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Oklahoma Losses Temper Obama Win The Red State Blues

By Arnold Hamilton

The long national nightmare is over. Is Oklahoma's just beginning?

The political tidal wave that swept Barack Obama into office as the first African-American president, and signaled the end of George W. Bush's eight-year reign of error, didn't come close to penetrating Oklahoma's Red State fortress.

Not only did Sooners give John McCain his largest victory – nearly 2-1 over Obama – in the fewer than two-dozen states he won, but they also handed Republicans the keys to the Oklahoma Senate for the first time and strengthened the GOP's House majority.

Let the mischief begin.

A jubilant House Speaker Chris Benge – who might not have survived had Democrats picked up seats – quickly vowed to pursue his party's Holy Grail, lawsuit reform, a euphemism for tilting the scales of justice completely to Big Business.

Can new restrictions on a woman's right-to-choose be far behind? Will the nativists be emboldened to pursue more hateful, us-against-them, anti-immigrant legislation? Are even more corporate tax giveaways in the offing?

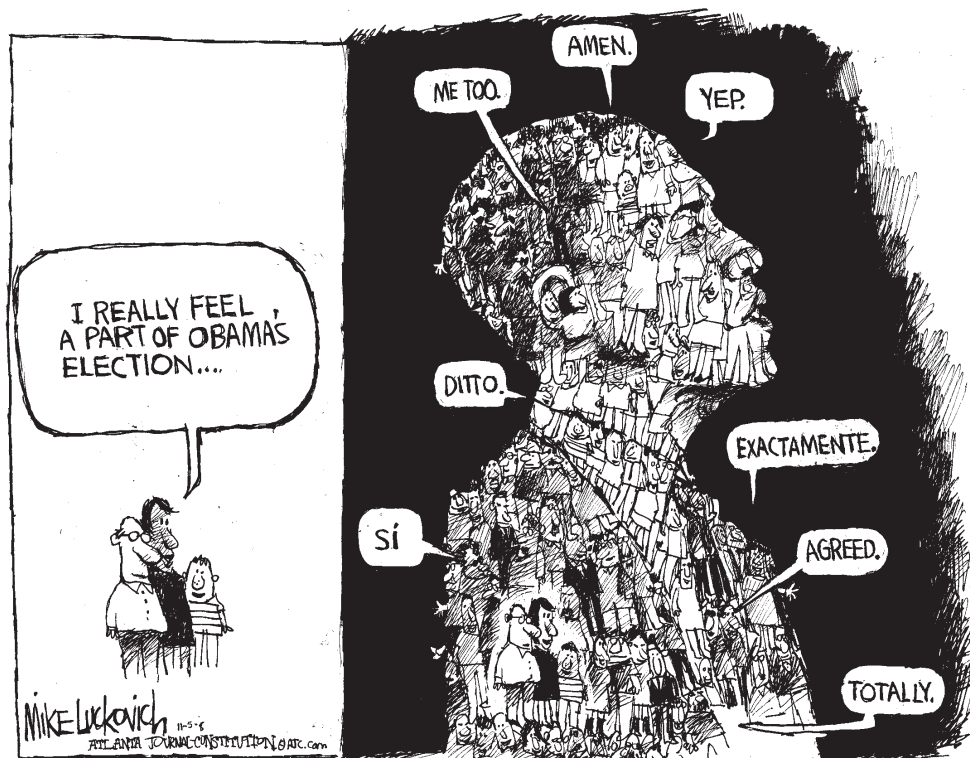
All that stands in the way of such shenanigans is a popular – but lame-duck – Democratic governor and a reeling Democratic legislative caucus left with little choice but to hunker down, pick their battles and rally around the power of the veto.

It's not rocket science. It's a model that former Gov. Frank Keating and a Republican legislative minority made famous.

Is nice-guy Gov. Brad Henry willing to play the role of hard-nosed, fully-engaged confrontationist or will he coast his final two years, preferring the path of least resistance?

Can legislative Democrats embrace a defensive strategy aimed at torpedoing the GOP majority's worst excesses or will they splinter into free-agent status that focuses on self-interest and self-preservation alone?

For Oklahoma Democrats, the state wipeout tempered the euphoria over Obama's victory and expanded congressional majorities.



Democrats were better organized – and in some cases, better funded – than in recent years thanks to the around-the-clock efforts of state party Chairman Ivan Holmes & Co.

But Obama wisely wrote off the state early – almost certainly unwinnable, only seven electoral votes – leaving the masses to hear unfettered GOP talking points from the mainstream media and the pulpit.

Down went U.S. Senate candidate Andrew Rice. Down went Corporation Commissioner Jim Roth. Down went the state Senate.

Is this rock bottom?

In two years, Republicans will take dead aim at the Democratic dominance of statewide offices. But the Democratic bench is strong.

Longtime Attorney General Drew Edmondson would be a prohibitive favorite for re-election, but could opt for the governor's race. Popular Lt. Gov. Jari Askins is similarly positioned, having traveled the state tirelessly. State Treasurer Scott Meacham, a former Elk City banker, cannot be under-

estimated.

Rice's name ID is now established statewide. The battle with U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe was not so brutal that it left Rice's image tarnished. More likely, many Oklahoma voters simply viewed the 35-year-old first-term state senator as unseasoned.

Traditionally, mid-term elections are not kind to the party that controls the White House. But as 2008 emphatically reminded, Oklahoma pays scant attention to national political trends these days.

There are hopeful signs for Oklahoma Democrats in 2010:

- In neighboring Texas, Democrats managed to all but erase an eight-seat deficit in the state House even though McCain won handily [55%] as did Republican U.S. Sen. John Cornyn.

- Across the South, Republicans have shown uncanny inability to govern once they take control of legislatures.

They still haven't figured out the voodoo in trickle-down economics. Let's make it simple: Tax cuts don't

generate more tax revenue. Shrinking revenue [combined with inflation] results in lousy roads and bridges, overcrowded and crumbling prisons, cutbacks in schools, higher college tuition ... and more.

What the wingnuts who often drive legislative agendas also fail to understand is this: while many taxpayers are suspicious of government and unconvinced their tax dollars are spent as wisely as they should be, they don't want to destroy government.

They want smart government. They want excellent services.

Several years ago, a dear Republican friend confided a sort of crisis-in-confidence. It was during the time when the GOP revolution ushered in by Newt Gingrich's Contract with America was unraveling.

The friend lamented that it was much easier – and a lot more fun – to be in the minority, lobbing Molotov cocktails and uttering simple election slogans, than it was to actually make the hard choices and govern.

As the Oklahoma economy slows, legislative Republicans will come face-to-face with these realities: Oil prices are falling. The state is 31st in foreclosures. Restaurants and retail shops are closing.

Tax revenues seem strong, but it is an illusion. By the time the state Board of Equalization meets in December to certify the funds available for spending by next year's Legislature, don't be surprised if Oklahoma is looking at a \$250 million shortfall over current spending levels.

It doesn't sound like much, compared to a \$7 billion-plus budget. But remember: the current budget was a standstill, hold-the-line spending plan that provided few increases.

As costs go up, and budgets stagnate, Oklahoma falls farther behind.

Many anti-government Republicans – the kind who want to starve the beast and drown what's left in the bathtub – figured they'd be long gone thanks to term limits before their tax-cutting chickens [\$720 million in recent years] came home to roost.

It looks like Judgment Day will come much sooner. Perhaps voters will take that into account in 2010.

Observations

Saint Dobson

Radio Evangelist James Dobson's ministry asked all believers to pray for a storm so that Barack Obama's acceptance speech outdoors in Denver would have to be canceled.

God thought otherwise and the weather was fine, the crowd gigantic.

Two weeks before the election, Dobson & Co. put out a lengthy letter opposing Barack Obama's election.

God thought otherwise. Obama won.

From his point of view, these were perfectly normal things to do because James Dobson thinks he's God's sidekick – a spiritual Jerry Lewis.

We have been warning you for years that Dobson is nothing more than a Bible-thumping demagogue with a sick political agenda.

He has trashed public education for years, to no avail. He keeps pushing a rightwing political agenda but those days may be ending.

In the primary Dobson said he would vote for Hillary Clinton before he would vote for John McCain. Then along came another demagogue, Sarah Palin, and Dobson fell on his knees before her.

Dobson is another reason why the equal time clause removed by Reagan ought to be restored to the media so that some of the defamation on radio and TV could be answered. The people own the airwaves, not the pundits.

If Dobson were a Catholic we would say that Barack Obama is his penance. Stand as much of it as you can, Jimmy boy.

live in middle-income households, and one-fifth live in high-income households, the report said.

Oklahoma ranks 40th with the largest gap in the country between infant mortality and a mother's education.

The Oklahoma infant mortality rate among the least-educated mothers is 7.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, higher than the 4.7 deaths per 1,000 live births among the most-educated mothers, the report said.

The national benchmark: 3.2 deaths per 1,000.

Oklahoma ranks as having the 34th largest gap between child health and family income among all states.

Among lower-income Oklahoma families 13.7% of children have lower than optimal health, while 5.3% of children in higher-income families have less than optimal health, the report said.

Experts say there is no innate biological reason that all children cannot be as healthy as those in wealthy families. Less-than-optimal health refers to children with conditions such as asthma and diabetes.

One-third of children in Oklahoma live in households where no one has education beyond high school.

An additional 36% of children live with at least one person who has attended but not completed college, and 31% live with at least one college graduate, the report said.

Income is linked with quality of housing and neighborhood and the ability to afford a healthy diet.

Girlie Man

Despite the credit market collapse, California Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger sent an extraordinary letter to Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson asking for \$7 billion.

The barrage of criticism was so strong, he withdrew the request. The California budget is expected to be up to \$18 billion short.

The Terminator was all huff-and-



puff in his bid for governor, promising to streamline state government.

Yet days before penning his note, the governor told an audience at the Commonwealth Club of California not to worry about the state's budget crunch and to approve \$9.95 billion in new debt on the ballot to build a bullet train to connect Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Experts say his high-speed rail is a fantasy that has as much chance of delivering on its promises of creating 450,000 jobs, vanquishing road congestion and lowering greenhouse gases as Conan the Barbarian had of winning the Oscar.

He turns out to be just another spend, spend Republican but is opposed to pay-as-you-go government.

Luckily, Oklahoma's Constitution requires a balanced budget – plus a rainy day fund that is overflowing.

Standard & Poor's has warned that California is under a negative credit watch and its credit rating is already the second lowest in the country. And yet, California taxpayers are being asked to approve another \$16.8 billion in borrowing.

California's general obligation bond debt under the Terminator has nearly tripled from \$42 billion in fiscal 2001-02 to \$120 billion in 2007-08.

Deliver us from "conservative" Republicans. They will bankrupt us all.

Made In USA

The American factory is dying, or so much of today's political rhetoric suggests. No corporation wants to make anything in the U.S. anymore; everyone has fled overseas.

Turn over a lamp or a computer or anything else at the big discount mall and you will read "Made in China," "Made in Mexico," or "Made in Anywhere But the USA."

In reality, American manufacturing is not in decline. The U.S., in fact, remains the world's largest manufacturing nation, accounting for a striking 22% of the world's total manufacturing output in 2005, the most recent year for which figures are available.

That's the way it's been for the last 25 years, with global dominance reaching a peak in the late '90s when the U.S. produced 27% of all manufactured goods due to the boom in U.S.-made computers.

What has happened in manufacturing is that employment has indeed decreased markedly, from a high of 17 million workers in 1979 to about 13.5 million today, notably in industries like automobiles and textiles.

Without a doubt, this job loss has been a hardship for 3.5 million workers – be they older workers who have lost their jobs, or younger ones who have had a hard time finding manufacturing jobs to begin with – and their families.

Emerging nations and reinvigorated old ones will certainly challenge the U.S. in the future. In all likelihood there will always be American companies committed to homegrown talent.

Wow!

We are among the bellyachers who deplore so little alternative to 1,500 rightwing radio and TV talk shows.

Now there is a sparkling alternative on TV – Rachel Maddow on MSNBC.

She is a woman who doesn't own a TV but has doubled the audience for the cable news channel's 9 p.m. hour in a matter of days.

More important for her bosses at MSNBC is that "The Rachel Maddow Show," a news and commentary program, has averaged a higher rating among 25- to 54-year-olds than Larry King.

So quit griping and start listening – she's fair and balanced, which is more than you can say about Fox News and its so-called anchors. She is Keith Olbermann without the sharply partisan edge.

She is a former AIDS activist who's hosted a show for four years on the progressive Air America radio network.

Maddow has confirmed that cable news is now a three-way race.

The Gap

Teachers who meet the "highly qualified" state-set standard were teaching core subjects in 94% of the nation's classrooms in the 2006-07 school year.

Poorer schools were still less likely than their wealthier counterparts to employ them.

In some states, the gap was glaring: 95% of elementary classes in low-poverty schools in Maryland were staffed with highly qualified teachers, compared with only 66% in poorer schools.

The "highly qualified" teacher requirement is a provision of the six-year-old No Child Left Behind Act.

All states must report annually the percentage of core-subject classes taught by highly qualified teachers and break down the numbers for classes in high-poverty schools.

Poverty

Another black eye for Oklahoma – the mortality rate for infants of high school dropouts is double the rate for college-educated mothers.

The new report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation pulls no punches in criticizing Oklahoma for its failure to address poverty.

Half of Oklahoma children live in poor or near-poor households. A third

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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

If he could, the Indian Guardian atop the State Capitol would hang his head in shame at the fact that Oklahoma leads the nation in domestic abuse and is second only to Nebraska in kids in state custody.

Dart: To Rep. Frank Lucas, R-OK, for Monday morning quarterbacking. He has served 14 years on the House Finance Services committee without once blowing the whistle. He now blames Freddie Mac and Fanny Mae.

The \$850 million HOPE initiative petition campaign to – among other things – pay teachers at the regional average, collected 238,000 signatures – 100,000 more than required to be on the ballot.

Laurel: To State Sen. Richard Lerbance, D-Hartshorne, absolutely right in saying the GOP hoped the lottery would fail. They want it both ways – no tax increases and no education funding by way of the lottery.

The State Ethics Commission is undaunted by criticism from legislative leaders – some apparently haven't read the law. Voters have a right to know all about political money. There should be no gifts for the 10th best paid Legislature in America.

Dart: To our state leadership for presiding over the decline of Oklahoma's overall health rating to 48th in the nation – 50th in heart disease deaths. Those \$720 million in tax cuts only saw to the state's "economic" health.

Good news! Oklahoma is No. 1 in home value gains – up 4.9%, according to the Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight Home Price Index.

Laurel: To Gene Christian and staff at the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs for an acclaimed treatment program specifically for girls. A total of 608 juveniles are in state custody, including 134 girls.

More than 60% of kids born in Oklahoma in the past year were Medicaid babies, with 40% born to parents who were unmarried. The Bible Belt is unbuckled.

Dart: To Frank Keating, now a Washington insurance lobbyist, who made the rounds of rightwing outlets to defame Barack Obama prior to the election. He's an expert at trash talk.

The state's premier CareerTech system has 12,000 students on a waiting list and is unable to fill 45 staff vacancies of its 405 authorized positions.

Laurel: To Travis Schnalthman of Garber, winner of the \$4,000 2008 American Star Farmer Award from the National FFA. He has added 1,000 acres to his farm and perfected artificial insemination techniques.

We mourn the passing of Carter Bradley, Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Famer whose career also included public service and education. He will be sorely missed.

Dart: To the NRA and their clones, partially responsible for 30,000 gun deaths last year, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Sensible gun control is fought tooth and nail by those sloping skulls.

There are five million opposite sex couples shacking up in America, up from 500,000 in 1970. How come homophobes don't rage against this "sin"?

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Corrections Department for a \$591 million budget request that hammers the Legislature's inadequate funding. Republicans are yet to address the recommendations in the outside audit they ordered.

Drugs and alcohol account for 85% of Oklahoma homicides, 80% in prison, 75% of divorces, 65% of child abuse cases, 55% of domestic assaults, 50% of traffic fatalities, 35% of rapes and 33% of suicides. [Oklahoma Mental Health Department]

Dart: To Marlin Oil Corp. for their crybaby ad deploring Oklahoma taxes. First, we're 50th in combined state, local and federal taxes [Tax Foundation], while the oil industry reaps \$18 billion a year in unfair federal tax exemptions.



Where are all those "violent" public schools? The No Child Left Behind law talks about Persistently Dangerous Schools but in fact, out of 99,000 districts, only 46 are consistently violent. [FBI annual report]

Laurel: To State Sen. Jim Wilson, D-Tahlequah, for planning legislation to buy the Oklahoma State University Medical Center in Tulsa to assure continued residency and emergency room programs.

From 1995 through 2005 more than 8,600 companies were sold to foreign owners, costing the American economy \$1.3 trillion. Check it out at the Bureau of Economics Analysis.

Dart: To J. Rufus Fears for the asinine statement that the Founding Fathers would join the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. Those far right OCPA "free market" clowns are the cause of America's financial crisis.

In 1972, 73% approved of the job done by the President, 68% by Congress and 66% by the judiciary. Today it's 29% for the President, 16% for Congress and 42% for the Judiciary. [Gallup Poll]

Laurel: To Langston, Rose State and UCO for winning the 2008 Registration Contest. In all, the 16 college campuses registered 5,331 new voters, beating the record of 3,910.

Non-partisan Public Citizen tracks major congressional legislation. Sens. Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe scored 13%; Rep. Dan Boren scored 50% while Reps. Tom Cole, Frank Lucas and John Sullivan scored 20%. Worst record? Rep. Mary Fallin at 10%.

Dart: To whoever inserted the Tulsa World obituary for a 14-year-old girl who had written a "plea to God" the evening before she died in an accident: "Don't let Obama get into office."

The Economic Policy Institute did a state-by-state survey of the wage gap between teachers and similar professions. In Oklahoma the gap is 28.7%. Nationally it's 15%.

Laurel: To Public Agenda for a survey showing public libraries are prized more than any other community service, with 71% of those polled saying their local libraries used public money very well.

If you see the movie "W" you may recognize disgraced Oklahoma City Attorney Mike Gassaway portraying Scooter Libby. Reviews generally have been poor for the depiction of George W. Bush's life.

The Democratic Party smear by the Daily Disappointment before the election was typical of the worst daily newspaper in America.

Dart: To Patterson, NJ, Catholic Bishop Arthur Serratelli, who compared Barack Obama to Herod, the king who ordered John The Baptist beheaded. And this bishop is a Christian?

Nearly 40,000 grandparents in Oklahoma are raising kids attending public schools. More than 60,000 children live with their grandparents – 6.5% of all Oklahoma kids. So much for today's parenting.

Laurel: To plant scientist Richard Dixon of the Noble Foundation, named Top Oklahoma Scientist by the Institute for Scientific Information.

Ripping into the House Republican leadership, Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, will again file a bill to prevent forced school consolidation. He was refused a hearing on his bill last session.

Dart: To Big Oil, including Oklahoma-born ConocoPhillips, funding the congressional campaign that deregulated oil, leading to a price jump that has contributed to the meltdown of the U.S. economy.

Average folks can't blame a corrupt corporate America for all of today's mess. The average American has eight credit cards and owes \$16,000. [Fortune Magazine]

Laurel: To Muskogee third grade teacher Ronia Davison, winner of the Milken National Educator Award which includes \$25,000. She teaches at the Sadler Arts Academy.

More than 1,200 faith-based schools serving 425,000 students have closed since 2000, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Dart: To the Republican Texas Legislature. Dallas schools laid off 1,100 employees, including 550 teachers, thanks to clueless GOP leaders.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer


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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

"Addicts are not bad people who need to get good, they are sick people needing to get well," said Ellen deGraad, licensed drug/alcohol counselor, in her sermon at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Stillwater, OK.

She continued, "Years of using alcohol and drugs cause the brain to become inflamed. You will not get well or good behavior from an inflamed brain. By definition a disease is chronic, progressive, fatal and relapse-able."

It all begins innocently enough. Her patients tell her they started through social or peer pressure, to fit in, to ease tension, or stress, to numb the emotional pain of past trauma, to enhance life or to increase productivity. What they don't realize is that their bodies would begin to change on a cellular level. No one told them that once a cucumber becomes a pickle, it can never be a cucumber again. No one told them they risked a lifetime disease.

deGraad continued, "Addiction is a dis-regulation of the pleasure center of the primitive [reptilian] brain, the part of the brain that deals with survival. Is it any wonder that the addictive process is so strong? The American Psychiatric Association endorses the proposition that drug dependencies, including alcoholism, are diseases and that their treatment is a legitimate part of medical practice."

Her view is that religious communities need to rethink current policies of punishment and incarceration. As family and friends become sick, drug war laws continue to punish rather than treat the problem. It is a disease owned by individuals, families, and the nation.

Ron du Bois
Stillwater, OK

Editor, The Observer:

Think about how you feel when you stand in front of a cashier who can't count your change correctly [even when the register computes it for her/him]. Multiply this lack of a grade school education a thousand times and we have a sampling of the idiots who devise rules, laws and procedures that have deadly consequences. This pertains to all aspects.

Witness the debacle of the banking/mortgage/Wall Street fiasco. Witness the four-year grueling political race where nothing of substance has been on the agenda compared to acts of attacks and discussions of clothing!

When was the last time you witnessed a person of authority act rati-

nally and with a modicum of honesty? The flotsam has risen to the top and we are all left flapping in the wind. Poisoning our water because these morons say it's OK is absolute insanity on a mass scale.

Why do we sheep follow so meekly? Are we also idiots? Or have we been conditioned by "teaching to the test" rather than teaching us to analytically use our brains? We must begin to think and demand quality leaders and quality rules, regulations and laws.

The Nuclear Regulatory Agency has a big, big problem and no brains to handle it. A total moratorium on all plans for nuclear plants and disposal of spent fuels must be enacted now.

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon, OK

Editor, The Observer:

In early October, 90-year-old Addie Polk of Akron, OH, shot herself twice in the upper body because they were foreclosing on her house. She didn't die, so ...

"On Friday, Fannie Mae spokesman Brian Faith said the mortgage association had decided to halt action against Polk and sign the property 'outright' to her.

"We're going to forgive whatever outstanding balance she had on the loan and give her the house," Faith said. "Given the circumstances, we think it's appropriate."

I am not sure how much she owed and if you try this and your mortgage balance is too high, you may have to shoot a couple of family members ...

I think it's sweet that Fannie Mae has "Faith" on their side.

Karen Webb
Moore, OK

Editor, The Observer:

I was reading your 9.25.08 issue and the article, "Cynic Develops Rules To Live By" with thanks to Marc Troy. I am a Steven Wright fan and these, for the most part, sounded like quotes from him. I Googled Steven Wright and found these quotes attributed to him. Just thought I would put in a plug for my favorite comedian.

Cathy Blackburn
Stratford, OK

Editor, The Observer:

Your cover story [10.25.08] is superb. Let me add something from my perspective: I'm a conservative and should be a natural Republican. If Oklahoma Republicans were like Henry Bellmon, moderate and pragmatic, I'd be one.

Instead fundamentalist Christians



[who would forbid me to practice my faith if they could] have a powerful voice in the party and the legislative Republicans never saw a tax cut they didn't like [while our infrastructure crumbles]. Interesting note: I believe that human life is sacred from conception to natural death. To take a human life is a morally serious act.

In the Democratic Party, I am shunned because I have a problem with laissez faire abortions; in the Republican Party, I'm considered a liberal because I question the death penalty.

The leadership of the Democratic Party is not hospitable to conservatives and I have encountered a distressing number of liberals who cannot respond to a reasoned argument.

Fr. Henry Roberson
Norman, OK

Editor, The Observer:

With the cost of gas down temporarily, it's easy to forget Oklahoma's dismal options and need for public transit.

Several cities including Norman, El Reno, Shawnee and Chickasha have passed resolutions asking the governor to appoint a commission to study rail transit options, and to preserve Union Station's rail yards in Oklahoma City. Other cities are said to be considering similar resolutions.

One group, Organization for Intermodal Transit [ONTRAC], believes the Union Station's rail yard can be saved by moving the new Crosstown Expressway 300 feet to the south - and will allow the Crosstown to be built almost as planned - and will save money in the long run. Several other local groups and individuals have been communicating with state and local officials for the past decade on this issue.

Crosstown construction is now in legal tangles because of a ruling by the Surface Transportation Board this past spring that found BNSF railway had submitted false statements in its application for track abandonment.

If the statewide network of rail lines is destroyed - according to present plans - the cost to replace them, and gain new right of ways, will prevent desperately needed alternative transportation in the future.

It is unthinkable that as we strive to be a first-class destination city we fall to the bottom in our nation in intermodal transportation. And it is illogical that we ignore the benefits of connecting with adjoining cities.

Concern about the life of the current Crosstown is valid, but the struc-

ture could have been re-decked, saving taxpayers hundreds of millions and leaving money for alternative transportation.

Meanwhile, heavy trucks continue to traverse the highway daily when they should be redirected around the city, immediately. This should help prevent further deterioration.

In Utah, 60 trains per day carry workers to Hill Air Force Base - all made possible by our former Congressman, Ernest Istook. Hill AFB, a logistics center, is said to be a competitor to Tinker for contracts. And their employees don't have to worry about the cost of gas or weather.

Although construction on the new highway is underway, it's not too late to save the rails. Act now to let your city and state officials - and the media - know how you feel.

Jim Finch
Choctaw, OK

Editor, The Observer:

Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson sensibly decided to follow the British model and inject capital directly into the major banks in exchange for equity. But Paulson didn't exactly cut a great deal for taxpayers. As a New York Times editorial complained, he made government a passive investor, leaving in place the boards and the directors that led their banks into crippling losses.

Paulson made no demands that the banks begin lending again instead of just hunkering down, girding for future losses. And remarkably, he didn't demand that the banks stop paying out dividends to shareholders. Nor is it clear that bank regulators will perform the sorting needed, merging and purging the banks of excess capacity. That failure is likely to be very costly to taxpayers and very generous to the very folks who led us into this mess.

No one doubts that the bailout is needed to prop up the global economy. But under Paulson's plan, we may end up throwing money at an industry that pays too many people more than they're worth, to perform services the world has too much of already.

What's needed is an independent agency with summary powers and an independent board, to work with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and other agencies to sort out the solvent banks from the broke, those that need to be saved from those that should fail. And a suspension of dividends to shareholders until the government has been repaid.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

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Frosty's Notebook

Manners

Italian essayist Natalia Ginsburg called civility a "little virtue," not a great one. I couldn't disagree more.

Rudeness has become a way of life in America. Common courtesy and good manners may pale in comparison to big issues such as elections, terrorism and financial collapse, but they are needed now more than ever.

I was at the airport the other evening to greet my daughter Marti back from Africa. I was watching the outside TV at the news shack when a fellow walked up and started watching.

After a few minutes his cell phone rang and he began talking at the top of his lungs.

"Excuse me," I politely said to him. He waved me off with his hand.

"Excuse me!" I said at a high pitch. He withdrew.

The issue of respect – how people treat each other in their daily interactions and whether they are willing to moderate their own desires and comfort to accommodate the needs of others – seems to be a profoundly important one that provokes a strong and often heartfelt response.

I was one of a big family and my mother would preen when someone told her how polite the Troy children were. We had no choice.

Even on my Dad's hospital deathbed, he managed a smile at one of my brothers and said, "Break your jaw to say 'sir.'"

It's more than common courtesy. It's a matter of life and death. I watched two vehicles on the Turner Turnpike going at each other.

An inconsiderate cell phone user or a reckless driver behind the wheel can spell injury or death.

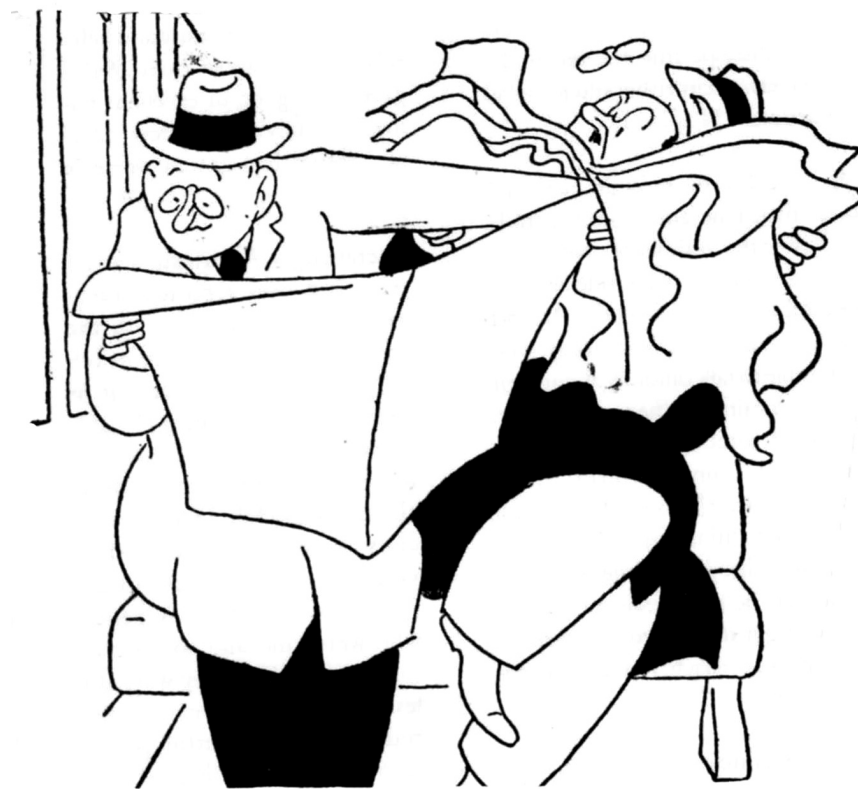
According to eight in 10 Pew survey respondents, lack of respect and courtesy is a serious problem, one we should try to address; only 19% did not find it important, given all the other issues facing society.

Only 13% of those polled said people are treating each other with enough respect these days; 40% said things should be somewhat better, and 44% said they should be a lot better.

I think the root cause is the "me first" philosophy, best typified by the use of cell phones in public places.

I don't want to hear their conversations. While driving they're more concerned about themselves, not whether they're running the risk of a car wreck.

Fully 61% of those polled believe rude and selfish behavior in places such as



highways, stores and airports had increased in recent years. Duh!

I have women and senior citizens look at me quaintly because I still hold the door for them. Always have. Always will.

Are my concerns over behavior driven merely by a sense of nostalgia for an imaginary past? People in the survey did not think so. When asked directly, an overwhelming 73% said it was a fact.

Talk to almost any teacher. Children today are rude beyond belief – a symptom not of school but of the home. One teacher told me she told a sixth grader to be quiet and take his seat. He wheeled and screamed, "You shut up!" He was off to the principal's office.

I believe with Anne Frank that most people are good at heart. The survey noted that 48% often witnessed people being kind and considerate, and only 6% practically never did.

Americans ages 65 years and over reported somewhat better experiences on the civility front. Almost six in 10 gave people excellent or good grades for treating the elderly with respect and courtesy.

I know I sound like an old codger but it has nothing to do with my status as a senior citizen. Civility knows no age constraint. Pass it on.

Drug Court For Pot Kids

I was visiting a state prison to talk to inmates. The young man at the desk told me to take a seat once I had cleared a search and deposited my belongings in a cubicle.

Being a typically curious journalist, I asked him what he was in for.

"Marijuana. Intent to sell. But I wasn't a dealer, it was for my use but nobody believed me but my lawyer."

"How much time did you get?"

"Be out when I'm 46 since they enhanced my sentence."

Young people, in many cases those under 18 years of age, disproportionately bear the brunt of marijuana law enforcement.

Some proclaim that marijuana enforcement disproportionately impacts African-Americans and Hispanics – and it does.

A 2005 study found 74% of Americans busted for pot are under age 30, and one out of four are age 18 or younger.

That's nearly a quarter of a million teenagers arrested for marijuana violations each year – an entire generation that has been alienated to believe the police and civic leaders are instruments of their oppression rather than their protection.

Remarkable Success

Hamilton County, TN is home to one of the nation's most widely touted school-reform success stories. Beginning in 2001, eight low-performing elementary schools began to show remarkable improvement after the Benwood Foundation and the Public Education Foundation formed a partnership with Hamilton County Schools.

At the outset of what is known as the Benwood Initiative, district officials reconstituted the faculties of participating schools by requiring teachers to reapply for their jobs and hiring replacements for those that didn't make the cut.

In addition, community officials established incentives [free graduate school tuition, mortgage loans and performance bonuses] to attract new talent.

However, most of the teachers who reapplied for their jobs were hired back and less than 20 of the 300 teachers received bonuses in the first year of the incentive plan.

When investigating the reasons for the startling successes, Education Sector found that the initiative focused on the ever more important reform strategy of helping teachers improve instruction.

Education Sector's analysis of "value-added" teacher effectiveness data suggests that during the course of six years, existing teachers improved steadily.

This made the initiative about way more than flashy incentives and reconstitution.

If more than 650,000 Americans busted for weed annually are under age 30, why don't we spend more time talking about it?

There's a saying among reformers that drug law reform is the "third rail" of politics. If that's true, then talking about drugs and kids is the "third rail" of drug law reform. But it's a "rail" we need to start talking about.

Those who favor the continued felonious prohibition of cannabis base their arguments on the false premise that continued enforcement of said laws "protects our children." The opposite is true.

Criminal laws are far more likely to result in having children arrested and placed behind bars than they are likely to discourage them from trying pot.

Change the marijuana laws. By changing the laws, we would be protecting the health and safety of America's young people.

One partial solution is to require young offenders to go directly to drug court.

There is no way Oklahoma is going to decriminalize pot so we ought to start looking out for the kids we put in prison. Isn't it the "Christian" thing to do?

Consider also that we're spending \$18,000 a year to keep that young marijuana smoker in a minimum security prison, not to mention ruining his life.

Collateral Damage

Among the victims of the war in Iraq are America's children. During the past five years, children have lost significant ground in the federal budget.

While overall spending on children's issues increased by about 1.4%, in real terms, total federal non-defense spending grew at nearly 10 times that rate.

As a result, the children's share of the federal nondefense budget declined from 11% in 2004 to 10% in 2008.

This drop continues a trend in which the budget share allocated to children has declined 23% since 1960.

In fact, spending for children's education, welfare and youth training has been particularly hard hit during the last half decade, with total spending declining by 9.9%, 11.5% and 14.9% in each area, respectively.

Unfortunately, President Bush's fiscal year 2009 budget proposal continues this trend. Even his vaunted No Child Left Behind law is grossly underfunded.

Spending on children's health programs would increase next fiscal year by 2.2% but discretionary spending in this area would drop by 12% from 2008 levels.

Every American needs to know that of every dollar the American taxpayer pays, 42 cents goes to the military, with only 4.4 cents going toward education, training and social services.

There is little doubt that America has lost its way under George W. Bush.

Families Struggle

Boosting Grocery Tax Credit Needed

By David Blatt

The family budgets of low and moderate income Oklahomans are under increasing strain from the rapidly rising costs of such essentials as food, fuel and utilities.

Food costs rose 5.9% over the past year, according to the government's August inflation data. Price increases have been particularly steep for such dietary staples as dairy [6.4% increases over the past year], bread and cereals [11.7%], and fruits and vegetables [12%].

With Oklahoma already suffering one of the highest rates of food insecurity and hunger in the nation, rising food costs pose a direct threat to family health and well-being.

This situation has brought renewed attention in Oklahoma to the state's continued levying of the sales tax on groceries. Of the 45 states that have a general sales tax, Oklahoma is one of just 16 that taxes groceries. Counties and municipalities also assess sales taxes on groceries.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST

This brief considers the arguments for and against eliminating the sales tax on groceries. Given the budgetary constraints on state and local government, it recommends an increase in the state grocery tax credit as the most targeted and cost-effective way to assist those with the greatest needs.

Should Oklahoma eliminate the sales tax on groceries? The main argument against taxing groceries is that it represents an especially regressive form of taxation, taking a larger slice of the income of the poor and middle-class than of the wealthy.

Overall, Oklahomans pay an average of 0.4% of total income in state sales taxes on groceries, according to analysis conducted by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy [ITEP].

WHO PAYS FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

However, the average households in the bottom fifth of income pay 1% of their total household income in state grocery sales taxes, compared to just 0.1% of income for households in the top 1% of income.

Exempting groceries from the sales tax would be the simplest way to assist Oklahomans with their grocery bills and make the state tax system more equitable. However, there are also several drawbacks to this proposal:

COST

The sales tax on groceries contributed an estimated \$308 million to state revenues in 2007, which represented approximately 17% of total states sales tax revenues.

Abuse Of Public Funds Kept Secret

By Nick Baker

Oklahoma will soon come face to face with its own state financial disaster resulting from the same failed economic philosophies that recently resulted in the nation's and world's economic implosion.

It's best described in a recent article in the Wall Street Journal as a financial disaster brought on by a long held policy "that the best road to prosperity is to unleash financial markets to allocate capital, enjoy profits."

The same economic policy that cost this country trillions is descending, in yet another form, on the Oklahoma public who will be stuck with picking up billions in revenue shortfalls from a tax avoidance scam.

HUGE UNEARNED PROFITS

A scam profiteers use to reap huge unearned profits selling state income tax credits to corporations and wealthy individuals so they can avoid paying state income taxes.

The first warning went unnoticed when this past June, before any knew of the coming national disaster, state finance officials quietly revised 2008 corporate income tax projections down from \$450 million to \$284 million and even further for 2009.

A whopping 37% reduction while Oklahoma was reaching its energy induced economic peak. This didn't include the larger drop in personal income tax for the wealthy which is not broken out from all personal income taxes.

WHY IT HAPPENED

What was the cause in Oklahoma? All are results of a decade of Oklahoma-style laissez faire lawmaking where officials and legislators with little, if any, knowledge and experience in economic development relied on special interests, that stand to benefit most, to formulate economic policy - including structuring language in the law setting up the program.

A key element in the law was to prevent the public from learning how much the program was costing, who was receiving public funds, and how the money was used.

THE ISSUE IS MIRED IN SECRECY

The law gave unidentified private groups free and unmonitored access to divert
See ABUSE Page 7



By Horsey for The Seattle Post-Intelligencer

The loss of this revenue would have a significant impact on funding of core public services. For example, grocery tax revenues provide over \$100 million each year for the operation of public schools, \$37 million for the Medicaid program and \$17 million for the teachers retirement system;

TARGETING

The benefits from eliminating the sales tax on groceries would be poorly targeted. According to ITEP's analysis, the poorest 40% of taxpayers would get just one-fifth of the savings [an average of \$120 per household], while those in the top fifth of income would get roughly one-third of the benefits [an average of \$364 per household];

IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Under current Oklahoma law, counties and municipalities can only tax items that are taxed by the state. The Oklahoma Tax Commission estimates that local governments collect roughly \$250 million in taxes from grocery sales, which represents about 7% of total local tax collections.

Eliminating the sales tax on groceries would either impose an enormous budgetary loss on local governments, or, by decoupling state and local sales tax bases, create new complications and costs for retailers and tax administrators.

A more modest and cost-efficient alternative to eliminating the sales tax on groceries is to increase the state's grocery tax credit, officially known as the Sales Tax Relief Credit.

SALES TAX RELIEF CREDIT

Enacted in 1990 as a means to offset the state sales tax on groceries, the Sales Tax Relief Credit currently provides a rebate of \$40 per household member to households with incomes at or below the following levels:

\$50,000 per year for filers who are elderly, have a physical disability or claim a dependent; or \$20,000 per year for everyone else.

See TAX CREDIT Page 9

Preventing Student Injuries And Deaths

More than 1.4 million high school players are injured every year across the nation, including 75,424 Oklahoma high school students, according to an interim legislative study.

Rep. Joe Dorman, D-Rush Springs, conducted the study to look for ways to prevent critical injuries and even fatalities during sporting events at Oklahoma schools.

"We need to do everything possible to ensure our students' safety and health is maintained whether in a classroom or out on a football field," Dorman said.

"This study is a tool to see what areas the Legislature can help in sport safety - whether it's requiring coaches to have increased first aid and injury care training, properly checking equipment such as football helmets to make sure they are sized for the student properly or providing enough funding for schools to ensure an athletic trainer is present at all practices and games."

EIGHT OKLAHOMA ATHLETES HAVE DIED

From 1999 to present, there have been eight Oklahoma high school students who have lost their lives while playing in an athletic event. One of those students was from Dorman's hometown.

Last October, Justin Barney, as student from Rush Springs, died from an injury suffered during a collision in a football game.

There were no doctors, EMTs or athletic trainers present and it took over 20 minutes for an ambulance to arrive as Barney quickly fell into a coma.

Dorman said having an athletic trainer or trained medical personnel at that game may have not changed the outcome for Justin Barney, but he doesn't want to take that chance with any student in the future.

THE NEED FOR TRAINERS

Ron Walker and Dan Newman from the Oklahoma Athletic Trainers Association spoke to lawmakers, stressing the importance and benefit of having an athletic trainer at every school.

Walker said having on-site medical care would ensure officials make return-to-play decisions without a conflict of interest from coaches.

The medical officials could also provide injury assessment and rehabilitation at a school without the need to miss class or leave campus; and the officials

See STUDENT Page 9

CareerTech Meets Design Challenge

By Ann Houston

Oklahoma CareerTech teachers from 20 middle, junior and senior high schools and technology centers received hands-on training with industry's top-of-the-line engineering software to prepare students for competition in the U.S. Department of Energy's first annual "Real World Design Challenge."

The two-day training session was held at Francis Tuttle Technology Center's Portland Campus in Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma joins Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia and Washington as the first 10 states to launch the "Real World Design Challenge."

Each year, student teams will be asked to address a challenge that confronts one of the nation's leading industries, such as aerospace.

ENGINEERING SHORTAGE LOOMS

There will be a critical shortage of engineers in the U.S., with some 60,000 retiring by 2010 and only half being replaced. In Oklahoma, the expected shortfall of engineers is 650 by 2013.

At the workshop teachers learned how to create and animate three-dimensional technical drawings using Parametric Technology Corporation's Pro/ENGINEER design software.

They also learned how to introduce students to global engineering concepts and how to collaborate with mentors from government and industry in solving problems concerning national energy conservation.

PTC Worldwide Education Director Ralph Coppola said that the partnership will help address the growing industry demand for workers in technology, engineering, science and mathematics.

\$1 MILLION PER TEACHER

"The Challenge is making a long-term investment in Oklahoma's educators with each participating teacher receiving almost \$1 million in top-of-the-line engineering software to use with their students," Coppola said.

Teachers received full training for Pro/ENGINEER Wildfire 4.0 Schools Edition software and the use of the WindChill on-line collaboration software.

WindChill facilitates the collaboration and management of Pro/ENGINEER CAD designs so that geography is no longer a limiting factor.

WindChill is a tool used by product designers in large organizations that do Global Engineering. Some of PTC's customers that use WindChill for Global Engineering include the Department of Defense, NASA, the Department of Energy, LG Electronics, and Boeing.

It will serve as the repository for student projects and will be used by judges to score them at the conclusion of the State Real World Design Challenge.

NOVEMBER 15 DEADLINE

"The State Challenge was issued Oct. 1. Teachers have until Nov. 15 to register teams. This is a new event that provides high school students, grades 9-12, the opportunity to work on real world engineering challenges in a team environment," according to Oklahoma's RWDC Coordinator Jim Bullington.

Bullington is assistant state program manager for Trade and Industrial Education programs at the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Educa-

ABUSE

From Page 6

unlimited amounts of future tax revenue to their own use. This resulted in future state income tax revenue tunneled into unidentified accounts.

Done in a way the money is not recorded on state ledgers, skirting the budgetary process and all financial accountability. Leaving no paper trails!

The crime is in the secrecy, stupid! The crime is in the failure to protect the public interest!

The crime is in failure to properly account for public funds!

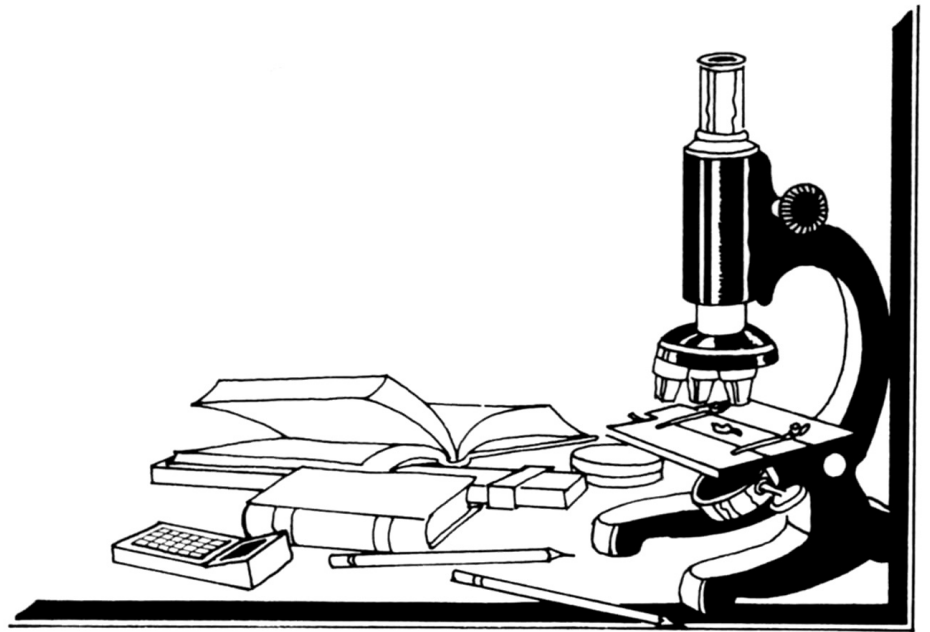
The crime is in failure to follow constitutional responsibilities! When all our public officials are involved, there is no one left to enforce our laws!

Visit our blog to leave your comments at [Clubcrony.com](http://clubcrony.com). Further details and explanations can be found at <http://prowlingowl.com>

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tion. State winners will advance to a national competition in March, to be held in Washington, DC.

The partnership between Oklahoma, the U.S. Department of Energy, Federal Aviation Administration, Parametric Technology Corp., Hewlett-Packard Corp., Business Educational Partnerships Group and Mentor Graphics, Inc., boosts science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

"The Pro/ENGINEER software and use of WindChill is valued at \$900,000 per teacher and is being provided through a generous contribution from PTC," Bullington said.

GOAL IS WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

"The Challenge provides students with opportunities to apply the lessons of the classroom to the technical problems that are being faced in the workplace."

In the competition, students will use professional quality computer-aided design software to develop and simulate solutions and will also generate presentations that demonstrate the solution's value.

CareerTech centers that provide manufacturing, aerospace and engineering education are a natural fit for the program, according to Oklahoma CareerTech Director Phil Berkenbile.

"Both adult and high school students in Oklahoma's CareerTech system will benefit from the software donation and partnerships developed through the Real World Design Challenge," Berkenbile said. "This will be a tremendous advantage for our students and, ultimately, Oklahoma's economy."

Fall Peace Festival



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Booths & Tables of Social Justice Groups
Live Music & Entertainment All Day

Holiday Shopping Opportunities

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

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www.peacehouseok.org

Four Sad Children And No Place To Go

Editor's Note: Here is another of our continuing series putting a human face on Oklahoma's grossly underpaid, understaffed Department of Human Services:

Just last night our Child Welfare Unit picked up four children that are the victims of sexual abuse. I was on my way to pick up my son from daycare, running a little late as usual due to work, and received a call from our intake worker stating that she needed a placement for four children.

I picked up my son and took him with me to the office, giving him some crayons and coloring sheets to keep him busy, and got on the phone to try to find a foster home that could take four children.

My son, who is only four years old, became restless and hungry waiting for me to finish my job. Finally, after exhausting all of my options, I left with my son.

At this point, I had resigned myself to the fact that these children were going to have to spend the night in the shelter and would look for more options in the morning.

The good news is, we have managed to place each of the four siblings within our county, with one another, close to everything that they know. Signed, Just another worker.

SERVING PEOPLE WITHOUT BASIC NEEDS

Every day we as social workers face an extremely challenging job and that is helping people meet their basic needs of survival.

The most important things in a person's life that are necessary for families to function are food, clothing, shelter, medical and daycare and those are the things that we as social workers touch daily.

There are days when clients walk into the office who have no income, no education and are crying because they can't find jobs or feed their children.

Then there are also days when you have a young couple who apply for food stamps because they cannot feed their children – but due to a different situation.

Their mortgage payment has skyrocketed, they are losing their house and they have a new car payment and they have drowned themselves in debt and do not qualify for benefits because they are over income.

SOCIAL WORKERS ONLY SOURCE OF HOPE

It is even in these situations that it is up to the social worker to provide some kind of hope for the person that walked through their door surrounded in a cloud of gloom.

In both situations you search through your books of information and try to give them contacts in other organizations that might be able to help.

You make phone calls to see if they would qualify for low-income housing and you provide them with the GED locations.

As a social worker you do as much as you can to try and make someone else's life comfortable and worth getting up the next day.

After that you go home and, although you are not supposed to take the work home with you, it is hard to not think about the family that you had to deny for benefits, who are losing their house next week, who can't find a job and have three little kids under four, who you certified for \$426 worth of food benefits, but can't afford to buy diapers or toilet paper.

Then you look at yourself – your own kids come home from basketball practice asking what you're fixing for dinner. The ice box is empty, no milk, no meat, only



tea and peanut butter, no money in the bank and you don't get paid for another week.

There's one roll of toilet paper left in your own bathroom and you have a toothache because you can't afford to go to the dentist because of the portion that you are responsible for.

VISITS ARE SOMETIMES DANGEROUS

I have been a Long Term Care Nurse in DHS for 10 years. I received an application for services on a 58-year-old consumer and made arrangements with the client for a home interview and assessment.

All of our assessments are completed in the home unless we are aware of a danger and then can arrange for the client to come to the office or for someone to go to the home with the assessor.

Very rarely do we know what we are walking into when we go to the home – as with this particular incident. I knew the neighborhood was known for crime and drugs but knew nothing about the client.

During the interview, there were multiple interruptions with visitors coming to see the client. The client would get up [using a cane to ambulate], answer the door, take the visitor to a back room, an exchange of money would take place and the visitor would leave.

TROUBLING INTERRUPTIONS

This happened approximately five times during a two-hour interview. I do admit to having a very uncomfortable feeling while in the home, but when I asked the client if he could finish the interview in the office, he reported that he had limited transportation and didn't "feel" like coming to the office and requested that the application be finished in his home.

I did complete the application, even as uncomfortable as I was. About two weeks later, this client was apprehended and taken to jail for selling drugs out of his home, but was later released on a technicality.

Although I was not harmed in this situation, I did know what was taking place and tried to play dumb to the incident so that I would remain safe.

This is just a simple example of the impending danger that continues to escalate in our communities. I think the Legislature needs to understand the lengths state employees have to go to provide services.

To Be Continued

Silver Alert Brings Missing Betty Home

By Janine McCullough

I was peeling tomatoes when the doorbell rang. The only one who comes to my door that late is Betty, an elderly neighbor who wants to talk about our mutually owned cats, or lately has been having electrical and phone problems.

I took a second to dry my hands and tell the dogs to be quiet while I walked to the door. It wasn't Betty. It was her other friend, Barbara. She was asking if I had seen Betty today. Odd. I went outside to talk and pieced together this story.

On Wednesday Betty fell in her home. She drove herself to St. Anthony Hospital [in Oklahoma City]. They released her at 3 a.m. Thursday with a broken tooth and a possibly fractured shoulder.

SHE DROVE HERSELF HOME

Betty drove herself home. She called Barbara at 7:30 p.m. Thursday and told her what happened. Betty said she was trying to get to the dentist on Friday because her tooth hurt. Then she said she was going to bed because she was tired.

At 8 a.m. on Friday, Barbara found Betty's paper in her yard and put it on Betty's porch then went to work. When she came home there were three strange ladies at Betty's house.

They asked Barbara if she knew where Betty was. They were from Betty's church. They were concerned because she hadn't shown up for her volunteer work.

CHURCH FRIENDS CONCERNED

They had called the police but were told they didn't have a reason to worry. Betty's paper was still on the porch. Barbara watched and waited as long as she could then came to see me when she couldn't stand it anymore.

I decided to call 911 and told them my neighbor was missing. The first thing they asked was, "How old is she?" 80.

"How long since anyone has seen her?"

"I don't know but her neighbor talked to her at 7:30 last night."

They sent a car around. Actually, they sent three cars and five policemen and women. They spent three hours taking our report, looking in windows and watching Betty's house.

ROBO CALL ABOUT BETTY

At 11:30 I was up watching. It felt disloyal to go to bed. The phone rang. It was a recording describing a missing endangered adult with medical problems, Betty.

Three hours from when I dialed 911, a Silver Alert was out for Betty. She came home just before midnight. The Binger police drove her home. They were very nice. They said she thought she was in Edmond. They didn't think she ever realized where she was.

Betty's angels were working overtime for her.

Anyone who knows me knows that this isn't my first time at bat. My grandfather disappeared in July 1967. The police, family and a few good friends searched but couldn't find him. Three days later someone stumbled across his body.

My brother disappeared in June 2005. There was a multi-county ground and air search three days later. He has never been found.

I am grateful to have seen the Silver Alert in action. It is time that family and friends felt that no stone is unturned and that we can finally help each other.

Thank you to the Silver Haired Legislature and all the advocates who worked on the Silver Alert. It is time. Check the calendar for the Alliance on Aging Strategy Committee meeting schedule and come help us get quality legislation for all seniors.

– The author is president of the Oklahoma Alliance On Aging. This is from their newsletter.

PUBLIC FORUM

Methodists Wrong On Bush Library

By Kay Ahaus

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner's letter in a recent Observer was right on! The United Methodist Church really has muffed it!

I called the Office of the President at Southern Methodist University to voice opposition to building the Bush Library on campus. The secretary told me many others had done the same.

I then wrote a letter to the Annual Conference in our area requesting that the members of our conference oppose spending any United Methodist funds for the Bush Library and oppose putting it on the SMU campus.

In it, I asked them to go on the record with their opposition. My minister and her district superintendent both told me opposition in the case had little chance of passing. I sent my resolution anyway.

At first I was told I was too late to have my concern placed on the agenda unless I paid \$49 for administration fees to put it on an addendum. I paid the fees.

DEBATE WAS SILENCED

But the conference never heard my concern because, as my pastor told me, the conference attendees agreed in advance that no negative remarks would be made during the conference.

I had cited Bush policies that conflicted with the Sermon on the Mount, indi-

cating that Bush had failed to live up to Christian principles. Thus we should not honor such a man by spending money on his Presidential Library and certainly not on a campus that carried the Methodist name.

Those remarks were, I have concluded, too negative for my objection to the Bush Library to come before the conference. Those attending forwarded such responsibility to some other conference in the Methodist Church, or so my pastor told me.

ONLY POSITIVE REMARKS ALLOWED

I wonder if anything of merit was accomplished at the Annual Conference in southern Illinois if all remarks had to be positive. There are always at least two sides to every issue, and sometimes many sides.

Discussion may be pleasant if all remarks must be positive, but it may not be fruitful.

My husband and I have been Methodists some 60-plus years. But this is enough for me to search for a more meaningful fellowship that will discuss ethics and Christian principles and not be afraid to act on them.

So much for separation of church and state.

— The author is a former Oklahoman who now lives in Trenton, IL

STUDENT

From Page 6

could help prevent and reduce injuries while improving students' on-field performance.

ACCREDITING IS REQUIRED

Currently, five Oklahoma colleges offer bachelors' degree in accredited athletic training. Upon graduation, graduates must be licensed by the state upon passing the Independent National Board Certification Examination and must receive 25 hours annually of continuing education.

Dan Dodson, another athletic trainer and CEO of PR2 Systems, also spoke to the need of having qualified medical personnel in place to recognize injuries.

"I am one of the first athletic trainers in the state of Utah. This came about as a result of a graduate assistant athletic trainer covering a state basketball game that prevented an injury from growing potentially worse," Dodson said.

"The student who was injured in a basketball game could have been paralyzed from the fracture he sustained from a fall during a game if he had been moved.

"If it had been up to all present – referees, fans, other teams' coaches and state high school officials – the student would have been taken off the court without proper spine boarding and head stabilization. This would have resulted in permanent paralysis."

The athletic trainer along with the head coach of the student did not allow him to be moved and this allowed him to lead a normal life today.

QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDED

As a result of this action more attention was placed upon the need for qualified medical personnel at sporting events and practices.

"This allowed me to be one of the first full time athletic trainers in the high schools in the state of Utah," Dodson said.

Shelley Shelby, from the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, said it would cost around \$17 million to have a trainer in all high schools and roughly \$26 million for all school sporting functions.

Shelby noted that new regulations were adopted last year requiring Oklahoma coaches to receive an extra 25 hours of training on care and prevention of athletic injuries in addition to their basic first aid training.

THE NEED IS FOR MEDICAL PERSONNEL

Dr. Brian Coleman, a physician from OU Health Science Center, also was present to testify on the need for medical personnel at sporting functions.

"To ensure proper safety, the right personnel needs to be on hand at not only games, but also practices," he said. "I remember my days as a student, we had parents who were also doctors serve in a volunteer capacity in small towns.

"We were fortunate to have someone there if necessary and we need to find ways to have this coverage in all communities around the state."

Klayn Hitt, director of the Grady County 522 District, and Jay Mitchell, a regional EMS administrator with the Department of Health, spoke to the need of increased ambulance services in the areas of the state that are currently lacking proper coverage.

There are currently not enough ambulances in the state that could cover all high school football games on one Friday night.

Andy Fancher, a student from Eastern Oklahoma State College and an EMT Basic, requested the committee look at placing Automated External Defibrillators [AEDs] in all schools around the state.

This legislation was proposed by Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, in the last legislative session. Republicans blocked it.

TAX CREDIT

From Page 6

The credit was claimed by 486,000 households in 2007, representing about one-third of Oklahoma households. These taxpayers received credits totaling \$41.2 million.

In addition to those who claimed the credit by filing a tax return, an additional \$3.8 million was distributed as cash payments by the Department of Human Services to Medicaid-eligible nursing home residents and TANF [Temporary Assistance to Needy Families] recipients.

TARGETED ASSISTANCE

The sales tax relief provides targeted assistance to low- and moderate-income households and limits the regressivity of the sales tax on groceries.

The Sales Tax Relief Credit has the effect of decreasing grocery taxes as a share of household income from 1% to 0.5% for the bottom fifth of households, from 0.7% to 0.5% for those in the second fifth, and from 0.6% to 0.5% for the middle fifth. Those in the top 40% of household income do not qualify for the credit.

While the credit is an important instrument in offsetting grocery sales taxes, it has failed to keep pace with rising food costs. The amount of the credit has been left at \$40 since it was initially enacted in 1990, while eligibility for the credit was last raised in 1998.

IMMEDIATE, ONGOING BENEFITS

Increasing the amount of the credit and expanding eligibility would provide immediate and ongoing benefits to low and moderate-income Oklahomans.

The estimated fiscal impact of possible scenarios, according to analysis conducted by ITEP, would be as follows:

- Increasing the credit to \$60 per household member and expanding eligibility to \$60,000 for filers who are elderly, have a physical disability or claim a dependent and \$30,000 for childless adults equals \$36 million;
- Just increasing the value of the credit from \$40 to \$60 per exemption equals \$19 million;

- Keeping the credit amount unchanged at \$40 but expanding eligibility to \$60,000/\$30,000 equals \$11 million.

MAIN DRAWBACK

The main drawback to expanding the Sales Tax Relief Credit as a form of targeted assistance is that not all eligible recipients claim the credit. In some cases, taxpayers eligible for the credit do not file income tax returns at all, while others file returns but neglect to claim the credit.

ITEP estimates the take-up rate at 70% for the Sales Tax Relief credit. Expanded publicity and outreach about the credit could lead to more eligible taxpayers claiming the credit.

The final report of the Oklahoma Task Force on Hunger, issued in December 2007, called for an increase in the amount of the Sales Tax Relief Credit, along with outreach efforts to promote greater awareness of the credit among eligible taxpayers, as part of its strategy for addressing food insecurity in Oklahoma.

INDEXING TO INFLATION

As part of an increase in the Sales Tax Relief Credit, policymakers should consider indexing to inflation the eligibility limit and amount of the credit to protect its value in future years.

In addition, it would be worth redesigning the credit so that the amount phases out at higher income levels, in lieu of the current all-or-nothing approach that creates a steep drop-off for those whose income rises above the eligibility cut-off.

— The author is Director of Policy for the Oklahoma Policy Institute. He may be contacted at dblatt@okpolicy.org or by calling 918.382.3228. The Oklahoma Policy Institute conducts objective analysis of state policy issues in order to better position Oklahoma to become a more prosperous, better educated, healthier and increasingly equitable state. Visit www.okpolicy.org for information and analysis.

Earth To Congress: Impeach Paulson

By Jim Hightower

"You don't tell deliberate lies," explained Britain's right-wing political icon Margaret Thatcher, "but sometimes you have to be evasive."

If only such honest dishonesty were practiced on this side of the pond. Unfortunately, in the Bush regime, the art of evasiveness has given way to the pervasive use of blunt falsifications – i.e., deliberate lies.

Take the ones we've been getting from Hank Paulson, George W.'s Wall Street bailout czar. This guy is now rivaling Donnie Rumsfeld for the Least Trustworthy Bushite in a Leading Role.

The Goldman Sachs CEO-turned-treasury-secretary has gone from confidently assuring us that he had "contained" the financial problem to frantically demanding that Congress federalize America's credit system.

HOW PAULSON'S STRATEGY CHANGED

However, even before Congress had passed his bill to buy up the bad investments created by Wall Street's "innovative" bankers, Paulson was secretly changing course. By executive fiat, and with no notice to Congress, he shifted into a bank nationalization plan.

He is spending \$250 billion of our tax dollars to purchase stock in the nation's biggest banks, including giving \$10 billion to the one he had headed.

Using our billions to save high-rolling, high-finance billionaires was not enormously popular in this presidential election year, so Paulson came up with this cover story: It's not about Wall Street, he and his minions rushed to assure us, it's about your street.

We must put government funds into these banks in order to unclog their credit flow, as though we were buying \$250 billion worth of Liquid-Plumr.

BLUEBIRDS OF HAPPINESS TWITTERING

With this federal investment, the Paulsonistas promised, banks would again begin to make loans to America's businesses and consumers – and bluebirds of economic happiness would once again twitter across our land.

They lied. The billions are now being distributed to bankers with no strings attached – no requirement whatsoever that the banks actually start making loans to help "your street." The unclogging rationale was a scam.

Sure enough, the big financial houses say they have no intention of increasing their lending, with some privately admitting that they'll make even fewer loans than before receiving Paulson's generous gift.

Noting that they've taken huge losses in the recent collapse, they say they'll apply much of the taxpayers' money to their own bottom lines, trying to shore up their corporate profits.

PAULSON & CO. GOAL: OLIGOPOLY

If that's not enough to disgust you, it now turns out that Paulson & Co. have quietly been pursuing an even more pernicious purpose with our bailout funds: oligopoly. That's the term for a non-competitive market that has hordes of consumers left to the mercies of only a handful of giant providers.

Behind the scenes, Treasury is actively encouraging big banks to use their taxpayer windfall to buy out our regional and local banks, eliminating these competitors from the marketplace. "One purpose of this plan is to drive consolidation," says an agency official, off the record.

New York Times columnist Joe Nocera quotes a top executive of JPMorgan Chase exulting to his colleagues about the oligopolistic potential that his bank has gained with the infusion of \$25 billion from us: "[We'll] be a little bit more active on the acquisition side or opportunistic side for [taking over] some banks

LAISSEZ FAIRE

From Page 10

a \$1 million grant from the Bush Administration to use in his children's ministry at the church.

It appears to be an economic system that blesses the top of the pyramid – and those at the bottom gotta just believe.

RELIGIOUS RIGHT'S DEVOTION TO VOODOO ECONOMICS

The Georgia Baptist Index wrote in an editorial in 1900 that the majority of the poor were poor because they were immoral. Later on, Southern Protestants blamed laissez faire capitalism for the Depression.

They appeared to have made the connection. The religious right never did.

When Barack Obama proposes eliminating the tax breaks given by the Bush Administration to the higher income portion of society, critics see this as redistribution of wealth – and the "s" word [socialism] is used. More emotional critics use the "c" word [Communism].

If you need economic help in your journey, the DeVos and Freemarket crowd have some advice for you: Work harder or have more faith.

The hatred of Obama by these types reaches extremes. One of the factors is that they view him as a product of the system that used the government to attend schools and move up the economic ladder.

I have heard snide remarks about the fact that the government assisted his education. In the system suggested by the religious right, government aid to needy is only supposed to cripple, as J. C. Watts used to say. Aid to bail out those at the top of the pyramid is just as embarrassing, but not as evil.

As the Amway folks would explain it, that's just the way it works.

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



who are still struggling. ... I think there are going to be some great opportunities for us to grow in this environment, and I think we have an opportunity to use that \$25 billion in that way."

Thanks, Hank.

By forcing this wrenching round of mergers, Paulson will reduce banking choices and services for you and me, and almost certainly drive up the fees we pay. At the same time, he'll drastically increase the size of the very giants that made the mess we're in – outfits that he tells us are already "too big to fail."

He has moved this bailout from scam to scandal. Where is Congress? Not only must Paulson be stopped, he should be impeached.

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How Wall Street Works

Once upon a time, in a village, a man appeared and announced to the villagers that he would buy monkeys for \$10 each.

The villagers, seeing that there were many monkeys around, went out to the forest and started catching them. The man bought thousands at \$10 and, as supply started to diminish, the villagers stopped their effort. He further announced that he would now buy at \$20 for a monkey.

This renewed the efforts of the villagers and they started catching monkeys again. Soon the supply diminished even further and people started going back to their farms. The offer increased to \$25 each, and the supply of monkeys became so small that it was an effort to even find a monkey, let alone catch it!

The man now announced that he would buy monkeys at \$50! However, since he had to go to the city on some business, his assistant would now buy on behalf of him.

In the absence of the man, the assistant told the villagers. "Look at all these monkeys in the big cage that the man has collected. I will sell them to you at \$35, and when the man returns from the city, you can sell them to him for \$50 each."

The villagers rounded up all their savings and bought all the monkeys.

They never saw the man nor his assistant again, only monkeys everywhere!

Now you have a better understanding of how Wall Street works.

– Thanks to Stan Simpson for sharing this gem

HEART

From Page 10

ings.

The Woman with the S-shaped spine

walks through walls of houses

that are no longer there

makes love to phantoms vanishing before dawn

This is a powerful, poignant, inspiring work that deserves widespread recognition. It is not a touchy-feely effort to leave the reader with a sorrowful heart. Rather it is a celebration of life and the never ending determination to fight back by a most courageous woman and poet with an abundance of soul and character.

This one will speak to your eye, your ear, and most assuredly your heart.

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

Very Punny

A chicken crossing the road: poultry in motion.

If you don't pay your exorcist, you can get repossessed.

Show me a piano falling down a mine shaft and I'll show you a flat-miner.

A guy fell onto an upholstery machine. Now he's fully recovered.

A grenade on a kitchen floor in France resulted in Linoleum Blownapart.

You are stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.

A calendar's days are numbered.

A lot of money is tainted: 'Taint yours and 'taint mine.

Deadly Mistakes

Disclosing Medical Errors New Trend

Disclosing medical errors has been the recent subject of newspaper, journal articles and TV programs. It's news when as many as 100,000 patients are killed each year by hospital mistakes.

Mounting evidence shows that physicians and medical institutions that say "I'm sorry" to patients are more often met with understanding than with lawsuits.

As a result, the culture of owning up to errors and letting patients and their families know that they have been harmed is very slowly making inroads and changing the prior practice of concealment.

ONLY 30% DISCLOSED

Still, only an estimated 30% of errors are disclosed to patients even when the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations now requires that patients be informed about all outcomes of care, including "unanticipated outcomes" occurring in hospitals.

Full disclosure of medical errors does not mean that patients need forego the option of suing. If they feel that an apology and settlement do not suffice to compensate them for their harm or cover their damages, they can seek legal redress.

In most cases, this will require the patients getting legal counsel before making any decision, in order to balance the power differential between patients, on the one hand, and health care providers and institutions, on the other, even when these are willing to admit their errors.

FOUR MAIN REASONS

At present, there are four main reasons why a policy of disclosure makes sense:

Disclosure humanizes the provider and takes the burden of concealment off him or her. Physicians are expected to tell the truth. The practice of deceptive behavior is therefore corrosive to their self-esteem and reputation, and tarnishes the profession as a whole.

The guilt that accompanies willful silence or deception may therefore trump the awkwardness and discomfort of admitting a mistake.

Moreover, compounding a mistake with a cover-up is, quite literally, adding insult to injury. Patients are justifiably incensed when they find out they have been lied to and dismissed as well as mistreated.

DECIDING ON A COURSE OF ACTION

Disclosure provides the patient with the tools to decide what action to take. Patients expect honesty and are entitled to know when they have been wronged.

Bioethicists underscore that full disclosure respects patients' autonomy and enhances their decision-making capabilities. Greater information alters the intrinsic inequality between patient and provider, thereby empowering the later.

Seven studies that have assessed patients' preference for error disclosure have found that patients want to be told about medical errors in their care.

Traditionally, attorneys have counseled clients to "admit nothing" and avoid the possibility of self-incrimination.

NOT ADMISSIBLE IN COURT

For those who have confessed to making a mistake, the legal profession has devised a way to circumvent the issue: a total of 35 states have adopted legisla-



It was an honest mistake

tion that makes an apology offered to a patient not admissible in court.

Nevertheless, several major medical centers have found that adopting a policy of full disclosure can reduce legal settlements and save the institution money.

The University of Michigan Health System found that, when physicians were encouraged to disclose errors and apologize, claims decreased from 262 to 83 between 2001 and 2007 and legal fees were reduced by over 50% by 2002.

The average time to resolution of claims was reduced from 20.7 months to 9.5 months in five years. More recently, academic medical centers such as those at Stanford and Johns Hopkins have adopted similar policies aimed at informing patients of adverse events. Both report favorable outcomes as a result of the new policies.

APOLOGIES WORK IN CIVIL CASES

Studies looking at other personal injury situations have tended to find that apologies can promote the successful resolution of these cases.

A straightforward explanation of what happened can clear the air, open communications, and turn an adversarial situation into a productive negotiation.

Medical schools and teaching hospitals are just beginning to prepare physicians-in-training to disclose their mistakes, avoid jargon, express regret, and state what can be done to correct the situation and avoid similar errors.

Although there are no universally held "best practices" in this field, some have devised lists of suggestions for divulging medical errors to patients.

BEWARE OF QUICK APOLOGIES

Patient advocates and lawyers alike nevertheless caution patients to be wary of any quick apology followed by a settlement offer.

Contrite providers are no substitute for money, particularly when correcting the medical error [or dealing with its consequences] is costly.

Unless injured patients have access to appropriate legal counsel from the onset of the process, they may be unaware of future medical costs and agree to unacceptably low offers.

Moreover, they may be lulled into thinking that whatever is offered is the best they can get, which may not be the case.

While the change from the previous dictum of "deny, deny, deny" to that of "admit, apologize, and make amends" is welcome, it may be prompted more by concern for the bottom line of the erring doctor or institution than by a recommitment to moral rectitude.

Public Citizen Health Care Newsletter

Fewer Doctors Are Family Practitioners

Fewer than 2% of graduating medical students say they plan to work in primary care internal medicine, raising worries about a looming shortage of the first stop doctors who used to be the backbone of the American medical system.

The results of a new survey suggest more medical students, many of them saddled with debt, are opting for more lucrative specialties.

The survey of nearly 1,200 fourth-year students found just 2% planned to work in primary care internal medicine. In a similar 1990 survey, the figure was 9%.

Paperwork, the demands of the chronically sick and the need to bring work home are among the factors pushing young doctors away from careers in primary care, the survey found.

HARD WORK, MONEY AND TIME PRESSURES

Dr. Karen Hauer of the University of California-San Francisco, the study's lead author, said it's hard work taking care of the chronically ill, the elderly and people with complex diseases – "especially when you're doing it with time pressures and inadequate resources."

The salary gap may be another reason. Family medicine had the lowest average salary last year, \$186,000, and the lowest share of residency slots filled by U.S. students, 42%. Orthopedic surgery paid \$436,000, and 94% of residency slots were filled by U.S. students.

Meanwhile, medical school is getting more expensive. The average graduate last year had \$140,000 in student debt, up nearly 8% from the previous year, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENT A FACTOR

Another likely factor: Medicare's fee schedule pays less for office visits than for simple procedures, according to the American College of Physicians, which reported in 2006 that the nation's primary care system is "at grave risk of collapse."

A separate study in the Journal of the American Medical Association suggests

graduates from international medical schools are filling the primary care gap left by domestic schools.

About 2,600 fewer U.S. doctors were training in primary care specialties – including pediatrics, family medicine and internal medicine – in 2007 compared with 2002.

In the same time span, the number of foreign graduates pursuing those careers rose by nearly 3,300.

New Investment Strategy

If you had purchased \$1,000 of shares in Delta Airlines one year ago, you would have \$49 today.

If you had purchased \$1,000 of shares in AIG one year ago, you would have \$33 today.

If you had purchased \$1,000 of shares in Lehman Brothers one year ago, you would have \$0.00 today.

But if you had purchased \$1,000 worth of beer one year ago, drank all the beer, then turned in the aluminum cans for recycling refund, you would have received \$214.

Based on the above, the best current investment plan is to drink heavily and recycle. It is called the 401-Keg.

A recent study found that the average American walks about 900 miles a year. Another study found that Americans drink, on average, 22 gallons of alcohol a year.

That means that, on average, Americans get about 41 miles to the gallon!
Makes you proud to be an American!

– Thanks to Allison Lynn Weaver for this gem

Bankruptcies Soar For Senior Citizens

By Anne Murphy

First came the health problems. Then, unable to work, Ada Noda watched the bills pile up. And then, suffocating in debt, the 80-year-old did something she never thought she'd be forced to do. She declared bankruptcy.

While the bankruptcy filing rate for those under 55 has fallen, it has soared for older Americans, according to a new analysis from the Consumer Bankruptcy Project, which examined a sampling of noncommercial bankruptcies filed between 1991 and 2007.

The older the age group, the worse it got – older people became more than twice as likely to file during that period, and the filing rate for those 75 and older more than quadrupled.

SENIORS HIT BY ONE-TWO PUNCH

"Older Americans are hit by a one-two punch of jobs and medical problems and the two are often intertwined," said Elizabeth Warren, a Harvard Law School professor who was one of the authors of the study.

"They discover that they must work to keep some form of economic balance and when they can't, they're lost."

That's precisely what happened to Noda. She worked all her life, on a hospital's housekeeping staff, and later selling boat tickets to Florida tourists. She cut corners when she needed to but always paid the bills she neatly logged in a ledger.

"I was born during the Depression," she said. "I paid the bills whether I ate or didn't, whether I went to the doctor or not."

HEALTH PROBLEMS TOOK HER DOWN

It all worked fine for Noda, a widow for 23 years, until she was forced to undergo double-bypass surgery and deal with respiratory problems.

She started using two credit cards more frequently for food and bills. Before long, she was \$8,000 in debt and behind on car payments.

"I'd go to bed and all I had on my mind was bankruptcy," she said. "I had nothing left."

Noda's car was repossessed, but her trailer home wasn't in jeopardy because her daughter owns it.

While she's covered by Medicare and receives \$968 in Social Security each month, she relied on her job for other expenses. She had no choice but to get help from Legal Aid and declare bankruptcy.

FILINGS BY SENIORS ARE SOARING

Most bankruptcies are still filed by people far younger than Noda, but the percentage that younger filers make up has fallen over the 16-year period, according to the Consumer Bankruptcy Project analysis.

In 1991, the 55-plus age group accounted for about 8% of bankruptcy filers, according to the study, which looked at more than 6,000 cases filed in 1991, 2001 or 2007. By last year, filers 55 and over accounted for 22%.

Each age group under 55 saw double-digit percentage drops in their bankruptcy filing rates over the survey period, but older Americans saw remarkable increases.

The filing rate per thousand people ages 55-64 was up 40%; among 65- to



74-year-olds it increased 125%; and among the 75-to-84-year-old set, it was up 433%.

SEVERAL FACTORS ARE TO BLAME

A number of factors are contributing to the increase. Higher prices for ordinary consumer goods have hit seniors on fixed budgets.

For older Americans living below the poverty level, or not far above, a safety net likely doesn't exist for economic setbacks such as medical problems. And some fall prey to scams that cripple their finances.

Increasing numbers of Americans are entering their retirement years with significant debt and are still paying off mortgages. It is wrong to assume that lives of luxury are bankrupting seniors; rather, they're incurring debts to meet needs such as medical treatment.

"There's no evidence that the problem is consumerism," the professor said.

Nor is there a significant aging trend to blame. While the country is set to experience a notable age shift in the coming years, no major one took place between 2001, when the average age was 33, and 2007, when it was 36.

THEY BOUGHT A LEMON

Frank and Hazel Peters lived frugally their entire 53-year marriage. They always rented a home but decided after the husband's retirement from a factory job that they would cash in his 401[k] and buy a manufactured home.

They fell victim to fraud when they tried to fix a plumbing problem that had black, sulphur-smelling water coming through the pipes of their new home without enough funds to fall back on. They declared bankruptcy.

"We knew we had no other option," 73-year-old Hazel Peters said. "We'd probably be out on the street."

Bankruptcy, tough no matter a person's age, is especially hard when you don't have many years left to recover. Some seniors fear telling their families because they're afraid they'll be put in a nursing home if they're seen as unable to take care of their affairs.

"This phone rang all the time," one senior who filed for bankruptcy said. "It made you not even want to pick up. Sometimes you think, 'Let me go jump off a bridge somewhere.'"

At least now, he says, he can fall asleep without crying.

The Greying Of America Quickens

Americans are living longer than ever, the government has reported. But that seemingly good news [who wants to die young?] is more of a mixed blessing than might be apparent at first blush.

That's because it does not address the quality of life during those added months and years of existence.

In particular, it does not address our nation's ongoing failure to generate novel solutions to the problem of what to do with the quickly growing population of elders who cannot live independently.

Many are in need of varying levels of long-term care. Current estimates are that the number of Americans older than 85 will quadruple by 2050, to 18 million from today's four million.

THEY WILL NEED HELP TO GET BY

A huge proportion of these people will require some kind of ongoing help with the tasks of daily living. The need is only going to grow. In 2006, the latest year for which data are available, U.S. life expectancy grew to a record high of 78.1 years up from 77.8 a year earlier.

Yet as spelled out last year in a Center for American Progress report by Lisa Eckenwiler, "Caring About Long-Term Care," the vast majority of our elderly will not get the benefit of professional long-term caregivers because of the lack of resources or lack of available programs in their communities.

The worst thing that could happen is for people to gain extra years of life and wish, for lack of decent care, that they'd had an earlier exit.

In fact, 80% of the nation's long-term care is provided by unpaid caregivers, mostly family and friends.

FAMILY CARE NOT ALWAYS PRACTICAL

There are many obvious benefits of keeping at least a portion of long-term care in the family, but it is not practical in many cases to expect family members to be able to carry the entire burden.

At least 60% of those unpaid caregivers are already busy with their own jobs.

Meanwhile, few employers offer assurances of help for employees who need to care for aging relatives. The Family and Medical Leave Act, which assures up

to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for such purposes, still applies to only a fraction of employers and, if anything, has lately come under threat of being weakened by business lobbyists.

Death rates from all the major killers dropped, including cancer, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes. In fact, diabetes dropped from the No. 6 leading killer to No. 7, overtaken by Alzheimer's disease.

PAYOFF FROM YEARS OF RESEARCH

In large part this reflects a payoff of years of basic research by federally funded researchers, especially those supported by the National Institutes of Health.

"Thanks to NIH research, millions of deaths from heart disease have been averted, millions more people have survived cancer, and deaths from diabetes have decreased dramatically," Robert Palazzo, president of the Federation of American Societies, said in a statement.

Yet as Palazzo and others have noted with increasing alarm, the \$27 billion agency – considered the crown jewel of U.S. biomedical research – has been flat-funded for five years now under President George W. Bush.

WE NEED RENEWED COMMITMENT

Clearly we need to renew our nation's commitment to high-quality research aimed at understanding the mechanisms of the major diseases.

We need to develop a comprehensive approach to caring for all the people who will benefit from those discoveries.

Eckenwiler notes that among the problems contributing to the long-term care crisis is an overemphasis on research relating to acute medical problems, and an inadequate research focus on medical and social management of the chronic conditions that lower the quality of life for long-term survivors.

This fragmented approach to medicine, which emphasizes specialists focused on their part of a patient's problems instead of taking a holistic approach to patients' needs, is out of step with the rising longevity of the American people.

This fragmentation is mirrored in the conflicting payment structures for different kinds of care.

– The author is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress

Hurting Students

Teacher Laments Horrors Of NCLB

By Demitrious S. Sinor

The last question in the final presidential debate between John McCain and Barack Obama had to do with what moderator Bob Schieffer suggested might be the most important issue of all: education.

Both candidates expressed a deep need to reform education, and both conceded – as did their vice presidential candidates in their own debate – that the federally mandated program No Child Left Behind, embraced by many Democrats and Republicans, was underfunded.

While this may be the consensus of legislators, I could not help but be left with feelings of distrust and discouragement.

Rather than approach the challenge and reward of education with the promise of cooperation, the presidential contenders offered a recipe calling for charter schools and school vouchers and an incentive for parents to move their students out of “failing schools,” a decidedly competitive approach to education.

LEADING TO A GREATER DIVIDE

This divisive strategy can only lead to a greater divide between the haves and the have-nots. This is not what Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall had in mind when he successfully argued in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case 54 years ago that “separate but equal” can never truly exist in education, or in society.

Amid perhaps the most important presidential election since 1932, the statements about education by our presidential and vice presidential candidates, even in the face of our current economic crisis and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, stuck with me more strongly than any other utterance in the debates.

WHY I AM A TEACHER

There is no secret why: I am a high school teacher. The night of the final debate, I was exhausted. My feet were aching – a consequence of standing on the job for the better part of 10 hours every day as a teacher of United States history.

I wanted to relax, but my mind was racing; there is a lot to think about these days.

We have seen a “bailout” of corporate and Wall Street swindlers, with the working class being forced to pick up the tab. The administration has continued to escalate defense spending while cutting taxes, never seeming to consider the dire social, international and economic consequences.

DROP THE DAMAGING MANDATES

Public educators deserve a break, not the damaging mandates of program improvement and the threats of state takeover that have fallen on my high school



and countless others like it due to the draconian quotas of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Sadly, NCLB doesn't care about strong relationships in the classroom; NCLB cannot measure smiles, teamwork, camaraderie or the overcoming of adversity. It doesn't allow for creative and authentic assessments and engaging activities in the classroom. Tragically, it has demanded that we educators check our hearts and souls at the classroom door.

TEACHES IN A POOR DISTRICT

I teach in Desert Hot Springs, a little-known California town of about 25,000 inhabitants. We are overshadowed by the neighboring desert community of Palm Springs, with its glamorous history, and the far wealthier towns to the south-east.

Sadly, the goal of changing the world as an educator has become increasingly unattainable as the metal vise of the NCLB machine and its iron-fisted standardized testing approach has begun to squeeze the life out of educators and the students we teach.

Though I still do my best to smile in the classroom and bring students out of their adolescent shells, public education is being cruelly shortchanged by NCLB. The only things that seem to matter, from the state superintendent down to the district office and the school administration, are California Standardized Testing and Reporting data.

As a result of the federal government's industrial approach to education, my school must improve test scores in every major core class – math, history, science, English – and at increasingly high rates.

See **TEACHER** Page 15

Gallup Poll: Public Doesn't Buy NCLB Law

By Gene R. Carter

In late summer, schools throughout the United States reconvened against a backdrop of presidential conventions. Around the same time, the results of the 40th Phi Delta Kappa [PDK]/Gallup Poll on the “Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools” made the rounds in education circles, sending a clear message about the need to improve the U.S. system.

The message, however, did not come from education organizations or any particular interest groups; it came from the American public.

Results from the poll underscore the challenges facing U.S. students and schools and indicate the public's desire for change. For example, fewer than 2 out of 10 Americans believe No Child Left Behind [NCLB] should continue without significant change, and only 1 in 4 think the legislation is helping their local schools. In addition, Americans fear U.S. schools are not keeping up in today's global economy.

EUROPE, ASIA GRADED HIGHER

About half gave schools in Europe and Asia grades of As and Bs, compared with more than 60% who assigned U.S. schools Cs or below. These results represent a distressing view of the U.S. education system and raise concern for the country's status as an economic and political leader.

Indeed, as demands for a highly skilled and educated workforce grow, U.S. schools are struggling to keep pace. The public knows it. The question is: How do we fix it?

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development believes that answer should come from the people who know the most about what is and is not working in schools – the educators.

EDUCATORS OUGHT TO BE CONSULTED

The PDK/Gallup Poll indicates the American public agrees, with the vast majority [77%] feeling that the new president should rely on educators for advice about how to improve our education system.

In mid-September, a group of ASCD educators – representing classroom teachers, principals, district administrators, curriculum developers, college professors, and others – traveled to Washington, DC, to meet with their federal lawmakers during ASCD's Leadership for Effective Advocacy and Practice [LEAP] Institute.

During their meetings, educators shared ASCD's legislative priorities, which form the basis of the association's policy recommendations for improving NCLB

and echo some of the concerns expressed in the PDK/Gallup Poll.

Currently, the assessment and accountability system under NCLB relies heavily on standardized tests that provide a snapshot of student knowledge and ability at a single moment in time.

ASCD's LEAP attendees called on their lawmakers to establish better assessment systems that allow achievement and accountability to be measured using a variety of indicators, including student grades, portfolios and exhibitions, teacher evaluations, and progress and growth over time.

When the PDK/Gallup Poll asked Americans to choose the assessment method they believed would provide the most accurate picture of student achievement, more chose examples of student work and teacher observations than test scores.

And 80% felt school performance should be measured by student academic progress instead of the percentage of students who passed a state test.

THE PROBLEM CAN'T BE STALLED

Historically, the first year of a new presidency and Congress is productive. Early in 2009, we anticipate movement on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, the final education funding amounts for the year, and we can't wait until then to act.

Now is the time to get informed and mobilize at the grassroots level so that educators have a stronger voice in shaping policies that support what is best for students.

ASCD educators understand the public's frustration and stand ready to help the new administration improve the U.S. education system.

The association is committed to the education of the whole child and seeks to recast the definition of a successful learner from one whose achievement is measured solely by academic tests to one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling.

Will the next president get the message? If not, he will jeopardize both our kids' future success in school, work, and life, as well as our country's future success in the global marketplace.

– The author is executive director of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. For complete results from the PDK/Gallup Poll, visit www.pdkpoll.org

The 'Ol Girls Club Continues To Grow

When Diane Williams took over her family's business as CEO in 1981, she had plenty of strategic questions but few places to turn.

The company, Precision Tube Bending, Santa Fe Springs, CA, supplies metal tubing to the aerospace industry. Joining trade organizations didn't help much.

"They were all men," she says. "I didn't have the working relationships with them that they had with each other."

That changed in 1999, when Williams joined Women Presidents Organization [WPO], the premier women's entrepreneurial advisory group.

RECORD GROWTH IS NOTED

Women's entrepreneurship is experiencing record growth. In 1977, only 4.5% of privately-held companies were led by women, says WPO president Marsha Firestone, PhD. Today it's close to 45%.

Initially drawn by the opportunity for greater influence and power, better pay, and more flexible schedules in entrepreneurship, many are now at the helm of substantial businesses years later.

Founded by Firestone in 1997, WPO now includes 1,300 members, with \$13.2 billion in aggregate revenues.

"Being an entrepreneur is the great equalizer for women," Firestone says. "You can go as far as you want to go."

TRUSTED ADVISORS NETWORK

As Williams discovered, having a network of trusted advisors is essential.

"At WPO, women can collaborate in a confidential environment where there is a commitment to share expertise," says Firestone. "The education they need isn't a curriculum coming from a course."

Putting systems in place that enable rapid expansion is just as important, notes WPO board member Janice Bryant Howroyd, founder and CEO of Act-1 Group, a \$1 billion personnel services company.

"You've got to invest in technology and hiring people," she explains.

ATTRACTING THE BEST PEOPLE

When WPO member Shelly Sun, a former financial executive, had trouble finding aides for her husband's elderly grandmother, she wrote the business plan for BrightStar Health Care, a provider of carefully screened home health aides.

To attract the best people, she paid them 10% more than the norm.

In the first year, she invested in custom software that automates office paperwork, freeing franchisees to make sales calls. This year, the Gurnee, IL-based franchise chain, founded in 2002, is on track to bring in \$33 million.



But even with the best systems in place, successful women entrepreneurs know it's important to stay nimble. WPO board member Judi Sheppard Missett launched Jazzercise nearly 40 years ago, and the Carlsbad, CA-based chain is now experiencing some of its best sales ever.

Why? Missett refuses to stand still. When the dance routines get stale, she changes them. She bolstered her management team and sharpened her business plan recently.

"As business people we have to be open to cues that tell us it's time to try something different," she says. Firestone agrees, noting that WPO strives to help women identify those strategies.

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TEACHER

From Page 14

Additionally, every student subgroup – including white, Hispanic/Latino, African-American, Asian, socially, economically disadvantaged, English language learners, special education students – must meet these yearly growth targets regardless of the inherent obstacles.

The tests must be taken by 95% or more of the students in each subgroup. If just one subgroup fails to meet the performance or test attendance standards of NCLB, the school is put into "program improvement."

GROWTH TARGETS MUST BE MET

Moreover, these growth targets must be met or exceeded for two consecutive years. Though my school, amazingly, met its growth targets last year, we are in program improvement for the fourth year. In fact, the entire district is in program improvement.

NCLB is not only impacting certain minority populations, but also unattainable goals of NCLB are cutting across distinctions in class and race as more and more schools are being labeled as "failing schools."

Finally, as many educators are aware, in just five years all students in all schools in every state in the nation must pass their standardized tests at a "proficient level."

EXPECTING A MIRACLE

That's right: 100% of all students must be proficient by 2014. No Child Left Behind has not been adjusted in any way to fit the reality of education. I guess I should not only check my heart and soul at the classroom door but my sanity as well.

I am not suggesting we disregard the need for testing accountability, content standards and standards for the teaching profession.

Imagine what the learning-disabled or English language learner faces when taking standardized tests. If we continue down this business-approach road, treating students as products and teachers as robots, we will see the tragic collapse of it all.

EDUCATION WILL BE DEFEATED

Education will fall flat in humiliating defeat. It is my wish that our new president as well as our federal legislators – Republican or Democrat – heed my call and that of many of my peers to end No Child Left Behind.

For once, let us put partisanship aside so we can address an issue as important as our economy and our entanglements overseas: education.

At the local level, we can do something even more important. Educators, administrators and parents can breathe life back into education.

We can – and must – re-emphasize the joy of learning, the rewards of teamwork, the unique qualities of performance, animation, humor, role-playing, individual and group-based projects, and the overall life skills, relationships and memories

that students and teachers are exposed to every day in a truly high-quality classroom within a school that cares.

STUDENTS ARE STILL JUST KIDS

After all, students are still kids. They must have fun and they must want to learn in order to compete, collaborate and achieve beyond secondary and post-secondary education.

In my years as a professional educator, I have never been inspired by the numbers of standardized tests or NCLB. And I have never met a fellow teacher or former student who truly has been, either.

Teachers are remembered by students because of how we make them feel. We educators must be the teachers we always wanted to have.

We must not let media overemphasis on the "failure" of public education discourage us. I could not disagree with media more. My school has not failed me.

NCLB HAS FAILED US ALL

My community has not failed me. My students, most of all, have not failed me. Rather, No Child Left Behind has failed us all.

No matter, I still love teaching and I will never leave my inspiration behind. At the end of the day, students leave my class smiling because of a joke I have told.

Or they are left sobered by the real-life experiences shared by other students in the classroom. Or they are changed by the indelible emotional experience of taking part in a three-day dramatic play on the Holocaust.

This is proof to me that my students have been inspired and have grown stronger intellectually and emotionally because of that inspiration.

At year's end when students are promoted beyond my class and visit me with the sentiment, "I miss your class, Mr. Sinor," I realize that a relationship has been built that won't soon fade.

As those students graduate, go on to college, get married and share stories of classroom inspiration with their own children, I realize that my dream is no longer just that; it is real, a certainty that I have made a difference in students that will last a lifetime.

I never want this dream to end.

– The author has been named Teacher of the Year and sticks to teaching despite suffering from cerebral palsy



Union Card Or MasterCard

Nation Of Workers To Debtors Nation

By Frank Joyce

It has been apparent for some time that the 20th Century American social contract is defunct beyond repair. Now the economic system faces the prospect of collapse as well.

Not surprisingly, these developments are related. They did not come about overnight. Looking back, it's easy to see that the system which emerged from the post-Bolshevik revolution, mass industrial production era of the 1920's, 30's and 40's was beginning to unravel by the end of the 1970's.

Union membership provides a helpful lens through which to view the process.

During the 1960's union membership bounced up and down within a narrow range ending the decade slightly higher than it began.

STEADY DECLINE BEGINS

Starting in 1970, it began a steady decline. In 1970 union workers were 29.6% of the work force. At those numbers, unions were able to exert considerable leverage over the wages, benefits and working conditions of all workers.

By 1980 union workers were down to 23.2% of the total workforce. By the year 2000, union members represented just 13.5% of all workers. Today it is about 12.1%.

Ronald Reagan caused the decline of unions by busting the air traffic controllers union [PATCO] in 1981.

BUSINESS GOT THE MESSAGE

The message that unions could be beat came through for all to see. Employers got the point and stepped up their already fierce resistance at the bargaining table.

They devoted new and effective resources to defeat organizing efforts by their workers by any means possible.

Unions were indisputably an effective instrument for building a broad "middle" class. They did so by applying sufficient power to assure that workers shared in the values that they were helping to create.

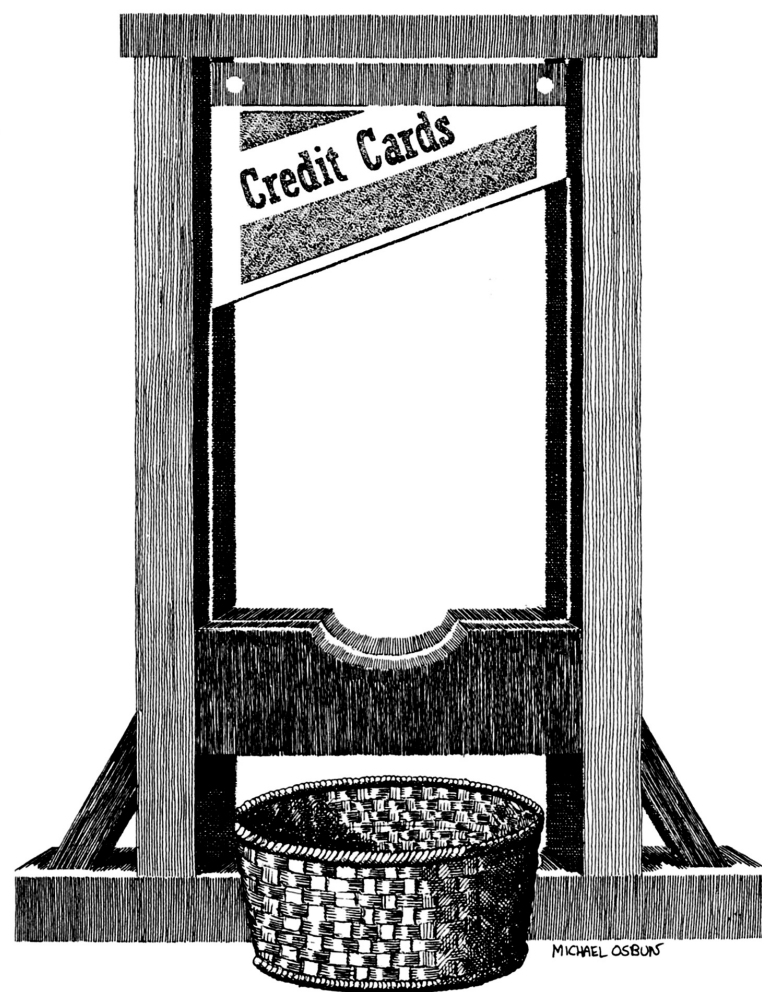
As industrialization brought enormous innovation and productivity, workers waged epic struggles that won them the wages to buy what they were making.

IT WAS AN ECONOMIC BONANZA

Working conditions improved. Home ownership, car ownership and college for the children of workers became widespread. Pensions and employer paid health care became the norm.

A critical variable is this: as the wallets of workers held fewer and fewer union cards, credit cards were filling up those very same wallets. Workers were in effect trading union cards for MasterCards.

Because even though worker power was in decline, worker consumption was going up. Color TV's replaced black and white TV's, only to be replaced again by



bigger screen TV's and now LCD's and Plasmas.

Vehicles got bigger and better and working families had more of them. Shopping malls proliferated and shopping itself became the national religion.

Cell phones, computers, video games, boats, iPods and snowmobiles – workers had stuff, lots and lots of stuff. The whole economy grew.

Between 1970 and 2000, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis of the Federal Reserve Bank, household debt relative to disposable personal income nearly doubled.

In 2006, David A. Gaffen reported in the Wall Street Journal that "households' debt-to-income ratio reached an all time high – 131.1%."

PER PERSON DEBT LOAD SOARS

Exploding public debt is an important component of this dynamic, too. According to Federal Reserve Board data, between 1957 and 2007 the inflation adjusted total debt load per person in the U.S. increased \$145,432, equivalent to an increase of \$581,728 per family of four.

That number, of course, does not include long-term costs of the war in Iraq or of ongoing taxpayer funded bailouts of financial companies.

See DEBTOR NATION Page 17

Republican Workforce Assault Shrinks Unions

By Matt Corley

Half of all workers would join a union if they could. But as the director of the Center for American Progress' American Worker Project, David Madland, writes, "Existing laws make joining a union a Herculean task that few are able to undertake."

Indeed, just 8% of workers in private industry are union members today, down from just over 30% after World War II.

The decline in union membership paralleled with a decline in real wages, retirement benefits, and quality of health care.

To ensure that workers who wish to organize are able to do so, the House passed the Employee Free Choice Act [EFCA] in March 2007 with bipartisan support.

REPUBLICAN SENATORS BLOCKED IT

In the Senate, however, a group of 48 conservatives successfully blocked the measure with a filibuster threat three months later.

As the next Congress approaches, conservatives have renewed their campaign against the EFCA. Across the nation, right-wing pundits and politicians are using hyperbolic language to mischaracterize the legislation and paint the EFCA's supporters as anti-worker and anti-business.

Despite conservatives' claims to the contrary, the EFCA preserves the secret ballot election process established by the National Labor Relations Board.

The law simply guarantees that workers also have the option to form a union through a "card-check" system in which a union would be recognized if a majority of workers signed a petition testifying to their desire to organize.

CURRENT LAW IS A HANDICAP

Under current law, workers can only form a union via the card-check system if their employer agrees to allow it. Otherwise, the employer can insist on a union secret ballot election.

Unfortunately, as Madland notes, employers legally can force workers to attend anti-union meetings, including "one-on-one conversations" with supervisors, and workers often are pressured by employers to reveal their private preferences for the union.

"This takes the 'secret' out of the 'secret ballot,'" Madland said. Even more

disturbing is that in "25% of organizing campaigns, private-sector employers illegally fire workers because they want to form a union."

EMPLOYERS CONTINUE TO STONEWALL

Even after workers successfully form a union, in one-third of the instances, employers do not negotiate a contract.

The EFCA would strengthen penalties for such labor law violations and prevent employers from delaying first-contract negotiations.

While conservatives suggest that the EFCA card-check system is anti-business, in a recent survey of employers who had used majority sign-up agreements, a majority reported that the agreements resulted in improved relations with the union, enabling management to achieve other bargaining or business goals.

THE UNION DIFFERENCE

The importance of unions to the American worker cannot be understated. Union workers earn 30% higher wages than nonunion workers.

For women and people of color, union membership improves wages even more.

As union membership has declined, so, too, have real wages. Meanwhile, top business executives earned 344 times the salary of the average American worker in 2007.

As Madland explained in the Washington Post, income inequality "is now at the level it was in the 1920s, when unionization rates were also below 10%."

Furthermore, when health care costs continue to rise, workers in unions are 63% more likely to have employer-provided health insurance than nonunion workers.

Union workers' health insurance coverage is far more comprehensive than that of nonunion workers and union workers pay 18% less in health care deductibles and a smaller share of costs for family coverage.

When union workers retire, they are more likely to have a guaranteed, defined benefit pension; 72% of union workers have such retirement benefits, compared to only 15% of nonunion workers.

Throughout our history, when unions are strong, wages go up, health care coverage improves and pensions are strengthened. That's an indisputable fact.

\$2.7 Billion In '07 Is Lobbying Record

Corporations, unions and other interests spent a record-setting \$2.79 billion last year lobbying Washington.

The Center for Responsive Politics said spending in 2007 eclipsed the previous record in 2006 by \$200 million, with health care interests, Wall Street, the real estate industry and insurers among the biggest spenders.

"Lobbying seems to be a recession-proof industry. In some respects, interests seek even more from our government when the economy slows," said Sheila Krumholz, executive director of the 25-year-old group that analyzes data on money in politics.

The latest figures show a year of typical growth for K Street, the nickname often applied to the capital's booming influence industry, but there were notable changes, too.

For instance, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce remained the nation's single largest spender, with \$52.8 million expended to 2007 on in-house and outside lobbyists. But that was down 27% from last year, the center said.

Sharply higher spending was seen on other fronts, with private equity firm Blackstone Group LP ramping up its expenditures 477% to \$5.4 million.

The private equity industry successfully halted an effort in Congress recently to raise taxes on the profits of its senior partners.

The National Education Association, largest U.S. teachers union, spent \$9.2 million last year – up 464% – amid efforts to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind act.

Lobbying spending grows because fees are up, more groups see lobbying as important and more expenses are being disclosed as rules tighten.

Drug and health care product companies spent \$227 million on lobbyists last year, up 25% over 2006 and more than any other industry group, with insurers second at \$138 million.

Next came electric utilities at \$113 million, computer and Internet companies at \$111 million, and hospital and nursing home companies at \$90.5 million, said the center.

Securities and investment firms spent \$87 million, raising their expenditures



by 40% over 2006, the center said.

Corporations that spent heavily on lobbying included General Electric, Exxon-Mobil, AT&T, General Motors, Verizon, Northrop Grumman, Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

Among K Street's many firms, Patton Boggs reported the highest revenue from registered lobbying for the fifth consecutive year at \$41.9 million.

The firm's top clients included private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management, candy and pet food maker Mars Inc., drugmakers Bristol Myers Squibb and Roche Holding AG, as well as an association that represents trial lawyers.

On the level of lobbying expenditures overall, the center said: "The amount of money spent on federal lobbying has increased about 8% annually since the late 1990s, making last year's growth typical."

Pope Benedict XVI Lives In Glass House

Pope Benedict XVI, speaking in Sydney, Australia, deplored the "squandering" of our planet's resources "in order to fuel an insatiable consumption."

He's right, of course, but he neglected to mention overpopulation as the major cause of resource depletion, environmental degradation, and climate change.

He also called for "nonviolence, sustainable development, justice and peace," but again said nothing about how overpopulation leads to social unrest, violence, and even genocide.

The National Security Study Memorandum report on overpopulation approved by President Ford in 1975 called for universal access to family planning information and wherewithal.

DEBTOR NATION

From Page 16

That debt is bondage is a profound moral truth. But it is an important shaper of political and economic consciousness as well.

The more you are in debt, the less likely you are to rock the boat. Take on your employer? Go on strike? Risk your job by trying to start a union? What, and miss a credit card payment? Don't you get it? I'm maxed out. Risk getting my car getting repossessed? You've got to be kidding.

BECOMING POLITICALLY CONSERVATIVE

If you had a growing 401[k] – which you were led to believe was far more secure than Social Security – why wouldn't you have a literally "conservative" political outlook?

Why not align with the politics that come with living in a "gated" community to defend against the less well off hordes?

From that outlook, it's easy to imagine immigrants and/or "angry" African-Americans as being seen as a much bigger threat than financial shenanigans on Wall Street. Thus are born "Reagan Democrats."

Did not the Credit Card Masters of the Universe barefacedly testify before Congress that it was they who needed protection from irresponsible borrowers?

CONGRESS READILY OBLIGED

Did not a substantial majority of the "people's" representatives from both political parties in Congress agree with them?

Those very same credit card companies routinely troll bankruptcy filings to get names of bankruptcy filers to whom they then send credit card solicitations.

The debt society truly is a house of cards. MasterCard, VISA cards, Discover cards, debit cards. And it is built on sand at that. Clearly, we need to start designing and building a new house altogether.

In the 20th Century, the Flint, MI sit-down strike and the Montgomery, AL Bus Boycott stand as icons of successful struggles by working men and women to win economic and social justice against daunting opposition.

It's time to do it again.

© Independent Media Institute

The report was mysteriously "classified" and deep-sixed until shortly before the 1994 UN population conference in Cairo and, significantly, not long before the slaughter of more than half a million people in Rwanda.

HE DOESN'T CONNECT THE DOTS

Rwanda is Africa's most densely populated country, one with a strong Catholic majority, thanks to German and Belgian missionaries during the colonial period.

Benedict carefully avoided connecting the dots between overpopulation and resource depletion, on the one hand, and the Vatican's uncompromising and consuming opposition, on the other, to contraception and safe, legal abortion.

This is one of the reasons for the Bush Administration's failure to provide the UN Population Fund with money appropriated by Congress these past seven-plus years.

Ironically, while Vatican influence has largely stymied effective steps toward dealing with overpopulation [and the concomitant horrible effects on countless women and children], Catholics in North America, Europe and Latin America pay little or no attention to the Vatican's condemnation of contraception and abortion.

Indeed, it is a Catholic organization, Catholics for Choice, that has been leading the struggle to reduce the Vatican's influence on this issue in the U.S. and around the world.

FYI, Clinton Plan Helped Create 23 Million New Jobs

The Wall Street Journal reports that the number of U.S. workers filing new claims for unemployment benefits climbed back up toward the half-million mark, suggesting severe weakness in labor markets.

Unemployment is now at 6.1%. Nevertheless, conservatives continue to claim that "tax and spend" liberal policies will lead to job loss.

But the Wonk Room notes that President Bush, whose economic agenda consisted almost entirely of massive tax cuts heavily skewed to the wealthy, oversaw sluggish job growth, creating only 4.8 million jobs over the course of his entire presidency.

In contrast, in the first months of his administration, President Bill Clinton proposed a budget that raised income tax rates slightly on the very rich and included "new investment" spending for education, job training, social services, health, science and technology and community and regional development.

The budget proposal laid the groundwork for a balanced budget and for the stunning economic growth that created 23 million jobs over the course of his presidency.

At the time, the Washington Post reported that conservatives blasted the Clinton plan, despite its success.

OSHA Under Bush

Whistle-Blower Finds Himself Out Of A Job

By Carole Bass

In less than an hour, Adam Finkel will be teaching a class on environmental risk assessment. But first, he's hustling off to audition for a tenor solo in Carl Orff's cantata *Carmina Burana*.

The song, he explains, is the musical equivalent of a "dying swan: You basically stand there and scream for five minutes."

A cynic might say that's the perfect role for Finkel. He has spent the past five years standing up alone and screaming.

In 2002, Finkel was a high-ranking official at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the federal agency charged with protecting Americans from hazards on the job.

TRYING TO PROTECT OSHA INSPECTORS

Finkel was worried about hazards to some of OSHA's own inspectors, who faced the possibility of serious lung disease from exposure to the toxic metal beryllium.

He leaked the story of OSHA's refusal to offer the inspectors a blood test that would reveal whether they were at risk of disease.

The day the article appeared, Finkel was essentially demoted. He filed a whistle-blower complaint, won a \$500,000 settlement and left OSHA. Ever since then, he has been performing a long, loud solo protest aimed at getting the agency to do its job.

HE STILL BELIEVES IN THE MISSION

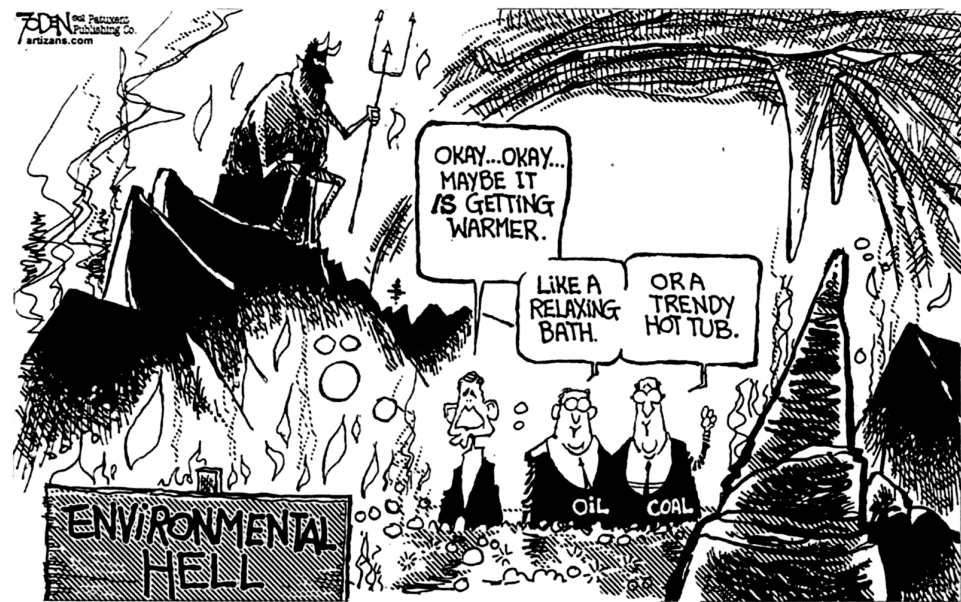
Despite his bitter experience at OSHA [which denies retaliating against him], Finkel believes "more than ever" in the agency's mission, proclaimed by Congress in 1970 "... to assure so far as possible every working man and woman in the nation safe and healthful working conditions."

He believes it is possible to blend good science and good politics, producing rules that protect workers. And he believes that, whether solo or in the chorus, Adam Finkel can still play a role.

Between 50,000 and 60,000 Americans a year are dying prematurely from work-related illnesses, according to expert estimates. From time to time, spectacular accidents – a crane collapse, a sugar refinery explosion – focus public attention on OSHA's failure to protect workers. On-the-job accidents claim only about one-tenth as many victims as do occupational diseases.

TOXIC AILMENTS ARE SNEAKY

A majority of those diseases, Finkel says, stem from exposure to toxic chemi-



cals. The ailments are sneaky: They may masquerade as ordinary asthma, or lie latent for decades before emerging as cancer. Only rarely are they diagnosed as work-related.

Launched 37 years ago, OSHA now bears responsibility for health and safety at more than seven million workplaces across the country. Even in the best of times, OSHA has struggled with political opposition, court challenges and limited resources.

Under the Bush Administration, the agency's would-be enforcers and regulators face additional obstacles. In the past seven years, OSHA has issued only one new health standard; that came under court order.

THANKS TO A SUPREME COURT RULING

Ever since a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1980, OSHA has set exposure limits that are calculated to kill at least one of every 1,000 people exposed for a working lifetime.

By comparison, the Environmental Protection Agency aims to reduce the same toxics in air and water to a risk level of one in one million. Finkel lays out that discrepancy in a PowerPoint presentation that he calls, for short, "What's Wrong With OSHA."

He lists poison after poison – including cancer-causing benzene and the neurotoxin methylene chloride – for which OSHA's allowable limit inside a workplace is roughly 1,000 times what the EPA permits outside.

One slide graphs state by state how long it would take OSHA to inspect every workplace. [The answer: between 22 and 227 years.]

It takes two slides to list all the health and safety regulations begun during Bill Clinton's presidency and withdrawn under Bush.

Hurricane Survivors Share With Strangers

By Mike Dowdy

I just returned from New Jersey. While en route there, I was stuck in traffic on Interstate 81, just below the Virginia state line [Bristol, TN], due to a traffic accident with a fatality involved.

This accident involved a tanker truck hauling a hazardous material load that developed a leak, which meant that we weren't going anywhere for several hours.

After being told by the Tennessee state troopers that we would be sitting still until the clean up was completed, I set my brakes on the truck and got out to stretch my legs. Other truck drivers did the same.

At one point there were five of us standing there by my truck, complaining. Sitting right beside me in the left lane were two elderly people in a Silverado pickup truck, which was loaded quite well.

WE WERE TALKING TO THE COUPLE

The man [Joe] lowered his window and asked what was going on regarding the traffic situation. Soon we were all talking with this couple.

I mentioned that if I had known about this, I would have bought something to drink [water] for I was becoming thirsty. The lady [Anna] said that they had plenty of water and sodas in the cooler in the bed of the truck, and offered everyone present something.

While she was back there, she said that she had plenty of tuna salad made up, and asked if we would be interested in a sandwich.

After some urging from Joe, we agreed to a sandwich. While Anna was making the sandwiches on the tailgate of the truck, she was singing like a songbird. To be close to 70 [I guess], she had a remarkable voice.

MISSISSIPPI LICENSE PLATE

When she finished making the sandwiches, and putting everything up, Joe raised the tailgate of the truck to close it. I noticed a Mississippi license plate on it.

I inquired as to what part of Mississippi they were from. Joe said Biloxi. Knowing that Biloxi had been ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, I asked if they sustained any damage.

Joe said that they lost everything but what they had on and what was in the pickup. All of us drivers tried unsuccessfully to pay them for their drinks and the sandwiches. They would have nothing to do with it.

GOING TO START ALL OVER

Joe said that their son was living around Harrisonburg, VA and that they were

going there. He was in the real estate business and there was a home that became open, and that they were going to start all over there.

Starting over at their age would not be easy.

I will soon be 48 years old, and I have to say that I have never eaten a tuna sandwich with side orders of reality and humility.

These people lost everything except the pictures, important documents, and some clothes.

Joe had managed to get their antique heirloom grandfather clock into the bed of the truck and Anna got her china and silverware, but that was all.

These wonderful people lost practically everything they owned and still would not accept any money for their food and drinks. Joe said "it was better to give than it is to receive."

HOME, BELONGINGS DISAPPEAR

They sought refuge behind a block wall that he had built years ago, and they watched their belongings and their home disappear in the winds of Katrina.

Joe said that during all this he had one hand holding onto Anna and the other holding on to God. Their truck and themselves came out of Katrina unscathed.

Anna was singing a song while making the sandwiches. The song is titled "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow," an old gospel song. She knew every word, and was quite a gifted singer of it.

Have you ever heard it? The chorus of this song is, "Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand. But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand."

HOLDING BOTH THEIR HANDS

There is no doubt, in my mind, who was holding both their hands. I know there have been many, many e-mails that have circulated over the years about things that will touch your heart, but this one I personally was involved in.

Forget all of the politics that the news is striving on, and think about people just like Joe and Anna. If you can, help out with the victims' relief funds.

If you cannot, at least offer a prayer for everyone. Do what you wish with this e-mail – forward it, delete it, whatever.

I know that these two elderly people got to this old boy. I will always remember them.

Joe and Anna, if by some strange way you, or someone you know, gets this, and shows it to you, God bless you!

– The author lives in Hartselle, AL

The Hall Of Shame 2008 Media Awards

By Lisa Bennett

Media sexism was a hot topic this election year. The National Organization for Women took the lead in calling attention to the issue. For years, NOW and the NOW Foundation have addressed the inclusion and depiction of women in the media.

After more than a year of consistently condemning media misogyny aimed at Hillary Clinton, NOW created an online Media Hall of Shame where the worst offenders and readers can rank them and then talk back to the press.

MSNBC's Chris Matthews and New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd both received a "lifetime achievement award" for their stubborn dedication to sexist commentary.

MEDIA ON SARAH PALIN

The Hall of Shame has grown to include items about Michelle Obama and Gov. Sarah Palin, and was one of the most popular spots on the website.

NOW presented the very first "awards" from the Media Hall of Shame this year. The honors [or dis-honors] went to the media offenders who scored the worst ratings from web visitors.

Rush Limbaugh, Tucker Carlson [MSNBC] and Charlotte Allen [Washington Post] were the "winners," and NOW presented lifetime achievements awards in absentia to Matthews and Dowd.

In her Sept. 5 "Below the Belt" web column, NOW President Kim Gandy wrote about the condescension heaped on Palin in her first week as Sen. John McCain's running mate.

If It's Not Global Warming, What Is It?

From 30,000 feet in the air the Greenland ice cap seems impregnable, nearly 800 trillion gallons of frozen water locked safely away.

Get closer and the cracks begin to emerge. Dancing by helicopter above the mouth of the Jakobshavn Glacier, near the western coast of Greenland, you can make out veins of the purest blue meltwater running between folds of ice.

What you can't see is Jakobshavn's inexorable slide toward the sea at 65 feet to 115 feet a day – an alarming rate that has accelerated in recent years.

As the glacier nears the coast, it breaks off into the Ilulissat fiord, a stream of churning ice that might have birthed the monster that sunk the Titanic.

Those icebergs are spat out into Disko Bay, 20 billion metric tons' worth every year, where they loom above the tiny fishing boats that ply these deep, cold waters.

Sail close and you'll find that these seemingly permanent cathedrals of ice,

If You Must Drink, Drink Responsibly

Much has been said and written about the many health problems associated with alcohol. Death also can result abruptly from alcohol abuse, usually connected to vehicle crashes or alcohol poisoning. These dangers make it critical that if you drink, you do it responsibly.

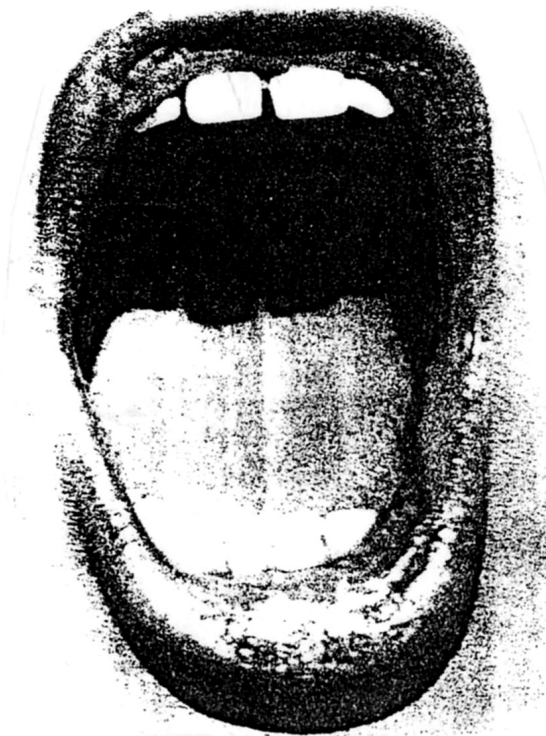
Alcohol affects different people in different ways. One individual may be affected more by one type of alcohol ["hard" liquor versus beer, for example] than another. Also, an individual's tolerance for liquor varies, depending upon his or her age, health status, medication interference and other factors.

The latest estimate is that 12% to 14% of all regular drinkers go on to become heavy drinkers or alcoholics. All of these factors can make it hard to determine just what is "responsible" drinking. In general, though, if you plan to drink, follow these guidelines:

- Never use alcohol, even in small amounts, for at least four to five hours before you drive a car, a boat or other machinery. If you are responsible for the safety of others, this is especially vital. Remember, any amount of alcohol will affect your judgment and coordination.

- If you choose to drink, stick to a moderate amount. Excessive alcohol, especially regular drinking binges, can damage your liver and other organs. Moderate drinking is best and is defined as no more than one drink a day for women or two drinks per day for men. Remember, though, that how much you can safely drink depends upon your age, gender, weight, general health and family heredity.

- Abstain from alcohol on a regular basis. Even heavy drinkers should give



Right out of the gate, several media pundits questioned whether a mother of five [including a new baby] should be running for the second highest office in the U.S. – a question unlikely to be asked of a new father with four other children.

Why would NOW come to the defense of an ultra-conservative, anti-abortion woman candidate, in the same way that we did for Hillary Clinton?

Because NOW believes women should be treated as fairly as men.

some 200 feet to 300 feet high, are leaking water like broken pipes. They're dying.

Greenland is the front line in humanity's battle against climate change. The warming that is easy to dismiss elsewhere is undeniable on this 860,000-square-mile island of fewer than 60,000 people.

More and more of Greenland, whose frozen expanses are a living remnant of the last ice age, disappears each year, with as much as 150 billion metric tons of glacier vanishing annually, according to one estimate.

If all the ice on Greenland were to melt tomorrow, global sea levels would rise more than 20 feet – enough to swamp many coastal cities.

Though no one thinks that will happen anytime soon, what keeps glaciologists awake at night is that thinking is not the same as knowing – and no one can say with certainty what Greenland's fate will be. Or ours.

their bodies at least one or two days a week without alcohol, in order for the liver to rest and recuperate.

- Pregnant women should never drink alcohol. Even small amounts of alcohol can seriously harm a growing fetus, resulting in brain damage, learning disabilities and other serious medical problems.

- Anyone with a family history of alcoholism or alcohol abuse is advised to not drink at all. A genetic predisposition to alcoholism has been documented in many families.

- Never use alcohol in combination with either prescription or over-the-counter medicine; their effect may be intensified. Antihistamines and sedatives are two examples of medicines that interact badly with alcohol. If enough drugs and alcohol are mixed, it can result in death.

Teaching John McCain

Sarah Palin was trying to explain to John McCain how she was reconnecting the Republican religious base to his campaign.

"You have to pray," she told him. "I bet you \$20 you can't say the Our Father." McCain began, "Now I lay me down to sleep ..."

Palin interrupted, handing him a \$20 bill, exclaiming, "I didn't think you could do it!"

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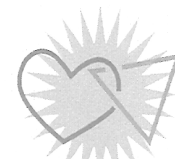
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