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An Oklahoma Epidemic

Violence Against Women

By Frosty Troy

Let 2008 be the year that every Oklahoman pledges to fight the epidemic of murder, stalking, forcible and attempted rape, and domestic abuse of women.

Oklahoma currently ranks 10th nationally in the number of females murdered by their intimate spouses.

There were 25,893 domestic violence cases reported to Oklahoma law enforcement agencies, resulting in 32 homicides and 20,516 felony assault and battery cases.

Tragically, only 50% of intimate violence incidents are reported to law enforcement.

A total of 1,557 forcible and attempted rapes of women were reported to Oklahoma local police and sheriffs departments in the latest reporting period.

The rate of forcible and attempted rape in Oklahoma is 38% higher than the U.S. rate. Yet we call ourselves the buckle on the Bible belt.

It is estimated that 74,600 to 88,500 Oklahoma women experienced threatened, coerced, or forced sex since the age of 18 and 8,500 to 14,500 had experienced forced sex in the past year.

The latest study was published by the Oklahoma Women's Health Survey by the State Department of Health [OSDH].

In 89% of incidents the perpetrator was a person known to the victim, most often an intimate partner, friend or acquaintance.

Disabled women reported higher rates of forced sex since age 18 and forced sex in the past year than women who were not disabled.

Twelve percent of surveyed women 18 years and older reported they had experienced unwanted sex in their lifetime. [Oklahoma Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, OSDH]

More than 9% of high school girls and 5% of high school boys had been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. [Youth Risk Behavior Survey]

It starts early - 12% of 9th grade girls, 11% of 10th grade girls, and 8% of 11th grade girls reported they had been forced to have sexual intercourse.

According to a survey of women 18-35 years of age, 31% had been sexually assaulted in their lifetime. [Sexual Assault Prevention Women's Survey, University of Oklahoma Public Opinion Learning Laboratory, 2006]

More than 74% were younger than 18 years of age when the first sexual assault occurred.

Thirty-two percent of women who had been sexually assaulted had experienced more than one sexual assault.

More than a million women and almost 400,000 men are stalked annually in the United States. Eight percent of women and 2% of men in the U.S. have been stalked in their lifetime.

Although stalking is a gender-neutral crime, most victims in America [78%] are female and most perpetrators [87%] are male.

Twenty-eight percent of female

stalking victims and 10% of male victims obtained a protective order. Sixty-nine percent of female victims and 81% of male victims had the protection order violated.

Eighty-one percent of women who were stalked by a current or former husband or cohabiting partner were also physically assaulted, and 31% were also sexually assaulted by that partner.

The average duration of stalking is 1.3 years; most stalking, however, lasts one month.

Two-thirds of stalkers pursue their victims at least once per week.

Seventy-eight percent of stalkers use more than one means of contacting the victim. Weapons are used to harm or threaten stalking victims in one out of five cases.

One-seventh of stalkers are psychotic at the time of stalking.

One-third of stalkers are repeat stalkers.

Over 50% of stalkers have had a previous relationship with the victim [commonly referred to as intimate partner stalking]. Intimate partner stalkers use more insults, interfering, threats, and violence, including with weapons, than other types of stalkers.

Stalking is one of the significant risk factors for femicide [homicide of women] in abusive relationships. An analysis of 13 published studies of 1,155 stalking cases found that the average overall rate of violence experienced by the victims was 8.7%.

The same analysis found that a history of substance abuse is one of the strongest predictors of increased rates of violence in stalking crimes.

The prevalence of anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression is much higher among stalking victims than in the general population.

One study found that serious violence in stalking was significantly associated with former sexual intimacy, previously appearing at the victim's home, the absence of a criminal record, and a shorter duration of stalking.

A survey of university undergraduates revealed that 20% had been stalked or harassed by a former dating partner; 8% had initiated stalking or harassment; and 1% had been both the target and the initiator.

A recent study identified threats, partner jealousy, and former partner drug abuse as factors that were predictive of stalking violence.

Unfortunately, America's mental healthcare is woefully underfunded. In Oklahoma, neither victims nor perpetrators can get help unless they can afford private treatment.

A safety plan includes anything that helps increase someone's safety before, during, or after an abusive relationship.

The Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault has safety tips, but remember every situation is different.



Observations

Flunked!

Yet another attempt to allow tiny minorities ballot access in Oklahoma has failed – a whopping 70,000 signatures short.

Oklahomans for Ballot Access Reform say they obtained only approximately 14,000 voter signatures but claim that it is evidence of strong support for expanding the ballot.

Pardon us if we disagree. The last thing we want is a California-style ballot, one that is so open to the sincere and the nuts that the state has to send out booklets in advance of the election to explain all the ballot issues.

Under Oklahoma law, a minority party needs valid signatures equal to 5% of the total vote in the last presidential or gubernatorial general election. Gaining recognition for the 2006 elections required more than 73,000 signatures.

If they don't like the political party closest to their philosophy, get active. How many times have these whiners attended a precinct meeting?

As for the Libertarian Party, these loons want to junk the public schools, recall all troops worldwide and, in the words of one of their heroes, shrink government to a size so small, you can drown what's left in the bathtub.

These are patriots?

What Budget?

Little wonder that the legislative powers that be want to restructure state government. The Oklahoma Tourism Department is Exhibit A – caught sequestering an internal audit showing gross mismanagement.

"Inadequate budgeting controls" are cited for overspending as much as \$10 million over the amount coming into a state Tourism Department fund.

One of the Oklahoman's reporters, Michael McNutt, secured a leaked copy. Sure there was no overt wrongdoing cited in the audit of the 215 fund but that's not the point. Tourism's Executive Director Hardy Watkins was caught flat-footed.

"We are taking the steps to do a midyear budget reduction revision for fiscal 2008," he said. "It helps to protect and ensure that we don't hit the end of the year with overspending in that account."

Now Watktns is asking for funds to hire a full-time budget director to monitor and track all agency funds. You mean a department so large had no one in charge?

The 215 fund consists of fees generated by the state's 50 parks, five state lodges, 10 golf courses and campgrounds.

The fund is expected to generate about \$24.5 million for this fiscal year, which ends June 30. However, the audit showed budgeted expenditures could total \$34.7 million. Whew!

Wake Up Call

American emergency rooms are so clogged with patients that it takes nearly an hour for 25% of heart attack victims to be seen by a doctor, according to a study by Harvard Medical School.

During the 1997-to-2004 study period, as the number of emergency room visits rose and the number of emergency departments declined, the time it took for any patient to see a doctor stretched 36%.

But the increase was longer, 40%, for patients identified by a triage nurse as needing help immediately. The sickest of the sick waited 14 minutes on average.

Surprisingly, the patients who saw the greatest increase in waiting time were ones whose lives most depend upon rapid treatment: those having a heart attack.

Every minute of delay in treatment during a heart attack increases the likelihood that the patient will die, but heart attack patients waited 50% longer for care by the end of the study period, or 20 minutes on average. One in four waited 50 minutes or more.

Want a scary quote? Linda Lawrence, president of the American Col-



lege of Emergency Physicians: "We can no longer guarantee that a bed is going to be available when you have your heart attack. I hope this is a wake-up call to society."

We tell you this to point again to the fact that we have wonderful medicine in America but serving all Americans is a different matter. Today the loans are so large that fewer people are entering medical school.

Will we wake up?

Nursing Homes

It's a prospect dreaded by those reaching advanced years – the nursing home. Especially in Oklahoma, where they are grossly underfunded.

Half of us wind up spending our final days in one of these institutions – not because they're pleasant places, but because they're often the only alternative for people who can no longer take care of themselves.

Though most nursing homes are now clean and safe, they are ghettos of the old and the infirm. There's no privacy, little contact with younger people, and every meal and activity is rigidly scheduled.

A small band of nursing home abolitionists has a better idea. They are establishing group homes for the elderly, where life revolves around the kitchen and living room, "not a nurse's station."

Residents have private bedrooms and help one another with cooking and other chores. They're real communities, where older people are interdependent but still are autonomous, respected individuals.

For all our sake, let's hope the movement spreads. Old age and death are inevitable, but loneliness, boredom and hopelessness need not be.

Dumb & Dumber

A survey by Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. found that American teens not only don't know much about handling money, they don't know that they don't know anything about personal financial literacy.

The teens responding to the survey estimated they would earn an annual salary of \$145,500 based on the career that interests them most.

Only 5% of the U.S. population currently earns a six-figure income, and the average national wage stands at about \$40,000 – well ahead of Oklahoma's \$34,000.

Two of every three respondents said they are knowledgeable about money management, but only one-third knows how to balance a checkbook.

Only one-fourth comprehend how credit card interest and fees work.

How can you be successful if you can't balance a checkbook or don't know anything about a 401(k)?

A new law will require teaching financial literacy in Oklahoma public schools. It should also be required for every member of Congress.

China isn't sinking the United States. In the words of Pogo, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Bush Tax Cut

From 2001 to 2006, the typical middle-income American received a tax cut totaling \$1,855 per family member [over the six years]. But that family's share of the added national debt burden was \$8,936 per person.

This means the net impact of Bush fiscal policies on the middle 20% was an added burden of \$7,081 per person – or \$28,322 for a family of four.

Because the benefits of the Bush tax cuts have gone primarily to the wealthiest 1% of Americans, that small group still comes out ahead even after its added debt burden is factored in.

For the 99% of Americans who ended up net losers over the 2001-06 period, for every dollar in tax cuts the federal government gave them over the past six years, they were left holding a bill for \$3.74 in debt.

Robert S. McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice keeps warning Congress and the American people of impending doom unless we get a handle on the tax structure and family and federal debt.

Plea

Still have that Christmas spirit? Enid's Disabled American Veterans chapter will have to foot the bill to replace its van used to transport veterans to Oklahoma City for medical treatment after it was totaled in an accident on Jan. 4.

The accident has put the group into a fundraising bind, needing to raise \$13,500 by the end of April.

Since June the van had traveled more than 39,000 miles to take 1,276 veterans to the VA hospital in Oklahoma City.

Cost of an average trip to OKC from the group's coverage area, which stretches from Okarche to the Kansas state line and from Interstate 35 to Guymon, is about \$35.

There are veterans who wouldn't get any medical care if not for the van.

If you want to help, give the DAV chapter a call 580.242.3808 or send your check to DAV Chapter 66, 601 N. 26th St. Enid, OK, 73701

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

State Auditor Jeff McMahan should reconsider his decision not to step down pending the outcome of felony indictments against him.

Dart: To Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa, for bolstering his attack on public education by citing U.S. Chamber of Commerce propaganda that has been wholly discredited. Shame on OETA for not setting the record straight in their report.

Last year less than half of 1% of the federal farm bill went to fruit and vegetable production. Yet some wonder why we have an obesity epidemic. [Physicians for Responsible Medicine]

Laurel: To Rep. Doug Cox, M.D., R-Grove, for promoting the Oklahoma Dental Foundation's program to improve dental hygiene for residents in long-term care facilities.

Dart: To what passes for a Republican House Speaker. Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, says he wants another major tax cut this year even if it comes out of education and highways.

First the haters accused Hillary Clinton of acting like a man. Then when she shows the slightest emotion they accuse her of acting a woman. Go figure.

Laurel: Senate Co-Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, turning thumbs down on cuts in education or highways to promote another tax cut. He also said \$40-\$50 million will have to go to corrections. That's leadership.

The national report card on public education nailed the so-called political leadership in Oklahoma – grossly underfunding teachers and what is spent on a student's education. Details in this issue.

Dart: To "news" on Fox News. It is so slanted, England will not allow it to be broadcast on cable in that country because it fails to meet the country's "fair and balanced" standard for news.

Don't forget to vote in the presidential primary on Feb. 5. Registered Democrats and Republicans are eligible to pick the party candidate of their choice.

Laurel: To the 15 states that have refused federal money rather than teach sex education via "abstinence only." Now you know why teen pregnancy rates are so high in America and Oklahoma.

Latest poll has 29% of GOP Oklahoma voters favoring Mike Huckabee, 17% for John McCain and 11% for Rudy Giuliani. For Democrats it's Hillary Clinton 34%, John Edwards 25% and Barack Obama 15%.

Dart: To T. Boone Pickens and the other Swift Boat liars for surging again against Democrats. T. Boone personally sunk \$3 million in the national campaign to lie about John Kerry's magnificent war record.

National polls unfailingly list health care as the No. 1 domestic issue – 84%. If Democrats sweep in November the first order of business should be a national single payer health care plan.

Laurel: To Clem McSpadden, honored with the Chester A. Reynolds Memorial Award for his contributions to America's western heritage. He's Will Rogers' grand-nephew.

Times are tough for this country here and abroad but don't give up on America. We were reminded that more than 98 million Americans lend their time and talent every year to non-profit organizations.

Dart: To Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for his reckless and irresponsible attacks on Attorney General Drew Edmondson. He's not fit to shine Edmondson's shoes.

Oklahoma is now home to 13,500 gang members, according to a study by a criminal justice professor at Northeastern Oklahoma State University. They are concentrated in Oklahoma, Tulsa, Comanche and Cleveland Counties.



BY HANDELSMAN FOR NEWSDAY

The 2008 Legislature may be the one to finally step up and rewrite Oklahoma's badly outdated public school funding formula. A 2005 outside study by Augenblic, Palaich & Associates, said it would take \$4 billion to adequately fund the schools.

Dart: To the shameless Republican House leadership for questioning operations of the Department of Human Services which they grossly underfund.

The last thing America needs is a national sales tax – the most unfair tax because it isn't based on ability to pay. What percentage of income does a rich person spend on groceries compared to a working stiff?

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Center for Advancement of Science and Technology [OCAST] reporting that the \$15.3 million state investment returned \$421.4 million – \$27.02 for every \$1 invested.

For the second year lottery proceeds for education have fallen below the estimate – \$4.7 million. Last year \$17 million had to be absorbed by school districts. It was all a ruse.

Dart: To those criticizing public schools for enrolling children of undocumented workers. It's the law, stupid. There are 64,000 Hispanic children in state schools today – 35,000 more than a decade ago.

This election year's biggest phony, Mike Huckabee, was forced to apologize after asserting that Mormons believe "Jesus and the devil are brothers." That's a flat lie.

Laurel: To Rep. Mike Brown, D-Tahlequah, for his bill to provide birth control shots for low-income women who can't afford them. We have far too many unwanted children.

States are moving swiftly – including Oklahoma – to require that cigarettes be made of fire-safe materials that automatically go out if left unattended. Rep. Joe Dorman, D-Rush Springs, had introduced a bill.

Dart: To the Legislature for not dealing with legalized loan sharking by the so-called payday loan companies. Alternet documented one case in which a student's loans began at \$5,500 and ended up three years later at more than \$14,000.

Want to check out how your tax dollars are spent? The new web page is up and running – www.openbooks.ok.gov. It is also being used to look up individual salaries – some call a clear invasion of privacy.

Laurel: To Stigler third grade public school teacher Valorie Lewis, named a USA Today All-USA Teacher. Her impact on poor children is fantastic – a subject she knows firsthand growing up as a homeless student.

Why are Republican legislative leaders in a blind rage over Tulsa Public Schools' lawsuit questioning the state's charter school law? Let the courts sort it out – that's why they are there.

Dart: To the far right Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, claiming Oklahoma has too many state employees. They failed to note that the state funds local government programs, from DAs to county roads.

State Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester, is filing a bill requiring a fee on the 4,375 prisoners brought from out of state to Oklahoma's private prisons – \$2 per inmate per day.

Laurel: To State Rep. Randy McDaniel, R-OKC, for crusading to modernize the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission for not accepting electronic payments. Bet they also use quill pens.

Why won't insurance companies pay for the treatment of autism? Senate Bill 1537 by state Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, would require it. One of every 150 children is affected. Seventeen states have such a law.

Dart: To the sloping skulls who argue that there is \$300 million in new dollars to spend. State Treasurer Scott Meacham quickly rained on that parade. When all obligations are met, new money is about \$32 million.

The state task force studying campus safety recommends \$16 million in new funding to provide more safety measures and additional mental health counselors.

Laurel: To Mart Green for his magnificent \$70 million gift to restore Tulsa's Oral Roberts University, a first-rate private school that unfortunately had greedy Richard Roberts at the helm in place of his Dad.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Many states issued commemorative quarters that easily identified their states, including New York, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, South Dakota and others.

Oklahoma has many outstanding symbols that should have been considered, including the following:

The Land Rush, the Pioneer Woman, the greatest athlete in the world who was a Native American, our Native American heritage, representation of our oil industry

Unfortunately, Oklahoma chose not to do so. We now have a second chance on our new vehicle license plates. Let's get it right this time.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

The OKC Council has decided to call a vote on March 4 to approve or disapprove a one-cent sales tax for 15 months. It would be to renovate the Ford Center, which was completed five or six years ago.

It is also to build an off-site basketball practice facility for approximately \$20 million. This would be so that an NBA team might come to OKC.

This would be a privately owned team. The owners are wealthy businessmen who want OKC taxpayers to subsidize their business venture by paying for many enhancements to their investment.

I believe OKC Council has used poor judgment in asking citizen taxpayers to provide this subsidy. I believe a NO vote in March is appropriate.

It would also result in lowering the sales tax by one cent effective Jan. 1, 2009.

Donald M. Smith
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Being Republican isn't bad, but it must be out of sheer bigotry of being Republican that there are those who support G Bush's war that was based on nothing but a pack of lies. [I've argued those lies previously so I won't now.]

Out of that same bigotry, they allowed a war about to be a trillion dollars of no-bid contracts and rip-offs to help bankrupt this country.

Out of that same bigotry, they allowed hundreds of thousands of innocents to die in a country that was innocent.

Imagine what they'd say if a Democrat was conducting this war. Remember how Clinton was hounded no matter what he did.

Out of that same bigotry they call those who protest this war traitors.

Quite the contrary, it is patriotic to protest such a war. In that G Bush and Dick Cheney betrayed our trust, they may be considered traitors. And until more Democrats stand up, they should change their party symbol from a donkey to a chicken.

It wasn't the surge that worked in Iraq; it was change of philosophy. G Bush came into Iraq killing left and right. Iraqis were sometimes treated as subhuman. Later, we changed to endear the Iraqis and educate them that Al Qaeda was their enemy. That was what worked.

I don't blame the troops, I blame G Bush, and it's time GOPs stop using our troops as shields for their war of lies.

Jim Stodola
Denton, TX

Editor, The Observer:

In the Dec. 26, 2007 Oklahoma Gazette, my Congresswoman, Mary Fallin, was quoted as saying "I support the use of heightened interrogation techniques" and "... intelligence agents should not be confined to the limited interrogation techniques detailed in the Army Field Manual."

How deplorably low we have sunk when we can condone such practices as waterboarding, use of dogs, electric shock, and sexual degradation, and justify such practices as merely tough interrogation "techniques."

To re-define "torture" does not make it less deplorable. To say the United States of America "does not torture" nor participate in "torture by proxy" does not make it so.

As a patriotic Marine Corps Vietnam veteran, I hold my country to higher standards than Congresswoman Fallin. Sen. John McCain aptly stated: "... It's not about them - it's about us."

Ron Wasson
Oklahoma City

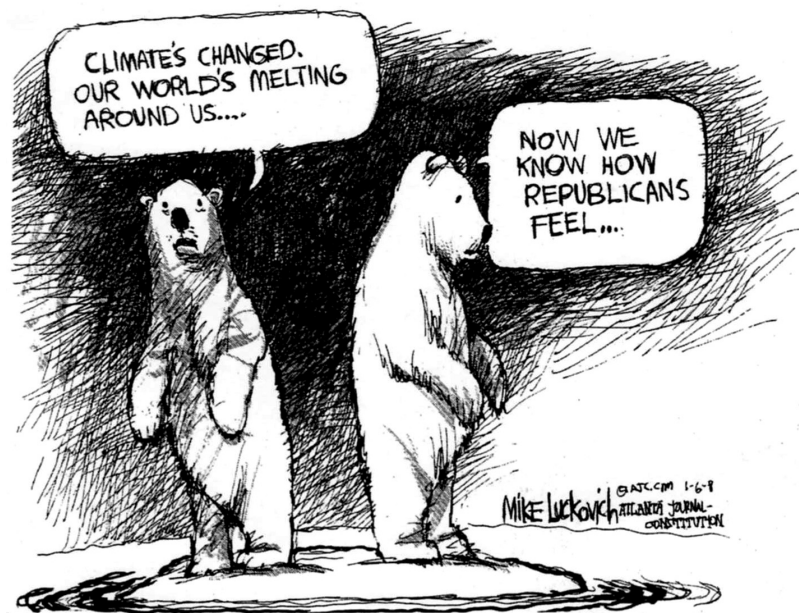
Editor, The Observer:

When it's [Mayor Mick] Cornett's political agenda being advanced, then he's comfortable with appearing on the famous lesbian Ellen DeGeneres's TV show as he did on Jan. 17, ostensibly to promote his weight loss program for OKC.

Mayor Cornett has proclaimed an official day for Ellen DeGeneres's birthday and this is coming from a man who previously never met a gay man or woman he liked. Well, I have a bridge in Brooklyn, too.

Could his self-serving appearance also have anything to do with the National Conference of Mayors having their 2010 annual meeting in OKC?

Is he trying to get a homo-friendly face-lift as well as lose weight in or-



der to make himself more attractive for re-election? Did his failed attempt at running for Congress show him the error of his ways or just point him to another snake-oil strategy?

Now, in order to show that Mayor Cornett is exercising all his Christian sincerity of turning the other cheek, will he introduce a human rights commission with legal force that can be approved by the City Council so that cases of gay/lesbian harassment and discrimination can be handled with respect and the intention of making life better for all of OKC's taxpaying citizens?

I'm not a Christian and I've turned both of my cheeks, upper and lower, for the last time to self-serving politicians who use gay people for their own ends and then dispose of them like a fast food clam shell.

James Nimmo
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The original purpose of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], now commonly called the No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], was to attempt to remedy disparities in educational opportunities and resources for poor children.

If one of the goals is to remedy achievement and skills gaps that exist between different groups of students in this country, we cannot do so without also addressing the existing opportunity gaps.

This means facing the responsibility of tackling the insidious problem of equity that plagues too many communities and students. This is about the disparities in per-pupil spending across states, within states, and within districts.

It is about disparities in the basics of a student's life - disparities in learning environments that students experience, disparities in the age of textbooks and materials, disparities in course offerings, disparities in access to after-school help and enrichment, and disparities in access to qualified, caring educators.

These disparities must be addressed not just from an appropriations standpoint but from a policy standpoint as well in the new ESEA statute.

Frank P. Belcastro
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

A friend and I were talking about the state of the nation. He remarked: "I guess everyone's become a crook." I said how so? He ran down the following list:

- Insurance companies that don't

send claims adjusters out when you report ice storm damage;

- Drug advertisements that list all the side effects [to ostensibly cover themselves from prosecution];

- Court cases that are settled "out of court" with agreements "sealed" from the public's eye while admitting no liability;

- 300% inflation in three years at the gas pump with no transparency or meaningful investigations by Congress;

- A jillion dollar preemptive war that is not headline news;

- War profiteering without end by corporations with single source, no bid contracts;

- Complete destruction of unions by capitalists using overseas labor and transferring what would have been American wages to their stockholders;

- Evaporation of what once was the middle class dream in a job and housing market that narrows by the hour;

- A national and foreign policy that has reduced us to living with 32-cent dollars;

- Concentration of media unrivaled in our history that produces uniform, "canned" news on all outlets and "entertainment" that is so bizarre as to be unacceptable and pathetic in its very conception.

I finally said: "Enough. What do we do?"

He replied: "Vote against every office holder, regardless of party affiliation and hope your vote is counted [this time]."

It's enough to challenge an optimistic person I said, but I want to quote two American Presidents to you: "The first duty of the State, and by that I mean Government, is to promote the welfare of the citizens" and "There is nothing so wrong with America that what is right with America cannot overcome it."

My friend's eyes glazed a bit and I said: FDR and WJC.

L.D. Dobie
Claremore

Editor, The Observer:

The federal government today announced that it is changing its emblem from an eagle to a condom because it more accurately reflects the government's political stance.

A condom allows for inflation, halts production, destroys the next generation, protects a bunch of pricks and gives you a sense of security while you're actually being screwed!

Darn, it just doesn't get more accurate than that.

Darla Reynolds-Sparks
Yukon

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Frosty's Notebook

Work Ethic

I was 11 when I asked my Dad if he would buy me a bike.

"All you kids think I'm made of money. You want a bike? Get a job."

Looking back, he had a point. Eight kids – all boys. I took his suggestion to heart. That's the summer I began cutting lawns.

My Aunt Jo hired me and so did two of our neighbors. It was 10 cents a lawn. The fancy bike I yearned for at Oklahoma Tire & Supply was \$12.

After I turned 12, I asked Gabe Guerra, our grocer, if he had a job for me. He laughed and turned to his wife and repeated my question.

"He could stock shelves," she said.

I was hired! It was 25 cents a day. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I worked like a dog lugging those boxes from the storage room and neatly arranging the shelves.

I was so flush I went to the Star Drug and ordered a chicken salad sandwich and a fountain Cherry Coke.

"Hey," said the owner. "I need someone to get the gum off the bottom of the seats and the booths. Could you do it? Two bits if you do it."

That was when I started a second job that only lasted until my Dad saw me going at it with a putty knife. He was embarrassed.

When I was 13 I was a substitute newspaper carrier, route 15-A of The McAles-ter News Capital. At 15 I took over the route.

I was making so much money – about \$3.60 a week – that my Dad opened a Christmas Club account at the First National Bank.

There is a difference between a workaholic and someone with a work ethic. Dad instilled a good work ethic in all of his kids.

Of course we had fun. Of course there should be time off for recreational activities. We fished and hunted like crazy.

I mention this because in today's corporate climate, Americans are putting in more hours at work and making less in real dollars.

The average in 2007 was 42.5 hours, compared to 37.5 hours in 2003, according to the time-use surveys by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Why? The extra hours are a result of fewer employees to do the work, fears of job security, a need for overtime pay and a hope for advancement.



Among the drawbacks are burnout and an impact on health and quality of life.

The average workweek for men increased to about 45 hours in 2007, up from about 40 hours in 2003. Women worked slightly more than 40 hours in 2007, an increase from 35 hours in 2003, the surveys found.

Americans are hard workers and have the highest productivity in the world. In the United States, 18% of workers put in more than 48 hours a week, fifth-highest percentage among developed countries. The United Kingdom was first with about 25% of workers exceeding 48 hours a week.

The study, which examined working conditions in 50 countries, found that attempts to reduce working hours failed for various reasons because companies use overtime to boost production and workers want to earn more.

Guidelines for a 40-hour workweek did not take effect until 1945, resulting from the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

There are a few signs of progress. Democrats won a gradual increase in the minimum wage for the first time in 10 years. Of course Bush and the Republicans opposed it.

Every worker deserves a decent income and time to stop and smell the roses.

Public School Critics

Turn on TV. Pick up a newsweekly. Listen to the motormouths on radio and TV talk shows. The message is always the same – public education is a failure.

That's baloney. Of all the defamed institutions, the battering taken by public education is by far the worst. Schools aren't perfect – especially in the inner cities – but 90% of our 97,000 public schools in more than 15,000 districts are enormously successful against heavy societal odds.

America sends a higher percentage of kids through universal free public education than any other country in the world and graduates a higher percentage than most countries.

We send a higher percentage to college and are tied with Japan in four year degrees. No other country is even close to our graduate level programs.

So why all the bad-mouthing? A lot of those reading and math "failures" are 6.1 million special education students. Try finding that program in most countries in the world.

As for test score critics – you know the one about lies, damned lies and statistics. In fact, my dream is to give Congress an ACT test.

Major media outlets in America are in cities with the most serious public education problem – and they mindlessly extrapolate that to the rest of the country.

We have thousands and thousands of outstanding public schools that never make the evening news. They are never mentioned by Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Walter Williams, ad nauseam.

My Buddy The Cat

My wife Helen and I have always been dog people. We owned dogs for 50 years. When our attorney daughter, Marti, volunteered to teach criminal justice law in the old Soviet bloc, we became custodians of her cat.

We inherited her house, her car and her Russian Blue named Buddy. This is the same cat that bit my hand so badly I had to go to the doctor.

He is as big as a small dog and when he relocated to our home, he avoided us and would come out of hiding only to eat.

As the months went by, he started taking a shine to us. Before you knew it, he was my shadow. I can't go anywhere, even to the bathroom, without him tagging along.

Anyone who owns a cat is probably an expert in the ways that cats are and aren't domesticated.

As one cat owner put it, no creature exemplifies the idea that domesticated animals chose domestication better than cats.

They demonstrate every day just who in the human-feline relationship is boss.

I have discovered that cats are not only smart, they rule the roost. When Buddy wants out, he taps on the patio door. When he wants a treat, he stands by the refrigerator.

Marti has been gone four years – she's now doing the same thing in Liberia

There are also critics with their own agendas – the religious right, the Republican Party, the Catholic hierarchy and home schoolers. To win public funding they think they have to slander public education.

Don't fall for that bunk that we spend more money on public education than any other country, yet get less bang for the buck.

In Oklahoma, with the 10th best prepared teachers nationally, we rank 44th in what we spend on a child's public school education. If House Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, has his way, it will get worse before it gets better.

Among industrial nations we rank 14th in public school spending. Japan plunks down 4.8% of its gross national product for public education, Germany spends 4.6% and we spend 3.5%.

Oklahoma's pathetic congressional delegation follows Bush-Cheney like puppy dogs, wagging their tails in agreement on the disastrous No Child Left Behind law.

Our 3.2 million public school teachers are among the best prepared in the world and the poorest paid. The same can be said for our administrators and support personnel.

What other profession spends an average \$475 a year out of their own pockets to help other people's kids? Our public school teachers did that last year.

Unfortunately, we have leaders in America today who would privatize the entire system if they could. Don't you wish we'd had special education when they were children?

– and her cat has adopted me.

I have to be honest with you – I like Buddy. I like his independence. He doesn't gleefully jump up on me like a dog. He will definitely ignore me when I call him – unless he wants to respond.

He stands staring at the couch until you pick him up and brush him.

I still want a dog but I'm no longer anti-cat – unless he bites me again, but at least he now has no teeth.



The Cargill Chronicles

Taxes And Ethics And Spin, Oh My

By Arnold Hamilton

Will the clock soon strike midnight for Lance Cargill?

The House speaker's Cinderellaesque dream of ascending to the governor's throne is beginning to more closely resemble Nightmare on Elm Street – not only for him, but also for taxpayers and even his own party.

The New Year is less than a month old, and for Cargill, the pre-session optimism and joviality that usually oozes from legislative leaders is noticeably absent, replaced by a combative, bunker-like mentality.

He's clashed publicly with reporters who dared question his spurious claims about spending and ethics.

He's lashed out repeatedly at House Democrats who challenged his spin on government modernization and fiscal responsibility.

And he's found himself answering embarrassing questions about his failure to file state income tax returns for two years – something the vast majority of hard-working, time-pressed taxpayers managed to do without prompting from the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

HEADACHES FOR REPUBLICANS

It all adds up to a less-than-rosy scenario for Republicans in what is shaping up – even in fire-engine red Oklahoma – to be a hard-fought election year and an even more rugged legislative session with only \$32 million in new, uncommitted money available to spend.

Cargill's problems are self-inflicted, the predictable result of excessive chutzpah, especially from someone with a political tin ear. Maybe former House Speaker Todd Hiatt was on to something when he deposed Cargill as his chief lieutenant in the midst of the 2006 session.

Among Cargill's pre-session follies:

- At a Capitol news conference trumpeting the House GOP's so-called "Year of Solutions," the speaker asserted yet again that he and Republican lawmakers won meaningful ethics reform last session by banning campaign contributions inside the Capitol.

Of course, he failed to note that while lawmakers were in session, he held fund-raising meetings with lobbyists every 15 minutes at a private office only about five miles from the Capitol. He also didn't bother to mention that he and his GOP colleagues successfully pressured the Oklahoma Ethics Commission to back off real reform: a rule that would ban PAC-to-PAC transfers.

DANK LEFT ON THE SIDELINES

This year, fellow Republican Rep. David Dank has proposed a comprehensive ethics package that would ban PAC-to-PAC transfers. It also would eliminate in-session fund-raising. With Cargill facing an ethics commission investigation into questionable fund-raising tactics four years ago, it's reasonable to ask: How committed is the speaker to real reform?

Cargill answered the question, loud and clear, at the pre-session news conference: He failed to summon Dank to the podium to discuss the package, despite ethics reform being listed as one of the GOP's four key goals.

An oversight? Consider that Cargill called on other lieutenants – including Reps. Rex Duncan, Guy Liebmann, Tad Jones and Chris Bengtson – to discuss other, less personal topics on the agenda.

- Cargill repeatedly asserts that he and House Republicans are modernizing and streamlining state government, ushering in a new era of fiscal responsibility after years of profligate Democratic spending.

The speaker evidently never banked on anyone checking out his "facts." The Associated Press's Ron Jenkins reported that the House's budget has increased

Maternal And Child Care Sadly Lacking

Maternal and child advocates have become increasingly concerned about the lack of access to primary health care services for children and pregnant women.

The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA] has designated all or parts of 58 of Oklahoma's 77 counties as "medically underserved" areas.

This designation is based on an index of four variables, including numbers of primary care physicians, poverty rates, infant mortality rates and the percent of the population over 65.

Currently, 42 Oklahoma counties have no labor and delivery services available, forcing expectant moms to travel great distances to deliver their babies.

To determine Oklahoma's demand for key health care positions, a series of surveys was conducted in late 2005 of the state's hospitals, ambulatory care facilities and other health care providers.

The results indicated clear evidence of substantial workforce vacancies and projected demands for specific types of providers.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

With only \$32 million in extra money available and hundreds of millions of dollars in needs for corrections, schools, highways and bridges, and other critical government services, the 2008 legislative session promises to be a real head-knocker. In our Feb. 10 edition, we detail and analyze the agendas of House and Senate Democrats and Republicans at the dawn of the state's new century.



from \$18.1 million when the GOP took control in the 2004 elections to \$19.2 million this year.

THIS IS STREAMLINING?

"Just because you say it doesn't make it true," said House Democratic Leader Danny Morgan of Prague. "The speaker may say that he has streamlined government but the fact is that since the Republicans took control of the House in 2004 the number of the speaker's personal staff has nearly doubled and the House's budget has increased."

Moreover, while other state agencies – including corrections – are begging for help to pay their bills this fiscal year, the GOP-controlled House ratholed \$8.7 million over the last several years that it used to buy more than \$1 million in new furniture, fund staff salaries and absorb other expenses.

One example: In 2004, the Democratic speaker's press secretary earned a \$41,000 annual salary. This year, the Republican speaker's spokesperson earns nearly \$80,000.

- Cargill doesn't seem to understand that in politics, perception is often more important than reality.

TANGLED WEB: FISHER, PHILLIPS AND HUCKABEE

He and other House Republicans recently attended a fund-raiser for GOP presidential contender Mike Huckabee at the home of a Texas businessman linked to convicted former state Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher.

Subsequently, three Republican House members returned campaign contributions from the same businessman, Gene Phillips.

Cargill told reporters he didn't know the event was to be at Phillips' home and that he only attended in order to meet Huckabee.

The problem is, the speaker repeatedly claims he is pursuing high ethical standards and transparency in government. What does it say that he is willing to attend a high-profile function at the home of a man at the center of Fisher's upcoming bribery trial?

- Even more baffling: How could Cargill fail to file personal income tax returns for the last two years? Yes, people make mistakes. But the speaker – already in a lightning rod of a position, anyway – can't afford such obvious blunders.

Oklahomans will tolerate much from their elected officials. After all, they keep re-electing U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, despite his ignorance on global warming.

Failing to file your income tax returns, however, leaves voters with the impression that you somehow think you're above the law.

Just ask former U.S. Rep. Mickey Edwards, whose bounced checks covered by the House bank derailed a long, noteworthy political career. And he wasn't even angling to be governor.

These findings were contained in a 2006 report from the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development, which revealed that Oklahoma will have a shortage of more than 3,000 nurses, 600 lab technicians, 400 physical therapists, 300 surgical technologists and nearly 200 occupational therapists, as well as shortages of other critical health care workers by the year 2012.

These numbers are very conservative, as they do not include shortages in physician offices and clinics, schools and public health agencies across the state. Nor do they account for the impending retirement of baby boomers from the health care industry and health faculty.

The Oklahoma Health Care Workforce Center has determined that shortages in Oklahoma's health care professional workforce are directly tied to the current size of the educational pipeline.

Qualified applicants to nursing and allied health programs are turned away due to the lack of faculty and clinical capacity. It is vital that we substantially boost the number of graduates from these educational programs to fill these high-demand professions.

The Oklahoma Health Care Workforce Center is requesting \$7,827,000 through the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to expand health care educational capacity, through faculty development and other initiatives, and to provide scholarships for nursing and allied health professions. This is the first year of a three-year phase-in plan, with \$18 million annualized by 2011.

– From the 2008 legislative agenda for Children, Youth and Families

Our Food Deserts

Oklahoma One Of Hungriest States

It was John F. Kennedy who said, "The war against hunger is truly mankind's war of liberation."

Food is life. Just as all human beings have a right to life, which is inherent and sacred, they also have a right to food, the fuel of life. The good society, one of both justice and mercy, is morally obligated to ensure that all of its members are fed.

When some among us go hungry, regardless of the cause, their suffering is a stain on our community fabric.

Whether in Oklahoma or elsewhere in the world, hunger rarely occurs because there is simply not enough food; rather, hunger occurs because families and individuals can't afford to buy the food.

OKLAHOMA'S PLOTS OF POVERTY

The roots of Oklahoma's hunger problem are embedded in the plots of poverty amidst our pastures of plenty.

Oklahomans have long known and treasured the values of community and charity. When they know that someone's human needs are not being met, they do not hesitate to offer a helping hand.

Sadly, despite an outpouring of support and determined effort, Oklahoma still has far to go in achieving many of these goals. Prominent among these, our goal of eliminating hunger in Oklahoma is retreating from our grasp.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, Oklahoma is one of the hungriest places in America.

HUNGER CONTINUES TO GROW IN OKLAHOMA

Over the past 10 years, the percentage of our population classified as "food insecure" has risen from 13.1% to 14.6%. Only four states have a higher percentage of their population facing the threat of hunger.

Over the past 10 years, the percentage of our population that goes hungry each year, those classified as "food insecure with hunger" has risen from 4.2% to 5.3%, also placing us among the five worst states for that measure.

This deterioration is particularly disturbing given the successes in service capacity and program participation achieved by both public and private entities over this same time frame.

TASK FORCE TACKLES THE ISSUE

In an effort to better understand Oklahoma's hunger problem, and to find workable solutions, the Oklahoma Task Force on Hunger was created and tasked with evaluating and devising strategies to fight hunger.

Among the Task Force's conclusions, we believe that, with the proper amount of political and community commitment, Oklahoma could dramatically increase the food security of its citizens in the near future. This belief is founded upon

Fiscal Train Wreck In State's Future?

The three new "sin taxes" that Oklahoma voters approved in the fall of 2004 to boost funding for education and health care have generated less revenue than was initially anticipated.

This is documented in a report by Community Action Project [CAP]. The revenue gains from the new funding streams have been nullified by revenue losses from tax cuts enacted in recent years.

"We feel it is important for policymakers and the public to have a more complete and accurate picture of the impact of the lottery, gaming compacts and increased tobacco taxes that were approved three years ago," said David Blatt, the report's author and CAP's Director of Public Policy.

TIME TO EXAMINE REVENUE DECISIONS

"In particular, we believe that this is an opportunity to examine these new funding streams in the context of other revenue decisions of recent years."

The report shows that the state collected \$241 million in the last fiscal year from the lottery, gaming compacts, and increased tobacco taxes. At the same time the major tax cuts approved between 2004-06 decreased last year's state revenues by some \$333 million.

Over time, this gap will widen to the point that by FY 2010, the lost revenue from tax cuts will more than double the additional revenues from lottery, gaming and tobacco.

"The net impact of increasing sin taxes while cutting the income tax is to make the tax system less able to fund essential public services and achieve the collective goals Oklahomans care about in the areas of education, health care and public infrastructure," Blatt said.

VOTERS LIKELY TO OK 'SIN TAXES'

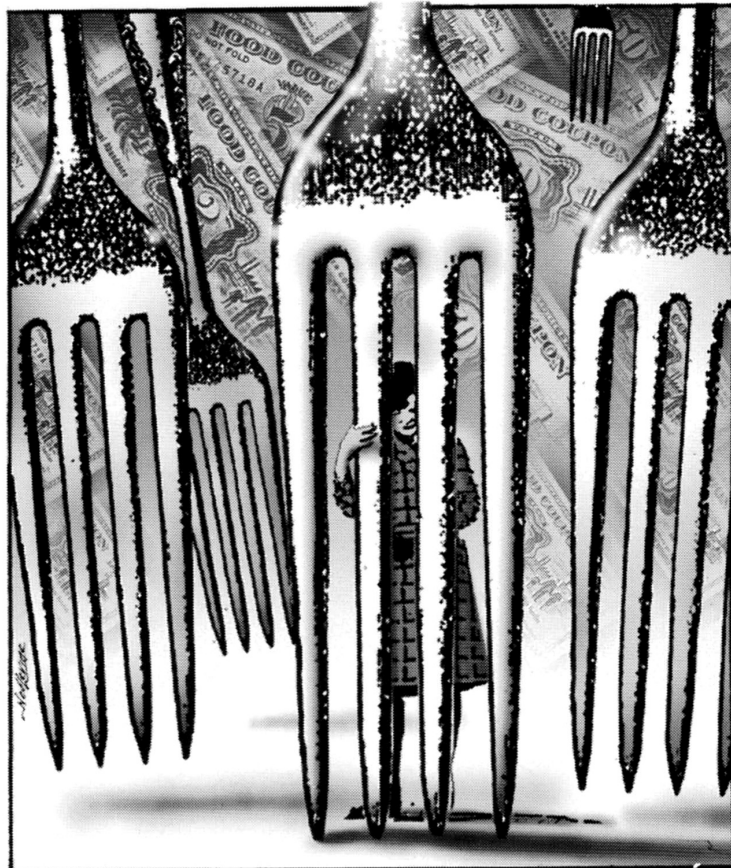
"Voters may be more inclined to support 'sin taxes' than broad-based revenue increases, but this is not a sustainable or responsible approach to funding services.

"With structural budget deficits looming on the horizon, it will be up to policymakers, advocates and ordinary citizens to propose and support better policy choices if we are to avert a major fiscal train wreck."

In addition to weakening the adequacy of the revenue system, swapping sin taxes for income taxes puts more of the responsibility for funding public services on those who are less well off, since lower-income households spend a greater share of their income on tobacco and gambling than upper-income households.

AMONG THE REPORT'S MAIN FINDINGS

- The lottery generated \$71.4 million in FY '07, while gaming compacts brought



four major observations:

1. Many of our existing nutrition programs are under-utilized in Oklahoma.
2. Oklahoma's private charitable emergency food network provides effective assistance to those in need and could be further strengthened.
3. Through improvements to existing programs, Oklahoma could substantially improve the family economic security of its low-income citizens.
4. Oklahoma has a strong set of resources through which to enhance community food security.

Oklahoma's high rates of hunger and food insecurity are strongly connected to its unusually high poverty rate. Currently, 17% of Oklahomans live below the poverty line, placing us in a tie with Kentucky for the 7th worst poverty rate in the nation.

POVERTY RANKS EVER GROWING

This represents a substantial increase since 2000, when 13.8% of Oklahomans lived below the poverty line. In Oklahoma, 24.3% of children live below the poverty line; children make up more than one-third of Oklahoma's population living in poverty.

This also represents a substantial increase since 2000, when 18.4% of Oklahoma's children lived in poverty.

See HUNGER Page 10

in \$56.8 million;

- While lottery and gaming revenues did generate new funds for education, the share of state appropriations for the major education agencies has fallen in recent years. Common education, in particular, has received a declining share of total state appropriations in recent sessions, as legislators have shifted general revenue dollars to other priorities;
- Collections from the new tobacco taxes totaled \$112.4 million in FY '07, some \$38 million below what was projected when the measure was approved. Most of the shortfall is attributable to a shift of tribal tobacco sales to the lowest cigarette stamp rate of 5.75 cents.

Stonewall Democrats To Host Convention

The weekend of February 21-24 will have Stonewall Democrats, U.S. Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts, and the Oklahoma Delegate Convention offering a series of events displaying the extent of Oklahoma Democratic Party constituencies.

On Feb. 23, state Rep. Al McAffrey, of Oklahoma City will have a major fundraiser for his re-election campaign with Frank as keynote speaker.

In addition to representing Massachusetts' 4th District, Frank is chair of the House Financial Services Committee and founder of National Stonewall Democrats.

The 45-member governing board of National Stonewall Democrats will convene Feb. 22 at the Skirvin Hilton Hotel in downtown OKC for a board meeting and other events that weekend.

Members of Oklahoma Stonewall Democrats will host the meeting and related events. Three Oklahoma City members of the NSD board [Steve VanHook, Linda Gray Murphy, and Colin Raley] represent Stonewall members in six states: Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas.

In addition to headlining the McAffrey fundraiser, Frank will appear at a fundraiser for his own re-election campaign, hosted by OKC attorney and renowned Democratic activist Bob Lemon.

Details of locations and times will be announced at a later date. You can get the latest news by visiting the Oklahoma Stonewall Democrats website at www.okstonewall.org or by sending an email to james.nimmo@okstonewall.org.

State Schools Hit On Funding Gap

By Sandy Garrett

Oklahoma's public education system scored a 100% in accountability on Education Week's 12th annual national report, "Quality Counts 2008."

"Quality Counts" is the only national study that looks at more than 150 educational indicators and attempts the daunting task of comparing all states' school systems.

Letter grades are given based on each state's ratings in six areas of performance and policy, though the various criteria change somewhat from year to year. The complete report can be found online at www.edweek.org.

This year's report awarded Oklahoma an "A-" and a ranking of 13th in the nation for academic standards, assessments and accountability system.

In the teaching profession category, our state ranks 10th and is given a "B-" compared to the national average of a "C." Our state's overall ranking is 28th in the nation, scoring a "C" – the same grade the nation earned.

SCHOOLS HELD TO HIGH STANDARDS

We are proud of the 100% score in the "School Accountability" section of this major national study. It means Oklahoma schools are being held to high standards compared to other states.

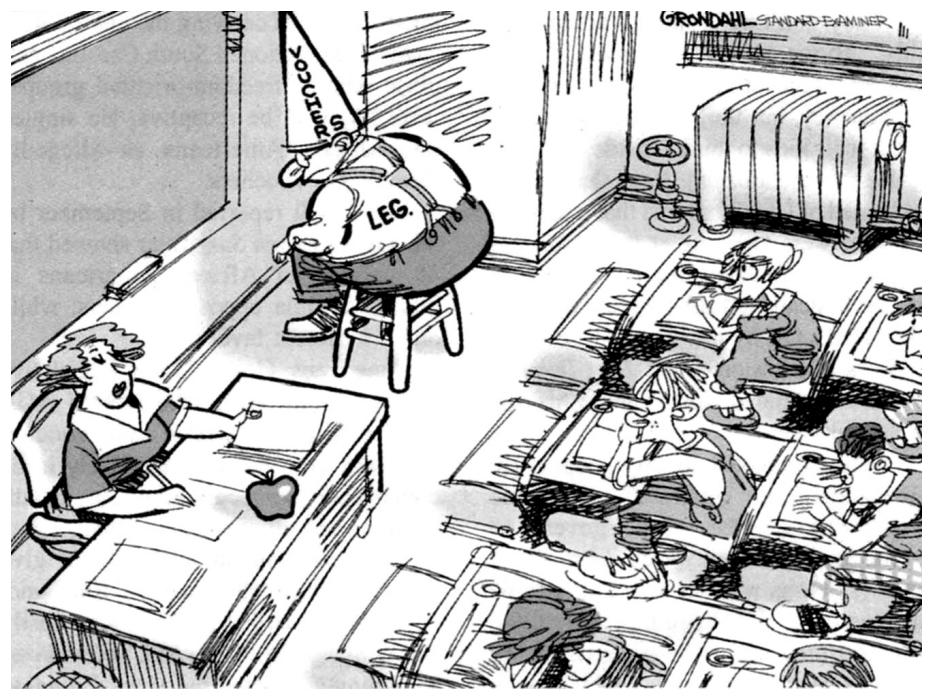
Not all of Oklahoma's scores were high. In the area of "School Finance," Oklahoma received a "D+" for financial investment in public schools even after the report's researchers made cost-of-living adjustments to each state's data. The nation as a whole was given a "C+."

In the subcategory of per-pupil expenditures – "adjusted for regional cost differences" – Oklahoma ranked 44th nationally.

SORRY TEACHER SALARIES CITED

The report compared teacher salaries to the salaries of comparable professions and our state fared poorly in this area as well.

Data analyzed showed Oklahoma's teacher pay had the nation's sixth worst pay gap. When teacher salaries were matched to those of comparable professions in the report, teachers in Oklahoma were determined to be making 82 cents on the dollar.



AN OLD-FASHIONED PUBLIC EDUCATION

Student achievement in every state is considered below par according "Quality Counts 2008," which set the national average at "D+." Oklahoma received a "D" and a national ranking of 36th.

WHY STATE FARES POORLY ON NAEP

This section of the report was based primarily on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam that tests only a small sample of students from each state in Grades 4 and 8.

Oklahoma's low ranking is due in part to the lack of essay and short-answer questions on our state tests, meaning that students have little experience with these types of standardized exams when taking portions of the NAEP tests.

We are hopeful for funding to be provided to make state tests more similar to the NAEP.

While many challenges remain for our schools, we are proud "Quality Counts" has recognized our efforts in education reform, accountability and high-quality teaching as they are key factors to furthering student success.

– The author is State Superintendent of Public Instruction

New Report: Teachers Earn Less Than Peers

By Pauline Vu

In 40 states, including Oklahoma, public school teachers fail to make as much as workers in comparable professions, such as reporters and insurance underwriters.

A new report by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center [EPE] reveals that teachers nationwide earn only 88 cents for every dollar paid to workers in equivalent jobs.

These findings were a new feature of the 12th annual Quality Counts report, published by the trade newspaper Education Week, which is published by EPE.

The report looked at more than 150 indicators to grade states in six categories: teacher policies; standards, assessments and accountability; school funding; K-12 achievement; school transition and alignment policies; and a child's chances for success in life.

NORTHEAST STATES LEAD PACK

Across these categories, a trio of Northeast states led the pack: Maryland, Massachusetts and New York. At the other end of the scale, the District of Columbia and five states barely avoided failing grades: Idaho, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada and Oregon.

The main focus of this year's report is states' teaching policies. States are ranked on factors such as how stringent their license requirements are, whether they provide mentoring programs for new teachers or incentives to teach in hard-to-staff subjects and schools, and working conditions such as class size and the level of school violence.

This year's report also includes a new analysis comparing teacher salaries to those of 16 jobs that require similar skill sets, such as museum curators, registered nurses and accountants. Teacher pay was found to be deficient in 40 states.

TEACHERS MATTER MOST FOR CHILDREN

Christopher B. Swanson, director of the EPE Research Center, said studies have shown that teaching quality matters more than anything else in a child's education, and there's some truth to the belief that the best and brightest aren't entering the profession because of low pay.

"A college student just graduating might think, 'Do I teach chemistry for \$35,000, or do I go on to become a chemist in the private industry for \$70,000 or \$80,000?'" he said.

"Teaching is a noble profession. College students may want to make a difference, but at the same time, we all have to pay our bills."

The 10 states with higher teacher salaries are – in order of those that meet the pay-parity line to those that surpass it – California, New York, Ohio, Arkansas, Wyoming, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Montana and Rhode Island. North Carolina had the lowest comparable teacher pay, with just 78.8 cents to every dollar earned by other professions.

Overall, however, Southern states ranked highest for their teaching policies, with South Carolina topping the list, followed by Arkansas, North Carolina, Flor-

ida, Georgia and Louisiana.

STATES THAT DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES

Most of these states distinguished themselves by having teacher evaluations tied to student achievement, encouraging more professional development, and offering incentives to principals to work in hard-to-staff schools.

The report's second chance-for-success index, which Ed Week debuted last year, rates a child's likelihood of succeeding in life depending on the state in which he or she is born.

Some of the index's factors include the state's average parental level of education, employment and English-speaking ability.

Last year, Virginia took the top spot, but this year fell to 8th place, relinquishing the crown to Massachusetts. Children in New Jersey, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Vermont also have good chances of success in life, according to the findings.

Mississippi ranked lowest on this scale, followed by Louisiana and New Mexico, which last year had the dubious distinction of being the state where a child was most likely to succeed.

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Fond Memories Of Summer In An Oklahoma Winter

You know you are living in Oklahoma when:

The birds have to use potholders to pull worms out of the ground.

The trees are whistling for the dogs.

The best parking place is determined by shade instead of distance.

Hot water now comes out of both taps.

You can make sun tea instantly.

You learn that a seat belt buckle makes a pretty good branding iron.

The temperature drops below 95 and you feel a little chilly.

You discover that in August, it only takes two fingers to steer your car.

You discover that you can get sunburned through your car window.

You break into a sweat the instant you step outside at 7 a.m.

You realize that asphalt has a liquid state.

The potatoes cook underground, so all you have to do is pull one out and add butter, salt and pepper.

Farmers are feeding their chickens crushed ice to keep them from laying boiled eggs.

The cows are giving evaporated milk.

Ah ... Oklahoma. What a place to call home!

Music Teacher Is There For Students

By Cristi Miller

A very ugly monster came to my building today. In fact, I thought it was there to swallow me up. Its name was frustration, and I found it sitting in my lap at 10:07 a.m.

You see, tomorrow I have a music program. It's one I helped write about Oklahoma, and to be honest, I've been working on it since July.

First, there was the reworking of the script, and then I started writing songs to complement the history. ["This shouldn't be hard," I thought. Several months later I was still writing.]

When the program date was set, school had started and it was time to select parts. Everyone gets to be in the program if they want to be. After all, this is the time to build self-esteem. [I am glad I started this tradition, right?]

THEY READ THE NOTES, DON'T THEY?

After the audition process was over, notes went home: "Please check your calendars now to see if there is an unavoidable conflict that would take your child away from our evening performance. If you find your singer will not be in attendance, notify me by the end of the week so that I may find his/her replacement."

[Parents do read notes addressed to them, right? I mean, they check their child's backpacks, don't they?]

Next it was time to set down the orchestration for the "homemade" music. After all, it should sound professional. [I wish I'd paid more attention during my college orchestration class.]

A NOTE HOME ABOUT THE COSTUMES

Rehearsals began in the classroom, dances were taught, solos practiced and music memorized. More notes - "This is the costume your child is responsible for having for our music program. Please let me know before Fall Break if you are unable to find these articles."

[I'm sure this note found a place in that backpack where the first note still remained.]

Oops - almost forgot about the PowerPoint. That's the slide show that illustrates the "real" pictures of famous Oklahoma sites or people. It's the presentation that helps the audience understand what your speakers are talking about since a few of them mumble and others want to speak too quickly.

SLIDES COLLECTED FOR THE SHOW

Thank goodness Vivian Rice had spent many hours collecting pictures for this show. All I had to do was edit them for my program needs. [OK, maybe I didn't need all 53 slides.]

Everyday in class - "It is so important for you to be responsible in locating your costumes and being at our program. I have only heard from two of you who are unable to make it to our musical."

[Maybe I was speaking another language that day and didn't realize it.]

So today - the day before the program - yes, today I had one of my four soloists and one of my 10 speakers, as well as two terrific cowboy dancers tell me they aren't going to be at the program tomorrow evening.

They are all boys. Have you figured out WHY they aren't going to be there? You're right. They have a big championship football game at the same time ... one that's been on their calendar since July.

OOPS! GIRLS LACK PRAIRIE DRESSES

Oh wait! Did I tell you that four girls told me today that they didn't know they were supposed to have a prairie dress? ["Mrs. Miller, I don't think you gave me a costume note." "Yes I did, Chelsea. In fact, I gave you two costume notes."]

There's more ... one student didn't know the program was tomorrow and one child wanted to wear his Halloween costume for the show instead of cowboy attire.

Suddenly my entire teaching career flashed before my eyes. How can I combat this kind of irresponsibility from both students and parents? The show was going to be a disaster!

God has a way of making blessings out of despair, as not long after I had first

Yes, These Are True Notes From Home

These are real notes written from parents in a Mississippi school district. [Spellings have been left intact.]

My son is under a doctor's care and should not take P.E. today. Please excuse him.

Please excuse Lisa for being absent. She was sick and I had her shot.

Dear School: Please excuse John being absent on Jan. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, and also 33.

Please excuse Gloria from Jim today. She is administrating.

Please excuse Roland from P.E. for a few days. Yesterday he fell out of a tree and misplaced his hip.

John has been absent because he had two teeth taken out of his face.

Carlos was absent yesterday because he was playing football. He was hurt in the growing part.

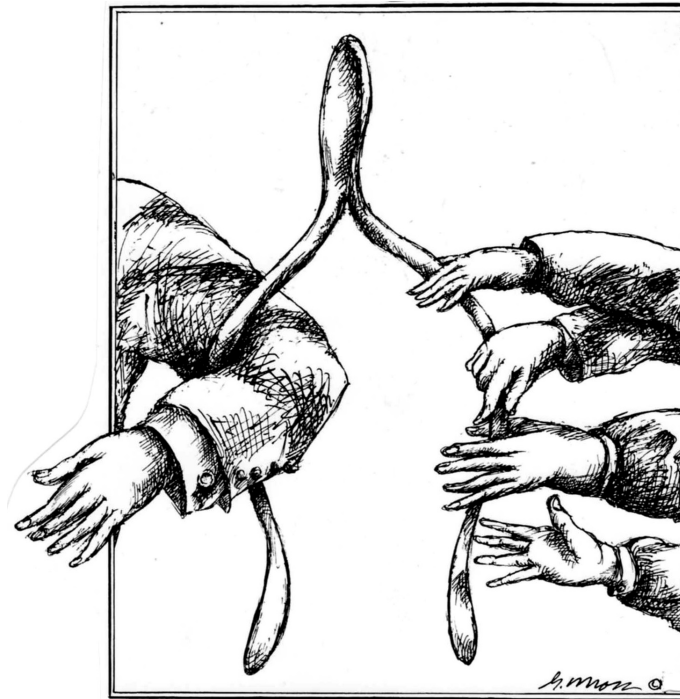
Megan could not come to school today because she has been bothered by very close veins.

Chris will not be in school cus he has an acre in his side.

Please excuse Ray Friday from school. He has very loose vowels.

Please excuse Pedro from being absent yesterday. He had [dlahre] [dyrea] [dl-reathe] the shits. [Words were crossed out in the []'s]

Please excuse Tommy for being absent yesterday. He had diarrhea and his



graders come to my room. We sang Skin and Bones with my puppet friend, Ghostie. We wrote rhythms with "bones" from the graveyard. We sang and danced to Pumpkin Jack and their faces glowed.

"Can we do this again tomorrow, Mrs. Miller?"

TEACHING IS ABOUT THE KIDS

And then it occurred to me. Teaching isn't about me. It's about these kids. It's about giving every child an opportunity to achieve. For those children who do care, this is their chance to soar. For those who act irresponsibly, continue to encourage them to make good choices and love them despite their decisions.

As a music educator, I'm convinced music teachers are some of the most dedicated and committed teachers there are. We go the extra mile to make things happen for our students. We spend hours preparing the perfect audition tapes or rehearsing for those All-State auditions.

We go above and beyond to prepare for the upcoming concerts and programs. We attend workshops, advance our educational levels, and constantly research new materials in order to discover new approaches in creating innovative lessons to meet the needs of our children.

AMONG THE LAST TO LEAVE THE SCHOOL

We are some of the last teachers to leave our buildings at the end of a school day.

What we often fail to remember is that we aren't doing this for ourselves. We're doing this because as educators we have the goal of wanting to provide multiple positive opportunities for our children.

We want to make them look good and feel good about themselves. We are instilling musicality in these students that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Congratulations to those of you who had students selected to perform at our coming Winter Conference, either as honor groups or All-OMEA performers.

Your young musicians will experience such growth and maturity through this experience. Just keep in mind that this performance is not about you. It's about your young musicians! Yes, your knowledge helped prepare them for this task, but you did it for THEIR benefit.

THE KIDS WERE AWESOME

P.S. As I'm finishing this article, my program is over. It went great and the kids were awesome. And I was told the boys won their football game, as well, so all is not lost - I guess.

I've even started preparation for my winter program. I can hardly wait to see those young fifth-grade students on the stage, sharing their talents with family and friends. I know they will grow musically through the preparation and presentation of this performance.

I only have one thought as I continue to prepare - I wonder how many of those boys play basketball?

- The author is president-elect of the Oklahoma Music Educators Association. This is from their winter newsletter.

boots leak.

Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father's fault.

I kept Billie home because she had to go Christmas shopping because I don't know what size she wear.

Please excuse Jennifer for missing school yesterday. We forgot to get the Sunday paper off the porch, and when we found it Monday, we thought it was Sunday.

Sally won't be in school a week from Friday. We have to attend her funeral.

My daughter was absent yesterday because she was tired. She spent a weekend with the Marines.

Please excuse Jason for being absent yesterday. He had a cold and could not breed well.

Please excuse Mary for being absent yesterday. She was in bed with gramps.

Gloria was absent yesterday as she was having a gangover.

Please excuse Brenda, she has been sick and under the doctor.

Maryann was absent December 11-16, because she had a fever, sore throat, headache and upset stomach. Her sister was also sick, fever and sore throat, her brother had a low grade fever and ached all over. I wasn't the best either, sore throat and fever. There must be something going around, her father even got hot last night.

Sooners Favor Huckabee

Election Impact Of The Religious Right

The Pew Research Center has been busy attempting to fathom the impact the religious right will have on the Republican race for president.

White evangelical Protestants make up 37% of all Republican voters but constitute a majority [55%] of Republican social-issue voters. Many fewer are white mainline Protestants [13%] or white non-Hispanic Catholics [14%].

Seven-in-10 of these social-issue voters attend religious services at least once a week, which is nearly double the rate of other Republican and Republican-leaning voters [39%].

Compared with all Republican and Republican-leaning registered voters, Republican social issue voters possess lower levels of education and are less affluent.

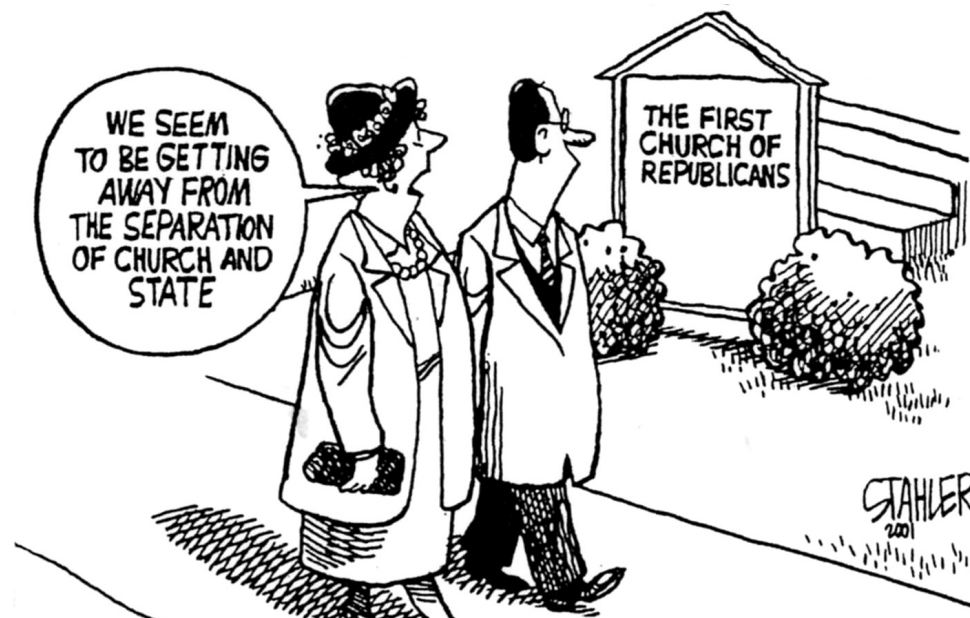
WOMEN DOMINATE THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Roughly half of all Republican social-issue voters say they are working class, compared with 38% among other Republican voters. More than half of social-issue voters [52%] are women, 10 points higher than among other Republican voters [42%].

Politically, social-issue voters also are strikingly different from other Republicans. More than half [54%] describe themselves as "strong Republicans," compared with less than one third [32%] of other Republican voters.

Ideologically, four-in-five social-issue voters [80%] say they are politically conservative, a level of conservatism that is more than 20 points higher than that seen among other Republican voters.

Oklahoma Republicans helped turn Oklahoma into the second reddest state in the last presidential race [Utah was first]. A large percentage of Democrats side



with them.

HUCKABEE FAVORED IN OKLAHOMA

Early polling gives the Oklahoma nod to ex-Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee. The last time a Democrat carried Oklahoma was LBJ in 1964.

With no clear heir apparent to President Bush, and a nominating contest that remains very much in flux, many 2008 Republican presidential candidates are vying for the support of an influential segment of the primary electorate – social-issue voters.

These voters are Republican and Republican-leaning registered voters, many of whom are conservative Christians who say social issues such as abortion and gay marriage will be very important in their presidential voting decisions.

A recent Pew Research Center survey finds that for the general public, social issues continue to be overshadowed in the presidential campaign by the war in

See RELIGIOUS RIGHT Page 11

HUNGER

From Page 7

Sadly, the poverty line is not an accurate reflection of the size of Oklahoma's at-risk population; there are many families living above the poverty line who, nonetheless, face great instability and insecurity related to their inadequate incomes.

POVERTY LEVEL ISN'T ALWAYS SUFFICIENT

For a single mother raising two children, the poverty line is set at an annual income of only \$16,242, which can, in many cases, be an income that is far from sufficient to provide adequate housing, healthcare, food, transportation, clothing, home heating, and other basic necessities.

The poverty threshold for a senior living alone is only \$9,669. For many seniors, this income may barely be enough to pay for prescription drugs, housing, and utilities, much less an adequate supply of nutritious food.

Even for those families who are able to cope with income near the poverty line, security is often far from a reality; household budgets are so tight that a major disruption, such as a medical emergency or job loss, can send them into financial crisis.

POTENTIAL FOOD INSECURITY EVEN GREATER

The number of Oklahomans who could potentially fall into food insecurity at any given time is significantly larger than even our high poverty rate would suggest.

The situation is, indeed, worsening. Many of Oklahoma's working families are seeing their incomes become more and more inadequate, as the costs of basic necessities are rising faster and further beyond their wages.

Adjusted for inflation, Oklahoma's economy grew by 8.5% between 2002-2005. Unfortunately, wages have not kept pace.

Adjusted for inflation, the 2005 Oklahoma median wage [\$12.26] was slightly lower than the 2001 median wage. Adjusted for inflation, the median household income in Oklahoma fell by 4.1% between 2001 and 2005.

EVEN LESS HOSPITABLE PICTURE

The picture becomes even less hospitable when the differing rates of inflation for different income earners are taken into account.

Through 2007, food prices rose by an annual rate of 5.1%.

Food prices are expected to continue to rise, threatening the food security of Oklahoma's families.

Rising food prices hurt the ability of Oklahoma's charitable community to meet human needs, weakens food purchasing budgets and weakens supply of donated food.

Among those facing the threat of hunger, children are disproportionately at risk. Nationwide, 18% of children live in food insecure households; in Oklahoma, more than 22% of children live in food insecure households.

FOCUS IS ON THE VERY YOUNG

Even among children, the threat is disproportionately focused on the youngest. In Oklahoma, 28.7% of children below the age of five live in poverty; among children between the ages of 16 and 18, that percentage falls to 20.5%.

Proper nutrition is imperative for children; the lack of an adequate and nutritious diet can irreversibly affect a child's growth and development, disadvantaging them for a lifetime.

Senior citizens who are food insecure face especially large risks, as well as barriers to obtaining assistance.

HUNGER CAN MEAN HEALTH DISASTER

Hunger increases their risk for stroke, exacerbates pre-existing ill health con-

ditions, limits the effectiveness of many prescription drugs, and may affect brain chemistry increasing the incidence of depression and isolation.

Research suggests that insufficient nutrient intake accounts for a disproportionate amount of health care costs among low-income elderly individuals, unrelated to the aging process. Unfortunately, senior citizens face many unique barriers in obtaining adequate nutrition assistance.

The rising costs of prescription drugs and medical care weigh disproportionately on senior citizens, compromising their food budgets in the process. The countervailing burdens of food and medicine can often play a large role in pushing individuals into food insecurity.

CHOOSING BETWEEN FOOD AND MEDICINE

For instance, of those who receive food through the Oklahoma Food Bank network, 32% report having to choose between buying food and paying for medicine or medical care.

The process of applying for federal food assistance can be especially difficult for seniors. The complexity of the application forms, as well as the eligibility formula itself, can serve to hinder their ability to be food secure.

Between 2000 and 2030, Oklahoma's senior population is expected to grow by nearly 67%.

Unless serious effort is put into improving nutrition services for them, Oklahoma may see a dramatic rise in the number of senior citizens, many with special needs, struggling with hunger.

Rural residents often live far from grocery stores. Thirty-two of Oklahoma's 77 counties are classified as "food deserts," meaning that at least 25% of their population lives 10 miles or more from a supermarket or supercenter.

NINE 'SEVERE FOOD DESERT' COUNTIES

Nine of those counties are "severe food deserts," meaning that the entire population has limited access to such food outlets [Cimarron, Dewey, Ellis, Grant, Greer, Harmon, Harper, Hughes, and Jefferson]. All of these food desert counties are non-metropolitan.

Access to emergency food assistance is also limited in many rural areas. Unlike Oklahoma's metropolitan areas, which have substantial numbers of private, charitable emergency food assistance sites, rural Oklahoma has a much lower concentration of such services.

WHAT HUNGER DOES

Hunger carries with it not just profound human costs, but also serious economic costs.

Hunger decreases children's ability to grow and learn, undercutting their potential in their future careers.

Hunger causes health and social affects that decrease productivity in adult workers.

A national report concludes that hunger costs American citizens \$90 billion each year, at a minimum. This estimate does not include tax money spent on nutrition and anti-hunger programs.

The authors estimate that Oklahoma alone loses more than \$1.4 billion each year from hunger, through increased illness and decreased academic achievement alone.

If lost worker productivity and other costs were included, the total economic cost would be even higher than this estimate suggests.

The task force had many recommendations, including a partnership between state government and those fighting hunger.

PUBLIC FORUM

The Real Highway To Heaven? Try I-35

By Karen Webb

I heard it first on Channel 4 in Oklahoma City, but when I read *Holy Highway: Evangelicals Pray to "Light" Interstate 35* on the Internet, I knew why I had been feeling so *Like a Virgin, touched for the very first time. Like a vir-r-r-gin.*

Folks, I live less than half a mile from the holiest of holies. They say that some people are claiming that Interstate 35 is mentioned in the Bible as the "Way of Holiness." My husband has had two wrecks on it, but so far he is still here.

Evangelicals, from Laredo to Duluth, have been praying 24 hours a day for a month to bring light to the highway. I don't know about Laredo or Duluth, but a call to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation can get those lights replaced.

I haven't observed any "purity sieges" in my area, but there are young people in the movement having them. It's a movement like the Alice's Restaurant Anti-Massacre Movement, I guess.

These "purity sieges" are supposed to be in front of gay businesses, porn shops and things like that. I am going to Houston and I will check to see if they are "purity sieging" at that humongous porn shop on the south bank of the Red River in Texas and that big Indian Casino on the north side of the river.

INTERSTATE 35 FULFILLS SCRIPTURE

They say I-35 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 35:8: "And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it."

Take my word for it, I was on I-35 several times today and there are fools going about on it, including one really wicked one who flipped me off.

They say it is because it is Chapter 35 so it must be I-35, but why not 35th street? It is pretty wicked. My word the Oklahoma State Capital is pretty close to both I-35 and 35th street.

People in the "Highway to Holiness" movement have had prophetic experiences that involve I-35. I know how they feel. There have been times on OU game days when I have had a vision of being trapped in traffic until the 12th of never.

AN ORWELLIAN PROPHECY?

The "Highway to Holiness" movement has a prophetess named Cindy Jacobs. Cindy told CBN that a German prophet made the discovery about Interstate 35 in 1984. 1984 ... woooooooooo, how Orwellian?

No one knows the name of this prophet, but he seems credible, at least to CBN. They do have a lot of faith in things they haven't seen. The unknown German

had a dream – "And in this dream he saw a highway that went from the bottom of someplace to the top that had a '35' sign on it. And God showed him that revival was going to begin at the bottom of this highway and go to the top."

That explains it. There is a long, long, long, desolate, dreadfully long stretch of I-35 nothingness from Laredo to near San Antonio, about 155 miles of near nothing. The revival is just not here, yet.

POSSIBLE SIGNS: BRIDGE COLLAPSE, A MUSLIM CONGRESSMAN?

That collapse of the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis really put the fear into the movement.

Christine Pickett of Little Canada was getting downloads from the Lord. She doesn't usually share her "downloads from the Lord," but she thought this one was significant.

Pickett's charge is that U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison, a Muslim, announced his trip to Israel on the same day the bridge collapsed and this is an omen.

"I think the Lord may be saying that this man and his district and what he is about doing in Israel is connected. I could be wrong – however, I just have to look at the timing and the fear of the Lord comes upon me," Christine said.

THESE FOLKS ARE REALLY SCARY

I feel something coming up on me at this moment and it is fear of people like Christine.

Caleb Valdez, a student at Heartland Ministries in Dallas put it this way: "We are tired of seeing the destruction of what sin has brought on the world, and so, we believe God has ordained this highway for us to go up and down ... to see lives transformed, to see people revolutionized for God [and] for the betterment of this place."

I agree. Dallas needs revolutionized betterment in a big way. I hope they start on that interchange from I-35 to I-20.

Cindy, Christine and Caleb, does your first name have to start with a "C" to be in the "Highway to Holiness" movement?

Are they aware that there are likely hundreds, if not thousands of roads coming "from the bottom of someplace to the top, that had a '35' on it somewhere."

At Duluth, I-35 becomes State Highway 61. Does that mean there is no hope for those north of Duluth?

What about Thunder Bay, Ontario?

– *The author lives in Moore*

Oklahoma's Illogical Voting Is Inexplicable

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Most of us will recall a little of our earlier education in syllogistic reasoning, limited as it may have been. It went something like the following:

All terriers are dogs.

All dogs are mammals.

Therefore, all terriers are mammals.

Although there are many other forms of syllogisms, some negative, the idea is that deductive reasoning is based upon recognition of a logical relationship of existing facts. Voters are not always logical, and thus politics may often be illogical.

For a case in point, a recent newspaper article reports that 650,000 Oklahomans have no health insurance. This article says that 18.4% of Oklahomans are uninsured, and that Oklahoma ranks fifth in the percentage of its population having no health insurance.

That is fifth from last place nationally in this one indicator of the welfare and quality of life for Oklahoma citizens. Not good.

VOTING AGAINST SELF-INTEREST?

Combine this fact that Oklahoma has consistently voted Party A in presidential elections, that it has two Party A senators, that all but one of its congressmen are Party A, and the Legislature is now basically Party A.

Now add in the facts that all major Party A presidential candidates oppose any real plan for universal health care, eschewing all such as "socialized medicine." Likewise, Oklahoma's Party A congressional delegation has been negative toward universal health care, even for children. Meanwhile, all Party B candidates for president or for congressional office support major extensions of health care moving toward covering everybody.

Given these facts and conditions, and considering the fact that health care is always named high in surveys of political priorities, one would think that voters in Oklahoma would turn out to vote overwhelmingly for Party B candidates and remove Party A from office for not representing their needs.

Since the logical has not been happening, and state voters still consistently go to the polls and vote against their own interests, there must be some explanation for that irrationality.

ANALYZING THE IRRATIONAL

What are some of the possible explanations for irrational voting behavior of Oklahomans?

1. Irrational conduct can stem from ignorance. That is, voters may not be well enough informed to know their own self-interest, or they may be misinformed or misled [example: trickle-down tax cuts; Iraq War = patriotic].

2. The 80% who have health insurance may not be concerned about others. But this is of questionable logic since their insurance costs are higher because of the uninsured. [Faulty logic may apply to other social programs.]

3. Other significant issues may be distracting, if the voter's welfare is affected by these. Significant issues usually named are the Iraq War, the economy, deficits and national debt, exporting jobs, political corruption, and immigration, etc.

Since Party B candidates are all aligned with the majority on most of these issues, other than possibly mixed views immigration, it would appear that voters are consistently voting against their own stated priorities.

WHAT INTERFERES WITH ELECTORAL LOGIC?

4. Extraneous, emotionally-toned issues may be interfering with logic. Here we encounter immigration again, but also a host of other issues brought into the political realm as red herrings, ranging from women's privacy and childbearing rights to prayer in schools, gay unions, God in the pledge, professed Christianity, displaying Ten Commandments, and so on.

Some people are emotional rather than logical about these, and they are pushing the government toward [unconstitutionally] interfering with private, personal, and religious matters [while deregulating predatory businesses].

It would appear that these issues may well be the decisive ones for many. Why else would so many people vote against their own interests?

5. Unexamined traditional loyalties may also interfere with logical decisions. One would expect that a number of citizens have been brought up within one political party, and they remain loyal to that party and its candidates without ever giving real thought as to whether the party now actually represents their self-interest, or the welfare of others like them.

Why else would a teacher vote for a legislative candidate of a party that always advocates tax cuts? "I was raised Party A" is not a logical reason.

A CASE OF PURE SELF-CENTEREDNESS?

Why would a person interested in better roads, schools, mental health, prisons, domestic security for children, or public infrastructure vote for the tax-cutting party? An answer, not of logic, may be pecuniary selfishness.

So, in conclusion, there must be a reason why a person on Social Security goes to vote for candidates who advocate ruinous "reforms." There must be a reason why one sees Party A political signs in the front yards in the poor areas of town, quite obviously occupied by beneficiaries of Party B social programs and certainly not beneficiaries of the Party A tax cuts.

Stickers on pick-up trucks saying "Don't blame me, I voted Party A" are certainly illogical. Who else should we blame?

It seems quite obvious that if logic and information were the guiding forces in politics, this might remake the voting landscape. There would, of course, still be basic, logical philosophic differences among us, and between Party A and Party B, but our votes would serve our individual, state, and national welfare better if based on good information and solid personal logic.

– *The author, AKA The Militant Moderate, lives in Enid*

BOOKS

Our New Gilded Age Demands Another FDR

By Alvena Bieri

THE CONSCIENCE OF A LIBERAL

By Paul Krugman
W.W. Norton & Co. Inc.
352 pages, \$25.95

At a recent public forum in Stillwater on the living wage, a speaker suggested that poverty in the richest country in the world is a moral issue. He also said that our government has the power to create and sustain a strong middle class. That would help get 17% of Oklahoma's population – 587,591 people – out of poverty.

It just so happened that at that very time I was reading Paul Krugman's latest book. Its main point is exactly the same: Our government can not only create, but maintain a strong middle class.

Greed is not good. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt put it in his second inaugural address, "We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; now we know it is bad economics."

What are good economics? Social Security, unemployment insurance and Medicare have been very positive building blocks for a more equitable economy for quite a while now. And there are many more.

Krugman is often called "the world's most widely-read economist." That is quite a recommendation and seems to give him a lot of power to influence ideas.

KRUGMAN'S PRESCRIPTION: A 'NEW' NEW DEAL

Born in 1953, he says he grew up in what he felt was "a middle-class society," what he thinks now is a "paradise lost." So what he recommends now for us is a new New Deal.

He became not only an economics expert but a campaigner for liberal politicians and anti-war activists.

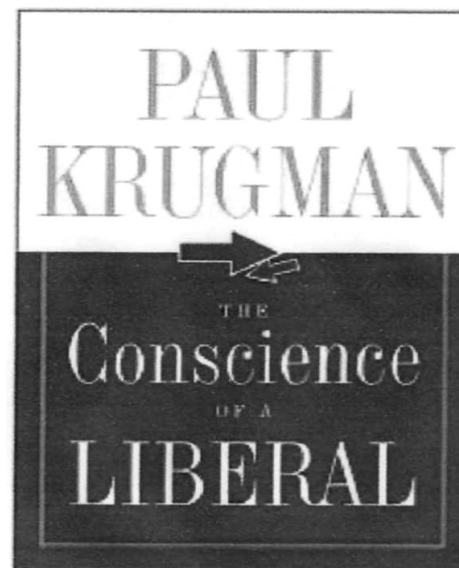
From the beginning of the book, he reminds us of the role of racial prejudice as a deleterious influence on all of American politics and culture.

Look at these two strong sentences: "The legacy of slavery, America's original sin, is the reason we're the only advanced economy that doesn't guarantee health care to our citizens. White backlash against the civil rights movement is the reason America is the only advanced country where a major political party wants to roll back the welfare state."

Then Krugman blames politicians like Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich for this.

'WELFARE STATE' IS STIGMATIZED

By the way, he uses the wording "welfare state" a lot. Over the past years



The truth is,
liberalism
"is about
democracy
and the rule of
law."

I think it has unfortunately taken on a bad connotation, something like "the nanny state."

It might be a little awkward, but what he should be after is an expression like maybe "the cooperative state." That would imply that the general good of everyone is what a true democracy is all about.

Essentially the Krugman book is a history of economics in the United States starting with the Gilded Age which he says extended from the 1890s up through the Depression. But everything changed with the advent of the New Deal.

Incidentally, he says that before that, the Populists had many good ideas. But they were handicapped by the division between rural and city dwellers and between blacks and whites. So the New Deal was truly new.

The key to clarifying our definitions of liberal and conservative and what the words actually mean is also at the heart of this book's instruction on political terms.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIBERALS AND PROGRESSIVES

After he brushed us up on history, Krugman concludes that liberalism in the United States "is about democracy and the rule of law." On the other hand "movement conservatism" [as opposed to true conservative values following the rule of law] "has been antidemocratic, with an attraction of authoritarianism."

Now, one more important term for our time is "progressivism." In an honest and unacademic tone, Krugman states that "you are a liberal if you believe that the U.S. should have universal health care. You're a progressive if you participate in the effort to bring universal health care into being." So action is important!

Read more about growing income inequality in what he calls the Long Gilded Age and the New Gilded Age we're in today.

And think about this quote: "Franklin Delano Roosevelt was very much the right man at the right time. And under his leadership the nature of American society changed vastly for the better." Oh, for another FDR!

– The author lives in Stillwater

RELIGIOUS RIGHT

From Page 10

Iraq and domestic issues such as the economy and health care.

SOCIAL ISSUES VERY IMPORTANT TO THEM

Nevertheless, a large portion of Republican voters [43%] say social issues will be very important in deciding who to vote for in the 2008 presidential race.

A closer analysis of the Pew survey findings shows that these Republican social-issue voters differ in many ways from other members of the GOP coalition.

For example, they are much more religious and more conservative than other Republican voters.

And though more than three-quarters of Republican social-issue voters express a favorable view of former New York mayor and presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani, they are somewhat less likely than other Republican voters to express a positive view of him.

THEY ARE MUCH MORE CONSERVATIVE

Not surprisingly, social-issue voters are much more conservative than other Republican and Republican-leaning voters on cultural issues such as abortion, stem cell research and gay marriage.

More than eight-in-ten [81%] social-issue voters oppose legalized abortion in most or all cases, with 41% saying that abortion should be illegal in all cases.

Among other Republicans, by contrast, a slim majority [52%] says that abortion should be legal in most or all cases.

Similar divides are seen on stem cell research and gay marriage. Two-thirds [66%] of social issue voters oppose stem cell research, while a narrow majority [51%] of other Republicans support it.

STRONG GAY MARRIAGE OPPOSITION

Overall opposition to gay marriage is nearly 30 points higher among social-issue voters than among other Republicans [91% vs. 63%], and strong opposition to gay marriage is more than 40 points higher among social-issue voters than

among other Republicans [70% vs. 29%].

Though social-issue voters clearly are distinctive in several ways, the exact nature of their impact on the GOP nominating process is unclear.

Many are supporting Huckabee, despite a history of political corruption. They could care less about his character. It is sufficient that he is a religious right-winger on social issues dear to their hearts.

Whether they will ultimately unite behind a particular candidate, and how this might affect the Republican nomination process and ultimately the general election, remains to be seen.

INSIGHT. ANALYSIS. PERSPECTIVE.

*With three decades on the front lines
of national and state political reporting,
Oklahoma Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton
is the perfect choice to address your civic
club, political gathering or classroom.*

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Baloney Detection Is Hard Work

"Finding the occasional straw of truth awash in a great ocean of confusion and bamboozle requires intelligence, vigilance, dedication and courage. But if we don't practice these tough habits of thought, we cannot hope to solve the truly serious problems that face us – and we risk becoming a nation of suckers, up for grabs by the next charlatan who comes along." – The late Carl Sagan, as reported by Today's Word on Journalism

What They Call 'Progress' In Iraq

By Joe Conason

As America marks the first anniversary of the troop escalation in Iraq, at least one thing has become clear. Although the "surge" is failing as policy, it seems to be succeeding as propaganda. Even as George W. Bush continues to bump and scrape along the bottom of public approval, significantly more people now believe we are "winning" the war.

What winning really means and whether that vague impression can be sustained are questions that the war's proponents would prefer not to answer for the moment. Their objective during this election year is simply to reduce public pressure for withdrawal, which is still the choice of an overwhelming majority of voters.

So long as the surge appears to be working, political space is created for the Republican candidates who support the war – especially Sen. John McCain, the hawk's hawk, who said recently that he might keep U.S. soldiers in Iraq for "a hundred years."

Although that remark was not well received in the Arab world, they may take comfort in the fact that no matter how determined the Arizona senator is to fulfill that threat, he is unlikely to do so since he is already over 70 years old.

MEDIA ENERGIZE MCCAIN'S CAMPAIGN

But the revival of McCain's moribund candidacy over the past few weeks would have been impossible without the media's endorsement of "progress" in Iraq. Indeed, war propaganda itself has surged lately on the strength of casualty statistics from December 2007.

Consider the work of William Kristol, who played an important role in selling the war as editor of *The Weekly Standard* and on the Fox News Channel. From his new perch on *The New York Times*' op-ed page – proof that being hideously wrong is no obstacle to scaling the heights of American punditry – he proclaims that "we have been able to turn around the situation in Iraq" and achieve "real success."

According to Kristol, who once mocked concerns about religious strife in Iraq as "pop sociology," the drop in violence last month marked the lowest overall number of deaths for both civilians and military forces since the war began in March 2003. Declining casualties for a month or two means progress, which, in turn, means that the war must continue, and that the president's policy is correct.

EVER-SHRINKING STANDARDS OF SUCCESS

What has fallen far more sharply than the casualty statistics in Iraq is the standard for success there, as defined by neoconservatives like Kristol.

In the original promotional literature produced by these individuals and their associates, and recited by the president, this war was supposed to remake the Middle East into a showcase for democracy, with ruinous consequences for our terrorist enemies and cheaper oil for us – and all for free because the Iraqi petro-



leum industry would cover all the costs.

When that happy future never arrived, to put it mildly, the war's proponents scrambled to reduce expectations. So in announcing the surge, the president set forth a series of benchmarks for progress in Iraq that were supposed to result from our increased troop presence.

The objective was not a temporary reduction of sectarian killing, but real movement toward reconciliation of the contending factions, including the passage of laws on sharing oil revenues and political power among the Sunni, Shia, Kurds and other ethnic communities.

President Bush declared the escalation would create space for the Iraqis to act on behalf of their own country.

RECONCILING THE LACK OF RECONCILIATION

Even those minimized objectives have yet to be met. The oil-sharing statute is stalled in the Iraqi parliament, while Kurdish regional authorities make their own separate deals with foreign oil companies.

The Sunni militia organizations that we have armed to fight al-Qaeda have been rejected by the Shiite central government. The statute passed by the Iraqi parliament to reduce sanctions against former members of the Ba'ath Party, which was supposed to mollify the Sunni leadership, appears only to have alienated them further because they consider it fraudulent.

Worst of all, despite the undoubted courage and commitment of our troops, violence in Iraq has increased since the year began.

Killings of civilians by car bombs and snipers averaged more than 50 per day during the first two weeks of January, and U.S. military deaths are averaging slightly more than one per day, or nearly 50% higher than last month.

At that level, if American troops stayed for another 10 years, let alone a century, as Mr. McCain suggests, our casualties would double. What would winning mean then?

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Hey, Dubya, Read Our Lips: No More War

By Molly Ivins

Editor's Note: A year ago, on Jan. 30, a most remarkable voice in American politics was silenced when Molly Ivins lost her long, difficult battle against cancer at the much too tender age of 62. A liberal's liberal, Molly's keen wit and insight are sorely missed, but will never be forgotten, especially by her loyal legion of Oklahoma Observer readers. What follows is her final column, still as relevant and poignant as it was 12 months ago.

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.

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.

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. We need people in the streets, banging pots and pans and demanding, "Stop it, now!"

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A Million A Minute How Bush Wrecked The U.S. Economy

Like a ticking time bomb, the national debt is an explosion waiting to happen. It's expanding by about \$1.4 billion a day or nearly \$1 million a minute.

What that means to you? It means almost \$30,000 in debt for each man, woman, child and infant in the United States.

Even if you've escaped the recent housing and credit crunches and are coping with rising fuel prices, you may still be headed for economic misery, along with the rest of the country.

That's because the government is fast straining resources needed to meet interest payments on the national debt, which stands at a mind-numbing \$9.13 trillion.

Like homeowners who took out adjustable-rate mortgages, the government faces the prospect of seeing this debt – now at relatively low interest rates – rolling over to higher rates, multiplying the financial pain.

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

So long as somebody is willing to keep loaning the U.S. government money, the debt is largely out of sight, out of mind.

The national debt – the total accumulation of annual budget deficits – is up from \$5.7 trillion when President Bush took office in January 2001 and will top \$10 trillion sometime right before or right after he leaves in January 2009.

That's \$10,000,000,000,000.00, or one digit more than an odometer-style "national debt clock" near New York's Times Square can handle. When the privately owned automated clock was activated in 1989, the national debt was \$2.7 trillion.

HERE COME THE BABY BOOMERS

Over the next 25 years, the number of Americans aged 65 and up is expected to almost double. The work population will shrink and more and more baby boomers will be drawing Social Security and Medicare benefits, putting new demands on the government's resources.

These guaranteed retirement and health benefit programs now make up the largest component of federal spending. Defense is next. And moving up fast in third place is interest on the national debt, which totaled \$430 billion last year.

Aggravating the debt picture: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office estimates could cost \$2.4 trillion over the next decade.

IT'S A BIG CHUNK OF LIABILITY

The national debt as a percentage of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product has grown from about 35% in 1975 to around 65% today. By historical standards, it's not proportionately as high as during World War II when it briefly rose to 120% of GDP, but it's a big chunk of liability.

It is estimated that the national debt will hit 350% of the GDP by 2050 under unchanged policy.

Who is loaning Washington all this money?

Ordinary investors who buy Treasury bills, notes and U.S. savings bonds, for one. Also it is banks, pension funds, mutual fund companies and state, local and increasingly foreign governments.

This accounts for about \$5.1 trillion of the total and is called the "publicly held" debt. The remaining \$4 trillion is owed to Social Security and other government accounts, according to the Treasury Department, which keeps figures on the national debt down to the penny on its web site.

THE DYNAMIC COULD CHANGE

For now, large U.S. trade deficits with much of the rest of the world work in favor of continued foreign investment in Treasuries and dollar-denominated securities. After all, the vast sums Americans pay in dollars for imported goods has to go somewhere. But that dynamic could change.

The first day the Chinese or the Japanese or the Saudis say, "we've bought enough of your paper," then the debt [whatever level it is at that point] becomes unmanageable.

The dollar is down about 35% since the end of 2001 against a basket of major currencies. Foreign governments and investors now hold some \$2.23 trillion – or about 44% – of all publicly held U.S. debt. That's up 9.5% from a year earlier.

CHECK WHO OWNS MOST OF OUR DEBT

Japan is first with \$586 billion, followed by China [\$400 billion] and Britain [\$244 billion]. Saudi Arabia and other oil-exporting countries account for \$123 billion, according to the Treasury.

Of all federal budget categories, interest on the national debt is the one the president and Congress have the least control over. Cutting payments would amount to default, something Washington has never done.

Congress must from time to time raise the debt limit – sort of like a credit card maximum – or the government would be unable to borrow any further to keep it operating and to pay additional debt obligations.

The Democratic-led Congress recently did just that, raising the ceiling to \$9.82 trillion as the former \$8.97 trillion maximum was about to be exceeded. It was the fifth debt-ceiling increase since Bush became president in 2001.

DEMOCRATS POINT FINGER AT BUSH

Democrats are blaming the run-up in deficit spending on Bush and his Republican allies who controlled Congress for the first six years of his presidency. They criticize him for resisting improvements in health care, education and other vital areas while seeking nearly \$200 billion in new Iraq and Afghanistan war spending.



Even during the four most recent years when there was a budget surplus, 1998-2001, the national debt ranged between \$5.5 trillion and \$5.8 trillion.

There's little dispute that current fiscal policies are unsustainable. Yet too few of our elected leaders in Washington – including the Oklahoma delegation – are willing to acknowledge the seriousness of the long-term fiscal problem and even fewer are willing to put it on the political agenda.

CLINTON WAS TRUE FISCAL CONSERVATIVE

Not long ago, it actually looked like the national debt could be paid off in full, thanks to the Clinton Administration.

In the late 1990s, the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office projected a surplus of a \$5.6 trillion over 10 years and calculated the debt would be paid off as early as 2006.

That surplus was quickly blown by the Bush Administration which began passing out tax cuts for the super wealthy.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody'sEconomy.com, said he's more concerned that interest on the national debt will become unsustainable than he is that foreign countries will dump their dollar holdings – something that would undermine the value of their own vast holdings.

"We're going to have to shell out a lot of resources to make those interest payments. There's a very strong argument as to why it's vital that we address our budget issues before they get measurably worse," Zandi said.

"Of course, that's not going to happen until after the next president is in the White House," he added.

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Country Wisdom

- Don't name a pig you plan to eat.
- Country fences need to be horse high, pig tight, and bull strong.
- Life is not about how fast you run, or how high you climb, but how well you bounce.
- Keep skunks and Republicans at a distance.
- Life is simpler when you plow around the stumps.
- A bumblebee is faster than a John Deere tractor.
- Trouble with a milk cow is she won't stay milked.
- Don't skinny dip with snapping turtles.
- Words that soak into your ears are whispered, not yelled.
- Meanness don't happen overnight.
- To know how country folks are doing, check the barns, not their houses.
- Never lay an angry hand on a kid or an animal, it just ain't helpful.
- Teachers, Moms, and hoot owls sleep with one eye open.
- Forgive your enemies. It messes with their heads.
- Don't sell your mule to buy a plow.
- Two can live as cheap as one if one don't eat.
- Don't corner something meaner than you.
- It don't take a very big person to carry a grudge.
- Don't go huntin' with a fellow named Chug-A-Lug.
- You can't unsay a cruel thing.
- Every path has some puddles.
- Don't wrestle with pigs: You'll get all muddy and the pigs will love it.
- The best sermons are lived, not preached.
- Most of the stuff people worry about never happens.

The Ten Commandments display was removed from the Alabama Supreme Court building. There was a good reason for the move. You can't post Thou Shalt Not Steal, Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery and Thou Shall Not Lie in a building full of Republicans without creating a hostile work environment.

The American Dream

A Nightmare For Black Americans

By Joshua Holland

Thirty years after the civil rights era, middle-class African-American families face a grim reality: their kids are far more likely to experience downward mobility in today's economy than they are to move up.

For both black and white families, America's vaunted upward mobility is largely a myth, and research suggests that Americans actually enjoy less upward mobility than people in many other wealthy countries. But the outlook is different for white and black families.

A new study by Julia Isaacs, a Fellow with the Brookings Institution, paints a dark picture for black families, and especially for the large group of African-Americans who moved up and into the middle class following the hard-fought gains of the 1950s and 1960s.

COMPARING APPLES TO APPLES

Isaacs looked at a unique set of data, one that allowed her to compare the incomes of people in their 30s in 2004 with their parents' generation in the mid-'70s [this allowed her to compare people at the same general stage in their careers – apples and apples].

While white men's incomes have been stagnant for the past three decades – for both white and black families, most of the increase in family income was a result of women entering the workforce rather than wages increasing – the current generation of 30-something black men actually earn, on average, 12% less than their fathers did in the mid-1970s.

That trend toward downward mobility has an enormous impact on the black middle class. While children of middle-class whites tend to do better than their parents did at the same age, a majority of middle-class African American children do worse than theirs, both in income and in terms of their position on the nation's economic ladder.

THE DIFFERENCE FOR BLACK AND WHITE CHILDREN

According to Isaacs, "Only 3% of black children born to parents in the middle of the income distribution have family income greater than their parents, compared to 68% of white children from the same income bracket."

The key findings from the study are truly eye-opening:

- Startlingly, almost half [45%] of black children whose parents were solidly middle class end up falling to the bottom of the income distribution, compared to only 16% of white children.
- Achieving middle-income status does not appear to protect black children from future economic adversity the same way it protects white children.
- Black children from poor families have poorer prospects than white children from such families. More than half [54%] of black children born to parents in the bottom quintile stay in the bottom, compared to 31% of white children.

THE INCOME LEVEL KEEPS ON FALLING

In 1974, black families earned, on average, almost two-thirds of what whites did; by 2004, that number had fallen to 58%.

But looking at income alone misses a crucial part of the story. The differences in accumulated wealth – in net worth – are far greater than the differences in income, and that impacts black families' prospects of moving up in a big way.

In *Black Living In The Red*, Dalton Conley, director of NYU's Center for Advanced Social Science Research, showed that white families, on average, had eight times the accumulated wealth of black families who earned the same, and that remained true even when you adjust for education levels and savings rates.

Conley said, "When you are talking about the difference between financing their kid's college education, starting a new business, moving if they need to move for a better job opportunity – differences in net worth might make the dif-



ference between upward mobility and stagnation."

EDUCATION PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE

Education plays a crucial part in reproducing African-Americans' lower economic status in their kids. Schools are primarily funded through state and local taxes, which leads to dramatic differences in the education available to kids in wealthier and poorer communities.

That goes a long way in explaining a phenomenon long observed in American education: black children excel until the middle grades, and then their achievement levels begin to decline.

At younger ages, large numbers of African-American kids are enrolled in early childhood programs like Headstart, but by the middle grades, the picture changes. According to the Urban Institute's annual report on the State of Black America, black children got 82 cents on the white education dollar last year.

You get what you pay for, and twice as many black children as white kids are taught by instructors with less than three years of experience.

The Urban Institute's study, which looks at five different measures of success in the African-American community, found that the greatest divide between blacks and whites in America is not in political participation, health or social justice, but in the economic realm.

THERE IS LITTLE GOOD NEWS ON THE HORIZON

This is a story with little good news on the horizon. As bad as the economic divide between black and white families is now, the sub-prime lending crisis is going to fall particularly hard on people of color and make matters far worse.

There's an old saying that white folks keep their wealth in the bank and black folks keep theirs in their houses.

Given the degree to which wealth and opportunity intersect, and with an estimated half-trillion dollars worth of low-cost "teaser loans" ready to reset this year, black families in America likely face even more opportunities to fall down the economic ladder.

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Generation Y Is Key To Nomination

By Linda Nazareth

It's a battle of the generations in the U.S. presidential race, and the winner is going to have the challenge of leading a broader range of generations. Among the presidential contenders are representatives of three different generations:

John McCain [born 1936] is a member of the "Silent Generation" – a pre-boomer who is part of a generation brought up to work hard and believe in their government and other institutions.

Although subject to many economic cycles through their life, the Silent Generation generally started their careers and families at a time when the economy was strong, which has tended to keep them optimistic.

Mitt Romney [born 1947], Hillary Clinton [born 1947], John Edwards [born 1953] and Mike Huckabee [born 1955] are all first wave baby boomers, raised in an era when television brought the unrest in the world around them into their living rooms.

Generationally, they have strong ideals and strong opinions, even if those opinions span a wide range within boomers. As a generation they have questioned their institutions, and are wary about the economy.

Still, being born ahead of the second wave of boomers they have tended to have done well in terms of the economy, especially through real estate.

Barack Obama [born 1961] is a self-proclaimed Generation Xer, at one point

saying that the "boomers should get over themselves." In fact, the U.S. baby boom did not really end until 1965, making Obama a boomer.

Still, in terms of his economic experience, he is in synch with a generation who entered the labor market to a difficult economic environment and who saw the first-wave of boomers dominate in terms of cultural influence.

Gen Xers tend to be more easy-going than boomers in terms of their management style, more family oriented, and somewhat cynical of institutions, including government.

Winning the primaries and the presidency will mean winning their own generations, and in particular winning over Generation Y – the generation born since the late 1970s.

These are the college students and twenty-somethings who are frequently accused of being spoiled, and who want more than corporate success.

More likely they are misunderstood: they want lives that include work as well as leisure, and they don't apologize for that. They are also surprisingly optimistic – and may be big voters if the right candidate appeals to them.

– *The author is an economist, author and television broadcaster. She is author of Leisure Economy: How Changing Demographics, Economics, and Generational Attitudes Will Reshape Our Lives and Our Industries.*

Thanks To Bush **Workers' Injuries And Deaths Soaring**

By Dick Meister

Despite the enormous loss of lives and millions of serious injuries and illness caused by workplace hazards, the Bush Administration continues to blatantly disregard its legal obligation to curtail the needless dying and suffering.

Past experience guarantees that unless the administration acts swiftly and decisively, the number of workers dying on the job this year will reach almost 6,000.

More than two million will be seriously injured. Another 50,000 or more will die from cancer, lung and heart ailments and other occupational diseases caused by exposure to toxic substances.

Think of it: That's an average of at least 16 workers killed and nearly 5,500 badly hurt every day, plus 135 or more dying daily from job-related illness.

HEALTH COSTS AND LOST PRODUCTIVITY

The financial toll is also high: more than \$3 billion in health care expenses and other costs to employers and workers, such as lost wages and production.

Much of that could be avoided. What's needed most – and badly needed – is strengthening the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the two related acts that cover mine safety and the agencies that administer the laws.

For more than three decades, the agencies have been the only real tools for protecting workers from physical harm. Yet they've been woefully underfunded, understaffed and lax in enforcing the law – especially under President Bush.

The agencies are currently run by political appointees of Bush, many of them former executives from the industries they're supposed to regulate.

SAFETY RULES WEAKENED OR DUMPED

They have blocked, withdrawn or weakened dozens of safety rules and stopped development of others recommended by safety and health experts. They've discontinued safety education and training programs and worked with Bush and Republican leaders in Congress to cut their own budgets by millions of dollars.

The agencies have largely abandoned on-site inspections in favor of a "voluntary compliance strategy." That means taking the word of employers that they have voluntarily complied with those rules that remain on the books and providing little protection to workers who face employer retaliation for challenging their word.

FINES ARE MERE TOKENS

Fines for violations are in any case rarely more than token amounts. Even rarer are criminal charges against employers whose willful violations lead to injury, illness or death.

Bush's obvious attempts to help his corporate allies avoid the expense of making working life safer for their employees began very soon after he took office. In one of his first acts, he signed GOP sponsored legislation that repealed regulations – enacted under President Clinton after a decade of research – that covered the most numerous of all occupational hazards.

The regulations were designed to protect computer operators, factory and construction workers, meat and poultry processors, hospital and restaurant employees, supermarket clerks and others who risk serious neck and back problems, chronically sore arms and wrists and other "repetitive motion injuries."

They account for more than 60% of all on-the-job injuries, some of them permanently disabling.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA] has even blocked

124,000 Doctors For Single-Payer!

By Stacey Burling

The Philadelphia-based American College of Physicians – the nation's second-largest physician group with 124,000 members – has endorsed a single-payer health-care system.

The organization stopped short of saying that a single-payer system like Medicare, in which the government would get and pay most bills, is the best way to achieve universal health coverage.

The group said the country also could do that through expansion of the current mix of private insurance and government coverage. Under the proposal, people would be required to get health insurance.

While some physicians have formed organizations that push for single-payer, David Dale, president of the ACP, said his was the largest general-interest doctor group to support the controversial idea.

WHY THEY ISSUED THE ENDORSEMENT

The group said change was necessary because access to health care has deteriorated.

The largest physician group in the United States, the American Medical Association, does not support single-payer. Earlier this year, it released a proposal to expand insurance coverage, primarily through tax incentives and changes in insurance regulations.

The ACP's membership includes internal-medicine physicians and related specialists.

After analyzing health care in the United States and 12 other industrialized countries, the group concluded that universal coverage had been successfully achieved elsewhere through single-payer and pluralistic systems.

Either could work here, the report said. The pluralistic system gives consum-



a proposed rule that would require employers to provide free protective equipment such as goggles, hard hats and gloves that thousands of low-wage workers can't afford.

OSHA'S INACTION PUTS MORE WORKER AT RISK

Workers at all wage levels are at increasingly greater risk because of OSHA's inaction, but especially vulnerable are the generally lower paid immigrants who have become so important to our economy.

They typically are hired for some of the most dangerous jobs, but hesitate to speak out against unsafe conditions for fear of deportation or other retaliation. New studies show that many of their injuries, and many injuries of others, are not even reported.

The number of workplaces and workers has increased substantially since passage of the job safety laws, as has the number and variety of hazards that need regulation.

BUSH AND ALLIES WON'T SPEND THE MONEY

Meeting that need would cost money – money that the Bush Administration and its allies are adamantly unwilling to spend.

Larger job safety budgets aren't all that's needed. There must be much greater oversight of particularly dangerous workplaces and new and tougher regulations if necessary.

Penalties for violations have to be increased, workers granted strict whistleblower protections and programs created to allow them to identify hazards and suggest ways to avoid them. Employers should be required to provide safety gear.

The laws should be extended to farm workers, local and state government employees and other groups not currently covered.

Bills to carry out those and other reforms have long languished in Congress. But now that worker-friendly Democrats control both houses, there's a good chance that at least some of the bills will pass.

That might not quite carry out the promise of the Occupational Safety and Health Act to guarantee a safe job for every American worker, but it would come light-years closer than George W. Bush has taken us.

– The author is a San Francisco-based writer

ers more choice, but also leads to higher administrative costs and inequalities.

DOCTOR COMPARES IT TO REMODELING

"It's like remodeling your house to make it better for your whole family," Dale said.

Single-payer has lower administrative costs, but is not politically popular, he said.

"I'm not a political analyst. I'm just a doctor," Dale said. "But I think there will probably be resistance to that. That's why we don't have it now."

Thomas E. Getzen, professor of insurance and health management at Temple University, said doctors had long resisted single-payer systems for fear it would give the government more control over them.

HIGH TECH IS TAKING A FINANCIAL TOLL

Because much of the growth in expense in the current system is in procedures performed by specialists or in increased use of technology like MRIs, doctors who work in those areas have the most to fear from a single-payer system, Getzen said. Internists, who serve as primary-care doctors for many people, have less to fear.

The ACP also called for better payments for primary-care doctors to help avert a shortage and for the creation of a uniform billing system and greater use of electronic health records to reduce administrative costs.

Dale said that some U.S. doctors and hospitals were better than their counterparts in other nations, but that this country's health system compares poorly.

"Part of our call is, 'Look around, guys, and see how other people are doing,'" he said, "and they're doing better than us."

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Immigration Con Artists Exposed

By David Sirota

I once got suckered by con artists. As I was walking by, they baited me into betting that I could guess which shell a little ball was under.

Moving the shells at lightning speed, they diverted my attention and tricked me into taking my eye off the ball.

When I lost the bet, I felt bamboozled, just like we all should feel today watching the illegal immigration debate. After all, we're witnessing the same kind of con.

As our paychecks stagnate, our personal debt climbs and our health care premiums skyrocket. We the People are ticked off.

Unfortunately for those in Congress, polls show that America is specifically angry at the big business interests that write big campaign checks.

IT IS A DIVERSIONARY TACTIC

So now comes the con, the dishonest argument over illegal immigration trying to divert our ire away from the corporate profiteers, outsourcing, wage cutters and foreclosers that buy influence and protection in Washington.

Republicans like Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado are demanding the government cut off public services for undocumented workers, build a barrier at the Mexican border and force employers to verify employees' immigration status.

Democrats like Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois are urging their allies to either embrace a punitive message aimed at illegal immigrants, or avoid the immigration issue altogether.

Nobody asks the taboo question: What is illegal immigration actually about?

The answer is exploitation. Employers looking to maximize profits want an economically desperate, politically disenfranchised population that will accept ever worse pay and working conditions. Illegal immigrants perfectly fit the bill.

EXPLOITATION FUELS THE PROBLEM

Politicians know exploitation fuels illegal immigration. But they refuse to confront it because doing so would mean challenging their financiers.

Instead we get lawmakers chest-thumping about immigration enforcement while avoiding a discussion about strengthening wage and workplace safety enforcement – proposals that address the real problem.

Equally deplorable, these same lawmakers keep supporting trade policies that make things worse. Recently, both Emanuel and Tancredo voted to expand NAFTA into the Southern Hemisphere.

This is the same trade model that not only decimated American jobs and wages, but also increased illegal immigration by driving millions of Mexican farmers off their land, into poverty and ultimately over our southern border in search of subsistence work.

The con artists' behavior is stunning for its depravity. First they gut domestic wage and workplace safety enforcement. Then they pass lobbyist-crafted trade pacts that push millions of foreigners into poverty.

CON ARTISTS FOLLOW THREE STEP PROGRAM

And presto! When these policies result in a flood of desperate undocumented workers employed at companies skirting domestic labor laws, the con artists



follow a deceptive three-step program:

1] Propose building walls that would do nothing but create a market for Mexican ladders;

2] Make factually questionable claims about immigrants unduly burdening taxpayers and

3] Scapegoat undocumented workers while sustaining an immoral situation that keeps these workers hiding in the shadows.

The formula allows opportunists in Congress to both deflect heat away from the corporations underwriting their campaigns and preserve an exploitable pool of cheap labor for those same corporations.

These opportunists get to divide working-class constituencies along racial lines and vilify destitute illegal immigrant populations that don't make campaign donations and therefore have no political voice whatsoever.

Diversionary scapegoating is nothing new. As Ronald Reagan pushed his reverse Robin Hood agenda, he attributed America's economic stagnation to "welfare queens."

THE MEDIA SAYS IT IS TOO COMPLICATED

Undoubtedly, the media will keep claiming illegal immigration is complicated for both parties. Republicans or Democrats could begin solving the issue, if they simply stopped letting corporate lawyers write trade pacts and started punishing employers who violate wage and workplace laws.

Sadly, even those modest steps probably won't be taken. In a political system that makes it difficult to tell the difference between a lobbyist and a lawmaker, both parties employ the art of distraction to perpetuate the crises that enrich their campaign contributors.

Whether their target is undocumented workers or indigent recipients of public assistance, the political con artists attack the exploited to avoid cracking down on the exploiters – and with immigration, they are hoping America once again gets duped.

Editor's Note: The same Oklahoma Republicans who pushed and passed the most aggressive anti-immigration law bitterly opposed an increase in the \$5.15 per hour minimum wage. None more hypocritical than principal author Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore.

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Protesting Southern Baptist Political Activities

By D.R. Brooks

I protest the prostitution of our convention to serve political goals. The ruthless tactics of political wheeler-dealers disgrace a religious body [Matt. 10:33, II Cor. 4:2, Eph. 6:12].

I protest the 180-degree turn on separation of church and state. For 300 years Baptists have been in the forefront of the fight to keep separate what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God [Gen. 1:27, 22:21, John 8:36, Gal. 5:1].

I protest the unbiblical view that the U.S.A., rather than church, is God's new Israel. This has adulterated biblical faith with civil religion [I Peter 2:9, Eph. 2:12-19].

I protest the shift from the Great Commission and Bold Mission to culture religion. The shifting tides of social and political movements swing right then left,

WOMEN

From Page One

At home, stay aware of possible exits if an argument erupts.

Keep an extra set of keys, money, and a packed bag in case you need to leave quickly.

Identify a friend, family member, or neighbor you can contact in case something happens.

Create a code word or signal to use with your children, friends, family or neighbors to let them know when you need the police or other help.

Plan in advance where you can go if you need to leave home.

At work or in public ... decide if there is someone at work you can tell about your situation, including office or building security, and provide a photo of your abuser if possible.

Arrange to have someone screen your calls. Create a plan for when you leave work. Ask for an escort to your car, use different routes to go home, know where the closest police station is and drive to it if you are being followed.

but our foundation in God never changes [Matt. 28:18-29, Heb.13:8-9].

I protest the effort of some to brush aside soul liberty and the priesthood of believers and impose a creed on us. The Bible has been our sufficient Baptist creed for 300 years [John 8:31-32, Rom. 14:24, I Cor. 4:3-5, II Cor. 1:24].

I protest reckless attacks on our institutions, agencies and officials by people who offer no documentation for their charges. Jesus made love of the brethren the test of discipleship [Ex. 20:16, John 13:35, James 3:12, I John 3:13-14].

Let us say in no uncertain terms to the political power brokers: Get off our backs and let us get on with our God-given task of converting sinners and maturing saints.

- The author lives in Nashville

If you are preparing to leave, create a list of things you would need to take with you when you leave: identification, drivers license, car registration and title, birth certificates for yourself and your children, money, bank books, keys, medications, social security cards, address book, clothes, etc.

Begin to create your own resources by opening bank accounts in your name, renting a post office box to receive mail, or doing any other things that will increase your independence.

Leave money, keys, copies of important documents, and extra clothes with someone you trust, so you can leave quickly.

Talk with family, friends, police, or staff at community agencies who would lend their support.

Remember that leaving is a dangerous time, as many abusers will escalate their violent behaviors to maintain control.

Keep the Oklahoma Safeline number close at hand – 800.522.SAFE.

Ron Paul Is Scary, Fans Even Scarier

By Earl Hutchinson

The scariest thing about no-hope GOP presidential contender Ron Paul is not his fringe, oddball racial views. It's not that he polls in single digits in all national polls and has zilch of a chance to get the nomination. It's not that at times the GOP candidates sound just as racially isolationist as he does.

The scariest thing about Paul is that even though only a few hard-core Paul backers will waste a vote on him, millions more seem to agree that his offbeat views, especially on race matters, make sense.

They even stand logic as high as it get can go on its head to defend their leader against all comers. That's especially true when it comes to Paul's views on race and ethnic politics.

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE

That's not a small point given the open but more often sneaky role that race and ethnicity will increasingly play in the presidential derby.

Democratic presidential contenders Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and John Edwards pulled out all stops to woo and court blacks, Latinos and Asian voters.

They have made poverty, affordable health care, immigration reform, and job protections the linchpins of their campaigns.

Paul and the GOP candidates have done just the opposite. They duck, dodge, and deny racial issues. The only departure from their racial blind eye is to fan anti-immigrant flames.

HE GOES EVEN FURTHER ON WEB PAGE

Paul has gone one better. In an ad, he demanded that students from alleged terrorist countries should be denied visas into the U.S.

Paul offered not a shred of proof that there are hordes of students pouring into America to commit terrorist acts. The ad was more than just a cheap ploy to fan terrorism fears.

This reinforced the worst in racial and religious stereotyping and negative typecasting. The stereotype is that anyone in America with a non-white face and is a Muslim is terrorist.

Then there's Paul's now infamous slavery quip that he made on Meet the Press. Paul claimed the Civil War was an unnecessary bloodbath that could and should have been avoided. All Lincoln had to do was buy the slaves.

PAUL'S HISTORICAL DUMBNESS

Other slave promoting countries, asserts Paul, didn't fight wars and they ended slavery peacefully. Paul's historical dumbness would have been laughable except for four things.

One, he was dead wrong. Lincoln twice made offers to the slave owners to buy the slaves. They turned him down flat.

The countries that freed the slaves without war, presumably France and England, unlike the U.S., did not practice slavery in their countries. And France did fight a war – Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Haiti to put down the slave revolt there.

Two, he's running for president and has a national platform to spout his wrong-headed views [Meet The Press!]

HIS VIEWS ON RACE INCREDIBLE

Three, he's done and said stuff like this many times before. Among the choice Paulisms are that blacks are criminally inclined, political dumbbells, and chron-



ic welfare deadbeats.

There was also the alleged Paul hobnob with a noted white supremacist.

Here's what Paul on his campaign website ronpaul2008.com has to say about race. In fact, he even highlights this as "Issue: Racism" on the site.

"Government as an institution is particularly ill-suited to combat bigotry." In other words, the 1954 landmark Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education school desegregation decision, the 1964 and 1968 Civil Rights Acts, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and legions of court decisions and state laws that bar discrimination are worthless.

PAUL IS PROMOTING BIGOTRY

Worse, says Paul, they actually promote bigotry by dividing Americans into race and class.

Paul's cure for racial bigotry is to change people's hearts. Whew! The ghosts of Barry Goldwater, Strom Thurmond, the unreconstructed George Wallace and packs of Southern States Righters and Citizens Councils big shots would lustily cheer Paul on that one.

They railed for decades against the federal government's lift of even the tiniest finger to protect black rights and lives. Their stock line was that race relations can only change when hearts change.

WE WOULD HAVE MADE NO PROGRESS AT ALL

If we waited for that to happen the "whites only" signs would still be dangling prominently from every toilet and schoolhouse door in the South.

Paul's views are a cornball blend of libertarianism, know-nothing Americanism, and ultra conservative laissez faire limited government. This marks him as a type A American political quirk.

Now there's the fourth reason not to laugh at Paul. And this is really what makes him scary. There are apparently millions that don't see a damn thing wrong with any of this and pillory anyone who does. They are even scarier than he.

It's always good to see an extremist publicly confirm just how scary he and those that cheer him on really are.

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No Happy Birthday For The NCLB Law

The No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] had a raucous week-long birthday celebration that really beat the pants off of a typical six-year-old's party [you know with the freaky clowns and flea-ridden petting zoos].

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-MA, started the week with an opinion piece in the Washington Post in which he derided campaigns for turning the law into a political football without adding much substance to the debate.

Kennedy, one of the chief architects of the legislation, detailed the positive aspects of the law, most notably that all children be counted.

Before the law's enactment, only a handful of states monitored achievement levels for every student group.

KENNEDY A CHIEF ARCHITECT OF THE LAW

While this has been an important step, Kennedy discusses the negative aspects [one size-fits-all, teaching to the test, etc.] with a focus on the law's failure to supply the essential resources that schools desperately need to improve performance [otherwise known as the unfunded mandate argument – more on this later].

Kennedy finishes his piece by appealing to both parties to put progress ahead of politics and support what is working in school reform.

Later that same day, President George W. Bush said that if Congress doesn't re-authorize NCLB, he would make as many changes as he can on his own. The president added that if Congress does renew the law but weakens it, he'd "strongly oppose it and veto it."

BUSH THREATENS CONGRESS

Additionally, the president discussed changes he would consider making administratively, which could include ensuring "a high school degree means something," increasing flexibility for states and school districts, providing extra help for struggling schools and devising an accurate measurement of high school

dropout rates.

[There is no such thing as a high school "degree" – it's a diploma.]

Even later that same day, a federal appeals court revived a lawsuit challenging the compliance costs associated with NCLB, reports Tim Martin for the AP.

School districts in three states and the nation's largest teacher's union filed the lawsuit, arguing that schools should not have to comply with requirements that aren't fully funded by the federal government.

The suit also charges that the federal government is imposing unfunded mandates, even though the act itself prohibits them.

The crux of the claim is that federal funding does not maintain pace with federal mandates, which in turn forces schools to pay from local and state sources to keep up.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings said her department disagrees with the ruling and that federal education funding is up about 46% since the president took office – far short of funding federal mandates.

Explaining The Picture

Terri asked her Sunday School class to draw pictures of their favorite Bible stories. She was puzzled by Kyle's picture, which showed four people on an airplane, so she asked him which story it was meant to represent.

"The flight to Egypt," said Kyle.

"I see ... And that must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus," Terri said. "But who's the fourth person?"

"Oh, that's Pontius – the pilot."



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