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## Cargill's Demise Helps Dems This New House

By Arnold Hamilton

Lance Cargill is out. Chris Bengé is in. House Democrats are ... where?

The Legislature's version of *Extreme Home Makeover* played out as a soap opera-like mini-series on session's eve, with Cargill and Co.'s implosion leaving Republicans badly splintered over how best to rebuild.

They could have leveled the old house and embarked on a complete redesign, featuring a consensus-builder – admired by Republicans and Democrats alike – as the cornerstone.

Imagine the GOP majority electing the state's first female speaker, Chickasha Rep. Susan Winchester. Or making a clean break from the partisan, take-no-prisoners Cargill-Todd Hiatt model by elevating Braman Rep. Dale DeWitt.

They settled instead on Bengé, an amiable Tulsa Republican who as Appropriations and Budget Committee chairman was ostensibly a member of Cargill's leadership team.

Bengé, though, never fit the mold of Cargill's smug, towel-snapping Boys Club, retaining his soft-spoken, friendly demeanor – publicly, at least – in one of the Legislature's most difficult positions.

The sudden, last-minute changes in House leadership significantly alter the complexion of a session that promises to be bruising with only \$32 million in extra money available and hundreds of millions of dollars in needs for corrections, schools, highways and bridges.

Add in the fact that 2008 is an election year – control of the evenly-divided state Senate is up for grabs and Democrats need to gain only seven seats to retake the House – and this year's session has all the ingredients to be a real head-knocker.

Though Democrats likely would have fared better under a DeWitt or Winchester regime, they are at least back in the game after being all but shut out under Hiatt and Cargill.

"This election signals a new era of bipartisanship for Oklahoma," said new Democratic Caucus Chairman Chuck Hoskin of Vinita. "In the past, only pieces of legislation that received the personal stamp of approval by Speakers Hiatt and Cargill were ever

allowed a fair hearing on the House floor."

Cargill, R-Harrah, lasted only a year as speaker, resigning after a series of embarrassing revelations that he repeatedly failed to pay property taxes and file state income tax returns. He also is facing an ethics commission investigation into questionable campaign finance dealings.

Similar tax problems doomed heir-apparent Gus Blackwell of Goodwell.

Majority Leader Greg Piatt of Ardmore faced questions about a \$5,000 campaign contribution he is keeping from a Texas man who sought legislation that would have benefited his family's insurance companies.

Four other GOP lawmakers on the committee that approved the bill returned contributions from Bradford Phillips, whose father Gene is linked to convicted former state Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher.

The ethical lapses splintered the House Republican caucus, igniting a

rebellion that led to Cargill's resignation one day before he was to unveil the results of his year-long "100 Ideas" campaign – his thinly-disguised Cargill-for-governor coming-out party.

The ethical lapses hounding former House leaders, coupled with their heavy-handed treatment of fellow Republicans, bruised egos – hard feelings unlikely to soften anytime soon.

The climate creates an opportunity for House Democrats, at the very least, to block the most egregious proposals from far-right extremists, incessantly promoting an anti-government, fundamentalist agenda.

Republicans typically are more disciplined and lock-step than Democrats.

It's doubtful that House Minority Leader Danny Morgan of Prague can keep his disparate, 44-member caucus together on all key votes. But it's equally unlikely that 57 House Republicans can always be whipped into conformity after three years of Cargill

and Hiatt.

It's suddenly less difficult to imagine that House Democrats can forge an alliance with enough clear-thinking Republicans to ensure Gov. Brad Henry's \$1,200 teacher pay raise or 5% state employee salary hike become a reality.

Morgan acknowledged that House Democrats struggled the last three years after nearly a century as the dominant legislative party.

"It took us a little while to get our feet on the ground," he said. "We've seen we all need to work together for the good of our issues."

A resurgence of House Democrats could bolster Senate Democrats and the governor, as well. After all, it wasn't long ago that legislative Republicans exerted considerable influence with the twin powers of Gov. Frank Keating's veto and a united, veto-proof GOP minority.

"The Senate Democratic leadership, ourselves and the governor," Morgan said, "are talking much better than we ever have."

It's still early, of course. It was only a year ago that some Democrats were cautiously optimistic when Cargill promised to usher in a new era of openness and accountability in which Democratic bills would be heard and debated. It didn't happen.

Make no mistake: Bengé is a conservative. He wants, for example, to pursue merit pay for teachers. And he's open to more tax cuts, despite slowing revenues [\$700 million in tax cuts the last three years].

His track record, though, suggests he is no phony. He'll push his agenda, but he'll give Democrats their say – so long as he can keep the more rabidly partisan members of his caucus muzzled.

"I have hopes that we'll be able to work together," Bengé said of his Democratic counterparts. "You know, it is an election year and that usually turns up the heat a little bit politically."

"We're going to have differences, but if we can deal with those differences constructively, I think there's hope we can accomplish a lot this session."



# Observations

## Merit What?

Serial tax dodger Lance Cargill's attack on public education takes form under the guise of "merit pay" – a few bucks for a few teachers in a few schools.

Cargill, disgraced Republican ex-Speaker of the Oklahoma House, is the bitterest enemy of public education in recent legislative history – topping even Frank Keating.

Cargill broke the GOP's word to help move school teachers to the regional average. They now dwell in the cellar at 46th in teacher pay – even behind Arkansas.

Cargill is long on corny phrases [100 Ideas, etc.] but short on leadership – a fact not lost on his fellow Republicans who finally rebelled against his negative leadership.

He dubbed merit pay Higher Outcomes and Performance in Education [HOPE] Rewards Act of 2008. The better acronym would be How to Outlaw Public Education [HOPE].

The legislation is his top priority this session, creating a performance pay pilot program for up to 25 schools.

Oops? Only 25 schools in a state with 550 districts? He went to Beggs, OK, to announce it. Many Oklahomans don't even know where Beggs is.

Cargill said he would oppose Gov. Brad Henry's meager \$1,200 pay raise for all teachers.

Don't kid the folks, Cargill. They're not as dumb as you think. You despise all unions, especially the Oklahoma Education Association. Your goal is to destroy the OEA and promote vouchers. You will lose on both counts.

## SMU Revolt

President Bush and his big-money backers are in the midst of an eye-popping half-billion-dollar drive to make Southern Methodist University [SMU] home for the Bush presidential library and policy think [?] tank.

The idea was met with protests from SMU students, faculty, and staff, who wrote that they would "regret to

see SMU enshrine attitudes and actions widely deemed as ethically outrageous."

Now Methodist ministers are mounting a last-ditch effort to block the project. They argue that church rules require that an agreement be submitted to the 290 elected delegates of the church's South Central Jurisdiction.

One minister predicted that about 35% of the delegates would oppose the library. A Methodist petition opposing the library boasted after only two weeks the signatures of 14 bishops, more than 600 United Methodist clergy, and more than 9,000 members of Methodist churches in the United States and Canada.

The ministers object to Bush's preemptive, first-strike war, his policies that reward the rich while punishing the poor, and the torture of prisoners.

They sound like Christians ought to sound.

## Tell The Truth

Abortion has plummeted 25% thanks in large part to the wisdom of family planning. It would have been lower had it not been for the religious right push for abstinence-only sex education.

It was ironic to hear the Oklahoma City archbishop speaking at the Capitol, bemoaning the 1.2 million abortions last year.

The Catholic hierarchy can take credit for a sizable fraction of those abortions given their ignorant opposition to family planning. Coinciding with the 35th anniversary of the Supreme Court's ruling that legalized abortion, a new study shows that the United States continues to make progress on reducing the abortion rate.

The progress would be greater if more were done to avoid unintended pregnancies.

Between 2000 and 2005, the last year in the study by the Guttmacher Institute, abortions performed yearly dropped from 1.3 million to 1.2 mil-



lion, fewest since 1974. The proportion of pregnancies ending in abortion also declined significantly.

Thanks to then Republican Gov. Frank Keating, a Catholic, Oklahoma has taken millions to teach abstinence only, refusing to tell kids the whole truth about human sexuality.

It is no accident that Oklahoma has a high teen pregnancy rate.

## China Rising

While America's industrial base shrinks and our unprecedented debt is purchased by foreign governments, we thought we would share a few facts with you about China which has loaned us \$1.2 trillion.

China's economy grew at an average rate of 10% per year from 1990 to 2006, highest growth rate in the world. Its economic output is \$1.98 trillion, pushing China ahead of Italy as the world's fourth largest economy.

In 2002, China overtook the United States as the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment [FDI]. In 2005, China received \$60 billion in FDI and the United States was one of the largest sources, investing \$3.1 billion.

China runs a trade surplus with the world's three major economic centers. The U.S. bilateral deficit in 2006 [\$201 billion] was 1.6 times larger than that of the EU-15 [\$121.8 billion; the EU-25 deficit was \$133 billion] and seven times that of Japan [\$28.5 billion].

In 2005, the United States exported \$41.8 billion in goods to China, growing 157% since 2000.

During that five years, exports to China grew more than five times as fast as exports to the rest of the world, making China the U.S.'s No. 4 export market, behind only Mexico, Canada and Japan.

Just thought you'd want to know who might eventually replace our beloved America as the world's largest superpower. Thanks, Bush.

## Test, Test

As states such as Oklahoma grapple with the "simple" requirement of asking graduating seniors to pass exit exams in core subjects, the tests are proving increasingly controversial.

A basic question has resulted as to whether a student should receive a diploma if, in 13 years, that student has not learned basic math, English,

history and science.

Some students and families have sued to obtain diplomas.

At the very least, exit exams have created a culture of higher expectations.

In 2007, a record number of high school graduates took at least four years of English and three each of math, science and social studies.

According to a federal study, 51% of students were doing college preparatory work, up from 31% in 1990.

According to the Center on Education Policy, when exit exams work, "it becomes startlingly clear that there's unequal education."

Maybe instead of questioning schools, they should direct their fire at a Congress and President who send billions in unfunded mandates to the states, then set unrealistic goals – such as testing special ed students at grade level.

Don't just blame Bush. Two flaming liberal Democrats authored NCLB – Sen. Ted Kennedy and Rep. George Miller.

## Look Homeward

The gaps in critical home conditions and experiences of young children mirror the achievement gaps that begin early in life and persist through high school, according to results from a new study conducted by the Education Testing Service.

The study's researchers examined the factors that influence early childhood learning and found that 33% of children live in families in which no parent has a full-time, year-round job.

Additionally, by age four, children of professional families hear 35 million more words than children of parents on welfare.

According to Paul Barton, who co-authored the report, "single-parent families, lack of parents reading to children, hours spent watching television and school absences, when combined, account for about two-thirds of the large differences among states in National Assessment of Educational Progress reading scores."

The study suggests that in order to improve schools and student achievement, reform efforts must go beyond the public policy arena and focus on creating home and community environments that aid in educational development.

Any fifth-year teacher could have written that report.

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To invite Editor Arnold Hamilton to address your civic club, students or political gathering, contact him directly at 405.478.8700 or at ahamilton@okobserver.net.

PUBLISHER

Beverly Hamilton  
405.478.8700

EDITOR

Arnold Hamilton  
ahamilton@okobserver.net  
405.478.8700

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy  
ftroy@fullnet.net  
405.525.5582

ART DIRECTOR/WEBMASTER

Kyle Williams  
405.478.8700

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

# Observerscope

The governor and Legislature continue their tax cut fever while our parks continue to slowly deteriorate. Tourism is the state's No. 1 industry. More than 14 million visitors are expected this year.

Dart: To the brass at the Oklahoma Public Employees Association for cynically endorsing Rep. Lance Cargill's so-called merit pay plan.

In his State of the Union address Bush didn't mention the recent violence that has killed 147 students and teachers and closed 590 schools in Iraq. That's almost as many as the 680 the U.S. has built.

Laurel: To Oklahoma U.S. Rep. Dan Boren for voting for the Children's Health Insurance reauthorization. Mary Fallin, Tom Cole and John Sullivan voted against the children. Frank Lucas hit the door.

Giving the Oklahoma Humanities Award for Pulitzer Prize winning Dr. Scott Momaday was long overdue. A member of the Kiowa Tribe, his poetry, novels and plays have brought praise for Oklahoma.

Dart: To Oklahomans supporting Mike Huckabee for president. His non-stop pimping for the polluting poultry industry and his foul criticism of Oklahoma for protecting the Illinois River disqualifies him.

Next time you see Mike Turpen, ask the ex-AG if he ever found his checkbook. He pledged to match \$45,000 in donations to the state Democratic Party from OKC attorney Reggie Whitten and family.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment editorial page for cheerleading the drive for so-called merit pay for teachers. Too bad we don't have it for editorial writers.

The Public Integrity Foundation must have had time on its hands. The non-partisan think tank has documented 935 lies by Bush & Co., since 9/11. Check them at public integrity.org.

Laurel: To Dr. Gordon Deckert, honored by the OU Medical School Alumni Association with the Distinguished Service Award. Few in his profession have so superbly informed the public on the pitiful status of health in Oklahoma.

Gov. Brad Henry is attempting to hold GOP leaders to their pledge to raise teachers to the regional average, proposing \$1,200 this year at a cost of \$68.5 million. The Daily Disappointment begs to differ.

Dart: To Mitt Romney for his flip-flopping campaign for president. The non-partisan Tax Justice USA reports that part of his huge fortune was made by using island tax havens to avoid paying his fair share of taxes.

Laurel: To excellent reporting in the Oklahoman, exposing ex-GOP Speaker Lance Cargill and others for failing to file state income taxes. If Cargill is running for governor, he's running backwards.

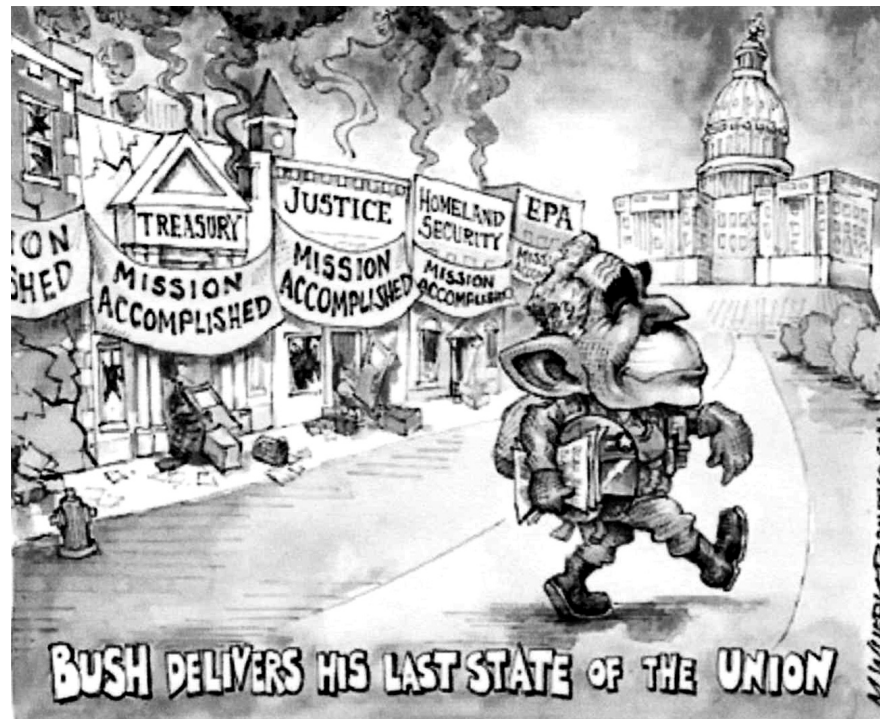
Mike Huckabee's lies border on pathology - especially his repeated claim he has a theology degree. Cornered by a fact-checking media, his campaign admitted no such degree exists.

Dart: To Rep. Paul Wesselhoft, R-Moore, for a bill that would require a DNA sample from every person arrested for a felony. What if no charges are filed? It's a serious invasion of privacy.

We mourn the passing of the "Other Little Giant," former state Rep. Opio Toure, at the much-too-young age of 53. He will be sorely missed.

Laurel: To Tulsa Attorney Mike Zacharias, named Legal Aid's Pro Bono Attorney Of The Year. He went to work for the penniless after retiring as a special district judge.

State Rep. Rebecca Hamilton, D-OKC, has an interesting bill - reduced class size for lower income areas and limiting working hours to make sure kids don't neglect school work for a paycheck.



Dart: To Republican leaders for again pushing legislation to move the independent Criminal Justice Resource Center to the OSBI. The Center's crime? Revealing the sorry legislative inaction on corrections funding.

Oops. Oklahoma, heart of the Southern Baptist Convention, is now home to 100 Indian casinos, four racinos [racetracks plus casinos] and 2,800 lottery outlets.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Academy for recommending that the Legislature create a Secretary of Indian Affairs, gubernatorial cabinet-level post. Tribal importance to our economy should be obvious.

Oklahoma's junior U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn has endorsed John McCain for president. Coburn and Sen. Jim Inhofe support the war in Iraq. McCain is the most ardent Senate cheerleader for the war.

Dart: To legislators opposing the Ethics Commission's new \$100 maximum contribution rule change. It's time this pay-for-play state government ground to a halt.

Will a miracle happen in the new legislative session? House leaders are talking about eliminating some of the 138 sales tax exemptions and 117 income tax exemptions.

Laurel: To the State Board of Education for pinpointing the need for \$503 million to adequately fund public schools and head teachers toward the regional average. They won't get it but three cheers for trying.

Oklahoma is the third least expensive state for college costs, but student aid is lacking for thousands of students. Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, has a plan to fix that. Details in this issue.

Dart: To advocates of Abstinence Only sex education. Consequently, 18,500 Oklahomans age 15-24 acquired a sexually transmitted disease last year. Trust our youth with the whole truth.

Wal-Mart's "new image" has a way to go. They have sued a brain-damaged employee, Deborah Shank, hurt in a traffic accident. Wal-Mart wants her money for the settlement with the truck that hit her car.

Laurel: To Dr. Larry Rice, named Rogers State University president, replacing retiring Dr. Joe Wiley. Rice, a former legislator, has a long and productive career in higher education.

We yearn for the days when Oklahoma had a Legislative Council to stop bill duplication. The new session faces 2,175 bills - many of them on the same subject. How many would swear they read them all?

Dart: To a congressional delegation that votes billions for an un-winnable civil war in Iraq but sits idle while one in four of the nation's 600,000 bridges are in need of major repair. Oklahoma leads the pack.

Once again the courts have blocked Republican attempts to lock the courthouse door in favor of corporate Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals tossed Senate Bill 629 as unconstitutional.

Laurel: To the Republican legislative leadership for favoring a constitutional amendment to get the governor out of the parole process. We're the last state to do so, costing taxpayers millions of dollars a year.

No state employee has held a more thankless job than Tommy Beavers, executive secretary of the horribly underfunded Teachers Retirement System since 1988. He's retiring but he did his best.

A whopping 36% of Americans tell the Pew Research Center poll they believe in the literal word of the Bible. Race and education are leading factors.

A new Census report lists 537,000 Oklahomans living in poverty, up from 406,500 in 2004. That's 15.4% of the state's population. Nationally, poverty has declined slightly.

At the end of 2007, 8,200 Oklahoma students were homeless, a huge jump from 3,452 in 2006. Nationally, 905,000 students were homeless. Federal law requires states to report youth who are homeless.

We hope parents are listening to Senate Co-Leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, urging that they consult the video games ratings on the front and back of all games. Some are unfit for any age.

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# Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Re: Your Jan. 10 articles on immigration.

It is not the immigration, legal or illegal. It is all of us, all nations, races, and colors.

In 1930 the global population was 2 billion. Today it is 6.5 billion and skyrocketing. In 1930 U.S. population was 123 million, today it is over 400 million [census is underestimating just over 300 million] and skyrocketing. In 1960 the U.S. population was only 181 million.

If we place a pair of deer on an island of one-mile diameter, first the deer population will explode and then after the resources have been used up, the population will crash.

It is the same with humans on the planet. Peak oil has come and gone with all of its implications. Water is running out in many areas. The oceans will have no life left in them in another generation. It is so much easier to blame some group than to accept the fact that it is all of us.

The bad news is that if we try to control human explosion with fertility reduction alone, it will take 60 years before there is any reduction in population demographics. Do we really have 60 years of resources forever exploding human numbers?

Kerry Lund  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

The Oklahoma GOP House [Oxymoron Alert] leadership has proposed abolishing the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission as a "government efficiency" measure. Their plan would turn over all duties of the HRC to the Attorney General. This would insure that enforcement of human rights in Oklahoma would be a political football. Imagine any politician wanting to get on the bad side of the so-called "special rights" issue.

Abolishing the Human Rights Commission is a sure way to tell businesses that their employees will face bigotry and discrimination in Oklahoma. Intolerance is the most anti-business condition ever conceived.

Lynn Green  
The Village

Editor, The Observer:

Whenever politicians of both parties start praising each other on an economic issue – hold onto your wallet because you are about to get fleeced. And the issue is the economic "stimulus" package.

Why are we talking about "stimulus" only now? After all, most people have been hurting for quite a while. Paychecks have been stagnating, fore-

closures have become commonplace, health care premiums continue their double-digit increases. The reason? Wall Street is panicking.

The response? Congressional Democrats appear poised to support a package stripped of increases in safety-net programs and comprised primarily of business tax cuts. This, even though experts agree the safety-net programs would have an immediate economic impact and the tax cuts will take at least six months to hit. Smoke and mirrors again. It looks like action but is really running in place.

The whole thing has the odor of politics and payoffs. Here we have major health care, unemployment, public infrastructure and housing crises, and our government is once again rushing to hand over more of the federal treasury to private corporate interests – many of the same interests that caused the current financial meltdown.

Does this Congress – both Democrats and Republicans – care about the working public? I don't think so.

Frank P. Belcastro  
Dubuque, IA

Editor, The Observer:

Does anyone remember "Pogo?" "We have found the enemy and he is us." Another cliché goes: "With these as friends, who needs enemies?"

Our congressional ingrates need to be FIRED and sent to find a job in the private sector – then pass a much stronger law that they can never be lobbyists or hold federal government contracts in any capacity.

Until we replace these corrupted, over-paid foxes in our henhouse [DC], America will go down the tube faster than Nero's empire! It's already happening. How dare any vile and despicable elected person block impeachment of the worst and most immoral bunch in our country's history! "Imperial President," indeed.

All he needs is a fiddle to play while America burns! I will never support any presidential candidate who refuses to allow impeachment proceedings against the criminals within this administration. The description for those who would block or advocate against impeachment of Cheney and, also, Bush, is "aiding and abetting."

In my book, this makes them as guilty as the Veep and President! They certainly are NOT working on behalf of the American citizens.

Darla Reynolds-Sparks  
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Didn't Emperors used to do that? You know – stage lavish games and



give away free food when unrest seized the citizens. And didn't this take the minds of the citizens off their economic problems for about as long as the lavish entertainment and free food lasted?

Well, the President and Congress are about to take a page from the Emperor's Handbook.

If you substitute television for lavish entertainment and checks from the government for free food, you've got it in one: temporary distraction from the incipient economic imbalances of the national deficit, world trade and outsourced wages of Americans.

Temporary is the key word here [the national debt not included].

Oh, weren't the Emperors also engaged in crippling foreign wars during those times? Hmmm. Where are the Helots when you really need them. Oh, by the way – how well did that work for them?

Larry D. Dobie  
Claremore

Editor, The Observer:

I heard an interview with Merle Haggard on NPR recently and was impressed by the words of his new song, "what happened/ does anybody know/ what happened/ where'd America go?" The song goes on to lament the fact that America used to be very different country. A country that did not torture people. We were better than that.

What happened? I know. The Republicans installed George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in the White House in two very questionable elections and they proceeded to defile our Constitution and drag the good name of the United States of America through their torture chambers at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.

The standing of this country around the world has never been lower. An unnecessary, unprovoked war in Iraq, a foreign policy of arrogance and belligerence, and a government of cronyism and incompetence has made us a joke. And whom do we have to thank for that? George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, that's who.

I'm not particularly smart or intuitive, but I knew what George W. Bush was the first time I looked into those cold empty eyes of his. Dick Cheney is even worse. How could so many people have been fooled by these two? What happened? Where'd America go?

Deborah Lewis  
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

WANTED: Superintendent for large school system where 50% of African American and Hispanic students don't graduate. You will be expected to handle a budget of \$250 million per year.

You will be treated like a criminal.

The accountant will reimburse you for items that were improper and turn the information over to the school board. They will sit on it for six months, then publicly embarrass you about it.

You will not have the authority to make the changes needed to turn a mediocre school system into a world-class school system. Any changes you make will be exposed to the utmost scrutiny by an unscrupulous businessman who is using the taxpayers of OKC to make windfall profits for himself and his wealthy friends.

You will have to accept the fact that basketball is more important than education in OKC. You will have to accept the fact that OKC has one of the worst transportation systems of any large city in the U.S. Many students cannot get to the schools they want to attend, and nothing is going to be done about it. You will be expected to support tax hikes for everything imaginable except education.

Anyone who doesn't like you will be able to remain anonymous while going on television and saying whatever they want to about you while remaining in the shadows and disguising their voices. These video clips will be played over and over.

The powers that be will ignore strong public support for you. Even if you are able to avoid ouster, your reputation will be scarred for life.

Fannie Bates  
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

A society forms, has its ups and downs, and finally succeeds. Fraud and corruption enter. Without oversight, fraud and corruption flourish until they, maybe or maybe not along with other factors, bring that society down into a depression.

Rules and regulations are made to prevent it from happening again. The society eventually recovers from that depression. It flourishes. High powered people convince the rulers that rules and regulations are no longer needed. Deregulation.

And it happens all over again. When will we realize that we will always need most rules and regulations? I wrote about this 20 years ago.

In fact, I predicted [April 29, 2005] G Bush's recession, only I said it would turn into a depression and cited eight reasons for it. And it may take some time to develop. The Fed, Congress, and Bush are making several frantic moves but they still won't prevent the recession from ultimately coming. One of eight reasons: you can't give tax breaks to ship jobs overseas.

Jim Stodola  
Denton, TX

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## Political Parties

You hear it all the time – people say they are sick of both political parties, claiming the parties are essentially the same and it doesn't matter who is in power, because the Democrats and the Republicans are in the pocket of special interests and equally disengaged from the concerns and needs of average people.

I have spent more than half a century of covering politics and I can tell you that the claim may be a conversation-starter but it's wholly false.

I love what a Baltimore Sun columnist stressed to show the difference – the Crandall Canyon Mine disaster.

Say you are a miner, a historically dangerous job in which more than 100,000 of your compatriots have perished since 1900.

Who would you want to have in charge of the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the government agency charged with inspecting mines and promulgating and enforcing safety regulations: J. Davitt McAteer, the Clinton appointee, or David Lauriski, the man selected by George W. Bush?

Here is a bit about each:

McAteer was a law student at West Virginia University when an explosion occurred at a mine near Farmington, WV, that killed 78 coal miners.

The disaster led McAteer to organize fellow students to study the West Virginia coal industry. The resulting report helped persuade Congress to pass a series of safety reforms under the 1969 Coal Mine Health and Safety Act.

The law revolutionized mine safety, requiring regular inspections of underground mines, fresh air supplies for miners and fines for safety violations.

After law school, McAteer worked to develop a mine safety program for Ralph Nader's Center for the Study of Responsive Law.

In 1984, he founded the Occupational Safety and Health Law Center, a public interest law firm, which is where he was working when President Bill Clinton tapped him to head up the federal mine agency.

Consider Mr. Lauriski, President Bush's choice. He has a far different resume – 30 years in the service of mining companies.

In 1984, Lauriski was employed by the Emery Mining Corp. in Utah when 27 people died in a mining fire. Safety violations contributed to the cause, concluded mine agency investigators. But Lauriski later defended his employer's safety operations before Congress.

In 1997, as general manager at the Energy West Mining Co., Lauriski lobbied for a substantial elevation in acceptable coal dust levels.

I am all too familiar with the problem. Growing up in McAlester, I heard first-hand accounts of mining dust and I saw what it did to the grandfather of one of my friends.

Because of its high combustibility, coal dust has been the root cause of a number of deadly mine accidents. Coal dust is also a demonstrated source of black lung disease, and experts at the federal National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health say the acceptable levels should be cut in half.

## Presidential IQs

In a published report, the Lovenstein Institute of Scranton, PA, detailed its findings of a four-month study of the intelligence quotient of President George W. Bush.

Since 1973, the Lovenstein Institute has published its research to the education community on each new President, which includes the famous "IQ" report among others.

According to statements in the report, there have been 12 presidents over the past 50 years, from F. D. Roosevelt to G. W. Bush, who were all rated based on scholarly achievements, writings that they alone produced without aid of staff, their ability to speak with clarity, and several other psychological factors which were then scored in the Swanson/Crain system of intelligence ranking.

The study determined the following IQs of each president as accurate to within five percentage points:

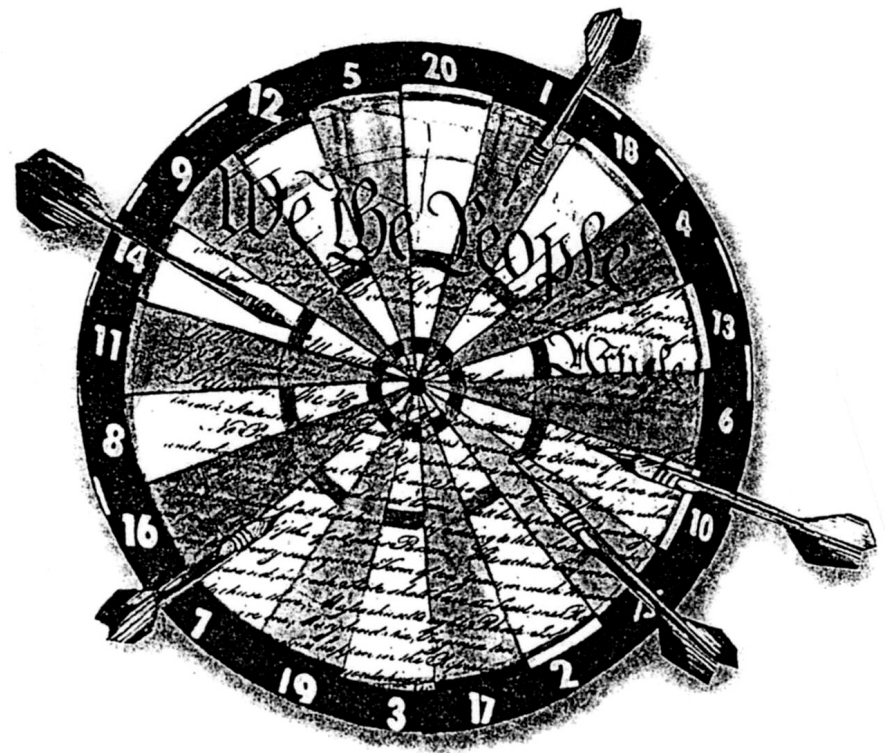
147 Franklin D. Roosevelt [D]; 132 Harry Truman [D]; 122 Dwight D. Eisenhower [R]; 174 John F. Kennedy [D]; 126 Lyndon B. Johnson [D]; 155 Richard M. Nixon [R]; 121 Gerald Ford [R]; 175 James E. Carter [D]; 105 Ronald Reagan [R]; 98 George H.W. Bush [R]; 182 William J. Clinton [D]; 91 George W. Bush [R].

The six Republican presidents of the past 50 years had an average IQ of 115.5, with President Nixon having the highest IQ, at 155. President G.W. Bush was rated the lowest of all the Republicans with an IQ of 91.

The six Democrat presidents had IQs with an average of 156, with President Clinton having the highest IQ at 182. President Lyndon B. Johnson was rated the lowest of all the Democrats with an IQ of 126.

Among comments made concerning the specific testing of President G.W. Bush, his low ratings were due to his apparent difficulty to command the English language in public statements, his limited use of vocabulary [6,500 words for Bush versus an average of 11,000 words for other presidents], his lack of scholarly achievements other than a basic MBA, and an absence of any body of work which could be studied on an intellectual basis.

The complete report documents the methods and procedures used to arrive at these ratings, including depth of sentence structure and voice stress confidence analysis.



Unlike the safety-enhancement agenda that McAteer pushed, Lauriski's tenure at the helm of the Mine Safety and Health Administration was marked by the slashing of regulations.

According to The New York Times, the agency "rescinded more than a half-dozen proposals intended to make coal miners' jobs safer, including steps to limit miners' exposure to toxic chemicals."

In 2004, soon after Bush's re-election, Lauriski resigned to "devote more time" to his family. It also happened to be shortly after a Labor Department inspector general's report found that the agency had engaged in improper contract-letting under his leadership.

Lauriski's replacement was to be Richard Stickler, a former coal industry executive who couldn't get confirmed even by a Republican-controlled Senate. Senators expressed concerns about the safety records of the mines he managed.

So Bush bypassed Congress and made a recess appointment in October 2006 to put Stickler in the top spot at the mine safety agency.

Then six men were trapped for weeks in Utah's Crandall Canyon Mine and three men who tried to rescue them died. Stickler issued a cloying statement about how "pleased" he was that the mine owner had agreed to drill another borehole to see if there was anyone alive.

Where were the statements demanding that all mines be equipped with the latest communications systems, so trapped minors can be located?

Where were the statements promising to fully implement the 2006 Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act?

So don't tell me there is no difference in political parties. It was more than the war that helped Democrats seize Congress.

All voters are not the dolts that Jay Leno interviews. Ask the miners. Ask the honest generals who have served in Iraq. Too bad you can't ask the Polar bears drowning while trying to reach ice flows that have disappeared.

The Lovenstein Institute includes high caliber historians, psychiatrists, sociologists, scientists in human behavior, and psychologists.

Among their ranks have been Dr. Werner R. Lovenstein, world-renowned sociologist, and Professor Patricia F. Williams, a world-respected psychiatrist.

G.W. Bush has now authored a book, with help from a co-author who subsequently learned Bush lied about his religious conversion by Dr. Billy Graham. In fact, Dr. Graham said it never happened.

## How To Use School Answering Service

You have reached the answering service of your school. In order to assist you in connecting to the right staff member, please listen to all options before making a selection:

To lie about why your child is absent Press 1.

To make excuses for why your child did not do his work Press 2.

To complain about what we do Press 3.

To cuss out staff members Press 4.

To ask why you didn't get needed information that was already enclosed in your newsletter and several bulletins mailed to you Press 5.

If you want us to raise your child Press 6.

If you want to reach out and touch, slap or hit someone Press 7.

To request another teacher for the third time this year Press 8.

To complain about bus transportation Press 9.

To complain about school lunches Press 0.

If you realize this is the real world and your child must be accountable/responsible for his/her own behavior, classwork, homework, and that it's not the teacher's fault for your child[ren]'s lack of effort – Hang up and have a nice day.

# New Rules Limit Big Money Influence



Let the cleanup begin.

The Oklahoma Ethics Commission ignored powerful lobbyists and lawmakers when it recently approved new rules aimed at eliminating the corrosive influence of big money on state elections and lawmaking.

First, the panel endorsed a ban on PAC-to-PAC transfers, a campaign finance shell game that enables special interests, lawmakers and candidates to disguise who's giving how much to whom.

It's a loophole used to create an unofficial, but no-less-real "pay-for-play" world in which special interests feel compelled to contribute handsomely to powerful lawmakers and their PACs in order for their bills to be heard.

Moreover, the PAC-to-PAC transfers in political campaigns amount to a legalized "straw donor" system in which donors can exceed campaign contribution limits by funneling extra money through other PACs to their favored candidates.

"By banning PAC-to-PAC transfers, the Ethics Commission has increased the transparency of our campaign financing system," said state Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC. "The public has a right to know the identities of the people who bankroll political candidates.

"But for too long, the rich and powerful have been able to funnel large amounts of cash to their hand-picked candidates without public disclosure thanks to the PAC loophole."

Second, the Ethics Commission took aim at the gifts lobbyists shower on legislators, hoping to build relationships and curry favor.

The panel decided against an outright ban on such items as tickets to concerts and sporting events – entertainment that can't help but erode public trust in its elected officials.

But it did the next best thing, reducing the amount that lobbyists can spend annually on state lawmakers and other elected officials from \$300 to \$100.

"Legislators need to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, but when lobbyists buy expensive meals or gifts for politicians, it looks too much like a bribe to working Oklahomans," Reynolds said.

The panel divided 3-2 over reducing the annually limit to \$100. Former state Sen. Bernice Shedrick and newly-appointed member Jo Pettigrew, a former teacher and assistant executive director of the Oklahoma State School Boards

Association, opposed the tighter restrictions.

The panel, however, signaled that it intends to seriously consider an outright ban on all meals, gifts and entertainment when it discusses proposed rules changes next year. Can you say Dutch Treat?

The recently approved rules changes will take effect July 1 unless state lawmakers vote this session to repudiate them. Even then, Gov. Brad Henry could veto the legislative action, re-imposing the new rules. The governor has said he supports both rules.

Some legislative leaders aren't happy with the restrictions. None, however, want to publicly oppose the new rules, especially in an election year and with the recently resigned House speaker under investigation for possible campaign finance violations.

Still, nothing is certain. Keep a close watch on the session's final hours. It's often in the last-minute frenzy that good government legislation meets its demise.

## Oklahoma Lobbying Is A Big Business

By John Wood

**Fact 1:** Lobbyist expenditures have risen over recent years and expect to double this year. Lobbyist expenditures in Oklahoma: \$125,000 in 2004; \$175,780 in 2005; \$161,652 in 2006; first six months of 2007, \$137,369.40.

**Fact 2:** Potential expenditures under the current system have a rather high ceiling.

Each lobbyist can give up to \$300 per legislator/year. Therefore, a lobbyist can potentially multiply that by 149 legislators.

Hypothetically: If so, I have made some quick and easy calculations. Expenditures of registered lobbyists in Oklahoma for the first half of 2007:

### THREE FOR EVERY LEGISLATOR

• 400 lobbyists [registered in 2004] x \$300 limit times 149 legislators equals \$19,668,000 [There are nearly three lobbyists for every legislator].

• \$38,400 salaries x 149 legislators = \$5,721,600.

So, there is potentially more than three times the money swirling around lobbyists' circles than legislator salaries. Each lobbyist could spend up to \$44,700 each for the whole Legislature if lobbyists maxed out on their giving.

**Fact 3:** There are a large number of lobbyists and lobbyist employers in Oklahoma, 5% of whom are former state legislators.

There were approximately 700 lobbyist principals [lobbyist employers] in 2006. The most effective lobbyists are former legislators.

### ONE OF TOP THREE STATES

In 2005, Oklahoma had 39 former legislators as lobbyists. Oklahoma is one of the top three states to have former legislators as lobbyists, including New Hampshire and Utah.

"They sell that they have unique access because they're a former legislator," says Blair Homer, the legislative director for the New York Public Interest Research Group, a state government watchdog organization.

In 2007, 19 states require a one-year cooling-off period before their legislators can become lobbyists. Six states already have a two-year wait and North Carolina will begin enforcing a six-month ban in 2007.

### BECOMING A LOBBYIST NEXT DAY

However, in Oklahoma, a legislator can register as a lobbyist the day after he or she leaves office. In 2004, state Rep. John Trebilcock's two-year restriction on former legislators becoming a registered lobbyist failed.

**Fact 4:** The 700 lobbyist principals have an asymmetrical relationship with legislators compared to Oklahoma citizens at large.

The average Oklahoman cannot afford to retain a lobbyist. The typical annual income from lobbying in Oklahoma is \$86,525. Nearly 40% of Oklahoma lobbyists make more than \$100,000.

Large industries such as health care, business, petroleum/mining, transportation/communication, banking/finance and realtors/insurance have a large number of lobbyists.

In 2007 business lobbyists represent 50.9% of all lobbyists, a dramatic increase from 29.2% in 2004.

### NO LOBBYIST FOR PLAIN FOLKS

However, labor, environment, minorities, churches, senior services, public employees, average citizens, etc., do not have nearly as many registered lobbyists, if at all. The only non-business area with a large number of lobbyists is education.

**Fact 5:** Term limits increase lobbyist power.

Terms limits have increased lobbyists' relative power to legislators who are overall less experienced and have less institutional memory compared to legislators who have been in office a lot longer.

Thomas and Hrebrenar [1990] researched the impact of interest groups in each of the 50 states. They came up with five categories: dominant, dominant/complementary, complementary, complementary/subordinate, and subordinate.

### GREAT ABILITY FOR INFLUENCE

States with dominant interest groups have a great ability to influence policy within the state. Oklahoma's interest groups fall within the second tier category of dominant/complementary.

Therefore, interest groups are strong in the state, but face some limitations with the strength of the governor and legislature. However, the business and oil interest groups in the state are very powerful coupled with a weak two-party system and term limits.

**Fact 6:** Oklahoma compares poorly to other states in lobby disclosures.

In 2003, Oklahoma ranked the 42nd best state with a score of 47.

In 2006, even 44% of Oklahoma lobbyists themselves feel "there are as many shady deals and underhanded tactics in Oklahoma as there ever were."

### ETHICS COMMISSION MAKES PROGRESS

However, the Oklahoma Ethics Commission has gained great strides in putting lobbyist expenditures, names, and employers online since 2005.

**Fact 7:** Americans say that lobbyists have too much influence. A CNN Poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, Dec. 15-17, 2006, Adults nationwide: "Here are some of the proposals which the Democratic leaders in the U.S. House have promised to address in the first weeks of 2007.

"Reducing the amount of influence lobbyists have in congressional decisions." Favor 75%; Oppose 21%; Unsure 4%.

"And now a question about the power of different groups influencing government policy, politicians, and policymakers in Washington. Do you think lobbyists have too much or too little power and influence on Washington?" Too much 79%; Too Little 14%; About Right 3%; Unsure 4%.

– From *Common Cause Oklahoma newsletter*. The author teaches at Rose State College. For documentation of the facts cited, contact *Common Cause* at 405.525.6334.

# Plan Would Help College Attendance

State Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, has filed legislation to create Oklahoma's "Second Century Promise," targeting students who currently do not qualify for Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program, formerly known as OHLAP.

"There are three words I use to describe Second Century Promise - hope, change and opportunity," said Corn.

"This is a fundamental change in how we develop an educated work force. It will provide hope to kids who may not feel college is an option because of the cost, and it's an opportunity for Oklahoma to leapfrog our surrounding states by increasing the number of college graduates.

"This will help attract high paying jobs, grow our economy and ultimately improve the quality of life for our entire state," he said.

## HE HAS BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

Since first unveiling the concept last year, Corn has met with people in all areas of higher education, common education, legislators from both parties, as well as business and community leaders who have each given input to help fine-tune the proposal.

Corn said initial feedback was overwhelmingly positive and included some very constructive suggestions about how to improve the plan.

That process has resulted in the creation of Senate bill 2020, Oklahoma's Second Century Promise, to be considered in the 2008 session.

SB 2020 includes several key provisions, including:

- Raising the family income limit for Oklahoma's Promise from \$50,000 to \$80,000.

- All students would be required to enroll in Oklahoma's Promise, unless parents opt out.

- The program will be phased in to include students who have not enrolled in Oklahoma's Promise by providing a two-year scholarship to any student who graduates from high school beginning with the 2008-09 school year through 2012-13.

## MINIMUM STANDARDS ARE REQUIRED

During that time period, any student meeting family income requirements and graduating with a minimum 2.0 grade point average, or any home-school or GED student scoring at least a 19 on the ACT, will be eligible for tuition and fees at a two-year college or career-tech.

They would also have the option to attend a four-year institution, and would receive a scholarship equal to the average tuition and fees charged at two-year

# Rice Offers Vets Insurance Plan

Noting that about one of every eight veterans under age 65 are uninsured, state Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, announced he is introducing legislation this year creating the Oklahoma Veterans' Health Insurance Program.

"Most people assume that all veterans qualify for free health care through the U.S. Veterans Affairs Department," Rice said.

"Sadly, that's not true and when the Legislature sets our priorities at the beginning of this session, Oklahoma's military veterans deserve to be at or near the top."

Rice said the insurance program he has fashioned would not be free. Veterans will be required to pay premiums and co-payments based on their household income.

## LATEST CENSUS DATA

According to the latest census data, there are a total of approximately 340,000 veterans living in Oklahoma. A Harvard Medical School study recently estimated that one in eight veterans is uninsured.

"These are veterans who fall through the cracks - too poor to afford private coverage but not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid or means-tested VA care," Rice said. "I believe every American military veteran has earned the right to qualify for some form of health insurance."

Rice said that in lieu of a federal initiative making all veterans eligible for health care benefits, states like Oklahoma have the opportunity to take care of their own.

"Sen. Rice deserves a lot of credit for noting a serious problem in Oklahoma, and tackling it," said Jon Soltz, an Iraq War veteran, and chairman of VoteVets.org, a pro-military political group.

"Hopefully, the day will come when the federal government guarantees health insurance and care for every veteran."

## THE STATE DEPARTMENT WOULD ADMINISTER IT

Under Rice's plan, the Veterans' Health Insurance Program would be administered by the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs. Its scope would be contingent on availability of funds.

To be eligible, veterans must be between 19 and 65, prove they don't qualify for Medicaid or means-tested VA care and can't afford private insurance.

Veterans can lose eligibility if they don't make timely payment of their premiums. Veterans are not eligible if they live in a nursing home or an inmate correctional facility.

The bill instructs the State Department of Veterans Affairs to make rules that determine individual cost-sharing by veterans based on then-household income.

## HE EXPECTS OBSTACLES

Rice said that because his veterans' health care plan involves new costs, he



institutions.

- The program will not cover any remedial courses.

"Beginning in 2014, high school students who do not achieve the required 2.5 GPA to qualify for the Oklahoma Promise four-year scholarship would still be eligible for a two-year scholarship if their GPA is at least 2.0," Corn explained.

"Furthermore, if they keep their GPA above 2.5 in their first two years of college, they'll be eligible for Oklahoma Promise scholarships for the final two years. It's what I call a second-chance provision, but they must have enrolled in the program and completed all other requirements."

## HE SPEAKS FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Corn said his own experiences as a child strengthened his determination to ensure all Oklahoma students have the opportunity to attend college.

"When I was in the sixth-grade, I entered an essay contest for a full college scholarship. I won, but I had to keep my grades up through junior high and high school to keep it. My parents didn't have the resources to send me to college, but the scholarship changed everything.

"Because I had that chance, I worked hard in school and it has made all the difference in my life," Corn said. "I want every child in Oklahoma to have that kind of hope and that opportunity."

Corn said if approved by the Legislature and Gov. Brad Henry, his legislation would take effect during the 2009-2010 school year.

expects to face obstacles in a year when budget constraints are tight.

However, he vowed he is undeterred by arguments that Oklahoma can't afford to take care of its veterans.

"Our state has traditionally been among the nation's leading states in number of troops deployed around the world," Rice said. "As citizens, we can show our appreciation by taking care of them when they return home."

According to figures released by the Department of Defense, Oklahoma currently has 3,368 members of the National Guard and reserves on federal status. That puts the state third, after Indiana's 4,515 and California's 3,914.

# House Is Covered But Schools Aren't

A \$1,500 life-saving device could be located in every Oklahoma school if a measure by state Rep. Wallace Collins can navigate the legislative process this year.

Collins is again pushing for passage of House Bill 1847, a measure he introduced last year, which would require an Automatic External Defibrillator [AED] to be placed in every public school.

The measure was assigned to the House Education Committee but never received a hearing.

"How many times do we read or see a news report of a person, usually a young athlete, who suffers from cardiac arrest after a sports contest or practice?" asked Collins.

## ONE TIME IS FAR TOO MANY

"Even one time is far too many when we have inexpensive life-saving devices that can be purchased and made available at a moment's notice."

Collins said a small number of school systems around the state already have AEDs on site, but most do not. The Norman Democrat believes that every school should have one for the protection of all school patrons, whether they are athletes, employees, students or visitors.

A recent article in the Oklahoman told the story of an Oklahoma City man whose coworkers used a defibrillator to save his life after he suffered a heart attack at his desk.

## THEY ARE SIMPLE TO USE

Collins cited the article as an example of not only how vital the devices are but also how simple they are to use - even for an untrained person.

"Defibrillators today are automatic enough for even an untrained person to use

See DEFIBRILLATOR Page 11

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Our Leaders Are Slow Learners On Economy

By Larry D. Dobie

Three months ago no media or politician mentioned the "I" word [inflation] or the "R" word [recession]. Now they can't say it enough.

Anyone in this nation who buys gasoline has known the inflation spiral for several years. It has gone up a dollar a year for three years.

The "sub-prime lending crisis?" Oh yes. But if you're a big enough mortgage bank you will be bailed out by the Fed.

A little over 30 years ago, on national television, President Carter warned of the impending "national catastrophe" of waste and denial regarding gasoline. Doesn't anyone recall the "Double Nickel" [55 mph] speed limit on the interstate to conserve fuel?

### THE 'MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR'

And if readers fail to recall these facts of history, they certainly will not recall that President Carter said "this is the moral equivalent of war." This was national leadership – a bitter pill perhaps, but necessary and far better than the illness.

Well, the current President's solution to this nation's economic recession and inflation is to deal "smart bombs" to Saudi Arabia for a quid pro quo of increasing oil supplies. And no one should doubt that bankers have messed their nest when they take billions in loans from oil rich nations.

This is not foreign policy. This is continuing to dig the United States into an even deeper hole. It's time for a bath.

It is ridiculous that the federal rhetoric now includes "giving" every taxpayer money to stimulate the economy.

### THE FOLLY OF REBATED TAX DOLLARS

First, giving taxpayers dollars with 32 cent buying power won't go very far and



increases our national debt; and second, the foundation of this nation is not in rebates from the treasury, it is in jobs with living wages [which have been outsourced].

Let the fed keep our tax dollars and let the sub-prime lenders "go under."

A little thinning of the herd would be a good thing.

How about Congress [recently controlled for seven years by Republicans and still without a legislative Democratic majority] holding publicly televised hearings and under oath have oil companies disclose their actual cost to refine their products, then juxtapose their national, retail selling price? That should be very illuminating. Gouging may take on a whole new dynamic.

If the President will not lead, if the Congress is incapable, then truly, I ask your readers to recall the last stanza of The Star Spangled Banner and reflect on the coming national candidate choices.

The sovereignty of the nation rests with its citizen-voters, not its politicians.

– The author lives in Claremore

# Electoral College: A Way Around Elitism

By Del Patterson

What were the Founding Fathers thinking when they introduced the oblique concept of the Electoral College? To be sure, they weren't too keen on the one-man-one-vote theory for the commoner.

A walk down History Boulevard would bring to light generations of national leaders who did everything in their power to throw up detours to the polling place.

The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution became the engine to drive the precious right to vote for minorities, only to be stalled by obstacles along the way – Galled Black Codes and Jim Crow.

Even the Senate with the Gilded Age moniker of the "Millionaire Club" was exempt from the commoner's vote until 1913 with the arrival of the Seventeenth Amendment, but the roadblock for women wouldn't be removed until 1920 with the Nineteenth Amendment.

### A SELECTIVE RED LIGHT

The vista leading to the precinct hall looked bright and promising save for a selective few – that red light which abruptly stopped blacks and poor whites from the privileged vote until passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which banned poll taxes.

Now remains, however, the Electoral College installed by our forefathers to

insure that 538 electors would determine the outcome of presidential elections and not we the people.

There is, however, a way to insure the one-man one-vote concept. It deserves dialogue and serious debate and could work in this manner:

**Marketplace Idea:** State legislatures could enter into an interstate pact in which – regardless of the popular vote in a state – they could agree to give their electoral vote to the national winner of the popular vote. This agreement would activate when enough large states [say 10 or 11] joined the pact to elect a president.

### EACH STATE IS GIVEN THE AUTHORITY

The Constitution plainly grants to each state the power to "appoint" its presidential electors "in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct."

There it is, plain and simple. No need for a constitutional amendment to repeal the Electoral College; no messy two-thirds approval by both houses of Congress, no approval by three-fourths of the states.

In the marketplace of ideas, why not throw this one out on the superhighway of democracy and spin it toward approval?

– The author teaches government/history at Sapulpa High School and is president of United Sapulpa Educators

# America Puts Profit Over Health Care

By Ron du Bois

Our medical and medical insurance ethos sadly is that sick people are good for business.

That health care should be a money-making machine is the mentality of a nation tricked into believing that for-profit health care and medical insurance are superior to national health care as practiced in every other industrialized nation.

In contrast, the ethos of national health care is to keep people healthy in order to save buckets of money. It works. Every nation with national health care delivers health care for all at a fraction of the cost Americans pay.

I am a World War II veteran. My response to conservatives who are certain government can't do anything right is that I am grateful for VA health care and for Medicare, both run by "the government" and paid for in the same way we pay for public education and the fire department – through public taxation.

### FOR THE U.S. IT'S PROFITS OVER HEALTH CARE

"In the box" thinking places profit over the health of the nation. It prevents Americans from having full medical insurance from Day One.

We are the only industrialized nation in the world in which parents are forced to advertise in the newspaper that an account has been set up at a local bank to accept donations to pay for treatment of a child with life-threatening cancer.

No Canadian, French or English parent would need to "pass the hat" in order to save the life of a child. In other nations it is never "charity," but "health care with dignity."

### OUTRAGED CRY OF CONSERVATIVES

"Why should I pay for the health care of my neighbors?" is the outraged cry of

conservatives. With national health care, the answers are:

1. Your neighbors pay for yours.
2. It is the Christian thing to do.
3. Costs are half or less than half of what we pay now and would cover everyone.

Every other advanced nation pays a fraction of what the U.S. does. Canadians pay \$3,000 per person to cover everyone while the U.S. pays \$7,000 per person and leaves out 47 million, plus an equal number are under-insured.

European nations pay a third of what we do with better outcomes.

A national health care system would make us feel good about ourselves. At last we could say with pride to the world, "We are willing to pay for the health care of our neighbors just like everyone else."

– The author is co-founder of Oklahomans for Universal Health Care, 612 S. Kings St., Stillwater, OK 74074

## To Little Johnny, There's No Place Like Home

After the christening of his baby brother in church, little Johnny sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong.

Finally, the boy replied, "That priest said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I want to stay with you guys!"

## PUBLIC FORUM

# ***Don't Diminish Energy Efforts As A P.R. Ploy***

*By Melvin Moran*

A few weeks ago The Observer ran an article written by a woman whose entire family has long been involved in the oil and gas industry. She described the cleaning up of old well sites for free as "mostly a P.R. project." She complained about Oklahoma's "deplorable infrastructure" with special emphasis on our terrible roadways and unsafe bridges.

I too am involved in the energy industry. I am a small independent oil and gas producer in Seminole. My perspective of my industry is somewhat different.

Tens of thousands of oil wells were drilled in Oklahoma over half a century ago. Many of these wells were drilled by out-of-state operators. Many of these well sites were abandoned and a mess remained. Back then there were no environmental laws holding those operators accountable.

In 1993, the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association asked the Legislature to place an additional voluntary tax on all oil and gas producers and royalty owners for all oil and gas produced in Oklahoma. Most of the proceeds were to be used to clean up abandoned well sites.

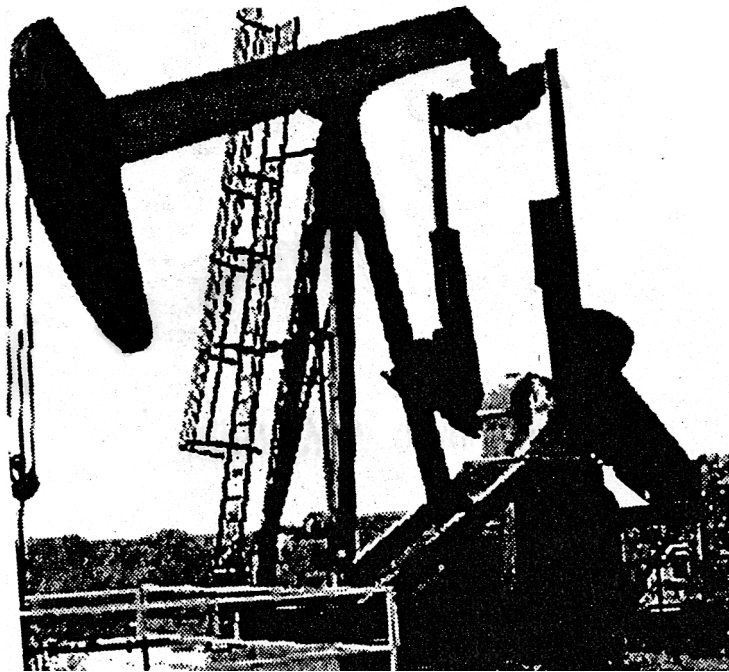
### **FEW WANT TAX REFUNDED**

The tax is voluntary in that, if requested, it will be refunded. Refunds are seldom requested.

The Oklahoma Energy Resources Board was created to supervise this well site cleanup. Forty million dollars has been voluntarily contributed and 8,000 sites have been cleaned up – and counting.

Oil and gas is one of Oklahoma's most heavily taxed industries. Through gross production [over \$1 billion last year], corporate, ad valorem, and personal income taxes, the oil and natural gas industry contributes \$1 out of every \$4 that the state spends on education, roads, bridges and other state programs.

In fiscal year 2007, \$77,216,849 was returned to counties and the County Bridge and Road Fund from gross production taxes. To the previous article writ-



er: the additional money for roads and bridges is coming from the industry you criticized.

### **WHAT ENERGY TAXES HELP FINANCE**

Our recent income tax cuts were made possible because of the increase in energy revenue. So were the increase in teacher's salaries and many of the other recent budget increases.

And that's only part of the story. Oil and gas companies rank high on the list of Oklahoma's most philanthropic corporate citizens. Additionally, individual oilmen contribute generously to higher education, medical research, the arts, and every worthwhile cause you can name. And there are more than a hundred charitable foundations, and the majority of those foundations were founded by energy philanthropists. Their good work is incalculable.

With considerable credit due our energy industry, Oklahoma's economy is booming. There are an estimated 250,000 royalty owners in the state, with one in 10 Oklahoma adults receiving a total of approximately \$2.5 billion in royalty checks each year.

I am very proud of my industry.

– The author lives in Seminole

# ***Exploding Myths About 'Real' Polling***

*By Karen Webb*

I worked during the 1994 governor's election in Oklahoma at probably what was then the most used polling company – it was owned by Tom Cole, now a Republican congressman.

The questions were nearly always slanted to get the desired effect the GOP wanted.

We were in a very small room with about 10 stations and in front of every station was a large negative poster regarding the Clintons.

Take my word for it, on a poll, they don't necessarily have to put down the answers given, but some calls are monitored so it is not a good idea to make up your own answers, but the caller can answer any way they feel.

They can lie about their age, their race or anything else.

### **SAME PEOPLE POLLED REPEATEDLY**

Virtually the same people were called on every poll because we knew they would answer.

I also worked for another polling firm that was not affiliated with a politician. We did all kinds of polling there, but still no one had to tell the truth. The only thing we knew they didn't lie about was what state they lived in.

We had one poll that I hated and we did it almost every month. It took about 20 minutes and was all about beer. Asking people in Georgia what the favorite beer of New Hampshire or Canada was seemed a bit weird.

You have to have a certain amount of each age and gender, though some polls like the beer one were only supposed to include men who were over 40.

There is absolutely nothing to keep me from answering a poll that I am 22, black, religion is druid, I am a registered Republican, I make over \$500,000 a year, I have 15 children all below the age of 17 and am voting for Obama.

You can answer whatever you please and Zogby won't know. They will just know I live in the Oklahoma City area.

– The author lives in Moore

# ***Dwelling In The Cellar Takes Its Toll***

*By Darla Reynolds-Sparks*

Purging is exactly what needs to be done.

I'm continually amazed at all the entities in state government that are set up, financed and run for years without one conscientious or honest person on the taxpayers' payroll ever inquiring what the group does and why they exist.

Nor do they ever question the expenditures in our budget for these frauds and scams.

Our state government seems to be running on scams that the con men of the world would admire. All of these committees, departments, etc., are never audited unless there's a full-blown national scandal reported by national media.

### **FOREVER DOOMED TO THE BOTTOM?**

It is questionable if Oklahoma will ever occupy anything except the bottom of every list in the nation.

One-third of my family has exited for greener and more rewarding pastures. Two-thirds of my nearest and dearest friends have long since migrated to 21st Century, progressive states and my first- and second-born grandsons are now living and working out-of-state.

Seventy-one years ago, I was born in an unheated side room of a Southwestern Gin Co. house in McClain County, OK.

I have lived out of this country and I have lived out of this state for a total of 20 years of my life.

### **TIME FOR GREENER PASTURES?**

I believe I am ready to exit permanently from this area of the world and spend my last years admiring progressive, creative and inspired governing, while enjoying affordable public transportation systems, rail transit, trolleys, buses, jitneys, any systems that can run a regular schedule on time and efficiently serve the

unlicensed which includes the young, the elderly, the handicapped, the poor plus the licensed "greenies."

Have you any idea where that would be?

– The author lives in Yukon

# ***Important Lesson Learned***

During my second month of college, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions until I read the last one: "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?"

Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50's, but how would I know her name?

I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank.

Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our quiz grade.

"Absolutely," said the professor. "In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say, 'Hello.'"

I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned her name was Dorothy.

– Anonymous

**THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER ON-LINE**

**WWW.OKOBSERVER.NET**

## Oklahoma Disgrace

# Childhood Obesity Is Out Of Control

Almost 40% of Oklahoma's children and youth are either overweight or at risk of being overweight. This epidemic has dire health and economic consequences for children and the state of Oklahoma.

Afterschool is a critical part of the solution for combating childhood obesity. Unstructured, unsupervised out-of-school time has not only been proven to contribute to childhood obesity but quality afterschool programs have been shown to reduce childhood obesity and increase physical activity among participants.

Today, only about 10% of Oklahoma's school children [K-12] regularly participate in an afterschool program. These low numbers are due to barriers such as program cost and access.

Among existing programs [2006 survey], only 70% report a focus on obesity prevention, nutrition, athletics or recreation as part of their regular afterschool program offerings.

### QUITTING TELEVISION DOESN'T HELP

A Harvard study following 10,000 children over a four-year period showed that there was no correlation between reducing the amount of "screen time" and children's level of physical activity – meaning that when kids stop watching television, they aren't choosing to spend more time being physically active.

Another study revealed that school is a protective factor for preventing childhood obesity. It is during the summer months that children gain the most weight.

A study found that when controlling for baseline obesity, poverty status and race and ethnicity, the prevalence of obesity was significantly lower for afterschool program participants compared to non-participants.

### EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM

The Oklahoma State Department of Health is implementing an evidence-based afterschool program, CATCH Kids Club, designed to combat childhood obesity in 20 counties in Oklahoma.

Since Oklahoma's children spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school, there is no question that addressing the epidemic of childhood obesity demands an out-of-school time solution.

The added bonus is that quality afterschool programs have been proven to increase academic achievement [e.g., higher test scores], reduce levels of misconduct and aggression, reduce the use of drugs and alcohol, raise graduation rates and make it less likely participants will use welfare in the future.

### HEALTH DEPARTMENT SEEKS FINANCIAL AID

The Oklahoma State Department of Health is requesting \$4 million for the Physical Activity and Nutrition to Reduce Obesity and Improve Cardio Health initiative, a portion of which is designated for afterschool activities.

The Oklahoma Afterschool Network is seeking \$500,000 through the Oklahoma State Department of Health to be used for grants to support comprehensive, community-based afterschool programs that include an evidence based obesity reduction component.

## Alternative Ed Is Booming Success

Oklahoma has created a nationally recognized model for statewide alternative education that is saving taxpayers \$156 million.

Over the past decade Oklahoma's dropout rate has steadily declined, from an annual rate of 5% in 1999 to 3.3% in 2006. Much of this decline can be attributed to the Statewide Alternative Education Program.

In 2006-07, Oklahoma's Statewide Alternative Education Academy Grant Program completed 11 years of educating disaffected and at-risk students.

Oklahoma's nationally recognized model continues to adapt to changing populations, increase resources for teachers, and improve the implementation of alternative education to improve student outcomes.

There are 257 alternative education programs in 467 districts, with 11,802 students being served at any given time.

### THE RESEARCH WAS CAREFULLY DONE

OTAC Field Coordinators conducted 1,125 site visits to statewide alternative education programs during the 2006-07 school year, an average of more than four visits to each program.

At the end of each school year, the programs are rated against the 17 criteria established in Oklahoma school law. These ratings are made using a very specific scoring rubric and are reviewed by OTAC program evaluators for reliability and validity.

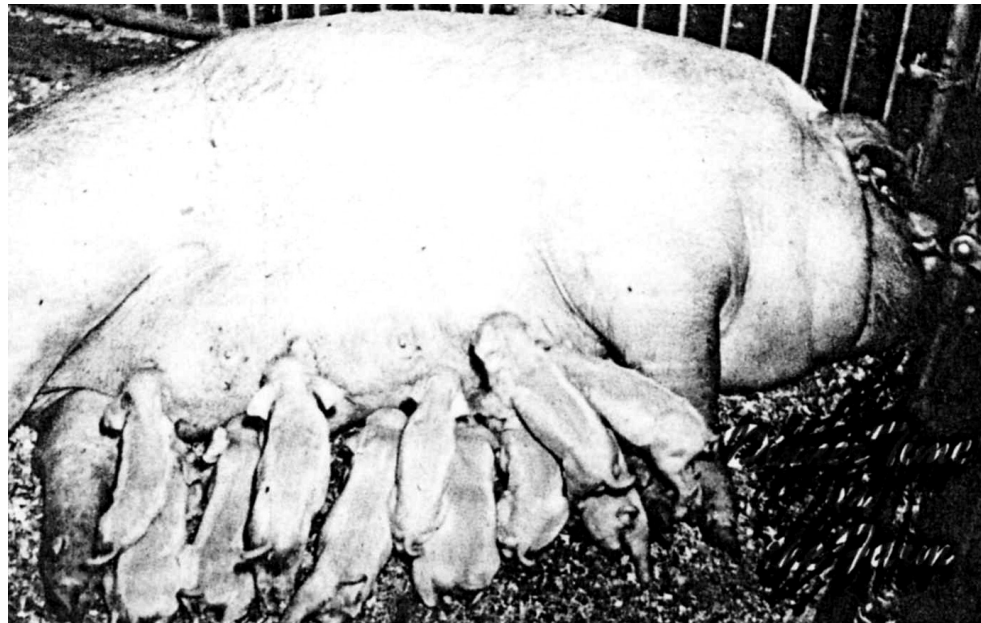
Of the students served, 88.65% were in high school [seniors comprised the largest group] and 87.97% of the program participants were at least one-year overage for grade.

Students were referred to alternative programs for a variety of reasons. As in previous years, the principal reason for referring students to alternative education was academic deficiency.

### THE PROGRAM HAS POSITIVE EFFECTS

Once students are enrolled in an alternative education program, they are absent less often, made higher grades, failed fewer classes, are referred less often for disciplinary problems, and improved their scores on academic achievement tests.

Students most likely to drop out of alternative education were those who had



Research consistently demonstrates that the provision of high-quality care from the beginning of a child's life makes an enormous difference in a child's cognitive, emotional and physical development.

### NATION'S BEST EARLY CHILD CARE

Oklahoma has built a nationally recognized quality child care program. Called Reaching for the Stars, the program allows the Oklahoma Department of Human Services [OKDHS] to assist low-income families in paying for child care, when it is needed in order for a child's caregiver to work or attend school, and to provide higher reimbursement rates for higher quality care.

According to the Oklahoma Child Care Portfolio, published by the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association, the most important factor in ensuring high quality care is the teacher.

A trained teacher is essential to helping young children learn, responding to their emotional needs, identifying potential health, developmental or behavioral issues and working with parents to understand the changing needs of their children.

Yet despite the importance of this work, the most common degree held by most Oklahoma child-care providers and facility directors is a high school diploma.

### PAY IS PITIFULLY LOW FOR KEY JOB

On average, a child care provider earns just above minimum wage, less than half the average salary for Oklahoma's elementary school teachers.

This makes it difficult to attract and retain teachers with the experience and education needed to ensure high quality care. In fact, Oklahoma's average turnover rate is almost 60% per year.

In order to increase the wages of teachers, OKDHS is requesting funds for a subsidy rate increase to come up to market standards. In addition, funds are being requested to address the recent increases in the federal minimum wage.

The minimum wage increased from \$5.15 per hour in 2006 to \$5.85 per hour in July 2007; it will increase to \$6.55 per hour in July 2008.

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services [OKDHS] is requesting \$12,583,000 to increase reimbursement rates to meet market demands tied to quality child care standards, and \$13,445,000 to address the increases in minimum wage. Total request: \$26,028,000.

– Oklahoma Institute For Child Advocacy

dropped out previously [referred to as "recovered dropouts"].

Alternative education students' scores on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests were lower than those of traditional education students.

This was most likely due to skill deficits they brought with them.

Student surveys were administered to more than 5,000 participants. Eighty-four percent of survey respondents reported positive perceptions of alternative education. Most of the positive comments focused on students' improved academic performance.

### MEDIAN COST PER STUDENT IS LOW

The median state cost per student per year in alternative education was \$1,263. Local funds often supplemented state dollars.

The median cost per student per year in cooperative programs was \$1,933; in single-district programs it was \$1,319. There was a wide variation in per-pupil costs across programs. A majority of the school districts contributed local funds to the programs but a substantial number did not.

Is the Alternative Education program cost effective? Using the evaluation database as a basis of estimation, we can calculate that a minimum of 1,195 students enrolled in alternative education were recovered dropouts – approximately 10% of all the Statewide Academy students.

Nearly two-thirds of these students [65.3%] had a positive exit status. Positive outcomes included graduating, continuing in the alternative program, returning to traditional school, or earning a GED.

The potential savings of \$156 million to the state and federal social services, which accrued just from successfully recovering 780 former dropouts, was more than eight times greater than the entire state budget for the Alternative Education Academy program for 2006-07.

## Pay To Pray

A little child in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed the offering plates. When they neared the pew where he sat, the youngster piped up so that everyone could hear: "Don't pay for me, Daddy. I'm under five."

## BOOKS

# Obama's Literary License Troubling

By Charles Edwin Jones

### DREAMS FROM MY FATHER

*A Story of Race and Inheritance*

By Barack Obama

Crown Publishing Group

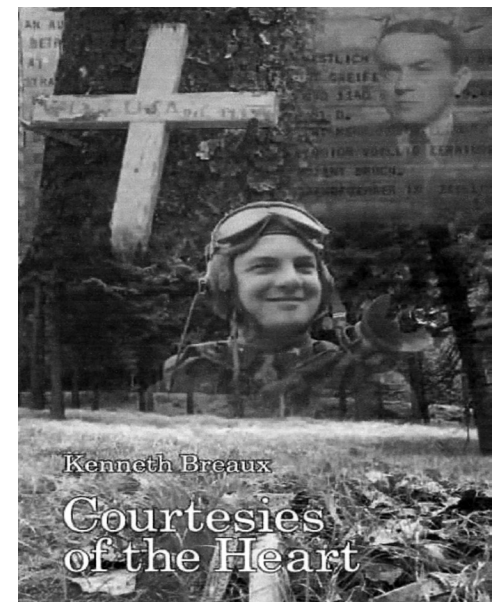
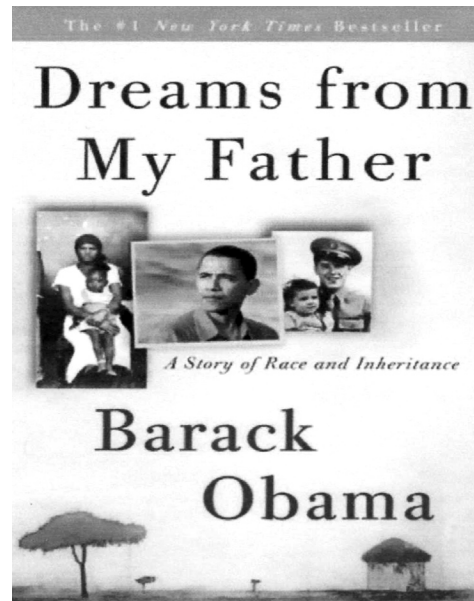
480 pages, \$14.95

On the morning news in late January, I learned, to my surprise, of the rather triumphal visit of Barack Obama to El Dorado, KS, the birthplace of Stanley A. Dunham [1918-1992], the grandfather who helped raise him.

This came close on the heels of my finishing reading Obama's autobiography recounting as unvarnished demographic fact his grandfather's account of his growing-up years there.

Having [literally dozens of times] since 1950 passed through El Dorado and nearby Augusta [the birthplace of Obama's grandmother, "Toot"], I was dumfounded that [in this, his valedictory as the first African-American editor of the Harvard Law Review] he as a lawyer and law editor should be so careless of facts as to describe these most substantial towns in the area as "too small to warrant boldface on a road map."

The town, "dab-smack" in the "landlocked center of the country," was one in his grandfather's childhood in the 1920s in which "decency and endurance and the pioneer spirit were joined at the hip with conformity and suspicion and the potential for unblinking cruelty," and in which "classrooms" were "filled with farm boys who got sewn into their woolen underwear at the beginning of winter and stank like pigs as the months wore on."



So goes the grandson's embellishment of his grandfather's memory!

In this the most intimate glimpse into family in the entire book, one is given no hint of the nature of the "unblinking cruelty" abroad in El Dorado in "Gramps" boyhood or whether it was either peculiar or confined to that locale.

In explaining this and every other event, decision and transition in an admittedly most difficult life journey, Obama's facile pen serves to camouflage emotion and motivation.

Because he, in this way, makes it impossible to discern ways in which our emotions and life experiences intersect, it becomes impossible to ascertain whether or not to trust him with decisions on our behalf.

This vignette, and the vagueness of much of the more than 400 page narrative which follows, gives me pause.

Issued first in 1995 [on the eve of Obama's tenure as a professor of constitutional law] and re-issued in 2004 [after he had bypassed opportunity to clarify causes and relationships and to eliminate cavalier statements and hyperbole], *Dreams From My Father* both reveals and conceals the world of Barack Obama.

What really does he stand for and how and where will he lead?

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

# Searching For The Father She Never Knew

By Mike Nobles

### COURTESIES OF THE HEART

By Kenneth Breaux

Trafford Publishing

264 pages, \$21.50

The events depicted in this book are true, occurring over a 60-year period. They had their genesis on Sept. 11, 1944, in the sky over Germany and ended on Memorial Day, 2004, in Tulsa.

It is an amazing, almost unbelievable, story of courage, despair, friendship, duty, and basic kindness and caring that will make you proud and help restore your faith in humanity.

Lt. William M. "Bill" Lewis was a Tulsa native, born on Jan. 18, 1922. He graduated from Central High School and joined the Army in 1943.

He was married and soon after joining the service learned his wife was pregnant. He attended flight school and was assigned to the Eighth Air Force in England as a pilot. He briefly saw his daughter, Sharon, before reporting for duty in England. He flew his first combat mission on June 4, 1944, just two days prior to D-Day.

#### WHATEVER BECAME OF THE OKLAHOMA NATIVE?

He disappeared on Sept. 11, 1944, in a mission over Oberhof, Germany.

This book is the story of his mission, disappearance, and return to Tulsa after 60 years. Lewis was engaged in providing escort protection to the 100th Bomb Group that was conducting a raid on German oil refineries when he was reported missing, one of 57 U.S. planes reported lost on that day.

His whereabouts were to remain a mystery for almost 60 years. The military declared him dead in 1946 and closed the chapter on his life.

His daughter Sharon, only 6 months old when he died, always wondered about her father but it was not until she saw the movie *Saving Private Ryan* in 2001

that she decided to act on her life long desire to know his fate.

She enlisted the assistance of a friend, the author of this book, who was a computer consultant and Internet research buff. Breaux embarked on a quest to locate Lewis that is at the heart of this story.

#### THE FIVE-YEAR SEARCH IS SUCCESSFUL

The five-year effort resulted in not only the location of Lewis' remains but his return to Tulsa for final burial and some closure for the family.

The search uncovered a university worker in Prague who had not only done in-depth research on the Sept. 11 battle but had created a museum dedicated to its remembrance and, incredibly, had found the Lewis crash site and knew what happened to his remains.

Even more unbelievable, a German naturalist/forester had discovered the crash site within days of its occurrence and had not only buried Lewis' remains but had erected a cross to note the location and had tended the site for some 30 years as an act of respect and caring.

#### TRUE STORY, STRANGER THAN FICTION

Combine these remarkable events with the discovery that American forces had indeed located the crash site, then in East Germany, but had been unable to recover the remains and the ultimate involvement of an American recovery team visit to the scene and you have a true story stranger than fiction.

In addition to a spellbinding story of loss and recovery there is a highly readable history of the air war over Germany from both the allied and German perspectives.

But most of all this is a story of faith, honor, duty, courage, character, and friendship that proves humanity knows no borders and that one person can make a difference and every person ought to try.

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

# DEFIBRILLATOR

From Page 7

them," he said.

"As I understand it, they are able to lead you through the instructions of use, so that anyone could administer the life saving procedure."

The bill, however, would require that each school have employees trained and available to use the AEDs. Defibrillators can range in price from only a few hundred dollars to several thousand dollars, but with volume buying, there could be a considerable savings.

#### PRIVATE SECTOR COULD BE TAPPED

The measure would first seek help from the private sector to pay for the AED's, but would include state funds if necessary. Collins said he has been told by medical professionals that it is critical for a victim to receive treatment in the first three to five minutes following a cardiac arrest, meaning that a defibrillator needs to be close by.

Also, a defibrillator greatly increases a victim's chance of survival when compared to having CPR applied.

Collins noted that the measure received the support of both the American Red Cross and of the mother of a local student who died after an athletic event, yet the bill did not even receive a hearing in committee.

"Life and death doesn't donate money to campaigns or vote our representatives into office," said Collins. "We have AEDs on every floor of the state Capitol building, yet we refuse to give the same protections to our school employees and students."

"It is shameful that a measure that has the real potential to save lives cannot even make it to the House floor to receive an up-or-down vote by the members who have been placed here to protect our citizens. This is a non-partisan issue that deserves to be heard."

Campaign '08

# Despair Over The State Of Our Union

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Even though we should be glad that this is President Bush's last State of the Union message, some of us are not feeling so well.

We feel a little nauseous. We find his smirks repugnant. We find his manner offensive. We have heard most of his ideas before, over and over. We listen dutifully, but then we become agitated as we reason behind the words.

Sometimes our conscience bothers us a little for feeling about this president the way we do. We know that these feelings are not good for our nation. "Can we not moderate these in some way?" we ask ourselves.

During the last few years, 60% of our people polled said that the nation is heading in the wrong direction. That proportion has grown now to 68%, or to "3 out of 4," depending on which poll interpretation.

Mr. President, the people do NOT believe that the state of the union is good.

## MISGIVINGS ABOUT OUR DIVIDED AMERICA

But we feel bad about the division in our country. We wish it were not so. The reasons were obvious during the president's speech. He called for cooperation, and then a moment later scolded his opposition for not doing his bidding. He made provocative threats of vetoes if they did what he did not like.

This president has never learned that there are two legitimate parties, thinking only of his and the disloyal opposition. He has never learned that there are supposed to be three branches of government. He thinks he has gained control of the Supreme Court, and he refuses to accept that he does not now control Congress.

Republicans hated President Bill Clinton. Some of us now understand a little about how they might have felt, although we have never experienced the vituperative intensity they apparently felt.

We have not resorted to the venom of well-publicized character attacks and lies, both volunteer and paid. We have not subjected this president to impeachment proceedings for high crimes and misdemeanors in the conduct of his office, even though he may well have deserved that. We have not suborned admittedly libelous publications about him.

This president's personal and private behavior has not been made the subject



of court inquiry.

## WHITE HOUSE'S NOT-SO-FUNNY BUSINESS

Even his public, business, and military records were quickly lost or sealed off from examination.

Alleged criminal activities in this administration have been covered up by stonewalling, lost files, lost e-mails, and now deliberately destroyed videotapes.

No person and no family have been as thoroughly vetted as the Clintons, both in the courts and in the public media.

Strangely, when the former president suggested that the media should look at all Democratic candidates with equal scrutiny, he was suddenly made out to be a racist by them.

## CLINTON, OBAMA EACH HAVE STRENGTHS

There is little doubt that Hillary Clinton is the best-qualified candidate for the presidency on the Democratic ticket. She represents the mainstream, moderate Democrats. She has practical ideas and practical proposals.

On the other hand, Barack Obama is a wonderfully inspirational candidate. He represents the more liberal sector of the party. He brings youth and idealism to the political altar. The endorsement of the Kennedy family was meaningful, although perhaps not all that helpful.

It would be nice to have less divisive rancor and less vindictive political behavior in our nation. Fairness in media treatment would be nice. This election, both Republican and Democrat, does not offer much promise, however.

One can only cringe at the thought of how dirty the general election may be.

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

# Emerging Democratic Force? Single Women

By Froma Harrop

Single women were supposed to be the Democrats' guest of honor on Election Day. Excuse me, *unmarried* women. The party has studied unmarried women so much it knows they don't like to be called single women.

But something wild is happening. Unmarried women are crashing the party early. In Iowa, they were 28% of Democratic caucus-goers. In New Hampshire, they were 22% of the party's primary voters, and in South Carolina, 30%.

Those are big numbers – for them.

"It's exceptional given past history," Sarah Johnson of the Democratic-aligned group "Women's Voices. Women Vote" told me.

That history shows single women voting in dismal numbers. Only 59% turned out for the 2004 presidential election, compared with 71% of married women. For midterm elections, their participation nearly falls off the map. They normally sleep through the early political contests – the caucuses and primaries. Until now.

## AWAKENING A KEY DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUENCY

Democrats have huge stakes in awakening this demographic. Unmarried women make up nearly a quarter of the electorate – a bigger share than African-Americans, Latinos and Jews put together. And when they do participate, their vote is overwhelmingly Democratic.

In 2004, single women preferred Democrat John Kerry by 25 percentage points. By contrast, married women gave Republican George W. Bush an 11-point margin. The Democratic Party's big hope is that an activated single sisterhood will do for them in 2008 what white evangelicals did for Republicans in 2004.

The category, of course, covers a lot of territory. Unmarried women can be impoverished young mothers, hotshot professionals, elderly widows or college students.

But these subgroups all go to the polls less often than their married counterparts. Single African-Americans, three-quarters of black women, come closest to matching their married sisters' voting records.

## DIVISIONS OVER OBAMA, CLINTON

Unmarried women certainly haven't shown unity of preference in the Democratic caucuses and primaries.

Young educated whites pushed Barack Obama to victory in Iowa. Older women drove Hillary Clinton's triumph in New Hampshire, and Hispanics helped her take Nevada. And in South Carolina, black women propelled Obama to his major win.

What accounts for this burst of civic interest? One explanation is that the campaigns are aggressively recruiting single women.

Another says it's the times. The economic insecurities haunting many struggling Americans are even darker for single women. If wages are flat, theirs are flatter. Unmarried women are more likely to lack health coverage than the popu-

lation at large.

## HARDLY SANGUINE OVER COUNTRY'S DIRECTION

A study by "Women's Voices. Women Vote" found unmarried women less happy over the country's direction than any other major voting bloc.

The storyline in South Carolina focused on whether black women would favor a fellow woman, Hillary Clinton, or a fellow African-American, Barack Obama. [Over half of the Democratic primary voters in South Carolina were African-American. That these women might have considered factors other than race and gender – health care, for example – got little play.]

Whatever. Obama's sizable margin of victory wasn't the most interesting statistic here. It was the turnout numbers. More than 500,000 people had voted, an 80% increase from the 2004 Democratic primary.

A Democrat will eventually be anointed, and the angry dust will settle. While single women may now be splitting their affections among the Democratic candidates, they haven't shown a similar divide between Democrat and Republican.

If the turnout by unmarried women on Nov. 4 follows the trajectory of these early contests, this group may very well elect the next president. Democrats will no doubt target single women in an energetic get-out-the-vote campaign, but they may not have to send engraved invitations.

Call them single. Call them unmarried. But don't call them politically disengaged. Not this year.

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## The V-8 Answer To Idiots

I have an appropriate response to ignorance and propaganda. When someone says:

All Muslims are terrorists.

Iraq had WMD.

Clinton is to blame for everything that has happened SINCE he left office.

Gays are not going to Heaven.

Bush is a good Christian.

Bill O'Reilly [or anyone with FOX News] knows what he is talking about.

Media is fair and unbiased.

Obama is a Muslim.

We are winning the war in Iraq.

Republicans are good for the economy.

Osama bin Laden can't be found.

We support our troops because we believe we had to go into Iraq.

Just tap them on the head and say: "You could of had a brain!"

— Thanks to Darla Reynolds-Sparks for passing this along. Feel free to add your own examples to the list.

# Era Of Segregation Is On The Rebound

By A.M. Paulson

At one time, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina was a model of court-ordered integration.

Today, nearly a decade after a court struck down its racial-balancing busing program the school district is moving in the opposite direction.

More than half of its elementary schools are either more than 90% black or 90% white.

"Charlotte is rapidly re-segregating," says Carol Sawyer, a parent and member of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Equity Committee.

It's a trend that is occurring around the country and is even more pronounced than expected in the wake of court cases dismantling both mandated and voluntary integration programs, a new report says.

## YANKEE SCHOOLS MOST RE-SEGREGATED

The most segregated schools, according to the report, which documents desegregation trends, are in big cities of the Northeast and Midwest.

The South and West – and rural areas and small towns generally – offer minority students a bit more diversity.

Suburbs of large cities, meanwhile, are becoming the new frontier: areas to which many minorities are moving.

These places still have a chance to remain diverse communities but are showing signs of replicating the segregation patterns of the cities themselves.

"It's getting to the point of almost absolute segregation in the worst of the segregated cities – within one or two percentage points of what the Old South used to be like," says Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project and one of the study's authors.

## METRO AREAS LEAD THE WAY

"The biggest metro areas are the epicenters of segregation. It's getting worse for both blacks and Latinos, and nothing is being done about it."

About one-sixth of black students and one-ninth of Latino students attend what Orfield calls "apartheid schools," at least 99% minority. In big cities, black and Latino students are nearly twice as likely to attend such schools.

Some two thirds of black and Latino students in big cities attend schools with less than 10% white students; in rural areas, about one-seventh of black and Latino students do.

Although the South was the region that originally integrated the most success-



fully, it's beginning to re-segregate, as in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district.

## SUPREME COURT FACILITATES RESEGREGATION

While re-segregation has been taking place for some time, Orfield says the latest numbers are worrisome both for the degree to which they show the trend is occurring and in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's most recent decision on the issue last June, which struck down several voluntary integration programs and made it more difficult for districts that want to work at desegregating schools to do so.

Some groups applauded the Supreme Court's decision last summer as another step toward taking race out of school admission policies and allowing parents to send their kids to the schools most convenient for them.

If schools start reflecting neighborhood makeup – which often means nearly all-white or all-minority – that doesn't have to matter, they say.

"Segregation means people are being deliberately assigned to schools based on skin color," says Roger Clegg, president of the Center for Equal Opportunity in Falls Church, VA. "If it simply reflects neighborhoods, then it's not segregation."

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# The NCLB Law Is Not Education

By Joseph Quigley

As with most anything else that has elected officials involved, whatever the original intent and potential benefit, No Child Left Behind, as it is now, has absolutely nothing to do with what its name implies, or its purpose was.

It has nothing to do with educating students, but all to do with image and keeping the jobs that supply the big bucks.

Education is supposed to prepare students for life. In so doing the student should be the focus of the educational system. Everything done and taught should have as its aim the most complete education for each student, supplying them with knowledge and skills they will use immediately and often according to their intentions, or be prepared for if those change by design or force.

## TEACHING TO THE MAXIMUM TO EACH STUDENT

Therefore you teach the maximum to each student knowing that any test they take will only cover part of what they have learned. A broad education means anything can be included on tests because the students know enough material to cover most of what could be conceivably included.

Under the present implementation of NCLB, the students are a means to an end that does not have their best interest or real education as its goal.

Because people are elected on the nebulous promise to improve education without actually pinpointing what is truly wrong with it beyond catch phrases, they need to make it appear they actually are effecting change for the students.

## THE FED REQUIRES ENDLESS STATISTICS

Washington decides whether or not a school system is making certain benchmarks such as test scores and graduation rates, before funds are delivered, and the only proof they require is the stream of statistics students provide through all the tests they take.

If a system appears to be failing according to these requirements, those in charge will look like they are not carrying through on their promises, and to this will be added the additional shame of losing federal funds.

So, the people on top who have the most to lose demand that those under them provide the necessary statistical evidence for them to look good and keep the titled and monied positions.

## IT'S A THREE TEST PREPARATION

These in turn pass this requirement down the line until students are forced to take practice tests, quarterly measurement tests, and finally the End of Instruction tests.

Depending on the grade level, students, like sophomores, spend up to two weeks of testing in any one semester even before the test that really counts. And this does not count the classroom tests and quizzes, along with nine-week and semester tests they have to take in their respective classes.

This leaves little time to actually teach the students fully. Without time to actually educate the students, the public needs to know what these students are actually being taught, and if they are taught anything, when did the teacher have the classroom time to do it.

But, to paraphrase, "it's the statistics, stupid."

## TEST COULD COVER A PLAY NEVER SEEN

A student could conceivably do very well answering questions to define what a soliloquy is, or an aside, or even a Shakespearean Sonnet without actually having ever seen a play, or read a sonnet by the Bard.

This "fluff," such as watching a play by Shakespeare, has to wait until after the test so valuable preparation time is not "wasted," apparently on the students' education.

The student just has to do well on the test so the statistic can be passed back up the line until the person on top can boast of his success and the effectiveness of his or her methods.

Meanwhile, the students graduate to be replaced by another crop of test takers, while what happens to the graduate is of no real concern to the school district as they are on their own and unneeded by it.

## PARANOIA GRIPS THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Paranoia sets in throughout a school district's leadership as they begin to fear anything that might not be on the test, because if taught for the students' personal betterment and growth, it might take away from the time required to prepare to take a test about whose content they can actually remain ignorant.

This could explain, for example, why a once in a lifetime event like the Oklahoma State Centennial could be ignored at many schools without so much as an announcement, as taking the time for a school wide celebration of it would have taken valuable time away from instruction, time that is already reduced by district administered quarterly tests, state tests and other test taking related activities whose only purpose is to make sure the right statistics can be delivered.

## AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THE NCLB TEST WORKS

Let's say there are five ways to get from Oklahoma City to Tulsa. The students read a selection describing these and mentioning that one is the best route. This is followed by a few questions, one of which asks which route is the best.

If students read the questions before the selection, which is perfectly acceptable, then knowing what they need to look for they can carelessly read the selection looking for the words that tell them which route is the best, and then answer the question correctly.

They do not need to comprehend what the paragraph is truly about because

See NCLB Page 14

# No Handcuffing High Court

## Rewriting History On Lethal Injection?

By Danny M. Adkison

The controversy over lethal injection as a form of capital punishment was before the U.S. Supreme Court recently. I counted at least a dozen articles devoted to the topic in local and national newspapers. Some were not factual news reports but commentaries by professional columnists.

When writing about a constitutional issue you can attack it head on, or sometimes, you can get at the issue by using what others have said about the issue.

Long-time syndicated political commentator James Kilpatrick wrote an article on the issue of lethal injection. The article was probably read by those interested in the issue, but for anyone who seriously studies the U.S. Constitution and constitutional law, the article takes on a life of its own due to the analysis provided by the author.

As background, keep in mind that the issue presently before the Supreme Court has to do with states using lethal injection in capital punishment cases. The Eighth Amendment to the Constitution stipulates that no "cruel and unusual punishments" shall be inflicted. A question has been raised about whether the lethal injection used by most states might inflict excruciating pain on those injected with the variety of drugs used in the injection.

### ANALYZING LETHAL INJECTION THROUGH A DARK GLASS

This was the subject of Kilpatrick's essay. Not only did he fail to make the various issues involved in the constitutional issue transparent, his analysis hardly made it translucent – more like looking through a glass darkly. Here are a few examples:

"Two hundred years ago, when the Founding Fathers proposed the Eighth Amendment, hanging was the preferred method of execution." Now, you can see where Kilpatrick is going with this [compared to lethal injection, how painless could hanging be?], but what about the grounds for this argument?

The Founding Fathers did not write the Eighth Amendment. That Amendment was written by the First Congress, which proposed 12 amendments [only 10 were immediately ratified] that went on to become the Bill of Rights in 1791.

The phrase "Founding Fathers" packs a lot of punch with most Americans and that, no doubt, is why Kilpatrick is employing it in his argument. But there is no punch when there is no stipulation endorsed by the Founding Fathers.

### KIRKPATRICK'S SPURIOUS CONTEXT

Furthermore, concerning Kilpatrick's argument, what other types of execution did the Founding generation have other than hanging, quartering, burning at the stake, crucifixion? Hanging may have been, one could at least argue, the most humane form of quickly and painlessly executing someone.

"The most interesting question is this: Assuming, *arguendo*, that capital punishment in the 21st Century has become both cruel and also unusual, may the Supreme Court declare it constitutionally abolished? To be sure, the high court may effectively rewrite any of the 10 original amendments by judicial fiat. It would take only five votes and capital punishment would join Prohibition on the scrap heap of history."

This analysis is, to say the least, odd. First, it is hard to see how anyone, but especially a professional writer who focuses on the Supreme Court, could seriously question whether the Court can determine the constitutionality of issues such as are raised by lethal injection. Why did the First Congress bother with



proposing and the states with ratifying the Eighth Amendment unless there was something they wanted to prohibit? People may disagree on what that something is but there is no disagreement that if a punishment is deemed "cruel and unusual" it is prohibited by the Constitution.

### A MOST CURIOUS ARGUMENT

Furthermore, this odd statement follows Kilpatrick assuming that the death penalty itself is cruel and unusual. Granted, his argument is for argument's sake, but why do this when there is a better argument to make for saying the opposite.

There are three references in the Fifth Amendment to the death penalty. One refers to how to indict for crimes involving a capital offense, another refers to not putting a person's life in jeopardy twice, and the final reference states that due process must be used to deprive a person of life.

Would the First Congress refer to the death penalty three times in one amendment and then ban it in another? One would assume not.

Kilpatrick's reference to Prohibition is also odd. Prohibition was overruled by another amendment to the Constitution [the 21st] not by a vote of the Supreme Court.

### HE CAN'T GET HIS FACTS RIGHT

Even when he does try, at the end of his essay, to refer to how Prohibition was ultimately challenged he mistakenly refers to two-thirds of the states proposing an amendment, when, in fact, all amendments to the Constitution have been proposed by a two-thirds vote of Congress.

"Readers know where I come from. If capital punishment is to be abolished, the states must do it one by one, through statutory repeal of their own laws."

This is how Kilpatrick concludes his essay. It basically sees no role for the Supreme Court to enforce the Constitution by refusing to allow laws to operate which contradict that document. Even though our Framers wrote that if the Supreme Court could not do this the words of the Constitution "would amount to nothing."

No hedging here. No beating about the bush. However the Supreme Court ought to rule on the question of lethal injection [the subject maybe of another essay] that ruling will apply to every state.

Sometimes the arguments used in a constitutional debate are as interesting as the constitutional issue itself.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

## NCLB

From Page 13

they know the answer to look for. Students, after the amount of practice and preparation they go through, have become very adept at appearing to be knowledgeable because of test scores, but incapable of conversation about many topics because they never had to learn the information, just how to take a test

### STUDENTS FACE GOOD ODDS

The process of eliminating the two obviously impossible answers from a list of four, and then choosing one from the remaining two gives each student a 50/50 chance of actually guessing the right answers, and those are good odds.

The falseness is further compounded by comparing American schools, which have to accept and educate all students regardless of abilities, to other industrialized countries that weed out those of lesser ability before they get to the ages whose test scores are compared to American students.

If in America we expelled students throughout elementary and middle school who did not make the grade and steered them toward menial labor jobs, those who remained would be closer to those with whom American school students are compared – kids who go to the American equivalent of a school requiring an entrance exam.

### EMPTY GRADES AND STATISTICS

The educational system is no longer for the students. It is no longer about knowledge, but empty grades and statistics.

At some schools students can make up lost time due to any sort of absence by spending a few hours on Saturdays doing all their missed work.

This way they can pass, and grades and graduation rates look very good.

The only real work a student can do during make-up time is by and large busy work, as their absence kept them away from the instruction that was going on.

Students who have exceeded the allowable limit of absences [over 10] cannot

possibly get the information they should have gotten in 10 80-minute classes held every other day by completing work in a workbook on a Saturday when they haven't been in the classroom for most of a nine-week period.

It is a case of appearance vs. reality, and produces what looks like success for the school, while, besides helping the occasional students with self-esteem issues, does very little to prepare students for the future by giving them a real education. You cannot learn if you are not present.

### TEACHES HOW TO AVOID RESPONSIBILITY

It does, however, inadvertently teach students the survival skill of avoiding responsibilities because someone else will always accommodate. It is like the student who asks to do the easy things he or she has mastered, over and over, as a way to bring up their grades because it is easier to do that than to learn the new information.

These end up frustrated in college because they have to have classes with students who have substance behind their grades while they are swimming in a sea of confusion.

No Child Left Behind does not really benefit the students; it only benefits those who know how to present the resulting statistics and are experts in double-speak and self-applied back patting.

The most effective way to measure the claims of success bolstered by all these test results and the instructional time lost for test preparation – and actually taking the multiple tests each year – is to ask this simple question:

"When you speak to those who have been educated under No Child Left Behind, do you find you have to explain more and more in order to converse about less and less?"

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

# American Unions Increased In 2007

By Ben Zipperer and John Schmitt

For the first time in the past quarter of a century, U.S. unions in 2007 increased their share of membership among workers, according to the annual union membership report released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Unions added about 310,000 members last year, raising the unionized share of the workforce to 12.1% from 12% in 2006.

The increase is small, and may well reflect statistical variation rather than an actual increase in the union membership share, but the uptick is striking because it is the first time the union share has increased since the bureau began collecting annual union membership rates in 1983.

American union membership has declined almost continuously, with occasional pauses, from 20.1% in 1983 to 12.1% this year. Those are the well-paying jobs.

## CALIFORNIA WAS THE BIG WINNER

The national rise reflected a large increase in union membership in California, partially offset by substantial declines in the Midwest.

Among women, union membership rose from 10.9% of women workers in 2006 to 11.1% last year. Rates for men remained unchanged at 13%.

This modest narrowing of the gender gap in union membership was primarily driven by gains among white women, whose unionization rate increased from 10.5% to 10.8% in 2007. African-American men saw their membership rate grow from 15.6% to 15.8%, but rates for black women fell to 13% in 2007 from 13.7% in 2006.

In the private sector, which accounts for the bulk of employment in the economy, union membership gains varied by industry.

## CONSTRUCTION UNIONS LED THE WAY

Construction unions increased their membership faster than the rate of job growth in that industry, with membership jumping from 13% in 2006 to 13.9% in 2007.

Membership in the private health and education sectors grew from 8.3% to 8.8%. Unions also made headway in the low-paying retail industry, increasing membership rates from 5% to 5.2%.

Manufacturing, however, continued to lose unionized jobs in 2007 faster than the sector's overall decline in employment. Union membership in manufacturing fell to 11.3% in 2007 from 11.7% in 2006.

Although manufacturing jobs were once accurately identified with unionized employment, manufacturing workers are now less likely to be in a union than is the average worker.

## IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE REGION

While the U.S. experienced an overall gain in union membership, trends dif-

# U.S. Falls To 15th In Average Income

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] annually ranks worker income in the 30-richest countries in the world. For America, the news is all bad – it now ranks 15th.

In the newest OECD Economic Outlook, the average annual wage in the total economy of the U.S. was \$45,563 for 2005. Luxembourg, a wealthy banking duchy, tops the list with an average of \$50,634.

Britain, Ireland, and Australia are not far behind the U.S. with incomes above \$40,000.

Oklahoma's worker average income is 20% below that.

The result was "monumental," says Jacob Kirkegaard, an economist at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

The richest middle class, if measured in terms of the purchasing power of their income, is Britain.

## AMERICA HAS LOST ITS BRAGGING RIGHTS

That ranking would surprise most Americans, who likely consider their nation the most prosperous in the world.

In one fell swoop, OECD statisticians lowered the estimated income of the average American worker by more than 10% and raised average incomes of other rich nations by as much as 30%, he said.

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ferred by region. Unionization in northeastern states such as New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania grew modestly from 18.4% in 2006 to 18.7% last year.

Southern union membership remained unchanged at 5.9%, less than half of the national average.

Midwestern states, which include Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin, historically have had a higher unionization rate than states in the West.

But for the first time since comparable annual data became available in 1983, the unionization rate in the West [14.7%] exceeded the unionization rate in the Midwest [13.8%].

In the West, California added over 200,000 union members in 2007, helping to expand unionization in western states from 13.9% in 2006 to 14.7% last year.

## ILLINOIS UNIONS WERE THE BIG LOSERS

Meanwhile, Illinois weathered the largest loss of union membership of any state in 2007, as its share of unionized workers fell from 16.4% to 14.5%. Midwestern union membership in total dropped from 14.4% to 13.8%.

Although U.S. unions overall saw only a small increase in membership in 2007, this is the only year that unionization has risen in the past quarter of a century.

This long-term decline stands in remarkable contrast to worker desire for unionization. According to polls of non-managerial workers, about one-half want to be but are not union members.

It won't happen as long as corporations rule America and own an ardent anti-union president.

© Truthout

It may well be that the comparative U.S. standard of living is slipping. The price of oil has risen more dramatically in the United States than in other nations because of the dollar's large devaluation – thanks to the Bush Administration.

The OECD's report is based on the "average worker," which captures all sorts of private sector jobs including mining, utilities, construction, retail, hotel/restaurants, financial services, real estate, and other areas.

## OF COURSE THE RICH ARE GETTING RICHER

The richest Americans' incomes have risen enormously in recent years. Outside of Hungary, the U.S. has the most extreme income inequality in the OECD.

Kirkegaard figures middle- and lower-income Americans are being squeezed by the flood of money going to the superwealthy.

Democrats in Congress have the same view, and their tax proposals would shift the tax burden up the income ladder.

After the early 1990s, the incomes of "very well-off Americans increased much faster than those of both the middle class and the poor," says Gary Burtless, an expert at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

For example, top corporate officers got pay increases of 9.5% a year in the 1990s, on top of high levels to start with.

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## WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

For nearly 40 years, The Observer has been Oklahoma's only journal of free voices, providing news, analysis and commentary that can't be found in the state's lock-step, right-wing mainstream media. We've never wavered in our commitment to speak truth to power and to shine the spotlight on rank hypocrisy and public corruption.

But here's a truth we confront daily: We don't own the deep pockets of the Gaylords or the Lortons or the big national media chains. Our feisty journal relies on the generosity and support of its subscribers and small advertisers to keep challenging the status quo.

You can help ensure The Observer's future for generations by making us a part of your legacy and remembering us in your will. In return, we promise to continue delivering messages the silk-stocking elite don't want rank-and-file Oklahomans to receive. And to remain true to our motto: To Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable.

# Overcoming Stigma Of Mental Illness

By Stacy Hollingsworth

It's a feeling I've come to know well – the knot in my stomach, the palpitations, the racing thoughts that question the potential consequences of what I'm about to do. Should I tell them? Is it possible they'll understand what I'm going through? Will they think any less of me once they find out?

Questions such as these run through my mind every time an otherwise uneventful conversation suddenly turns into a highly personal one, often times beginning with the phrase "I have a mental illness."

By the time I entered high school, I knew something was wrong. I noticed that I was depressed more often than not, was disinterested in activities I once enjoyed, and wanted to spend considerable time alone.

## SHE REALIZED SHE WAS MENTALLY ILL

After researching disorders on the Internet, I finally realized that I was facing a severe case of major depressive disorder. No matter how hard I tried, I could not identify a single cause or event that was responsible for the tremendous pain I was experiencing.

It didn't make any sense to me. My life was just so picture perfect, and yet there I was, so miserable. I nearly convinced myself that things would get better without appropriate intervention, as my condition continued to deteriorate.

Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, I felt compelled to hide my suffering from the outside world; even those closest to me were unaware of my battle with depression.

## I WAS A WALKING TIME BOMB

However, I could not hide from the fact that I was a walking time bomb. I was desperate for an end to the immense pain and therefore spent much of my time pondering suicide.

Unlike many of my peers, for whom college represented independence, exciting new social opportunities, and an intellectually stimulating atmosphere, my personal transition into college was most notably a symbol of my entrance into the mental health care system – an opportunity to reclaim the life that had been stolen from me as a result of the depression.

I still recall the first day I set foot into a counseling center on campus. I somewhat reluctantly got off the shuttle bus and quickly made sure no one who knew me saw where I was headed.

## IT IS HARD TO GO PUBLIC

At first, opening up about the illness was incredibly awkward. I was so nervous that I'm not even sure I was speaking in coherent sentences.

Since then, though, I've had plenty of opportunities to discuss the illness with psychiatrists, therapists, and other people suffering from mental illness.

Because I was relatively treatment resistant, it took a lot of patience to get through the many failed treatment attempts, which included a variety of different medications, repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation, acupuncture, and electroconvulsive therapy [ECT].

# Lack Of Insurance Equals Poor Health

The case for providing health coverage for all Americans got even more compelling when two new studies presented the most comprehensive evidence yet that lack of health insurance is seriously harmful to a patient's health.

The studies found that uninsured people suffer significantly worse outcomes from cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer than those who have coverage.

One study by researchers at Harvard Medical School, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that uninsured near-elderly people got sicker at a faster rate than comparable people with insurance.

Those disparities were sharply reduced when people turned 65 and became eligible for Medicare.

Those who previously had insurance reported no significant change in their health as they transitioned to Medicare, but those with little or no prior coverage reported a substantial slowing of the decline of their health.

It was strong proof of the value of Medicare's universal coverage for elderly Americans.

## THE VALUE IS PARTICULARLY EVIDENT

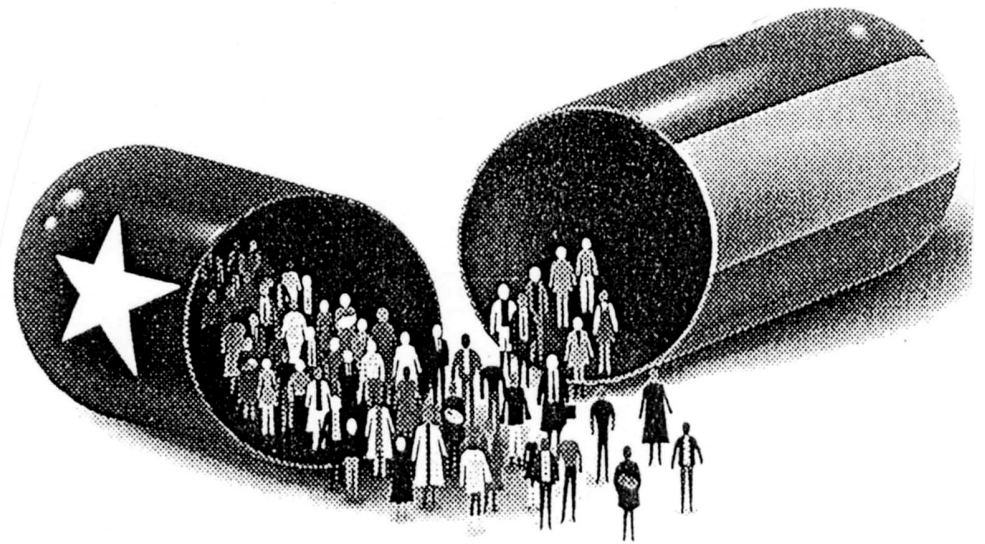
The value was particularly evident for previously uninsured individuals suffering from heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure or diabetes. Once on Medicare, they benefited greatly from medical management of blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels and quicker access to effective treatments and prescription drugs.

They had 10 fewer major cardiac complications, such as heart attacks or heart failure, than would have been expected by age 72 based on their previous health trends.

A second study, by researchers at the American Cancer Society, found substantial evidence that lack of adequate health insurance coverage was associated with less access to care and poorer outcomes for cancer patients.

The uninsured were less likely to receive recommended cancer screening tests and more likely to have their cancers diagnosed at a later stage, when they are less curable.

They had lower cervical rates than those with private insurance for several



Electroconvulsive therapy, also referred to as "shock therapy," has quite a controversial history that extends into the present day.

## STIGMATIZED ILLNESS AND TREATMENT

So, in addition to the fact that I was coping with a stigmatized illness, I was now undergoing a rather stigmatized treatment, as well.

The use of medications in treating depression has gained acceptance in society, but shocking the brain? How barbaric, right?!

Ironically, in our culture, it's perfectly acceptable to shock a heart in order to save someone's life, but it's not OK to shock a brain. Remember, the brain is an organ, too.

Although ECT was personally ineffective, it did serve as a reminder that what I was suffering. You have to ask yourself what's more important – that everyone thinks you're doing well ... or that you truly are doing well.

## NOT EVERYONE CAN OR WILL UNDERSTAND

Not everyone out there will understand or will want to understand the nature of the disorder. We cannot blame them – they haven't been educated about mental illness. All we can do is be ourselves. We shouldn't have to apologize for having to deal with a disorder that was uninvited in the first place.

Early intervention can improve your overall prognosis – not to mention spare you years of dealing with was a disabling medical disorder – not a character flaw.

Getting comfortable with the disorder to the point where you can speak about it openly does not happen overnight. It's a process, but one that does get easier over time. For me, it first took personal acceptance.

Our newly created NAMI-Rutgers will educate the campus community about mental illnesses, promote the early detection of mental illnesses and early intervention, provide support for students with mental illnesses, reach out to family members and friends of students living with mental illnesses and combat the unfortunate stigma that continues to exist with these illnesses.

This illness IS treatable. You CAN feel better. What are you waiting for?

*Editor's Note: The author is a junior at Rutgers University in New Jersey, where she started a NAMI campus-based affiliate that opened its doors to students and faculty.*

[www.NAMI.org](http://www.NAMI.org)

cancers for which there are screening tests and effective treatments, including breast and colorectal cancer.

The two studies leave little doubt that health improves when people gain insurance coverage. That coverage should be available to all Americans.

© The New York Times

## Why Brewster Rooster Was Cock Of The Walk

Boudreaux was in the fertilized egg business. He had several hundred young layers, called pullets, and 10 roosters, whose job was to fertilize the eggs.

Boudreaux kept records, and any rooster that didn't perform well, went into the gumbo pot and was replaced. That took an awful lot of Boudreaux's time.

Boudreaux bought some small bells and attached them to his roosters.

Each bell had a different tone so Boudreaux could tell, from a distance, which rooster was performing. Now Boudreaux could sit on his porch and fill out his efficiency report simply by listening to the bells.

Boudreaux's favorite rooster was old Brewster. Yep, Brewster the rooster. A very fine specimen he was. But on this particular morning, Boudreaux realized that he had not heard Brewster's bell ring. Hmmm. Boudreaux went to investigate.

The other roosters were chasing pullets, bells a-ringing. The pullets, hearing the roosters coming, would run for cover. But, to Boudreaux's amazement, Brewster had his bell in his beak, so it couldn't ring.

He'd sneak up on a pullet, do his job and sneak up to the next one.

Boudreaux was so proud of Brewster that he entered him in the parish fair. Brewster was the hit of the fair. He was an overnight sensation. The judges not only awarded him the No Bell Piece Prize, but he also won the Pulletsurprise.

[All groan in unison.]

# Hatred Of Women Pervasive In U.S.

By David Whitfield

*"How do we explain the oppression and brutalization of half the world's population by the other half, throughout history?" – Jack Holland in Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice*

The first time I witnessed violence against a woman, I was 17, living next door to a stockyard butcher, his wife and baby, on the South Side of Chicago.

"I hate you!" followed by the B-word, then flesh hitting flesh – the butcher was at it again. After entering their apartment, I managed to wrestle the meat cleaver from him.

When the cops arrived, I was accused of molesting his wife. And had she not spoken up, I would have gone to the notorious Cook County jail, for attempted rape – black teenager in a white couple's apartment.

## BEATEN AND KILLED AND TRAFFICKED

Loretta Francis' study found that a woman is beaten every nine seconds in this country; more than three women are killed by their husbands or boyfriends daily. And then there's trafficking.

Of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked yearly across international borders, 80% are women, used primarily for prostitution and forced labor, according to the State Department's "2006 Trafficking In Persons Report."

According to Kevork Djansezian's report, some 12,000 to 18,000 persons are trafficked into the United States yearly, from some 50 countries; most are women used for sex and slave labor.

## COPS ARE COMPLICIT

Imagine your 11-year-old daughter trapped in a brothel, six to eight men force themselves on her daily. If she gets to the police, the police take her back to the brothel because the perpetrator and the police are complicit – a finding in the State Department's report.

Though sex cases are the priority for prosecutors, many women are put in sweatshops in almost every state in the union, making bridal dresses by hand, without compensation.

Women are also abused in the regular workplace, economically. The Coalition of Labor Union Women said in 2005, women were paid 77 cents for every dollar men received.

That's \$23 less to spend on groceries, housing, child care and other expenses for every \$100 worth of work women do. The average 25-year-old working woman

# Misogyny Is The National Pastime

By Bob Herbert

If there was ever a story that deserved more coverage by the news media, it's the dark persistence of misogyny in America.

Sexism in its myriad destructive forms permeates nearly every aspect of American life. For many men, it's the true national pastime, much bigger than baseball or football.

Little attention is being paid to the toll that misogyny takes on society in general, and women and girls in particular.

Its forms are limitless. Hard-core pornography is a multibillion-dollar business, having spread far beyond the stereotyped raincoat crowd to anyone with a laptop and a password.

## CRAZED PHOTOGRAPHERS

Crowds of crazed photographers risk life and limb to get shots of Paris Hilton or Britney Spears without their underwear.

At New York Jets home games, men regularly gather at Gate D to urge female fans to expose themselves.

In its grimmest aspects, misogyny manifests itself in hideous violence – from brutal beatings and rape to outright torture and murder.

Fifteen months ago, a gunman invaded an Amish schoolhouse in rural Pennsylvania, separated the girls from the boys, and then shot 10 of the girls, killing five.

## CABLE FEASTS ON GRUESOME STORIES

The cable news channels revel in stories about women [almost always young and attractive] who come to a gruesome end at the hands of violent men.

The stories seldom, if ever, raise the issue of misogyny, which permeates not just the crimes themselves, but the coverage as well.

Latest of these obsessively covered stories concerned a pregnant marine, Maria Frances Lauterbach, who had complained to authorities that she had been raped by a fellow marine.

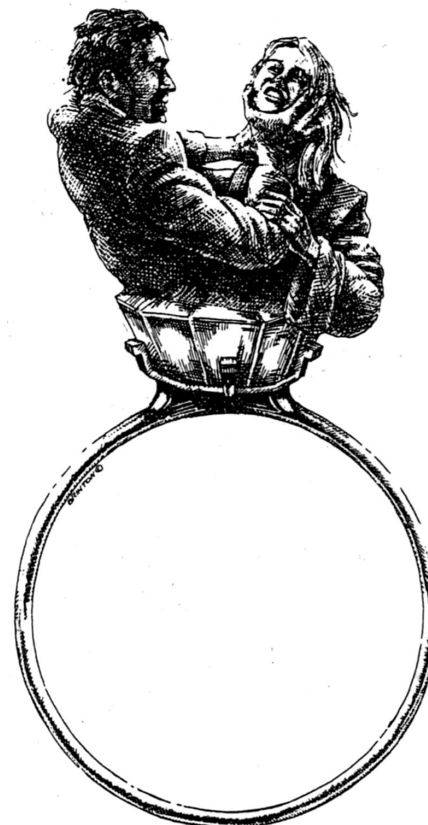
Her body was found buried in a backyard fire pit in North Carolina. It just so happens that the Democratic presidential candidates were campaigning in the misogyny capital of America: Nevada.

## CANDIDATES WON'T RUN THE RISK

It's a perfect place to bring up the way women are viewed and treated in this society, but don't hold your breath. Presidential wannabes are hardly in the habit of insulting the locals.

Prostitution is legal in much of Nevada and heavily promoted even where it's not.

In Las Vegas, where prostitution is illegal but flourishes nevertheless, Mayor Oscar Goodman has said that creating a series of legal, "magnificent" brothels would be a great development tool for his city.



is denied more than \$523,000 through unequal pay during her working life.

## WORKING FAMILIES LOSE BILLIONS A YEAR

Nationwide, working families lose \$200 billion in income annually to the wage gap.

These figures are even worse for women who are non-white. And because women are paid less, they have less for their future and will earn smaller pensions than men – not my definition of social justice or economic justice.

What makes this so vile is that most of us behave, as Jerry Harvey says, like "little Eichmanns in the corporation," perpetuating it by remaining silent, keeping our hands clean, and committing "little murders."

So, how do you respond when faced with misogyny? Would you have entered the butcher's apartment?

I challenge you to list just two actions you are taking against the subtle and not-so-subtle acts of hatred against women – all women. If you cannot, then think about the meaning of being a "little Eichmann in the corporation."

– The author is founder of Integral Leadership Inc. and adjunct professor in Gonzaga University's doctoral program in leadership studies

The fundamental problem in all of this is that women and girls are dehumanized, opening the floodgates to every kind of mistreatment.

## IT BEGINS WITH DEHUMANIZING

"Once you dehumanize somebody, everything else is possible," said Taina Bien-Aime, executive director of the women's advocacy group Equality Now.

A grotesque exercise in the dehumanization of women is carried out routinely at Sheri's Ranch, a legal brothel about an hour's ride outside of Vegas. There the women have to respond like Pavlov's dog to an electronic bell that might ring at any hour of the day or night.

At the sound of the bell, the prostitutes have five minutes to get to an assembly area where they line up, virtually naked, and submit to a humiliating inspection by any prospective customer who has happened to drop by.

## TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

If you don't think this is an issue worthy of a presidential campaign, consider the scandalous way that women are treated in the military and the fact that the winner of this election will become the commander in chief.

Sexual mistreatment of women in the military is widespread. The Defense Department financed a study of female veterans seeking health assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Nearly a third of those surveyed said they had been the victim of a rape or attempted rape during their service.

The Associated Press reported in 2006 that more than 80 military recruiters had been disciplined over the course of a year because of sexual misconduct with young women and girls who had considered joining the military.

## WIDESPREAD COMPLAINTS CONTINUE

There continue to be widespread complaints from women about rape and other forms of sexual attacks in the military, and about a culture that tends to protect the attackers.

To what extent are the candidates of either party concerned about these matters? Do they have any sense of how extensive and debilitating the mistreatment of women and girls really is?

We've become so used to the disrespectful, degrading, contemptuous and even violent treatment of women that we hardly notice it.

Staggering amounts of violence are unleashed against women and girls every day. Fashionable ads in mainstream publications play off of that violence, exploiting themes of death and dismemberment, female submissiveness and child pornography.

If we've opened the door to the issue of sexism in the presidential campaign, then let's have at it. It's a big and important issue that deserves much more than lip service.

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# Debunking The Myth **Reagan's Real Legacy: Greed And Selfishness**

By Paul Krugman

Historical narratives matter. That's why conservatives are still writing books denouncing F.D.R. and the New Deal. They understand that the way Americans perceive bygone eras, even eras from the seemingly distant past, affects politics today.

It's also why the furor over Barack Obama's praise for Ronald Reagan is not, as some think, overblown. The fact is that how we talk about the Reagan era still matters immensely for American politics.

Bill Clinton knew that in 1991, when he began his presidential campaign. "The Reagan-Bush years," he declared, "have exalted private gain over public obligation, special interests over the common good, wealth and fame over work and family."

## **GILDED AGE OF GREED, SELFISHNESS**

"The 1980s ushered in a Gilded Age of greed and selfishness, of irresponsibility and excess, and of neglect."

Contrast that with Obama's recent statement, in an interview with a Nevada newspaper, that Reagan offered a "sense of dynamism and entrepreneurship that had been missing."

Maybe Obama was, as his supporters insist, simply praising Reagan's political skills. [I think he was trying to curry favor with a conservative editorial board, which did in fact endorse him.]

Where in his remarks was the clear declaration that Reaganomics failed? For it did fail. The Reagan economy was a one-hit wonder.

## **ONLY THE RICH GOT RICHER**

Yes, there was a boom in the mid-1980s, as the economy recovered from a severe recession. But while the rich got much richer, there was little sustained economic improvement for most Americans.

By the late 1980s, middle-class incomes were barely higher than they had been a decade before – and the poverty rate had actually risen.

When the inevitable recession arrived, people felt betrayed – a sense of betrayal that Clinton was able to ride into the White House.

Given that reality, what was Obama talking about? Some good things did eventually happen to the U.S. economy – but not on Reagan's watch.

## **NO REAGAN YEARS OF RESURGENCE**

For example, I'm not sure what "dynamism" means, but if it means productivity growth, there wasn't any resurgence in the Reagan years.

Eventually productivity did take off – but even the Bush Administration's own Council of Economic Advisers dates the beginning of that takeoff to 1995.

Similarly, if a sense of entrepreneurship means having confidence in the talents of American business leaders, that didn't happen in the 1980s, when all the business books seemed to have samurai warriors on their covers.

Like productivity, American business prestige didn't stage a comeback until the mid-1990s, when the U.S. began to reassert its technological and economic leadership.

## **CONSERVATIVES WANT TO REWRITE HISTORY**

I understand why conservatives want to rewrite history and pretend that these good things happened while a Republican was in office – or claim, implausibly,



that the 1981 Reagan tax cut somehow deserves credit for positive economic developments that didn't happen until 14 or more years had passed. [Does Richard Nixon get credit for "Morning in America"?)

Why would a self-proclaimed progressive say anything that lends credibility to this rewriting of history – particularly right now, when Reaganomics has just failed all over again?

Like Ronald Reagan, President Bush began his term in office with big tax cuts for the rich and promises that the benefits would trickle down to the middle class.

## **BUSH MADE THE SAME FAKE CLAIM**

Like Reagan, he also began his term with an economic slump, then claimed that the recovery from that slump proved the success of his policies.

And like Reaganomics – but more quickly – Bushonomics has ended in grief. The public mood today is as grim as it was in 1992. Wages are lagging behind inflation.

Employment growth in the Bush years has been pathetic compared with job creation in the Clinton era. Even if we don't have a formal recession – and the odds now are that we will – the optimism of the 1990s has evaporated.

This is, in short, a time when progressives ought to be driving home the idea that the right's ideas don't work, and never have.

## **CLINTON FAILED TO CHANGE TRAJECTORY**

It's not just a matter of what happens in the next election. Clinton won his elections, but – as Obama correctly pointed out – he didn't change America's trajectory the way Reagan did. Why?

I'd say that the great failure of the Clinton Administration – more important even than its failure to achieve health care reform, though the two failures were closely related – was the fact that it didn't change the narrative, a fact demonstrated by the way Republicans are still claiming to be the next Ronald Reagan.

Now progressives have been granted a second chance to argue that Reaganism is fundamentally wrong: once again, the vast majority of Americans think that the country is on the wrong track. But they won't be able to make that argument if their political leaders, whatever they meant to convey, seem to be saying that Reagan had it right.

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# **Learning To Live In Depressing Middle Age**

By Susan Estrich

"Hospice is code for six months."

That was the lead, figuratively if not literally, of Leroy Sievers' "My Cancer" blog entry on NPR.com. It's been stuck in my head since I first read it. How could it not be? Leroy, a longtime journalist and former producer at Nightline, has been fighting a recurrence of colon cancer for the last 18 months. And like thousands of others who read his blog religiously, I feel like I've been fighting it with him.

Recently he met with the hospice nurse for the first time. Sometime during their meeting, she said those words. She was very nice, he writes. I'm sure. But the words aren't ones you can sugarcoat. They stick in your head. "Code for six months."

"Why do you read that every day?" my teenage son said to me recently, when he saw me staring bleakly at my computer, reading about Leroy's struggles to deal with the pain that followed back surgery for tumors on his spine, and then with a serious staph infection that he picked up while recuperating in the hospital. "Isn't it depressing?" he asked.

Sure. What else is new?

The Drudge Report recently featured this show-stopping headline: "Study: Middle age is truly depressing."

According to research data collected on 2 million people in 80 countries, happiness follows a U-shaped curve in which people are happy in their 20s and get miserable in their 40s.

Contradicting earlier studies that said well-being remained flat throughout life, new research found that in 72 of the 80 countries studied [the only exceptions were reportedly in the developing world], "people slide down a U-shaped level of happiness and mental health throughout their lives."

Andrew Oswald from Warwick University in Britain, who co-led the study with

David Blanchflower of Dartmouth College, told reporters, "It happens to men and women, to single and married people, to rich and poor, and to those with and without children. Nobody knows why we see this consistency."

I can guess: mortality, illness, career disappointments, dreams that aren't coming true. Your parents get sick and die. Your kids grow up and leave home. Your professional life hits the brick wall of reality as you realize that, no, you aren't going to be president or CEO, or have your own show or that house on the beach.

Reality bites. That's easy.

But there's another side, the real reason I read Leroy's column every day. It's not about figuring out how to die, but, finally, figuring out how to live.

It's the generosity of spirit I found when I went back to my alma mater for my 25th college reunion and discovered that even if we didn't look as great as we once did, even if many of us didn't achieve what we dreamed of, personally or professionally, the competitive edge was gone.

"Staying alive for 25," I joked with an old roommate of mine, who has fought cancer twice. We were nicer to each other than we had been when we were young. Less judgmental. Hopefully, we are also nicer to ourselves, less harsh in our self-appraisals.

The good news from the research study on middle age is that better days are yet to come. The academics found that if you make it to 70 and you're still physically fit, you're likely to be as happy and mentally healthy as a 20-year-old.

I can't wait. Actually, I can. But it's something to look forward to. In the meantime, I keep thinking about Leroy, who today is trying to find a comfortable chair to sit in. My bad shoulder seems like no big deal by comparison – because it is.

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# Moderate Baptists Denouncing Politics

By Rachel Zoll

Weary of Southern Baptists' dominance in American Protestantism, a new push is starting by other Baptist groups aimed at working on social justice issues, showing their religious tradition is broader than the conservative SBC.

Former President Jimmy Carter is leading the effort. More than 10,000 moderate and liberal Baptists met in Atlanta for the "Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant."

Organizers aren't forming a new denomination, but want to develop common ministries that would have a big impact.

Carter, a longtime Bible teacher at his Plains, GA, church, hopes the event will "solidify the image of Baptists and Christians being able to cooperate with other."

## CLINTON AND GORE WERE AT THE GATHERING

The biggest Baptist names at the event were prominent Democrats – former Vice President Al Gore and former President Bill Clinton, who has played a leading and provocative role in the presidential race of his wife, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa also addressed the meeting.

Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a Southern Baptist minister, had agreed to participate, then canceled.

Conservatives waged a long, vicious campaign for control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1970s and '80s to wipe out any moderate or liberal thinking in seminaries churches and Baptist agencies.

## PRESSLER WANTED GROUP THINK

Paul Pressler, a retired Texas judge and one of the leaders of the purge, famously said that conservatives were "going for the jugular" for the cause.

With 16.3 million members, the denomination is not only the largest U.S. Baptist group but also the largest Protestant group in the country.

The 30 groups joining the new covenant effort say they represent millions of Baptists. Among them are historically African-American Baptist denominations, which produced many civil rights leaders, including the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"This is an opportunity to correct what should have happened long ago," said the Rev. William Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc., the largest black Baptist group.

## SLAVERY FIRST SPLIT THE DENOMINATION

Northern and Southern Baptists split in 1845, when Northerners said they wouldn't support missionaries who were slaveholders.



African-American Baptists generally formed their own denominations, and had their own splits over civil rights strategies and other differences.

The groups meeting in Atlanta spanned a range of beliefs on theological and political issues, and have diverse styles of worship. Many oppose abortion and gay marriage, and several groups only ordain men.

However, they also heavily emphasize Bible teaching on social justice. The gathering spent a significant amount of time discussing poverty, health and other policy concerns, along with talks on preaching and the Gospel.

## COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

A leading organizer of the event is the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an association for Southern Baptists who distanced themselves from or broke with their national denomination after conservatives took control.

Carter severed ties in 2000 with the convention because of what he called its "increasingly rigid" beliefs.

In the last few years, Southern Baptists have been struggling to reverse stagnant membership. SBC leaders blame a lack of emphasis on effective evangelism in their churches.

But many Baptists in Atlanta contended the denomination's ties to the religious right and its role in the culture wars have alienated potential newcomers.

"The Baptist brand has been damaged over the last 40 years, especially the Southern Baptist brand, by the idea that conservatives or Baptists or Southern Baptists are mainly known for what they're against, who they're boycotting next," said David Gushee, professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University, a leading organizer of the new covenant.

"The sad thing is, on the grass-roots level, this is not how Baptists are. I'm hoping, and actually praying, that the spirit of this event, will reflect that kind of loving, inclusive community."

© Truthout

# Family Planning Is A No-Brainer

By Cynthia Tucker

The latest news on marriage confirms what we already knew: With 51% of women living without husbands, the traditional family no longer dominates our culture.

Whether you believe that represents triumph or tragedy hardly matters. The transformation is unlikely to reverse itself.

Once upon a time women married for economic support, to cement family alliances, to have children, to counter loneliness, to be like all the other women.

Once upon a time, women wore the title 'wife' like a badge of honor. Today, the word 'wife' does not convey the same unambiguous message, so writes Marilyn Yalom, author of *A History of the Wife*.

Ozzie and Harriet have been replaced by Desperate Housewives, and we ought to update our politics to reflect our modern reality.

There's no better place to start than with the politics of contraception, since children are among those adversely affected by the erosion of traditional family.

No amount of finger-pointing or sermonizing will bring back the days when women were expected to wait until marriage to become sexually active – or to proceed directly to the altar if they became pregnant before marriage.

The efforts of ultraconservatives to ban abortion and preach abstinence-only have only made matters worse by increasing the likelihood that women will get pregnant unintentionally.

Those women often resort to abortion.

That's why the time is right for Congress to pass a bill sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, as a Democratic majority attempts to push policies

with broad centrist appeal.

Reid's proposal, the Prevention First Act, would broaden access to both contraceptives and sex education.

Among other things, it would force more health insurance companies to pay for contraceptives; insist that sex education programs in public schools be based on science, not political or religious dogma; and require pharmacists, despite their religious objections, to fill prescriptions for birth control.

The bill drives right to the broad political center, since an overwhelming majority of Americans support the use of contraceptives.

According to a Harris Poll last year, 89% of Americans believe people should have more access to information about birth control options, and 81% believe that providing contraception would help prevent abortions.

Indeed, that's a no-brainer.

About half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, according to the Guttmacher Institute, which researches family-planning issues.

About 42% of unintended pregnancies end in abortion, the institute says, estimating that one-third of American women – many of them married, most already mothers – will have had an abortion by the time they're 45.

By contrast, many Western nations have much lower rates of abortion because they actively support family planning and birth control.

"The U.S. abortion rate remains among the highest of all industrialized nations – more than twice as high, for example, as the Netherlands," Guttmacher researcher Cynthia Dailard wrote.

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