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Meddling Lawmakers? Immigration Reform Folly

By Arnold Hamilton

At the local coffee shop, a constituent recently offered state Rep. Joe Dorman a simple prescription for addressing illegal immigration in Oklahoma.

Post signs at the state border with this warning:

NO TRESPASSING.

VIOLATORS WILL BE SHOT.

When Dorman, D-Rush Springs, regaled a recent House interim study session with the tale, it triggered more than a few snickers. Not so many are laughing now.

As the 2007 legislative session opens, a showdown looms over immigration reform, sharply dividing natural allies – think big business and Republicans – and stirring acrimonious, sometimes racially charged debate over the changing face of Oklahoma.

And to what end?

While advocates assert that illegal immigrants are tapping state services annually for about \$207 million, they concede their numbers are estimates of estimates of estimates. More specific data suggest costs actually may be far less.

Immigrants also are filling positions in sparsely populated areas with few workers. Consider: Who will fill the 3,000 jobs at the new \$200 million beef processing plant in Hooker, a Panhandle town with 1,800 residents?

Moreover, most state and local attempts to crack down on illegal immigration, experts say, probably won't stand up in federal court.

"There's going to be a huge reluctance on the part of federal courts to uphold state and local laws that interfere with what is a constitutionally protected area of federal law," said Steve Ladik, past president of the American Immigration Law Foundation.

The debate in Oklahoma already is so contentious that it even encompasses terminology. Gov. Brad Henry's Advisory Council on Latin American and Hispanic Affairs publicly admonished him to quit saying "illegal immigrant" or "illegal alien" in favor of "undocumented immigrants."

Such division isn't deterring some

state lawmakers determined to crack-down on a problem they claim the federal government won't.

State Rep. Randy Terrill, R-OKC, the Legislature's most visible proponent of immigration reform, said his "goal would be to make sure that we have the toughest immigration reform bill in the nation."

The legislation, he said, needs to attack identity theft and voter fraud, thwart illegal immigrants from collecting public benefits, bolster state and local enforcement of immigration laws and establish penalties for employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, recently filed legislation that he said is "modeled after the [2006] Georgia law" that imposes employer penalties, increases punishment for human trafficking and prohibits companies with state contracts from hiring illegal immigrants.

Finally, Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson, R-OKC, introduced a measure that would make English the state's official language – an important symbol to fervent nativists.

The mostly Republican immigration reform crowd has harped so loudly for so long about the perils of the grow-

ing menace that it's propelled the issue to the forefront in Oklahoma.

A Tulsa World Oklahoma Poll last fall found immigration was the No. 2 issue for likely voters surveyed – behind only education. Eighteen months earlier, it barely registered, mentioned by just 2% of respondents.

What is especially remarkable about the issue's growing significance to Oklahoma voters is how few illegal immigrants are believed to be living within the state's borders – about 83,000 out of an overall population of nearly 3.5 million.

Nationally, the number is estimated at about 12 million.

Terrill, repeating statistics generated by the Washington-based Federation for American Immigration Reform, said illegal immigration is costing state taxpayers more than \$200 million annually in health, welfare, education and other benefits.

"The federal government's failure to enforce the nation's borders functionally imposes a tax on Oklahomans every time we're forced to pick up the cost of services to illegal aliens who are not lawfully entitled to them but seek them nevertheless," he said.

Other evidence indicates Terrill and FAIR are overstating the costs. Two

examples:

- Despite claims by 2006 GOP gubernatorial nominee Ernest Istook that thousands of illegal immigrants were taking advantage of the state's in-state tuition waiver, higher education officials found only 37 of the state's 26,000 college-aid recipients were undocumented.

- Major County Sheriff Tom Shaffer told lawmakers recently his jail housed 230 illegal immigrants in the past three years at a cost of about \$10,000 – roughly 1/10th of 1% of the cost of his day-to-day operations.

What many immigration reform proponents fail to mention is that undocumented workers and their families also contribute to state and federal tax coffers. They pay taxes when they buy groceries, gasoline and diapers, just like everyone else.

Even those who use stolen identities to secure employment generate considerable revenue for government coffers: The Social Security Administration, for example, estimates 75% of undocumented immigrants pay payroll taxes and contribute up to \$7 billion yearly in Social Security funds they can never collect.

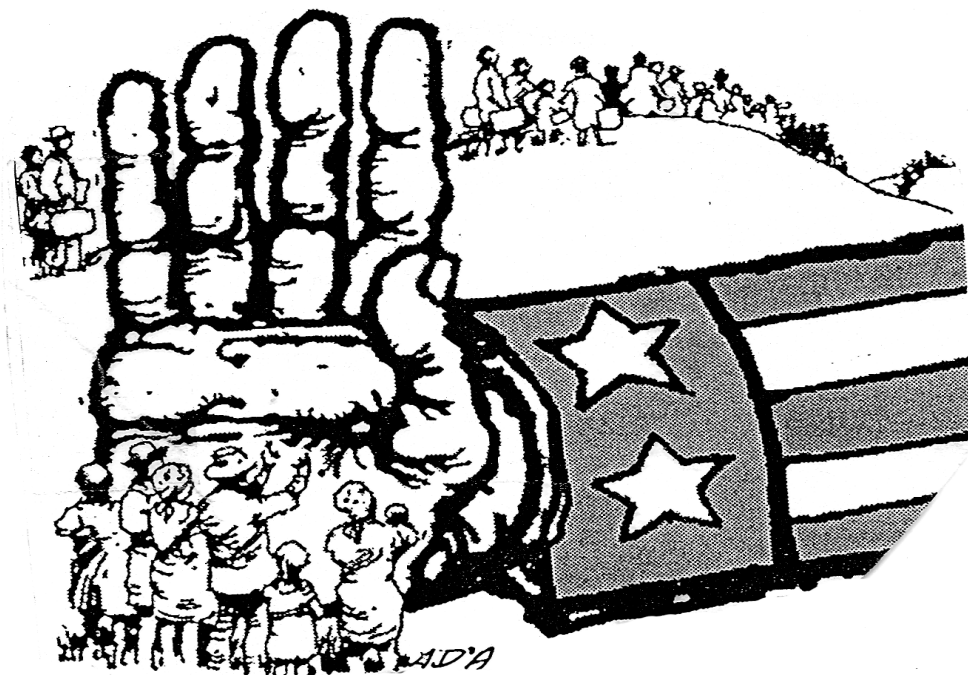
A new Texas study emphasizes the point: In one of her final acts before leaving office, former Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn – a Republican – produced a controversial study that indicates illegal immigrants generate about \$420 million more for state coffers than they take out.

"The absence of 1.4 million undocumented immigrants in Texas ... would have been a loss to our gross state product of \$17.7 billion," she said.

FAIR called the study "flawed," saying its analysis determined illegal immigrants cost Texas taxpayers \$3.7 billion annually.

Congress' failure to devise a comprehensive plan leaves a vacuum that some state and local governments are attempting to fill.

The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that last year more than 550 immigration-related



See IMMIGRATION Page 18

Observations

Not True

New State Senate Co-President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, claims there is a "large number of frivolous lawsuits." To put it kindly, that's false.

Last year's statewide survey of judges addressed that issue. Judges were asked about the percentage of cases considered to be frivolous. Judges responded that it was less than 5%.

They were asked: "Do you believe there is a litigation crisis requiring changes ... ?" A whopping 90% percent said no, 7.5% had no opinion and only 2.5% said yes.

Asked what the Legislature should do to change the civil justice system for the better, the number one response was "leave it alone or do nothing."

Judges replied that what the judicial system really needs is more resources for the courts, lower [or don't increase] fines and costs, and more control over the discovery process.

"Tort reform" is a mantra for the Republican Party, bolstered by the constant demand of the Daily Disappointment for lawsuit reform.

Repeat a lie often enough and it takes on the cloak of truth. A perfect Republican example is right to work. Instead of high paying industries rushing into Oklahoma, more than 33,000 industrial jobs have been lost. New jobs are mostly call centers.

Coffee promises to reintroduce his bill throwing roadblocks into the path of ordinary citizens' right to file lawsuits.

A 24-24 Senate split will determine whether the Democrats have the courage to stop the lie of "tort reform."

Coffee told the Tulsa World that one of his top priorities is "tax reform." Translation: more tax cuts for fat cats who fund the GOP in Oklahoma.

Sooner Shame

It is humiliating that the federal government has filed a lawsuit against Oklahoma for failure to protect juveniles at the Lloyd E. Rader Center at Sand Springs.

That mess has been well known for years but the governor and Legislature failed to take action, leaving a frustrated U.S. Justice Department to file suit - 30 months after Gov. Brad Henry was put on notice by the Department's Civil Rights Division.

This is not peanut stuff. The lawsuit addresses rampant physical abuse of inmates and inappropriate sexual contact by employees at the 200-bed facility.

Mental health services are seriously lacking at the state's only maximum-security lockup for juveniles.

The Tulsa World's series on conditions surely prompted the lawsuit. The World documented nearly 3,000 cases in the past three years. More than 300 were staff members assaulting juveniles.

A new director, Gene Christian, promises to make changes to meet the demands of the lawsuit.

As for the governor and Legislature - shame on you.

Just Do It

One of the first acts of the new Legislature ought to be passage of the measure to regulate all-terrain vehicles.

It would already be law except for the interference of Rep. Dan Sullivan, R-Tulsa, during the 2006 session.

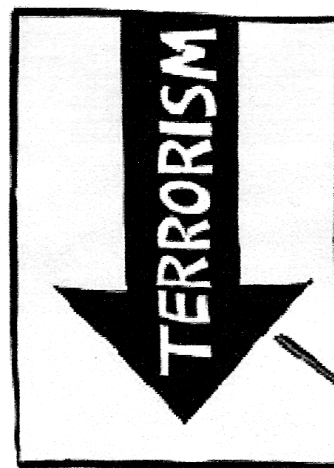
Fatalities involving ATVs have doubled since 2000, with most of them involving kids under 18 years of age. Some were 12 or under.

St. Francis Hospital in Tulsa reports 193 patients over a two-year period, with 63% involving rollovers. Forty-four were under 18 and seven were five years old or younger!

Regulating use of these vehicles is not government interference. When you have parents that stupid the government has an obligation to step in.

NCLB Flops

According to a recent Gallup Poll, 58% of Americans believe the five-year-old No Child Left Behind law has



either harmed or had no effect on schools, compared with just over a quarter who believe it has helped.

While most people approve of NCLB's goal of raising standardized test scores, few seem to support its methods.

"Systematically, the public rejects every strategy in it," said Lowell Rose, director of the poll, which is jointly authored by Gallup and the Phi Delta Kappa educators association.

Nearly 70% of respondents said they did not think a "single test" could "provide a fair picture of whether a school needs improvement." Are you listening Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah?

Under NCLB, student performance on state-based assessment tests is a primary measure of a school's annual progress ratings. And 81% of poll respondents said measurement tests should not just cover math and English but other subjects.

NCLB requires only that the tests cover math and English. Eighty-one percent of respondents also said they would prefer that NCLB measured progress according to individual student improvement; NCLB measures a school's achievement by making one test score the goal for all students and then measuring what percentage of them meets it.

The poll respondents preferred the "growth model" approach, which would set individual test-score goals for every student, then base achievement on the number of students who meet them.

Don't be misled. NCLB is a Republican attempt to federalize public education, setting most schools up for certain failure so Bush can push his voucher schemes, such as the \$100 million pilot proposal he's asked the new Congress to approve.

Cheating

The cheating epidemic in America should give the country pause. It's not just athletes, although they claim the headlines. It's a broad spectrum of America.

Sixty major corporations have had to restate their earnings after overestimating them to the tune of \$3 trillion.

Backdated stock options illegally proliferate. Investment banks have been forced to pay back more than \$1 billion.

Major corporate players are in prison or are awaiting sentencing - including the president of Tyco, Dennis Kozlowski, who spent \$6,000 of corporate money on a shower curtain.

Football coaches routinely cheat on the academic standards for players. Performance-enhancing drugs used by athletes are commonplace.

Star athletes such as Olympic medalist Justin Gatlin, Tour de France winner Floyd Landis, baseball's Barry Bonds and Mark McGwire are hardly role models for the nation's youth.

A study by Duke University revealed that more than 70% of students surveyed admitted to cheating at least once on exams in the previous year.

Tax evasion is a chronic problem for the IRS, which is doing far fewer investigations. Tax cheats cost the treasury more than \$500 billion a year.

Or as Leona Helmsley famously said, "We don't pay taxes; only the little people pay taxes."

More than two million Americans have offshore bank accounts.

So how does the nation cope? As long as parents and corporate boards look the other way, nothing will be done.

Silly Sally

A silly constitutional amendment filed by Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, would force state lawmakers to take a pay cut if a special legislative session is required to complete the state budget.

In fact, had not Senate Democrats forced a special session in 2006 there would have been no \$3,000 pay raise for teachers and 4% percent for most other retirees. The GOP House leadership blocked both.

House Joint Resolution 1001 would allow a vote of the people to amend the Oklahoma Constitution to include penalties for lawmakers should a special session be required to complete the state budget.

This deserves to be DOA in committee.

Well Done

A tip of our editorial hat to Ken Neal, 71, leaving the post as editorial page editor of the Tulsa World, surely the closest thing to fair and accurate commentary published in Oklahoma.

Tulsa has moved much closer to the far right spectrum in recent years and Neal has bent over backwards to put out a balanced editorial page.

We were present when Neal won the Friend of Education Award from the Oklahoma Education Association. His support for public education has been legendary.

His replacement is David Averill, an associate editor and former State Capitol correspondent. Neal will still be around, serving as a senior editor. Congratulations to both.

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

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

- Adapted by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

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It didn't take long for Republicans to throw down the gauntlet. Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, introduced House Bill 1040 to eliminate the state income tax by 2012 and immediately eliminate the inheritance tax. He doesn't say how he would replace the revenue.

Dart: To the Bush Administration, asking for \$100 billion more for Iraq while cutting education, housing and health care programs across the board. Defense R&D rose \$80 billion.

Note to Pat Robertson who said God told him there would be a terrorist "mass killing" in America in late 2007 - Pat, when you talk to God, it's prayer. When God talks to you, it's paranoia.

Laurel: To Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, filing Senate Bill 34 to repeal the sales tax on groceries. It ought to be the first order of business for the Legislature and governor.

The American Right rose to power in Washington in large measure due to \$3 billion that Korean cult leader Sun Myung Moon pumped into the Washington Times propaganda machine.

Dart: To Halliburton Co., Vince Orza's "good corporate citizen" who just paid another hefty claim - \$8 million for overcharging on Army construction by subsidiary Kellogg, Brown & Root.

Rep. Lucky Lamons, D-Tulsa, is again pushing for a stricter campaign contribution law, banning contributions during a legislative session. It would help if the Ethics Commission had a decent budget.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's war on methamphetamine, copied by 30 other states. Oklahoma meth lab busts dropped from 1,193 in 2001 to 274 last year.

A positive ID to vote would be required under Senate Bill 15 proposed by Sen. John Ford, R-Bartlesville. It

could be a voter ID card, driver's license, passport, state ID card, copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check or paycheck.

Dart: To Wal-Mart, snubbing state law on its \$4 generic drugs. Oklahoma prohibits selling below cost plus six percent. If they don't like the law they should work to change it.

Dallas Catholic Schools are ordered to close Feb. 7 so students can jam the State Capitol to lobby for vouchers. The Conference of Catholic Bishops has endorsed a campaign for vouchers.

Laurel: To Congressman Dan Boren, D-OK, who came out four-square against Bush's so-called "surge." The other members of the delegation lined up behind Bush.

The makeup of the new Congress includes 156 Catholics, 66 Baptists, 61 Methodists, 44 Presbyterians, 43 Jewish, 37 Episcopalian, 17 Lutherans, 15 Mormons. No other religion is in double digits.

Dart: To Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson, R-OKC, proposing legislation to make English Oklahoma's official language. She claims it is to "promote unity" but the opposite would result.

Norman residents are fortunate to have such an outstanding candidate for mayor as Cindy Rosenthal, director of OU's Carl Albert Center and a tremendous community activist.

Laurel: To the Democratic Congress for shutting off thousands of earmarks [pork barrel projects], including 45 for Oklahoma. Rep. Tom Cole whines about loss of a Tinker project. The military is already grossly over-financed.

A new group, Oklahomans For Modern Law, will attempt to collect 220,000 signatures to let voters decide whether wine and strong beer could be sold in grocery and convenience stores.



Dart: To the State Chamber of Commerce, already working to close the courthouse door for ordinary Oklahomans, a key goal of Republicans.

American teachers spend more time teaching than any other industrial nation - 1,080 hours. In Japan, it's 534 hours, Denmark 640 hours, Australia 809 hours, Mexico 1,047 hours. [OECD]

Laurel: To OKC Police Officer Robert Kemmet, creator of a computer program to track potential sexual predators. He was named Police Officer of the Year.

The Tulsa Board of Education has voted 4-3 to declare a moratorium on any more charter schools. All studies of the charter school movement show that public school students outscore them.

Dart: To Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, one of 15 senators who said even knowing what they now know, they would vote in favor of invading Iraq. Naturally Bushhugger Joe Lieberman was one of them. [ABC News]

The percentage of blacks in prison in Oklahoma is 26.9% - 61% higher than the national average.

Laurel: To Emily's List, largely credited with the election of 11 Democratic women to the U.S. Senate and 50 in the U.S. House.

Why does the Department of Corrections pay private prisons \$41-\$48 per day but county jails receive only \$27-\$31 per day?

Dart: To state Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, biggest show-off in the House. He wants to "overhaul" the Oklahoma Board of Pharmacy. The board's crime? Enforcing the minimum markup law.

Raise the pay of federal judges? They earn \$165,200 a year, the same as members of Congress. In Oklahoma they only handle about 3% of all litigation.

Laurel: To Dave Story, editor and publisher of the Claremore Progress, retiring after 58 superb years as a newspaperman. The profession needs more like him.

New Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, said he is in favor of eventually eliminating the state income tax.

He didn't say how he would replace the money. [Cox Cable's *The Verdict*]

Dart: To Oklahoma for earning an "F" for tobacco prevention and control while ratholing millions of dollars to do just that. [American Lung Association]

Once again Oklahoma is the laughingstock of the nation. The Daily Show featured Republican Bill Crozier, losing candidate for state school superintendent, proposing arming all teachers.

Laurel: To Oklahoma, coming in with the 47th lowest property taxes in America in 2006. Don't believe the nitwit conservatives who say this is a high tax state. It isn't. [Tax Foundation]

Rep. Randy Terrill, R-OKC, didn't lose his rank in the GOP House, although he put up signs and did a robo call for Democrat Lloyd Fields who narrowly defeated Republican Labor Commissioner Brenda Reneau.

Dart: To those Democrats passing out plaudits to the late right-winger Jeane Kirkpatrick, 80. They fail to remember her venomous attacks on Democrats - you couldn't be a Democrat and be a good American. She hated the U.N.

In politics it isn't what you know, it's who you know. OEA Associate Counsel Brandon Webb, 36, has been named president of Carl Albert State College. His dad, Roger Webb, is president of UCO. Brandon Webb has no higher education experience whatsoever.

Laurel: To more than 10,000 Christian clergy who are in support of the Clergy Letter Project, disavowing creationism. Evolution Sunday will be celebrated in Oklahoma and churches across America on Feb. 11.

Retired General Tommy Franks will build a \$15 million leadership think tank in his hometown of Hobart. He can teach a course on giving presidents bad advice. He was a top Bush cheerleader for invading Iraq.

Dart: To those in Congress supporting a two percent pay hike, raising the salary to \$168,500 a year. They have awarded themselves \$31,000 in annual pay raises since the \$5.15 minimum wage was last raised 10 years ago.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Why is it that Oklahomans continue to elect people who embarrass our state on a regular basis? The most recent example is Sen. Tom Coburn and his blockage of funding for breast cancer research. What does this code three wack-a-doo have against protecting women from this killer? Even a sub-par physician such as Coburn should have some compassion for other people. How sad.

Brian Carter
Broken Arrow

Editor, The Observer:

Here are the Washington Spectator's listing of five impeachable offenses, violations by President George W. Bush. They followed the listings up with facts supporting each violation.

1. Deceiving Congress and the people in taking the country into war in Iraq.

2. Directing an illegal domestic wiretapping program and other surveillance of Americans.

3. Permitting and condoning the use of torture or cruel treatment of detainees.

4. Showing reckless indifference to human life in the face of Hurricane Katrina, in inadequately equipping U. S. soldiers, in the insufficient planning for the occupation of Iraq.

5. Covering up his war deceptions with the leak of misleading classified information, an act that became entangled with the outing of a CIA agent, a possible crime.

John B. Gordon
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Although the number of illegal immigrants in the United States varies, the 2000 census figure estimates 8.7 million. It also reports an increase of as many as 500,000 per year. Some estimates indicate that there are as many as 20 million as of now.

I applaud legal immigration, but breaking the laws of the land is no way to start a new and better life.

According to a new report, money transfers to relatives in their home country by illegals are 51% higher than a year ago. One report from the state of Iowa indicates that the flow of money from Iowa to Mexico is expected to reach \$138 million this year.

It also states that the Latino population in Iowa is now 109,000 and the

loss of \$138 million in revenue will impact the Iowa economy.

This is just in one state. The actual effect will be felt in all 50 states. Anyone who expects huge growth with all those funds flowing out of the country is operating under a delusion.

The Center for Immigration Studies just released the following information: Illegals imposed more than \$26.3 billion in costs on the federal government in 2002.

Although some taxes were collected, the costs to the American taxpayer for illegals using government services such as Medicaid, food assistance programs, education, and the cost of courts and prisons, created a deficit of \$10.4 billion.

This report also states that granting legal status to those already here would increase that deficit to about \$29 billion, due to addition of more government services.

Not only must something be done, it's way past due.

G. M. Kesselring
Van Buren, Ark.

Editor, The Observer:

Since Republicans did control all three branches of government perhaps they should have read James Madison's famous Federalist 47:

"The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, selfappointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny."

The very definition of the Bush crowd!

Greg Scroggins
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Message forwarded: Write Governor Henry! We can no longer tolerate the despicable transportation decisions that result in relegating our state to the bottom of the barrel for quality of life.

Destruction of Union Station and rail yard while progressive areas of this country are installing rail transits is the poorest planning ever!

Who is benefiting from this and who is suffering? Once you answer this question, you'll know where the problem lies. Let's smother the governor's office with letters demanding that our area provide our people with viable,



economical, safe transportation to and from our jobs.

We have enough unsafe bridges, toll roads, truck traffic tearing up roads as fast as they are built and taxpayers taking their lives and their vehicles into jeopardy every time they enter one of our major thoroughfares.

We must utilize the wonderful rail system our forefathers provided. Destroying it will be the most backward action ever! Can Oklahoma afford any more of these kind of bad decisions?

The future transportation needs of this entire country will NOT be centered around the auto. Where will we be then if we do not set our goals NOW?

Gov. Henry, save Union Station and its rail yard now!

Send your plea now!

Darla Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

TV news headlined "16,000 dead from acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and aspirin." I couldn't help but think that the drug companies were wanting to convert these into prescription items. That way they could create a new monopoly and squeeze out a greater profit. After all they can only be trusted to be greedy.

Let's go to the greater issue.

Paracetamol is in use worldwide. Paracetamol is in the public domain. It cannot be patented or copyrighted. That would make it automatically generic in the U. S. of A. Hence, there is no big profit for a drug company.

Hence, it is used internationally everywhere except in the U.S. It has almost no side effects and can be and is used almost exclusively elsewhere. Nobody is willing to raise the \$200 million to \$300 million to get it past the FDA.

This should not be necessary. Any time a drug has been in international use for some number of years without serious side effects it should automatically grandfathered in. That would be good for the general public.

Our laws have been written to protect the drug companies. The blood of some giant portion of the reported 16,000 people is on the hands and heads of Congress and the drug companies. There is no interest in changing the law.

I went to a British doctor several years ago. He prescribed it. It was

and is over the counter. It is available to citizens of the U. S. from Canada and Mexico. A course in comparative medicine should be standard in Oklahoma's medical schools. It isn't, of course. I have yet to meet an Oklahoma doctor that admits to have heard of paracetamol.

If you care for your own health and/or have significant pain you need to act.

Ray Barton
Chickasha

Editor, The Observer:

The President should tell the truth. Why did he attack Iraq?

We have been told numerous reasons for the war in Iraq: weapons of mass destruction, Iraq ties to Al Qaeda, Iraq ties to 9/11, purchase of uranium from Niger, Iraq building nuclear weapons. All proved to be untruths. Bringing Democracy to Iraq has become a disaster.

Three thousand of our soldiers and Marines have died in that war without cause, 22,000 wounded, many handicapped for life. These are sons, daughters, husbands, wives, sweethearts, mothers and fathers. Each of these casualties has altered the lives of many forever.

Fifty-seven thousand Iraqis have been killed and their country torn asunder. The human carnage is not the only loss. The resources spent on that needless war are sorely needed here at home.

Our infrastructure is falling apart, our poor are hungry, our aged need pharmaceuticals, almost half of our population are without health care, one third of our children go to bed hungry. There is also the Katrina debacle.

Where is Osama bin Laden? Haven't heard about him since he escaped at Tora Bora. We now call him Osama bin forgotten.

Remember the anthrax scare?

Homeland Security has the envelopes anthrax was mailed in, know where they were mailed and even know where the anthrax was manufactured. The perpetrators are still free.

Resistance to the Iraq war by our citizens is increasing across all political parties. It is time for the truth. A thorough unbiased investigation is necessary for the government to regain the confidence of our citizens.

Joe Forgy
Oklahoma City

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Frosty's Notebook

Catholic Lite

A new survey of American Roman Catholics has found strong support for the Pope and U.S. bishops, but disagreement over church positions such as whether priests should marry.

In the study released Nov. 16 by LeMoyn College of Syracuse, and the research firm Zogby International, nearly all the respondents felt the Pope was doing a good job leading the worldwide church. U.S. bishops and local clergy were given high marks as well.

More than half of Catholics disagreed with the church position banning priests from marrying and preventing women from serving as pastors.

More than 60% disagreed with church teaching that artificial birth control is morally wrong. Still, most agreed with the church's opposition to abortion and homosexual practices.

About 64% of Catholics said they attend Mass at least once a week. About 24% said they increased their observance in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Nearly all the respondents said they believe God has the power to answer every prayer and the Bible is the inspired word of God, but 68% said they seldom or never read the Bible.

The Eastern Oklahoma Catholic newspaper left out the findings on birth control and priests marrying.

Here are findings about Catholic voters from exit polls by Voter News Service, a consortium of the networks and The Associated Press. The poll of more than 13,000 voters taken outside polling places on election day had an error margin of plus or minus one percentage point.

- Catholics made up a fourth of the 2000 electorate.

Our Health Care Disgrace

It is no surprise to hear that the U.S. health care system is in shambles. Health care costs are increasing faster than wages and nearly 47 million Americans – eight million of whom are children – are uninsured. Millions more are underinsured.

Oklahoma has 700,000 uninsured, including nearly one out of every three children.

Yet, we continue to spend more on health care per person than any other country, including countries that provide health care coverage to their entire citizenry.

According to a new report by the Kaiser Family Foundation, health spending last year was at least 24% higher than that of Luxembourg [the second highest spending country] and over 90% higher than countries considered global competitors.

Our health care system spending is not buying us superior health. Americans on average die at a younger age compared to the average age of death of comparable nations. Japan has the highest life expectancy.

The U.S. infant mortality rate is 6.9 deaths per 1,000 live births, while Japan

Ford Spoke Up Too Late

Too bad Gerald Ford didn't speak out before he died. His strong opinions on Iraq, Reagan, the Bush family and the takeover of the Republican Party might have made a difference given the level of respect he garnered.

Newsweek, among others, was granted an interview with the understanding it was not to be published until after his death. See the Jan. 8 issue for an eye-popping article.

"If I had been elected in '76 the party wouldn't be as far right as it is at the present time," he said. "I sure hope it comes back to the center."

"My wife and I are moderate Republicans. We felt uncomfortable at the [1992] convention. And unless things change, we'll feel uncomfortable in the next one ... if we go."

He lamented the fact that Bush Senior didn't try to make a difference. He said Bush Senior was a more moderate guy.

"I was disappointed that George didn't fight harder against the hard right."

He also criticized him for opposing abortion rights.

Gutting Unions

The Bush Administration has consistently sent signals to the labor movement and the general workforce that they do not have an ally in the White House.

In the wake of the Sago mine disaster that called attention to the administration's lack of safety enforcement, Bush nominated Richard Stickler, a coal industry executive who managed coal mines with injuries that were double the national average, to head the Mine Safety and Health Administration [MSHA].

When the Senate blocked the nomination, Stickler was hired by MSHA as a "consultant" to advise the agency on mine safety issues.

Now Bush makes the recess appointment of Paul DeCamp, former lawyer for Wal-Mart "with a long paper trail outlining his opposition to the Fair Labor Standards Act's [FLSA's] overtime pay and other provisions to run the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division [WHD]."

Also, labor leaders are concerned that the National Labor Relations Board



• They essentially split the vote between Democrat Al Gore and Republican George Bush, 49-47, after backing Democrat Bill Clinton by a significant margin in 1992 [9 percentage points] and 1996 [16 points].

• Bush lost the Catholic vote in his second term bid – 52-48.

• They identified themselves as 40% Democrat, 35% Republican, 22% independent.

• They generally identify themselves as moderate, with 27% conservative and 20% liberal. By comparison, 37% of Protestants said they are conservative.

• Catholics were less pessimistic than Protestants about the moral direction the country was going. Forty-four percent said the country was headed in the right direction morally, and 54% said it was off on the wrong track. Protestants were split 35-63 on that question.

• They were no more opposed to abortion than Protestants. Just over half of Catholic voters, 55%, said abortion should be always or mostly legal, compared with half of Protestants who felt that way.

• Catholics essentially split evenly on voting for U.S. House candidates as well, tilting Democratic by 50% to 48%.

and Sweden have rates below 3.5 deaths per 1,000 live births.

The obesity rate among adults in the U.S. is 30.6%, the highest rate of developed countries. This rate is nearly 21% higher than the rate of the second highest country, Mexico.

Nor does it buy us better health care or more resources. About 70% of deaths and health costs in the U.S. are attributable to chronic disease, which are largely preventable. Yet, only half of recommended preventive services are provided to adults.

The U.S. has fewer practicing physicians and nurses per 1,000 people than comparable countries.

Instead, our health care system is pushing millions of hardworking Americans into relentless financial constraints and sends thousands to early graves.

With a new Democratic Congress, the impetus for real health reform is now – we can afford to provide every American affordable health care that emphasizes prevention, while controlling costs and maintaining individuals' choice of doctors and plans.

"I know damn well that he and Barbara are pro-choice. Why didn't they get up and say it? That really disappointed me more than anything."

He said Ronald Reagan cost him the '76 election by challenging his nomination. Reagan appeared only once with him during the campaign.

"If he had made an appearance in Ohio, Louisiana and Mississippi we would have won, I'm sure," Ford said.

Ford campaigned enthusiastically for Reagan when he got the 1980 nomination. After Reagan's election Ford said he was upset about the Reagan presidency. He bitterly criticized Reagan's budget deficits.

"With all his pronouncements about our federal budget, his eight years were about as bad as any in the history of our country," Ford said. [Reagan added a trillion dollars to the national debt.]

Two-bit Republican politicians are still lionizing Reagan but Ford was exactly right about him. Like a good actor, he read his lines well but he was a corrupt disaster as President in both foreign policy and domestic affairs.

– composed of five Bush appointees – is weighing a series of cases that "could make it easier for companies to declare certain workers 'supervisors' and thus ineligible for union membership."

Union activists fear that employees who could possibly be reclassified as "supervisors" – such as nurses and teachers – would be forced to do so by employers trying to prevent the formation of unions.

Business groups are pushing for such authority, arguing as Elizabeth Gaudio with the National Federation of Independent Business Legal Foundation did, that the "bottom line" is to be profitable.

The more union jobs the nation loses, the wider the income gap and the further decline of the middle class.

The neo-cons running the country know this and they're determined to corporatize America.

Big GOP Tax Cuts Would Be A Mistake

Republicans have filed bills that would gut the state budget by more than a third because there is no plan to replace the revenue loss.

The most draconian measure is House Bill 1040 by House gadfly Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC. It would slash the 5.65% income tax, phasing it out.

Bills to immediately abolish the estate tax and lower the income tax significantly were filed by legislative newcomer state Rep. Randy McDaniel, R-OKC.

Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, criticized the Republican proposals as a "terrible mistake."

The Reynolds' measure would implement tax cuts that were either scheduled for future years or remove trigger language that made the cuts conditional.

His bill would immediately cut Oklahoma's top income tax rate to 5% and then slash the income tax by an additional 1% each year until 2012, when the personal income tax would be eliminated.

CUTS ALREADY IN PROGRESS

Under current law, the top rate is now 5.65% and is scheduled to decline to 5.25% by 2010 if state revenue increases during that time period.

House Bill 1040 also increases the state standard deduction to match the federal deduction and provides for immediate repeal of the estate tax.

Eliminating the inheritance tax has been a focus for many Republican legislators, despite the fact that only the wealthy few pay it because there is a \$1.1 million exemption.

"There's no question Oklahoma's tax code needs to be taken a look at," Corn said. "We've certainly moved from one kind of an economy of a manufacturing base to a service-based economy. So we might need to look at updating our tax code."

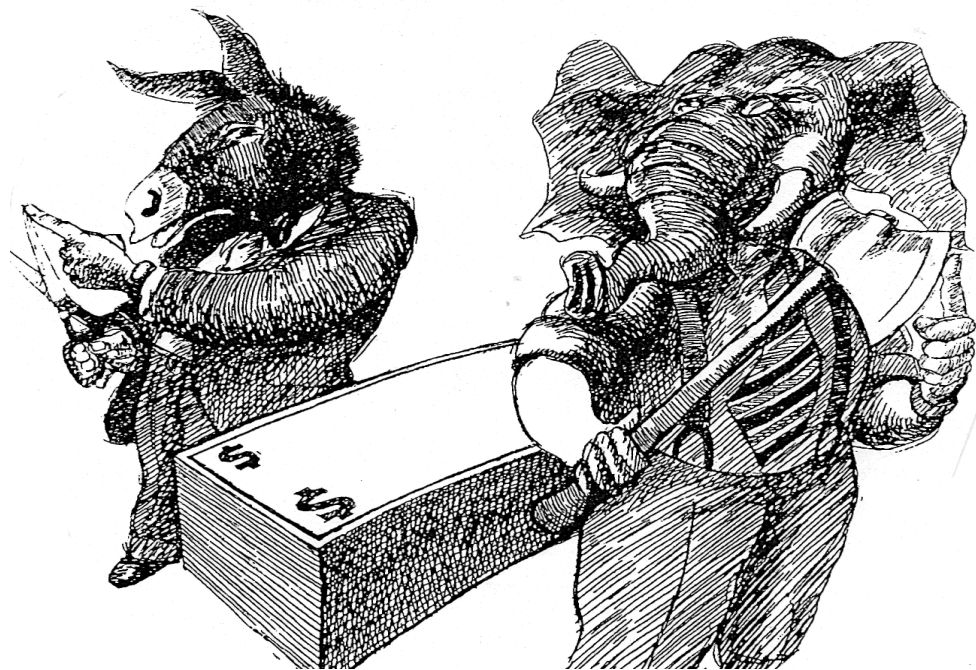
EVERYBODY OUGHT TO PAY FAIR SHARE

"But we need to make sure we have a tax code that's fair, that everybody pays, everybody participates in paying for the government services in which they receive."

"Eliminating the tax code completely ... if we just do what Rep. Reynolds is advocating, then we will totally depend Oklahoma's future on gross production revenues. That would be a terrible mistake."

Corn has filed legislation calling for a constitutional amendment to restrict spending of gross production tax revenues.

"Something the Legislature must do is learn from our history of what happened



to this state during the oil boom of the 1980s and not repeat that," he said.

"I have great concerns that as we move forward in the state that we do not continue to change our diverse tax code and depend on gross production taxes in order to fund state government."

DON'T ADOPT A FALSE ECONOMY

"As you know, as we move forward in the next few years, we have a tremendous opportunity to do lots of things in this great state, but we cannot afford to build a false economic security for our state by building gross production revenue into our budget and using it for re-occurring expenses in our state budget or even using it for the ability to argue for tax cuts in the state of Oklahoma."

Corn reminded Oklahoma that "during the 1980s, the Legislature and Gov. George Nigh passed record tax cuts and major spending initiatives in the state. Then we had an oil bust ... and we've never quite recovered from that part of Oklahoma history."

"I think that's one of the things that let us get far behind in transportation issues, infrastructure needs for Oklahoma. And so we've had a great opportunity to get caught up."

"What I'm asking us to do is to be more cautious as we move forward in the state budget."

The GOP House bills are only the first salvo, assuring a test of the so-called bipartisan agreement for operation of the 2007 session. Passage of either tax cut would test Gov. Brad Henry's use of the veto.

Coalition Will Work On New Farm Bill

In an effort to help build support for USDA Natural Resource Programs in the next federal farm bill, over 20 wildlife, environmental, civic and landowner organizations, along with several state agencies and private businesses, have announced the formation of the Coalition for Conservation.

It is a cooperative organization to help educate the general public and policy makers on the benefits of the programs.

"When you consider that over 98% of Oklahoma is made up of privately held agricultural land, we must have a strong conservation title in the next farm bill if we're going to have good wildlife habitat and a healthy environment," said Andy McDaniels, executive director of the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation.

"Farmers, ranchers and other landowners depend on these programs to conserve our natural resources and improve wildlife habitat. We support their efforts and that's why we have formed this coalition."

THE GOAL IS TO EDUCATE

Designed to help spread the word on the benefits of the programs to help both the wildlife habitat in Oklahoma and the bottom line of Oklahoma's agriculture producers and private landowners, the Coalition for Conservation will work to educate policy makers, wildlife groups, agriculture producers and other landowners and the general public on the benefits of conservation work on private lands.

"When you see the improvement in wildlife habitat that has been brought about through programs like the Conservation Reserve Program [CRP], the Environmental Quality Incentive Program [EQIP] and the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program [WHIP], the value of USDA conservation programs to Oklahoma wildlife speak for themselves."

"This, when combined with the fact we aren't seeing another dust bowl during the driest year on record in Oklahoma history, shows the benefits to the agriculture industry in Oklahoma and our environment," said Clay Pope, executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts.

IT IMPACTS THE QUALITY OF LIFE

"When you consider the help these programs give to producers and to the environment and when you see what this means for the quality of life of all Oklahomans as well as the bottom lines of our farmers and ranchers, it's easy to come together to support the conservation title of the farm bill."

The Conservation Title of the Farm Bill primarily deals with locally-led, voluntary natural resource programs under the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service [NRCS]. This title of law also deals with the Conservation Reserve Program under the USDA Farm Service Agency [FSA].

These programs generally work with landowners through financial assistance

in the form of cost-share dollars and technical assistance through NRCS technicians to help protect and conserve soil, water, air and wildlife habitats.

Last year over \$20 million in cost-share dollars were available to Oklahoma landowners through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program alone.

A MILLION ACRES NOW INVOLVED

Additional funding is also available to landowners through programs such as the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program [WRP] and over one million Oklahoma acres are currently in the Conservation Reserve Program.

"Oklahoma land owners work hard to make a living for their families and we must give them an incentive to set aside parts of their property to support habitat for wildlife, not just game wildlife, but for all wildlife," said Scott Holmes, president of the Oklahoma Station Chapter of Safari Club International.

"If we are going to leave our children a heritage of God's handiwork, we must conserve nature's bounty so generations to come can enjoy and appreciate our great wildlife diversity in Oklahoma."

"The conservation provisions of the Farm Bill accomplish that objective if funded as originally envisioned, but last year, only one in four land owners who applied for incentives were able to implement conservation measures due to lack of congressional funding."

PRODUCERS AND POLICY MAKERS TARGETED

"Working together we can help better educate producers as to the programs that are available and we can help encourage our policy makers in Washington on the benefits of these voluntary, locally-led programs to the wildlife habitats in our state and the bottom line of our farmers and ranchers."

Members of the Coalition include the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation, the Oklahoma Station of the Safari Club International, Ducks Unlimited, the Oklahoma Sierra Club, Quail Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Becoming an Outdoor Woman, Nature Works, the National Wild Turkey Federation, BassPro, the Boggy River Ranch, Cleveland County Audubon, Deep Fork Retrievers, the Oklahoma Department of Tourism, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Grasslander, Johnson Seed, McGrew Whitetails, the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, Oklahoma Christian Camps, Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing Tackle Show, On the Water in the Woods, Western Prairie Heritage Alliance, Weyerhaeuser, Oklahoma Sportsman Coalition, the Tulsa World, the Bow Hunting Council of Oklahoma, Delta Waterfowl, Tucks Game Calls, Whitetails of Oklahoma, Sportsman's Warehouse, RockyTop Ranch, Quail Forever, Specialty Outdoor Services, The Nature Conservancy, QDMA, and the Regional Food Bank.

Oklahoma's Prison Crisis Still Growing

Oklahoma should consider sentencing reform as an alternative to building more prisons, said Sen. Richard Lerblance, chairman of the Oklahoma Sentencing Commission.

"We need to think outside the box on how to fix the Department of Corrections' prison-crowding crisis," said Lerblance, D-Hartshorne. "We need to take this opportunity to re-examine exactly who we as a society are demanding to be locked up and ask if imprisonment is the best solution to that problem."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, the latest national report shows Oklahoma has an incarceration rate of 649 inmates per 100,000 residents, ranking fourth in the nation. Oklahoma continues to rank first in the nation in female incarceration.

PROBLEM IS DRUG DEPENDENCY

In a study just released, the Bureau also reports that among state prisoners across the country, 53 percent reported drug dependence or drug abuse problems.

"Just building another prison won't fix the core problem. For fully half of the people who go to prison each year, the real problem is that they're drug addicted or mentally ill. Sure, they've broken the law; that's not disputed," he said.

"We should be asking, why isn't government doing something about these people's problems until they get arrested and convicted?"

Lerblance has suggested a number of proposals that the Sentencing Commission and Legislature should consider as a means of containing the perpetual crisis in prison funding.

STEPS THE STATE NEEDS TO TAKE

- Expand drug and mental-health courts, and create structured sentencing for drug offenders so that there is a uniform policy statewide on how the criminal justice system deals with offenders who ought to be diverted from prison.
- Cap the maximum length of a revocation sentence at two years.
- Revise mandatory minimum sentences, such as Life Without Parole for certain drug trafficking offenses, that contribute to crowding without protecting the public.
- Make expunging criminal records easier for certain low-risk felons so that ex-offenders are more employable and less likely to resort to crime to pay their bills.
- Compare Oklahoma's criminal code to states like Kansas, whose incarceration rate is half that of Oklahoma despite nearly identical demographics.

TRIPLED SPENDING IN 17 YEARS

"We've tripled prison spending over 17 years," said Lerblance, noting that the DOC budget has grown from \$143 million annually in FY 1990 to \$456 million



for FY 2007.

"If I felt three times safer today than I did 17 years ago, or if my insurance rates had gone down to a third of what they were 17 years ago, I wouldn't question the wisdom of building more prisons."

Despite the tripling of corrections spending, Lerblance said crime has not been significantly reduced and noted the risk of being a victim has not changed.

"Building another prison today may be a quick answer to our problem, but it's not the best answer. Government should operate like a business and identify and find the most effective solution to society's problems."

CORN CALLS FOR NEW PRISON

Meanwhile, state Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, said with current Department of Corrections [DOC] projections indicating Oklahoma will soon run out of room, he supports the construction of new prison space.

Corn, who chairs the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Safety and Judiciary, called the situation critical.

"Just two weeks ago, DOC had a backlog of about 1,100 inmates waiting to get into its facilities. Last week it was more than 1,200 and as of this Tuesday morning, it was 1,355," Corn said.

"By early next year, there will be no prison space left in Oklahoma to house these inmates."

Corn said it was imperative to move quickly once the 2007 legislative session begins to address the situation, which he predicts will continue to worsen.

"The DOC already owns property in McAlester. We could pass a bond issue that would enable us to construct space for an additional 750 inmates," Corn said. "I also support the request for a new 1,400-bed medium security facility."

The lack of state prison space has forced DOC to rely on county jails, but that has already led to court action in Oklahoma County, and is seriously straining resources in other counties, said Corn.

"In a worse-case scenario, we run the risk of federal intervention, which would be far more costly to our citizens," Corn said.

"Building additional space would actually be more cost-effective in several ways, because newer correctional facilities are designed to work with less staff and are more energy efficient," Corn said.

According to DOC Director Justin Jones, the state has not built a stand-alone secure facility in over 25 years. Other states have already contracted available private prison beds in Oklahoma.

"This is a public safety issue that must be a top priority in the coming session," Corn said. "I am hopeful that my fellow members agree that this is a crisis situation, and we must act quickly to address it."

Lawmaker Wants To Rein In Regents On Skyrocketing Tuition

With tuition nearly doubling the past five years at Oklahoma's two comprehensive universities, a state lawmaker is proposing the Legislature wrest away power to set tuition rates from the Regents for Higher Education.

"The regents aren't accountable to the voters, but the Legislature is," said state Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC. "Even in years when Higher Ed receives record appropriations, they increase tuition by the maximum amount allowed."

"The current system has proven to be a failure and the Legislature must take back its tuition powers – permanently."

For years, the Oklahoma Legislature had to approve tuition increases at Oklahoma colleges, but lawmakers ceded that authority to the regents in 2003. Since that time, the regents have imposed stiff increases that are making college unaffordable for many families.

In the past five years, state appropriations to colleges have increased by more than \$227.9 million, a jump of 28.8%. State colleges received roughly \$1 billion from the state last year – a record amount.

But even with that surge in state funding, the regents have increased tuition and fees by 48.3% during the same period.

Reynolds' measure, House Bill 1020, would again place the Oklahoma Legislature in control of tuition rates.

"The regents have no motivation to control tuition increases, and are not accountable to any Oklahoma voters," said Reynolds.

"The point of a higher education system is to produce college graduates, not increase bureaucrats' budgets. We need someone who is accountable to working families and cares about the affordability of college to be in charge of tuition decisions, and the Oklahoma Legislature is the best candidate for that job."

One In Every 32 Adults In Prison

As of last Dec. 31 there were 1,525,924 prisoners being held by state and federal correctional authorities, the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS] announced.

At the same time a separate BJS survey found that the adult U.S. correctional population, including those on probation or parole, reached a high of more than 7 million men and women for the first time.

About 3% of the U.S. adult population, or one in every 32 adults, were in the nation's prisons and jails or on probation or parole at the end of last year.

Between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2005, the number of inmates under state jurisdiction rose by 21,534 [1.6%]. At the same time, the federal population rose 7,290 [4%].

Overall, the U.S. prison population rose 1.9% during 2005, the same as the growth in 2004. On Dec. 31, 2005, nearly 2.2 million inmates were held in state and federal prisons or county and municipal jails – the equivalent of one in every 136 U.S. residents.

STATE'S RECORD NUMBERS

Oklahoma has 25,000 in prison – fourth largest in the nation, first in the percentage of women in prison.

Fourteen states reported increases of at least 5% during 2005; 11 states reported decreases. The federal sys-

tem remained the largest prison system [with 187,618 inmates under its jurisdiction], followed by California [170,676] and Texas [169,003].

During 2005, several states experienced significant growth, led by South Dakota [up 12%], Montana [up 11%] and Kentucky [up 10%].

At the end of 2005, there were 4,162,536 adult men and women on probation. Probationers are criminal offenders who have been sentenced to a period of conditional supervision in the community, generally in lieu of incarceration.

During 2005, the probation population grew by 19,070, or 0.5%, which was the smallest increase since the survey began in 1980.

There were 784,408 adult men and women on parole as of Dec. 31, 2005.

Parolees are criminal offenders supervised conditionally in the community following a prison term. The parole population grew by 12,556 – an increase of almost 2% percent during 2005.

Eleven states had increase of 10% or more in their parole population during 2005. Arkansas had the largest increase [23%] followed by North Dakota [17%]. Fourteen states reported a decrease in their parole population. Nebraska [down 17%] was the only state with a double-digit decrease.

– U.S. Justice Department

Until America's Color Blind, Schools In Bind

By Danny M. Adkison

If you know there is something you should do and you don't do it you have sinned. That, according to the last verse in Chapter 4 of the New Testament book of James, is what is called a sin of omission rather than a sin of commission. The distinction has plagued race cases in America for over 100 years.

It is, without a doubt, the most important Supreme Court decision of the 20th Century. Yet, the legal battle over race and the Constitution, which was seemingly won when the Court handed down *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, continues.

While it is understandable why so many, particularly in the South, found the Court's decision in *Brown* to be controversial, a case could be made that that decision was controversial for just the opposite reasons.

After all, many blacks thought the Constitution was finally going to guarantee their full acceptance in American society following the ratification of the Civil War amendments. The Thirteenth Amendment banned slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment overruled the Supreme Court's flawed *Dred Scott* decision, granted blacks full citizenship, and spoke in broad protective language [protecting privileges and immunities, guaranteeing due process of law, and requiring equal treatment under law]. The Fifteenth Amendment added the method whereby these rights could be enforced: denying states the authority to deny the right to vote on the basis of race.

HIGH COURT WAS MAJOR ROADBLOCK

Ironically, while it was the Supreme Court deciding *Brown* that would provide the legal and moral leadership in the middle of the 20th Century to begin the actual eradication of racial discrimination, it was the Supreme Court that thwarted race relations following the ratification of the Civil War amendments.

In the years immediately following these amendments the Supreme Court would rule that the Thirteenth Amendment, in spite of the fact that it was the only provision of the entire Constitution that addressed private citizens rather than the government, did not allow lawmakers to prevent public accommodations from engaging in racial discrimination.

It was then, and still is today, taken as a truism that the Constitution could not be used to prevent a private citizen from being a bigot. But surely the Constitution authorized lawmakers [federal, state, or both] to prohibit public accommodations [those hybrid institutions which are privately owned but which are open and cater to the public, almost always, by the way, with government assistance] from racist acts? It was not to be.

When Congress did finally get around to banning racial discrimination in public accommodations in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it justified its actions by relying on the "commerce clause."

The Disabled Face Job Discrimination

There are 600,000 Oklahomans with a disability but many are not taking advantage of a new law designed to aid them. Many are subject to job discrimination.

State Rep. Kris Steele, chairman of the House Health and Human Services Committee, asked for an interim study after being contacted about concerns regarding the current applicant process.

"Oklahomans with severe disabilities deserve an equal opportunity for state employment and protection from application-and-selection discrimination at state agencies," said Steele, R-Shawnee. "This study helped us identify better ways to give disabled citizens a fair chance for government employment."

In attendance were many individuals who voiced concerns with the current application process for disabled applicants based on the criteria of House Bill 1340, which passed in 1996.

STATE AGENCIES HIRE VERY FEW

The law was designed to encourage state agencies to hire qualified individuals with severe disabilities, but it has not had the anticipated impact.

According to statistics, in 2005 only 30 people with disabilities were hired by state agencies - not even one individual per county.

Jean Jones from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services said that in 2005 there were 600,000 Oklahomans with disabilities excluding children and infants. Of those, 361,000 were of work age.

Vicki Walls, one of Steele's constituents who lives with a disability, says the numbers prove House Bill 1340 is not having the desired impact and many qualified disabled applicants are slipping through the cracks at state agencies.

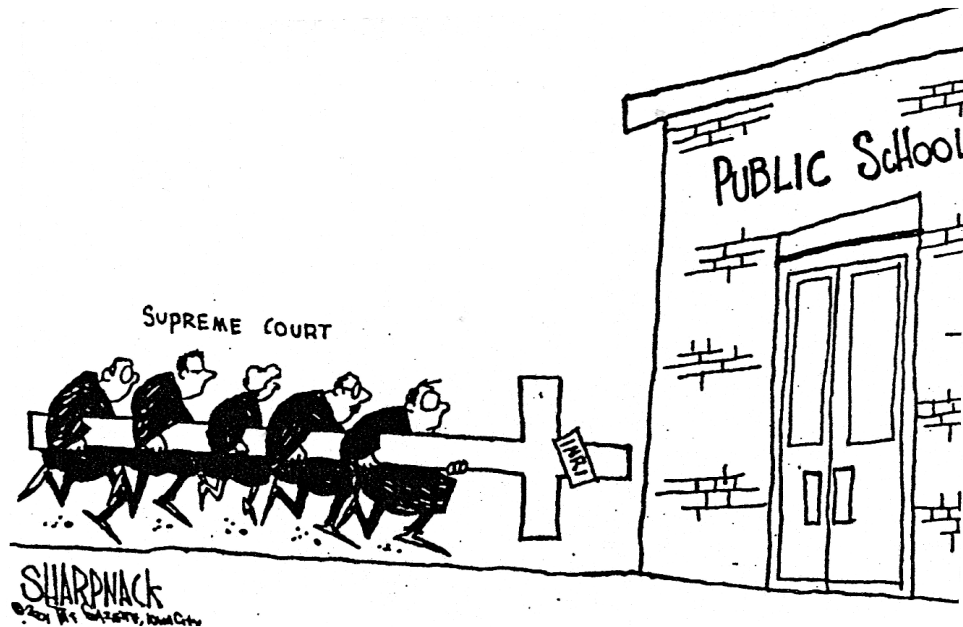
Steven Stokes, director of the Oklahoma Office of Handicapped Concerns, said many human resource and state agency employees are uneducated on the application processes and steps outlined in House Bill 1340.

CLASSES OFFERED TO EDUCATE THEM

He told the committee his agency offers classes to educate individuals of the workings of House Bill 1340.

Walls, along with Jones, said one main issue is the lack of a mechanism to alert state agencies of disabled applicants qualified for open employment positions.

Currently, even if a disabled applicant meets all job qualifications, they are not placed on the official state list of job candidates circulated among agencies



RACE AS 'TIEBREAKER' IN SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS

Recently, the Supreme Court broke with precedent. Normally, the Court sets aside one hour for oral argument in a case. This time, they had two hours of oral argument. At issue was a practice used in several states whereby race is used as a tiebreaker in assigning students to public schools.

The lawyers representing the schools that do this argued, obviously, that the Constitution allowed this on the grounds that although it is taking race into account it is for a greater good: providing a diverse school environment. Thus, we find ourselves returning to the notion of sins of commission versus sins of omission. You can't make people buy homes and live so that communities are automatically racially integrated. And it just so happens that in many communities in the U.S. people are inclined to live such that they racially segregate themselves. If students went to the closest schools to their homes, many public schools would be racially segregated.

That is why some schools, in a very limited fashion [too detailed for this space], rely on the racial "tiebreaker."

COMMON SENSE, A CENTURY LATE?

Paul D. Clement, the Solicitor General of the U.S., doesn't like the tiebreaker system. During oral argument he argued "that the lesson of history in this area is that racial classifications are not ones where we should just let local school board officials do what they think is right." That makes sense.

Really, it does. It is just that it is about 100 years late.

Where was this thinking when racial classifications were used to keep blacks and whites separate?

In a perfect world we should insist, as Justice Harlan did in *Plessy* in 1896, that justices be color-blind when reading the Constitution. We still have a long way to go. Maybe Justice O'Connor was right when she predicted we might be reaching our goal in 25 years. Until then, these tiebreakers should be upheld. A sin of omission, although not the same as one of commission, is still a sin.

- The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

during the hiring process. Instead, disabled applicants are required to separately send a letter identifying them as "severely disabled" along with a resume to every agency to which they apply.

Hank Batty from the Oklahoma Office of Personnel Management said the agency is working on a solution - an updated list of job openings posted online.

Officials are also concerned that disabled individuals are being further discriminated against by being labeled "severely" disabled.

"If you see 'severely disabled' some people assume the applicant cannot perform a particular job," said state Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove. "I think that unfair labeling needs to be changed because it could have definite negative impact in the hiring process."

GOP Bill Seeks To Lower Medical Costs

Oklahoma patients would have a new option to ensure they are properly and quickly compensated for medical malpractice while at the same time driving down the cost of medical services.

That's the claim of state Rep. Jason W. Murphey, R-Guthrie, who introduced legislation he said would lower medical costs by providing incentives for insurers to write "Negative Outcomes" insurance policies.

Murphey said Negative Outcomes insurance is a unique approach to medical tort reform and would provide a free-market alternative to the crises faced by physicians forced to deal with the high cost of medical malpractice insurance.

If passed, House Bill 1018 would allow a tax deduction for patients who purchase Negative Outcomes insurance. In the event of medical malpractice, the insurance would allow a patient to make an immediate claim for recovery of damages.

It would eliminate the need to become involved in protracted legal action against a physician, and leave the decision to litigate with the insurance company. A patient could receive a settlement directly and avoid costly legal fees.

"I think this legislation would be a significant step in reducing incentive for those promoting 'jackpot justice' legal actions against Oklahoma physicians," Murphey said.

282 Teachers Achieve National Certification

The teacher quality movement achieved a new milestone in Oklahoma with an announcement by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards that 282 teachers achieved National Board Certification [NBCT] in 2006 and are now recognized as among the nation's top educators.

Equally good news is that ninth-ranked Oklahoma has witnessed half of the board-certified teachers are using their skills in high-needs districts.

Oklahoma ranked seventh nationwide in the number of new NBCT. The state ranked ninth in the total number of teachers who achieved certification over time [1,569].

Oklahoma shows a 32% increase in the number of teachers who achieved certification in 2006 as compared to 2005 [282 in 2006 from 213 in 2005].

The number of NBCT in Oklahoma has nearly quadrupled in the past five years [394 in 2001 to 1,569 in 2006].

NEARLY 4% OF TEACHERS CERTIFIED

Nearly 4% of the state's teachers have achieved certification, more than doubling the national average.

At the Oklahoma NBCT Education Policy Summit, more than 300 of the state's NBCT worked with local education leaders and policymakers on creating ways to attract and retain more accomplished teachers for hard-to-staff and high-needs schools.

Nationally, the number of NBCT has more than tripled in the past five years [from 16,040 in 2001 to 55,300 in 2006]. Nineteen states have at least 30% growth in the number of new 2006 NBCT as compared to 2005.

In honor of those teachers and administrators who came together to have a conversation on how to staff and retain quality teachers, the Oklahoma Education Association released a first-of-its-kind policy paper.

THE VOICES OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The Teachers That Oklahoma Students Deserve is a policy paper that publishes the voices of classroom teachers and administrators on issues faced in Oklahoma high-needs schools.

The recommendations, made by Oklahoma's NBCT and administrators at the National Board Summit held in March 2006, include special training and incentives for teaching and leading in high-needs schools, "growing your own" NBCT, salary incentives and incentives beyond financial compensation, and aligning programs and opportunities for teachers to obtain National Board Certification.

"The National Board Summit was a great experience not only for our teachers and administrators, but for everyone involved. It gave those quality teachers that are in the classroom every day an opportunity to voice their concerns and give



recommendations on how to ensure every child receives a quality public education," OEA President Roy Bishop said.

ASSURING A GREAT FUTURE

"The recommendations included within the policy paper will ensure a great future for Oklahoma's public education system."

The day-long Summit allowed over 330 NBCT and 100 administrators to meet with some of the state's leading policy makers, including Gov. Brad Henry, State Superintendent Sandy Garrett, Sen. Susan Paddock and Rep. Ann Coody.

Garrett said she was proud of the fact that she was on the first national board, lauding the program as outstanding.

According to Bishop, the recommendations included within the policy paper promote collaboration between administrators and teachers.

"This collaboration offers a pathway to provide high-needs schools with quality teachers who understand the opportunities that come with improving student achievement," said Linda Everett, Associate Executive Director of the Cooperative Council of School Administration [CCOSA].

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

"Communication between administrators and teachers is key to ensuring a quality school. We recognize this need and support the recommendations made by Oklahoma's highly qualified teachers and administrators."

"We look forward to working with the Legislature to ensure that the recommendations included within The Teachers That Oklahoma Students Deserve are implemented so we can continue to recruit and retain our quality teachers in Oklahoma's high-needs schools," said Bishop.

The Legislature provides a stipend of \$5,000 a year for 10 years for those teachers who are certified.

\$7 Billion Short

Teacher Retirement Funding Is In Crisis

The Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma is one of the five worst-funded, state-run retirement plans in the United States - more than \$7 billion in the hole.

The most recent actuarial report continues to show the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma to be under-funded with only 49.3% of assets currently available to cover its accrued liabilities.

The state of Oklahoma, its school districts and other educational entities have met the actuarially required employer contribution in only eight of the last 37 years, causing the under-funded condition of the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma to continue to deteriorate.

Passage of Enrolled House Bill 1172XX will negatively impact state revenues dedicated to the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma in that revenues to the Retirement Fund will be reduced by \$57 million between January 1, 2007, and June 30, 2010.

DECREASED FUNDING EVERY YEAR

This will continue to cause the Retirement Fund to receive at least \$23 million less in each subsequent fiscal year thereafter.

The liabilities of the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma are a financial obligation to more than 143,000 active, inactive and retired education employees who depend on the state of Oklahoma for certain earned benefits when each member becomes eligible to receive his or her benefit.

These liabilities are a legal and moral obligation of the state of Oklahoma.

The continued failure to address this problem, which is one of the most serious financial problems facing the state of Oklahoma, creates a feeling of insecurity in both active and retired members of the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma.

IT HURTS MORE THAN RETIREES

It is having and will continue to have a negative impact on the state's ability to raise revenues through the issuance of general obligation bonds, and is costing plan participants, school districts and other educational entities and taxpayers of Oklahoma more in the form of additional contributions.

The Board of Trustees of the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma are requesting that Gov. Brad Henry and members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives and the Oklahoma State Senate take immediate and positive action to address the financial condition of the Teachers' Retirement System of Okla-

homa.

A MINIMUM OF \$50 MILLION A YEAR

The Board of Trustees of the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma in a resolution passed last November implored the governor and the Legislature to develop a plan to provide additional revenue over and above that which is already dedicated to the Teachers' Retirement Systems so that a minimum of \$50 million more per year is applied to reducing the system's liabilities, until the funding ratio is at least 80%.

Trustees also asked that the state provide additional new funds when necessary to ensure that retired members of the Teachers' Retirement System of Oklahoma receive post-retirement benefits equivalent to the level of benefit increases provided to other state retirees.

Editor's Note: Every school board member, educator, support personnel and concerned parent ought to personally place a copy of this article in the hands of their local editor, senator and state representative. No issue facing Oklahoma is more critical.

Jackson Leads National Group

Oscar Jackson, administrator of the Office of Personnel Management and Gov. Brad Henry's Cabinet Secretary of Human Resources and Administration, is the new president of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources [IPMA-HR].

"Oscar Jackson has served state government with distinction during the administrations of three governors," Gov. Henry said. "It is an honor to have a member of my executive cabinet serve as president of the largest public HR association in the United States."

IPMA-HR represents the interests of over 8,000 human resource professionals at the federal, state and local levels of government. The organization assists public HR professionals in increasing their job performance and overall agency functions through the provision of cost effective products, services and educational opportunities.

Jackson has served as OPM administrator and cabinet secretary since 1991, when he was first appointed to both posts by Gov. David Walters. He was re-appointed to the positions by Gov. Frank Keating in 1995 and Gov. Henry in 2003.

PUBLIC FORUM

Silly Sally Says Special Sessions Superfluous

By Karen Webb

First we should define superfluous for State Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, because she likely will think it is an effort to homosexualize Oklahoma. She thinks everything anyone says that she doesn't understand or disagrees with is part of the gay agenda to send the entire state to hell. Superfluous means exceeding what is necessary.

"Lawmakers are in session from the first week in February to the last week in May – plenty of time to finish its business each year," Kern said.

And a good deal of that time is used on asinine bills by Sally – like putting an "adults only" section in every children's library. She thinks she gets to choose what your child can read because she doesn't have time to spend with hers at the library to make sure they don't go to hell while reading true stories about male penguins raising a baby penguin. She thinks the male penguins are ghost-writers of the so-called "gay agenda." She has seen that agenda, but I have never met a gay person who has.

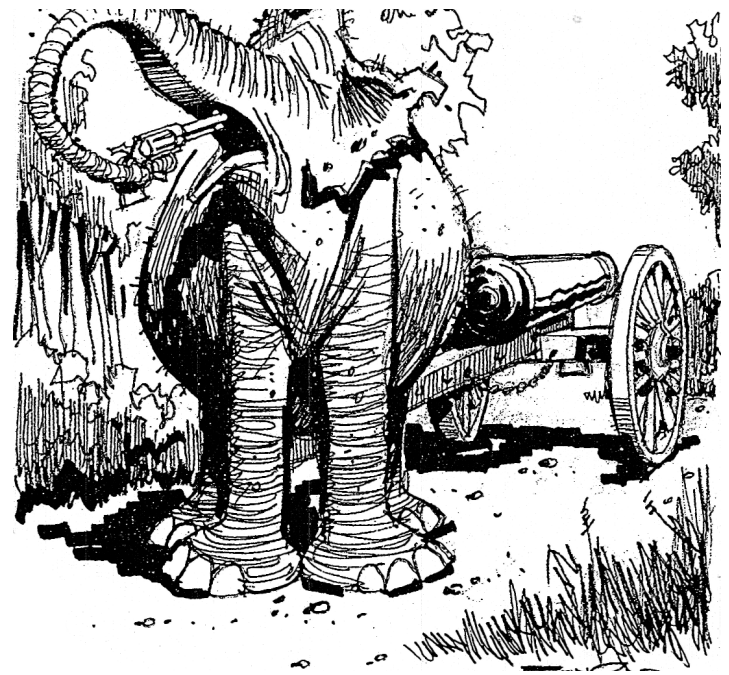
"If we don't have a budget completed on time, it's primarily the fault of legislative leaders because they have not been working together, so they should face a financial consequence," she said.

This coming from someone who has never been known to disagree with anyone, except in a nice way, like tell them they are bound for hell unless she gets to choose their mates.

Last year, a five-day special session was required because House and Senate leaders could not agree on the budget.

Well, Miss Sally, why don't you just go take it out of former House Speaker Todd Hiett's hide. He is the idiot who fired every House employee who had any idea how things are done.

"The resolution would make House and Senate minority and majority lead-



ers forfeit one-third of their salary during any month a special session is required. Other lawmakers would see their salary cut by 25 percent during the month."

Their salary for a month or just the period of the special session? Any month, don't you be calling Sally in early, like January or after dinner on Christmas. I don't recall that she really pushed Hiett to compromise. If she did, please let me know. Oh, Sally, why not cut yours by one-third since you did elect Hiett leader and since you did waste House time with frivolous crap while trying to micro-manage or legislate everyone into Christianity, like it or not.

"Our primary job as legislators is to write a budget for the state," Kern said. "I thought it was ridiculous that we didn't finish the budget on time last year, and things drug out for weeks until a government shutdown was a real possibility."

Really, Sally, I could have sworn I have heard you say that the primary job is to bring this state back to God. But Sally, I would like to see or hear the parts where you objected. Where you said, "Todd, it's God's will that you get this show on the road and compromise."

– The author lives in Moore

Black Indians Deserve To Remain Cherokees

By Fannie Bates

I am a third generation Oklahoman. My grandmother, Irish/Cherokee, walked to Oklahoma from Alabama in 1896.

Growing up in southeastern Oklahoma, I participated in many of the Indian ceremonies. I spoke a little Choctaw and sang in Choctaw. I ate pashofe. I sang all night on many occasions. These ceremonies included many "full-blood Indians," as well as "Black Indians" and "green-eyed Indians" like me.

The Black Indians were loved and respected among the group.

Now that the tribes are coming into gaming money, there is a serious push to expel the Black Indians from the tribes. There are around 30,000 Black Indians living in Oklahoma. A few thousand of them are "card-carrying" tribal members. All the ones I know are extremely proud of their Indian heritage.

It looks like the Cherokee Nation is going to be voting Feb. 10 on whether to kick the "freedmen" out of the tribe. This is a complex issue. The Constitutional amendment they will be voting on is extremely confusing.

FROM SLAVES TO TRIBAL MEMBERS

You see, most of the Black Indians are "descendants of freedmen." In other words, their ancestors were once slaves of the tribe. But after the Civil War, the tribes voted to accept them as members of the tribe. Over the generations, most of them married within the tribe. Consequently, most of them are, in fact, "Indian by blood."

There are several rolls within the Dawes Rolls. The freedmen's ancestors appear on a separate roll from the "by-blood" roll. Their roll is called the freedmen

roll. While most of them do not appear on the "by-blood roll," they are, in fact, Indian by blood.

But it is my understanding that this Constitutional amendment would kick them all out of the tribe whether they are Indian by blood or not. This has racist implications: a green-eyed Cherokee who is 1/200 Cherokee would stay on the roll, while a descendant of the freedmen who can prove that his grandmother was half Cherokee would be automatically expelled.

EMBRACING THEIR INDIAN CULTURE

The Black Indians I know had totally lost their "African" culture by the time the Civil War was over. Their only culture was their Indian culture. They spoke the languages, danced the dances, ate the food, and practiced the Indian ways of life.

I have many personal friends who are Black Indians. These are generous people who put the good of the tribe before their own, personal well-being. To be summarily expelled from their tribe is going to be extremely painful for many of these people.

When people come from all over the world to see the Oklahoma Centennial celebrations, they will doubtlessly hear about these beautiful people who have been treated so unfairly. It is ironic that the U.S. demands that other countries treat their racial minorities with dignity, but we have this racist activity going on in the heartland.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

Silent No More: Time To Fight America's Tyrant

By Colin T. Bent

I am uncertain about the feelings of my fellow citizens but in my eyes the ideals of this democracy called the United States of America have taken a blow from which it probably will never recover. Unlike most, I made a conscious decision to become an American and the day that I qualified to apply for my citizenship I did so with all seriousness and resolve because mine was not a flight for economic survival but rather for the ideals of freedom of speech and the many other rights granted under this Constitution.

Several years ago I took the time to read every word of our Constitution, the Bill of Rights and all, and I was reduced to tears when I saw the freedoms that this document gave me as a resident and later a citizen of this country. And so, with my limited knowledge of the powers that We the People have vested in our government, I have developed an ache that will never leave me.

I have just witnessed a man who has jettisoned the will of the majority of the people and of the Congress of the United States and has compelled the armed forces of the United States to perform his sole wishes and not that of the PEOPLE, the employers of those who govern. I have just witnessed the president of the United States, employee of the people, spurn the wishes of the people which were voiced in the way provisioned by the Constitution, anointing himself with

imperial powers not allowed by this sacred document.

NO DOUBTING THE MESSAGE OF ELECTION 2006

We said in November that we had arrived at our tolerant limits with this illegal war in Iraq and we needed for our country to go in another direction. Our King responds by telling us that not only will he continue the war but he will send more of us to kill and be killed and will also seek reasons to expand the excursion into Syria and Iran. I ask, are oil and the damn dollar that important? Are we that impotent a people that we will not raise our voices in refrain in opposition to the destruction of the Constitution of the United States of America? If we allow the trampling of our Constitution we basically have nothing for which to fight!

Our political representatives have no power but what we allow them and it is time that we remind ourselves, first, and them ultimately, that We the People are in control and if they refuse to do our bidding then we will withhold the power which they are granted. I can write and so I do, I can march and agitate and I will, but I'll be darned if I sit still while one tyrant attempts to destroy the idea that I have bought into, by choice, without exercising the full rights of what it is to be a citizen of these United States. Do I have a witness?

– The author lives in Tulsa

Payday Loans Are Seductively Easy

Some Oklahomans are chronically broke because each month they visit storefront money-lending shops, often paying as much as \$1,500 a month in interest.

Virtually every strip mall or empty building ends up with a payday loan interest.

While such lending is effectively banned in 11 states, through usury or other laws, it is flourishing in Oklahoma, thanks to then-Sen. Angela Monson, D-OKC, author of Oklahoma's law legalizing them.

The Center for Responsible Lending, a private consumer group, calculates that nationally payday loans totaled at least \$28 billion in 2005, doubling in five years.

The loans are quick and easy. Customers are usually required to leave a pre-dated personal check that the lender can cash on the next payday, two or four weeks later.

They must show a pay stub or proof of regular income, like Social Security, but there is no credit check, which leads to some defaults but, more often, continued extension of the loan, with repeated fees.

MILITARY FAMILIES TO BE EXEMPT

In September, Congress, responding to complaints that military personnel were the targets of "predatory lenders," imposed a limit of 36% annual interest on loans to military families.

Check Air Depot, the street leading into Tinker Air Force Base. It is littered with payday loan shops.

The new federal law will take effect next October and is expected to choke off payday lending to this group because, lenders say, the fees they could charge for a two-week loan would be negligible, little more than 10 cents per day.

The new law will have little impact on the larger practice because military families account for only a tiny share of payday lending, which lenders defend as meeting a need of low-income workers.

Defenders claim the industry had prospered because more people work in modestly paying service sector jobs, and in a pinch they find payday loans easy

Law Is Expected To Slow Identity Theft

A new state law is taking aim at identity thieves by giving Oklahoma consumers the right to place a freeze on their credit reports.

The Oklahoma Consumer Report Security Freeze Act, passed during the 2006 legislative session, allows Oklahomans to place a freeze on their credit files upon written request to the three credit reporting agencies, TransUnion, Equifax and Experian.

The cost for placing or lifting a freeze is \$10, but the fee is waived for Oklahomans 65 and older and identity theft victims who have a police report on file. The law took effect Jan. 1.

"Thanks to the new security freeze law, the party is over for impostors who use the credit files of unsuspecting consumers to open bogus accounts," said Bob Bristow, Oklahoma State President of the AARP. "The security freeze represents



Payday loan outlets are proliferating along Midwest City's Air Depot Boulevard, within a mile of a primary Tinker Air Force Base gate.

to get.

The Community Financial Services Association of America, a trade group that represents about 60% of payday lenders, said the frequency of extended rollovers and huge payments is exaggerated by critics.

THEY SUPPORT 'FAIR REGULATION'

The association said it supports "fair regulations," including a cap on two-week fees in the range of \$15 to \$17 per \$100, a level now mandated in several states, including Florida, Illinois and Minnesota.

This translates into effective fees of about a dollar a day for those who repay on time, which he said was reasonable given the risks and costs of business.

The biggest problem, consumer advocates say, and the biggest source of profits to lenders is that too many customers find that they must "roll over" the loans, repaying the same fee each month until they can muster the original loan amount.

Over several months, they can easily spend far more on fees than they ever received in cash and may end up by borrowing from multiple sites to payoff others. If it is good enough to protect military families, why isn't it good enough to protect all Oklahoma families?

a proactive solution to a growing problem."

AARP estimates the annual cost of identity theft is about \$50 billion for businesses and \$5 billion for individuals.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, Oklahoma reported more than 2,400 cases of identity theft in 2005, ranking 18th out of the 50 states. Oklahoma City had the most complaints [484] followed by Tulsa [366], Edmond [97], Norman [81], and Broken Arrow [66].

Through a security freeze, a consumer can prevent anyone from looking at his or her credit files for the purpose of authorizing new accounts unless the consumer decides to lift the freeze for a specific party or period of time.

If the consumer's credit files are frozen and an imposter applies for credit in their name, the application cannot be processed. Oklahoma is one of 25 states to pass the security freeze legislation.

"One by one, states are enacting security freeze legislation to provide an important new identity theft protection tool for consumers," said state Sen. Randy Bass, D-Lawton, who authored the Oklahoma law in the Senate.

"I encourage all Oklahomans to be well informed about the contents of their credit files and weigh the options to see if a security freeze is right for them."

Televising Most State Government Proposed

State Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, is sponsoring House Bill 1039 which would require creation of a C-SPAN-style, live broadcast of legislative floor and committee meetings, state executive board meetings and Supreme Court proceedings.

Murphey's legislation would require the content to be made available to the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority [OETA] and all Oklahoma licensed television operators.

He believes that with the additional delivery capacity provided to telecasters by digital service, a large number of Oklahoma homes would have access to the televised coverage.

"Other states began providing C-SPAN-like coverage of government. I think it is important for Oklahomans to have the same access to state government," he said.

His desire to advocate for televised government was reinforced by the 2006 judicial retention ballot returns. He observed that the difference between the five judges up for retention was only 2.8 percent.

"If people could see the Supreme Court on television then I think they would be able to form opinions about individual justices on whom they are voting," he said.

This is not the first time Murphey has worked to open up government via television. In 2001, Murphey campaigned for Guthrie City Council on a platform of televising local government proceedings, successfully passing a resolution establishing the existence of the Guthrie municipal channel.

"In local government we saw first-hand what a difference it made when people were empowered with the knowledge of what was going on," he said. "Now I would like to work for the same in state government."

Favorable OKC Job Market Expected

Oklahoma City area employers expect to hire at a respectable pace during the first quarter of 2007, according to the Manpower Employment Outlook Survey.

From January to March, 30% of the companies interviewed plan to hire more employees, while 13% expect to reduce their payrolls, according to Manpower spokesperson Steven Clay. Another 57% expect to maintain their current staff levels.

"In the Oklahoma City area, employers expect less hiring activity than in the fourth quarter when 37% of the companies interviewed intended to increase headcount, and 7% planned to decrease it," said Clay. "Employer optimism about hiring is similar to a year ago when 23% of companies surveyed thought job gains were likely and 7% intended to cut back."

For the coming quarter, job prospects appear best in construction, durable goods manufacturing, wholesale/retail trade and public administration. Employers in transportation/public utilities and education plan to reduce staffing levels, while those in mining and services voice mixed hiring intentions. Hiring in non-durable goods manufacturing and finance/insurance/real estate is expected to remain unchanged.

Of the 14,000 U.S. employers surveyed, 23% expect to add to their payrolls during the first quarter of 2007, while 11% expect to reduce staff levels. Sixty percent expect no change in the hiring pace, while 6% are undecided about their hiring plans for the first three months of the year.

BOOKS

David Fitzgerald's Centennial Gift

By Mike Nobles

OKLAHOMA 3

Photography by David Fitzgerald

Essay by Jane Jayroe

Graphic Arts Center Publishing Co.

144 pages, \$39.95

The publisher of this wonderful book, based in Portland, OR, has a well-deserved reputation for producing quality coffee-table-style books. They published two prior volumes on Oklahoma that were widely acclaimed and became collectors' items. However, with this book they have truly outdone themselves. This is an absolutely gorgeous testament to Oklahoma's stunning beauty and diversity and, if that's not enough, it is being released just in time to commemorate the upcoming Oklahoma Centennial celebration.

Where to begin? For starters, the book is filled with spectacular color photographs of both the cities and countryside of Oklahoma, taken by none other than the award-winning Oklahoma photographer David Fitzgerald. For over 40 years he has been documenting the incomparable beauty of Oklahoma in both the two former volumes and indeed in venues nationwide. The photo of the new state Capitol dome is priceless and the myriad pictures of the geographical diversity of the state serve as both a reminder of, and a source of pride in, our heritage.

Not to be outdone is the text provided by Jane Jayroe, former Miss Oklaho-

'An absolutely wonderful, must-have souvenir of the Oklahoma Centennial'

Oklahoma 3



Photographs by DAVID FITZGERALD — Essay by JANE JAYROE

ma and Miss America [1967]. Jayroe, former executive director of the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, stays true to her journalistic training by providing a highly readable, entertaining and informative essay on the contents of the book. From western Oklahoma through central to eastern Oklahoma and all places in-between the reader is taken on an almost magical trip both in pictures and text of this place we call home, Oklahoma!

The book will make an absolutely wonderful, must-have souvenir of the Oklahoma Centennial and is a great gift idea for just about anyone for any other occasion. Highly recommended.

— The author, cofounder of *A Gathering of Writers*, lives in Tulsa

The William Jennings Bryan You May Not Know

By Alvena Bieri

A GODLY HERO

By Michael Kazin

Knopf

400 pages, \$30.00

It may seem trite to call a book "thought provoking," but that is an accurate description of the new biography of William Jennings Bryan, "A Godly Hero," by Michael Kazin. Through the years Bryan's reputation has been subject to many interpretations. Some in his own time considered him a clueless demagogue. To others he was a Christian saint, putting the ethics of Jesus to work in a society much like ours today — rich at the top, struggling at the bottom, and uncertain in the middle. In his youth, Bryan was called "the boy orator of the Platte," then the Great Commoner, a title that would be rather hard to attach accurately to any major national politician today.

Kazin says in his introduction that "serious biographers of Mr. Bryan belong to a tiny, endangered species." Kazin calls himself a secular liberal, and he certainly seems open-minded and objective as he informs us of the myriad facts and ins-and-outs of Bryan's life.

Unfortunately, many of the negative feelings toward Bryan center on the last few weeks of his life at the Scopes trial at Dayton, TN, in 1925. As we know, the issue there was the teaching of evolution in public schools, something that is not quite settled yet. Bryan was anti-evolution, and he faced the famous lawyer Clarence Darrow who spoke for it. Bryan died just a few days after the trial was over.

But Kazin looks at the Great Commoner in a far more positive light, emphasizing his marvelous speaking skills, his boundless energy, his three-time run for the presidency, and reforms he introduced in our government. Most of all, he emphasizes Bryan's genuine concern for ordinary people.

He was really a man of many talents. Born right before the Civil War, he went to school in Jacksonville, IL, followed by law school, and when he moved to Nebraska to practice law, he even edited the Omaha World-Herald for a while. He agreed with the Populists of his time that excesses of the Gilded Age needed to be brought under control.

Bryan ran for president in 1896 on the Democratic ticket and received six million votes. Most of the Populists voted for him. It was his dramatic Cross of Gold speech favoring free silver that some said guaranteed his nomination. He traveled the entire country, but he was defeated by William McKinley. He ran two more times, in 1904 and 1908. His losses were painful.

But his political career was not over. He admired Woodrow Wilson, and Kazin says Bryan was "largely responsible for his [Wilson's] nomination for President in 1912." So when Wilson was elected, he appointed Bryan secretary of state. As World War I approached, Bryan was much against the involvement of the U.S., and he resigned. He made a novel suggestion we could use today. He proposed a vote of the people to decide whether this nation should go to war.

Bryan's political legacy included many reforms that actually came about. Prohibition turned out to be a mistake, but backing the vote for women in 1910, long before most politicians did, was a good step. His support also helped to achieve the direct election of senators. In 1907 he visited Oklahoma and supported our new Constitution which included anti-child labor laws, compulsory schooling, and the initiative and referendum.

In 1920 the family moved to Florida. I was surprised to learn that by that time in his life he was a millionaire. He had made a lot of money with his great speeches on the Chautauqua circuit, and he also had profitable investments in real

estate.

Kazin calls his final chapter "The Fate of a Christian Liberal." Like all human beings, Bryan was imperfect. He was accused of anti-Semitism because of his attacks on big business. He was not ahead of his time on race relations. Bryan's wife Mary once asked, "What is it that caused this man to be so widely known, so greatly loved, and so ardently hated?" I am glad to say that Will Rogers in his newspaper column called Bryan "a fighter for the plain people."

His daughter Ruth went to Congress as a Florida representative in 1928 and became a good friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. His other children were active in the Democratic Party. I suppose the lesson of Bryan's life for us today is that a political party should have worthy goals and then be inclusive, welcoming all who want to work together, including Muslims, Methodists, Catholics, Unitarians, or secular humanists. So far I have not heard anyone complain that Martin Luther King was a Baptist.

— The author lives in Stillwater

Not Your Father's Poetry

By Mike Nobles

JACK AND OTHER NEW POEMS

By Maxine Kumin

W.W. Norton & Co.

112 pages, \$13.95

Finally, the long awaited new paperback volume of poetry by Maxine Kumin, a former Poet Laureate of New Hampshire and winner of the Pulitzer Prize, has been released. Not only is the poetry first-rate, but given that it is published by one of the few remaining major independent publishers, the price is more than reasonable.

Kumin has published 15 volumes of poetry along with novels, short stories, a memoir, and essays on country living. She has taught at a score of colleges and universities and won a host of prestigious awards including the Ruth Lilly Prize, The Poets' Prize, the 2005 Harvard Arts Medal, the Robert Frost Medal as well as the Pulitzer Prize in 1973.

This new offering depicts Kumin's sometimes humorous, sometimes compassionate, but always respectful relationship with the animals that make up a significant part of her New England farm life. To be sure, the volume includes acknowledgement of her signature descriptions of the cycle of death and world events including racism, the Patriot Act, and elections that are less than honest, but her relationship with animals as living beings is a tribute to her humanity and a major theme of the book.

For example, the title poem, "Jack," is a poignant reminder of an incident that occurred 25 years ago, but still haunts Kumin with a guilt and heartbreak that *Every year, the end of summer lazy and golden, invites grief and regret*. It is a profound and moving poem that will speak to any animal lover and forever remain in your mind. The poem "Which One" speaks to the sometimes unspeakable acts that are perpetrated on animals and Kumin's admonishment that I look for you wherever I go will give the reader an idea of the depth of her caring.

This is a must-have book for anyone remotely interested in contemporary poetry done by one of the most readable, fearless, and enduring poets writing today. It is not the poetry you thought you didn't like.

— The author, cofounder of *A Gathering of Writers*, lives in Tulsa

Earth To Bush

Read Our Lips: No More War

By Molly Ivins

The purpose of this old-fashioned newspaper crusade to stop the war is not to make George W. Bush look like the dumbest president ever. People have done dumber things. What were they thinking when they bought into the Bay of Pigs fiasco? How dumb was the Egypt-Suez war? How massively stupid was the entire war in Vietnam? Even at that, the challenge with this misbegotten adventure is that WE simply cannot let it continue.

It is not a matter of whether we will lose or we are losing. We have lost. Gen. John P. Abizaid, until recently the senior commander in the Middle East, insists that the answer to our problems there is not military. "You have to internationalize the problem. You have to attack it diplomatically, geo-strategically," he said.

His assessment is supported by Gen. George W. Casey Jr., the senior American commander in Iraq, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who only recommend releasing forces with a clear definition of the goals for the additional troops.

Bush's call for a "surge" or "escalation" also goes against the Iraq Study Group.

NO WAY BUSH ADOPTS STUDY GROUP PLAN

Talk is that the White House has planned to do anything but what the group suggested after months of investigation and proposals based on much broader strategic implications.

About the only politician out there besides Bush actively calling for a surge is Sen. John McCain. In a recent opinion piece, he wrote: "The presence of additional coalition forces would allow the Iraqi government to do what it cannot accomplish today on its own - impose its rule throughout the country ... By surging troops and bringing security to Baghdad and other areas, we will give the Iraqis the best possible chance to succeed." But with all due respect to the senator from Arizona, that ship has long since sailed.

A surge is not acceptable to the people in this country - we have voted overwhelmingly against this war in polls [about 80% of the public is against escalation, and a recent Military Times poll shows only 38% of active military want more troops sent] and at the polls. We know this is wrong. The people understand, the people have the right to make this decision, and the people have the obligation to make sure our will is implemented.

Congress must work for the people in the resolution of this fiasco. Ted Kennedy's proposal to control the money and tighten oversight is a welcome first



step. And if Republicans want to continue to rubber-stamp this administration's idiotic "plans" and go against the will of the people, they should be thrown out as soon as possible, to join their recent colleagues.

'HOW COULD WE HAVE LET THIS HAPPEN?'

Anyone who wants to talk knowledgeably about our Iraq misadventure should pick up Rajiv Chandrasekaran's "Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone." It's like reading a horror novel. You just want to put your face down and moan: How could we have let this happen? How could we have been so stupid?

As The Washington Post's review notes, Chandrasekaran's book "methodically documents the baffling ineptitude that dominated U.S. attempts to influence Iraq's fiendish politics, rebuild the electrical grid, privatize the economy, run the oil industry, recruit expert staff or instill a modicum of normalcy to the lives of Iraqis."

We are the people who run this country. We are the deciders. And every single day, every single one of us needs to step outside and take some action to help stop this war. Raise hell. Think of something to make the ridiculous look ridiculous. Make our troops know we're for them and trying to get them out of there. Hit the streets to protest Bush's proposed surge. If you can, go to the peace march in Washington on Jan. 27. We need people in the streets, banging pots and pans and demanding, "Stop it, now!"

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Grieving Deaths In A Mistaken War

By Edwin E. Vineyard

"How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" queried a decorated, young, former Navy lieutenant with several Purple Hearts of Congress in 1971 about the Vietnam War. Although John Kerry was much maligned by his political enemies for his role in leading protests to a war in which he had fought, the question remains a poignant one. It is particularly relevant to our own era.

The thought of being the last soldier to die in any war is a tough one to put one's mind around. It would be even more difficult to fathom the wantonly lost feeling in contemplating the last one to die unnecessarily without good cause.

The Militant Moderate has been sufficiently disturbed by these thoughts as to be motivated to see what might be readily available on the Internet about those soldiers who had been the last to die in some of our wars. It became even more disturbing to find that these last men to die were so obscure as to be beyond easy reach or identification. An irony of the search was that certain of these names were found only on trivia sites. How sad!

George Pike, a Canadian, was said to be the last to die in the trenches on November 12, a day after the signing of the Armistice ending World War I. However, numerous men of American, Australian, and other nationalities died on the day of the Armistice. It was said that vigorous artillery barrages, much heavier than usual, were exchanged on the morning in an apparent effort to inflict as much harm as possible before the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month when the Armistice would go into effect.

THEY DIED HELPING OTHERS AT SAIGON AIRPORT

Charles McMahon, 21, of Massachusetts, and Darwin Lee Judge, 19, of Iowa, were the last ones to die in Vietnam at the Saigon airport, guarding the departures there in 1975. So, these two young men were the last to die in that mistaken war about which Kerry inquired four years earlier.

Some say that Abraham Lincoln was the last to die in America's Civil War. However, the last young soldier to die was John Williams from Indiana who died one month after the surrender at Appomattox in a skirmish at Palmito Ranch in Texas. He was the only casualty of that last battle.

Certainly it is a sad, discomfoting thought to think of the young men who have been the last to die in our wars. However, in another sense, the last to die are no more significant than the first, and the first are no more significant than those between themselves and the last. Deaths in war are a sad thing. The writer has experienced death in war in his own family. It is a heart wrenching experience that lasts forever.

But it is even more tragic to be either the last, or in any position, among those who die in a mistaken cause or following mistaken orders. Who can forget the gallantry of the Light Brigade, memorialized in the epic poem about the Crimean War? Or, who can forget the tragic and wasteful error of Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg?

Let us not leave our young Americans to die in Iraq as a continuation of a mistake! We would wish that the last one to die there was yesterday.

- The author, aka the Militant Moderate, lives in Enid

Domestic Violence Off Sharply

Domestic violence rates in the United States dropped sharply between 1993 and 2005 but showed recent signs of a rebound, the Justice Department reports.

The number of domestic homicides fell 32% from 1993 to 2005, and the frequency of nonfatal violence between domestic partners dropped by more than 50%, from 5.8 attacks per 1,000 U.S. residents age 12 or older, to 2.6 attacks, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Men benefited from the decline more than women, and black victims more than white women. The number of women killed by current or former partners fell from 1,572 in 1993 to 1,159 in 2005, or 26%. The number of men killed dropped from 698 to 385, or 45%.

"The best news overall is that 'intimate partner violence' has declined since 1993, but there's still too much of it," said bureau statistician Shannan M. Catalano, author of the Justice Department online report. The report did not address violence among other household members or relatives.

Noting that current or former partners account for 22% of violence against women, but 3% of violence against men, Catalano said, "It still is a crime against women. Women are more often victimized by someone they know. Men are more often victimized by strangers."

Theories credit increased policing, neighborhood-watch and victim-assistance programs, and awareness raised by the 1994 Violence Against Women Act.

On average, 18.2 of 1,000 American Indian and native Alaskan women were victimized a year, nearly three times the rate among white women and twice the rate among black women. The least violence was reported against Asian men, white men and people age 50 and older.

Down On GOP, Too

Soldiers Losing Faith In Bush And War

By Robert Hodierne

The American military – once a staunch supporter of President Bush and the Iraq war – has grown increasingly pessimistic about chances for victory, according to the 2006 Military Times Poll.

For the first time, more troops disapprove of the president's handling of the war than approve of it. Barely one-third of service members approve of the way the president is handling the war.

When the military was feeling most optimistic about the war – in 2004 – 83% of poll respondents thought success in Iraq was likely. Now, that number has shrunk to 50%.

Only 35% of the military members polled this year said they approve of the way President Bush is handling the war, while 42% said they disapproved. The president's approval rating among the military is only slightly higher than for the population as a whole. In 2004, when his popularity peaked, 63% of the military approved of Bush's handling of the war. While approval of the president's war leadership has slumped, his overall approval remains high among the military.

Just as telling, only 41% of the military said the U.S. should have gone to war in Iraq in the first place, down from 65% in 2003. That closely reflects the beliefs of the general population today – 45% agreed in a recent USA Today/Gallup poll.

CASUALTIES, PRE-WAR INTELLIGENCE TO BLAME

Professor David Segal, director of the Center for Research on Military Organization at the University of Maryland, was not surprised by the changing attitude within the military.

"They're seeing more casualties and fatalities and less progress," Segal said.

He added, "Part of what we're seeing is a recognition that the intelligence that led to the war was wrong."

Whatever war plan the president comes up with next, it likely will have the replacement of American troops with Iraqis as its ultimate goal. The military is not optimistic that will happen soon. Only about one in five service members said that large numbers of American troops can be replaced within the next two years. More than one-third think it will take more than five years. And more than half think the U.S. will have to stay in Iraq more than five years to achieve its goals.

Almost half of those responding think we need more troops in Iraq than we have there now. A surprising 13% said we should have no troops there. As for Afghanistan force levels, 39% think we need more troops there. But while they want more troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, nearly three-quarters of the respondents think today's military is stretched too thin to be effective.

The mail survey, conducted Nov. 13 through Dec. 22, is the fourth annual gauge of active-duty military subscribers to the Military Times newspapers. The results should not be read as representative of the military as a whole; the survey's respondents are on average older, more experienced, more likely to be officers and



more career-oriented than the overall military population.

MOST SERVED IN IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN

Among the respondents, 66% have deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan. In the overall active-duty force, according to the Department of Defense, that number is 72%.

The poll has come to be viewed by some as a barometer of the professional career military. It is the only independent poll done on an annual basis. The poll's margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

While approval of Bush's handling of the war has plunged, approval for his overall performance as president remains high at 52%. While that is down from his high of 71% in 2004, it is still far above the approval ratings of the general population, where that number has fallen into the 30s.

While Bush fared well overall, his political party didn't. In the three previous polls, nearly 60% of the respondents identified themselves as Republicans, which is about double the population as a whole. But this time, only 46% of the military respondents said they were Republicans. However, there was not a big gain in those identifying themselves as Democrats – a figure that consistently hovers around 16%. The big gain came among people who said they were independents.

Similarly, when asked to describe their political views on a scale from very conservative to very liberal, there was a slight shift from the conservative end of the spectrum to the middle or moderate range. Liberals within the military are still a rare breed, with less than 10% of respondents describing themselves that way.

SOLDIERS MIRROR PUBLIC'S PESSIMISM

Segal was not surprised that the military support for the war and the president's handling of it had slumped. He said he believes that military opinion often mirrors that of the civilian population, even though it might lag in time. He added, "[The military] will always be more pro-military and pro-war than the civilians. That's why they are in this line of work."

The poll asked, "How do you think each of these groups view the military?" Respondents overwhelmingly said civilians have a favorable impression of the military [86%]. They even thought politicians look favorably on the military [57%]. But they are convinced the media hate them – only 39% of military respondents said they think the media have a favorable view of the troops.

The poll also asked if the senior military leadership, President Bush, civilian military leadership and Congress have their best interests at heart.

Almost two-thirds [63%] of those surveyed said the senior military leadership has the best interests of the troops at heart. And though they don't think much of the way he's handling the war, 48% said the same about President Bush. But they take a dim view of civilian military leadership – only 32% said they think it has their best interests at heart. And only 23% think Congress is looking out for them.

Despite concerns early in the war about equipment shortages, 58% said they believe they are supplied with the best possible weapons and equipment.

SOLDIERS DON'T BUY WAR-ON-TERROR LINK

While President Bush always portrays the war in Iraq as part of the larger war on terrorism, many in the military are not convinced. The respondents were split evenly – 47% both ways – on whether the Iraq war is part of the war on terrorism. The rest had no opinion.

On many questions in the poll, some respondents said they didn't have an opinion or declined to answer. That number was typically in the 10% range.

But on questions about the president and on war strategy, that number reached 20% and higher. Segal said he was surprised the percentage refusing to offer an opinion wasn't larger.

"There is a strong strain in military culture not to criticize the commander in chief," he said.

One contentious area of military life in the past year has been the role religion should play. Some troops have complained that they feel pressure to attend religious services. Others have complained that chaplains and superior officers have tried to convert them. Half of the poll respondents said that at least once a month, they attend official military gatherings – other than meals and chapel services – that began with a prayer. But 80% said they feel free to practice and express their religion within the military.

© Military Times

Be All You Need To Be

How Army Keeps Numbers Up

In an effort to bolster recruiting, the Army in recent years has offered new incentives and loosened enlistment requirements for incoming GIs:

	THEN	NOW
Age Limit	34	42
High school dropouts	10%	19%
Cap on GIs with substandard aptitude scores	2%	4%
Maximum body fat for a 20-year-old male	24%	30%
Tattoos visible while in uniform	No	Yes
Waivers for medical conditions*	4,567	5,168
Waivers for serious criminal records*	408	630
Length of active duty before noncitizen soldiers can apply for citizenship	3 years	1 day
Maximum enlistment bonus	\$20,000	\$40,000

* - Differences between 2004 and 2005

Source: Forbes Magazine

Judge Praises The Public Defenders

By Morris B. Hoffman

Sixteen years as a state trial judge have left me with a deep respect for the professionalism and competence of the public defenders who handle felony cases for indigent criminal defendants in my courtroom.

In fact, I've told friends, only half jokingly, that if they are ever charged with a serious criminal offense, the first thing they should do is give all their assets to charity, in an effort to qualify for public defender representation.

So when two economists from Emory University, Paul Rubin and Joanna Shepherd, agreed to collaborate with me on an econometric study of how effective public defenders really are, I had to guard against confirmation bias.

I was positive that public defenders would prove more effective than their private counterparts. Mr. Rubin and Ms. Shepherd, with their occupational faith in markets, were equally positive of just the opposite.

AN INTERESTING TWIST

In the end, the economists were right, though with an interesting twist. [The full study has been published in the *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law*.]

We looked at all 5,224 felony criminal cases filed in Denver in 2002. Most other studies measure lawyer effectiveness through indicators like acquittal rates, but we used the one thing criminal defendants care about most: the amount of jail or prison time they receive.

Thus, acquittals counted as zero. Probationary sentences likewise counted as zero, unless the probation was combined with some jail time.

We counted halfway-house sentences as 120 days, which is typical for Denver defendants. We counted the initial length of a prison sentence without decreasing it for early release or increasing it for parole violations. Life sentences we arbitrarily counted as 110 years.

THEY USED REGRESSION ANALYSES

My economist friends were able to use regression analyses to control for other variables [such as whether a case was plea bargained or went to trial], to minimize the chance that the differences we found were caused by factors other than effectiveness.

They also used regressions with different combinations of variables to ensure that our results were not sensitive to a particular variable.

The results were surprising. The average sentence for clients of public defenders was almost three years longer than the average for clients of private lawyers.

But our most notable finding was hidden in one of the variables we had controlled – the seriousness of the case. We had assumed that public defenders on average handled more serious cases than private lawyers, if for no other reason



than that such cases carry higher bonds, and defendants who can't make those bonds are often rendered indigent by their pretrial incarceration.

THEY HANDLE MORE SERIOUS CASES

The length of their clients' sentences would of course be distorted by the fact that they handle more serious cases with longer potential sentences.

When we removed the control for the seriousness of the crime, public defenders performed relatively worse, not better [five years more incarceration versus three years more].

When we examined the seriousness of the cases handled by each type of lawyer, we discovered not only that private lawyers tend to handle more serious cases, but also that as the seriousness of the case increases, the chances that a private lawyer is handling it also increases.

What in the world could explain such a result?

It turns out that the explanation, at least in part, is one that should put a smile on the face of all free-marketers and rational choice theorists: criminal defendants, just like any other consumers of services, appear to be making choices based on their rational assessments of costs and benefits.

IT APPEARS THEY HAVE A CHOICE

But, you might ask, do criminal defendants ever really have a choice between public defenders and private counsel? It appears many do.

Our data suggested that, contrary to the law's rather binary notion of indigency, a large chunk of felony criminal defendants are what we have called "marginally indigent." They could, if they had to, tap hidden resources, or the resources of family and friends, to retain private lawyers. But what drives that decision? Just what you'd expect from any rational consumer of criminal defense services: a combination of the seriousness of the offense and the likelihood of conviction.

- Morris B. Hoffman is a Colorado state trial judge and a fellow at the Gruter Institute for Law and Behavioral Research

McCain Proves That He Is Totally Phony

In his quest for the Republican nomination for President, Sen. John McCain, R-AZ, continues to talk out of both sides of his mouth.

In October, McCain declared that "another 20,000 troops" were necessary to stem the violence. Five weeks later, that number shot up five times.

"We must have more troops over there, maybe 20,000 more Marines, and 80,000 army," McCain said. "We have to have a big enough surge that we can get Baghdad under control."

One month after that, McCain's recommendation had dropped back down.

"I would advocate two additional combat units in the Anbar Province, four in Baghdad with one in reserve. That's about 30,000," he told NBC News.

On Jan. 4, during a Today Show appearance McCain was asked, "Will 20,000 do the job in your opinion?"

SO NOW HE SAYS HE'S NOT SURE

He responded, "I'm not sure ... To make it of short duration and small size would be the worst of all options to exercise, in my opinion."

And on Jan. 6 he was asked, "How many troops are you calling for in Iraq?"

McCain answered, "We are not specific on numbers."

He went from saying he would not support repeal of *Roe v. Wade* to saying the exact opposite.

He criticized TV preacher Jerry Falwell as "an agent of intolerance" in 2002, but has since decided to cozy up to the man who said Americans "deserved" the 9/11 attacks. [Indeed, McCain has now hired Falwell's debate coach.]

He used to oppose Bush's tax cuts for the very wealthy, but he reversed course last February.

In 2000, he accused Texas businessmen Sam and Charles Wyls of being corrupt, spending "dirty money" to help finance Bush's presidential campaign.

FIRST HE BATES THEM, THEN HE DOESN'T

McCain not only filed a complaint against the Wyls for allegedly violating campaign finance law, he also lashed out at them publicly. In April, McCain reached out to the Wyls for support.

McCain supported a major campaign-finance reform measure that bore his name. Last June, he abandoned his own legislation.

He used to think that Grover Norquist was a "crook and a corrupt shill for dictators." Then McCain got serious about running for President and began to

reconcile with Norquist.

As a former Vietnamese prisoner of war he took a firm line in opposition to torture, then caved to White House demands.

McCain was against presidential candidates campaigning at Bob Jones University. Now he thinks it is OK.

McCain was anti-ethanol. Now he's pro-ethanol.

There are two things we don't like about McCain – his face.

'The Gift Of Peace' To Be Performed In OKC

The Gift of Peace, a new play aimed at promoting creation of a U.S. Department of Peace and Nonviolence, will be performed in Oklahoma City on Jan. 28 at Mayflower Congregational UCC Church, 3901 NW 63rd Street.

"The idea for this series of monologues grew from my belief that a Department of Peace is exactly what this country needs," said playwright Stacey Martino.

Valentino Ferriera is directing the troupe on its nine-city, cross-country tour that begins Jan. 26 in Los Angeles and includes a Feb. 2 performance at the Department of Peace Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.

The public is invited to the Oklahoma City performance, set to begin at 7 p.m. An offering will be taken to help cover the troupe's expenses.

The proposed cabinet-level Department of Peace and Nonviolence would be charged with researching, articulating and facilitating proven nonviolent solutions to domestic and international conflict. Its budget would be the equivalent of 2% of the Defense Department's. So far, the proposal [H.R. 3760, S. 1756] has 75 congressional co-sponsors.

The Oklahoma City performance is endorsed by Code Pink of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Green Party of Oklahoma, Green Party Peace Action Committee, Interfaith Alliance, Mayflower Congregational UCC Church, Peace Education Institute, Peace House, Spiritual Walk for Peace, Unity Church and many other peace and justice groups.

Tests Don't Allow For Any Dissent

By Jack Blatherwick

Teaching answers to standardized tests should not be called "education," especially when problem-solving will be the most important tool for a generation of students destined to inherit the incredible problems we will leave as our legacy.

To repeat the answers we feed is, at best, preparing future "patriots" for greater acceptance of official policy. The consequences of this blind trust have become painfully apparent.

Our government spent millions of dollars on propaganda to sell a peace-loving populace on an illegal invasion of a sovereign country.

Of all the multiple-choice reasons for this invasion, the one remaining is that Iraq sits in a strategic position for our military to control Asian oil. Imagine the mark this answer would have received on a government-generated standardized test.

BUSH ACTED IN OUR NAME

In our name, and with our unwitting approval, George W. Bush has aggressively squandered a peace that was earned by the blood of generations before us.

We the people unknowingly "agreed to" torture of prisoners, non-compliance with international treaties, destruction of the environment, and proliferation of a nuclear arsenal that was already excessive for its insane, outdated, imaginary purpose.

We've widened the gap between the wealthy and the less-fortunate; denied affordable access to health care, and – to avoid any sacrifice – we've left our children with the tab.

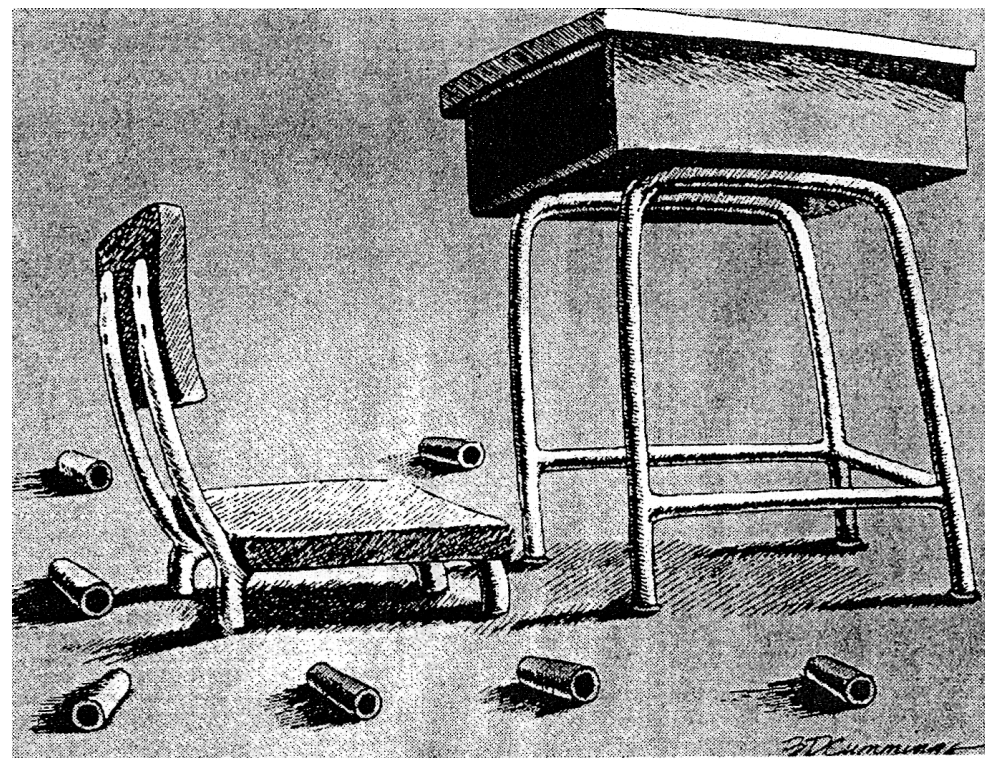
We acquiesced, because to dissent would have been unpatriotic, non-supportive of the troops, and part of a far-left agenda. Standardized tests have just as little room for dissent, and might be the perfect preparation for naive acceptance of creeping fascism.

WHAT NEOCONS BELIEVE

After all, many neo-conservative leaders believe THE problem in our country is a lack of patriotic indoctrination at the elementary levels of public education.

Rote memorization of answers to tests will not prepare anyone for this mess we leave. Furthermore, it defies logic to insist that our answers are the ones that should be memorized. Many of our answers have been abject failures, and those of our government have been criminal.

Better we teach our children no answers – only questions and suspicions,



courage and insight to detect official ideology. They will need wisdom beyond ours to rebuild our trusted position of leadership in a peaceful world – to restore environmental health to a wounded planet, and to redefine concepts like patriotism, democracy, and morality.

EDUCATION, NOT SHORT ANSWERS

They will need an extraordinary education, not short answers. Testing and re-testing is no substitute for investment in education. We wouldn't consider cutting the budgets of failing governmental services that affect our own quality of life.

If the military needs more money, it is appropriated, as it would be for police, fire, or highway departments if we thought their product was substandard. But, if irrelevant tests suggest that schools are struggling, our solution is to cut funding, rather than to give them what they need.

Will our generation be remembered as the most self-centered in history?

Or will we recognize the problems we've created and leave the one thing we can – a quality education? Our ancestors sacrificed proudly to provide for us – with hammer and saw, they built the best schools in the world.

We, as custodians of this tradition, might even have to raise taxes to pass our own final examination.

- Jack Blatherwick has been a physiologist and teacher for 40 years

Erotic Adolescence Embraced By Parents

By Lawrence Downes

It's hard to write this without sounding like a prig. But it's just as hard to erase the images that planted the idea for this essay, so here goes: The scene is a middle school auditorium, where girls in teams of three or four are bopping to pop songs at a student talent show.

Not bopping, actually, but doing elaborately choreographed re-creations of music videos, in tiny skirts or tight shorts, with bare bellies, rouged cheeks and glittery eyes.

They writhe and strut, shake their bottoms, splay their legs, thrust their chests out and in and out again. Some straddle empty chairs, like lap dancers without laps.

They don't smile much. Their faces are locked from grim exertion, from all that leaping up and lying down without poles to hold onto.

SHE SINGS SHE "FEEL SO X-HATED"

"Don't stop don't stop," sings Janet Jackson, all whispery. "Jerk it like you're making it choke ... Ohh. I'm so stimulated. Feel so X-rated." The girls spend a lot of time lying on the floor. They are in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

As each routine ends, parents and siblings cheer, whistle and applaud. I just sit there, not fully comprehending. It's my first suburban Long Island middle school talent show.

I'm with my daughter, who is 10 and hadn't warned me. I'm not sure what I had expected, but it wasn't this. It was something different. Something younger. Something that didn't make the girls look so ... one-dimensional.

IT CAN'T BE CALLED REBELLION

It would be easy to chalk it up to adolescent rebellion, an ancient and necessary phenomenon, except these girls were barely adolescents and they had nothing to rebel against.

This was an official function at a public school, a milieu that in another time or universe might have seen children singing folk ballads, say, or reciting the Gettysburg Address.

It is news to no one, not even me, that eroticism in popular culture is a 24-hour, all-you-can-eat buffet, and that many children in their early teens are filling up. The latest debate centers on whether simulated intercourse is an appropriate dance style for the high school gym.

PARENTS ARE THE PROBLEM

What surprised me, though, was how completely parents of even younger girls seem to have gotten in step with society's march toward eroticized adolescence – either willingly or through abject surrender.

If parents give up, what can a school do? A teacher at the middle school later told me she had stopped chaperoning dances because she was put off by the boy-girl pelvic thrusting and had no way to stop it – the children wouldn't listen to her and she had no authority to send anyone home.

She guessed that if the school had tried to ban the sexy talent-show routines, parents would have been the first to complain, having shelled out for costumes and private dance lessons for their Little Miss Sunshines.

I'm sure that many parents see these routines as healthy fun, an exercise in self-esteem harmlessly heightened by glitter makeup and teeny skirts. Our girls are brats, not sluts, they would argue, comfortable in the existence of a distinction.

BOY TOY SEXUALITY

But my parental brain rebels. Suburban parents dote on and hover over their children, micromanaging their appointments and shielding them in helmets, kneepads and thick layers of S.U.V. steel.

They allow the culture of boy-toy sexuality to bore unchecked into their little ones' ears and eyeballs, displacing their nimble and growing brains and impoverishing the sense of wider possibilities in life.

There is no reason adulthood should be a low plateau we all clamber onto around age 10. And it's a cramped vision of girlhood that enshrines sexual allure as the best or only form of power and esteem.

It's as if there were now Three Ages of Woman: first Mary-Kate, then Britney, then Courtney. Boys don't seem to have such constricted horizons. They wouldn't stand for it – much less waggle their butts and roll around for applause on the floor of a school auditorium.

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Giving Thanks

I've sure gotten old! I've had two bypass surgeries, a hip replacement, new knees, fought prostate cancer and diabetes. I'm half blind, can't hear anything quieter than a jet engine, take 40 different medications that make me dizzy, winded and subject to blackouts. Have bouts with dementia. Have poor circulation; hardly feel my hands and feet anymore. Can't remember if I'm 85 or 92. Have lost all my friends. But, thank God, I still have my driver's license.

Brace Yourself For The Idiots Of 2006

Number One Idiot of 2006 I am a medical student currently doing a rotation in toxicology at the poison control center. Today, this woman called in very upset because she caught her little daughter eating ants.

I quickly reassured her that the ants are not harmful and there would be no need to bring her daughter into the hospital.

She calmed down and at the end of the conversation happened to mention that she gave her daughter some ant poison to eat in order to kill the ants. I told her that she better bring her daughter into the emergency room right away.

Number Two Idiot of 2006 Early this year, some Boeing employees on the airfield decided to steal a life raft from one of the 747s. They were successful in getting it out of the plane and home. Shortly after they took it for a float on the river, they noticed a Coast Guard helicopter coming towards them.

It turned out that the chopper was homing in on the emergency locator beacon that activated when the raft was inflated. They are no longer employed at Boeing.

Number Three Idiot of 2006 A man, wanting to rob a downtown Bank of America, walked into the Branch and wrote this: "Put all your money in this bag."

While standing in line, waiting to give his note to the teller, he began to worry that someone had seen him write the note and might call the police before he reached the teller's window.

So he left the Bank of America and crossed the street to the Wells Fargo Bank. After waiting a few minutes in line, he handed his note to the Wells Fargo teller.

She read it and, surmising from his spelling errors that he wasn't the brightest light in the harbor, told him that she could not accept his stickup note because it was written on a Bank of America deposit slip and that he would either have to fill out a Wells Fargo deposit slip or go back to Bank of America.

Looking somewhat defeated, the man said, "OK" and left. He was arrested a few minutes later, as he was waiting in line back at Bank of America.

Number Four Idiot of 2006 A motorist was unknowingly caught in an automated speed trap that measured his speed using radar and photographed his car. He later received in the mail a ticket for \$40 and a photo of his car. Instead of payment, he sent the police department a photograph of \$40.

Several days later, he received a letter from the police that contained another picture, this time of handcuffs. He immediately mailed in his \$40.

Number Five Idiot of 2006 A guy walked into a little corner store with a shotgun and demanded all of the cash from the cash drawer. After the cashier put the cash in a bag, the robber saw a bottle of Scotch that he wanted behind the counter on the shelf.

He told the cashier to put it in the bag as well, but the cashier refused and said, "Because I don't believe you are over 21." The robber said he was, but the clerk still refused to give it to him because she didn't believe him. At this point, the robber took his driver's license out of his wallet and gave it to the clerk.

The clerk looked it over and agreed that the man was in fact over 21 and she put the Scotch in the bag. The robber then ran from the store with his loot. The cashier promptly called the police and gave the name and address of the robber that she got off the license. They arrested the robber two hours later.

Number Six Idiot of 2006 A pair of Michigan robbers entered a record shop nervously waving revolvers. The first one shouted, "Nobody move!" When his partner moved, the startled first bandit shot him.

Number Seven Idiot of 2006 Seems this guy in Arkansas wanted some beer

Role Of Churches In Secular Society

By Raymond Bailey

Thomas Jefferson's wall of separation between church and state continues to be bombarded.

It is vital to the freedom of religion for all faiths, and those who have no faith, that the wall be maintained.

The church should resist being seduced by federal financial assistance that compromises the responsibility of the church to set standards for ministry and proclamation.

The government should not financially support religious institutions or show favoritism to any religion.

No minister, denomination or local church should become a blind supporter of an administration or politician, no matter how noble the politician or administration.

Separation allows the church to be accountable only to God and to applaud or criticize policies according to their conformity to the values of our faith.

THE ROLE THE CHURCH SHOULD PLAY

The church, like Christ, should be an advocate for the oppressed and subservient to no earthly power structure.

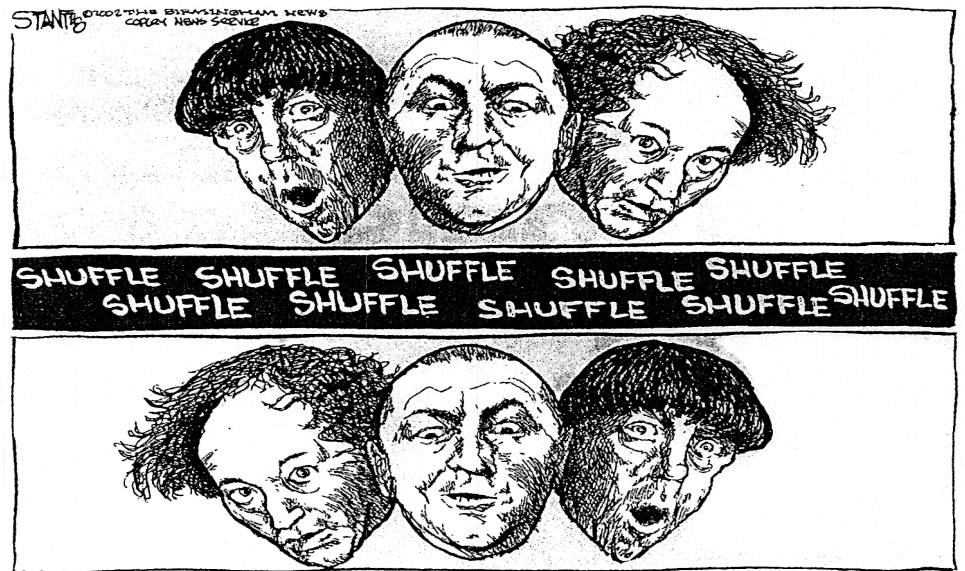
The danger of federal financial support to charities was demonstrated by the court ruling that private and religious institutions of higher learning that accept federal funds cannot bar military service recruiters from their campuses.

"Separation" does not mean that people of faith must be silent with regard to injustice and immorality practiced or encouraged by government.

People of faith are at times required to speak out against policies or even administrations as a matter of conscience.

But preserving a favorable economic system or seeking advantage over other

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pretty badly. He decided that he'd just throw a cinder block through a liquor store window, grab some booze, and run. So he lifted the cinder block and heaved it over his head at the window. The cinder block bounced back knocking him unconscious. It seems the liquor store window was made of Plexi-Glass. The whole event was caught on videotape.

Idiots in the neighborhood I live in a semi-rural area. We recently had a new neighbor call the local township administrative office to request the removal of the Deer Crossing sign on our road. The reason: "Too many deer are being hit by cars out here! I don't think this is a good place for them to be crossing anymore."

Idiots in food service My daughter went to a local Taco Bell and ordered a taco. She asked the person behind the counter for "minimal lettuce." He said he was sorry, but they only had iceberg. He was a Chef? Yep ... From Kansas City!

Idiot sighting I was at the airport, checking in at the gate when an airport employee asked, "Has anyone put anything in your baggage without your knowledge?" To which I replied, "If it was without my knowledge, how would I know?" He smiled knowingly and nodded, "That's why we ask." Happened in Birmingham, AL.

Idiot sighting The stoplight on the corner buzzes when it's safe to cross the street. I was crossing with an intellectually challenged co-worker of mine. She asked if I knew what the buzzer was for.

I explained that it signals blind people when the light is red. Appalled, she responded, "What on earth are blind people doing driving?!" She was a probation officer in Wichita, KS.

Idiot sighting At a good-bye luncheon for an old and dear co-worker, who was leaving the company due to "downsizing," our manager commented cheerfully, "This is fun. We should do this more often." Not another word was spoken. We all just looked at each other with that deer-in-the-headlights stare. This was a bunch at Texas Instruments.

Idiot sighting I work with an individual who plugged her power strip back into itself and, for the sake of her own life, couldn't understand why her system would not turn on. A deputy with the Dallas County Sheriff's office, no less.

Idiot sighting When my husband and I arrived at an automobile dealership to pick up our car, we were told the keys had been locked in it. We went to the service department and found a mechanic working feverishly to unlock the driver's side door.

As I watched from the passenger side, I instinctively tried the door handle and discovered that it was unlocked. "Hey," I announced to the technician, "it's open!" His reply, "I know - I already got that side." This was at the Chevy dealership in Canton, MS!

Stay alert! They walk among us. And they reproduce!

- Thanks to Joyce Birdwell for this jewel

believers or non-believers is no such warrant for political engagement.

THERE ARE TIMES A MORAL RESPONSE IS REQUIRED

Religious groups should not engage in the ordinary political process to serve self-interest or to preserve a particular set of secular cultural values, even if they are labeled "Christian family values." But there are "political" issues that require moral responses.

Certainly, we know of extraordinary circumstances that demand bold proclamation on the part of Christians.

We read of German churches' silence, and in many cases outright support of Hitler and the Nazis. Justice and freedom might be so threatened by individuals or parties as to require prophetic judgment.

I am not suggesting that such a situation presently exists in the United States, but such a situation could arise.

FREE VOICES FOR ALL FAITHS

The free voice of all faiths must not be controlled or restricted by any government. While I do not agree with churches that routinely endorse candidates, I do not think the government should be able to control the message of religious groups.

The church must preserve the right to speak with a prophetic voice, and no agency of the federal government, including the IRS, should determine what message is appropriate for any religious group, except in cases where the message takes the form of a threat, or calls for the suppression of individuals or groups.

Nothing short of advocacy of violence against government or individuals can justify interference by secular authorities in the proclamation of the church.

- The author is pastor of Waco's Seventh and James Baptist Church

IMMIGRATION

From Page One

bills were filed in legislatures across the country, resulting in more than 75 new laws in nearly 30 states.

At the local level in Oklahoma, Oologah, for one, enacted an ordinance that allows residents to make complaints against businesses that employ illegal immigrants.

A more realistic strategy for state and local governments? "Put pressure on the federal government to fix it," said Ray Lauser, affiliated with the Center for Law and Border Studies at the University of Texas-El Paso.

The U.S. Senate and the president last year both embraced a reform package that included a sensible guest worker program, but the xenophobic, GOP-dominated House demurred.

At the national level, neither party nor the president is willing to tackle the real culprit: Widespread poverty and corruption in Mexico and Latin American countries.

The flood across the southern U.S. border is propelled by economic desperation, millions of immigrants so hungry for decent-paying jobs that they are willing to live in the shadows, in constant fear of deportation, as easy targets for exploitation.

Wouldn't it be smarter for the U.S. to help those countries build a middle-class, where workers are paid a decent, living wage and their children are well educated?

The politics of immigration reform offers perils for both parties, but especially Republicans who balance the demands of their big business bankrollers – who adore low-paid, easily controlled immigrant workers – with an increasingly ferocious, anti-immigrant wave igniting social conservatives.

Some GOP strategists, for example, were convinced passage of a 700-mile fence along the southern border – immigration reform's equivalent of the Alaskan Bridge to Nowhere – would provide an election boost in 2006.

It may have spurred turnout among rabid nativists, but it clearly turned off Hispanics, a group Republicans long have courted with mixed results. Exit polls showed 69% of Hispanic voters cast ballots for Democratic congressional candidates, while only 29% backed Republicans – down from 44% in 2004.

The number of Hispanics registered to vote is still small – just 6.5% of the

nation's 142.1 million registered voters in 2004 – but it is skyrocketing, up 23% between 2000 and 2004, more than twice the rate of all voters.

Perhaps 2006 voters overall were more motivated by the abysmal Iraq war strategy or the Republicans' ethical lapses. But it seems likely Hispanic voters ignored President Bush's twangy Spanish talk and watched his walk – especially how he rolled over for his party's round-'em-up, bus-'em-home, fence-'em-out crowd.

It would behoove Congressional Democrats to advance a comprehensive, compassionate and sensible immigration policy that includes a realistic guest worker program.

It's unrealistic for the U.S. to issue only about 66,000 unskilled visas a year – and then only for seasonal work. And it's unworkable to allow a patchwork quilt of immigration laws to sprout nationally, leaving everyone – immigrants, lawful residents, even law enforcement – uncertain what's legal, where and when.

Ladik, the Dallas attorney and former president of the American Immigration Law Foundation, said the wave of undocumented workers reflects a basic change in the American economy.

Thirty years ago, he said, half of young men dropped out of high school, providing "an abundant supply of un-educated laborers." Now, he said, fewer than one in 10 drop out, creating a "huge demand and vacuum in those lesser skilled jobs which demand workers."

Terrill, however, argues that illegal immigration is primarily an "uncompetitive, unfair practice that is driving down wages, salaries and benefits for average Oklahomans."

And he thinks the state has authority to legislate areas where the federal law is silent.

"This is a very tough and complex public policy issue," Terrill said, "but it's one that's got to be taken on."

The issue should be addressed. But Terrill wages his battle in the wrong forum. Only comprehensive, federal immigration offers significant hope of solving the problem.

Oklahoma lawmakers who think they can impose a state-level fix are like so many Sooner drivers during the recent winter storms.

They're spinning their wheels.

GOP Redefines 'Free Market'

Improving Medicare's Drug Plan The VA Way

By Froma Harrop

Seniors are happy with the Medicare drug benefit, so why change it? That's the line we keep hearing from Republicans opposed to letting the government negotiate Medicare drug prices.

"Of course seniors are happy," says Alan Sager, a health-care finance expert at the Boston University School of Public Health. "They're getting a huge subsidy." The taxpayers pick up 75% of the drug program's mammoth bill.

Republican leaders once prided themselves as the taxpayers' friend. That was before they redefined "free-market solution" to mean a big government program that overpays private businesses with public money. Democrats and some like-minded Republicans have since taken up the taxpayer cause by proposing better controls on the Medicare drug program's exploding costs: They want the federal government to bargain for lower prices than the private plans have been getting.

The House recently passed a bill to do just that, though not by enough votes to overcome a threatened veto by President Bush. But, as Sager puts it, "This is a step toward sobriety."

THE VA MODEL WORKS – AND HOW!

The Department of Veterans Affairs has long negotiated drug prices with good results. A study by Families USA found that for the top 20 drugs prescribed to seniors, the VA's price is lower than the lowest price offered by any of the five biggest Medicare private insurers [who cover two-thirds of the program's beneficiaries]. The median difference is 58%!

These lower prices would please beneficiaries, as well as taxpayers. For starters, their Medicare Part D premiums would fall. Better prices would also slow or even prevent their descent into the doughnut hole – the gap in coverage where beneficiaries must pick up the full cost of their drugs at the prices charged by their private plan.

Families USA figured out how much a beneficiary who takes the five drugs most frequently used by seniors might save if she could get VA prices. For the comparison, it used the least expensive private plan that covers the same drugs. The result? Out-of-pocket savings of \$2,217 a year.

Letting the government negotiate prices would also save beneficiaries the hassle and time spent studying dozens of competing plans – each with its own drug list, premiums, deductibles and rules for the doughnut hole.

GOP TROTS OUT TIRED, OLD SCARE TACTICS

Foes of VA-style negotiated drug prices have developed an effective scare tactic. They point out that the VA has a formulary – a list of approved drugs that doesn't include everything. "Washington bureaucrats will decide which drugs will be available for patients," warns Rep. Tom Price, R-GA, in a typical line of attack.

He neglects to note that every private insurer has its own "bureaucrats" drawing their own restricted lists. It's true that different private plans offer different formularies, but seniors have no guarantee of finding a plan that covers all their drugs at reasonable prices.

The bigger point is that a well-made formulary, like the VA's, does the job. "The VA formulary has all the drugs that VA doctors think they need," Sager says, noting that a lot of drugs simply copy what others already do.

VA EVEN CHOOSES BRAND-NAME OVER GENERIC

There are even cases where the VA formulary chooses a brand-name drug over a generic substitute, because it is considered better. And the VA makes it a lot easier to get drugs not on its list than does the typical private insurer.

Americans will spend \$300 billion this year on drugs – nearly half the world's total, even though they're only 4% of its people. Something is clearly wrong with the prices we've been paying.

Sure the seniors are happy with the Medicare drug benefit, but they'd be happier still if the prices were lower. And taxpayers would be ecstatic.

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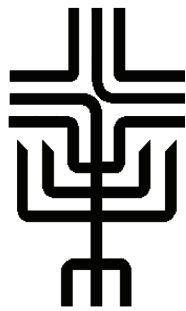
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