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Will 2008 Be Year Of Real Reform? Oklahoma's Ethics

By Arnold Hamilton

Oklahoma's long, sordid history of political corruption – everything from campaign finance violations to influence peddling – could add an important new chapter in 2008.

Yet another legislative leader, House Speaker Lance Cargill, is subject of an Oklahoma Ethics Commission investigation, this time into questionable Republican fundraising tactics four years ago.

What's even bigger news, and perhaps far more important, is that state lawmakers and the ethics panel may be on the verge of enacting the most comprehensive reforms ever in an all-out quest to end – finally – the disgraceful cycle of public corruption.

"In politics, timing is everything," said Rep. Lucky Lamons, D-Tulsa, long a promoter of tougher ethics law. "I think this is a good time. I think you're going to see some real reform – not window dressing like last year."

It's far from a certainty, of course. Partisan, electoral politics is a never-ending quest for advantage and power, leaving legislators from both major parties ever fearful of the unintended consequences of such reforms.

The result: lawmakers often give lip service to good government reforms, but rarely deliver them.

The most recent example, ironically, is Cargill.

Last year, he promised a comprehensive ethics package, but ended up helping derail the most meaningful rules, including an end to in-session fund-raising and PAC-to-PAC contributions.

This year, with Cargill in the crosshairs of investigators, ethics reforms are front-and-center both in the Legislature and at the Oklahoma Ethics Commission.

At its Jan. 25 meeting, the five-member ethics panel will consider new rules that could sharply curtail lobbyists' gifts to legislators and reduce the amount they can spend on lawmakers in a year.

It also will re-consider the proposed PAC-to-PAC ban that it withdrew on the 2007 Legislature's final day after a House Republican-commissioned legal brief raised doubts about its constitutionality.

The PAC-to-PAC ban is especially important because it would prevent special interests and candidates from skirting campaign limits – and disguising who's giving how much to whom.

Currently, political action committees are prohibited from contributing more than \$5,000 to each candidate. But they also can give up to \$5,000 each to other PACs – which can then distribute more money to the same candidate.

In the 2006 campaign year, PAC-to-PAC contributions are believed to have exceeded \$700,000 in Oklahoma.

At the same meeting, Commissioner John Raley, the former U.S. attorney for Oklahoma's eastern district, will press the ethics panel to approve new rules that would reduce from \$300 to \$200 the amount lobbyists can spend annually on state lawmakers and other elected officials.

Raley's proposal also would put an end to lobbyists courting legislators

with tickets to concerts and sporting events – entertainment freebies that "duly noted by the media and public alike actually erodes the perception of trust the voters should have in their elected officials."

Commissioner Bernice Shedrick, a former Democratic state senator from Stillwater, is offering a status quo-like counter-proposal that would retain current limits, but require more reporting.

Raley knows it won't be easy to get his proposals approved. Even if the ethics commission agrees, the Legislature could balk.

"You're talking about decades of custom," he said. "If this thing goes through, it's revolutionary."

Even so, he said, he can no longer abide a system that creates the perception that corporate interests and other power groups can guarantee themselves access to lawmakers while "the little guy feels like he doesn't have a voice."

"The majority of calls I've received have been very supportive, very encouraging," he said. "They've said, 'Don't give up.' 'Stand your ground.'"

"I think the general public is dismayed and to some extent disgusted by what they read in the media about lavish parties and golfing weekends."

Moreover, when the Legislature returns in February, state Rep. David Dank, R-OKC, will push an ethics reform package that not only would eliminate PAC-to-PAC contributions and in-session fund-raising, but also put more teeth into punishment for campaign finance violators.

With Cargill under investigation – making it difficult for him or his lieutenants to publicly torpedo the reform package – Dank's proposals could slip through the Republican-controlled House. Their fate in an evenly-divided state Senate may be less certain, however.

In addition, Lamons is offering legislation that would increase the ethics commission's budget by 70%, giving it more resources to investigate allegations of official misconduct.

In the past, lawmakers have disgracefully underfunded the agency, recoiling at the idea of a strong, independent watchdog enforcing campaign laws. What they wanted instead was to create the illusion a watchdog was in place, ensuring campaigns are conducted lawfully.

Lamons said the influence of special interests and money grew exponentially when Republicans wrested control of the state House from long-entrenched Democrats.

The Democratic majority, he said, had three PACs. When the GOP took over, the speaker and all the committee chairs had PACs. Last year, when Cargill became speaker, he operated "like LAX" – Los Angeles International Airport – scheduling fund-raising meetings every 15 minutes with lobbyists.

"I saw the legislative process being up for sale," Lamons said. "We need to be more concerned with what's in the bill, rather than whose name is on the check."

"This building [state Capitol] is not for sale."



Observations

Greetings!

As we embark on our 40th year together, we welcome hundreds of new readers – many joining us through the generosity of loyal subscribers who help keep this journal of free voices alive.

It won't take long to discover The Observer is unlike anything else available in Red State Oklahoma.

Most of the state's mainstream media allow but one voice – their owner's. With few exceptions, they're archconservative, toadies of the corporate elite.

We love to stir the proverbial pot. We don't protect sacred cows. We're not in the hip pockets of either party. We welcome different viewpoints.

Make no mistake: We are social liberals. But we are far more conservative fiscally than our mainstream media brethren who worship their undeserved tax exemptions and routinely promote corporate welfare. We think all should pay their fair share of taxes.

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

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. Everyone else is on their own, unless they need a boost, not a handout.

As an independent journal of commentary, we strive to be provocative, entertaining and informative. You won't agree with everything you read, but it will get you thinking.

If you share our conviction that more information and debate are essential for a healthy democracy, we urge you to invite family, friends and neighbors – especially younger folk – to become Observer readers, too.

Top Ten

We know you're up to here with Top 10 stories of the past year, yet we would like to add to the list: Top 10

reasons why you should fork over the money for a gift subscription to keep The Observer going.

10. GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill wants to run for governor. We want to stop him.

9. We plan to take Rep. Randy Terrill on a goodwill tour of Mexico.

8. If we can talk him into it, Gov. Brad Henry would beat Sen. Jim Inhofe.

7. While some states are focusing on stem cell research, Oklahoma specializes in jail cell space.

6. What other publication will tell you what our congressional delegation is up to?

5. Read here about the flip-flops of the presidential candidates in both parties.

4. No, "liberal" isn't a dirty word, neither is "moderate" or "conservative." We feature them all.

3. The far, far right Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs will continue its propaganda and we will continue to debunk their stuff.

2. Where else can you read about Democrats who stray from the party's principles?

1. Frosty and Arnold promise you insightful coverage of the 2008 Legislature.

A GOP Dream

It's a Republican dream come true. Next year's state budget is so bad, less than \$32 million in new dollars will be available.

That means either standstill budgets or drastic cuts. The increase is a small fraction out of a multi-billion dollar budget.

It means the Police and Fire Pension fund will not be repaid \$35 million the Legislature borrowed.

It means the Teachers Retirement System will not recoup \$30 million the Legislature borrowed.

It means the shortage of social workers at the Department of Human Services will not be addressed. [They need 150 more and decent salaries to stop the constant turnover.]



It means that the nearly \$30 million shortfall in the Corrections Department will not be met unless funds are taken from other vital agencies.

It means more big tuition hikes at Oklahoma colleges and universities.

As for public education, lack of funding is already so severe that all of Henry Bellmon's HB 1017 reforms will remain unfunded – small class sizes, certified teachers, etc.

Nightmare? No, it's a dream come true for the Republican-controlled Legislature. Their libertarian fantasy is little or no government. That's why they have pushed through \$700 million in tax cuts – especially for fat cats.

We remind you that leadership budgets are rosy and the House GOP has jettisoned perfectly good office furniture and carpets for brand new stuff – all under a no bid contract.

Lagging Pay

American public school teachers earned an average of \$46,752 last year, a slight raise that did not keep pace with inflation.

The average salary increased 2.1% in 2007, according to 50-state figures compiled by the National Education Association, the country's largest teachers union.

The inflation rate was 3.3%. Since 2000, the raise for teachers has ranged from 2.1% to 3.8%.

The top state, Connecticut, paid public school teachers an average yearly salary of \$57,337. The District of Columbia was next at \$57,009.

South Dakota paid the lowest average salary, \$35,236, while Oklahoma was next-to-last at \$37,061. [Most Oklahoma teachers received a \$3,000 raise not calculated by the NEA.]

The NEA got its figures by surveying state education agencies. Salaries are often seen as an important reason why schools struggle to hire and keep teachers, particularly in subject areas or locations that have frequent shortages of instructors.

Oklahoma is also dead last in the region. The Republican House leadership has vowed to keep them there. Their primary reason is a dislike for all unions and an abiding dislike of "overpaid" administrators.

We continue to encounter educators who vote Republican. Go figure.

Dump It

Henry Bellmon fought for it when he was in the U.S. Senate – a constitu-

tional change that would wipe out the Electoral College. He had no luck.

After 220 years, even the best-designed mechanism needs a few repairs. The U.S. Constitution, which our Founding Fathers began drafting in May 1787, prescribes a "clumsy, indirect system" for electing presidents.

As we were reminded in 2000, Americans don't actually vote for their preferred presidential candidate. Instead, they choose a slate of presidential electors. The electors, in turn, vote for the candidate who receives the most votes in their state.

The Founders devised the Electoral College because they were elitists who disdained popular elections. Frankly, they considered most of their countrymen ignorant and unworthy of directly electing the nation's president.

On four occasions the Electoral College has elected presidents who lost the popular vote – John Quincy Adams in 1824, Rutherford Hayes in 1876, Benjamin Harrison in 1888, and George W. Bush in 2000.

Each time, it shook the nation's faith in democracy.

Before this trauma happens again, we should amend the Constitution and seize the right to choose our presidents. After 220 years, we're entitled.

Wrong!

Would even waterboarding get the truth out of state Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, the immigration spin doctor whose fame is not unlike that of Pinocchio?

His direct quote in response to Tulsa Bishop Edward Slattery's criticism of HB 1804: "The fastest growing parishes in Catholicism are non-English speaking, and a good portion of them are illegal aliens. I understand they're protecting their non-English speaking parishes ..."

The truth? A wave of surveys, including one by the Pew Research Center, show that increasing percentages of both American born and immigrant Hispanics are abandoning the Catholic Church.

A larger poll by the American Religious Identification Survey revealed that tens of thousands of Hispanics are leaving the Catholic Church, either for secular reasons or they are attracted to Pentecostal denominations.

Terrill is nothing if not predictable – always ignoring the facts before unloading his lips.

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OUR MOTTO: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

OUR CREDO: So then to all their chance, to all their shining golden opportunity. To all the right to love, to live, to work, to be themselves, and to become whatever thing their vision and humanity can combine to make them. This seeker, is the promise of America.

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Laurel: To Oklahoma's Garth Brooks, for five concerts in two days for California wildfire victims. Add to that all the profit from his new album is going for breast cancer research.

Oklahomans now rank 47th in nest eggs - including retirement plans, home ownership and personal debt level. - A.G. Edwards

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment and the rightwing American Tort Reform Association for pure propaganda. There is no lawsuit epidemic here. They would lock the Oklahoma courthouse door for their corporate buddies.

Is it the unbuckled Bible Belt? The 33 Oklahoma compacted tribes plan a billion dollars in expansions in 2008. There is now one slot machine for every 80 Oklahomans.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Bar Association, paying \$90,000 to clients whose six attorneys ripped off their funds. All six were disbarred. What other profession does likewise?

Good news for the Capitol news media. Damon Gardenhire, easily the sorriest House Republican PR person in history, is joining the OCU Law School to do marketing. Perfect, since the OCU law school has become a rightwing hotbed.

Dart: To the so-called Liberty Council for spreading the falsehood that Southwestern State University at Weatherford, under orders from the AG, banished the word Christmas in oral or written form. Internet blogs are often just plain fabricators.

More than 41% of babies born in Oklahoma last year were to unwed mothers. Inadequate funding from the GOP-controlled Legislature has the Department of Human Services stretched to the limit trying to educate and serve poor single moms.

Laurel: To the State Medical Examiner's office, calling the Legislature's hand. Years of gross underfunding has led to the decision to quit doing autopsies in Tulsa.

A legislative panel has decided to take a look at the so-called prisoner reintegration plan - \$50 and a bus ticket. Yet some wonder why the recidivism rate is so high.

Laurel: To the House Democratic Caucus announcing that no "merit pay" or other Republican dodge would be acceptable until and unless teachers reach the regional average in pay and all mandates are funded.

In 1983 household debt in America was 55% of income, today it's 114% - and above 136% on after-tax disposable income. Debt at the family and federal levels will end up destroying America.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment editorial page, hotly opposing expansion of the state's hate crimes law to include gay people. Odd, since the publisher's daughter is gay.

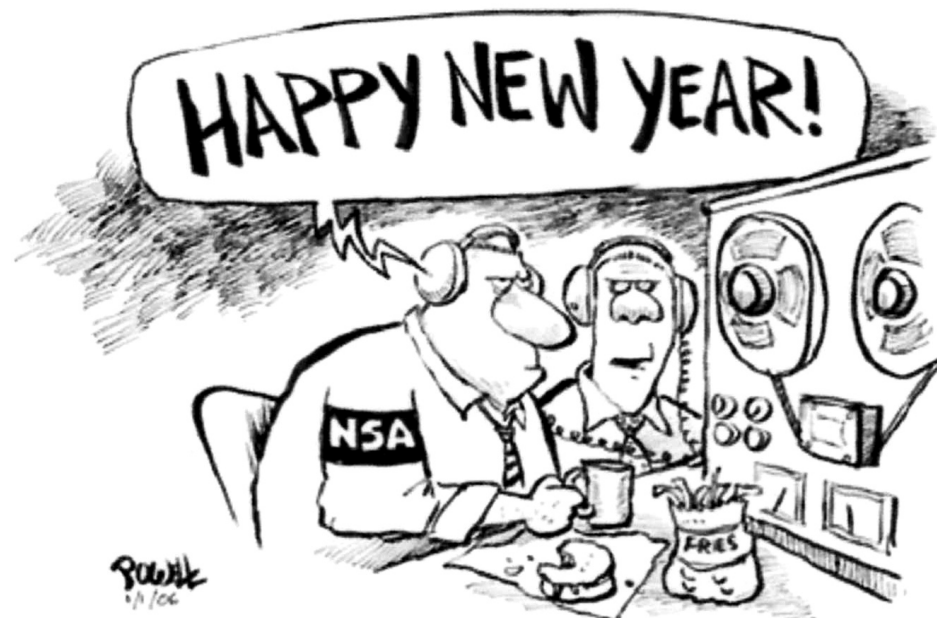
We told you several months ago that OKC banker Burns Hargis, 62, would be named OSU president. Some Cowboy supporters are upset because he is a rightwing Republican TV personality. Give him a chance.

Laurel: To Attorney General Drew Edmondson, required by law to rule on the new immigration law, which he found terrible but constitutional. Quit criticizing. That's his job. The courts will sort it out.

More than 500 Oklahomans committed suicide last year. Why? The state is ranked sixth from the bottom in the percentage of citizens stricken by depression. Yet our mental health program is grossly underfunded.

Dart: To Burger King, refusing to join McDonald's and other chains to increase the miserable wages paid to mato pickers - 40-50 cents an hour.

State and private dollars will build a \$20 million health clinic on Tulsa's mostly African-American north side. Sponsored by OU, it will address health issues such as a life expectancy disparity of 14 years.



"WANT TO RUN IT THROUGH TH' COMPUTER TO CHECK FOR SUSPICIOUS MEANINGS?"

Dart: To the so-called "fair and balanced" Fox Network. It refused an ad by actor Danny Glover that called attention to the rights Americans are losing under the Bush Administration.

A new Reuters poll reveals that 82% of Americans believe in God but only 42% believe in Darwin's theory of evolution. Nearly half of Catholics believe in Darwin's theory which the Vatican supports.

Laurel: To Rep. Al McAffrey, D-OKC, for legislation that would include sexual orientation and gender in the state's hate crimes law. Who would Jesus hate?

The Annie Casey Foundation national survey found that Oklahoma poor children rank 48th in health care, family activities and social and emotional well-being.

Dart: To Mitt Romney for daring to compare himself to Jack Kennedy. Yes, no person's religion should be a factor but Romney is a non-stop flip-flopper on the issues that Jack Kennedy fought for.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's Southern Baptists, announcing they will continue their mission despite House Bill 1804. That about makes it unanimous among Oklahoma's denominations.

They don't come any classier among state legislators than Sen. Harry Coates, R-Seminole, who announced he will introduce a bill to rewrite the immigration bill to minimize its negative impact on Oklahoma nationwide.

Dart: To those Americans opposing a guestworker program. How do you expel 12 million people? If so, how do you keep them out?

The Oklahoma hotel/motel industry reports the loss of approximately 25,000 employees - obviously undocumented workers. OKC's Grider's Discount Foods reported the loss of \$75,000 a week in the first month of HB 1804.

Laurel: To Oklahomans, who still rank education as the state's No. 1 issue. It has been seriously underfunded by legislative Republicans.

Latest polls show term limits are here to stay and may be expanded to include statewide offices.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma School Funding Formula Task force for recognizing an outside audit that proved state public education is short nearly a billion dollars. Somebody read it to GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill.

Byng Public School Superintendent Steven Crawford said his district sent 44 special ed kids to Ada Special Ed classes at a cost last year of \$750,000. Such costs are not covered in the budget the Legislature approved.

Dart: To Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, The Observer's Single Worst Legislator of 2007. He richly deserves the "honor" given his Libertarian attempts to wreck state government finances.

Good News! Oklahoma State University awarded 33 doctorates to American Indians between 2002-2006. OU awarded 17. Many tribes are using their new wealth to educate their young.

Laurel: To Southwestern State University in Weatherford for naming the Education Building for former President Joe Anna Hibler, one of Oklahoma's jewels in higher education.

Dart: To what passes for leadership at the Oklahoma Department of Central Services. An IBM consulting firm report says the agency could save \$250 million over 10 years by adopting "good business practices." Are you listening, Governor?

The Time Reform Task Force is out of luck with the recommendation that the state spend \$90 million to lengthen the school year by a week. There is no new money.

Laurel: To Rep. Al Lindley, D-OKC, for asking GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill to quit childish "name calling" when anyone disagrees with his policies.

What a difference a year makes. This time last year it was predicted that nearly \$300 million would be available for the 2008 Legislature to spend. Now it's \$32.1 million. No more tax cuts.

Dart: To those criticizing the Oklahoma County DA because he prosecuted a meth addict who gave birth to a stillborn infant. If she cleans up she won't serve most of that 15 year sentence. Her child got a death sentence.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I have a problem accepting the argument of neo-cons and even some self-proclaimed progressives that say "We broke it, so now we have to fix it. Forget why we are there - we're there."

Is it arrogance or stupidity that says we must conduct our wars in accordance with the "Pottery Barn Rules," but it is OK to ignore the rules of the Geneva Convention?

Just because we allowed George in the china closet, doesn't mean we have to stay. Any moral, diplomatic or ideological credibility we possessed has long been lost because of this "well thought-out war."

It's time to make amends and ask the world's forgiveness. It's time to pack up our gear and come home, time to stop funding the war machine, and time to rid ourselves of leaders who make such irresponsible decisions.

We must never again have selective amnesia and forget the tough lessons of this and past futile wars.

Ron Wasson
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to Oklahoma lawmakers:

In regard to the recent discussions concerning water sales to Texas and other discussions concerning water and our stewardship concerning water, please remember that water is a resource, a precious one, and should be treated as such - not an endless commodity with a price tag.

It is also an integral part of an increasingly fragile ecosystem, an ecosystem that is whispering to us to live in harmony. I urge you to step away from consumerism and listen to conservatism.

You may want to read *The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan. It is a National Book Award Winner and deserving of such an award. It poignantly captures the experience in what was known as the Dust Bowl and accurately depicts the man-made cause of this tragedy.

In the 1920s, there were a few scattered voices, urging caution and cooperation with nature over hubris and domination. They were ignored as the alarmist cries of a few extremists, but the resulting dusters, which blew for almost a decade, blocking the sun and filling folk's lungs with dirt, were alarming and extreme.

Again, I urge you to lean toward long-term stewardship and the resulting natural balance of the world we inhabit, not short-term profits and the resulting imbalance and long-term damage to our home.

I say that our ecosystem is whispering for us to live in harmony and if we listen, we'll be the ones who benefit. Please, let's listen while it's still a whisper.

Bo Cox
Norman

Editor, The Observer

It was nauseating to me to see all the comparisons in the media of Mitt Romney to John Kennedy, when Romney made his speech about his religion. I saw John Kennedy speak in Oklahoma City when I was a child, and Mitt Romney is no John Kennedy!

When Kennedy spoke in Houston his motive was to convince people that he would not allow his religion to affect his governance. When Romney spoke the opposite was true. He spoke to convince the so called "religious" right that he was every bit as intolerant as they, and that he wouldn't let anything as petty as the Constitution get in the way of his religious bigotry.

He wanted to make it clear that, though many of them consider his religion a cult, he would still be catering to their prejudice. He spoke to ask that they use their intolerance in his favor and not against him. It was cold calculating and crass and in no way was he trying to invoke the "better angels" of our nature.

It's nice to see a "Hypocrit" be hoisted on his own petard!

Rick Ewing
Lexington

Editor, The Observer:

There are none within the public school system who take more pressure - while affecting more lives by applying their own commitment to others - than the classroom teacher.

They alone are the "cutting edge" preparing the next generation of productive citizens, leaders of our nation and even the world.

Theirs is a vocation spurred by a calling. They cannot be seekers of self and fortune. All facts and figures across our nation attest to that [look at the pay they receive for their hard work and giving spirit].

I personally have been taught, worked with, and known many public school teachers from Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona and California. On occasion I met a few that truly did not belong in the classroom. However few, they bring down public sentiment toward the whole. This problem is not isolated in the schools alone. It permeates every scope of the work environment here in America.

Although I am not a man of power



and influence, the Lord has given me a keen insight into the life and actions of public officials and teaching staffs in the greater metro area. Therein exists excellent teachers, good teachers and mediocre teachers, also bad teachers. Most fall into the good to mediocre range. Few are excellent and few are deficient. I share this experience not to wax verbose or try to impress you as a man without understanding and concern.

So, to the point of my heartfelt expression and personal observation: In far northwest Oklahoma City, in the Edmond school district, at Angie Debo Elementary School, I have witnessed many teachers applying their trade in the last 10 years. However, within my 50-plus years experience with the actions of teachers, I have never noticed such an honorable application of the profession - especially as exemplified by one fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Sharita Prasuhn.

Every time I have had opportunity to observe her class, she has exhibited command and firm attention of her students. Having such attention, all of her students receive valuable instruction, education and input on an individual basis.

Her teaching style is of such an art it makes me recall a similar teacher in Texas, when I "cut an A" in my senior year of high school. It was a thrilling moment in my life. It is due to one teacher that had command and dedication to his calling.

Mrs. Prasuhn is one of these powerful influences to every young pupil she teaches. She is due recognition on a grand scale. She receives it from me, and my family. She deserves it from the "system!"

Truly a professional if ever I met one!

Gary L. Sayre
Edmond

Editor, The Observer:

I was half-heartedly listening to a news broadcast when a reporter startled me with an acronym he had coined for city government, CITGOV. It sent a shiver down my spine.

I retreated and found my copy of George Orwell's 1984. I hadn't read it in nearly 30 years. There are some chilling comparisons with America today.

Firstly, surveillance of the population has become possible. "Big Brother is Watching."

Secondly, torture, or the fear of torture, is used to condition minds and attitudes rather than simply elicit information.

Thirdly is the significance of con-

tinuous arms production without which the economic system cannot function.

Oh yes, Newspeak. In his superb 1960 "Afterward," Eric Fromm points out several examples of "doublethink" - the power of holding and accepting two contradictory beliefs at the same time - existed in his own time. One example is propaganda refers to the "free world," which includes all manner of dictatorships as well as democracies, the only common link being anti-Communism.

When government can rationalize torturing foreign nationals as "saving American lives," it's only one step removed from justifying the torture of Americans for some other "good" reason.

Robert Nilson
El Reno

Editor, The Observer:

Either pay our entire military the same as Blackwater or vice versa. And they should all be accountable to U.S. taxpayers if we pay them.

Take Eric Prince's sanctimonious and inflated ego and hang it out to dry in the desert if possible.

By the way, the protection of my congressmen or anyone in this administration isn't worth any more than any grunt on the front and absolutely not worth \$900 or \$350 per day, per mercenary, for protection.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

There is only one "73-cent girl" in the race for president. That's why I'm voting for Sen. Hillary Clinton.

She knows first-hand why we, working girls, earn 73 cents for every dollar a man makes.

We, girls, have to accept substandard wages and benefits to feed our families.

As president, Clinton will put more money in our paychecks while her opponents, all good ol' boys, have no intention of rocking the bosses' boats.

In the Senate, Clinton has introduced the Paycheck Fairness Act.

It will put some teeth in the Equal Pay Act by allowing complainants to seek compensatory and punitive damages against discriminating employers.

Boy presidents will be boys.

Only a girl president will see to it that her "sisters" - 51% of the population - don't keep getting the short end of the stick.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Frosty Troy's

Commencement Address

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

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Frosty's Notebook

Helen

I was back from Korea in the spring of 1952, attending a McAlester Rockets New York Yankee farm club game. I spotted a friend, Margaret Altman, and took a seat beside her.

She introduced me to Helen Nix. Yes, as corny as it sounds, I was instantly smitten. After the game we went to the White House Cafe for coffee. From that day on, I never missed a game.

We began dating and I knew she was the one for me. [Let me go on record in defense of homely guys everywhere – if you keep talking, a pretty girl will see past your looks.]

The day we were married we rushed to Muskogee where I was a police reporter. I had to work until midnight, but she waited up for me. We left Muskogee for a job in Lawton. We left Lawton for a City Hall reporting job on the superb Tulsa Tribune.

We both overdid the work ethic, but she encouraged me every step of the way, including a State Capital assignment for the Trib, two tours in Washington. [She rose to executive assistant to Rep. Clyde Doyle, D-CA, making well over twice my salary.]

We toured every Civil War battlefield, went to Broadway and had many Virginia weekends – all on her money. [She would correct me, "It's OUR money."]

When I returned to Tulsa as associate editor she went to work for a law firm. Helen typed a phenomenal 90 words a minute and took Gregg shorthand. It wasn't long before she exceeded my salary.

I hated being tied to a desk as associate editor, despite the lovely home in southeast Tulsa and more money than I had ever made.

I talked to Helen again and of course she supported my decision to ask Publisher Jenkin Lloyd Jones if I could go back the State Capital – a job I dearly loved. He reluctantly agreed.

I received a call from Father Johnny Joyce, editor of the Catholic diocesan paper. A Little Council meeting at St. Gregory's had voted to withdraw the paper's subsidy. Did I want the paper?

I told Helen it would be a gamble but she said, "You've always wanted your own paper. You may not get this chance again." Wow! What a woman.

I believe that was when we bloomed as a partnership in more ways than marriage. We started from scratch, with her publishing the paper from a bedroom of our Midwest City home because she wanted to be a homeroom mother for our daughter Marti and son Philip, both students at Ridgecrest Elementary school. [She later goaded me into being president of the PTA.]

I was increasingly in demand across Oklahoma as a public speaker. She handled all the arrangements.

Incredibly, she put the paper in the black in two years, freeing me to work full-time on the Observer. We didn't pretend it was anything but what it is – a small twice-monthly journal of commentary, a genuine journal of free voices.

Then along came an invitation from National Public Radio and I was suddenly a national commentator. I also had seven local stations in Oklahoma paying for my commentary.

NPR led to requests for speeches nationally and added to her workload. For our entire 35 years at the Observer, she carried two briefcases home every workday evening, sitting at the dining room table doing bookwork.

She has been described as sweet and kind, but not many knew of her brilliance.

When the kids went off to OSU we quit taking weeklong vacations and parked the ski boat. We preferred four-day weekends at our favorite retreat, Padre Island. She brought along her pocket calendar in case a call came in about a speech!

We kept winning local, state and national journalism awards – although we



never entered anything. A caller once challenged an Observer ad for my speeches, saying he doubted we had won so many awards.

It was a challenge for Helen. She went back through all the records, all the awards – 48 of them by her count – some big, some small. She called the guy back and he apologized.

One of the proudest days of our life together was the evening when the Oklahoma Education Association gave her the Marshall Gregory Award – a coveted annual media honor.

As a proofreader she had no peer. As a critic, she wasn't bossy, she made "suggestions." If I was speeding, she would calmly declare, "The speed limit is 70."

"Isn't that harsh?" she would ask about one of my darts. On one occasion I said it was deserved. She replied, "But do his wife and kids deserve it?" I rewrote it.

She was a far more passionate Democrat than I am, but she was not unaware of the flaws of Democrats in public office. The eternal question she asked in exasperation: "Why do they pander? Do they think Republicans would ever vote for them?"

She was a fiery advocate for women's rights – she knew the sting of discrimination in her own work experience.

Helen had three passions in life: faith, family and the Oklahoma Observer, in that order. Her mother Molly raised three daughters – Mable, Hazel and Helen – three jewels. Only Hazel remains.

It was going through her checkbook that I learned of the many charities we supported. She was the most generous and the most private person I've ever known.

She was deeply spiritual, upset by the language and violence in today's media. Nudged by her, we walked out of several movies.

I have often wondered if the Observer would have survived if not for her ability to check my Irish temper and her willingness to talk me through political and personal issues.

I was asked how we lasted 54 years and I replied, "If you don't marry your best friend, odds are against a lifetime commitment."

Going through her desk I found a tattered old item she had clipped. It is a fitting tribute to the kind of person she was and her wise counsel which I miss so much.

Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking that I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs.

Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all – but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends.

Keep my mind from the recital of endless details – give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by.

I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others but help me to enjoy them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory but a growing humility and lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memory of others.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and talents in unexpected people. Give me the grace to tell them so.

Helen, I love you and I look forward to our reunion.

Personal Note

Words cannot begin to express my thanks for the outpouring of sympathy and personal remembrances of Helen. They have flooded in from across the country, including many who knew her only by her telephone voice.

I can't begin to answer them all but know we take them to our hearts.

Please remember us in your prayers, particularly our daughter Marti and son Philip.

We had only three short weeks between the time she went in for an MRI and her death. We didn't tell her it was bone cancer, the same cancer in the same spinal region that took her older sister, Mable.

Until her final hours she was alert, surrounded by family and the magnificent staff at Oklahoma City's Heart Hospital. Her illness, she told me, was no excuse not to make my speaking engagements!

The neurologist sought to rouse her by shouting her name in her face. No response. When he left the hospital room I shouted in her face, "What is your name?" She softly replied, "I love you."

Those were her last words. She slipped into a pain-free coma and was gone. I felt as though someone had ripped open my chest and ripped out my heart.

She would be thrilled to know of the many gifts to Neighbor for Neighbor in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma City Jesus House and other charities, including the Special Olympics.

Please continue to support The Observer. She worked so hard for so long to make it a reality.

Federal Intervention? **No Surprise: Prisons Need More Money**

By Arnold Hamilton

It took six months and \$844,000 of the taxpayers' money to tell us this?

The long-awaited performance audit of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections simply reinforced the message that penal experts repeatedly delivered to lawmakers in recent years: The state's prison system is lean, mostly well managed and grossly underfunded.

MGT of America Inc., the Tallahassee, FL-based firm hired to conduct the analysis, didn't find massive cost-savings and inefficiencies that some legislative leaders – especially Republican House Speaker Lance Cargill and Co. – expected.

Instead, MGT recommends spending at least \$30 million *more* annually to get the system where it needs to be.

With lawmakers approving – and Democratic Gov. Brad Henry signing into law – more than \$700 million in tax cuts in recent years, Oklahoma is projected to have only about \$32 million in new money to spend in fiscal year 2008-09 on *all* state services ... not just corrections.

NOT WHAT LEGISLATIVE LEADERS EXPECTED

The audit's results were bad news for the speaker and his counterparts in the evenly-divided state Senate, Democratic President Pro Tem Mike Morgan and Republican Co-President Glenn Coffee.

Not surprisingly, they unveiled the report on a Friday afternoon, at the end of a holiday week – a near-perfect time to ensure the fewest Oklahomans would take note, what with some still traveling and others gearing up for a return to work or school.

At a Capitol briefing where MGT would detail its findings, the leadership troika offered brief opening statements – primarily praising the process, not addressing the results – and vanished.

They would have no further comment, aides said, until they had time to digest the report – a draft of which had circulated since at least mid-December.

"It's an example of good government," said Cargill, summing up the leadership's spin. "There's really no higher priority for us as legislative leaders than to ensure taxpayers are getting a good return on their investment, that public dollars are being used in an efficient and productive way."

AUDIT A WASTE OF TAXPAYERS' MONEY?

What he and his Senate colleagues didn't note, of course, is that corrections experts – including those from the oft-maligned Criminal Justice Resource Center – have delivered the same bad news, almost verbatim, for years.

Further, state Auditor and Inspector Jeff McMahan and his staff probably could have provided the same detailed analysis at less than one-third the cost to taxpayers.

The problem is, lawmakers love to play the law-and-order game, repeatedly mandating that convicts serve more time for less serious offenses. But many of the same legislators aren't willing to pony up for their lock-'em-up, throw-away-the key pandering.

The MGT report illustrates: Oklahoma's rate of incarceration is No. 3 nation-

MAPS For Millionaires Anything But 'Super'

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

When does corporate welfare go too far? In my opinion, when a few Oklahoma City millionaires want to pilfer the pockets of grannies existing on Social Security.

These rich folks influenced our so-called "public servants" on the Oklahoma City Council to call for a March 4 election for a sales tax increase to raise \$121 million.

This tax would pay to redesign and improve Oklahoma City's Ford Center [built in 2002] in the hopes of bringing the Seattle SuperSonics basketball team to town.

Seattle residents didn't want to use their public money to build the Sonics a new arena in that city.

Sonics owners are fully capable of paying for these improvements themselves.

This group is led by Clayton Bennett, who is married to the daughter of the late billionaire Edward L. Gaylord, owner of The Oklahoman. That newspaper shamelessly promotes this regressive tax aimed at making the poorest among us pay more for groceries and other necessities.

It's no wonder that in 1999 the Columbia Journalism Review called The Oklahoman "the worst newspaper in America."

In addition to Bennett, other SuperSonics investors include Aubrey McClendon and Tom Ward, co-founders of Chesapeake Energy as well as Jeffrey Records, Chairman and CEO of MidFirst Bank.

MAPS means "Metropolitan Area Projects" for Oklahoma City. The sales tax which funds the popular MAPS for Kids [a program to improve schools] expires at the end of 2008.

That's why Mayor Mick Cornett surveyed Oklahoma City residents about their priorities for potential MAPS 3 projects. The results came back – overwhelming support for mass transportation. No other issue even came close.



ally – a primary reason the state spends more than double the national average on corrections as a percentage of its budget.

"Your problem in Oklahoma isn't necessarily you're sending too many people to prison," said Kenneth McGinnis, an MGT partner. "It's how long you're sending them."

WHAT CORRECTIONS HAS TO WORK WITH

At the same time, Oklahoma's prison system is operated on a shoestring and a prayer: The state is 41st in per inmate per diem [\$47.13] – more than \$20 below the national average [\$67.55]. And its inmate-to-correctional officer ratio [9-1] is highest in the region – and many times, as a practical matter, it's a 50-1 or 60-1 ratio, depending on staffing issues.

Although MGT officials said they have not studied in detail the corrections department's bond proposal for \$310 million in infrastructure improvements and expansion, it appears reasonable.

First, research indicates the state will need nearly 4,000 more prison beds in the near future to meet its needs.

Second, many of the department's facilities are fast becoming unusable and uninhabitable – some because of age [the maximum security prison in McAlester, for example, is nearly a century old], others because they weren't built to be prisons in the first place.

OKLAHOMA'S PRISONS 'THE WORST'

"Of all the systems we've [reviewed], the infrastructure physical plant here in Oklahoma is probably the worst," said McGinnis. "It's just the reality."

McGinnis said it's likely some facilities will have to be bulldozed. He and MGT colleague Karl Becker urged the state to conduct a thorough assessment of its prison construction needs in order to maximize its investment.

It seems only yesterday that a federal judge seized control of Oklahoma's understaffed, underfunded, decaying prisons and ordered the state to make significant, costly improvements.

Could Oklahoma be headed back to the courthouse?

Nevertheless, Cornett asked the City Council to co-opt and divert the potential MAPS 3 tax into a scheme which opponents have dubbed "MAPS for Millionaires."

George W Bush got rich by persuading Arlington, TX voters to build a sports stadium for the Texas Rangers, which he managed.

According to Tom Farrey [senior writer for the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network], Bush cleared \$14 million on that deal and stuck it in his pocket.

My hope is that the Oklahoma City voters will tell the big shots to get their greedy hands out of our pockets. Voters in Tulsa recently talked back to that city's leaders by defeating the call for a Tulsa river tax. I know nothing about the merits of that tax.

What I do know is that the people have the power when they choose to exert it. "It could happen" in Oklahoma City.

– The author, a former state representative, lives in Oklahoma City

Fridays With Frosty

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



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Divided Oklahoma

Ugly Anti-Immigrant History Repeated

By John E. Orr

My grandparents moved to Indian Territory as immigrants. They were hired to do work the Indians did not wish to do. They couldn't own land and their customs were strange to the Indians. They came to Indian Territory desperately seeking a better life.

Sound familiar?

Over the years, we have had an influx of immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Cuba and Vietnam. Each has contributed mightily to our culture and the Hispanics are no different.

Now, a boob named Randy Terrill, a Republican, authored House Bill 1804, a so-called immigration bill. His bill is evil and totally uncaring.

Unfortunately, all Republicans present in the House voted for it. Sadly, some ill-informed Democrats went along. [Remember, at election time!]

The bill attempts to turn neighbors against neighbors, and turn local police into snitches. This is the same initial action Hitler took against the Jews.

Now, just in case you are rolling your eyes at this point, do a little history check and keep in mind Mr. Terrill's future intention to confiscate property of those that rent to or otherwise aid Hispanics.

The Hispanics have been good neighbors and they have been willing to take the dirty jobs no one else wanted. In return, they should be entitled to human dignity and encouraged.

According to this bill you are forbidden to give them work, or allow them to rent [or buy] in your community.

Mr. Terrill and his supporters contend the Hispanics are not paying their way. Such rubbish! They are paying a larger percentage of taxes than Terrill and most of his radical right supporters. Immigrants pay into the system on all levels – and should not be deprived of ANY public benefits!

According to HB 1804, poor Hispanics can starve, and as their neighbor, it's a felony if you help them, or even transport them.

My admiration goes out to the members of Sacred Heart Catholic Church for refusing to recognize the provisions of the hate-filled bill and advising the governor of their intentions.

I join them in their refusal. But where are all the other churches?

See ANTI-IMMIGRANT Page 8

New Law Turns Doctors Into Detectives

By J. Michael Pontious

House Bill 1804 went into effect two months ago. I really think that the Oklahoma Legislature is on to something with this wonderful piece of legislation.

You will remember that this bill makes it a crime to employ, transport, offer housing, provide medical care, or otherwise help undocumented workers or their families...

These people have broken the law. Our current approaches to the management of illegal immigration have not worked as well as we would like. This type of law is precisely what we need. Now you and I will be able to investigate citizenship as part of our past medical history and avoid the expense and discomfort of providing medical care to people who have broken the immigration law.

Matter of fact, if we provide medical care, we can be charged with a felony crime. That, my friends, will get you a trip to the Oklahoma Board of Medical Licensure and Supervision.

NEW ROLE AS IMMIGRATION COMPLIANCE OFFICERS

But then, this may be the first of many such laws that co-opt you and me into the role of immigration compliance officers. I am sure it will also increase the number of people that I need to hire at the office to make sure I comply with this law. If I tell my staff to "don't ask and don't tell," then I am at risk from someone who turns me in as a whistleblower. If I don't take care of someone in need and they have a bad outcome then I am at risk for malpractice or abandonment.

And all of this because they don't have documentation...

We will also have to consider the stimulation to the underground production of counterfeit documentation and then those that enforce, defend and prosecute

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So Only Bigots Oppose Illegal Immigration?

By A.M. Schnitzer

I am an American who believes our laws should be followed and enforced. If that makes me a bigot, then I am a bigot.

I believe our laws should be enforced regardless of race, color or creed. If that makes me a bigot, I am a bigot.

Millions of our fellow countrymen are underfed and under-housed including the homeless, many of whom are veterans. I believe we should help them before trying to help people who are in our country illegally. If that makes me a bigot, color me as a bigot.

I believe the U.S. has provided more money, food, pharmaceuticals and other necessities to the world's needy and underprivileged than any other nation in history, but we can't take care of the whole world. Other countries need to help themselves, primarily by cutting back on their population growth until it matches their economic growth. If so believing makes me a bigot, then a bigot I am.

I believe it is unfair and unethical to those who have entered our country legally and become citizens according to prescribed procedures to permit illegal immigrants, regardless of who they are or where they come from, to remain here. If that makes me a bigot, paste the label on me.

I believe that any country that has porous borders is not a country, but a

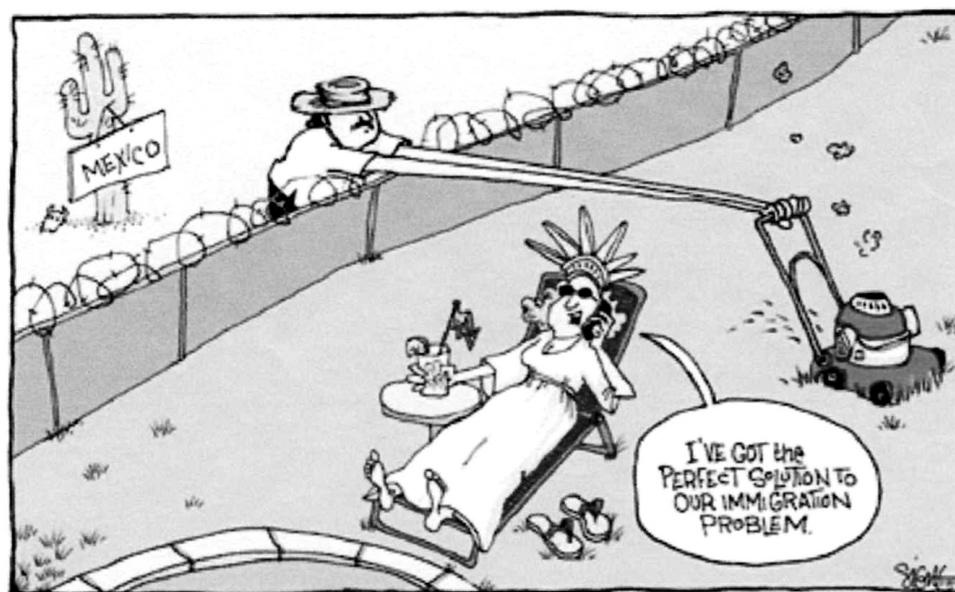
highway leading downhill, thus permitting invasion and occupation by criminals, drug peddlers and gangs, among others. If that makes me a bigot, I am a bigot.

I have lost friends, classmates and a roommate fighting in foreign wars to protect this country, its borders and its way of life. I believe it is a desecration of their lives, their memories and their sacrifices to allow people to invade our country by simply walking across our borders and permitting them to stay. If that makes me a bigot, a bigot I am.

I believe it is wrong for businesses to hire people who are here illegally, pay them substandard wages and then strive to do business with them. I believe Thomas Jefferson had a point when he said, "Merchants have no country. The mere spot they stand on does not constitute so strong an attachment as that from which they draw their gains."

If the above makes me a bigot, then it is a label I wear with pride, right alongside my World War II service ribbons.

- The author lives in Bartlesville



the morass of cases that will flood our already over-burdened judicial system.

There will of course be a backlog of cases. So these folks will need to be housed and fed and managed in holding cells or local jails or prisons. This will then increase our need to build more prisons and all because we want to be perceived as having control of our internal borders.

I am beginning to see the big picture here.

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS

Now if it works for this problem, let's use similar legislation to do the same with drug use and alcoholism. How about those folks who persist in using prostitutes? Or HIV infected patients?

Why don't we just expand this to anyone who is mentally ill. Surely they have broken a law or two that would validate our reporting them to the authorities. Surely all of these groups have been a burden to our limited health care resources.

If I am not mistaken this was the technique used by the Nazi Party to co-opt physicians into reporting imperfect citizens to governmental authorities ... so that they could be "managed."

Maybe history has a way of repeating itself.

WHAT WILL THE MEDICAL BOARD SAY?

I can envision my defense in front of the medical licensure board, as I explain that I was not interested in knowing someone's citizenship, nor how long they had been in this country, before I delivered their infant.

See DETECTIVES Page 8

Will We All Become Immigration Spies?

By Bob Herbert

There was the moderator asking the Democratic candidates whether American citizens have an obligation to turn in people they suspect are illegal immigrants.

It was not just a question asked in passing. The moderator pressed the issue. He asked Sen. Chris Dodd, for example, about the hypothetical situation of a "citizen" interviewing for a nanny. Their documents may not be in order.

It wasn't made clear what should trigger the suspicions of such oh-so-solidly American parents, causing them to scrutinize an applicant's papers with a thoroughness worthy of Sherlock Holmes.

WILL IT BE SKIN COLOR?

Might it be a skin tone darker than Paris Hilton's? Or maybe an accent, like that of my Aunt Lottie, who came here from Barbados?

You wouldn't have wanted to face my family if you were some rat who tried to turn in my Aunt Lottie.

The last thing in the world that the United States needs is a signal from presidential wannabes that it's a good idea to turn ordinary American citizens into immigrant-hunting busybodies.

The Democrats did not rise to the bait. Sen. Hillary Clinton was especially good. The moderator asked her, "If a citizen witnessed some other kind of crime, wouldn't you want them to report it?"

CLINTON DOESN'T TAKE THE BAIT

Sen. Clinton replied: "It's a very clever question, Steve, but I think it really begs the question, because what we're looking at here is 12 to 14 million people.

"They live in our neighborhoods, they take care of our elderly parents, they probably made the beds in the hotels that some of us stayed in last night. They are embedded in our society."

She warned that listening to the "demagogues and the calls for us to begin to try to round up people and turn every American into a suspicious vigilante" would do grave harm to the fabric of our nation.

She couldn't have been more correct. Enlisting ordinary Americans in a nationwide hunt for so-called illegals is a recipe for violence and hysteria, a guarantee of tragedy.

We've already got radio-active talk show hosts spewing anti-immigrant venom from one coast to another.

MICHAEL SAVAGE PEDDLES PURE HATRED

Media Matters for America, a monitoring group, has noted that Michael Savage, who has the third-most listened-to show in the nation, said the following on his July 2 broadcast:

"When I see a woman walking around with a burqa, I see a Nazi. That's what I see. How do you like that? A hateful Nazi who would like to cut your throat and kill your children."



When a woman wears a burqa, said Savage, "She's doing it to spit in your face. She's saying, 'You white moron, you, I'm going to kill you if I can.'"

That's what's already out there. We don't need national leaders adding fuel to the fires of bigotry by calling for recruits to join in a national dragnet for people who look or sound a certain way.

That kind of insidious leadership helps drive people to irrational fury over neighbors speaking Spanish at a barbecue, or a Muslim co-worker competing for a coveted promotion, or a schoolteacher with a Hispanic surname who gives a failing grade to little Sally.

AMERICA NEEDS TO COOL IT

This country needs to cool it on the immigration front. Solutions to immigration problems need to come from rationally thought-out and compassionate government policies, not a witch hunt by all and sundry.

It was beyond ironic to listen to Mitt Romney ask Americans to view his candidacy with a sense of tolerance.

"We believe that every single human being is a child of God," he said. "We are all part of the human family."

At the same time, Romney's political operatives were distributing campaign material [some of it inaccurate] beating up on his opponents for being insufficiently intolerant on the immigration issue.

The U.S. has a chance in this presidential campaign to emulate the best in its history, not the worst. I have a recommendation for anyone who thinks a witch hunt for undocumented immigrants is a good idea:

Don't go there.

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ANTI-IMMIGRANT

From Page 7

Where are all the leaders that preach and preach family values? Are they not enraged by such a denial of basic rights, for all families?

Do they condone depriving needy people – only because they are Hispanic? Shame!

What is your church doing to get this horrible bill repealed? I can hardly believe any reasonable person would not speak out.

Now, for those that do not understand compassion or human dignity, let's talk about the harsh economic reality.

You would think even members of the Oklahoma Legislature would be smart enough to know you can't run a quarter of a million people out of Oklahoma, without destroying our economy – to say nothing of disrupting thousands of families.

Why can't they realize our Hispanic neighbors are doing a great service in furthering our economy? They are paying taxes [yes, they are!]

Hispanics have been the leaders in buying cars, groceries and renting and/or buying homes. Without them, south Oklahoma City will collapse. It will affect all portions of the state economy. Already it has had an adverse effect on real estate and rentals, and could serve as a trigger for a full recession.

In addition, we will lose some of our most skilled craftsmen – people who have made their homes here for decades.

Immigration is a national problem, and is none of the Oklahoma Legislature's damned business. Oklahoma is not a nation and should not be trying to make criminals out of the very people driving our economy.

Was it racist bias, rather than logic that compelled them to vote for HB 1804? Why are some Democrats forgetting they are supposed to stand for the poor and those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder?

As for me, [1] I oppose any attempt to make things more difficult for struggling neighbors, and [2] I resent any attempt to limit my choices of whom to associate or assist.

We raise our voice to morality, based on tolerance, equality, justice and respect for all.

And I hope you will also.

There's a saying, "There's no antidote for ignorance." Perhaps it would be in

the Legislature's selfish best interest to fund some research.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

DETECTIVES

From Page 7

I should have known ... but I did not ... I was just trying to practice respectable medicine. They then will tell me that I have knowingly broken the law. Because of this they cannot renew my license to practice medicine in Oklahoma. So I will need to seek work outside of our state, where I will once again explain the reason that I have a criminal record.

To be silent about this issue is equivalent to giving consent and signing up to be an agent of the state government. The Oklahoma Legislature is really on to something here. I am really impressed with the opportunities that exist for the future.

Might as well come and lock me up now, because this is not a tenable situation.

When you see my name on the felony list, remember me from the days of when it was appropriate and acceptable to provide medical care to people in need, no matter what the color of their skin, nor the accent in the speech, nor the documentation that they may or may not carry in their pocket.

– The author is a physician living in Enid. This column first appeared in the November 2007 issue of the Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association.



Define Pork

Coburn Plays Big Role In Jam-Fest

By Ryan Grim

A typical bill moving through the Senate has a number of institutional hurdles to clear: subcommittee, committee, leadership and Coburn. It's Oklahoma Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn that you won't find in a textbook.

Coburn has long been known as the Senate's gadfly, crusading against his version of wasteful government spending.

In the last year, however, this gadfly has gone through a metamorphosis and is now more of a scorpion: If you're not careful, he'll kill your bill. He has made war on veterans and breast cancer research, among others.

Senate aides on both sides of the aisle now take legislation directly to Coburn's office before moving forward to make sure he has no objections – whether he's on the relevant committee or not. If he does, they often swallow their pride and make the changes he's asking for.

PUTS A HOLD ON VETS' SUICIDE BILL

Among others that made no sense, he opposed the Joshua Omgig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act to screen retiring soldiers for signs of suicide risk. It passed the House 423-0, endorsed by all veterans' organizations.

"He's definitely been a fly in the soup. I can think of another apt analogy, but that's the one I'll use," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-TX, fifth-ranking Republican.

Whether they're for items big – say, breast cancer research – or small, such as the naming of a post office, Coburn is open about his holds.

"I'm not trying to block legislation. I'm trying to make it better. But we have some parameters," he said. "People are recognizing that we're not hard to deal with if you talk with us, but if you won't talk with us, we are hard to deal with."

TRYING TO GET PAST A ONE-MAN RULER

"I think he's open about the issues, but he is pretty persistent. It's not easy," said Sen. Ben Cardin, D-MD. "It's been tough. We've had some success. Some amendments we've gotten through."

Coburn has a hold on several of Cardin's bills, and he recently put one on small-business legislation backed by Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-ME. Both are hoping to work out their differences with Coburn.

They'll have to get in line. Although the Senate doesn't keep official records on how many holds senators employ, Coburn's office does: He's holding 95 different pieces of legislation for a variety of reasons.

His jam-fest likely ranks as one of the most prolific in the history of the institution, said Donald Ritchie, an associate Senate historian.

THERE WAS NO HOLIDAY FOR THE JAM-FEST

If senators thought there might be a holiday reprieve in their efforts to get crucial spending measures passed, Coburn let them know otherwise in a letter prior to Christmas.

"In the remaining hours of this session of Congress," he promised, "I will not agree to any unanimous consent requests to authorize or appropriate increased spending or expand the size and cost of the federal government."

Coburn has the rule of the Senate in his favor.

"It's difficult to work around a senator. Ultimately, it's a cloture vote. It's very time-consuming, and you can't do that on most issues," said Cardin.



Coburn's liberal use of the senatorial privilege is what gives him his sting. It has earned him increased influence, won him some battles and helped him acquire some unlikely allies, such as Sen. Barack Obama, D-IL – but it's also brought out a fair share of detractors.

SENATE LEADER DECRIES HIS APPROACH

Jim Manley, a spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-NV, is no fan, saying in an e-mail that Coburn is "exercising his rights as a senator, but his approach is contrary to the traditions of collegiality and bipartisan compromise in the Senate.

"No wonder it's so hard to get things done when a handful of junior members insist on a their way or the highway approach to legislating."

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-CA, as chairwoman of an appropriations subcommittee, must get spending bills past Coburn.

His tactics have exasperated her to the point where she has developed a new way to define what he does.

WHY HE IS PLAYING THE ROLE

"I think it's a way an individual tries to exacerbate their power, and it's really unfortunate," she said, her voice rising.

Sen. Ben Nelson, D-NE, also an appropriator, still betrays some anger after being in Coburn's cross hairs a few months back over an earmark that Nelson was pushing for a Nebraska company that employed his son.

"What we found out was that the earmark [Coburn] was complaining about in Nebraska, his colleague had similar earmarks in Oklahoma that he had no problem with," said Nelson.

A Coburn aide said that the senator doesn't have the time to go through every earmark, and he encourages others to challenge ones that he hasn't specifically gone after.

Editor's Note: Coburn glories in the media attention, appearing on virtually every network, every talk show. Kids in elementary school refer to such a gadfly as a show-off.

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Warm Fuzzies Can't Hide Big Oil's Damage

By Darla Reynolds-Sparks

My great grandfather was a land agent in Caddo County during the first Oklahoma oil boom and the discovery of the Anadarko field. My grandfather was a oilfield employee who never missed a day, 365 per year, 40 plus years, logging well outputs in that county.

My dad drove pipeline trucks his entire adult life. My husband opened the Canadian branch of an oilfield supply company.

My first-born son is an employee of an oil company involved with radioactive tracing of older wells. My second son has been a diesel mechanic for semi-trucks for 30 years.

So I'm qualified from observational experience and as a royalty owner to comment on the following message: The fuzzy TV ad regarding cleaning up old well sites for free sponsored by the oil industry's royalty group is mostly a PR project so you and I won't notice their destruction of our infrastructure and their ownership of our corrupted politicians.

I would trade my .000000005% royalty checks for safe bridges and decent roads any day of the week.

I can't fill my car tank once a month on the royalty check much less repair the springs, tires and other assaults on my auto caused by the deplorable roadways of my home state!

Between the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's love of the trucking industry and the "oil boom" traffic, we taxpayers are being served a repair bill that will cost us billions while the oil industry and trucking companies pocket the most lavish profits.

The oil industry needs to be held accountable for their share of maintenance costs for our infrastructure and our state politicians need to do the job of regulating this in the interest of our taxpayers and for the safety of all our citizens.

This will not be possible until we elect honest men and women to represent all of our citizens and not just those with deep pockets!

Oklahoma has appreciated the generated jobs and payrolls created by our oil revenue but the future will not be about oil. We cannot afford turning a blind eye to our future developments by allowing the preferential treatment we have afforded the oil business in this state. And we cannot risk losing other types of companies locating elsewhere because of our deplorable infrastructure.

We need leaders with vision and we need citizens to elect such if our state is to become all it can become!

– The author lives in Yukon

The Lies About Malpractice

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, Oklahoma's average payment on medical malpractice claims for 2005 was well under the national average, ranking Oklahoma as 16th-lowest in the nation per doctor average.

Furthermore, the average claim was actually lower than the limits proposed by the Legislature, further evidence that the most severely injured patients are the only ones who receive larger awards.

If the medical malpractice condition in Oklahoma isn't as dire as Co-Senate Leader Glenn Coffee and House Speaker Lance Cargill would have us believe, one has to ask why they would propose such legislation that would restrict a patient's rights to be made whole?

You can find the answer by looking no further than those who would directly benefit – the insurance companies. We shouldn't limit an injured patient's right to justice in the interest of higher profits for the insurance companies, especially when the "crisis" and claims used to put forth the legislation are grossly exaggerated.

– The Oklahoma Center for Consumer and Patient Safety

Veterans Are Honored High Tech Comes To Asher Public School

By Whitney Allen

As I sit down to write this "press release" I am surrounded by conditions slightly similar to those experienced 66 years ago by the men who visited our school today.

My house was cold and quiet, not the typical temperature at 50 F. Thick ice boldly covered trees as far as I could see to the east and west. Buckling from the enormous weight, limbs were breaking, burdened by the ice. Power lines also yielded to the weight – electricity would be out for an indefinite period.

I, however, was thankful that weather and not war caused my temporary inconvenience and discomfort. War, although temporary, was no comparison to my trivial problems associated with the bad weather.

VETERANS INVITED TO SCHOOL

I know because I had just encountered, first hand, personal accounts of what war was like. Let me explain. On Thursday, December 6, 2007, Asher Public School invited World War II vets to spend the day at our school.

Students were involved in a project to capture and preserve oral history – history related to WWII. Four WWII vets, Hank Thompson, Calvin Craddock, Cliff Williams, and J. T. Freeman – all local to the Asher/Ada area – addressed grades 7-12 in a group type forum.

Col. J.L. Rhoades, a Korean/Vietnam vet, accompanied the gentlemen and shared his story, too. Three of the four WWII vets saw combat action in the South Pacific and one in Europe.

INTERVIEWS WILL BE DIGITALIZED

Individual interviews were conducted intermittently throughout the morning using Olympus digital recorders. The dialogues obtained will be turned into digital stories using PhotoStory 3, Audacity, Switch, and Wave.

The vets were invited to stay for the afternoon after a wonderful lunch prepared by one of our teachers, Melinda Brothers, and observe an interactive webcast over the Internet from Pearl Harbor.

The webcast was planned around the dedication ceremony for the U.S.S. Oklahoma and part of the Oklahoma Digital Centennial Project. Asher, a small rural school in Pottawatomie County, was one of 10 schools out of 74 total schools that applied to participate in the interactive webcast.

WEB CAST HOSTED BY DICK PRYOR

Students were chosen to ask questions of the panel of WWII Vets who were actually survivors of the U.S.S. Oklahoma. The webcast was hosted by OETA's Dick Pryor.

The webcast was projected on a newly purchased Promethean Board as well as the mobile video conferencing unit. Mrs. Johnson's third grade classroom led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by an a cappella rendition of The Star Spangled Banner.

Dominique Ford, a 7th grader, read aloud a poem that was the perfect end to a perfect day.

The information the vets exchanged that day was unequaled to information obtained from a textbook. The term "virtual textbook" comes to mind when describing the WWII Vets and the information exchanged that day. In education, we talk about the importance of authentic learning. I can't think of a better example.

PART OF THE CENTENNIAL PROJECT

Thanks to Wesley Fryer, AT&T director for education advocacy, for including Asher school in this project, which was part of the Oklahoma Digital Centennial Project.

And thanks to the administrators of Asher school who also believe in the im-

How Can You Tell If You Are An Okie?

You know you're from Oklahoma if:

1. You can properly pronounce Eufaula, Gotebo, Okemah, and Chickasha.
2. You think that people who complain about the wind in their states are sis-sies.
3. A tornado warning siren is your signal to go out in the yard and look for a funnel.
- 4 Your idea of a traffic jam is 10 cars waiting to pass a tractor on the highway.
5. You've ever had to switch from "heat" to "A/C" in the same day.
6. You know that the true value of a parking space is not determined by the distance to the door, but by the availability of shade.
7. Stores don't have bags, they have sacks.
8. You see people wear bib overalls at funerals.
9. You think everyone from a bigger city has an accent.
10. You measure distance in minutes.
11. You refer to the capital of Oklahoma as "The City."
12. It doesn't bother you to use an airport named for a man who died in an airplane crash.
13. Little smokies are something you serve only for special occasions.
14. You go to the lake because you think it is like going to the ocean.
15. You listen to the weather forecast before picking out an outfit.
16. You know cowpies are not made of beef.
17. Someone you know has used a football schedule to plan their wedding date.
18. You have known someone who has had one belt buckle bigger than your



A SOLDIER'S LIFE

He marches through the night,
He marches after yet another fight.
And although how tired he must be,
He keeps on marching to keep his country free.
He wishes to return home,
To see his family, but has only their pictures to keep him moving on.
He longs to see his wife, his children, his mother,
He yearns to see his father and little brother.
On days he thinks he can go no further,
God gives him the strength to go on another.
Slowly the days pass,
And he's allowed to go home at long last.
He returns a hero smiling gladly.
Knowing he didn't get hurt too badly.
His family stares admiringly at him knowing he's done,
Proud to call him a father, a husband, a brother, a son.
He lives the rest of his years knowing he did a great deed,
At a time when his country was in need.
He knows he will be rewarded in the after life when he's old and ripe,
For there he will receive treasures of every type.
- Dominique Ford, 7th grader, Asher Public School

portance technology plays in the classroom and with student achievement. Integrating technology into the classroom is of utmost importance in today's global economy.

This project is the epitome of what partnerships between schools and the private sector can accomplish and what staff development opportunities such as the State Department's Encyclomedia can provide.

I look forward to similar projects in the future. But most of all, thank you to the veterans who, had it not been for their contribution, the freedom to do projects such as this one would not be possible.

- The author is a Certified Library Media Specialist at Asher Public School

fist.

19. A bad traffic jam involves two cars staring each other down at a four-way stop, each determined to be the most polite and let the other go first.
20. You know in which state Miam-uh is and in which state Miam-ee is.
21. You aren't surprised to find movie rental, ammunition, and bait all in the same store.
22. Your "place at the lake" has wheels under it.
23. A Mercedes Benz is not a status symbol. A Ford F350 4x4 is.
24. You know everything goes better with Ranch.
25. You learned how to shoot a gun before you learned how to multiply.
26. You actually get these jokes and tell them to your friends.

Trevor Helpline

866-4-U-TREVOR

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

BOOKS

Happiness: Presidency In A Rearview Mirror

By Alvena Bieri

BEYOND THE WHITE HOUSE

Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope

By Jimmy Carter

Simon and Schuster

288 pages, \$26

Barbara Walters asked Jimmy Carter a few years ago what he considered to be the very best years of his life. He didn't hesitate to answer, "By far the best years are those I'm enjoying with Rosalyn since we left the White House."

In his new book, the former president interestingly elaborates on exactly what he has been doing to improve the world.

The Carters returned to Plains, GA, after the election of 1980 to find their once-thriving farm supply business in financial trouble. They were able to sell it, plan a presidential library and start raising big money for the project they called the Carter Center.

The result was that they have reached out and helped many poor people in the world.

THE CARTER BLUEPRINT

Carter is careful in the book to reveal the solid ethical principles behind his work. His ideas stress a non-partisan approach, not duplicating the work of other groups, and taking action on problems, not just discussing and debating them.

He also decided to report on his trips abroad, not just to his family but to the State Department and the U.N.

He figured correctly that it would be positive to work with people at Emory University in Atlanta, too. And he has been very successful as a fund-raiser.

Maybe fame and money go together.

The Carter Center now has more than 150 employees and a yearly budget of between \$35 million and \$40 million.

CARTER'S HERCULEAN AGENDA

Now for the three main points of the book.

First, waging peace. Carter goes into a lot of detail on his efforts to reconcile Israel and its neighbors and made a little progress there. Obviously, much more effort and many more creative ideas are needed today.

And talk about another Herculean task – trying to open up Soviet media. Gor-

APPRECIATION

Doris Gunn's Quest For Justice Never Wavered

By Rick Seifert

Doris Gunn's smile often had a playful mischievousness about it. If she suspected you of being susceptible to her thinking, her grin took on a hint of sly conspiracy. She was about to weld you to what was on her mind.

There was always something on Doris's mind.

For behind her good humor and ease with others, burned a passion for reform that warmed all she met.

She was a spirit on fire for a better world.

Her fire went out, after 84 years, early in the morning of Oct. 30 while she slept.

DORIS TOUCHED, INSPIRED OTHERS

Family and friends gathered at her son's house near Capitol Hill School to recount the many ways Doris touched and inspired us.

Parked outside was her old white Ford Escort station wagon, a tired, old stallion bereft of its knightly driver.

It was plastered with peace and alternative energy bumper stickers, badges of honor. "I'm for Solar Energy and I vote!" read one. "War is not the answer!" proclaimed another.

The car still bore Oklahoma plates [888 MGS, to be exact] even though the car and Doris had been in Oregon for five years. She came here because she wanted to be near her family. Here, she found a spiritual home.

Those of us from Hillsdale met Doris not long after she arrived here. She wanted to be with like souls and, laser-like, she sought them out.

She liked action. We first met her in the Hillsdale Farmers Market – her kind of place. When we decided to hold peace walks to Multnomah Village and back, Doris joined us. Her pace was understandably slower than ours. We adjusted. With Doris, you adjusted, always. In her good-humored way, she was irrepensible.

UNSUCCESSFUL BID FOR OKLAHOMA LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

She grew up in Asheville, NC, in an upper middle-class family. She lived most of her adult life in Oklahoma where she raised her three children. She is survived by them, five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Her background left her with a hybrid Southern/Oklahoma accent, a down-home wisdom and a raw sense of humor.

At the gathering, we learned from her children that Doris had run for lieutenant governor of Oklahoma in 1970. If it was a surprise to us, it was a shock to her husband back then when he learned about her candidacy in the newspaper. Years later, their lives divided and they divorced.

In the Democratic Party primary, she came in fifth in a field of eight. But, oh, to

BEYOND THE WHITE HOUSE



JIMMY CARTER

“

By far the best years are those I'm enjoying with Rosalyn since we left the White House.

”

bachev was an ally in this effort, but Putin has not been so positive.

The next of the three goals is fighting disease. It is not just physical maladies they are trying to cure. Mrs. Carter has worked hard on mental health services, too. One of the obvious goals has been parity in treatment for those who can't really afford it.

The people from the Carter Center have worked in many African countries, especially Nigeria and Ghana, where they have tried to control the weird disease called the Guinea worm malady, worms that attack the body and then push out of all body openings.

It originates from impure water, and the workers found that they were able to cure it by having villagers filter their water through a special cloth. It's like protecting from malaria by using mosquito nets.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE

Building hope for the future is closely related to establishing the best of ethical values everywhere, according to the Carter philosophy.

Human rights are a central topic with him. He takes up for the work of the U.N., especially its Human Rights Commission headquartered in Geneva.

Another "hope" that Mr. Carter has is achieving equality for women worldwide.

We are also glad to learn that the Carter Center has not forgotten the people of Atlanta who are poor.

Like Al Gore, Carter has also earned a Nobel Peace Prize. Global warming issues and humanitarian relief are part of the same moral goal.

– The author lives in Stillwater

have heard her on the stump!

Doris was never, ever at a loss for words. Her children recounted how she would fill the phone answering machine with seemingly endless monologues and lectures. She would always end them with a curt notation of time and date.

BLACK FOX, SILKWOOD AND CIVIL RIGHTS

She opposed the construction of a nuclear power plant near Tulsa and became involved in the Karen Silkwood trial. Swept up in the '60s civil rights movement, she spearheaded the integration of Oklahoma City's public schools. John noted her children were among the first whites to attend an integrated school there. The Gunns chose to live in a predominantly black neighborhood.

She fought for the rights of Native Americans in the state, for the welfare of the blind, for the Equal Rights Amendment. She belonged to the NAACP.

She was a prolific writer of letters to the editor and guest opinion columns. Her children spread photocopied samples of her writings out on the coffee table before us.

"Phyllis Schlafly's mind twisted about World War" was the headline on one long letter written in 1983. "As a woman whose brother and several friends were maimed and murdered in World War II," Doris began, "it is impossible for me to understand Phyllis Schlafly's belief that war is jolly good for men but bad for women and children."

SHE REFUSED TO GIVE UP

A 1986 opinion piece in the liberal Oklahoma Observer bore the headline: "Righting America's Wrongs" and began: "I have decided not to lie down and die of despair at the disgraceful behavior of my country. I am a U.S. citizen as Ronald Reagan and his space cowboys are citizens."

The thought of Doris ever lying down in despair is not possible. Three days before she died, she directed her children to go to the post office to mail the actor/activist Ed Asner a letter opposing nuclear power. Because they didn't or couldn't always do all she told them to do, she insisted they return with a certification that the letter had been posted.

When she wasn't writing for the media, she was hounding them to do their job. She was known to command networks in New York to come out to Oklahoma to cover one story or another.

In 1996 she wrote in one of her letters to the editor: "We are all one and can do a part in restoring the commons: common good, common decency, common sense, common courtesy, and common bonds to all life."

See APPRECIATION Page 16

2007 Top 10 Rights & Liberties Stories

In certain ways, the Rights & Liberties Top 10 list is the most depressing of the year. Nevertheless, it demonstrates why consistent and critical media coverage is crucial for beating back the erosion of our basic freedoms.

It should give us hope for the New Year, for as many problems as the conservative stranglehold has created in our present, we have the power, and the knowledge, to shape the future.

10. **Disappeared: Five Years In Guantanamo** by Lou Dubose, *The Washington Spectator*.

In 2001, 19-year-old Murat Kurnaz was an innocent man caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Accused of being a terrorist, he spent five years in Guantanamo before being released – now he's telling his story.

A SLASHED SAFETY NET

9. **America Gone Wrong: A Slashed Safety Net Turns Libraries into Homeless Shelters** by Chip Ward, *Tomdispatch.com*.

A dirty little secret about America is that public libraries have become de facto daytime shelters for the nation's street people while librarians are increasingly our unofficial social workers for the homeless and mentally disturbed.

8. **Life in Solitary Confinement: 12,775 Days Alone** by Brooke Shelby Biggs, *AlterNet*.

Americans shamefully imagine that spending a life sentence in solitary confinement could only happen in faraway countries. But two men in Louisiana's Angola prison know otherwise.

7. **The War on Drugs Is Really a War on Minorities** by Arianna Huffington, *Los Angeles Times*. Democratic presidential candidates crave the Latino and black vote, but ignore the drug war's unfair toll on people of color.

WERE THEY 'ACCIDENTALLY' DESTROYED?

6. **In Violation of Federal Law: Ohio's 2004 Presidential Election Records Are Destroyed or Missing**, by Steven Rosenfeld, *AlterNet*.

In 56 of Ohio's 88 counties, ballots and election records from 2004 have been "accidentally" destroyed, despite a federal order to preserve them – it was crucial evidence which would have revealed whether the election was stolen.

5. **The 'Silent' Ninth Amendment Gives Americans Rights They Don't Know They Have**, by Daniel A Farber, *Basic Books*.



The First Amendment right of free speech and the Fifth Amendment right to avoid self-incrimination are well-known, but the Ninth Amendment is ignored. Pity, because it bears directly on abortion, the right to die and gay rights.

4. **Is a Presidential Coup Under Way?** by Jim Hightower, *Hightower Lowdown*. The Constitution is being trampled and nothing less than American democracy itself is endangered – a presidential coup is taking place. Where is Congress?

IT'S A CONSTITUTION, NOT A KING

3. **Don't We Have a Constitution, Not a King?** by Marjorie Cohn, *AlterNet*.

Bush has issued a directive that would place all governmental powers in his hands in the case of a catastrophic emergency. If a terrorist attack happens before the 2008 election, could Bush and Cheney use this to avoid relinquishing power to a successor administration?

2. **The End of America? Naomi Wolf Thinks It Could Happen** by Don Hazen, *AlterNet*.

An interview with author Naomi Wolf, whose new book, *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, may confirm your worries about democracy in America.

1. **The Rise of Christian Fascism and Its Threat to American Democracy** by Chris Hedges, *Truthdig*.

We must attend to growing social and economic inequities in order to stop the most dangerous mass movement in American history – or face a future of fascism under the guise of Christian values.

© *Independent Media Institute*

America Laughed At The 2007 News

OK. Just so you know: the Top Ten Comedic News Stories of the Year are as different from the Top Ten Legitimate News Stories of the Year as Froot Loops are from porridge.

10. Jimmy Carter called President Bush the "worst President ever." And by the very nature of that statement, that would have to include ... Ronald Reagan, most criminal administration in history, not to mention his attacks on public education and horrendous debt.

9. David Petraeus, the Surgin' General, said Iraq looks more and more like America every day. Apparently they want us out of there, too. Claims the government is paralyzed by petty partisan squabbling, so maybe they are getting the hang of a Western-style democracy.

HE WANTS TO START ANOTHER WAR?

8. Barack Obama not only doesn't know world geography, he said he would use the U.S. military even if it meant following the terrorists into Iran. Oh gee! Another war when we can't handle what we've got.

7. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad demonstrated the concept of free speech in America. Both he and Bush at the U.N. on the same day. Think of it: a religious fanatic who sponsors secret prisons and has antagonized the whole world and an Iranian, both addressing the General Assembly.

6. Rudy Giuliani tried to espouse traditional family values on the campaign trail. And the fact that he's had three wives just means he's extra traditional. The Christian Coalition threatened to form a third party if Rudy Giuliani becomes the Republican nominee. Wonder what they'll call it? Too bad "the Taliban" is already taken.

TWO TOP-FLIGHT RESIGNATIONS

5. Karl Rove and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales both resigned. I'm thinking the only reason he kept supporting Gonzales is because "Attorney General" and "Alberto Gonzales" both start with AG, and it was the only way he could remember who was filling the position. Like a mnemonic device. Karl Rove: proof positive that the Devil and the Pillsbury Dough Boy had more than a passing acquaintance.

4. Mitt Romney's tried to run a perfect campaign. Looks like he's been dipped in a polyurethane bath. Flip-flopped so much he's in danger of triggering a Stage Four John Kerry Alert. His campaign ads should close with "I'm Mitt Romney, and I both approve and disapprove of this ad."

PARIS HILTON AND SCOOTER LIBBY

3. Paris Hilton was offered community service, but the community declined. Q. What's the difference between Paris Hilton and Scooter Libby? A. 23 days.

2. Dick Cheney's Chief of Staff Scooter Libby was fined a quarter million dollars which was paid for by the Scooter Libby Defense Fund, which you and I know as Halliburton. His 30-month sentence was then commuted by President Bush, who apparently is not just the Decider, he's also the Commuter.

1. Idaho Republican Sen. Larry Craig isn't gay and didn't quit. He may be ho-

mosexual, but he is so not gay. Like a Rorschach blot of not gay. Said he was entrapped. Cop must have worn some fetching footwear. Italian design, really shiny and the laces were perfect. Should have gone with the Restless Leg Syndrome defense.

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Top 25 Censored News Stories Of '07

Editor's Note: The Oklahoma Observer is the only Oklahoma publication ever included in Project Censored. It was for our assailing the popular media's failure to report on the good things about public education.

Here are the 2007 most censored stories:

- Future of Internet Debate Ignored by Media
- Halliburton Charged with Selling Nuclear Technologies to Iran
- Oceans of the World in Extreme Danger
- Hunger and Homelessness Increasing in the U.S.
- High-Tech Genocide in Congo
- Federal Whistleblower Protection in Jeopardy
- U.S. Operatives Torture Detainees to Death in Afghanistan
- Pentagon Exempt from Freedom of Information Act
- The World Bank Funds Israel-Palestine Wall
- Expanded Air War in Iraq Kills More Civilians
- Dangers of Genetically Modified Food Confirmed
- Pentagon Plans to Build New Land Mines
- New Evidence Establishes Dangers of Roundup
- Homeland Security Contracts KBR to Build Detention Centers in the U.S.
- Chemical Industry is EPA's Primary Research Partner
- Ecuador and Mexico Defy U.S. on International Criminal Court
- Iraq Invasion Promotes OPEC Agenda
- Physicist Challenges Official 9/11 Story
- Destruction of Rain Forests Worst Ever
- Bottled Water: A Global Environmental Problem
- Gold Mining Threatens Ancient Andean Glaciers
- Billions in Homeland Security Spending Undisclosed
- U.S. Oil Targets Kyoto in Europe
- Cheney's Halliburton '07 Stock Rose over 3000%
- U.S. Military in Paraguay Threatens Region

www.projectcensored.org/censored

Billy Graham Nixes Bush's Conversion

By Craig Unger

How George Bush really found Jesus. The story Bush tells about how Billy Graham converted him is a fable, concocted during the 2000 presidential campaign. Here's the truth.

Did George W. Bush become a "born-again" Christian in the summer of 1985, after extended private talks with Rev. Billy Graham?

That's the tale told by Bush himself in *A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House*, a ghostwritten autobiography prepared for the 2000 presidential campaign.

According to the Bush tale, one evening at Walker's Point, the Bush compound in Kennebunkport, ME, Graham, spiritual confidant to Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan and a close friend of the Bush family, sat down by the fireplace and gave a talk.

"I don't remember the exact words," Bush wrote. "It was more the power of his example. The Lord was so clearly reflected in his gentle and loving demeanor."

HE SAYS THEY WALKED BY THE SHORE

The next morning, Bush and Graham went for a walk along the rugged Maine shore, past the Boony Wild Pool where Bush had skinny-dipped as a child.

"I knew I was in the presence of a great man ..." Bush wrote. "He was like a magnet; I felt drawn to seek something different. He didn't lecture or admonish; he shared warmth and concern. Billy Graham didn't make you feel guilty; he made you feel loved.

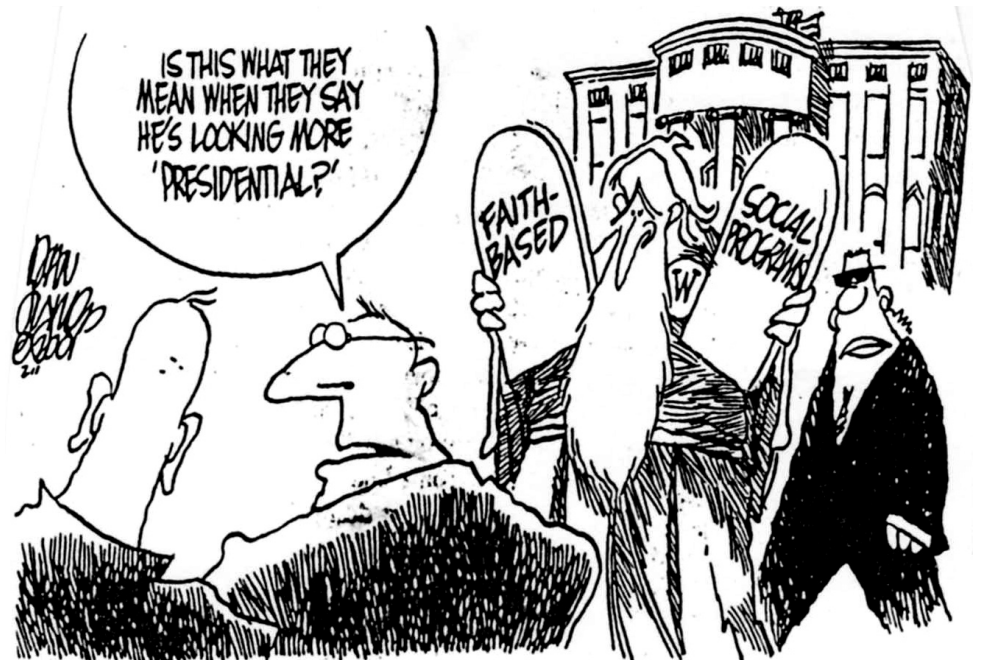
"Over the course of that weekend, Rev. Graham planted a mustard seed in my soul, a seed that grew over the next year," he continued. "He led me to the path, and I began walking."

There's just one problem with Bush's account of his conversion experience: it's not true.

BRIAN WILLIAMS ELICITS THE TRUTH

For one thing, when Billy Graham was asked about the episode by NBC's Brian Williams, he would not corroborate Bush's account.

"I've heard others say that [I converted Bush], and people have written it, but I cannot say that," Graham said. "I was with him and I used to teach the Bible at



Kennebunkport to the Bush family when he was a younger man, but I never feel that I in any way turned his life around."

Even if one doesn't accept Graham's candid response, there's another good reason to believe that the account in Bush's book is fiction.

Mickey Herskowitz, a sportswriter for the Houston Chronicle who became close friends with the Bush family and was originally contracted to ghostwrite *A Charge to Keep*, recalled interviewing Bush about it when he was doing research for the book.

HE COULDN'T REMEMBER A SINGLE WORD

"I remember asking him about the famous meeting at Kennebunkport with the Rev. Billy Graham ..." Herskowitz said. "And you know what? He couldn't remember a single word that passed between them."

Herskowitz was so stunned by Bush's memory lapse that he began prompting him.

"It was so unlikely he wouldn't remember anything Billy Graham said, especially because that was a defining moment in his life. So I asked. Well, governor, would he have said something like, 'Have you gotten right with God?'"

According to Herskowitz, Bush was visibly taken aback and bristled at the suggestion.

"No," Bush replied. "Billy Graham isn't going to ask you a question like that."

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Santa Was Good To Wall Street's Richest

Things did not go well on Wall Street in 2007. Depending on the year-end news, the stock market looks at best to have eked out a small gain for the year.

The record setting pace of mergers and buyouts in the winter and spring dwindled to a trickle in recent months.

Some of the great citadels of Wall Street, like Citigroup, Merrill Lynch, and Morgan Stanley, were forced to eat billions of dollars in write-downs on the complex financial instrumentals they had peddled to their customers.

The bad news also showed up in stock prices. Morgan Stanley's stock was down almost 20% for the year. Lehman Brothers stock was down a bit more than 20%. Citigroup's stock price was down almost 50% from its level at the beginning of the year.

NO LUMPS OF COAL FOR WALL STREET LOSERS

You might have expected that most of the Wall Street gang would have been waking up on Christmas morning to find lumps of coal in their stockings. But that's not the way that the modern economy works.

According to The Associated Press, bonuses on Wall Street were up a healthy 14% over last year. In a year in which tens of millions of families were struggling to pay their heating bills and hang onto to their homes, it seems that Santa still had a soft spot for the folks who cut deals on Wall Street.

Typically, corporations count unreturned shareholder proxies as supporting management's position. This means that if 30% of the shareholders [by number of shares owned] don't return their proxies, then management needs the support of less than one-third of the people who actually vote in the election to get their way.

THE WAY THINGS WORK IN CORPORATE AMERICA

Suppose incumbents in Congress got to count all the non-voters as supporting

their re-election. This is pretty much the way things work in corporate America, which is why shareholders now find themselves handing out big bucks to top executives no matter how badly they screw up.

Of course, it's not just the shareholders who were generous with the Wall Street crew. All of us, as taxpayers, did our part to ensure that these folks had a happy holiday season.

In particular, we deserve thanks because we gave hedge and equity fund managers a special tax break that allows them to pay a much lower tax rate than workers like firefighters and schoolteachers.

The fund managers' tax break allows some of the richest people in the country to pay a tax rate of just 15% on their earnings, compared to the 35% tax rate that they would face if they had to pay taxes like ordinary workers.

LOBBYISTS TEAM UP WITH REPUBLICANS

Congress did consider eliminating the fund managers' tax break in 2007, but a determined lobbying effort, aided by Republican members of Congress, saved the day.

One of the leaders of this lobbying effort was Peter Peterson, an investment banker with the Blackstone Group, a private equity firm that earned Peterson and other partners billions when it went public last year.

Peterson is primarily known for having spent much of the last 15 years arguing for cuts in Social Security and Medicare for people like schoolteachers and firefighters.

When arguing for these cuts Peterson routinely asserts that he does not need his Social Security. With the tens of millions in tax breaks he gets from the government, this is surely true.

© Truthout

Sign Of The Times For The New Year

Check this humorous list to help recognize the signs of the times for 2008:

1. You just tried to enter your password on the microwave.
2. You have a list of 15 phone numbers to reach your family of three.
3. You call your son's beeper to let him know it's time to eat. He e-mails you back from his bedroom, "What's for dinner?"
4. Your daughter sells Girl Scout Cookies via her web site.
5. You chat several times a day with a stranger from South Africa, but you haven't spoken with your next-door neighbor yet this year.
6. You check the ingredients on a can of chicken noodle soup to see if it contains Echinacea.
7. Your grandmother asks you to send her a JPEG file of your newborn so she can create a screen saver.
8. You pull up in your own driveway and use your cell phone to see if anyone is home.

9. You buy a computer and six months later it is out of date and now sells for half the price you paid.

10. Leaving the house without your cell phone, which you didn't have the first 20 or 30 years of your life, is cause for panic and turning around to go get it.

11. Using real money, instead of credit or debit, to make a purchase would be a hassle and take planning.

12. Cleaning up the dining room means getting the fast food bags out of the back seat of your car.

13. Your reason for not staying in touch with family is that they do not have e-mail addresses.

14. You consider second-day air delivery painfully slow.

15. Your dining room table is now your flat filing cabinet.

16. Your idea of being organized is multiple-colored Post-It notes.

Bush & Co. Dodge Moral Responsibility

By Carl Pope

"Government is not the solution to our problem," Ronald Reagan famously declared in his first inaugural address in 1981. "Government is the problem."

Since then many politicians have found Reagan's formulation to be a convenient cover not only for attacks on environmental regulation and social services, but also for incompetence and corruption.

None has so excelled at making government the problem as President George W. Bush.

New Orleans remains the iconic example. After ignoring the city in the days following Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Emergency Management Agency provided contaminated trailers to 20,000 hurricane victims.

When the refugees complained about health problems, FEMA did nothing. The Sierra Club tested the trailers and found high formaldehyde levels in most of them, but the agency still refused to act.

THEY DIDN'T WANT TO ADMIT THE TRUTH

On June 16, 2006, three months after news of the cancer-causing compound surfaced, FEMA's Office of General Counsel advised the agency not to conduct its own testing because doing so "would imply FEMA's ownership of this issue."

The agency still owned the trailers, however, and had to dispose of them as the refugees were evicted. Then FEMA sold them to the public – despite their toxic hazards – right up to the day when FEMA administrator David Paulison was hauled before Rep. Henry Waxman's House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

There he declared that the Sierra Club's intervention had been "a wake-up call" for the agency.

"Mr. Paulison," retorted Waxman, "you're a heavy sleeper."

DODGING MORAL AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

Waxman's concise summary of FEMA's sorry approach – "They didn't want the moral and legal responsibility to do what they knew had to be done" – could just as well be applied to the EPA, the Interior Department, or nearly any other department of Bush's executive branch.

The U.S. Forest Service, for instance, knew that homeowners in California's Tahoe National Forest were living in a firetrap.

Among the causes were years of high-grading [the removal of large, fire-resistant old-growth trees], suppression of small fires that had historically thinned out the forest, a drier climate, and insect infestations.

Since 1997, the Forest Service has pledged to thin 30,000 of the most flammable acres in the Lake Tahoe basin. But the agency turned out to be less interested in helping woodland communities than in protecting salable timber, so only 13,000 acres were thinned.

HE DID LESS THAN HALF THE JOB

Forest Service Chief Mark Rey did less than half the job he was supposed to, and as a consequence, 250 homes went up in smoke in the Angora fire.

A lot more went up in smoke on September 11, of course, but even then the Bush Administration made sure that government was part of the problem.

Imbecilic G.W. Bush Destroys The Dollar

By Will Durst

Talk about how the almighty have fallen. The dollar is headed downhill faster than Bode Miller on a set of rocket skis. Think nose-dive. Plummetville. Plunge City. Belly Floppo Rama. Recession is such an ugly word.

Try walking down a New York City street these days without getting knocked off the sidewalk by a gaggle of foreigners brandishing a circumference of high end shopping bags like a cardboard armada. Can't be done.

I blame George Bush and his imbecilic economic chicanery for subjecting us to these indignities. Spending \$2 trillion on an unnecessary war. Silly boy. Lowering taxes during that same unnecessary war. Sillier boy.

Policies that have prompted OPEC to make noises about following Brazilian super-model Giselle Bündchen's lead, in asking to be paid in Euros.

SHE SHOULD BE PAID IN CLOTHES

Euros, hell, the lady should choose to be paid in clothes, because to look at her, she doesn't seem to own any. Somebody, throw this girl a jacket. She must be cold.

The dollar has sunk lower than a strip show flyer stuck to the undercarriage of a leased Lamborghini Murcielago. The pound is up to \$2, levels not seen since the '50s. The Euro is at its highest level against the dollar – ever.

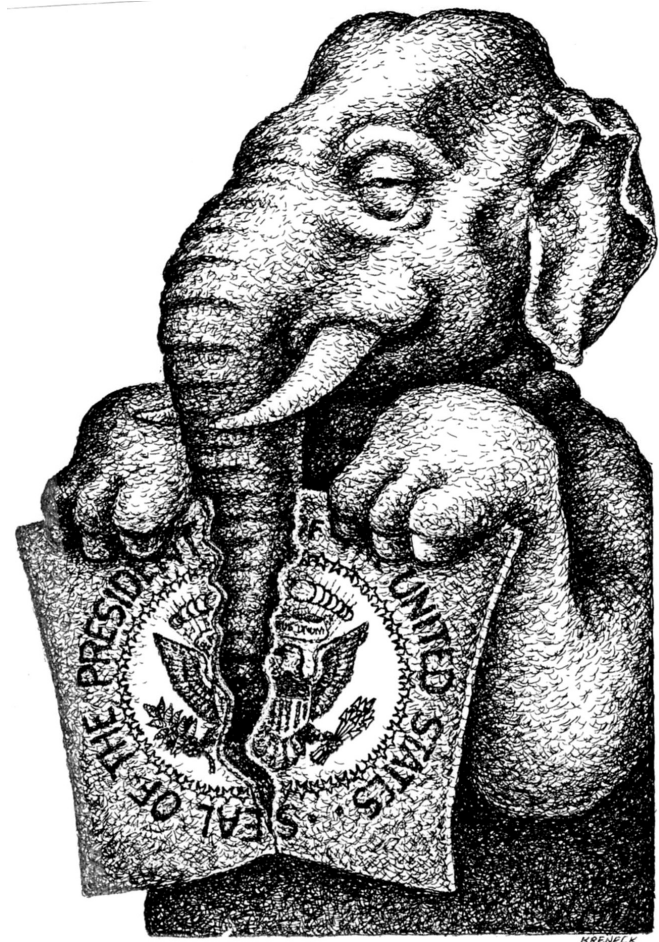
French President Sarkozy spent his summer vacation in New Hampshire – 400 francs and that includes everything, including zee servants.

Things have gotten so bad, Russian mob bosses are back to using 5000 Ruble bills to snort lines of cocaine off of hookers' chests. It's like the October Revolution all over again.

That obnoxious sound coming from north of the border: the non-stop laughter of millions of Canadians playing a little game they call payback, mocking the play money we call moolah.

CANADIANS HAVE THE LAST LAUGH

"Oh, so I guess you would be talking about American dollars, eh? Oooh. I don't know there, eh."



Public health professionals were denied a say in how cleanup workers were protected, first responders and residents were misled about safety issues, and fire equipment leaving ground zero wasn't checked for toxic contamination.

This past summer, called before Congress to account for the EPA's assurances of air safety in lower Manhattan, former EPA administrator Christie Todd Whitman argued that "dust and air are two different things."

GEE, IT WAS JUST THE DUST

The air was safe to breathe, Whitman maintained – it was just all that dust that was making people sick.

By the standards of a White House that scorns government, Whitman, Rey and Paulison – like former attorney general Alberto Gonzales and former FEMA director Michael Brown – all did a "heckuva job."

Low expectations for government are not exclusive to Republicans. Politicians of both parties have become accustomed to a government that thinks small and provides less – even when enormous societal challenges like global warming demand sweeping action.

Yet after seven years of Bush, we have nowhere to go but up. Pollsters report that 18- to 24-year-olds are increasingly engaged in politics and voting.

Among the most popular politicians at the state level are governors like Arnold Schwarzenegger, R-CA, and Charlie Crist, R-FL, both advocates of big ideas and actions.

Embracing the national tide of rising expectations for government might even lift the sinking fortunes of the party of Reagan and Bush.

– The author Pope is the executive director of the Sierra Club

Our economy isn't in the doldrums. Our economy can't even see the doldrums. Our economy aspires to the doldrums. Dubyah has turned us into a Third World Banana Republic. We're Costa Rica to the rest of the world. With lousier snorkeling.

Who can blame the hordes of Euro-trash from clogging the aisles of our Tiffany franchises like an extended family of hillbillies at a dollar store? Everything here is so incredibly cheap.

We've turned into a discount playground for the world's trust fund babies. High-end restaurants, the good hotels, VIP sections of our most exclusive night-clubs, Saturday night movie tickets: pretty much off limits to anybody holding an American passport.

MINIMUM WAGE SECURITY GUARDS

We're the minimum wage security guards of a giant high-end outlet mall known as America – just one cut rate Virgin flight away from true civilization.

And thank heavens we, the general public, never fell for that whole "you got to save your money" BS and are still proud holders of the "Least Personal Savings of any Country in the Industrialized World" award.

You know what those dollars are worth now? Zero. Zip. Zilch. Nada. Nothing! Maybe kicking the greenback dollar under the couch is just the neo-con idea of how to squelch our looming Social Security crisis.

Make the dollar worth so little, that in the future, any one of us will be able to cover the entire shortfall by digging into our own wallets.

"\$30 trillion? Is that all you're worried about? Why didn't you say so? Who here can break a quadrillion?"

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER ON-LINE

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Preparing For The U.S. Post-Oil Society

By James Howard Kunstler

Expand your view beyond the question of how we will run all the cars by means other than gasoline. This obsession with keeping the cars running at all costs could really prove fatal.

Cars are not part of the solution [whether they run on fossil fuels, vodka, used fry oil, or cow dung]. They are at the heart of the problem.

We have to produce food differently. The Monsanto/Cargill model of industrial agribusiness is heading toward its Waterloo. Farming will soon return much closer to the center of American economic life. It will necessarily have to be done more locally, at a smaller-and-finer scale, and will require more human labor.

We have to inhabit the terrain differently. Virtually every place in our nation organized for car dependency is going to fail to some degree.

TRADITIONAL HUMAN ECOLOGIES

We'll have to return to traditional human ecologies at a smaller scale: villages, towns, and cities [along with a productive rural landscape]. Our small towns are waiting to be re-inhabited.

This whole process will entail enormous demographic shifts and is liable to be turbulent. Like farming, it will require the retrieval of skill-sets and methodologies that have been forsaken. The graduate schools of architecture are still tragically preoccupied with teaching Narcissism.

We have to move things and people differently. This is the sunset of Happy Motoring [including the entire U.S. trucking system]. Need something to do? Get involved in restoring public transit.

RAILROADS WILL BE RUNNING AGAIN

Let's start with railroads, and let's make sure we electrify them so they will run on things other than fossil fuel or, if we have to run them partly on coal-fired power plants, at least scrub the emissions and sequester the CO2 at as few source-points as possible.

We also have to prepare our society for moving people and things much more by water. This implies the rebuilding of infrastructure for our harbors, and also for our inland river and canal systems.

We have to transform retail trade. The national chains that have used the high tide of fossil fuels to contrive predatory economies-of-scale [and kill local economies] – they are going down.

GOODBYE TO THE SUPER-SIZED CHAIN STORES

Wal-Mart and the other outfits will not survive the coming era of expensive, scarcer oil. Their 12,000-mile supply lines to the Asian slave-factories are also endangered as the U.S. and China contest for Middle East and African oil.

We will have to make things again in America. However, we are going to make less stuff. We will have fewer things to buy, fewer choices of things. The curtain is coming down on the endless blue-light-special shopping frenzy that has occupied the forefront of daily life in America for decades.

The age of canned entertainment is coming to an end. It was fun for a while. We liked "Citizen Kane" and the Beatles. But we're going to have to make our own music and our own drama down the road.

LEARN THE BANJO OR THE VIOLIN

We're going to need playhouses and live performance halls. We're going to need violin and banjo players and playwrights and scenery-makers, and singers.

The Internet is not going to save canned entertainment. The Internet will not work so well if the electricity is on the fritz half the time [or more].

We'll have to reorganize the education system. The centralized secondary school systems based on the yellow school bus fleets will not survive the coming decades.



The huge investments we have made in these facilities will impede the transition out of them, but they will fail anyway. Since we will be a less-affluent society, we probably won't be able to replace these centralized facilities with smaller and more equitably distributed schools, at least not right away.

THE BIG UNIVERSITIES MAY GO UNDER

The big universities, both public and private, may not be salvageable. And the activity of higher ed itself may engender huge resentment by those foreclosed from it.

Anyone who learns to do long division and write a coherent paragraph will be at a great advantage – and, in any case, will probably out-perform today's average college graduate.

One thing for sure: teaching children is not liable to become an obsolete line-of-work, as compared to public relations and sports marketing.

We have to reorganize the medical system. The current skein of intertwined rackets based on endless Ponzi buck passing scams will not survive the discontinuities to come.

WE MAY HAVE TO RETURN TO 'DOCTORING'

We will probably have to return to a model of service much closer to what used to be called "doctoring." Medical training may also have to change as the big universities run into trouble functioning.

Finally, life in the U.S.A. will have to become much more local, and virtually all the activities of everyday life will have to be re-scaled. You can state categorically that any enterprise now supersized is likely to fail – everything from the federal government to big corporations to huge institutions.

If you can find a way to do something practical and useful on a smaller scale than it is currently being done, you are likely to have food in your cupboard and people who esteem you.

An entire social infrastructure of voluntary associations, co-opted by the narcotic of television, needs to be reconstructed. Local institutions for care of the helpless will have to be organized.

Local politics will be much more meaningful as state governments and federal agencies slide into complete impotence. Lots of jobs here for local heroes.

The best way to feel hopeful about the future is to get off your arse and demonstrate to yourself that you are a capable, competent individual resolutely able to face new circumstances.

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Bill Moyers' Dad Proud Of His Friend

By Bill Moyers

Editor's Note: Bill Moyers, born in Oklahoma, gave the following remarks at the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute's 20th anniversary Four Freedoms ceremony, where he received the Freedom of Speech Award.

Thank you for this recognition and the spirit of the evening. Thanks especially for giving me the chance to sit here awhile thinking about my father.

Henry Moyers was an ordinary man who dropped out of the fourth grade because his family needed him to pick cotton to help make ends meet. The Depression knocked him off the farm and flat on his back.

When I was born he was making \$2 a day working on the highway to Oklahoma City. He never made over \$100 a week in the whole of his working life, and he made that only when he joined the union on the last job he held.

He voted for Franklin Roosevelt in four straight elections, and he would have gone on voting for him until kingdom come if both had lived that long.

I once asked him why, and he said, "Because the President's my friend."

SURE HE HAD A FRIEND IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Now, my father never met FDR. No politician ever paid him much note, but he was sure he had a friend in the White House during the worst years of his life.

When by pure chance I wound up working there many years later, and my parents came for a visit, my father wanted to see the Roosevelt Room.

I don't know quite how to explain it, except that my father knew who was on his side and who wasn't, and for 12 years he had no doubt where FDR stood. The

first time I remember him with tears in his eyes was when Roosevelt died. He had lost his friend.

We can't revive the man and certainly we wouldn't want to revisit the times, but we can rekindle the spirit.

There are 37 million people in this country who are poor; there are 57 million who are near poor, making \$20,000, to \$40,000 a year – one divorce, one pink slip, one illness away from a free fall.

A THIRD OF AMERICANS LIVING ON THE EDGE

That's almost one-third of America still living on the edge. They need a friend in the White House.

My father, with his fourth-grade education and two fingers with the missing tips from the mix-up at the cotton gin, got it when Roosevelt spoke. "I can't talk like him," he said, "but I sure do think like him."

My father might not have had the words for it, but he said amen when FDR talked about economic royalism. Sitting in front of our console radio, he got it when Roosevelt said that private power no less than public power can bring America to ruin in the absence of democratic controls.

A GOVERNMENT BY MONEY IS TO BE FEARED

Don't think for a moment he didn't get it when Roosevelt said that a government by money was as much to be feared as a government by mob, or when he

See FRIEND Page 16

Mirror, Mirror: Cristina and Hillary

By Danny M. Adkison

There was a woman. She wanted to be president of her country. She was ready to assume the role and lead the nation. The question was, was the nation ready for her?

She had, it seemed, been preparing for this her whole life. Of course, since it was a man's world, she had to wait her turn. Her husband had already held the position she sought. He was still immensely popular.

He could still draw crowds and not only applause from the populace but also praise from the pundits.

Wait her turn – she had waited. The time was ripe. To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose. Her husband's time had come and gone. Had he been running could he have won? Probably, but he was not running.

Other nations had had women at the helm, guiding the ship of state. Some were historic figures: Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher come to mind. Why not here? It was not a question of "if" it would happen, but "when" it would happen.

THE ULTIMATE GLASS CEILING

No female had been elected to the presidency, making that the ultimate glass ceiling. She thought now was the perfect time to break that barrier.

There was only one remaining question, was the nation ready?

She felt she was ready. She had observed her husband in the office of the presidency for years. She had played a key role [even if only an informal one] in her husband's presidency.

Then, she had won election to and served in a distinguished manner as a senator. She was, after all, as prepared as many men had been for the presidency.

To be president, to be elected to the highest office in the nation, that is quite an achievement. History would record that. But to be the first woman elected to the presidency of the nation would guarantee that her election would be one of the most celebrated in the nation's history.

A REFERENDUM ON HER HUSBAND'S POLICIES?

Would some vote for her because of her husband? Could, in fact, a vote for her appear to be a kind of referendum on the part of the voters, sending a signal that they wished to return to the policies of her husband's presidency? Maybe.

She had met her husband in law school. They shared so many political interests. They were both political activists. She had stood by him during the good and the bad.

He had ushered in a new economic era during his presidency. The nation's relatively recent obsession with debt and deficits had subsided during her husband's presidency.

If voters wished to return to the economic policies of her husband, so be it.

Six In Ten Say War Not Worth Fighting

According to a recent Washington Post-ABC poll, 60% of Americans say that the war is not worth fighting.

Intensity of opposition to the war remains as strong as it was one year ago, with twice as many Americans stating they feel "strongly" that the Iraq war is not worth fighting as those who feel strongly that it is worthwhile.

President Bush's overall approval rating remains at his career low point of 33%, where it has remained since July in the Washington Post-ABC poll.

In contrast, nearly two out of three Americans disapprove of the job Bush is doing.

The goal of Bush's "surge" strategy was to create the space for political progress, but there is none in sight. Instead, it is reported that the Bush Administration has "scaled back" its goals for progress from the Iraqi government, abandoning major benchmarks [The New York Times].

FRIEND

From Page 15

said that the political equality we once had won was meaningless in the face of economic inequality.

My father got it when he heard his friend in the White House talk about how "a small group had concentrated into their own hands an almost complete control over other people's property, other people's money, other people's labor – other people's lives."

My father knew FDR was talking for him when he said life was no longer free, liberty no longer real, men could no longer follow the pursuit of happiness – against economic tyranny such as this.

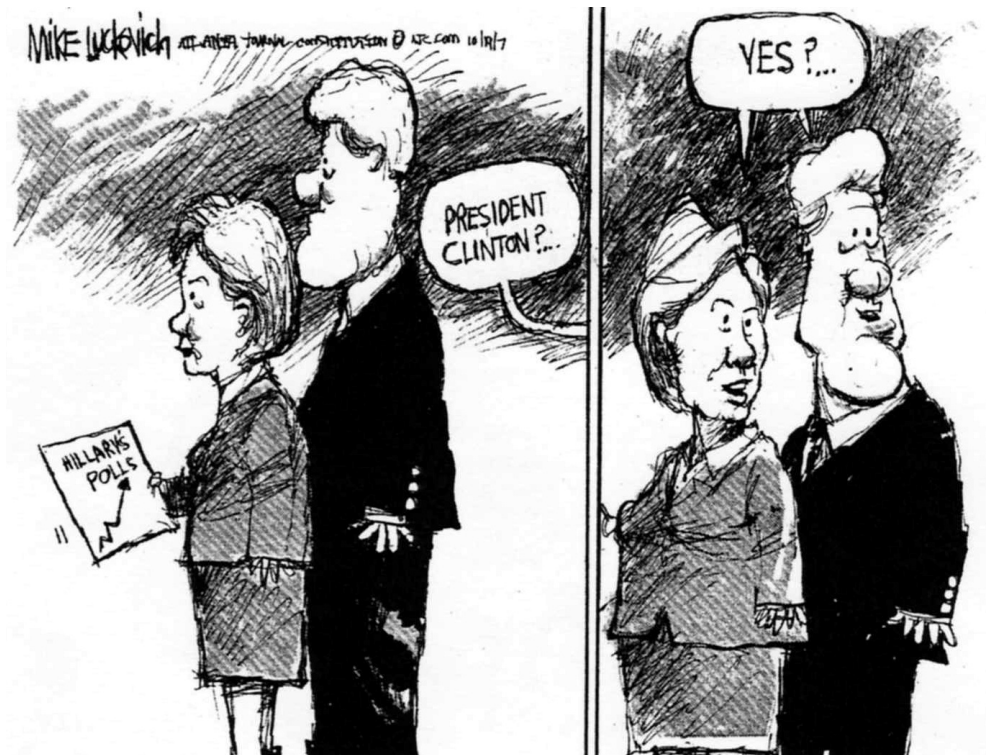
WHERE A CITIZEN COULD APPEAL

My father listened raptly when his friend the President said, "The American citizen" – my father knew the President was speaking of him – "could appeal only to the organized power of government."

So thank you for reminding us that liberalism is less about ideology and doctrine than about friendship and faith – the bond between a patrician in the White House and a working man on the Texas-Oklahoma border and their mutual belief in America as a shared project.

Thank you for this reminder of how we might yet turn the listing ship of state. My father thanks you, too.

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, JANUARY 10, 2008, PAGE 16



She supported him then, he was supporting her now, and how could anyone argue with improving the nation's economic condition.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT HER PERSONALITY

The one criticism that seems to stick with voters is her rather staid personality. She seems to be posing for the presidency rather than running for the presidency.

In any event, winning the presidency, she, and her husband, would reside not in the White House, but in the Pink House.

The woman? Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner.

She is the first female elected president of Argentina, and she is residing in the Pink House [the Presidential Palace]. She is also quite popular. Running against 12 other candidates [two quite formidable ones], Ms. Kirchner garnered 45% of the vote – enough to avoid a runoff.

Her husband, Nestor, was very popular as president but decided not to run for re-election. Rather, he opted to have his wife run in his place.

Argentina's Constitution, however, allows him to run for the presidency again at the end of his wife's four-year term [which some expect him to do].

Meanwhile, farther to the North, another female is trying to become the first elected female president of the United States. Her husband may suddenly be an admirer of Argentina's Constitution.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

The American public recognizes the White House policy failure. A majority of those polled say the United States is not making significant gains toward restoring civil order in Iraq. [Washington Post-ABC poll]

The American public is saying enough is enough: 2007 was the deadliest year on record for U.S. troops in Iraq and there is still no political reconciliation.

A Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll of the military community, including active-duty members, veterans and their family members, shows that like the rest of the country, the military community feels the war is not worth fighting.

Nearly seven in 10 favor a withdrawal within the coming year or "right away."

Americans are demanding an end to Bush's war policy and do not want another dime spent on more of the same. After almost five years, over a trillion dollars, and the loss of nearly 3,900 of our bravest men and women, the American people are putting their foot down.

APPRECIATION

From Page 11

On the table in front of us was a petition she had been circulating in the month before she died. It called for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Also on the table were scores of greeting cards she had bought over the years but never sent. They urged peace, harmony and citizen involvement.

Before we left, we passed around the petition and signed it. I chose seven cards from the pile. Yesterday I sent the cards and copies of the petitions with our signatures on them to the seven members of the Oregon Congressional Delegation.

I included a brief explanatory note. It read:

The friends and family of Doris Gunn, who died on Tuesday, Oct 30, have signed the enclosed petition in memory and honor of her passion for social justice and peace. Doris had prepared this petition and bought the card we also enclose. Doris's passion was to make the world a safe and just place for her children and grandchildren – for all children and grandchildren, forever. We ask that you make her cause yours by supporting HR-2647, the Nuclear Disarmament and Economic Conversion Act.

– The author lives in Portland, OR. This article first appeared on The Red Electric blog at <http://theredelectric.blogspot.com/2007/doris-gunn-remembered.html>

Announcing 2007 P.U.-litzer Prizes

By Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon

Many journalists qualified for the 16th annual P.U.-litzer Prizes, but only a few were able to win recognition for turning in one of the truly stinkiest media performances of the year. Here are the winners of the P.U.-litzers for 2007:

SPINNING FOR ANOTHER WAR AWARD – Michael Gordon of *The New York Times*

Continuing where he left off before the Iraq invasion, when he used unnamed official sources to produce wildly inaccurate page-one articles on Iraq's alleged weapons threat.

Gordon in February wrote a front-page story with the stunning claim that Iran's Supreme Leader had approved sending lethal explosives into Iraq to attack U.S. soldiers. [Even President Bush soon backed away from the claim.]

"SOMETHING ABOUT A RETRO MACHO MAN" AWARD – Chris Matthews, host of MSNBC's "Hardball"

With a worshipful media wind pushing actor and former Sen. Fred Thompson toward the presidential race, Matthews lauded Thompson's "sex appeal" and "star quality."

The hardballer was nearly rapturous as he said: "Can you smell the English Leather on this guy, the Aqua Velva, the sort of mature man shaving cream, or whatever, you know, after he shaved? Do you smell that sort of – a little bit of cigar smoke? You know, whatever."

Four years earlier, when George Bush flew onto an aircraft carrier to celebrate "Mission Accomplished" in Iraq, Matthews had gushed at length about the president's looks and how Americans love "a guy who has a little swagger. We like having a hero as president. We're not like the Brits."

"AMERICANS DON'T WANT UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE" AWARD – Jeff Greenfield of CBS, et al.

Reflecting what became mainstream media's conventional wisdom in the wake of Michael Moore's "SICKO" documentary, CBS correspondent Greenfield explained that the U.S. lacks a universal healthcare system not because of the powerful insurance lobby – but because "Americans are just different."

Actually, CBS's own poll of Americans had found 64% supporting the view that the federal government should "guarantee health insurance for all" – with 60% approving of higher taxes to pay for it.

A CNN poll found 64% American support for the idea that "government should provide a national health insurance program for all Americans, even if this would require higher taxes."

"3-H CLUB" PRIZE – Too Many to Name

At the same time they're imposing their own fixations on candidates, elite political reporters like to pretend that they have absolutely no idea why the candidates are struggling to overcome those fixations.

A Dec. 11 Washington Post article deadpanned: "John Edwards has faced challenges of his own, namely 'the three H's – his expensive haircut, his hedge fund work after the 2004 election, and his sprawling homestead.'"

Dozens of news reports in major outlets have deployed the "three H's" shorthand, many implying that Edwards – unlike the wealthy candidates who never mention the poor – is a hypocrite when he discusses poverty.

In July, the Post's John Solomon devoted an entire investigative article to Edwards' pricey haircuts.

RISKY DEMOCRATS AWARD – L.A. Times, Washington Post

If you believe certain political pundits and reporters, Democrats are continuously pushing "risky" proposals that are off-putting to the American public.

In November, a Los Angeles Times report – headlined "Democrats Calculate Risk on Tax Hikes" – called proposed Democratic tax hikes on wealthier Americans "a major political gamble."

Unmentioned was the fact that Bill Clinton raised taxes on the rich and was re-elected, or that a Gallup poll shows 66% of Americans think "upper income people" don't currently pay enough taxes.

Days later, a Washington Post report was headlined "Climate is a Risky Issue for Democrats; Candidates Back Costly Proposals." Unmentioned was the Post's own poll showing that 70% of Americans think the federal government "should do more" on global warming; only 7% said "it should do less."

SPINNING HAWKS INTO DOVES AWARD – ABC, CNN, Fox, CBS and others

There'd be little news value in Iraq war boosters returning from a brief trip to Iraq and endorsing troop escalation. But by presenting two self-acknowledged Iraq war supporters – Ken Pollack and Michael O'Hanlon – as doves, national outlets created a fictitious story line and major media push this summer in support of the war.

Few media "experts" had argued more relentlessly for war in 2002 than Pollack, author of *The Case for Invading Iraq*. Yet here was ABC anchor Charles Gibson last July: "A bit of a surprise today on Iraq. Two long and persistent critics of the Bush Administration's handling of the war today wrote a column in *The New York Times* saying that after a recent eight-day visit to Iraq, they find significant changes taking place."

CNN called them "two fierce critics."

A Fox reporter claimed the duo had "changed their views after seeing some of the military successes first-hand."

CBS spoke of how O'Hanlon "now believes the troop surge should be continued" – even though he'd written a national column seven months earlier: "A



Skeptic's Case for the Surge."

PUTTING CLOTHES ON THE EMPEROR PRIZE – New York Times

After numerous inside accounts of the Iraq invasion and other policies had exposed Vice President Cheney as a true believer who often put ideology ahead of data and facts, readers may have thought *The New York Times* was joking when it reported in February on the impact that the perjury trial of Cheney's chief of staff would have on the vice president.

According to the newspaper of record: "The trial has chipped away at the public image of Cheney as a sober-minded policy architect."

"IT'S TRUE BECAUSE WE SAID IT" AWARD – CNN's Lou Dobbs

To prove his claim that illegal immigrants were bringing "once eradicated diseases" into our country, Dobbs featured a CNN reporter in 2005 who claimed that the U.S. had seen only 900 cases of leprosy for 40 years – but that "there have been 7,000 in the past three years."

In May, Dobbs was challenged on the shocking statistic by Lesley Stahl on 60 Minutes, who cited a federal report saying there were 7,000 leprosy cases over the last 30 years. Dobbs response: "If we reported it, it's a fact."

Stahl: "How can you guarantee that to me?"

Dobbs: "Because I'm the managing editor, and that's the way we do business. We don't make up numbers, Lesley. Do we?"

"You do, Lou. The Centers for Disease Control report that new leprosy cases in the U.S. have been on the decline for close to 20 years [with 166 cases in 2005]."

THE LOU DOBBS US-vs.-THEM AWARD – Bill O'Reilly of Fox News

Talking to Sen. John McCain in May, O'Reilly said: "But do you understand what *The New York Times* wants, and the far-left want? They want to break down the white, Christian, male power structure, which you're a part of, and so am I.

"And they want to bring in millions of foreign nationals to basically break down the structure that we have. In that regard, Pat Buchanan is right."

"WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLFOWITZ" AWARD – Newsweek

As he was being forced out of his job as World Bank president, Paul Wolfowitz was described by Newsweek as "a man whose managerial talents do not appear to rise to the level of his analytical prowess. By most accounts, Wolfowitz is a genteel, brilliant figure ..."

The Newsweek piece – headlined "With the Best of Intentions" – didn't mention how the brilliant and analytical former Deputy Defense Secretary had insisted just before invading Iraq that the country had no history of ethnic strife, that the U.S. would not need to deploy more than 100,000 troops, or that the war might cost as little as \$10 billion. [So far it has cost about \$500 billion.]

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The Preacher's Donkey

A man bought a donkey from a preacher. The preacher told the man that this donkey had been trained in a very unique way.

The only way to make the donkey go is to say, "Hallelujah!" The only way to make the donkey stop is to say, "Amen!"

The man was pleased with his purchase and immediately got on the animal to try out the preacher's instructions. "Hallelujah!" shouted the man. The donkey began to trot.

"Amen!" shouted the man. The donkey stopped immediately. "This is great!" said the man. With a "Hallelujah" he rode off, very proud of his new purchase. The man traveled for a long time through the mountains.

As he headed towards a cliff, he tried to remember the word to make the donkey stop. "Stop," said the man. "Halt!" he cried. The donkey just kept going. "Oh, no ..."

"Bible! ... Church! ... Please! ... Stop!!!" shouted the man.

The donkey just began to trot faster. He was getting closer and closer to the edge of the cliff. Finally, in desperation, the man said a prayer ... "Please, dear Lord. Please make this donkey stop before I go off the end of this mountain. In Jesus name, AMEN."

The donkey came to an abrupt stop just one step from the edge of the cliff.

"HALLELUJAH!" shouted the man.

– Thanks to Bob Bearden for this.

Scandal Haunting Bush Appointees

By Paul Kiel

Boy, was it time for an update. We decided to take stock of all the Bush Administration officials who'd been accused of corruption and/or resigned in the face of scandal.

A quick note on methodology. Since a complete catalog of administration officials who've been accused of some form of corruption or abuse of power would be endless, we tried to maintain a high standard for inclusion.

Most of those below were the subjects of criminal probes, but we also included officials who were credibly accused of acts that, if not criminal, were a corruption of office [like the U.S. attorney scandal].

And even then, such officials were only included if their accusers had them dead to rights [which is why Karl Rove didn't make the cut].

We also limited ourselves to officials who were either political appointees or whose actions were so political that they were effectively political appointees [like John Tanner].

Indicted/convicted/pleaded guilty:

Eric G. Andell – deputy undersecretary in charge of newly created Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools [previously senior adviser to Secretary of Education Rod Paige] pleaded guilty to one count of conflict of interest for using government travel for personal causes and was sentenced to one year of probation, 100 hours of community service, and fined \$5,000.

Claude Allen – assistant to the President for domestic policy – resigned, pleaded guilty to shoplifting from Target stores.

Lester Crawford – commissioner, FDA – resigned in late September 2005 after only two months on the job. On Oct. 17, he pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor counts of conflict of interest and false reporting of information about stocks he owned in food, beverage and medical device companies he was in charge of regulating. On Feb. 27, 2007, Crawford was sentenced to three years of probation and was fined \$90,000.

CHILD SEX CHARGE HITS PRESS AIDE

Brian Doyle – deputy press secretary, Department of Homeland Security – resigned in the wake of a child sex scandal. Doyle was arrested on April 4, 2006 and pleaded no contest on Sept. 19, 2006 to seven counts of use of a computer to seduce a child and 16 counts of transmitting harmful material to a minor. On Nov. 17, 2006 Doyle was sentenced to five years in state prison and 10 years of probation. He will also need to register as a sex offender.

Steven Griles – deputy secretary at the Interior Department – the highest-ranking administration official yet convicted in the Jack Abramoff scandal. In March 2007, Griles pleaded guilty to lying about his role in the scandal. Sentenced to 10 months incarceration.

'SPECIAL GUEST' BITES THE DUST

John T. Korsmo – chairman of the Federal Housing Finance Board from 2002 to 2004 – pleaded guilty in 2005 to lying to the Senate and an Inspector General. He swore he had no idea how a list of presidents for FHFBB-regulated banks were invited to a fundraiser for his friend's congressional campaign. On the invites, Korsmo was listed as the "special guest." Got 18 months of probation and a \$5,000 fine.

Scooter Libby – Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff – resigned after being indicted for lying to a grand jury and investigators in connection with the investigation stemming from the leak of Valerie Wilson's covert CIA identity, convicted on four of five counts, making him the highest-ranking White House official to be convicted of a felony since the Iran-Contra scandal.

LIBBY DRAWS A PASS FROM PRESIDENT BUSH

Libby was sentenced to 30 months imprisonment and a fine of \$250,000. On July 2, after a judge decided that Libby would remain in prison during the appeals process, President Bush commuted Libby's sentence by removing the 30 months in prison.

David Safavian – former head of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy at the Office of Management and Budget – convicted of lying to ethics officials and Senate investigators about his ties to lobbyist Jack Abramoff. On Oct 27, 2006, he was sentenced to 18 months in prison. He is currently appealing the ruling.

Robert Stein – former comptroller and funding officer for the now disbanded Coalition Provisional Authority, Southern Central Region in Al-Hillah, Iraq – pleaded guilty to conspiracy, bribery, conspiracy to commit money laundering, possession of a machine gun, and being a felon in possession of a firearm. On Jan. 30, 2007 Stein was sentenced to nine years in prison and ordered to forfeit \$3.6 million.

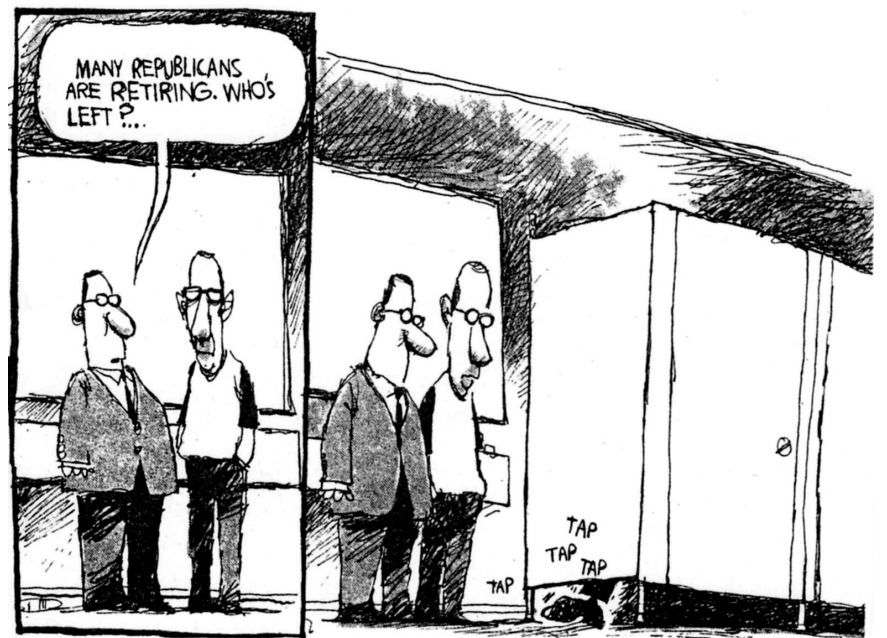
Roger Stillwell – desk officer, Interior Department – pleaded guilty to failing to report Redskins tickets and free dinners from Jack Abramoff.

Resigned due to investigation, pending investigation or allegations of improprieties:

Philip Cooney – chief of staff, White House Council on Environmental Quality – a former oil industry lawyer with no scientific expertise, Cooney resigned after it was revealed he had watered down reports on global warming.

George Deutsch – press aide, NASA – resigned amid allegations he prevented the agency's top climate scientist from speaking publicly about global warming.

Michael Elston – chief of staff to Deputy Attorney General Paul McNulty – announced his resignation on June 15, 2007. Despite allegations that he'd threatened at least four of the eight fired U.S. Attorneys, McNulty said Elston had served



the Justice Department "with distinction for nearly eight years."

CIA OFFICIAL CHARGED WITH BRIBERY

Kyle Dustin "Dusty" Foggo – appointed executive director of the CIA, the agency's third-highest post, in October 2004 – resigned and was ultimately indicted on bribery charges related to the Duke Cunningham bribery scandal.

Alberto Gonzales – former U.S. Attorney General – resigned without explanation amidst investigations of the firings of U.S. attorneys, the politicization of the Justice Department, warrantless surveillance, and the torture and mistreatment of detainees.

Monica Goodling – former Justice Department liaison to the White House and senior counsel to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales – resigned on April 7, 2007 amidst the investigation of the firings of U.S. Attorneys.

WIFE HELPS HUBBY WITH DONOR SCAM

Michelle Larson Korsmo – deputy chief of staff, Department of Labor – helped her husband [see John Korsmo, above] with his donor scam. Quietly left her Labor plum job in February 2004, about two weeks before news broke that she and her husband were the targets of a criminal probe.

Howard "Cookie" Krongard – former State Department inspector general – accused of not properly investigating State Department contractor fraud in Iraq and Afghanistan; of retaliating against whistle blowers in his own office; and of not telling the truth about his knowledge of his brother's ties with Blackwater, a State Department contractor. Faced with a possible perjury investigation, Krongard resigned on December 7, 2007.

LEAKING OFFICIAL INFORMATION

Julie Macdonald – former deputy assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks at the Interior Department – resigned in May 2007 after an "inspector general's report found she had improperly leaked information to private organizations, bullied staff scientists and broken federal rules." The Department of the Interior is investigating many of her decisions regarding endangered species; so far seven have been overturned.

Paul McNulty – deputy Attorney General for the Department of Justice – resigned after questions about his involvement in the U.S. attorney firings and his testimony to Congress about the firings.

Richard Perle – chairman, Defense Policy Board – resigned from Pentagon advisory panel amid conflict-of-interest charges.

SHOWERED WITH GIFTS FROM ABRAMOFF

Susan Ralston – White House assistant – resigned amidst revelations that she had accepted thousands of dollars in gifts from Abramoff without compensating him, counter to White House ethics rules.

Janet Rehnquist – inspector general, Department of Health and Human Services – resigned on June 1, 2003 in the face of an investigation into her alleged efforts to block a politically dangerous probe on behalf of the Bush family.

James Roche – secretary, U.S. Air Force – resigned in the wake of the Boeing tanker lease scandal, after it was revealed he had rather crudely pushed for Boeing to win a \$23 billion contract.

Kyle Sampson – former chief of staff for Attorney General Alberto Gonzales – resigned amidst the investigation of the firings of U.S. Attorneys.

Joseph Schmitz – inspector general, Defense – resigned amid charges he per-

See SCANDALS Page 19

Easiest Surgery

Five surgeons from big cities are discussing who makes the best patients to operate on.

The first surgeon, from New York, says, "Accountants are on my operating table, because when you open them up, everything inside is numbered."

The second, from Chicago, responds, "Yeah, but you should try electricians! Everything inside them is color coded."

The third surgeon, from Dallas, says, "No, I really think librarians are the best, everything inside them is in alphabetical order."

The fourth surgeon, from Los Angeles chimes in: "You know, I like construction workers ... those guys always understand when you have a few parts left over."

But the fifth surgeon, from Washington, DC, shut them all up when he observed: "You're all wrong. Congressmen are the easiest to operate on. There's no guts, no heart, no balls, no brains and no spine, and the head and the butt are interchangeable."

SCANDALS

From Page 18

sonally intervened to protect top political appointees.

RESIGNS AFTER HOLDING THREE SPOTS

Bradley Schlozman resigned from his third and final post with the Justice Department after accusations of actively politicizing the department. He's currently under investigation by the department's inspector general.

Thomas Scully – administrator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services – Shortly after Scully resigned in 2003, an investigation by the Department of Health and Human Services inspector general found that Scully had pressured the agency's actuary to underestimate the full cost of the Medicare reform bill by approximately \$100 billion until after Congress passed the bill into law.

Scully was also hit with conflict of interest charges by the U.S. attorney's office for billing CMS for expenses incurred during a job search while he still headed the agency. He settled those charges by paying \$9,782.

HE SHOT BAMBI'S MOTHER AND ATE HER

David Smith – deputy assistant secretary for fish, wildlife, and parks, Interior Department – resigned on July 21, 2006 after shooting a buffalo and accepting its skeletal remains and meat as an illegal gratuity. He eventually paid over \$3,000 for the dead buffalo, but only after the internal inquiry had commenced.

The Department of Interior inspector general also noted in a May 16, 2006 report that Smith's involvement in the designation of Houston as a port of entry for imported wildlife in order to benefit a friend was inappropriate.

John Tanner – Voting Rights Section Chief, Justice Department – resigned in December, 2007 and moved to the Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices.

HE SAYS IT'S UNFAIR THAT BLACKS DIE FIRST

Already under suspicion for aiding efforts to politicize the voting section, the bumbling proponent of voter identification laws angered lawmakers with his comments that such laws actually discriminate against white voters because "minorities die first." Even more impressive was his apology for the comment. The DOJ's Office of Professional Responsibility is currently investigating his travel habits and those of his deputy.

Sara Taylor – deputy assistant to the President and director of Political Affairs at the White House, where she was Karl Rove's top aide – resigned amidst the U.S. attorneys' investigation and other probes of Rove's alleged politicization of the government.

ILLEGALLY USING PBS MONEY

Ken Tomlinson – board chairman, Corporation for Public Broadcasting; member, Broadcasting Board of Governors – resigned at the release of an inspector general report concluding he had broken laws in spending CPB money to hire politically connected consultants to search for "bias" without consulting the board.

At BBG, a separate investigation found he was running a "horse racing operation" out of his office, and continuing to hire politically-wired individuals to do "consulting" work for him. After being nominated and serving another term, he finally stepped down from that spot in early 2007.

Carl Truscott – director, Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Bureau – resigned. A report by the Justice Department's inspector general found that Truscott wasted tens of thousands of dollars on luxuries, wasted millions on whimsical management decisions and violated ethics rules by ordering employees to help his nephew with a high school video project.

Paul Wolfowitz – World Bank president – resigned in May 2007 after a committee report found that he broke ethics rules by giving his girlfriend a substantial raise.

NOMINATION FAILED DUE TO SCANDAL

Linda Chavez – nominated, Secretary of Labor – withdrew her nomination in January 2001 amidst revelations that an illegal immigrant lived in her home and worked for her in the early 1990s. Chavez blamed what she said were the "search-and-destroy" politics of Washington.

Timothy Flanigan – nominated, deputy Attorney General [also Alberto Gonzales' top deputy at the White House] – withdrew his nomination in October 2005 amidst revelations that he'd worked closely with lobbyist Jack Abramoff when he was General Counsel for Corporate and International Law at Tyco, which was a client of Abramoff's.

Bernard Kerik – nominated, secretary, Department of Homeland Security

How Bush Supported The Troops In '07

1. Required that soldiers discharged early because of battlefield injuries repay their enlistment bonuses.
2. Sent the longest-serving National Guard unit home after 729 days of combat in Iraq – one day shy of the 730 that the soldiers needed to qualify for education benefits.
3. Omitted 20,000 cases of brain trauma from the official tally of troops injured in Iraq.
4. Denied medical benefits to 22,000 veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress by discharging them for having enlisted with "pre-existing personality disorders."

– Rolling Stone Magazine

– withdrew his nomination amidst a host of corruption allegations. Eventually pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor relating to improper gifts totaling tens of thousands of dollars while he was a New York City official in the late 1990's.

Subsequently, on Nov. 8, 2007, Kerik was indicted on 16 counts for bribery, tax fraud, and false statements with a maximum sentence of 142 years and more than \$5 million in fines. Kerik has pleaded not guilty.

William Mercer – the former associate deputy attorney general and U.S. Attorney for Montana – withdrew his nomination to be the permanent No. 3 official at the Department of Justice on June 22, 2007 due to his role in the U.S. attorney firings.

Hans von Spakovsky – commissioner, FEC – nomination to another term after his recess appointment failed due to allegations that he'd worked at the Justice Department to suppress minority voter turnout.

Under investigation, still in office:

Stuart Bowen – Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction [SIGIR] – was once admired for his successes while investigating allegations of waste and fraud in Iraq, but now employee allegations have prompted four government investigations into the Office of the SIGIR.

Lurita Doan – administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration – still in office, despite investigations by both the Office of Special Counsel and the House oversight committee that found that Doan had "crossed the line" by suggesting that the GSA use its resources to help Republicans get elected.

Alfonso Jackson – Secretary of Housing and Urban Development – following reports that Jackson told a business group in April 2006 that he once canceled a contract after the contractor criticized President Bush, an investigation by the HUD inspector general found that while Jackson told his deputies to favor Bush supporters, there was "no direct proof that a contract was actually awarded or rescinded because of political affiliation."

A second, criminal investigation was triggered in part by Jackson's claim before Congress in May 2007 that, "I don't touch contracts." That probe, now before a federal grand jury, has turned up evidence that Jackson may indeed have touched contracts – and steered them towards friends.

Oklahoma Thelma

As a trucker stops for a red light, Thelma catches up. She jumps out of her car, runs up to his truck, and knocks on the door. The trucker lowers the window, and she says "Hi, my name is Thelma and you're losing some of your load." The trucker ignores her and proceeds down the street.

When the truck stops for another red light, Thelma catches up again. She jumps out of her car, runs up and knocks on the door. Again, the trucker lowers the window. As if they've never spoken, Thelma says brightly, "Hi, my name is Thelma, and you're losing some of your load!" Shaking his head, the trucker ignores her again and continues down the street.

At the third red light, the same thing happens again. All out of breath, Thelma gets out of her car, runs up, knocks on the truck door. The trucker rolls down the window. Again she says "Hi, my name is Thelma, and you're losing some of your load!"

When the light turns green, the trucker revs up and races to the next light. When he stops this time, he hurriedly gets out of the truck, and runs back to Thelma. He knocks on her window, and after she lowers it, he says:

"Hi, my name is Kevin. It's winter in Oklahoma. I'm driving the salt truck!"

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