive parents, birth mothers and adult adoptees through the past few months to an effort to gain understanding of their perspective related to birth records," said McDaniel.

THE MOVEMENT IS GAINING MOMENTUM

"Other states have begun to open records [in some cases to varying degrees] to adult adoptees.

"Legislators in some states where records were sealed have recognized the complications of processes put in place for privacy and confidentiality have become hurdles – hard to overcome for those that need access. Oklahoma needs to follow in line and do something."

McDaniel said several states, including Oklahoma, closed adoptee birth records in the late 1930s. It was the belief at that time that sealed birth records could save "embarrassment" for families that adopted children.

In 1997, Oklahoma changed that to provide open records to post-1997 adoptees when they reached adulthood.

One-Size-Fits-All Isn't The Answer

By Sharon Edge Martin

Those of us in the educational trenches know two things: It is mathematically impossible for all kids to be average. Mainstreaming doesn't work.

Imagine this class: 18 students, six reading above grade level, five reading at grade level, and seven reading below grade level, three of the latter floundering in first-grade waters. Now, design a reading program that works for this class that challenges the advanced students without leaving the challenged students behind.

In this classroom, about one-third of the students need one-on-one attention to complete most assignments, whether it involves reading, math or both. Those left alone to work while the teacher is helping the helpless find all sorts of interesting ways to entertain themselves.

I've read all the heartwarming stories in which an exceptional child adds texture to a classroom. I believe the stories. I do. But one exceptional child is not the same as a third of the class working below grade level.



rural population is engaged in farming [just 5% of the state's population].

RURAL OKLAHOMA HAS HIGH POVERTY RATES

Poverty rates are high in rural Oklahoma counties, per capita income is low, and farming for many is barely profitable.

Do Oklahomans still belong to the land? Some would say no and feel no regret. Yet others feel strongly about Oklahoma-grown in restaurants and groceries.

Which brings up the question – can this trend make us healthier? Can Oklahoma farmers help us to eat better?

You're doing fine, Oklahoma!

To be able to say [or sing] this, without reservation, is the motivation behind this report.

Funded by a grant from the USDA's Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program, this publication [of the Kerr Center for sustainable Agriculture] attempts to answer the questions:

Can Oklahomans eat better?

Can communities make it easier for individuals to eat better?

Can Oklahoma farmers help us to eat better? How?

IT COULD BE MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL

We explore these and related questions such as:

If Oklahoma farmers can help Oklahomans eat better and therefore become healthier, can consumers in turn help Oklahoma farms become healthier – more diversified, more profitable and more ecologically sustainable?

Will these healthy farms benefit us by making our food supply more secure?

We look for answers in the stories of Oklahomans growing, processing, selling, cooking, and eating the bounty of Oklahoma's fields and gardens.

Alongside these portraits, we delineate the issues that Oklahomans should

See NUTRITION Page 13

However, the change still leaves those adopted prior to that date to deal with court orders and intermediaries with few options.

ONE DEFECTIVE GENE CAN WREAK HAVOC

According to Heredity and Your Family's Health by Aubrey Milunsky, M.D., over 4,000 diseases are caused by single defective genes.

This means missing and sketchy health histories put adopted persons at risk, particularly as they age and need to know the risk factors for common killers such as cancer and heart diseases.

Guests in the study included adult adoptees, parents that chose to both adopt and who surrendered a child for adoption, and Samantha Franklin, Oklahoma representative to the American Adoption Congress, who has successfully worked with dozens of adoptees.

They stressed the preponderance of evidence that show access to family history – genealogy and medical records – as well as the importance of removing a veil of secrecy regarding one's birth, is an issue of rising importance.

NEW DIALOGUE ON FAMILY HISTORY, MEDICAL RECORDS

"This study was an effort to give legislators a snapshot of where we are in Oklahoma," stated McDaniel.

"Our motive was to inform and open a dialogue for review of this very poignant issue that impacts many lives in Oklahoma.

"Hopefully now with all the insight and knowledge, we as legislators can change the laws to allow adoptees to know their family medical history before it is too late and they are suffering from a genetic affliction unknown to them."

PUBLIC FORUM

'08 Choice Is Clear: Clueless Vote GOP

By Kenny Belford

Testifying before a congressional committee, Army Chief of Staff General George Casey gave a sobering assessment recently of the state of our Army. He said, "The current demand for our forces exceeds the sustainable supply."

He didn't state that as a possibility. He stated it as a fact. That simply means we're at the end of the trail on having enough troops to keep Bush's surge plan in operation. It's simple math and the numbers just aren't there.

Gen. Casey also issued a warning that should be sobering to all of us. He added, "The Army might have difficulty providing the necessary forces for other potential contingencies."

George W. Bush has already stated that he intends to keep his surge going through the remainder of his term and hand off the problem to someone else to fix. Consider the fact that the president has no useful military experience or credentials and Gen. Casey clearly has a grasp on troop levels available. Since they're at opposites on the feasibility of Bush's plan, one is right and the other wrong.

AMERICA MORE VULNERABLE, LESS SAFE

The general's warning about any other potential threats and our inability to meet them, undeniably indicates that continuing Bush's plan for a war with no end is making America more vulnerable and significantly less safe.

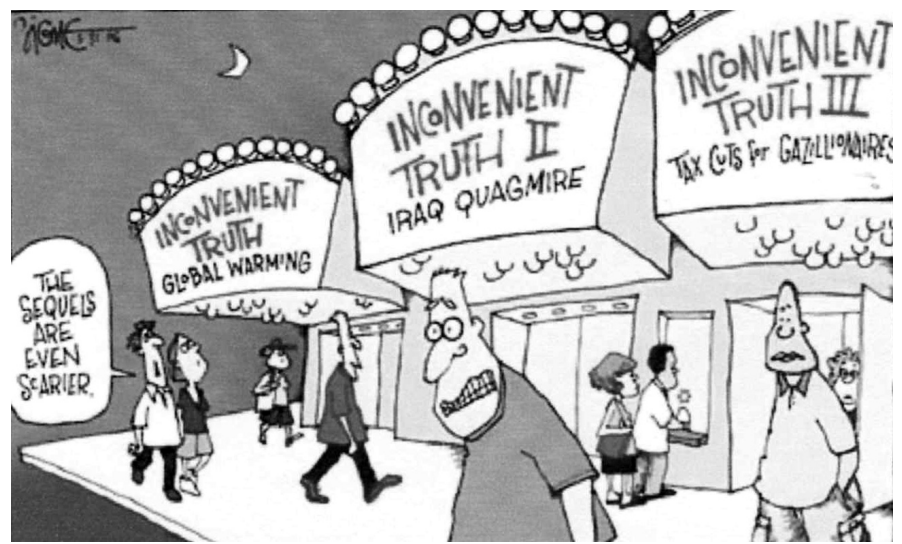
As we approach the presidential elections the comparisons couldn't be more stark.

Every single top tier Republican candidate has repeatedly stated they will continue Bush's war. No ifs, ands, buts, or maybes. They all want the Iraq war to keep going.

Every single Democrat has repeatedly stated they will end the war. No ifs, ands, buts or maybes. They all have said they will end it.

THE CHOICE REALLY IS QUITE SIMPLE

This presidential election rises above political parties. It's a simple choice. If you want to keep Bush's war going indefinitely, then you should vote for a Re-



publican. If you want to keep spending \$2 billion a week on Bush's war, while cutting funding for our own social programs and infrastructure, then you should vote for a Republican.

If you think it's a good idea for America to be more vulnerable in a dangerous world, then you should vote for a Republican. Every single one of the top Republican candidates is committed to that path and their positions have been publicly stated repeatedly.

On the other side, if you think continuing a war that was started from false claims makes no sense, then you should vote for a Democrat. If you think saving \$2 billion a week and spending that money on Americans, restoring the budget cuts to programs that benefit Americans is a wiser move, then you should vote for a Democrat.

If you think it's a fool's policy to intentionally make America more vulnerable and less safe in order to keep Bush's needless war going indefinitely, then you should vote for a Democrat. Every single one of the Democratic candidates is committed to ending Bush's war and their positions have been publicly stated repeatedly.

There is a third possibility, however. If you've kept yourself intentionally uninformed, and intend to remain that way, you'll probably vote for the Republican candidate. They're counting on you to stay clueless or they won't have a chance.

- The author lives in Tulsa

How To End This Senseless War

By James Nimmo

America, the light of the free market world supported by corporate welfare, citadel of freedom where freedom is locked up right now, exemplar of excessive consumption and not of the tubercular kind - Let's have some truth and it will set you free.

Normal people of the U.S.A. don't want their military personnel killed and most who join the military are not expecting to actually go to war.

The military career, either the full service kind or the limited National Guard genre, is frequently seen as the security needed for health benefits, education, and pensions that will be required in a person's life.

Funny, though, that people entering a life-threatening occupation should think too much about the future as the Bu\$h Junta cuts military benefits while extolling the blood-letting catharsis of active killing and maiming directed at foreigners.

JINGOIST JUNTA CHEERLEADS THE WAR

However, with a jingoist Junta in charge of the U.S.A. we're cheerleader-ed and inflamed to support the troops because the Junta knows that should we fully understand that the reasons for the involvement of the military in a foreign civil war are bogus, our willingness to let our military personnel be fed into the threshing

machine of death and war profiteering would be at an end.

Few people will admit that American military personnel are dying in vain.

To admit that thousands are dead, and tens of thousands are maimed physically and mentally for the rest of their lives, is too damaging to the nation's collective psyche to admit in the light of sober and reasoned discussion.

Therefore, our puppet masters pull our emotional strings at every opportunity. Who is the more responsible: those who insist on an open-ended war or those wanting killing to stop?

REAL PATRIOTISM? WORK TO END WAR

That's why I feel the most rational action any authentic American can perform is to work peacefully for the removal of American troops from foreign civil and religious wars.

In addition to direct resistance to this Junta's war, voting for candidates who do not equivocate about the senselessness of war fighting is the best example in the custom of our limited democracy that we can perform.

Truth need not require threats to life and limb but it does require the moral engagement of the mind.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

Racial Profiling Is Fact For Minorities

By Michael Camfield

Your Sept. 10, 2007 cover story referred to "onerous anti-racial profiling regulations" in a manner that dismissed the reality of racial profiling by law enforcement in the United States. The following information contradicts your story.

A 2003 multi-jurisdictional report by the Police Foundation found that, of seven Kansas police departments assessed, "all are targeting either blacks or Hispanics and three of the six who were assessed for both blacks and Hispanics are targeting both."

A 2004 report by the Maryland Justice Analysis Center found that 36% of all stops in Maryland were of African-Americans, who were only 28% of the population.

A 2003 Institute of Race and Poverty study found that African-Americans were stopped three-and-a-half times more often than white motorists.

MISSOURI POLICE ARE CITED

A 2005 report by the Missouri Attorney General indicated that African-Americans were 46% more likely to be stopped than white drivers.

A 2006 survey by the U.S. Department of Justice found that African-Americans were nearly three times as likely and Hispanics were more than twice as likely as whites to be physically searched or to have their vehicles searched when their cars were stopped.

Of individuals stopped by the Colorado State Patrol in 2002, Hispanic drivers were only 15% of those stopped, but 30% of those searched.

A 2000 study by the Tennessee State Comptroller found that police officers searched 16.8% of Hispanics stopped, 8.1% of African-Americans stopped and 5.8% of whites.

NO DIFFERENCE IN CONTRABAND

The foregoing studies and other research have consistently found no difference in contraband discovery across racial lines.

The higher rates of stopping minority drivers have not yielded higher rates of discovering drugs, weapons or other contraband. These examples are only some of the evidence demonstrating that racial profiling is a continuing problem.

- Michael Camfield is development director of the ACLU of Oklahoma

The author of the Sept. 10 article replies: As a lifelong member of the ACLU, I am aware of the problems facing African-Americans and Hispanics but Camfield ignores the thesis of the article - poverty is the leading cause of crime and a majority of crimes are committed by the minority poor. That should come as no surprise to anyone. Not one critic has refuted the facts we reported, despite the source being a rightwing organization. - Frosty Troy

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BOOKS

Finally, The Voices Of Oklahoma Women

By Mike Nobles

VOICES FROM THE HEARTLAND

Edited by Carolyn Anne Taylor, Emily Dial-Driver, Carole Burrage
and Sally Emmons-Featherstone
University of Oklahoma Press
292 pages, \$19.95

I have long said the University of Oklahoma Press is one of the crown jewels in Oklahoma. They consistently publish quality, timely, authoritative books on a variety of subjects and do so in a professional manner. This book is a perfect example.

This may be the first book of its kind devoted to Oklahoma women. It surely is the first in a long, long time, is long overdue and helps fill a void in state history.

It is not a history book, per se. It is no scholarly, academic tome that must be read from beginning to end to ensure understanding and continuity. It is much better.

This is a series of essays – an anthology if you will – written by 50 Oklahoma women outlining their accomplishments, sacrifices, experiences and contributions to their communities, Oklahoma and, indeed, the world.

VAST LIFE EXPERIENCES, PERSPECTIVES

They come from all walks of life – rich and poor; red and yellow, black and white; professionals and lay persons – and perspectives, making the book a treasure of Oklahoma history and pride.

It's all here. In 12 general sections the women share their experiences in an open, candid manner that opens a rare window on what it means to be an American woman today in Oklahoma and the world.

The sections range from Sooner Spirit, Family, Mothering, Women and Work, Politics, Education, Transitions and a host of other themes that together provide a remarkable story and picture of Oklahoma women not usually seen on the evening news programs or read about in the newspapers.

These personal narratives address such diverse issues as adultery, the loss of children, surviving the Oklahoma City bombing, prison life and the trials and tribulations of left-handedness and a myriad of other topics that is breathtaking

An Inconvenient Truth About Reason

By Alvena Bieri

THE ASSAULT ON REASON

By Al Gore
Penguin Group
308 pages, \$25.95

Al Gore's new book is an argument in favor of returning to the great old American value of Reason in our public and political lives. That is Reason with a capital R.

I was interested to learn that our former Vice-president – author of *An Inconvenient Truth* about the dangers of global warming who now lives in Nashville – is on the board of Apple Computer and president of Current TV, "an independently-owned cable and satellite television nonfiction network for young people.

Maybe he's trying to modify and reform the role of TV watching in our lives because that is where he starts his analysis of the things wrong with our nation today.

TELEVISION'S NEGATIVE POWER

We are watching way too much television, and it is giving most of us a skewed picture of the world.

For the most part TV, including the news, presents an active picture of violence. Even the Weather Channel takes pride in its feature called Storm Stories. And the news channels feature one violent story after another.

CNN and others seem to stay on stories about crimes against children without ever really discussing public actions to mitigate these terrible circumstances.

The rest of the time there are plenty of stories like the most recent O.J. Simpson incident to fill the evening on Larry King Live.

EASY WAY OUT FOR JOURNALISTS

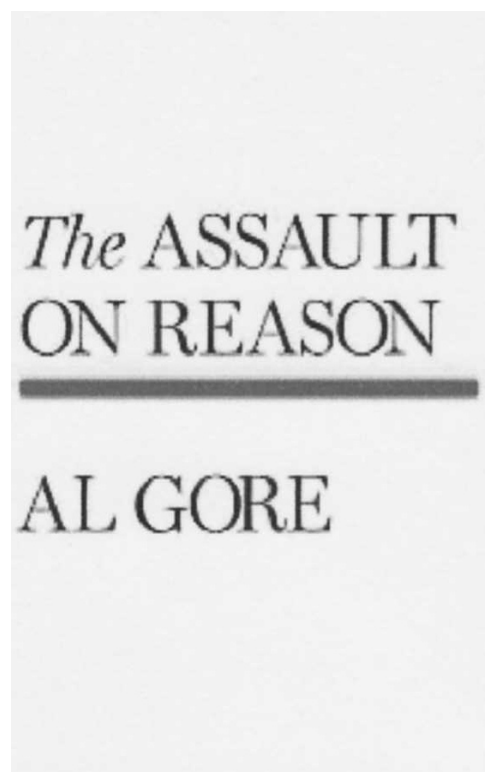
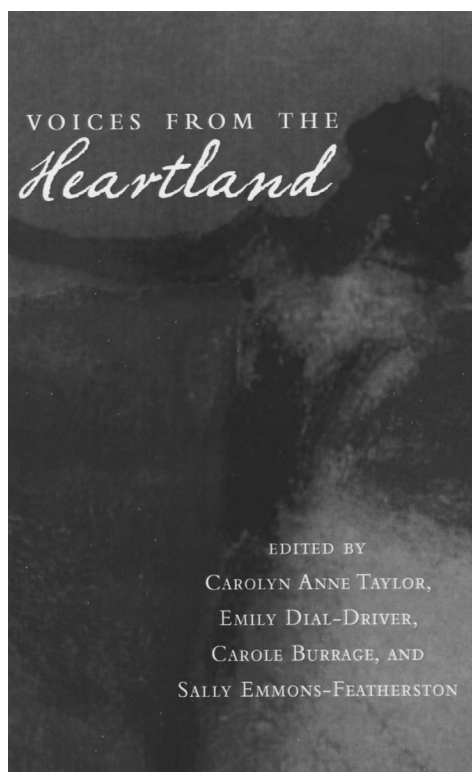
Do repeated stories like this detract from reports on even more important issues?

The answer is yes, probably because they are easier for journalists to cover than other demanding social problems.

So in Gore's definition of Reason, it is the old faith that we as free citizens can debate logically on the issues that face us – if we can find a space to do it – and use our minds instead of relying on TV reports or the dictatorial sayings of "leaders."

It was pleasantly surprising to find so many prolific quotations all the way through the book on the role of Reason in our American tradition. I'm guessing that Gore kept the assistants he lists very busy looking them up.

HISTORICAL POWER OF REASON



in its scope.

A WHO'S WHO OF CONTRIBUTORS

The contributors run the gambit from world-renowned authors Rilla Askew, Eddie Faye Gates, Carolyn Hart and Billie Letts to acclaimed poet Joy Harjo; from author, activist and first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation Wilma Mankiller to artist Jean Richardson; to regional notables such as Lynn Schusterman, Gerl Wisner-Foley, Becky Hawkins, Kim Henry and a sterling collection of others that space limitations will not allow me to print.

The book documents the positive role women have had and are playing in Oklahoma. It provides an inspiring story of outstanding achievement and character provided by women in Oklahoma that are making a positive impact on our society and providing a much-needed role model for others.

In reading this book I was reminded of an old African proverb: Until the Lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.

Thanks to the editors, themselves highly successful in academia and politics, and the contributors to the book, women in Oklahoma finally have their historians ... and not a minute too soon.

This book will make you proud.

– The author, a co-founder of *A Gathering of Writers*, lives in Tulsa

The Age of Reason in Europe during the 1600s and 1700s was also called the Enlightenment. Among its most famous figures were Voltaire in France and John Locke [Life, Liberty and Property] and Francis Bacon [Knowledge is Power] in England.

On our side of the Atlantic leading up to the American Revolution, many of our leaders such as Thomas Jefferson were strongly influenced by these ideas.

The point Gore keeps coming back to is simply that we need to think for ourselves, using scientific evidence, hard as that may sometimes be.

His best illustration of the importance of trusting science comes, not surprisingly, in the chapter he calls "The Carbon Crisis" about global warming.

EXAMPLE: CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT COAL

He says that coal burning is much worse than oil in its waste because it traps harmful gases.

By the way in north central Oklahoma a bid for a big, new, coal-burning plant was turned down recently by the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. Good news.

To summarize, Al Gore wants us to strive for a more open and truly democratic society, not based on fear but on reasoning together. Good political leadership from the top would help, including giving us some hope for the future.

As Solomon put it so long ago, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." And where there is no Reason, we just get hopelessly discouraged.

– The author lives in Stillwater

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Iraq Vet To Rush: You're The Phony

By Jon Soltz

Where to begin? First, in what universe is a guy who never served even close to being qualified to judge those who have worn the uniform?

Rush Limbaugh has never worn a uniform in his life – not even one at Mickey D's – and somehow he's got the moral standing to pass judgment on the men and women who risked their lives for this nation, and his right to blather smears on the airwaves?

Second, maybe Rush doesn't much care, but the majority of troops on the ground in Iraq, and those who have returned, do not back the President's failed policy.

[Limbaugh reported to his Missouri draft board but had a pilonidal cyst on his behind. He was given time to get well, then never called again.]

TROOPS THINK WE'RE ON THE WRONG TRACK

If you go to our "Did You Get the Memo" page at VoteVets.org, there's a good collection of stories, polls, and surveys, which all show America's troops believe we are on the wrong track, not the right one, in Iraq.

Does Rush believe, then, that the majority of the U.S. Armed Forces are "phony?"

Third, the polls and stories don't even take into account the former brass who commanded in Iraq, who are incredibly critical of the Bush Administration, and steadfast refusal to listen to those commanders on the ground who have sent up warning after warning.

Major Generals John Batiste and Paul Eaton left the military and joined VoteVets.org for that very reason.

ARE HIGHLY DECORATED GENERALS "PHONIES?"

Does Rush believe that highly decorated Major Generals are "phony soldiers?"

Finally, as Media Matters notes, just recently, members of the 82nd Airborne in Iraq wrote a New York Times op-ed, very critical of the course in Iraq, and suggesting it was time to figure out the exit strategy.

Two of them just died. Will Rush call up their grieving parents and tell them that they should stop crying, because they were just "phony soldiers?"

Get the point here, Rush?

You weren't just flat out wrong, you offended a majority of those of us who actually had the courage to go to Iraq and serve, while you sat back in your nice

NUTRITION

From Page 10

consider when thinking about how to make Oklahoma's families, farms and communities healthier.

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture is uniquely qualified to have undertaken this report. A non-profit educational foundation, the Kerr Center was established by the family of Oklahoma's first native-born governor, Robert S. Kerr, who had a profound love for his home state.

Since 1965, the center has served the farmers and ranchers of Oklahoma with an array of outreach efforts including on-farm consultation, demonstration crops, producer grants, educational publications and events.

Under the leadership of Kerr Center president Dr. James E. Horne, the center has worked to make Oklahoma agriculture more sustainable: economically profitable, environmentally friendly, and socially just.

Editor's Note: The Observer will be gleaming portions of this fabulous report in upcoming issues.

The Kerr Center can be reached at www.kerrcenter.com

MAINSTREAMING

From Page 10

would end grade disparity, as well.

Students working below level get one-on-one help with a difficult math assignment. They come back to class with identical papers, all perfect. My mathematically gifted student has pulled a B, my on-level students have earned Cs and Ds, and by the end of the week, they have mastered the concept. My A students still need one-on-one help.

Education majors understand the difference between independent and instructional learning levels. If a student needs scaffolding to learn a new concept, active teaching is required. If a student doesn't need scaffolding, then the assignment is probably busy work. If the instructional level ranges from first grade to high school, active classroom teaching becomes impossible.

With mainstreaming, the impossible is what an elementary teacher is expected to do. We need special education classes, not dummed-down mainstream classes. It is the only way we can insure that every child is served.

We can complain about the cost of educating every student. We can cut corners with mainstreaming and part-time specialists.

But the cost of not educating children is always higher than the cost of educating them.

Our democracy depends on free, quality education, the best our tax dollars can buy.

- The author, a public school teacher, lives in Oilton



studio, coming up with crap like this.

My challenge to you, then, is to have me on the show and say all of this again, right to the face of someone who served in Iraq. I'll come on any day, anytime.

Not only will I once again explain why your comments were so wrong, but I will completely school you on why your refusal to seek a way out of Iraq is only aiding al Qaeda and crippling American security.

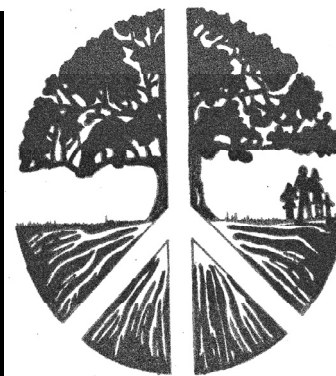
Ball's in your court.

- The author, co-founder and chair of VoteVets.org, is a leader of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans community and is originally from Pittsburgh. He served as a captain during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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Peace Festival

Saturday,
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The War On Pot **USA's \$42 Billion Annual Boondoggle**

By Rob Kampia

What would you buy if you had an extra \$42 billion to spend every year? What might our government buy if it suddenly had that much money dropped onto its lap every year?

For one thing, it might pay for the entire \$7 billion annual increase in the State Children's Health Insurance Program that President Bush killed because of its cost – and there would still be \$35 billion left over.

Or perhaps you would hire 880,000 school teachers at the average U.S. teacher salary of \$47,602 per year.

Or give every one of our current teachers a 30% raise [at a cost of \$15 billion, according to the American Federation of Teachers] and use what's left to take a \$27 billion whack out of the federal deficit.

Or use all \$42 billion for a massive tax cut that would put an extra \$140 in the pockets of every person in the country – \$560 for a family of four.

TOP CASH CROP IN LITTLE DIXIE?

The mind reels at the ways such a massive sum of money could be put to use.

Why \$42 billion? Because that's what our current marijuana laws cost American taxpayers each year, according to a new study by researcher Jon Gettman, Ph.D. – \$10.7 billion in direct law enforcement costs, and \$31.1 billion in lost tax revenues.

[Editor's Note: The unofficial report is that in southeastern Oklahoma, marijuana is the top cash crop. Since the Iraq war, the National Guard is no longer destroying the crops.]

Gettman's research may be an underestimate, at least on the law enforcement side, since he made his calculations before the FBI released its latest arrest statistics in late September.

The new FBI stats show an all-time record 829,627 marijuana arrests in 2006 – 43,000 more than in 2005.

TALK ABOUT THE LIMITLESS ARRESTS!

That's like arresting every man, woman and child in the state of North Dakota plus every man, woman, and child in Des Moines, IA, on marijuana charges ... every year.

Arrests for marijuana possession – not sales or trafficking, just possession – totaled 738,916. By comparison, there were 611,523 arrests last year for all violent crimes combined.

Basing his calculations mainly on U.S. government statistics, Gettman concludes that marijuana in the U.S. is a \$113 billion dollar business.

That's a huge chunk of economic activity that is unregulated and untaxed because it's almost entirely off the books.

Of course, the cost of our marijuana laws goes far beyond lost tax revenues and money spent on law enforcement. By consigning a very popular product – one that's been used by about 100 million Americans, according to government



surveys – to the criminal underground, we've effectively cut legitimate business people out of the market and handed a monopoly to criminals and gangs.

DEALERS HAVE A \$113 BILLION FREE RIDE

Strangely, government officials love to warn us that some unsavory characters profit off of marijuana sales, while ignoring the obvious: Our prohibitionist laws handed them the marijuana business in the first place, effectively giving marijuana dealers a \$113 billion free ride.

All this might make some sense if marijuana were so terribly dangerous that it needed to be banned at all costs, but science long ago came to precisely the opposite conclusion.

Compared to alcohol, for example, marijuana is astonishingly safe. For one thing, marijuana is much less addictive than alcohol, with just 9% of users becoming dependent, as opposed to 15% percent for booze. And marijuana is much less toxic.

IT DOESN'T COMPARE TO THE DAMAGE OF ALCOHOL

Heavy drinking is well documented to damage the brain and liver, and to increase the risk of many types of cancer. Marijuana, on the other hand, has never caused a medically documented overdose death, and scientists are still debating whether even heavy marijuana use causes any permanent harm at all.

And then there's violence. Again, the scientific findings are overwhelming: Booze incites violence and aggression; marijuana doesn't.

Despite all that, we now arrest one American every 38 seconds on marijuana charges. And we do so at a staggering cost in law enforcement expenses, lost tax revenues, and staggering profits for criminal gangs.

The alternative is clear: Regulate marijuana just as we do beer, wine, and liquor. The only thing lacking is the political will.

– The author is executive director of the Marijuana Policy Project in Washington, DC

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A New Gilded Age Comes To America

By Paul Krugman

Four years ago the Bush Administration, exploiting the political bounce it got from the illusion of success in Iraq, pushed a cut in capital-gains and dividend taxes through Congress.

It was an extremely elitist tax cut even by Bush-era standards: the non-partisan Tax Policy Center says that more than half of the tax breaks went to Americans with incomes of more than \$1 million a year.

Needless to say, administration economists produced various misleading statistics designed to convey the opposite impression, that the tax cut mainly went to ordinary, middle-class Americans.

They also insisted that the benefits of the tax cut would trickle down – that lower tax rates on the rich would do great things for the economy, helping everyone.

BUSH BOOM RUNS ITS COURSE

Well, the latest dismal jobs report showed that the Bush boom, such as it was, has run its course. And working Americans have a right to ask, "Where's my trickle?"

It's true, as the Bushies never tire of reminding us, that the U.S. economy has added eight million jobs since that 2003 tax cut.

That sounds impressive, unless you happen to know that a good part of that gain was simply a recovery from large job losses earlier in the administration's tenure – and that the United States added no fewer than 21 million jobs after Bill Clinton raised taxes on the rich, a move that had conservative pundits predicting economic disaster.

What's really remarkable, however, is that four years of economic growth have produced essentially no gains for ordinary American workers.

REAL WAGES ARE STAGNANT

Wages, adjusted for inflation, have stagnated: the real hourly earnings of non-supervisory workers, the most widely used measure of how typical workers are faring, were no higher in July 2007 than they were in July 2003.

Meanwhile, benefits have deteriorated: the percentage of Americans receiving

health insurance through employers, which plunged along with employment during the early years of the Bush administration, continued to decline even as the economy finally began creating some jobs.

And one of the few seeming bright spots of the Bush-era economy, rising home ownership, is now revealed as the result of a bubble inflated in part by financial flim-flam, which deceived both borrowers and investors.

BUSH GETS THUMBS DOWN FROM THE PEOPLE

Now you know why 66% of Americans rate economic conditions in this country as only fair or poor, and why Americans disapprove of President Bush's handling of the economy almost as strongly as they disapprove of the job he is doing in general.

Yet the overall economy has grown at a reasonable pace over the past four years. Where did the economic growth go?

The answer is that it went to the same economic elite that received the lion's share of those tax cuts. Corporate profits rose 72% from the second quarter of 2003 to the second quarter of 2007.

The real income of the richest 0.1% of Americans surged by 51% between 2003 and 2005, and although we don't yet have the data for 2006, everything we know suggests that the income of the rich took another upward leap.

The absence of any gains for workers in the years since the 2003 tax cut is a pretty convincing refutation of trickle-down theory.

CLINTON TAX CUTS ON THE RICH

So is the fact that the economy had a much more convincing boom after Bill Clinton raised taxes on top brackets. It turns out that when you cut taxes on the rich, the rich pay less taxes; when you raise taxes on the rich, they pay more taxes – end of story.

But it's not just trickle-down that has been refuted: the whole idea that a rising tide raises all boats, that growth in the economy necessarily translates into

NCLB Is Failing **Get Congress Out Of The Classroom**

By Diane Ravitch

Despite the rosy claims of the Bush Administration, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 is fundamentally flawed.

Latest national tests just released show that academic gains since 2003 have been modest, less even than those posted in the years before the law was put in place. In eighth grade reading, there have been no gains at all since 1998.

The main goal of the law – that all children in the United States will be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014 – is simply unattainable.

The primary strategy – to test all children in those subjects in grades three through eight every year – has unleashed an unhealthy obsession with standardized testing that has reduced the time available for teaching other important subjects.

Furthermore, the law completely fractures the traditional limits on federal interference in the operation of local schools.

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS ARE WRONG

Unfortunately, congressional leaders in both parties seem determined to renew the law, probably after next year's presidential election, with only minor changes.

No Child Left Behind should be radically overhauled, not just tweaked.

Under the law, the states devise their own standards and their own tests. Based on the test results, every school is expected to make "adequate yearly progress" in grades three to eight so as to be on track to meet that goal of universal proficiency by 2014.

Schools that do not meet their annual target for every group of students – as defined by race, poverty, language and disability status – are subject to increasingly onerous sanctions written into the federal law.

THERE IS NO PLACE TO TRANSFER

Schools that fail to meet their target for two consecutive years must offer their students the choice to go to a more successful public school; if they fall the following year, they must provide tutoring to their students.

If the students continue to miss their target, the entire teaching and administration staff may be replaced, or the school may be turned over to state control, or it may be converted into a charter school.

Yet these tough sanctions thus far have been ineffective. Federal agencies report that only about 1% of eligible students take advantage of switching schools and fewer than 20% of eligibles receive extra tutoring.

INNER CITY STUDENTS SELDOM TRANSFER

In inner cities, where academic performance is weakest, only a handful of students move to successful schools because there are very few seats available to them.

In rural America, choice is limited by the small number of other schools in the geographic area. Furthermore, neither research nor experience validates any of the "remedies" written into law.

There is little evidence that failing schools improve if they are turned over to state control or converted to charter status.

SAVE NCLB BY REVERSING THE ROLES

No Child Left Behind can, however, be salvaged if policy-makers recognize that they need to reverse the roles of the federal government and the states. In our federal system, each level of government should do what it does best.

The federal government is good at collecting and disseminating information.

Why Do Men Skip Becoming Teachers?

According to the National Education Association [NEA], the number of male school teachers is hovering at a 40-year low. Only one quarter of three million public school teachers are men.

In elementary schools, the problem is more acute – just 9% are men, down from 18% in 1981.

"If kids do not see males in the classroom, they begin to believe teaching is only for females," says Reg Weaver, president of the NEA.

Unless more men become teachers, says Weaver, the shortage will continue to be a self-perpetuating problem.

Although the feminization of the teaching profession has been underway since the 1890s, school administrators say it's becoming a more salient issue as boys fall behind girls in graduation rates and demonstrate more difficulties with reading and writing.

THE STARTING SALARY IS A BIG PROBLEM

There are several reasons many men find it difficult to enter, and stay in, the teaching profession: the starting salary for teachers is about \$30,000, and less in early education.

Another reason men fail to consider teaching is a widely held belief that they lack nurturing skills. Conversely, if a man expresses tenderness or too many traits associated with being female, some parents assume the male teacher is gay.

Yet another problem is that grown men who express physical affection for small children can be accused of being pedophiles, reports Julie Scelfo in Newsweek.

Canada and America have more in common than a border, as both countries



The states and school districts, being closer to the schools, teachers and parents than the federal government, are more likely to be flexible and pragmatic about designing reforms to meet the needs of particular schools.

However, under current law, state education departments have an incentive to show that schools and students are making steady progress, even if they are not.

WHY THEY ARE COOKING THE BOOKS

So the results of state tests, -which are administered every year, are almost everywhere better than the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the benchmark federal test that is administered every other year.

Many states claim that 80% or more of their students are proficient in reading or math at the same time that the federal assessment shows only a minority of students in those states reaching its standard of proficiency.

We will never know how well or poorly our students are doing until we have a consistent national testing program in which officials have no vested interest in claiming victory.

Under current law, Congress now decides precisely which sanctions and penalties are needed to reform schools, which is way beyond its competence.

The leaders of the House and Senate Education Committees are fine men, but they do not know how to fix the nation's schools.

WASHINGTON SHOULD ONLY SUPPLY DATA

The obvious solution is to reverse roles. Washington should supply unbiased information about student academic performance to states and local districts. It should then be the responsibility of states and local districts to improve performance.

Congress should also drop the absurd goal of achieving universal proficiency by 2014. Given that no nation, no state and no school district has ever reached 100% math and reading proficiency for all grades, it is certain that the goal cannot be met.

Perpetuating this unrealistic ideal, however, guarantees that increasing numbers of schools will "fail" as the magic year 2014 gets closer. Thus the real Bush agenda: Vouchers.

Unless we set realistic goals for our schools and adopt realistic means of achieving them, we run the risk of seriously damaging public education and leaving almost all children behind.

- The author, professor of education at New York University, is one of public education's toughest critics. When she says NCLB is a failure, congressional leaders should listen. She was assistant secretary of education for research from 1991 to 1993.

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currently experience drastic shortages of male teachers.

This fact is strikingly true in Canada at the elementary/primary level, where only 27% of teachers are male, as reported by Roger Collier in the National Post of Canada.

THE PERCENTAGE COULD DROP EVEN LOWER

Additionally, the percentage of male teachers could get even lower, as 21% of teachers over 55 are male, while only 11% of teachers younger than 30 are men.

Women have consistently dominated the education field, yet ratios between female and male educators had remained constant until the 1980s.

At that time, women began attending universities in record numbers, being responsible for 75% of the enrollment growth to Canadian universities since 1981.

This has made it far more difficult to get into teacher's colleges, and in 2005 males made up only 27% of total enrollment.

Canadian men also are moving away from teaching for similar reasons to American males: poor earning potential, perceived lack of nurturing ability, and society's suspicion of men who enjoy being around children.

Yet unlike America's National Education Association, Canadians are not as sure having a male teacher matters.

A study conducted by the universities of Alberta and Winnipeg suggests that boys who struggle to read respond better to female educators.

Parents are not as convinced.

They believe boys – especially those without fathers – need good male role models, and teachers usually fit that bill.

Bill O'Reilly Learns About Black People?

By Rory O'Connor

If he weren't such a ridiculous, pathetic oaf, I'd invite Bill O'Reilly up to my 'hood for a little white-on-white bonding, re-education and diversity training – if he weren't afraid to set foot in it!

It would obviously surprise, and perhaps even frighten the Man Who Wouldn't Shut Up, to learn that I now live in Harlem – along with many other white people, not to mention a wide and growing assortment of Asians, Hispanics, Arabs, African Americans and all the rest of what makes Manhattan such a vibrant, interesting and exciting place to live and work.

Apparently O'Reilly, trapped back in time as well as in his suburban cocoon and Fox bunker, hasn't noticed any of the ongoing changes in Harlem – or for that matter the rest of America – that have taken place since he and I attended the same very Catholic, very strict and very segregated college prep school in lily-white Long Island back in the '60s.

BLACK KID REGULARLY BRUTALIZED

Back then there was only one skinny little black kid in the class – and he was regularly brutalized by the hulking football players.

Given that racist background – and given the further fact that he obviously hasn't progressed much since then – it comes as no surprise that O'Reilly recently expressed his surprise that “there was no difference” between Sylvia's, a world-famous Harlem restaurant, and other restaurants in New York.

“I mean, it was exactly the same, even though it's run by blacks, primarily black patronship,” the amazed talkmeister told his national audience of millions.

This latest in a depressingly long series of O'Reilly racial dustups began on his syndicated radio program, while he was discussing a recent dinner he had enjoyed at Sylvia's with his new pal Al Sharpton.

IT IS ALWAYS ALL ABOUT HIM

O'Reilly told his audience he “had a great time, and all the people up there are tremendously respectful.” [For Bill, it's somehow always *all* about him!]

He added, “I couldn't get over the fact that there was no difference between Sylvia's restaurant and any other restaurant in New York City.”

Later, while talking with Fox News contributor [and National Public Radio senior correspondent] Juan Williams, O'Reilly further exposed his cosseted ignorance, saying, “There wasn't one person in Sylvia's who was screaming, ‘MF-er, I want more iced tea.’”

“You know, I mean, everybody was – it was like going into an Italian restaurant in an all-white suburb in the sense of people were sitting there, and they were ordering and having fun. And there wasn't any kind of craziness at all.”

IMAGINE THAT! ACTING LIKE WHITE FOLK

Just imagine – those crazy MF-ers in Harlem “ordering and having fun” just like they do in Italian restaurants in the “all-white” suburbs that O'Reilly STILL

Study of Black Infant Mortality

By Halimah Abdullah

For decades, health experts have tried to determine why African-American babies are twice as likely to die as white infants.

A new series of studies from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies' Health Policy Institute, along with a small but growing number of neonatologists nationwide, suggests that the stressful effects of racism play a role.

“That's the elephant in the room,” said Michael Lu, an obstetrician-gynecologist and professor at UCLA who studies disparities in infant health.

“When we're studying racial disparities, for decades people have looked at stress and infant mortality without looking at the reasons for the stress.”

IT IS A COMPLICATED PUZZLE

Black infant mortality is a complicated puzzle that includes poverty, poor nutrition, inadequate prenatal care, teen pregnancy, heredity, high blood pressure, stress, obesity, low birth weights and prematurity.

However, some neonatologists and child health advocates have pushed for more research to get behind the social reasons why these factors seem to take a higher toll on black infants than they do on other babies.

For the 600 black women in Atlanta who participated in a related study on the effects of racial discrimination on health, the reasons for their higher stress levels ranged from hearing white teachers comment on “those kids” to working extra long hours to win acceptance from white colleagues.

FEARFUL FOR HER BLACK MALE CHILD

“The pregnancy scares the life out of me because I am pregnant with a baby boy, and I know how black boys are treated in this society,” one study participant told researchers from Spelman College and Emory University.

In his research, Lu and his colleagues found a disproportionately higher number of fast-food restaurants and liquor stores, lower number of grocery stores and a higher cost of fresh produce in many urban, predominately black communities.

This caused poorer pregnant black women to make stressful choices about what to eat and where to live.

WORRIES ABOUT POORLY EQUIPPED SCHOOLS

So did the higher crime rates in these communities and worries about sending children to poorly equipped schools.



inhabits! What will they think of next – donning leisure suits?

[Frankly, the only crazy people I've ever heard yelling obscenities in New York restaurants were O'Reilly's Fox fellow travelers screaming for more booze in Langan's, the Irish pub they hang out in near their Sixth Avenue headquarters.]

The racist ranter then compounded his idiocy by noting, “I think black Americans are starting to think more and more for themselves. They're getting away from the Sharptons and the Jacksons and the people trying to lead them into a race-based culture. They're just trying to figure it out. ‘Look, I can make it. If I work hard and get educated, I can make it.’”

Then, after trashing Sharpton, the two-faced O'Reilly turns around and praises him as “a very, very interesting guy.”

HE WOULD PROFILE ALL MUSLIMS

On the Aug. 16, 2006, edition of The O'Reilly Factor, O'Reilly called for “profiling of Muslims” at airports, arguing that detaining all “Muslims between the ages of 16 and 45” for questioning “isn't racial profiling,” but “criminal profiling.”

In a Feb. 27, 2006, conversation with a caller about the disproportionately few jobs and contracts that have gone to locals in the rebuilding of New Orleans, O'Reilly said: “The homies, you know... I mean, they're just not going to get the job.”

On the Sept. 13, 2005, broadcast of The Radio Factor, O'Reilly claimed that “many of the poor in New Orleans “did not evacuate the city before Hurricane Katrina because they were drug-addicted” and “weren't going to get turned off from their source,” adding, “They were thugs.”

The culture is still dominated by dumbass, ignorant old white farts like Bill O'Reilly, spouting bromides from the '50s while we're busy going to hell in a hand-basket.

So here's an open offer to my fellow Flyer from Chaminade High – come on up to my neighborhood sometime soon, get educated, and join the rest of us in the 21st Century!

Over the past few years, several researchers have published studies in the American Journal of Public Health and the New England Journal of Medicine that examine this issue.

The researchers found that whether rich or poor, well-educated or barely literate, African-American women were still more likely than white women, first-generation poor Hispanic immigrant women and foreign-born black women to have premature and low birth-weight babies.

Though the infant mortality rate for all races has decreased over the past two decades, the United States still has one of the highest rates among developed nations.

In this country, the infant mortality rate for black babies is 13.5 per 1,000 live births, compared with roughly 5.7 for whites and Hispanics, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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GILDED AGE

From Page 14

gains for the great majority of Americans, is belied by the Bush-era experience.

Inequality rose rapidly during the Reagan years, but “Morning in America” was nonetheless bright enough to make most people cheerful, at least temporarily.

Inequality continued to increase during the Clinton years, but wages rose, as did the availability of health insurance – and the great majority of Americans felt prosperous.

What we've had since 2003, however, is an economic expansion that looks good if not great by the usual measures, but which has passed most Americans by.

Guaranteed health insurance, which all of the leading Democratic contenders [but none of the Republicans] are promising, would eliminate one of the reasons for this disconnect.

It should be only the start of a broader range of policies – a new New Deal – designed to turn economic growth into something more than a spectator sport.

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Ethanol Is Booming While Farmers Bust

By Lisa M. Hamilton

From the news these days you'd think farmers have never had a better friend than ethanol. Headlines holler that corn prices are soaring and that at this moment farmers are planting more acres of corn than they have in the last 50 years.

Reporters writing about the ethanol boom are throwing around words like gold rush, jackpot, and nirvana. But if you actually are a farmer, ethanol and the high corn prices it brings is looking less and less like a blessing – and more like a curse.

In concept, corn ethanol could benefit American farmers. Any time we as a country look to them to supply our daily needs, it's an opportunity for rural communities to win.

The problem is that the boom is taking place in the same old agricultural economy, which works to the benefit of those on top: landlords, processors, and companies selling inputs like seeds and fertilizers. It's agribusiness as usual, and like always, farmers will finish last.

EXCITED BY HIGH PRICES AT FIRST

"Initially we all were excited by the high prices," said Troy Roush, a sixth-generation farmer who grows 2,600 acres of corn in central Indiana. "But the truth is that the farmers won't keep any of it. There's an old saying that expenses will always rise to meet revenue. It all gets built in."

And that's exactly what has happened: As the price of corn has gone up, so has the cost of growing it. In just two months, the price Roush paid for fertilizer doubled. Speculation has driven land prices through the roof.

"It's insane," Roush said. "In the last four months our land values have increased 40%. We're all sitting around wondering if it's real."

While most farmers own some land, the vast majority rent part or all of their acreage. Rents already swelled in some areas for this season, and farmers are bracing themselves for an even greater increase in 2008.

RENTS FOR FARMLAND WILL SOAR

A study by the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers forecasted that if corn prices stay high, rent for prime farmland in the state next year will rise by 19% – to \$218 an acre.

For young farmers, something rural America desperately needs, such inflation can make getting into the business impossible.

It is true that ethanol can offer farmers more control in the market through cooperative ownership of production plants.

Thanks to the recent boom, corporate investors from around the world are now building plants that dwarf the farmer co-ops of the 1990s. In the rush to meet the government's renewable fuel mandate, most incentives no longer favor farmer-owned plants.

In this new marketplace many farmer co-ops have cashed out, selling themselves partially or entirely to outside investors.

MOST FARMERS ARE OUT OF THE LOOP

According to the American Coalition for Ethanol, of the 75 plants slated for construction over the next two years only 25% are farmer-owned, and even those are often run in part by non-farmers from Des Moines and Chicago.

Without ownership of ethanol plants, farmers return to being mere workers in service of a volatile market. While the price of corn may be at a glorious \$4 a

The Myth About Ethanol Savings

By William Baldwin

Carrie Nation, save us from the scourge of alcohol sweeping across the country! Smash our gas pumps.

Ethanol, so wowed of politicians and farmers, has powerful effects. Growing corn and turning it into a transportation fuel wrecks havoc on our aquifers, our soil and our bank accounts.

The problem is destined to get worse. In a mad rush for subsidies, farm co-ops, VeraSun and other outfits erected a few too many ethanol plants.

Now there's an impending glut, and the distillers need to get bailed out. The folks in Washington, DC, will no doubt oblige. Look for George Bush and his Democratic friends [at least, the ones planning to run in the Iowa primary next year] to increase either the tax subsidies for this fuel or the mandates on motorists to use it.

Just what ethanol does for the cause of energy independence is a matter of controversy. Two well-known cynics, David Pimentel of Cornell and Tad Patzek of UC-Berkeley, calculate that producing a gallon of corn ethanol consumes 29% more fossil fuel energy than the ethanol displaces.

FEDS COME UP WITH ANOTHER VERSION

The federal government has a study with the opposite conclusion: The ethanol costs, in fossil fuel terms, 26% less than it's worth.

A report from some researchers at Washington State University comes down in the middle, with ethanol making a slight contribution to the country's energy supply.

What about the economics? Drivers put up with alcohol only because it seems to be competitive in price [after the benefit of a federal subsidy] with gasoline.

But this volume-for-volume comparison is an illusion. A gallon of ethanol has



The Next Dinosaurs

bushel now, when it evaporates farmers will likely be left to pay for costs that reflect a boom but with profits that reflect a bust.

Considering that much of the biofuels industry is already calling corn an archaic fuel source, looking forward instead to cellulosic ethanol, this crash is bound to happen within the next few years.

To Roush and his colleagues it's beginning to feel ominously like the lead-up to the farm crisis of the 1980s, when high times led to unsustainable debt. They fear that the near future holds widespread foreclosure, not rural salvation.

THE PENDING FARM BILL IS BAD

To make matters worse, the boom is happening in a Farm Bill year. Congress is under tremendous pressure to peel back agricultural subsidies as they write the bill, and today's high corn prices and the promise of a bright, ethanol-powered future for farmers might give them the excuse to do so.

Of course maintaining the subsidy system indefinitely isn't a solution, but the fact is that thousands of family farmers rely on those payments; to remove them without adequate replacement in such uncertain times could alone cause another farm crisis.

Despite all the problems it's causing, \$4 corn itself is not the problem. In a sense it's actually a good thing, for it means farmers are getting closer to a fair price for their product.

A high price today doesn't ultimately benefit farmers if they remain in a system that allows the price to freefall tomorrow.

What farmers need in order to rebuild their communities and secure their farm incomes is not an ethanol boom – or any kind of boom for that matter. They need a system that offers a fair return for their product all the time, not just during a fuel crisis.

FARMERS WANT TO RETURN TO OLD SYSTEM

The United States has had such a system, with the New Deal price supports that lasted into the early 1970s. In its proposal for how to shape the 2007 Farm Bill, the National Family Farm Coalition has proposed a similar system of price supports [along with complementary programs].

If we as a nation care about family farmers as much as we claim to, we ought to take the NFFC's advice: scrap the subsidy system, which only perpetuates the vicious cycle of farm-level booms and busts, and replace it with a predictable system that growers can rely on.

If we do that, perhaps the ethanol boom will turn out to be a godsend for family farmers – not because it gave them a quick windfall of profits, but because it awakened the rest of us to how vulnerable the current system has made them. And spurred us to do something about it.

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only two-thirds as much chemical energy as a gallon of gas. You have to burn 1.5 gallons of ethanol to go as far as the gasoline will take you.

That fact alone could chop the ethanol industry down to size – if only drivers knew it. Let's make it known. Rejigger gas pumps so that they charge by the BTU, not by the gallon.

What amounts to the same thing: The advertised price on the pump would not be per gallon of fuel but per gallon of pure gasoline equivalent.

Any \$2 ethanol that the retailer throws into the mix is going to cost him, in effect, \$3. It can't compete with \$2 gasoline, not without a lot of help from the people buying votes in Iowa.

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Court Turns Down Catholics, Greedy

Three cheers for the U.S. Supreme Court for sidestepping two church-state cases that social conservatives had hoped the justices would use to chart a rightward course.

The justices would not consider a challenge by Catholics and a few other religious groups to a New York law requiring health plans to cover birth control pills.

So much for fear that the five-Catholic court majority would be Catholic before being constitutional.

The other was a California case in which an evangelical group was denied use of a public library for religious services.

"We were hoping the Supreme Court would provide broader protections for religious liberties, and both these cases were excellent vehicles to do that," said Jordan Lorence, an attorney representing the evangelical group that was turned away from the library in Antioch, CA.

ROBERTS APPEARED TO BE OK

The first session of the term opened with Chief Justice John Roberts, who suffered an unexplained seizure during the summer, actively questioning lawyers in two cases argued before justices. He is a Catholic.

The cases involved a Washington state dispute over its political primaries and New York City's challenge of a court ruling forcing it to pay private schooling for a special education student who never tried out public schools.

The court's opening day also marked the publication of Justice Clarence Thomas' autobiography, *My Grandfather's Son*. As part of the sales effort for the book, Thomas sat for lengthy interviews with two television networks and conservative talk radio host Rush Limbaugh.

THOMAS WAS HIS USUAL MUM SELF

In court, Thomas was no less reticent than usual, asking no questions during two hours of argument.

One of the two oral arguments was over forcing the city of New York to pay for private schooling for a special education student, a case notable for the fact that the man who sued the city is Tom Freston, a former CEO of Viacom.

Justice Antonin Scalia, among several justices skeptical of Freston's case, said affluent parents who have no intention of using public schools might think "what the heck, if we can get \$30,000 from the city, that's fine."

In the argument over the Washington case, the political parties want more say over how candidates identify their party affiliations on the ballot.



Justice David Souter said candidates were unlikely to identify themselves with a party unless they agree broadly with its principles.

THEY LIST THE CASES THEY WON'T HEAR

Earlier, the court issued a list of cases it would not hear this year. No explanation was given for the justices' decision not to consider the cases.

Among them was the dispute over a New York state law that forces religious-based social service agencies to subsidize contraceptives as part of prescription drug coverage they offer their employees.

New York is one of 23 states that require employers offering prescription benefits to employees to cover birth control pills as well. The state enacted the Women's Health and Wellness Act in 2002 to require health plans to cover contraception and other services aimed at women, including mammography, cervical cancer screenings and bone density exams.

Catholic Charities and other religious groups say that New York's law violates their First Amendment right to practice their religion because it forces them to violate religious teachings that regard contraception as sinful.

Over 70% of Catholics of child-bearing age practice artificial means of birth control, according to repeated polls.

The Senate's Strange Double Standard

By Joe Conason

For an object lesson in the distorted values of the United States Senate, consider how that august institution is handling the ethical embarrassments created by Republican Larry Craig of Idaho and Republican Ted Stevens of Alaska.

As everyone in America knows by now, Craig pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge for an indiscretion in an airport men's room. Stevens, along with his son Ben and a number of other Alaska politicians and businessmen, is the subject of a corruption investigation that resulted in an FBI raid on his home last summer.

Every day, the pressure mounts on Craig from his colleagues to resign – and every day, those same colleagues treat Stevens as if he remains above suspicion.

The Craig case is currently under investigation by the Senate Ethics Committee, yet no such probe of the Stevens matter has commenced.

BATHROOM TOE-TAPPING WORSE THAN PAYOLA?

According to the prevailing morality in the Senate, a legislator who may or may not have signaled his prurient interest in another man demands the most searching scrutiny, but a legislator who quite plainly accepted financial favors from a contractor deserves none.

Now Craig's colleagues feel a special sense of outrage because he has violated his promise to resign by the end of September if he was unable to get his original guilty plea withdrawn.

Clearly, the senator is given to rash gestures that he later regrets, whether tapping the toe of another man in a toilet stall, entering a plea or vowing to surrender his Senate seat.

"I wish he would stick to his word," complained Sen. John Ensign of Nevada, who chairs the National Republican Senate Committee and understandably does not relish the bad publicity that makes his task of re-electing Republicans much more challenging.

Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota, a freshman Republican up for re-election next year, told reporters that he hoped the Idahoan would step down and "respect the institution."

HOW CAN YOU TAKE THE SENATE SERIOUSLY?

But the institution is not so easy to respect when its members show so little of it by ignoring the stench that surrounds Stevens.

The 83-year-old Alaskan, a powerhouse of patronage and seniority, has operated both his state and the Senate Appropriations Committee as fiefdoms that he can use and misuse at will.

When his sponsorship of the infamous "bridge to nowhere" drew condemnation

from conservatives and liberals alike as an example of egregious pork spending, Stevens gave a furious floor speech in which he threatened to resign. He stopped a "sunlight" provision designed to reveal the sponsorship of every earmark.

Such egotistical displays must be expected from a politician who has the largest airport in his state named after him.

TURNING ALASKA INTO THIRD WORLD KLEPTOCRACY

A platoon of FBI agents has passed through that airport over the past several months as they probe bribery and corruption that appear to implicate dozens of figures, from the statehouse to the oil industry.

[How bad is it? Bad enough that a group of Republican legislators, including the former speaker of the Alaskan House, smugly called themselves "the Corrupt Bastards Club."]

These crooks transformed their state into an American version of a Third World petroleum kleptocracy.

At the center of the scandal is Bill Allen, a former oil services executive who pleaded guilty last May to bribery and extortion charges.

Since then he has become a major prosecution witness in the probe. His sworn confessions include an accounting of the costly renovations made to one of Stevens's homes by his company, as well as other allegedly illegal favors provided to the senator and his son.

IT'S THE OUTSIDERS OUT TO GET 'EM

The Alaska senator has scarcely deigned to address the Allen investigation, except to insist that he has done nothing wrong and will be vindicated.

His son Ben went further, complaining publicly about the prosecutors because they have come from "out of state" and are "not from Alaska" – and presumably also not loyal to the local political machine that has allowed corruption to flourish there.

But no matter what Stevens or his son may say, the Justice Department, which has put Allen on the witness stand, must believe that the oilman is telling the truth about the favors he did for the senator.

Those favors clearly violate Senate rules – and are by any measure much worse than the toe-tapping indiscretions of Craig.

When will the Senate restore its own tattered prestige by opening an ethics investigation of Stevens?

Their failure to deal with his disgrace raises questions about their own probity – and all the favors that he may have done for them in his powerful appropriations post.

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Hillary: Efficient, Tough – And Joyless?

By Susan Estrich

I could swear it was just a week or so ago that Hillary Clinton was taking heat for laughing – or should I say, cackling – too much.

I can't count how many times I heard various not-to-be mentioned television and radio hosts playing the tape, snidely asking whether this was the sound Americans wanted to hear in their living rooms for the next four years, or whether the cackler had failed to realize that Halloween was still weeks away.

How dare the frontrunner for the Democratic Party nomination, the woman who is so often and so wrongly accused of being deeply challenged in the sense of humor department, actually sound like she was having fun running for president?

Who did she think she was?

RUDY AND MITT PROVIDE REAL HUMOR

Not that there isn't plenty to laugh about, with the former governor and the former mayor, Romney and Rudy, who are running on their experience as chief executives, promising to eliminate the nation's deficit while running them up in their own campaigns.

Deficit spending in a political campaign the summer before a single vote has been cast! Now that's something to write about.

But Hillary is so much the juicier target, if you know what I mean. The widely read and much-quoted former Wall Street Journal bureau chief-turned-Bloomberg columnist Al Hunt is the author of the most talked about hit job, attacking the Hillary campaign for being "efficient, tough, and joyless."

While acknowledging that, based on his three Washington insider dinners with her over the last 15 years, the real Mrs. Clinton actually has "the ability to charm" and a "decent sense of humor," Al claims this is not the Hillary people see on the campaign, owing to the fact that her campaign, for all its brilliance, is "joyless, humorless, and lacking in heart and soul."

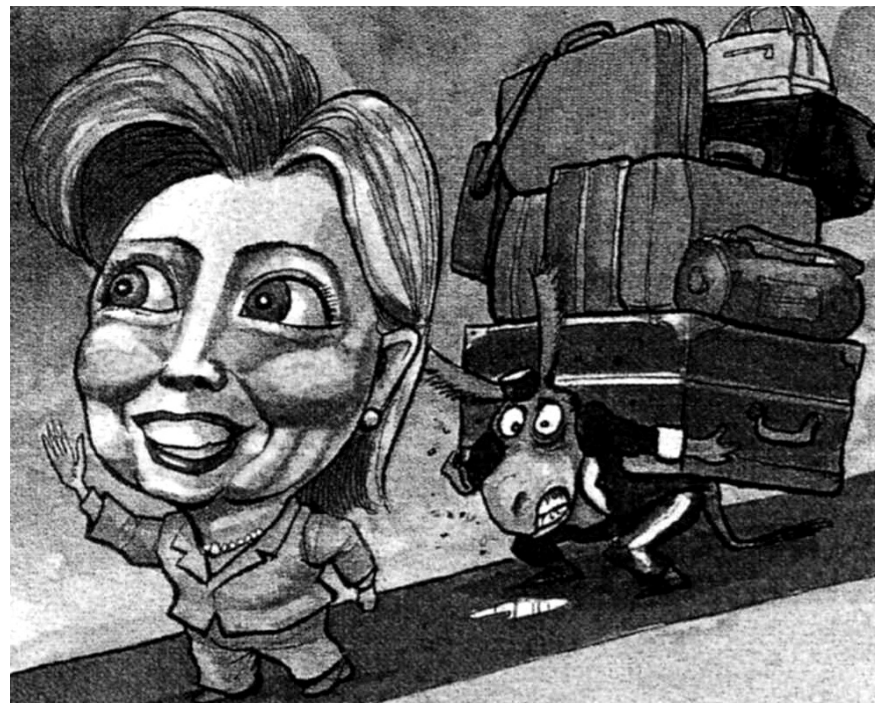
To which I can only say one word. Tough.

JOYFUL CAMPAIGNS ARE LOSING CAMPAIGNS

Dennis Kucinich's campaign is full of joy, humor, and heart and soul. It's also going nowhere. Ditto for former Sen. Gravel, the comic relief at Democratic debates, and Gov. Huckabee, whose future as a diet book author seems far more secure than his future as a presidential contender.

Sad to say, but most of the political campaigns I've known, successful and not so successful, were not rollicking affairs.

There's nothing particularly joyful about working 20 hours a day to stave off



attacks based on such vital matters as tapes you supposedly listened to 15 years ago, according to the account of a single former campaign aide who didn't even have the guts to go on the record.

This is fun?

What surprises me is not that Hillary is joyless, but that she's managed to find any fun at all in the grueling process of raising tens of millions of dollars, or in waiting for tens of millions of dollars raised by other people to be transformed into mud to be thrown at her and her family.

WASHINGTON ESTABLISHMENT NEVER WARMED TO CLINTONS

Hunt makes the point, rightly, that while the Clintons certainly have close friends in the Washington establishment, beginning with Vernon Jordan, the lawyer and insider who is in a league of his own, other parts of the establishment, which is to say the media establishment, have never really warmed to them.

Ever since insider par excellence Sally Quinn slammed Hillary mercilessly [A decorator from Arkansas? Imagine!] upon her arrival in Washington, Hillary has been wary of the fair-weather friends who court invitations one day and spike you the next.

Imagine taking offense at the fact that New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd has never had a nice word to say about you, or that blogmeister Arianna Huffington has been running a nonstop campaign to block your nomination.

If the definition of "joyful" is open arms to those with knives bared, I guess she's not joyful.

Then again, when she makes it to the White House and they're still courting access, they may not be either.

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Frankly, It's Not Possible To Please All

By Froma Harrop

The only openly gay congressman, Barney Frank, has long been subject to homophobic attacks. Happily, the Massachusetts liberal is master of the precision-guided comeback, which he unleashes with devastating results.

No one has earned more stripes promoting gay rights than Frank, but the Democrat now finds himself targeted by, of all groups, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. And as usual, he's not holding return fire.

"For some of these people, you can never be an ally," Frank told me. And the proper response is to "call their bluff."

"Who are they going to run against me?" he asks. "Larry Craig?"

FIRESTORM OVER TRANSGENDER PROTECTIONS

At issue is Frank's decision to remove language on "gender identity" from a bill that protects gay men and lesbians in the workplace. This is a reference to the "transgender" community – people who do not identify with the gender assigned them at birth. Cross-dressers are one example.

Frank insists that the bill can't pass if it includes the transgendered. America is not yet ready to take that step. In response, gay advocates [though not all of them] have bitterly accused him of stripping the rights of this besieged group.

Frank marvels at their poor grasp of political reality.

"They think that getting a bill protecting sexual orientation is easy," he says. "We started on the gay and lesbian thing decades ago."

LONG AT ODDS WITH PARTY MILITANTS

Frustration over his party's militants is not a new theme for Frank. In his 1992 book, *Speaking Frankly: What's Wrong With the Democrats and How to Fix It*, Frank notes that the far left often spoiled the Democrats' ability to win the presidency.

By making the party seem soft on national security, crime and the work ethic, it scared away the swing voters needed to win.

And the fringe groups will never be content. They keep the party on perpetual "political probation," he writes. Thus, Democrats waste much energy "making sure that the left wing of the party is emotionally secure."

Frank recently told antiwar activists holding vigils outside House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's home in San Francisco that they've seen too many showings of "The Wizard of Oz."

PELOSI CAN'T WAVE WAND AND MAKE WAR GO AWAY

They think Pelosi is Glenda the Good Witch, he said, who can wave her wand and make the Iraq war go away. Changing the war's direction requires compro-

mise.

On things like appropriations, he notes that Democrats don't have the votes to override presidential vetoes. "We're going to have to accept inadequate funding for a whole range of issues."

Frank sees the campaign to push transgender rights into the anti-discrimination bill as creating a potential "Terri Schiavo" moment for the Democrats – that is, a situation where the fringes drag their party into a crusade that makes the broader public think its leaders are out of their gourds.

FRANK LAMENTS WACKY EXPECTATIONS

The radicals have no idea what it takes to get things done in the real world, Frank complains. And they have wacky expectations.

"We're supposed to pass with votes from Indiana, Nebraska and South Carolina a better bill than we have in Massachusetts and New York," Frank says.

The latter two states have laws banning discrimination against gay men and lesbians but say nothing about transgendered people.

"Like America is supposed to be easier than New York," he adds.

Last year, the Democrats regained power by winning congressional seats far from New York and San Francisco – including moderate-to-conservative areas that voted for George Bush in 2004.

Democrats hope to expand on those victories next year, but that won't happen if they let the far left define them.

The babysitting has got to stop, Barney Frank says. And if that means displeasing people who were never terribly loyal to begin with, so be it.

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