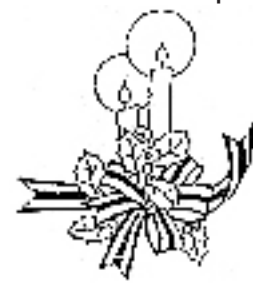




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The Reason For The Season A Special Christmas

By T.L. Spradlin

Pa never had much compassion for the lazy or those who squandered their means and then never had enough for the necessities. But for those who were genuinely in need, his heart was as big as all outdoors. It was from him that I learned the greatest joy in life comes from giving, not from receiving.

It was Christmas Eve. I was 15 and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there just hadn't been enough money to buy me the rifle that I'd wanted for Christmas.

We did the chores early that night for some reason. I just figured Pa wanted a little extra time so we could read in the Bible.

After supper was over I took my boots off and stretched out in front of the fireplace and waited for Pa to get down the old Bible.

I was still feeling sorry for myself and, to be honest, I wasn't in much of a mood to read Scriptures. But Pa didn't get the Bible; instead he bundled up again and went outside. I couldn't figure it out because we had already done all the chores. I didn't worry about it though; I was too busy wallowing in self-pity.

Soon Pa came back in. It was a cold clear night out and there was ice in his beard.

"Come on, Matt," he said. "Bundle up good, it's cold out tonight."

I was really upset then. Not only wasn't I getting the rifle for Christmas, now Pa was dragging me out in the cold, and for no earthly reason that I could see.

But I knew Pa was not very patient at one dragging one's feet when he'd told them to do something, so I got up and put my boots back on and got my cap, coat, and mittens. Ma gave me a mysterious smile as I opened the door to leave the house. Something was up, but I didn't know what.

Outside, I became even more dismayed. There in front of the house was the work team, already hitched to the big sled. Whatever it was we were going to do wasn't going to be a short, quick, little job. I could tell. We never hitched up this sled unless we were

going to haul a big load.

Pa was already up on the seat, reins in hand. I reluctantly climbed up beside him. The cold was already biting at me. I wasn't happy.

When I was on, Pa pulled the sled around the house and stopped in front of the woodshed. He got off and I followed.

"I think we'll put on the high sideboards," he said. "Here, help me."

The high sideboards! It had been a bigger job than I wanted to do with just the low sideboards on, but whatever it was we were going to do would be a lot bigger with the high sideboards on.

After we had exchanged the sideboards, Pa went into the woodshed and came out with an armload of wood – the wood I'd spent all summer hauling down from the mountain, and then all fall sawing into blocks and splitting. What was he doing? Finally I said something.

"Pa," I asked, "what are you doing?"
"You been by the Widow Jensen's

lately?" he asked. The Widow Jensen lived about two miles down the road. Her husband had died a year or so before and left her with three children, the oldest being eight. Sure. I'd been by, but so what?

"Yeah," I said. "Why?"

"I rode by just today," Pa said. "Little Jakey was out digging around in the woodpile trying to find a few chips. They're out of wood, Matt."

We loaded the sled so high that I began to wonder if the horses would be able to pull it. Finally, Pa called a halt to our loading, then we went to the smoke house and Pa took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and told me to put them in the sled and wait.

When he returned he was carrying a sack of flour over his right shoulder and a smaller sack of something in his left hand.

"What's in the little sack?" I asked.

"Shoes. They're out of shoes. Little

Jakey just had gunnysacks wrapped around his feet when he was out in the woodpile this morning. I got the children a little candy, too. It just wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy."

We rode the two miles to Widow Jensen's pretty much in silence. I knew we didn't have any money, so why was Pa buying them shoes and candy?

Really, why was he doing any of this? Widow Jensen had closer neighbors than us; it shouldn't have been our concern. We came in from the blind side of the Jensen house and unloaded the wood as quietly as possible, and then we took the meat and flour and shoes to the door. We knocked.

The door opened a crack and a timid voice said, "Who is it?" "Lucas Miles, Ma'am, and my son, Matt. Could we come in for a bit?"

Widow Jensen opened the door and let us in. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The children were wrapped in another and were sitting in front of the fireplace by a very small fire that hardly gave off any heat at all.

Widow Jensen fumbled with a match and finally lit the lamp.

"We brought you a few things, Ma'am," Pa said and set down the sack of flour. I put the meat on the table. Then Pa handed her the sack that had the shoes in it.

She opened it hesitantly and took the shoes out one pair at a time. There was a pair for her and one for each of the children – sturdy shoes, the best, shoes that would last.

I watched her carefully. She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling and then tears filled her eyes and started running down her cheeks. She looked up at Pa like she wanted to say something, but it wouldn't come out.

"We brought a load of wood, too, Ma'am," Pa said. He turned to me and said, "Matt, go bring in enough



See SPECIAL Page 19

Observations

Goodbye 2006

It was a heck of a year—the year that Democrats in the Legislature discovered their backbones.

It will be remembered as the year America dumped the 109th Congress, worst on record with a public approval rating of 16 percent.

One of the real blessings was the defeat of Sen. Rick Santorum, top Bush cheerleader who still believes WMDs existed.

It was a delight to see “red” states supporting stem cell research and keeping abortion safe and legal.

Oklahoma’s premier embarrassment, Republican Sen. James Inhofe, who calls climate change the “greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people,” no longer chairs the Senate environmental committee.

It was the year Al Gore helped the country face the inconvenient truth—global warming is a reality, not a theory.

Bill O’Reilly, the very well-oiled, character assassination machine, was again unmasked as a pathological liar.

We glory in the outing of such hypocrites as Pastor Ted Haggard, a world class bigot who denounced gay people while being one.

It was the year MSNBC’s Keith Olbermann’s ratings were way up while O’Reilly’s were way down.

The “Decider” hit bottom, with a 31 percent approval rating and more than 70 percent opposing his conduct of the war in Iraq.

Not a bad year after all.

Carrie

She was one of the most remarkable women we’ve ever met, and one of the greatest Oklahomans the state has ever known.

Carrie Barefoot Dickerson is said to have died peacefully in her sleep at 89. If she went peacefully, it would be a first for her because she and her late colleague Ilene Younghein were fighting machines.

It was their drive that led to Public Service Company of Oklahoma

finally dropping the Black Fox Nuclear plant.

In 1973, PSO announced plans to build Black Fox near Inola. Then began the environmental work that pervaded the remaining four and a half decades of Carrie’s life.

Finally in 1981, an anticipated Corporation Commission decision prompted by the work of CASE [Citizens’ Action for Safe Energy], the organization founded to teach the public about the dangers posed by nuclear power, led to PSO’s cancellation of the project.

She raised the money—even mortgaging and losing her family farm. Ilene was the technical brains behind this citizen uprising.

During the nine years of hearings, Carrie became a master quilter, designing and creating works to occupy her fingers while she listened and that she could use to help raise money for legal fees once they consumed the proceeds from selling the family nursing home.

Ilene was an encyclopedia of knowledge on nuclear power and its devastating effects on the environment. [They proved to be right since Black Fox nuclear waste became a huge health threat to nearby residents.]

After Black Fox was canceled, Carrie supported herself by teaching quilting and with a health-foods store she and her daughter Mary operated.

Never one to slow down, Carrie had been in good health and spirits, receiving excellent physical therapy and care at Wood Manor Nursing Home in Claremore.

It was there she had recently completed, under the auspices of the not-for-profit Carrie Dickerson Foundation, a children’s history of wind power in collaboration with Drumwright artist Gwen Ingram and her daughter Patricia.

Neither she or Ilene were ever inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, yet we can’t think of an inductee in living memory who rose to their level of what it means to be a great Oklahoman.



Short Takes

Facts you need to know that you won’t get from most of the media:

- According to the latest Harris Poll, only 29 percent of Americans approve of Bush’s handling of Iraq, matching the lowest mark of his presidency. The congressional approval rating is 16 percent—lowest in history.

- Nearly 70 percent of Americans say Bush did not have a plan to end the war, and 80 percent say Bush’s effort to rally public support for the conflict amounted to a change in language but not policy.

- Inspectors general from NASA and the Commerce Department are investigating if Bush’s political appointees have prevented climate researchers from conveying their findings to the public.

- The Bush Administration delayed the release of an annual hunger report until after the election. The Agriculture Department report, which has generally been released in October, has shown steady increases in the number of Americans struggling with hunger.

- An internal State Department review has found that U.S. officials screened the public statements and writings of private citizens for criticism of the Bush Administration before deciding whether to select them for foreign speaking projects.

- Eric Burgeson, who was chief of staff to Energy Secretary Sam Bodman, recently left to head lobby tycoons Barbour, Griffith & Rogers—an example of the corrupt revolving door in Washington.

Pals Jump Ship

You know Bush is in deep doo-doo when his allies turn on him.

“I think we have an administration today that is dysfunctional,” said neoconservative Richard Perle, leading proponent for the war in Iraq. “And if it can’t get itself together to organize a serious program for finding nuclear material on its way to the United States, then it ought to be replaced by an administration that can.”

The U.S. Air Force has requested a “staggering \$50 billion in emergency funding for fiscal 2007”—an amount equal to nearly half its annual budget—in part to help cover costs for transporting the “growing numbers of U.S. soldiers being killed and wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

After three years, \$2.3 billion in government contracts, and 52 company contractors killed, Bechtel Corp. is leaving Iraq. The contracting

giant has been criticized for shoddy work, cost overruns, and missed deadlines.

Further hurting Bush was a radio interview in which Vice President Cheney confirmed that detainees were subjected to water-boarding—the first such admission by a Bush administration official.

The Interior Department has dropped claims that oil giant Chevron systematically underpaid the government for natural gas produced in the Gulf of Mexico, a decision that could allow energy companies to avoid paying hundreds of millions of dollars in royalties owed the American people.

And finally, please don’t share this editorial with Bill O’Reilly or we’ll never hear the end of it. After 11 months of debate, Auburn University student government decided the “Holiday Tree Lighting” will now be called the “Holiday Celebration Featuring the Lighting of the Christmas Tree.”

Costly Denial

Global warming deniers have frequently argued that, even if global warming is real, it is too expensive to mitigate.

The National Review’s Jason Storts said it would result in “economic ruin” to reduce greenhouse gases.

Sen. James Inhofe [R-OK] said “economic calamity” would result. Rush Limbaugh told his listeners that taking action is a cost not worth the consequences.

“What’s at stake is the U.S. economy—folks—what’s at stake is our lifestyle.” Rush is right but for the wrong reasons; the economy and our lifestyles are indeed at stake if we continue to listen to the deniers.

A new report commissioned by the British government puts the “disastrous” consequences of inaction into numerical terms. Authored by economist Sir Nicholas Stern, the report warns that unchecked global warming will devastate the world economy on the scale of both the world wars and the Great Depression combined.

Unabated climate change would eventually cost the world between five percent and 20 percent of global gross domestic product each year. Nearly \$7 trillion in global value could be wiped out.

The possibility of avoiding a global catastrophe is already almost out of reach. Despite the dire warnings, there is reason for hope. Stern, whose report is viewed as an “urgent call to arms,” said that acting now to cut greenhouse gas emissions would cost only about one percent of global GDP each year, a price that will increase if we fail to act.

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Our Motto: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

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

- Adapted by Thomas Wolfe

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Observerscope

Please don't forget our Christmas gift campaign [page 19] — It plays a large part in keeping the Observer going. If you can't think of names, we have a list of worthy recipients.

Laurel: To Nebraska, Maine and Oregon voters for defeating the so-called Taxpayer Bill of Rights [TABOR]. Voters in Colorado defeated the "65 percent solution," an equally repulsive rightwing attack on education.

"Bipartisan" in Oklahoma politics is a euphemism for voting Republican. U.S. Rep. Dan Boren says he's bipartisan but he has voted 65 percent with Bush since going to Washington.

Dart: To the AG's office for appealing the ruling that adoptions by single parents or same sex parents in other states are not legal in Oklahoma. Let's hope the Tenth Circuit tells 'em to shove it.

The National Labor Relations Board has redefined who is a "supervisor" resulting in eight million workers potentially ineligible to join a union—including all teachers and nurses.

Laurel: To a Tulsa reader who said she telephoned around for her Mom's prescriptions and was surprised to learn that Wal-Mart wasn't even close to the lowest prices.

We sorrow at the deaths of five superb Oklahomans—Political activist Keith Smith, Father Paul Mollan, Tulsa oilman Wayne Swearingen, union activist H. Parker "Whitey" Sneed and the anti-nuclear activist Carrie Dickerson.

Dart: To what passes for a governor in Texas. Gov. Rick Perry told a group of fundamentalist preachers that non-Christians "are going straight to Hell."

Jay Leno asks the question: Does Bush's trip to Vietnam finally fulfill his military obligation to serve there?

Estimated number of problem or compulsive gamblers in Oklahoma? At least 35,000 and growing. [Mental Health Assn.]

Laurel: To Oklahoma Corporation Commissioners for thumbing their noses at the Legislature for refusing to fund repairs at weigh stations. The Commission is using portable scales statewide.

America ranks 27 among industrialized nations in life expectancy. For males it is 74.4 years, for females 79.8 years. Japan is tops at 85.9 for females, 78.1 for males.

Dart: To Oklahoma's U.S. House delegation for supporting a bill declaring animal-rights tactics terrorism. It includes blockades, trespassing and freeing research animals. They are unlawful but how is that "terrorism"?

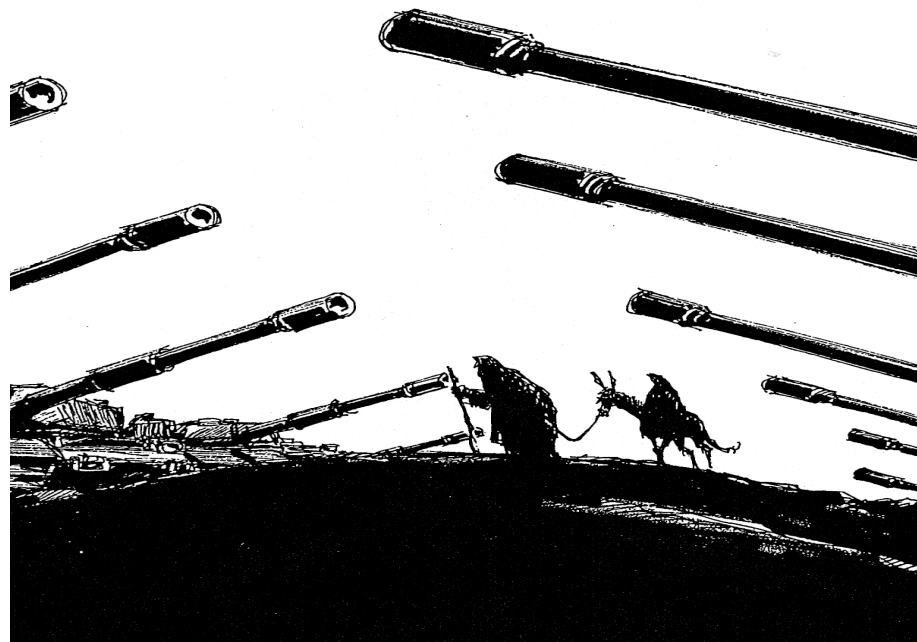
The latest Newsweek poll has 76 percent of respondents worried about global warming, 21 percent were not worried. [Nov. 20 poll]

Laurel: To Publisher Christy Everest for running at no charge a full-page ad thanking law firms, individual attorneys, foundations and corporations that donate to Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma. The state's law firm for the poor serves 20,000-plus poverty level Oklahomans annually.

Tribal casinos now operate 37,134 electronic gambling devices—up 81 percent since 2004. If the feds change the Class II gaming law, it will mean about \$75 million more for education annually.

Dart: To the dunderheads in the Legislature who are yet to pass legislation requiring background checks on guardianships. As a result, in one recent case \$15 million was recovered from a guardian with a dubious record.

Oklahoma is one of 10 states allowing straight party voting. Oklahoma Republicans want it stopped but that isn't likely to happen unless the state Senate okays it.



Dart: To the legislative minions of the Far Right already crusading for more tax cuts when there are 700,000 Oklahomans without health insurance, including one out of every three children.

Think of how many hungry children in Tulsa could be fed with the money Planned Parenthood and the Catholic Church are spending on the billboard battle over birth control.

Laurel: To the U.S. Justice Department for tracking down sexually explicit web sites available via Google and Microsoft—one percent of their total sites. Federal law requires a credit card number or other proof that minors are not accessing those sites.

The number of Americans who believe the United States is winning the war in Iraq is at an all-time low—19 percent. Fifty-four percent of Americans believe the U.S. economy is being degraded by the war.

Dart: To those singing the praises of Economist Milton Friedman, dead at 94. Public education never had a sorrier enemy, the original promoter of vouchers. He and his wife constantly slandered the public schools.

"Tucked away in fine print in the military spending bill for this past year was a lump sum of \$20 million to pay for a celebration in Baghdad 'for commemoration of success' in Iraq and Afghanistan." —New York Times

Laurel: To Attorney General Drew Edmondson for standing his ground in the lawsuit against Arkansas chicken operations polluting the Illinois River watershed. They spent a ton to defeat him but he drew 61 percent of the vote.

Oklahoma ranks 21st in tax climate by the Tax Foundation. But it failed to take into account a \$627 million tax cut package adopted this year. We're 13th in corporate taxes and 34th in sales tax.

Dart: To Baptist Youth minister David Paszkiewicz of Kearny, N.J., who as a public school history teacher told his class that "non-Christians belong in hell." Fire him.

Wonderful news! President Bush's approval rating is 31, dropping three points since the Democrats took the Congress. Oklahoma's delegation is now totally toothless.

Laurel: To The Center for Constitutional Rights for filing the first challenge to new law stripping detainees of their habeas corpus centuries-old right to challenge their detention.

We told you so. A new "power" ranking showed Oklahoma coming in at 37th among the 50 states. Sen. Jim Inhofe is ranked 50th in the Senate, goofy Sen. Tom Coburn ranks 70th. [Congress.org]

Dart: To global warming doubters. Extreme drought will affect about a third of the planet and spread across half of the earth's land surface by 2100 because of global warming, according to new predictions from Britain's leading climate scientists.

Laurel: To the 250-member Broken Arrow High School band, winner of the national championship at the finals in Indianapolis.

Hypocrite of the year nationally goes to Sen. John McCain who has flip-flopped on so many major positions even the pundits have lost count. He says he's now a close pal of Jerry Falwell.

Laurel: To Jerry Peddy of Moore, named volunteer of the year by the AARP of Oklahoma. His contributions are based on his belief that "we make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."

The Bush pick to head the family planning program at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is Eric Kereoack who is on record as saying contraception is "demeaning to women."

Dart: To UCO Professor Jan Hardt for pushing for easy ballot access. It now requires 73,188 signatures out of two million registered voters. We don't want a super-sized ballot featuring assorted nut cases.

Laurel: To the State Board of Education for requesting a \$400 million budget increase. It would help restore Henry Bellmon's education reforms and pay for a modest teacher salary increase.

THE OKLAHOMA
Observer

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Wal-Mart recently announced discounts on some generic drugs for \$4 a month in 27 states. As reported in your article, Wal-Mart drug prices were praised, criticized.

However, the article left out some interesting details. First, there still are no price cuts whatsoever for Wal-Mart customers in 23 states. Next, Wal-Mart is not discounting generic drugs in general. It offered the \$4 price on 291 of the several thousand generic drugs commonly available.

To make matters worse, part of the 291 contain, for example, 12 different variations of the common antibiotic amoxicillin. Many other common drugs appear in multiple dosages, including some already available at other stores for less than \$4.

In the end, a global corporation made a business decision to discount a small portion of one product line [even Wal-Mart says the discounts apply to less than one quarter of their generics], and received priceless publicity promoting its low price image.

The evidence overwhelmingly indicates independent pharmacies, not Wal-Mart or other chains, offer the greatest value. For example, in 2003, the state of Maine researched prices of 15 common prescription drugs at independent and chain pharmacies of all kinds statewide. The 10 lowest-priced pharmacies all were independents, beating all five Wal-Marts in the study.

Wal-Mart sells for less. Really? A deceptive corporate citizen.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, Iowa

Editor, The Observer:

There are obvious important reasons for leaving Iraq now: nearly 3,000 dead American troops; not the 20,000 we recorded wounded, but a more revealing account of 50,000 wounded, maimed or sick during this war; and at least 150,000 Iraqis killed.

G. Bush and his GOP Congress have not only pillaged the treasury domestically but have bankrupted America, spending \$2 billion every week in Iraq [and all based on a pack of lies].

Now we are on the verge of becoming a Third World country unless we spend at least \$1.6 trillion on bridg-

es crumbling across the country, dams in danger of collapsing, roads and highways in need of repair or expansion, an antiquated rail system, crumbling sewer systems, crumbling water supply systems [our water supply gets more polluted every year], many schools becoming dilapidated, and all of these systems in need of expansion.

Also is the need for mass transit systems and renewable energy systems to take our dependence from foreign oil. It is not a matter of whether we are going to do these things, it's a matter whether we want to become a Third World country. When the GOP asks how are we going to pay for all of this, I ask them how did they pay for a \$400 billion war based on lies. Get out of Iraq now while things are still relatively sane.

Jim Stodola
Corinth, TX

Editor, The Observer:

With the kind of Neanderthals we Oklahomans send to Washington is it any wonder that the rest of the U.S. thinks Okies are the dregs at the bottom of the 50-state-barrel? Coburn, Inhofe, Istook [Hallelujah! He's history!] have made us look like morons every time they open their mouths to speak. When will we become cognizant of the fact we are allowing such unprincipled people to represent us?

As a woman, I can't understand why any female Oklahoman would mark a ballot for these men who hate us. Are we suffering from such low esteem as to believe we deserve this crap? If so, then WAKE UP! Start using the brains with which we were endowed by our creator to see the truth.

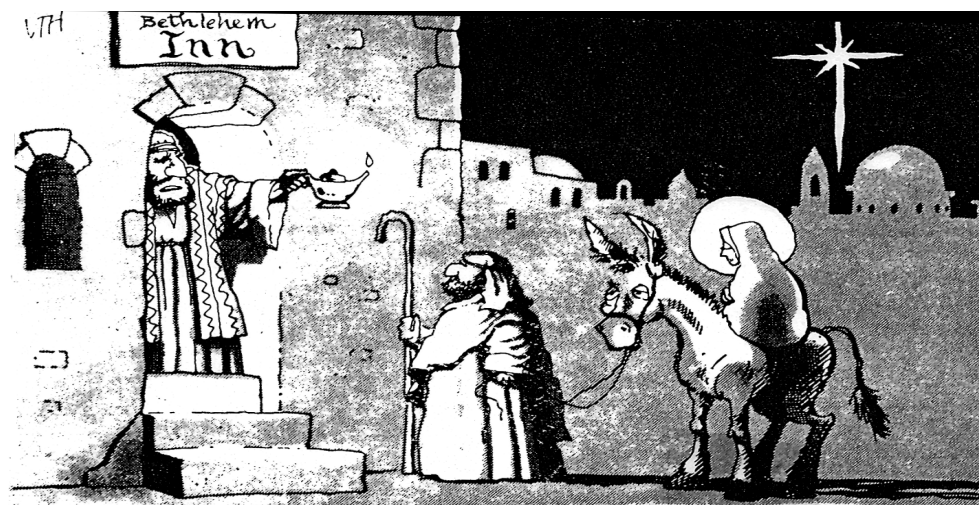
These guys do NOT represent our best interests nor the best interests of Oklahoma. We need to get rid of them!

Darla Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from the "outing" of the Reverend Ted Haggard by the gay prostitute. And I say this with a great deal of pain and empathy for a man who admittedly has suffered for most of his adult life attempting to rid himself of his homosexual tendencies.

His congregants have easily



Are you Conservative Republicans?

chalked this up to a mistake on his part and have quickly forgiven him for his "sin." But have they honed in on the real sin in this matter? I really do believe that the sin committed here was the sin of hypocrisy and not the sin of being a homosexual.

For while Rev. Haggard shrouded himself with the trappings of a heterosexual family man and while he mercilessly attacked those of a gay and lesbian lifestyle, he was himself fighting to hide his own homosexuality and committing the very acts which he condemned.

The religious world should be very careful not to condemn all gays and lesbians as sinners because try as much as they want this way of life will never be "covered under the blood" or eradicated by exorcism. If this was possible Rev. Ted would quite likely have been one most likely to have his homosexual tendencies expunged.

Perhaps the real answer lies not in us trying to change gays and lesbians but in the rest of us who call ourselves "straight" educating ourselves as to the scientific explanation as to why 10 percent of all our fellow human beings the world over, find it necessary to love others of their own sex.

It is my belief that Rev. Ted did not sin by satisfying his lust in this case but rather by indulging in the very actions for which he excoriated others.

Colin T. Bent
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Anyone that doesn't think our country is in grave danger simply isn't paying attention. Last month the Republican Congress, at the request of George W. Bush, passed a bill, which he signed into law, that effectively did away with our Bill of Rights.

The law gave raw, unprecedented power to the president never intended by our founding fathers. For the first time in our nation's history the president is accountable to no one... not Congress, not the Senate, not even the Supreme Court.

It is now legal for the president to order anyone, non-citizen or citizen, to be grabbed and detained indefinitely. No charges have to be issued. No requirement for evidence to be presented to any authority. Solely on the president's orders anyone can be detained for any period of time. There is no right to an attorney. There is no legal way to appeal to any court.

Our government does not even

have to acknowledge that they have you in custody. Our government can now legally, solely on the order of the president, grab anyone and take them to any location and keep them for any period of time they wish. It's a concept identical to the power the former Soviet Union had over their citizens.

The new law is currently being challenged in court. Instead of the Justice Department coming to the rescue of our Constitution and the former rights of American citizens, the Bush appointees are arguing against us and the Bill of Rights.

In their formal filing with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, our Justice Department actually claimed "detainees have no constitutional rights." We are actually witnessing our own Justice Department arguing against our own Constitution. If they prevail, we will cease being the kind of nation our Constitution describes. In its place we will have a single supreme authority, responsible and accountable to no one.

Hopefully, there are a few remaining Americans that don't think that's such a swell idea.

Kenny Belford
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Dear Kenny Belford: I intensely disliked your column, "Why Sooners Still Favor George Bush." It felt like making fun of Oklahoma, and I don't like that, or find it constructive. Is there some truth to your piece? Yes. But there's so much more. In our history, we have had significant left/progressive/radical/liberal people and movements, and THAT is the part of our history that makes me hopeful we can be that kind of state again!

Davis D. Joyce
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Guess what George W. Bush, you are not the decider. The American people are. And we sent a message to you and your regime that we are tired of your lies, your arrogance, your war mongering, your vote rigging and your manipulation of God and the church for your political gain.

As much as you have tried to suppress it, democracy worked. Not even Karl Rove and your buddies at Diebold could fix this one for you. The jig is up, Georgie.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Frosty Troy's Rasing Hell in Oklahoma!

Want the unvarnished truth about Oklahoma politics and government from someone who has been on the scene for 50 years? Frosty will tell you about the saints and sinners in both parties, the winners and losers who have brought both honor and disgrace to Oklahoma. Frosty is unafraid to name names. Brace yourself for glory and disgrace in Oklahoma.

**Contact: Helen Troy
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Frosty's Notebook

Wind-Up Dolls

The George W. Bush Doll, wind it up and it tries to call 911 but there is no 11 on the phone.

The Rummy Rumsfeld Doll, wind it up and it proudly finishes a jigsaw puzzle in six months. [The box said 2-4 years.]

The Dick Cheney doll, wind it up and you can count on him to lay down your life for his country.

The Gov. Brad Henry Doll, wind it up and it is a self made man whose wife is the power behind the drone.

The David Boren Doll, wind it up and it so egotistical, when it hears thunder it takes a bow.

The Frank Keating Doll, wind it up and its ambition is to die in its own arms.

The Congressman John Sullivan Doll, wind it up it and if you want it to notice you, pretend you're a bartender.

The Mike Turpen Doll, wind it up and it makes Democrats look ridiculous.

The state Rep. Randy Terrill Doll, wind it up and its mouth is so big, it can whisper in its own ear.

The Brandon Dutcher Doll, wind it up and it is so dull, it can't even entertain a doubt.

The AG Drew Edmondson Doll, wind it up and it poops on the Tyson doll.

The Brenda Reneau Doll, wind it up and the union dolls strangle it.

The Rep. Todd Hiett Doll, wind it up and it self-destructs. [Free advice: Don't wear new boots in a cowlot TV commercial.]

The Sen. James Inhofe Doll, wind it up and it catches fire while denying global warming.

The Daily Disappointment Editorial Page Doll, wind it up and it grows progressively worse.

The Sen. Tom Coburn Doll, wind it up and lesbian dolls chase it to Coalgate.

The Rep. Tom Cole Doll, wind it up and it wearies you with the patter of little feats.

The Rep. Ernest Istook Doll, wind it up and it moves to Salt Lake City.

The Rep. Dan Boren Doll, wind it up and it pulls itself up by its bootlicks.

The Tom Daxon Doll, wind it up and it loves its neighbors, especially the ladies.

The Sen. Randy Brogdon Doll, wind it up and it's trapped for hours on an escalator when the power goes out.

The Sen. Glenn Coffee Doll, wind it up and it is so narrow minded it can look through a keyhole with both eyes.

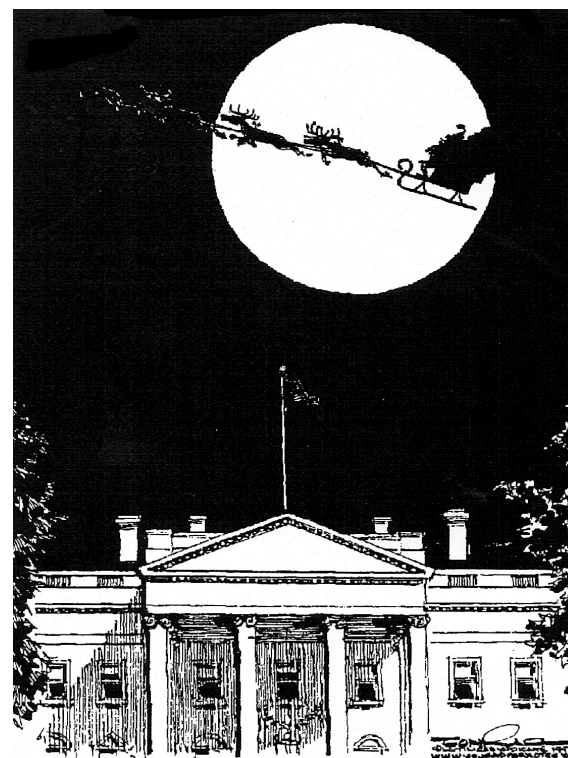
The Jari Askins Doll, wind it up and it unwinds the Todd Hiett Doll.

The Gene Stipe Doll, wind it up and it provides limitless fodder for the Daily Disappointment.

The Thad Balkman Doll, wind it up and if it wants your opinion, it gives it to you.

The Carroll Fisher Doll, wind it up and it lands in jail for making money—an inch too big.

The T. Boone Pickens Doll, wind it up and it offers to buy the state if they will rename it Easy Pickens.



The Rep. Kevin Calvey Doll, wind it up and it is like the earth—flattened at the polls.

The Rep. Sally Kern Doll, wind it up and it takes back a new scarf because it is too tight.

The Rep. Doug Cox Doll, wind it up and it tries to talk slow to the House Republican dolls.

The Rep. David Dank Doll, wind it up and its wears Odilia's old dresses.

The Sen. Scott Pruitt Doll, wind it up and the only time it knows where it's going is when it takes castor oil.

The Rep. Rebecca Hamilton Doll, wind it up and the Religious Right dolls canonize it.

The Rep. Mike Reynolds Doll, wind it up and it is a pain in the neck. Some have a lower opinion of it.

The Rep. Marian Cooksey Doll, wind it up and it gets to park in the handicapped lot.

The Rep. Ann Coody Doll, wind it up and it has a bad cold—went to the drive-in to see "Closed For The Winter."

The Rep. Fred Morgan Doll, wind it up and it runs over three TV cameras and a radio mic.

The Rep. Trebor Worthen Doll, wind it up and the David Boren Doll falls in its arms.

The Rep. Paul Wesselhoft Doll, wind it up and it hates M&Ms because they are so hard to peel.

The John Kerry Doll, wind it up and its sues itself for divorce, naming its mirror as correspondent.

The Anthony Jordan doll, wind it up and it skips unpopular parts of the Bible—such as divorce.

The John McCain Doll, wind it up and it keeps changing faces.

The J.C. Watts Doll, wind it up and it sells you a used John Deere lawnmower.

Advice From Sanity Claus

Then in a twinkling they heard at their door
A glib, smooth salesman with values galore.

A bundle of bargains he had in his car,
Goodies and gadgets priced way below par.

Imported woolens for a handsome new suit,
Magazine subscriptions and steak knives to boot.

Tw'as the night before Christmas and all through the town
Everyone was promising "the best deal around!"

The Yuletide merriment was marred by the sight
Of fast-dealing swindlers – a perennial blight.

Many stockings that hung by the chimney with care
Soon would be crammed with the gyp artists' ware.

Mamma in her kerchief, papa in his cap,
Were busily looking for bargains to wrap.

When all at once there arose such a clatter,
They ran to the TV set to see what was the matter.

And what did their wondering eyes see and ears hear
But a closing out sale [it continues all year!]

A smoothie announcer so earnest [on cue],
They knew right away what he said must be true.

"We'll save lots of cash," they exclaimed with delight,
"Let's buy all our presents this very night!"

As they reached for their money and were turning around,
In came Sanity Claus with a bound!

The look in his eyes and the twist of his head
Soon gave them to know they had something to dread.

"Outfits who use the huge discount appeal
Will say anything," he said, "to make a fast deal.

"Complete satisfaction after you buy
Is quite unimportant to this sort of guy.

"Your hard earned dollars are precious to you,
To make them go further, here's what you should do."

He looked at them shrewdly and said with a zest,
"Always investigate – BEFORE you invest.

"Don't try to get something for nothing," he said,
"You'll wind up with nothing for plenty instead."

With this warning he left and hopped in his sleigh,
To his team gave a whistle and they scampered away.

But they heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight,
"Merry Christmas to all – all who do business right."

– From the Better Business Bureau



Oh Dear! J.C. Watts Is New Deere Dealer

Would you buy a used John Deere tractor from J.C. Watts Jr.?

The New York Times has published a lengthy number on Watts and his dealings with the John Deere Co., one of the most racist corporations in America.

Watts, a former African-American congressman from Oklahoma, was hired by Deere to find black businessmen and women to become John Deere dealers after losing a lawsuit. That lawsuit disclosed that there was not a single black among the roughly 1,400 dealers nationwide.

In May, according to the Times, Watts' lobbying and consulting firm in Washington announced that, after a lengthy search, they had found the "first African-American" owner for a John Deere dealership. That dealer's name: the J.C. Watts Cos.

"I am proud to join the John Deere team," Watts said in a news release about his firm's purchase of two small dealerships in Texas.

HOW TO ACCESS FEDERAL MONEY

Now as a lobbyist, Watts has a flair for turning his lobbying assignments into business deals for himself and his clients. He's the host of a TV infomercial on how to access federal money.

Oops! It turns out that Watts' principal partner in his John Deere dealerships is not African-American, nor is he even an American. Instead, he is a South Korean businessman who, until recently, was paying Watts' firm to help him win construction work at a U.S. military base in that country.

That businessman, Keum Sang-yeon, did not end up with military work.

But he agreed last year to join with Watts in buying the Deere outlets in Texas, putting up \$2 million of the \$4 million price tags.

To be sure, no one has suggested that Watts has done anything wrong in connection with John Deere. But several experts said that it is unusual for lobbyists to have business relationships with their clients that go beyond lobbying. "I don't think it is commonplace," said Paul Miller, president of the American League of Lobbyists in Washington.

UNAVAILABLE FOR COMMENT

A spokeswoman for Watts, Pamela Mantis, stated in an e-mail that Watts was unavailable to be interviewed for this article because of his "heavy travel and work schedule."

Watts is executive director of GOPAC, a political action committee that works with Republican candidates.

A co-founder of Watts' lobbying firm, Elroy Sailor, said that it had fulfilled its assignment of helping to bring blacks into the ranks of Deere dealers, noting that he was also a member of that historic group.

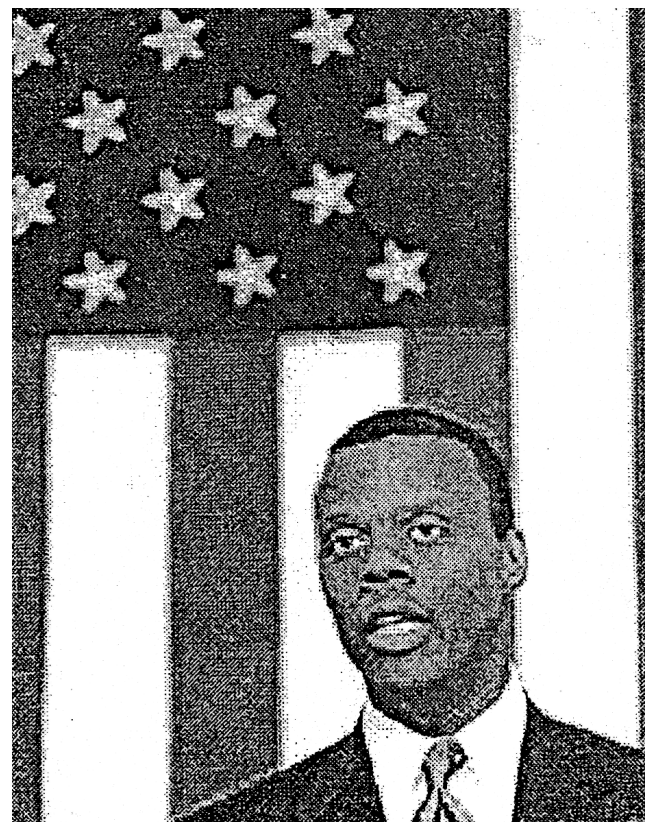
Sailor described Watts' company as the "majority owner" of the Texas outlets. However, citing the private nature of the transaction, he declined to say how much it had invested or comment on the statement by Keum's associate that he had put up one-half of the funds.

John Deere's search for a black dealer began not long after the company was sued in late 2003 by a retired black employee who had tried to become one.

EDWARDS QUALIFIED EXCEPT FOR HIS COLOR

That former employee, Kenny Edwards, appeared qualified to be a dealer.

According to court papers, Edwards had worked for the equipment maker for 30 years, becoming, prior to his retirement in 2001, sales director of its division



that sells equipment for use on golf courses.

Edwards said he didn't consider the two Texas operations "particularly attractive" and would not be interested in either.

An article in a trade magazine, Crittenden Golf Inc., credited him with "leading" John Deere to a position of prominence in the golf industry once held by a competitor, Toro.

In his lawsuit, Edwards claimed that the company had blocked his efforts to purchase two lucrative dealerships in Alabama from their owners by making excessive demands, such as requiring him to pledge additional property.

Such demands, which Edwards contended the company did not seek from white dealers, prevented him "from realizing his dream of becoming the first African-American to own a Deere dealership," his lawsuit stated.

Terms of the settlement were not disclosed.

JESSE JACKSON STEPS IN

The Rev. Jesse Jackson also got involved and eventually met with John Deere executives.

"We asked them to open up and end the pattern of discrimination," he said.

In late 2004, John Deere hired Watts to help mend the breach. It seemed like a natural fit.

In early 2005, the company, which is headquartered in Moline, Ill., also retained Watts' firm as a lobbyist to research existing and potential legislative actions that might benefit the company's dealers, said Kenneth Golden, a Deere spokesman. Last year, the company paid Watts \$120,000 in fees, lobbying reports show.

The John Deere outlets, located in San Antonio and Marble Falls, a town near Austin, are modest operations that sell riding mowers, tractors and consumer products such as chain saws.

Keum did not respond to interview requests.

It was in May 2005, lobbying records filed by Watts' firm show, that it signed an agreement with Keum to help Keum win new business opportunities including construction contracts at a U.S. military base in South Korea. Records show Watts' firm received a monthly fee of \$10,000.

Oklahoma Could Be Biofuels Leader

By Clay Pope

Biofuels seems to be the buzzword of the day. Just mention ethanol and the conversation soon turns to talk of corn, our dependence on foreign oil and government programs that either help or hurt [depending on who you ask] the alternative fuels industry.

What spurred this interest in biofuels? Does this mean a change in what energy source we use? Is rural Oklahoma on the cusp of an energy boom, only this time instead of oil it will be based on crops?

To answer the first question, anyone who filled their tank just a few weeks ago knows why there's increased interest in biofuels.

If indeed we are close to a peak in world oil production and if we continue to see new consumers of fuel come on line in places like China, we are facing a major challenge in meeting America's future energy needs.

As to the coming agriculture energy boom, the answer is maybe. There's tremendous potential in Oklahoma for the production of crops that can be used in the production of biofuels, including milo, soybeans and canola.

Other feedstock such as grasses could also be produced in our state for ethanol made from cellulose.

QUESTIONS REMAIN TO BE ANSWERED

The kicker on all this is can farmers make money when they produce these crops, and what are the impacts we will see if the current land management practices we now see are changed?

Many have suggested converting current Conservation Reserve Program acres from the grasses that now cover them to biofuels feed stock production.

While there are some CRP acres suitable for conversion back into cropland, we need to remember that the majority of this land was taken out of production to reduce the impact of wind erosion. You can imagine how bad the dust would be blowing in this record drought year if all this marginal land was once again cultivated and exposed to the wind.

Before this happens we need to have a thorough discussion on what should and shouldn't be converted to cropland and how it should be farmed.

Others speak of switch grass or other biomass to make cellulose ethanol.

This holds much potential, but many questions remain.

If you grow switch grass for fuel, does it need to be a monoculture [just one type of grass with no others included] or is there a way to use "mixes" of grasses?

IS WHOLESALE CHANGE NECESSARY?

Can we devise a system that uses crop residues and grasses that are already established on existing acres or does cellulose ethanol require a wholesale change in Oklahoma agriculture and is this economically feasible?

The recent Governor's Conference on Biofuels has helped bring these and other questions to Oklahoma's attention. State Energy Secretary David Flieschaker and Gov. Brad Henry should be applauded for increasing focus on these issues.

Oklahoma could be a leader in the area of biofuels, but first many issues need to be addressed. At least now we as a state are asking the right questions.

- The author is executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

PUBLIC FORUM

Fakirs Abound In Christmas Season

By Jim Downing

Friends: It's almost Christmas time. If we call ourselves Christians, which many of us do even if we spend very little time thinking about it, we would accomplish a lot if we spent these holidays thinking about Jesus and particularly in reading His words.

I read where 75% of Americans believe that "God helps those who help themselves" is from the Bible. It is in fact from Ben Franklin. The Bible teaches that we should first help others.

Shoppers are rioting and beating each other up to get to the sale items first, in celebration of The Prince Of Peace.

An evangelist calls for the assassination of Venezuela's democratically elected president.

We have a leader who calls Jesus his "favorite political philosopher." He says, "We will export death and destruction to all comers of the globe to protect our great nation."

He told a group of Amish that "God speaks through me."

DID JESUS CONDONE KILLING?

A soldier in Iraq asks, "Where did Jesus say that you should kill people for your nation? Where did he say that?" Well, he didn't. He never said killing was justified.

Jesus refuted much of the Old Testament. He said, "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' but I tell you resist not an evil person. If someone strikes you, turn the other cheek that he may strike it also."

He often quoted Isaiah: "They praise me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me, preaching as doctrine the precepts of men."

He also said, "Beware of those who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them."

Anyone can say, "I'm saved, I'm born again, Jesus is my savior," and so on.

But do they really even know what He said? Do they do what he advises us to do? There is no ambiguity in what He says.

WHAT THE RIGHTEOUS ARE TO DO

He said the way you could tell the righteous from the damned was by whether they'd fed the hungry, slaked the thirsty, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger, and visited the prisoner. He did not say they have the biggest guns or the fastest cars.

The idea that the Book of Revelation is about the end of the world is fairly new. Over the last 200 years many churches have sprung up, claiming that they alone have the secret as to when the world will end and when Jesus will return, even though he said that no one shall know, not even He, only the Father.

It seems much more logical that Revelation is about revelation; a guide to meditation. There is the book with seven seals, and seven churches. The sin of each church is pointed out.



It is probably no coincidence that these correspond exactly to what Hindus call the seven chakras, or spiritual centers in the physical body, the seven endocrine glands, and that those sins correspond to the urges of these. There are also 144,000 cranial nerves.

"Love God and love your neighbor. This is the whole of the law of the prophets," said Jesus. "As you do unto the least of those among you, you have done unto me."

YOU CAN'T SERVE GOD AND WEALTH

He told us not to worry about what we wear or what we eat, as God will take care of us. He told us, "My kingdom is not of this world." And, "You can not serve God and wealth."

Most of us get more philosophical and more religious as we get older. We should get wiser and the words of wise men ring more true to us.

It is an upside-down world as the Prince Of Peace is used to justify gluttony and all manner of selfishness. The Knights Templar, the KKK and Hitler have all claimed to be Christian. Rev. Moon says he is Christ. So did David Koresh and Charlie Manson.

Many do the right thing out of fear. The whole end-times-rapture scenario relies on fear. Pope John Paul's favorite saying was, "Don't be afraid."

Even our government seems to want to scare us all the time. As one philosopher pointed out, "We should follow God's rules because if we don't then we will burn in hell forever - because he loves us?"

When someone asks for your help, that is a blessing. It is your chance to show the love for your brother that God has for all of us. We should do the right thing to perpetuate righteousness, as like begets like. "As a man sows, so shall he reap."

- The author lives in Tulsa

Just The Facts On Immigrant Tuition

By Jerry L. Steward

At the state and federal level, there has been much recent discussion of immigration. There also has been much discussion of Senate Bill 596, which became law in Oklahoma in 2003.

SB 596 allows all students meeting certain requirements to be eligible for resident tuition at institutions of higher education that are governed by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

At the time of its passage, SB 596 had broad bipartisan support, although to be fair, some legislators who previously supported the law have now stated that they do not support the law.

SB 596 requires the state regents to adopt a policy that allows a student to enroll in an institution within the Oklahoma state system of higher education if the student meets admission standards determined by the state regents, and allows a student to be eligible for resident tuition if the following requirements are met:

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW

- The student graduated from a public or private high school in Oklahoma or successfully completed the General Educational Development [GED] test in Oklahoma; and
- The student resided in Oklahoma with a parent or guardian for at least two years prior to graduation from high school or successful completion of the GED test.
- If the student is without lawful immigration status, the student must file an affidavit with the institution stating that he or she either has filed or will at the earliest opportunity file an application or petition to legalize the student's immigration status.
- A student who meets the criteria in the law is not disqualified from scholarships or financial aid provided by the state of Oklahoma on the basis of the

student's immigration status.

NONE ARE TUITION FREE

SB 596 does not provide that any student may attend institutions of higher education tuition free. It doesn't relieve any student of the obligation to meet admission requirements or any other requirements of an institution of higher education.

The purpose of this column isn't to engender support or opposition to the provisions of SB 596. The sole purpose is to explain what SB 596 does and does not do and, hopefully, to diminish chances that it will be misunderstood or misrepresented.

- The author is vice president for government relations and community development at Oklahoma City Community College

Care Packages Make Difference

Lindsay's First Christian Church invites Oklahoma Observer readers to join them in supporting our Fort Sill-based troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan this holiday season. The church regularly sends care packages to the 300-plus soldiers deployed overseas from the Steel Warrior Battalion, 1st Battalion, 14th Field Artillery.

"I must say that in over 17 years of service and with three operational deployments, I have never witnessed such an outpouring of support," writes Lt. Col. Geoffrey P. Buhlig. "Having spent many days in Iraq, I know the joy a soldier feels when a package from home arrives and is first opened. It is absolutely wonderful."

Observer readers are urged to contact Pastor William H. Bentley at 405.756.2596 for an updated list of needed items. The church will take care of packaging and shipping.

Breast Cancer Bill

Coburn Putting Out False Information

By Fran Visco

Recently I wrote an article stressing the importance of political activism in the war on breast cancer and specifically highlighting Sen. Tom Coburn's role in single-handedly blocking the crucial Breast Cancer and Environmental Research from reaching the Senate floor.

I questioned his inconsistent policies. I pointed out that if he felt so strongly about the bill, the proper course of action would be to vote against it, not to derail the democratic process as he did.

I said that with three million women in the U.S. living with breast cancer, with more than 40,000 women dying of the disease and more than 270,000 diagnosed this year alone, we are not "already spending enough money on breast cancer," as Coburn [R-OK] said.

I explained that this bill was the result of years of research, analysis, discussion and compromise with policymakers, scientists and the public. His response, sadly, was to use his Senate website for a personal attack on me.

Sen. Coburn's tirade was a complete misrepresentation of the facts.

More disturbing was his effort to draw attention away from the substance of the bill by "accusing" me of being a Democrat and, therefore, unable to represent the best interests of my organization.

A VERY CLEAR WARNING

This acts as a very clear warning to heads of nonprofit organizations in this country – your privately-held political beliefs make you unfit to head a nonpartisan organization, and they will be used against you.

My goal, my purpose in life, is to serve the interests of breast cancer survivors and all those at risk of the disease, and the National Breast Cancer Coalition's membership is as diverse as America.

It is a coalition of hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals from every region or the country, every walk of life, every political persuasion.

I am proud to serve a nonpartisan, nonprofit grassroots organization that works with members from both sides of the aisle.

When someone applies for membership in the National Breast Cancer Coalition, I do not ask them who they voted for in the last election or who they have given money to.

I do not question whether the work I do will benefit members of one party or another. I serve in the interest of all women and their families. It is a shame Coburn does not take a similar view in his role as a United States senator.

COBURN'S FOG OF MISINFORMATION

In his attack, he obscured the facts behind innuendo and a fog of misinformation. My personal political beliefs and financial contributions have nothing to do



with this bill.

The reality is this: This bill is supported by 66 United States Senators, including 29 Republicans. This bill is supported by hundreds of breast cancer groups and other organizations across the country – of every political viewpoint and diverse perspective.

He is holding up a bill that could uncover what causes breast cancer. He doesn't have to agree with us, he doesn't have to change a single belief or position on the substance of the bill.

Coburn tried to explain his behavior by expressing his belief that Congress should not be directing the National Institutes of Health how or where to spend its money.

He is perfectly free to raise this point in debate on the Senate floor. Of course, he has on at least two occasions supported legislation doing that very thing, bills for autism research and research into premature births.

He didn't hesitate to tell the Centers for Disease Control how to label condoms when he was a member of the House.

Coburn did get one thing right. Almost. He said I have a "personal partisan political agenda." Though it's not partisan, as a 19-year breast cancer survivor I do have a very real personal agenda – the eradication of breast cancer. Right now, Sen. Coburn is standing in the way.

-The author is president of the nonpartisan National Breast Cancer Coalition.

Yes, Virginia! The Democrats Believe

Dear Oklahoma Democrats:

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say that Democrats don't believe in Christmas. Papa says, "Tell them not to listen to Pat Robertson." Please tell me the truth. Do Democrats believe in Christmas?

Virginia O'Hanlon

Eleanor Roosevelt Grade School

Dear Virginia:

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age of war, tax-cuts for the wealthy, and program cuts for the poor.

But, Virginia, remember that Democrats take Jesus and the birth of all poor, oppressed and refugee children very seriously – and, yes, Virginia, Democrats do believe in Christmas!

Virginia, many Democrats like Jimmy Carter try to live what Jesus stands for all the days of the year.

Alas, Virginia, how dreary would be Christmas if there were no Democrats! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no hope for poor children, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable our existence in the days of George W. Bush, Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich and Jerry Falwell.

Democrats not believe in Christmas?! You might as well not believe in good government, peace and justice! No Medicaid! No Social Security! No Medicare! No Civil Rights and Civil Liberties! No Public Schools!

Virginia, Democrats do believe in Christmas; Democrats just don't believe in the existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq! Democrats don't believe in tax breaks for the wealthy! Democrats don't believe in torturing people! And, no, Virginia, Democrats don't believe in trickle-down economics or privatizing Social Security!

Democrats not celebrate Christmas? Democrats think Jesus preached what Democrats care most about. Democrats believe that Jesus was serious when he preached the Sermon on the Mount or told people to take care of the least among

them. Democrats believe Jesus cares deeply about the poor, the sick and those who work, and that society should, too.

A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, Democrats will continue to take Jesus very seriously and seek a world of peace and justice to make glad the hearts of children!

So, Virginia, join your many Democrats in celebrating the birth of Jesus. Remember to register as a Democrat when you are old enough to vote.

- From Tim Mauldin, Ph.D.

Christmas Morning Golfing

Four old timers were playing their weekly game of golf, and one remarked how for Christmas this year he'd love to wake up on Christmas morning, roll out of bed, and without an argument go directly to the golf course, meet his buddies, and play a round.

His buddies all chimed in and said, "Let's do it! We'll make it a priority, figure out a way, and meet here early Christmas morning."

Months later, that special morning arrives, and there they are on the links.

The first guy says, "Boy, this game cost me a fortune! I bought my wife such a diamond ring that she can't take her eyes off it."

Number 2 guy says, "I spent a ton, too. My wife is at home planning the cruise I gave her. She was up to her eyeballs in brochures."

Number 3 guy says, "Well, my wife is at home admiring her new car, reading the manual."

They all turn to the last guy in the group, and he is staring at them like they have lost their minds.

"I can't believe you all went to such expense for this golf game. I slapped my wife on the butt and said, 'Well, babe, is it sex or golf?' and she said, 'Take a sweater.'"

George Will Whiffs At 9th Circuit Plate

By Danny M. Adkison

George Will recently made a point about the U.S. Courts of Appeal. There is one appellate court for each of the 11 "circuits" [regions] in the U.S. and one in Washington, D.C. [plus an oddball 13th that covers the entire U.S. but which hears very specialized cases]. Will was complaining about the court located in the Ninth Circuit. Guess which state is located in this circuit? California.

Will seems to think that a state with crazies who hug trees also has crazies for judges. Put differently, Will thinks they are out of sync with the rest of the nation's appellate judges because they are far too liberal.

He seeks to prove his point with statistical facts. Will first notes that in the last term of the Supreme Court, 22 percent of the cases it decided came from the Ninth Circuit. He also points out that only about 17 percent of the cases appealed to the Supreme Court from the Ninth Circuit were upheld by the nation's top court. In other words, 83 percent of its decisions were reversed. [This, he points out, is a success ratio that is less than the winning record of the 1962 season of the New York Mets.]

That is the beginning and end of Will's argument. Case closed. Or is it? It turns out that Will left out a few facts and in the process missed the real issue concerning federal appellate judges.

STEREOTYPE ISN'T REALITY

The place to start is with some genuine facts about the present-day status of the U.S. Courts of Appeal. First, the judges that serve on these courts go through the same procedure that members of the Supreme Court do. That is, they are nominated by the president, the Senate exercises advice and consent, and then the president appoints them [assuming the Senate gives its consent, by majority vote].

Will implies that the problem is that some of the judges serving on these courts were appointed by Democrats [like the Carter judge whose decision raised Will's ire]. The implication here is that since Carter was a Democrat, and thus a liberal, he appointed liberal judges and they are still deciding lots of cases [especially in the Ninth Circuit].

One has to wonder, though, why would Will compare the success rate of the Ninth Circuit before the Supreme Court with the 1962 Mets' season instead of comparing it with the success rate of other appellate courts? Could it be that he knows that such a comparison would indicate the Ninth Circuit is not that different from the other circuit courts? This brings us to a genuine point – not the phony one given by Will – concerning the impact of the appellate courts on the Supreme Court.

The fact is that one of the major reasons why the Supreme Court takes the cases it does [it gets about 8,000 requests a year] is because it disapproves of the lower court's decision. If it agreed with the lower court's decision, there would be little reason to take the case on appeal.

It is normal under our system for the Supreme Court to overrule lower court rulings. What is not normal [but is gradually becoming so] is the number of



cases the Court decides each year.

WILL CONVENIENTLY IGNORES FACTS

A decade or so ago, the Supreme Court was delivering about 150 full opinions a year. Now, it decides and gives full opinions in about half that number. Why? Is it because America is becoming less litigious? Hardly. In fact, one reason so many cases come from the Ninth Circuit is because California has so many cases [it also has the maximum number of federal District Courts].

The explanation can be found in the statistics that Will doesn't provide. The point is that were you to focus on all the appellate judges [instead of just the judges from one circuit] an interesting fact emerges. It turns out that 75 percent were appointed by a Republican president – meaning that only 25 percent were appointed by a Democratic one. Furthermore, Republican judges constitute the majority in nine of the 12 courts. In fact, in the all important D.C. court, ALL of the judges were appointed by Republican presidents. Not only does this court decide important cases dealing with disputes within our government, but it also is often the springboard for selecting Supreme Court justices.

This explains why the Supreme Court's workload [in terms of full opinions] has been cut in half. The appellate courts are dominated by judges appointed by Republican presidents. These judges give opinions which the Supreme Court is inclined to agree with. Ergo, they are deciding fewer cases, allowing the lower courts to have the final say. Will strikes out when it comes to pointing out these facts.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

It Really Pays To Hire The Disabled

By Jody Harlan

When Cathlene Brooks interviewed at the Oklahoma Blood Institute in Ada, Susan Scroggins flipped the computer screen around so they both could see it. Scroggins asked how to make the information readable so that Brooks could do the available donor recruiter job.

Brooks, who has macular degeneration caused by retina damage, was diagnosed as legally blind at age 14.

She had just lost two job offers because she told employers about her vision impairment. She wondered if being truthful had sabotaged a third opportunity.

Scroggins hired Brooks for 20 hours per week and extended the offer to full-time employment when Brooks returned to work after a five-month recovery from a retina detachment.

Ten years later, Brooks uses enlarged screen text to call between 75 and 140 potential donors each day. Their blood donations are needed to restock the blood supply. It is Cathy Brooks' job to talk them through the front door.

"We wanted someone who is efficient and personable, who could interact with the donors and convince them to come in," Scroggins said. "I knew we could work with Cathy because she has a great attitude, and she's done great. She can do anything the other recruiters can do."

HUGE NUMBER OF DISABLED OKLAHOMANS

One in five working-age Oklahomans, approximately 361,145, has some type of disability, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Thirty-eight percent of this group is employed, compared to nearly 74 percent of the general population.

In Oklahoma, the Department of Rehabilitation Services [DRS] helps individuals with disabilities face barriers to employment, such as inaccessible worksites, lack of transportation or specialized equipment, and employer reluctance.

The agency also provides career counseling, training and other services that build skills and qualifications needed in the workforce.

Last year, the divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation and Visual Services

helped 2,284 individuals with disabilities start new jobs, reducing their need for government assistance and enabling them to pay taxes on collective earnings of nearly \$39 million.

BLOOD INSTITUTE HELPS OUT

Cathlene Brooks first sought assistance from DRS's Division of Visual Services to prepare for work 10 years ago. She turned to the division again recently to assist with testing and purchasing TV equipment that will enlarge printed text. Oklahoma Blood Institute purchased special software to enlarge the text on screen last year.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help," Brooks advises. "I don't like to, but people are receptive. You need several in your life that you feel comfortable with so you don't overload one person."

Brooks, who is known as "the rock" of her family, has a history of helping others. She took care of five brothers and sisters after their mother died.

She and her former husband managed their disabled son Chad's care at home for many years. He had a rare genetic illness that took his life at age 13.

"There's life out there, and you can't give up," Brooks explained. "You have to figure out what's best for you in each environment you're in. There's a way to do it."

When it comes to hiring applicants with disabilities, Susan Scroggins advises other employers, "Talk to the person and get to know their strengths. Give them a chance. It will be to your advantage."

-- The author is with the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitative Services

LETTERS TO EDITOR

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Is Santa Claus Real? Ask Bobby Decker

I remember my first Christmas adventure with Grandma. I was just a kid.

I remember tearing across town on my bike to visit her on the day my big sister dropped the bomb:

"There is no Santa Claus," she jeered. "Even dummies know that!"

My Grandma was not the gushy kind, never had been. I fled to her that day because I knew she would be straight with me. I knew Grandma always told the truth, and I knew that the truth always went down a whole lot easier when swallowed with one of her "world-famous" cinnamon buns.

I knew they were world-famous, because Grandma said so. It had to be true.

Grandma was home, and the buns were still warm. Between bites, I told her everything. She was ready for me.

"No Santa Claus?" she snorted "Ridiculous! Don't believe it. That rumor has been going around for years, and it makes me mad, plain mad! Now, put on your coat, and let's go."

"Go? Go where, Grandma?" I asked. I hadn't even finished my second world-famous cinnamon bun.

KERBY'S GENERAL STORE

"Where" turned out to be Kerby's General Store, the one store in town that had a little bit of just about everything. As we walked through its doors, Grandma handed me \$10. That was a bundle in those days.

"Take this money," she said, "and buy something for someone who needs it. I'll wait for you in the car."

Then she turned and walked out of Kerby's. I was only nine years old. I'd often gone shopping with my mother, but never had I shopped for anything all by myself.

The store seemed big and crowded, full of people scrambling to finish their Christmas shopping. For a few moments I just stood there, confused, clutching that \$10 bill, wondering what to buy, and who on earth to buy it for.

I thought of everybody I knew: my family, my friends, my neighbors, the kids at school, the people who went to my church. I was just about thought out,



PROOF POSITIVE THAT PEARY DID MAKE IT TO THE NORTH POLE.

when I suddenly thought of Bobby Decker.

BOBBY DECKER HAD NO COAT

He was a kid with bad breath and messy hair, and he sat right behind me in Mrs. Pollock's grade-4 class. Bobby Decker didn't have a coat. I knew that because he never went out to recess during the winter.

His mother always wrote a note, telling the teacher that he had a cough, but all we kids knew that Bobby Decker didn't have a cough; he had no good coat. I fingered the \$10 bill with growing excitement. I would buy Bobby Decker a coat!

I settled on a red corduroy one that had a hood to it. It looked real warm, and he would like that.

"Is this a Christmas present for someone?" the lady behind the counter asked kindly, as I laid my \$10 down. "Yes, ma'am," I replied shyly. "It's for Bobby."

The nice lady smiled at me, as I told her about how Bobby really needed a good winter coat. I didn't get any change, but she put the coat in a bag, smiled again, and wished me a Merry Christmas.

That evening, Grandma helped me wrap the coat in Christmas paper and ribbons [a little tag fell out of the coat, and Grandma tucked it in her Bible] and wrote, "To Bobby, From Santa Claus" on it. Grandma said that Santa always insisted on secrecy.

THE AWFUL RUMOR WAS FALSE

Then she drove me over to Bobby Decker's house, explaining as we went that I was now and forever officially, one of Santa's helpers.

Grandma parked down the street from Bobby's house, and she and I crept noiselessly and hid in the bushes by his front walk. Then Grandma gave me a nudge.

"All right, Santa Claus," she whispered, "get going." I took a deep breath, dashed for his front door, threw the present down on his step, pounded his doorbell and flew back to the safety of the bushes and Grandma.

Together we waited breathlessly in the darkness for the front door to open. Finally it did, and there stood Bobby.

Fifty years haven't dimmed the thrill of those moments spent shivering, beside my Grandma, in Bobby Decker's bushes.

That night, I realized that those awful rumors about Santa Claus were just what Grandma said they were: ridiculous. Santa was alive and well, and we were on his team. I still have the Bible, with the coat tag tucked inside: \$19.95.

- Thanks to Joyce Birdwell for this anonymous gem

Cargill Names Leadership Team For Oklahoma House

Republican Speaker-elect Lance Cargill has announced three key leadership positions for the upcoming legislative session.

Cargill said that Reps. Greg Piatt, Chris Benge and Rob Johnson would serve in the key positions of Majority Floor Leader, Appropriations and Budget Committee Chair and Majority Whip, respectively.

"We now have our top leadership positions in place to conduct the business of the House in an orderly fashion to advance conservative policies for Oklahoma," said Cargill, R-Harrah. "I'm excited about our united leadership team as we prepare for the 2007 legislative session."

The 57-member Republican majority enters its second term, returned to power in the November elections for the first time in state history.

As Floor Leader, Piatt, R-Ardmore, will oversee the daily floor activity of the House during the legislative session from the beginning of February through the end of May. The Floor Leader also coordinates supporting votes for legislation.

Rep. Benge, R-Tulsa, returns to his role as chair of the House Appropriations & Budget Committee, a leadership position he has held the past two years. As the panel's chair, Benge is charged with overseeing the legislative formation of the state's annual budget for various state agencies and departments - including the filing of all appropriation bills and assigning those bills to subcommittees.

As Majority Whip, Johnson, R-Kingfisher, now in a second two-year term, will assist the Speaker, Floor Leader and Caucus chairman with duties pertaining to the GOP caucus, including keeping members advised of various floor and committee votes.

The House Republican majority caucus chose Cargill as Speaker-elect, along with Rep. Gus Blackwell, R-Goodwell, as Speaker Pro Tempore and Rep. John Wright, R-Broken Arrow, as House Majority Caucus Chair.

For Cargill, it is a bittersweet victory. Former GOP Speaker Todd Hiatt fired him as majority leader.

DHS Offers Hope To State's Needy

By Howard Hendrick

A single mom struggles to feed and clothe her children. A family needs care for a beloved aging parent. Children without a voice need safety, security and protection.

They all have stories. They are the stories of persons who live in the shadows of life and lack the personal or family resources necessary to care for themselves and their family. Each of them need help and hope.

At the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, help and hope are offered. Hope is offered through a reassuring word, an approval for benefits, a referral to a relevant service, or an opportunity for personal growth by participating in a human services program.

HALF A MILLION HELPED

In fiscal year 2006, we offered hope to more than half a million Oklahomans:

- 1,336 children found hope, love and strength in an adoptive family - the most authorized adoptions ever.

- 1,150 adults and their families found hope by participating in adult day services - the most ever.

- A record 2,014 child-care facilities earned two-star status and a record 189 child-care facilities achieved national accreditation and received three-star status. Nurturing, educational child-care facilities offer hope to hundreds of thousands of Oklahoma children and their families.

- A record 5,118 persons with developmental disabilities found hope through community-based Medicaid waiver services during June 2006 - an increase of 15 percent from the previous record of 4,448 in June 2005.

- Elderly Oklahomans received more than 3 million meals through community meal programs and home delivery services.

- Oklahoma's children found hope through the more than \$230 million collected in child support - the most ever.

CHILDREN HELPED BY MEDICAID

- A record number of Oklahomans - more than 700,000, mostly children - were certified through the Medicaid program, offering hope for many healthy tomorrows.

- Adult Protective Services and Child Protective Services offered hope by providing the protection, safety and security needed by thousands of Oklahomans.

- Thousands of Hurricane Katrina victims found hope through the efforts of staff that expedited emergency food stamps, both in Oklahoma and in the devastated regions.

The list goes on, as hope is limitless, imaginative and inspiring.

DHS's annual report is a collection of stories. They are representative of the hope offered to hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans by the 7,500 employees of OKDHS. They are stories of hope found, dreams fulfilled and brighter tomorrows.

- The author is director of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services

Two Thousand Years Later ...

Zealots Still Want To Politicize Jesus

By Edwin E. Vineyard

No, this is not a Sunday School lesson, nor is it a theological treatise. However, the Militant Moderate has been deeply disturbed by the warlike incursion of some fundamentalist Christian groups into politics. Apparently these folk are on a mission, led by what they believe to be the Spirit, or perhaps the teachings of their Bible. History has shown misguided zeal to be highly dangerous.

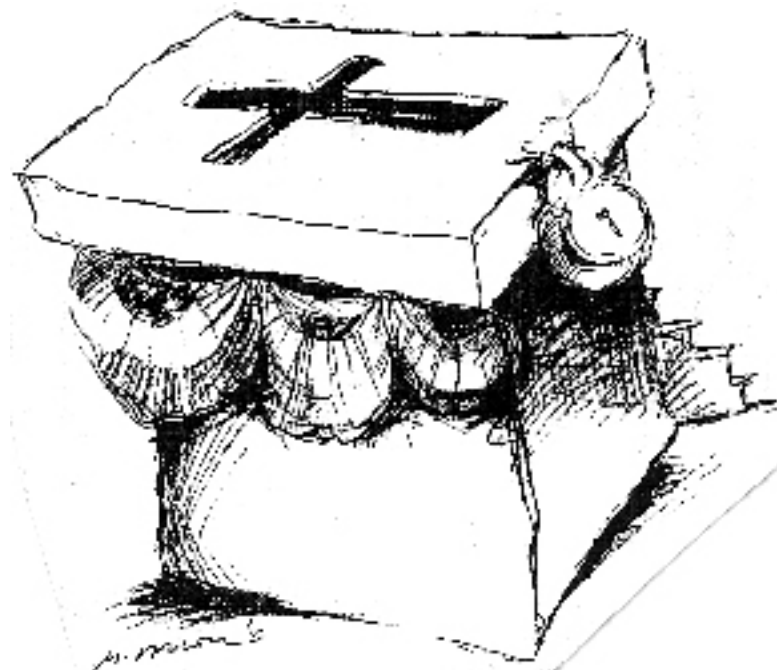
I am disturbed by this movement for two reasons: First, it is very bad politics and potentially harmful to the nation and the freedoms of the people. Second, it is a misuse of Christianity, an apostasy, and it is in conflict with the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament.

We could cite numerous examples of conflicts between the religious right movement's tactics, teachings, and principles with the lessons of the scriptures. We could also expound on the meanings of the First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution. However, in this piece we will do neither. Instead, we would like to take a different tack.

We all remember Judas, the Betrayer. What did he do? He took money from the high priests to assist in locating and identifying Jesus. Most of our lives we have been taught that Judas was possessed by the Evil One and did his bidding. Theologically, it was always hard to rectify that a close follower committed to Jesus could be so possessed as to perform the heinous act of selling out his Master for a few coins.

JUDAS DIDN'T GET IT, EITHER

Modern teachings shed a different light on Judas. Many in that day expected Jesus to become an earthly king and ruler. That temptation from Satan was very real. When Jesus began to predict his own arrest, death, and resurrection, many followers fell away. Judas was greatly disturbed. There is thought now



that Judas sought to force Jesus' hand with the arrest, causing him to have to exercise his power and take over secular rule. That is, he would become the rebel king that Judas and others wanted.

Thus, Judas wanted to make Jesus into his own version of the Messiah, and not the version intended by God and prophesied as the Suffering Servant by Isaiah.

Just as Judas was misguided, and his actions precipitated tragic results, so are our devout fundamentalists now similarly busy. They seek to turn the Christian religion into a secular political power. They are trying to bring to fruition their vision of Jesus as an earthly ruler. They disregard numerous teachings of Jesus, including one of his last ones, "My kingdom is not of this world."

In spite of their belief otherwise, it seems clear to some of us that the Christian Right political movement is not in keeping with either the text or the principles of the teachings of Jesus.

Again, misguided zeal may bring great harm to the nation.

— The author, aka *The Militant Moderate*, lives in Enid

Child Abuse Laws Need To Be Revised

By Angela Jones

My heart breaks on what seems like daily stories of children being abused at the hands of their parents or those left in charge of providing care for these small angels. I don't understand what evil lies inside a person who can do such horrific things.

What is even more confusing is what can be done to protect them and to prevent this from being a daily part of the news. It scares me that this has become just another news story.

As an attorney I am frequently appointed by the court to represent children who have been abused or neglected. While I love doing this because I feel in some small way I am doing something to put an end to this nonsense, I wish that more could be done, or even more, I wish my services were not even necessary.

I believe the first step is for our leaders to stop wasting energy, time and money on needless causes such as TABOR [Taxpayer Bill of Rights], tax breaks for the rich and so-called "lawsuit reform" so they can start focusing on things that really matter like supporting our Department of Human Services and law enforcement agencies so that they can dedicate the time and manpower necessary to protect Oklahoma's precious and priceless children.

OVER-WORKED, UNDER-PAID

Our DHS caseworkers are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They are over-worked and under-paid but they faithfully do their jobs in spite of the lack of support they receive.

The funding and support for these agencies and causes has been cut or simply ignored to the point that we do not have enough money or manpower to adequately investigate potential abusive homes, to follow-up on children returned to previous abusive situations, and to step in and protect these beautiful children before they are injured.

Furthermore, our existing legislation is a joke and does little to protect these children. After a child is taken into DHS custody for abuse or neglect, with small exceptions, all a parent has to do is meet some negligible requirements contained in an individualized service plan and they get their kids back.

Unfortunately, we frequently see these same children back in DHS custody over and over again because of continued abuse.

LAWS NEED TO BE STRENGTHENED

Our laws need to be rewritten to protect these children from being forced back into an abusive home. How many times do they have to be abused before we stand up and do something? They have rights, too!

We are fortunate to have groups such as CASA, Oklahoma Lawyers for Children and our local attorneys and county bars to help in this cause, but that simply is not enough.

I guess what I am really looking for is for dedicated readers who are sickened about these awful tragedies to write to their legislators and express their dissatisfaction and the need for more focus on protecting our children and funding for child abuse and neglect prevention and family oversight and put aside the unnecessary legislation and tax cuts that focus on big interest groups and the wealthy.

It is time for them to step up to the plate and do something that is truly needed. Our children deserve better.

— The author lives in Chickasha

CareerTech Offers Bid Assistance

The Oklahoma Bid Assistance Network, a division of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, is beginning its 20th year of service to Oklahoma companies that want to conduct business with government agencies.

OBAN recently received \$495,000 in a cost-matching cooperative agreement with the Defense Logistics Agency to help these Oklahoma companies.

"OBAN helps companies, large and small, contract for and with a variety of products and services," said Carter Merkle, program manager. "We provide training, one-on-one counseling and partner with other organizations to assist companies in bidding for valuable contracts."

OBAN has 15 bid assistance coordinators in 14 technology centers throughout the state. These coordinators work through the technology centers to provide bid matches, market research, procurement history, interpretation of technical drawings and specifications as well as individualized specific counseling sessions.

Specialized workshops and training and small business programs also are offered. OBAN plans to open at least one additional center this year.

HEADQUARTERS IN STILLWATER

It operates out of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology located in Stillwater. The state office provides resources, ensures OBAN meets the goals and requirements required by the cooperative agreement and ensures each coordinator has the resources and tools to work with the individual companies.

In 2005 OBAN's return on investment was \$418 to \$1. Each year OBAN assists 2,000 Oklahoma companies and individuals who want to do business with local, county, state and federal agencies. OBAN has four construction plan rooms in the rural parts of Oklahoma to help construction companies with drawings and plans.

They are High Plains Technology Center, Woodward; Red River Technology Center, Duncan; Pioneer Technology Center, Ponca City; and Indian Capital Technology Center, Muskogee.

For more information call 405.743.5571 to locate your local Bid Assistance Center.

**"We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty."
— Edward R. Murrow, journalist [1908-1965]**

How Fundamentalists Corrupted The GOP

THE CONSERVATIVE SOUL
How We Lost It, How to Get It Back
By Andrew Sullivan
HarperCollins, 294 pp, \$25.95

Reviewed by Bryan Burrough

I don't spend much time in Washington – maybe it's different down there. But let me tell you, out here in the wilds of the New Jersey suburbs, it is pure hell being a Republican these days, or a conservative, which used to be the same thing.

The party I grew up in, which stood for fiscal discipline and strong defense and avoided the sloppiness and stained dresses of so many goodhearted Democratic administrations, seems to have been conquered by people who think stem-cell research is murder, who want to ban unpopular sex acts and who have proven incapable of managing such basic government tasks as disaster relief and a war.

A war! That used to be the one thing you knew the GOP could run efficiently. Now, well, now it's gotten to the point where I'm just too embarrassed to admit that I'm a Republican.

CHANGING PRESIDENTS WON'T WORK

Conservatism is facing a crisis that won't be solved, one suspects, merely by switching presidents. To those of us far removed from Beltway philosophical battles, Andrew Sullivan – a columnist for Time magazine, a prominent blogger and a senior editor at the New Republic – might seem an unusual candidate to parse the problem.

He's British. He's Catholic. But Sullivan is also smart and well read, and in his new book, "The Conservative Soul," he calmly and rationally attempts to deduce the malady that in barely 15 years has rendered Reagan-era conservatism all but unrecognizable.

The pathogen he identifies is Christian fundamentalism. "The Conservative Soul," in fact, is one of several similar books issued this fall that collectively serve as a call to arms to American elites to put down their New York Times crossword puzzles and their glasses of Fume Blanc and wake up to the idea that the fundamentalists most dangerous to our future are not Islamic and foreign but Christian and homegrown.

A SIREN CALL TO ARMS

Sullivan's is at once an obvious yet much-needed siren; his text calls to mind the book Mary Lefkowitz wrote several years back, "Not Out of Africa," to rebut charges that the foundations of ancient Greek culture were built by black Africans.

Afrocentrism was so nutty that most intellectuals couldn't be bothered to answer it. The same, I fear, is true for Christian fundamentalism. Its political tenets are so addlebrained and its leaders so difficult to take seriously that it's only now – after the country has been run by a born-again Christian for six years – that thinkers like Sullivan realize that it's time for reasonable people to do something about it.

"The Conservative Soul," unfortunately, is not only too polite but too high-minded to galvanize anyone without a graduate degree in philosophy.

This is not a bad thing, just a warning. If you belong to the Elks Club, apply



catsup to your scrambled eggs or have ever read anything by Ann Coulter, this is not a book for you.

WRITTEN FOR INTELLECTUALS

It is written by a card-carrying intellectual and aimed at card-carrying intellectuals. Sullivan wades deep into the high grasses here – he is more interested in Hegel, Hobbes and Leo Strauss than anyone you've seen arguing on television, much less voted for.

The book's great value is that Sullivan takes us back to basics – we're talking Plato here – to remind us of the bedrock differences in the two schools of belief that, like squabbling conjoined twins, inhabit the Republican Party's tortured body. The first half of "The Conservative Soul," which explores the philosophical underpinnings of Christian fundamentalism and explains how they are anathema to a free society, made me as angry as anything I've read in months.

That there are people in 21st-Century America who believe the Bible is literally true, who believe the Earth was created 6,000 years ago, and who believe that our lives today should be dictated by codes of conduct written by people who lived 2,000 years before modern medicine, electricity or equal rights – and that these same Americans have influence in national affairs – should infuriate anyone with a functioning mind.

THEY ARE THE ANTITHESIS OF REASON

Fundamentalism, Sullivan reminds us, is the antithesis of reason. Its adherents – Christian or Muslim or otherwise – have been handed The Truth and cling to it, facts be damned.

Quoting figures as varied as Pope Benedict XVI and Republican Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, Sullivan repeatedly emphasizes how fundamentalism abhors the thinking mind, insisting that an individual's conscious choices – whether to have an abortion or what to order at Burger King – amount to moral anarchy.

He traces the influence of fundamentalists to Bill Clinton's various personal deficiencies, which triggered a moral counterattack from Christian leaders who felt they knew something about morality. It's a good story.

He gnashes his teeth in frustration at changes this period brought to conservatism. It's the hallmark of his book – a fine intellectual effort that, for all Sullivan's clear thinking and clear prose, probably won't change any minds that fundamentalist beliefs haven't already ossified.

- The author is a special correspondent for Vanity Fair

Escorting a Marine Home For Last Time

By Stuart Margel

While traveling to Chicago on business, I noticed a Marine sergeant traveling with a folded flag, but did not put two and two together. After we'd boarded our flight, I turned to the sergeant, who'd been invited to sit in First Class and was seated across from me, and inquired if he were heading home.

"No," he responded.

"Heading out?" I asked.

"No. I'm escorting a soldier home."

"Going to pick him up?"

"No. He is with me right now down below. He was killed in Iraq. I'm taking him home to his family."

The realization of what he had been asked to do hit me like a punch to the gut. It was an honor for him. He told me that, although he didn't know the soldier, he had delivered the news of his passing to the soldier's family and felt as if he did know them, after so many conversations in so few days.

I turned back to him, extended my hand, and said, "Thank you. Thank you for doing what you do so my family and I can do what we do."

Upon landing in Chicago the pilot stopped short of the gate and made the following announcement over the intercom:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to note that we have had the honor of having Sergeant Steeley of the United States Marine Corps join us on this flight. He is escorting a fallen comrade back home to his family.

"I ask that you please remain in your seats when we open the forward door so as to allow Sergeant Steeley to deplane and receive his fellow soldier. We will

then turn off the seat belt sign."

Without a sound, all went as requested. I noticed the sergeant saluting the casket as it was brought off the plane, and his action made me realize that I am proud to be an American.

So here's a public thank you to our military for doing what you do, so we can live the way we do.

- The author is from Washington, DC.

Little Justin's Dad

One day a fourth-grade teacher asked the children what their fathers did for a living. All the typical answers came up – fireman, mechanic, businessman, salesman, doctor, lawyer, and so forth.

However, little Justin was being uncharacteristically quiet, so when the teacher prodded him about his father, he replied, "My father's an exotic dancer in a gay club and takes off all his clothes in front of other men and they put money in his underwear."

The teacher, obviously shaken by this statement, hurriedly set the other children to work on some exercises and then took little Justin aside to ask him, "Is that really true about your father?"

"No," the boy said. "He works for Tom Daxon at the Oklahoma Republican Party, but I was too embarrassed to say that in front of the other kids."

Bush Family Values?

Black Sheep Neil NCLB Big Winner

By Bill Berkowitz

Two years ago, Neil Bush and his mother were featured guests at a \$1,000-a-table fundraiser for the Western Heights School District in Oklahoma City, with proceeds specifically earmarked for the purchase of products from Neil's company, Ignite! Learning.

Late last year, when Neil's mom agreed to make a contribution to a Hurricane Katrina relief foundation for those victims that had relocated to Texas, she stipulated that her donation had to be used by local schools to acquire Ignite products.

It must have been a long time ago that Neil Bush, the son of H.W. Bush and the younger brother of G.W. Bush, discovered that the key to unlocking the entrepreneurial vault was to take full advantage of the Family.

While entrepreneurial nepotism is as American as apple pie and Thomas Kinkadee paintings, the Bush Family has made it a science.

HE ALWAYS GETS CAUGHT

Over the past two decades, while Neil Bush has made impressive amounts of money in all sorts of interesting business deals, he has always seemed like the kid who was caught red-handed throwing chalk at the teacher, got sent to the principal and yet returned to the classroom unscathed.

These days, with the help of the Saudi Royal Family, a former junk bond dealer, a Russian mobster, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, and mom and dad, family string-pulling is again paying off.

The Los Angeles Times reported that Ignite! Learning, headed by Neil Bush "and partly owned by his parents, is benefiting from Republican connections and federal dollars targeted for economically disadvantaged students under the No Child Left Behind Act."

PLANS TO GO INTERNATIONAL

The company has managed to "place its products in 40 U.S. school districts and now plans to market internationally," the Times reported.

"Interviews and a review of school district documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act," by the Los Angeles Times, "found that educators and legal experts were sharply divided over whether Ignite's products were worth their cost or qualified under the No Child law."

According to the Times, "Most of Ignite's business has been obtained through sole-source contracts without competitive bidding. Neil Bush has been directly involved in marketing the product."

A story about these developments also appeared in a mid-October issue of BusinessWeek. Headlined "No Bush Left Behind," the magazine reported that "after five years of development and backing by investors like Saudi Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal and onetime junk-bond king Michael R Milken, Neil Bush aims to roll his high-tech teacher's helpers into classrooms nationwide."

NEIL BUSH CALLS THEM "COWS"

He calls them "curriculum on wheels," or COWs. The \$3,800 purple plug-and-play computer/projectors display lively videos and cartoons: the XYZ Affair of the late 1790s as operetta, the 1828 Tariff of Abominations as horror flick.

The device plays songs that are supposed to aid the memorization of the 22 rivers of Texas or other facts that might crop up in state tests of "essential knowledge."

Bush's Ignite! Inc. has sold 1,700 COWs since 2005, mainly in Texas, where Bush lives and his brother was once governor. In August, Houston's school board authorized expenditures of up to \$200,000 for COWs.

The company expects 2006 revenue of \$5 million. Says Bush about the impact of his name: "I'm not saying it hasn't opened any doors. It may have helped with some sales."

In September, the U.S. Education Department's inspector general accused the agency of improperly favoring at least five publishers, including The McGraw-Hill Companies, which owns BusinessWeek.

HE OFFERS NO READING INSTRUCTION

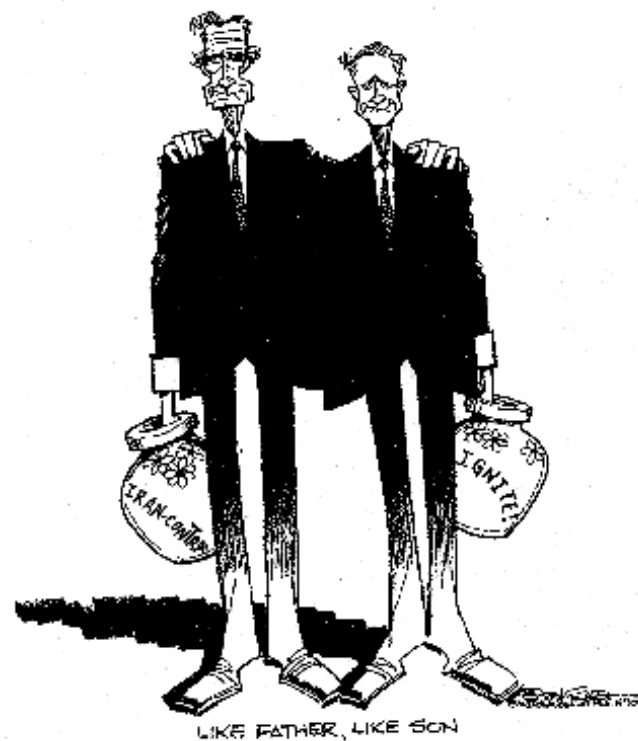
According to the Los Angeles Times, "The law provides federal funds to help school districts better serve disadvantaged students and improve their performance, especially in reading and math."

However, Bush's company "does not offer reading instruction, and its math program will not be available until next year."

Unfortunately, the Department of Education "does not monitor individual school district expenditures under the No Child program, but sets guidelines that the states are expected to enforce," said spokesman Chad Colby.

Ignite executive Tom Deliganis admitted that "some districts seem to feel OK" about using No Child money for the Ignite purchases, "and others do not."

BusinessWeek also pointed out that the Washington Times Foundation, "A foundation linked to the controversial Reverend Sun Myung Moon has donated



\$1 million for a COWs research project in Washington, D.C., area schools.

PAID TO SHOW UP AT BOARD MEETINGS

In 2004 a Shanghai chip company agreed to give Bush stock then valued at \$2 million for showing up at board meetings. [Bush says he received one-fifth of the shares.]

In 1988 a Colorado savings and loan failed while he served on its board, making him a prominent symbol of the S&L scandal. Neil calls himself "the most politically damaged of the [Bush] brothers."

The Rev. Moon, Saudi Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal and Milken aren't the only controversial financial participants. Fugitive Russian billionaire Boris Berzovsky, who has been accused of having strong ties to the Chechen mafia, has been an investor in Bush's Ignite! project since at least 2003.

And then, there's mom and dad. The former first lady got herself in a bit of hot water when she contributed to a Hurricane Katrina relief foundation for storm victims who had relocated to Texas and stipulated that her donation had to be used by local schools for purchases of COWs.

OKLAHOMA DISTRICT DROPS IGNITE

Neil and his mom were guests of honor at that \$1,000-a-table fundraiser in Oklahoma City.

While Mary Blankenship Pointer, the organizer of the event said she planned it because district students were "utilizing Ignite courseware and experiencing great results [and] our students were thriving," Western Heights school Supt. Joe Kitchens said the district eventually dropped Ignite because it disagreed with changes Ignite had made in its products.

"Our interest waned in it," he said.

At Colorado-based Silverado Savings and Loan Association, Bush presided over a monumental scam that actually cost taxpayers something north of \$1 billion.

A Resolution Trust Corporation suit against Bush and other officers of Silverado was settled in 1991 – during the time his father was president – for \$26.5 million. Bush was fined \$50,000 and banned from all future banking activities.

He managed, however, to avoid going to the hoosegow. Instead, he left the state for the greener pastures of Texas, and the opportunity to get back on the entrepreneurial horse.

The Bush divorce threatened to spill over into a tell-all book by his former wife because Neil was being downright tightfisted with the financials. He ultimately loosened his purse strings and Sharon's book was shelved.

Nevertheless, the public's right-to-know was advanced – although some might argue that it was set back – when it was revealed in Bush's deposition that during numerous business trips to Asia, Neil was a serial recipient of late-night visits by anonymous prostitutes, assignments that he apparently didn't have to pay for.

BUSH'S UNUSUAL BUSINESS DEALS

In a post dated October 6, Wonkette pointed to several of Neil Bush's unusual business assignments:

- "He earned \$2 million from a semiconductor company in China owned by the son of former Chinese president Ciang Zemin – proving once again the long-term value of Poppy's years as U.S. ambassador to communist China."
- He started up "a new company created just for him with \$2.3 million from Bush Family confidant Louis Marx. Neil burned through that money in two years and Apex Energy was no more."
- "He moved on to the Middle East, using Poppy's oil-sheik connections to get millions from the royalty and politicians of Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Dubai and of course Saudi Arabia."

• "Neil ran some shadowy Swiss 'ecumenical foundation' [the Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue] in the 1990s" with Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI.

On January 2, 2004, the Associated Press reported, in a story headlined "Neil Bush makes one-day profit over \$170,000," that Neil Bush "made at least \$798,218 on three stock trades in a small U.S. high-tech company where he had been a consultant, according to his tax returns, including \$171,370 buying and selling the company's shares in a single day."

He characterized the Times' piece as "entirely political."

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What The Amish Are Teaching Americans

By Sally Kohn

On October 2, Charles Carl Roberts entered a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish community of Nickel Mines, PA. He lined up 11 young girls from the class and shot them each at point blank range.

The gruesome depths of this crime are hard for any community to grasp, but certainly for the Amish, who live such a secluded and peaceful life, removed even from the everyday depictions of violence on TV.

When the Amish were suddenly pierced by violence, how did they respond?

The evening of the shooting, Amish neighbors from the Nickel Mines community gathered to process their grief with each other and mental health counselors.

As of that evening, three little girls were dead. Eight were hospitalized in critical condition. [One more girl has died since.] According to reports by counselors who attended the grief session, the Amish family members grappled with a number of questions: Do we send our kids to school tomorrow? What if they want to sleep in our beds tonight, is that okay?

ONE SURPRISING QUESTION

But one question they asked might surprise us outsiders. What, they wondered, can we do to help the family of the shooter?

Plans were already underway for a horse-and-buggy caravan to visit Charles Carl Roberts' family with offers of food and condolences. The Amish, it seems, don't automatically translate their grieving into revenge. Rather, they believe in redemption.

Meanwhile, the United States culture from which the Amish are isolated is moving in the other direction – increasingly exacting revenge for crimes and punishing violence with more violence.

In 26 states and at the federal level, there are “three strikes” laws in place.

Conviction for three felonies in a row now warrants a life sentence without parole, even for the most minor crimes.

For instance, Leandro Andrade is serving a life sentence, his final crime involving the theft of nine children's videos – including “Cinderella” and “Free Willy” – from a Kmart.

TRIGGERING MANDATORY SENTENCES

Similarly, in many states [including Oklahoma] and at the federal level, possession of even small amounts of drugs trigger mandatory minimum sentences of extreme duration.

In New York, Elaine Bartlett was just released from prison, serving a 20-year sentence for possessing only four ounces of cocaine.

This is in addition to the 60 people who were executed in the United States in 2005, among the more than a thousand killed since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976.

The President of the United States is still actively seeking authority to torture and abuse alleged terrorists, whom he consistently dehumanizes as rats to be “smoked from their holes,” even without evidence of their guilt.

Our patterns of punishment and revenge are fundamentally at odds with the deeper values of common humanity that the tragic experience of the Amish are helping to reveal.



Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done in life. Someone who cheats is not only a cheater. Someone who steals something is not only a thief. And someone who commits a murder is not only a murderer.

The same is true of Charles Carl Roberts. We don't yet know the details of the episode in his past for which, in his suicide note, he said he was seeking revenge. It may be a sad and sympathetic tale. It may not.

HIS ACTIONS ARE INEXCUSABLE

Either way, there's no excusing his actions. Whatever happened to Roberts in the past, taking the lives of others is never justified. But nothing Roberts has done changes the fact that he was a human being, like all of us. We all make mistakes.

Roberts' were considerably and egregiously larger than most. But the Amish in Nickel Mines seem to have been able to see past Roberts' actions and recognize his humanity, sympathize with his family for their loss, and move forward with compassion not vengeful hate.

We've come to think that “an eye for an eye” is a natural, human reaction to violence. The Amish, who live a truly natural life apart from the influences of our violence-infused culture, are proving otherwise. If, as Gandhi said, “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind,” then the Amish are providing the rest of us with an eye-opening lesson.

– The author is director of the Movement Vision Project at the Center for Community Change

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The Saga Of The Christmas Memo

DECEMBER 1

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

I'm happy to inform you that the company Christmas Party will take place on December 23rd at Luigi's Open Pit barbecue. There will be lots of spiked eggnog and a small band playing traditional carols ... feel free to sing along. And don't be surprised if our CEO shows up dressed as Santa Claus to light the Christmas tree! Exchange of gifts among employees can be done at that time; however, no gift should be over \$10. Merry Christmas to you and your family. Patty Lewis, Human Resources Director.

DECEMBER 2

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

In no way was yesterday's memo intended to exclude our Jewish employees. We recognize that Hanukkah is an important holiday that often coincides with Christmas [though unfortunately not this year]. However, from now on we're calling it our “Holiday Party.” The same policy applies to employees who are celebrating Kwanzaa at this time. There will be no Christmas tree and no Christmas carols sung. Happy Holidays to you and your family. Patty

DECEMBER 3

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

Regarding the anonymous note I received from a member of Alcoholics Anonymous requesting a non-drinking table, I'm happy to accommodate this request, but, don't forget, if I put a sign on the table that reads, “AA Only,” you won't be anonymous anymore. In addition, forget about the gifts exchange – no gifts will be allowed since the union members feel that \$10 is too much money. Patty.

DECEMBER 7

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

I've arranged for members of Overeaters Anonymous to sit farthest from the dessert buffet and pregnant women closest to the restrooms. Gays are allowed to sit with each other. Lesbians do not have to sit with the gay men. Each will have their table. Yes, there will be a flower arrangement for the gay men's table. Happy now? Patty.

DECEMBER 9

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

People, people – nothing sinister was intended by wanting our CEO to play Santa Claus! Even if the

anagram of “Santa” does happen to be “Satan,” there is no evil connotation to our own “little man in a red suit.” Patty.

DECEMBER 10

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

Vegetarians – I've had it with you people! We're going to hold this party at Luigi's Open Pit whether you like it or not. You can just sit at the table farthest from “the grill of death,” as you put it, and you'll get salad bar only, including hydroponic tomatoes. But, you know, tomatoes have feelings, too. They scream when you slice them. I've heard them scream. I'm hearing them right now ... Ha! I hope you all have a rotten holiday! Drive drunk and die, you hear me? Patty.

DECEMBER 14

To: ALL EMPLOYEES

I'm sure I speak for all of us in wishing Human Resources Director Patty Lewis a speedy recovery from her stress-related illness. I'll continue to forward your cards to her at the sanitarium. In the meantime, management has decided to cancel our Holiday Party and give everyone the afternoon of the 23rd off with full pay. Happy Holidays! Terri Bishop, Acting Human Resources Director

Pelosi Success Hinges On Picking Battles

By Susan Estrich

Turns out that being a winner has helped Nancy Pelosi in the eyes of the American people, which may be a lesson for her speakership. John Kerry, on the other hand, is losing friends fast, and Hillary now faces the problem that her husband is more likeable than she is. Those are among the findings of a Quinnipiac University Polling Institute survey, which creates a “thermometer reading” for national leaders as of the week after the Democrats took over Congress.

According to the “thermometer readings,” the hottest guy in American politics is Rudolph Giuliani, at 64.2 on a scale of one to 100, voters having been asked to rate the warmth of their feelings for each of the leaders numerically, unless they didn’t know enough to have an opinion.

In the case of the former New York mayor best known for his leadership on 9/11, only nine percent of the survey sample opted out because of lack of knowledge.

Numbers like these would be extremely good news for Giuliani if the Republican Party ran a national primary, or four regional primaries, instead of a complex marathon in which insiders and activists on the right exercise disproportionate influence.

EVEN EVANGELICALS LIKE RUDY – FOR NOW

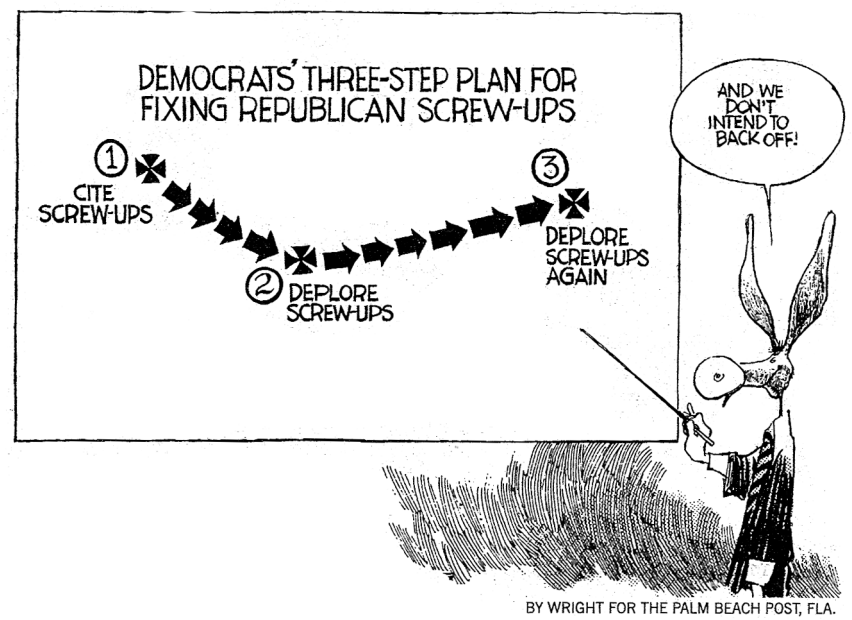
Even so, as of now, there is no difference in Giuliani’s popularity between white Protestants and white born-again evangelical Christians, though many expect the latter will ultimately have difficulty with the New Yorker’s positions on abortion [pro-choice] and gay rights [supportive].

Running second on the warmth scale is the new kid on the block, speaking in terms of presidential politics, Barack Obama, who almost no one really knows enough about to evaluate, but only 41 percent admitted that. The rest gave him a score of 58.8, allowing him to nose out Sen. John McCain at 57.7, Condoleezza Rice at 56.1 and Bill Clinton at 55.8 [1 percent of the sample said they didn’t know enough about the former president to form an opinion – it’s not clear where those people have been].

Hillary doesn’t show up until ninth place, after Joe Lieberman and John Edwards.

BILL MORE POPULAR THAN HILL

What’s striking is that with the exception of women, who rate them about the same, voters in every other group like Hillary by a margin of six to nine points less than her husband, whether you’re talking about men [36 to 27], white Prot-



estants [41 to 35], white Catholics [33 to 27] or white born-again Christians [46 to 38]; these are the percentages that put her in the very lowest category.

What’s wrong? How did Hillary come to be hated so much more than her husband when her greatest sin, in most people’s eyes, was standing by him?

That is a question the disparity in their popularity makes inevitable. This is going to be one fun campaign.

But Hillary is beloved compared to John Kerry. According to those who know him, this is a message he will not get. He is about to do a book with Teresa. That will certainly change things.

To quote Borat: Not.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING KERRY

John Kerry comes in last on likeability. In the last year, his numbers have been heading steadily in the wrong direction. The number who put him in the lowest category has grown steadily, to more than a third of the country. Overall, his thermometer reading is a paltry 39.6 – 25 degrees lower than the former New York mayor.

While Kerry is falling, Pelosi is climbing. A week after the election, she scored 12 points higher than she was in early September, and two-thirds of the electorate says it knows enough about her to form an opinion.

If it is, as Peter Brown, the assistant director of the Quinnipiac Polling Institute, suggests, “because everyone loves a winner,” then Pelosi has to keep winning. She can’t afford ugly, losing inside fights like the Hoyer-Murtha battle. Save it for big stuff. What goes up can go down. Just ask John Kerry. He used to be a contender.

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Back To The Future: Poppy To The Rescue

By Molly Ivins

AUSTIN, Texas – There’s been so much in print about how Daddy 41’s people are back in the saddle, I was terrified when I saw a photo of Dan Quayle among the pack. If they’ve called back Dan Quayle to lend intellectual heft, we’re all dead ducks. Fortunately, it was just a file picture of Quayle with the old team.

It does seem that we may be going back to the typical modus operandi of Dubya. Poppy Bush has helped Junior out of the Vietnam War, his failures in the oil business and other efforts all of his “adult” life.

Unfortunately for us and for the world, the people from the first Bush administration who initially joined this administration were Dick Cheney and Don Rumsfeld. Not exactly the most diplomatic, forward-looking, helpful people to be guiding Dubya.

During the first Gulf War, Bush 41 and his administration knew what it would be like if they tried to take Baghdad – and opted not to go in. Now, the more sober-headed people from that administration are moving in to try to clean up the mess Junior made in his Iraq excursion.

SO LONG, RUMMY

Meanwhile, let us bid farewell and adieu to Brother Donald Rumsfeld, who is so full of wisdom he does not seem to be able to apply it. As a parting gift, here are some of his classic quotes:

1. “If you develop rules, never have more than 10.”
2. “Don’t think of yourself as indispensable or infallible. As Charles De Gaulle said, the cemeteries of the world are full of indispensable men.”
3. “Needless to say, the president is correct. Whatever it was he said.”
4. “I don’t do quagmires.”
5. “I don’t do diplomacy.”
6. “I don’t do foreign policy.”
7. “I don’t do predictions.”
8. “I don’t do numbers.”
9. “I don’t do book reviews.”
10. “Don’t divide the world into ‘them’ and ‘us.’ Avoid infatuation with or resentment of the press, the Congress, rivals or opponents. Accept them as facts. They have their jobs, and you have yours.”
11. “Don’t say, ‘The White House wants.’ Buildings can’t want.”
12. “If I know the answer, I’ll tell you the answer. And if I don’t, I’ll just re-

spond cleverly.”

13. “I believe what I said yesterday. I don’t know what I said, but I know what I think, and, well, I assume it’s what I said.”

RUMMY SAID THE DARNDEST THINGS

In fact, I’m rather going to miss Rumsfeld’s Zen-like nuggets of wisdom, the most famous of which is probably about the known unknowns and the unknown unknowns:

“As we know, there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”

According to Newsweek, Air Force Secretary Jim Roche went to Rumsfeld early on and said, “Don, you do realize that Iraq could be another Vietnam.”

Replied Rummy: “Vietnam? You think you have to tell me about Vietnam? Of course it won’t be Vietnam. We are going to go in, overthrow Saddam, get out. That’s it.”

I don’t know what happened to that excellent plan, but I would like to know who knew it was unknowable.

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Services To Mark MLK’s Birthday, Honor Two Civil Rights Giants

A nationally-renowned theologian will headline the Church of the Open Arms’ Jan. 14 commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King’s birthday.

Dr. Randall C. Bailey, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Hebrew Bible at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, will speak during the Oklahoma City church’s regular 10:45 a.m. service.

At 3 p.m., he also will speak during a special service honoring Clara Luper and the Rev. Orra Compton for their contributions to Dr. King’s dream of racial reconciliation.

The church is located at 3131 N. Pennsylvania. For more information, call 405.525.9555.

Finding A Gift For Mike's Christmas

By Beverly Wilbanks

It's just a small, white envelope stuck among the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past 10 years or so.

It all began because my husband Mike hated Christmas. Oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it. Overspending – the frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and the dusting powder for Grandma – the gifts given in desperation because you couldn't think of anything else.

Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, ties and so forth. I reached for something special just for Mike.

The inspiration came in an unusual way. Our son Kevin, who was 12 that year, was wrestling at the junior level at the school he attended, and shortly before Christmas, there was a non-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church, mostly black.

STARTLING CONTRAST BETWEEN RICH AND POOR

These youngsters, dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together, presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes.

As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear, a kind of light helmet designed to protect a wrestler's ears. It was a luxury the ragtag team obviously could not afford. Well, we ended up walloping them, taking every weight class.

As each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that couldn't acknowledge defeat.

Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly. I wish just one of them could have won, he said. They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them.

I HAD AN IDEA FOR MIKE'S PRESENT

Mike loved kids – all kids – and he knew them, having coached little league football, baseball and lacrosse. That's when the idea for his present came.

That afternoon, I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church.

On Christmas Eve, I placed the envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me.

His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years.

For each Christmas I followed the tradition, one year sending a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, another year a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground the week before



Christmas, and on and on.

THE HIGHLIGHT OF OUR CHRISTMAS

The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents.

As the children grew, toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure.

The story doesn't end there. You see, we lost Mike last year due to dreaded cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was still so wrapped in grief that I barely got the tree up.

But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree, and in the morning, it was joined by three more. Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad.

The tradition has grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren standing around the tree with wide-eyed anticipation watching as their fathers take down the envelope.

Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit, will always be with us.

May we all remember Christ, who is the reason for the season, and the true Christmas spirit this year and always.

BEVERLY@PRODIGY.NET

Bush Crowd Drops The Word "Hunger"

By Marie Cocco

It hasn't the zesty political punch of that Reagan-era effort to turn ketchup into a vegetable. But really, could there be a more unfortunate time for the Agriculture Department to banish the word "hunger" from its description of people who are, well, hungry?

Just a week before Thanksgiving the Bush crowd came up with a new definition for the millions among us who are more likely to turn up at a food pantry than at a well-set dining table.

They are now to be known as people with "very low food security." They were previously known as "food insecure, with hunger." Those who had some, but not much more to eat were known as "food insecure, without hunger."

Now they're just suffering from "low food security." The linguistic legerdemain doesn't change the method the USDA uses to count Americans – it says there are about 35.1 million – who are uncertain of having enough food or simply don't have enough money to buy it.

HUNGER CLIMBING FOR FIVE YEARS

The number of people without sufficient resources to get food has been climbing for five years under Bush, but leveled off in the latest survey, the department says.

The worst-off households fared worse, with the number of people described as having "very low food security" climbing from 10.7 million to 10.8 million.

These are households in which "the food intake of some household members was reduced and their normal eating patterns were disrupted" because they couldn't buy food. In a word, they went hungry.

The switch of bureaucratic jargon came about after the White House budget office questioned why the agriculture researchers actually called hungry people "hungry."

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY HUNGRY AMERICANS?

The new wording raises a meaningful question: Why are more than 35 million Americans going without food, or without enough of it?

About half of people who turned to a charitable food pantry last year already were living in households that received federal food stamps, the USDA's annual

survey says.

An even greater proportion – 66 percent of those who turned to pantries – received at least some form of federal food assistance, including school lunches and the feeding program for women, infants and children [WIC].

"It's a 10-year story," says Jim Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center. The 1996 welfare overhaul threw millions of legal immigrants and able-bodied adults without children out of the food stamp program.

Though Congress restored eligibility little by little, it neglected to alter the program in ways that would stretch food-assistance dollars far enough to keep up with the economic changes buffeting low-income people.

DEPRESSED, STAGNANT WAGES

Food stamp allotments assume that a family spends at least some of its own money on food. But depressed and stagnant wages for unskilled workers, coupled with astronomical rents, now leave them without the cash the government assumes they'll have to feed themselves.

The average food stamp benefit allows \$1 per person, per meal, according to Dottie Rosenbaum, a food assistance expert at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

"They don't have other income to purchase food," Rosenbaum says. "Their food stamps may run out two weeks into the month." And when was the last time you made homemade chickpea dip?

The market basket of items the government uses to determine how much it costs a food stamp recipient to make "thrifty" foods relies heavily on the purchase of raw ingredients such as beans, which are then to be miraculously transformed into meals made from scratch.

It's a feat few middle-class families can accomplish these days. For most food stamp recipients – the disabled, the elderly and low-wage workers with long and sometimes unpredictable hours – it's mission impossible.

Congress is due to reauthorize the food stamp program next year – a task that would usually draw little attention. Now we know the problem isn't really what we call those who are hungry. It's finding a better way to feed them.

Truthdig.com

Not A Very Merry Christmas For Vets

By Edward Humes

When Ronald Reagan convinced the nation that the nine most dangerous words in the English language are "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you," he knew better even if his audience didn't.

Reagan was a member of the World War II generation and half his colleagues in Hollywood, from Newman to McQueen to Matthau, got their education, training and first homes through the biggest of big government programs, the G.I. Bill.

Yet Reagan's 1980s cynical laugh line has become 21st Century conventional wisdom, justification for slashing and spurning every government cause that doesn't have pork on its label – shortchanging even the veterans our current leadership claims to support.

Consider these two contrasting images to understand just how far we've sunk since June 1944, when Franklin Roosevelt signed the original G.I. Bill:

After World War II, millions of veterans lined up for hours for a remarkable purpose: to register for free college education, to buy homes with no money down and mortgages cheaper than rent, to sign up for vocational training and job counseling, and to apply for business and farm loans – all courtesy of Uncle Sam and the original G.I. Bill.

VETERANS STANDING IN BREAD LINES

In the wake of the Iraq war and occupation, very different but no less remarkable lines now snake across many military bases nationwide: bread lines.

This is the dirty secret in a war filled with them: Thousands of military families have been left so desperate they must queue up for donations of surplus cheese, day-old bread and damaged boxes of frozen food.

This is especially true for bases in areas with high costs of living, such as the Marines' Camp Pendleton near San Diego, where food lines have become a weekly fixture.

When our warriors come home from Iraq, all too many find empty bank accounts, maxed-out credit cards and the realization that the college benefits used to entice enlistees won't cover the costs of a four-year degree, nor support their families while they're in class.

BLOWING \$10 MILLION AN HOUR

Still others, wounded in a war costing the country \$10 million an hour, learn that their president and Congress have cut programs to heal their injuries, post-combat stress, and economic distress.

"It is a scandal," says Paul Rieckhoff, director of the Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America. "You can be sent to Rikers Island [New York's jail], and you'll get better transitional assistance when you get released than you do getting out of the Marines."

Sadly, this is not merely a story of slighted veterans, but of America's dismal failure to invest in its future. Just imagine how a politician today would be pilloried if he proposed offering an entire generation free college, subsidized mortgages, job training and medical care.

Why that would be a costly boondoggle, outright social engineering – it would violate Reagan's dictum that government isn't the solution, it's the problem.

THE GI BILL WAS BIPARTISAN

Today's unthinkable was yesterday's matter of course. In the midst of war, FDR and Congress overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan G.I. Bill to aid 16 million veterans – one out of eight Americans – rebuild their lives.

This investment in America's future powered far more than a return to the status quo. It transformed the nation and the American Dream. It opened up the colleges [formerly elite bastions], raised suburbs out of bean fields [a nation of renters became a nation of homeowners], grew the middle class [from 1 in 10 before the war to 1 in 3 a decade after], and provided the medical, engineering and scientific prowess to conquer dread diseases, usher in the information age, and win the Cold War.

Such luminaries as Bob Dole, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, William Rehnquist, Warren Christopher, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush, and George McGovern,



among many others, got their starts through the G.I. Bill, as did 14 Nobel Prize winners, two dozen Pulitzer Prize winners, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 450,000 engineers and a million assorted lawyers, nurses, businessmen, artists, actors, writers and pilots.

IT WAS GOVERNMENT, NOT THE MARKET

We seem to have forgotten that it was not unfettered free markets that transformed postwar America so much as a massive government program that intervened mightily in the housing, lending and education businesses, pushing [and subsidizing] them in ways they had long resisted – spreading the wealth as never before. Or since.

Costly? Sure, but the G.I. Bill was truly a hand-up, not a hand-out. It more than paid for itself. A 1988 congressional study found that every dollar spent on education under the bill returned \$7 through increased productivity, consumer spending and tax revenue. Fifty billion [in today's dollars] earned a \$350 billion return.

Unlike the \$450 billion and counting being flushed down the Iraq drain, the G.I. Bill left us safer, stronger, more united, and more prosperous. That's called investing in the future – not for the next quarter, but the next quarter century.

The original G.I. Bill had sweeping power because it touched a whole generation. Today's pale imitation reaches less than 1% of Americans. Decency and patriotism demand that it be strengthened, and our vets deserve every cent.

U.S. NEEDS AN ENGINE OF OPPORTUNITY

Short of world war and a massive draft, it will never again be the same engine of opportunity. And America needs such an engine.

Before he died, FDR had a solution: national service. Young people would do good while earning education, medical, housing and pension benefits – not just veterans, but everyone, a civilian G.I. Bill.

Polls suggested a receptive public, but the idea died with FDR. Bill Clinton tried a modest resurrection with his AmeriCorps project. Much more is needed.

In an era when college is a growing financial burden for families, when home ownership grows less affordable each day, when we are losing our competitive edge in advanced degrees, and when the American Dream so generously nurtured after World War II is under siege, it is time again to expect greatness from our government – our common enterprise, our commonwealth.

It is time to realize Reagan's old saw was not truism but self-fulfilling prophecy. Before he convinced us otherwise, our magnificent American government bested the Great Depression, created Social Security, won World War II, ended racial segregation, eradicated the scourges of polio and small pox, harnessed the atom, put a man on the moon, invented the Internet, rebuilt war-ravaged Europe and Japan with the Marshall Plan, and raised America to new heights with the visionary G.I. Bill. Such is the legacy of greatness we inherited.

Now, for the first time in our history, polls show that Americans expect their children to inherit less prosperous lives than the current generation, a direct result of our embrace of those nine dangerous words. Is that really the legacy we want to leave behind?

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What A Difference A Century Makes

Here are statistics for the Year 1906:

The average life expectancy was 47 years. Only 14 percent of the homes had a bathtub. Only 8 percent of the homes had a telephone. There were only 8,000 cars and only 144 miles of paved roads. The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph.

The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower. The average wage in 1906 was 22 cents per hour. The average worker made between \$200 and \$400 per year.

A competent accountant could expect to earn \$2,000 per year, a dentist \$2,500 per year, a veterinarian been \$1,500 and \$4,000 per year, and a mechanical engineer about \$5,000 per year.

More than 95 percent of all births took place at home. Ninety percent of all doctors had no college. Instead, they attended so-called medical schools, many of which were condemned in the press and the government as "substandard."

Sugar cost four cents a pound. Eggs were 14 cents a dozen. Coffee was 15 cents a pound.

Most women only washed their hair once a month, and used borax or egg

yolks for shampoo.

Canada passed a law that prohibited poor people from entering into the country for any reason.

Five leading causes of death were: [1] pneumonia and influenza, [2] tuberculosis, [3], diarrhea, [4] heart disease, and [5] stroke.

The American flag had 45 stars. The population of Las Vegas, Nevada, was only 30! Crossword puzzles, canned beer, and ice tea hadn't been invented yet.

There was no Mother's Day or Father's Day. Two out of every 10 adults couldn't read or write. Only six percent of all Americans had graduated from high school.

Marijuana, heroin, and morphine were all available over the counter at the local corner drugstores. Back then pharmacists said, "Heroin clears the complexion, gives buoyancy to the mind, regulates the stomach and bowels, and is, in fact, a perfect guardian of health."

Eighteen percent of households had at least one full-time servant or domestic help.

There were about 230 reported murders in the entire U.S.

– Thanks to Joyce Birdwell for forwarding this gem.

Dems To Repeal Big Oil Tax Breaks

By J.H. Hebert

House Democrats are targeting billions of dollars in oil company tax breaks for quick repeal next year. A broader energy proposal that would boost alternative energy sources and conservation is expected to be put off until later.

Hot-button issues such as a tax on the oil industry's windfall profits or sharp increases in automobile fuel economy probably will not gain much ground given the narrow Democratic majorities in the House and Senate.

Incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in an outline of priorities over the first 100 hours of the next Congress in January, promises to begin a move toward greater energy independence "by rolling back the multibillion dollar subsidies for Big Oil."

The energy plan being assembled by Pelosi's aides for the initial round of legislation is less ambitious than her pronouncement might suggest.

EYEING BIG OIL'S HUGE PROFITS

For the most part, the tax benefits are ones that lawmakers talked of repealing this year when Congress struggled to respond to the public outcry over soaring summer fuel prices and oil companies' huge profits.

Topping the list for repeal are:

- Tax breaks for refinery expansion and for geological studies to help oil exploration.

- A measure passed two years ago primarily to promote domestic manufacturing. It allows oil companies to take a tax credit if they chose to drill in this country instead of going abroad.

Democrats say neither tax benefit should be needed for an industry reaping large profits at today's high crude oil prices.

Over 10 years, the production tax credit saves oil companies \$5 billion and the refinery measure and exploration credit a total of about \$1.4 billion, according to Congressional Budget Office estimates.

SOME TAX BREAKS WILL BE LEFT ALONE

Other oil tax breaks probably will go unchallenged. That includes some passed by Congress only a year ago and others already targeted for repeal this year.

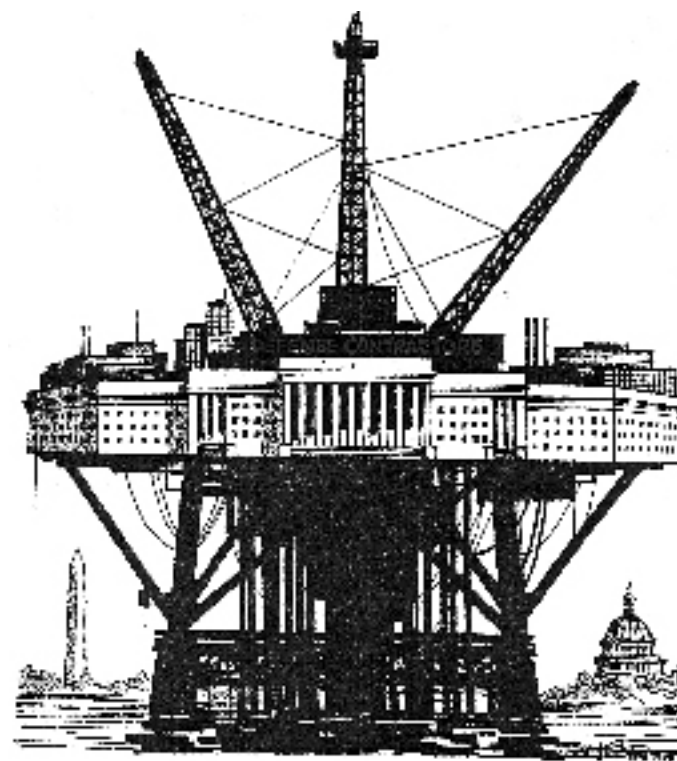
House Democrats have no plans to change a provision that allows oil companies to avoid billions of dollars in taxes by the way they calculate inventories.

The Senate this year agreed to a repeal but the effort was abandoned amid House GOP opposition and an uproar from other industries that also benefit from the tax language.

House Democrats also are shying away from tampering with more than \$1 billion worth of oil- and gas-related tax breaks, enacted last year. These breaks largely benefit small companies or gas utilities rather than the major oil companies now awash in cash.

FLAWED OFFSHORE DRILLING LEASES

The House and Senate are expected to push legislation early to force oil companies to renegotiate flawed offshore drilling leases that have allowed the companies to avoid paying federal royalties. The loss eventually could cost the government \$10 billion, according to some congressional estimates.



Other prime targets of House and Senate Democrats include:

- Alleged price gouging. Proposals to create a federal price gouging law for gasoline and other fuels probably will move quickly.

- More incentives and mandates to expand the use of ethanol and biodiesel as a substitute for gasoline. Requiring oil companies to phase in retail pumps that deliver fuel that is 85 percent ethanol.

- Requiring power companies to produce a percentage of their electricity from renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power. Such a measure is a priority of Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-NM, incoming chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

- Extending energy efficiency tax credits approved by Congress last year. Most are scheduled to expire at the end of next year.

- Expanding a tax break for buyers of gas-electric hybrid cars and offering more incentives for automakers to build greater numbers of the vehicles.

MORE CONSERVATION TO BE PROMOTED

Rep. John Dingell, D-MI, who will take over as chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said he plans hearings on legislation to spur further production and distribution of ethanol and biodiesel, and promote conservation.

On the Senate side, Bingaman probably will avoid writing a single broad energy bill, preferring to push through specific legislation. Among Bingaman's other goals are new incentives to spur renewable energy development and more tax breaks for conservation.

Last spring, Sen. Charles Schumer, D-NY, said if the country is to reduce its addiction to oil and high energy prices it needs a "crash program" to develop more alternative energy sources, dramatically increase conservation and examine "whether or not we should break up the big oil companies."

Next year, Schumer assumes the No. 3 leadership position among Senate Democrats and will be one of the party's top strategists.

A Merry Christmas At The Nursing Home

'Twas the night before Christmas at Rock-Away Rest,
And all of us seniors were looking our best.

Our glasses, how sparkly, our wrinkles, how merry;
Our punch bowl was prune juice and a bit of sherry.

A bedsock was taped to each walker, in hope
That Santa would bring us soft candy and soap.

We surely were lucky to be there with friends,
Secure in this residence and in our Depends.

Our grandkids had sent us some Christmassy crafts,
Like angels in snowsuits and penguins on rafts.

The dental assistant had borrowed our teeth,
And from them she'd crafted a holiday wreath.

The bed pans, so shiny, all stood in a row,
Reflecting our candle's magnificent glow.

Our supper so festive – the joy wouldn't stop –
Was creamy warm oatmeal with sprinkles on top.

Our salad was Jell-O, so jiggly and great,
Then puree of fruitcake was spooned on each plate.

The social director then had us play games,
Like "Where Are You Living?" And "What Are Your Names?"

Old Grandfather Looper was feeling his oats,
Proclaiming that reindeer were nothing but goats.

Our resident wanderer was tied to her chair,
In hopes that at bedtime she still would be there.

Security lights on the new fallen snow
Made outdoors seem noon to the old folks below.

Then out on the porch there arose quite a clatter
[But we are so deaf that it just didn't matter].

A strange little fellow flew in through the door,
Then tripped on the sill and fell flat on the floor.

'Twas just our director, all rigged out in red.
He jiggled and chuckled and patted each head.

We knew from the way that he strutted and jived
Our Social Security checks had arrived.

We sang – how we sang – in our monotone croak,
Till the clock tinkled out its soft 8 p.m. stroke.

And soon we were snuggling deep in our beds,
While nurses distributed nocturnal meds.

And so ends our Christmas at Rock-Away Rest.
'Fore long you'll be with us, We wish you the best!

– Anonymous

SPECIAL

From Page One

to last awhile. Let's get that fire up to size and heat this place up."

I wasn't the same person when I went back out to bring in the wood. I had a big lump in my throat and as much as I hate to admit it, there were tears in my eyes, too.

In my mind I kept seeing those three kids huddled around the fireplace and their mother standing there with tears running down her cheeks with so much gratitude in her heart that she couldn't speak.

My heart swelled within me, and a joy that I'd never known before filled my soul. I had given at Christmas many times before, but never when it had made so much difference. I could see we were literally saving the lives of these people.

I soon had the fire blazing and everyone's spirits soared. The kids started giggling when Pa handed them each a piece of candy and Widow Jensen looked on with a smile that probably hadn't crossed her face for a long time.

She finally turned to us. "God bless you," she said. "I know the Lord has sent you. The children and I have been praying that he would send one of his angels to spare us."

In spite of myself, the lump returned to my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes again. I'd never thought of Pa in those exact terms before, but after Widow Jensen mentioned it I could see that it was probably true.

I was sure that a better man than Pa had never walked the earth. I started remembering all the times he had gone out of his way for Ma and me, and many others. The list seemed endless as I thought on it.

Pa insisted that everyone try on the shoes before we left. I was amazed when they all fit and I wondered how he had known what sizes to get. Then I guessed that if he was on an errand for the Lord that the Lord would make sure he got the right sizes.

Tears were running down Widow Jensen's face again when we stood up to leave. Pa took each of the kids in his big arms and gave them a hug. They clung to him and didn't want us to go. I could see that they missed their Pa, and I was glad that I still had mine.

At the door Pa turned to Widow Jensen and said, "The Mrs. wanted

me to invite you and the children over for Christmas dinner tomorrow. The turkey will be more than the three of us can eat, and a man can get cantankerous if he has to eat turkey for too many meals. We'll be by to get you about 11. It'll be nice to have some little ones around again. Matt, here, hasn't been little for quite a spell."

I was the youngest. My two brothers and two sisters had all married and had moved away.

Widow Jensen nodded and said, "Thank you, Brother Miles. I don't have to say, 'May the Lord bless you,' I know for certain that He will."

Out on the sled, I felt a warmth that came from deep within and I didn't even notice the cold.

When we had gone a ways, Pa turned to me and said, "Matt, I want you to know something. Your Ma and me have been tucking a little money away here and there all year so we could buy that rifle for you, but we didn't have quite enough.

"Then yesterday a man who owed me a little money from years back came by to make things square. Your Ma and me were real excited, thinking that now we could get you that rifle, and I started into town this morning to do just that. But on the way I saw little Jakey out scratching in the woodpile with his feet wrapped in those gunnysacks and I knew what I had to do.

"Son, I spent the money for shoes and a little candy for those children. I hope you understand."

I understood, and my eyes were wet with tears again. I understood very well, and I was so glad Pa had done it. Now the rifle seemed very low on my list of priorities. Pa had given me a lot more. He had given me the look on Widow Jensen's face and the radiant smiles of her three children.

For the rest of my life, whenever I saw any of the Jensens, or split a block of wood, I remembered, and remembering brought back that same joy I felt riding home beside Pa that night. Pa had given me much more than a rifle that night; he had given me the best Christmas of my life.

-The author lives in Bryan, Texas

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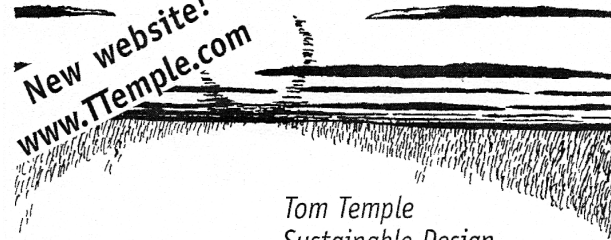
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