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FEBRUARY 10, 2007

## State's Homeless Aren't Who You Think The Invisible Among Us

By Dallas Tupper

As I entered the men's dorm at the Salvation Army looking for my bunk for the night I didn't want to make eye contact with anyone. However, there was one pair of eyes that locked onto mine and wouldn't let go.

When I entered I was ready for the wild gaze of a schizophrenic, the thousand-yard stare of a veteran, or the hazy detachment of a drunk's eye. What I wasn't ready for was that pair of eyes. I could feel them penetrating me wondering what I was doing there. Those eyes had no way of knowing that I was just in the middle of spending a week homeless for research but they knew I was an imposter.

I had already slept under a bridge, in an alley, and in the woods, but I hadn't seen anything as scary as those eyes.

They wouldn't let me just find my bunk and go to sleep like I had planned. After I saw them I knew that I would be up all night. Wondering.

They belonged to an old friend.

He was a University of Oklahoma student on a scholarship and the last I had known of him he left Oklahoma for a job on the west coast. I had him pegged for the kind of guy who might be sleeping under a palm tree on a beach, not under a bunk in a shelter.

How could this have happened?

Homeless people are supposed to have beards, old army jackets, a cough, and smell like alcohol.

They aren't supposed to look like you or me, or my friend. He was still clean-shaven and well dressed. I had never known him to use drugs or alcohol, but he must have gotten hooked on drugs out in California, I thought.

The truth wasn't that simple.

"I got sick," he told me. "I was working two jobs and making a living out there and then I got a stomach ulcer. I kept on throwing up blood and wound up spending more time in the hospital than at work and got fired."

He said it was too expensive to live out there without a job so he came back to Oklahoma to survive. With nowhere else to go he found himself in a shelter. Now he finds himself sleeping on my couch.

Not everyone is that lucky though.

Danny Scott is also disabled but has lived in a shelter for over a year. His scoliosis prevents him from working and he is still waiting on a disability check. He is well spoken and doesn't have a substance abuse problem, a beard, an army jacket, a cough, or a home. Danny is quick to point out the fact that the stereotype most people have of the homeless is wrong.

"We are all on a different walk," he said with a defiantly iron jaw. "We all have different needs, we all have different problems and we all have a different story."

The stereotype of a homeless person being some crazy bearded guy asking for money so he can go get drunk is not a myth. Anyone who has been in downtown Oklahoma City by the shelters knows that the streets are strewn with empty vodka bottles like shells on a beach. However, that bearded guy is only a small part of the story. He is what we see. He is right in our face. He is on the corner holding up a sign trying to get our attention. What we don't see is my old friend; Danny, or Frances Langston.

Frances doesn't drink or use drugs.

She does have a steady job, a disarming smile, and a history of domestic abuse. What she doesn't have anymore is her own home.

Her husband had broken her ankle and four of her ribs, caused her to have 30 stitches in her head, and doused her with gasoline. Fortunately she found the courage to leave before he found the courage to get a match.

The only place she had to go was a shelter.

"I didn't know what to do," said Frances. "Anywhere was better than where I was so I left. At first I stayed with a friend but we were both so scared that he would find me so I left that place, too. I had to leave. I don't know what would have happened to me without the shelter. I'd probably be dead."

Like most domestic abuse victims Frances remains hidden for protection.

We see the homeless everyday and don't know it. They are serving us food, passing us on the street, and opening doors for us. After my sleepless night in the Salvation Army, I recognized the guy trying to sleep in

the bunk next to me working at McDonalds. After we exchanged knowing glances I realized that nobody else there knew he was homeless because he wasn't holding a sign that said "Hungry" or "God Bless You."

Gov. Brad Henry has acknowledged the clean-shaven homeless.

"There is a new face of homelessness in our state and nation," said Henry. "You might not recognize it: Children, entire families, men and women with full time jobs, those unable to pay a few bills or with unexpected health problems and no insurance. Studies indicate that there are thousands of these faces throughout Oklahoma."

According to the annual "Point in Time" survey, Oklahoma City had 1,555 countable homeless individuals.

Dan Straughan, executive director of the Homeless Alliance, points out that they aren't all bearded drunks.

"More than half of them are like you and me," said Straughan. "They were living paycheck to paycheck and got tripped up. Something happened like an unforeseen medical expense or domestic abuse and they found themselves out on the street."

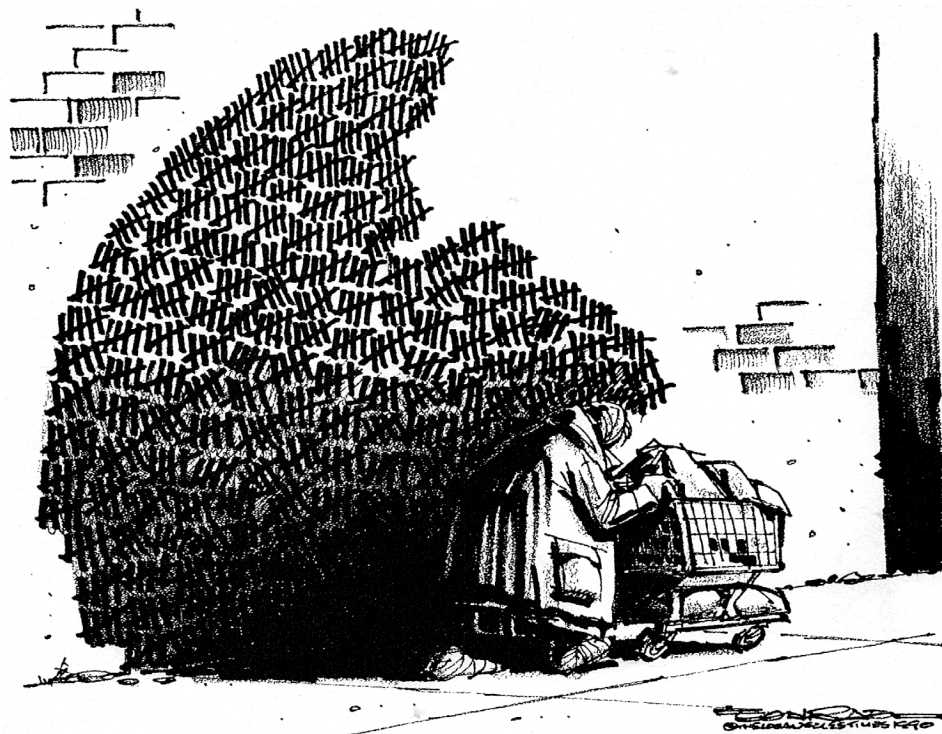
Oklahoma isn't unique in suffering from homelessness but we are unique in how we deal with it.

"Oklahoma is rare because for decades the municipal government has left the homeless problem to faith-based organizations," lamented Straughan. "The local government plays a tiny role. If the local government were to play a bigger role it would be easier for strategic direction."

Compared to our peer cities of Albuquerque and Memphis, Oklahoma City and Tulsa lag way behind in local funding for the homeless.

Our peers each give around \$2.5 million per year for homeless services while Oklahoma City and Tulsa don't even ante up \$200,000 combined.

That does not mean that Oklahoma City services aren't funded. In fact, Oklahoma City homeless services get



See HOMELESS Page 19

Remembering The Incomparable Molly Ivins • 1944-2007  
Special Coverage Pages 2, 14 and 15

# Observations

## Molly

We can't begin to express the personal and professional grief we feel on the death of Molly Ivins due to breast cancer. We not only lost a great columnist but a dear friend.

Our founding editor, Frosty Troy, used the Texas Observer as a model for the Oklahoma Observer. At that time Ronnie Dugger was publisher and Molly Ivins teamed up with Kaye Northcutt to edit the paper. They were a hoot!

Molly's ability to cut through the jargon of bureaucrats and speak her mind in plain English was unparalleled. She did so with wit and a keen ability to analyze an issue.

The fact that she was one of the premier columnists in America didn't go to her head. Despite coming from money, speaking several languages and graduating from a private university, her down-home humor and earthy language were trademarks.

The loss of her voice is a tragedy for American journalism. Many of today's national columnists, with the exception of E.J. Dionne and Ellen Goodman, are toadies of the George Will and David Broder stripe. We know because we introduced most of them to Oklahoma and fired most of them.

She was unabashedly liberal in an era when liberals are ducking and dodging and calling themselves "progressives."

No goodbyes Molly. We know we will meet again. In the meantime, we know you will tell the crowd in heaven to lighten up.

## She's Right

Bravo for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. She said there would be no pay raise for Congress until a minimum wage bill is passed. That's the kind of leadership the country has yearned for since George Bush took office.

The annual raise for Congress this year is slated to be \$2,760 – quite a boost from the present salary of \$165,200.

For 10 years Congressional salaries have been raised while the \$5.15 per hour minimum wage has stagnated. Today the minimum wage is worth \$3.40 an hour.

The stumbling block has been GOP members of Congress, opposed to a hike unless it includes more than \$1 billion in tax breaks for "small" business.

Guess where the Oklahoma delegation is? Right! The GOP members voted for more than a trillion dollars in tax breaks [mostly for the wealthy] but oppose a clean minimum wage bill.

Study after study has shown that the minimum wage hike would not harm small business or hurt teenagers. In fact, 60% of those trying to exist on it are adults.

Little wonder that the voters threw the GOP out of Congress. We wish Oklahoma voters would do likewise.

## Pure Politics

The 2007 Legislature will address 13 bills hostile to the Hispanic community, according to the Governor's Advisory Council on Latin American and Hispanic Affairs.

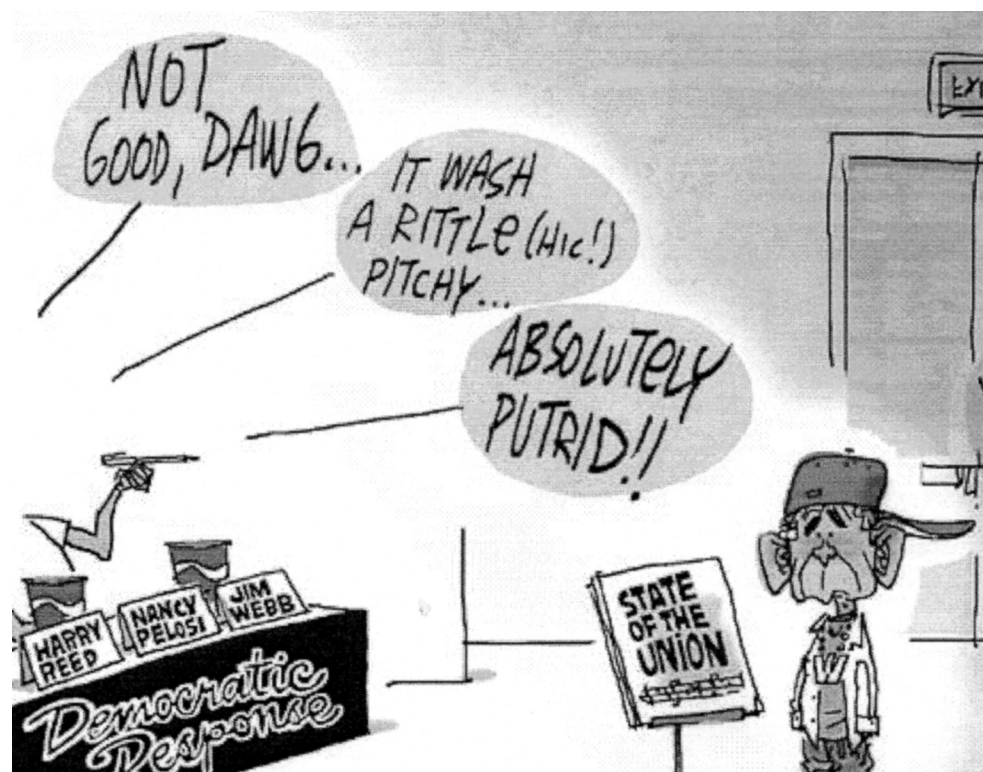
Eleven immigration bills and two "English only" bills are in the hopper.

The "English only" bills are pure pandering. A coalition has been formed by Spanish and American Indian language advocates to oppose the bills.

One immigration bill would repeal 2003 legislation allowing certain children brought here illegally to pay in-state tuition and qualify for financial aid at Oklahoma colleges and universities.

The Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce opposes repeal.

The U.S. needs a guest worker program because it isn't possible to eject 11 million persons illegally in the



## Gravy Train

Leave it to the Daily Disappointment editorial page to completely mislead the public on the subject of big oil and the \$13 billion in handouts from Bush and the unlamented GOP Congress.

The disastrous effects of the energy policy written for Big Oil by Big Oil became crystal clear last year.

Oil companies raked in record profits – due in no small measure to the generous giveaways engineered by the President and his friends in Congress.

Big Oil needs these subsidies like Bill Gates needs more money. Now that Democrats are in charge in Congress, they have pledged to derail the gravy train.

American voters rejected the dirty politics wrought by Big Oil's deep pockets and the dirty outdated technologies of yesterday that threaten our security, our pocketbooks and our environment.

Naturally the Oklahoma delegation continues to shill for Big Oil. To hell with the voters, 74% of whom told Lake Research that their vote was influenced by dissatisfaction with Big Oil's influence in Congress and the desire to embrace an alternative.

In a year where voters saw \$3-a-gallon gas and a \$400 million retirement package at ExxonMobil, it is hardly surprising that 96% of voters said they wanted a new direction for energy. [ExxonMobil has spent \$15 million for anti-global warming propaganda.]

For the past several years Republicans [and a few oil state Democrats] have given Big Oil numerous tax breaks and loopholes that make it easier for them to avoid paying taxes on the oil.

These range from changing the definition of oil from a "commodity" to a "service," to reducing the amount in royalties they have to pay the government for oil drilled on leased public land.

The Daily Disappointment lied by omission by failing to note that 1,000 oil leases did not include the normal clause calling for royalties costing the federal government \$10 billion over 25 years.

House Democrats have voted to end all subsidies. Let's hope the Senate does likewise.

country since most would simply re-enter.

The problem isn't illegal immigrants. The root problem is Mexico, one of the most corrupt countries on the globe. Crime, bribery, drugs and unemployment are rampant.

Be prepared for a cascade of preening politicians trying to make hay on these bills without ever addressing the real problem.

## Do It!

We heartily endorse Gov. Brad Henry's proposal to earmark a fraction of the income tax as a permanent source of funding for the Oklahoma's Promise – the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program [OHLAP].

It is giving an opportunity to students to go to college who otherwise would not. Oklahoma needs more college graduates.

At his press conference announcing his proposal, the governor introduced Wendell Graham, a foster child who completed college, thanks to OHLAP. He's now a management analyst at Tinker Air Force Base.

Over 68,000 high school students have enrolled in Oklahoma's Promise since its inception in 1992. The most recent high school sophomore class, the graduating class of 2008, enrolled nearly 9,500 students.

Over 21,500 college students have received the scholarship to date. Most of those [15,000] are still in college. Through 2005-06, nearly 2,000 students have received college degrees. By 2020, another 40,000 are expected to complete college degrees.

By the end of FY2007, \$100 million in scholarships will have been provided to college students through the program.

For FY2008, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education have requested an \$11 million funding increase for the scholarships, a 30% increase from \$37 million in FY2007 to \$48 million in FY2008.

Students in the program have higher than average high school GPAs, higher than average ACT scores, higher than average college-going rates, lower than average remediation rates, higher than average college degree completion rates.

Surely this plan should have strong bipartisan support.

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

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

- Adapted by Thomas Wolfe

# Observerscope

**Dart:** To the House's leading panderer, Rep. Charles R. Key, R-OKC, who filed legislation to eliminate the income tax on Jan. 1, 2008. That loss would be \$2.8 billion. It would shut down state government.

Faculty members at SMU are opposing their university as the site for George W. Bush's library. What's their problem? It would be only two books, including one he hasn't colored.

**Laurel:** To Greenlock Worldwide, a manufacturer of concrete forms, for donating \$25,000 and allied materials to tech centers for construction trade programs.

Why stay in school? In Oklahoma the average dropout earns \$12.73 an hour. With a high school diploma it's \$14.36, with a CareerTech certificate it's \$16.60, and with a Bachelor's degree it's \$23.56. Nuff said?

**Dart:** To State Chamber Executive Ronn Cupp for referring to the state inheritance tax as a "death tax." That's rightwing drivel spewed by tax cut hogs. Fewer than 350 Oklahomans paid it last year, with the first \$1.1 million exempt.

The state Senate needs to put a limit on bills introduced. Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, has introduced 54 bills this year. The House sensibly limits the number of bills to eight.

**Laurel:** To OKC Mayor Mick Cornett for taking the initiative to do something concrete about the homeless mentally ill. He said local shelters and the county jail are not adequate in caring for them.

The University of Oklahoma's foundation has hit a record \$647.6 million in net assets. At OSU it's \$260.9 million. Northeastern has \$11.1 million and Rogers State has \$6.7 million.

**Dart:** To Rep. Paul Wesselhoft, R-Moore, for his bill to add censorship to public libraries for persons 12 or younger using a computer. Their use would have to be witnessed by an adult.

New House Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, is on the right track with a Commission on Accountability and Review of State Agencies. Legislative oversight has been almost non-existent since the Walters Administration.

**Laurel:** To an awakening public. A CBS poll finds that only 18% of Americans favor Bush's escalation of the war in Iraq. The worst president in American history has even lost many members of his own party.

The \$350 billion squandered on the war in Iraq would have bought 35,000 new elementary schools, or hired six million teachers, or funded single payer health care for every American.

**Dart:** To Oklahoma's Libertarian Party trying to enter the voucher scheme through the backdoor via tax credits for parents to be used as they see fit.

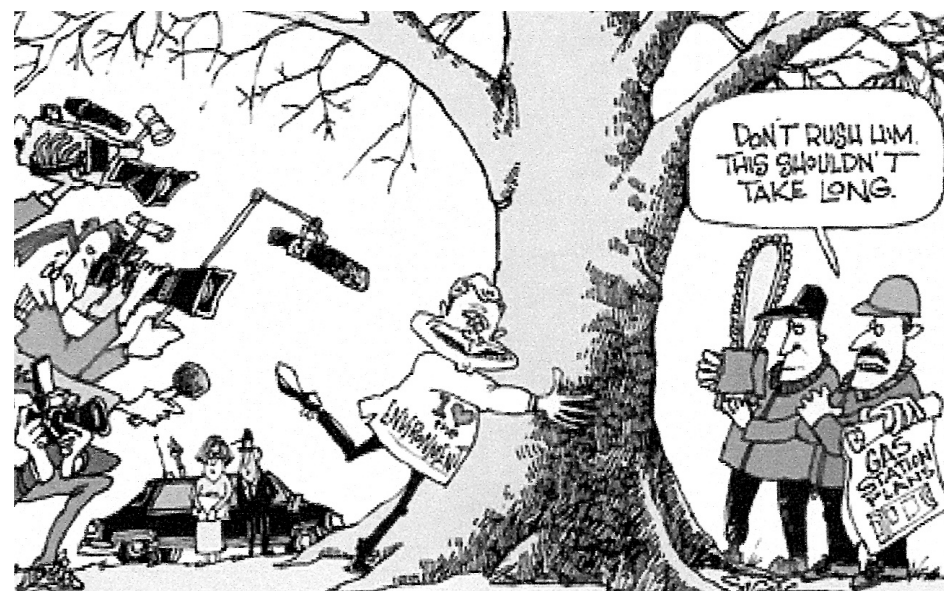
Cut taxes? The Department of Human Services is able to provide services for only 265 developmentally disabled, while 2,460 await care. They are trying to cope with an epidemic of child abuse.

**Laurel:** To former Deputy U.S. Secretary of Education Michael Petrilli who, upon leaving that post, said the No Child Left Behind law is "fundamentally flawed and probably beyond repair."

Oops! The Corporation for Enterprise Development has given Oklahoma a D for business performance, C in business vitality and an F for development capacity. On the plus side, Oklahoma ranks 15th in affordable urban housing.

**Laurel:** To Jesse "Chip" Lott II, Correctional Industries manager for being selected as the Outstanding Employee of the Year 2006.

The Oklahoma Gazette took a hard swipe at House Speaker Lance Cargill, noting all ideas aren't welcome under his 100 Ideas initiative and he won't say who is paying for it.



**Dart:** To the intellectually challenged who continue to talk on cell phones while driving a vehicle. That caused 775 vehicle crashes last year. Insurance companies should rewrite their policies to forbid cell phone usage.

The Oklahoma Ethics Commission was absolutely right in banning free tickets to legislators from OU and OSU. That should have been stopped years ago.

**Laurel:** U.S. District Judge Robin Cauthron's decision to throw the book at Tim Pope for illegal automated phone calls during last year's elections. He could be fined as much as \$10 million.

Unless the Legislature intervenes, the State Board of Long Term Care Administration will go out of business. In the first eight months of 2006 they reviewed 92 cases and suspended 28 nursing home licenses. They're broke.

**Dart:** To Rep. Ken Miller, R-Edmond, for his Tabor-lite bill that would reduce government spending from 12% plus inflation to 6% plus inflation. Goodbye public education.

Oklahoma is 42nd in federal money allocated for poor children - 117,122 poor Oklahoma children average \$1,097.

**Dart:** To the Oklahoma Corrections Department for the slow response to the water cut off for 36 hours at the Mabel Bassett women's prison. More than 1,100 inmates endured overflowing toilets, no drinking water and little food.

Dr. Art Stellar, former superintendent of OKC schools, has been named by the Education Commission of the States as a district leader for Civic Engagement and Service Learning Network. He heads the Taunton, MA, schools.

**Laurel:** To Barack Obama for pointing out that it isn't legislative experience that counts but, according to the Federalist Papers, a candidate should have "pre-eminent ability" - which Obama clearly has.

One of the sickening truths about this country is the fact that 14 million students between kindergarten and 12th grade take care of themselves after school. Bush killed the after-school program.

**Dart:** To the tax-cutting governor and Legislature while the State Veterans Affairs Department is in a leaking building with backed up storm drains and endless roaches. The state VFW, American Legion and the Disabled Veterans also share the building.

Term limited in 2008 are Senators Mike Morgan, Jeff Rabon, Owen Laughlin, Kathleen Wilcoxson and Jim Williamson. House members include David Braddock, James Covey, Darrell Gilbert, Al Lindley, Ray McCarter, Dale Turner and Terry Ingmire.

**Laurel:** To the state for funding the fabulous Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology. A \$11.9 million invested in 2005 resulted in a stunning \$509.74 million, a 43-to-1 return.

No global warming? Last year was the hottest in America in the past 112 years, caused by the burning of fossil fuels.

**Dart:** To two-faced Sen. John McCain. He told the AP in '03, "We will win this conflict easily." But in '07 he told the Washington Post, "I knew it was probably going to be long and hard and tough."

Yes, gentle reader, 60% of American corporations paid not one cent in taxes last year. Most are "small" businesses pleading for tax relief in Congress! (Mother Jones magazine)

**Dart:** To the Tulsa County sheriff's office for refusing the Office of Juvenile Affairs the right to check up on treatment of juveniles in the jail. The Attorney General says they have the legal right.

**Dart:** To Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for his bill to provide full vouchers under the guise of "opportunity scholarships" - another way of attacking public schools. Newt Gingrich said don't call them vouchers, call them "opportunity scholarships."

"We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character - this is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only the power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate." - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**Laurel:** To new Labor Commissioner Lloyd Fields for putting ex-State Rep. M.C. Leist on his staff. He was one of the finer legislators in recent years.

## THE OKLAHOMA Observer




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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I'm so confused. I'm sure Observer readers can help me through my foggy logic. It shouldn't be that hard.

We are told that our military has been deployed to Iraq to ensure democracy. December surveys of Iraqi citizens indicate that over 70% want American troops to leave so that civilian violence will subside.

How about instead of a "surge" we demonstrate to the world how successful our democracy building effort has been and hold an Iraqi plebiscite regarding continued U.S. occupation. What could be more demonstrative of our goal of democracy?

If they vote for our troops to leave [and polls say they would], so be it. Bush can then claim that our whole mission was successful because we brought self-determination to Iraq and the whole world should be grateful. Mission accomplished! We claim victory, and we're outta there. Is that too simplistic or difficult?

Larry Hicks  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

While rightwing radio con artists are still trying to say that global warming is a hoax, a cycle, or that we don't have any responsibility for it, I urge you not only to think otherwise, but to write your congressman.

By now everyone knows of receding ice shelves, but the process is accelerating. What scientists earlier said will happen in 40 years may now happen in eight or 10 years. And for those of you who think that you will be raptured by then, grow up.

Jim Stodola  
Corinth, TX

Editor, The Observer:

Do you want a woman President?

Why wait until January 2009 to inaugurate Hillary? Impeach Dick and George simultaneously and get Nancy now!

J.A. Gowman  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The Reagan Administration was afraid Iraq might actually lose in its war with Iran. Reagan chose Rumsfeld as emissary to Hussein whom he visited in December 1983 and March 1984. Iraq had begun to use chemical weapons against Iran in November 1983, the first sustained use of poison gas since a 1925 treaty banning that.

Rumsfeld never mentioned this bla-

tant violation of international law to Hussein, instead focusing on a shared hostility toward Iran and an oil pipeline through Jordan.

Rumsfeld apparently did mention it to Tariq Aziz, Iraq's foreign minister, but by not raising the issue with the paramount leader he signaled that good relations were more important to the United States than the use of poison gas.

Perhaps Rumsfeld and the entire Bush Administration and its conservative backers should shine a light that will expose this hypocrisy and the real appeasers will show themselves!

Greg Scroggins  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

It does appear that Sen. John McCain has not yet recovered from the pimp-slapping he took from George Bush and Karl Rove in 2000.

Here is a man who announces to the world, "We have a deal," after agreeing in effect to remove the protection of habeas corpus from the Constitution, now blaming America's last known elected President for North Korea's nuclear ascendancy.

All right, he is adjusting his position in order to run for president but does the office he fantasizes not require the character of responsibility? Apparently the only political responsibility Republicans deem necessary is the one to win elections and by any means necessary because it is obvious that the act of proper governing escapes them at every attempt.

How else could a group of individuals in total control for close to six years seriously contend that the previous administration is to blame for our present disasters?

The writing has been on the wall since our dictator-in-residence declared his intentions, at the outset, to disobey the non-proliferation treaties of the past. Has this declaration been forgotten? Sen. McCain, have you no shame?

So now that every tinfoil ruler throughout the world has been busy acquiring nuclear weaponry the blame rests squarely with the last known U.S. president with an intellect.

This is a crazy scenario and would have been laughed out of town had we a media with investigative skills. It seems all we have left is a Democratic Party that has lost its gonads and is afraid to incorporate its bellows.

All I can say is, "Come back, Bill."  
Please blast these suckers one



BY HANDELSMAN FOR NEWSDAY

more time and remind us what it is to have leaders not afraid to show us the way it ought to be.

Colin T. Bent  
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Dr. Michael Rosenfeld of OKC retired recently [Jan. 1, 2007] after helping geriatric and shut-in patients for 40 years. A native of New York City, he took his skill and knowledge to the homes and healthcare facilities of his patients.

He returned all calls from his answering service in 10-15 minutes or less. He was attentive, thorough and dependable. A lifetime baseball fan, he attended the famous 1951 Giant-Dodger Bobby Thompson home-run game along with eight million other claimants except he still has his ticket stub encased with a sign that warns, "Never leave early." [Which he had done.]

He was active in the Civil Rights Movement of the 60's and marched near Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the Washington D.C. rally. Later he was chosen as a young intern for duty in Alabama and Mississippi attending to injured Civil Rights workers. En route to those places he remembered a billboard in a Georgia town that excluded blacks and Jews.

He gave my Mom over four years extra quality life after several doctors had given up hope. My Dad will miss him and his visits and likewise countless aged and paraplegic citizens. The world needs more Michael Rosenfelds.

Randall & Charlotte Orr  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Since the Jan. 2 swearing-in ceremony, two-thirds of Oklahoma County has been in the safe hands of the returning veteran Jim Roth, District 1 and the rookie Ray Vaughn, District 3.

Later that day, Roth was re-elected for the third year in a row as chairman of the County Commission.

In his remarks from the stage Roth thanked the voters for re-hiring him and his team. He continued by renewing his commitment to doing good by the strangers we will never meet - the physically and mentally ill, the down-trodden, the homeless - those who rarely have an advocate in elected office.

In his turn Vaughn pledged to run an office in a professional manner without personal disputes.

Commissioners Roth and Vaughn, along with most of the county offi-

cers, are keen to restore the county budget board, which will bring back greater scrutiny of tax dollar expenditures. This oversight board was abolished two years ago by Commissioners Brent Rinehart and Stan Inman.

This action played a major role in removing Stan Inman from office. The remaining commissioner, Brent Rinehart, District 2, was in attendance at the ceremony and seemed to be listening intently to the comments being made.

Rinehart has proven to be divisive and contrary during the first two years of his term. He now has two good examples to work with.

Should he wish to run for a second term, he'll have to be a quick study and clean up his act in the less than two years remaining to him on the County Commission.

Time will tell.

James Nimmo  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Rep. Mike Reynolds, I was just wondering if there will ever be a day when you guys stop your concern for Oklahoma children before they are born?

If you and yours cared 1/100 as much about children already here as you do about the ones not born we would have a much better state.

How about raising minimum wage and providing health care for 100% of Oklahomans?

Once they are out of the womb, they are on their own in Oklahoma. If you can't be self-righteous judge to the masses, then you just aren't happy.

Karen Webb  
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Think about how many more days of pure sunshine we have than Ontario! Think about how many more windy days we have than just about anywhere else on the North American continent!

Now, think about how far and how fast the USA is losing ground in this race for renewable energy sources. While our Congress and this incompetent administration dilly-dally with their oil conglomerates' profit sheets, we are losing our shirts in every area one can name!

What a lousy shame. Oh, yes! One more thing to consider: We won't need to sacrifice American lives in the battle for renewable energy sources!

Darla Sparks  
Yukon

**Frosty Troy's  
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Funny fellows**  
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## Frosty's Notebook

# Why Unions?

Why do I support unions? A critical step to helping poor and middle class Americans get ahead is to remove barriers that prevent employees from joining unions.

Workers represented by unions earn 28% more than non-union workers, are 62% more likely to have medical insurance through their jobs and are four times as likely to have guaranteed pensions.

The most important legislative step to smashing these barriers is passage of the pending Employee Free Choice Act [EFCA], the labor movement's top priority.

According to worksite surveys, 42 million non-union employees in America would like to have representation at work but don't.

A 2005 survey found 53% of non-union workers – that's more than 50 million people – want to join a union, if given the choice.

According to Human Rights Watch: "Legal obstacles tilt the playing field so steeply against freedom of association that the United States is in violation of international human rights standards for workers."

Clearly, the system is broken and Congress needs to fix it. Of course the Oklahoma delegation will be of no help.

With labor under sustained assault, the share of American workers carrying union cards has plunged from over 20% in 1980 to under 13%, and almost half of those are government employees.

In a report on the recent boom in corporate profits, economists at Goldman Sachs wrote plainly, "The most important contributor to higher profit margins over the past five years has been a decline in labor's share of national income."

Cornell University researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner writes, "at least 5% of workers involved in unionization campaigns are fired, which is both quite illegal and quite routine."

Companies would rather pay the nominal fines than pay their workers higher wages and lose the absolute control they hold over the work lives of their employees.

Today's labor movement faces union-busting law firms and consulting agencies which are increasingly enlisted by union-wary employers to keep labor from organizing.

Today, the vast majority of union members – 84% – live in only 12 states, leaving workers with little organized power in much of the country.

The Employee Free Choice Act addresses three critical problems. First, under the current "secret ballot" system, employees who want to form a union face a lengthy and divisive process which exposes workers to harassment, intimidation, threats and firings.

That is exactly what The Oklahoma Observer documented when employees tried to form a union at Hobby Lobby.

Every year, over 20,000 U.S. workers are illegally fired, demoted, laid off, sus-



pending without pay or denied work by their employers as a result of union activity.

The EFCA allows employees to request federal mediation services if no agreement on a first contract has been reached after 90 days of bargaining, and refers the dispute to binding arbitration if the mediation is not successful.

Finally, current labor law is feebly enforced and filled with loopholes.

The EFCA increases penalties for illegal firing of employees and other anti-union activity, and gives organizers the right to seek court orders to stop employers from engaging in certain prohibited activity.

The primary conservative message against card-check organizing is that it threatens workplace democracy. This is deeply misleading.

Union workers are still guaranteed the right to choose whether to unionize. Indeed, whereas an election system requires that only a majority of *voting* employees approve a union, the card-check system requires that a majority of *all* employees approve.

Bless her. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, has called the EFCA a "high priority," and said she wanted a vote on the measure by spring. The legislation is a top agenda item for Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-MA, and Rep. George Miller, D-CA, the chairmen of the Senate and House labor committees.

It is backed by a strong bipartisan coalition, including conservative members of the Blue Dog Coalition.

Keep your fingers crossed.

## Visiting A State Treasure

We in the media are so busy chasing cranks, crooks and clowns that we seldom slow down long enough to tell you about the positive things in Oklahoma.

I just visited the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, one of the nation's oldest, most respected independent biomedical research institutes.

Chartered in 1946, OMRF's scientists focus on such critical research areas as Alzheimer's disease, cancer, lupus and cardiovascular disease.

The nonprofit institute employs a staff of more than 500 and is home to Oklahoma's only member of the National Academy of Sciences and only Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator.

Discoveries at OMRF led to the first FDA-approved drug for the treatment of severe sepsis, a blood infection that claims the lives of more than 200,000 Americans each year.

OMRF researchers also have identified the enzyme believed responsible for Alzheimer's disease. And a drug with OMRF roots – Captopril, which is used to treat children suffering from life-threatening blood-clotting complications – became the first drug licensed under the European Union's new centralized procedure.

The work of OMRF scientists has yielded more than 500 domestic and international patents, ranking OMRF among the nation's leaders in patents per scientist.

These patents speed the movement of discoveries from bench to bedside, ensuring that patients receive the treatments they need in the shortest possible time.

In addition, every one of these patented discoveries represents a potential revenue source. With each patent that gives birth to a new drug.

OMRF – and Oklahoma's economy – can reap millions of dollars. Each patented discovery also represents a potential new business venture, and OMRF has spun off 11 biotech startup companies.

These companies have a total market capitalization in excess of \$1.5 billion. And they fuel widespread private-sector growth, creating high-quality, high-paying jobs, many right here in Oklahoma.

In addition to deepening scientists' understanding of human disease, OMRF's research also generates a significant flow of revenue grants – into Oklahoma from outside the state.

In 2006, OMRF secured more than \$25 million in federal grants and contracts. Those awards help support 543 jobs at OMRF, which has an annual payroll of

\$31 million.

Each job at OMRF also creates, on average, almost one additional job in the state, generating another \$15 million in salaries for Oklahomans each year. All told, OMRF has an annual impact on Oklahoma's economy of \$46 million and creates an estimated 1,061 jobs in the state.

With an average full-time annual salary of \$47,676, the average wage at OMRF is nearly 50% above the state's mean of \$31,856.

When Oklahomans count their blessings, OMRF should be among them.

## Women Moving Up

In case you hadn't noticed, women across the world have been moving into new and groundbreaking political leadership positions.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the first woman president of Liberia, succeeding the bloody dictator Charles Taylor who is awaiting trial for genocide.

Our daughter Marti is one of a team of American attorneys working to restore the criminal justice system in Liberia.

In the United States, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, is the speaker of the House. The 11-term member of Congress has been credited with breaking the "marble ceiling" that has prohibited women from advancing to one of the highest leadership positions in the U.S.

May Eljeribi was elected in late December to lead Tunisia's Progressive Democratic Party, the principal opposition party in the North African country. She is the first woman party leader in Tunisia, despite the nation's reputation as one of the more progressive North African countries on gender issues.

Eljeribi is the second woman to lead a political party in North Africa; the first was Louisa Hanoun of the Algerian Workers' Party.

In Iran, Mehrnoush Najafi, a lawyer, women's rights activist, and blogger, recently won a seat in the Hamedan City Council elections, Eteraz reports. According to Eteraz, Najafi wrote in her *bloa* [which is unavailable in English] about the importance of women's political participation in Iran, saying, "Why don't women want to have a larger share of participation? We shouldn't wait until they give us a share."

## Bills, Bills And More Bills

# Prolific Lawmakers File 2,200 Measures

The 2007 Oklahoma Legislature returned to work Feb. 5 with an avalanche of bills awaiting action. House members pre-filed 1,195 bills, 45 joint resolutions and 11 concurrent resolutions. Senators filed 1,091 bills and 30 joint resolutions. The session is required to end by May 25. A look at what lawmakers want:

### DEMOCRATS

#### IN THE HOUSE

House Democrats are promoting a five-point "Vision for Oklahoma's Second Century."

"Our Vision for Oklahoma's Second Century details the fundamental issues that must be addressed in order to lay a strong foundation for our state," said Democratic Leader Danny Morgan, D-Prague. "It is an outline of our core values which will move Oklahoma forward."

Among their goals:

- Access to affordable healthcare and prescription drugs for all Oklahomans.
- A first class education system.
- A strong economy.
- Safe communities for Oklahoma children.
- Responsible government and ethics reform.

House Democrats say they will work to compensate and reward teachers for excellence and continued education, strengthen and expand the Career Tech system and ensure students have access to an affordable higher education system.

The Democrats also said they would seek an increase in the minimum wage and work to establish complete health care coverage, including preventative health care, for all Oklahoma children.

#### IN THE SENATE

Senate Democrats are calling their 2007 session strategy "Oklahoma Rising."

"Oklahoma and its people are truly rising to greatness during this centennial year, and we felt it was appropriate to reflect that momentum in our agenda," said President Pro Tem Mike Morgan, D-Stillwater. "Our focus when developing this agenda was with the people of this state; the hard-working, tough-spirited people we meet each time we are back home in our districts."

Topping the priority list:

- A plan to provide greater access to quality affordable healthcare for all of Oklahoma's children.
- Protecting Oklahoma workers from illegal competition from non-U.S. citizens by cracking down on employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.
- Creating a comprehensive water plan to ensure the precious natural resource is protected for generations to come.
- Ending annual threats of forced school consolidation by allowing Oklahomans to vote on a Constitutional change that will ensure the citizens who live in rural school districts, not politicians in Oklahoma City, have the final say in what happens to their schools and communities.
- Addressing the unfunded liability in the Oklahoma Teacher's Retirement System.

### REPUBLICANS

#### IN THE HOUSE

House Republicans are pursuing a "Year of Ideas" strategy that focuses on three key areas: the entrepreneurial society, healthy Oklahoma and safe families.

"In nearly every corner of this state, opportunity and progress are beginning to flourish," said House Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah. "Our government should work in partnership with individuals, communities and the private sector to reward hard work and savings to move Oklahoma forward."

The House GOP agenda includes:

- Working to preserve and continue last year's tax cut agreement, on track to bring income taxes down to 5.25%, and create a childcare tax credit to support stay-at-home moms.
- Promoting wise fiscal policy, requiring more accountability from state government and reducing needless or duplicative government.
- Pushing higher standards in public schools, providing more opportunities for students in low-performing schools and rewarding teachers by boosting programs that offers cash bonuses to the best-performing teachers.
- Reforming the state's civil justice system, targeting such areas as class-action lawsuits and medical liability, and capping pain and suffering awards at \$300,000.

#### IN THE SENATE

Senate Republicans are pressing a four-point plan they are calling "Vision for a Better Oklahoma."

Co-President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, said the blueprint is aimed at "making Oklahoma a superior state in which to live and raise a family, receive an excellent education, work at a quality job, succeed in business, and comfortably retire."

The four areas of emphasis:

- Working to improve education by toughening standards and increasing accountability in schools, and fixing the Teacher Retirement System.
- Enhancing economic opportunity by demanding financial accountability and eliminating wasteful government spending, fostering a job-rich environment by fighting for lawsuit and workers compensation reform, and reducing the tax burden on Oklahoma families.
- Upgrading the health of Oklahomans by ensuring access to affordable, quality healthcare, emphasizing free-market health care cost reductions, and working to lower prescription drug costs.
- Ensuring public safety by protecting seniors and children from sex offenders, strengthening laws against illegal immigration and fixing the state's roads and bridges.

## Henry Proposes Record Public Ed Budget

Gov. Brad Henry proposed a record \$3.9 billion budget for public education this year with an emphasis on teacher salaries, dropout prevention and college scholarships, among other things.

The spending blueprint would provide a \$359 million increase to the three main branches of education – common education, higher education and career technology. The funds would come from growth and carryover revenues in addition to savings identified in state agency budgets.

"To compete effectively in today's global economy, you must have a first rate public education system," Henry said.

"Oklahoma already has many great schools, but we have to keep up with other states and nations that are also dedicating significant resources to public education.

"With proper accountability and oversight, every dollar we invest in classrooms and teacher salaries will pay dividends down the road," he said.

#### PUBLIC EDUCATION TO GET \$221.5 MILLION

The governor's program would provide K-12 public schools with a \$221.6 million budget increase next fiscal year. The total includes a major investment in classroom resources and funding for the third-year of Gov. Henry's four-year program to raise teacher pay to the regional average.

It also includes an additional \$50 million in supplemental funding to pay benefit costs that were not funded in last year's pay raise program.

"We must continue to invest in the classroom and keep the commitment we made to raise Oklahoma teachers' salaries to the regional average. Oklahoma produces some of the best teachers in the country, and we need to pay them a competitive salary," he said.

#### ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION

He has proposed additional funds for dropout prevention programs, including alternative schools and remediation programs. He's also advocating a new law that would make it tougher for students to drop out of high school.

"Instead of writing off problem students and making it easy for them to drop-out, we need to push them more and provide help through remediation and alter-

native schools," said the governor.

"My goal is for every student in Oklahoma to earn a high school diploma. Some may suggest that just isn't possible, but it is something we must pursue, not just for the betterment of the student but for the state as a whole."

For higher education, state colleges and universities would receive a \$130.7 million budget increase. The new money would help hold down tuition increases and fully fund the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program [OHLAP] – also known as Oklahoma's Promise – a highly successful scholarship initiative that provides tuition assistance to students who take a college curriculum, make good grades and stay out of trouble.

#### PERMANENT FUNDING SOUGHT FOR OHLAP

The governor initially said he wants to earmark funds from the income tax to fund OHLAP, a suggestion that was not warmly embraced by the legislative Republicans, some of whom want to eliminate the income tax altogether.

"Each year, state colleges and universities play an even greater role in our overall economic development strategy. With more businesses focusing on high technology and research-related initiatives, we have to produce more college graduates and strengthen our universities to compete. That requires a significant investment," the governor said.

Henry's education budget also includes an additional \$6.7 million for Oklahoma's career technology system.

"Our career tech system, which is the best in the nation, provides the type of high-quality job training that business and industry demand. To retain our competitive edge, we have to invest more in tech schools, and that's what this budget does," the governor said.

Changes would address the unfunded liability of the Oklahoma Teachers Retirement System. In addition to advocating a deposit of \$25 million in surplus revenue to the fund, the governor is proposing a long-term strategy to address the system's financial needs.

Legislators are also encouraged to add an additional \$50 million for research and development for a total endowment of \$200 million.

# Answering The Speaker's Call

## 7 Modest Proposals

### For A Better Oklahoma

By Edwin E. Vineyard

The Militant Moderate is intrigued by Speaker Lance Cargill's public announcements soliciting 100 good ideas for improvements in the state of Oklahoma. Unfortunately, he limited these drastically by putting in the caveat "do not involve spending more money."

Since the speaker borrowed this idea from the Republican Party in Florida, and it is financed by a group of rich donors, it seems unlikely to turn up anything not on the agenda of the Republican Party. Too bad! One wonders what might have arisen otherwise. The question of "Who judges?" is significant, of course.

With considerable effort the Militant Moderate might come up with 25 or 30 good ideas for Oklahoma. It would be hard to rank these in priority, but good ideas are naturally hard to prioritize. Some are simple, while others can get very complex.

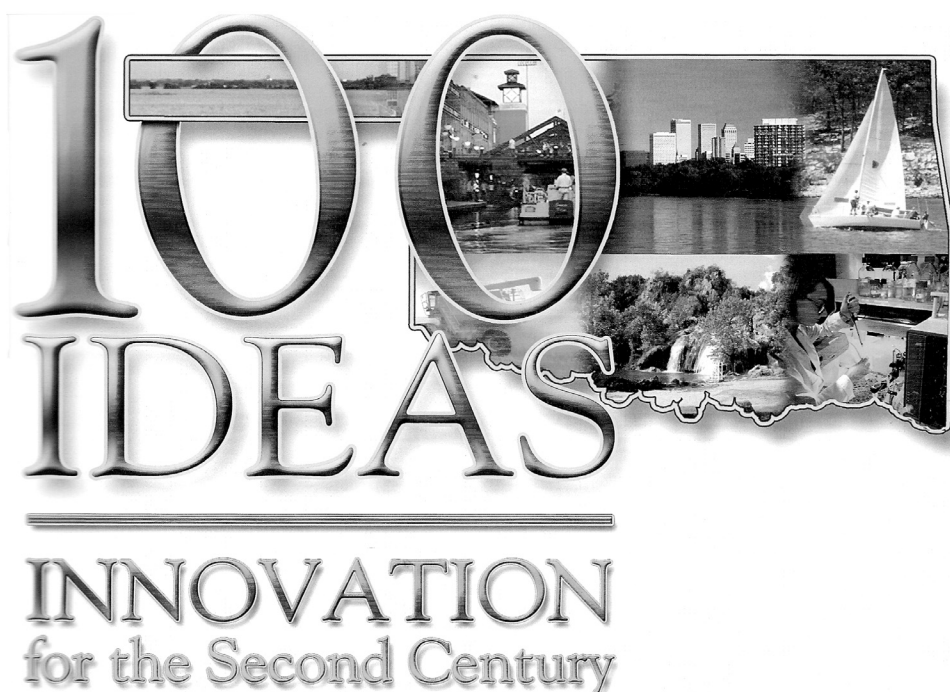
Saving others for later, maybe it might be okay to mention just a few ideas here.

1. Run the state government with the welfare of all the people in mind, rather than just working the agenda of business donors and special interests, i.e. tax cuts, workers comp cuts, limiting citizen access to courts, religious right premises, etc.

2. Adopt the slogan: "Good, responsive government is more important than tax cuts, and sometimes may demand tax increases."

3. Eliminate quickly all the political posturing, ideologue bills that waste the Legislature's time and distract from significant governance problems and issues. Stop legislators from trying to insert their religion into law.

4. Follow the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma, and pay for highways, public buildings, penal institutions, and other capital costs by voting a state tax to pay for bonds issued. Stop incurring debt against future state budget income to pay for present needs.



5. Pay for current highway needs by advancing state taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel to one cent below the level of surrounding states.

6. Do a comprehensive study of crime and punishment in Oklahoma with a view toward more progressive, less expensive, humane, and socially responsible ways of dealing with minor crimes, drug offenses, and with the mentally ill.

7. Do something about the burgeoning unfunded liability of the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System, now beginning to affect the bond credit rating of the state. The Council of Retired Presidents of Oklahoma Colleges and Universities has submitted a proposal to do just this, while giving modest cost of living increases to retirees.

Perhaps these good ideas would make more than just a start for the Legislature, and could keep their agenda full for a while. Yet these are things that a legislature should consider – if indeed they really are interested in better, more efficient government for the people.

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

## An Independent's Warning To Democrats

By Norm Rourke

I'm one of almost 200,000 registered Independents in Oklahoma. Therefore I've no particular ties to either the Democratic or Republican Party. Over the years, I've voted for candidates of both parties after trying to carefully determine their truthfulness and commitment to middle class Americans. As a result, I've been right sometimes and wrong sometimes.

Over the years of their existence, both parties have had their greatness with equally great leadership. They've also had less than stellar eras. For the GOP this is one of those eras.

Under the dictatorship of His Imperial Majesty George Bush II, the Republican Party has been stolen from the good people who worked hard in its behalf. His Majesty has successfully destroyed the Grand Old Party and all that it stood for over its long history. His pompous arrogance has caused, and continues to cause, uncontrollable desertion by those who have served the party faithfully.

### KEEPING KING GEORGE AT ARM'S LENGTH

Of course, those who hope to be president [and at this point in the party's history, that may be a long shot] certainly want to distance themselves from this megalomaniac who is a legend in his own mind.

It's really a shame when they don't even want the president of their own party to speak in their behalf at fund raisers. This is an unfortunate and sorrowful situation for such a historic political party.

His Majesty George Bush II has lost all contact with the real world ... as have many other politicians of BOTH parties. He continues to flush billions of Ameri-

cans' hard earned dollars down the toilet of Iraq while America's Gulf Coast still looks like a third world country as a result of Katrina. He has no feelings for two honorable Border Patrol agents – Jose Compean and Ignacio Ramos – who are serving prison time for doing their job while a Mexican drug smuggler goes free. This is a deplorable situation and one that George Bush II should be run out of town on a rail for.

As for the Democrats, they would do well to heed the warning – note that word: warning – from American voters. We want positive change. We want an end to politics as usual. We want you to get out on the streets and find out where America lives. It isn't in the fancy Washington restaurants where you eat unpronounceable food and drink expensive wine paid for by lobbyists. It isn't on the golf courses at some high falutin' spa with your rich buddies.

### MESSAGE TO POLITICOS: VISIT THE REAL WORLD

No, America lives in the factories, in the corn fields, on the cattle ranches, in the offices, on the cops' beat and the firefighters' emergency runs. It lives in the public schools where under-paid teachers guide your spoiled brat kids to be better people. It lives in the homes where vacant chairs sit at dinner tables because His Imperial Majesty George Bush II started a war so he'd look good for daddy.

So don't get too cocky Democrats. Remember: you won power because Americans were fed up with the Bush Empire. You can just as easily be replaced in another two years.

– The author lives in Beggs

## Lessons Of Saddam's Fall Lost On Bush?

By Kenny Belford

Few people consider arrogance or stubbornness much of an attribute. Sometimes it carries a heavy price tag. We witnessed one of those moments with the execution of Saddam Hussein.

His raw arrogance, combined with pig-headed stubbornness created his own downfall and subsequent death at the hands of taunting executioners.

When George W. Bush and Dick Cheney were making claim after claim about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the "clear and present danger" they posed to the United States, Saddam never actually stated he had none.

It's entirely likely that had he answered the challenge with a statement announcing his government had no such weapons, and if he had welcomed in the United Nations weapons inspectors to prove the point, history would have taken a different path.

Once it was apparent that 100% of the Bush Administration claims were 100% false, it's doubtful that our rubber stamp Congress would have authorized a war anyway.

Had Saddam been less arrogant, it's probable that his two sons would be alive today. It's probable that he would be alive today, and still in power. It's probable

that over 400,000 Iraqi citizens would be alive today. It's probable his nation wouldn't be in the middle of a civil war. His arrogance, not our military might, created his ultimate downfall.

It's a lesson George W. Bush and Dick Cheney should take note of. If their arrogance, combined with pigheaded stubbornness hadn't been our real, secret Iraq war strategy, 3,000 Americans would be alive today.

Saddam and his family paid a heavy price for their arrogance, but here in the United States, other families are paying the price for our leaders' arrogance and stubbornness.

We're bogged down in a worsening mess we shouldn't be in, and our leaders, in their struggle to find any kind of plan are considering sending tens of thousands more American troops into Iraq.

In the later years of the Vietnam War, someone coined the rhetorical question, "How do you ask an American to be the last one to die for a mistake?" Forty years later, that question deserves to be asked again. Arrogance and stubbornness have far exceeded a price we should be willing to continue to pay.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

# Governor Wants To Boost Health Care

Gov. Brad Henry has announced proposals for the 2007 legislative session aimed at increasing the numbers of Oklahomans with health care coverage.

"One in five Oklahomans has no health insurance, and the implications of that are far-reaching and serious," he said. "Uninsured citizens end up in our emergency rooms, with hospitals and insurance companies passing those costs on to those who have insurance."

A total of 700,000 Oklahomans are without health care, one of the nation's highest rates.

Henry is asking lawmakers to expand the Insure Oklahoma program. It was part of his health care initiative in 2004. The program helps eligible small businesses with 50 or fewer employees provide health insurance for their workers.

## INCLUDES CHILDREN IN HIS PROPOSALS

Children are also at the forefront of Henry's health care proposal. He is asking the Legislature to augment Medicaid funding to provide health coverage for all poor children in Oklahoma.

Currently, the Insure Oklahoma program limits eligibility to employees earning no more than 185% of the federal poverty level. Henry wants to extend that limit to 200% of the poverty line, the maximum allowed by the federal government.

The legislation would allow the state to set the threshold even higher if further waivers are granted by the federal government.

The governor's proposed change would enable as many as 118,000 more Oklahomans to be eligible for the program.

Under Insure Oklahoma, participating employers and employees pay a portion of their health insurance premiums, with the state picking up the rest of the tab.

The state pays 60% of the cost, employers pay 25% and employees pay 15%. For every dollar the state invests in the program, it receives approximately two dollars in matching federal money.

## OKLAHOMA FACES TWO CHALLENGES

Henry said Oklahoma faces two challenges with Insure Oklahoma. "First, we have heard from small business owners that the current eligibility cap hinders many businesses from being able to participate in the program," he said. "And second, too many small businesses in Oklahoma don't know about Insure Oklahoma and the tremendous impact it can have."

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority, in conjunction with the Oklahoma De-



Photo Courtesy of Stu Ostler

partment of Commerce and the Insurance Commissioner's Office, has already announced a \$1 million marketing plan to raise awareness of Insure Oklahoma.

"Too many Oklahoma families without health insurance have no recourse but to hope and pray that their children don't get sick," the governor said. "That is unacceptable. We have a responsibility to our youngest generation to give them an opportunity to lead healthy, productive lives."

By increasing Medicaid eligibility for children from 185% of the poverty level to 300% – the maximum allowed by federal restrictions – the state's Medicaid program would be able to provide coverage for as many as 42,000 additional children.

In 2006, 185% of the poverty line for a family of four equaled roughly \$37,000. Raising the cap to 300% would encompass a family of four with a household income equivalent to \$60,000. About 65% of the 740,000 Oklahomans on Medicaid are 18 years old or younger.

Both the Insure Oklahoma and Medicaid proposals are in legislation authored by state Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC.

# Ten Facts To Know On Budget & Taxes

Ten true things you should know about Oklahoma's tax system.

1. Oklahomans pay just under 10 cents of every dollar we earn in state and local taxes – Oklahomans' taxes are 43rd in the nation per capita and 35th as a share of personal income [2004].

2. Income and sales taxes are the largest revenue sources for state and local government – nearly \$4 of every \$10 at the state level comes from the income tax. The sales tax is the second largest revenue source for both state and local government [behind the income tax and property taxes, respectively].

3. Oklahoma's property taxes are 47th in the nation. The average Texan pays more than 2½ times as much as Oklahomans in property taxes [2002].

## WHO CARRIES THE BURDEN IN OKLAHOMA?

4. Low and moderate income Oklahomans pay a greater share of their income in state and local taxes than do upper-income Oklahomans. In fact, the bottom three-fifths of taxpayers pay 11 cents of every dollar, on average, in state and local taxes, compared to less than nine cents of every dollar for the wealthiest 5%. This is because sales taxes hit low- and moderate-income families hardest.

5. Recent policies have made the tax system more regressive. In recent years, Oklahoma has enacted major cuts in the top income tax rate, providing the greatest benefit to the best off. Raising the standard deduction has partially offset the regressive impact of recent changes.

## WELL BELOW THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

6. Government spending in Oklahoma, per capita, is \$1,200, or 16.2%, below the national average. Total state and local expenditures in Oklahoma are 42nd in the nation.

7. About 9/10th of Oklahoma's annual state budget is spent by the 10 largest agencies. The state budget is spent overwhelmingly on education, health care, social services, transportation and public safety. All 77 other state agencies that address public needs, such as consumer safety, economic development, environmental protection, and other general government operations, spend just over \$500 million combined.

8. State spending has been growing less rapidly over time than the state economy. In 2006, about 5.6 cents of every \$100 in state personal income went to state appropriations. This is less than the 25-year average of 5.9%.

## STRICT FISCAL CONSERVATISM

9. Oklahoma has one of the strictest systems of constitutional tax and spending limits in the nation. Constitutional limits put stringent controls on the Legislature's ability to raise taxes and caps local property taxes. Oklahoma must balance its budget each year and put surplus funds aside into a rainy day fund.

10. The state faces serious fiscal challenges in the years ahead. With an aging population, rapidly rising health care costs, unfunded pension obligations and an outdated tax system, Oklahoma will struggle to provide adequate levels of

funding for basic public services even without state policies that make the situation more difficult.

– From the *Alliance for Oklahoma Future*, a non-partisan, broad-based alliance of organizations and individuals who have pledged to work together to educate their respective members, policymakers, and the public about budget issues and the need for policies that ensure adequate investment in public services in Oklahoma. For more information call 405.615.2880.

## Four Votes Reveal The Real Mary Fallin By Wanda Jo Stapleton

Mary Fallin, our new Republican congresswoman in District Five, was obviously convincing during the campaign when she declared, "Your values are my values." Already she has had at least four chances to prove that statement.

How well has she measured up?

First, she opposed new budget rules. These rules would restore "PAYGO" which requires that any tax cuts be offset by spending cuts or higher taxes elsewhere in the budget so as not to increase the budget deficit.

Then, she opposed raising the minimum wage.

Next she opposed giving Medicare authority to negotiate for lower prescription drug prices. The Veterans Administration saves "a bundle" by negotiating with pharmaceutical companies for lower prices.

However, the Medicare Prescription Drug Act [P.L. 108-173], passed by Congress in 2003, prohibited Medicare from negotiating for lower prices because of bulk purchases.

That means Congress turned pricing of our prescription drugs over to pharmaceutical companies and ordered Medicare to pay whatever was asked.

Finally, she issued a statement supporting President Bush's escalation plan to send 21,500 more troops to Iraq.

To show their displeasure with Fallin's stance, almost 100 persons gathered in front of her Oklahoma City office building with signs, chants, honking cars, Fox News and Channel 52.

Based on these four votes, Fallin's values are certainly not my values.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

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# Kerr-McGee Fine To Top \$30 Million?

By Edmund Andrews

A federal jury in Denver has agreed with a former top auditor for the Interior Department that the Kerr-McGee Corp. had cheated the government out of \$7.5 million in royalties on oil it produced in publicly owned coastal waters.

The decision, reached by the jury after deliberations of about four hours, is a vindication for the auditor, Bobby L. Maxwell. He became a whistleblower and sued Kerr-McGee as a private citizen after GOP officials at the Interior Department ordered him to drop his audit findings.

It is also a potentially big embarrassment for the Interior Department, which dismissed Maxwell in a "reorganization" and which had insisted that his case against Kerr-McGee had no merit.

The Minerals Management Service, an Interior Department agency that collects more than \$10 billion a year in royalties on oil and gas pumped on federal territory, is now the subject of numerous investigations by Congress, as well as its own inspector general, over its enforcement of royalty rules.

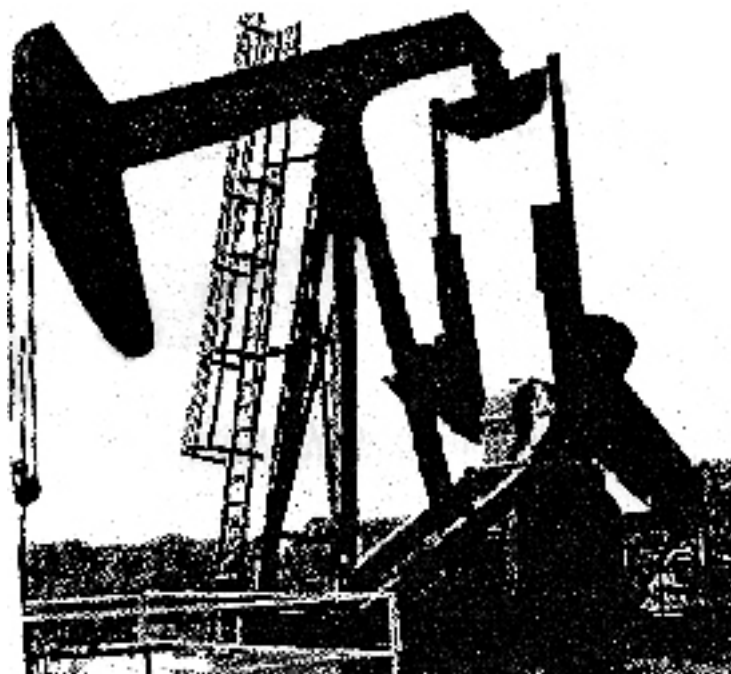
#### FOUR COMPANY WHISTLE BLOWERS

In addition to Maxwell, three other auditors in the royalty program have filed their own lawsuits as whistle-blowers against more than a dozen other oil companies.

Like Maxwell, those auditors have said the Interior Department blocked them from pursuing what they viewed as valid cases of underpayments.

Under the False Claims Act, a law that was intended to encourage whistle-blowers, Kerr-McGee could be forced to pay more than \$30 million – double or triple the original amount it owed, as well as penalties of up to \$11,000 for each of 1,200 false statements that the company is accused of making in its royalty reports to the government.

Maxwell could be entitled to as much as 30% of that, though the judge has



considerable discretion in deciding the reward.

#### KERR-MCGEE LEFT OKLAHOMA CITY

Kerr-McGee was acquired last year by Anadarko Petroleum and left Oklahoma City. The firm steadfastly denied that it had underpaid its royalties and insisted the government had agreed with it.

Many of the nation's biggest oil companies took a keen interest in the case, warning the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in a friend-of-the-court brief last year that Maxwell's lawsuit would "open the floodgates" to lawsuits by what it said would be other disgruntled federal auditors and investigators.

Kerr-McGee is almost certain to appeal the verdict. For more than two years, it tried to block the trial on the ground that Maxwell was not entitled to sue under the False Claims Act because he was using information obtained from his work.

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## PUBLIC FORUM

# An Oklahoman In Iraq Writes Home

By John Haas, AIA

I am up at five. When I walk to work it is always dark. Sometimes I am alone in a brisk gait and then suddenly surrounded by 17 or 20 gray shirts jogging along side. There is total silence and a platoon of shadows.

When the desert moon is full there is a shimmer like a caterpillar as the platoon runs as one. Soldiers are often son Robert's age or close [19]. The ladies are, like the men, required to carry rifles.

On the man's torso a slung rifle allows room to clear the ground by a lot of inches, maybe a foot, but on the ladies it drags and reaches the ankles.

The camouflage is very different amongst the coalition countries. The Turks are dark green, the Aussies custard yellow with ameba designs in gray and brown.

A POHM is a slang term for an Aussie. It has two popular meanings. One has it an antonym for a "Prisoner of Her Majesty."

This is plausible enough and most likely the best, but the other POHM is for designating a sailor who was forced to eat a daily ration of pomegranate to ward off scurvy.

#### CAUGHT UP IN A STRANGE WAR

Many U.S. soldiers are weekenders who got caught up in this strange war, never really planning in their lives for it happening, at least not until they retired from the National Guard.

It is also common to run along with older soldiers in the dark morning, too. These boys are my age and may teach school or be a mason back in Ohio.

Recently, one of these chaps, a history teacher from upstate New York gave a tryst on World War I and our German connections which could have brought us into the Axis realm. History to go.

American young people are often of Latin descent and a culture of salsa dancing and great food comes with them.

The salsa dance instructor, Penny, is a Rice graduate who ran track there.

Our staff has a young Canadian who grew up in India, an Albanian, a Bosnian, Syrian, New Zealander, and Aussies from New Zealand.

#### GETTING AHEAD WITH FINANCES

It is rewarding to see the young folks getting ahead with their finances.

This is something that always eluded me until now.

The little lizards are about the only sign of life here as vector control is way too efficient. I shelter a family of mice under the boardwalk.

You may want to know I wear body armor in the Helio and in the "hard car."

Finding and transporting critical materials is a big problem.

Buildings need anchor bolts, stuck in a truck convoy somewhere I shouldn't say, so a GPS system tracks them, all 1000 Kilograms.

Finally it is decided to send a duplicate order by Federal Express. Then the new mess hall built for \$10 million will be taken out of service and moved or raised in 24-36 months.

The autos are large SUV's. They have no license plates. The indelible ink marks the inventory numbers written on the body.

#### PHILIPPINOS SING AND DANCE

Mourning doves are the chipping rhythm of early morning. The Philippine help

at the laundry is singing and dancing to American top 40 sung in broken English. Big smiles.

For them pay is perhaps \$600 a month. A broker may take six to 10 months fee from them up front in India. American companies shamefully often look the other way.

Reported abuses are sometimes never investigated. [I know because I made one.] It should be a crime with high risk. They may also hold passports but this, too, is illegal.

A special type of individual must investigate these cases. These are unsung good guys – \$600 is five times the salary back home in India so many have no choice in the matter.

Simple things mean a lot. To get a packet of Chinese mustard is an unexpected luxury. Some fellows sent home for a whole case from their Chinese restaurant. They gladly share it.

Breakfast has catfish, pinto beans and bacon, grits and fruit. Hot tea with honey is my favorite.

#### UGANDANS GUARD THE ENTRY

Proud Ugandan soldiers guard our entry. The British are not happy with this delegation of responsibility. We see them at mess.

Unlike the American contractors like me, these Ugandans are happy to take only an extra tangerine while many of our folks load their pockets with junk food.

We work a lot of long hours. Money means nothing. Everything is at no cost. The ice cream is the best and freshest possible.

The jackal pups and a giant school of trained carp [forced to come up out the water after bread] are an unexpected diversion.

It is an extremely important time in the life of, not only for me, but the region as well.

– The author is an American architect and contractor working for a private engineering firm charged with the design and construction of safe code compliant buildings for the military in Iraq. He is an occasional contributor to the Oklahoma Observer. He grew up in Bartlesville before attending the University of Oklahoma School of Architecture in Norman.

## The Golden Rule

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. – Buddhism  
What is hateful to you, do not your fellow man. That is the entire law; all the rest is commentary. – Judaism

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. – Christianity  
No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. – Islam

Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. – Bahai Faith

# Working Sooners Are Losing Ground

Working Oklahomans are losing ground despite strong economic growth and lower unemployment. They face higher health care costs and stagnant wages.

Tulsa's Community Action Project reports that state economic growth and increase in per-capita income is occurring while many working Oklahomans are being left behind in the economic recovery.

The report, The State of Working Oklahoma, notes: "Even during a period of overall economic prosperity, wages and incomes for most households are growing less rapidly than inflation."

David Blatt, the group's director of public policy and one of its authors, said after adjusting for inflation, the median wages declined by 1% from 2001 to 2005.

Half of all wage earners earned below \$12.35 an hour in 2001. The median hourly wage fell to \$12.26 in 2005, after adjusting for inflation.

## MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME FELL

During that period, inflation-adjusted median household income fell to \$37,645, down from \$39,269 a year. Yet those at the top of the income scale – the 99th percentile – saw their household income jump 22% to \$365,000 a year in 2005.

The inflation-adjusted declines in hourly wages and household incomes happened even as productivity rates and corporate profits increased from 2001 to 2005 in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma companies were keeping more profits or spending them on research and development, higher energy costs or technology – rather than on wage increases.

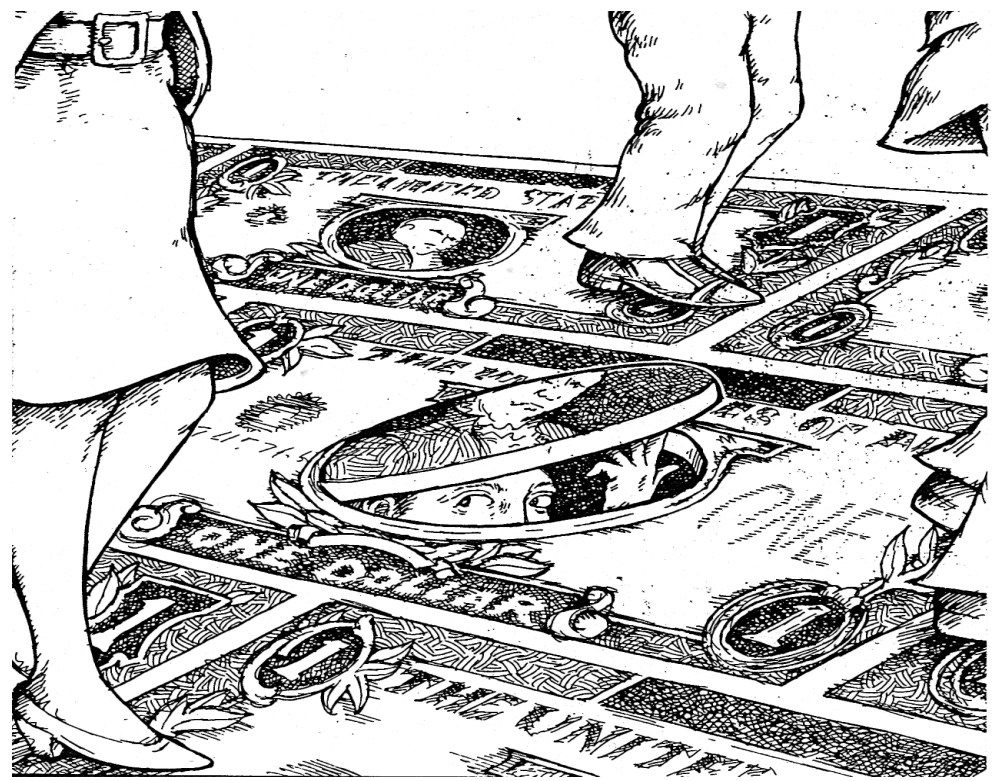
"It's not just the bottom rungs being excluded," Blatt said. "It's the middle-income earners, too, who are seeing stagnant incomes and wages."

Many of the job losses came in manufacturing or information technology sectors, which paid more than the majority of the service sector jobs created since the recession.

## LEGISLATURE COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Community Action Project wants state lawmakers to expand access to health insurance and increase the state's Earned Income Tax Credit.

The credit is available for families with total incomes of less than \$35,000 a



year, but is at 5% of the federal credit, or up to \$226 a year.

The state should spend more on early childhood education, promote savings for higher education and improve consumer protection from more than 400 payday loans firms.

Action on health insurance has reached a critical mass. About 19% of Oklahomans – 650,000 people – lacked health insurance in 2004-2005. Meanwhile, workers who are covered find themselves paying more for plans with higher deductibles, more co-payments and fewer benefits. Businesses also struggled with rising premium costs.

Naturally, the State Chamber tried to downplay the study, which is based on solid facts.

Since their holy grail of right to work was adopted, the state has been on a downward trend for many working Oklahomans, trapped in low paying service sector jobs, or simply moving out of state.

# What Happened To The Genuine News?

By Larry D. Dobie

Thank you for making a smooth transition possible with Arnold and Beverly Hamilton. This is the answer to our question regarding how "we" were going to continue to get opinions that are required for a voter to function. Thank you. We were facing the real issue of where to get news [certainly not from the media sources available].

Now to the subject of American culture – our main topic. It is the same as a major whiplash injury reoccurring nightly when one views the "news." Is everything "entertainment?" Entertaining to whom?

Is the mainstream of America so juvenile and undeveloped that we must be "entertained" with cute-see repartee and hype by talking-heads, punctuated, punctuated, mind you, with the results of American foreign policy.

During the Thanksgiving and Christmas period [and previously] I certainly consider all the fortune that Americans enjoy, but then the whiplash of dismembered soldiers, combatants and noncombatants in Iraq and Afghanistan – their forever changed families, their children and their relatives – hits like a sucker-punch.

## SILLY, UNIMPORTANT, SELF-CENTERED

How can American media program the silly, unimportant, self-centered junk and keep their jobs? They should be out "ankle-mobiling" around looking for honest work.

I am advocating media facing, impartially, the crisis of national values; holding leadership accountable for policy, implementation and evaluation.

# Enid High School Takes Top Honors

Enid High School out-scored two other teams to be named state champion in the We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution competition held Jan. 27 at the state Capitol.

Social studies teacher Matthew Holtzen's team will advance to the national competition in Washington, D.C., in April. For the competition, the team studied the history and principles of the U.S. Constitution.

They formed small groups to make six presentations on different topics during simulated congressional hearings. The six units were scored individually, with Enid winning three of the units and earning the highest overall score.

The Oklahoma Bar Association administers the We the People program locally through its Law-Related Education Program. LRE Coordinator is Jane McConnell.

"The We the People competition showcases students demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of how democracy works in the United States," she said.

"Our judging panels listened to their prepared opening statements and followed-up with questions. Students then had to explain their positions on relevant historical and contemporary issues facing our society."

The students represented Oklahoma Congressional District Three, and educa-

I am not advocating a media without entertainment. I'm not advocating Red Skeleton, Make Room For Daddy or Jackie Gleason – but I wouldn't mind.

I'm awaiting the emergence of media leadership towards reality therapy. Walter Cronkite, Edward R. Murrow or reporters of their "cut" would be welcome.

Glorification of "popular" culture [which is not popular at all] should be gone. If I sat down with the networks and reviewed their TV Guide offerings, their faces would be a red as the marker I would use to slash through whole blocks of their programming.

## WHEN YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN TROUBLE

You know your culture is in trouble when your kids sing along with every commercial "jingle" and can't find Michigan on the map.

Newton Minnow had a point about "the great wasteland." Now, media decision-makers have my challenge.

Is there hope? Of course. One bright sliver was the recent Rupert Murdoch decision to withdraw the O.J. Simpson programming [once his affiliates rebelled]. A little rebellion now and then may be the tonic the nation needs.

This nation, from 1861-1865, engaged in a great Civil War. It was unavoidable. Based on the clash of values, to be sure, but at its base, based on economics. Iraq now faces this question. We have won the Iraq War, now only the citizens of Iraq can shape their peace. Declare victory, 'o foreign policy pundits and bring our soldiers safely home.

– The author lives in Claremore

tor Cheri Franklin is the We the People program coordinator for the district.

Winning students were Christian Balden, Victoria Boeckman, Jay Cooper, Al-lura Dean, Tommy DeWall, Jordann Good, Jamie Hughes, Daniel Martens, April Morrow, Leslie Newell, Kasie Nichols, Brandt Pastor, Serena Prammanasudh and Jamie Reeves.

Norman High School took second place in the competition. The Street School. Inc. team from Tulsa came in third.

We the People is co-sponsored by the California-based Center for Civic Education and the U.S. Department of Education.

The 15,000-member Oklahoma Bar Association, headquartered in Oklahoma City, is overseen by the Oklahoma Supreme Court to advance the administration of justice and to foster and maintain learning, integrity, competence, public service and high standards of conduct among Oklahoma's legal community.

## Important Breakthrough

Here is an important announcement from Apple Computer: "Apple Computer reported that it has developed computer chips that can store and play music inside women's breasts. This is considered to be a major breakthrough because women are always complaining about men staring at their breasts and not listening to them."

# A President In Search Of A Legacy

By Danny M. Adkison

It is now a certainty President Bush is thinking about how history will treat his presidency. That point was made clear when the President reversed a long-standing position on the "war" on terrorism.

Keeping the government in "check" was a basic tenant of our Framers. They thought the primary means of doing this was by allowing citizens to vote. The notion of holding regular elections was a way of reminding politicians that their exalted status as the nation's lawmakers and policy makers was temporary. That status was subject to review by the voters, making their term of office a kind of probationary period.

As powerful as the Framers thought the vote would be in keeping government in check, they also saw the need for "auxiliary precautions." One such precaution was to not only allow the people to "check" the officeholder, but to allow the various departments of government to check each other. As Publius put it, "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition."

While the Framers thought the Congress would be the most dangerous branch [Madison described it as "an impetuous vortex of power"], they might think differently today. Since World War II most who analyze government would conclude that the presidency is the most powerful branch of our government and thus the one most in need of "checks."

## THE INCREDIBLE EXPANDING PRESIDENCY

Modern presidents, big surprise, don't see it this way. They actually see it the other way around. They think they have special powers that give them vast authority. Some think they have the prerogative power. Under this concept presidents not only have the powers specified in the Constitution, along with unspecified powers that can be inferred from the specified powers, but they can act in a manner which is not implied from the specified powers. They may, in fact, have to act contrary to constitutional provisions if they deem it necessary.

Where do American presidents get this idea of prerogative power and are they justified in asserting that they have it?

A 17th Century social contract theorist with whom the Framers were very familiar was John Locke. Locke was a prolific author writing on such varied topics as politics, religion, and education. His most famous work is his Two Treatises of Government [1689].

It is in his second treatise that Locke makes the case for executives having the prerogative: "The [legislative branch] is usually too numerous, and so too slow, for the dispatch requisite to executing; and because it is impossible by laws to provide for all necessities that may concern the public; therefore there is a latitude left to the executive power, to do many things of choice which the laws do not prescribe."

President Bush asserted a kind of prerogative when he refused, according to

# Role Of Churches In Secular Society

By Raymond Bailey

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE ROLE THE CHURCH SHOULD PLAY

The church, like Christ, should be an advocate for the oppressed and subservient to no earthly power structure. The danger of federal financial support to charities was demonstrated by the court ruling that private and religious institutions of higher learning that accept federal funds cannot bar military service recruiters from their campuses.

"Separation" does not mean that people of faith must be silent with regard to injustice and immorality practiced or encouraged by government. People of faith are at times required to speak out against policies or even administrations as a matter of conscience.

But preserving a favorable economic system or seeking advantage over other believers or non-believers is no such warrant for political engagement.

## THERE ARE TIMES A MORAL RESPONSE IS REQUIRED

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

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

We read of German churches' silence, and in many cases outright support of



federal law, to seek permission from a special court before invading the privacy of private American citizens. For some time now the President had asserted the "we are at war" argument to justify ignoring the law which, itself, was based on the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution.

## DEMS, COURTS AGREE: UNCONSTITUTIONAL

Ever since it became public just a little over a year ago Democrats have been complaining of this practice claiming it illegal and unconstitutional. A lower federal court agreed and ruled that the president's policy was unconstitutional and that decision is being reviewed by a federal court of appeals.

Recently, the Attorney General's office, on the order of President Bush, capitulated. From now on the government would seek approval before ordering wiretapping or intercepting of telephone conversations. What accounts for this reversal in policy? The president certainly doesn't feel we are any less at "war" than we were a year or so ago. If you take him at his word he certainly doesn't believe this. It could be the president thinks the courts are going to strike his policy down [although there is still a long way to go before that decision would be finalized]. There is another explanation for what has "checked" the president. It is not lawsuits. Neither is it the constitutional check of impeachment nor the threat of impeachment. Bush is at that stage in his presidency when he must be giving serious thought to how history will judge his presidency.

Constitutional scholars disagree on whether or not presidents have the power of the prerogative. In the most important writing in which the Framers explain the powers of the executive [The Federalist Papers], they never make reference to presidential power in this fashion. No matter.

The impending judgment of history has basically made the issue moot [along, perhaps, with the impending lawsuit]. President Bush is now starting to act like a president who is soon to leave office, never to return.

- The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

Hitler and the Nazis. Justice and freedom might be so threatened by individuals or parties as to require prophetic judgment. I am not suggesting that such a situation presently exists in the United States, but such a situation could arise.

## FREE VOICES FOR ALL FAITHS

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

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

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

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

## Subject: God's E-Mail To Earth

Subject: God's E-mail Addressed To Earth

One day God was looking down at earth and saw all of the rascally behavior that was going on. So He called one of his angels and sent the angel to earth for a time.

When he returned, he told God, "Yes, it is bad on Earth; 95% are misbehaving and only 5% are not."

God thought for a moment and said, "Maybe I had better send down a second angel to get another opinion."

So God called another angel and sent him to earth for a time, too.

When the angel returned he went to God and said, "Yes, it's true. The earth is in decline; 95% are misbehaving, but 5% are being good."

God was not pleased. So he decided to e-mail the 5% who were good, because He wanted to encourage them, give them a little something to help them keep going.

Do you know what the e-mail said?

Okay, just wondering. I didn't get one either.

## BOOKS

# A Rich Tale Of Salesman Bush

By Alvena Bieri

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### THE GREATEST STORY EVER SOLD

*The Decline And Fall Of Truth*

By Frank Rich

The Penguin Press

341 pages, \$25.95

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Truth is always the first casualty of war. The Iraq War has been no exception. Journalist Frank Rich's new book gives us an encyclopedic look at how the Bush administration has botched the war in Iraq as well as the crisis in New Orleans caused by the hurricane. Actually most of his book is about Iraq with only a few pages on Katrina, so the title is a little misleading. But I like how he has named the two main parts, first, Making the Sale and second, Buyer's Remorse.

The first part describes the propaganda put out by the government about Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction it supposedly had, and the second is what we're living every day – a long-lasting quagmire that probably isn't going to be changed by Bush's latest plan. So the information here is nearly all related to George W. Bush and his policies.

Now, many people make fun of him, of his mispronunciations and word use, and many other things. Rich says that Bush is not too well read, citing a story about a school child who asked him, "What was your favorite book when you were growing up?" Bush replied, "I can't remember any titles."

But the author holds that Bush is not stupid, but he thinks everyone else is. Add to that his strong sense of "entitlement." That is, he's out of touch with most of America's citizens because he has led a very privileged life. Say, maybe he's trying to be more ordinary by having that ranch at Crawford, TX. I do wish he would replace the little old tattered building we see in the background when he has a news conference there. I bet he could afford it!

Also coming in for a lot of criticism are Bush's strange procrastinations after the Trade Center attack and the hurricane. He was in a grade school in Sarasota, FL, reading to schoolchildren when the first happened. He flew to Louisiana and then to Omaha before he finally got back to Washington late that night. And he didn't really get involved with the hurricane disaster for a couple of days. Then there was his compliment to Michael Brown of FEMA – "You're doing a heckuva



job, Brownie!"

Rich is hard on John Ashcroft and the USA Patriot Act as well as most of the other people in the Bush administration. The Patriot Act, like many other measures, has an Orwellian ring to it – a kind of opposite meaning as in "War Is Peace."

Where is the truth then? Writer Ron Suskind in the New York Times reports speaking to a presidential aide who talked contemptuously about journalists and their "reality-based community."

"To study reality," he said, "is just not the way the world really works anymore," since the United States is now an empire. The press may be trying to keep us informed of the truth, but Rich thinks we have just as good a chance at understanding current events from watching Comedy Central.

There is a timeline at the end of the book, packed with strong statements by different people about all these issues. So whether you want to think again about Bush's "Mission Accomplished!" gestures, Dick Cheney's statements on the issue of uranium bought by Iraq from Niger, and countless other familiar events of the past five years, it's all there.

The old saying is that "all governments lie." That's sad to think about. What Rich doesn't discuss is why we are so naive and gullible. It makes me long for another Emerson to set us straight and then to encourage us to think for ourselves and trust ourselves.

– The author lives in Stillwater

# America's Gutsy Conscientious Objectors

By Mike Nobles

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### SMOKE JUMPING ON THE WESTERN FIRE LINE

*Conscientious Objectors During World War II*

By Mark Matthews

The University of Oklahoma Press

336 pages, \$29.95

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In reading this book I was reminded of the hysteria and intolerance that has been, and to a lesser extent continues to date, directed toward citizens that either question or sometimes outright oppose the current war in Iraq.

In actions ranging from the silly renaming of French fries and French toast to freedom fries and toast to the more serious questioning of someone's patriotism when they dared to question the United States' unilateral invasion of another country, many citizens have been subjected to ostracism, threats, and humiliation.

If such actions can occur in a situation not involving another country attacking the U.S., one must wonder what it must have been like when individual citizens elected to remain true to their beliefs and declare themselves to be conscientious objectors in the aftermath of a direct attack on the United States as at Pearl Harbor and the advent of World War II.

This book examines that subject and tells the mostly unknown story of a group of men that managed to both uphold their beliefs and serve their country with honor in spite of public scorn and ostracism.

It is estimated that some 72,000 men, known as pacifists, applied for conscientious objector status during World War II and declared their opposition to serving in a combat capacity for religious reasons.

Most came from three peace churches: Mennonite, Quaker, and Brethren. While the three differed in dogma and ritual they all agreed in the doctrine of non-resistance.

Not surprisingly, these men were publicly scorned as cowards, "yellowbellies" and traitors for refusing to fight in "the good war" against fascism. Public abuse and physical attacks were frequent and many times vicious.

Many, ultimately, relented and joined fighting units. Others agreed to join medical units serving alongside combat troops. And a large group volunteered for the Civilian Public Service [CPS] program, an alternative to military service. They were assigned a multitude of tasks such as working in hospitals, agricultural

research facilities, and assuming many of the duties formerly performed by the Civilian Conservation Corps whose members had entered military service.

A small group volunteered for a then-experimental program initiated by the U.S. Forest Service that became known as smoke jumping. It had originally begun in 1939 as an experiment to determine if placing fire fighters at the location of wildfires when they were first discovered would reduce the loss of timber in national forests.

Before the project could expand the war drained available manpower and the experiment was in danger of collapse. In 1942 the CPS volunteers entered the program and became what is still the Forest Service's first line of defense against wildfires in the West, Smoke Jumpers.

The book tells the story of a wildly successful experiment that saved the Forest Service and taxpayers untold amounts of tax dollars; saved cultural and natural resource treasures; and instituted a now legendary service known as Smoke Jumpers.

As importantly, it puts a face on so-called cowards and traitors and tells the story of individual men that made the program a success in spite of monumental obstacles and in the face of danger inherent in jumping from airplanes and facing wildfires that continue to this day to injure and kill smoke jumpers and make it one of the most dangerous jobs in the country.

They made a lasting contribution to the preservation of our natural resources and proved both to themselves and the country they were not cowards. This is a bittersweet story of men that managed to maintain the courage of their convictions and serve their country with honor in the face of sometimes seemingly insurmountable odds.

This book helps to fill in a gap in the history of World War II by bringing to the public's attention the contribution of a brave group of American pacifists and their honorable service to the country in a time of war.

Regardless of one's political or philosophical persuasion this book is a must read for anyone interested in a little known but important period in American history.

It is sometimes difficult to learn of those that have the courage to not only talk the talk but also to walk the walk in furtherance of a genuine belief or conviction. This was such a group.

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

## CNN Equally Bad

# ABC Home For The Worst On Television

By Judd Legum

President George W. Bush's popularity has fallen to new lows, Democrats have been swept into office, and a strong majority of Americans now opposes the war in Iraq – but not ABC.

That network decided the time is right to beef up with more conservative pundits on staff and to strike out against a liberal online critic who raised questions about the network's policy of broadcasting hate radio.

ABC spotlighted its unfortunate trend toward irresponsibility, as the broadcasting giant hired Glenn Beck, a high-profile war cheerleader known for grade-school level name-calling of Democrats.

He is commenting on the day's events for Good Morning America. ABC was also dealing with the messy fallout from its wrongheaded decision to fire off a cease-and-desist letter to a little-known blogger.

### DOCUMENTED HATE BROADCASTING

Blogger Spocko had been posting audio clips from KSFO in San Francisco, an ABC-owned talk station where hosts have advocated violence against progressives, Muslims, and Democratic members of Congress.

ABC warned Spocko the audio clips were posted in violation of copyright laws, although it appears ABC's real concern was driven by the fact Spocko was informing advertisers about KFSO's unique brand of extremism and that blue-chip advertisers were fleeing the station in disgust.

By trying to silence a critic through legal intimidation, while at the same time hiring a pro-war talker as a network commentator, ABC once again advertised its allegiance.

Sadly, the Beck and Spocko developments are not unique. In recent years ABC has regularly gone out of its way to curry favor with rightwing ideologues while simultaneously disrespecting Democrats and progressives.

### CONSIDER THESE FACTS

Consider these facts on ABC and its parent corporation Disney:

- Recently aired the historically inaccurate miniseries Path to 9/11, which was created by a cadre of conservative filmmakers determined to blame the Clinton Administration for not preventing the 9/11 attacks.
- Employs Mark Halperin as ABC News' political director – the same Halperin who last fall in a series of interviews with rightwing media outlets, endorsed conservative conspiracy theories that mainstream journalists are “overwhelmingly liberal,” “hate the military,” are “blind” to their bias, and should use the closing weeks of the campaign season to “prove” their worth to conservatives.
- Let the network's online daily newsletter, The Note, run by Halperin, evolve into a sycophantic outlet of Bush/GOP spin.
- Refused to distribute Michael Moore's award-winning documentary Fahrenheit 9/11 because the company didn't want to be associated with a product so “political,” despite the fact some ABC-owned talk radio stations and ABC-syndicated radio hosts engage, on an hourly basis, in wildly partisan and often off-the-chart hate rhetoric.

### FABRICATOR STOSSEL'S PLATFORM

- Give chronic, professional fabricator John Stossel a national, primetime platform, where his opinions are always aired unopposed.
- Hired Rush Limbaugh as a football analyst only to have to remove the rightwing boob from the air after Limbaugh immediately inserted unwanted racial overtones into a broadcast.
- Used bogus reporting to help relentlessly hype the phony Whitewater scandal during the Clinton administration.

According to long-held corporate media standards, radicals on the right are good for business, but radicals on the left are simply ... radical.

Can you imagine The New York Times-owned radio station employing fringe, leftwing hosts who fantasized on the air about assassinating Republicans?

But fair warning, the days have now passed when corporate news entities like ABC can shrug off critics who call out its shameful pandering, like hiring a hate merchant to comment on current events or trying to crush a righteous blogger.

### TIME-WARNER GAVE BECK HIS BOOST

Glenn Beck can thank another corporate media giant, Time Warner, for getting him his new ABC gig. In January 2006, Time Warner's CNN Headline News signed Beck to produce a nightly hour-long talk show.

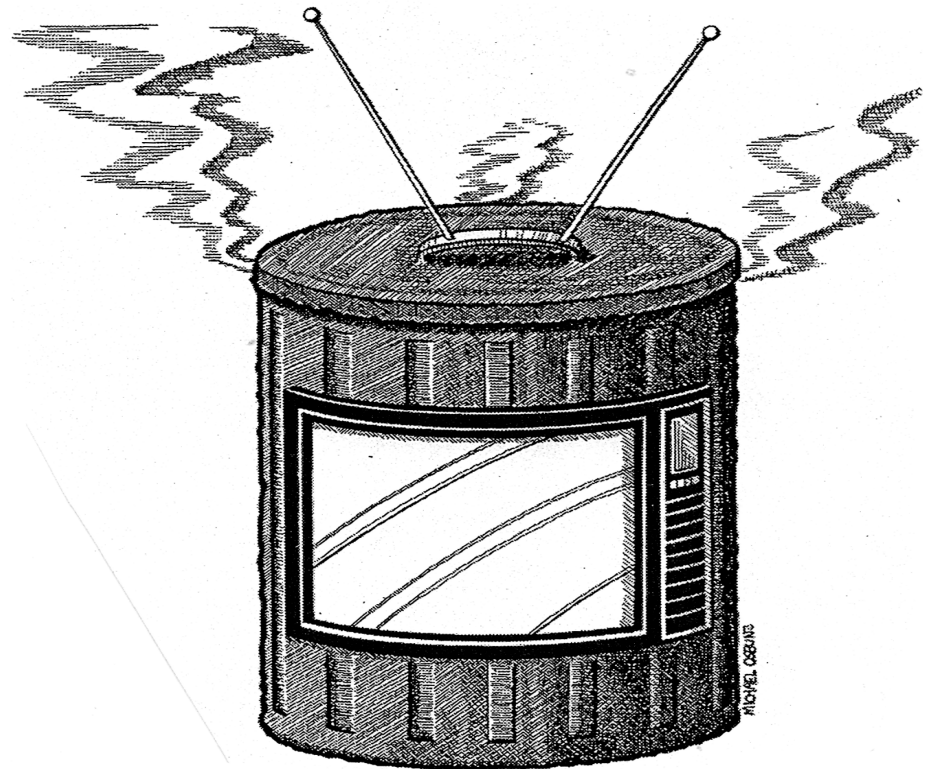
Announcing the new hire, Headline News President Ken Jautz, trying to take the edge off Beck's fringe past, described the host as “cordial” and “not confrontational.”

Yet the previous year, when not fantasizing about killing filmmaker Michael Moore [“I'm wondering if I could kill him myself, or if I would need to hire somebody to do it”], Beck told his listeners that Hurricane Katrina survivors trapped in New Orleans were “scumbags,” and that he “hated” “9/11 victims' families.”

He also labeled Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-NY, the “Antichrist,” Al Gore of being like “Hitler,” and congratulated a caller to his program who claimed to have tortured prisoners in U.S. custody by saying, “I've got to tell you, I appreciate your service ... Good for you.”

### RADICAL, INCENDIARY SPEECH

Since joining the CNN family [“the most trusted name in news”], Beck has



continued with his often radical, incendiary ways.

For instance, he's warned that if Americans don't wake up to the dangers of the “deadly enemy that is embedded in” our ranks – radical Islam – that the streets of Detroit, New York, and Chicago may soon erupt in flames as part of a “global religious civil war.”

Indeed, Beck has waged something of his own personal jihad, declaring that if “Muslims and Arabs” don't “act now” by “stepping to the plate” to condemn terrorism, they “will be looking through a razor wire fence at the West.”

And that “Muslims who have sat on your frickin' hands the whole time” rather than “lining up to shoot the bad Muslims in the head” will face dire consequences.

Beck garnered headlines with his one-hour special about radical Islam, Exposed: The Extremist Agenda. The program was built around the evident notion that Muslim extremists in the Middle East hate America.

### NOTHING LIKE A GOOD SOURCE

Beck interviewed former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who confirmed Exposed's obvious premise.

To help boost interest in the special, Beck, on the eve of the Exposed showing, manufactured a controversy by inviting Rep. Keith Ellison, D-MN, the first Muslim elected to Congress, to be on the program.

Beck then sandbagged Ellison by asking him, after noting that Ellison is a Muslim, a war opponent, and a Democrat, to prove that he was not “working with our enemies.”

The global news outlet then rewarded Beck by promising him guest appearances on CNN's Paula Zahn Now, as well as three upcoming one-hour news specials for Headline News. This, despite the fact Beck twice emphasized during Exposed that he is not a journalist.

One of Beck's upcoming news specials will focus on the “myths” of global warming, which Beck insists is a natural phenomenon and not caused by humans or the pollution they generate. That's why Beck likened Gore to a Nazi propagandist; Beck did not like An Inconvenient Truth.

### OBSCURING THE TRUTH

It was the need to obscure the truth about Beck that led company attorneys to send off a cease-and-desist letter against Spocko, the self-described “5th-tier” blogger who had been contacting advertisers and informing them about the blatant hate talk being broadcast on ABC Radio's signature San Francisco talk station, KSFO.

KSFO hosts recently mocked Sen. Barack Obama, D-IL, as a “Halffrican,” for having a white mother and a black father. [The hosts later apologized, but only after being publicly criticized for the racist remarks.] Additionally, the hosts:

- Applauded torturing and killing a Nebraska criminal.
- Asked a caller to prove that he is not Muslim by calling Allah a “whore.”
- Advocated the murder of millions of Muslims in Indonesia.
- Suggested that someone “dig up” late environmentalist Rachel Carson “and kill her all over again.”
- Warned Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi [D-CA] that she had “a bull's-eye painted on her big wide laughing eyes.”

### THEY PUNISHED THE MESSENGER

Rather than publicly reprimand the radical talkers and explain to them the standards of broadcasting in this country, not to mention the damage they were doing the station, ABC Inc., a subsidiary of the Disney-ABC Television Group, decided it was the anonymous blogger who needed to be shown a lesson.

He was sent a strongly worded cease-and-desist letter, under the threat of copyright litigation. [According to the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Spocko was well within his right to post the KSFO clips, under the Fairness doctrine, which allows copyrighted material to be reproduced when used for “purposes of commentary, parody, education, or artistic expression.”]

Disney's heavy-handed approach scared Spocko's Internet provider into yanking his website. But within days he was back online with another provider and this time with the full support of the liberal netroots behind him.

Center for American Progress

## Remembering Molly Ivins

# In Praise Of The Incomparable Molly

By Gaylord Shaw

As readers of the Oklahoma Observer know, the political columns of Molly Ivins graced these pages for the last dozen years, blending Texas humor and a wicked wit with good ol' girl charm as she skewered conservative politicians and punctured pompous egos right and left, east and west, north and south, in and out of government, commerce, academe, the arts, religion, you name it.

In the days since her death Jan. 30 from breast cancer at the age of 62, her friends and acquaintances have devoted uncounted hours of verbal conversation and thousands of written words to reminiscing about Molly.

I have a few advantages when it comes to Remembering Molly:

- For two years, 1978-80, Molly and I were fierce head-to-head competitors in rival one-person bureaus in Denver [she New York Times, me Los Angeles Times], both with the title of Rocky Mountain Correspondent and a license to uncover the secrets of the magnificent West. Or that's what we wanted our bosses to think – that we were out to cut one another's journalistic throats.

Actually, we enjoyed long lunches and many beers at the Rocky Mountain Diner in downtown Denver and uncounted other fine restaurants or honky-tonks throughout the West when our paths would cross. Like journalistic buddies are wont to do, we regularly shared tales of idiotic editors [she had many more than I] and details of what stories we were working on.

- In 1982, as assistant managing editor of the Dallas Times Herald, I shared in a not-so-difficult task of getting Molly home to Texas. She had been summarily recalled from the Rocky Mountains to Manhattan and was going through a messy divorce from the Times. Thus she was more than willing to accept our invitation to move to Dallas to become a columnist for the Times Herald. She was our bazooka in America's last Great Newspaper War as we battled the Dallas Morning News for supremacy in that juicy media market.

### MOLLY'S TEXAS ROAD TRIP

Jon Katz, then managing editor of the Times Herald, recalls signing up Molly to write a local column for the front of our Metro section, with a promise she could write anything she wanted, within the bounds of decency, libel, etc.

If Katz thought Molly understood he meant anything with a focus on Dallas and environs, the heart of the Times Herald's circulation area, he was mistaken. One of her first acts when she got to Dallas was to purchase a shiny new souped-up Dodge Charger and to set off on a column-collecting tour of Texas, from Dalhart to Brownsville and El Paso to Texarkana. Some great columns, but sans any Dallas flavor. Mostly chicken-fried steak and Tex-Mex. Before long, she asked to be based in Austin. She promised to park her Dodge Charger, quit drag racing through the many one-stoplight towns of Texas [and thus quit filing expense accounts with astounding mileage reimbursement entries and, well-disguised, a few speeding tickets].

She'd worn out the Dodge Charger and the patience of the Times Herald's bean-counters. The newspaper agreed to park her in Austin. Maybe a more accurate description of events is this: she parked herself in Austin and told the editors of the Times Herald she henceforth would write her columns from there.

Molly once said [I think it was during her misery at the New York Times] that her tombstone should bear the epitaph, *She Never Made A Wise Career Move*. She was, oh, so wrong about that. Getting home to Texas and Austin with a paper like the Times Herald was the wisest career move Molly could possibly have made. For herself, for her friends and readers, for American journalism and politics.

### ON FIRST-NAME BASIS WITH 'FRED ALMIGHTY'

I suspect Divine involvement. Our mutual friend Jim Henderson told me Molly had her own name for God: Fred. I would have thought she would have picked a feminine name. But she obviously had met Fred personally; she was such a stickler for honesty in reporting she had to use His real name.

After the Times Herald folded in the early 1990s, she signed on with the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Eventually, her columns were distributed to 400 newspapers by Creators Syndicate.

From her base in Austin, she became thoroughly entrenched as America's leading liberal columnist [she preferred progressive but didn't argue with liberal. Though she despised hyphenated descriptive phrases, considering them indecisive, I think liberal-populist was the best description of her politics.]

She was a passionate advocate for the little guy and gal, the underdog, the oppressed. She demanded that they, too, be fully endowed with the fruits of America. She never slacked in her promotion of truth and justice, of the public's right to know and of protecting the rights of the press endowed by the Constitution.

### A WONDERFULLY WICKED WIT

She was never stuffy. Instead, she brought a tone of joyous outrage to her writing and her life. With a wicked wit she gleefully skewered conservative politicians and punctured the pomposity of elected officials or public personages of all political stripes. She had a gusty laugh that matched her ample six-foot frame. Until chemotherapy claimed it, she had a lovely mane of strawberry blonde hair.

A few viewed her as a radical troublemaker. "We're going to run that New York-thinking pinko outa Texas," one man would bellow in his regular telephone calls to the newsroom of the Times Herald in my tenure there 25 years ago. Another elderly reader who also called me regularly to protest Molly's column always

*With a wicked wit she gleefully skewered conservative politicians and punctured the pomposity of elected officials or public personages of all political stripes.*



ended our conversations on a more civil note: "At least she gets my heart beating in the morning."

I first met Molly in June 1978. I had just arrived in Denver to establish the LA Times bureau and I wanted to size up my competition. So I called the telephone number listed for the New York Times Denver Bureau, introduced myself to the woman who answered, and asked to speak to Miss If-vinz.

"Hon, you better just call me Molly," she responded in her twang, politely glossing over my mispronunciation of her last name [*Eye-vins* is the correct pronunciation]. She didn't pause. "Welcome to Denver. I'm so glad you finally got here. I suppose you're wearing your neon PPW sign."

"What?" I said, puzzled, then listened to one of Molly's endearing traits: dispensing flatteringly, overblown, perhaps, but charmingly delivered.

"You mean you don't have one? Well, honey, we'll get started on that right away. Every Pulitzer Prize winner must wear one, you know. Not to brag but to give fair warning to folks who meet you for the first time that you're hot stuff."

[Earlier that spring, I'd won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting for a series of articles in the LA Times on unsafe dams.]

### NO FANCY DIGS FOR THE STATELY TIMES

By the time I figured out she was joking about the neon PPW sign, she was rushing on: "You must come see our bureau. You surely will want one just like it."

I thought it would be somewhere in the high rises sprouting so rapidly in downtown Denver, or perhaps in fashionable Cherry Creek. Instead, she gave me an address in Littleton, a middle-class suburb in the southern fringe of Denver. She also gave me driving directions, including: "When the pavement ends, you'll know you're getting close."

Sure enough, the Rocky Mountain Bureau of the mighty New York Times was located in the spare bedroom of a somewhat dilapidated white frame house on a dirt road in a neighborhood populated by retired plumbers and young auto mechanics with screaming kids and pregnant wives.

Molly loved it there. So did her big black hound dog with a name that shouldn't be reported in family publications. The day the dog died at age 15, Molly's column was a detailed obituary that would touch any dog lover's heart. And also

See MOLLY Page 17

## Freedom Fightin' Is Just Plain Fun – Win Or Lose

*Molly Ivins wrote this column in 1993. It offers a poignant final word from our beloved friend and colleague.*

**By Molly Ivins**

I've been talkin' to a bunch of the fun-lovin' freedom fighters of Texas lately, and we all agree that there's one thing we need to pass on to all of y'all from the few of us before I take a leave from these pages. [I'm takin' a leave of absence on account of I have to write a book, and time has become both scant and precious.] The thing is this: You got to have fun while you're fightin' for freedom, 'cause you don't always win.

Havin' fun while freedom fightin' must be one of those lunatic Texas traits we get from the water – which is known to have lithium in it – because it goes all the way back to Sam Houston, surely the most lovable, the most human, and the funniest of all the Great Men this country has ever produced. While Sam was president of the Republic of Texas, he was visited by a French ambassador. This Frog was quite the wonder of frontier Austin; he minced along the wooden sidewalks wearing a silk suit with lace at the collar and cuffs, with a gilt epee, no less, slung along his side. Though Sam had a perfectly good fine house, he elected to receive the Frenchman in a log hut with a mud floor. By choice a sometime Indian, Sam wore only fringed leggings and a blanket around his big ol' hairy chest.

While the French ambassador held forth grandiloquently, Houston, who was

See FREEDOM Page 18

## Remembering Molly Ivins

# A Texas Original, And So Much More

By Anthony Zurcher

Molly Ivins is gone, and her words will never grace these pages again – for this, we will mourn. But Molly wasn't the type of woman who would want us to grieve. More likely, she'd say something like, "Hang in there, keep fightin' for freedom, raise more hell, and don't forget to laugh, too."

If there was one thing Molly wanted us to understand, it's that the world of politics is absurd. Since we can't cry, we might as well laugh. And in case we ever forgot, Molly would remind us, several times a week, in her own unique style.

Shortly after becoming editor of Molly Ivins' syndicated column, I learned one of my most important jobs was to tell her newspaper clients that, yes, Molly meant to write it that way. We called her linguistic peculiarities "Molly-isms." Administration officials were "Bushies," government was in fact spelled "govement," business was "bidness." And if someone was "madder than a peach orchard boar," well, he was quite mad indeed.

Of course, having grown up in Texas, all of this made sense to me. But to newspaper editors in Seattle, Chicago, Detroit and beyond – Yankee land, as Molly would say – her folksy language could be a mystery. "That's just Molly being Molly," I would explain and leave it at that.

### SO MUCH MORE TO MOLLY THAN HER COLUMN

But there was more to Molly Ivins than insightful political commentary packaged in an aw-shucks Southern charm. In the coming days, much will be made of Molly's contributions to the liberal cause, how important she was as an authentic female voice on opinion pages across the country, her passionate and eloquent defense of the poorest and the weakest among us against the corruption of the most powerful, and the joy she took in celebrating the uniqueness of American culture – and all of this is true. But more than that, Molly Ivins was a woman who loved and cared deeply for the world around her. And her warm and generous spirit was apparent in all her words and deeds.

Molly's work was truly her passion. She would regularly turn down lucrative speaking engagements to give rally-the-troops speeches at liberalism's loneliest outposts. And when she did rub elbows with the highfalutin' well-to-do, the encounter would invariably end up as comedic grist in future columns.

For a woman who made a profession of offering her opinion to others, Molly was remarkably humble. She was known for hosting unforgettable parties at her Austin home, which would feature rollicking political discussions, and impromptu poetry recitals and satirical songs. At one such event, I noticed her dining table was littered with various awards and distinguished speaker plaques, put to use as trivets for steaming plates of tamales, chili and fajita meat. When I called this to her attention, Molly matter-of-factly replied, "Well, what else am I



going to do with 'em?"

### MOLLY'S DEVOTED READERS

Perhaps the most astounding aspect of Molly's life is the love she engendered from her legions of fans. If Molly missed a column for any reason, her newspapers would hear about it the next day. As word of Molly's illness spread, the letters, cards, e-mails and gifts poured in.

Even as Molly fought her last battle with cancer, she continued to make public appearances. When she was too weak to write, she dictated her final two columns. Although her body was failing, she still had so much to say. Last fall, before an audience at the University of Texas, her voice began as barely a whisper. But as she went on, she drew strength from the standing-room-only crowd until, at the end of the hour, she was forcefully imploring the students to get involved and make a difference. As Molly once wrote, "Politics is not a picture on a wall or a television sitcom that you can decide you don't much care for."

For me, Molly's greatest words of wisdom came with three children's books she gave my son when he was born. In her inimitable way, she captured the spirit of each in one-sentence inscriptions. In "Alice in Wonderland," she offered, "Here's to six impossible things before breakfast." For "The Wind in the Willows," it was, "May you have Toad's zest for life." And in "The Little Prince," she wrote, "May your heart always see clearly."

Like the Little Prince, Molly Ivins has left us for a journey of her own. But while she was here, her heart never failed to see clear and true – and for that, we can all be grateful.

– The author, Molly's longtime editor and friend, is a Creators Syndicate editor based in Austin, TX

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# A War Molly Would Have Embraced

By Susan Estrich

Molly Ivins was a gem. In a world where women's voices are still rare, hers could not be ignored. She wasn't good at what she did, she was great. I didn't always agree with her, on Hillary for instance, but I always read her. She had a unique way of seeing the world and putting it into words that made a Molly Ivins column totally recognizable and often unforgettable.

She was passionate and inspirational, and now that passion and inspiration is gone. Stolen by breast cancer. Another one lost. When will this end?

According to the National Cancer Institute [NCI], things are getting better. Death rates from cancer in this country [as opposed to the rest of the world] are down, albeit barely. In 2007, NCI predicts 178,480 women and 2,030 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer; 40,460 women and 450 men will die of it. Molly Ivins was one of the 41,000 we will lose. It may be better, but it is hardly good enough. It still feels like an epidemic, a war in which all you can do is try to duck the bullets.

### BREAST CANCER TERRIFYING

One of my closest friends had her double mastectomy last week. The first reports from the pathologist are not good. Don't worry, I tell her, I'm good at going to chemo. I've been taking good friends for years. I make jokes, tell stories, befriend nurses. I am not afraid.

I am terrified.

Thirty-five years ago, 75% of all women diagnosed with breast cancer survived for five years; today, nearly 90% do. That's because of both earlier detection and improved treatment. But the number of women who are having regular mammograms is actually going down, not up.

According to the latest data from the American Cancer Society, the percentage of women 40 and older who reported having a mammogram in the past two years was 76.4% in 2000, but had dropped to 74.6% by 2005. "Although a 1.8% decline in mammography screening from 2000 to 2005 may not seem like much, it means that in 2005 about 1.5 million fewer women took advantage of getting this proven lifesaving test," says Len Lichtenfeld, MD, deputy chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society.

That means thousands of women with cancer don't know it and aren't being treated.

I click every day for free mammograms: <http://www.thebreastcancersite.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/CTDSites>. I go every year for my own and hold my breath. If only that were enough. My friend had mammograms religiously every 12 months. But her cancer is stage III. How can that be? It is.

### SURVIVAL RATES IMPROVE SOME

Five-year survival rates have improved, but five years isn't enough when you're in your 50s or 60s, let alone your 30s and 40s, when breast cancer tends to be most aggressive. The five-year survival rate for stage III breast cancer ranges from 54-67%. The overall 15-year survival rate for all breast cancer is only 57%.

As of August 2005, the American Cancer Society was funding 188 research projects related to breast cancer, totaling more than \$103.8 million. Most of these projects, they say, extend over several years. That is supposed to sound like a lot. To me, it doesn't.

The war in Iraq has cost us \$350 billion so far. The total budget for all National Cancer Institute research for this year is under 2% of that. The NCI's annual budget for breast cancer research is barely \$600 million.

We talk about a war on cancer, but the truth is we're not really fighting one. The war we're fighting is a losing one in Iraq, not a winning one against cancer. How wrong can we be? The loss of 3,000 Americans over the course of the war in Iraq is unacceptable, but losing 41,000 every year to breast cancer is beyond intolerable.

President Bush, whom Molly memorably called "Shrub," was gracious about her death. But I can't help but believe he could have prevented it, that we could have, if only we got our priorities straight. How long will it take, how many more will we lose before we do? Enough is enough.

Just a few weeks ago, writing in the face of death, Molly urged every American to do their part to stop the war in Iraq. "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. We need people in the streets, banging pots and pans and demanding, 'Stop it, now!'"

We also need to start a new war, against the cancers that take our best from us. And this one, we need to win.

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# Ignore The Critics, Schools Doing Fine

The usual hand-wringing accompanied the Education Department's release of statistics on how U.S. students performed on international tests.

How will the United States compete in the global economy, went the lament, when our students lag behind the likes of Singapore and Hong Kong in math and science?

American fourth-graders ranked 12th in the world on one international math test, and eighth-graders were 14th. Is this further evidence of the failure of the nation's schools?

Not exactly. In fact, a closer look at how our kids perform against the international "competition" suggests that this story line may contain more than a few myths:

## CHECK OUT THE MYTHS

**Myth – U.S. students rate poorly compared with those in the rest of the world.**

This is true only if you cherry-pick the results. University of Pennsylvania researchers Erling Boe and Sujie Shin looked at six major international tests in reading, math, science and civics conducted from 1991 through 2001.

Their conclusion: Americans are above average when compared with 22 other industrialized nations. In civics, no nation scored significantly higher than the United States; in reading, only 13% did.

Even in math and science – the two subjects considered "vital" to future technological competitiveness – the United States fell in roughly the middle of the pack.

**Myth – U.S. students are falling behind.**

Actually, American students are mostly improving, or at worst holding their own. As the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study shows, America's eighth-graders improved their math and science scores in 1995, 1999 and 2003.

Only students in Hong Kong, Latvia and Lithuania – three relatively tiny and homogenous entities – improved more than the United States did. Unfortunately, news accounts focus on the relative position of American students [are we No. 1 or No. 12?] rather than on their absolute performance [did they improve, regardless of what others did?].

## GERALD BRACEY COUNTERS THE LIE

**Myth – U.S. students won't be well prepared for the modern work force. This myth has been bandied around since at least the turn of the 19th century by business leaders who blame schools for inadequately preparing workers. It's part of the never-ending notion that U.S. schools are in crisis.**

Education researcher Gerald Bracey cites a March 1957 cover story in Life magazine – at the height of post-Sputnik paranoia over Soviet scientific prowess – that contrasts the stern, rigorous education of a Moscow teenager with the carefree lifestyle of a Chicago youth.

The cover headline: "Crisis in Education." In the 1980s, when Japan seemed to be an unstoppable economic juggernaut, the seminal policy manifesto "A Nation at Risk" warned that deficiencies in high school graduates "come at a time when



the demand for highly skilled workers in new fields is accelerating rapidly."

Despite these doomsday cases, the United States survived and, by many measures, bested the competition.

## WE STILL LEAD THE WORLD

**Myth – Bad schooling has undermined America's competitiveness.**

This canard was given a boost by the recent World Economic Forum survey of international economies. Typically this annual survey ranks the U.S. economy as the most competitive in the world, but last year it put the United States in sixth place.

But the drop had nothing to do with school performance. Rather, the forum cited U.S. trade and budget deficits, a low savings rate, tax cuts and the government's increased spending on defense and homeland security.

Another recent survey, by the Council on Competitiveness, found that over the past two decades the U.S. economy grew faster than that of any other advanced nation, and generated a third of the world's economic growth.

Yet this performance followed a period in which the authors of "A Nation at Risk" were warning that a "rising tide of [educational] mediocrity threatens our very future as a nation." That was in 1983.

Those high school mediocrities are now turning 40, and presumably have been playing a part in helping the U.S. economy grow "faster than any other advanced economy" over the past two decades.

A dynamic economy is much more than the sum of its test scores. It's part of a culture that rewards innovation and risk-taking, and values unconventional problem-solving. Much of this is nurtured in our schools, even if it can't be quantified on a test.

© The Washington Post

# Violent Toys And Games? Just Say No!

By Bill Cirone

These are trying and stressful times on a global level. The continuing war in Iraq creates news coverage and daily conversations that include more allusions to violence than is usually the case.

What difference does it make if children play with violent toys or games?

Children learn through play and they absorb values by mirroring what they see and hear.

When we give a child a violent toy or game, we're saying it's OK to play in that way, and those activities are acceptable. There is a subtle message being sent – and one that is reinforced in this day and age at every turn – that violence is "out there" and it's OK, maybe even good, to fantasize about it.

But it's not OK for children to fantasize about violence, certainly not at the personal level. And we should make that message clear to our young people as early as we can.

## MEDIA FILLED WITH MESSAGES OF VIOLENCE

The problem is we live in a media-saturated world and the media themselves are filled with messages of violence. This is a big departure from when most of us were children.

Many of us played with violent toys, but it was easier to separate play from reality because the movies and shows we watched, the books and newspapers we read, were gentler and more innocent than the current fare. Play and fantasy were clearly separated from reality.

Today that's not true. Cartoons, reality shows and games seem to blend with informational shows or news. We have become numbed to tragedy and suffering.

Giving a child a violent toy or game reinforces the notion that violence is everywhere and it's OK to fantasize taking part in it. What's more, the current advertising and promotion of toys and games has taken a twist that's unprecedented.

We now have toys and games that are developed first, and then cartoon programs are created strictly to market those toys or games, under the guise of programming. The programs serve as models of how to play with those toys, and,

more often than not, they are distressingly violent.

## DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE THE MESSAGES

When movies, television programs, videos and even the daily newspaper and the evening news are filled with messages of violence, it becomes more difficult to separate the cartoon messages from those of the real world. Children are becoming numb to human suffering simply because news of it surrounds them at every turn.

As parents, we send messages to our children through everything we do, and – whether we mean to or not – through the toys and games we give. If we really hope to achieve a "kinder, gentler world" just act on those values and reinforce them whenever we can.

Actions always speak louder than words, and giving violent toys and games can counteract what we say to our children about kindness and compassion.

What's a parent to do under pressure? The hardest thing of all – just say no!

- The author is Santa Barbara County, CA, Superintendent of Schools. This is excerpted from his newsletter.

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# Beware The Campaign That Never Ends

By Lenore Skenazy

She's in it to win it. Yes she is. The phrase has already become more familiar than "This call may be monitored for quality assurance." [And do you think it ever is?]

Whatever you may feel about Hillary – or Obama, or the others, who are probably kicking the furniture at already being lumped together as "the others" – here's one feeling most of us share:

Aieeee! Didn't we just get *done* with an election? Do we really have to start all over again already?

It's like taking off on a cross-country flight, finishing your pretzels and looking down at your watch. Good God – five more hours to go? It wouldn't be so bad, if there were a great movie to look forward to. But you know exactly what you're going to see.

## IT KEEPS THE PUNDITS BUSY

In fact, I already saw it. It started running about a day or two after Hillary made her announcement: the infinite pundit loop. Very intensely, one of the oh-so-serious morning anchors was interviewing the author of one of the oh-so-illuminating Clinton books.

"What about Bill Clinton?" the anchor was asking: "Asset or albatross?"

Gee, never heard that one before, right? And can you possibly guess the answer? Oh go ahead – try. Do you think the pundit replied:

A) "Gosh, I guess I never really gave it much thought."

B) "Why? Did Bill do anything controversial?"

C) "This may surprise you, anchorman, but I solemnly believe Bill Clinton is both an asset *and* an albatross."

I am so glad I was watching this thing, because the answer turned out to be C! You learn something new every day. The interviewer then went on to probe whether Bill might in fact overshadow Hillary.

"She has to be very careful about that."

And isn't Hillary rather "polarizing?" [Underneath, the crawl read "Polarizing?"]

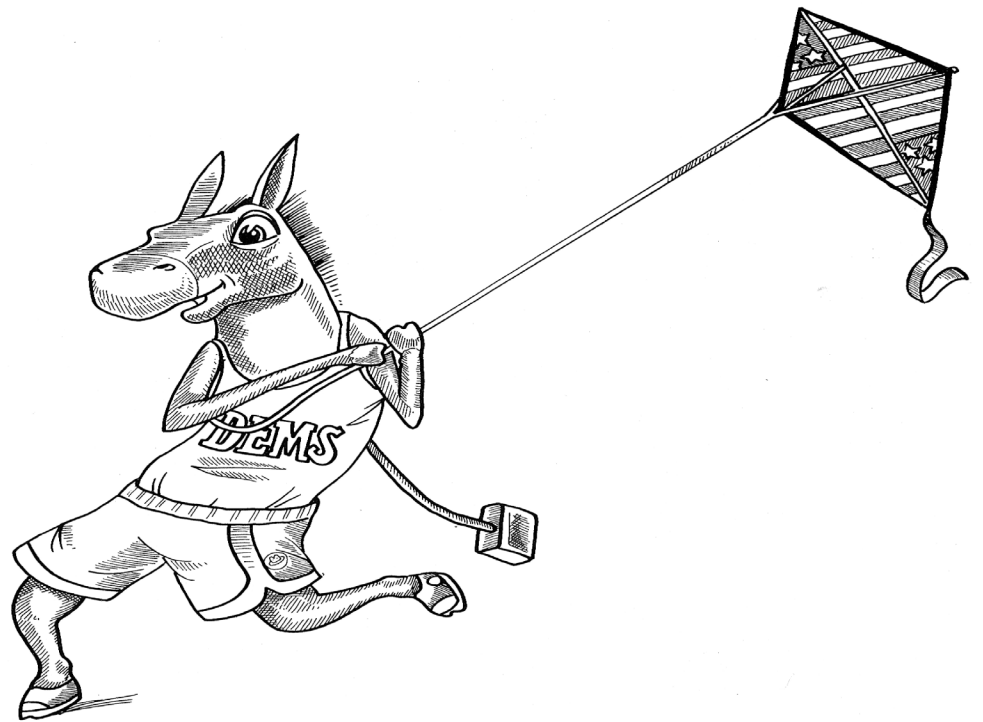
By golly, the pundit averred: She just might be.

## YADA, YADA, YADA

And there you have it: the exact conversation we are going to hear almost every morning – and noon and night – for the next 21 months. Of course Obama-mania came up, leading to the interviewer's inevitable last question: "Is she going to be able to pull it off?"

"Yes, she's going to win by seven states against the surprise Republican nominee, Scooter Libby."

Oh, please. You know the guy didn't say that. He waffled, said goodbye and no



doubt trotted off to his blog.

Now, the fact that I actually watched this whole exchange despite its painful predictability shows that there is something undeniably exciting about having "one of the most famous people on the planet" [another annoying catchphrase] vying for top office. "Whither Kucinich?" this was not.

## UNPRECEDENTED TWO-YEAR CAMPAIGN

"But I wonder: How long are we going to pay attention?" asked Maurice Carroll, director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. "Everybody will have fun with the Bill Clinton stuff," he said. And they'll love handicapping the First Serious African American vs. First Serious Female candidate horse race. "But a two-year campaign is unprecedented," Carroll said. And it may be unbearable.

"You know how when you're home with the flu, you turn on a soap and there's Jason, and he's in the hospital and Diana is in love with him and they're getting married?" asked my political junkie pal Divyashakti. "Then you're home again a month later and you turn it on and Jason's still in the hospital and they're still getting married? That's what this is going to be like."

Yup. Until suddenly it changes. And then it'll be worse.

"With an attempt to find a story every day, they'll just keep making bigger and bigger mountains out of smaller and smaller molehills," said a journalist who asked to remain anonymous because he may, indeed, be part of the problem. "A little remark will come to dominate and sometimes even define the candidate." Think John Kerry's bungled joke. Think "macaca." Think the Dean scream.

Now think 21 months.

Hillary is in it to win it, fine. But the rest of us? We're just in it – for the long haul.

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# Interior Is A Hotbed Of Waste And Graft

By Karin Lissakers

In the last six months, media coverage, congressional hearings, lawsuits by private citizens and a scathing report by the Interior Department's inspector general have exposed a litany of failures in the department's management of oil and gas leases on public lands and waters.

The department's inspector general, Earl E. Devaney, found that the government's bookkeeping is so poor that it does not actually know how much money it recovered, nor how many audits it conducted.

These failures have lost the government billions of dollars in royalties.

Our government's record on resource revenue management – a bipartisan record, one should add – looks more like that of a corruption-ridden failing state than that of an advanced industrial country.

## POINTING FINGERS AT OTHERS

Many of the same failures we criticize elsewhere – for example, the mismanagement of the Iraqi oil industry – are rampant here.

Like the Iraqi government, the United States government lacks the systems to determine exactly how much oil and gas is being produced on federal properties.

Private lawsuits and state investigations have exposed systematic underpayment by companies on gas leases, yet the Interior Department relies on these companies to tell the government how much they owe, with no independent verification.

The inspector general also found the department unable to verify quantities and prices for payments-in-kind [when the government takes a share of the oil and gas instead of cash], which are a growing portion of the royalties the government collects.

## MISMANAGEMENT AND SECRECY

Interior's mismanagement is compounded by the secrecy that surrounds the entire enterprise. Though these are payments to the government for oil and gas extracted from public lands, companies are not required to disclose either payments or production levels to the public.

The department says such data must be protected, because it could reveal pricing strategies and cost structures.

Such secrecy is contrary to the public's right to know what is being done on public lands.

It is also contrary to an emerging international standard of transparency and accountability regarding oil, gas and mining revenues – standards that the United States is pressing developing countries to adopt.

Congress, with the president's encouragement, should insist that the United States practice at home the transparency it preaches abroad.

It should enact a requirement that all companies extracting oil, gas and other minerals from federal lands publicly report all of their production on those lands and all royalties and other payments made to the federal government from that production.

Only then can the American public have confidence that the taxes owed by those who have benefited from the use of our public lands are being properly accounted for and fully collected.

-The author is director of the Revenue Watch Institute

## MOLLY

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tickle their funny bone.

The dog got its obscene name for good reason. During her unhappiest days at the home office of the New York Times, Molly would walk the dog at night through the streets of Manhattan's ritzy upscale residential neighborhoods. She'd unleash the hound and, as the dog gleefully scattered garbage from every container within sniffing range, making a joyful ruckus, Molly would shout the hound's obscene name loudly, very loudly, then wave the leash in explanation and add the admonishment to "Stop That!"

That's sorta what Molly did in many of her columns, isn't it? Raise a ruckus, ripping open the bags of garbage belonging to politicians and the titans of government and business, then displaying the ugly contents and shouting: "Stop It!"

- The author lives in Duncan

# W's Strange Plan To Fix Health Care

By Froma Harrop

The president has finally found a tax increase he likes – on workers' "gold-plated" health benefits. The new-found tax revenues would supposedly offset the cost of helping Americans buy their own coverage. This weird plan won't go anywhere politically – even though elements of it have merit.

The tax system can't fix the health system. Bush has this idea that fiddling with the tax code will meet most every social need. It won't, and that goes double in the very complex world of health care.

Employer-provided health insurance is now entirely tax-exempt. Coverage bought outside the job is not. Bush's proposal, mentioned in his State of the Union Address, would do the following:

Workplace health coverage costing more than \$15,000 for a family or \$7,500 for an individual would be subject to income and payroll taxes. Families that buy their own policies, meanwhile, could deduct \$15,000 from taxable income. Individuals could take off \$7,500. It doesn't matter if the actual cost of the insurance is less.

## AN INCENTIVE TO BECOME INSURED

The idea is being sold as a way to help the 47 million uninsured Americans buy coverage. Not many are buying.

"It's totally unclear as to how these benefits would be reprogrammed to help the uninsured," Fitzhugh Mullan, a former U.S. assistant surgeon general, said over the phone.

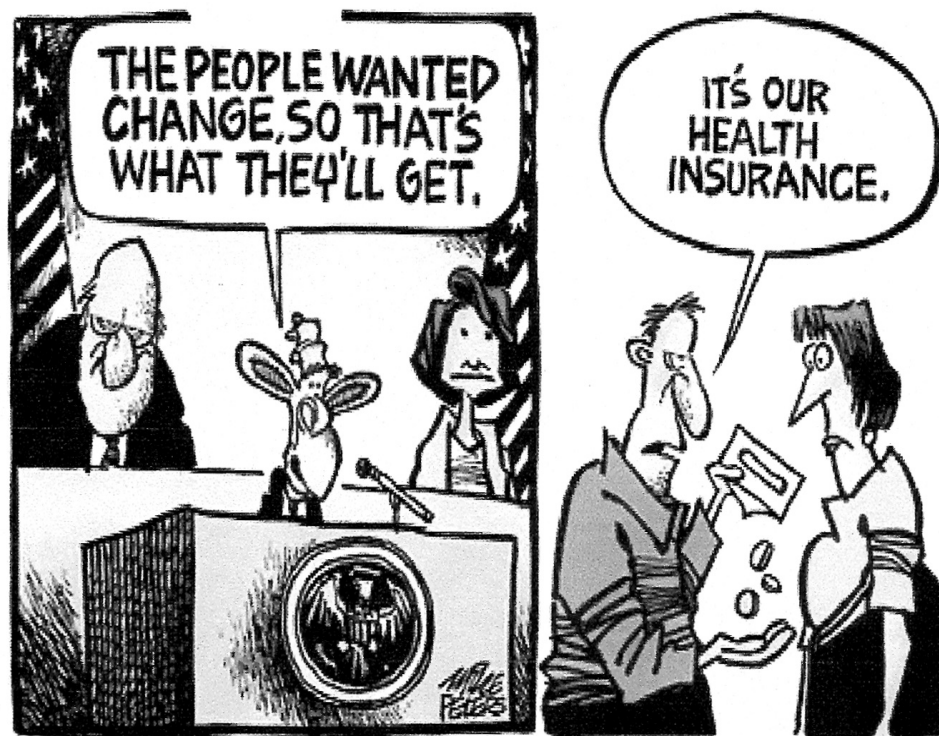
The uninsured are mostly the working poor, who don't earn enough to use tax deductions. The proposal does nothing for those who can't get insurance because a family member is already sick. Private insurers shun even well-to-do people with pre-existing conditions.

The deduction would be a boon to the 27 million Americans who already buy health insurance outside of the workplace – and a matter of fairness. As Bush correctly noted, it would "level the playing field" for people who obtain coverage outside the job.

## IT'S NOT ABOUT HELPING DISHWASHERS

No doubt there are people with good incomes who haven't bothered to buy health insurance and would do so with an attractive tax incentive. But let's be clear about one thing: This tax deduction is more about helping real-estate agents and freelance consultants than dishwashers.

However, placing some limit on the tax subsidy for health insurance makes sense, says Mullan, now a professor of health policy and pediatrics at George Washington University.



"We're going to have to design ways in which the individuals with more luxurious or extensive health benefits are not receiving those at public expense," he says. "If you want to buy a Lexus, you can buy a Lexus, but you have to have a bank account to do it."

But this is a minor point. The big negative in Bush's health-care policy, Mullan contends, is that it doesn't address the big stuff – "The crazy-quilt of insurance carriers, government coverage, complexity and waste in the system."

## THIS ANALOGY WON'T HUNT

In his weekend radio address, Bush likened this proposed tax treatment of health insurance to that of home ownership. Just as Americans can deduct interest payments on home mortgages, he said, they would deduct premium payments on health insurance.

It's an awkward choice of analogy in that there's almost no cap on the deductibility of mortgage interest. You can deduct all the interest paid on a \$1 million mortgage, whether it bought a McMansion, a beach house or both.

Economists argue that allowing generous deductions for mega-mortgages raises the price of housing – just as tax subsidies for fancy health coverage increase medical costs. But while Bush has ignored their calls to curb the subsidy for luxury residences, he's perfectly happy to jump on the autoworkers' spiffy health benefits.

"Of all the tax breaks for all the interests in all of America," the workers must be thinking, "and you had to come into mine."

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# FREEDOM

From Page 14

himself a magnificent orator, replied only with an occasional, "Ugh."

Our Texas freedom fighters have been prone to misbehavior ever since. A recent Ku Klux Klan rally in Austin produced an eccentric counterdemonstration. When the 50 Klansmen appeared [they were bused in from Waco] in front of the state capitol, they were greeted by 5,000 locals who had turned out for a "Moon the Klan" rally. Citizens dropped trou both singly and in groups, occasionally producing a splendid wave effect. It was a swell do.

But I reckon the man who taught most of us how to have fun while fightin' for freedom was John Henry Faulk, who went and died on us a few years back. Despite gettin' blacklisted during the McCarthy era and having a number of other misadventures during his life, Johnny never lost his sense of mischief, and to the end of his days, he could be counted on to hatch some elaborate practical joke to bedevil whichever do-badder had most recently and most egregiously harmed the cause of liberty and justice for all.

## NOTHING TO FEAR BUT A CHICKEN SNAKE

Johnny used to tell a story about when he was a Texas Ranger, a captain in fact. He was seven at the time. His friend Boots Cooper, who was six, was sheriff, and the two of them used to do a lot of heavy law enforcement out behind the Faulk place in south Austin. One day Johnny's mama, having two such fine officers on the place, asked them to go down to the hen house and rout out the chicken snake that had been doing some damage there.

Johnny and Boots loped down to the hen house on their trusty brooms [which they tethered outside] and commenced to search for the snake. They went all through the nests on the bottom shelf of the hen house and couldn't find it, so the both of them stood on tippy-toes to look on the top shelf. I myself have never been nose-to-nose with a chicken snake, but I always took Johnny's word for it that it will just scare the living s--- out of you. Scared those boys so bad that they both tried to exit the hen house at the same time, doing considerable damage to both themselves and the door.

Johnny's mama, Miz Faulk, was a kindly lady, but watching all this, it struck her funny. She was still laughin' when the captain and the sheriff trailed back up to the front porch. "Boys, boys," said Miz Faulk, "what is wrong with you? You know perfectly well a chicken snake cannot hurt you."

That's when Boots Cooper made his semi-immortal observation. "Yes, ma'am," he said, "but there's some things'll scare you so bad, you hurt yourself."

And isn't that what we keep doing in this country, over and over again? We get

scared so bad – about the communist menace or illegal immigration or AIDS or pornography or violent crime, some damn scary thing – that we hurt ourselves. We take the odd notion that the only way to protect ourselves is to give up some of our freedom – just trim a little, hedge a bit, and we'll all be safe after all.

## HISTORY OF FEAR TRUMPING FREEDOM

Those who think of freedom in this country as one long, broad path leading ever onward and upward are dead damned wrong. Many a time freedom has been rolled back – and always for the same sorry reason: fear.

So one thing I have learned from Johnny Faulk, Texas, and life, is that since you don't always win, you got to learn to enjoy just fightin' the good fight.

On the occasion of the bicentennial of the Constitution, the ACLU was fixin' to lay some heavy lifetime freedom-fighter awards on various citizens, and one of 'em was Joe Rauh, the lawyer who defended so many folks during the McCarthy era and the civil rights movement [note that the rightness of those stands is always easier to see in retrospect].

Rauh was sick in the hospital at the time and asked a friend of his to go down and collect the award for him. His friend went to see him in the hospital and said, "Joe, what you want me to tell those folks?"

So there was Rauh lyin' there sick as a dog, thinkin' back on all those bad, ugly, angry times – the destroyed careers, the wrecked lives – and he said, "Tell 'em how much fun it was. Tell 'em how much fun it was."

So keep fightin' for freedom and justice, beloveds, but don't you forget to have fun doin' it. Lord, let your laughter ring forth. Be outrageous, ridicule the fraidy-cats, rejoice in all the oddities that freedom can produce. And when you get through kickin' ass and celebratin' the sheer joy of the good fight, be sure to tell those who come after how much fun it was.

## Close A School, Open A Jail

"We believe that out of the public school grows the greatness of a nation. It is curious to reflect how history repeats itself the world over. Why, I remember the same thing was done when I was a boy on the Mississippi River. There was a proposition in a township there to discontinue public schools because they were too expensive. An old farmer spoke up and said if they stopped the schools they would not save anything, because every time a school was closed a jail had to be built. It's like feeding a dog on his own tail. He'll never get fat. I believe it is better to support schools than jails." – Mark Twain

# 15,000 In Oklahoma **744,000 Homeless Across United States**

There were 744,000 homeless people in the United States in 2005, according to the first national estimate in a decade. A little more than half were living in shelters, and nearly a quarter were chronically homeless.

The report came from the National Alliance to End Homelessness, an advocacy group.

Oklahoma has an estimated 15,000 homeless.

A majority of the homeless were single adults, but about 41% were in families, the report said.

The group compiled data collected by the Department of Housing and Urban Development from service providers throughout the country.

## **FIRST NATIONAL STUDY SINCE 1996**

It is the first national study on the number of homeless people since 1996. That study came up with a wide range for America's homeless population: between 444,000 and 842,000.

Counting people without permanent addresses, especially those living on the street, is an inexact process. But the new study is expected to provide a baseline to help measure progress on the issue.

"Having this data brings all of us another step closer to understanding the scope and nature of homelessness in America, and establishing this baseline is an extremely challenging task," HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson said.

"Understanding homelessness is a necessary step to addressing it successfully."

HUD is preparing to release its own report on homelessness in the coming weeks, Jackson said. In the future, the department plans to issue annual reports on the number of homeless people in the U.S.

Some cities and states have done their own counts of the homeless, providing a mix of trends, said Nan Roman, president of the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

## **HOMELESS POPULATION VARIES**

For example, New York City and San Francisco have seen decreases, while the number of homeless in Washington, D.C., has increased, Roman said.

"In the last 12 to 18 months, the homeless population has essentially exploded in Philadelphia," said Marsha Cohen, executive director of the Homeless Advocacy Project, which provides free legal services to the homeless in Philadelphia.

"We are seeing big increases in singles and families, both on the street and attempting to enter the homeless system," she said.

more funding than Albuquerque or Memphis. What it means is that our homeless service providers rely on the generous nature of Oklahomans while the local government tells us that homelessness isn't their responsibility.

Frances moved here from Colorado and has witnessed the giving nature of Oklahomans firsthand.

"Oklahomans are generous people," she said. "They are really good people. Nine times out of 10, the ones who aren't are not from here."

It is that generous nature that brought Danny Scott here and my friend back from California.

So why doesn't the local government ante up like our peers?

Oklahoma City Manager Jim Couch says it is because the people of Oklahoma City don't want it to.

"We conducted a survey of the residents of OKC," said Couch. "And homelessness was not one of their priorities."

Last year Oklahoma City found itself with a \$6.7 million surplus. No dollars and zero cents of it were spent on homelessness.

It was suggested to the City Council to raise the amount of city dollars to only 15% of what our peers spend. This was denied on the grounds that the survey administered to the citizens of OKC indicated that homelessness wasn't a priority.

The survey consisted of 24 questions. Only question 16 even remotely gave an opportunity to list homelessness as a priority and was the only "optional" question on the survey. Less than half of the respondents answered question 16.

Question 16 begged the question "What ONE thing would you like to see the City do more of or begin doing that it is not already doing?"

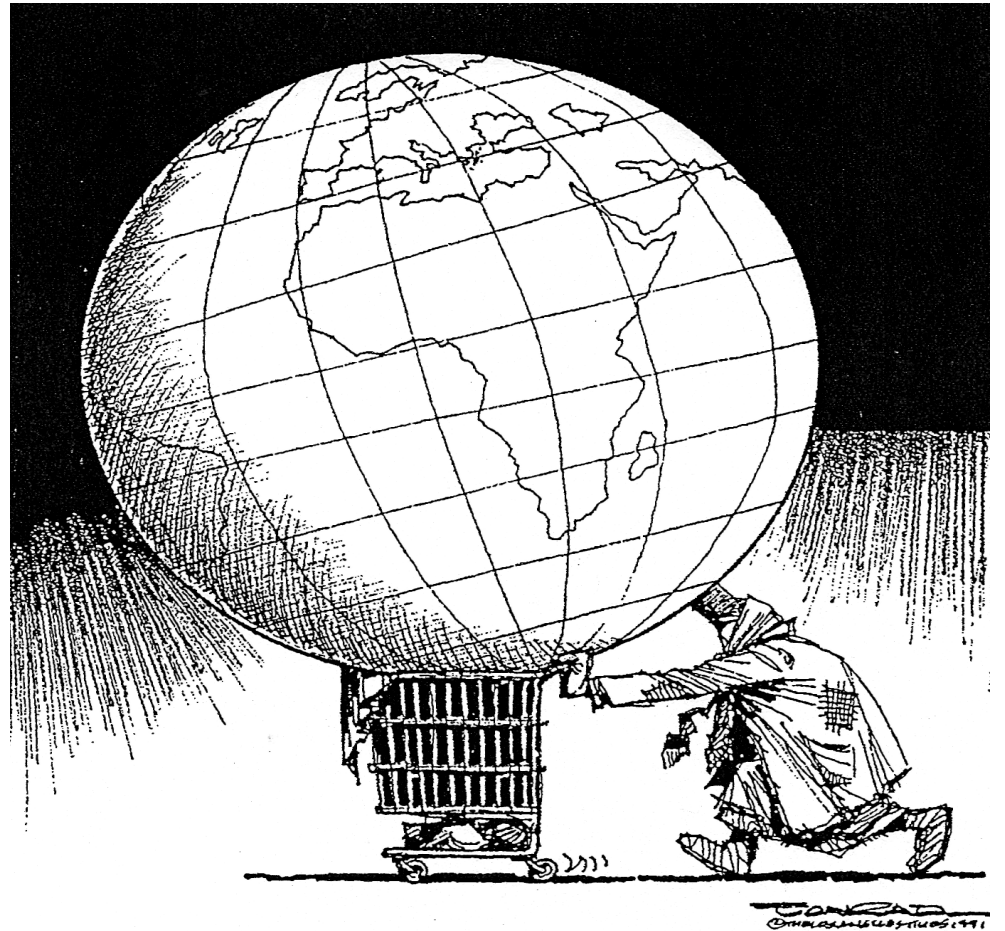
Even a PAC-10 referee could see that Oklahoma needs better roads and that is what the survey indicated.

So the entire \$6.7 million surplus was spent on roads and spray-parks. In the mean time, you, Danny, Frances, and me are left wondering what a spray-park is.

Councilwoman Ann Simank defended the council's decision but amended her defense by saying, "Oklahoma City has historically relied on the shelters and they do a fine job, but they aren't designed to end homelessness."

[In his January State of the City address, Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett urged a new commitment to solving the city's homeless problem, saying:

"We do have our shortcomings. Perhaps the largest, in my view, is the way we treat our mentally ill. Our largest mental health facility is the County Jail. Jail should not be our answer to mental health. There is a difference between being a criminal and being



"It's a whole influx of new people, and that's the really scary part," Cohen said.

In Columbus, Ohio, workers are scrambling to help an increasing number of people living under bridges and in wooded encampments near rivers and streams, said Barbara Poppe, executive director of the Community Shelter Board.

"We're very concerned about the health and well being of those people being out in the elements," Poppe said. "We had an encampment set on fire, and we had a woman struck by a train."

California was the state with most homeless people in 2005, about 170,000, followed by New York, Florida, Texas and Georgia, according to the report.

Nevada had the highest share of its population homeless, about .68%. It was followed by Rhode Island, Colorado, California and Hawaii.

"The driver in homelessness is the affordable housing crisis," Roman said. "If we don't do something to address the crisis in affordable housing we are not going to solve homelessness."

She said many of the chronically homeless have mental health and substance abuse problems. Others, she said, simply cannot afford housing.

# **HOMELESS**

**From Page One**

sick and we have chosen not to recognize or fund the difference.

"Our lack of concern for the mentally ill plays out not only at the jail, but also in many of our homeless shelters. Those shelters are not equipped to handle it. I understand this is more of a state issue than a city issue but we have funding issues at the jail and we have funding issues at our homeless shelters and it is unwise to spend more money at those facilities when we are not addressing the root of the problem. I hope that 2007 is the year that the state truly takes on the issue of a lack of funding for mental health."]

Managing the situation instead of fixing it makes shelters very expensive band-aids.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the cost of an emergency shelter bed funded by HUD's Emergency Shelter Grants Program is approximately \$8,067 more than the annual cost of a federal housing subsidy.

In addition to that cost, a University of Texas two-year study of homeless individuals indicated that each person cost the tax payers \$14,480 per year.

A report in the New England Journal of Medicine pointed out that homeless people spent an average of four days longer per hospital visit than did comparable non-homeless people.

This extra cost, attributable to homelessness and absorbed by taxpayers, is approximately \$2,414 per hospitalization.

"Taxpayers spend \$45,000 per person per year on homeless people," said Straughan. "That includes hospital bills, police, and shelters."

"If we provided housing and wrap around services like counseling it would only cost \$22,000. Homelessness has been managed and not dealt with. Once we deal with it with a small investment we will save a significant amount of money."

Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic Policy Research, in Washington, D.C., says the future of homelessness just got some resuscitation.

"Now that the Democrats have taken over Congress the prospect for homelessness is better. They have some Republican support and might raise the minimum wage."

"It's not easy to get jobs that provide the minimum requirements to get by. When adjusted for inflation the minimum wage is 40% lower than in the late 70s. There is more hope now."

In the meantime, we can keep taking the Marie Antoinette approach and just keep yelling, "Get a job!" or we could try something new.

- The author is a senior journalism student at the University of Oklahoma.

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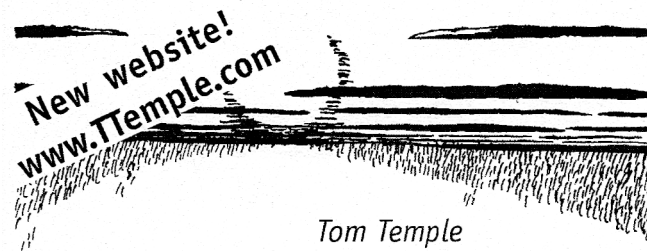
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