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State Oblivious To National Trends

Land Of The Red Voter

By Arnold Hamilton

What's the matter with Oklahoma?

With apologies to Thomas Frank and his remarkable analysis of the Kansas electorate, few states can match Oklahoma's political transformation of the last 90 years.

From a state with arguably more socialists per capita than any other in the early 20th Century, Oklahoma has morphed into America's reddest bastion – all but certain to vote overwhelmingly Republican for the 11th consecutive presidential election.

With much of the nation poised to repudiate the GOP's divide-and-conquer political and laissez-faire governing models – and to elect the first African-American president – Oklahoma glides along, oblivious to national trends.

Signs that the pendulum is swinging nationally – even in longtime Republican hotbeds like Texas – are difficult, if not impossible, to find in Oklahoma, where GOP nominee John McCain enjoys his largest lead in state-by-state polls.

How did Oklahoma, with its collective pioneer-era suspicion of silk-stocking, big-business elites, become such a reliable rubber-stamp for the nation's unabashedly corporatist party?

And what can be done to penetrate the right-wing cacophony and re-ignite a healthy, inclusive political debate over Oklahoma's future?

The first question – how did this happen? – is explained mostly by the powerful, twin influences in Oklahoma history of politically-active, fundamentalist religious leaders and the rabidly rightwing Daily Oklahoman editorial page.

The second question is more complex, but answers may be found in the stories of America's political, religious and community leaders who risked careers – and many times, their lives – to speak unwaveringly against the tyranny of the majority and for social and economic justice.

The confluence of religion and politics is strong in a state that considers itself the buckle on the Bible belt.

For example, Southern Baptists who once championed the separation of church and state – for fear the state



would attempt to mandate a religion or certain religious practices they opposed – now are one of the GOP's most loyal voting blocs.

They freely distribute one-sided voter "guides" that pillory Democrats and all but nominate Republicans for sainthood. They welcome rightwing zealots like state Rep. Sally Kern, U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn and retired Col. Oliver North into their churches, if not their pulpits, to speak, signaling that GOD and GOP are synonymous.

The unsavory mix of religion and politics also has created alliances that a half-century ago would have been unthinkable.

Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics, once mortal enemies, put aside a seemingly unbridgeable theological divide in order to unite on a series of social issues, including abortion and gay marriage creating a powerful political force that often dominates Oklahoma elections.

Their thinking is illustrated by the story of a 20-year-old Oklahoma college student who was raised a Southern Baptist but has decided to cast his first presidential vote for Democrat Barack Obama. The young man recently was confronted by a friend's father.

"You know," said the older man, a staunch Southern Baptist, "you'll have to answer one day for your vote."

The implication could not be clearer: In today's Oklahoma, a real Christian cannot be a Democrat.

Couple the power of the pulpit with the power of what was, for much of the 20th Century, the state's most powerful media outlet and it's not difficult to understand how Oklahomans could be persuaded to vote against their self-interests, economically and socially.

Even more remarkable: In an era when the influence of daily newspapers is waning across America, many

Oklahoma residents rail against the Oklahoman's "bias" in one breath – yet parrot its John Birch-esque editorials without even realizing it in the next.

Dr. David Baird, a noted Oklahoma historian who serves as a dean emeritus and professor at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA, says the Oklahoman's influence on the state's development and its politics cannot be overstated.

"It played a huge role over the years," he says. "It was often said they couldn't always elect people, but they could almost always defeat them."

Oklahoma's historical reliance on mining – from coal to oil to natural gas – also may help explain the state's collective insistence on Red State politics at a time when the rest of the nation seems to be catching a Blue wave.

Baird, author of the new book *Oklahoma: A History*, says the mining culture often creates a bootstrap-pulling, me-first, you're-on-your-own mentality of "you have your money and I want to make sure and get mine."

All may help explain why Oklahoma stubbornly votes to return a national laughingstock, Jim Inhofe, to the U.S. Senate. And why Inhofe successfully campaigns – or so it would seem – as a man of principled stubbornness.

It doesn't matter that Oklahoma ranks in the bottom half, if not the bottom five, in most socioeconomic categories. It's as if Oklahomans have been convinced it's better to be poor, uneducated and unhealthy than to be viewed as – gasp! – liberal.

It's a worldview that government is the problem, not part of the solution – a theory celebrated by conservatives, especially in Oklahoma, ever since the Reagan era, but one increasingly challenged by thinking Republicans, including former Oklahoma U.S. Rep. Mickey Edwards.

So, what can Democrats, and those interested in social and economic justice, do to get their groove back in Oklahoma?

While it is almost certainly too late to overcome what the polls suggest is McCain's insurmountable lead in
See RED STATE Page 16

Observations

Enough Already

Are you sick of Oklahoma's national rankings in the quality of life? You can do something about it – carefully consider who you vote for in legislative races.

A whopping 46% of Oklahoma babies were born to unwed mothers in 2006. Sadly, we lead the nation in child murders – 52 last year.

Oklahoma ranks at top in the percentage of the population seriously mentally ill, yet more than 3,000 languish on a waiting list for treatment.

We rank in the top five states in pregnant teenagers, divorce, poverty and uninsured [661,000]. We're No. 1 in incarcerated women – usually drug-related convictions.

Oklahoma is in the top 10 in minors in foster care – more than 16,000.

For lack of counselors, early intervention and poor parenting contribute to more than 8,000 school dropouts a year. Half of all public schools kids qualify for free and reduced lunches.

We had more than 25,000 cases of domestic violence last year, yet the Department of Human Services is 157 child welfare workers short.

Other than creating interim studies, the Republican-led Legislature has ignored these problems. Remember that when you vote in November.

Racism

Think the Civil War ended with General Lee's surrender? Guess again.

Mississippi was forced to integrate public schools in 1970, but until last May, the Delta town of Charleston continued a system of separate proms, organized privately, for black and white students.

Academy Award-winning actor and Charleston native Morgan Freeman had offered to fund the prom if everyone could attend, but this year was the first time school officials accepted his offer.

Some white parents still wouldn't let their children attend and insisted on holding a private prom.

"It was just magnificent," said student Chasidy Buckley. "That night, when we stepped in that door, everybody just had a good time. We proved ourselves wrong. We proved the community wrong, because they didn't think that it was going to happen."

Buckley said the school will host an interracial prom next year, giving black and white kids another chance to dress up and step out.

The snide inferences of John McCain and Sarah Palin play to the segregated past. Readers wonder why we worry about Barack Obama's lead in the polls. Will it continue in the voting booth? How bad will the racial falloff be?

Cost Of Waste

Food prices are rising, but your grocery bill might be lower if you weren't paying for an estimated \$20 billion worth of food that supermarkets throw away each year.

Stores in the U.S. waste twice as much food annually as those in Europe, and a recent UN report found that total American food waste – including what we pitch from our refrigerators – is worth \$48 billion each year.

Many Oklahoma groceries and restaurants are donating their leftovers to food banks and others who distribute it to the poor.

One reason is that since food travels 1,500 miles on average to reach your plate, some of it spoils in transit.

Americans are used to huge displays of fresh food at the grocery store, so some produce is piled up for decoration rather than sold.

Supermarkets are trying to cut waste – or at least find more environmentally friendly ways to handle it such as reducing the number of items on display and asking suppliers to use smaller boxes, resulting in less waste.

Supermarkets in Nashua, NH, and Deerfield Beach, FL, make compost out of spoiled produce, meat, and



even flowers. Still, keeping food from the trash pile in the first place would be best.

We waste between a quarter and a half of all the food we produce. If there's a silver lining to today's rising grocery prices, it may be that they force us to value our food more.

Guess Who?

It's easy for the average American to blame Wall Street for all the financial woes the nation faces today.

Americans once saved about 15% of their incomes. By the roaring '80s the rate was 4%. Now Americans are in negative numbers, -.04%.

Easy credit bloomed and usury became a vice that had lost its sinful thrust. The average American today has nine credit cards with a total \$17,000 balance.

We borrow against homes and pensions to live in a way that cannot be sustained. Our actions dare us to actually grow old.

"Never invest in any idea you can't illustrate with a crayon," Fidelity mastermind Peter Lynch advised, but we have embraced all kinds of investments about which we understood nothing except the hollow promise that they would never fail.

When the economy began to falter we kept spending, effectively sending ourselves rebate checks from accounts already way overdrawn.

We buy a new big screen TV and charge it to our kids. Oklahoma funds public schools by selling lottery tickets.

George W. Bush has never been reluctant to frame policy debates in moral terms but thrift is one virtue he never invokes.

He will leave the nation \$11 trillion in debt, thanks to a gutless Congress and an unwinnable war.

If you are an average American looking for a culprit, check the mirror.

Dirty Coal

Thanks to the state Corporation Commission, we aren't saddled with a new mega coal refinery. Alternatives such as wind and switch grass are the way to go.

Some of King Coal's claims are outrageous lies, to wit:

- Coal is today's new technology. False! This "new" technology was invented in World War II Germany. In-

stead of a bridge to the future of energy, liquid coal is a toxic return to the past.

- Today's coal is clean. False! Big Coal's massive PR and lobbying campaign is trying to make this filthy misnomer stick.

Make no mistake, there's nothing "clean" about coal. Coal is dirty when you mine it, dirty when you ship it, dirty when you use it. And coal is dirty when you get rid of its ashy remains.

- Liquid coal is a cure-all to our energy problems. False! Big coal and its allies promote liquid coal as a solution to our dependence on oil. But liquid coal produces double the carbon dioxide emissions of a regular gallon of gasoline. It would be a disaster for global warming.

- Coal is the most affordable energy choice. False! The cost of building coal plants has escalated by more than 50%.

The cost to human health is phenomenal, as coal spews its toxic emissions into our environment and increases lung disease. The cost to our landscapes is devastating – from the loss of America's mountaintops to the pollution of America's lakes and streams.

Bullying

We told you bullying is primarily a parent problem. Now there is proof.

A study conducted by scientists at New York's York University and Queens University finds that students who bully tend to have difficulties with other relationships, such as those with friends and parents.

Consequently, targeting these relationships may offer ideas for intervention and prevention. The study, which was published in Child Development, notes that children who bullied tended to be aggressive and lacked a moral compass.

Bullies also typically experience a lot of conflict in their relationships with parents and friends.

The findings indicate that bullying is a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions; i.e. key is in a focus on a particular bully's strained interactions with parents and risky associations with peers.

As noted by Oklahoma City Council member Skip Kelly at a recent gathering, the Weed and Seed program addressing youth is showing remarkable results in one neighborhood and is soon to spread to others.

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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

"I think Congressmen should wear uniforms like NASCAR drivers so we could identify their corporate sponsors." - Thanks to Jan Burton for sending us this jewel.

Laurel: To Rep. Dale Turner, D-Holdenville, prime booster for agricultural education, who received the VIP Award at this year's National Future Farmers of America convention in Indianapolis.

Don't bury the country too soon. A new international poll by the World Economic Forum shows America still has the world's most competitive economy. We just need to rein in the greedheads.

Dart: To Toby Keith, claiming he's changed from Democrat to Independent because Democrats keep hammering Sarah Palin. Yes, telling the truth about Palin's lies.

The more Republican Rep. Randy Terrill obfuscates, the longer his nose grows. Now he's blaming an aide for a "mistake" in his not reporting \$11,000 in campaign funds in his bankruptcy filing.

Laurel: To Sen. Roger Ballenger, D-Okmulgee, named 2008 Legislator of the Year by the Oklahoma State Troopers Association.

It didn't take a genius to predict that Oklahoma's anti-abortion law would be challenged. The Center for Reproductive Rights has sued over a mandatory ultrasound before a woman could receive an abortion.

Dart: To OKC's rightwing KTOK Radio for reading a long blog attack on Corporation Commissioner Jim Roth with no equal time until the following day. Roth told KTOK to take a hike. Bravo!

We are saddened by the death of our friend Robert Kamm, 89, former OSU president. He ran as a Republican for the U.S. Senate but Democrat David Boren won. Too bad today's Republican Party seldom produces his kind of superb Oklahoman.

Dart: To T. Boone Pickens for refusing to pay the \$1 million he promised to anyone who could prove his millions for the Swift Boat liars was false. Ten men who served on the swift boat in Vietnam with John Kerry provided the proof - in writing.

That ghastly odor you smell is ex-lobbyist Vince Robison's so-called ranking of legislators. It's a far right pile of BS that the Daily Disappointment prints in a free full-page treatment with no details.

Laurel: To MSNBC for adding a terrific commentator to their lineup - Rachel Maddow. Catch her at 8 p.m. for a Rhodes Scholar who actually knows what she's talking about.

The Corrections Department has asked for an \$88 million operational increase next year, plus \$318 million for new and expanded facilities. Hope they don't hold their breath.

Dart: To Republican U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe for voting against reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP] that provides health care for poor six million children. He also opposed plans to cover four million more poor kids.

Thanks to an oil and gas bonanza, the 2009 Legislature starts with an \$89 million surplus and a hefty \$597 million in the rainy day fund - which can only be tapped for emergencies.

Laurel: To Sapulpa's Frankoma Pottery, celebrating 75 years of iconic products collected worldwide. Some of the pieces today go for up to \$5,000.

Don't the adults engaged in the bizarre 3-2 ouster of Broken Arrow Superintendent Jim Sisney realize the sorry example they're setting for students? We know who the real children are, don't we.

Dart: To Oklahoma's No. 1 political showoff, Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, placing a hold on disaster relief for Oklahoma's hard hit farmers and hurricane-related rebuilding on the Gulf Coast.

MIKE LUCKOVICH ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION @AJC.com 10-14-08

election night coverage



Let us see if we have this right: Bush has billions to waste in the Middle East but five Oklahoma counties hard hit by flooding are denied a little bit of aid. The brain has 100 billion nerve cells - Bush's has none.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry whose 3,328 appointments to boards, agencies and commissions, wipe out remnants of the sorry Frank Keating Administration.

Seven Catholic schools in Washington, DC, have been converted to charter public schools in order to attract government funding. They were required to shed their Catholic identity.

Dart: To John McCain who finally admitted that he would cut \$1.3 trillion from Medicare and Medicaid over 10 years to fund his privatized health care initiative.

One of the most serious problems Oklahoma needs to address is the fact that African Americans are 8% of the population but 30% of the prison population.

Laurel: To 67% Oklahomans not fooled by the relentless attack of the extremist Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs on Oklahoma's premier CareerTech program. [Cole-Hargrave Poll]

Our heartfelt condolences to Rep. Danny Morgan on the loss of his wife Debbie, 47, who died suddenly at the OU Medical Center. Our prayers are with him and children Zac and Danielle.

Dart: To a Republican-controlled Legislature for failing to address Oklahoma's No. 2 ranking in domestic abuse - more than 2,400 Oklahoma County victim protective orders issued from January through September.

Co-Op America, a nonpartisan green activist group, lists its Top 10 corporate offenders to avoid: Wal-Mart, ExxonMobil, Coca Cola, Nestle, Monsanto, Sears, Dominion, Citigroup, Sara Lee and McDonalds.

Laurel: To columnist Robert Novak for retiring. We wish him well but are glad his infamous political attacks are at an end. Now if only Pat Buchanan would hang up his diatribes.

New figures show Oklahoma locks up 24,315 people, including 6,500 in private prisons and 1,323 held in county jails waiting for a cell in our overcrowded corrections system.

Dart: To Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for misalleging Gov. Brad Henry's \$5,000 donation to Young Democrats of Oklahoma was illegal. Earth to Reynolds: They really are part of the Democratic Party.

American Indians have more strokes and a 1.5 times higher fatality rate from first strokes than whites and blacks. The OU study concludes the only way to reduce it: healthy eating and no smoking.

Laurel: To Tulsan Darwin Eaton, 86, for an incredible 40 gallons of blood donated to the Red Cross in the past 50 years - his 320th donation this month.

Were it not for precious billions wasted on war, think what America could do for the two billion earthlings who live on \$2 days, 800 million without any schools.

Dart: To arrogant Rogers County District Judge Dwayne Steidley for locking the public out of judicial proceedings. He even has a sign on his courtroom door: ONLY DEFENDANTS.

General Tommy Franks has joined the board of the National Center for Policy Analysis. It was Franks who hyped non-existent WMDs to George Bush.

Think public financing of elections is a bad idea? More than \$1.3 billion is how much both presidential campaigns will spend on advertising by Nov. 4.

Note to the 2009 Legislature: Based on a survey by the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development, by 2012 the state will be short more than 3,000 nurses, 600 lab techs, 300 surgical techs and 200 occupational therapists.

For more Darts, Laurels and short-takes, check out:

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Oklahomans need to secure their belts. We have lost sight of the economic attack on America on 9/11.

The trillions spent on this war have helped to bust our nation. Interestingly enough, comedian Garry Shandling presented this remembrance on Bill Maher's Real Time [10.3.08]. Christiane Amanpour suggests Osama bin Laden is comfortable in a villa. "Vengeance quest" did not work. It has been our demise.

Sarah Palin asked her church to pray this war is a task from God. SP, do some research; even the families of the victims who lost lives on 9/11 do not advocate killing other people's children as an antidote for their losses. Ask Andrew Rice for a first hand account.

Why would God encourage killing?

John McCain has presented a very negative aspect of who he is without attempting to promote his policies as positive measures to improve our lives. This is narcissistically in line with his limited self-centered "I am Maverick" prideful worldview and one that suggests Americans are only moved by Jerry Springer events - like the ones he is presently encouraging.

Wrap anything in the flag, repeat it, and shame those who think differently ... it is a proven dishonest tactic pulling in many insecure or ignorant people.

"Kill him!" is pretty negative verbiage to incite at your campaign rally.

Aligning with misguided e-mail education courses lacking authenticity is a weak comprehension of this election. If you are a "racist," admit it and move on. Oklahoma may be the buckle on the Bible belt, but most people claiming to be a "notch" aren't secure enough.

Denise Ashley
Bristow

Editor, The Observer:

As I see it, the rise of fundamentalism has been aided and abetted by preachers from mainline Protestant churches: Christian [Disciples of Christ], Episcopal, Lutheran [ELC], Presbyterian [USA], United Church of Christ [UCC], United Methodist, plus other smaller denominations.

[I purposely omitted Southern Baptist, since for the last 50 or 60 years, they have drifted away from the mainline churches and are now closer to the typical fundamentalist denominations.]

My gripe with these preachers is this: They spend approximately four years in seminaries [usually after attaining a bachelor's degree] where

they are subjected to an excellent education in theology. They learn that "all religions" - Christianity included - are based on symbols and myths. They also learn the true definition of "faith" and what it means to be a Christian in a society that is constantly bombarded by secular-based ideas and philosophies.

What happens then? These new preachers go out into their new jobs as pastors and purposefully neglect to pass on their acquired knowledge to their congregations - mainly because of economic fear. Obviously, they want to become successful in their chosen professions, and they fear that they will be rejected if they do tell it "the way it is." They fear they will be shown the back door and asked not to come back.

Some preachers, notably Bishop Jack Spong on the national scene, and Robin Meyers or Tom Boyd locally are definite deviations from the norm. Many others skirt the true issues, speaking in a sort of psychobabble that does justice to neither side.

As a result, the average mainline Protestant member is at a loss when it comes to significant dialogue with his more fundamentalist friends and relatives. This allows the expansion of fundamentalism, because the typical mainline Protestant doesn't know what he is talking about, and is easy prey when confronted by the aggressive fundamentalist.

J.A. Gowman
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

My husband filled both our cars yesterday and remarked that at the station it was \$2.49 a gallon. He wondered why this morning.

I told him it was because we have all been bribed. No one has started any new drilling, people stopped buying so much gas and there is an election. It is bribery pure and simple.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

I'd like to take moment to echo something we've heard before, about a phenomena in our world today which we know as the religious right cult: They do not have a monopoly on God. And they certainly do not have a monopoly on morality or ethics, either.

I've lived long enough to observe that any pretenses to the contrary are just that - pretense. It's all about show, and Jesus warned his disciples about religion for show and pretense.

And by the way, it is not right to conveniently label someone "an abor-



tionist" simply because they have never thought about the subject long enough to come to a firm decision as to whether or not governments should dictate every case of this sort of personal matter, such as rape and other what-not, involving very personal circumstances. It is unimaginable that any would want to get themselves into a fix where they felt they had to consider this obvious predicament and tragedy.

Stephanie Hershberger
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In spite of lip-service in support of veterans, presidential candidate John McCain gets consistently low ratings on his voting record from non-partisan veterans groups - 20% from the Disabled American Veterans and a "D" grade from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

McCain voted 28 times against funding for veterans' benefits, including health care, and opposed increased spending on TRICARE to give National Guard and Reserves members and their families greater access to this health care benefit.

He voted against a ban on waterboarding, opposing a bill that required the intelligence community to follow the same standards in the Army Field Manual, which bans this form of torture. In 2007, he voted against mandatory minimum downtime between tours of duty for troops serving in Iraq.

In 2008, McCain opposed the "21st Century GI Bill" because "generous benefits" such as paying full tuition and living expenses for veterans would "encourage people to leave the military." He voted at least 10 times against any plan to withdraw troops from Iraq, saying in June 2008 that it's "not too important" when U.S. troops leave Iraq. There are many other similar votes too numerous to list here.

While I respect Sen. McCain's military service to our country, his voting record indicates not only a lack of respect, but also a callous disregard for the military service of others. Please vote Nov. 4 with this truth in mind.

Jody Harlan
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

When retired Army First Sergeant Wes Davey arrived, in uniform, at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul on day one of the Republican National Convention to deliver a letter to fellow veteran John McCain, it didn't take long for him to be turned away. Re-

publicans and McCain don't want the American people to know that vets and active duty soldiers are not in support of the war anymore.

In the spring of 2006, McCain voted against two components of an emergency Iraq supplemental that would have provided more funds for veterans' healthcare. We haven't heard an explanation of why he voted against proposals to increase healthcare funding of the VA in 2004-07 when we had troops coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan. McCain says the VA's not working; that's in part because he hasn't funded it properly.

Do we want a president who does not support our troops?

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

One of the points the Republicans, including Bush's appointed Secretary of the Treasury, have fought against in the bailout bill are attempts to regulate CEO compensation at the failed institutions we're being asked to shell out our money to save. While logic might indicate that rewarding a CEO for failing doesn't make much sense, apparently it does to Republicans.

On the other hand, it would be really interesting to watch Republicans attempt to justify this news item that surfaced Oct. 1 on MSN's online financial section:

"Congress wants to crack down on CEO mega-salaries for banks participating in the bailout. And while politicians argue how best to do that, Alan Fishman of Washington Mutual [WaMu] is headed for the doors with \$19 million in his pocket."

If that wasn't outrageous enough, consider this: Fishman started the job three weeks earlier. I never saw the employment ad Fishman answered, but it must have read something like this:

WANTED - Top executive for train-wreck bank about to be seized by federal regulators. Must be able to look busy while FDIC sells business from under you. Previous experience with angry shareholders sitting on worthless stock a plus. Perks: \$7.5 million hiring bonus and \$11.6 million cash severance.

Fishman got the best temp gig in history.

Only a Republican would think that makes sense, and they wonder why they're going to lose the White House, lose Senate seats and lose seats in Congress.

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

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Frosty's Notebook

My Vote

I am astonished at the flimsy excuses I hear from Democrats as to why they won't vote for Sen. Barack Obama. I expect bigotry from the Far Right – they hold the copyright to the lies. To quote a few:

Obama wants sex education in kindergarten, he called Sarah Palin a pig, he's a Muslim, he pals around with terrorists and – the worst one – America is not ready for a black president.

Lying or bending the truth is nothing new in politics, especially coming from the Daily Disappointment editorial page.

What is truly horrifying are the malignant Republicans at Sen. McCain's rallies calling for Obama's death. Add to that the Democrats who have told me they can't vote for Obama because he would be assassinated.

The Swift Boating of Obama is well underway but this time it includes more than a few older Democrats.

One of the half-truths is the claim that Obama is too inexperienced. Aside from being in the trenches for poor people in Chicago, he spent nine years teaching constitutional law.

One of Obama's strongest points is his reverence for the Constitution – a document George Bush has attempted to ash-can with his drive for an imperial presidency and his "signing" letters.

McCain has tried to calm his supporters while continuing to unleash venomous Sarah Palin, certainly the trashiest, lowest common denominator in recent American politics.

When someone tells me he or she is not ready to vote for a black for president, I urge them to vote for the half that's white. It usually shuts them up.

Obama has tried to stay on the high road, but failure to address lies can be fatal. As one political scientist recently noted, people vote their emotions and images, not issues.

What Obama lacks in foreign policy experience is more than compensated for with his brilliant selection of Sen. Joe Biden as his running mate.

Biden is easily among the foremost foreign policy wonks in America today. I

Homeschool Alarm Bell

Homeschoolers in Oklahoma and across the nation are relieved that a federal judge has put on hold a California appeals court ruling outlawing homeschooling by anyone but certified teachers.

Ever wondered just who is homeschooling anyway? In the 1970s practically no children were homeschooled.

It was a fringe phenomenon practiced primarily by nonconformists. In 1985 approximately 50,000 children were being homeschooled nationally.

Today that estimate has risen to nearly two million. Though that represents only a small percentage of 50 million school-age children, it is still a significant number.

With the home schooling community growing by 15% to 20% a year, home schooling is an educational choice that appears to be here to stay.

We have no quarrel with home schooling, but as things stand in Oklahoma, there is absolutely no way to judge the outcome. And please don't start that yarn about spelling bee champs.

We have talked to many public school teachers who tell us that homeschooled children are typically two to three grades behind when they are enrolled in public schools.

Yes, some parents are adequately training to teach their children the more difficult subjects. Stanford University accepted 27% of its home schooled applicants. Home schooling has gone from the fringe to the mainstream.

Although in the beginning religion was cited as the major reason for home schooling, today the primary reason parents choose to homeschool is dissatis-

Terrorist Pal

Don't you love the "Christians" who play God in judging others? Consider the case of William Ayers, the domestic anti-Vietnam War terrorist, a pal of Barack Obama.

Ayers was one of the three co-authors of Chicago's winning Annenberg Challenge \$49.2 million grant proposal to help the less fortunate.

Today he is associate professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago; co-director of the Small Schools Workshop; co-director of the Chicago Forum for School Change – an affiliate of the Coalition of Essential Schools; chairman of the Alliance for Better Chicago Schools [ABCs] coalition; former Chicago assistant deputy mayor for education.

I don't defend for a moment what he did, but he has paid for his crime and if there is such a thing as rehabilitation, he's the prototype. As for his soul, I leave that to God.

How many of his critics have hit the bricks as did Obama and Ayers on the bleak and dangerous streets of Chicago as community organizers?

A lot of young people paid a price for their opposition to the Vietnam War – a war that was as tragic and pointless as Iraq. Obama was 8 years old when Ayers violently opposed the Vietnam War.

My brother Johnny, career military with three tours in the helicopters, wrote me bitter anti-Vietnam War letters. It was based on the Gulf of Tonkin lie just as Iraq was based on the lie of WMDs.



would rather have windy Joe Biden than Bush clone McCain or pathological liar Sarah Palin.

I can understand yellow dog Republican support for McCain, but that's a far cry from bigots, racists and religious fanatics.

You can't blame McCain for suddenly attacking Bush, who he supported more than 90% of the time by his Senate votes, but his record is all he has to run on.

If family values is your bedrock reason in seeking a president, it's no contest. McCain is a self-confessed womanizer and adulterer, Obama is the epitome of moral rectitude in his marriage.

We don't judge McCain for his moral lapses. Bill Clinton was elected to a second term despite immoral conduct. We hasten to note that he was a good president – from the waist up.

Personalities aside, cast your vote for the ticket that will best serve America.

faction with the public school system. Most homeschooling parents come from a religious viewpoint.

With the advent of the Internet the opportunities for homeschoolers will only increase and expand – if allowed to.

Florida, for example, has the first state-funded virtual high school. Its promotional materials state that it presently consists of 54% public school students, 38% homeschool students, and 8% private school students.

Some of the benefits cited are a flexible schedule, enhanced course selection and accommodation of alternative learning styles. Its 65 courses include AP classes.

In addition to worrying about the outcomes, we have two other problems with homeschooling.

First is the belief of too many homeschooling parents that they must libel and slander public education in order to defend homeschooling. That's hardly "Christian."

Second, many are angling for state aid, joining in an assault on the Constitution by the Catholic hierarchy. American bishops, egged on by the Pope, have pledged to work for vouchers.

Public education is already underfunded without having to share its meager allotment with people who have made their choice for separation.

Achievement Gap

New research into the black-white achievement gap suggests that students who lose the most ground academically in United States public schools may be the brightest African-American children.

Debbie Viadero, writing for Education Week, notes that as African-American students move through school, two new studies show that test-score gaps between them and their better-performing white counterparts grow fastest among the most able students.

The analysis, conducted by Sean Reardon, a Stanford University professor of sociology and education, showed that from kindergarten to fifth grade, achievement gaps grew twice as fast among students who started out performing above the mean than they did among low-performers.

This implies that, if the gaps continue to grow, "even kids who enter school with high levels of readiness are going to end up falling below where they started," said Reardon.

The other study, conducted by economists Steven Rivkin and Eric Hanushek, found that the higher the initial achievement score, the more scores diverged over time between African-American and white students.

Perhaps Barack Obama will sound the clarion call for America's black families to step up as never before.

AIDS INFORMATION
ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME
1.800.535.AIDS

Battle For The Legislature: 20 Races To Watch

Will Republicans finally break through and seize control of both houses of the Oklahoma Legislature?

Or will Democrats stem the hemorrhage, keeping the Senate deadlocked, regaining Senate control and/or closing their seven-seat disadvantage in the House?

For at least a decade, the trend in legislative races has been mostly Republican. And this year's conventional wisdom holds the GOP finally will gain a state Senate majority, as well.

Still, it might not be as easy to forecast this year's legislative races as it first appears.

Oklahoma's demographics are changing, as the rural-to-urban migration accelerates and as the state attracts newcomers searching for work in energy, agriculture and research technologies.

Suddenly, districts in Oklahoma City and Tulsa that were once dependably Republican or Democratic are no longer so dependable. The same can be said of rural districts that once were Democratic and Republican locks, but aren't so much now. The GOP won seven House seats in 2006 by a combined 2,547 votes.

As the late U.S. House Speaker Tip O'Neill once famously remarked, "All politics is local." Which is why we've identified 15 House and five Senate races that bear watching Nov. 4 as Democrats seek to cut into the GOP's 57-44 House advantage and Republicans fight to take control of a Senate that is currently divided 24-24.

HOUSE

DISTRICT 9: Republican incumbent Tad Jones, chairman of the House Education Committee, isn't high on the list of many Oklahoma teachers because he's toed the line on the GOP's anti-public school agenda. Democrat Bill Snyder, a former Oologah newsman, is the challenger in the district northeast of Tulsa.

DISTRICT 14: Democrats are salivating at the prospect of unseating incumbent Republican George Faught, widely viewed as a radical right-winger, in a district where two-thirds of voters are registered Democrats. The Democratic challenger, Eugene Blankenship, is a local emergency management director who's been campaigning for a year in the district that includes parts of Cherokee and Muskogee counties.

DISTRICT 25: First-term incumbent Republican Todd Thomsen captured the seat two years ago by a mere two votes, determined by a recount. He is challenged by Democrat Gary Starns, a Pontotoc County commissioner, in what traditionally has been a Democratic area.

DISTRICT 48: Incumbent Republican Greg Piatt, the House floor leader, opted not to seek re-election. Voter registration in the southern Oklahoma district is more than 2-1 Democratic over Republican. GOP nominee Pat Ownbey, a former radio station owner, faces Democrat John Moore, the Ardmore mayor.

DISTRICT 49: Incumbent Democrat Terry Hyman was killed in a June farming accident. Despite an overwhelming Democratic edge in voter registration, an open seat isn't always predictable – especially if Barack Obama runs poorly in southern Oklahoma. Ardmore attorney Samson Buck, designated by Democrats to fill Hyman's slot on the ballot, is battling Republican Sean Oliver of Madill, a contract telephone engineer.

DISTRICT 50: Former Democratic state Sen. Daisy Lawler is challenging incumbent Republican Dennis Johnson in an area where she has shown electoral strength in the past and where Democrats own a nearly 2-1 voter registration advantage.

DISTRICT 71: The south Tulsa district – a battle of two attorneys, incumbent

Republican Rep. Dan Sullivan and Democrat George Bullock – has been reliably Republican for decades, but it could be one of those urban districts in transition. Two years ago, most of the district's precincts backed Democrat Kathy Taylor's successful mayoral bid. Plus, much of the district is represented by one of the state Senate's most progressive members, Democrat Tom Addelson.

DISTRICT 87: Incumbent Republican Trebor Worthen, a member of the GOP House leadership team, opted not to seek re-election in a northwest Oklahoma City district he won by only 247 votes two years ago. Democrat Dana Orwig is once again the Democratic nominee, facing Republican Jason Nelson, a political strategist and legislative liaison for former Gov. Frank Keating.

We list seven other seats as being in play because incumbents were term-limited or chose not to seek re-election and the districts' demographics and/or voting trends make the outcomes less predictable. Worth noting: It is often difficult, if not impossible, to knock out an incumbent, but open seats can produce surprising results.

Among districts where term limits prevented incumbents from seeking re-election: **34** in the Stillwater area [Republican Rep. Terry Ingmire], **51** in west central Oklahoma [Democratic Rep. Ray McCarter], **52** in southwestern Oklahoma [Democratic Rep. David Braddock], **57** in western Oklahoma [Democratic Rep. James Covey], and **93** in south Oklahoma City [Democratic Rep. Al Lindley].

Two open seats – created when incumbent Republicans opted not to seek re-election – are especially worth watching: **District 96** in north and east Oklahoma County [former House Speaker Lance Cargill] and **District 47** in the Chickasha area [five-term Rep. Susan Winchester].

SENATE

DISTRICT 21: Democratic Senate President Pro Tem Mike Morgan is term-limited in the Stillwater-area district. Former Oklahoma State University president Jim Halligan is the GOP nominee, challenged by former District Judge Bob Murphy, a Democrat whose father served many years in the Legislature.

DISTRICT 27: Incumbent Republican Owen Laughlin of Woodward cannot seek re-election because of term limits. Democratic nominee Bowdy Peach is a professional bull rider and small businessman whose family is well-known politically [his father Terry is state agriculture secretary]. The GOP nominee is Bryce Marlatt, a former field representative for U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas and U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe.

DISTRICT 31: Republican incumbent Don Barrington is battling Democrat Keith Erwin, an insurance company owner. The GOP enjoys an overwhelming voter registration edge in the southwestern Oklahoma district, but Democrats smell a possible upset because the best time to knock off an incumbent is when he seeks re-election for the first time.

DISTRICT 37: Republicans targeted incumbent Democrat Nancy Riley, a former school teacher, because she switched parties in 2006. She is challenged by a first-time candidate, Republican Dan Newberry, president of Homeland Federal Mortgage, in the south and west Tulsa district.

DISTRICT 43: Incumbent Republican Jim Reynolds would seem well-positioned in the district that includes parts of south and east Oklahoma City and Moore, but he is facing a famous name: Democrat David Boren. No, not *that* David Boren. But this David Boren, a psychiatric nurse, has been working the district hard. And sometimes, a famous name can pay off in lower-profile, down-ballot races.

VISIT WWW.OKOBSERVER.NET FOR MORE CAMPAIGN '08 ANALYSIS

Four State Questions On The Nov. 4 Ballot

Oklahoma voters will decide four state questions on the November ballot. The Observer recommends a yes vote on all four.

STATE QUESTION NO. 735 LEGISLATIVE REFERENDUM NO. 343

This measure amends the Oklahoma Constitution. It adds Section 8D to Article 10. The measure takes effect January 1, 2009. It creates an exemption from personal property tax. The Legislature could pass laws to carry out the exemption. Such laws could not change the amount of the exemption.

SHALL THE PROPOSAL BE APPROVED?

FOR THE PROPOSAL – YES

AGAINST THE PROPOSAL – NO

STATE QUESTION NO. 741 LEGISLATIVE REFERENDUM NO. 344

This measure amends the Oklahoma Constitution. It would add a new Section 22A to Article 10. This section is related to exemptions from property taxes. It would require a person or business to file an application for an exemption. No exemption could be granted prior to filing an application. The Legislature may write laws to carry out the provisions of this section.

SHALL THE PROPOSAL BE APPROVED?

FOR THE PROPOSAL – YES

AGAINST THE PROPOSAL – NO

STATE QUESTION NO. 742 LEGISLATIVE REFERENDUM NO. 345

This measure adds a new section to the State Constitution. It adds Section 36 to Article 2. It gives all people of this state the right to hunt, trap, fish and take game and fish. Such activities would be subject to reasonable regulation. It al-

lows the Wildlife Conservation Commission to approve methods and procedures for hunting, trapping, fishing and taking of game and fish. It allows for taking game and fish by traditional means. It makes hunting, fishing, and trapping the preferred means of managing game and fish. The new law will not affect existing laws relating to property rights.

SHALL THE PROPOSAL BE APPROVED?

FOR THE PROPOSAL – YES

AGAINST THE PROPOSAL – NO

STATE QUESTION NO. 743 LEGISLATIVE REFERENDUM NO. 346

This measure amends Section 3 of Article 28 of the Constitution. It requires a customer to be 21 and physically present to purchase wine at a winery, festival or trade show. The measure changes the law to allow certain winemakers to sell directly to retail package stores and restaurants in Oklahoma. The change applies to winemakers who produce up to 10,000 gallons of wine a year. It applies to winemakers in state and out of state. Those winemakers may not also use a licensed wholesale distributor. They must sell their wine to every retail package store and restaurant in Oklahoma that wants to buy the wine. The sales must be on the same price basis. The sales must be without discrimination. Those winemakers must use their own leased or owned vehicles to distribute their wine. They may not use common or private carriers. If any part of this measure is found to be unconstitutional, no winemaker could sell wine directly to retail package stores or restaurants in Oklahoma.

SHALL THE PROPOSAL BE APPROVED?

FOR THE PROPOSAL – YES

AGAINST THE PROPOSAL – NO

Republicans Defend Prison Profiteers

Recent statements from the Republican chairman and vice-chairman of the House Judiciary and Public Safety Committee lauding the efficiency of private prisons brought withering scorn from two Democrats armed with the facts.

Reps. Brian Renegar, D-Blanco, and Terry Harrison, D-McAlester, mocked the dismal duo, citing facts contained within the recent MGT Performance Audit, an independent comprehensive performance review of the Department of Corrections.

Chairman Rex Duncan of Sand Springs, and Vice-Chairman T.W. Shannon of Lawton came up short in the facts department.

THEY IGNORED THE DOC AUDIT

"I am concerned with their conclusion that private prisons are efficient, cost-effective, and a step in the right direction for our state," said Renegar. "It is obvious that they failed to notice or consider the lessons learned from Cornell."

The MGT Audit referenced the state's termination of the Cornell private prison contract, which was the result of demands for increases in per diem rates after the contract was negotiated by the Department of Corrections.

The DOC refused to agree to these substantial increases in rates and was subsequently forced to quickly relocate 800 inmates in order for Cornell to accommodate a richer contract from out of state.

INCREASED USE WILL CREATE A CRISIS

Renegar contends that private for-profit prisons are driven by market forces and, as such, increased reliance on private prisons will lead to decreased alternatives for bed-space, placing the state in similar circumstances.

Therefore, these firms could hold the state hostage to the demands. The MGT Audit points out that if again faced with a comparable scenario, it would create a crisis for the DOC.

Currently there are six private prisons in Oklahoma, three that house Oklahoma inmates and three that house only out-of-state inmates.

"I am leery of continued efforts to privatize every facet of government. What's next, we privatize our Oklahoma Highway Patrol and use rent-a-cops instead?" Harrison said.

EXTREMELY HIGH TURNOVER RATE

Another concern is the extremely high turnover rate within private prisons. Per the MGT Audit, in fiscal year 2006 CCA's Cimarron facility experienced a 58% staff turnover rate, and GEO's Lawton facility was experiencing a 69% staff turnover rate in 2007.

Prisoner Failure Rate Low 27.8%

For offenders released in FY 2005, the Department of Correction's overall recidivism rate was 27.8%. For males it was 28.9%, for females, 21.8%.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections defines recidivism as the percentage of all offenders released in a given year who have returned to DOC incarceration at the end of three years.

This corresponds with the definition used by most states, the federal government, and academic research and is the most commonly cited measure of correctional success or failure.

YOUNGER INMATES FAIL MORE OFTEN

By age categories, for males the recidivism rate tends to increase as offenders get younger. Those 20 or younger returned at a 43.5% rate while those 56 or older returned at a 9.6% rate.

Female rates, however, tend to remain steady through youth and middle-age [20%-25%], then decrease after age 45 to 15% across the remaining ages.

By race and ethnicity, white males recidivated at 26.3%, black males at 36.2%, Native American males at 30.3%, Hispanic/Latino males at 17.1%, and others at 21.2%.

FAILURE RATE FOR WOMEN

White females recidivated at 18%, black females at 27.9%, Native American females at 28.5%, Hispanic/Latino females at 25%, and others at 20%.

National statistics on other state recidivism rates have not been updated since offenders were released in 1994.

Some states contiguous to Oklahoma have reported recidivism rates in recent years: Texas [2001 releasees - 8.3%], Missouri [recent years - 33%-40%], Arkansas [2001 releasees - 51.4%, 52.6% males and 41.6% females], Louisiana [approximately 50%], and Colorado [2003 releasees - 49.8%, 50.1% males and 47.5% females].

SURVIVAL ANALYSES USED

For measurement of effectiveness of program participation, DOC does not use traditional recidivism measures. Instead, the department uses survival analyses to track how many offenders remain outside DOC supervision after a selected number of months, usually 36 months.

These groups of released program participants are compared to matched releasees from the same period who did not receive the program treatment.

The most recent survival analyses of institutional treatment programs find that completers of all Oklahoma DOC programs have lower return rates after at least 36 months than program non-participants.

In the most recent analyses, the program with the highest success rates of non-return to incarceration within 36 months was Adult Basic Education [ABE], with 98% of treated female offenders still outside DOC supervision after 36 months

See FAILURES Page 8



from private prisons," Renegar said.

"The risks and problems of expanding our usage of private prisons require more than a cursory glance and tour of a facility. Too many times, the claims of the profiteer ring hollow."

The irony is that it was the Republican leadership that ordered the expensive DOC outside audit but has consistently ignored the findings.

These levels are significantly higher than those in state-run facilities and draw legitimate concerns as to staff preparedness of operational procedures and communication skills due to the low number of seasoned staff members.

According to the DOC, during FY 2008 the DOC withheld \$355,744.56 in payments to private prisons that house Oklahoma inmates due to violations of contracts regarding staff position vacancies.

INEXPERIENCED STAFF

The audit revealed a possible correlation of private prisons' serious incidents rate to the reliance on a high number of inexperienced staff. Private prison incidents' rate is twice the public prisons' rate, with an average of 0.42 serious incidents per 100 inmates to 0.21 per 100 inmates, respectively.

"Many factors were blatantly overlooked by both Duncan and Shannon, such as the extremely high turnover rate of employees, the fact that private prisons can be more selective in their choice of inmates, and the state's coverage of the costs of inmate escapes

Fall Peace Festival



Celebrate Peace & Justice

Saturday, November 15th ** 10 am to 4 pm

Civic Center Music Hall – Hall of Mirrors

Downtown Oklahoma City

* Free Parking at Meters*

Booths & Tables of Social Justice Groups

Live Music & Entertainment All Day

Holiday Shopping Opportunities

Supporting Groups working for Human Rights, Social Justice, Environment, and PEACE

Sponsors include: The Peace House * Peace Education Institute * Spiritual Walk for Peace * Anti-War Fair Coalition * Social Justice Committee First Unitarian Church

www.peacehouseok.org

Welfare Workers' True Life Stories

Editor's Note: We continue with stories from the Department of Human Services frontlines, an agency grossly underfunded but whose dedicated staff makes a difference every day for thousand of hurting Oklahomans.

We put our lives on the line every time we knock on a door because we do not know what is on the other side. We are on 24-hour call and go out any time it is necessary. We can't tell people they will have to wait until morning.

When we go out in the middle of the night, our families are left to fend for themselves, because it could be two hours or 20 hours before we return. I have a permanent attachment called a cell phone on my hip. It has replaced my child, because the cell phone comes first.

Our jobs are stressful enough. We should not have to avoid newspapers because who knows what comes out next.

MEET A GIRL CALLED JANE

I will call her Jane. This case was assigned to me straight out of training. She was 14 and tired of the system. I was able to reunify her siblings and her with their mother only to remove them again six months later. I stood at the bench with her when her mother relinquished her rights in court.

I held her hand at the hospital, when she suffered a miscarriage after becoming pregnant at 16. Answered my cell phone at 2 a.m. on more than one occasion when she needed someone she could trust to talk to.

Jane has since grown up and will be 18 before the end of the year. She called a few months ago and told me that she wanted to get a picture taken with me. I told her I was not the most photogenic. Her response is what keeps me going when I wonder about how much simpler life would be in a different job. She said, "I need it for my photo album. I have pictures of everyone important to me that I love in there."

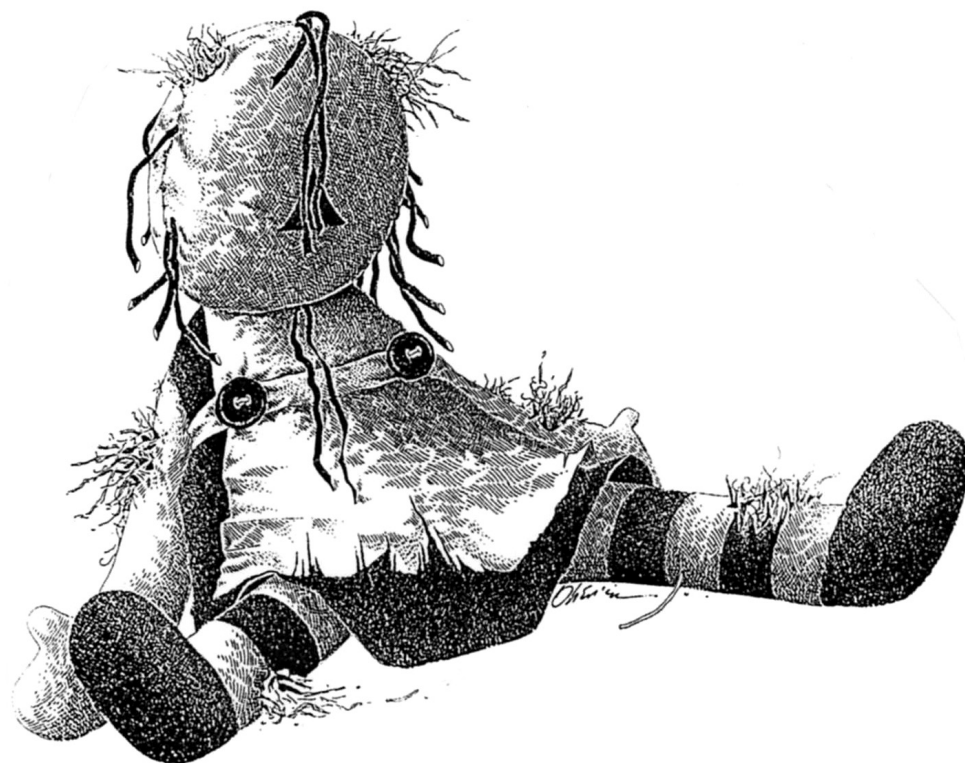
WHY STICK TO A JOB SO TOUGH?

You see, for some of us this is not just a paycheck. This is a calling. We suffer from long hours, almost unmanageable caseloads, no time to take ourselves to the doctor when we have walking pneumonia and losing out on valuable family time. We spend our days trying to mend broken families while ours are being neglected.

There are days that it all seems worth it. The day a parent thanks you for showing them how to make their lives better. The day that a child hugs you and says thank you for finding me a safe and permanent home.

There are also days that you wonder if you are a worthy parent. The days when you miss your daughter's first homerun. When your husband has to fix your daughter's hair on picture day because you are still at the ER with a child and have been there since seven the night before.

When you have to look into the eyes of your own child and tell them you can not be there for their Valentines Day party at school or the field trip to the zoo



because the judge does not want anyone but you in court or you have to take another child to the doctor when the foster parent can't. Only to be told by your kiddo that it is OK because "mommy helps to keep kids safe."

THEIR LIVES VERSUS YOUR FAMILY

No amount of money can make up for what we miss out on or what we endure. It is the premise that we would at least have some sort of consolation that we are recognized and it is understood that our duties never end, we are on call 24/7 and willingly go.

Do I love my job? Absolutely. But I love my family more. There comes a time that you have to ask if the lives of others are worth more to you than your own health, your 10-year marriage, and the lives of your children.

When I go to work every day I always think of my own trials and tribulations, the struggles I faced. I put 100% in my work so the kids receive the child support that they should get.

I worked on a case in which the non-custodial parent was really hard to locate due to him living in another state. The custodial parent would tell us that he is hiding and we probably won't be able to locate him.

Our hard work and dedication paid off. Not only did she start getting child support, we were able to deliver her a lump sum of back child support.

TO BE CONTINUED

CareerTech Cares For Baghdad Nurses

New CareerTech teachers in high schools and technology centers across the state donated care package items to the 86th Combat Support Hospital nurses stationed in Baghdad.

This community service project was initiated at the state's CareerTech New Teachers Academy.

Now, students are modeling their teachers' efforts through HOSA's Fall Leadership Conference. HOSA has more than 4,400 members in 100 chapters across the state.

HOSA is the CareerTech student organization affiliated with Health Careers Education. The project involves collecting items for healthcare providers in the armed forces who are stationed in Iraq.

LOCAL CHAPTER DONATIONS

HOSA chapter officers who attend the conference will be asked to bring donations for troops from their local chapters. The chapter that brings the most items by weight will be awarded \$50 to their chapter treasury.

"Our project allows potential healthcare workers across Oklahoma to get involved and lend a hand in the industry now," said Debbie Shumaker, state HOSA adviser. "Their donations will make a big difference to the nurses in Baghdad."

"We proposed the community service project as part of leadership development in teaching standards," said Lara Skaggs, state program administrator for Health Careers Education at the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education.

BIG BAGS FULL OF DONATIONS

"The response was outstanding. Most came back with big bags full of donations."

The idea for the project came from Skaggs' summer experience with an ROTC leadership training course for educators in Fort Knox, KY.

"While I was at Fort Knox, we listened to a nurse briefing from the 86th Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad," Skaggs said. "They are there on an 18-month deployment, while most people stay six months."

Skaggs and others wanted to help the nurses in Baghdad, so they asked Col. Susan Raymond, who is in charge of support at the hospital, if there was anything they needed.

"Col. Raymond told us anything would be greatly appreciated," Skaggs said. "They suggested we send things like magazines, gum and packets to flavor water."

Having new teachers across the state donate items was a perfect fit, according to Skaggs. She said the teachers quickly embraced the project, donating everything from cookies and crackers to ink pens and disposable cameras.

The state CareerTech agency is also collecting items to send to troops stationed overseas.

"We believe community service should become a lifelong habit," Skaggs said. "From students to new teachers to state staff, everyone wants to help support those serving our nation."

FAILURES

From Page 7

and 90% of males.

The program with the lowest "survival" rate was Regimented Inmate Discipline [RID], with 98% of offenders still outside DOC supervision after 36 months.

The biggest difference between the program participants and matched non-participants occurred among the males receiving the Thinking for a Change [TFC] program.

WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

For 40 years, The Observer has been Oklahoma's only journal of free voices, providing news, analysis and commentary that can't be found in the state's lock-step, right-wing mainstream media. We've never wavered in our commitment to speak truth to power and to shine the spotlight on rank hypocrisy and public corruption.

But here's a truth we confront daily: We don't own the deep pockets of the Gaylords or the Lortons or the big national media chains. Our feisty journal relies on the generosity and support of its subscribers and small advertisers to keep challenging the status quo.

You can help ensure The Observer's future for generations by making us a part of your legacy and remembering us in your will. In return, we promise to continue delivering messages the silk-stocking elite don't want rank-and-file Oklahomans to receive. And to remain true to our motto: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

PUBLIC FORUM

Voters Ignore History At Their Own Peril

By Joe Forgy

I was three years old on "Black Tuesday," October 29, 1929, when after 12 years of Republican control of Congress and three Republican presidents, the market crashed and the Great Depression began.

No, I don't remember the day the market crashed, but I lived through the results of 12 years of Republican administrations. Google the Great Depression and find out if you want to go through another one.

Is your hate for some groups of people and greed worth living through another greater depression? Just keep listening to the politicians that "tickle your ears" and they will lead you to another depression.

The Republicans wrote part of their record from 1921-33. They led the country to depression, poverty, and despair.

The Republican Party was ready to carry big business through the crisis. It created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for that purpose. The banks, the railways, the insurance companies – they got relief, but not the American people.

For the unemployed, it was Hooverilles and soup kitchens. Veterans were encouraged to go into business for themselves – selling apples.

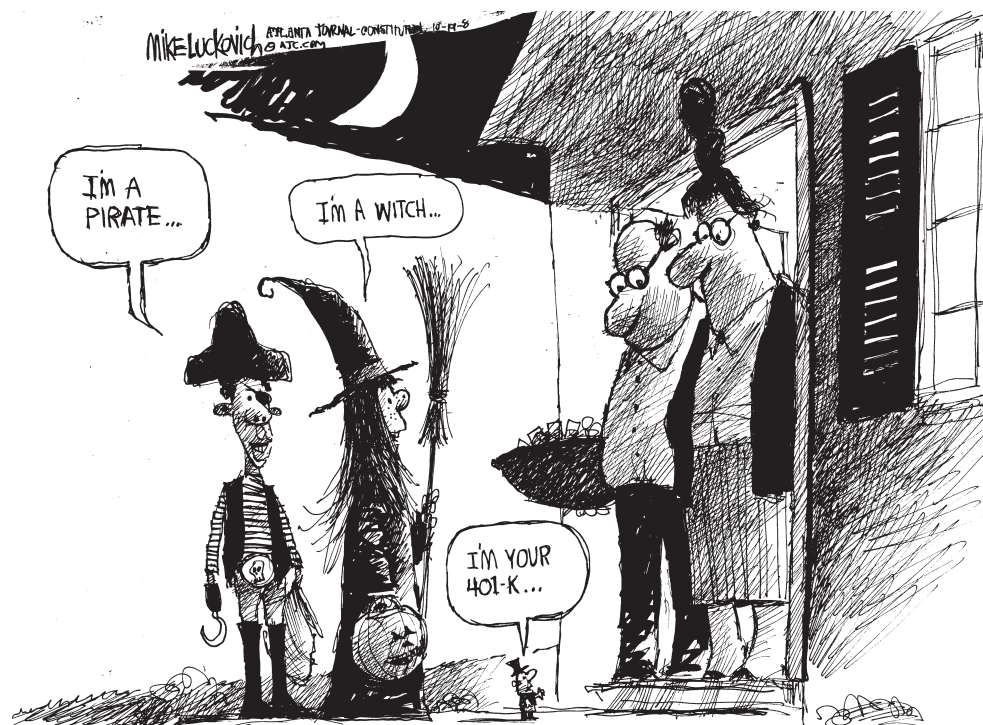
That is the Republican record.

Today, very few remember it. The Democratic part of the record begins in 1933, when the Democratic Party began to build prosperity for business, labor, and agriculture.

The Democrats wrote into law:

- The right of the working men and women to organize in unions of their own choice and to bargain collectively;
- Put a floor under wages;
- Outlawed child labor;
- Created a great insurance system to protect working men and women against the hazards of unemployment and old age;
- Wrote into law a system of price supports for farm products, so that the bottom would not drop from under the farmer's income the way it did in the 1920's;
- Put a curb on Wall Street speculation, and stopped the money changers from gambling with people's savings.

For over a half a century we have had prosperity. All are results of Democratic policies – Social Security, minimum wage, unemployment compensation, Medi-



care, Medicare, war on poverty.

After surviving the Depression and a war, I had over a half a century of great life. When I retired in 1991, I thought I had enough to live a wonderful life. It was great until 2002 – my savings even increased in value.

Since 2002, inflation, depressed interest rates and stock market losses have eaten up much of my savings.

I hear from many that there are safeguards now to prevent another Depression. Somewhat true. However, the Republicans oppose those safeguards [all Democratic policies], they have destroyed some of them and have plans to eradicate the rest.

At least 11 banks and thrifts have failed this year causing a strain on the FDIC. The FDIC was created during the Depression to protect bank depositors. With the loss of FDIC funds and Wall Street losses, is your money safe?

Increasing unemployment, manufacturers moving to other countries, the costs of the Iraq war, no money for weather crises facing us today, high national debt, no money for crumbling infrastructure, foreclosures, big companies filing bankruptcies, the big market crisis and federal bailouts for big industry along with inflation are clues to another Depression.

If the majority of U.S. voters just want to ignore history and vote their hate and greed, they will get what they deserve.

But do our nation and our posterity deserve it?

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

McCain's Dangerous Nuclear Drumbeat

By B.A. Geary

One of the many scary things about presidential candidate John McCain is his aggressive promotion of nuclear power. He seems to have not a clue that there is anything unreliable or unsafe about this energy source.

I think his ignorance and/or lack of frankness on this issue alone disqualifies him from being a leader on energy issues.

Doesn't he know that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, normally a very timid agency [vis-a-vis the industry it is supposed to regulate], made the devastating announcement last June that reliable cost estimates, licensing estimates, and construction estimates for the "new generation" of nuclear reactors are simply non-existent?

In other words, no one knows how much a new reactor will cost [possibly billions over budget] or when it can be completed.

Who would be willing to back such an open-ended enterprise? Why, the gullible American public, of course, if it heeds McCain.

Wall Street doesn't invest in nuclear power. McCain is promoting more federal

spending for an industry that has never paid its own way.

Leaving aside safety and health concerns [of which Obama, by the way, does show some awareness], and looking only at the economic side of nukes, does McCain not know of the trap of high electric rates being prepared by the nuclear industry?

In five southern states nuclear utilities have schemed to force electric ratepayers to pay billions for reactors that may never be completed.

The nuclear industry has many dark sides, kept deliberately in the dark. The financial side needs to be revealed right now.

Funds wasted on nuclear energy will be lost forever for really clean, renewable technologies.

Words wasted on promoting pie-in-the-sky nukes distract us from working on energy conservation and efficiency, which could yield results immediately.

This is not a time to be listening to the nuclear drumbeat of John McCain.

– The author lives in Tulsa

Unspeakable Suffering So Women Could Vote

By Connie Schulz

The women were innocent and defenseless. And by the end of the night, they were barely alive.

Forty prison guards wielding clubs and their warden's blessing went on a rampage against the 33 women wrongly convicted of "obstructing sidewalk traffic."

They beat Lucy Burn, chained her hands to the cell bars above her head and left her hanging for the night, bleeding and gasping for air.

They hurled Dora Lewis into a dark cell, smashed her head against an iron bed and knocked her out cold. Her cellmate, Alice Cosu, thought Lewis was dead and suffered a heart attack.

Additional affidavits describe the guards grabbing, dragging, beating, choking, slamming, pinching, twisting and kicking the women.

Thus unfolded the "Night of Terror" on Nov. 15, 1917, when the warden at the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia ordered his guards to teach a lesson to the suffragists imprisoned there because they dared to picket Woodrow Wilson's White House for the right to vote.

For weeks, the women's only water came from an open pail. Their food – all of

it colorless slop – was infested with worms. When one of the leaders, Alice Paul, embarked on a hunger strike, they tied her to a chair, forced a tube down her throat and poured liquid into her until she vomited. She was tortured like this for weeks until word was smuggled out to the press.

So, refresh my memory.

Some women won't vote this year because ... why, exactly? We have carpool duties? We have to get to work? Our vote doesn't matter? It's raining?

Last week, I went to a sparsely attended screening of HBO's new movie "Iron Jawed Angels." It is a graphic depiction of the battle these women waged so that I could pull the curtain at the polling booth and have my say. I am ashamed to say I needed the reminder.

All these years later, voter registration is still my passion. But the actual act of voting had become less personal for me, more rote. Frankly, voting often felt more like an obligation than a privilege. Sometimes it was inconvenient.

My friend Wendy, who is my age and studied women's history, saw the HBO

See WOMEN Page 19

BOOKS

Obama's Potential For Presidential Greatness

By Maya Schenwar

OBAMA'S CHALLENGE

America's Economic Crisis and the Power of a Transformative Presidency

By Robert Kuttner

Chelsea Green Publishing

192 pages, \$14.95

I began reading Robert Kuttner's latest book in late summer. Then, amid the pandemonium of the plummeting stock market and the huge banks tumbling toward death, I put it aside. I finished it in late September. My timing was soberingly ironic.

As I turned the final pages, Congressional leadership was cinching a deal on a \$700 billion bailout plan for the country's wealthiest financial institutions – a plan that wallowed universes away from the innovative proposals put forward in Kuttner's book.

Where Kuttner challenges Obama to utilize deficit spending to finance job-training programs, living wages, public works initiatives and – eventually – universal health care, the bailout plan would bypass low-income Americans.

While Kuttner asks Obama to dip into debt to get Americans back on their feet from the bottom up, the bill cobbled together by Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Congress would dip even deeper into the deficit in order to, for the most part, prop up the very top.

IGNORE DOOM-MONGERING CONSERVATIVES

Obama's Challenge warns against doom-mongering fiscal conservatives who'd block far-reaching programs, prioritizing "virtuous" frugality over regular Americans' basic needs. In the face of Paulson's \$700 billion request, those fiscal conservatives did rear their shaking heads – though this time in opposition to a plan that would neglect regular Americans in favor of Wall Street.

The bill initially failed in the House, but not primarily due to progressive Democrats backing a Kuttner-like alternative. It failed because of hard-line conservatives, the folks who would no doubt raise a ruckus if a President Obama started getting all New-Deal-y after inauguration.

The creation of, and response to, the bailout plan showcase some of the barriers an economic change-seeker would face in today's political climate. However, those barriers are no match for the "transformative presidency" Kuttner has in mind for Obama.

IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

The book begins by asking readers to take two leaps of faith. One: Obama will be the next president. Two: Obama, despite his driftings toward the center-right in recent months, has the imagination, the heart and the know-how to steer the nation in a wholly new political direction.

These leaps seemed unduly risky at the time. During my first hour of reading, I couldn't turn off the whiny little voice in my head, squeaking, "Don't get your hopes up! Don't get your hopes up!"

Kuttner himself called his assumption of an Obama victory a "slightly cheeky exercise." But he also showed that it's a highly useful one. Only by mentally catapulting Obama into the White House can we fully address the question of what he should do when he gets there.

OBAMA'S FDR POTENTIAL

Also, Kuttner demonstrates that Obama does in fact have the potential to initiate Roosevelt-like reform.

At one point, by piecing together excerpts from several of Obama's speeches and writings, Kuttner constructs a sample speech on the economy that praises the capacity of expansive government to serve its citizens, rejects the Republican infatuation with tax cuts for the wealthy and proposes broad new investments in public education, scientific research, jobs programs and renewable technologies.

Kuttner notes that, using the same process, he could have constructed a speech full of conciliatory, "bipartisan" rhetoric and overly cautious proposals.

"Those who become excited about a particular candidate are at grave risk of getting their hearts broken," he writes, noting that his book is intended as a "sober counterweight to a lot of bad advice [Obama] will receive to govern as a post-partisan, pragmatic centrist."

PRINCIPLED IDEALIST, NOT A CYNIC

But at heart, Kuttner says, Obama seems more a "principled idealist than a cynic." That idealism sets him apart from the triangulation and weak standards that have marked the last two Democratic administrations. Unlike Jimmy Carter or Bill Clinton, according to Kuttner, Obama has all the makings of a "great president," should he have the true audacity to undertake that goal.

This means taking full advantage of the authority afforded the executive branch. Strong use of executive power may seem a terrifying prospect on the heels of the Bush Administration's train of abuses, scandals and lies. Yet, Kuttner notes, this power is what gives the president a unique ability to quickly incite large-scale transformation.

To explore Obama's possibilities, Kuttner delves into the workings of three former presidents he considers "great:" Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson.

ACCOMPLISHING COLOSSAL GOALS

Each took incredible political risks to advance his vision, while connecting deeply with the public and working to transform stale opinions and status quo assumptions. Each accomplished colossal goals – the freeing of the slaves, the preservation of the union, the overcoming of the Great Depression, the passage

of the Civil Rights Acts – and won the trust and collaboration of the American people to accomplish them.

They took advantage of the opportunities their position granted them; in fact, they took their election as a mandate to seize those opportunities. Kuttner notes that when Johnson's aides initially warned him against pushing hard for civil rights, he responded, "Hell, what's the presidency for?"

Obama has gained a reputation for "reaching across the aisle," a habit that it's currently fashionable to praise. However, if he's going to be a transformative president, Obama needs to stop being so goshdarn politically friendly, according to Kuttner.

FINDING THE RIGHT TOUCH

"Compromise" should not be a leader's goal; at best, it should be an "endgame" strategy used when necessary to further big change. Being a great president, then, is not about getting everyone to like you. In fact, if you've got some haters, you may well be on the right track.

At the same time, to be a great president, Obama need not steamroll into the White House and announce an immediate revolution. Kuttner points out that both Lincoln and Roosevelt grew significantly more radical in office. Pre-presidency, Roosevelt was viewed as an "affable lightweight," according to Kuttner, while Lincoln entered office promising not to interfere with slavery.

In other words, Obama's sometime-hesitance does not mean he's hopeless.

Finally, Obama shares a key talent with Kuttner's three "great presidents:" he is a gifted and passionate communicator. The best presidents are teachers, according to Kuttner.


TOUGH TIMES DEMAND AN FDR-LIKE PRESIDENT

Today's economic mess, he says, calls for an FDR-like president who will sit down with the American people for fireside chats – who will talk them through the crisis, reassure them that government is on their side and instill in them the hope that their world can change.

If there's anything we know about Obama – no matter how tired we are of his campaign slogans – it's that he has the ability to inspire hope for change.

Amid the financial upheaval of the past few months, we'd all do well to take a hint from Robert Kuttner and try out his "cheeky exercise." A revolutionary tide change just may be hovering on the January horizon.

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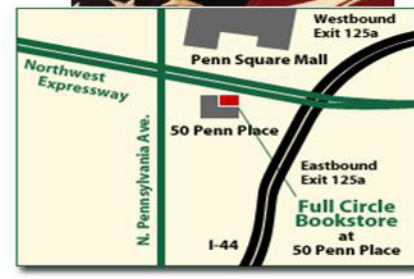
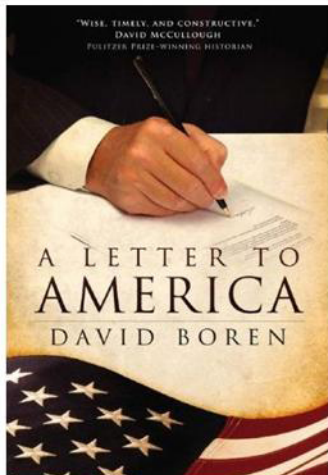
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THE OKLAHOMA Observer

Desperation Fueling Return Of Swift Boats

By Edwin E. Vineyard

When it is all said and done, this presidential campaign will likely go down as one of the dirtiest and most negative in history. As any U.S. history scholar will confirm, there have been a lot of dirty campaigns in our past.

Perhaps the first of these was perpetrated by John Adams against Thomas Jefferson. Andrew Jackson suffered insults to himself and his wife, and ended up killing an accuser in a duel. Grover Cleveland was attacked in debate for having fathered an illegitimate child. Some may recall his reply, "My illegitimate son is in Harvard. Where is yours?"

The modern era of dirty politics was ushered in by Richard Nixon. Called "Tricky Dick" for good reason, Nixon's campaign staff set a pattern for underhanded and unethical campaigns.

These were the underpinnings of the Lee Atwater school of smear tactics – not to be hindered by truth, civility, or ethics. Remember that it was the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate complex that Nixon's minions targeted for burglary.

MODERN REPUBLICAN ARSENAL

George H. W. Bush's campaign had the guiding hand of Atwater. He was the author of the Willie Horton ads, which blamed the Democratic nominee, Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis, for a murder committed by a black inmate on humane leave from a state prison. Although Dukakis had nothing to do with the episode, it was portrayed graphically as if it were personally orchestrated by him.

The Jim Inhofe campaign is using a commercial in a similar vein against his opponent, Andrew Rice, in today's Oklahoma U.S. Senate campaign. Branding your opponent as soft on crime and gays, or hard on guns, is still a favored Republican campaign tactic.

Then came the era of Karl Rove, an acolyte of Atwater. In 2000 he masterminded George W. Bush's dirty primary campaign against none other than John McCain. At a crucial time in the South Carolina primary, Bush accused McCain of fathering an illegitimate black child. It cost McCain that election, and set Bush on the path to capture the nomination.

FROM ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN TO SWIFT BOATS

Karl Rove also masterminded the dirty campaign against John Kerry, the worst being the privately financed swift-boaters avalanche of TV ads. That was an extremely dirty, smelly, smear tactic.

Rove is still not out of the picture. Even today a professional lobbyist and acolyte of the Rove-Atwater tradition, Rick Davis, is running McCain's campaign. Counters report that McCain's approved ads are running now in excess of 90% negative, while Obama's are less than 50%.

The McCain camp openly says it is attacking Obama's "character." That is, they are attacking the opponent personally rather than proposing constructive ideas for solving the nation's problems. They have apparently given up winning on merit.

HOPING SOMETHING – ANYTHING – WILL STICK

This has been a bad stretch for McCain/Palin personal negative attacks. They have tried hard to get some mud to stick, but it hasn't.

Negative ads about an opponent's proposals are one thing, but personal attack ads are another. The McCain camp has been attacking Obama personally, unfor-



tunately stretching truth and using "guilt by association" in the process.

If guilt by association is to be accepted, then McCain and Palin are two of the most guilty. How about the Keating Five and the Alaskan Independence Party?

Since McCain is behind now in the race, he is likely to get even more desperate, and the remainder of the campaign may get even dirtier. Observers think so.

HERE COME THE 2008 SWIFT BOATS

"Swift-boat" type ads against Obama are now emerging, sponsored by private moneyed groups with patriotic sounding names. These are likely to become worse and more frequent, as right-wing billionaire money comes into play.

Fearful of losing not only the presidential election but also seats in the House and Senate, these fringe groups are becoming active.

Remember that it was John McCain's "Campaign Finance Reform" law that authorized private attack groups to form in anonymity and secrecy and pour money into defeating an opponent without the candidate or his party accepting responsibility.

As exemplified by the "Swift-boaters," these moneyed groups have turned campaigns into latrine pits.

WHERE ARE FAMILY VALUES, CHRISTIAN ETHICS?

This gives one cause to wonder: "What kind of people support a candidate who engages or suborns such personal mudslinging? Is this the camp of 'family values,' God-fearing, and religious folk? Have these people been just grownup schoolyard bullies all the time?"

"What kind of candidate incites and condones hate expressions, as practiced in recent Republican political rallies? Who among us supports such? Does being a Republican require acquiescence to this?"

We might also ask the question: "What do we call those folk who have a slogan 'country first,' but engage in unnecessarily hostile, angry, political attack activity which divides that same country?"

We have heard before from a man who promised to "be a uniter and not a divider," and he led us into eight years as a bitterly fractured nation beset by vicissitudes on all sides.

This country has been going in the wrong direction. We need a different style of politics in America, led by a different kind of person.

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

OK, Boss, Which Would You Hire?

By Warren Hegg

What if John McCain were a former president of the Harvard Law Review? What if Barack Obama finished fifth from the bottom of his graduating class?

What if McCain were still married to the first woman he said "I do" to? What if Obama were the candidate who left his first wife after she no longer measured up to his standards? [Carol McCain was crippled in an auto accident.]

What if Michelle Obama were a wife who not only became addicted to pain killers, but acquired them illegally through her charitable organization? What if Cindy McCain graduated from Harvard?

WHAT ROLE WOULD ETHICS PLAY?

What if Obama were a member of the Keating Five? What if Obama was censured by the U.S. Senate for unethical conduct?

What if McCain were a charismatic, eloquent speaker?

If these questions reflected reality, do you really believe the election numbers would be as close as they are?

This is what racism does. It covers up, rationalizes and minimizes positive qualities in one candidate and emphasizes negative qualities in another when there is a color difference.

Boss ... which team would you hire?

With America facing historic debt, two wars, stumbling health care, a weakened dollar, all-time high prison population, mortgage crises, bank foreclosures, etc.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Obama: Columbia University, BA in Political Science with a specialization in International Relations; Harvard, Juris Doctor [JD] Magna Cum Laude.

Biden: University of Delaware, BA in History and BA in Political Science; Syracuse University College of Law, Juris Doctor [JD]

McCain: United States Naval Academy. Class rank: 894 of 899.

Palin: Hawaii Pacific University, one semester; North Idaho College, two semesters, general study; University of Idaho, two semesters, studying journalism; Matanuska Susitna College, one semester; University of Idaho, three semesters, BA in journalism.

Now, which team are you going to hire?

P.S.: What if Barack Obama had an unwed, pregnant teenage daughter ...?

– The author is founder and president of Digital Clubhouse Network www.digiclub.org

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List Of McCain's Nastiest Moments

By Melissa McEwan

Is John McCain “truly as nasty and belligerent as he appears to be? Is he really that bad – or is it just one of those partisan themes that develops about an opponent?”

I’m guessing many are asking that question, and, since detailing McCain’s long list of objectionable qualities has been what one might call a specialty of mine, I figured I’d put together a little collection of McCain’s nastiest hits to answer that question and for handy-dandy reference.

Accusing the Democrats of being sore losers and obstructionists motivated by partisan “bitterness” just because they had the temerity to not treat Condoleezza Rice’s confirmation as Secretary of State as “a foregone conclusion.”

ATTACKS ANTI-WAR CONGRESSMAN

Accusing Vietnam veteran Congressman Jack Murtha of being “too emotional” to be rational about the war.

Sending then-freshman Sen. Barack Obama what Matt Stoller called “remarkable” and one of “the single most bitter, nasty letters I have ever seen from any senator.”

Threatening to leave an appearance before the AFL-CIO’s Building and Construction Trades Department because members of the audience challenged his statements on immigration, organized labor, and the war.

He also questioned their work ethic and skills, telling them “You can’t do it, my friends,” when some accepted his hypothetical job offer of \$50 an hour to pick lettuce in Arizona.

JOKING ABOUT SUICIDE

Threatening to commit suicide if Democrats win a majority in the Senate. Using the racially-charged and highly inappropriate term “tar baby,” singing about bombing Iran.

Responding to criticisms of that hilarious little ditty by snapping:

“Please, I was talking to some of my old veterans friends. My response is, lighten up and get a life,” without, naturally, the merest glimmer of irony that he’d been casually joking about taking lives.

Telling critic Jon Stewart he’d brought him an IED from Iraq as a gift.

Responding to Congressman Murtha’s criticism of that hilarious joke with: “All I’m going to say to Murtha and others ... Lighten up and get a life,” to what ought to have been obvious to any halfwit but eluded the witless.

McCain: “The point is that dead troops and other victims are no longer capable of getting a life.”

CURSING A FELLOW GOP SENATOR

Erupting at fellow Republican Sen. John Cornyn in a meeting about immigration legislation, McCain accused Cornyn of raising a concern just to torpedo a legislative deal, using a curse word associated with chickens, and shouted “[Expletive] you! I know more about this than anyone else in the room!”



Responding to one of his supporters asking of Hillary Clinton, “How do we beat the bitch?” by laughing. Saying he hoped Fidel Castro would die.

Shoving one of his Republican colleagues and repeatedly calling another “boy.”

Telling women to get “education and training” instead of fighting for equal pay in the Legislature. Joking about his reputation as “Senator Hothead.”

Calling Obama’s response to Bush’s outrageous suggestion that Obama wants to appease terrorists a “hysterical diatribe.” Got that? Bush calling Obama a terrorist sympathizer isn’t a hysterical diatribe? But Obama defending himself against the charge is?

JOKING ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Joking about domestic violence. Joking about exporting cigarettes to kill Iranians. Joking about rape.

Asserting that Obama “would rather lose a war in order to win a political campaign.” Challenging Obama’s patriotism.

He can’t get along with his colleagues, even the ones on his side of the aisle. He flies off the handle when he doesn’t get his way. He’s hostile toward anyone who disagrees with him.

He has no seeming objection to the casual use of sexist and racist language, and he makes highly inappropriate jokes about rape and violence against women and war and death, including the murder of TV hosts and deaths of foreign leaders.

Is this the kind of person we really want leading our country? Is that the kind of person we want as our head of government, no less our head of state?

– The author writes and edits the blog *Shakespeare’s Sister*

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Catholics Fight Over Church’s Teaching

By David D. Kirkpatrick

As the Roman Catholic Church observed its annual “respect life” Sunday in this heated presidential election season, the unusually pitched competition for Catholic voters is setting off a round of skirmishes over how to apply the church’s teachings not only on abortion but also on the war in Iraq, immigration and racism.

In a departure from previous elections, Democrats and liberal Catholic groups are waging a fight within the church, arguing that the Democratic Party better reflects the full spectrum of church teachings.

It is a contest for credibility among observant Catholics, with each faction describing itself as a defender of “life.” The two sides disagree over how to address the “intrinsic evil” of abortion.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that the head of the AFL/CIO in Missouri had stormed out of mass because his priest had invoked Hitler’s name in condemning Democratic support for abortion rights.

OKLAHOMA BISHOPS JOHNNY-ONE-NOTES

The escalating efforts by thinking Catholics are provoking a vigorous backlash from some bishops [especially from johnny-one-note Oklahoma bishops] and the far right.

Douglas W. Kmiec, a Catholic legal scholar who was a legal counsel in the administrations of President Ronald Reagan and the first President George Bush, has been telling Catholic audiences in Pennsylvania and other swing states that Obama’s platform better fits Catholic social teaching, including reducing the abortion rate.

Kmiec, who recently published a book on the subject – *Can a Catholic Support Him? Asking the Big Question about Barack Obama* – was speaking in Scranton when Bishop Joseph Martino issued his letter rebutting those arguments.

HOW HIS CRITICS RESPOND

Asked how his Republican colleagues were responding to his Obama evangelism, Kmiec acknowledged some resistance.

“Some remind me that George Washington gave orders for Benedict Arnold to be shot on sight,” he said.

In Scranton, every Catholic attending mass that weekend heard a special homily about the election. Bishop Martino ordered every priest in the diocese to read a letter warning that voting for a supporter of abortion rights amounts to endorsing “homicide.”

In response, a coalition of lay Catholics is pushing back, criticizing the bishop’s message for neglecting other aspects of “life” talked about in Catholic social teachings, especially concern for the poor, the single most often mentioned subject in the Bible.

NUN NOTES THAT RACISM IS A SIN

To underscore the point, a nun is collecting signatures of prominent Catholic leaders there for a newspaper advertisement reminding those who may be wary of voting for Obama that the church also considers racism a sin that threatens the dignity of life.

“Here in Scranton, racist attitudes often prevent us from seeing all of our fellow citizens and candidates for public office as God’s children,” says the petition, circulated by Sister Margaret P. Gannon, a professor at Marywood University.

Scranton is also one of several heavily Catholic, working-class cities in swing states – like Cincinnati; Cleveland; Detroit; Erie, PA; Pittsburgh; and St. Louis – where a new network of groups such as Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Catholics United, are trying to promote the church’s social justice teachings.

CATHOLICS ARE A CENTRAL FOCUS

Catholics make up about a quarter of the electorate nationwide and about a third in many of the most heavily contested states in the Northeast and Midwest, an increasingly central focus of both presidential campaigns.

The Obama campaign has trained its grass-roots organizers in the details of recent policy statements of the Bishops Conference. [Obama supports abortion rights.]

Thinking Catholics cite a 2007 statement from the United States bishops explicitly condoning a vote for a candidate who supports abortion rights if the vote

See CATHOLICS Page 16

Whoa, Podnah! McCain All Hat, No Maverick

By Jim Hightower

If you watched the television coverage of John McCain's acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, you might have noticed a delegate brandishing a hand-lettered sign proclaiming McCain to be "THE MAVRICK."

The misspelling was made even more embarrassing by the fact that, just when the sign was being flashed to a worldwide TV audience, the GOP nominee was mentioning the need to deal with adult literacy.

Worse than a misspelling, however, is the gross misapplication of the label.

Far from a maverick, McCain is a 26-year Washington insider who is now the trusted candidate of America's corporate establishment.

AN UNABASHED CORPORATIST

He's such a reliable conformist to the corporate agenda that, at last count, 177 lobbyists for Big Oil, Wall Street banks, telecommunications giants and other industries form the very core of his campaign.

The campaign manager, chief strategist, top economic advisor, foreign policy director and fundraising chairman – lobbyists all.

Yet, there's a concerted and cynical political effort to dress the candidate as an unruly outsider who'll defy the corporate order in Washington. McCain bills himself as a "maverick of the Senate," and Sarah Palin perkily joins the chorus, describing the ticket as "a team of mavericks."

Puh-leeze. It's been my privilege to know some genuine mavericks [including one actually named Maverick], and I can tell you, John McCain is not one of them.

THE REAL MAVERICKS

The term itself comes from Samuel Augustus Maverick, an early Texas land baron who helped win Texas' independence from Mexico in 1836. Somewhat of a quirky rancher, he steadfastly refused to brand his cattle. As a result, any unbranded steers wandering the range became known as "mavericks."

The term soon entered the vernacular to describe independent-minded people who wore no one's brand – rebels, nonconformists and dissenters.

In the 1930s, this proud trait flowered in the boldly progressive political life of Maury Maverick, grandson of the old rancher. In 1934, Maury beat the monied establishment of San Antonio to become a member of Congress.

An ardent New Dealer, he was a spirited opponent of both entrenched corporate interests and recalcitrant bureaucrats [he coined the term "gobbledygook"].

WHAT A REAL MAVERICK DID

He returned home to become mayor of San Antonio in 1939, standing for such public works projects as the construction of the now-famous San Antonio River Walk, while also facing down a Ku Klux Klan lynch mob as part of his effort to



help empower the city's Mexican-American population.

Then came Maury Jr., a feisty state representative in the 1950s and a crusty lifelong fighter for civil liberties. He battled the state's oil and gas barons, and had the courage to stand against the racists and red-baiters of the Joe McCarthy period.

He died nearly broke in 2003 after decades as a brilliant ACLU lawyer, working for free to help win a little justice for such outsiders and freethinkers as civil rights protestors, conscientious objectors, communists and atheists.

That, my friends, is a maverick.

MISAPPROPRIATING THE MAVERICK MONIKER

It's an insult to those who have earned the moniker [often at great personal sacrifice] to have it usurped by political hucksters. Maury Jr.'s nephew recently said that if he hears ONE MORE TIME that McCain is a maverick, he's going to shoot the TV!

And who can blame him?

After all, being hoisted toward the presidency on the beefy shoulders of corporate lobbyists is the very opposite of being a maverick. Voting in lockstep with George W. 90% of the time hardly makes you a rebel within your party. Pushing the agendas of insurance corporations, oil drillers, war contractors, investment bankers and the like makes you a meek conformist, not a courageous iconoclast.

McCain's been branded again and again with the logos of corporate powers. Call him what you will, but be honest – he's damned sure no maverick.

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Nasty Politics Reveals Much About McCain

By Joe Conason

Nothing in the presidential campaign so far has been as instructive as its swift descent into the politics of personal destruction. Although voters have probably heard little lately that they did not already know about Sen. Barack Obama, they have learned something very important about Sen. John McCain.

Back when this contest began, McCain expressed the desire for a different kind of campaign than we have seen in recent years.

Rather than the old style of character-assassination politics perfected by his former nemesis Karl Rove to defeat him, Al Gore and John Kerry, the Arizona Republican urged a substantive debate and a fair comparison of public careers.

He invited Mr. Obama to join him in a series of town hall meetings to discuss their competing visions of the nation's future. He hoped to run "a respectful campaign focused on the issues and values that are important to the American people."

WHAT LOSING HATH WROUGHT

That is what the man known for straight talk said he wanted. But it is no longer possible to assume that he meant it, even then. Now that he is losing, he has sunk into the same shameful conduct that he once professed to despise.

Entering the election's final weeks, the rhetoric of the former maverick and his lipstick-toting pit bull, Gov. Sarah Palin, has turned so ugly and inflammatory that their rallies have begun to sound like lynch mobs.

"Who is the real Barack Obama?" asked McCain at a rally in New Mexico – and didn't correct a thug who yelled, "Terrorist!" in response.

"Kill him!" screamed the crowd at a rally in Florida after Palin smeared Obama for his supposed association with former Weather Underground bomber Bill Ayers.

She didn't object to the lynching cry, but went on to say: "I'm afraid [Obama] is someone who sees America as 'imperfect enough' to work with a former domestic terrorist who had targeted his own country."

LIEBERMAN'S TWO FACES

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, the McCain surrogate from Connecticut, assures us that this is "all fair game," a statement that would be surprising if it were not uttered by him. He was happy to accept Obama's support when his own reelection was in jeopardy two years ago, and he is happy to help smear him today.

But is it fair game? Considering that Obama was a child when Ayers was involved in those bombings, and that he has forthrightly condemned the Weather

Underground's lethally insane conduct, it is neither fair nor germane.

It is somewhat less fair, for instance, than dredging up McCain's old association with an international fascist outfit called the World Anti-Communist League.

Back when he joined up with WACL, a quarter-century ago, the shadowy group was a haven for war criminals, drug smugglers and other miscreants from Europe, Latin America, Asia and the Mideast, promoting the ideology of the far right, supposedly to combat the Soviet foe. Among those involved in WACL were the fascist terrorists identified as responsible for bombings in Italy that had killed hundreds of innocent people.

MCCAIN WAS AN ADULT

Was McCain, then a political neophyte, responsible for the crimes of his associates in WACL? No, but he was an adult when he signed up, and he lent his prestige to them.

He says he quit, but John Singlaub, the ultra-right former Army general who served as WACL's American frontman for many years, doesn't recall him resigning.

Then there is McCain's former association with financial crook Charles Keating, who was not only a political supporter but also a benefactor who brought Cindy McCain into his investments and bestowed free Caribbean vacations on the McCain family.

Is it fair to revisit that old controversy, which the senator thinks he has expiated? Only because his campaign wants to distract the public with discussions of "character."

THIS IS WHAT HONOR MEANS?

What these concluding weeks have told us about the Republican candidate, to the shock and surprise of many of his admirers, is that he misunderstands the meaning of honor.

Evidently he believes that the credit he accrued for suffering bravely for his country in Vietnam somehow licenses him to campaign as crudely and deceptively as he can, if that will help him to win.

He seems not to realize that the respect he earned so many years ago requires him to uphold a higher standard of decency in politics.

A leader who doesn't realize that honor can be lost as well as earned is a danger to himself and his country.

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Issues That Keep People From Voting

By Allison H. Fine

Enormous efforts have been made by campaigns and public interest groups to register people to vote on Nov. 4. According to the Election Assistance Commission, more than two million poll workers will be working at over 200,000 polling places this election.

Unfortunately, what these new voters don't know is that just registering to vote may not ensure that they are able to vote on Election Day or that their vote will be counted. Here are the top five ways that voters will be disenfranchised before and on Election Day.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY

1. Twenty-seven states [including Oklahoma] closed their voter registration the first week of October; another 12 followed shortly thereafter.

Too many states continue to cut off registration just as most people are beginning to tune into the election. Election Day Registration [EDR] in nine states has demonstrated that it is an efficient and problem-free way for 10%-12% more citizens to participate on Election Day.

DELIBERATE DISENFRANCHISING TACTIC

2. The Social Security Administration is shutting down its database, the one needed to verify registrations for people without state-issued IDs for three days in mid-October. This "routine maintenance" by the Bush crowd puts in jeopardy the ability of 41 slow moving states to verify millions of new registrants in time for Election Day for voters without state-issued IDs.

Millions of people may have properly filled out their registration forms but not make it onto the rolls if this maintenance continues as scheduled.

MILLIONS STRICKEN FROM VOTER ROLLS

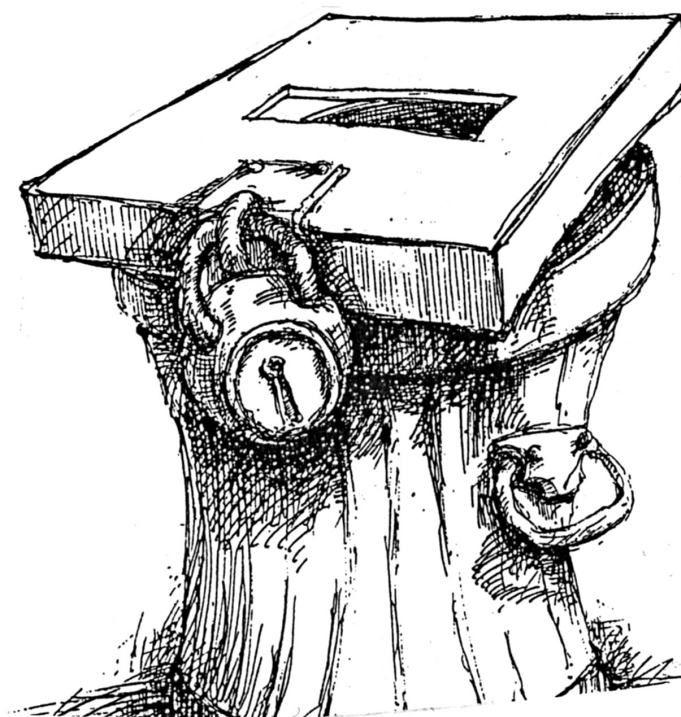
3. Voter Purge – a report released from the Brennan Center for Justice – reveals that "election officials across the country are routinely striking millions of voters from the rolls through a process that is shrouded in secrecy, prone to error, and vulnerable to manipulation."

Millions of names will be struck from voter registration roles in advance of the Nov. 4 election – and if your name is struck in error – you won't know until you show up at the polls and it's too late to change it.

NEW MACHINES AREN'T BETTER

4. The new voting machines are no better than the old machines that were much worse than hand ballots. During the primary season, municipalities were testing optical scan machines, and many failed. Others have been furiously buying new machines that won't be tested before Nov. 4.

How many times will we hear on election night that votes have been cast and



lost or just plain lost? Moreover, how many elections are we going to keep hearing this?

CREATING BOTTLENECKS

5. You remember those pictures from 2004 and 2006 of voters waiting for hours to cast their ballots – up to 12 hours in some cases in the rain and cold. Our voting system is a mechanical engineer's nightmare.

The biggest bottleneck in the process of voting is checking in to ensure that voters are registered to vote – this is a human interaction that is slow and tedious.

I spoke to a person in the registrar's office in Fairfax County, VA, who told me that they had increased the number of recruited poll workers from 2,600 in 2004 to 3,100 this year.

Here's the real problem: There is no way to know until Election Day if they will show up, whether they have been adequately trained for the job and whether there are enough of them to account for the expected surge in voting in critical voting areas like Cuyahoga County, OH, and Palm Beach County, FL.

Cross your fingers that your vote will be cast and counted on Election Day – in some states your chances aren't so good. Thankfully, Oklahoma is not one of them we have to worry about.

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GOP Election Day Strategy: Disenfranchise

By Jim Hightower

Vote! Editorialists remind us that it's our privilege and patriotic duty to vote. Candidates of all stripes plead with us to vote. "Vote," declares a billboard campaign sponsored by McDonald's. Even Tiffany & Co. chimes in with a pricey pin that spells out "vote" in diamonds.

But not everyone is in the civic spirit. Rather than urging folks everywhere to join in America's festive democratic exercise, there are ugly and aggressive efforts across the land to harass, intimidate and outright block legitimate voters. Ironically, at a time when massive turn-out-the-vote drives are being mounted, various Republican partisans are pushing some widespread voter-suppression drives.

A tricky one called "vote caging" has appeared in Colorado, Florida, Michigan and Ohio. It involves a letter from the Republican National Committee that's been sent to households of older Democrats.

Signed by John McCain, this first-class letter has "Do not forward" printed on the envelope. If recipients are having their mail forwarded to, say, a summer home, the RNC piece never reaches them. Instead, it goes back to the GOP.

A MEANS TO CHALLENGE VOTES

Here's the game: An undeliverable letter can be used later at a polling place on Election Day to challenge the eligibility of the voter, asserting that said voter does not really live in the precinct.

Another variant of caging deserves an especially hot layer of hell for its practitioners. The Michigan Republican Party has threatened to use foreclosure lists to challenge the eligibility of people who're losing their homes, claiming they don't really live there.

Just the threat will keep some of these hard-hit families from even trying to vote, for they'll think to themselves: "You know, I've got enough problems right now without this hassle, so forget it."

Then there are America's wounded veterans in Veterans Affairs hospitals. In a move that leaves me whopper-jawed, George W.'s secretary of Veterans Affairs issued an edict in May banning voter-registration drives inside VA facilities.

SLAMMING DEMOCRACY'S DOOR ON VETS

For decades, nonpartisan groups routinely have been allowed inside so vets who served our country and suffered physical and mental harm could register. But now the Bushites have slammed democracy's door on them.

Under pressure from Congress and veterans groups, the VA officially reversed

this inane policy last month, but registration campaigns say they still were being blocked even as registration deadlines passed Oct. 4.

College students are special targets of suppression this year. With predictions that the November election will produce the largest turnout of young people in history, there's been an impressive outburst of creativity by GOP voting officials who want to dilute that turnout.

In Colorado Springs, for example, the county election office, run by Republicans, sent word to out-of-state students at Colorado College that they could not vote at their school precinct if their parents claimed them as dependents for tax purposes. This is, of course, false.

Curiously, it was directed at the liberal arts college, but there's no sign that the same message was sent to Republican-minded students at the Air Force Academy, also located in Colorado Springs.

SCHOLARSHIPS IN JEOPARDY?

At Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, a voter registrar warned students that they could lose scholarships if they tried to vote there. At Radford University, also in the battleground state of Virginia, a registrar automatically denied all voting applications that listed dorm addresses. And at Virginia's Old Dominion University, students got intimidating questionnaires from the local election board asking whether their cars were registered out of state.

The Supreme Court, by the way, has ruled that students can vote where they go to school.

These tactics to keep people from the polls are disgraceful insults to our nation's proud democratic ideals. It should be easy to vote, and every vote should be encouraged. Easing the system and halting these nonsensical suppression efforts should be a priority of the next Congress.

Let's really mean it when we say, "Vote!"

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**THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND.
VOTE.**
- WOODY GUTHRIE

Troopergate Becomes Bush-Style Whitewash

By Joe Conason

For anyone who followed the story of how and why Sarah Palin fired her state's public safety commissioner, the recent release of a legislative investigation that found she had violated state ethics statutes was anticlimactic.

After all, everyone knows that she and her husband, Todd, tried to push Walt Monegan, then Alaska's public safety commissioner, to fire a state trooper named Mike Wooten, who was involved in a bitter divorce from Ms. Palin's sister – and that after Monegan refused, he lost his job.

But while the state probe's conclusions were unsurprising, there is still something to be learned from its findings and the McCain-Palin campaign's response: From beginning to end, this episode demonstrates a disregard for the rule of law and a contemptuous attitude toward truth that are all too familiar by now.

MORE OF THE SAME

Here, too, the election of the Republican ticket will mean more of what we have already experienced for the past eight years.

It is a pattern that can be traced back through the years of the Bush Administration whenever a whiff of scandal arises: Promise a thorough investigation and full cooperation with the lawful authorities. Then stonewall and withhold evidence and testimony so that the investigation can never quite be completed.

Insist that the partial investigation is actually a full and complete exoneration, even if official reports and prosecutors clearly indicate otherwise. Create a "reality" that will be mirrored and echoed by friendly media and the partisan base, while denigrating any effort to discuss actual facts as a conspiracy by the "liberal" media.

Whitewash, rinse and repeat.

THE KARL ROVE PLAYBOOK

The same seedy pattern can be traced in the White House response to the Valerie Plame scandal and more recently in the probe of the firing of U.S. attorneys, both of which implicated the former deputy chief of staff, Karl Rove.

And it can be seen just as clearly in the way that Palin and her campaign handlers have dealt with the problems of "Troopergate" – which culminated in her strange statement claiming that the scorching report on her firing of Monegan had "cleared" her.

"I'm very, very pleased to be cleared of any legal wrongdoing, any hint of any kind of unethical activity there. Very pleased to be cleared of any of that," she told reporters. "If you read the report, you'll see that there was nothing unlawful or unethical about replacing a cabinet member."

Or as McCain campaign manager and lobbyist Rick Davis assured the credulous audience of Fox News Channel: "The reality is there was absolutely no wrongdoing found in the report ... [and] no violations of any kinds of laws or ethics rules."

THERE WERE CLEAR VIOLATIONS

Reading the 263-page report, however, it is obvious that Palin was no more cleared of unethical activity than she blocked the "bridge to nowhere." In fact,



BY HANDELSMAN FOR NEWSDAY

precisely the reverse is true.

The legislative report, filed by one of Alaska's most respected and nonpartisan prosecutors, states with absolute clarity that as governor, Palin violated the Executive Branch Ethics Act, which prohibits any official from seeking to "benefit a personal interest."

She, her husband and her aides tried on nearly 20 separate occasions to induce Monegan to fire her former brother-in-law.

The wording of the report's conclusion could not be plainer – namely that "impermissible pressure was placed on several subordinates in order to advance a personal agenda, to wit: to get Trooper Michael Wooten fired."

But she didn't violate state law – as far as the investigation could determine – because that law permitted her to fire Monegan for any reason whatsoever. The ethics violations occurred before the firing.

AN ALLERGY TO DISCLOSURE

The other bad habit that Palin seems to share with Rove and the Republicans currently in power is her allergy to disclosure, even when required by law. The 263-page report notes acutely that the Palin probe suffered from stonewalling by members of her administration, with at least 10 top officials refusing to testify or ignoring subpoenas, presumably on the advice of the New York lawyer hired by the McCain campaign.

Some of those same individuals later "agreed" to provide responses to written questions – not the same as sworn testimony – long after their answers would have been useful to the investigators.

Moreover, the Palin administration refused to provide e-mails and other documentation that the investigators required. Executive privilege, they cried, parroting the perennial Bush line.

John McCain enhanced his reputation over the past eight years by his occasional demurrals from the worst abuses of the Bush Administration, including torture. Aware of the president's bottoming poll numbers, he said the other day that "we cannot spend the next four years as we have spent much of the last eight."

But that is precisely what we will do if he and his unethical pit bull enter the White House.

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Jesse's Not-So-Secret Wish: Obama's Defeat?

By Susan Estrich

A Barack Obama victory will mean many things at home and abroad. It will mean a new team on foreign and domestic policy and new political leadership for both the Democratic Party and the country.

And it will mean, finally, the end of any excuse to listen to the self-involved, selfish and stupid rantings of the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Earlier this year, Jackson made a complete fool of himself with his jealous tirade against Obama, spoken into an open mike and ultimately heard by millions.

It doesn't bear repeating, and I would not be writing about it today were it not for the sad but not surprising fact that Jackson is now selling himself as a member of Obama's "family" – or vice versa – and pontificating in an ignorant and divisive way about the changes an Obama Administration will bring.

HOPING OBAMA WILL LOSE?

If you didn't know better, you might think Jackson wants Obama to lose. And I wouldn't be surprised if he does. A President Obama makes Jackson politically irrelevant.

Jackson's latest outburst came during the inaugural World Policy Forum held at some fancy resort in France. The only surprise here is that it seemed to take almost a week for Jackson's drivel to reach American shores. But it's arrived, proving once again that the man who once called New York "Hymietown" has learned very little from his mistakes.

If you haven't seen it yet, you will. Check out www.drudgereport.com. The headline is impossible to overlook. "Jesse Jackson: Under Obama, 'decades of putting Israel's interests first' would end." According to Jackson, the "Zionists who have controlled American policy for decades" will lose clout.

Could he have really said these things? So it appears. But why?

JACKSON HAS NO INSIDE INFORMATION

Let's eliminate the obvious reasons for concern about such a comment. Could Jackson know something about Obama's plans that the rest of us don't? Short

answer: No.

Jackson didn't pretend – how could he? – to be an Obama adviser or confidant. He called himself a "supporter," although I can think of other words to describe a guy who would talk about Obama the way he did. But, of course, Jesse being Jesse, he couldn't stop there.

Tens of millions of people are Obama supporters. Being an Obama supporter wouldn't make Jackson worth listening to.

Obama, Jackson told the New York Post, is "a neighbor or, better still, a member of the family." Better for whom? Jackson's son has long been close to Obama, and his daughter went to school with Michelle Obama. But that doesn't make Jackson a member of the Obama family. Not even close.

Could Jackson be right, even if he doesn't have any inside information? Short answer: No.

ZIONISTS DON'T CONTROL U.S. POLICY

Bad news, Jesse: "Zionists" haven't controlled American foreign policy for decades. Americans have – Americans who recognize that Israel is the only stable democracy in the Middle East, a stalwart friend to America, and that supporting Israel is right both strategically and morally. And those Americans will also control policy during an Obama Administration.

Indeed, during the primaries, the Obama campaign crowed about just how many former foreign policy advisers from the Clinton Administration were now working for Obama. Call them what you will, Jesse, they're on their way back.

The senator himself repeatedly went out of his way to assure voters that he and Hillary were in fundamental agreement on protecting the security of the state of Israel.

Expecting a major change in policy from the "Zionist control" of the last decades? No such "luck."

So if he doesn't have inside information – and he doesn't even seem to know

See JACKSON Page 16

Fox News Effect

It's Hard To Change The Misperceptions

By Sean Gonsalves

A long time ago, Mark Twain told us: "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

Entwined in Twain's train of thought is an implicit and important distinction – the difference between being uninformed and being misinformed.

Today, there's scholarship to back up Twain's theory that being ignorant isn't as troublesome as being certain about something that "just ain't so."

Ignorance can be educated. But what's the antidote to misinformation? Correct information? [How do you counter Fox News' "fair and balanced" assertion, when it isn't?]

Not exactly – according to political scientists Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, co-authors of one of the few academic studies on the subject, "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions."

THE TRUTH MAKES NO DIFFERENCE

While it may seem like common sense to think misinformation can be countered by giving people the real 411, Nyhan and Reifler's research indicates that correct information often fails to reduce misperceptions among the ideologically-committed, particularly doctrinaire conservatives.

That's something many readers of this column understand intuitively after having seen false claims like Obama-is-a-Muslim refuted over and over again and yet, unbelievably, they somehow manage to persist.

There's lots of research on citizen ignorance but there's only a handful of studies that focus on misinformation and the effect it has on political opinions.

CHANGING MISINFORMED OPINIONS

Nyhan and Reifler's work adds to what Yale University political scientist Robert Bullock has found: it's possible to correct and change misinformed political opinions, but the truth [small 't'] ain't enough.

In Bullock's experimental study, participants were shown the transcript for an ad created by a pro-choice group opposing the Supreme Court nomination of John Roberts.

The ad falsely accused Roberts of "supporting violent fringe groups and a convicted clinic bomber."

JACKSON

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the people who would – why is Jackson spouting off in a way that is certain to cause concern among the millions of voters, Jews and non-Jews alike, who are firmly committed to the security of the state of Israel, and whose support, both in terms of financial backing and actual votes, Obama needs if he is to turn his current lead in the polls into an actual victory in November?

Jackson is many things, but stupid he isn't. He has to understand when he makes comments like this that, first, they will get back to America, more likely sooner than later, and that when they do, they will, unless repudiated, hurt and not help Obama.

At best, they are divisive. At worst, they are harmful to Obama. So why make them, even if you believe them?

SAY GOODNIGHT, JESSE

The short – and unavoidable – answer is that Jackson does not want Obama to become president of the United States.

The election of Obama means Jackson is wrong: that America is not hopelessly racist; that the politics of victimization is not the right answer for African-Americans; that a qualified black candidate can do what an unqualified one couldn't.

Say goodnight, Jesse. A new day is dawning, and it's not about "Zionists" losing control.

If Jackson can look in the mirror, he will see who is about to lose control and credibility. Couldn't happen soon enough.

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CATHOLICS

From Page 12

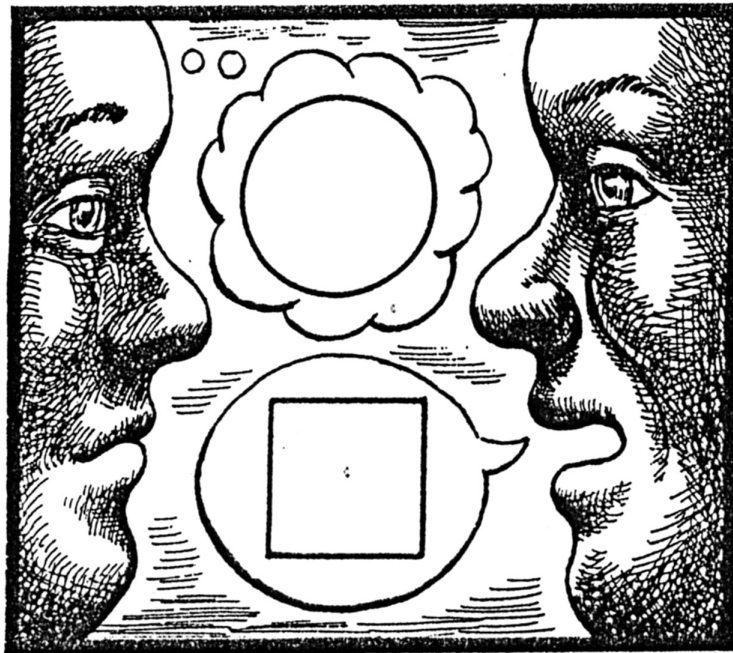
The subtleties can be slippery. The Cathedral of St. Peter in Wilmington, DE, where Biden lives, is promoting a video produced by the conservative Catholic group Fidelis that is intended to persuade Catholic voters to put opposition to abortion rights and same-sex marriage above all.

The Bishops Conference, perhaps to forestall a blizzard of competing pamphlets, has banned third-party voter guides from parishes, requiring the explicit endorsement of the presiding bishop.

Alexia Kelley, executive director of Catholics in Alliance, said her organization was spending more than \$250,000 on radio, print and billboard advertisements in Scranton and other heavily Catholic areas.

The advertisements emphasize what Ms. Kelley described as the broader spectrum of Catholic concerns about the "common good," including health care, jobs and home foreclosures.

© Truthout



What Bullock found was that 56% of the Democratic participants disapproved of Roberts before hearing the misinformation. After seeing the attack ad, it jumped to 80%.

TRUTH DIDN'T CHANGE MOST MINDS

When they were shown an ad that refuted the misinformation and were also told the pro-choice group had withdrawn the original ad, the disapproval rating didn't drop back down to 56% but to 72%.

Nyhan and Reifler conducted a series of studies where subjects were presented with mock news articles on "hot button" issues that included demonstrably false assertions:

Iraq possessed WMD immediately before the U.S. invasion. Tax cuts lead to economic growth. Bush banned stem cell research, as Sens. Kerry and Kennedy claimed during the 2004 presidential campaign.

With the Iraq-possessed-WMD immediately before the invasion assertion, participants were shown mock news articles supporting the unfounded Bush Administration.

DETAILED EVIDENCE IGNORED

Then they were provided the refutation by way of the Duelfer Report, which authoritatively details the documented lack of WMD, or even an active production program, in Iraq just before the invasion. Instead of changing the minds of ideologically-committed war-backers, Nyhan and Reifler found a "backfire effect" in which Iraq invasion-supporters only slightly modified their view without letting go of the misinformation by saying "Saddam Hussein was able to hide or destroy these weapons right before U.S. forces arrived." Sigh.

Nyhan and Reifler attribute that kind of "thinking" to the affects of "motivated reasoning," which can distort how people process information.

THE SITUATION IS EVEN WORSE

"As a result [of motivated reasoning] the corrections fail to reduce misperceptions for the most committed participants. Even worse, they actually strengthen misperceptions among ideological subgroups."

Now you know why those back-and-forth on-line debates so often prove to be fruitless.

Unfortunately, neither Bullock, Nyhan, or Reifler suggest a way to successfully counter misinformation clung to by those who hold their political opinions with an air of certitude.

Washington Post columnist Shankar Vedantam suggests wrapping refutations in language that enhances the self-esteem of the misinformed.

Whatever you do, just don't forget Twain's timeless advice: "tell the truth or trump – but get the trick."

– The author is a syndicated columnist and news editor with the Cape Cod Times

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RED STATE

From Page One

Oklahoma this year, it is not too late to begin pushing back against the agents of intolerance, the corporatists and the theocrats.

There is anecdotal evidence that more Oklahomans are confronting heavy-handed religious leaders and self-righteous, judgmental parishioners. For example, Catholics here – and elsewhere [see page 12] – are speaking out, and sometimes joining forces, to oppose what they view as political pressure from church leaders.

Further, the state's leading elected Democrats must no longer cower to the noisy demagoguery of rightwing ideologues, even if it risks political defeat in the short term. It's difficult to imagine Democratic lawmakers can't visit the local coffee shops and make winning, common-sense arguments to their neighbors on behalf of those who can't help themselves – the poor, the mentally ill and children, just to name a few.

"The problem in Oklahoma is no one is willing to speak out," says Dr. Robert Darcy, a regents professor of political science at Oklahoma State University and ironically – in light of his comments – a lifelong Republican.

"You can't expect the mass of the state to be ahead of its leadership. If you don't have [Gov.] Brad Henry and prominent Democrats speaking out and defining their presidential nominee and what they stand for and against" then a political void is left for "the extreme rightwing to demagogue everybody."

Oklahoma deserves so much better.

Credit Card Debt Collapse Is Next

By Danny Schechter

Let me try a few words out on you: "Charge It," "Swipe It" and "Priceless."

You know exactly what I am talking about. We all have credit and debit cards. We all use them, and many of us keep our lives going because of them. That is, until the bill comes due.

The sad truth is that we are all complicit in our own economic servitude even if, at bottom, it's not our fault because we live in a consumption society, and don't feel we could live without them.

While many eyes are focusing on the housing meltdown and its hugely negative effect on an economy clearly moving into recession, few are paying attention to the next bubble expected to burst: credit cards.

CREDIT CARD NIGHTMARE POTENTIAL

Combined with the subprime losses, such a credit card nightmare has the potential, experts say, of bringing down the entire financial system and global economy.

You and your credit card have become key players in the highly unstable financial crunch. Mortgage lender cupidity and bank credit card greed wedded to financial institution deregulation supported by both political parties have been made manifestly worse by Bush Administration support-the-rich policies. It has brought us to a brink not seen since just before the Great Depression.

While campaigning in Edinburg, TX, in February, Barack Obama met with students at the University of Texas-Pan American.

OBAMA PREDICTS THE NEXT FAILURE

"Just be careful about those credit cards, all right? Don't eat out as much," he said. After the foreclosure crisis, he warned, "the credit cards are next in line."

The coupling of home equity debt and credit card debt has gone hand in glove for years. The homeowners at risk can no longer use their homes as ATM machines, thanks to their prior re-financings and equity loans, often used in the past to pay off their credit cards.

Indeed, homeowners cashed out \$1.2 trillion from their home equity from 2002 to 2007 to pay down credit card debts and to cover other costs of living, according to the public policy research organization Demos.

FEWER PAYING BILLS ON TIME

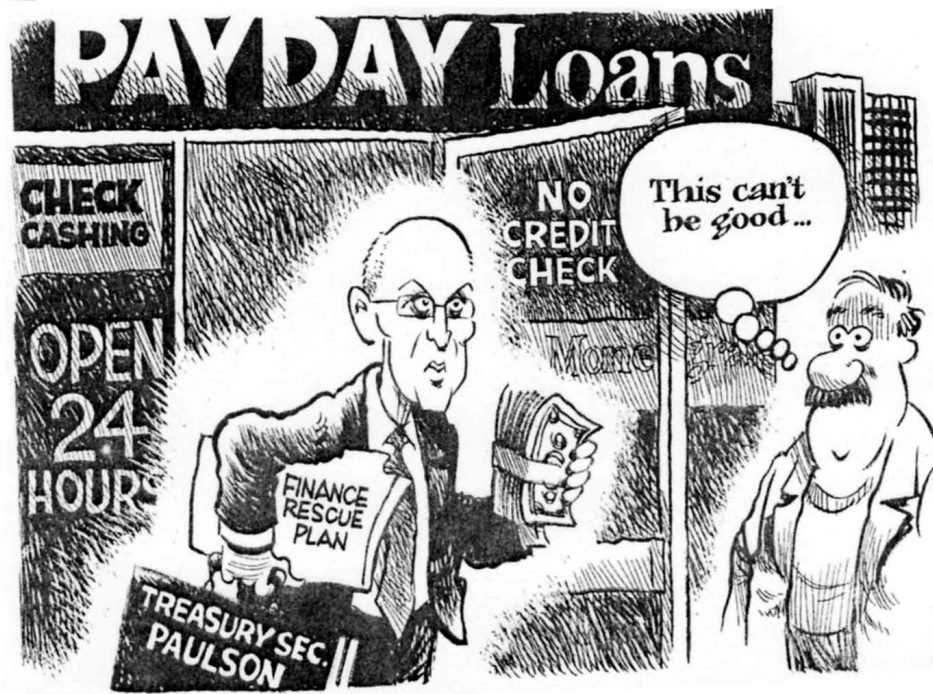
To compound the problem, fewer people are paying their credit card bills on time. And, to flip the old paradigm, more are using high-interest credit card cash to pay at least part of their mortgages instead of the other way around.

Younger people are being crushed by this debt burden as college students and new consumers. Emma Johnson of MSN Money reports that "Generation Y" is broke.

"The democratization of credit has really generated a competitive spending culture, and plastic has allowed for material goods not had in the previous generation," says Bob Manning, author of *Credit Card Nation*.

LUXURY UNDREAMED OF

Most of us grew up in a home with just one or two bathrooms for the whole family, he points out. Today, new homes usually have at least one bathroom per bedroom.



"This generation feels that somehow or another they're going to figure out some technological advancement that's going to get them out of their financial troubles and outsmart the market," says Manning, who served as adviser to the documentary *In Debt We Trust*.

The documentary paints a picture of national financial crises stemming from the personal-debt burden.

Happily, this issue is finally being addressed by Congress and the Federal Reserve Bank. When the Federal Reserve asked for comments on its proposed rules on abusive credit card practices, an astonishing 56,000 poured in.

UNWARRANTED LATE FEES CITED

Most were from outraged consumers. They told of interest rates skyrocketing when they paid an unrelated bill late. They complained of unwarranted late fees and pushed-up due dates.

One Pennsylvania customer fumed, "I'm fed up with credit card company tricks that drive us deeper in debt."

This anguished deluge should send a clear message to leaders in Washington. The Federal Reserve should swiftly adopt its proposed rules against unfair or deceptive credit card practices. But the real burden to curb these abuses falls on Congress.

This discontent is being organized to press Congress to act by groups like the Consumer Federation of America and the Center for Responsible Lending. And Congress is listening.

CONGRESS MOVING REFORM BILL

Legislation aimed at curbing credit card billing practices that surprise borrowers with unexpected interest rate increases and fees was approved by a U.S. House of Representatives committee.

The bill approved by the Financial Services Committee mirrors Federal Reserve proposals that would effectively end double-cycle billing – in which card companies reach back to prior billing cycles to help calculate the interest charged in the current cycle.

These reforms are a start but much more needs to be done because it's not just billing practices at issue – it's high interest changes, deceptive marketing, and

See CREDIT CARDS Page 19

North Pole Ice Is Disappearing

Polar scientists have revealed dramatic new evidence of climate change. It seems unthinkable, but for the first time in human history, ice is on course to disappear entirely from the North Pole.

The disappearance of the Arctic sea ice, making it possible to reach the pole sailing in a boat through open water, would be one of the most dramatic and worrying examples of the impact of global warming on the planet.

"From the viewpoint of science, the North Pole is just another point on the globe, but symbolically it is hugely important. There is supposed to be ice at the North Pole, not open water," said Mark Serreze of the U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center in Colorado.

VALUABLE OIL AND MINERALS

If it happens, it raises the prospect of the Arctic nations being able to exploit the valuable oil and mineral deposits which have until now been impossible to extract because of the thick sea ice above.

Seasoned polar scientists believe the chances of a totally ice free North Pole are greater than 50-50 because the normally thick ice formed over many years at the pole has been blown away and replaced by huge swathes of thinner ice formed over a single year.

This one-year ice is highly vulnerable to melting during the summer months and satellite data coming in recently shows that the rate of melting is faster than last year, when there was an all-time record loss of summer sea ice at the Arctic.

FIRST-YEAR ICE NOTED

"The issue is that, for the first time that I am aware of, the North Pole is covered with extensive first-year ice – ice that formed last autumn and winter. I'd say it's even odds whether the North Pole melts out," said Dr. Serreze.

Each summer the sea ice melts before reforming again during the long Arctic winter but the loss of sea ice last year was so extensive that much of the Arctic Ocean became open water, with the water-ice boundary coming just 700 miles

away from the North Pole.

This meant that about 70% of the sea ice present this spring was single-year ice formed over last winter. Scientists predict that at least 70% of this single year ice – and perhaps all of it – will melt completely, Dr. Serreze said.

IT DEPENDS ON WEATHER PATTERNS

"Indeed, for the Arctic as a whole, the melt season started with even more thin ice than in 2007, hence concerns that we may even beat last year's sea-ice minimum. We'll see what happens, a great deal depends on the weather patterns in July and August," he said.

Ron Lindsay, polar scientist at the University of Washington in Seattle, agreed that much now depends on what happens to the Arctic weather in terms of wind patterns and hours of sunshine.

"There's a good chance that it will all melt away at the North Pole, it's certainly feasible, but it's not guaranteed," Dr. Lindsay said.

OTHER INDICATIONS REPORTED

There are other indications that the Arctic sea ice is showing signs of breaking up.

Scientists at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center said that the North Water "polynya" – an expanse of open water surrounded on all sides by ice – that normally forms near Alaska and Banks Island off the Canadian coast, is much larger than normal. Polynyas absorb heat from the sun and eat away at the edge of the sea ice.

Inuit natives living near Baffin Bay between Canada and Greenland are also reporting that the sea ice there is starting to break up much earlier than normal and that they have seen wide cracks appearing in the ice where it normally remains stable.

Satellite measurements collected over nearly 30 years show a significant decline in the extent of the Arctic sea ice, which has become more rapid in recent years.

Labor Board Limits All Political Strikes

By Robert Schwartz

An overlooked order by the Labor Board's lead lawyer this summer dealt a serious blow to the rights of U.S. workers to protest government policies.

On May Day 2006, hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers walked off their jobs to protest restrictive immigration legislation. Some were fired, and brought complaints to the board.

Ronald Meisburg, the National Labor Relations Board general counsel, responded by posting a directive on "political advocacy" this July that enables bosses to immediately fire employees who participate in work stoppages of a political nature.

The directive, as yet apparently unnoticed by both unions and labor lawyers, cannot be appealed.

POLITICAL STRIKES TRADITIONAL

Traditionally, workers around the world have used two kinds of walkouts to achieve their goals: economic strikes over workplace issues and political strikes directed at government policies.

Political strikes in the U.S. are not as common as in Europe and Latin America. But they have happened, as in the 1970s strike by coal miners for black-lung legislation and in this year's walkout by West Coast dock workers against the Iraq war.

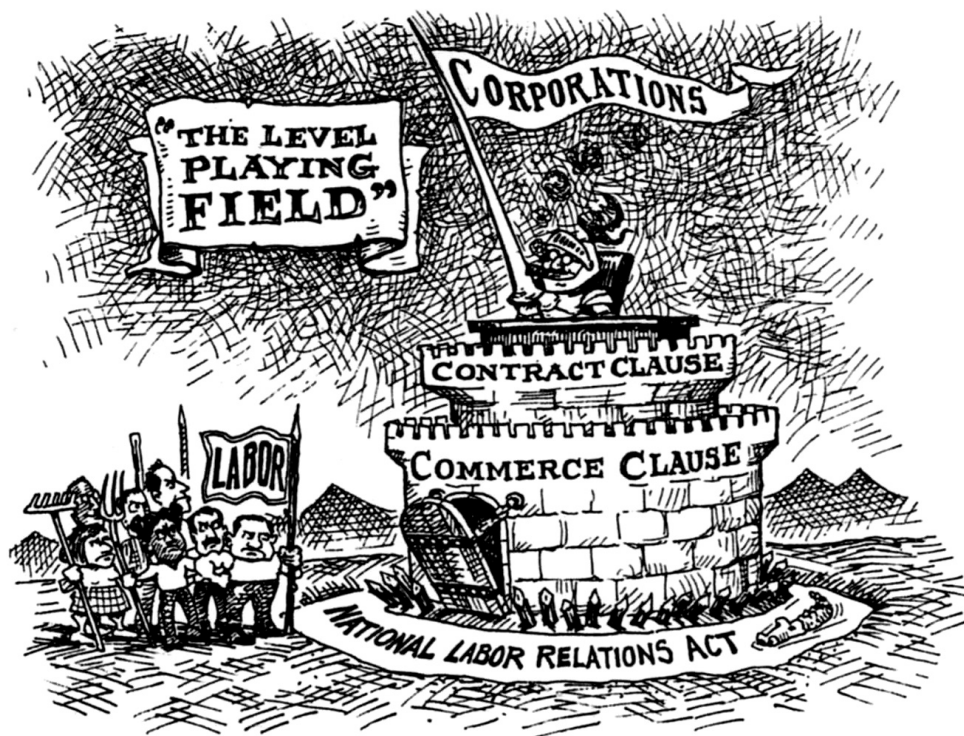
The massive immigrants rights marches in May 2006 may have been the largest political strike in U.S. history. In the aftermath, numerous workers, mainly Latino, were fired from their jobs. Among them were employees at three restaurants. La Veranda, a Philadelphia eatery, terminated five workers who told their manager they would miss work.

NONE BELONGED TO UNIONS

In Fresno, CA, a restaurant fired eight of 13 workers for violating its attendance rules. And an Applebee's restaurant whose location is unclear in the directive fired several workers who left work early. None of the workers belonged to a union.

The 2006 May Day cases appear to be the first to reach the NLRB where workers lost their jobs because of a politically inspired work stoppage. Since labor law gives all workers – not just union members – a protected right to strike over matters affecting their livelihoods, some of these workers filed unfair labor practice charges at the NLRB seeking reinstatement and back wages.

The workers asserted that they had the same rights as union strikers, in particular, the right to conduct stoppages over workplace-related matters without



permission.

BUSH APPOINTEE FROM MANAGEMENT

Meisburg's office dismissed the workers' charges. In his directive, Meisburg, a management lawyer appointed by President Bush, asserted for the first time that work stoppages are protected by the National Labor Relations Act only if they are "directed at an employer who has control over the subject matter of the dispute."

Thirty years ago the Supreme Court ruled that workers may take part in political activity in their workplaces if the issues involved have a substantial impact on workers' rights or job conditions.

Meisburg said his position was consistent with a footnote in that case, although no other legal authority had drawn such a conclusion.

Although the Meisburg directive does not go so far as to make political strikes illegal, the effect is the same.

Unless the next general counsel reverses the order, union and non-union workers who hit the bricks over government policies on immigration, health care, or fuel prices, no matter how closely related these matters are to their employment, do so at the risk of immediately and permanently losing their jobs.

– Robert Schwartz is the author of *Strikes, Picketing, and Inside Campaigns: A Legal Guide for Unions*

About Scholarship Offers On The Web

By S.L. Levy

Two thoughts occur to just about any parent whose child is about to enter college. The first is: "I can't believe how quickly the years have gone by." The second: "I can't believe how much it costs."

As one of those parents, I did my best to get past the disturbing first thought and tried to calm my churning stomach while dealing with the second.

That's when a fellow fretter pointed me to FastWeb, the most popular Internet scholarship site, self-described as "the best way to get free money for school."

A few sessions with FastWeb, and a hard look at some of the scholarships it offers, and I had another reason to hate the college-financing process.

IT REQUIRES TONS OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

My first problem was the volume of the personal information requested to get going – from the student's prospective major to grade point average and ethnic heritage.

Steve Boyce, director of marketing for FastWeb [which started as an independent company but was acquired by the job-placement site Monster.com in 2001], explains that it's necessary to link relevant scholarships to applicants.

If customers agree to release that information, FastWeb will share user data with third parties.

According to the FastWeb privacy policy, recipients can include "data aggregators" and marketers compiling lists.

ONCE IT WAS FOUND IN THE LIBRARY

"In the old days, you used to go into the library and flip a book to find out about scholarships," says Marc Rotenberg, head of the Electronic Privacy Information Center. "Now you don't find out about the scholarship until they find out about you."

Nor was I charmed that, before seeing the scholarships, the site required me to click "no thanks" to offers from survey companies, online universities and U.S. Navy recruiters.

Boyce says that FastWeb tries to get a proper balance between users and advertisers who fund the business, but the pushiness of the ads gave me the impression that FastWeb knows that its users won't bail because they're desperate for college funds.

ARE THEY WORTH PURSUING?

Once you get to the scholarships FastWeb finds for you, though, how many are really worth pursuing? Put aside for a moment the esoteric nature of some of the grants, like the \$1,500 scholarship for duck-calling.

The instant access the Internet provides about awards, as well as the desire of sites like FastWeb to list thousands of opportunities, has led to an abundance of what are called promotional scholarships.

These are an inexpensive way for a company to woo customers under the guise of kindness to a worthy young person. Since FastWeb doesn't rate the quality of its scholarships, these are cheek-to-cheek with more-traditional, less exploitative grants.

THEY ARE WORKING TO IMPROVE THE SITE

Boyce says that the site is working on a system to identify and explain these promotional scholarships.

A case in point is the Coca-Cola College Bound Contest, brought to you by the Chuck E. Cheese pizza operation. The winner gets \$25,000 toward a college fund. To qualify, one was asked to register for the "Chuck E-Club," thus opening one's Inbox to a stream of offers from the company.

Tucked in the bottom of the Web page was a link that allowed one to enter the contest without joining the club.

Many of the FastWeb offers ask entrants to write essays – in the aggregate, students spend millions of hours creating themes that will pay off only a very few.

Sometimes the assignments appear to be a form of indoctrination, like the ones offered by the Ayn Rand Institute to expound on issues in *The Fountainhead* or *Atlas Shrugged*.

BOOK'S AUTHOR OFFERS 'SCHOLARSHIP'

Then there is the \$250 prize given to the best essay based on the themes of the book *High School's Not Forever* – a gift offered by the book's authors.

Donald Heller, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University, says that applying for scholarships found on FastWeb and similar sites isn't worth the effort for most families.

"The real action is in the dollars given by the institutions themselves," he says.

FastWeb's Boyce says he doesn't have statistics to prove it, but "anecdotally, we are helping students meet their goals."

As for my own family's strategy, I've filled out the usual government forms and ones offered by the college my son will attend.

I will also keep an eye out for local programs that don't involve competing with FastWeb's 38 million registered users. And when the jackpot gets high, I play Mega Millions. At least with the lottery, you don't have to write an essay.

Prescription Drug Issue

Republican 'Doughnut Hole' Hurts Seniors

Many people in Medicare with diabetes, high blood pressure and other chronic conditions stop taking their medicine when faced with picking up the entire cost of their prescriptions, researchers say.

About 3.4 million older and disabled people hit a gap, known as the doughnut hole, in their Medicare drug coverage in 2007.

When that happened, they had to pay the entire costs of their medicine until they spent \$3,850 out of pocket. Then, insurance coverage would kick in again.

About 15% of those hitting the coverage gap stopped their treatment regimen. That rate varied depending upon illness. For example, about 10% of diabetes patients stopped buying the medicine, as did 16% of patients with high blood pressure and 18% of patients with osteoporosis.

CONSEQUENCES FOR SOME PATIENTS

"If a new president and Congress consider changes to the drug benefit, it will be important to keep in mind that the coverage gap has consequences for some patients with serious health conditions," said Drew Altman, the chief executive officer and president of the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The foundation conducted the study with researchers at Georgetown University and the University of Chicago.

The Republican-led Congress in 2003 crafted the doughnut hole as a way to make the drug benefit more affordable for the federal government.

The researchers based their findings on pharmacy claims data provided by IMS Health, a company specializing in collecting health care data. They excluded people who get extra help in paying for their drug coverage because of their income; they do not pay the full cost of medicine even when in the doughnut hole.

WHEN CATASTROPHIC COVERAGE KICKS IN

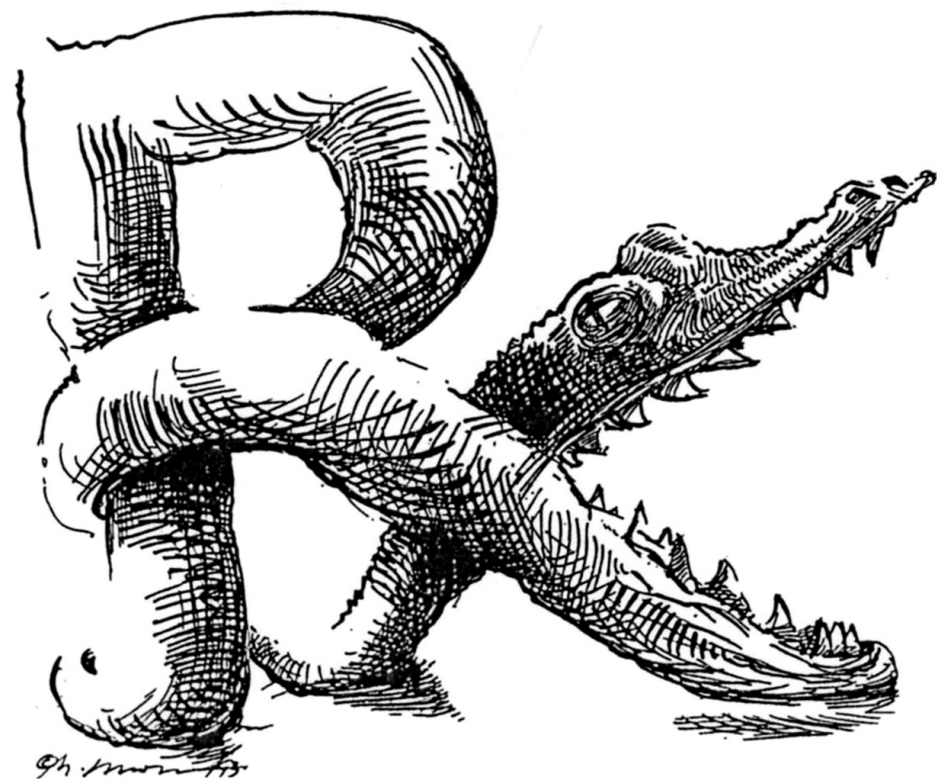
When looking at spending by people who did not receive the extra help, researchers could determine when they hit the coverage gap, which began at \$2,400 in total drug spending. They also could determine when they passed through the gap and catastrophic coverage kicked in.

The researchers focused their analysis on eight categories of drugs. Those least likely to stop taking their medicine were Alzheimer's patients, at 8%. Those most likely, at 20%, were patients taking medicine for heartburn, ulcers and acid reflux disease.

Jeff Nelligan, a spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said the coverage gap kicks in after participants have saved about \$1,600 on their drug costs, on average. He also noted that many plans offer some coverage when beneficiaries hit the doughnut hole.

LOW COST PLAN IN EVERY STATE

Those plans cost at little as \$28.70 a month, and are available in every state for



less than \$50 a month.

"We urge beneficiaries to choose wisely when selecting their drug coverage," Nelligan said. "Again, we emphasize that any changes to the coverage gap would need to come from Congress."

The share of Medicare recipients who reached the doughnut hole varied widely by region. About one-third in Arkansas and seven states in the Northern Plains hit the coverage gap in 2007, but only 12% in Nevada did.

Researchers said such regional differences may occur because of physicians' prescribing patterns as well as overall health of the population.

A separate factor may be enrollment in Medicare Advantage plans. Such plans offer comprehensive health coverage on top of the drug benefit.

Regions where Medicare Advantage plans were most prevalent had fewer enrollees hit the coverage gap, which could reflect stronger management of drug use.

Democratic lawmakers have led efforts to let the government use its purchasing power to negotiate cheaper drug prices. They say the savings could be used to reduce the coverage gap, though the Congressional Budget Office projected that the legislation would not lead to any significant savings.

About 5% of the people who hit the Medicare coverage gap switched to another medication, most often a generic drug.

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WOMEN

From Page 9

movie, too. When she stopped by my desk to talk about it, she looked angry. She was - with herself.

"One thought kept coming back to me as I watched that movie," she said.

CREDIT CARDS

From Page 17

arbitrary rules. On top of that, there are other loans that need scrutiny including payday lenders and student loans. And of course our own addiction to shop until we drop.

Also, let us not forget that our credit card companies have been colonizing markets throughout the world. As the New York Times explained in a series on debt, "As the American blessing of credit cards became widespread, so did the American curse of debt."

Bear in mind the experience of another addicting industry - tobacco. As they came under restraints in the US, they escalated their poison pushing worldwide.

Just as groups like NACA provide help to homeowners in distress, we need a major effort to help the victims of credit cards - with practical assistance and political demands for regulation and relief.

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"What would those women think of the way I use - or don't use - my right to vote? All of us take it for granted now, not just younger women, but those of us who did seek to learn."

The right to vote, she said, had become valuable to her "all over again."

HBO released the movie on video and DVD. I wish all history, social studies and government teachers would include the movie in their curriculum.

I want it shown on Bunco night, too, and anywhere else women gather. I realize this isn't our usual idea of socializing, but we are not voting in the numbers that we should be, and I think a little shock therapy is in order.

It is jarring to watch Woodrow Wilson and his cronies try to persuade a psychiatrist to declare Alice Paul insane so that she could be permanently institutionalized. And it is inspiring to watch the doctor refuse. Alice Paul was strong, he said, and brave. That didn't make her crazy.

The doctor admonished the men: "Courage in women is often mistaken for insanity."

- The author is a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the Cleveland Plain Dealer. This column first appeared on Feb. 19, 2004. Versions of it have been making the rounds on the Internet ever since, most without giving Schultz credit as its author. Schultz writes that she welcomes it being shared widely because the message is so important. Thanks to Jim and Louise Lazalier for sharing this gem with our readers.

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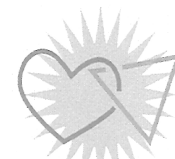
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