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Impersonating Integrity No Lawsuit Crisis

By Frosty Troy

Sen. Glenn Coffee, the Senate's leading bloviator, figures if he keeps repeating the canard that Oklahoma has a frivolous lawsuit epidemic the people will begin to believe it.

Add to the Republican mantra of "lawsuit abuse" the steady propaganda emanating from Oklahoma's sorry State Chamber Commerce and you have a recipe for locking the courthouse door.

Coffee's 210-page bill would be a disaster, yet lawyer bashing is so prevalent, it might just pass. The burden would then fall to Gov. Brad Henry, who would never have been elected had it not been for the generous campaign donations by trial lawyers.

Coffee, himself a lawyer, is typical of that breed who constantly knock a segment of their own profession.

A survey of 80 judges last year turned up no evidence of lawsuit abuse or a cascade of frivolous lawsuits. The Observer's own canvass of the state's appeals courts found no evidence to sustain Coffee's accusations.

GOP Speaker Lance Cargill's mouthpiece, Damon Gardenhire, said it was a poll of trial lawyers – which it wasn't.

Coffee would follow the Texas lead by capping non-economic judgments at no more than \$300,000. It was Gov. George W. Bush, kow-towing to rich contributors, who passed that so-called Texas tort reform law in 1995.

The Republican war on the tort system is nothing new. Typically, the GOP toadies for corporate America. Republicans are not dealing in facts, they're fronting for big business.

Whether it's the often-told lie about McDonald's coffee or some over-the-top verdict returned by a jury, there is seldom any follow-up revealing that appeals courts have knocked down "deep pocket" judgments.

The allegation about "court shopping" is also false. There was a time years ago when lawyers loved to file suit in Creek County, known for outrageous judgments, but the state Supreme Court has long since quelled that jurisdiction.

Coffee wants to follow the Texas lead and require dissatisfied homeowners to settle disputes with builders by arbitration.

The Texas Legislature, which also abolished "workmanlike construction" standards for homes, eliminated punitive damages and created a builder-controlled commission that determines whether you're even allowed to file for arbitration.

The few making it to arbitration seldom win, and there is no appeal.

Oklahoma already has a \$300,000 pain and suffering limit for ER doctors and OB/GYNs. Coffee and his cronies want that expanded to include all lawsuits – regardless of the circumstances.

With such restrictions, what lawyers would want the case? That's the point – they wouldn't.

In a case involving an 18-wheeler running a stop sign and breaking the back of a woman driving a car in the intersection, her attorney ended up borrowing more than \$50,000 to get expert witnesses and other trial material. Who would risk that today?

Serious journalists have debunked the lies about an alleged lawsuit crisis. An award-winning article in The Washington Monthly was expanded into a book, *Blocking the Courthouse Door*.

Another book, *The Medical Malpractice Myth*, was published last year, exposing the insurance industry as the

power behind the so-called lawsuit crisis.

Profits at the largest malpractice insurers were more than double those of the Fortune 500 average in 2005. Average profit for the largest malpractice insurers was 17.7%; average for Fortune 500 firms was 8.7%

One new study shows 250,000 Medicare patients were killed by preventable medical errors. Hospitals killed more than 90,000 last year.

Medical errors cost America \$500 billion in 2005 – approximately 30% of all health care costs. [Forbes magazine, June 20, 2006]

The Daily Disappointment uses editorials and op-ed pieces from the corporate crowd to convince Oklahomans of the need for tort reform.

The Disappointment was "deeply disappointed" that lawsuit reform was not mentioned by the governor in his state of the state address.

Republicans were particularly outraged by a decision upheld by the State Supreme Court invalidating a portion of the 2003 law that required patients to get a certificate from a medical expert before their medical malpractice lawsuit could go forward.

In other words, the Legislature would let a single doctor try the case before the case could go to court. Ri-

diculous.

Remember the Ford Pinto, which exploded in a rear-end collision? Remember when flammable pajamas were sold? Remember Fen-Phen, the diet drug? Remember Erin Brockovich's fight for clean water? Remember the nine tobacco executives committing perjury before a Congressional committee?

Would the cases have gone forward if there were a \$300,000 cap?

Republicans also want to revisit the two-year-old workers compensation law, which they claim is not working.

Henry signed that sorry bill into law, knowing it would deny an injured worker the right to choose his own doctor.

Some Democrats want that provision changed, while Republicans would rewrite the law more favorable to business interests.

In fact, most of the workers compensation appeals are coming from injured workers – the reverse of what it was a few years ago when businesses led the appeals parade.

Instead of beating up on trial lawyers, the critics ought to thank goodness that we have them.

Attorneys are the only profession we know of that reimburses persons wronged by an attorney – \$126,000 of their own money last year.

Do doctors, dentists, engineers or accountants do that?

The average lawyer in America earns \$108,000 a year – hardly up there with doctors, dentists or engineers.

There are those among us who say we have too many laws.

Sir Thomas Moore's nephew Roper said he'd cut down every law in England to get at the Devil.

Moore's answer is a classic: "Oh? And when the law was down, and the Devil turned round on you where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat?"

"This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast – man's laws, not God's – and if you cut them down – and you're just the man to do it – do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow them?"

"Yes, I'd give the Devil the benefit of the law, for my own safety's sake."



Observations

They Did What?

It was one of the most irresponsible acts thus far this session. Republicans pushed through an income tax cut that would amount to more than \$400 million over two years.

Only Democrat dumb enough to vote for it was Joe Dorman of Rush Springs.

"In spite of recent tax cuts, there's no denying that Oklahomans are still overtaxed, which creates a barrier to economic growth and job creation," said state Rep. Randy Terrill, chair of the House Revenue and Taxation Subcommittee. "We've got to reform our tax code in Oklahoma if we want good jobs to stay in the state."

That's flatly false. In fact, newest figures show Oklahoma is the 47th lowest taxed state in America.

Tax cuts don't attract industry. Only quality education and a good environment are the main attractions.

House Bill 1388, by Terrill, would cut Oklahoma's top income tax rate from the current 5.65% to 4.65% over a two-year period. The bill would cut the tax rate to 5.25% in tax year 2008 and to 4.65% in tax year 2009. The combined tax cuts would save working Oklahomans more than \$394 million per year when fully implemented.

They cut taxes \$621 million last year and \$300 million the year before, yet they owe tens of millions in unpaid bills – from Teacher's Retirement to \$35 million borrowed from the Police and Fire Pension fund.

Irresponsible tax cuts by pandering Republicans are nothing new – they tell the 49th lowest paid teachers in America to quit grousing. Oklahoma is 46th in what it spends on a child's education.

The Terrill bill was not discussed with the governor nor legislative leaders and is probably dead on arrival.

Incompetence

The public learned that the Bush Administration will go to exceeding lengths to avoid leveling with the American people about the difficul-

ties in Iraq.

In its early stages, the Bush escalation plan has encountered many glitches, and yet the administration claims "so far, so good."

The Congressional Budget Office [CBO] reports that the escalation could be twice as large as Bush has claimed, stating that the 21,500 troops that will be sent to Iraq need to be accompanied by as many as 28,000 support troops.

The White House responded that the additional troops won't need additional support.

The administration also stated that it could not project the amount of funding that Iraq will require past 2009. Yet the CBO was able to estimate that the cost for Bush's plan would be \$919 billion over the next 10 years.

In the wake of the recent spate of U.S. helicopter downings in Iraq, the administration has decided, according to one journalist, to keep information about the incidents "close to the vest."

For an unpopular president trying to execute an unpopular strategy, a candid and honest approach is needed. Unfortunately, there isn't an honest bone in his body.

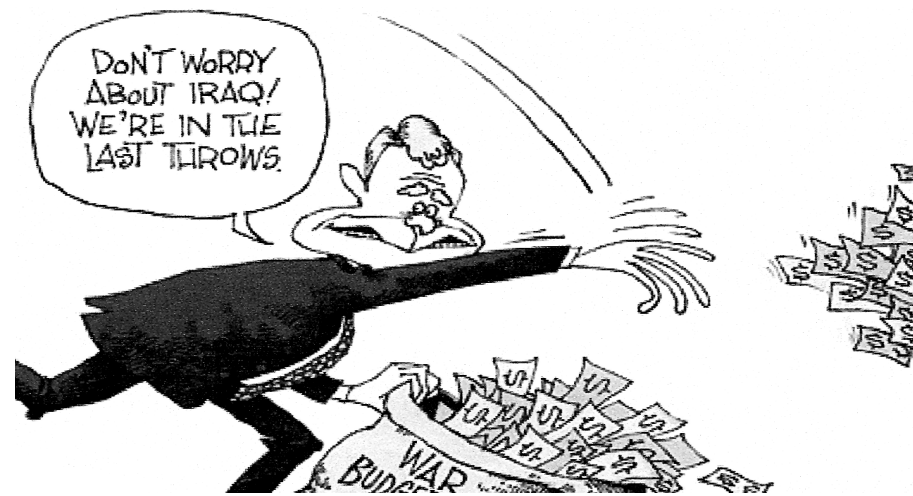
Inequality

On Jan. 31, the President headed to Wall Street and acknowledged for the first time that income inequality exists in America. The fact is that income inequality is real. It has been rising for more than 25 years.

Apparently, Bush is not quite ready to do anything about it. Low and middle income Americans are hit the hardest by Bush's sorry 2008 budget.

A total of 141 government programs would be eliminated or sharply reduced if the budget is enacted. Bush cuts housing for low-income seniors by nearly 25%.

Also on the Bush chopping block is the program to provide low-income people with assistance in paying for



heating costs – 18% cut.

Funding for community development grants cut by 12.7%, and grants for education and employment training cut by 8%.

Bush's budget also cuts funding for child-care and HeadStart, an early education program for low-income children. It also provides no new funds for family planning, even though a million more women are in need of contraceptive services and supplies since 2001.

The bottom line: 200,000 fewer low-income children would receive child-care assistance. Wealthy Americans, however, will not have to suffer under Bush's budget, which proposes making his tax cuts permanent at a cost of \$1.6 trillion over 10 years.

According to The Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution: "If the President's tax cuts are made permanent, households in the top 1% of the population [currently those with incomes over \$400,000] would receive tax cuts averaging \$67,000 a year by 2012.

In today's dollars, that amount is larger than the entire income of the typical American household.

On second thought, maybe he ought to be impeached.

Hillary Haters

We were walking into the Capitol one recent morning when a lady was screeching at the top of her lungs, "I hate that woman! Oh, how I hate Hillary Clinton!"

Asked why, she replied, "I don't know. I just do."

What is it about this very bright U.S. senator that sends people into a blind rage? The venom on the letters page of the Daily Disappointment is spewed regularly.

One of the sorriest reporters we worked with at the State Capitol was Bob Haught, now the Washington-based parrot for the Disappointment.

In one recent column he took his cue from Rush Limbaugh, not only personally savaging Sen. Clinton but also bringing her daughter, Chelsea, into the diatribe.

He is a disgrace to print journalism.

Outrageous

The federal government is trying to recover nearly \$3 billion from its own employees who failed to file income tax returns for 2005.

More than 450,000 active and re-

tired federal employees did not voluntarily comply with federal income tax requirements for the 2005 tax year, according to documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

The total balance owed is \$2,799,950,165. The documents show that every federal agency has employees who failed to comply with federal tax laws.

Seventy-one Bush employees in the Executive Office of the President, which includes the White House, owe \$664,527 in taxes for 2005.

About 20 of those employees have entered into an IRS payment plan, bringing the EOP balance down to \$455,881 owed by 50 employees.

Naturally, The White House would not respond to repeated requests for comment.

A third of the delinquent employees, or 149,500, entered into a payment plan, but the total owed is still more than \$2 billion.

We hasten to point out that the percentage of federal employees who still owe back taxes for the year 2005 is only 3.3% of the workforce, including retirees. That's 3.3% too many.

Vouchers

A huge upside of the Democratic takeover of Congress is the near unanimous opposition to vouchers schemes – another way of de-funding public education.

The Bush Administration has unveiled another scheme that would allow poor students at chronically failing public schools to use federal vouchers to attend private and religious schools, angering Democrats who vowed to fight the measure.

Private school vouchers, which on average would be worth \$4,000, were among a series of proposals hawked by Bush.

His failed NCLB is designed to set public schools up for failure in order to go after vouchers for the Catholic hierarchy and Republican union haters.

Low performing schools are almost universally in the big cities where poverty is rampant and single moms are the norm. The billions wasted on NCLB ought to be targeted to these schools.

NCLB is grossly under-funded. Governing magazine's nationwide survey revealed that it would take \$30 billion to fully fund the Bush disaster.

If the past is prologue, you can bet the Oklahoma delegation will back Bush. They are exhibit "A" when it comes to education's failure.

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

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

- Adapted by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

The Oklahoma Poll gives Gov. Brad Henry an approval rating of 83% – highest ever garnered by a sitting governor. No wonder legislative Republicans are treading lightly.

Dart: To U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn for his sour grapes after the Federal Election Commission nailed him for major campaign reporting violations. He says he won't run again if the pending Ethics Bill becomes law. Good ride.

A woman as president? A new poll shows the overwhelming majority of Oklahomans are all for it. Among Sooner Democrats, Hillary Clinton is favored.

Laurel: To superb Tulsa World editorial writers Janet Pearson and Julie DelCour, both promoted to associate editor positions on the state's best daily newspaper.

Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, has filed legislation to limit the authority of appeals courts to modify judgment and sentencing in cases where the defense is insanity. It's probably unconstitutional.

Dart: To Stuart Jolly of Americans for Prosperity Foundation, for a Daily Disappointment op-ed piece calling for elimination of the franchise tax. Why not just exempt all business taxes?

Rep. Dennis Adkins, R-Tulsa, took in \$4,200 in gifts from lobbyists' last year. **Rep. Ron Peterson, R-Tulsa,** hauled in \$3,300. Top givers: OU at \$31,800 and OSU \$22,000.

Laurel: To U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, the only member of Oklahoma's delegation with the good sense – and backbone – to oppose the President's fallacious troop surge.

Democratic State Treasurer Scott Meacham is quietly laying the groundwork for his campaign for governor. Another likely candidate, if she can raise the money, is Lt. Gov. Jari Askins.

Dart: To a President who would spend \$100 billion more on an illegal, unwinnable war while cutting education 5%, housing 8% and veterans 15.6%. Social programs would take an \$89 billion hit.

We mourn the Feb. 15 passing of former longtime state Sen. Bryce Baggett, a fine public servant and architect of the Uniform Commercial Code.

Laurel: To Senate co-majority leader Charles Laster, D-Shawnee, for nailing the GOP so-called tort reform bill for what it is – pure garbage, locking the courthouse door for ordinary Oklahomans.

GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill has refused to name Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, to the Mental Health Committee although he alone represents a mental hospital.

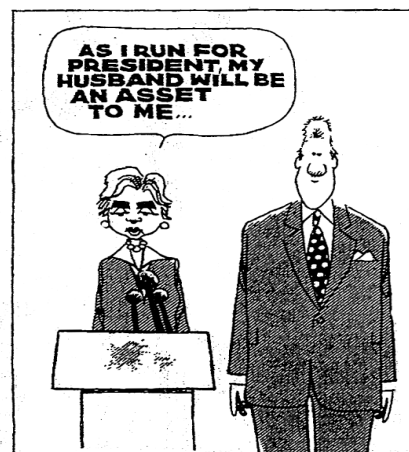
Dart: To the editorial page editor of the Tulsa World for printing a filthy letter attacking the Democratic Party. It was from a nitwit named Charles Callum of Tulsa.

One of the myths perpetually circulating in Oklahoma is that lawyers dominate the Legislature. There are only 26 out of 149, and some of them don't practice law.

Laurel: Bravo for the Henry budget including \$300,000 for establishing two-person offices in McAlester and Woodward for Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma.

Four in 10 babies were born out of wedlock last year – 1.5 million, a record high. Most were to unwed mothers in their 20s. Unmarried couples with children hit 1.7 million, up from 200,000 in 1970.

Dart: To Gov. Brad Henry for his election-year clamp down on paroles. He signed more than 1,400 in 2005 but only 798 in 2006. No wonder our prisons are bulging.



Nobody in Oklahoma is getting rich off welfare. The average payment for a family of four is \$361 a month. Don't forget, thanks to Bill Clinton, welfare is now a time-limited program.

Laurel: To legislative Democrats, including Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, and Sen. Jeff Rabon, D-Hugo, for taking the lead in addressing the Teachers Retirement System, most poorly funded in the nation.

Thanks to the profligate Bush crowd, America now owes China \$350 billion. China is building an oil pipeline to Iran and we have no leverage to stop it.

Dart: To Wal-Mart, stonewalling a gender discrimination lawsuit for more than five years. The ruling is in and a class action lawsuit involving 1.5 million underpaid women is going forward.

The capital improvements recommended by Gov. Brad Henry's executive budget include funds to fix the east tunnel which fills with water after each rain. Thank goodness!

Laurel: To House Speaker Lance Cargill for ordering scantily clad dancers out of the Speaker's ball. The black tie audience was stunned. The band leader arranged it without any consultation.

Rep. Joe Dorman, D-Rush Springs, wants the watermelon to be named the official state vegetable. While they're at it, **Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC,** ought to be named the official state nut.

Dart: To Co-Senate leader Glenn Coffee, R-OKC, for wrongly asserting that the governor's budget would "mortgage our children's future." Wrong! It is designed from top to bottom to help our children.

New House rules adopted under the guidance of Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, and in consultation with the Democratic caucus, aren't perfect but terrific compared to ex-Speaker Todd Hiett's vicious rules.

Laurel: To OSU Professor Joey Senat for his determined leadership in making certain public records and meetings stay public.

The 51st Legislature is making history on two fronts. First, the number of Indian legislators has jumped from eight to 22. Second, **Rep. T.W. Shannon of Lawton** is only the second black Republican to serve in the House.

Dart: To Sen. Brian Crain, R-Tulsa, for his bill that would allow judges to carry guns in the courtroom. Why?

A Zogby Poll on how Americans feel about Oklahoma shows 47% have a favorable opinion, 30% are not familiar with Oklahoma, and 17% hold an unfavorable view.

Oklahoma's ethics system is one of the 12 best in the nation, according to U.S. Public Interest Group. Thanks to then-Gov. Henry Bellmon, we have public official oversight via the Oklahoma Ethics Commission.

Dart: To the Eastern Oklahoma Catholic newspaper for trashing Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Compare their drivel to her Archbishop, Theodore Wesolek, who says she's a wonderful person.

Tulsa County GOP Chairman Jerry Buchanan is seeking the chairmanship of the state party. Anybody would be an improvement over Tom Daxon.

Dart: To those claiming Texas cities are after Oklahoma water. No, it's T. Boone Pickens and Chesapeake.

The Tulsa World's Oklahoma Poll found that 80% of Sooners say they are conservative, 92% say they are religious and 73% said they are "laid back."

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists for giving the First Amendment Award to the Oklahoma Ethics Commission for making campaign reporting available electronically.

How many ordinary Oklahomans do you know who can afford to join a fitness club? **Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa,** has introduced a bill to make such memberships tax-free.

Dart: Adult abuse is soaring in Oklahoma, with 17,319 reported cases in the past year, mainly due to underfunding. To report a suspected case, call the DHS Adult Protective Abuse Hotline at 800.522.3511.

Laurel: To Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, for being one of the few Democrats fighting the tax cutting crazies in the Republican Party. How about funding Teachers Retirement?

Linda Gray Murphy of Oklahoma City has been named to the board of directors for the National Stonewall Democrats. She is an activist and political consultant.

Quote worth repeating: "What the country needs is dirtier fingernails and cleaner minds."—Will Rogers.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

David Boren's enduring legacy is Clarence Thomas and Dan's will be the Military Commissions Act.

Eventually, everything the CIA and Bush Administration are doing [will become public] and Dan will go down with that ship because he will be saying he wasn't aware of what was happening. He will eventually go down because he trusted this bunch of crooks in order to get votes.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Gov. Henry proposes earmarking \$15 million to pilot a pre-school program for three-year-olds. I think we need to focus on educating the students we already have in school.

Currently the state allowance for library books is \$9 per student. The average cost of a library book is over \$20 [School Library Journal]. The e-revolution has increased publishing exponentially. School libraries would make good use of even a portion of that \$15 million.

Neal Bachman
Alva

Editor, The Observer:

With respect to your recent letter from Ray Barton of Chickasha, a glance at Wikipedia shows that paracetamol is the exact same thing as acetaminophen, sold generically in this country, and of course sold under the familiar brand name Tylenol, among others. Paracetamol is not a wonder drug being kept off the market in the USA by drug companies. Neither is it without side effects. It is just a different name for the widely available acetaminophen.

Steve Tedder
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

If your father was a lifelong Democrat who voted for Democrats and your grandfather was a lifelong Democrat who voted for Democrats and you are a registered Democrat who votes most of the time in national elections for Republicans, you are likely a third generation Oklahoman.

Royse Samples
Cache

Editor, The Observer:

Not Molly Ivins gone! Forgive me, but for me your paper will never be as good without Molly; her wit, her irony. Her's was always the first column

I turned to in The Observer. No one could stick it to the man like Molly. I hope she and Ann Richards are partying together in the hereafter [even if they didn't believe in it].

Sheila Tiarks
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

In his last visit to Oklahoma, the consumers' best friend, Ralph Nader, had a few choice words to describe Oklahoma's congressional delegation: "The cruelest, most craven [i.e. cowardly] legislators in Washington, second only to Texas lawmakers."

I thought things might change for us, small fry, when last November, for the first time since 1922, we sent a woman, Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin, to Washington.

So, how did "Mother Mary" vote on a \$2.10 an hour increase in the \$5.15 an hour minimum wage for those who empty bedpans, change the bed linens, sweep the floors and do the hardest work in America?

With 11 million women to benefit from the raise, Fallin went along with our three other Republican House members and voted against her own sex.

Our senators were also meany pants. Sen. Tom Coburn was one of three senators voting against the raise and Sen. Jim Inhofe was absent.

Democratic Rep. Dan "Blue Dog" Boren voted for the pay hike, saying Oklahoma has a higher percentage of workers making at or below the minimum wage than any other state, 4.3% of hour workers or 36,000 people.

The raise passed the House and Senate and now goes to a conference committee to wrestle with tax relief for small business.

And, the six Republicans who represent us in Congress are what President Harry Truman was talking about when he said, "Republicans are for the minimum wage - the more minimum the better."

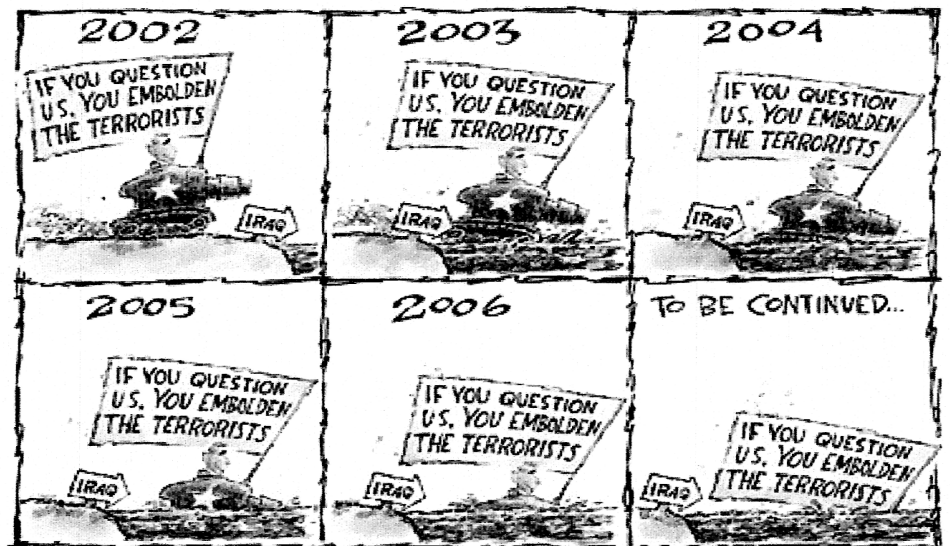
Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

This segment of the sphere vowed recently - enough blood and guts - focus on the funny.

Then, the cover story of a news magazine featured the current plight in Iraq. Said plight isn't a problem; problems have solutions - this problem has none favorable to the U.S.

Reality TV shows may get good rat-



ings, advertising pays the bill. The bill of real realities of the people of this planet cost those involved, or not involved - Death And Destruction.

Worse, the true reality shows will change lives and living for generations to come.

Sectarian warfare is daily reshaping Iraq in many malevolent ways; also forging the future by poisoning the next generation of Iraqis.

The people of today's Iraq are young, as are those of many of its neighbors; nearly half the population is under 18 years old. Millions of these young ones have decided to abandon education; getting to class means six or more checkpoints [there are 1,000-plus in Baghdad].

Many parents have witnessed deaths and kidnappings when taking their children to school. Teachers have been killed, school buildings hit by mortar fire.

The Ministry of Education estimates only 30% of the 3.5 million Iraqi elementary children are now in school.

In addition to the above, fears decimating the educational process drive Iraqi young into sectarian gangs who rule the streets.

Soldiers find graffiti from competing militias on walls of schools. Toy guns are handed out to local youngsters to "play militia" - train the kids to use real weapons.

One 13-year-old is grateful the Iraqi army "made a man out of me." He can barely grow a wisp of a mustache, but handles an AK-47 with professional ease.

A State Department poll learned that 9 of 19 Iraqis see the United States as an occupying force.

Now Iraq's youngsters and oldsters have a glorious goal: Kill An American. Tragic.

Cecil Acuff
Perkins

Editor, The Observer:

The Observer should be supportive of the progressive transportation models in other cities around the country. ODOT is the most inept and incompetent organization in our government, but we won't be hearing the truth from the Joklahoman anytime sooner or later.

If one follows the dollar we could well understand this lack of progress on every front in this state.

Such a shame and it shouldn't happen to the nicest commoners on the planet!

Darla Sparks
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

Witch hunts ... McCarthyism ... How many people silently suffer, as with each generation, warped human nature finds a new outfit to wear?

Perhaps only God knows the toll of victims run over in the path of a stampede of those seeking symbols to validate their presuppositions about "evil" - looking for human symbols in order to get the "feel good" high that shirking blame promises to accomplish.

I'm afraid that recent phenomena such as the Joyce Gilchrist and Duke lacrosse team accusations are just the tip of the iceberg - things which just somehow by a fluke became obvious to us - of a human karmatic cycle gone berserk with blame seeking.

It makes one want to ask, "What is wrong with people?" [I both want to know, and don't want to know, since to know might mean to be just like them.]

However evil the world is with misappropriated anger and false blame, it gives me at least some hope that Christ taught his disciples to pray "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Because this means it is OK to hope for and dream about the world being a better place, not run by dictators, liars, and witch hunters.

"Normal" is whatever we make it to be. In one generation it might be slavery. [Meaning society has the power to make absurd or bizarre things "normal."] For another generation, "normal" might be anything else. Please, though, as humanity, let's not digress by just finding some new "get-up" to wear.

Stephanie Hershberger
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I know that Christ came down to preach love and peace. We can't have it continuously, but by Christ's teaching we are bound to give it our best. That means that true Christians would defend themselves, but don't start wars against countries that were not a threat to us [Iraq].

It means that you don't promote torture. Yet G. Bush, who claims to be guided by God, does both. I think G. Bush is a fraud. He sounds more anti-Christ than Christ-like. And he's bankrupting our country doing it.

There are a dozen reasons to make this charge. Just turning his back on global warming or refusing to raise the minimum wage is like spitting in Jesus' face.

Jim Stodola
Corinth, TX

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Frosty's Notebook

Abortion

Obtaining a legal abortion at one of Oklahoma's three clinics [Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Norman] would be virtually impossible if a raft of Republican bills become law.

The legality of the bills is almost certain to give rise to litigation if and when they become law.

I happen to be a practicing Catholic who abhors the thought of abortion.

But I also believe abortion should be safe and legal.

As for the rhythm method, my mother had 11 children and she laughingly said six were rhythm babies.

I well recall the abortion mills in McAlester and Grove in my youth. I covered the trial of a McAlester teenage girl who induced an abortion with a coat hanger, wrapped the dead child in a newspaper and put it in a garbage can.

It would be a wonderful world if all children were wanted, if all parents were suited for parenthood, if there was not rape and incest.

There were more than 16,000 reported child abuse cases in Oklahoma last year. Oklahoma is in the top five states in divorce rates.

There were 6,600 abortions performed in Oklahoma last year. The bills introduced this year are nothing more than roadblocks.

Wanda Jo Stapleton has written brief descriptions of the pending abortion bills:

HB2181 [McNeil, R-Dist. 29, Creek & Tulsa] – Requires physicians administering RU-486 [mifepristone, the abortion pill] to report any adverse effects to the State Board of Medical Licensure and Supervision. This report becomes a public record that identifies the physician but not the woman receiving the pill.

The bill also subjects physicians to lawsuits [for actual and punitive damages] filed by the woman taking RU-486 and the father involved. Either one can allege that the physician administered RU-486 “in a knowing and reckless manner.” Question: Do laser surgeons, family practitioners, etc. have to report adverse effects of their procedures?

Note: RU-486 is provided only in a doctor's office. It is often confused with the emergency contraceptive, also called Plan B, or the morning-after pill, which is dispensed in pharmacies.

HB-1004 [Kern, R-Dist. 84, Oklahoma] – Sets an unreasonable precedent.

Requires physicians in the three clinics where abortions are performed in Oklahoma to be on the medical staff at a hospital within 30 miles of their clinics – or face felony charges.

Note: If patient safety is the issue, why not require “clinical privileges” for any physician who performs outpatient surgery in an office or clinic?

HB-1652 [Peterson, Pam, R-Dist. 67, Tulsa] – Tightens the definition of “Medical Emergency” regarding abortion. The proposed definition thwarts – even prohibits – a physician from diagnosing a medical emergency. Present law requires a physician to make a “good faith clinical judgment.”

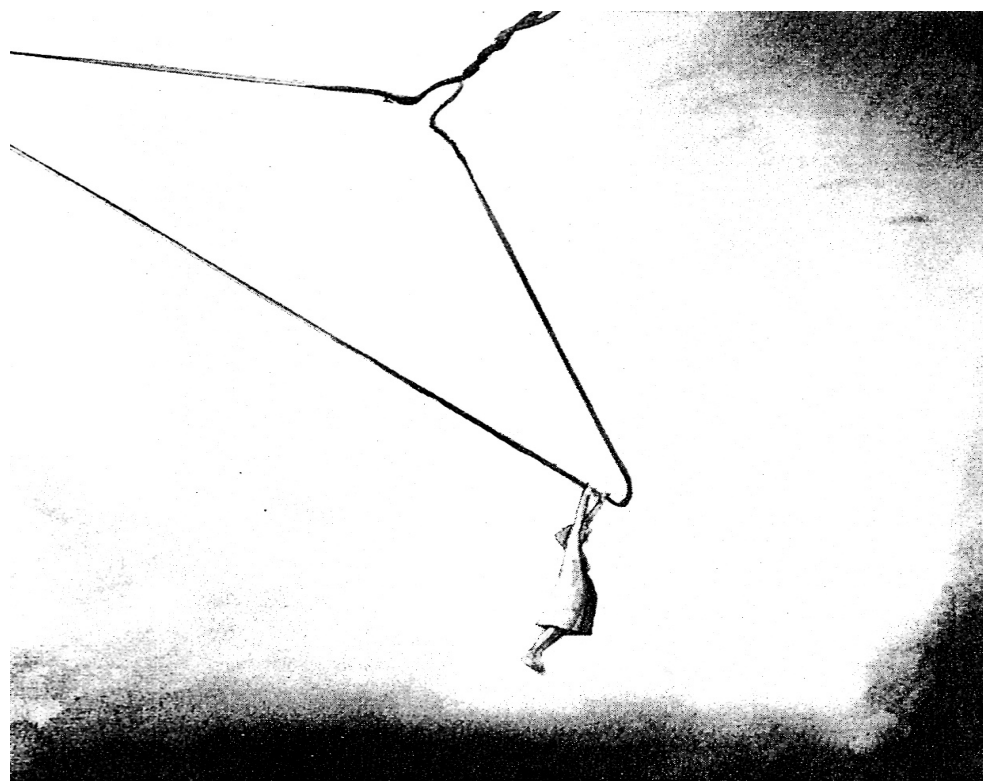
The proposed change requires the physician to be reasonably prudent, have knowledge of the case, and know how to treat whatever is wrong with the woman.

In other words, a physician in an emergency room must be omniscient – that is, know what's in the case file [if there is one] and be knowledgeable about any possible medical condition.

It also requires the physician to do annual, extensive reporting to the State Health Department or be fined \$500 for each 30-day period the report is late. Non-reporting by a year from the due date subjects the physician to a court order and sanctions for civil contempt.

HB-2047 [Kern, R-Dist. 84, Oklahoma] – Proposes a new law defining “medical emergency” regarding abortion for a minor. The proposed definition is the same as the one in HB-1652 [above] with these additions:

Requires that the minor's physical condition would permanently impair a ma-



...jor bodily function if abortion were delayed.

Requires that the physician [or agent] must notify one parent about details of the abortion within 24 hours – no exceptions for a parent who caused the pregnancy.

Non-emergency – not life threatening: The physician performing the abortion must get proof of minor's age and proof of emancipation [if emancipated]; get proof of consenting parent's identification, a notarized statement from the consenting parent, vouch in writing for the statement's authenticity, and keep the information on file for 5-7 years.

Reporting in onerous and burdensome detail about each abortion performed on a minor – subject to a \$500 fine for each 30-day period the report is late.

Physicians who don't report or who submit incomplete reports are subject to court order and sanction for civil contempt. The judge in a judicial bypass must base any decision on “clear and convincing evidence.”

The State Department of Health must submit a comprehensive, annual report. Felonies abound for untrue statements to get an abortion and for physicians who illegally perform an abortion on an un-emancipated minor.

HB-2042 [Faught, R-Dist 14, Cherokee & Muskogee] – According to an explanation in committee, this bill redefines abortion in a way to prevent potassium chloride [KCI] from being injected into the uterus to kill the fetus, then legally remove it as a dead fetus.

No justification or documentation was given regarding the need for this bill. Third-hand gossip was presented about how a nurse “allegedly” told the anti-choice lobbyist about such a procedure. The lobbyist then told the bill's author. Note: Sounds like the game of “gossip.”

HB-1317 [Wright, R-Dist 76, Tulsa] – Shuts down abortions in Oklahoma which are in any way related to state government, its agencies, or any of its subdivisions like counties or cities. Prohibits use of state employees, facilities, equipment, assets, etc.

Also prohibits use of any government funds [taxes, gifts, grants, etc.] from any source to be used for counseling regarding abortion that is not necessary to save the life of the mother. [Note: Tough luck for rape or incest victims.]

HB-1881 [Reynolds, R-Dist. 91, Oklahoma] – Prohibits non-therapeutic research on a human embryo that destroys the embryo or subjects it to harm. Violators can be charged with a misdemeanor.

Prohibits any Oklahoma income tax credit for such research. Prohibits any state agency or retirement system from investing in businesses engaged in this non-therapeutic research.

A Forgotten Genocide

We were delighted to see that two Oklahoma legislators are doing their bit to call attention to the genocide going on in Africa.

A bill sponsored by a pair of Oklahoma City Democrats, Rep. Rebecca Hamilton and Sen. Constance Johnson, would not allow companies doing business with the Darfur region of western Sudan to receive state contracts for as long as the genocide continues.

Since 2003, the Sudanese government and the government-sponsored Janjaweed militia have used rape, displacement, organized starvation and mass murder to kill more than 400,000 and dislocate 2.5 million.

This is where America ought to be sending troops and financial aid, not to an unwinnable war.

Atrocities are occurring daily in Sudan's Darfur region – rape and pillage directed against civilians are at a horrific level in a crisis that is growing worse by the day.

The Darfur conflict has spread to two neighboring countries and is now in “free fall” with six million people facing the prospect of going without food or protection.

Attacks on aid workers in Darfur almost doubled in 2006 and assaults on people displaced by the four-year-old conflict in Sudan's remote west more than tripled.

For over two years, the Bush administration recognized the conflict for what it

is – a genocide. Then came a rhetorical shift – as well as slow movement on economic sanctions – showing the administration does not grasp the urgent need for action. Now they say it isn't genocide.

Others have had to fill the leadership void left by the Bush Administration. The ENOUGH campaign, a new initiative co-sponsored by the Center for American Progress and International Crisis Group, has called on the U.S. and international community to support the “3 Ps” of stopping genocide: “promoting the peace, protecting the people, and punishing the perpetrators.”

Thanks to two Oklahoma legislators for one small step.



See an opinion with which you disagree? See an error that we missed? Tell us what's on your mind. The Observer is a journal of free voices, a public forum for ideas.

Cargill Hopes To Abolish Income Tax

By Arnold Hamilton

First-year House Speaker Lance Cargill's goal is clear: He wants to eliminate Oklahoma's income tax and replace it with a consumption tax.

He concedes a transition to higher sales taxes – perhaps even new taxes on services – won't happen this year, but he already is devising a long-term strategy to make his dream a reality.

"The first step towards that goal is keeping the reductions, the scheduled reductions in the income tax, in place," the Harrah Republican said in a recent interview with *The Observer*.

"As you reduce that percentage dependency of the state on income tax, then it does get easier to talk about a wholesale restructuring of the tax mix."

NO MORE TAX CUTS THIS YEAR

While Cargill said he does not expect any additional income tax cuts to be approved this year, some of his GOP colleagues – including those on his leadership team – are already taking action.

Rep. Randy Terrill, R-OKC, recently won approval for \$400 million more in income tax cuts from the House Revenue and Taxation Subcommittee he chairs.

"I welcome them to the debate," Cargill said of those who would cut deeper and faster. "We're a low-tax caucus, we're a low-tax party, and we certainly welcome their ideas on how to get there."

"Obviously you can't just talk about the revenue side without considering the spending side as well ... Are they all going to be paid out of excess growth revenue or are there program cuts, etc.? You can't consider them just in a vacuum."

TAX CUTS DOA IN SENATE?

It's just as likely that Cargill is a political realist: He knows further cuts are dead-on-arrival in an evenly-divided state Senate – especially with slower-than-anticipated growth this year in tax revenues.

With gross production taxes helping produce record revenues, lawmakers in 2006 approved the largest tax cut in state history, dropping the income tax rate to 5.25% from 6.25% over four years.

Terrill's plan would hasten the income tax's demise, slashing rates from 5.65% currently to 5.25% in 2008 and 4.65% in 2009. The state income tax yields more than half the state's annual operating revenues.

The tax cuts generate second-coming headlines in the state's mostly arch-conservative daily press, especially during flush times. But what happens when the economy sours, as it inevitably will? Constitutional restrictions now make it virtually impossible for state lawmakers to raise significant amounts of new revenue that may be necessary to operate schools, build and repair roads and maintain public safety.

STILL PLAYING CATCH-UP

The nightmare scenario played out as recently as the Keating Administration. The result: As a percentage of the state budget, common education still lags behind its levels of a half-dozen or so years ago. Prisons are woefully understaffed and overcrowded. Bridges are ranked the worst in the nation. And the teachers' retirement system is so under-funded that it's hurting the state's bond rating.

The impact of last year's first round of tax cuts – nearly \$300 million – already is being felt, especially as growth revenues slow.

Racist Bill Draws Indian Criticism

A bill by GOP Rep. Sally Kern that declares English the official language of the state of Oklahoma and requires that all government business be conducted in English is catching flak.

Reps. Chuck Hoskin [Cherokee] and Scott BigHorse [Osage and Cherokee], both candidates endorsed by INDN's List and elected in November, are speaking out against the measure.

"Oklahoma is a Choctaw word," said Hoskin, D-Vinita. "Are we going to have to change the name of all the towns, rivers, counties and other entities that are named from Native American languages? Instead of shunning the cultures that helped form our state, we should embrace them."

"This bill would have a negative impact on the economy," said BigHorse, D-Pawhuska. "It would decrease tourism and send a message to everyone outside the state that Oklahoma does not embrace diversity."

State leaders, both Indian and non-Indian, decry the bill as a mean-spirited and a bigoted throwback to the days when the American government forced Indians to speak English in their homes and schools.

IT SERVES NO PRACTICAL PURPOSE

Not only is the bill discriminatory toward other cultures, but it also serves no practical purpose beyond political gain.

Rep. Jerry McPeak [Muscogee Creek], a friend of INDN's List, is also a leader in the fight.

"This is a slap in the face to every Native American nation in Oklahoma," said McPeak, D-Warner.

"I'm embarrassed to be a part of a Legislature that takes part in legislation like this. I am sure that this piece of legislation is nothing more than political fluff, designed to scare people."

"INDN's List is convinced that racism and cultural discrimination in the halls of state legislatures and in the policies of our government must end if we are to move our country forward and create a country where diversity is allowed to



Cargill, though, argues that transitioning from an income tax to a consumption tax makes sense as Oklahoma's economy becomes more service-oriented.

"It gives more autonomy to the individual to control their rate of taxation," he said. "If you're a big, rich guy – fat cat – and you want to go out and buy a big yacht, you're going to get popped with a big sales tax."

"If you instead choose to save your money, work hard, build up savings, investments, etc., you're not going to be punished ... The consumption tax allows someone to do all those economically productive things and not be taxed for them – only be taxed at a rate that you essentially choose to be taxed at."

WHAT ABOUT TAX FAIRNESS?

A key issue, though, is fairness. Under the income tax, rich and poor pay based on what they earn. A consumption tax hits the poor disproportionately, inevitably consuming a larger percentage of their budgets. Those with hefty disposable incomes can decide whether they're willing to pay a tax on such luxuries as yachts. But those struggling to make ends meet would have little choice but to pay higher taxes on basic necessities. Bread and milk aren't exempted from sales taxes, after all.

"The criticism obviously is that is a highly regressive tax – point taken," Cargill said. "But I think there are things that certain states do in terms of rebates, etc., to taxpayers that try to account for at least the basic necessities of life."

Cargill isn't ready, though, to endorse a proposal by state Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, that would repeal the state sales tax on groceries.

"I think it's worth consideration," he said, but, "At the end of the day, we have to be concerned about what tax reforms best incentivize economic activity in this state. And for me, that goes squarely back to taxes like the income tax."

Cargill said it also may be necessary to look at taxing some services that currently are exempt.

"As the economy moves more towards a service economy, I think we have to be realistic about what the tax mix is," he said.

"I'm not suggesting a tax going up on its own, apart from an overall tax reform package, taxing services. But again I think it's a debate that we ought to be looking at. We'll be doing our research on it for the long term."

enrich our lives instead of divide us," said Kalyn Free, president and founder of INDN's List.

NATIVE VOICES BEING HEARD

"This is exactly why INDN's List exists," Free said. "These are Native voices in positions of influence speaking out against divisiveness and marginalization, while also clearly understanding the impact this sort of legislation will have on society as a whole."

"Three months ago, your enthusiastic support and your votes elected 20 Indians around the country, including five candidates in Oklahoma, so that Indian voices would speak for the rights and well-being of Indian Country and all citizens of our country," Free said.

She said the fight is against racist lawmakers and discriminatory laws. House Bill 1423 passed out of committee and now heads to the House Floor. The bill states that "all official business of this state will be conducted in English." It barely passed out of committee by a vote of 9-7.

"A hundred years ago, Native Americans were discriminated against when they spoke their own native languages in their own schools," said Rep. Mike Brown, D-Tahlequah.

NO RESPECT FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE

"They were forced to speak English. Now, as our state enters its second century, the Legislature is trying to tell Native Americans that they don't want them to speak their native language. This is not a way to respect the cultural heritage of those nations who helped found Oklahoma."

When the bill was heard in committee, several House Republicans misled committee members by saying that Secretary of State Susan Savage was supportive of the measure. She was not allowed to speak in the committee, but her office released a letter explaining that she was not in support of the bill.

An effort to force a statewide vote on a proposed constitutional amendment aimed at making English the state's official language failed in August of 2000.

They Wronged Henry Reality Check: OCPA Is Off Base – Again

By David Blatt

An op-ed by Mark Nichols and Brandon Dutcher of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs [OCPA] appearing in the Oklahoman claimed that Gov. Brad Henry's budget for the upcoming fiscal year, FY '07, proposes an 18.4% increase in state spending.

This claim of an 18.4% spending increase is inaccurate, based on both a mistake in the OCPA's analysis and on misleading use of the data.

When these errors are corrected, it turns out that Gov. Henry's budget proposes spending increases of \$462 million [7.4%], which is less than half the size alleged by OCPA.

OCPA's broader argument about state spending is also exaggerated. Even with last year's budget increases, the state budget has grown less quickly than the state economy in recent years and state appropriations remain below historical averages.

During this period of economic growth and robust state revenues, it is vital that the state seize the opportunity to make investments in public services that will provide for Oklahoma's prosperity, security and well-being while preparing for the inevitable fiscal challenges that lie ahead.

FUZZY MATH

OCPA claims that the governor is proposing an FY '07 budget of \$7.15 billion, which would amount to "an eye-popping increase of \$1.1 billion – 18.4%!" To arrive at their figure of a \$7.15 billion budget for FY '07, the OCPA adds together three figures:

- \$6,638,856,014 in proposed FY '07 spending in the governor's budget;
- \$117,733,501 in lottery revenue which OCPA claims is excluded from the governor's budget;
- \$392,000,000 in surplus General Revenues that surpass the cap in the state's Rainy Day Fund.

While the \$6.6 billion number is uncontroversial, the other two numbers used to unearth the 18.7% growth are more problematic.

LOTTERY REVENUES

OCPA alleges that "the governor plans to spend an additional \$117.7 million in lottery money." In reality, the basic spending figure in the governor's budget includes the \$117,733,500 in lottery revenues that were certified by the State Board of Equalization on December 27, 2006.

While the presentation of the summary table in the governor's budget document creates some confusion about the \$117.7 million, it is clear from checking against the December certification packet that the projected lottery revenues were part of his total proposed expenditures.

SURPLUS GENERAL REVENUE FUNDS

OCPA's calculation of an 18.7% budget increase is based on adding an additional \$392 million that is expected to be available from "surplus" General Revenue [GR] Funds.

The surplus involves GR that the state collects in excess of the year's certified estimate.

Usually, surplus GR goes to the state's Rainy Day Fund [RDF], but since the RDF fund has reached its 10% cap, revenues in excess of the cap have been available the past two years for other purposes.

Last year, the Legislature divided \$182 million in surplus Rainy Day funds equally between direct tax rebates and investment in a newly-created Economic Development Research Endowment Fund.

OCPA fails to include any of last year's \$182 million as part of FY '06 spending, but then adds the entire \$392 million in proposed RDF expenditures into the FY '07 budget.

It is far from clear that these expenditures should be counted at all as part



of the annual state budget. With the exception of \$100 million for the repair of structurally deficient bridges, the governor proposes setting aside the remainder of the surplus in investment funds for economic development and to help address the unfunded liabilities in the state's teachers retirement pension system. Little, if any, of this spending would occur in FY '07.

Yet if there is no single authoritative way to count these revenues, consistency demands that if surplus General Revenue is counted in FY '07, it should also be counted in FY '06.

RECENT UPSWING IN PERSPECTIVE

The OCPA's claims about wild state spending are based on the current budget year and their overstated forecast of what will be appropriated for next year. However, it is dangerous and misleading to draw broad conclusions and make sweeping recommendations based on such a short period of time.

Using a longer time frame helps put the current two-year period into better perspective and reveals that state spending remains well in line with state economic growth and with historical patterns.

Spending fell sharply from 1999 to 2004, particularly during the years of sharp budget cuts in FY '02 and FY '03. Emerging out of the state budget crisis, the state budget rose to 5.6% of total state personal income in FY '06. This is still below the 5.9% long-term historical average for the period from 1980-2006.

The six-year period of FY '00-FY '06 shows that the state budget grew substantially less quickly than state personal income over this period.

Even if next year's budget should grow above personal income, as expected, we are still unlikely to see state spending outpace personal income over this period of time.

THINKING AHEAD

OCPA's response to the current trend of robust revenue collections is to promote another round of permanent tax cuts, focusing on the personal income tax and the estate tax.

The obvious danger of this approach is to respond to temporary circumstances with permanent policy decisions.

The state's healthy budget situation is due in large part to the surging energy sector, which has produced huge windfalls of gross production tax revenues and has also contributed to strong income tax and sales tax collections.

This strength is by no means guaranteed to continue. At the same time, the state faces extremely serious spending pressures in coming years due to the aging population, unfunded pension liabilities, declining federal budget support and other factors.

Today's surpluses should be used to help us prepare for tomorrow's challenges, not for immediate gratification that will ensure that the next budget downturns will be more severe and unmanageable.

- The author is director of public policy at Tulsa's Community Action Project.

Teachers Retirement Deserves Big Boost

With \$140 million left on the table after the 2006 session of the Oklahoma Legislature, Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, wants to use half of that money to shore up the Oklahoma Teachers Retirement System [OTRS].

He has introduced legislation to take \$70 million of the so-called "spillover" dollars and put it into the beleaguered system.

"Many retired educators have told me they are frustrated and outraged at the way the teachers retirement system has been ignored," he said. "This won't solve all the problems, but it would give the system added strength at a time when we have resources available."

As of last year, the teachers retirement system had an unfunded liability of \$7 billion – more than the state's annual budget. The weakness in the system led to retired educators receiving the smallest cost-of-living adjustment of any group of state retirees, 2%. All others received 4%.

"Teachers certainly deserved better than that," Gumm said. "But an agreement to put more dollars into the system got caught up in election politics."

Then-Speaker Todd Heitt, R-Kellyville, killed the 4% hike for retirees. The OTRS unfunded liability has affects far beyond the system.

The unfunded liability of the system is considered when the state's bond rating

is determined.

Just like a poor credit rating increases interest costs for individuals, a bond rating increases interest costs for the state's capital projects.

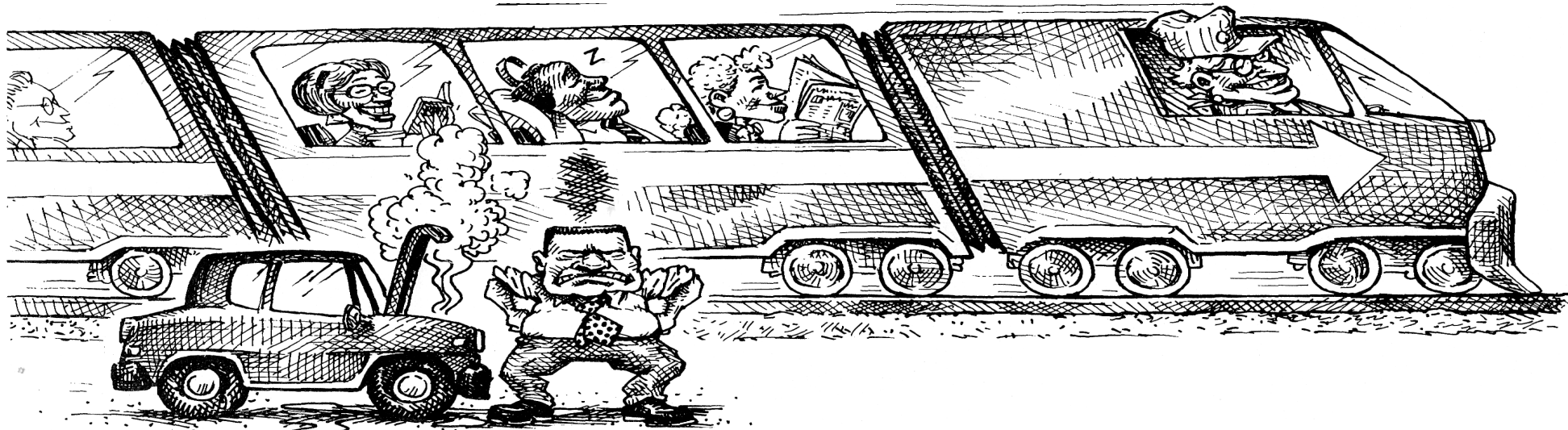
The current estimate is that the OTRS unfunded liability costs taxpayers an additional \$20 million per year in interest charges.

"As bad as that is, it is just a side effect," Gumm said. "The heartbreaking truth is that many of Oklahoma's active and retired educators do not feel as though they can depend on this system in the future. Certainly we owe them better than that."

The lawmaker said there is no reason to leave this money on the table when the state "has an obligation to our educators that must be met." He hopes for bipartisan support, which is necessary to ensure its passage.

"In a Senate divided evenly down the middle, it takes support from Democrats and Republicans to pass any legislation," Gumm said. "This gives us a tremendous chance to put partisanship aside for the greater good of all Oklahomans."

"I look forward to working with members of both parties to send a strong message of support to our educators and of fiscal responsibility to Oklahoma's taxpayers."



Gotta Love Cars, Deadly As They Are

By Tom Elmore

In the days of the Oklahoma Railway's trolleys and Interurbans, citizens had the option to walk down to the end of the block, pay a few cents and go where they needed to go. They didn't have to worry about that trolley or interurban car when they left it; nobody was gonna "break into it" – and "what if they did?"

They didn't have to build a garage to house it overnight. They didn't have to buy it gas or oil or tires or windshields or insurance. Using the trolley didn't bring the "personal injury lawyers."

They didn't have to "be perfect behind the wheel today." They didn't make themselves into disability targets.

Gosh – it was all far too easy and far too cheap. And there plainly came a time where captains of U.S. industry caught on to that. Heck, we all oughta have to pay them something!

If they could convince us "our cars are who we are," and that we should consider ourselves somehow subhuman and embarrassingly blighted without two or three automobiles to "tell us who we are," they could stick us not just with the cost of the cars, but with the cost of the roads they operate on, and the cost of everything related, every day.

THEY CONVINCED US

In short, they convinced us to put all our tender rumps on the line every day to "feel like real men – or women" – just to get to work and to the grocery store.

What this has done to the American pocketbook is one thing. A national survey a few years back noted that a significant number of U.S. families spend up to 40% of their yearly incomes keeping up automobiles. What it has done to the way we think about simple transportation is another thing entirely.

Someone in a former time said, "A man on a horse is imperious." It's not what that man really is that matters so much – it's what he "thinks he is" sitting in the saddle – until running into something big enough to disabuse him of his folly.

In short, a significant number of American drivers become jerks behind the wheel – and are willing to pay a lot of extra money to reinforce "the special way they feel" when they're sitting there.

EIGHT MILES TO THE GALLON

Do you like that feeling – sitting up high in the seat of that 4WD SUV getting eight miles to the gallon – to send your sons and daughters to Iraq to guarantee the privilege?

We've been carefully, methodically sold a bill of goods no less egregious than the days when most folks were convinced they "needed a cigarette hanging out of their jaws to feel like they wanted to feel."

Turns out there was a price to pay for "looking like Bogie" – and even Bogie had to pay it. So it is, I'm afraid, with our view of the automobile.

However, think about how difficult it has become to lay out the simple truth about quality transit. How much of the actually quite tenuous Oklahoma economy hinges on the automobile and all that goes with it? "4,5 and 9" hardly have time to pretend they're reading us the news, they're so busy trying to sell us a car.

Think about the amount of daily advertising revenue the state's largest newspapers draw from the same source.

SNOTTY LITTLE DIATRIBE

I had to chuckle when I read Joe Mecham's snotty little diatribe in the Oklahoma Gazette against those of us who have so long fought to preserve Union Station, even as he pined for "transit champions from among the rich and famous" of central Oklahoma.

Why would they want it any different than it is today? As things are, we have to pay to build the roads, then pay them to use them. We have to pay them and their buddies to loan us money to buy the cars, to sell us oil, gas, tires, insurance – all that stuff.

Boy, it all has to be "first rate" if we're gonna use it on "our roads." It's "the law." If we fail to obey those laws – or "go human" behind the wheel at some point – we can pay them and their lawyer buddies to get us out of jail.

Even more fascinating is to see the national media glom on to any story where some 80 or 90 year old "hits the gas instead of the brake" and either drives the Caddy through a crowd of people at a Farmers Market or Quik Stop – or puts the old buggy in somebody's swimming pool.

THE MEDIA SPRAYS THIS STUFF

The media loves to spray this stuff around. Everybody needs to see it.

"Ain't it awful?" "When are they gonna take those OLD dudes' licenses away?"

What's really awful is that our fathers and mothers of the greatest generation

somehow had a blind spot when it came to letting the auto sellers talk them out of the old trolleys and interurbans they used during the war years.

When the battles were done, maybe they thought they'd be young forever – or maybe they just weren't thinking about it, the way people don't seem to think about building their new houses with doors wide enough and bathrooms and other facilities generous and accessible enough to accommodate them in their old age.

Most contemporary "homes," as the house sellers call them, are about as useful to the disabled elderly as, say, a 1957 Corvette would be.

Why is it we all think it "won't happen to us." Don't we realize that if we respected the aged and their limitations we'd actually be respecting ourselves?

USEFUL TO ALL OF US ALL OUR LIVES

Don't we understand that a transportation system that the young, the old and the disabled can use is also useful to all of us at every stage of our lives?

Instead, in movies and other elements of our misguided, contrived consumer culture, we tend to make fun of the old folks that all of us will become if we live long enough! [Think about it: Elvis would have been 72 years old. Marilyn Monroe would have been 80 last June!]

I'll never forget coming to Oklahoma City in the '70s with my younger brother – who'd conned me into coming to an Alice Cooper concert at the Fairgrounds.

We stopped at the old-style gas station that used to be at the northwest corner of 1-35 and SE 66 – there catty-cornered from Crossroads Mall.

While my brother tried to link up with his buddies on the pay phone, an old fellow in a land yacht who'd just had his car filled up with gas by the attendant roared off north – down southbound I-35 off ramp – with the gas station attendant running as fast as he could behind him hollering "NO! NO! Mr. So and So – you're goin' the wrong way!"

It didn't phase the guy. I have no idea how it all turned out. If he died he probably did feeling powerful with a big smile on his face. After all – he was "DRIVIN'!"

We must all be nuts.

-The author lives in Oklahoma City

Payday Loan Bill Hits 'Bad Actors'

A bill changing the policy of a few "bad actors" in the payday lending business was the first approved by an Oklahoma Senate evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.

Senate Bill 693 by Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, would prevent payday lenders – those that make high-interest, high-risk short term loans with a post-dated check – from cashing the check of a customer who dies before the loan matures.

The measure passed without opposition 47-0.

That practice, currently allowed under Oklahoma law, effectively put these unsecured loans in a priority position over any other debts a deceased customer may owe, Gumm explained.

In addition, the practice also causes resources to be unexpectedly drained away as a family is trying to put in order the affairs of a loved one.

"When a family is trying to make final arrangements for a loved one who just passed away, the last thing they should have to worry about is an unsecured creditor cashing a post-dated check the family might not even know about," he said.

"That practice seems to me to be fundamentally wrong, to prey on people during an exceptionally emotional time in their lives."

Gumm said most payday lending companies already have policies in place preventing this sort of practice. However, a situation occurred in his own Senate district in southern Oklahoma that prompted him to write the bill.

"The bill will stop that practice from ever happening again to any Oklahoma family," he said. "I am grateful that every one of my colleagues agreed."

Gumm said the bill places debts from payday lending companies on the same level as any other debt – allowing these high-interest, high-risk lenders to seek reimbursement through the probate process like any other creditor would.

He said the bill also protects the family members of the deceased loved one who may have used this type of loan.

"This bill is a reasonable common sense approach and would place reasonable restrictions on these payday lenders," he said.

The bill now moves to the House of Representatives for consideration.

Inhofe Disputes New Report On Warming

By D.R. Sparks

Climate change skeptic Sen. James Inhofe, R-OK, says the new IPCC's report is "a political document, not a scientific report." In fact, the power of the IPCC findings is in their exhaustive scientific rigor.

Inhofe claims it's a plot by liberals and Hollywood to destroy America. [See why he's considered the most ignorant member of the U.S. Senate?]

The main science report – more than 1,600 pages in its draft form – was compiled by 150 scientists as main authors, another 400 scientists as contributing authors, a team of review editors and some 600 reviewers.

The document went through two rounds of reviews. And unlike past efforts, review editors required chapter authors to respond to each responsible review comment.

Researchers utilize the latest technology – scientists at the federal Geophysical Fluid Dynamics laboratory devoted half of their super computer's time for a year running models for the latest report – and every government in the world approves the summary for policymakers.

A VERY SCARY DOCUMENT

Only points that were considered indisputable survived this process, one climate scientist notes. "It is a very conservative document – that's what makes it so scary."

Indeed, the process is at times so ploddingly exhaustive that "many top U.S. scientists reject the rosier numbers about sea level rise because the calculations don't include the recent, and dramatic, melt-off of big ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica.

The findings of the new report are most dramatic when compared to language used in previous IPCC statements.

The panel's first report released in 1990 found that rising temperatures were broadly consistent with prediction of climate models, but it is also of the same magnitude as natural climate variability, meaning the observed increase could be largely due to this natural variability.

Five years later, the IPCC argued that a balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate.

ATTRIBUTABLE TO HUMAN ACTIVITY

In 2001 the report cited that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities. In the latest report, it states that warming is "very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic [human made] greenhouse gas concentrations."

Continued global warming is predicted in the new report, leading to a "huge disruption to agriculture, more floods, heatwaves, desertification and melting glaciers.

'Droughts will be longer, flooding rains will be rarer but heavier. Cyclones will hit harder. Violent storms and extreme heatwaves will strike more frequently.

'Evaporation will suck up scarce inland water. Sea levels will creep up half a meter. Oceans will be so acidic that in some places shells and reefs will dissolve."

The increase in hurricane and tropical cyclone strength since 1970 more likely can be attributed to man-made global warming.

GREAT BARRIER REEF TO BE EXTINCT

Australia, currently in the grip of its worst recorded drought, is warned that "the Great Barrier Reef will become 'functionally extinct' because of coral bleaching."

The impact of global warming will be catastrophic, "forcing hundreds of millions of people to flee their devastated homelands, particularly in tropical, low-lying areas, while creating waves of immigrants – dubbed climate refugees – whose movements will strain the economies of even the most affluent countries.

Climate change will bring water scarcity to between 1.1 million and 3.2 million people by the end of the century. An additional 200 million to 600 million people



across the world would face food shortages in another 70 years, while coastal flooding would hit another seven million homes.

WARMING WILL HIT EVERY COUNTRY

The message is that every region of the earth will have exposure, says Pearman.

As the poles warm and substantial parts of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets melt or disintegrate, "we may be essentially remaking the face of the Earth."

It will put more water into the ocean, reconfiguring the coastal zone, drowning areas like river deltas, where tens of millions of people live in some countries, like the Netherlands, Bangladesh, the Louisiana delta in this country.

Princeton climatologist Michael Oppenheimer calls it "the most pervasive and most threatening consequence of global warming. It will be very expensive. And once it gets under way, it is essentially impossible to stop."

Meanwhile, the poor in developing countries will suffer the most, even though they are the least responsible for global warming.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Kimoon points out "the annual costs of climate change impacts in exposed developing countries could range from several percent to 10% of gross domestic product."

A White House letter, following the release of the IPCC report, laments that "a number of media reports perpetuated inaccuracies that the President's concern about climate change is new."

Actually, the White House says, "Beginning in June 2001, President Bush has consistently acknowledged climate change is occurring and humans are contributing to the problem."

LAST YEAR HE SANG A DIFFERENT TUNE

But just last year, Bush claimed there is still "a debate over whether global warming is man-made or naturally caused."

Moreover, the White House says, "climate change has been a top priority since the President's first year in office."

What? Bush has consistently rejected stronger measures to combat climate change, even as carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S. have increased by 354 million metric tons since 2001, including the largest annual amount ever produced by any country on record.

Bush has also cut NASA's earth science budget by 30% since taking office. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman again rejected the idea of limiting U.S. emissions.

"We are a small contributor to the overall, when you look at the rest of the world, so it's really got to be a global solution," he said.

Apparently Bodman is unaware that the U.S. emits a quarter of global carbon emissions, more than any other country, despite having only 5% of the world's population.

The Bush Administration has rejected global solutions, from 2001 's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol to the dismissal [along with China and India] of a new global body aimed at slowing warming.

Oklahoma's Most Embarrassing Moments

By Jim Wilcox

In a recent interview, the state of Oklahoma was asked, "What has been your most embarrassing moment?"

Oklahoma flushed for a few seconds then responded with more than the interviewer anticipated.

"I'm embarrassed that I am still debating issues like cock-fighting and tattoos.

"I'm embarrassed that I always vote for conservative Republicans even when I know the candidate is about as qualified as Will Rogers.

"I'm embarrassed of my local news, particularly my largest metropolitan newspaper, consistently voted among the nation's worst, and television broadcasts that seem to believe weather and petty crime are my only marketable exports.

(One night, a weather person broke into prime-time programming to tell my folks that there were "NO storms in the state." That's a direct quote.)

"I'm embarrassed that I'm considering a bill that makes English my official language, virtually relegating my non-English speakers to marginal, second-class status.

"I'm embarrassed that I have to resort to a lottery to pay for my children's education.

"I'm embarrassed that one of the nation's longest east-west highways, I-40, is in its worst condition as it passes through me.

"I'm embarrassed that even though I tell people I'm pro-life, I'm still among the nation's leaders in executing men and women.

"To be quite honest, I'm actually embarrassed you asked me that question."

The interviewer, by this time, was trying to get the circulation to flow back into his writing hand.

"What's the problem with your hand?" Oklahoma asked.

"I had no idea you'd have so many embarrassing moments," the interviewer said.

"That's funny. Same thing happens to me when I tote my God-given, Constitution-granted, 9mm handgun."

Bang. Bang.
– The author lives in Oklahoma City

Oklahoma Schools' National Rankings

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett has issued a report card on Oklahoma's rankings in PK-12 education.

January 2007: Oklahoma again had the 9th highest number of National Board Certified teachers in the U.S. in 2006 – according to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards – thanks to legislation and funding for incentives and support. In Oklahoma, nationally certified teachers comprise 4% of all teachers, double the national average.

November 2006: Oklahoma's average teacher salary for 2004-05 ranked the state 48th nationally while per-pupil expenditures ranked the state 47th in the U.S., according to "Rankings of the States 2005 and Estimates of School Statistics 2006." [50 states and the District of Columbia.]

August 2006: The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation issued its first comprehensive report on the quality of state academic standards since 2000. Oklahoma ranked 10th nationally on that analysis, which included the curriculum standards adopted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

OKLAHOMA IS A NATIONAL MODEL

March 2006: Oklahoma is a national model for Pre-Kindergarten programs, according to reports from the National Institute for Early Education Research. NEER's most recent "State Yearbook" says Oklahoma is No.1 in the percentage of four-year-olds attending public preschool programs, and is one of only two states offering voluntary access statewide.

January 2006: Education Week's 10th annual report card on state education systems ranked Oklahoma among the top 10 states in each of four major reform categories. More than 100 indicators were monitored by Education Week's researchers, who also analyzed state policy efforts over a decade. Oklahoma outperformed the national average on each of the "2006 Policy Implementation" in-



Barbara Kiwak

dicators. In January 2007, Education Week suspended annual report card grades in favor of a series of new indices.

July 2005: The Education Commission of the States uses a massive database tracking each state's implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In July 2004, Oklahoma ranked No. 1 in the U.S. with more of the 40 major requirements met than any other state. Since then, the ECS has revised its database tracking system but in July 2005 Oklahoma remained in the top five nationally.

February 2005: The Manhattan Institute documented Oklahoma's graduation and college readiness rates as higher than the national average in every category. The state ranked 9th nationally for its 2002 graduation rate. Oklahoma ranked 2nd among 32 states reporting data on African-American student data and 4th among 18 states providing Hispanic student data. Their 2003 study included graduation rates for Native American students – Oklahoma ranked 1st.

Five Schools Win Security Awards

Oklahoma is the first state in the nation to win Homeland Security grants for implementing security plans in public school campuses.

The 2006 Education Grant Program is a collaborative effort between the Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security [OKOHS] and the Oklahoma State Department of Education [SDE] in conjunction with National Preparedness Month in September.

The 2006 Education Grant Program offered elementary schools across the state an opportunity to apply for one of five \$10,000 grants for physical security enhancements.

The five schools selected to receive the grants are Calvin Elementary [Calvin], Orvis Risner Elementary [Edmond], Park Elementary [Tulsa], Remington Elementary [Tulsa] and Richmond Elementary [Stillwater].

WORKING TO MAKE OKLAHOMA SAFER

"We work everyday to make the people of Oklahoma safer," said Kerry Pettin-gill, Oklahoma Homeland Security Director.

"Developing our Regional Response System, expanding the statewide communication system or providing the best training for our state's responders, we strive to blanket the state with a layer of capability to prevent, respond and recover from any disaster. This year we expanded our efforts to include elementary schools."

Elementary schools across the state were invited to submit an application to participate in the program prior to the beginning of the school year and before a number of deadly school attacks gained national media coverage.

First Lady Kim Henry praised the state Office of Homeland Security for the grants. She presented the awards in a Capitol Blue Room program.

"Speaking as a mother and as a former schoolteacher, I want to congratulate Oklahoma's Homeland Security Office for this exciting and innovative program, the first of its kind anywhere in the country," she said.

SAFE CHILDREN UTMOST IMPORTANCE

"The safety of our young people and those tasked with their education is of the utmost importance. Through this pilot program, participating elementary schools are taking a critical step toward enhanced security measures that can and will make a real difference.

"For our children, the world of today, sadly, can sometimes be fraught with danger. I commend these schools for doing their part to help protect our most valuable resource, our children."

To be considered for one of the grants, applying schools were required to complete an assessment of their facility, submit an Enhancement Plan using information collected during the assessment and incorporate the Ready Kids curriculum in their classrooms during the fall semester.

"Naturally, we have no way of knowing when a disaster might strike but we can be prepared and have emergency plans in place," said Sandy Garrett, state superintendent.

EQUIPMENT THEY COULD NOT AFFORD

"This is an excellent way to promote the Ready Kids curriculum and help deserving schools purchase equipment they may not otherwise be able to afford. And, all school officials who completed the steps involved in applying for these grants now have updated plans to improve the physical security of their schools."

The types of equipment the winning schools can purchase with these grant dollars include physical security enhancement equipment and/or communication equipment. Examples include security cameras, magnetometers, concrete barriers, identification systems and two-way radios.

"Unfortunately, there are far too many schools in Oklahoma needing security enhancements and funding for a program such as this is limited," said Pettin-gill.

To date, OKOHS has been awarded more than \$130 million from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Consider The Real Cost Of Vouchers

Voucher proponents often argue that giving parents chits that they could use to send their children to any school of their choice would be one way to force public schools to shape up.

But Stanford University researcher and economist Henry Levin says the price tag for such a switch would be high: about \$73 billion a year.

Levin and co-researcher Cyrus Drive calculated that the additional costs of a voucher system would pop up in a number of areas.

First, they conclude, students who are now in private and parochial schools would probably want to use vouchers as well, adding \$33 billion a year to the national cost of public education

Second, record-keeping systems would be needed to track students and their needs and to monitor and evaluate schools. Using the Social Security system as a model, the researchers figured that – even with the money saved by dismantling the present educational system – operating such a mammoth data system would cost another \$2.5 billion annually.

TRANSPORTATION COSTS WOULD SOAR

The researchers predict getting all those children to the schools of their choice wouldn't be cheap. They estimate that the proportion of students who ride buses to school would rise from 60% to 80% under a voucher system. Tack on another \$42 billion a year.

Then, they added in other expenses, such as the costs of making information available so that parents could make knowledgeable choices and of setting up a system to adjudicate disputes between parents and schools. Add another \$3.6 billion.

Over all, they conclude, the extra expenses would add \$1,500 a year per student to the cost of public education.

Levin is best known for his Accelerated Schools Project, a school improvement approach that calls for speeding up the curriculum for poor and low-achieving students. He is also a longtime economist who decades ago suggested experimenting with tuition vouchers as a way to improve inner-city schools.

The cost estimates are in an article on vouchers Levin published in the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. In that essay, he also analyzed existing research from this country and from abroad on other aspects of educational choice programs.

National Model **Childhood Studies** **Soaring In Tulsa**

By David Leonhardt

To get to the new preschool in Tulsa's Kendall-Whittier neighborhood, you drive down a dead-end stretch of East Fifth Place. Two of the houses on the street have been boarded up.

Outside some of the others, cardboard boxes and appliances sit on the front lawn. Those boxes and appliances were covered with snow.

But then you get to the end of the block and see the brick and stone building with the bright blue roof. Inside, sunlight streams into a front atrium, and children run around big classrooms that are filled with new wooden furniture.

Set aside the neighborhood, and most parents would be thrilled to have their child going to school in a place like this.

The school is called Tulsa Educare, and it is the showpiece for the finest state preschool system in the country.

Yes, that state is Oklahoma, a bastion of small-government conservatism that hasn't voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since Lyndon B. Johnson.

IT STARTED A DECADE AGO

Almost a decade ago, thanks to a low-key push by a small group of state legislators, business executives and educators, Oklahoma agreed to pay for one year of pre-kindergarten.

The program is voluntary, but 70% of four-year-olds here now attend public preschool, more than in any other state.

In every classroom, the head teacher must have a bachelor's degree – nationwide, most preschool teachers don't – and there must be a teacher for every 10 students.

This combination of quality and scale makes the Oklahoma program the most serious attempt to deal with economic inequality anywhere in the country.

Long before children turn 5, there are already enormous gaps in their abilities. One study found that three-year-olds with professional parents know about 1,100 words on average, while three-year-olds whose parents are on welfare know only 525.

ENVIRONMENT NOT GENES

Much of the gap is caused by environment rather than genes, according to a wide body of research.

By letting children start school at age four – and, if the current governor has his way, eventually at age three – Oklahoma is trying to give all of them at least a shot at success.

Dexie Organ, a former drug user whose son David attends a Tulsa preschool she loves, put it better than I can:

"I don't care if they're drug addicts' children or doctors' children – there is no child that should not have this opportunity."

James J. Heckman, a Nobel Prize-winning economist at the University of Chicago, even argues that spending on preschool ultimately pays for itself.

Early childhood education is so important that it makes workers more productive and reduces crime. No other form of education spending, certainly not the college financial-aid package passed recently by the House of Representatives, brings nearly the same bang for the buck.

SUCCESS STORIES ARE CITED

For years, advocates of early education have pointed to a few well-known success stories such as the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Mich.

Low-income children from those programs went on to do better in school than many of their peers, to be arrested less often and to earn more money. But Perry was small and intensive, not the sort of program likely to be replicated nationwide.

Oklahoma is not a test. It suffers from all the typical imperfections of a big bureaucracy [including urinals at some schools that were too high for four-year-old boys].

The state pays about \$4,000 per four-year-old, which isn't enough for a full-day program. So some school districts offer only a half-day, leaving working parents to cobble together day care for the other half.

Other districts use federal or private funds to make up the difference. A local oil billionaire, George B. Kaiser, No. 27 on the Forbes 400 list of the richest Americans, and Warren E. Buffet's daughter, Susan, essentially paid for the construction of Educare.

EARLY RESULTS ENCOURAGING

The early results in Oklahoma have been very encouraging. In every socioeconomic group, four year olds have benefited from attending public preschool, researchers at Georgetown University found.

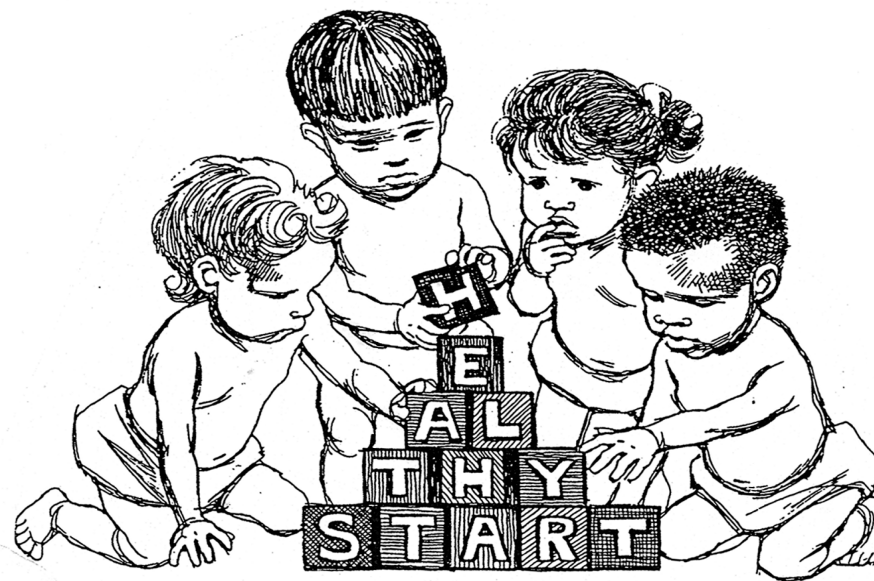
[Most go to an elementary school, not a separate school such as Educare.]

All else being equal, for example, a child who went through a year of pre-kindergarten did 52% better on a better-recognition test than one who didn't.

Not surprisingly, the gains were largest for low-income children and for Latinos, many of whom don't hear English at home.

At McClure Elementary School here, where 97% of families are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, one whole class of kindergarteners started writing full sentences last month.

Before the preschool program existed, teachers would celebrate if every stu-



dent knew the alphabet by the end of kindergarten.

When I asked Bertha Jimenez, whose son Ivan attends another Tulsa preschool, what he had learned there, she laughed and said: "Todo. Todo." Everything.

The big remaining question is whether the gains will last for more than a few years, as they did for the Perry graduates.

OTHER STATES COPYING OKLAHOMA

That won't be clear for a while. But Oklahoma's program has already been promising enough to inspire Illinois, Iowa, New Mexico, Virginia and other states to try to expand preschool.

As this list of states suggests, preschool cuts across some of the usual ideological lines. Liberals like its antipoverty bent; conservatives prefer education to straight income redistribution.

Business executives see preschool as a way to build a better work force.

Kaiser likes to refer to himself as a "robber baron from red-state America" who has come to love public preschool.

The biggest preschool opponents tend to be religious conservatives worried about the creation of a nanny state.

"There are plenty of critics," Brad Henry, Oklahoma's Democratic governor, told me, shortly before calling for universal preschool for three-year-olds in his State of the State address. "We'll just have to make the case."

IT STEMS FROM SIMPLE SELF-INTEREST

It's worth remembering that some of this opposition stems from simple self-interest. Universal preschool is a threat to the many churches that help support themselves with the revenue from their day care programs.

For the same reason, a coalition of Montessori schools in California helped defeat a flawed preschool ballot initiative there last year.

This country isn't yet in any danger of having too much preschool.

Consider what has happened in the last generation: millions of women have entered the work force, making child care a real challenge for many families, and a deluge of scientific studies has pointed to the importance of early learning. Yet most states have done almost nothing to respond to the changes.

Did I mention that you can buy a perfectly nice house in Tulsa for \$200,000?

© New York Times

'Girlocott' Caps Events At OKC's Mayflower Church

A March 3 "Girlocott" at an Oklahoma City coffee house will culminate a two-day program aimed at promoting the health, education and safety of the world's children.

The opposite of a "boycott" or protest, the Girlocott will honor the Red Cup, 3122 N. Classen, for serving its customers Fair Trade Coffee.

The 1 p.m. celebration will involve those participating in a two-day program at Mayflower Congregational Church led by Beth Osnes, co-founder of the Mothers Acting Up movement.

The activities begin at 7 p.m. on March 2 when Osnes, a University of Colorado theater professor, presents a series of motivational monologues in the church's sanctuary.

At 9 a.m. Saturday, March 3, Osnes will lead a training workshop at the church, 3901 NW 63rd, that includes exercises in "effective public expression." Participants will rehearse and act out situations often encountered in acting up – from talking about one's concerns with family and friends to phoning or meeting with a government representative.

A combined ticket price for the Friday and Saturday events is \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. A sliding scale fee is offered. Child-care also is available. Children under 12 will be admitted free to the meetings.

Tickets may be reserved by e-mailing Helen at cyasunday@mayflowerucc.org.

Those participating in the Saturday morning workshop then will travel to the Red Cup to honor the business for serving Fair Trade coffee. Companies harvesting Fair Trade coffee agree to treat their field workers justly and pay them a fair wage.

Candy Robinson, who is organizing the events, said the Friday night performance and Saturday morning workshop is open to anyone – men as well as women – who wants to gain the skills, confidence, and practice in "acting up."

BOOKS

Not So Pretty Truth About Free Trade

By Alvena Bieri

TAKE THIS JOB AND SHIP IT

How Corporate Greed And Brain Dead Politicians Are Selling Out America

By Byron Dorgan

St. Martin's Press

277 pages, \$24.95

Reading Senator Byron Dorgan's book made me have a sudden little surge of hope for our country. The book cover has recommendations from Tom Daschle, Lindsay Graham, Jim Hightower, and several others. You couldn't ask for more.

His message is that the "free trade" policies of the U. S. are ruining our country but it's not yet too late for citizens to demand changes.

What we do affects the whole world, and Dorgan says the "U.S. cannot help the rest of the world by impoverishing its own people and bankrupting its own economy."

What we need is not free trade but fair trade. With NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the U.S. has lost about 750,000 jobs, mostly to Mexico.

We now import cars, auto parts, and electronics from that country.

So steelworkers in Pittsburgh and metal workers in Ohio suffer because labor is so much cheaper south of the border.

Interspersed with the grim economic facts are Dorgan's thoughtful quotes from some very rich, very smart people – like Warren Buffet.

He thinks our economy is now in real danger. This extraordinary American lives very simply in Omaha, NE, and has always been successful in predicting large economic trends.

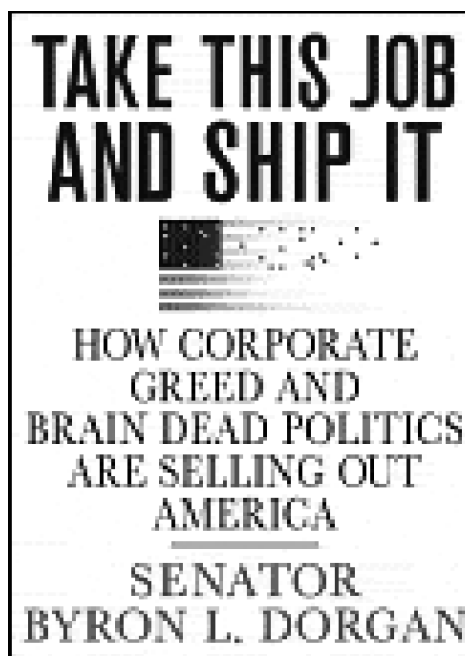
So we should be worried that he is worried. Then Alan Blinder, formerly of the Federal Reserve, says that over the next few years 42 to 56 million jobs could be exported.

Big businesses have myriad ways of assuring high profits and low taxes for themselves. Finding low cost labor, as when the Huffy Bicycle Co. of Celina, OH, moved to India where workers are paid 33¢ an hour for a 12- to 15-hour work day, seven days a week is just one example of "cost savings."

At the same time Huffy's CEO makes about \$900,000 a year. Other better-known companies like General Motors and General Electric do the same thing. Levi Strauss is in Mexico now, and Dorgan says Fig Newton cookies are made there, too.

I was surprised to learn that some airline maintenance is outsourced. Jet Blue sends its planes to El Salvador to be repaired.

Getting out of paying taxes is another ploy the companies use.



“
Dorgan says the
“U.S. cannot help
the rest of the world
by impoverishing
its own people and
bankrupting its own
economy.”
”

Dorgan describes a big office building in the Cayman Islands that is “headquarters” for over 12,000 companies. What they are doing is using that address to avoid paying U.S. taxes.

Dorgan, who was once a state tax commissioner in North Dakota, says that as many as 63% of U.S. corporations are not paying any income tax. All the anti-taxers of the world might want to remember that they, whether rich or poor, still drive on public roads, send their children to public schools, and get mail delivered to them every day.

Dorgan is a strong supporter of labor, reminding us that non-union members often benefit from the gains that unions achieve. Out-sourcing jobs, he thinks, is just another name for “union busting.”

The motto of these companies seems to be that of Cornelius Vanderbilt of the Gilded Age – “The public be damned. I’m working for my stockholders.” In addition to the trade deficit of over \$700 billion a year, Dorgan is concerned about our national debt, 40% of which is held by bankers in Japan and China.

My hope comes mostly from knowing that there are people like Dorgan who are working on these problems. His last chapter lists several others as concerned as he is, like Lou Dobbs, John Sweeney, and Bill Moyers.

He even gives an example of a responsible company, Malden Mills, which when the firm suffered a bad fire, held on to its employees through the re-building by giving them three months’ pay instead of moving overseas.

Then he includes a list of what can be done “to take our country back and start building opportunity once again.” The 11 suggestions go from developing an American Fair Trade Plan to encouraging labor unions and controlling “out-sourced pollution.”

I was struck all the way through this book by how problems are intertwined. So are their solutions.

– The author lives in Stillwater

Stories Of Hope From The Great Depression

By Mike Nobles

THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS IN ARIZONA'S RIM COUNTRY

Working In The Woods

By Robert J. Moore

University of Nevada Press

176 pages, \$34.95

THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS IN NEVADA

From Boys To Men

By Renee Corona Kolvet and Victoria Ford

University of Nevada Press

224 pages, \$34.95

By all accounts it was one of the most successful government assistance programs in United States history. In all, between the years 1933-1942, nearly 3 million young men between the ages of 18 and 25 participated in a program that paid them \$30 a month, \$25 of which was sent home to their families.

They went from grinding poverty and restless despair to an era of hope, sense of purpose, and self-pride that has never been duplicated on such a scale in the world. They worked on restoring and preserving America's natural and cultural resources and experienced what many considered the most rewarding and enjoyable experience of their lives. Most went on to serve honorably in World War II.

Such a program was the Civilian Conservation Corps.

It is remarkable, amazing really, that such a successful program has had so little written about it. This is especially so given that literally thousands of books are written and published each year.

Thankfully, this oversight has been partially remedied by the University of Nevada Press with the publication of these two excellent books.

The story of the CCC in the Arizona Rim Country is a story of the experiences of the young men that worked in the forest camps of the spectacular Mogollon Rim that bisects the state from Sedona eastward to New Mexico. It includes the White Mountains and the largest contiguous forest of ponderosa pine in the U.S. This is the first published story of the men – boys, really – who worked in the Arizona Rim Country during the depression years.

Relying on numerous interviews with CCC veterans along with archival research, the author provides an indispensable history of the work of the young men who built trails and roads, fire lookout towers, administrative buildings, campgrounds, and a host of other tasks that provided much needed assistance to the Forest Service in Arizona.

Much of the work done is still evident to this day in the form of facilities used by families taking advantage of the recreation activities in the national forests in Arizona.

It is a story of hard work, friendship, and self-discipline that many historians suggest ultimately helped America prosecute the war to a successful conclusion.

The book about the CCC in Nevada is the result of five years of research and is the first comprehensive history of the Nevada CCC and the nearly 31,000 young men who inhabited the 59 camps throughout the state.

Combining interviews of CCC personnel and veterans with research in private manuscript collections, newspapers, government reports and documents, and unpublished memoirs, the book tells the story of massive work performed on federal rangelands, military reservations, parks, forests, water districts, and refuges.

From road building to irrigation systems, from fences to flood control systems and a variety of other tasks, the CCC “boys” were instrumental in restoring Nevada's lands and resources and in the process developed into men of which the nation became proud.

Both of these books are highly readable, thoroughly researched, and provide the reader with a first-time look at the men that comprised the CCC in Arizona and Nevada during a time in our history that offered little hope to millions of citizens.

In addition to the stories of individual participants, the books offer maps, wonderful photographs, helpful bibliographies, indexes, and a history of men and times that are gone but, thanks to these books, not forgotten. Highly recommended.

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

Sooners Join Quest For Peace Department

By Lydia Gill Polley

"I am tired of being *against* wars, I want to be working *for* peace." These words were spoken by Bob Delaney during the build up to the Iraq war at a meeting of peace activists. They echoed the feelings of all of us there and the "Spiritual Walk for Peace" emerged as one of our efforts, which many readers will probably recognize and have attended.

This feeling, I believe, is shared by many, many Americans. Diverse Americans—moderate, conservative, liberal, radical—whether they have protested against wars or fought in them, whether they have supported our troops with family members, or by lobbying Congress to give them better armor and medical care, or by shouting at protestors on the streets. We are all tired of being *against* such violence and have been desperately searching for a way, as stated by President Franklin Roosevelt, "More than an end to war, we want an *end to the beginning of all war.*"

This tiredness of resisting violence aches in everyone's bones; this yearning to end the beginning of war cries out from every heart; and this longing for peace—that is much more than a lull between bombs or between school shootings—peace that heals and connects all people so they experience "justice...domestic tranquility...common defense...general welfare...and the blessings of liberty" — is a longing held in common by all. This I believe.

And I confidently believe that we have something reasonable and viable that every person can do to help turn this longing into reality!

Five Oklahomans joined 700 citizens from 45 states at the annual Department of Peace Conference in Washington D.C. – Nathaniel Batchelder, Bob Lemon, Peter Pham, Glenn Norris, and me. I had been to two of the previous three conferences and with each one have seen more of the practicality, viability, and benefits of having a U.S. Department of Peace and Nonviolence headed by a Secretary of Peace in the president's cabinet.

The idea of a Department of Peace was first expressed by George Washington and first drafted in 1792 by Benjamin Banneker, noted African-American scientist, surveyor and editor, and Benjamin Rush, doctor, educator and signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Lying dormant until 1935, it was revived and introduced 93 different times between 1935 and 2001. It is worth noting that many of these bill authors were Republican, which certainly highlights our knowing that peace and nonviolence is a bipartisan issue and solution.

This current version was introduced in 2001, 2003 and 2005 by U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-OH, and introduced in the Senate last session by Sen. Mark Dayton, D-MN.

We were privileged to be walking the halls of Congress seeking Oklahoma co-sponsors for the legislation as it was again introduced September 5, 2007. Rep. Kucinich, joined on stage by six other congressmen, declared that "the time is now for this historic legislation, House Resolution 808, to pass!"

The crowd of citizen lobbyists went wild with joyous agreement. The time is now. This is the most important legislation we have ever worked for. This is something positive that I can do. I believe it can and will pass. It must, for as



Rep. Dan Boren joins some of the Oklahomans attending the Department of Peace Conference, including, from left, Bob Lemon, Glenn Norris, Boren, Lydia Gill Polley, Michael White, Nathaniel Batchelder and Eli Grayson.

Albert Einstein said, "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought. But I can assure you that World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

A companion bill has not been re-introduced to the Senate, but it will be very soon. We can give peace a seat at the table of presidential and federal power. And won't the world be amazed when the word goes out, "The United States has a Department of Peace and Nonviolence!"

HR 808 will augment our current problem-solving options, providing practical solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict. It will harness leading-edge peace building work in a "best practices" model to resolve, transform and prevent conflict in many contexts – both domestic and international.

A recent World Health Organization report estimated the cost of interpersonal violence in the U.S. at \$300 billion a year. This is excluding war related costs. HR 808 will identify, support and replicate proven proactive preventive measures for domestic and gang violence, and successful programs for improving community/police relations, rehabilitating prisoners, reducing recidivism rates, cultural competency education, teaching nonviolent conflict resolution and preventing school violence. The Department of Peace will provide the institutional platform, and the federal heft of adequate funding for universal application.

Investment in prevention costs only a fraction of violence and war. As currently written, the Department of Peace and Nonviolence will be funded by an amount comparable to 2% of the Defense Budget. How's that for a great investment?

Terrorism is a very real and serious threat. Many are working to prevent the next terrorist attack, yet who is working to prevent the root cause of terrorism? This Department, with a cadre of peace builders educated and trained by the Peace Academy, will bring understanding of cultures, language, religions, and needs; and use their expertise to bear on crucial issues to prevent the escalation of conflict.

The Secretary of Peace will offer the President, and Departments of State and Defense alternatives for resolving international conflict. This will help America and other nations abandon war as a first line of defense.

Help pass this legislation! Join our plea—we don't have a Department of Sickness, we have a Department of Health! We don't have a Department of Ignorance, we have a Department of Education! By this same standard, we should not just have a Department of Defense, we need to have what we long for, a Department of Peace and Nonviolence.

Seek details about the bill and campaign at our website: www.thepeacealliance.org. Contact our Oklahoma campaign through Lydia: lydiapolley@cox.net.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

GOP Newspaper Attacks INDN's List

By Kalyn Free

The Daily Oklahoman, named the worst newspaper in America by the Columbia Journalism Review, has again attacked INDN's List.

On Feb. 13, the publication's Right-Wing Spin Page, masquerading as a credible editorial page, attacked INDN's [Indigenous Democratic Network] List for its unparalleled success in supporting the election of several American Indian Democrats to the Oklahoma Legislature.

This is the same editorial board that two years ago, shortly after the birth of INDN's List, took issue with our mission, complaining that "what [Free] learned from her campaign may ultimately increase Native American representation in Congress and state legislatures throughout the land."

Imagine that! This country's original inhabitants participating in state and national politics!

The Oklahoman rightfully points out that all the Native American candidates we endorsed did win and apparently, the Oklahoman just isn't happy about it!

In fact, they are so incensed that they refuse to use our name, only referring to us as "A Tulsa-based Indian political advocacy group" or the "aforementioned political group."

AGE OLD TRICK USED

The "news"paper utilizes the age-old trick of not using the name of an organization you don't want people to learn more about or support. It's quite childish behavior for a supposed entity that seeks to report news.

Why go to all these extremes? Honestly, why is the Daily Oklahoman so scared? Are they afraid of American Indians gaining political power in a state with a long history of at best ignoring and at worst trampling on the sovereignty of its Indian Nations, which apparently suits the Daily Oklahoman just fine?

The aforementioned paper's biases are clear in its remark that "This isn't your grandfather's tribe." Well Christy Gaylord, "This isn't your Grandfather's Okla-

homa anymore!" Oklahoma is a state where we all determine, together and with our unique histories, what is best for us.

It seems the only campaign this Oklahoma City-based newspaper would like to see Oklahoma Indians involved with is the "Discover Native Oklahoma Campaign," an effort to draw tourism to our great state.

WE MUST CHART A NEW COURSE

We know, just like the Daily Oklahoman fears, that in order to make a brighter future for the people we care about – our children's children – we must chart a new course and that means having our voices heard in the halls of power, from the courthouse to the statehouse.

And yes, our organization does only support Indians who are Democrats. The reason for that is simple:

The Democratic Party shares the same values that American Indians hold so dear – making our elders, our children, those less fortunate, and those who need a helping hand, our priority.

Daily Oklahoman, you may as well go ahead and state it: You don't like INDN's List because our mission is to support American Indian candidates who want to put Oklahoma and America on a new course, a path that no longer tolerates Republican extremism, a path that will roll back the tax breaks for the wealthy, punish corporations who outsource our jobs, and hold accountable anyone who exploits working men and women.

You have made one thing crystal clear: In your eyes, the only Good Indian Politician is a Republican Indian Politician. But, hey, you feel that way about all politicians so none of us should be all that surprised.

Contribute now to help INDN's List continue to put a scowl on the Gaylords' faces. Call 918.583.6100.

– The author, president of INDN's List, lives in Tulsa

Labor Future Linked To Leaders Of Color

By Kevin Himeda

Over the past 50 years, labor unions have experienced a steady decline in membership, and the dearth of people of color in leadership positions may be an important cause, say some union organizers.

"Historically, unions were structured for white males," says Sergio Salinas, president of Service Employees International Union [SEIU] Local 6.

"However, a lot of traditionally white male jobs, such as those in manufacturing, are moving away to other countries, and our economy is changing to one of service and finance, where we have mostly minority groups."

Union membership grew rapidly after World War II, peaking in 1954 at 35% of the work force. Since then, however, union density has dropped.

By the 1980s, unions represented only 20% of the workforce, and by 2005, less than 10% of workers were unionized.

DIVERSITY IS ON THE RISE

Meanwhile, ethnic diversity has steadily increased in unions, with white membership dropping to 19% in 1983 and just 12.2% by 2005, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

With Black and Hispanic membership also dropping, the reason for this seems to be the large influx of Asian and other immigrants into the workforce.

Due to union leadership being composed predominantly of white males, some believe the lack of leadership diversity is one of the root causes for the decline in unions.

"Ray Charles could see that there's no diversity in the leadership," says Verlene Jones, Union Cities organizer for the AFL-CIO. "There are only one or two unions in Washington that have Latinos as presidents."

The job of unions, according to Jones, is to reflect the experiences of its members, and ethnicity is connected to the experiences they have. A non-diverse leadership is thus at a disadvantage in organizing workers and attracting new members.

IT TAKES INVOLVEMENT

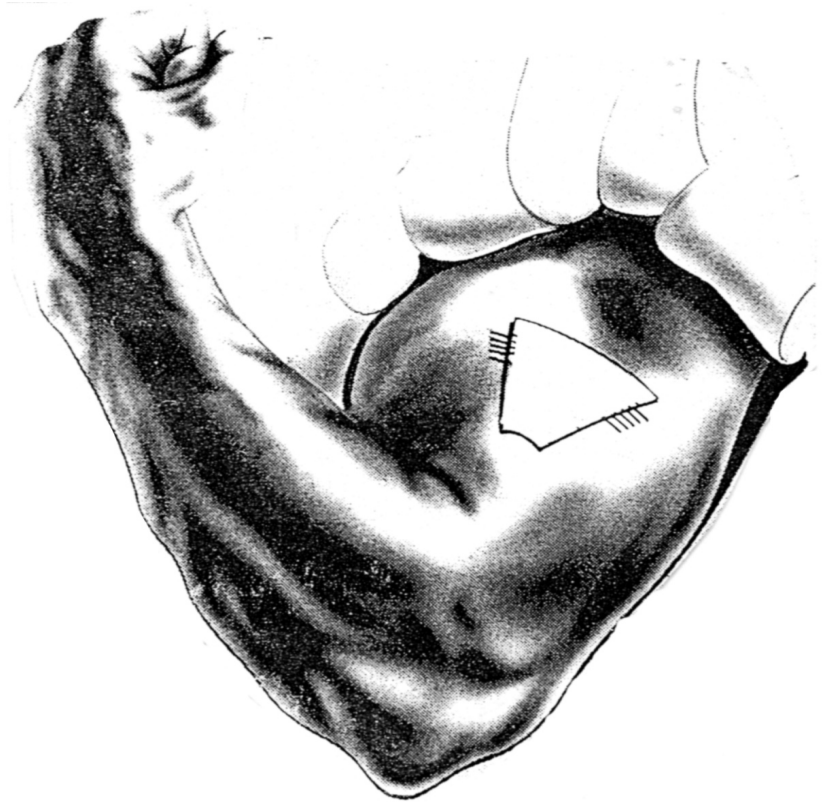
"It's more than making sure workers have good wages and benefits," Salinas adds. "We have to be actively engaged with their community, know what their members are going through, and talk with them."

For Salinas and Jones, until union leadership becomes more diverse, unions will continue their decline into irrelevance.

Union leaders, however, are elected to their positions, which begs the question: Why are white males consistently winning elections?

Jones holds that union election results have been controlled by the leaders running for re-election, but Salinas disagrees.

He allows that, "Historically, union leadership has been set. But the process is open. The voting is every three years, and an independent commission of mem-



bers will supervise the election with all members being able to come and vote."

HIS OWN PERSONAL TIME AND MONEY

Salinas points out that union leaders cannot take advantage of any resources available to their positions. Even as president, he cannot use "one penny" to help him in his campaign, but must spend his own personal time and money to win.

The reason white males are elected, says Salinas, is due to low turnout and a general disincentive to elect new leaders.

"If you have to replace a leader every election, you won't be able to get anything done. Also for SEIU [Local 6], out of 2,400 members, only 550 came to vote."

Salinas says that in the past, turnout dropped as low as 3%, allowing white males to win elections. That's one of the biggest problems in building a representative union, says Jones.

"Just because you're told to join a union and you do so, with a reduction in your paycheck, you're not a member," she says. "You have to participate."

Jones described the need for unions to be more transparent, educate workers on their rights and union processes, and provide leadership training to help minorities make the transition successfully.

"Of the 1.8 million workers we represent," Salinas says of SEIU, "800,000 are new members."

Salinas stressed the importance of educational access for entry-level workers to move up the ladder, linguists to help communicate with newly arrived immigrants, and methods to appeal to workers.

"It's definitively a process we have to go through," Salinas finished. "But I'm hopeful for the future"

Union Membership Hits Record Low

Union membership dropped to 12% of U.S. workers last year, extending a steady decline from the 1950s when more than a third belonged to unions.

After membership had held steady at 12.5% in 2005, it declined anew last year, a decrease of more than 325,000 workers, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported.

Membership had been 20.1% in 1983, when the bureau first provided comparable numbers. About 35% of American workers were union members in the mid-1950s.

The latest gloomy news for organized labor comes at a time when the group is pushing legislation in the Democratic-controlled Congress that would make it easier for unions to organize.

But labor laws aren't the only obstacle to union membership.

LABOR LAW NOT ONLY PROBLEM

"Much of the decline is coming from shifts in the economy," said Greg Denier, a spokesman for Change to Win, a federation of labor unions.

"Thousands of jobs are being outsourced or lost to technological changes. And employers are aggressively campaigning against the formation of unions," he said.

Labor unions are pushing legislation that would let workers form unions more readily by simply signing a card or petition, impose stronger penalties on employers who violate labor laws, and allow for arbitration to settle contract disputes.

Advocates of the legislation say they doubt that it will get signed into law by President Bush, but that they think passage in Congress would make eventual signing of the law more likely.

DROP FUELS NEW MOTIVATION

The continuing drop in membership has given them new motivation. "There's no better argument for quick passage," said Stewart Acuff, organizing director of the AFL-CIO. The federation's own research, he said, suggests many people would join unions if they had the chance.

Supporters say the proposal is more fair to workers because employers can't intimidate workers to discourage formation of a union. Opponents say it deprives workers of the right to vote privately on their union preferences, and can lead to union intimidation.

The union membership rate for government workers, 36.2%, was substantially

higher than for private industry workers, 7.4%.

The latest membership statistics have to be "incredibly discouraging for labor," said Gary Chaison, a labor specialist at Clark University in Worcester, MA.

"Before they can grow, they have to stand still," he said. "The unions are losing so many members each year because their jobs are being outsourced and they are organized in shrinking sectors of the economy, like autos, steel and textiles."

PRESSURE CAUSED A SPLIT

The pressures on organized labor led to a split starting in the summer of 2005, with more than a half-dozen unions breaking free of the AFL-CIO.

The breakaway unions cited the need for more emphasis on organizing, though the split was also caused by power struggles and personality disputes among union leaders.

Much of the recent union recruitment has focused on industries unlikely to lose jobs overseas such as the hotel industry, health care and service workers.

The continuing erosion of union membership is "just another sign of the collapse of the middle class," said David Gregory, a professor of labor law at St. John's University Law School.

New Film: 100 Years Of Oklahoma

"100 Years Of Oklahoma" will be a feature documentary celebrating 100 years of Oklahoma history. The project will capture on film an overview, highlights, and reenactments of the most important events in Oklahoma from the past 100 years.

This documentary, by National Film Projects Inc., will involve a tremendous amount of research and cooperation with Oklahoma historians, writers, museums, universities, clubs, societies and American Indian tribes.

It will include original, archived footage, photos, or documents of Oklahoma's events along with interviews and historical accounts given by extraordinary individuals: the people who are Oklahoma.

This one of a kind documentary, finally captured on film, is expected to form a crucial piece of historical documentation for the State of Oklahoma.

Producer-Director is Peter Zhmutski. Writer/Director is Curt Fischer.

Public Forum

Abortion Should Be Safe And Legal

By Llyn French

There are lots of concepts that are great in theory but they just don't fly, and right-to-life is one of them. As the now-60-year-old veteran of one 40-year-old daughter, three miscarriages, and two abortions, I feel sufficiently qualified to speak on the subject.

Like the pregnancy from which it results, abortion is painful, expensive, and emotionally earthshaking. Those who choose it do so because it is the least damaging of the available options.

Women have had abortions as long as humans have existed, only now they don't have to risk death or sterility in the process. I hate abortion, but I'll defend with my life a woman's vital right to have them safely on demand during the first trimester.

"Vital to what right?" you ask. This is what right: The right of a child to be loved, to be prized, to have its needs met without resentment, not to be abused or neglected, to be fed and clothed adequately, to feel that the world is a good place to be. The right of the mother not to bring a child into the world if she cannot provide a quality existence for it.

CONSIDER HER CIRCUMSTANCES

Say I'm the single mother of a half-grown child, having divorced my husband years before because he habitually beat me, kept bringing his girlfriends home, tried to kill our baby, and refused to hold a job except that of drug dealer.

There's never been child support because the bum won't work enough to pay it. I labor 12 hours a day at half a man's salary to support a child I hardly see. I can't make ends meet and have to live on mushroom soup so she can have enough to eat. Some "freewheeling and uninhibited lifestyle!"

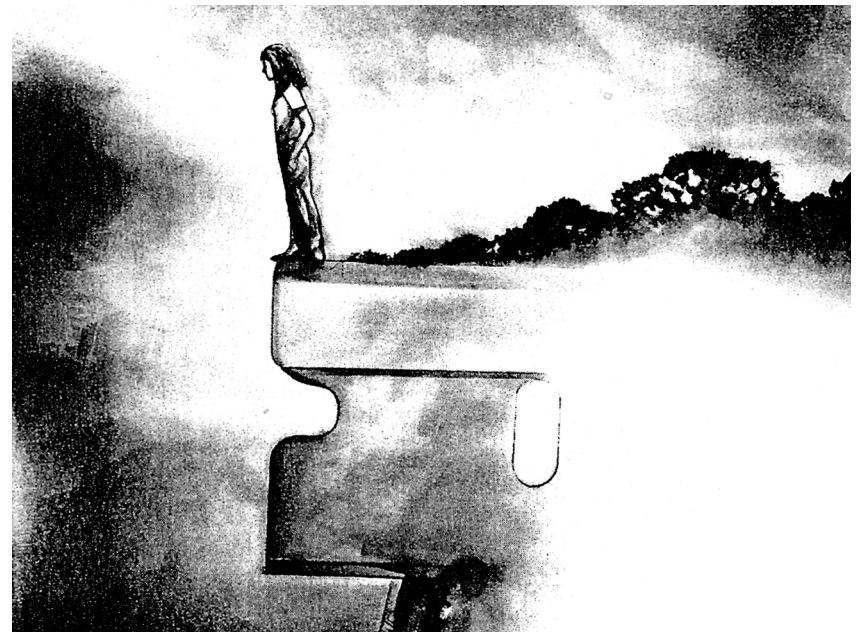
One night when I'm feeling like a ragged mule, I succumb to a back rub from a male friend and get pregnant when my IUD fails. So here I am, headed regretfully into an abortion clinic, when I meet a picket of you right-to-lifers.

"Millions of abortions," you lament. Sure. Thirty Denver-sized cities worth of resented, neglected, abused, hostile people. Where would you have put them? Who would have provided their carob chips, locker keys, Transformer robots? Who would have gotten up at 2 a.m. to put lotion on their chicken pox? Surely not you. Someone else would have done it [or more likely, not done it]. Be real.

UTTER MISERY FOR NINE MONTHS

"Oh, but I can't have any and I'd love to adopt your baby."

You want me to go through nine months of utter misery so I can give the baby to you? I'm sorry, but I don't give my children away. If I can't provide for them, I won't have them.



It hurts me more to have a child and no husband than it hurts you to have a husband and no child. I'll give you my child when you give me your husband. Don't cry to me, lady; we all have our crosses to bear.

"If you don't want them, why don't you use birth control?"

No contraceptive is 100% effective. They fail quite often, all of them. I've become pregnant on every form I've used except the Dalkon Shield, and we all know what that did to women – don't we?

"The most effective contraceptive is the word 'no.'"

Have you ever known a rapist, even a "date rapist," to desist upon being told "no?"

SHE CAN'T LIVE THAT WAY

Assuming it's consensual, do I look like a mother bird whose sole purpose in life is to bring home the food, never again to know a hug, a kiss, or other physical affection? Sorry, I can't live that way. You couldn't, either.

"If you can't earn enough to feed another child, you can get government assistance."

Weren't you the one who voted for this president who cut AFDC, WIC, food stamps, and welfare?

"You are taking a precious human life!"

No, at five or six weeks, it is an embryo that requires an expert to distinguish it as human. I imagine that if any of you macho men ever once held a spontaneously aborted embryo in your hand, as I have, you would lose not only your romantic notions of "precious human life" but also your lunch. Besides, there are zillions more where this came from.

"But abortion is murder!"

If you're so against the murder of children, how come you push war as a means of problem-solving, which kills everybody's kids? The murder of the unborn is nothing compared to the murder of those already in existence. Get it together!

– The author lives in St. Petersburg, FL

Terror Policy Endangers America's Soul

By Lynn Green

Kaled el-Masri is a German citizen. On December 31, 2003, he was on vacation in Macedonia. When the bus he was traveling on reached the Serbia-Macedonia border, he was detained by Macedonia authorities and turned over to the CIA.

They suspected him of being linked with terrorist organizations. Mr. el-Masri was held for 23 days before being beaten, drugged and flown on a plane leased by our government to Afghanistan where he was detained in the notorious "Salt Pit" prison.

The trouble is that by this time, the CIA knew that he was innocent. He was a victim of mistaken identity.

Five months after being kidnapped, Mr. el-Masri was led out of his cell, blindfolded, handcuffed, chained to the seat of a plane, flown to Albania and – without explanation – abandoned on a hillside at night.

RENDITION, KIDNAPPING AND TORTURE

President Bush first denied that the U.S. engaged in rendition, another term for kidnapping. He denied we used torture. When cases like Mr. el-Masri's came to light, his lie was exposed.

He then successfully got the Republican Congress to pass the Military Commissions Act to give him the right to continue the practice of denying basic human rights to anyone he believes to be guilty of terrorism.

The law allows among other things to:

- Deny prisoners the right to habeas corpus so that a prisoner can be locked away without charge or without the right to an attorney.
- Use force to gain evidence against prisoners and convict them on the basis of statements made under coercion.
- Keep prisoners locked up indefinitely.

The claim is always made that 9/11 gives us the right to use means above the Constitution to defend ourselves, that we are dealing with very dangerous people.

IT'S ABOUT US, NOT THEM

But as Sen. John McCain said in his debate against the use of torture, this is not about who they are, it's about who we are.

If we resort to kidnapping, torture, forced confessions, indefinite imprisonment, denial of the rule of law, then what have we become? How can we say that

we have the moral right to defend freedom around the world, when we can't exercise it at home?

Congress must repeal the Military Commissions Act. Our national soul is at stake here. For how can we ask the brave men and women of our military to sacrifice themselves if America has become little better than the tyrannies we oppose.

ALL MEN NOT EQUAL

To paraphrase a famous statement of Abraham Lincoln: I assert that as a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except those we declare to be enemy combatants."

If this is allowed to continue, we will say "all men are created equal, except Muslims and others we dislike."

When it comes to this, I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty so that my tyranny can be taken pure, and without hypocritical lip-service to the ideal of liberty and justice for all.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

Is This Funny Or What?

A Southern California fence-building company and two executives pleaded guilty to knowingly hiring illegal immigrants and agreed to pay a combined penalty of \$5 million. The executives could also go to prison.

Golden State Fence Co will pay \$4.7 million. Mel Kay, 64, the company's founder, chairman and president, will forfeit \$200,000 and Michael McLaughlin, 42, a manager in the company's Oceanside, CA, office will pay \$100,000.

The two men admitted hiring at least 10 illegal immigrants.

Among the company's projects was the construction of part of a 14-mile border fence in San Diego.

In 2005, in one of the biggest cases of its kind, Wal-Mart agreed to pay \$11 million to end a federal investigation into the use of illegal immigrants at stores in 21 states.

Building Dossiers

Yes, Big Brother Is Watching You

By Bruce Schneier

If you've traveled abroad recently, you've been investigated. You've been assigned a score indicating what kind of terrorist threat you pose. That score is used by the government to determine the treatment you receive when you return to the U.S. and for other purposes as well.

Curious about your score? You can't see it. Interested in what information was used? You can't know that.

Want to clear your name if you've been wrongly categorized? You can't challenge it.

Want to know what kind of rules the computer is using to judge you?

That's secret, too. So is when and how the score will be used.

U.S. customs agencies have been quietly operating this system for several years. Called the Automated Targeting System, it assigns a "risk assessment" score to people entering or leaving the country, or engaging in import or export activity.

THEY CAN SHARE IT WITH PRIVATE CONTRACTORS

This score, and the information used to derive it, can be shared with federal, state, local and even foreign governments. It can be used if you apply for a government job, grant, license, contract or other benefit. It can be shared with non-governmental organizations and individuals in the course of an investigation.

In some circumstances private contractors can get it, even those outside the country. And it will be saved for 40 years.

Little is known about this program. Its bare outlines were disclosed in the Federal Register in October.

We do know that the score is partially based on details of your flight record – where you're from, how you bought your ticket, where you're sitting, any special meal requests – or on motor vehicle records, as well as on information from crime, watch-list and other databases.

Civil liberties groups have called the program Kafkaesque. But I have an even bigger problem with it. It's a waste of money.

The idea of feeding a limited set of characteristics into a computer, which then somehow divines a person's terrorist leanings, is farcical. Uncovering terrorist plots requires intelligence and investigation, not large-scale processing of everyone.

IT WILL GENERATE MANY FALSE ALARMS

Additionally, any system like this will generate so many false alarms as to be completely unusable. In 2005 Customs and Border Protection processed 431 million people. Assuming an unrealistic model that identifies terrorists [and innocents] with 99.9% accuracy, that's still 431,000 false alarms annually.

The number of false alarms will be much higher than that. The no-fly list is filled with inaccuracies; we've all read about innocent people named David Nel-



son who can't fly without hours-long harassment. Airline data, too, are riddled with errors.

The odds of this program's being implemented securely, with adequate privacy protections, are not good. Last year I participated in a government working group to assess the security and privacy of a similar program developed by the Transportation Security Administration, called Secure Flight.

After five years and \$100 million spent, the program still can't achieve the simple task of matching airline passengers against terrorist watch lists.

In 2002 we learned about yet another program, called Total Information Awareness, for which the government would collect information on every American and assign him or her a terrorist risk score.

CONGRESS FOUND IT ABHORRENT

Congress found the idea so abhorrent that it halted funding for the program. Two years ago, and again this year, Secure Flight was also banned by Congress until it could pass a series of tests for accuracy and privacy protection.

In fact, the Automated Targeting System is arguably illegal, as well [a point several congressmen have made recently]; all recent Department of Homeland Security appropriations bills specifically prohibit the department from using profiling systems against persons not on a watch list.

There is something un-American about a government program that uses secret criteria to collect dossiers on innocent people and shares that information with various agencies, all without any oversight.

It's the sort of thing you'd expect from the former Soviet Union or East Germany or China. And it doesn't make us any safer from terrorism.

– The author is chief technology officer for a security company

Condi On Hot Seat On Gay Linguists

Condoleezza Rice got a grilling on Capitol Hill when she bemoaned "the foreign language deficit that we have" and how much the government needs Farsi and Arabic speakers.

Rice was appearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, justifying the State Department's proposed budget increases.

After she complained several times that the department was facing a problem funding translators, an exasperated Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-NY, asked why the department had not hired any of the translators fired by the Pentagon because they are gay and lesbian.

Under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," more than two dozen Arabic translators have been dropped since the war in Iraq began.

"It seems that the Defense Department has a 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' when it comes to homosexuals. You don't have such a prohibition in your agency, do you?" Ackerman asked Rice.

"No, we do not," Rice replied.

"Well, it seems that the military has gone around and fired a whole bunch of people who speak foreign languages – Farsi and Arabic," Ackerman said.

TRAINED AND PASSED SECURITY

The congressman said that they had already been trained at government expense and had passed security tests.

"For some reason, the military seems more afraid of gay people than they are terrorists, but they're very brave with the terrorists," Ackerman said, "If the terrorists ever got a hold of this information, they'd get a platoon of lesbians to chase us out of Baghdad."

The remark drew some smiles from fellow members of the panel, but Rice was stone faced.

Ackerman then asked directly why the State Department had not looked at the fired gay linguists.

"Can we marry up those two or maybe that's the wrong word – can we have some kind of union of those two issues?" Ackerman asked.

"Congressman Ackerman, I'm not aware of the availability of people, but I certainly will look at what we are doing right now," Rice replied, adding that the de-

partment had increased staff in many critical areas but needs additional people at higher levels.

"But maybe you might find some of those competent people among those who are recently unemployed," Ackerman said.

SHE WILL LOOK AT IT

"We'll look at it," is all Ackerman could get Rice to commit to.

"Secretary Rice would have no trouble finding gay linguists," said Sharon Alexander, deputy director of policy for Service-members Legal Defense Network.

"In fact, our government could go a long way in addressing the shortage of language expertise by doing just as Congressman Ackerman suggests. SLDN would be happy to introduce Secretary Rice to our many clients who speak Arabic but have been dismissed because of the ban," said Alexander.

Since the ban on gays serving openly was implemented a decade ago, more than 11,000 men and women have been dismissed under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," according to the Government Accountability Office.

Last month, Rep. Marty Meehan, D-MA, said that he will reintroduce legislation to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in this session of Congress and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-OR, has told Defense Secretary Robert Gates he wants an answer on the new secretary's position on DADT by March 16.

Fridays With Frosty

Join Oklahoma Observer Founding Editor Frosty Troy for commentary every Friday at 7:35 a.m. and 4:44 p.m. on Oklahoma's Public Radio. Neva Hill's commentary airs Thursdays at the same times.



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Big Changes Sought

NCLB Law Up for Renewal This Year

The No Child Left Behind Act broke new ground when it required the states to educate impoverished children up to the same standards as their affluent counterparts, in exchange for federal aid.

The law did not just drop out of the sky. It clearly was a Republican attempt to take over public education, dictating policy and standards from Washington.

It represented a deliberate attempt by the Bush Administration to press for standards-based accountability systems that quickly show promising results. It means teaching to the test.

The achievement gains have fallen far short of what Congress hoped for when it passed the landmark federal law. NCLB is underfunded by an estimated \$30 billion, according to *Governing Magazine's* national poll.

STUDENTS PERFORMANCE FLAT

In addition, student performance has flattened in recent years. The U.S. Department of Education tried to hide their own study showing that public school students out-scored charter schools.

Recent studies offer sobering news about the challenges that lie ahead.

Happily, there is also encouraging news from the states that have stayed the course and continued to build rigorous reforms. Oklahoma is one of the few meeting most of the NCLB standards.

Analyzing student performance between 1992 and 2005, another study found clear signs of progress, especially in fourth-grade math performance, which had gone up nearly two grade levels since 1992.

Black and Hispanic students, by the way, showed larger gains than their white counterparts over that same period. Had the scores of white students not risen at all, the progress by black and Hispanic students would have substantially erased the white-minority achievement gap.

READING PERFORMANCE STILL LAGS

The news was less heartening in reading performance, which inched up only about two points over the same time period. Even so, Education Week found that reading achievement for black, Hispanic and low-income fourth graders had risen at nearly three times the national average.

Low-income students still lag far behind their affluent counterparts. But the data in a subsequent study shows that states that commit to rigorous standards and accountability systems can make progress in this difficult area.

The bad news is that only eight states, including Oklahoma, even achieved

"moderate progress."

With the easy achievement gains already reached, the next level of progress will require rigorous systemic change. The states, for example, will need to adopt rigorous examinations that track the federal test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, more closely.

More bad news is that by pushing only math and reading, NCLB has taken a terrible toll on music, art, drama, social studies, PE, counseling and extra curricular activities – a leading indicator of future success.

CRACKDOWN IN TEACHER COLLEGES

A crackdown on state teachers colleges that turn out poor graduates has been ordered by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings. She also wants to devise ways – including differential pay – to persuade highly qualified teachers to work in failing schools that they have historically avoided.

Oklahoma has the fifth best prepared teachers in the nation, according to the annual Quality Counts report.

To move forward, the country must also find new ways to support and transform failing schools, beyond labeling them failures and presuming that the stigma will inspire better performance.

Congress is to reauthorize NCLB this year. Educators across the country are calling for significant change, especially full funding of the federal mandates.



Bush Unleashing Killer 18-Wheelers

By Stephen Labaton

As Dorris Edwards slowed for traffic near Kingdom City, MO, on her way home from a Thanksgiving trip in 2004, an 18-wheeler slammed into her Jeep Cherokee.

The truck crushed the sport-utility vehicle and shoved it down an embankment off Interstate 70. Edwards, 62, was killed.

The truck driver accepted blame for the accident, and Ms. Edwards's family filed a lawsuit against the driver and the trucking company.

In the course of pursuing its case, the family broached a larger issue: whether the Bush Administration's decision to reject tighter industry regulation and instead reduce what officials viewed as cumbersome rules permitted a poorly trained trucker to stay behind the wheel, alone, instead of resting after a long day of driving.

After intense lobbying by the politically powerful trucking industry, regulators a year earlier had rejected proposals to tighten drivers' hours and instead did the opposite, relaxing the rules on how long truckers could be on the road.

HE ADMITTED HE WAS TIRED

That allowed the driver who hit Edwards to work in the cab nearly 12 hours, 8 of them driving nonstop, which he later acknowledged had tired him.

Government officials had also turned down repeated requests from insurers and safety groups for more rigorous training for new drivers.

The driver in the fatal accident was a rookie on his first cross-country trip; his instructor, a 22-year-old with just a year of trucking experience, had been sleeping in a berth behind the cab much of the way.

Federal officials, while declining to comment about the Edwards accident, have dismissed the assertion that deregulation has reduced safety and have maintained that in fact it has helped, though the Edwards family and many other victims of accidents have come to the opposite conclusion.

In loosening the standards, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration was fulfilling President Bush's broader pledge to free industry of what it considered cumbersome rules.

In the last six years, the White House has embarked on the boldest strategy of deregulation in more than a generation.

INDUSTRY REDUCING REGULATIONS

Largely unchecked by then a Republican-led Congress, federal agencies, often led by former industry officials, have methodically reduced what they see as inefficient, outdated regulations and have delayed enforcement of others.

The Bush Administration says those efforts have produced huge savings for

businesses and consumers.

Those actions, though, have provoked fierce debate about their benefits and risks. The federal government's oversight of the trucking industry is a case study of deregulation, as well as the difficulty of determining an exact calculus of its consequences.

Though Edwards' family and the industry disagree on whether the motor carrier agency's actions contributed to her death, her accident illuminates crucial issues in regulating America's most treacherous industry, as measured by overall deaths and injuries from truck accidents.

The loosened standards, supporters say, have made it faster and cheaper to move goods across the country. They also say the changes promote safety; without longer work hours, the industry would be forced to put more drivers with little experience behind the wheel.

5,000 TRUCK-RELATED DEATHS

Regulators and industry officials point out that the death toll of truck-related accidents – about 5,000 annually – has not increased, while the fatality rate, the number of deaths per miles traveled, has continued a decline. The number of annual injuries has also been dropping slowly, falling to 114,000 last year.

Weakening the rules has reversed a course set by the Clinton Administration and has resulted in the federal government repeatedly missing its own targets for reducing the death rate.

In decisions that had the support of the White House, the motor carrier agency has eased the rules on truckers' work hours, rejected proposals for electronic monitoring to combat widespread cheating on drivers' logs and resisted calls for more rigorous driver training.

IGNORING GOVERNMENT SAFETY RULES

While applauded by the industry, those decisions have been subject to withering criticism by federal appeals court panels in Washington who say they ignore government safety studies and put the industry's economic interests ahead of public safety.

To advance its agenda, the Bush Administration has installed industry officials in influential posts.

In addition to supplying prominent administration officials, the trucking industry has provided some of the Republican Party's most important fund-raisers. From 2000 to 2006, the industry directed more than \$14 million in campaign contributions to Republicans.

Its donations and lobbying fees – about \$4.7 million.

The Clinton Conundrum

What's A Democrat To Do About Hillary?

By Molly Ivins

Editor's Note: The late Molly Ivins wrote this column in January 2006.

I'd like to make it clear to the people who run the Democratic Party that I will not support Hillary Clinton for president.

Enough. Enough triangulation, calculation and equivocation. Enough clever straddling, enough not offending anyone. This is not a Dick Morris election. Sen. Clinton is apparently incapable of taking a clear stand on the war in Iraq, and that alone is enough to disqualify her. Her failure to speak out on Terri Schiavo, not to mention that gross pandering on flag-burning, are just contemptible little dodges.

The recent death of Gene McCarthy reminded me of a lesson I spent a long, long time unlearning, so now I have to re-learn it. It's about political courage and heroes, and when a country is desperate for leadership. There are times when regular politics will not do, and this is one of those times. There are times a country is so tired of bull that only the truth can provide relief.

If no one in conventional-wisdom politics has the courage to speak up and say what needs to be said, then you go out and find some obscure junior senator from Minnesota with the guts to do it. In 1968, Gene McCarthy was the little boy who said out loud, "Look, the emperor isn't wearing any clothes." Bobby Kennedy - rough, tough Bobby Kennedy - didn't do it. Just this quiet man trained by Benedictines who liked to quote poetry.

What kind of courage does it take, for mercy's sake? The majority of the American people [55%] think the war in Iraq is a mistake and that we should get out. The majority [65%] of the American people want single-payer health care and are willing to pay more taxes to get it. The majority [86%] of the American people favor raising the minimum wage. The majority of the American people [60%] favor repealing Bush's tax cuts, or at least those that go only to the rich. The majority [66%] wants to reduce the deficit not by cutting domestic spending, but by reducing Pentagon spending or raising taxes.

The majority [77%] thinks we should do "whatever it takes" to protect the environment. The majority [87%] thinks big oil companies are gouging consumers and would support a wind-fall profits tax. That is the center, you fools. WHO ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

I listen to people like Rahm Emanuel superciliously explaining elementary politics to us clueless naifs outside the Beltway ["First, you have to win elections"]. Can't you even read the damn polls?

Here's a prize example by someone named Barry Casselman, who writes, "There is an invisible civil war in the Democratic Party, and it is between those who are attempting to satisfy the defeatist and pacifist left base of

the party and those who are attempting to prepare the party for successful elections in 2006 and 2008."

This supposedly pits Howard Dean, Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi, emboldened by "a string of bad news from the Middle East ... into calling for premature retreat from Iraq," versus those pragmatic folk like Steny Hoyer, Rahm Emmanuel, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden and Joe Lieberman.

Oh come on, people - get a grip on the concept of leadership. Look at this war - from the lies that led us into it, to the lies they continue to dump on us daily.

You sit there in Washington so frightened of the big, bad Republican

"Do not sit there cowering and pretending the only way to win is as Republican-lite."

- Molly Ivins

machine you have no idea what people are thinking. I'm telling you right now, Tom DeLay is going to lose in his district. If Democrats in Washington haven't got enough sense to OWN the issue of political reform, I give up on them entirely.

Do it all, go long, go for public campaign financing for Congress. I'm serious as a stroke about this - that is the only reform that will work, and you know it, as well as everyone else who's ever studied this. Do all the goo-goo stuff everybody has made fun of all these years: embrace redistricting reform, electoral reform, House rules changes, the whole package. Put up, or shut up. Own this issue, or let Jack Abramoff politics continue to run your town.

Bush, Cheney and Co. will continue to play the patriotic bully card just as long as you let them. I've said it before: War brings out the patriotic bullies. In World War I, they went around kicking dachshunds on the grounds that dachshunds were "German dogs." They did not, however, go around kicking German shepherds. The MINUTE someone impugns your patriotism for opposing this war, turn on them like a snarling dog and explain what loving your country really means. That, or you could just piss on them elegantly, as Rep. John Murtha did. Or eviscerate them with wit [look up Mark Twain on the war in the Philippines]. Or point out the latest in the endless "string of bad news."

Do not sit there cowering and pretending the only way to win is as Republican-lite. If the Washington-based party can't get up and fight, we'll find someone who can.

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By Susan Estrich

Just who was Hillary Clinton talking about when she summarized a question about her ability to deal with America's enemies with: "What in my background equips me to deal with evil and bad men?" She raised her eyebrows. The crowd exploded in laughter.

It certainly wasn't about Osama. It had to be Bill. Asked later whether she was in fact referring to her husband, Hillary denied it: "Oh, come on. I don't think anybody in there thought that. I thought I was funny. You know, you guys keep telling me, 'Lighten up. Be funny.' You know, I get a little funny, and now I'm being psychoanalyzed."

Welcome to the 2008 campaign.

"The ideological question will be whether she is liberal enough, especially on the war."

- Susan Estrich

Hillary's joke on Bill overshadowed the questions and answers about George Bush in the coverage of the Senator's first trip to Iowa in three years. With reason. The big question about Hillary, for most Democrats, is painfully personal. Of course she's smart. Of course she's tough. No one argues that. The question is: Do you "like" her?

There are still many conservatives who view Hillary Clinton as the embodiment of liberal evil because of her role in the debate over health care early in her husband's administration. In the stick figure caricatures of the Clinton White House, she was perceived as the liberal one, the flat-out feminist, the supporter of bigger government. Even after six years as a more mainstream moderate in the United States Senate, they still rant about Hillary Rodham.

But that is the least of her problems in the months ahead, where the ideological question will be whether she is liberal enough, especially on the war, to suit those who dominate Democratic primaries and caucuses, especially in Iowa. The challenge for

Democrats in dealing with the Iowa caucus has always been not to go so far to the left that you can't get back to the center when you need to. The anti-war Hillary was out in full force in Iowa, criticizing the president's war in terms just as forceful as those of any of her opponents, even if the next day did find her smiling with John McCain, the current scourge of the anti-war left.

Hillary still has some convincing to do among liberal Democrats, but even on the war, the challenge for Hillary may ultimately have less to do with substance than motivation, less to do with policy than with character.

Did she support the war because she thought it was right, or because she thought it was the right thing to do? Was it a substantive decision that turned out to be wrong, a mistake many people made or a political miscalculation?

It is, in those terms, simply another version of the same question you hear about her marriage: Did she stick with her husband through the Monica Lewinsky mess out of loyalty, or out of ambition? Loyalty is understandable, acceptable, sympathetic. Ambition points to a person who is hard to like. It is, in other words, a question of character.

The caricature of Hillary Clinton among liberals is not about her ideology, but her personality; not about her positions, but why she takes them.

The reasons Democrats don't like Hillary are totally different from the reasons conservatives don't. For Democrats, it's all about what kind of person she is.

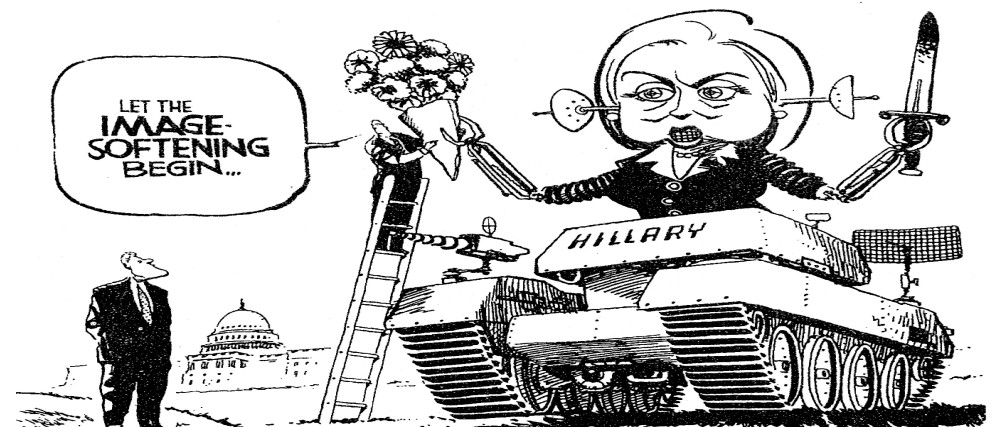
For Hillary, the Iowa campaign is a chance to begin showing a different face than most people have ever seen.

As her friends know, the real Hillary Clinton is very funny. The caricature isn't. The real Hillary Clinton has a sense of humor about herself. The caricature doesn't.

More than any other candidate, Hillary needs to use the months ahead to address the questions of character that plague her candidacy.

Hillary's "evil joke" was an important step in that direction. It was human, which is what those who don't like her think she isn't.

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Fulltime Hate Monger

Rush Limbaugh

For Nobel Prize?

By William Fisher

This is an event so bizarre that it easily broke through the fog of delusion to rise right to the top of the list – the nomination of Rush Limbaugh for the Nobel Peace Prize.

It came from something called the Landmark Legal Foundation, which describes itself as the leading conservative public interest law firm in the United States.

The nomination letter, signed by Landmark's president, one Mark R. Levin, called Limbaugh "the foremost advocate for freedom and democracy in the world today."

And just who is Mark Levin? He is a contributing editor to the National Review, as well as a frequent contributor to the Washington Times and Human Events. And he played a role in supporting Paula Jones during the Clinton sexual scandal by receiving funds from the Scaife Foundation and finding lawyers for Jones.

WHAT HE THINKS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

He's the man who, during the 2004 presidential campaign, asked, "How can [John Kerry] support an organization [the United Nations] that is anti-Semitic? I would like to know how the U.N., given the make-up of the august body, is any different than the KKK or all the rest of it. They've got people in that U.N. that are torturers, mass-murderers, anti-Semites, anti-Americans, anti-freedom, and we're supposed to keep conferring our decisions to them. Why?"

Levin is also the man who said, "We are also challenging what may be the most insidious legacy of modern liberalism – judicial activism and the radical judges who use it to advance an extremist social agenda. America's courts have become the final bulwark for the advocates of big government who have been defeated time after time at the ballot box at the local, state and federal level."

And what is the Landmark Legal Foundation? It is a not-for-profit supported by Exxon Mobil and some of the nation's most extreme right-wing foundations. It is working to reign in "activist judges" and their contempt for the rule of law.

According to Americans United for Separation of Church and State, LLF "focuses primarily on education and environmental litigation," promoting school vouchers and drafting bills for rightwing legislators to introduce.

RUSH IS GOOGLED

And what has the Nobel nominee said that would support his candidacy?

Thanks to Google, Rush's rants are knowable beyond the 20 million people who listen to him on 650 radio stations every day. Here are some of the more insightful items:

On Guantanamo: A picture of religious freedom that "may be a great vacation spot for oppressed Christians in the United States."

On AIDS: "And one of the things that...that the...the AIDS activists said regularly back then was, oh, this is only a matter of time before it spreads to the heterosexual community. It's only a matter of time. And they used that as- as one of the weapons to try to get people like Reagan to start talking about it from their standpoint. And of course it...it hasn't. It, it didn't, and it hasn't, other than in Africa, and in Africa it is – it is being spread not just by...it...it's promiscuity that...that...that spreads this, if you want to know the truth. It's promiscuity. But it...it hasn't made that jump to the heterosexual community."

On African-Americans: "Why should blacks be heard? They're 12% of the population. Who the hell cares?"

On Choice: "I think this reason why girls don't do well on multiple choice tests goes all the way back to the Bible, all the way back to Genesis, Adam and Eve. God said, 'All right, Eve, multiple choice or multiple orgasms, what's it going to be?' We all know what was chosen."

On Citizen Service: "Citizen Service is a repudiation of the principles upon which our country was based. We are all here for ourselves."

On Condoms: "Condoms only work during the school year."

On Drug Abuse: "And we have laws against selling drugs, pushing drugs, using drugs, importing drugs. And the laws are good because we know what happens to people in societies and neighborhoods which become consumed by them. And so if people are violating the law by doing drugs, they ought to be accused and they ought to be convicted and they ought to be sent up."

On Earth: "The Earth's eco-system is not fragile."

On Feminism: "Feminism was established so as to allow unattractive women easier access to the mainstream of society."

On Homelessness: "One of the things I want to do before I die is conduct the Homeless Olympics...the 10-meter shopping cart relay, the dumpster dig, and the hop, skip, and trip."

On Prison Abuse in Iraq: "This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation and we're going to ruin people's lives over it, and we're going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them because they had a good time. You know, these people are being fired at every day. I'm talking about people having a good time, these people; you ever heard of emotional release? You ever heard of need to blow some steam off?"

On Michael J. Fox's Support of Embryonic Stem Cell Research: "He is exaggerating the effects of his disease [Parkinson's]. He's moving all around and shaking and it's purely an act. . . . This is really shameless of Michael J. Fox. Either he didn't take his medication or he's acting. This is the only time I've ever



seen Michael J. Fox portray any of the symptoms of the disease he has. He can barely control himself."

On the NAACP: "The NAACP should have a riot rehearsal. They should get a liquor store and practice robberies."

On Nuclear Arms Reduction: "The only way to reduce the number of nuclear weapons is to use them."

On Sexual Harassment: "Sexual harassment at this work station will not be reported. However, it will be graded!"

On the Rich-Poor Gap: "Don't let the liberals deceive you into believing that a decade of sustained growth without inflation in America [in the '80s] resulted in a bigger gap between the haves and the have-nots. Figures compiled by the Congressional Budget Office dispel that myth."

On the Constitution: "You know why there's a Second Amendment? In case the government fails to follow the first one."

Can't you just picture Rush sitting in the Nobel pantheon along with Shirin Ebadi, Jimmy Carter, Kofi Annan, Kim Dae Jung, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, the Dalai Lama, Bishop Desmond Tutu and Lech Walesa?

And let's not forget how his \$1.7 million prize would come in handy: After all, OxyContin isn't cheap!

Truthout

U.S. Military Tells '24' To Cut Out The Torture

In the hugely popular television series 24, federal agent Jack Bauer always gets his man, even if he has to play rough. Suffocating, electrocuting or drugging a suspect is all in a day's work.

As Bauer – played by the Emmy Award winner Kiefer Sutherland – tells one baddie: "You are going to tell me what I want to know – it's just a matter of how much you want it to hurt."

But while 24 draws millions of viewers, it appears some people are becoming a little squeamish. The U.S. military has appealed to the producers of 24 to tone down the torture scenes because of the impact they are having both on troops in the field and America's reputation abroad.

Forget about Abu Ghraib, forget about Guantanamo Bay, forget even that the White House has authorized interrogation techniques that some classify as torture – that damned Jack Bauer is giving us a bad name.

The United States Military Academy at West Point confirmed that Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan recently traveled to California to meet producers of the show, broadcast on the Fox channel.

He told them that promoting illegal behavior in the series – apparently hugely popular among the U.S. military – was having a damaging effect on young troops.

The UK Independent

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