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Millions In Unpaid Bills Deadbeat Oklahoma

By Frosty Troy

The 2007 legislative session is shaping up to be a fiscal barnburner, thanks to a red-hot economy. Will they pay the bills or cut taxes again?

Republicans have retained their 57 vote majority in the Oklahoma House of Representatives and split the State Senate 24-24. A new Democratic lieutenant governor, Jari Askins, will cast the deciding vote in any 24-24 stand-off.

The session convening Feb. 5 will have \$276.9 million in new money. They would have had another \$181 million but that was gobbled up by tax cuts.

According to Appropriations Committee Co-Chair State Sen. Johnnie Crutchfield, D-Ardmore, the Legislature has \$500 million of commitments pending.

Normally the reaction of a Democratic governor would be similar to what Frank Keating did as a Republican governor facing a Democratic Legislature. He ruled by veto.

Because it takes a super majority to override a veto, Keating held the power and gutted the Rainy Day fund. He sought to punish public schools and ran roughshod over the state budget. He left Henry a bare \$35 million in the Rainy Day Fund and \$700 million in red ink.

If the past is prologue, nice guy Brad Henry is no Frank Keating. He is not pro-labor, signing a bill that prohibits an injured worker from hiring his or her own doctor.

He signed a bill that prohibits unions [including the OEA] from bundling campaign contributions, a blow for Democratic candidates. The business crowd was still legally allowed, through their 527s, to toss more than \$300,000 in the GOP pot within days of the general election.

Henry is pro-big business, signing an unprecedented \$100 million giveaway to Chesapeake Energy and pals. It was to "encourage" more drilling – as though any encouragement was needed. No accountability was required.

While Chesapeake was loading up on taxpayer money, more than 500 seriously mentally ill Oklahomans were being turned away every month for

lack of money for drugs, staff and facilities.

[Chesapeake executives donated \$500,000 to the Swift Boat liars who falsely attacked John Kerry's magnificent combat record. An odd coupling since Henry had given one of the nominating speeches for Kerry's presidential bid.]

Henry claims to be pro-education but angry Senate Democrats scoffed at his \$1,200 initial pay raise proposal in 2006 and won \$3,000 for the teachers by forcing a special session – which Henry opposed.

As luck would have it, fortune smiled on the new governor as oil and gas revenues bloated the '06 state budget by nearly a billion dollars.

Did Henry and the Legislature use the windfall to pay bills the state owed? No, instead they adopted major permanent tax cuts of unprecedented proportions – \$640 million. These include:

- SB 202: Slashed the top income tax rate from 6.25% to 4.9% [\$480 million impact] – \$343 million [70%] of the cut goes to top 20% of taxpayers,

only \$49.4 million [11%] benefits the bottom 60% of taxpayers.

- SB 334: Abolished the estate tax over the next three years [\$87.8 million impact].

- SB 2016: Increased exemptions on retirement income [\$181 million impact].

The public education budget was shorted by more than \$58 million. The State Board of Education is asking for an interim appropriation.

Gutting the state's revenue base because times are good [four years of revenue increases] is the height of irresponsibility.

Tax cut? Oklahoma still ranks 50th in average salary of public school teachers at \$38,722. The teacher turnover is horrendous and former Gov. Henry Bellmon's key education reforms are still suspended.

Tax cut? Oklahoma is 46th in what it spends on a child's public school education. College tuition has risen more than 96% over the past four years at OU, more than 74% at OSU. A bill to improve college tuition assistance for middle class families was killed in the

Republican-controlled House.

Tax cut? The Transportation Department estimates the state's decaying infrastructure repair price tag at \$11.2 billion. Oklahoma ranks third in the U.S. with 8,757 deficient bridges.

Tax Cut? Oklahoma's health care system is a sick joke – third in the nation in the percentage of adults lacking health insurance, 700,000, including one out of every three children.

Tax cut? Oklahoma's parks and lodges face a \$100 million maintenance deficit – yet tourism is the state's number one industry.

Tax cut? Salaries for public health nurses and nursing staff at public hospitals are 20% below the national average. Consequently, the nursing shortage is epidemic in Oklahoma.

Tax cut? Thanks to a do-nothing state leadership, Oklahoma hospitals provided over \$500 million in uncompensated care in 2005, shifting more of the cost to those with insurance.

It was Keating, at OU President David Boren's urging, who shifted OU's Health Sciences Center hospital to an HMO which subsequently closed the emergency room education program. A new ER program is emerging in Tulsa.

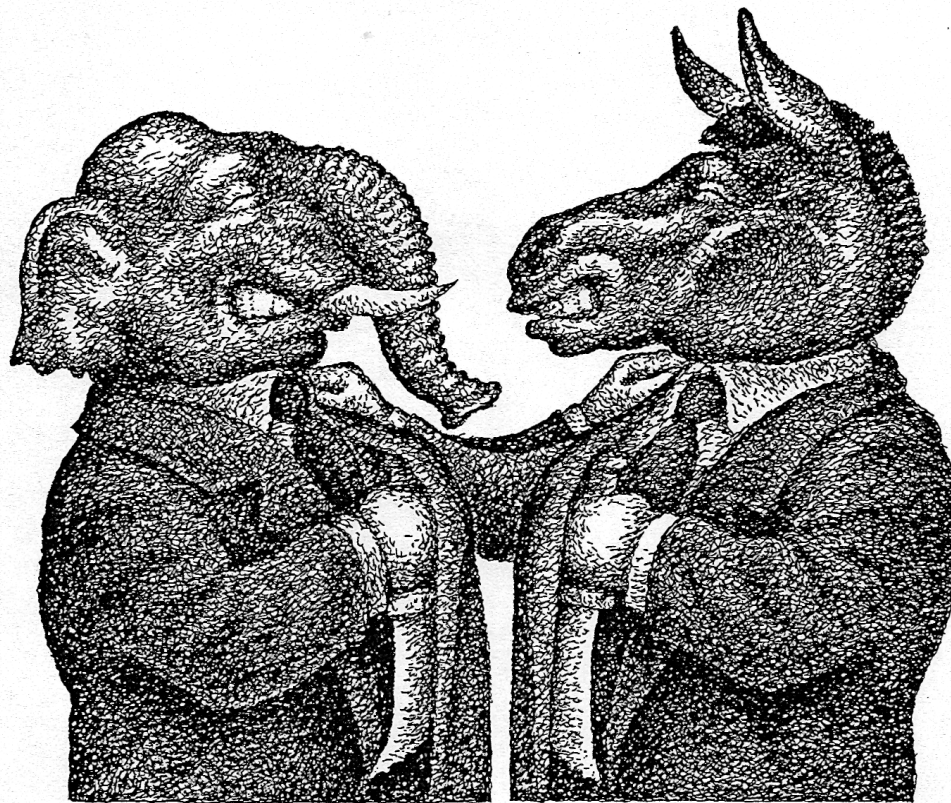
Tax cut? The Corrections Department has lost 418 employees since 2002 and needed 700 staff to return to a 5% vacancy rate. Instead, the Legislature left them short \$80 million for critical budget needs.

Tax cut? Funding for the juvenile justice system has been cut 10% since 2002, leading to critical staff shortages. Gross mismanagement and malfeasance of this agency have been routinely overlooked at the Capitol.

Oklahoma has been sued by the federal government over the juvenile facility at Sand Springs, charging abuse, neglect and incompetence. Gov. Henry is a named defendant.

Tax cut? Approximately 2,860 poor families with a developmentally disabled child are on a waiting list to receive home and community-based medical services they desperately need.

Tax cut? There are more than 3,000 seriously mentally ill Oklahomans on a waiting list for treatment – no staff, no



See BILLS Page 19

Observations

Howdy

With our first edition of 2007, we welcome hundreds of new readers, many joining us through the generosity of loyal subscribers whose gifts help keep this journal of free voices alive.

In the months ahead, you'll discover The Observer is unlike anything else available in Oklahoma.

Most of the state's mainstream media allow one voice: their owner's. They're typically archconservative and display a single-minded devotion to the silk-stocking corporate elite.

We love debate. We welcome differing viewpoints [libel and slander excluded]. We don't protect sacred cows. We're not in the hip pockets of either party.

We are social liberals, but we are far more fiscally conservative than our media brethren. We don't think it's right, for example, that the state's media are tax exempt while mothers pay sales tax on milk for their babies. We abhor the expansion of corporate welfare – it's often flag-waving, free-enterprisers first in line at the taxpayers' trough. We think all should pay their fair share of taxes – to whom much is given, much is expected.

We believe the government ought to stay out of private lives. We believe in fairness and equality and habeas corpus. And we believe in separation of church and state.

We view our government as a potential force for good. Not perfect. But it is the best system in the world. We can't abide Ronald Reagan's cynical laugh-line: I'm from the government and I'm here to help. We are more akin to Harry Truman/Hubert Humphrey Democrats who believe we ought to take care of children in the dawn of their lives and seniors in the twilight of their lives – and everyone else is on their own, unless they need a boost, not a handout.

It may take a few issues to get used to The Observer. We are an independent journal of commentary – sometimes provocative, always entertaining, never dull. You won't agree with everything. In fact, some writers likely will make you downright angry. But

our journal will make you think. Welcome aboard!

What A Year!

The most frantic days of the year are behind us and now we need to concentrate on important issues – ending the war, balancing the budget and shoring up our social programs.

Too many Americans are uninsured, too many children go to bed hungry, yet there are borrowed billions being used to run a protracted war that two-thirds of the American people oppose.

The 2006 elections were as ugly as we've seen. Yes, religion is a vital part of this nation, regardless of belief [or the right to disbelieve].

Vile vituperation oozed out of too many fundamentalist pulpits in 2006. The hate-mongering voters guide distributed by the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger was a disgrace.

In Oklahoma we remain a divided state, not just by political parties, but between the haves and have-nots. The level of corporate greed is boundless because we haven't had nearly enough leaders at the Capitol with backbone.

It is time to bury the bitter memories of the past and focus on building a future for all Oklahomans, not just a privileged few.

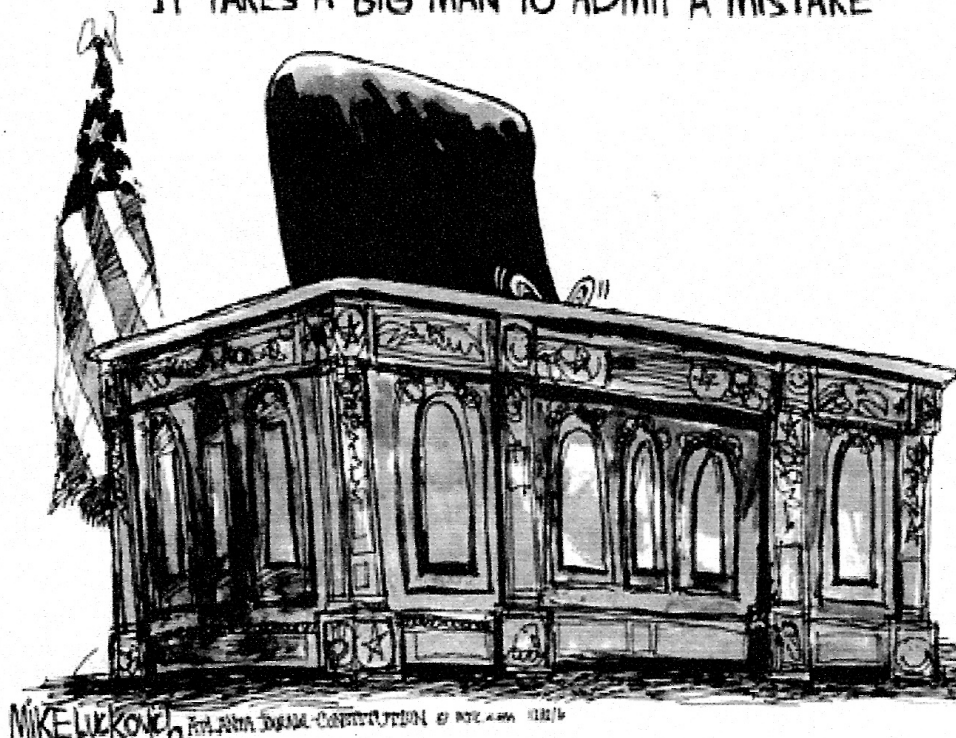
Our elected leaders will have to work together as never before. If they accept the challenge, the people of Oklahoma will reward them with even more victories in the future.

An Awakening

Young Americans have been notoriously indifferent to political participation – until this year when 44 percent of those eligible voted, compared to 42.5 percent of voters over 30.

State, county, and local elections have commanded even less attention, but this year was different due to the winless war in Iraq. It energized young voters.

IT TAKES A BIG MAN TO ADMIT A MISTAKE



Voting in America is seen not as a privilege, but a right that is taken for granted and only exercised by young people when some issue strikes them as directly touching their lives.

Topics of concern are few. Polls show the issues they are interested in include Iraq, taxes, Social Security, and health insurance.

Questions of military service get the attention of young people, but mostly males until Iraq and the focus on women in combat.

Is there any way to educate youngsters to see voting as a civic responsibility they should take seriously? Short of mandatory voting—a feature of Australian democracy—prospects for a new era of heightened voter participation by young people may be at hand.

Student-election processes for class and schoolwide officers should be a fixture in every school – from elementary on up. They are not only instructive, they can be fun.

A recounting of the national experience can inspire young people not to be casual about traditional rights and to perform their civic duty and vote.

It was kids in the streets, not politicians in Washington, who ended the Vietnam miscalculation – too late for 55,000 American military deaths.

If we paid half as much attention to civics – our living history – as we do to math, America would be far better off.

Every principal should invite elected officials—school board members, city council members, county sheriffs, state legislators, judges—into civics and social studies classes to discuss the process of running for, and the experience of serving in, elected office.

It would help to turn off the evening TV and the games for a few minutes of discourse on the topics of the day. Children also ought to see their parents reading a newspaper – still the soundest way to know what it going on.

The surest way to turn the American dream into a nightmare is to take this country for granted.

Waterlogged

When the heavy snow melted, the east tunnel to the Capitol was once

again turned into a flood zone. Then along came the Christmas rain and it was flooded again.

What makes this particularly irritating is that tourists, thousands of school children, visitors and state employees must use the tunnel or dodge heavy on Lincoln Boulevard.

Big shots such as the governor use the west entrance. There is no concern for the little people.

This travesty has been going on for years while tax cuts have been flying out of the Legislature. Legislators don't use the tunnel or it would already be fixed.

Some of the remarks of tourists tiptoeing through the water are hardly a boost for Oklahoma.

Will the 2007 session of the Legislature address this issue? Don't hold your breath – either roll up your pant legs or dodge the cars on Lincoln Boulevard.

Hammered

Don't get on the bad side of Oklahoma's Supreme Court Chief Justice. He hammered the so-called Taxpayer Bill of Rights [TABOR] in a unanimous opinion that alleged fraud and trickery.

TABOR is another misnamed movement by the far right to gut government programs – especially those serving the needy.

TABOR backers imported illegal circulators to garner more than 299,000 signatures to force a vote of the people. The court held that more than 80,000 were illegal.

Republican Sen. Randy Brogdon, the Owasso Cro-Magnon, is a prime promoter of TABOR, using big out of state bucks to sell the idea. He doubtless will be pushing that agenda in this year's legislative session, a version he calls TABOR-lite.

Petition promoters said they checked with Oklahoma authorities, which gave them the green light to bring in paid circulators. They didn't name one Oklahoma "authority" who said that.

TABOR was on the ballot in three states and defeated in all three. Colorado is the only state to adopt it, but when it became an economic disaster there, a conservative Republican governor led the drive to repeal it.

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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 by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

"It would disturb me if there was a wedding between the religious fundamentalists and the political right. The hard right has no interest in religion except to manipulate it." – Billy Graham, quoted in Christian Ethics Today

Dart: To the National Science Teachers Association, refusing 40,000 free copies of Al Gore's excellent global warming documentary because it might scare off ExxonMobil and other greedy corporate giants who fund NSTA programs. Arrrg!

"Ohio was as dirty an election as America has ever seen." – Lou Harris of the Harris Poll after the 2004 election.

Laurel: To the Regents for Higher Education for picking Glen Johnson as Chancellor. He did a great job at Southeastern State University, was an OU professor of law and former House Speaker. The agency badly needs shaking up.

A \$15 DVD of the late, great political activist Keith Smith's memorial service is available by calling Randy Poff at 405.722.5600.

Dart: To Tulsa's Sinclair Refinery, fined \$5.5 million by the EPA for admitting deliberately discharging waste water into the Arkansas River and then trying to cover it up.

That scornful laughter you hear results from Frank Keating thinking about running for President. Will he tell of a \$250,000 payoff from billionaire Stanley Dreyfus to drug Oklahoma prisoners?

Laurel: To more than 1,500 active-duty military that have signed a petition to Congress in opposition to the Iraq war. [The Nation Magazine]

Rep. Tom Cole, R-OK, has been elected chairman of the House Republican Congressional Committee, winning a deck chair on the Titanic.

Dart: To Oklahoma for again hitting number one in two shameful categories – leading the nation in hunger, and incarceration of 2,625 women, 625 per 100,000 population. Nationally, the rate is 491.

Getting students ready for Wall Street? Rutgers University reports in an anonymous poll that 27 percent of upper level business majors admit to cheating because "it's accepted practice in business."

Laurel: To retiring Carl Albert State College President Joe White, 69, who turned a sleepy Poteau campus into a marvelous college during his 31-year leadership.

The Oklahoma Centennial poster contest is underway, with 4th-12th grade students eligible. Winning poster artists are eligible for awards of up to \$1,000. For details call Brenda Jones at 405.516.9686.

Dart: To those trying to force making public the names of winners of the lottery – the same people who are always bellowing about the right to privacy.

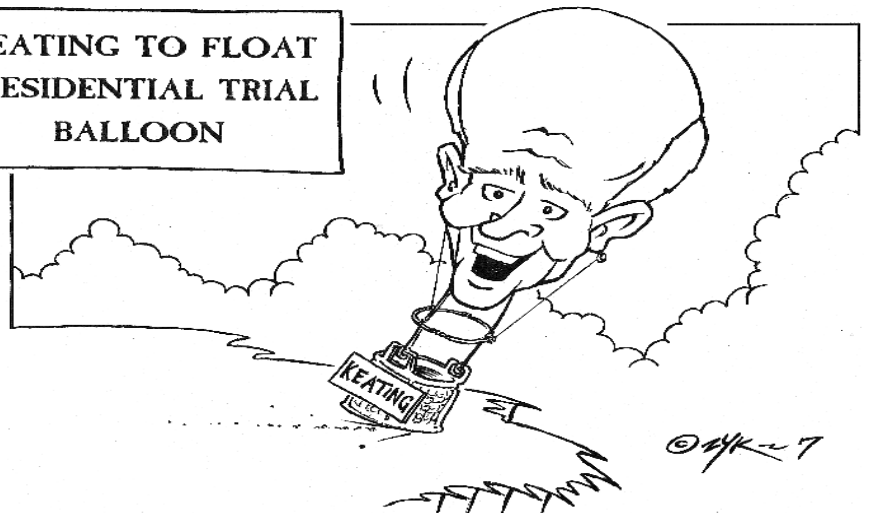
Wow! The National Education Association's annual filing with the federal government shows membership at 2,767,696 last year – up 36,550.

Laurel: To Dr. Jerome Solow, Tulsa dentist crusading to bring dental care to elderly Oklahomans in nursing homes – a serious problem mainly due to lack of brushing.

Thanks to Kaly Free's INDN's List movement, a record 20 Native Americans won races across the country in '06. A win in Pennsylvania put Democrats in control of the House for the first time in 12 years.

Dart: To Oklahoma's sorry congressional delegation for a unanimous vote against forcing oil companies to pony up royalties on oil taken from federal lands – billions stolen by big oil, according to the GAO.

KEATING TO FLOAT
PRESIDENTIAL TRIAL
BALLOON



I ALWAYS KNEW HE HAD ENOUGH HOT AIR TO GET A
BALLOON OFF THE GROUND!

U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn ought to bow his head in shame for blocking vital Katrina hurricane protection projects. Never has Oklahoma produced a bigger show-off – anything to get media attention.

Laurel: To the Tulsa World for unmasking that religious freak and convicted felon Tony Alamo, in an excellent article by Bill Sherman. Among other things, Alamo preaches that the Vatican is the "devil's seat."

Oklahoma City ranks a pitiful 98th on the list of Self Magazine's healthy cities. Tulsa comes in at 94th. Smoking, fast food gluttony and lack of facilities for exercise were the culprits.

Dart: To U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia who says his \$165,200 salary is too low. He said private practitioners can make far more. We would delight in his move to the private sector.

The U.S. Supreme Court denied certiorari to State Supreme Court Justice Marion Opala in his age discrimination suit brought because the court declined to elect him chief justice.

Laurel: To David Bernstein, Oklahoma Human Rights Commission humanitarian award winner, for launching Tulsa's first suicide hotline. Also honored: Shirley Cox, M.T. Berry, Donald Davis, John Hope Franklin, Albert Johnson, Roosevelt Milton, Rev. Victor Orta, Dr. Marcus Shook and Horace Stevenson.

On Christmas day more than 102,000 Katrina families were still living in government trailers and 33,000 were living in government-paid apartments. FEMA has recouped less than one percent of the \$1 billion in fraudulent claims it honored.

Dart: To right-winger Andrew Spiropoulos, an OCU law professor calling for a state constitutional convention. Corporate interests would rewrite Oklahoma's excellent Constitution.

The State Supreme Court was right on in the 8-1 opinion booting that so-called 2003 state tort reform law as to medical malpractice. Only Justice Robert Lavender dissented.

Laurel: To Cameron University Associate Prof. Vivian Thomlinson, named the 2006 Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation. Nominations came from peer groups.

The State Board of Education has asked for a 2007 budget of \$2.7 billion, up \$400 million, including \$70 million for new teacher pay. They need a supplemental \$58.3 million schools were short changed by the '06 session.

Dart: To OU Prof. David Deming, who believes global warming is media fiction. He was slammed by Harvard's Prof. Daniel Schrag, expert in the field who said global warming is running out of control. Ignore Deming.

Good news! Oklahoma has 600,000 smokers but 13 percent have quit due to a hefty price increase and more successful cessation programs. [State Health Department]

Laurel: To Rep. Lee Denny, R-Cushing, for spearheading the drive to create a special school in Stillwater for children with special needs – part of a successful national movement for kids we used to throwaway.

The Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation has won national recognition by the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future.

Laurel: To Charles Edward Jones, author of The Wesleyan Holiness Movement, a comprehensive guide launched in 1974, including two new volumes published by Scarecrow Press Inc.

Oklahoma labor unions have lost 20,000 members since right to work passed. The state has also lost 33,000 industrial jobs and now glories in low-paying call centers. Thanks, State Chamber.

Laurel: To the National Catholic Reporter newspaper for pointing out that many public officials have sworn on other than the Bible to assume office. John Quincy Adams used a law volume.

America's Republican-controlled Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] is considering doing away with health standards that cut lead from gasoline – one of the nation's biggest clean air accomplishments.

Dart: To Gov. Mitt Romney, R-MA, who in 1994 said the gay and lesbian communities "need more support from the Republican Party." Now, running for president, he's done a 180.

THE OKLAHOMA
Observer



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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I have to take exception to the item in the Observer that Planned Parenthood and the Tulsa Diocese were spending money on a billboard "battle."

The fact is that Planned Parenthood is a business [albeit, a nonprofit business] and it offers a valuable service to the community. It put up a few billboards to advertise its services. Many businesses do this to reach the general public.

The billboards said simply, "Birth Control is Easy." A few months later, the Tulsa Diocese made the decision to counter these signs with several that said, "Birth Control Does Harm."

The Catholic Church is also a nonprofit, but the billboards used to counter the Planned Parenthood campaign are political, not spiritual or religious. These billboards are another example of how that church continues to misuse it funds for political purposes.

In addition, I find it disgraceful that the Catholic Diocese has spent thousands of dollars to buy a vacant lot across the street from the only clinic in Tulsa that provides safe abortions. Now they will spend thousands more to build a "memorial" to aborted fetuses.

This is money spent for pure political propaganda. On the same day that article appeared, a World editorial pointed out that thousands of poor children in this town are going to school hungry!

Every year some 500,000 women around the world die from pregnancy-related problems - 200,000 of them from illegal abortions.

Many women in these Third World countries cannot get safe reproductive health care because the Catholic Church has imposed its religious beliefs about abortion and birth control on government policies all over the world.

And the Church claims to be "pro-life." Apparently, that definition doesn't include women. The Catholic Church's "pro-life" stance is a hypocritical farce, designed to control women, plain and simple.

Barbara Santee
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Because of the climate of political correctness now pervading America, those of us in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri will no longer be referred to as Hillbillies.

We ask that you now refer to us as

Ozark-Americans. Thank you!

Now if you'll excuse me, I got possums to fry.

E. G. Neal
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

I'm an 86 year old World War II honorable veteran myself. I have total respect for people of your caliber.

But how can I go about getting a censure action or impeachment started on the Crawford idiot that was appointed to move into the President's station?

I myself do not have enough education to know where to start.

Jackson A. Hendricks
Organ, NM

Editor, The Observer:

I thoroughly enjoyed and was deeply impressed by Hal Spake's article in your 10-10-06 edition. Unfortunately, the Okie rednecks prevailed on election day. Fortunately, however, the "Rush worshipers" took a solid drubbing on that date.

Keep up the good work.

Ernie Morris
Vancouver, WA

Editor, The Observer:

If anyone really wants to stop an abortion, they should raise the minimum wage.

Al Engel
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In his memoirs, "A World Transformed," George Bush Sr. wrote the following to explain why he didn't go after Saddam Hussein at the end of the Gulf War.

"Trying to eliminate Saddam would have incurred incalculable human and political costs. Apprehending him was probably impossible ... We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. There was no viable 'exit strategy' we could see, violating another of our principles. Furthermore, we had been consciously trying to set a pattern for handling aggression in the post-Cold War world. Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations' mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish. Had we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly



hostile land."

Joe Forgy
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The International Committee of the Red Cross confidentiality policy gives detaining powers legitimacy in Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and many Israeli detention centers.

The policy, in effect, allows ICRC to politely ask torturers to stop torturing while promising not to tell the rest of the world.

ICRC delegates trained at headquarters in Geneva are drilled in confidentiality, that is, talk about what you do, not what you see.

Ultimately, as ICRC is maintaining good working relationships with authorities, prisoners continue to be tortured again and again against international law. What good is knowing what is going on in torture centers if it cannot publicize the violations which would bring international pressure to stop those violations?

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, Iowa

Editor, The Observer:

All his life, George Bush has been given everything and turned it into nothing. My father used to joke about being a man who started out with a fortune and ran it into a shoestring.

That pretty much sums up W to me.

He was given vast fortunes in business and then pretty much went broke. His major accomplishment as a business leader was to get the taxpayers of Arlington, Texas, to fund a new stadium for the Texas Rangers. [Just about any baseball expert rates the Ballpark at Arlington or whatever they call it as one of the worst parks for the dynamics of the game - too many cheap homers.]

As president, Bush took a great American tragedy and turned it into greater one. When we had the entire world behind us to fight a common enemy, he blindly insisted on pursuing a course that nearly insured we would be practically isolated and hopelessly mired in a war with no hope of victory.

The Greeks would have understood Bush well. At the center of their tragedies is a man who is blinded on pride and arrogance, who starts out great and ends up nothing. However, in all of their plays, the tragic hero recognizes his flaw. Bush seems to be incapable of such insight.

Lynn Green
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

"I been to The Nations, only there ain't no Nations." - Forrest Carter

Sure, you Oklahoma idiots. Keep slashing taxes like a bunch of short-sighted, ignorant, stingy low-life. Why not go all the way and eliminate taxes completely until there's no support left for anything?

Let the roads go back to red muck.

Let the bridges rot. No fire departments, no schools, no streetlights, no police, no jails, no community swimming pools or rec centers, no common services at all. Wipe it all out.

Destroy everything that my ancestors and yours worked so hard and sacrificed so much to build out of virgin prairie. Let it all go back. What'll you have then, huh?

What? Well, gee, maybe you'll have a wasteland that none of you wants to live in, and you'll all leave and go to Houston or Kansas City. Then maybe, just maybe, we could finally have the Indian Nations that were promised ... and then I could stand to come home.

Llyn French
St. Petersburg, FL

Editor, The Observer:

I used to think the voting machines in Oklahoma were OK. They aren't. A documentary shows exactly the same system, being used by a county in Florida, being hacked. Plain and simple.

This problem runs deep ... and stealing our votes IS intentional AND orchestrated by very powerful "business" interests who have much to gain from keeping Republicans in power to do their bidding.

Remember, the written ballots are ONLY counted if an election result is "challengeable."

We need to force Diebold and ES out of the "ballot" business and have voting machines constructed, controlled and verified FULLY by our election boards. Our election boards have NEVER been allowed to have the Diebold or ES code reviewed. They must rely upon Diebold and ES claims that they are secure.

Well, they aren't and the documentary I saw shows just how dangerous they are. We must KILL the monopoly that Diebold and ES have in this country. Heck, Mexico probably just had an election stolen by them.

Oklahoma has a good system because SO FAR it has had some good people. But as this documentary shows, our election officials REALLY aren't in control. Take the time to view these videos. If you aren't scared yet, you will be.

L.C. Wade
Oklahoma City

Frosty Troy's

Heroes, Outlaws & Funny fellows

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But Hurry! Frosty's calendar fills fast

Frosty's Notebook

My Heroes

Not all American heroes are in uniform. Consider our amazing public school teachers.

If you have any doubts, check out a new national report, *Teacher Buying Behavior, 2006-2007*. It takes a look at what types of materials and products educators are purchasing and with what funds.

On average, teachers are spending a total of \$475 of their own money on classroom materials and poor student supplies, with 44% spending over \$500 and 20% spending over \$1,000.

More than 85 percent of teachers surveyed use their own money to buy student rewards and supplies – 75% use their own money for classroom decorations. Fifty-nine percent dug into their own pockets to purchase professional materials.

Congress recently passed a bill that temporarily extends three tax breaks for classroom teachers. The Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006 would allow teachers to deduct up to \$250 in out-of-pocket classroom expenses, even if they don't itemize deductions.

How many professions can you name whose members spend \$400 or more out of their own pockets to help poor kids?

Add to this the fact that American public school teachers rank 22nd in salary among the top 30 industrial nations in the world. In America, Oklahoma teachers rank a disgraceful 50th.

No wonder so many new teachers [even veteran teachers] flee the state to teach in neighboring states. Oklahoma teachers earn \$38,722 per year – lowest in the region. The national average is \$49,109. The regional average is \$41,586.

Colorado teachers earn \$45,616, Arkansas teachers \$42,093, Texas teachers \$41,744, New Mexico teachers \$41,586, Kansas teachers \$41,369 and Missouri



teachers \$39,922.

The No Child Left Behind law is billions short of what is needed to fund it. NCLB is also wiping out music, art, drama, foreign languages and counseling. There are just so many hours in a day.

It is sad to note that Oklahoma's congressional delegation has gone along with George W. Bush. He is the worst ever President on public education, proposing yet another round of cuts in his new budget.

He is once again calling for zero funding for CareerTech despite a plea from business and industry for more technical savvy from those entering the workforce.

It isn't sectarian prayer in the classroom that makes a difference. It is a teacher making a difference in a child's life. Read your Bible. It was John who said, "...not by word but by deed."

Our Marvelous Libraries

I was recently invited to address a gathering of public librarians. Having been named by the Centennial Commission as one of Oklahoma's 100 Library Living Legends, they wanted to know what had sparked my interest.

My lifelong love affair with the public library began in my childhood in McAlester where I was number six in a family of eight boys and a girl. My older brothers were all athletic but I was the runt of the litter. I tried out for boxing, baseball and basketball but I was too little and too slow.

That's when I discovered the McAlester Public Library and began my lifelong journey through a gazillion books. Much of my early reading was guided by the head librarian, Mrs. Andy Gravitt. She was the reason my book reports always drew an "A."

The most influential writer in my youth was Horatio Alger Jr. I literally sought to model my life on his ideal of an upward bound youth.

When I was assigned by the Tulsa Tribune as State Capitol correspondent in 1960, one of the first people I encountered was State Librarian Ralph Hudson. The

State Library was squeezed into the first floor west wing of the Capitol.

He was in a heap of trouble because the Legislature was not only stingy in its appropriations, there was talk about closing the library except for the law library.

I teamed up with Hugh Hall, Oklahoma City Times Capitol correspondent, and our pro-library crusade paid a handsome dividend for Ralph. [Does anybody remember when newspapers crusaded?]

Hudson then enlisted us in a campaign for his new idea – the bookmobile. Rural Oklahoma was badly underserved. Once again the stories paid off and the rural-dominated Legislature came up with the funding.

I have continued my support, including running a free ad periodically to promote libraries. I also go after library censors and meddlers with a vengeance, such as Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC.

Today's public library is a technological wonder, but the fanciest computer ever built will never replace the written word or the librarian who takes a personal interest in those using the vast resources of a public library.

Clueless Oklahomans

I left the State Capitol shaking my head. I had just sat through the first hour of a meeting of the Oklahoma Small Business Regulatory Review Committee.

The first part of the meeting focused on what many said was the foremost problem facing small business in Oklahoma – workforce development.

Ninety-six percent of businesses in Oklahoma employ 50 workers or less, yet finding personnel to fill the jobs is a daunting problem. Most have to be trained on the job.

One businessman said many students ought to be going to CareerTech not college – which has a horrible dropout rate.

A Tulsa Chamber representative said Oklahoma is not looked upon favorably in the rest of America, making it difficult to attract out-of-state college graduates. In-state college graduates leave Oklahoma in droves.

About Baptist Fiction

It is a fiction that the religious right galvanized as a political movement in response to the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973.

As Prof. Randall Balmer demonstrates in his book *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America*, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution in 1971 that called for the legalization of abortion!

To quote him from a recent letter in *Time Magazine*: "The *Roe* decision met largely with silence from evangelical leaders; a few registered mild disagreement, but a significant number, including the redoubtable fundamentalist W.A. Criswell, actually applauded the decision for marking the appropriate distinction between public policy and personal morality.

"Despite the recent efforts of Richard Land and other leaders to style themselves the 'new abolitionists' and align with the 19th-Century opponents of slavery, the religious right organized in the late 1970s to defend Bob Jones University – the fundamentalist school in South Carolina – against the efforts of the Internal Revenue Service to revoke its tax-exempt status because it banned interracial dating and marriage."

The IRS had determined that any organization that engaged in racial discrimination was not, by definition, a charitable organization and was not entitled to

I sat there biting my lip, wanting to stand up and shout:

1 – "Oklahoma employers pay an average 20% less than for the same job in other states."

2 – "CareerTech funding was gutted by then House Speaker Todd Hiett, resulting in 10,000 students turned away last year."

3 – "Thanks to Bush's sorry No Child Left Behind and the governor's dismal ACE initiative, so many unnecessary courses are piled on a six-hour school day that CareerTech, the arts, music, drama, foreign language and civics are taking a back-seat beating."

These folks mean well. They are the backbone of Oklahoma's economy. It is astonishing to see how clueless so many well-meaning people are about why Oklahoma is what it is.

tax-exempt status.

Only after evangelical leaders had organized to resist the IRS on the Bob Jones matter did they look to address other issues. Abortion was cobbled into the political agenda of the religious right in the late 1970s, in preparation for the 1980 presidential campaign, not as a direct response to *Roe v. Wade*.

Compounding the "abortion myth," leaders of the religious right anointed Ronald Reagan as their political savior in 1980 – a divorced and remarried man who, as governor of California, had signed a bill into law legalizing abortion. He didn't attend church and he didn't donate to charity.

Read This To Your Pastor

Article II, Section §5 of the Oklahoma Constitution says:

Public money or property – Use for sectarian purposes:

No public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, donated, or used, directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit, or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion, or for the use, benefit, or support of any priest, preacher, minister, or other religious teacher or dignitary, or sectarian institution as such.

Henry Speaks Out

Oklahoma's Prisons: Back To The Future?

By Arnold Hamilton

Is Oklahoma in danger of a second federal court takeover of the state's overcrowded, short-staffed and under-funded prisons?

Not yet, Gov. Brad Henry says – but the threat is real.

"Ultimately, if we don't do something about it, yeah, we will be in big trouble," the Democratic governor said in an interview with the Observer.

The 2007 Legislature can't ignore the issue. The crisis is so acute that corrections officials requested \$47 million in emergency funds – just to make it through the current fiscal year.

State prisons are virtually at capacity. With few beds available, more than 1,300 state inmates are warehoused indefinitely in county jails. The state needs to hire 400 correctional officers to be at full-force.

"Clearly, Oklahoma is a law and order state, and we like to lock 'em up," Henry said. "And I'm tough on crime myself."

RETHINKING OKLAHOMA'S APPROACH?

The governor, though, acknowledges that changes are necessary to avoid an unwelcome invitation to the federal courthouse.

"I think what we have to do is be smarter on crime," he said. "And we have to make sure that those that we're really cracking down on and that we're locking up for a long time are violent offenders who threaten our person and our property."

The reality is, Oklahoma's frontier-like mentality is squandering millions of taxpayer dollars. The state has the nation's fourth-highest incarceration rate. Even more dubious: Oklahoma is No. 1 per capita in imprisoning women.

Many of Oklahoma's inmates are drug offenders. Three strikes-and-you're-out may seem a clever campaign slogan, but it's a short-sighted, ill-conceived approach to corrections.

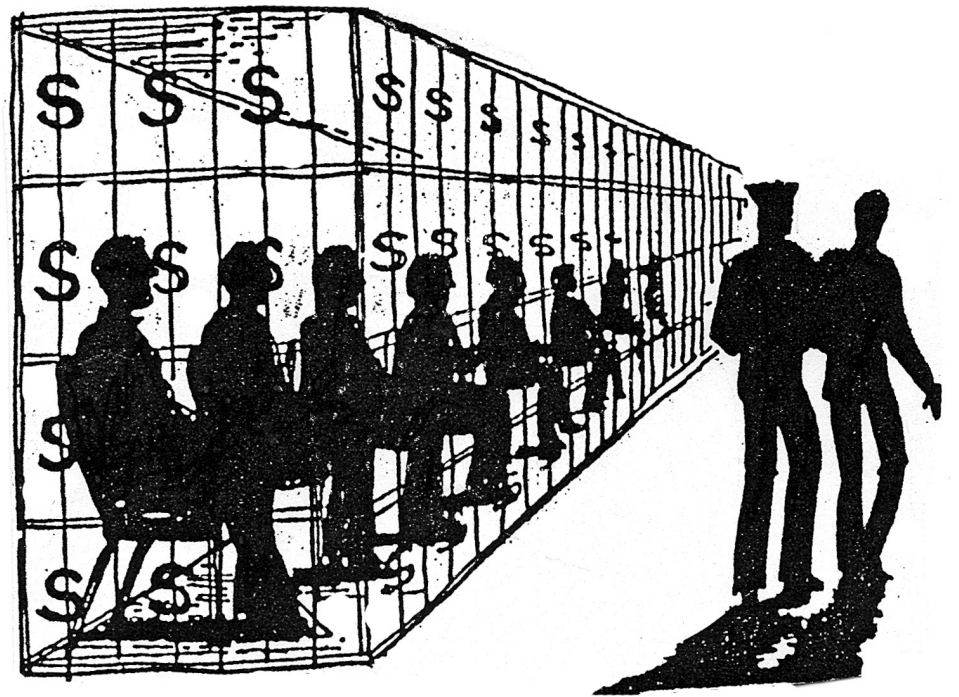
"It's turned into a revolving door," Henry said. "We don't put any money in [drug and alcohol] treatment programs, so they get picked up, they go to prison, they spend their time, they get out and we haven't done anything to help them kick the habit, so to speak.

"They turn right back to drugs and ultimately, in many cases, that turns to a life of harder crime in order to support their addiction."

THE HIGH COST OF FRONTIER JUSTICE

The choice: Invest in treatment programs that could help create productive, taxpaying citizens or cling to an expensive pound-of-flesh, throw-away-the-key mentality?

Do the math. It already costs the state an average \$17,500 annually to house each inmate – a price tag that is likely to skyrocket. One reason: The cost of pro-



viding health care to the system's burgeoning – and aging – life-without-parole population, now numbering more than 600.

Has there been an easier, less painful time to choose investing in treatment and rehabilitation over punishment? State revenues are overflowing with \$7 billion available to spend in the 2008 fiscal year.

"We've got to put more money into treatment programs in Oklahoma," the governor said. "If we do that, we'll see far less recidivism. There are numerous examples out there. We've studied this. We know that's the case.

"It's just hard to do politically. We have to muster the political will to put more money into treatment programs and when we do that, we'll begin to get a handle on our prison population."

ALTERNATIVES ARE ALREADY WORKING

The state is taking some significant steps toward smarter corrections' policies: Drug courts and mental health courts are taking root, providing hope that prison crowding can be eased and lives salvaged.

"We have put more money into drug courts in Oklahoma," Henry said. "It's having a positive impact. We've implemented and put money into mental health courts.

"So many of our inmates ... have serious mental health issues. And they're not being addressed, either. They're not receiving treatment. In many cases, it would just take some diagnosis and prescription of the appropriate medication and maybe some assistance so that they could continue to get that medication to keep them stable and productive.

"Until we put more resources into treatment – whether it's drug and alcohol addiction or mental health issues – we're going to see our prison population continue to swell."

The World According to Brad Henry

On the eve of his second term, Democratic Gov. Brad Henry sat down for a wide-ranging, one-on-one interview with Observer editor Arnold Hamilton. Following are excerpts.

On further tax cuts: I'm always open to tax cuts and tax relief ... The last two years in a row, we have enacted the largest tax cuts in our state's history.

We did some good things in addition to lowering the top marginal tax rate. We also increased the standard deduction that ultimately will be phased-in to match the federal level. That will do a lot for working families in Oklahoma.

I certainly believe that the tax relief packages that we've enacted over the past number of years are of the magnitude that we can handle that, even with a downturn in the economy. You always have to be concerned about a downturn in the economy. One thing that is inevitable, that I can guarantee you, as we sit here today, that sometime in the future there will be a downturn in our economy. I can't tell you exactly when it is going to be, but it will occur.

On the so-called Taxpayers Bill of Rights that would limit government spending: I'm always open to discussions of some sort of a TABOR-type law, but ... there is only one state that has had a TABOR law and that is Colorado, and because of the devastating impact that that caused Colorado, particularly on higher education, which everybody agrees is critical for Oklahoma's future prosperity, Colorado suspended TABOR for a period of five years, I think.

We need to be smart and learn from the experience of others. And that means any talk, any discussion about TABOR, needs to proceed cautiously. We need to make sure we don't unduly tie hands. We need to make sure that it doesn't devastate higher education, it doesn't devastate our road building program and bridge building program, and it doesn't devastate our programs to invest in research infrastructure to create those new companies and commercialize that technology and create good jobs. We need to make sure it doesn't devastate our efforts in developing what I think in the not so distant future will be one of the best health care systems in country, right here in Oklahoma.

On the controversial "65 percent Solution" that would mandate a one-size-fits-all approach to public school spending: I'm for putting more money in the classroom. I don't know why you ought to stop at 65 percent. But what I do know is that some arbitrary constitutional line in the sand can be very problematic. We

limit by statute in Oklahoma administrative spending in our school systems to 10 percent. And we're under that.

Now, if you want to get tricky and kind of funny and say, well, library services and librarians aren't part of the classroom and utilities to keep the lights on aren't part of the classroom and – guess what? – the janitorial service that keeps the class clean so teachers can actually teach the students aren't part of the classroom and busses to get them to school aren't part of the classroom and counselors and nurses that help our children stay healthy so they can learn ... if you want to talk about those kinds of things, boy, can you imagine our schools and how our education system would function without transportation, without lights in the classrooms, without janitors to keep the rooms clean, without food service personnel, without nurses, without counselors, without libraries or librarians.

My concern is this whole 65 percent issue is more of a way to not put any more money into schools. I think most Oklahomans agree that we need to put more money in our schools and more money in our classrooms and that's what we're doing and that's what we're going to continue to do.

On his bipartisan leadership style, a sore point for some Democrats who consider it a euphemism for voting Republican: My focus is on building a great state, not building a political party. I'll leave that to others. I try to do what's right. I sleep very well at night. I know that I'm never going to please the partisans in either party. I've always been very much a centrist. I think that's where most Oklahomans are. I think it's more effective to work together with members of both parties. We've shown that over the last four years. We've accomplished quite a bit through our bipartisan approach. And I think the people recognized that in the last election.

On Lisa Pryor's future as state Democratic Party chair: She has a number of options and opportunities and I'm probably really not at liberty to discuss those. ... I think she did a great job. It paid off at the ballot box in November. ... I'm going to be supportive of her whatever she wants to do in the future.

For more from our exclusive interview with the governor, go to www.okobserver.net. You can find his views on a proposed hike in the minimum wage, on making college more affordable for Oklahoma families and on his quest to increase teachers' salaries at least to the regional average.

Auditor Loses His Job

Whistle Blowing On On Kerr-McGee Oil

By E. L. Andrews

During a 22-year career, Bobby L. Maxwell routinely won accolades and awards as one of the Interior Department's best auditors in the nation's oil patch, snaring promotions that eventually had him supervising a staff of 120 people.

Then he ran afoul of the Bush Administration and its buddies at Kerr-McGee and ConocoPhillips and he was suddenly out of a job.

He and his team scrutinized the books of major oil producers that collectively pumped billions of dollars worth of oil and gas every year from land and coastal waters owned by the public.

Maxwell and his team of auditors recovered hundreds of millions of dollars from companies that shortchanged the American taxpayers on royalties.

The corrupt Interior Department eliminated his job in what it called a "reorganization." That came exactly one week after a federal judge in Denver unsealed a lawsuit in which Maxwell contended that a major oil company had spent years cheating on royalty payments.

HE HAS TAKEN HIS FIGHT TO COURT

Today Maxwell is at the center of an escalating battle with both the oil industry and the Bush Administration over how the federal government oversees about \$60 billion worth of oil and gas produced every year on federal property.

Invoking a law that rewards private citizens who expose fraud against the government, Maxwell has filed a suit in federal court in Denver against the Kerr-McGee Corporation.

The suit accuses the company, which was recently acquired by Anadarko Petroleum, of bilking the government out of royalty payments.

It also contends that the Interior Department ignored audits indicating that Kerr-McGee was cheating. Three other federal auditors, who once worked for Maxwell and still work at the Interior Department, have since filed similar suits of their own against other energy companies.

Several of the nation's biggest oil producers, including ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell and ConocoPhillips, failed in an effort to block Maxwell's suit, arguing before an appellate judge that his case would "open the floodgates" to suits by other federal auditors.

MAXWELL'S CASE GOES TO TRIAL IN JANUARY

The court rejected their pleas, and a trial is set to start on Jan. 16.

If Maxwell wins, Kerr-McGee could be forced to pay more than \$50 million in unpaid royalties and penalties. Maxwell and his lawyers could keep as much as 30 percent of any funds the government recovers.

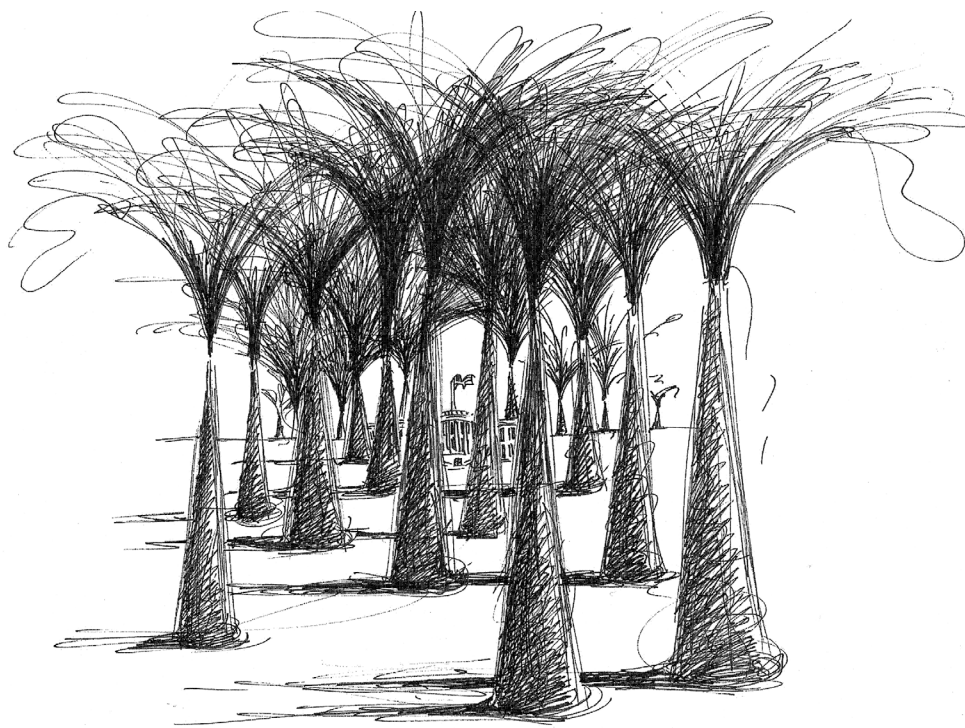
Last February the Interior Department admitted that energy companies might escape more than \$7 billion in royalty payments over the next five years because of errors in leases signed in the 1990s that officials are now scrambling to renegotiate.

The errors were discovered in 2000, but were ignored for the next six years and have yet to be fixed.

Even Republicans on the House Government Reform Committee, which had been reviewing the flawed leases, accused Interior officials of perpetuating a "culture of irresponsibility and lack of accountability" at the agency.

The committee ordered the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, to begin a broad examination of issues ranging from the agency's rules and enforcement practices to the accuracy of its most rudimentary data.

Maxwell says his first serious doubts about the Interior Department originated in 1998, when the agency reluctantly began to investigate accusations of system-



atic cheating on royalties for oil.

TAXPAYERS WERE LOSING BILLIONS

Several of the nation's biggest oil companies eventually settled that investigation by paying nearly \$440 million. The investigation occurred only after outside whistle-blowers argued for years that the government was losing billions.

Created in 1849 to manage the nation's publicly owned natural resources, from national forests to parks and waterways, the Interior Department oversees timber, grazing, mining and oil drilling operations over many tens of millions of acres.

While the agency has often tried to increase drilling and mining under Democrats and Republicans alike, current and former officials say the Bush Administration elevated that goal above almost all of the department's other mandates.

In 2004, the Interior Department's inspector general issued a blistering report about the auditing system, saying that many auditors were unqualified, that essential documents were being lost and that the internal review process was "ineffective."

In 2002, Maxwell was fed up. He and a team of auditors had worked for months to dissect a complicated marketing deal by Kerr-McGee that they believed was cheating the government.

He concluded that Kerr-McGee was selling all its oil at below-market prices to another company that compensated Kerr-McGee by assuming many of its marketing and administrative costs.

HOW KERR-MCGEE'S SCHEME WORKED

Simply put, Kerr-McGee seemed to be getting paid in both cash and services, but it was calculating its royalties only on the cash it received. Maxwell calculated that the company had underpaid the government by as much as \$12 million between 1997 and 2002.

State auditors in Louisiana had been investigating exactly the same issue in 2001, and ordered Kerr-McGee to pay an extra \$2 million in royalties on oil from state lands.

According to Maxwell and Interior Department officials, when Maxwell presented his findings to his superiors, agency lawyers told him to drop the case.

When he continued to argue, he recounts in his lawsuit, the agency's chief of enforcement warned him that the director of the Minerals Management Service, Johnnie M. Burton, would be "very upset" if he persisted.

Maxwell filed his suit against Kerr-McGee in 2004. The case was unsealed on Jan. 20, 2005. A week later, Maxwell lost his job.

Arriving at his office shortly before 8 a.m. on Jan. 27, Maxwell said he was summoned to a meeting with a senior M.M.S official, who had flown in from Washington. The official handed him a memo, explaining that his job responsibilities were being moved to Houston and that his position would be eliminated.

Anyone doubt that the Bush Administration is the most corrupt in history?

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Why Oklahomans Don't Get It Right

By Stephanie Hershberger

Why is it that all too often, the "state" of Oklahoma is to be focused on what is wrong with everyone else, instead of one's own self? And while our own selves are all we can truly amend, anyway?

This vile and jaundiced "state" of being results largely from our expertise at violating the principle to, as the Bible puts it, "not bear false witness against thy neighbor" as recorded in Exodus 20:16.

Though not exclusive to Oklahoma, I understand an entire "industry" [called public relations] has sprung up, based upon a sporty game of lying, misconstruing facts, and in general violating this commandment/principle.

Often it is to the point of fabricating and using official-sounding, but unsubstantiated reports. The problem is now finally gaining attention, as it's become so bad and widespread as to start a war, sacrificing our children like so many toy soldiers.

ANY QUESTIONING IS UNPatriotic

Bring them home as bronzed statues, and just do the patriot "act." Infer any
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questioning to be unpatriotic, or even traitorous. It is none other than a nouveau form of bigotry, in the same old style of days gone by, ala I-love-and-appreciate-my-precious-ignorance.

Don't get me wrong. I believe in warning others if a true villain is on the lurk. "By their fruits ye shall know them," Jesus said [Matthew 7: 16], and "beware of Alexander the coppersmith, he did me much harm," said Timothy [II Timothy 4: 14], if one needs biblical validation of this point.

But when we have a newspaper [the Oklahoman] that exists largely as a reputation "laundry mat" - to shirk the dirty blame elsewhere, and whitewash and uphold the "good ole boy" network, looking for and zeroing in on any convenient splinters in the eyes of victims, while a log is in their own eyes - is it any wonder such a pathetic "state" or condition develops?

They've had their party. Now they're in a drunken state of [nouveau] bigotry, and are going out to drive. Let's watch out.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

Keating & Co. Use Election Loophole

By Joan Claybrook

In 2002 Congress passed landmark campaign finance reform legislation designed to stem the flow of special-interest money into campaigns and curb associated corruption.

As expected, as soon as it passed, people started scheming about how to get around it.

These interests – in particular the U.S. Chamber of Commerce – expanded the use of nonprofit organizations, classified as 501c under the tax code, for political activities.

The Chamber's money paid for attack ads, mailings and phone banks. Some of the efforts were financed by multi-nationals such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Qwest Communications, the American Council of Life Insurers [headed by Ex-Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating] and other corporate interests.

THERE ARE RESTRICTIONS IN THE LAW

Tax-exempt [but not tax-deductible] nonprofits may make some political expenditures but may not make electoral activities their primary purpose.

However, 501c's have become attractive vehicles for surreptitious political activity because they don't have to disclose their funders' names and there are no specific limits on the money they can raise or spend. But they must report the total spent on electioneering and pay taxes on that amount or on the organization's interest income, whichever is less.

Public Citizen released a report analyzing the political activities of more than two-dozen nonprofit organizations from Americans for Tax Reform to the United Seniors Association.

We found that the groups had spent tens of millions of dollars to influence elections in 2000 and 2002 yet had reported just a fraction of those expenditures to the Internal Revenue Service [IRS].

U.S. CHAMBER A BIG PLAYER

One of the groups we scrutinized was the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

This year, we decided to take a more detailed look at its electioneering activities beginning in 2000.

After doing extensive research, we found that although Chamber representatives have bragged about the enormous sums of money the group has poured into elections across the country and its effectiveness, they dropped their braggadocio when communicating with the IRS.

In 2000 alone, the Chamber claimed that it spent \$6 million on judicial races and took credit for winning 15 of 17 state Supreme Court contests.

State Workers Plan Massive '07 Agenda

A fired-up Oklahoma Public Employees Association has adopted a fighting platform for the 2007 Legislature, pledging an end to being the lowest paid state employees in America.

OPEA will work to pass legislation that establishes a four-year compensation plan to bring state employee pay to market. Market pay should also include overtime pay, shift differential, hazardous duty pay, uniform allowances and holiday pay.

OPEA will work for a pay raise tied to the consumer price index [CPI], with a base increase of \$2,500, and pay equity in job classifications across agency lines.

OPEA will press for passage of legislation allowing for state agencies to pay education loan assistance for permanent state employees who have completed a four-year degree and have outstanding education loans.

CRUSADING FOR A LIVING WAGE

Also on the agenda: legislation raising the base pay for state employees so that all who work for the state receive a living wage. A hike in the minimum wage will be a top item in this year's session beginning in February.

Other items on the agenda:

- Work with the Office of State Finance to convert state employees to a bimonthly pay schedule, providing the transition does not include a pay lapse that adversely impacts participants.

- Work with the Office of State Finance and the Office of Personnel Management to change payroll policies so employees will not be forced to bank annual leave to receive their paychecks on time. OPEA will work for funding of the state performance pay system.

- Work for a community review of salaries of nursing, medical staff and ancillary staff for employees working in state operated medical/long-term care settings to ensure that pay rates are within 5% of the average salaries paid in the community.

IMPROVEMENT STATE PENSIONS

OPEA will support the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System [OPERS], Teachers Retirement System and Oklahoma Law Enforcement Retirement System continuing as defined-benefit plans. They will seek legislation refunding the excess contribution of retirees who retired prior to July 1, 1998.

OPEA is seeking legislation providing a 2% annual cost of living adjustment [COLA] for OPERS retirees.

One of the most vital issues is a pledge to work to maintain the state commitment of paying the total cost of health, basic life and dental insurance for state



In 2002, the Chamber said it planned to spend \$40 million on congressional and state-level attorneys general and judicial races. It didn't report any of these political activities on its 2000-2003 tax returns, as required by law.

PUBLIC CITIZEN FILES OFFICIAL COMPLAINT

Public Citizen filed a complaint with the IRS, appropriately enough last Halloween, asking it to investigate the Chamber's habit of tricking voters by handing out treats to big business candidates while failing to report its activities.

We asked the IRS to find out whether the Chamber and its affiliated Institute for Legal Reform [ILR] avoided taxes and violated disclosure requirements.

How could the Chamber do this so publicly without the IRS catching on?

It appears that the Chamber played a shell game.

Not only has it shared a bank account with the ILR – even though the two are separate legal entities – but the Chamber has given money to state-level front groups and concealed the source from voters by failing to disclose these grants on tax forms.

The government should curb these abuses. The Democratic Congress should close the loopholes and amend the tax code to hold those who prepare and file 990 forms responsible for the accuracy of the reports.

The IRS should look carefully at all 501c's involved in political activity and revoke the tax-exempt status of any that violate the law.

In addition, the IRS should create a searchable, sortable, downloadable electronic filing and disclosure system for tracking electioneering spending.

– The author is president of Public Citizen

employees and 75% of health insurance costs for dependents.

Also promised is a study of the impact to the Oklahoma State Education Employees Group Insurance Board [OSEEGIB] and Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System of allowing retirees a one-time opt-in to the state insurance program when they become eligible for Medicare. OPEA will work to increase the retiree insurance subsidy.

OPEA will continue to fight TABOR [so-called Taxpayers' Bill of Rights] and other expenditure constraints that limit resources to state government.

OPEA will work to stop the erosion of the merit system by fighting the un-classifying of positions that do not meet the criteria of unique work activity, market condition and specialization.

In addition, the Association will work to reclassify positions that have been removed from the Merit System and do not meet the criteria.

OPEA will continue to oppose the privatization of state agencies, functions and jobs.

National Guard Playing Dirty Politics

As a response to unprecedented personnel reclassifications enacted by the Oklahoma National Guard, the Oklahoma Public Employees Association has petitioned Attorney General Drew Edmondson to investigate potential violations of Oklahoma state statute.

In a letter addressed to Edmondson, OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger asks the Attorney General to "intervene into this situation on behalf of a group of dedicated state employees and the safety and security of the state in a time of international turmoil."

At issue is the agency's abrupt changing to those serving as "police officers" to that of "security guards."

"While this reclassification may appear innocuous, its ramifications are significant," said Barger. "Our members who have served as officers for many years will find that the tools upon which they have come to rely in order to serve the citizens of Oklahoma will be severely curtailed."

Barger has told members to expect an expedited favorable ruling. "Our legal team has researched this issue thoroughly and have pinpointed the exact state statute under which this situation falls," he stated.

– The Oklahoma Public Employees Association represents some 9,000 active and retired Oklahoma state employees

Gerald Ford First Unelected President

By Danny M. Adkison

Gerald Ford was only president for a few years. Still, his tenure as president is loaded with memorable events, one of which we may never know how to evaluate.

Numerous headlines recently described Gerald Ford as an “accidental” president. That he was. But we have had other “accidental” presidents. Ford belongs to that category called freak accident.

That is because of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment. That amendment was proposed in 1965 and ratified in 1967. The amendment was a reaction to John Kennedy’s assassination.

As stipulated in the Constitution, when Kennedy died, Vice President Johnson succeeded to the presidency. Who became President Johnson’s vice president?

The answer is no one. That is because the Constitution contained no stipulation for filling vice presidential vacancies. At that point in our history we had had about 30 years of vacancy in the vice presidency.

AN UNTENABLE SITUATION

Certain members of Congress thought in the Cold War era this was an untenable situation and proposed the Twenty-Fifth Amendment to rectify it.

Section Two of that amendment allows the president to nominate a vice president [if there was a vacancy in the office] and to appoint the nominee if both the House and Senate consented to it [by a simple majority vote].

The first vice presidential vacancy occurring after ratification of the amendment happened when Vice President Agnew resigned from office in the fall of 1973. Nixon was the first president who could appoint a vice president and he appointed Gerald Ford.

Like other “accidental” presidents, Ford became president when a vacancy occurred in the presidency [Nixon resigned from office in the summer of 1974]. Ford then became the second president to appoint a vice president [Nelson Rockefeller].

UNELECTED PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

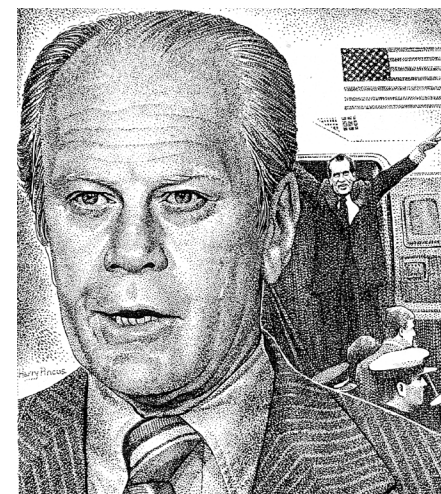
The result was a president and a vice president neither of whom had been elected, both of whom had gotten their jobs through appointment. Ironically, 1976 was the year we celebrated the bicentennial of our great experiment in democracy, yet both of our top executive officials were not elected.

Gerald Ford is the only vice president who succeeded to the presidency having never been elected vice president [he was never elected president or vice-president].

In spite of this unpredictable event [the legislative history on the Twenty-Fifth Amendment indicates Congress never anticipated an un-elected president and vice president], it is almost universally accepted that Ford did handle the succession problem well.

Never did there seem to be any doubt as to who was in charge of the executive branch of our government. That is important [it was the crux behind the design

“The issue here is not whether or not Ford should have pardoned Nixon.... The real issue, and the one we will probably never be able to answer, is whether or not Nixon made a deal with Ford.”



of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment] and one would have to conclude that Ford, while guiding our ship of state, was successful at keeping it on an even keel during turbulent times.

40 AMERICANS DIE TO RESCUE 39

Another significant issue occurring during Ford’s brief tenure was the Mayaguez incident. When the Cambodians seized the U.S.S. Mayaguez, President Ford spent little time seeking a diplomatic solution. Perhaps reacting to the Vietnam war, which had just recently been brought to a formal end, Ford acted quickly, ordering Marines in the air to rescue the crew.

In his rush to end the controversy Ford neglected to follow the recently enacted law [the War Powers Resolution] concerning war powers, but it turned out that just about every president since Ford has taken the same approach to this law.

Over 40 American troops lost their lives in the mission to rescue the crew of 39. In spite of this, the public rallied around Ford’s quick and decisive actions and his popularity spiked.

Some pundits later noted that had the Mayaguez incident occurred closer to the 1976 presidential election, Ford might have won.

Ford will also be remembered for making the erroneous statement concerning Soviet domination during his debate with Jimmy Carter.

Since it is hard to believe that Ford was ignorant of such Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, the only explanation for this misstatement is just that: Ford mis-spoke and then in that nanosecond that you have in a debate to decide how to react, he reacted poorly and repeated the misstatement. In the days following the debate he had to admit this, but the damage was done.

THE NIXON PARDON

Finally, there is the question of pardoning President Nixon. The issue here is not whether or not Ford should have pardoned Nixon. A good argument could be made for both sides of the issue [Ford relied on the Federalist Papers to justify his argument and I’m partial to that].

The real issue, and the one we will probably never be able to answer, is whether or not Nixon made a deal with Ford. Did Nixon tell Ford he would name him vice president if he would, if he became president, pardon him?

Nixon went to his grave saying there was no such deal and now we are left with Ford saying there was no deal. If there were, it would impeach the entire Ford presidency. But looking at the totality of Ford’s life, and particularly the manner in which he handled the presidency, his should be the final say on this issue

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

Inhofe’s Demotion Gives America ...

One Last Chance On Global Warming

By Froma Harrop

Americans can adapt, one supposes, to an Alaska without polar bears, a New Hampshire without fall colors and a Florida without its bottom third. But most would probably like to save these things for their descendants. A recent Time/ABC poll found that 88 percent of Americans think global warming threatens future generations.

President Bush was never one to lose sleep over future generations – just look at his budget deficits. Add in another matter he’s supremely indifferent to, the environment, and we have the Bush policy on global warming. That is, do zero to cut U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases. Actually, do less than zero. His early doubting that humans even play a role in climate change demoralized those trying to grapple with the problem.

The glad tidings are that the Bush administration no longer matters much. Even if its lawyers succeed in denying states the right to sue the Environmental Protection Agency for not regulating greenhouse gases – the case is now before the U.S. Supreme Court – it won’t make much difference. The Bush administration will be gone in two years, and the environmental grownups are already taking over.

For one thing, Democrat Barbara Boxer is replacing Republican James Inhofe as chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Inhofe famously called human-made global warming “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people.” Boxer talks a bit differently. She says: “This is a potential crisis of a magnitude we’ve never seen,” and, “Any kind of weakening of environmental laws or secrecy or changes in the dead of night is over.”

NEW DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY GIVES HOPE

For this attitudinal change, we can thank the Democrats’ new majority, however slim, in the Senate. It’s another reason to pray for the speedy recovery of South Dakota’s Tim Johnson – and for all Senate Democrats to look both ways when they

cross the street.

The 2008 election, meanwhile, will produce a new president, who could not possibly be as environmentally negligent as the current one. All likely Democratic candidates and the leading Republican, John McCain, have identified global warming as a serious problem to which they would apply themselves.

In the Supreme Court case, Massachusetts and 11 other states are demanding that the federal Environmental Protection Agency regulate greenhouse-gas emissions from vehicles. The arguments so far have largely centered on whether states have the right to sue the EPA: States must prove that they’ve been injured by EPA policy. One harm, explained the lawyer from Massachusetts, is the prospect of losing “sovereign territory” to rising oceans – in his state, 200 miles of coastline.

The EPA argues that the Clean Air Act covers only pollutants that are dangerous to breathe. Global warming is caused by the accumulation of otherwise harmless gases found in nature. The agency further contends that with the economies of China and India growing like mad, any cuts we make in greenhouse gases will be swamped by increases in theirs. Of course, the United States now produces 25 percent of these gases, so if we do nothing, why would anyone else?

STILL TIME TO SAVE L.A.

It may be too late to save the snows of Kilimanjaro – they’re going – but the snows of Greenland are still hanging on. If Greenland’s massive ice sheet melts in earnest, an event that could start in this century, then coastal civilizations from London to Los Angeles might disappear under the waves.

There’s no way to replace the dead Bush years of inaction. But we may have a last chance to deal with global warming. Will today’s Americans sacrifice for a posterity they will never see?

This is about family values put to the acid test.

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Sharp Left Turns Can Be Deadly, Politically

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Were the leaders of the new Democratic majority in the Congress to ask the Militant Moderate for his advice, it would be the very simple principle:

STAY IN THE MAINSTREAM.

The people of the country wanted a change. They were tired of a government that would not listen nor heed their voice. They were tired of a war with no goals relevant to them, and no end in sight. They were tired of government that catered to only one sector of America – the business and social elite. The people were tired of incompetence and ineptness. They were tired of a government that did little to control either its own fiscal extravagances or the rapacious pillaging of public and personal budgets by special interests. They were tired of a government that would neither enforce its own immigration laws nor protect its own workers and home industries in trade laws and outsourcing.

But Democrats must be cautious lest they become distracted by the siren songs of the disenfranchised minorities in their midst.

NO "FINGER IN THE FACE"

This win was not an opportunity for the pursuit of the gay/lesbian agenda, nor was it an endorsement for the enlargement of the victim and protected categorizations. This was not a victory for the "finger in the face" attitudes and legal challenges of those who disrespect traditional societal views, national symbols, or authority of any kind. People actually do resent usurpation of the meaning of marriage, and many still find public display of gay affection disturbing. Eventually most may become tolerant, if not accepting, of certain more limited domestic contracts, but this is not the right timing.

The election was not an endorsement for abortion, although it may have been something of a repudiation of government intrusion and interference in private and family affairs [as per the Schiavo case]. This whole issue is more one of freedom and liberty. It has to do with efforts of some to [unconstitutionally] "establish religion" into the laws of the nation, thereby seeking to criminalize certain of our

American Boys In A Heap Of Trouble

By Cecil Acuff

What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails and puppy dog
tails,

That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and everything
nice,

That's what little girls are made of.

Maybe the guys had best quit playing around, and perhaps the gals are not made of everything nice.

The distaff side, the womenfolk, may be taking over. An exercise in punctuation from "Eats Shoots & Leaves" by Lynn Truss: "A woman without her man is nothing," and "A woman, without her, man is nothing."

Perhaps America should add an exclamation mark to the latter of the above – Woman, without her, man is nothing!

More and more women are assuming roles as leaders of countries. The cover story of the January 30, 2006 issue of Time Magazine – "The Boy Crises; At Every Level of Education, They're Falling Behind. What To Do?"

Ellen Johnson of Liberia was inaugurated in January 2006, as the first woman president of any country in Africa.

Michelle Bachlet became Chile's first female president in the same month.

Christine Krichner, the First Lady of Argentina, was elected to the senate by a landslide [ala Hillary Clinton].

Leila Rashid is the foreign minister

of Paragauy. Tizipi is the foreign minister of Israel. And Angela Merkel is heading the German government.

Will Condoleeza Rice and Hillary Clinton battle for the U.S. presidency? Plenty of political pundits will give good odds.

VANISHING SCHOOL BOYS

Time reported the number of boys who said they didn't like school rose 71% between 1980 and 2001, according to a University of Michigan study.

Thirty years ago men were 80% of the U.S. undergraduate body, now they're a minority of 44%.

In middle school, eighth grade girls scored 21 points higher than boys, and between the ages of 5 and 14 boys are 200% more likely to commit suicide than girls.

Psychologists say it is difficult for boys to thrive in middle school; everything is measured by a single yardstick: "Does this make me look weak? If so, I won't do it; friends will laugh at me."

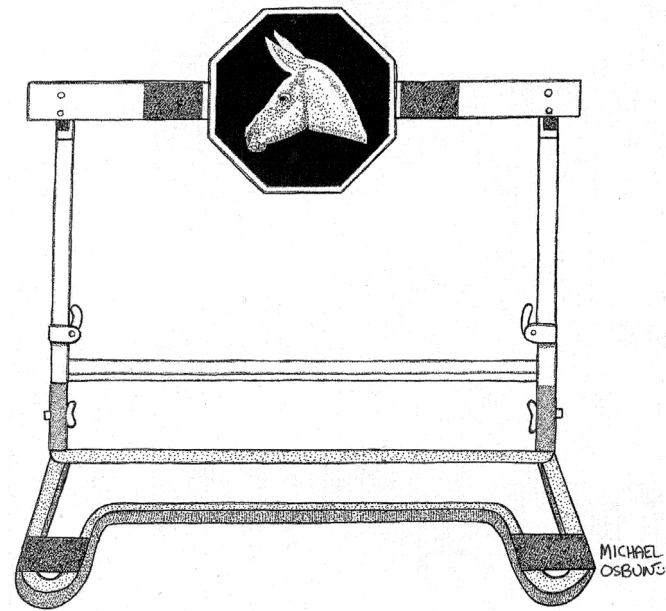
The Time article also states, "One of the most reliable predictors of a boy's success in high school and beyond – does he have a man to look up?"

Twelfth grade girls score 16 points higher than boys in reading tests.

Boys are 30% more likely to use cocaine.

Girls score 24 points higher on writing tests. Twenty-two percent of girls are more likely to attend college.

The macho men of modern America have problems?



liberties and our freedoms. Americans must remain free to "pursue life, liberty, and happiness," values inherent in our republic. Americans must remain free to live their own private lives and to die with dignity in their own time – free from government intrusion based upon someone else's religious creed. This issue needs to be reframed positively in the public forum.

THE BEST ROUTE: MAINSTREAM

It is important that Democrats stay in the mainstream on the issue of immigration. Nobody favors illegal immigration, and everybody wants border security. Few really expect every illegal immigrant over the last two decades to be rounded up and deported, but nearly everyone expects the most recent transgressors to experience just that fate. Everybody expects strong employer penalties and strict enforcement. Everybody thinks that illegal immigrants should be registered, enrolled, accounted, and traced.

The people have rejected the Republican "fix" for Social Security, which had a marked resemblance of the life-changing procedure the veterinarian performs on pets. However, there are simple adjustments that may be made in Social Security, which will preserve it in its traditional form as a safety net for all workers. Be cautious with this one.

There is a mainstream on most issues, and Democrats should be careful of political tangents off that mainstream if they expect to compete for the hearts and minds of the electorate in 2008.

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

Chiefs Want Better Trained Policemen

Oklahoma's police chiefs want stepped-up training and education to become a police officer.

The executive board of the Oklahoma Association of Chiefs of Police [OACP] met to discuss what is needed to improve police officer training in the state of Oklahoma.

The board established a number of recommendations regarding matters such as firearms training, basic training and continuing education for officers.

Executive Director Jim Cox said the recommendations should bring Oklahoma in line with the higher standards of other states in the region.

"What we proposed will bring us up to the level of the states that surround us, and to a much better position in the nation with respect to our peace officers," Cox said.

The OACP proposed that peace officers be required to complete handgun re-qualification each year by meeting the same minimum standards that are required at the CLEET basic academy. They recommended that CLEET accredited training be improved in the following ways:

RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS

- The number of hours of the CLEET Basic Academy should be raised to 600. Currently, 324 hours is the requirement.

- The number of hours of annual continuing education training should be raised to 24 hours with four hours of mental health training. The current standard is 16 hours with one hour of mental health training.

- The number of hours for the Reserve Officer Basic Academy should be increased from its current 160 hours to 300 hours – or half of what would be required for peace officers training through the Basic Academy.

The OACP board agreed to recommend the establishment of a CLEET committee to oversee and review curriculum approved for use in peace officer training.

Also, it proposed that communities that request permission to establish their own police academies be granted the right to do so, providing their departments employ at least 100 officers and that they have the resources to support a basic academy which meets those of the CLEET academy.

Cox said the board's recommendations have been sent to Oklahoma police departments for review.

"We'll wait for their input, then we'll share the recommendations with the other entities that are involved," he said. He said the potential of legislative action on the issue in 2007 was promising.

"We see it as a very positive commitment on the part of the government, that they are looking at these things and getting involved in the discussion."

–Thanks to the Oklahoma Municipal League for this information

PUBLIC FORUM

The Bill Of Rights Is Guttled By Bush

By Kenny Belford

If this doesn't scare the hell out of you, then you simply lack the intellect to comprehend what's happened. If this doesn't make you literally feel sick to your stomach, then you've convincingly shown your disdain for the Constitution of the United States.

The average Republican has remained oblivious to the takeover of their party by the Neo Cons. The most radical, extreme rightwing, tiny sliver faction of their party is now totally in control of their party.

If the Neo Cons actually revealed their full beliefs and agenda to America, or even to the Republican Party, they would be soundly routed out. It's truly that radical and extreme.

These are not stupid people. To the contrary, they're shrewd, calculating individuals able to put forth one image, while behind the scenes furthering their dangerous beliefs.

HE SWORE AN OATH, THEN VIOLATED IT

On two separate occasions, George W. Bush placed his hand on a Bible and swore this oath, "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

The out-going Republican Congress has changed the very fabric of our nation. They worked in unison with, and at the request of the White House and enacted H.R. 6166 that changed our entire concept of how our government works. It's now official. It's now a law, formally signed by George W. Bush. The Bill of Rights, a cornerstone of our democracy, is abolished.

Bruce Ackerman, a Yale law professor explains: "The compromise legislation authorizes the president to seize American citizens as enemy combatants, even if they have never left the United States. And once thrown into a military prison, they cannot expect a trial by their peers or any other of the normal protections of the Bill of Rights."

"UNLAWFUL ENEMY COMBATANT" DEFINED

The new law defines "unlawful enemy combatant" as anything George W. Bush wants it to mean. All he or a member of his administration need to do is claim it, with zero evidence required, and you are officially an "enemy combatant" whether or not you have had any connection to hostilities at all.

The new law also contains a definition of "wrongfully aiding the enemy" as what-



ever George W. Bush and/or his administration decide it is. If you're an American citizen and you breach your "allegiance to President Bush" he may legally designate you as a terrorist and you'll be subject to arrest, torture and conviction in front of a military tribunal.

The law also criminalizes any challenge to the legislation's legality by the Supreme Court or any United States court and allows the use of torture that is incidental to lawful sanctions.

You can criticize the president, be arrested, with no rights to an attorney, no rights to see the evidence against you, no rights to ask any court to protect you, no rights to even have any charge brought against you. You can simply be arrested, taken away and there is nothing anyone, not anyone, can do about it.

CHECK OUT THIS NEW CONTRACT

You probably didn't know this, but it's the honest truth. The Bush Administration has awarded Dick Cheney's company, Haliburton, another no bid contract.

This is an oil company, but wait until you learn what the contract is for. At the start of last year Haliburton's subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root, was awarded a \$385 million contract by Homeland Security to construct detention and processing facilities on American soil.

The new law eliminated the need for George W. Bush to have secret prisons around the world. He can now, solely as his own discretion, build one in the United States, have you arrested, detained, tortured and held indefinitely with no rights at all. It's now the law.

This feat was accomplished by the Neo Cons at the request of the man who swore on a Bible to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. He did that twice, then he did this to us.

I don't know whether I want to go throw up, or just mourn the passing our democracy.

-The author lives in Oklahoma City

Flag Burning Issue Raises Writer's Ire

By Larry Hicks

Please help me through my confusion. What the hell does the First Amendment really say about my freedom of speech?

The Supreme Court ruled in *Buckley v. Valeo* that money is free speech, a First Amendment right. That is, you can pour as much money as you want into political campaigns and that is protected as your freedom of speech.

When I first read this decision, I was reminded of a proclamation by the controlling pigs in the George Orwell novel, *Animal Farm*, that "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Now as I understand it, Congress is at work trying to forward an amendment to the states that says burning the flag should not be covered under First Amendment speech rights. Burning a flag should not be considered a form of free speech, they say.

In other words, if I decide that I am so outraged at the demagogic misuse of the American flag and the principles it represents that as a sign of protest, I will burn it in outrage, I can be charged with whatever level of crime they decide to attach to it.

BUT IT IS DIFFERENT IF YOU ARE RICH

But if I am a millionaire, or more commonly a billionaire, and I become so outraged at a politician or political party, I can legally express it by writing a big time check that is protected by the First Amendment. ["Some animals are more equal than others."] It's not to be called bribery, or influence peddling - it's freedom of speech.

Which of these two forms of speech is most prevalent in our nation today - flag burning or clearly corruptive contributions to political campaigns? Which one is most likely to be practiced by the best established and the most influential, well-heeled in our society? Which one might be resorted to by the most desperate in society to jar the conscience of other Americans?

I don't know of anybody who has ever burned an American flag. I don't remember seeing any American [in America] burning the flag since maybe the protest years of Vietnam.

The only times in recent years that I've seen the flag burned were on TV news-casts from countries that were protesting American policies.

THERE WOULD BE AN INCREASE IN BURNINGS

If those in Congress who want to make this a political dividing point have their way, I now predict that we will see an increase in flag burning, if nothing else to

test the law in the courts.

For example, "What is an American flag?" If I stitch together a facsimile of the American flag with 49 or 51 stars and 12 or 14 stripes and stand in the public square and burn it, is it an American flag?

Let's say I have taken pictures of the artifact that I burned and have witnesses that it was not an American flag because there was an incorrect number of stars and stripes.

Question: Have I burned an American flag or only a resemblance to piss off a bunch of people and gain attention to my cause? Am I guilty of burning an American flag that was not really an American flag?

I'm sure others have also wondered about a right to free speech wherein if I have big bucks to buy an election, I am exercising my First Amendment rights. But if I decide to burn a symbol [cloth, paper, plastic, or wooden] that I and other Americans love to show my outrage, I will be hauled up and prosecuted.

My recommendation to fellow patriots is to vote against any politician who is willing to use the flag to divide Americans.

- The author lives in Tulsa

Perils Of Growing Old

Funny, I don't remember being absent minded ... God grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference.

I started out with nothing and I still have most of it. My wild oats have turned into prunes and All Bran. I finally got my head together; now my body is falling apart.

Funny, I don't remember being absent minded ... if all is not lost, where is it?

Some days you're the dog; some days you're the hydrant. I wish the buck stopped here. I sure could use a few.

Kids in the back seat cause accidents. Accidents in the back seat cause kids.

It's hard to make a comeback when you haven't been anywhere. The only time the world beats a path to your door is when you're in the bathroom. If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would have put them on my knees.

When I'm finally holding all the cards, why does everyone decide to play chess?

These days, I spend a lot of time thinking about the hereafter. I go somewhere to get something and then wonder what I'm here after.

A Liberal Republican Worries About Future

By Alvena Bieri

WAR ON THE MIDDLE CLASS

By Lou Dobbs
Penguin Group
288 pages, \$24.95

Lou Dobbs, on CNN every night, calls himself a lifelong liberal Republican. In his new book, "War on the Middle Class," [I'll give you the subtitle in a minute] published in 2006 by Penguin, he lays out so many facts and figures we need to read it and then save it as a good reference book. Anyway, the rest of the title says it all – "How the Government, Big Business, and Special Interest Groups are Waging War on the American Dream and How to Fight Back."

His worry is that the American Dream is turning into a nightmare.

And we know he is serious about the best of our values when he tells us to re-read and study the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, placed conveniently at the end of the book.

It was Oklahoma's own Will Rogers who said that Americans have "the best Congress money can buy." Since his time things are even worse. George Bush likes to say we have "an ownership society." Yes, Dobbs continues, the ownership is by corporations, and we end up with a government that is dominated by corporate money. The Center for Responsive Politics, which Dobbs quotes, reports that at least three-fourths of campaigns are financed by corporations. Wal-Mart is tops in contributions. And he says the total spent is not just millions, but billions.

GOVERNMENT'S FOURTH BRANCH: LOBBYISTS

Lobbyists could now be called the fourth branch of government. In Dobbs' words, they are "the arms dealers in the war on the middle class." Jack Abramoff, now sentenced to six years in prison, is the prime example of many. Unfortunately, there is no big lobby for the middle class. We don't quite have the power of General Electric, which is bigger than the economies of Finland, Ireland, Portugal, and Thailand combined, or General Motors, larger than Saudi Arabia.

Most people think of themselves as middle class and have some concept of the idea of the common good as a goal for government and the society. Look at a few of Dobbs' statistics. He says the top 1% of people in our country are those who take in at least \$400,000 a year – movie stars, professional athletes, and some coaches. And oh, yes, Wall Street bankers. The bottom 20% have to get by on \$10,000 a year, and the rest of us are somewhere in between. And most CEOs make several hundred times as much as their employees.

As Warren Buffet puts it, "My class is winning, but they shouldn't be."

Dobbs is also worried about the effects of free trade on a democracy, or what



BY SUMMERS FOR THE ORLANDO SENTINEL. FLA

we used to think of as a democracy. He says, "The United States is losing not only production, capital, and jobs, but our sovereignty, the ability to determine our destiny as a nation." We don't even lead the world any more in the production of cars. Then check your clothing labels. Made in China, probably, or India. Look at your towels and washcloths. They are likely made in Honduras. Outsourcing of jobs all over the world is pretty simple to understand. Corporate executives are always looking for cheaper labor, no matter where it is. Add to all this that the U.S. now has a \$9 trillion debt. That's trillion with a T.

HOPE GLIMMERS AT STATE LEVEL

So what are we to do about the destructive money influence? Many once-powerful institutions just cannot be depended on any more to help. Nearly all the publishing groups are now owned by just eight companies. Then "labor unions are nearing extinction," universities are not the training ground for independent thinking anymore, and churches had much rather talk about gay marriage than the economy and the common good. The federal government is plain "dysfunctional."

After we re-read those two famous documents, Dobbs says that there is a little bit of hope at the state level. This was written, by the way, before the midterm election. But a good example of reform is the public financing of elections such as is being used in Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut.

As a Democrat who feels quite a bit better now, I say that we need more Republicans like Lou Dobbs.

– The author lives in Stillwater

Sooner Soldiers To Need Our Help

With numerous Oklahomans involved in the War on Terror, the state needs to prepare to deal with problems facing soldiers returning to civilian life. Rep. Joe Dorman plans to push that issue in the 2007 Legislature.

"We need to prepare for our troops coming home so they get the support they need to reintegrate into society," said Dorman, D-Rush Springs. "We can't be reactive on this issue. We must address the problem of stress disorders before the need increases beyond our ability to respond."

Dorman requested a legislative study on post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] by the House Health and Human Services Committee.

According to a 2002 study by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, about 8% of men and 20% of women develop post-traumatic stress disorder after facing trauma/severe stress. Roughly 30% of those individuals develop a chronic form of the ailment.

IT AFFECTS A HUGE POPULATION

About 3.6% of U.S. adults aged 18 to 54 have post-traumatic stress disorder during the course of a given year, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

However, officials said that many soldiers are not willing to admit any stress disorder when they return to the U.S. – and virtually all individuals who serve in a war zone have some form of stress disorder, although it does not always turn into PTSD.

If left untreated, PTSD can significantly impact psychosocial functions, creating many problems in the daily lives of those with the ailment.

Both psychotherapy [also known as "talk therapy"] and drug therapy can be used to treat PTSD.

Early intervention is key to successful treatment, but Oklahoma needs more providers of trauma services who are trained to recognize and treat PTSD, officials with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services said.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MAY ACT

Dorman noted that Congress appears ready to increase funding for treatment centers and said Oklahoma needs to make the most of that potential windfall, noting that the demand for PTSD treatment extends well beyond soldiers.

"Oklahoma currently does not have an in-patient facility for treatment of PTSD. I would like to see a state-federal partnership to fix this," Dorman said.

"We must work to expand our current treatment centers to allow the soldiers to

remain close to family and friends for that additional support they need.

"We must also provide services to rural police officers and firefighters who need the counseling following a traumatic event. Post-traumatic stress disorder is associated mainly with the military, but we also have to realize a lot of our heroes – such as police and firefighters – also suffer symptoms."

A New Element Is Recently Discovered

The recent hurricanes and gasoline issues are proof of the existence of a new chemical element. A major research institution has recently announced the discovery of the heaviest element yet known to science.

The new element has been named Governmentium. Governmentium [Gv] has one neutron, 25 assistant neutrons, 88 deputy neutrons, and 198 assistant deputy neutrons, giving it an atomic mass of 312.

These 312 particles are held together by forces called morons, which are surrounded by vast quantities of lepton-like particles called peons. Since Governmentium has no electrons, it is inert. However, it can be detected, because it impedes every reaction with which it comes into contact.

A minute amount of Governmentium can cause a reaction that would normally take less than a second, to take over four days to complete.

Governmentium has a normal half-life of four years; it does not decay, but instead undergoes a reorganization in which a portion of the assistant neutrons and deputy neutrons exchange places.

In fact, Governmentium's mass will actually increase over time, since each reorganization will cause more morons to become neutrons, forming isodopes.

This characteristic of moron promotion leads some scientists to believe that Governmentium is formed whenever morons reach a critical concentration.

This hypothetical quantity is referred to as critical morass. When catalyzed with money, Governmentium becomes Administratium – an element which radiates just as much energy as Governmentium since it has half as many peons but twice as many morons.

Now that is what I call a miraculous find.

– Thanks to Barbara Santee of Tulsa for this jewel

Insurance Law Is Unfair To Women

A state senator is giving the Oklahoma Legislature another chance to protect women left out of a state law governing small group health insurance policies.

Under current Oklahoma law, every health insurance policy – no matter how small the group – must cover prostate examinations for men. There is, however, no requirement that obstetrical and gynecological examinations for women be covered by health insurance group policies with 50 or fewer members.

Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, has introduced legislation to strike that inequity from the law. Senate Bill 11 would, if passed, ensure Oklahoma's women covered by small group health insurance policies are treated fairly under state law.

"A conservative businessman in my district – a business owner who would be affected by this change – brought this to my attention," said Gumm. "He and I share the unshakable belief that this statute is fundamentally unfair to Oklahoma's women."

SUFFERING AND DEATH MAY RESULT

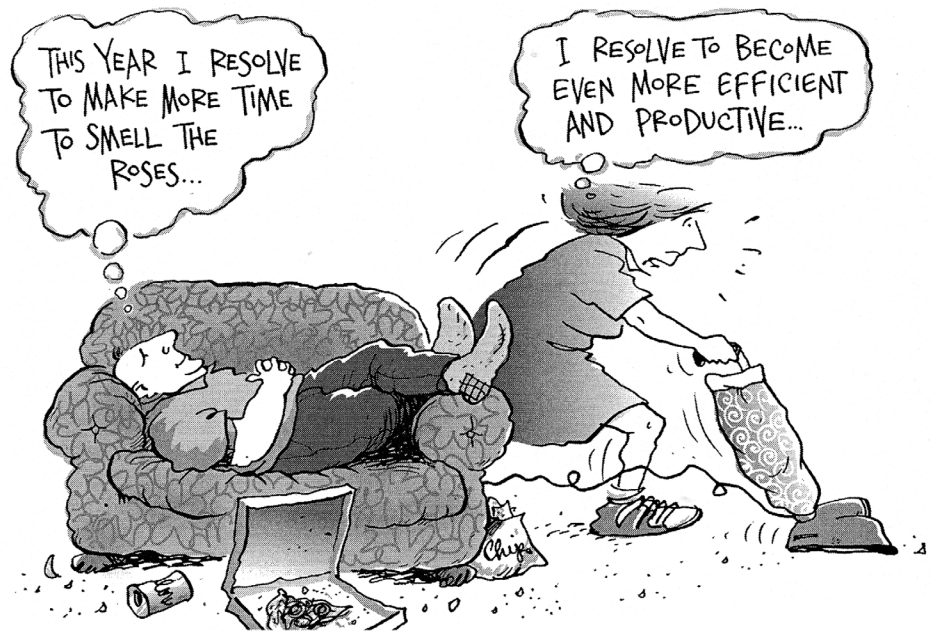
That unfairness could lead to unnecessary suffering and death. The kind of early detection state law mandates for men – but not women – is considered the key to beating cancer, he said.

"If the bill passes and all policies are required to cover these examinations for women, we give them a chance to detect life-threatening cancer and begin early treatment to defeat the disease," Gumm said.

"Ultimately, I believe this change would reduce medical costs to women and their insurers and, more importantly, save lives, which is good news for everyone."

Conversely, Gumm said, failure to pass the measure would keep Oklahoma's women and their families at risk unnecessarily. "Any cancer that strikes a woman has more victims than just her," he said.

"Children could face a future without a mother, and a father may have to raise his children alone. A woman fighting cancer is someone's daughter. She is a sister, a wife, a mother and a friend. We certainly owe Oklahoma's families better than



what current law provides."

GOP HOUSE PLAYED POLITICS

In 2006, Gumm introduced an identical bill. After passing the Senate on a bipartisan vote, the measure died in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives without so much as a hearing in committee.

The lawmaker said he simply fails to understand why anyone – regardless of party affiliation – would not enthusiastically support a bill to give a majority of the population the same protection men have. Census figures indicate women comprise 50.6 percent of Oklahoma's population.

"Ensuring state law is fair to a majority of our population should not be a partisan issue – and it certainly wasn't a partisan issue in the Senate," Gumm said. "We have a responsibility to do the right thing, and passage of this legislation is the right thing."

Senator Wants To Stop Spending Spree

State Sen. Kenneth Corn believes state government cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past, going on a spending spree when times are good, creating a financial crisis when oil and gas prices drop.

A bill filed by the Poteau Democrat would protect against the roller coaster budgeting that results from the cyclic nature of energy prices.

Senate Joint Resolution 5 calls for a constitutional amendment to be considered by state voters. It would require certification of the 10-year average of gross production tax revenue from oil and natural gas, and limits legislative appropriation of revenue above that average to one-time expenditures.

"This would prevent the Legislature from repeating the mistakes of the 1980s when the oil boom dramatically increased state revenues and, in turn, expenditures, leaving a huge hole in the state budget when the boom went bust," Corn said.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY THE GOAL

The measure has been named the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Stabilization Act.

Last year, for example, oil and gas revenues spiked to all-time highs. The Leg-

islature simultaneously passed the largest tax cut in state history and the largest state budget ever.

"We can't keep doing that and not expect to face a fiscal crisis in the future. Oil and gas prices have already dropped below their levels from last year and I expect we'll have some tough budget decisions to make in the [2007] session," Corn said.

"By limiting appropriation of gross production revenues above the 10-year average to one-time expenditures, we can provide greater stability in the state budget."

Corn said under his proposal the excess gross production revenue could be spent on capital needs and things like highway maintenance and bridge replacement.

"This measure won't allow the Legislature to use an unstable source of revenue to create new programs or expand old ones. That's not fiscally responsible and my bill will allow the people to force some fiscal restraint on their elected leaders with a constitutional amendment," Corn said.

The eight-year legislative veteran filed a similar measure last year.

OU's Financial Condition Perilous?

By Mike Wright

The Fitch Ratings service provides financial analysis and rates bonds as investment opportunities. In 2006 they reported the bonded indebtedness of the University of Oklahoma, posted at the Business Wire website [Google search terms: Fitch University of Oklahoma bonds].

The Fitch analysis was done before September 2006. They wrote: "OU currently has \$378 million of bonds outstanding." They reported that on September 25 OU intended to put an additional \$114 million worth of bonds on the market.

The UBS Investment Bank prospectus confirms that, for the recent issue, OU's total new obligation will be \$193 million including interest.

To arrive at OU's total debt to bond-holders, add \$193 million to \$378 million and subtract the 2006 annual debt service payment of \$29 million. The result is that OU's current total debt is \$542 million.

SHARP DECLINE IN ENROLLMENT

Fitch concludes that OU bonds are a good investment, but certain realities are ignored. Fitch claims that OU has "enrollment stability." That is wrong. Within the recent four-year interval, freshmen enrollment at OU has declined 20% – for reasons of Oklahoma's declining birth rate and David Boren's escalating tuition and fees.

Compare freshmen enrollment in 2002 to current freshmen enrollment.

This decline illustrates the consequences of the heavy increases in tuition and fee costs inflicted by Boren.

See also Oklahoma's report card on higher education, from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Oklahoma receives an F for affordability.

This is associated with the question of whether Oklahoma colleges and universities are affordable for the average Oklahoma family. Enrollment costs in 2006 were 2½ times greater than when Boren arrived as OU president in 1994.

ALSO ERRED ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADS

Fitch analysts also made an error when they wrote, of Oklahoma high school graduates: "The projected change in the number of high school graduates between now and 2017 is 1%."

October 2004 data about Oklahoma public school enrollment provided by the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction tells a different story.

At that time there were 49,977 ninth-graders and 43,911 third-graders.

This is a 12% difference. Many will drop out of high school and never enter college. Many others will not be able to afford OU.

Fitch realizes that a huge percentage of OU enrollees come from Texas.

That is because Boren's plan for rescuing OU from financial crisis has been to make false statements in order to present the illusion that OU is a "leading" university, so that he can attract enrollees from wealthy families from Texas and other states.

Boren has falsely claimed that the OU business college is in the Forbes top 50. This lie was published in The Oklahoma Daily on Sept. 30, 2005. The Forbes website does not list OU in its top 50 business schools [http://www.forbes.com/2003/09/24/bschooland.html].

- The author lives in Norman

Iraq War Resister Building New Life

By Carolyn Thompson

TORONTO – He was on his way to his hometown of Buffalo, N.Y., he'd told his military higher-ups, to see if the Bills' unproven quarterback, J.P. Losman, was "the real deal."

But on that long bus ride from Clarksville, TN, last year, the soldier vomited twice, maybe three times – and it wasn't football that had him so unnerved.

As he rolled north, Army Sgt. Patrick Hart was veering off a road he'd been on for nearly 10 years.

Every mile he traveled led away from the Army.

Away from his wife Jill, who worked in the commander's office at his Fort Campbell, KY, base, and away from their young son.

Away from the country he had sworn to defend.

"I knew I was at a turning point," the 33-year-old Hart said of the wrenching ride toward the border, where he would leave his country behind.

WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS

From Buffalo, Hart would cross into Canada. His parents, who were in on his secret, drove him across the Peace Bridge and delivered him to a network of Canadian supporters who welcome disillusioned U.S. soldiers with open arms, a place to stay and legal advice.

And so Hart became one of at least 25 U.S. troops who have applied for refugee status.

In an interview at a Toronto restaurant, more than a year since he wore the uniform and made the trip, Hart wore a Bills jersey as he discussed the complexities of his decision but voiced no regrets.

"I have no desire to go back," he said.

Back at Fort Campbell, an unsuspecting Jill Hart picked up the phone at the house she had decorated in red, white and blue, where a Rosie the Riveter poster hung on the wall. Her husband of five years said he was not coming home.

Within days, Patrick Hart was listed as AWOL from the Army.

BENEFITS DENIED EPILEPTIC SON

Jill, who had thrown herself into the military life – counseling families, working for the company commander – was told the Army would stop health benefits for her epileptic son, then 3.

The threat was supposed to convince Patrick Hart to reconsider. It convinced Jill Hart her husband was on to something.

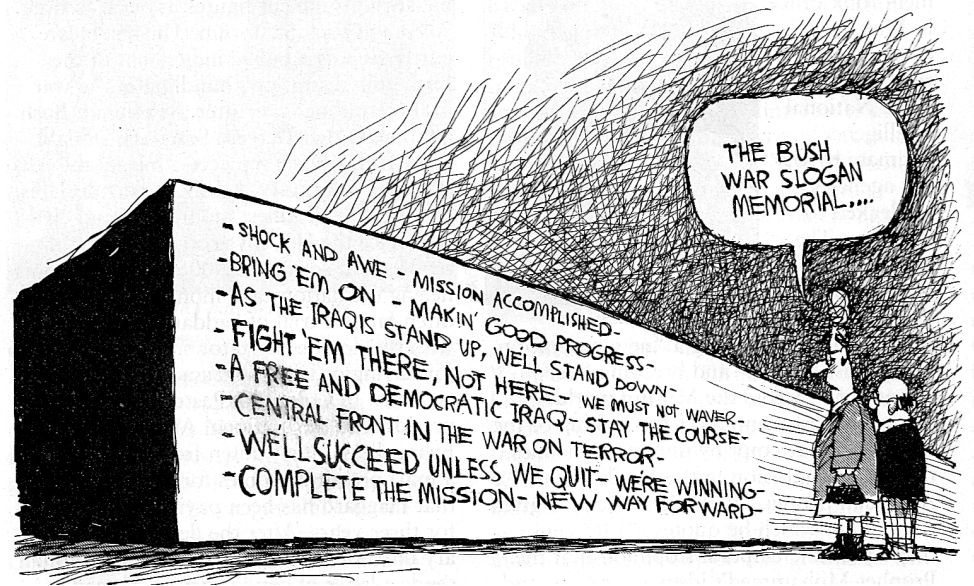
"I thought we had this great relationship," she recalled of her life within the military. "It made it very clear I'd been living in this world seeing what I wanted to see."

She acknowledges she would have told the base commander if she knew of her husband's plans, out of fear of the trouble he would be in.

Though devastated, she flew to Toronto, where the family was reunited in September 2005, a month after her husband crossed the border. Jill Hart decided to give it a year. "Three days later I was fine," she says now.

With their families and the resisters' organization helping with living expenses, the Harts have been active with peace groups and the Toronto Epilepsy Associa-

MIKE LUCKOVICH ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTIONAL ©
AJC.com 12-11-06



tion, and visible critics of the war that Patrick calls a "war of aggression."

THEY CONSIDER THEMSELVES SOLDIERS

He and others say they still consider themselves soldiers, that the military left them, not the other way around.

"If you want to support the troops, bring them home," said Hart, who was in the Army 9½ years and served nearly a year in Kuwait in 2003. He left a month before he was to be sent to Iraq.

To prepare for Iraq, he says he made himself study pictures and videos of atrocities captured by other soldiers: "People getting ripped apart by machine guns. Little kids with chemical burns all over ... I would watch the beheading of Nick Berg. I was trying to turn myself into a monster so that when I went over there, there would be no mercy ...

"But that leaves scars on the inside," he said.

Army representatives did not return repeated calls seeking comment. Supporters estimate there are well over 200 U.S. military deserters in Canada who have not yet sought formal protection.

NO CANADIAN TROOPS IN IRAQ

The Canadian government, which has troops in Afghanistan but not Iraq, has so far denied refugee status to today's U.S. troops.

The Immigration and Refugee Board in October ruled against Pfc. Joshua Key, saying he would likely be court-martialed if returned to the United States but not subjected to cruel or unusual punishment.

Appeals of two earlier rejections, in the cases of Jeremy Hinzman and Brandon Hughey, are pending.

War resisters leaving the United States and going to Canada, are allowed to live in Canada, they're allowed to work in Canada, they are even given access to medical and health insurance programs, but they are not given any legal status.

Despite an uncertain future, the Harts – who still display the poster of Rosie the Riveter in their Toronto apartment – have a positive view of the past year, which they would not have spent together had Patrick Hart gone to Iraq as planned.

"Every day I wake up with my son," Patrick Hart said, "it just assures me I did the right thing."

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Recruiters Lying To Get Enlistments

An ABC News undercover investigation showed Army recruiters telling students that the war in Iraq was over, in an effort to get them to enlist.

ABC News and New York affiliate WABC equipped students with hidden video cameras before they visited 10 Army recruitment offices in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

"Nobody is going over to Iraq anymore?" one student asks a recruiter.

"No, we're bringing people back," he replies.

"We're not at war. War ended a long time ago," another recruiter says. Last year the Army suspended recruiting nationwide to retrain recruiters following hundreds of allegations of improprieties.

POSING AS DRUG ADDICT DROPOUT

One Colorado student taped a recruiting session posing as a drug addicted dropout. "You mean I'm not going to get in trouble?" the student asked. The recruiters told him no, and helped him cheat to sign up.

During the ABC News sessions, some recruiters told students if they enlisted, there would be little chance they'd to go Iraq.

But Col. Robert Manning, who is in charge of U.S. Army recruiting for the entire Northeast, said that new recruits were likely to go to Iraq.

"I would not disagree with that," Manning said. "We are a nation and Army at war still."

Manning looked at the ABC News video of his recruiters.

"It's hard to believe some of things they are telling prospective applicants," Manning said. "I still believe that this is the exception more than the norm ... I've visited many stations myself, and I know that we have many wonderful Americans serving in uniform as recruiters."

TOLD HIM HE COULD ALWAYS JUST QUIT

Yet ABC News found one recruiter who even claimed if you didn't like the Army, you could just quit.

"It's called a 'Failure to Adapt' discharge," the recruiter said. "It's an entry-level discharge so it won't affect anything on your record. It'll just be like it never happened." Manning, however, disagrees with the ease the recruiter describes.

"I would believe it's not as easy as he would lead you to believe it is," he said. Sue Niederer, whose son, Seth, joined the Army in 2002, said she was all too familiar with recruiters' lies.

"They need to do anything they possibly can to get recruits," Niederer said. Seth was sent to Iraq and was killed by a roadside bomb.

Niederer said she was not surprised by what ABC News had found. She believes it's still a widespread problem. She said that recruiters told Seth he wouldn't be put into combat.

"Ninety percent [are] going to be putting their lives on the line for our country," she said. "Tell them the truth. That's all. Just tell them the truth."

Trevor Helpline

866-4-U-TREVOR

24/7 suicide prevention/crisis
confidential help for
gay and questioning teens

America Is A Religious Nation

Why Church/State Separation Is Vital

By U.S. Sen. Barack Obama

We need to understand the critical role that the separation of church and state has played in preserving not only our democracy, but the robustness of our religious practice.

Folks tend to forget that during our founding, it wasn't the atheists or the civil libertarians who were the most effective champions of the First Amendment.

It was the persecuted minorities, it was Baptists like John Leland who didn't want the established churches to impose their views on folks who were getting happy out in the fields and teaching the scripture to slaves.

It was the forbearers of the evangelicals who were the most adamant about not mingling government with religion, because they did not want state-sponsored religion hindering their ability to practice their faith as they understood it.

AMERICA'S INCREASING DIVERSITY

Moreover, given the increasing diversity of America's population, the dangers of sectarianism have never been greater. Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers.

And even if we did have only Christians in our midst, if we expelled every non-Christian from the United States of America, whose Christianity would we teach in the schools? Would we go with James Dobson's, or Al Sharpton's?

Which passages of scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is okay and that eating shellfish is abomination?

How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith?

OR JUST THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount – a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application? ...

Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion specific values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason.

I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.

This is going to be difficult for some who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, as many evangelicals do. But in a pluralistic democracy, we have no choice.

Politics depends on our ability to persuade each other of common aims based on a common reality. It involves the compromise, the art of what's possible.

AMERICANS ARE A RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

If we're going to do that then we first need to understand that Americans are a religious people. Ninety percent of us believe in God, 70% affiliate themselves with an organized religion, 38% call themselves committed Christians, and substantially more people in America believe in angels than they do in evolution.

This religious tendency is not simply the result of successful marketing by skilled preachers or the draw of popular mega-churches. In fact, it speaks to a hunger that's deeper than that – a hunger that goes beyond any particular issue or cause.



At some fundamental level, religion does not allow for compromise. It's the art of the impossible. If God has spoken, then followers are expected to live up to God's edicts, regardless of the consequences.

To base one's life on such uncompromising commitments may be sublime, but to base our policy-making on such commitments would be a dangerous thing.

Any reconciliation between faith and democratic pluralism requires some sense of proportion. But a sense of proportion should also guide those who police the boundaries between church and state.

Not every mention of God in public is a breach to the wall of separation – context matters. It is doubtful that children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance feel oppressed or brainwashed as a consequence of muttering the phrase "under God." I didn't.

VOLUNTARY SCHOOL PRAYER IS NOT WRONG

Having voluntary student prayer groups use school property to meet should not be a threat, any more than its use by the High School Republicans should threaten Democrats.

So, we all have some work to do here. But I am hopeful that we can bridge the gaps that exist and overcome the prejudices each of us brings to this debate. And I have faith that millions of believing Americans want that to happen.

No matter how religious they may or may not be, people are tired of seeing faith used as a tool of attack. They don't want faith used to belittle or to divide.

They're tired of hearing folks deliver more screech than sermon. Because in the end, that's not how they think about faith in their own lives.

Many Americans are looking for a deeper, fuller conversation about religion in this country. They may not change their positions, but they are willing to listen and learn from those who are willing to speak in fair-minded words, those who know of the central and awesome place that God holds in the lives of so many, and who refuse to treat faith as simply another political issue with which to score points.

I have a hope for America that we can live with one another in a way that reconciles the beliefs of each with the good of all. It's a prayer worth praying, and a conversation worth having in this country in the months and years to come.

- Excerpts from Sen. Obama's remarks to Sojourners/Call to Renewal conference. A Democrat, Sen. Obama represents Illinois.

U.S. Foreign Language Deficit A Real Threat

The feds have announced a national initiative on teaching of critical foreign languages. Better late than never.

American students must master critical need foreign language skills to remain competitive and continue the progress in securing the nation.

The Departments of State and Defense and the Director of National Intelligence and the Department of Education are proposing establishing grants and training teachers under President Bush's National Security Language Initiative.

Critically needed foreign language skills are necessary to advance national security and global competitiveness.

More than 100 million children in China are studying English, a compulsory subject for all Chinese primary school students. By comparison, only about 24,000 of approximately 54 million elementary and secondary school children in the United States are studying Chinese.

According to the Center for Applied Linguists, only 31% of American elementary schools [and 24% of public elementary schools] report teaching foreign languages.

EXPOSURE NOT PROFICIENCY

Most schools focus on giving introductory exposure to a language rather than achieving overall proficiency.

Only 44% of American high school students are enrolled in foreign language classes, as reported by the Digest of Education statistics.

Of those students, 69% are enrolled in Spanish and 18% in French. Less than 1% of American high school students combined study Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Japanese, Korean, Russian or Urdu.

Less than 8% of United States undergraduates take foreign language courses, and less than 10% study abroad in any given year. Foreign language degrees are only 1% of undergraduate degrees conferred in the U.S.

Remember the crack by the ugly American abroad:

"Don't any of you dummies speak English?"

Yes, a lot more than Americans speak another language.

You Just Had To Ask

A little old lady was sitting on a park bench in The Villages, a Florida retirement community. A man walks over and sits down on the other end of the bench.

After a few moments, the woman asks, "Are you a stranger here?"

He replies, "I lived here years ago."

"So, where were you all these years?"

"In prison," he says.

"Why did they put you in prison?"

He looked at her, and very quietly said, "I killed my wife."

"Oh!" said the woman. "So you're single ..."

Most Outrageous Comments of 2006

How extreme were conservative commentators in their remarks last year? Media Matters For America assembled some of the wilder statements:

William A. Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights: "Well, look, there are people in Hollywood, not all of them, but there are some people who are nothing more than harlots. They will do anything for the buck. They wouldn't care. If you asked them to sodomize their own mother in a movie, they would do so, and they would do it with a smile on their face."

Fox News host John Gibson: "Do your duty. Make more babies. That's a lesson drawn out of two interesting stories over the last couple of days. First, a story yesterday that half of the kids in this country under five years old are minorities. By far, the greatest number are Hispanic."

"You know what that means? Twenty-five years and the majority of the population is Hispanic. Why is that? Well, Hispanics are having more kids than others. Notably, the ones Hispanics call 'gabachos' – white people – are having fewer."

Right-wing pundit Ann Coulter on The New York Times' decision to report on the Bush Administration's warrantless domestic wiretapping program and a Treasury Department financial transaction tracking program: The Times had done "something that could have gotten them executed, certainly did get Julius and Ethel Rosenberg executed."

Coulter responding to Hardball host Chris Matthews' question, "How do you know that Bill Clinton is gay?": "I don't know if he's gay. But former Vice President Al Gore – total fag."

Nationally syndicated radio host Michael Savage: "That's why the department store dummy named Wolf Blitzer, a Jew who was born in Israel, will do the astonishing act of being the type that would stick Jewish children into a gas chamber to stay alive another day."

"He's probably the most despicable man in the media next to Larry King, who takes a close runner-up by the hair of a nose. The two of them together look like the type that would have pushed Jewish children into the oven to stay alive one more day to entertain the Nazis."

Coulter on Rep. Maxine Waters [D-CA], an African-American: "Congresswoman Maxine Waters had parachuted into Connecticut earlier in the week to campaign against Sen. Joseph Lieberman because he once expressed reservations about affirmative action, without which she would not have a job that didn't involve wearing a paper hat."

"Waters also considers Joe 'soft' on the issue of the CIA inventing crack cocaine and AIDS to kill all the black people in America."

Nationally syndicated radio host Rush Limbaugh, blaming America's "obesity crisis" on "the left," "liberal government," and "food stamps": "Because we are sympathetic, we are compassionate people, we have responded by letting our government literally feed these people to the point of obesity."

"At least here in America, we didn't teach them how to fish, we gave them the fish. Didn't teach them how to butcher or slaughter a cow to get the butter, we gave them the butter. The real bloater here, as we know, is in – is in government."

Coulter on Sen. Lincoln Chafee [R-RI]: "They shot the wrong Lincoln."

CNN Headline News host Glenn Beck to Rep.-elect Keith Ellison [D-MN]: "OK. No offense, and I know Muslims. I like Muslims ... With that being said, you are a Democrat. You are saying, 'Let's cut and run.' And I have to tell you. I have been nervous about this interview with you, because what I feel like saying is, 'Sir, prove to me that you are not working with our enemies.'"

Rightwing pundit Debbie Schlussel on Sen. Barack Obama [D-IL]: So, even if he identifies strongly as a Christian ... is a man who Muslims think is a Muslim, who feels some sort of psychological need to prove himself to his absent Muslim father, and who is now moving in the direction of his father's heritage, a man we want as President when we are fighting the war of our lives against Islam? Where will his loyalties be?"

Glenn Beck: "Cindy Sheehan. That's a pretty big prostitute there, you know what I mean?"

Republican strategist Mary Matalin: "I think these civil rights leaders are nothing more than racists. And they're keeping constituency, they're keeping their neighborhoods and their African-American brothers enslaved, if you will, by continuing to let them think that they're – or forced to think that they're victims, that the whole system is against them."

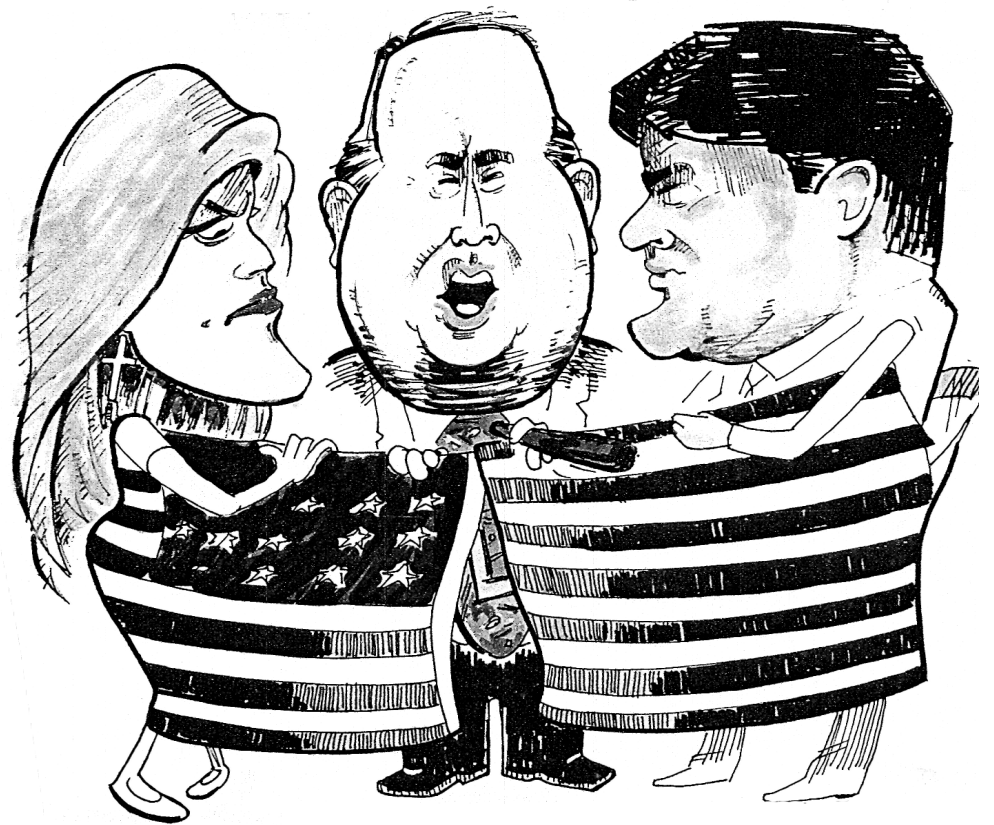
Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and host of the daily Christian radio show The Albert Mohler Program: "Well, I would have to say as a Christian that I believe any belief system, any world view, whether it's Zen Buddhism or Hinduism ... keeps them from coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ... it is a demonstration of satanic power."

Nationally syndicated radio host Neal Boortz on Rep. Cynthia McKinney's [D-GA] hairstyle: "She looks like a ghetto slut ... It looks like an explosion in a Brillo pad factory ... She looks like Tina Turner peeing on an electric fence ... She looks like a shih tzu!"

Limbaugh discussing a videotape released by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the then-leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq: "It sounds just like the Democratic National Committee is writing his scripts now." [4/26/06]

Beck: "Blowing up Iran. I say we nuke the bastards. In fact, it doesn't have to be Iran, it can be everywhere, anyplace that disagrees with me."

Jonathan Hoenig, managing member of Capitalist Pig Asset Management LLC, on Fox News' Your World with Neil Cavuto: "I think when it comes to Iran, the problem is we haven't been forceful enough. I mean if you want to see the Dow



go up, let's get the bombers in the air and neutralize this Iranian threat."

Savage: "I don't know why we don't use a bunker-buster bomb when he comes to the U.N. and just take Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad out with everyone in there."

Boortz: "I want you to think for think for a moment of how incompetent and stupid and worthless ... how incompetent, how ignorant, how worthless is an adult that can't earn more than the minimum wage? You have to really, really, really be a pretty pathetic human being to not be able to earn more than the human wage. Uh – human, the minimum wage."

Syndicated columnist and Fox News host Cal Thomas on businessman Ned Lamont's victory in Connecticut's Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate: "It completes the capture of the Democratic Party by its Taliban wing ... They have now morphed into Taliban Democrats because they are willing to 'kill' one of their own, if he does not conform to the narrow and rigid agenda of the party's kook fringe."

Fox News host Sean Hannity two months before the November midterm elections: "This is the moment to say that there are things in life worth fighting and dying for and one of 'em is making sure Nancy Pelosi doesn't become the House speaker."

Savage: "My fear is that if the Democrats win in the November midterm elections, and I'm afraid that they might, you're going to see America melt down faster that you could ever imagine. It will happen overnight, and it could lead to the breakup of the United States of America, the way the Soviet Union broke up."

Republican pollster Frank Luntz on Nancy Pelosi's appearance: "I always use the line for Nancy Pelosi. You get one shot at a facelift. If it doesn't work the first time, let it go."

Limbaugh on the Middle East: "Fine, just blow the place up."

Fox News host Bill O'Reilly [on his radio show]: "Do I care if the Sunnis and Shiites kill each other in Iraq? No. I don't care. Let's get our people out of there. Let them kill each other. Maybe they'll all kill each other, and then we can have a decent country in Iraq."

New York Post columnist Ralph Peters on Iraq Study Group co-chairman James Baker: "The difference is that Pontius Pilate just wanted to wash his hands of an annoyance, while Baker would wash his hands in the blood of our troops."

Conservative syndicated radio host Michael Medved on the animated movie Happy Feet: The film contains "a whole subtext, as there so often is, about homosexuality."

Media Matters For America.com

Things You Can Do

Change a light: Use fluorescent bulbs to save 150 pounds of CO2 per year per bulb.

Drive less: Save 150 pounds of CO2 for every mile you don't drive.

Recycle more: Save 2,400 pounds of CO2 per year by recycling half your household waste.

Check your tires: Improves gas mileage by more than 3%. Every unused gallon of gas saves 20 pounds of CO2.

Use less hot water: Install a low flow showerhead and wash clothes in warm or cold water to save up to 85 pounds of CO2 per year.

Avoid heavily packaged products: Cut down on your garbage by 10% to save 200 pounds of CO2.

Adjust your thermostat: Set thermostat two degrees higher in summer and two degree lower in winter. Save about 2,000 pounds of CO2 per year.

Plant a tree: A tree will absorb one ton of CO2 in its lifetime.

Turn off electronic devices: Turn off TV, DVD, stereo and computer when not in use to save thousands of pounds of CO2 per year.

– From *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's tremendous documentary on global warming

3 Million Votes Stolen

2006 Congressional Elections Hacked

By Rob Kall

A major undercount of Democratic votes and an over-count of Republican votes in U.S. House and Senate races across the country is indicated by an analysis of national exit polling data, by the nonpartisan Election Defense Alliance [EDA], a national election integrity organization.

These findings have led EDA to issue an urgent call for further investigation into the 2006 election results and a moratorium on deployment of all electronic election equipment.

"We see evidence of pervasive fraud, but apparently calibrated to political conditions existing before recent developments shifted the political landscape," said attorney Jonathan Simon, co-founder of Election Defense Alliance.

"The findings raise urgent questions about the electoral machinery and vote counting systems used in the United States," according to Sally Castleman, National Chair of EDA. "This is nothing less than a national indictment of the vote counting process in the United States!"

THIS NEVER HAPPENED

In 2004 fixers had to weight the vote very heavily, to the point that the party turnout was 37% Democrat and 37% Republican, which has never been the case. This was nowhere witnessed, no lines in Republican voting places were reported.

The distortion of actual turnout was even greater in 2006. The adjusted poll's sample, to match the vote count, had to consist of 49% 2004 Bush voters and only 43% 2004 Kerry voters, more than twice the actual margin of 2.8%.

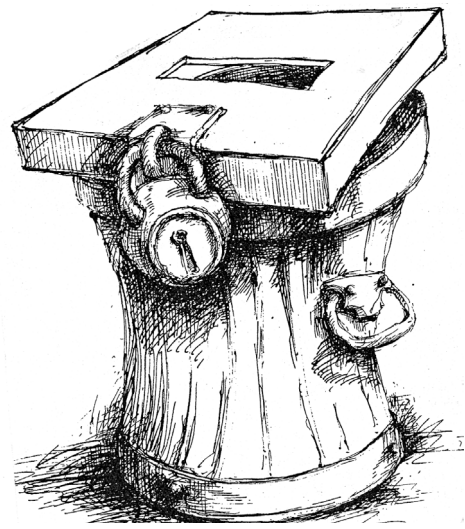
This may not seem like that much, but it translates into more than a 3,000,000 vote shift nationwide, which, depending on targeting, was enough to have altered the outcome of dozens of federal races.

Anyone who has ever wondered what is really in a hot dog should be aware that the voting machines are designed, programmed, deployed, and serviced by avowedly partisan vendors, and can easily be set up to generate entirely false counts with no one the wiser, least of all the voters.

COMMISSIONED BY THE MEDIA

The 2006 Edison-Mitofsky Exit Poll was commissioned by a consortium of major news organizations. Its conclusions were based on the responses of a very large sample of over ten thousand voters nationwide, and posted at 7:07 p.m. election night, on the CNN website.

That Exit Poll showed Democratic House candidates had out-pollied Republicans by 55% to 43.5% – an 11.5% margin – in the total vote for the U.S. House, some-



times referred to as the "generic" vote.

By contrast, the election results showed Democratic House candidates won 52.7% of the vote to 45.1% for Republican candidates, producing a 7.6% margin in the total vote for the U.S. House – 39% less than the Edison-Mitofsky poll.

This discrepancy, far beyond the poll's one percent margin of error, has less than a one in 10,000 likelihood of occurring by chance.

ACTUAL TURNOUT NOT REFLECTED

There is a significant over-sampling of Republican voters in the adjusted 2006 Exit Poll. It simply does not reflect the actual turnout on Election Day 2006.

This controversy comes amid growing public concern about the security and accuracy of electronic voting machines, used to count approximately 80% of the votes cast in the 2006 election.

The Princeton University Center for Information Technology Policy, in a September 2006 study, was the latest respected institution to expose significant flaws in the design and software of one of the most popular electronic touch-screen voting machines, the AccuVote-TS, manufactured by Diebold, Inc.

The Princeton report described the machine as "vulnerable to a number of extremely serious attacks that undermine the accuracy and credibility of the vote counts it produces."

These particular machines were used to count an estimated 10% of votes on Election Day 2006.

A separate "Security Assessment of the Diebold Optical Scan Voting Terminal," released by the University of Connecticut VoTeR Center and Department of Computer Science and Engineering, concluded that Diebold's Accuvote-OS machines, optical scanners which tabulate votes cast on paper ballots, are also vulnerable to "a devastating array of attacks."

The most prudent response is a moratorium on the further implementation of computerized voting systems.

And EDA's Simon summarized, "There has been a rush by some to celebrate 2006 as a fair election, but a Democratic victory does not equate with a fair election."

OpEd. Com

Paperless Voting Subject To Rigging

By Cameron W. Barr

Paperless electronic voting machines used throughout much of the country "cannot be made secure," according to draft recommendations issued by a federal agency that advises the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

The assessment by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, one of the government's premier research centers, is the most sweeping condemnation of such voting systems by a federal agency.

In a report hailed by critics of electronic voting, NIST said that voting systems should allow election officials to recount ballots independently from a voting machine's software.

The recommendations endorse "optical-scan" systems in which voters mark paper ballots that are read by a computer and electronic systems that print a paper summary of each ballot, which voters review – and elections officials save for recounts.

IT HAS TO CLEAR ONE MORE HURDLE

NIST's recommendations were debated before the Technical Guidelines Development Committee, charged by Congress to develop standards for voting systems.

To become effective, NIST's recommendations must then be adopted by the Election Assistance Commission, which was created by Congress to promote changes in election systems after the 2000 debacle in Florida.

If the commission agrees with NIST, the practical impact may not be felt until 2009 or 2010, the soonest that new standards would be implemented. The standards that the Election Assistance Commission will adopt are voluntary, but most states require election officials to deploy voting systems that meet national or federal criteria

NIST says in its report that the lack of a paper trail for each vote "is one of the main reasons behind continued questions about voting system security and diminished public confidence in elections." The report repeats the contention of the computer security community that "a single programmer could 'rig' a major election."

NO GUARANTEE WITH ELECTRONIC VOTING

Computer scientists and others have said that the security of electronic voting systems cannot be guaranteed and that election officials should adopt systems that produce a paper record of each vote in case of a recount.

Even critics of paperless electronic voting have grown disenchanted with tactical problems of adding printers to electronic "touch-screen" voting machines.

"Why are we doing this at all, is the question people are asking," said Warren Stewart, policy director of VoteTrustUSA, a group critical of electronic voting systems. "We have a perfectly good system – the paper-ballot optical-scan system."

Hold NCLB Accountable

By Stephen Krashen

Let accountability begin with the NCLB law itself.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act has poisoned schools with inappropriate and excessive testing, reduced reading instruction to mindless phonemic-awareness and phonics exercises, and encouraged the elimination of in-school free reading.

In the view of many scholars, research evidence did not support these moves, and, contrary to U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' claims, there is no evidence that the law has resulted in any improvement in student progress, or in any "closing of the gap" between children from low- and high-income families.

For further information see Gerald W. Bracey's "The 16th Bracey Report on the Condition of Public Education" in the October 2006 Phi Delta Kappan.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education's inspector general recently issued a report on apparent conflicts of interest in the administration of Reading First grants.

It detailed how certain reading methods and approaches were favored while others were shut out ["Scathing Report Casts Cloud Over 'Reading First,'" Oct. 4, 2006].

The Bush administration now wants to expand the No Child Left Behind law's requirements to high school, and there is even discussion of expanding them down to preschool.

With all the talk about making schools and teachers accountable, why isn't there any talk of making NCLB accountable?

- The author is professor emeritus, Flossier School of Education, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA.

Dear Conservative Brothers And Sisters

By Robert Anderson

I know you are dismayed and disheartened at the results of election. You're worried that the country is heading toward a very bad place you don't want it to go.

Your 12-year Republican Revolution has ended with so much yet to do, so many promises left unfulfilled. You are in a funk, and I understand.

Well, cheer up, my friends! Do not despair. I have good news for you. I and the millions of others who are now in charge with our Democratic Congress have a pledge we would like to make to you, a list of promises that we offer you because we value you as our fellow Americans.

You deserve to know what we plan to do with our newfound power – and, to be specific, what we will do to you and for you. Thus, here is our Liberal's Pledge to Disheartened Conservatives and Republicans:

RESPECT FOR YOUR BELIEFS

We will always respect you for your conservative beliefs. We will never, ever, call you "unpatriotic" simply because you disagree with us. In fact, we encourage you to dissent and disagree with us.

We will let you marry whomever you want, even when some of us consider your behavior to be "different" or "immoral." Who you marry is none of our business. Love and be in a wonderful gift.

We will not spend your grandchildren's money on our personal whims or to enrich our friends. It's your checkbook, too, and we will balance it for you.

When we soon bring our sons and daughters home from Iraq, we will bring your sons and daughters home, too. They deserve to live. We promise never to send your kids off to war based on either a mistake or a lie.

When we make America the last Western democracy to have universal health coverage, and all Americans are able to get help when they fall ill, we promise that you, too, will be able to see a doctor, regardless of your ability to pay.

WE WILL HELP YOUR AFFLICTED ONES

And when stem cell research delivers treatments and cures for diseases that affect you and your loved ones, we'll make sure those advances are available to you and your family, too.

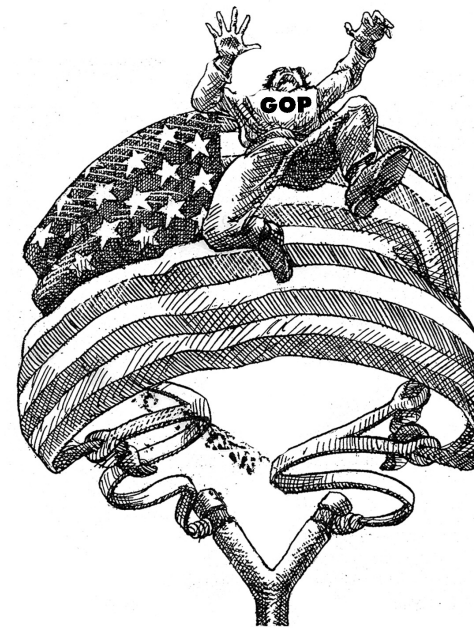
Even though you have opposed environmental regulation, when we clean up our air and water, we, the Democratic majority, will let you, too, breathe the cleaner air and drink the purer water.

Should a mass murderer ever kill 3,000 people on our soil, we will devote every single resource to tracking him down and bringing him to justice. Immediately. We will protect you.

We will never stick our noses in your bedroom or your womb. What you do there, as consenting adults, is your business. We will continue to count your age from the moment you were born, not the moment you were conceived.

KEEP YOUR HUNTING GUNS

We will not take away your hunting guns. If you need an automatic weapon or a handgun to kill a bird or a deer, then you really aren't much of a hunter and you



should, perhaps, pick up another sport. We will make our streets and schools as free as we can from these weapons and we will protect your children just as we would protect ours.

When we raise the minimum wage, we will pay your new wage, too. When women are finally paid what men make, we will pay conservative women that wage, too.

We will respect your religious beliefs, even when you don't put those beliefs into practice. In fact, we will actively seek to promote your most radical religious beliefs: "Blessed are the poor," "Blessed are the peacemakers," "Love your enemies," "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God," and "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

WE WILL SPREAD THE REAL WORD

We will let people in other countries know that God doesn't just bless America, he blesses everyone. We will discourage religious intolerance and fanaticism – starting with the fanaticism here at home, thus setting a good example for the rest of the world.

We will not tolerate politicians who are corrupt and who are bought and paid for by the rich. We will go after any elected leader who puts himself or herself ahead of the people. And we promise you we will go after the corrupt politicians on our side first.

If we fail to do this, we need you to call us on it. Simply because we are in power does not give us the right to turn our heads the other way when our party goes astray. Please perform this important duty as the loyal opposition.

We promise all this to you because this is your country, too. You are every bit as American as we are. We are all in this together. We sink or swim as one. Thank you for your years of service to this country and for giving us the opportunity to see if we can make things a bit better for 300 million fellow Americans – and for the rest of the world.

– The author may be reached at bobfandy@earthlink.net

Send More Troops? Outrageous

By Molly Ivins

The president of the United States does not have the sense God gave a duck – so it's up to us. You and me, Bubba.

I don't know why Bush is just standing there like a frozen rabbit, but it's time we found out. The fact is WE have to do something about it. This country is being torn apart by an evil and unnecessary war, and it has to be stopped NOW.

This war is being prosecuted in our names, with our money, with our blood, against our will. Polls consistently show that less than 30% of the people want to maintain current troop levels. It is obscene and wrong for the president to go against the people in this fashion. And it's doubly wrong for him to send 20,000 more soldiers into this hellhole, as he reportedly will announce soon.

What happened to the nation that never tortured? The nation that wasn't supposed to start wars of choice? The nation that respected human rights and life? A nation that from the beginning was against tyranny? Where have we gone? How did we let these people take us there? How did we let them fool us?

CIVIL RIGHTS, R.I.P.

It's a monstrous idea to put people in prison and keep them there. Since 1215, civil authorities have been obligated to tell people with what they are charged if they're arrested. This administration has done away with rights first enshrined in the Magna Carta nearly 800 years ago, and we've let them do it.

This will be a regular feature of mine, like an old-fashioned newspaper campaign. Every column, I'll write about this war until we find some way to end it. STOP IT NOW. BAM! Every day, we will review some factor we should have gotten right.

So let's take a step back and note, for example, that before the war one of the architects of the entire policy, Paul Wolfowitz, testified to Congress that Iraq had no history of ethnic strife. Sectarian and ethnic strife is a part of the region. And the region is full of examples of Western colonial powers trying to occupy countries, take their resources and take over the administration of their people – and failing.

And let's keep in mind that when the Army arrived in Baghdad, we, the television viewers, watched footage of a bunch of enraged and joyous Iraqis pulling down the

statue of Saddam Hussein, their repulsive dictator, in Firdos Square. Only one thing was wrong. The event was staged. Taking down the statue was instigated by a Marine colonel, and a PSYOP (psychological operations) unit made it appear to be a spontaneous show of Iraqi joy.

THE CAMERA NEVER LIES?

When we later saw the whole square where the statue was located, only 30 to 40 people were there [U.S. soldiers, press and some Iraqis – and one of several U.S. tanks present pulled the statue down with a cable]. We, the television viewers, saw the square being presented as though the people of Iraq had gone into a frenzy, mobbed the square and spontaneously pulled down the statue. Fake images and claims have been a part of this fiasco from the beginning.

We need to cut through all this smoke and mirrors and come up with an exit strategy, forthwith. The Democrats have yet to offer a cohesive plan to get us out of this mess. Of course, it's not their fault – but the fact is we need leaders who are grown-ups and who are willing to try to fix it. Bush has ignored the actual grown-ups from the Iraq Study Group and the generals and all other experts who are nearly unanimous in the opinion that more troops will not help.

So, like I said, it's up to you and me, Bubba. We need to make sure that the new Congress curbs executive power, which has been so misused, and asserts its own power to make this situation change. Now.

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Coltergeist's Latest Slander

"Most public schools are – at best – nothing but expensive babysitting arrangements, helpfully keeping hoodlums off the streets during daylight hours. At worst, they are criminal training labs, where teachers sexually abuse the children between drinking binges and acts of grand larceny." – Ann Coulter, better known as the Coltergeist.

BILLS

From Page One

drugs, no facilities for them. Thanks to the governor's lowball budget – a \$22 million increase. The agency needed \$57 million to provide bare minimum services.

Tax cut? Oklahoma was 250 child welfare workers and supervisors short but Henry and the Legislature funded only 49 new positions. Little wonder that more than 16,000 Oklahoma children were abused or neglected last year.

Tax cut? The state pension systems have an unfunded liability of over \$10 billion, including \$7.1 billion for the teachers' retirement system alone.

Tax cut? County governments are owed \$50 million that the Legislature did not reimburse. The police and fire pension fund is owed \$35 million borrowed by Henry. Rural firefighters are \$15 million short.

Tax cut? Thanks to then Speaker Todd Hiett, R-Kellyville, retired teachers got only a 2% cost of living increase while all other state pensioners got 4%. Hiett blocked a \$20 million annu-

al appropriation to shore up Teachers Retirement.

With an estimated \$275 million or more in spendable new revenue next session, men and women of real conscience – from the governor to the newest legislator – would address genuine needs before cutting any more taxes.

Republicans, spearheaded by Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, are pushing TABOR again. It is the so-called taxpayers bill of rights. In fact, it is a scheme to gut the state's budget, thus reducing social services.

The Brogdon gang has raked in tens of thousands of out-of-state dollars to finance the TABOR campaign.

The State Supreme Court tossed out the TABOR initiative petition 8-1, charging criminal malfeasance.

Also on the Republican agenda is the so-called "65 percent solution" which would require 65 cents of every education dollar be spent in the classroom.

Sounds great, doesn't it? But it is a disguised attempt to gut public school funding. It takes more than a teacher

to keep a public school in business – administration, aides, food services, maintenance, health services, transportation and security.

Oklahoma is already ranked third best nationally in what is spent in the classroom – slightly over 59 cents of every dollar.

Look for another round of tax breaks for Oklahoma's greedy oil and gas industry. Also look for a so-called "tort reform" proposal which is nothing more than denying access to the courthouse for ordinary Oklahomans. It is the State Chamber's wet dream.

Since former Rep. Kevin Calvey, R-Del City, was so badly burned politically by his bill for vouchers, that issue is not likely to come up in '07. Oklahomans don't like them, contrary to a rigged poll by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

Tax credits for homeschoolers are a Republican favorite. Many also push "merit pay" which is one way of not having to pony up the money to bring all teachers to the regional average.

Look for new State Rep. David Dank, R-OKC, former lobbyist/shill for business, to push his campaign promise for school consolidation.

Jari Askins has the record to prove she will stand her ground on key issues. The real question mark hangs over the head of a governor who preaches bipartisanship but dances most of the time with Republicans.

Henry is quick to say he is not interested in a U.S. Senate race, that he will go back to Shawnee to be more involved with his family.

Yes, The Observer endorsed Henry, despite his lack of leadership. Anybody but Ernest Istook. If Henry had used some of his \$3 million and his personal popularity for more of his party's candidates, he might have had Democratic majorities in both houses.

It promises to be a history-making 2007 session. Democrats will have to work extremely hard to shed Will Rogers' witticism – "I don't belong to any organized party, I'm a Democrat."

Organize or die.

\$1.3 Billion In Farm Aid Going To Non-Farmers

Even though Donald R. Matthews put his sprawling new El Campo, TX residence in the heart of rice country, he is no farmer. He is a 67-year-old asphalt contractor who wanted to build a dream house for his wife of 40 years.

Yet under a federal agriculture program approved by Congress, his 18-acre suburban lot receives about \$1,300 in annual "direct payments," because years ago the land was used to grow rice.

Matthews is not alone. Nationwide, the federal government has paid at least \$1.3 billion in subsidies for rice and other crops since 2000 to individuals who do no farming at all, according to an analysis of government records by The Washington Post.

Some of them collect hundreds of thousands of dollars without planting a seed. Mary Anna Hudson, 87, from the River Oaks neighborhood in Houston, has received \$191,000 over the past decade. For Houston surgeon Jimmy Frank Howell, the total was \$490,709.

"I don't agree with the government's policy," said Matthews, who wanted to give the money back but was told it would just go to other landowners. "They give all

of this money to landowners who don't even farm, while real farmers can't afford to get started. It's wrong."

The checks to Matthews and other landowners were intended 10 years ago as a first step toward eventually eliminating costly, decades-old farm subsidies. Instead, the payments have grown into an even larger subsidy that benefits millionaire landowners, foreign speculators and absentee landlords, as well as farmers.

Most of the money goes to real farmers who grow crops on their land, but they are under no obligation to grow the crop being subsidized. They can switch to a different crop or raise cattle or even grow a stand of timber – and still get the government payments.

The cash comes with so few restrictions that subdivision developers who buy farmland advertise that homeowners can collect farm subsidies on their new back yards.

The system pays farmers a subsidy to protect against low prices even when they sell their crops at higher prices. It makes "emergency disaster payments" for crops that fail even as it provides subsidized insurance to protect against those failures.



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