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Life In Prison Possible Marijuana Madness

By Frosty Troy

What is the current penalty for using marijuana? In Oklahoma it could mean up to life in prison.

According to the FBI national statistics, the human cost is 739,000 arrests in 2006 for small amounts of pot. Another 91,000 were charged with marijuana-related felonies.

The figure is the highest annual total ever recorded, and is nearly double the number busted 15 years ago.

Those arrested face a multitude of consequences, primarily determined by where they live.

Don't even think about getting busted in Oklahoma where a first-time conviction for minor pot possession can net you up to one year in jail, or up to 10 years if you're found guilty of a second offense.

Thinking of growing your own? In Oklahoma that will cost you a \$20,000 fine and anywhere from two years to life in prison. Yes, you read that right – *life in prison*.

Most Californians charged with violating the state's pot possession laws face little more than a small fine.

By contrast, getting busted with a pinch of weed in Ohio will cost you your driver's license for at least six months.

Move to Texas – well, now you're looking at a criminal record and up to 180 days in jail. Or if you happen to be a first-time offender, possibly a stint in court-mandated drug rehab, probation, and a hefty legal bill.

Not everyone busted for weed receives jail time. But that doesn't mean they don't suffer significant hardships stemming from their arrest.

That can include probation and mandatory drug testing, loss of employment, loss of child custody, removal from subsidized housing, asset forfeiture, loss of student aid, loss of voting privileges, and loss of certain federal welfare benefits such as food stamps.

And yes, some offenders do serve prison time. In fact, according to a 2006 Bureau of Justice Statistics report, 12.7% of state inmates and 12.4% of federal inmates incarcerated for drug violations are incarcerated for marijuana offenses.

In human terms, this means that there are now about 33,655 state inmates and 10,785 federal inmates behind bars for violating marijuana laws. [The report failed to include estimates on the percentage of inmates incarcerated in county jails for pot-related offenses.]

In fiscal terms, this means that taxpayers are spending more than \$1 billion annually to imprison pot offenders.

Yet this billion-dollar price tag only estimates the financial costs on the "back end" of a marijuana arrest. The criminal justice costs to taxpayers – such as the man-hours it takes a police officer to arrest and process the average pot offender – on the "front end" is far greater, with some economists estimating the financial burden to be upwards of \$7 billion a year.

Naturally, as the annual number of pot arrests continues to increase [according to the latest FBI data, marijuana arrests now constitute 44% of all illicit drug arrests], these costs are

only going to grow larger.

There are alternatives, of course – options that won't leave this sort of human and fiscal waste in its wake, and that won't leave entire generations believing that the police are an instrument of their oppression rather than their protection.

Oklahoma is pressing forward with drug courts to divert all sorts of drug offenders. Since its inception, more than 7,000 people have gone through drug courts – 20% for pot use.

Decriminalization, as first recommended to Congress in 1972 by President Richard Nixon's National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse, called for the removal of all criminal and civil penalties for the possession, use, and non-profit distribution of cannabis.

Such a policy, if adequately implemented, would eliminate the bulk of the human and fiscal costs currently associated with enforcing pot prohibition.

A second option, "regulation,"

would also significantly slash many of society's prohibition-associated fiscal and human costs.

Legalizing the commercial sale and use of cannabis in a manner similar to alcohol, with state-mandated age controls and pot sales, could be restricted to state-licensed stores.

It could also potentially raise billions of added dollars in tax revenue while simultaneously bringing an end to the more egregious and adverse black-market effects of the plant's criminalization – such as the production of pot by criminal enterprises and its clandestine cultivation on public lands.

Would either option be perfect? No, probably not. Decriminalization, for instance, might indirectly encourage pot use; "regulation" might not entirely eliminate the black market sales of pot.

How can America continue with the status quo? Since, 1990, law enforcement have arrested over 10 million Americans – more than the entire population of Los Angeles County – on pot charges.

Yet, according to federal figures, both marijuana production and use are rising.

Isn't it time we began looking at ways to address the marijuana issue that move beyond simply arresting and prosecuting an inordinate amount of otherwise law-abiding Americans?

Or must we wait until another 10 million citizens are arrested before our state and federal politicians find the courage to begin this discussion?

To put a human face on the issue, I met a 24-year-old man at the Lexington reception facility serving 20 years for pot possession with intent to distribute – a technicality since he didn't buy it to resell.

The argument continues on whether it is a "gateway" drug but significant studies have shown that longtime pot smokers do not go on to harder drugs.

You don't have to approve of that particular lifestyle to question whether Oklahoma can afford to spend \$20,000 a pop for incarceration.



Observations

Dear Family

Beginning March 1, the Observer's annual subscription rate will increase to \$40 – only the second price hike in 16 years.

We've worked diligently to streamline our business operations so that we can keep the state's only Journal of Free Voices affordable for all.

However, we face unprecedented challenges that leave us with no choice but to raise rates: Mailing costs skyrocketed 30%-plus last year [and First Class postage is increasing again this spring]. We absorbed three printing hikes in the last 24 months. And the cost of our syndicated columnists jumped nearly 4% on Jan. 1.

Even so, we believe the Observer remains a bargain – the equivalent of a modest dinner-for-two and a movie. Or one trip to Starbucks each month.

For our part, we pledge to intensify the good fight, pricking consciences, spotlighting the good, bad and ugly of Oklahoma politics and government, and telling the stories that no one in the mainstream media would dare to tell.

We can't thank you enough for your support the last four decades. Observer readers truly are a family, committed to making a difference in our state. Hang with us as we battle on!

Historic

Given the spotty history of race relations in Oklahoma – once a Klan state – we sometimes don't realize how far we've come.

When Ronald L. Johnson was introduced in the Oklahoma House of Representatives, the applause was thunderous.

Johnson was Oklahoma's first black member of the Oklahoma Highway Patrol. His remarks were brief.

"The first time I asked for an application, I was told, 'We're not ready for you yet.'"

"I replied, 'You may not be ready yet but I will be back and you better be ready.'"

Johnson was accepted in 1967. He retired as a member of the finest state police force in America.

DUI Rewarded

Government can be maddening. Consider the case of the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission.

Mr. and Mrs. Leland Wolfe Jr. own a restaurant in Tahlequah.

One of their cooks was arrested for DUI and landed in jail. They fired him. He filed for unemployment compensation and got it!

Rationale of the bureaucrat who handled the case was that he called from the jail to say he would not be at work.

The Commission was not created to defend drunk drivers but folks who honestly lose their jobs – such as in the case of Enron.

The Legislature ought to take a look at this case. Honest businesses have no trouble with the law, only interpretation such as in the case of rewarding a drunk driver.

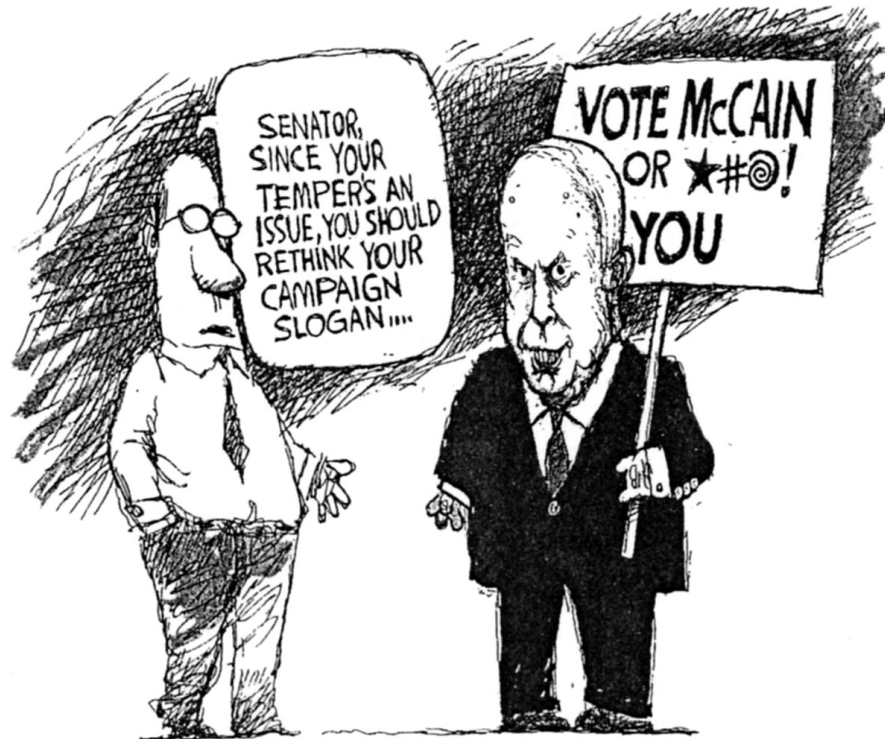
Serendipity

Surely it was just a happy coincidence? Republican House Majority Floor Leader Greg Piatt took a maximum \$5,000 campaign contribution from a fellow who sought legislation benefiting insurance companies in a family trust.

Piatt proposed a key amendment to the legislation sought by Bradford Phillips. Two days earlier, Piatt also received a \$5,000 donation from Stephen Jones, an attorney for Bradford Phillips' father, Gene Phillips.

It happens that the expert in the field, Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland, had proposed that an insurance company could make commercial real estate loans based on a cap of 2% of assets – in accord with a national model.

Piatt secured an amendment in the



House committee to raise the amount to 20%.

Serendipity is wonderful but is no match for the new House Speaker, Chris Bengie. He told Piatt to give it back. He did.

Bengie is a keeper.

Help Wanted

How many times have you seen it and brushed it out of your mind – a street beggar at the stop sign, a person sleeping under newspapers or rags?

Please read Gloria Dialectic's article in this issue on the need for aftercare for our mentally ill.

Mentally ill littering our streets is an everyday occurrence in Oklahoma. Every member of the Legislature and the governor – regardless of party – should hang their heads in shame for the lack of treatment for our mentally ill.

Oklahoma has the highest incidence of mental illness among adults in the nation but scores in the bottom five states in funding treatment.

You've said it all when a prison guard tells a Capitol news conference that the Corrections Department is now Oklahoma's largest treatment center for the mentally ill.

Largest single mental health facility is the Oklahoma County jail.

Gov. Brad Henry and legislators have been busy passing more than \$700 million in tax cuts while prison social worker Diana Givens tells of 260 mentally ill on a single prison ward.

She said the staff of four includes only one nurse. Prisoners range from those with dementia to those who are severely disturbed.

Some Republican legislative leaders are still talking about yet another tax cut and our governor is in Tulsa receiving a humanitarian award!

Sickening.

Nailing DUIs

Rep. Scott Inman, D-Del City, has filed a bill designating DUI, DWI convictions on drivers' licenses of offenders.

The designation would remain on the license for up to four years and would only be removed if the person received no additional drunk driving convictions during that time.

He points to the thousands of in-

nocent victims who die every year because of drunk drivers. In 2005, there were 16,885 alcohol-related fatalities, which accounted for 39% of the total traffic fatalities for the year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Of those fatalities, 86% were killed in crashes where at least one driver had a Blood Alcohol Content [BAC] of .08 or higher. As of May 2007, all 50 states have adopted .08 as the BAC level to determine whether a person is legally drunk.

In Oklahoma, 283 out of 802 total traffic fatalities were alcohol related in 2005. Let's hope the Republican-controlled Legislature will at least let this bill reach the House floor.

DHS Shambles

No other publication has been a more stout defender of the Department of Human Services and the job they do against all odds.

It was with great disappointment that we watched the DHS dismiss out of hand the lawsuit filed in the name of 10 foster children.

It's not a money lawsuit – none is sought. It is a lawsuit to fund adequate care for children in foster care. It's a lawsuit that the state will fight and lose if there is a scintilla of justice in federal court.

How do you defend an 11-month-old girl placed in 17 different foster homes and shelters? This is just one of the cases documented in the lawsuit.

Year after year DHS has asked for adequate funding but it never came because Gov. Brad Henry and a legislative majority were too busy approving \$700 million in tax cuts.

We hope the next lawsuit is against the state for the sorry conditions in our prison system – underfunded for 15 consecutive years.

You don't have to shed a tear for the prisoners although conditions are often inhumane. How about the guards and staff who endure the same conditions?

Now the bill is due. The money has run out and a \$700 million black hole will devour vital programs in the next few years. It takes a super majority vote to raise taxes, so even if they are contrite, it can't happen.

That's the result of a leadership more dependent on popularity than service.

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

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

- Adapted from Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

If you disagree with an opinion in the Observer, don't leave, fire back. This is a journal of free voices. We print opinions with which we disagree. This journal of free voices is for grown-ups.

Dart: To disgraced ex-Speaker Lance Cargill, sticking taxpayers with the cost of mailing 6,000 mea culpas to constituents – an apology for failing to file and pay his taxes. Can he even spell ethics?

Here sits term-limited Democratic Gov. Brad Henry, holding \$459,290 in his campaign fund, yet not pledging a dime to party Chairman Ivan Holmes.

Laurel: To Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa, for his drive to eliminate some of the undeserved \$2 billion in tax exemptions and incentives on the statute books. Expect a miracle.

Bush cheerleader John McCain says we will be in Iraq "for a hundred years." It may take that long to find \$9 billion of taxpayer dollars missing. [Government Accountability Office]

Dart: To the Legislature for creating Ronald Reagan Day in Oklahoma. Celebrating his \$1 trillion in red ink? More felony indictments than any other administration?

Labor Commissioner Lloyd Fields spent 10 hours in Oklahoma City detox, suspected of stealing a professional bull rider's guitar from a party. He claimed it was a prank gone awry.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry, calling for \$30 million in emergency funding to fix catastrophic damage to dams, terraces and waterways caused by the floods of 2007.

Oops! We mistook as fact a parody on presidential IQs that ranked George W. Bush dumbest in the last 70 years. Of course, if the shoe fits ...

Dart: To tax cutting legislative leaders while only 2% of the state's 22,683 bridges had maintenance in the past 24 months. As Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove, puts it, we build them well but don't take care of them.

Some good health news for a change. Oklahoma Childhood immunizations have risen from 44th to 25th nationally. Thanks to Blue Cross and Blue Shield for launching the campaign.

Laurel: To new Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, promising bipartisan leadership. It should begin with Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, serving on the mental health committee since he represents the only state mental hospital.

Network, the Catholic social justice ministry in DC, is out with its annual ratings of Congress. Only Democrat Rep. Dan Boren made a passing grade. All Oklahoma Republicans in the House and Senate flunked.

Dart: To the House majority that passed HB 3111 limiting the Legislature's authority to require insurance companies to require certain treatments. Had it been in effect, there would be no mammogram screening, no prostate cancer screening, etc.

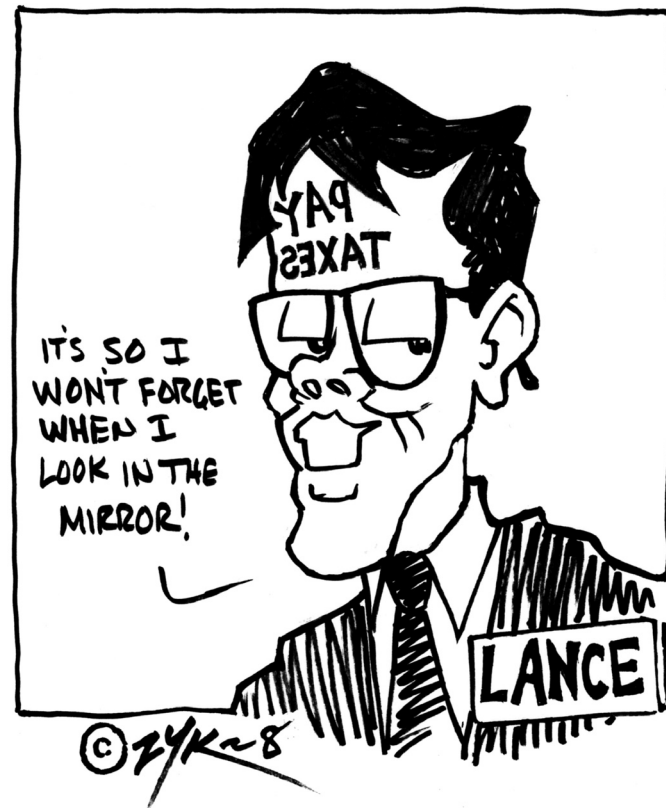
Add two more to the scofflaw list. Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, was late four years in a row on property tax owed. Sen. Judy Eason McIntyre, D-Tulsa, failed to pay half her property taxes on time.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma chapter of Zonta, business women's club, for naming their Rose State Scholarship after Helen Troy, late publisher of the Observer.

Senate Bill 2087 by Sen. Debbe Leftwich, D-OKC, has been buried in the Rules Committee. Domestic abuse victims would be entitled to unpaid sick leave for medical, legal and psychological help.

Dart: To sorry GOP legislative leadership that deliberately delayed funding for the new Supreme Court building, costing taxpayers an additional \$11 million.

Millions more for an Indian cultural center while the state maximum security prison at McAlester is falling apart? It would take \$3.3 million for minimal refurbishing.



Laurel: To the state for finally selling the dilapidated Texoma Lodge and grounds. It will be replaced by a spanking new facility financed by private enterprise. Now clean up the state parks.

We are saddened by the death of Wanda Bass at 81. Her philanthropy catapulted Oklahoma into one of the top states in the arts and music thanks to gifts to Oklahoma City University.

Dart: To Oklahoma, second largest producer of commercial pets in the nation yet has no law regulating breeders. Thus the puppy mills proliferate.

The U.S. Chamber, the State Chamber and the Tulsa and OKC chambers' want House Bill 1804 decriminalized. They are raising \$10 million to get the job done. The federal lawsuit claims it violates federal law.

Laurel: To Bixby High School, winner of CareerTech's game of LifeSmarts – promoting financial literacy.

We are sleeping better now that Oklahoma has joined the parade of states where drivers can put "In God We Trust" on license plates. Hope that doesn't include drunk drivers or legislators.

Dart: To James Dobson, political evangelist who said if John McCain is the nominee, "I will not vote for the first time in my life." He proves all squirrels don't live in the trees.

We are delighted to report that Rep. Kris Steele, R-Shawnee, is being inducted into the Child Advocates Hall of Fame. He is a true advocate for children in a political party that couldn't care less.

Laurel: To the Senate Democratic leadership for announcing in advance that the courthouse door will not be locked for ordinary citizens. There is no epidemic of frivolous lawsuits.

What passes for U.S. senators from Oklahoma, Jim Inhofe and Tom Coburn, voted against the stimulus package. Under the plan 98% of Oklahoma taxpayers will get a rebate, including 56,000 disabled veterans.

Dart: To Dr. Robert Jarvik, inventor of the artificial heart, non-stop shill for Lipitor with ads showing him energetically rowing. In fact, he has never rowed. [New York Times]

It ought to be a crime to use corn to produce ethanol while millions around the world are hungry or starving to death. Corn prices have doubled in five years.

Laurel: To the state Senate for passage of legislation to quit saddling county jails with medical costs for pre-existing conditions. Oklahoma County is staggering under \$2.2 million in medical bills.

Under the Bush budget, PBS and NPR would lose \$400 million – a tremendous loss to the best broadcasting in America. But he pumps untold billions into a winless civil war.

Dart: To State Rep. Rob Johnson, R-Kingfisher, announcing for the Corporation Commission seat held by Democrat Jim Roth, who is doing a superb job.

The State Medical Examiner, Dr. Jeffrey Gorton, has pleaded agency poverty, threatening to end Tulsa autopsies. Turns out he was sitting on an extra \$2.5 million.

Laurel: To the Sentencing Commission, recommending for the fourth year that the Constitution be amended to remove the governor from the parole process. Gov. Brad Henry plays endless politics with the system.

It's hard not to throw up when some legislators call themselves "conservative" but aren't. Case in point: Rep. Charles Key, R-OKC, wants to create another state agency – an independent District Attorneys Council.

Dart: To a media that consistently avoid the cost of war – \$720 million per day. The civilian body count is into the hundreds of thousands but the death count isn't reported.

Canine facts: More than five million dogs wind up in shelters each year; there are 4.7 million dog bites per year; one in five owners put their dog to sleep for bad behavior. [PBS]

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

When I was teaching environmental science at OSU some 20 years ago, I went to an international climate conference in Washington DC. At that time many participants predicted that one consequence of climate change caused by global warming would be more frequent severe weather events around the world ... that when it was cold it would be colder, where hot it would be hotter, where dry it would be drier, where wet it would be wetter ... that there would be more severe storms, more frequent tornadoes and hurricanes.

It took many years for these predictions to become reality, but recently we have seen more ice storms, rains and flooding, cold and snow events, and tornadoes out of season.

Many of these weather events have been more severe than such events typically are. Just to mention a few: the snow in China recently, the bitter cold in the northern U.S. this winter, the ice storms in Oklahoma and the flooding in Europe last year.

It will probably get worse in the future because the present generation of adults is doing too little to slow global warming. We are leaving our children and grandchildren a different and difficult world to cope with during their lives.

Helen Miller
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

The subject of a legacy for Bush's presidency pops up occasionally these days. Perhaps his time in office can be summed up by a quote from a novel written by Eric Ambler [A Coffin For Demetrios, chapter 15]: "When there are no facts to support lies, facts must be made."

Tom Ellis
Okeene

Editor, The Observer:

NCLB and the Republicans are so concerned about scores on standardized tests. Have you seen one lately?

I taught and gave standardized tests off and on from 1960-1994. I remember my fellow teacher's comments: "Where did that question come from? It has no connection to what I teach or what is in our textbook. Who makes these tests? Not teachers!"

I'm sure the Republicans will respond that we were some of those sorry teachers we need to get rid of, but my students won't say that.

The standardized social studies tests themselves were weird - look at them yourself!

Al Engel
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Was that Rep. Mary Fallin running after Shrub after the State of the Union address, like a high school girl running after Elvis for an autograph? [She already had one.]

C. Temple Bixler
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

We have mismanaged the war in Afghanistan, allowing a mass murderer to roam free.

We are mired down in an unprovoked war in Iraq going on five years with no end in sight.

The President is beating the drums for a war in Iran that will fan the flames of hatred and further destabilize the Middle East.

We have 41 million Americans at home without health care, rising homelessness, \$3-per-gallon gas and unchecked climate change - but don't be alarmed; Congress is scheduled to hold hearings on baseball!

This is the government you get when half the people in the country do not vote.

David Dunn
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

Recently I watched a CNBC fluff documentary on Wal-Mart. It looked to me as if Wal-Mart produced it as a promo, to answer their critics.

Guess who sponsored this piece? You got it: Wal-Mart.

CNBC should call itself the whore channel.

Rick Ewing
Lexington

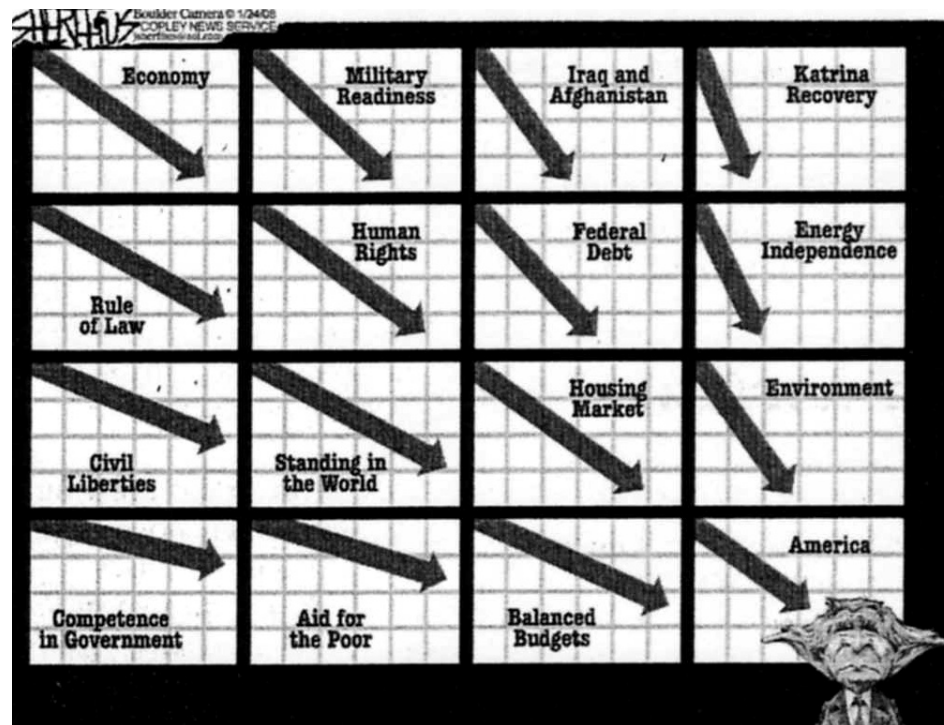
Editor, The Observer:

AP-AC sounds like something you take to induce vomiting or the sound a cat makes when it is trying to hurl a hairball.

"Gov. Huckabee understands that all the average guy with a Confederate flag on his pickup truck is saying is he's proud to be a Southerner," the ad states. "Mike Huckabee understands we value our heritage and why."

Americans for the Preservation of American Culture needs to look into the reasoning that caused them to ignore the four official flags of the Confederacy as opposed to a battle flag that is used by refuse who burn crosses and lynch people for no other reason than what they were born with. Only the first official Confederate flag doesn't include the "stars and bars" somewhere.

I can guarantee you that some guys with a Confederate BATTLE flag on their trucks don't give a rat's patootie about anything, except elevating



their low self-esteem by tormenting others.

Mike Huckabee wants votes - otherwise, why would he, a Southern Baptist minister, suggest telling someone to shove that flag pole up his hoo-ha [and that is exactly what he said]?

Maybe not in those exact words, but in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas, "stick it" doesn't have anything to do with Postit Notes.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Hillary's voting record is very different than McCain's or other Repubs.

One thing I found interested in show McCain voted 95% of the time against the veterans, while Hillary was supporting the veterans.

If labor, environment, human rights, or other issues are important to you, go see on this site [http://www.votesmart.org/voting_category.php?can_id=55463&type=category&cate=] how Hillary voted. You will like what you see.

What a person DOES is what COUNTS. Vote for the one who votes for YOU.

Frank Ford
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

In his letter [Feb. 10 Observer], Terry Lund warned of the dangers of unrestricted population growth, and illustrated it with a parable about a pair of deer on a small island. It isn't necessary to be hypothetical. We have a real historical example in Easter Island.

The island in the South Pacific, of course, is famous for the large stone figures. When Europeans first visited in the early 1700s, they found a barren island occupied by a primitive society living in squalid reed huts or caves. But archeological research has shown that there was once a flourishing and advanced society.

The rock figures were carved on site at a single rock quarry, and [at several tons] were transported to rock platforms at various locations. The platforms were aligned astronomically toward the solstice or the equinox, and were the sites of ceremonial practices.

Analysis of pollen types indicates that the island once had a dense vegetation cover including extended woods. That was at the time of the original colonization by Polynesians in the 5th Century. As the population increased [to about 7,000 in 1550],

trees were cut down for fuel, to accommodate agriculture, and to provide construction materials for housing and watercraft for fishing. Large numbers were used to construct "corduroy" roads over which to drag the stone figures.

The residents must have been capable of recognizing that their vital resources were being squandered. However, they did not mend their ways, and with too many people and a prodigal lifestyle, the environment was ruined. Result: Their society collapsed.

This miniature catastrophe should serve as a grim warning to the world today.

Phil Lorenz
Bartlesville

Editor, The Observer:

Repeatedly, the story of the Brooklyn Bridge is said to be a reflection of the character and personality of its designer, John Roebling.

That bridge, which opened to traffic in 1883, is, of course, still functioning well today. It is said to have been designed to a redundant safety factor of "6."

Presumably, today's ubiquitous "fracture critical" public roadway structures were deliberately, arrogantly and apparently unrepentantly designed with no such redundant safety factor.

Were the fine statesmen who designed the "fracture critical" OKC Crosstown bridge and the rest of the interstate highway system not aware that their characters and personalities would also be on display in their work?

Does this reality not now register with the public, whose money has been spent by these people to create such glaring liabilities?

Shouldn't those designers, engineers and public officials be held strictly, absolutely accountable [inasmuch as they chose a functional life termination that fell within many of their own lifetimes]?

Meanwhile, is OKC Union Station closer to the design philosophy of the profoundly educated and principled Roebling - or to that of the "Gary Riddleys" of the world? Why should Union Station, with its elegant yard and bridges, be glibly sacrificed to cover the crimes of designers who traded their shot at public service for near-term monetary gain?

Tom Elmore
Oklahoma City

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Frosty's Notebook

Conundrum

Even some Republican legislators are lining up to gut Oklahoma's new immigration law because of its impact on business.

The U.S. Chamber and the Tulsa and OKC Chambers have filed a federal lawsuit to nullify the law because they say Oklahoma's construction and hospitality industries are devastated.

The real villain is Congress where members of both parties killed President Bush's sensible guest worker program. How do you kick out millions of illegals and keep them out?

Immigration xenophobia, racism and demagoguery infect every sector of society and have morphed into the wishy-washy presidential election.

Columnist Jim Hightower can tell you why nearly 13 million Mexicans have come to America.

The 1994 imposition of NAFTA was particularly devastating. Just like Bill Clinton and the corporate elites did here, Mexico's Vicente Fox and the ruling elites touted NAFTA as a magic elixir that would generate growth, create jobs, raise wages and eliminate the surge of Mexican migrants into the United States. They were wrong. Consider:

- Economic growth in Mexico has been anemic since '94, and the benefits of any growth have gone overwhelmingly to the wealthiest families.
- Since NAFTA, Mexico has created less than a third of the millions of decent jobs it needs.
- Average factory wages in Mexico have dropped by more than 5% under NAFTA.
- Unemployment has jumped, and unskilled workers are paid only \$5 a day.
- U.S. agribusiness corporations have more than doubled their shipment of subsidized crops into Mexico, busting the price that indigenous farmers got for their production and displacing some two million peasant farmers from their land.
- Huge agribusiness operations, many owned by U.S. investors, now control Mexican agricultural production and pay farm workers under \$2 an hour.
- Since NAFTA passed, there has been a flood of business bankruptcies and takeovers in Mexico as predatory U.S. chains have moved in. U.S. corporations now control 40% of the country's formal jobs, with Wal-Mart reigning as the No. 1 employer.
- Nineteen million more Mexicans live in poverty today than when NAFTA was passed.

Doing Hard Time At OSP

Does anyone give a hoot about the plight of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester except the Tulsa World?

This 100-year-old facility is in shambles but the governor and the Legislature continue to look the other way.

The Oklahoma State Penitentiary opened in 1908 with 50 inmates. Inmates built their own temporary stockade under the supervision of guards.

That feeble beginning started a century of growth consisting of cheap inmate labor, and use of buildings that were never designed to be prisons. Some old buildings have been remodeled for an ever-increasing inmate population.

The Department of Corrections has announced the system is 98% full – not counting hundreds backed up in county jails.

I grew up in McAlester. My uncle, Buel Painter, retired as chief of guards at OSP.

I was home from Korea in the spring of 1952, working for the McAlester News Capital until OU took up in the fall.

I quickly learned that OSP was riddled with corruption but at least the facilities were adequately maintained.

I again covered OSP and the Parole Board for the Tulsa Tribune. Severe overcrowding created tensions. There was plenty of evidence that reform was long overdue. A handful of journalists kept sounding the trumpet to no avail.

The explosion came in 1973 with a riot. Rampaging prisoners set fires and tried to destroy the prison. Would you believe it – those buildings are still there and prisoners are kept in cells where you wouldn't put a dog.

If you don't want to shed a tear for the inmates, how about for the guards and staff? Not only does the pay stink, they have to somehow maintain order in crumbling facilities.

You would think the recent prison audit would galvanize our leaders but it hasn't. The state blew \$880,000 for answers they already had – 141 recommendations but don't hold your breath until they are followed.

I'm not trying to prejudge the 2008 legislative session but I agree with Republican complaints about Gov. Brad Henry's budget.

The governor's budget calls for millions for an Indian cultural center but not one thin dime to replace or remodel OSP.

Corrections Director Justin Jones said he needed a minimum of \$30 million to finish the fiscal year. The governor's budget calls for \$21 million.

Corrections proposed adding 1,500 beds to the prison last September, biggest chunk of a \$300 million bond request being sought by the agency.

The prison audit by MGT America, a private company that specializes in corrections audits, opposes new beds. At the minimum repairs would cost \$3.1 million.



YOU'RE A GREAT LISTENER, BUT I STILL DON'T FEEL I KNOW YOU.

Thanks for the facts, Jim. One of the principal architects of Mexico's troubles was then-President Fox, speaking in Oklahoma and across the nation for a single fee than an average Mexican earns in 20 years.

Thanks to Fox's corporatized economy, workers average \$5 a day [\$1,600 a year] while a few hundred miles north, they could draw that in an hour.

Hightower asks the question, "What would you do?"

No, I'm not defending those who are here illegally, but I know what I would do if my family was hurting. I'd swim that damn river and take any job I could find in America.

Plexiglass papers the windows. Heat is stifling in the summer months and the staff suffers numerous indignities right along with the prisoners.

Why? What political sickness infects both Democrats and Republicans when it comes to adequate funding for Corrections? Year after year prisons are short-changed. The staff turnover is horrendous.

Oklahoma is fourth in the percentage of male prisoners, first in females. Oklahoma is quick to imprison even non-violent prisoners for long sentences. Some sentences require serving 85% of a sentence before being eligible for parole.

Between the governor's sorry record in following Parole Board recommendations and the Legislature doing sentence-adds, both come off as hypocrites.

Gettysburg Address Circa 2008

Seven score and many years ago our fathers did not bring forth on this continent a new theocracy, conceived in bigotry and dedicated to the proposition that only members of the Christian Coalition are created equal.

We have witnessed a great transformation, testing whether that Bush ilk or any group so conceived and so transformed should long endure.

We are encouraged by a looming election of that transformation. We refuse to dedicate a portion of that election to rightwingers lest we lose peace, honor, and equality. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

We cannot safely disregard what Bush has done here. The world will little note nor long remember their constitutional subversion unless we let it.

In a larger sense, it is for us the thinking to be here dedicated to the great tasks remaining before us – to support, not condemn, public education; to support families, even poor families; to fund all social programs for the children; to keep libraries free; to get Bush government out of our hair and out of our bedrooms; to legislate fair taxes not tax shelters for the wealthy; to remind our fellow citizens that the heart of America is middle-class workers; to reform non-violent prisoners; to ensure that all unstable radicals and televangelists have unfettered and immediate access to exit visas; to fight discrimination against any race, group or religion; and to perpetually defend our individual freedoms.

We take increased devotion to these just causes, and we highly resolve that this nation under a loving God shall have a new birth of liberalism, and that government of the rich, by the rich, for the rich shall perish from the earth.

Guv's Budget Reveals Funding Squeeze On

By David Blatt

Gov. Brad Henry's \$7.3 billion fiscal 2009 budget reflects the struggle ahead, as rising costs and slowing revenues translate into possible cuts in vital public services.

On the positive side, the budget would cover cost increases for some essential programs and provides new funding for selected initiatives in education, economic development and public safety.

However, the budget underfunds or neglects some important obligations and, in some cases, relies on uncertain cost-saving and revenue-generating measures to remain in balance.

REVENUES

Permanent tax cuts passed in recent years continue to dampen revenue growth, resulting in a modest 4% percent increase in the Governor's fiscal 2009 budget.

In addition to the revenue certified by the Board of Equalization in December, the Governor's budget proposes to generate an additional \$261 million for appropriation in FY '09 from a variety of sources.

Of these sources, some appear straightforward and uncontroversial, such as the \$104 million that would be transferred from the Cash Flow Reserve Fund.

Others are potentially problematic. These include: raising some \$30 million from a "taxpayer compliance initiative" that includes waiving penalties on delinquent taxpayers and closing a corporate tax avoidance loophole; generating over \$80 million in agency "efficiencies and savings" from procurement, technology and human resource reforms, as well as cutting agency allocations for employee benefits; and transferring \$35 million from various other funds.

Whether the Legislature will be willing to adopt these measures – and whether they could generate the additional revenues and savings estimated in the budget – remain open to question.

[The budget and revenue picture is worsening. The \$32 million in new, extra money projected in late December vanished thanks to a slowing economy and tax revenues. The State Board of Equalization in late February certified a \$123 million budget shortfall for the next fiscal year.]

COST INCREASES & SPENDING INITIATIVES

The Governor's budget includes some \$310 million in spending increases compared to the base current year budget. These are premised on the availability of additional revenues as proposed above.

- The largest budget increases are for the following:
- Teacher salary increases [average \$1,200]: \$68.5 million.
- Declining federal Medicaid match: \$42.5 million.
- State employee pay raise [effective Jan. 1, 2009]: \$32.7 million.
- Teacher retirement fund increases: \$24.5 million.

Democratic Chairman Calls For Fairness

By Ivan Holmes

It is my hope that the new Speaker of the House, Chris Bengé of Tulsa, will act in a non-partisan manner and allow Democratic bills to be heard on the House floor this session.

Under the Republican leadership the past two years House Democrats were not allowed to have a majority of their bills debated on the House floor.

In a democratic society it should not matter whether it is Republican or Democratic, it should be debated.

I hope the new Speaker of the House will truly be non-partisan and let the democratic process work.

The people in Oklahoma are tired of the two political parties not working together for what is good for Oklahoma. Hopefully the 2008 Oklahoma House is ready for cooperation between the two parties.

The time has come for those in the Legislature to decide whether they represent the people of Oklahoma or lobbyists.

When lobbyists spend \$200,000 on meals, gifts and tickets for legislators – an increase of nearly 30% over the previous year – it is time to say enough is enough.

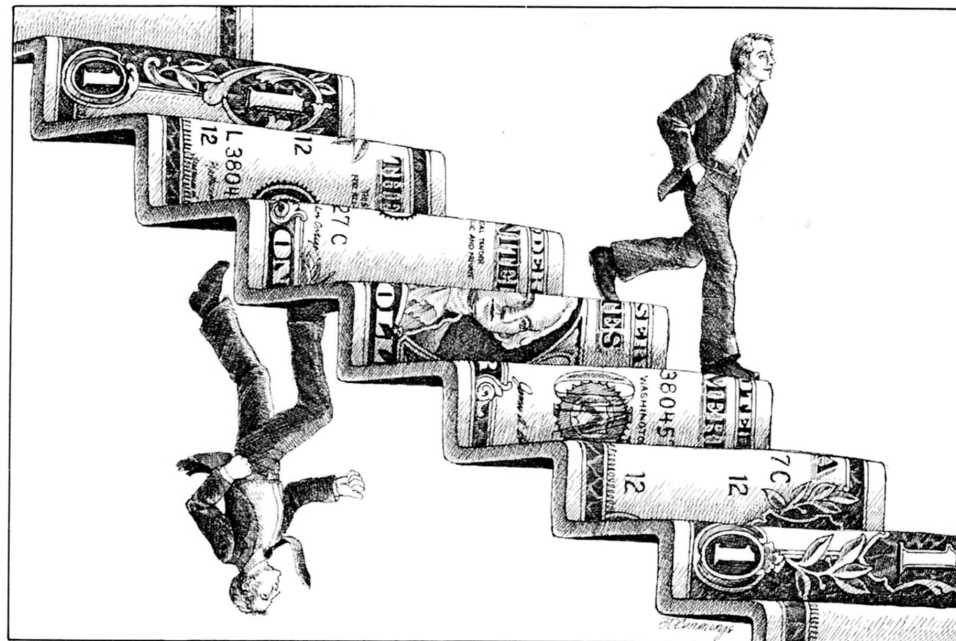
Topic: Post-Fundamentalism

Noted Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] author, teacher and pastor Jan G. Linn will appear March 7 in Oklahoma City to discuss a new, post-fundamentalist model for religious behavior in the 21st Century.

Linn's recent book *Big Christianity* is widely recognized as a breakthrough document for those seeking to ask the hard questions about the role of the church in the current world.

Taking insights from Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat*, Linn observes that the playing field has been leveled for all religious traditions. He also argues that respect for differences is a pragmatic necessary and that fundamentalism is not equipped for this new reality.

Linn's address is scheduled from 7-8 p.m. at the First Christian Church, 3700 N. Walker. It is sponsored by the church's Adult Education Ministry and The Interfaith Alliance of Oklahoma. For more information, contact Rev. Jeff Hamilton at 405.525.6551.



- Medicaid enrollment and utilization increases: \$17.7 million.
- Corrections inmate growth: \$ 13.7 million.
- Higher education institutional operations: \$13 million.
- Replace Medicaid carryover funds: \$12 million.
- Common education state aid formula: \$10 million.
- Langston University urban education initiative: \$10 million.

HOLES AND UNADDRESSED NEEDS

Even assuming additional uncertified revenues, the Governor's budget did not recommend funding several key priorities and obligations. These are among the potential holes that could, if unaddressed, force agencies to implement budget cuts in the year ahead:

• DHS has requested \$12.1 million for caseload growth in ADvantage [the long-term care waiver program for seniors and persons with disabilities], adoption assistance and family foster care.

The Governor's budget, however, appropriates just \$5 million in additional revenue for DHS programs.

• The Oklahoma Health Care Authority's current year Medicaid budget includes \$45 million in one-time carryover, of which only \$12 million is replaced for FY '09.

• The budget has no additional funding to help agencies cover legislated increases in state employee pension costs due to take effect next year, nor to cushion the impact of rising fuel and utility costs.

• Education agencies are appropriated no money to address an anticipated \$15 million shortfall from the Lottery Trust Fund this year.

• The recent Department of Corrections audit recommended an additional \$30 million in FY '09 to operate prisons, but the Governor's budget allocates just \$14 million in new funds.

For a detailed look at Oklahoma's short- and long-term fiscal outlook, visit www.okbudgetalliance.org.

– The author is chair, Alliance For Oklahoma's Future

Although both political parties are guilty, House Republicans accepted more than twice the amount as House Democrats.

Those receiving the most gifts were Rep. Dennis Adkins, R-Tulsa [\$1,733]; Rep. Mike Thompson, R-OKC [\$1,175]; Rep. Tad Jones, R-Claremore [\$1,070]; Sen. Bill Brown, R-Broken Arrow [\$1,040]; Sen. Owen Laughlin, R-Woodward [\$1,032]; and Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa [\$1,028] – all in the last six months of 2007.

If the Legislature really cares about Oklahoma residents they will back a proposed rule by the Ethics Commission that limits the amount lobbyists can spend on elected officials to \$100 per calendar year.

The Oklahoma Ethics Commission was created to keep the election process accountable to Oklahoma voters. The commission is underfunded and the Legislature needs to increase its funding so it can do its job.

I would suggest that Oklahoma voters call their House and Senate members this session and tell them to adequately fund the Ethics Commission.

You can contact your House member by calling 1.800.522.8502 or your Senate member by calling 1.800.865.6490.

– The author is chairman of the Oklahoma Democratic Party

Sexual Identity & Spirituality

Faith communities and organizations proclaiming that homosexuality is neither sickness nor sin are hosting a two-day Sexual Identity & Spiritual Conference March 7-8 at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond.

The conference opens at 7 p.m. March 7 with a keynote lecture by Dr. Deborah Appler, professor of Hebrew Bible [Old Testament] at Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA. Workshops are scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. March 8 on a wide range of topics including various spiritual and interfaith perspectives on sexuality and relationship issues for families and couples.

Sponsors include Church of the Open Arms, Cathedral of Hope OKC, Mayflower Congregational Church, First Unitarian Church, GATE [Gay Alliance for Tolerance and Equality, a UCO student group]; PFLAG-OKC [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] and the Cimarron Alliance.

Registration is \$15. Scholarships are available. Childcare will be provided if requested before March 1. For details, go to www.PFLAGOKC.org.

Oklahoma Ranks Fifth 2008's Ten Worst Places To Be Black

By Bruce Dixon

Oklahoma ranks as the fifth worst state to be black – with only 8% of the population, the state incarcerates 4.39 blacks for every caucasian.

Worst states in descending order are Wisconsin, Iowa, Colorado, Arizona, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, California, Oregon and Kentucky.

Corporate media work hard to obscure the facts of life for Americans, including the state of black America.

In this year of symbolic firsts and “never before” Black Agenda Report offers a useful index of how life is lived for hundreds of thousands of families in our communities.

America's prison system, the world's largest, houses some 2.2 million people. Almost half its prisoners come from the one-eighth of this country, which is black.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITIES HARD HIT

African-American communities have been hard hit by the social, political and economic repercussions of the growth of America's prison state. Its presence and its reach into black life is a useful index of the quality of life in black America itself.

In this year of symbolic optimism, when a black man is a leading contender in the presidential race, as well as a leading recipient of contributions from Wall Street, big insurance and military contractors, the need to measure and describe life as it is actually lived by millions of African-Americans has never been greater.

While a fortunate few of us are doing very well indeed, many more are hanging on as best we can. The conditions of life for a substantial chunk of black America are not substantially improving, and appear to be getting much worse.

USEFUL INDICES ARE NEEDED

It is high time to begin constructing useful indices with which to measure the quality of life, not just for a fortunate few, but for the broad masses of our people in America's black one-eighth.

Painting an accurate picture is not difficult. Useful measures of family income and cohesiveness, of home ownership, life expectancy, education levels, of unemployment and underemployment abound.

Among all the relevant data on the state of black America today, one factor stands out: the growth of America's public policy of racially selective policing, prosecution and mass imprisonment of its black citizens over the past 30 years.

OBAMA IS WAY OFF THE MARK

Although our black presidential candidate, Barack Obama, would have us believe that African-Americans are, as he has said many times, “90% of the way” to freedom, justice and true equality, the facts seem to say otherwise.

As recently as 1964, a majority of all U.S. prisoners were white men. But since 1988, the year Vice President George H.W. Bush rode to the White House, stoking white fears with an ad campaign featuring convicted black killer and rapist Willie Horton, the black one-eighth of America's population has furnished the majority of new admissions to its prisons and jails.

PRISON RATES VS. CRIME RATES

The fact is that while U.S. prison populations have grown seven times since 1970, crime rates have increased only slightly over that time.

According to Berkeley scholar Dr. Lois Wacquant, the increase in America's prison population over that time has been achieved simply by locking up five times as many people per 1,000 reported crimes as we did in 1980.

The ripple effects on black communities and families have been enormous and

Tulsa's Pinnacle Awards Are Announced

The Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women and the Tulsa Women's Foundation have announced the recipients of the 21st annual Pinnacle Awards.

Commission chairwoman Penny Painter said the awards feature women in a variety of fields who have made significant contributions to help other people.

Categories include education, health, business, arts and humanities, community service, spirit and rising star.

The winners:

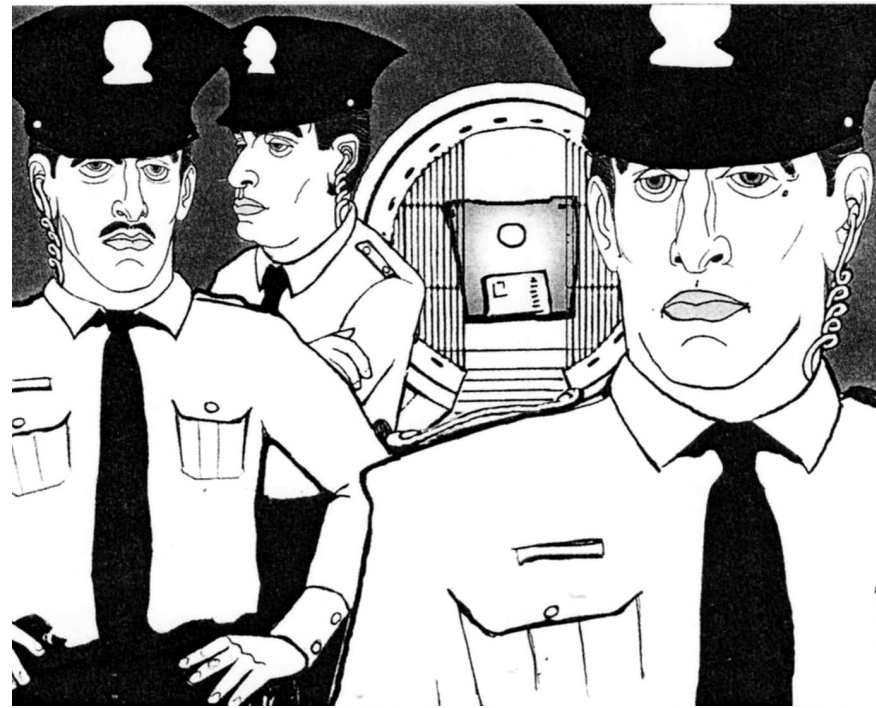
Barbara Santee, spirit. Santee has advocated for women's health and social justice issues for three decades.

Carol Axley, education. Axley is a student advocate at East Central High School. She has been instrumental in establishing collaborative relationships among students, parents and the school community in order to improve the educational experience.

Carla Lawson, health. Lawson is the executive director of Ability Resources. The Tulsa organization assists people with what some call disabilities attain and maintain their personal independence through advocacy, education and service.

Karen Schafer, business. Schafer is president of Tulsa Global Alliance, a group whose mission is focused on promoting world peace and understanding of different cultures through education and advocacy.

Virginia “Ginny” Le Doux, arts and humanities. Le Doux is a middle school teacher at Holland Hall and executive director of the Tulsa Children's Chorus. She is known for her dedication to children's involvement and access to the



devastating. Millions of the black poor are permanently stigmatized, excluded from much of the job market and opportunities for training and education.

They are sent home to the same resource-poor, de-industrialized communities in which they lived before prison, where there are no services for them and no societal will to educate or train them.

OUR ENORMOUS PRISON SYSTEM

America's enormous prison system, along with its punitive and exclusionary attitude toward the class of people from which prisoners originate, is freezing the black poor in place for most U.S. prisoners are nonviolent drug offenders.

Although federal statistics show the rates of illegal drug use for whites, blacks and Latinos to be within a single percentage point of each other, African-Americans are an absolute majority of the people serving time for drug offenses.

The stark and inescapable fact of double-digit disparity between black and white incarceration rates is hard to miss and harder to explain, except in terms of a consistently applied, if rarely acknowledged, policy of racially selective policing, sentencing and imprisonment.

GUESS WHAT? NONE ARE IN THE SOUTH

The states with the 15 highest disparity rates between black and white incarceration show some interesting characteristics.

First, none of them are in the South. Secondly, blacks make up a negligible percentage, 6% or less in 10 of these high disparity states.

Thirdly, the other five high-disparity states either contain or are adjacent to three of the five largest concentrations of African-American population in the United States, namely the metro areas of New York, Chicago and Philadelphia.

About half of all African-Americans live in the South, and that number is increasing. Generally, Southern states have higher percentages of black population, but lower disparity rates between black and white populations than elsewhere.

LARGE METRO COMMUNITIES

No Southern state locks up nine or 10 times as many African-Americans as whites. Evidently, the highest relative percentages of African-Americans, if not the highest absolute numbers of black incarcerated, are to be found in and near large metro communities.

There is good news, but not in the numbers. According to Prisons and Jails at Mid-Year 2006, in the 12 months ending on June 30, 2006, prison populations increased in 43 state jurisdictions and declined or remained the same in eight.

Overall, the number of America's prisoners is increasing at a rate not seen since 1999-2000.

Even Democratic presidential candidates have made cursory nods to the edges of the issue. Obama is promising to spend millions more on re-entry programs, and Hillary Clinton has denounced felony disenfranchisement.

– The author is editor of *The Black Commentator*

arts.

Glenda Love, community service. Love is the executive director of the Tulsa Ronald McDonald House, which provides shelter and hope for ill children and their families.

Carmela Hill, rising star. Hill is an executive assistant with the Bank of Oklahoma. In addition to playing a key role in the bank's adoptive relationship with Emerson Elementary School, Hill also does volunteer work for groups such as the American Red Cross, the Oklahoma Blood Institute and Junior Achievement.

She also is diversity crew leader with the Tulsa Young Professionals and spent considerable time on last fall's river development effort.

Mayor Kathy Taylor also is scheduled to receive a special Pinnacle Award for her leadership during the recent ice storm.

The Pinnacle Awards will be presented March 11. Proceeds from the awards dinner will fund projects that benefit women and children in the Tulsa community. Grants are scheduled to be awarded in June.

What Does It Take?

A little girl became restless as the preacher's sermon dragged on and on. Finally she leaned over to her mother and whispered, “Mommy, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?”

40 Years Behind Canadians

Okie Docs Misdiagnose Universal Health Care

By Ron du Bois

British philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, "Mankind has become so much one family that we cannot ensure our own prosperity except by ensuring that of everyone else."

Part of ensuring that prosperity is through universal health care. The current system is ineffective.

Virtually every state in the nation with the exception of Oklahoma has a chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program.

Why is this?

The attitude of many Oklahoma doctors towards universal health care as it is practiced in every industrialized nation with the sole exception of the U.S. is identical to those of Canadian doctors 40 years ago.

CANADIAN DOCTORS WERE RESISTANT, TOO

After laws were passed mandating universal health care in Saskatchewan, most Canadian doctors refused to obey those laws.

They were intractably opposed to a single payer system that covered everyone regardless of ability to pay.

There is little doubt this scenario will be replayed before the dinosaur mentality of today's American doctors change, private medical insurance companies no longer exist, and universal health care becomes law in this nation.

Doctors, like the general public, refuse to think of health care in the same way they think about public education, fire protection, road construction, postal service, civil service, legislative, all levels of law enforcement, and all branches of the military [all with health insurance paid for through public taxation].

UNIVERSAL CARE FOR 60% OF AMERICANS ALREADY

Health care of incarcerated persons and veterans are paid for through public taxation. So many people with subsidized health plans translates to 60% of Americans, yet few realize they are already well on their way to universal health care.

Canadian doctors 36 years ago [like most U.S. doctors today] held the notion that for-profit medical care was essential to the "best health care in the world."

Like Canadian doctors decades ago, many U.S. doctors claim to have the "best health care in the world."

Invariably they fail to add the phrase, "If you can afford it."

They fail to see that 47 million Americans cannot afford health insurance.

They fail to see that an equal number of millions are underinsured, a condition that is almost as bad and can spell stress and bankruptcy.

THE HIGH COST OF EMERGENCY CARE

Unintended consequences have resulted in huge emergency room expenses at public expense.



Emergency care is the only guaranteed medical care in the U.S.

It is the most expensive and also the most punitive. Unlike other nations, the U.S. fails to understand that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," a failure that guarantees excessive cost. Inability to pay medical bills is now the leading cause of bankruptcy, and is a detriment to the health of the nation.

With regard to the number of Americans who have no medical insurance of any kind, Frosty Troy, editor of the Oklahoma Observer, writes in the November 2006 issue, "Thankful? For more than 46 million medically uninsured, up six million since Bush began his second term. Virtually every nation in the world has a national health care program – but not America. Yet we spend three times more on medical care."

U.S. Representative Pete Stark D-CA, said, "For the richest country in the world not to have universal health care is a crime."

He continued, "Couldn't we just join the rest of the world?"

CURRENT SYSTEM NEITHER ETHICAL NOR MORAL

There is a growing conviction that it's not acceptable "that people who are poor should die because they're poor."

Universal health care advocates are not willing to be grateful for what they have while others go without. They believe the attitude of "I've got mine, you get yours" is neither ethical nor moral.

Advocates for health care reform think the attitude towards those 46 million without health insurance to "just suck it up and be grateful for what you have" is not ethical or moral.

A Canadian legislator summed it up succinctly when he looked me in the eye and said, "For profit health care is immoral." Dr. Patel, my Canadian doctor in Gimli, Manitoba, said, "I make plenty of money ... I don't have to lock my doors at night and I don't have to worry about patients paying their bills."

He added, "American health care is a money making machine."

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

State's Anti-Immigrant Strain Is All-American

By Edwin E. Vineyard

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

Emma Lazarus

The New Colossus, 1883

Few would fail to recognize this Emma Lazarus poem which graces the interior lobby of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. During the 19th Century, and much of the 20th, this represented the prevailing, formally expressed philosophy of Americans toward immigration.

This was "the American Dream."

The Irish came during the potato famine, and during decades of British political oppression. Others came for religious freedom. Jews came for economic opportunity, and to escape the hostility of Europeans. Armenians came after civil strife, and what some call an attempt at genocide. Polish, Lithuanians, Italians, and Slavs came to work in the mines, and thus escape the poverty of their own lands. So it was.

America was the "land of opportunity."

WELCOME OFTEN DEPENDED ON AMERICAN ECONOMY

The attitude of Americans toward immigrants has often varied with race and ethnicity, but most of all it has been affected by economic conditions and circumstances. In spite of the language of Lazarus' poem, newcomers were not always welcomed by everyone in their new land.

Wealthy employers have always tended to welcome and encourage immigration. These were a never-ending source of cheap labor and a servant class.

The sweat shops of New England welcomed the Irish and other newcomers. Italians found a home in New York, and in the coal mining areas of the back country. Africans did not come through Ellis Island. They were brought unwillingly, but also for economic reasons.

The newcomers often engendered hostility when they came into industrial centers and drove down the wages of working men. Free blacks were no exception.

When Italian and other immigrant laborers were brought in as strike breakers

in the mines, the hostility of resident miners boiled over into violence across the country, including Indian Territory and early Oklahoma.

Similar events occurred in other industrial and geographic sectors, for instance the importing of Chinese coolies into California for mining and railroad construction.

DEGRADING EPITHETS HURLED AT NEWCOMERS

Most are familiar with the degrading epithets and names given by angry American residents to the newcomers coming in to threaten those occupying the lower strata of the economic ladder.

Immigrants have not normally been welcomed by working class Americans, but more often have been met with open hostility.

Nevertheless, hostilities were often ameliorated with time, assimilation, and with the movement of that wave into the basic fabric of American life.

It then became a bit of nostalgia to claim grandparents who came through Ellis Island and made the good life in America.

'MELTING POT' OFTEN DIVIDED THE NATION

Thus came about another positive concept of America as "the melting pot" of nationalities and ethnicities. It is well to understand, however, that the immigration issue has always divided the nation.

It might also be well to understand that amelioration of hostilities often depended upon the compatibility of the race and culture of the immigrants with American society as it was at the time. Ill feelings tended to vanish as differences ceased, blending occurred, and the "melting pot" worked.

Negative feelings often lingered when imported cultures were resistant, language differences persisted, settlement was in enclaves, religions differed, and a distinguishing appearance continued.

Blacks, Asians, Mexicans, and Jews have thus continued to feel the pain of being different, as have the Amish and other smaller groups.

Those opposed to immigration, and negative to immigrants, often were the working people, whose lives have been adversely affected by immigrant labor.

Wealthy employers have found a strange alliance with compassionate liberals – each looking with favor upon immigration for vastly different reasons.

Emma Lazarus was just such a liberal.

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

Racial History Divides Oklahoma And Kansas

By Dean Rader

In a night of many surprises few were more puzzling than the shockingly different outcomes in the Democratic primaries in Oklahoma and Kansas.

My home state of Oklahoma voted overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama 54% to 31%. On the other hand, the Okies' neighbor to the North – some would say their virtual demographic twin – went for Obama, who snatched an amazing 73% of the Democratic votes across the border in Kansas.

How is it possible that two nearly identical states with so many things in common [values, agriculture, a strong rural base, lots of wheat, a hatred of Communists, and bigger hatred for all Nebraska sports teams] embrace such different candidates?

Of course, Obama's mother was born in Kansas while her father was in the Army, so that may have had some significance; but it's hard to imagine that a transitory birth in the 40's actually affected people at the polls in 2008.

COULD IT BE ABOUT RACIAL HISTORY?

Rather, I suspect it has something to do with the very different role that race has played in the ontology of the two states.

Kansas has enjoyed a long history of being among the more progressive Plains states in regard to race, particularly slavery. The so-called "Free Staters" of Kansas fought immigrants from Missouri and other Southern states [sometimes called "Border Ruffians"] who hoped to make the new territory a slave state.

Bolstered by their own immigrants from the Northeast, the influx of pro- and anti-slavery forces reached a head in 1854, and pre-War skirmishes broke out over the next four years.

Guerrilla fighters on the side of the Free-Staters during these wars became known as "Jayhawkers," which is now the mascot for the University of Kansas. Eventually, Kansas entered the Union as a free state, and Kansas has nourished a long legacy of racial tolerance.

Not so for Oklahoma.

OKLAHOMA'S TROUBLED PAST

In terms of both African-American and Native American racial issues, Oklahoma has a complicated and difficult past. This began when the Eastern half of the state was set aside as Indian Territory, eventually becoming the termination point for the Trail of Tears.

Even up into the 20th Century, Oklahoma was a major site for Indian removal and relocation.

In addition, Oklahoma bears the burden of the nation's largest race riot – the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 – in which over 300 people were killed.

American Indians Robbed Of Billions

The case of the mismanaged American Indian trust funds is Dickensian both in length – now 11 years before the courts – and inequity.

Now Judge James Robertson of the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia ruled that the Interior Department had "unreasonably delayed" its accounting for billions of dollars owed to American Indian landholders and that the agency "cannot remedy the breach."

There is, of course, no full remedy – not for the historical wrongs or the cynical and shabby accounting or the years of frustration.

As Judge Robertson and others before him have noted, a meticulously accurate tally of what the American Indians are owed is almost certainly impossible.

A COMPROMISE REMEDY LIKELY

Yet that does not mean that a reasonable compromise cannot be reached or that the government should abandon efforts to find one.

A study group set up by Gale Norton, former Interior secretary, in early 2001 was scrapped after less than two years. Simple justice requires a more sustained effort.

In 1996, Elouise Cobell, a Blackfoot Indian, filed a lawsuit claiming that the government had mismanaged billions of dollars in oil, timber and other royalties held in trust for some half-million Indians.

The Indians were given land allotments between the end of the 19th Century and 1934, a time when it was government policy to try to do away with tribal entities and reservations.

America Fails To Heed Ike's Warning

By James Nimmo

In her recent op/ed backing presidential candidate Barack Obama, Susan Eisenhower reminds us of her grandfather's famous phrase "military-industrial complex."

I would like to remind her and you that the original phrase was "military-industrial-Congressional complex."

"Congressional" was dropped as it was felt to be too close to home – an accurate description of what was happening then and has now come to full fruition.

And just as ripe fruit is at its peak for a short time and then falls rotten from the tree, can the robust practice of military-industrial-Congressional expenditures be far from falling from its own taxpayer watered tree?

IKE KNEW ALL TOO WELL THE DANGERS

Can anyone doubt that Eisenhower, with his career-long military experience,



Indeed, at times, there was a kind of triple-segregation in Oklahoma: red, black, white each together, each apart.

Though it is the 21st Century and Oklahoma's racial issues are less incendiary than they were 100 years ago, a legacy of cultural memory remains, as do important symbols.

IMPORTANT SYMBOLS: JACKHAWKS AND SOONERS

For example, I wonder if the University of Kansas logo [Jayhawks] serves as a constant visual reminder of the values that helped found Kansas, and as such daily re-inscribes into the consciousness of Kansans their anti-slavery history.

Similarly, I wonder if the OU mascot [Sooners, named after the people who sneaked early into the Land Rushes] serves as a different kind of indicator of the state's troubling history of segregation and Indian Removal.

White Oklahomans didn't really engage in wars to keep Oklahoma "Native" or to protect African-Americans. In fact, race has always percolated under the surface in Oklahoma; never fully ignored but never fully tapped either.

This is not to say that Kansas hasn't had its own racial issues; to be sure it has. And, in recent years, Oklahoma has tried to do better with its Native heritage. But, we see daily the many ways in which American culture and values were shaped by its earliest settlers and their cultures and values – in a country of states, should we expect them to be any different?

And so it is that two states that should embrace the same presidential candidates are among the most diametrically opposed in this regard. We think that the past has passed, but as William Faulkner noted, our past is often our future.

– The author is associate professor of English at the University of San Francisco

The government held title to the land, and these accounts were meant to collect and disburse the revenues.

A QUESTION WITHOUT AN ANSWER

The simple question is this: can the government account for the money it held in trust?

Judge Robertson's judgment: "It is now clear that completion of the required accounting is an impossible task."

This, as he points out, is an "irreparable breach of fiduciary duty," a breach that, in our opinion, is all the more galling because these individual trust accounts have come over time to look like a form of paternalistic fraud.

Even with meticulous oversight, monitoring them accurately would have been a tough assignment.

But the government's failure is not simply sloppy bookkeeping. It is willful neglect, including the active destruction of records and the failure to comply with court orders.

As Judge Robertson notes, the fact that the government cannot provide a full accounting for what may be billions of dollars "does not mean that a just resolution is hopeless."

He has scheduled a new hearing to try and find a remedy. We hope it will indeed mark the beginning of the end of this case and the beginning of real equity for the holders of these accounts.

© The New York Times

knew what he was talking about?

Just consider all the hullabaloo when there is consideration of closing any military base or facility in any state of the union.

FDR – though we'll never know how his last term would have turned out after the end of WW II, a war that awarded him four terms and a solution to the Great Depression – benefited greatly from a war economy.

War drains away money for the social programs that knit civilizations together and elevate us above rapacious destruction.

War, its implementation and the planning thereof, is GOOD only for corporate Amerika, the waste sucking vacuum of the entire world, and the "ultimate solution" to life as we know it.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

The Mentally Ill

Long Term Care Solutions Needed

By Gloria Dialectic

In 2006, Tulsa Day Center for the Homeless received 136 requests from local and nearby mental health hospitals to discharge a patient to the shelter. Of these requests, we accepted 98 patients.

The sad news is that 20 patients never came through the front door of the homeless center, and many of the 78 who did enter did not stay and did not follow through with any effective outpatient treatment.

Frequently, the medicines given to the patients upon discharge were stored at the Day Center, but the patients never touched them.

F&CS, which provides MSTP services to homeless clients, can provide statistics about the number of no-shows for the initial outpatient appointment arranged by the hospital.

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

These statistics indicate that many individuals with mental illness fall through the cracks after hospitalization, thereby subverting the benefits of expensive inpatient care and leading, almost invariably, to re-hospitalization.

Because hospitals offer only crisis care and because mental health treatment must be offered in the least restrictive setting, patients are discharged when, perhaps, the crisis has been stabilized, but the patient is far from being well enough to cope with a homeless shelter or, for that matter, an empty apartment or a family home in which care is not available.

Even those clients who keep their appointments for an hour or less each week have to somehow manage all the other hours filled with the demands of living – food, shelter, safety, human interaction, exposure to alcohol and drugs, and so on.

THEY NEED HELP OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL

We have learned from experience that patients continue to need structure, emotional support, help with medications, and time to become grounded and self-sufficient.

For this reason, we are proposing that a comprehensive and effective mental health system for Oklahoma requires transitional or halfway care.

We suggest a residence available for at least one month post-hospitalization on a voluntary basis.

Some clients might still have to be discharged into a homeless shelter fol-



lowing time in the transitional residence, but they will have had a head start at recovery, applying for housing, applying for Social Security benefits, and overall stability.

LONG TERM CIVIL COMMITMENT

A second element that's missing in a transformed mental health-system is long-term civil commitment. We know this goes contrary to the current emphasis on recovery.

However, the closing of the state's long-term inpatient facilities did not at all mean that those who would have stayed in long-term inpatient facilities are, magically, in recovery.

No, they now live in homeless shelters or prisons! The public has failed to serve those individuals whose mental illness, especially coupled with recalcitrant substance abuse, prevents them from the fullness of recovery.

State government funds pay for those in prison through the DOC budget, but they do not pay for those housed year after year in private, non-profit homeless shelters.

This problem should be faced honestly with long-term civil commitment.

Editor's Note: These are two major additions proposed by Mack Haltom, Associate Director of Tulsa Day Center for the Homeless, and Gloria Dialectic, Mental Health Case Manager at the Day Center. Both Haltom and Dr. Dialectic are part of the Tulsa Adult Recovery Workgroup.

- This article appeared in the Tulsa Alliance News. Comments or responses can be sent to the NAMI-Tulsa office at nami-tulsa@sbcglobal.net

Sexual Identity and Spirituality Conference

"Homosexuality is Neither Sickness nor Sin"

Friday, March 7th / Saturday, March 8th

at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond

Information & Registration: www.PFLAGOKC.org

Keynote Speaker: Deborah A. Appler, Professor of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, Moravian College

Sponsored by:

Church of the Open Arms UCC - - - Cathedral of Hope OKC - - - First Unitarian Church OKC
Epworth UMC - - - St. Stephens UMC - - - Mayflower Congregational Church UCC
GATE Student Organization - - - PFLAG OKC - - - Peace Education Institute - - - Peace House
Cimarron Alliance Foundation - - - Bob Lemon, in memory of Mary Lou

Friday, March 7th (Liberal Arts Bldg., UCO)

6:30 pm Registration, gathering, refreshments
7:00 pm KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Deborah Appler
8:20 pm Workshops (choice)
9:30 pm Reception

Saturday, March 8th (Liberal Arts Bldg. UCO)

9:00 am Workshops (choice)
10:30 am Deborah Appler Lecture & Questions
11:45 am Lunch on your own
12:45 pm Workshops (choice)
2:15 pm Process Groups
3:15 pm Closing

Sunday, March 9th: Deborah Appler will preach at the 10:45 am worship service at Church of the Open Arms, 3131 N. Pennsylvania Ave, OKC.

Sexual Identity and Spirituality

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons are of equal sacred value as any other persons. Our relationships and gender expressions are not sinful or signs of sickness. The scriptures are often distorted to bash LGBT persons, but more and more, faith communities are speaking out for justice, inclusion and affirmation of all persons. This conference reflects our faithful understandings of scripture and the Spirit as well as our desires to faithfully relate to one another.

Sponsoring faith communities and organizations have made a commitment to be welcoming and affirming of the GLBT community. Workshops are designed to explore the connections between sexual identity and spirituality. Though focused on the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the conference welcomes other faith traditions and seeks to engage their understandings of homosexuality and sexual identity.

PUBLIC FORUM

Editor's Note: Oklahoma City voters will decide March 4 whether to extend a one-percent sales tax for 15 months as part of an incentive package to lure the NBA's Seattle SuperSonics to the Sooner capital. Since some of OKC's most powerful and wealthy figures are part of the Sonics' ownership group, public debate [at least in the mainstream media] has been muted. Here, we present two voices that have had trouble being heard, explaining why this is a bad deal for OKC taxpayers.

Hey, Sonics: Hoop It Up On Your Own Dime

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

Forbes list of "The 400 Richest Americans" [2007] awarded the 220th place to Oklahoma's own Aubrey McClendon, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Chesapeake Energy.

Forbes placed McClendon's net worth at \$2.1 billion and noted his 20% stake in the Seattle SuperSonics.

The SuperSonics, along with McClendon and other team owners, will benefit if Oklahoma City voters on March 4 agree to continue a one-percent sales tax for 15 months longer even though it is supposed to end.

The \$121 million raised will pay to redesign and upgrade the city's 5-year-old Ford Center and build a basketball practice facility.

THESE PENNIES QUICKLY ADD UP

A "penny" sales tax sounds like "scarcely nothing." But it's one percent of what we pay each month for food, clothing, utilities, tools, computer supplies, home maintenance and lawn care items, pet supplies, and more – items subject to Oklahoma City's sales tax.

The total for me is \$20 per month times 15 months. That's \$300.

Why should I pay \$300 to benefit millionaire-and-billionaire owners of a private, profit-making ball team?

What if these team owners again give money [Supersonics profit?] to political causes with which I disagree?

ALREADY FEASTING AT PUBLIC TROUGH

Oklahomans have already paid income taxes that went to a couple of Super-

A Real Big League City Would Put People First

By Ed Holzberger

Only bush league ethics would allow billionaires to pickpocket the elderly on fixed incomes.

How utterly wrong it is that many who already choose between paying for medicine or food now would cough up scarce dollars for a regressive sales tax extension for the benefit of the affluent.

A working family that spends \$1,000 a month on essential groceries, clothing, household items, etc., and lacks room in the budget for pricey NBA tickets – let alone new tires for the car or decent shoes for all the kids – will suffer a \$150 confiscation of their hard-earned money over the duration of this tax.

The economics of these stadium/arena deals remains suspect at best. Independent studies from research groups such as the Brookings Institute and National Taxpayers Union debunk most of the promised benefits of these corporate welfare projects.

LOOK WHAT HAPPENED IN OTHER CITIES

As an example, the Cleveland sports projects in the 1990s were touted as an economic renaissance to the city. Tax revenue for public schools was supposed to be \$15 million-plus and ended up a negative \$3.5 million as excessive tax breaks backfired.

The Sonics ownership in Seattle has filed court documents that claim the exit of the NBA will not harm the Seattle economy and this is why the Sonics should be allowed to vacate the Key Arena lease early.

Meanwhile, Mayor Mick Cornett trumpets all the wonderful economic spin-off the Sonics will bestow on OKC. It is a big league contradiction.

Remember Bass Pro, where city leaders gipped voters \$18 million for the outdoor shop in Bricktown. [Then-Oklahoman Publisher Edward L. Gaylord owned 30% of Bass Pro.]

Promoters promised that this would be the only Bass Pro in Oklahoma. Then very shortly another Bass Pro opened in the Tulsa area.

TAXES ARE FOR BASIC NEEDS

Limited government that is fiscally conservative demands that the city should be responsible for only the most basic needs. The power to tax should be reserved for essentials such as police, fire, streets, sanitation, public health, and public schools.

Not luxury entertainment for the affluent.

Why not insist on private enterprise for private sector jobs? What makes Maps for NBA Big Business more worthy of public dollars than Maps for Small Business? Or Maps for Medium Size Businesses? Why should tax dollars be used at all?

Almost any project will provide jobs; the real questions still remain ask if the taxation is necessary and fair and a wise investment?

Would Oklahoma City be better off if the home dates that the NBA would require of the Ford Center generated concerts or events with better lease terms or more profit margin?

Why should city taxpayers defray costs for affluent ticket holders who shop in the wealthy suburbs?

SUBURBS ARE LIKELY BENEFICIARIES

Conversely, much of the benefit will accrue to the wealthy suburbs outside the OKC limits as Sonics personnel will likely buy houses in Edmond or Nichols Hills or Norman as did the Hornets.

What ironclad assurance do the taxpayers have that the Sonics office space in

Sonic owners in the oil and gas business.

Our state Legislature recently voted to give approximately \$160 million in tax refunds for natural gas drilling and about \$22 million in tax refunds for oil drilling. House Bill 2411 [2006] and House Bill 1718 [2007] became law and extended oil and gas tax breaks for three years.

[Note: I used the Oklahoma Tax Commission's totals for oil and gas refunds during the latest fiscal year and multiplied by three to get the estimated amounts above for the three-year extension.]

State Ethics Commission records document that since 2002 Chesapeake Energy has generously given \$571,740 in campaign contributions to state representatives and senators presently serving in the Legislature.

A grateful Legislature then approved over \$180 million for income tax refunds [cited above] to benefit drillers for oil and natural gas. Chesapeake will be the major beneficiary of the Legislature's generosity.

CHESAPEAKE CAN AFFORD IT

Why, then, couldn't Chesapeake spend this income-tax windfall to pay for upgrading the Ford Center – thus enabling McClendon and other team owners to benefit greatly by bringing the SuperSonics to Oklahoma City?

That selfless act would also save the embarrassment of millionaires and billionaires asking folks like me for more sales taxes.

– The author is a former Oklahoma City state representative and a university English teacher. Go to www.mapsformillionaires.org for more details.

the Ford Center will not be leased as a sweetheart deal?

Why do the Sonics need a \$20 million taxpayer funded gym when OCU has offered practice space?

Why is this proposition a no-city-sales-tax-or-no-team extortion? No other NBA city has faced that choice.

The owners in Toronto reached in their own wallets and built an arena. The Denver Nuggets used only 3% public money for their venue. Memphis built the FedEx Arena but eschewed a sales tax in favor of a ticket payer surcharge on events.

OKC produced attendance for the Hornets and that alone should satisfy NBA approval for a move to OKC. What other rival city has a proven track record? Kudos to the mayor for that coup.

Voters in Sacramento torpedoed [80% to 20%] a sales tax against the improvements the Kings NBA franchise wanted similar to the Ford Center upgrade.

WHO SPOKE FOR THE PROJECT?

Not a single citizen spoke in favor of the tax at the January session when the Oklahoma City Council rushed to put it on the ballot.

Only two hours of discussion was scheduled and most of that consisted of a whiz-bang power point presentation from the architect.

The fact that some City Council members felt uncomfortable with the vote was evident from the questions asked that day.

Nevertheless, all of them punted the football to the voters.

Only former state Rep. Wanda Jo Stapleton and I stood up and objected. Wanda Jo reminded the city that the MAPS III survey ranked at least seven other needs higher than a Ford Center upgrade. Mass transit stood out as an overwhelming first priority.

I pointed out MAPS for Kids had a far different ring than MAPS for Millionaires.

CHANCE TO VOTE FOR JUSTICE, COMMON SENSE

This vote on March 4 presents an opportunity for working people and others who care about their humble neighbors to vote for justice and common sense.

The billionaire owners who fund some of these politicians who put this woolly-bugger on the ballot hope that voters will bite again on a corporate welfare scheme – only for \$120 million plus this time.

Maybe they won't, since this singular multimillionaire pet project is not attached to more palatable projects like the downtown library renovation in MAPS I. Voters could send the message that everyone in this city counts and more important things need attention.

Maybe voters or reporters will ask the city councilmen or the mayor or state legislators with precincts in OKC what is the correlation with their stand on this issue and campaign contributions from the Sonics NBA ownership [including wealthy elite such as Gaylord-in-law Clay Bennett, Aubrey McClendon, Tom Ward, Jeffrey Records and multimillionaire Bob Howard.]

Maybe the mark of a Big League City is how we treat the least of our fellow citizens?

Or how a city responds when an April 19 happens? Or passage of a MAPS for Kids?

Maybe the OKC ownership of the Sonics will rethink [with the help of the OKC voters] this unfair tax extension and offer a real Big League proposal.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

BOOKS

The Rich Are Getting Filthy Rich, By George

By Froma Harrop

FREE LUNCH

How The Wealthiest Americans Enrich Themselves At Government Expense [And Stick You With The Bill]

By David Cay Johnston

Penguin Group USA

323 pages, \$24.95

President Bush's new budget will top \$3 trillion. It envisions massive deficits for fiscal years 2008 and 2009 – nearly matching the record in 2004, when the federal budget went \$412 billion into the hole.

The average American might properly ask, "Shouldn't we at least have something to show for all this?" Even the basics are missing – for example, health coverage for all children, a serious effort against global warming, bridges that don't fall down. Where has the money gone?

David Cay Johnston provides some answers in this angry and brilliant book.

An ace investigative reporter, Johnston explains: "From those leaves in the park to textbooks to highway bridge maintenance to food safety inspections, money is dwindling because so much has been diverted to the already rich through giveaways, tax breaks and a host of subsidies that range from the explicit to the deeply hidden."

IT ALL BEGAN WITH REAGAN

These diversions started in the Reagan years, according to Johnston, and Democrats have played their part. But the massive transfer of national wealth to the tippy-top became religion in the Bush administration.

Johnston recalls Bush's famous remarks to a white-tie crowd at the Waldorf-Astoria during his 2000 campaign. Referring to his audience as the "haves and have mores," he said that "some people call you the elite. I call you my base."

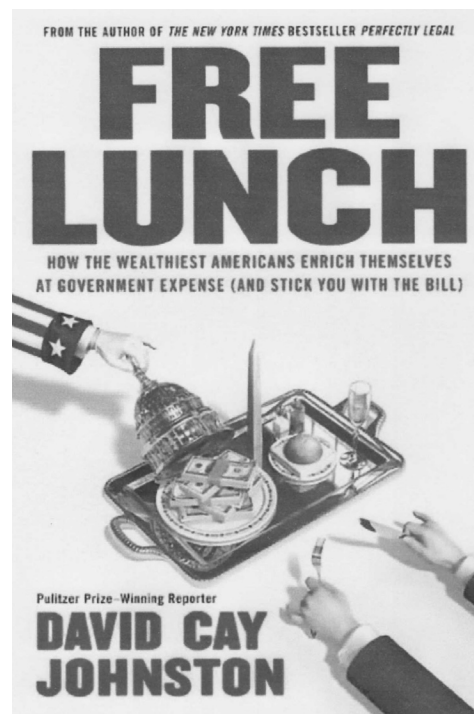
Bush gave the "base" some very big tax cuts in 2001 and 2003. The cuts were supposed to boost the economy and probably helped, but they never generated enough revenue to pay for themselves.

When higher collections helped lower the 2005 and 2006 deficits, the administration credited tax-cutting magic. Most economists disagreed, citing an upswing in the business cycle, bolstered by a housing bubble.

BUSH'S SLEIGHT-OF-HAND

And contrary to conservative legend, the Bush tax "reforms" did not raise the overall income-tax burden of the very rich.

The administration cleverly claims that the share paid by the top 40% is higher than it was in 2000 – which is true. It neglects to add that families at the tiny



David Cay Johnston will appear in OKC on Feb. 29 at the Belle Isle Library, 5501 N. Villa Ave., from 3:30-5:30 p.m., and on March 1 at Mayflower Congregational Church, 3901 NW 63rd St., from 10 a.m.-Noon.

For more information, contact the Oklahoma Media Awareness Alliance at 405.917.9872 or go to www.mapsformillionaires.org

pinnacle – the top tenth of 1% [who made at least \$1.7 million in 2005] – have seen their tax burdens decline significantly. In 2005, this group of 300,000 men, women and children made nearly as much money as all 150 million Americans in the lower half.

So the high earners below this super-elite accounted for the entire heavier burden of the top 40%. These are the members of the upper middle class – the doctors, lawyers and businesspeople who have to work for their money.

As Johnston brutally documents, the free-market posturing of the Bush administration is a total sham. The government has become the enricher of the already rich, not the other way around.

CORNUCOPIA OF GOODIES FOR THE RICH

For the connected, government gives away public land at deep discounts. It juggles the tax code to make moving factories to China more profitable. It undoes safety regulations that subtract from the bottom line. It weakens consumer protections, letting financial institutions prey on the unsophisticated and the not-very-bright. In fine-print legislation, it shifts risk from the corporate managers onto investors and makes the taxpayer cover their mistakes. There's a reason why the number of registered lobbyists in Washington has more than doubled to 35,000 since Bush took office.

The rising cost of Medicare is troubling and must be addressed. But isn't it interesting that Bush sees this middle-class entitlement as the budgetary outrage that needs his immediate attention?

His budget would make deep cuts in the Centers for Disease Control – and eliminate a \$301 million program that trains pediatricians at children's teaching hospitals.

That's stuff for the ordinary folks. The have-mores will do just fine.

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Party On: America's Ever-Evolving Ideologies

By Alvena Bieri

POLITICS, AMERICAN STYLE

Political Parties In American History

By Isobel V. Morin

21st Century Books

Out of print, 144 pages

Primary elections and the whirlwind of campaigning have recently focused our attention on just how it is that Americans choose their President.

Isobel V. Morin's book is short and clearly written, but the subject – America's varieties of political beliefs – is complex.

Some of our early leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams didn't even think that parties were desirable in the new democracy.

However, that didn't prevent the Federalists and anti-Federalists from facing off. The Federalists were for a strong central government while their opponents wanted more power for the states.

It's interesting that in the election of 1800 Jefferson's party – by then called the Republicans – in the words of the author, "dominated the federal government throughout the first two decades of the 19th Century."

DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S EMERGENCE

Then we learn that President Van Buren helped lay the foundation for the modern Democratic Party as he tried to put together an alliance between the planters of the south, the workers of the north, and the pioneers of the west.

The Whigs came along about 1832 – the party of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Quincy Adams. They were against the leveling out of the economic system toward the common people favored by the Jacksonians.

We read that as the Whig Party broke up, the Republican Party was starting in Ripon, WI, as an anti-slavery group. Morin has a whole chapter on parties during the Civil War.

Then there is the issue of third parties. They tend to form when the two major parties seem to be neglecting an important issue.

POPULISTS, PROGRESSIVES AND DEMOCRATS

The perfect example is the Populists. Morin's chapter on it is called "The Age of Reform: The Populist and Progressive Parties."

She explains how the Industrial Revolution caused great disparities in income, leading to the formation of the People's Party, which ran a presidential candidate in 1892. But by 1896 they were supporting the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan.

Some of the ideas of the Populists were carried forward by the socialists and the Progressive Party.

Theodore Roosevelt was actually a progressive in many ways in his attitude toward trusts. And the second Roosevelt, FDR, made the Democratic Party into a revolution-maker with the advent of the New Deal.

GOP'S RECENT REVOLUTION

Right now parties are still changing. Here's a 2008 quote from John Nichols: "The Republican Party – as recently as two years ago the dominant political force on the planet – is a divided and dysfunctional remnant of its former self."

As an ordinary citizen looking at the political scene, it seems to me there are some more reasons to improve our system. We need better campaign financing, abolition of the Electoral College, and better methods of attracting more than 50% of eligible voters to turn out.

Lastly, I'm just afraid that we are all going to get plain bored with all these candidates long before the election in November.

– The author lives in Stillwater

INSIGHT. ANALYSIS.

PERSPECTIVE.

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

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Good Time Charlie's Gospel *History's Lessons For The 'Values' Voters*

By Don Wilkey

The media is ablaze with the story of my recent local congressman known as Charlie "Good Times" Wilson.

The history channel ran a story about Charlie's life based on a book by George Grile, a *60 Minutes* producer. Hollywood picked up the story and produced a movie called *Charlie Wilson's War*. The movie stars Tom Hanks as Wilson and Julie Roberts as the Houston mistress Joanne Herring.

There is a scene from the saga in which Charlie is sitting clothed only with the glass of bourbon in a hot tub. [Depending on which account you take, there was cocaine mentioned.] Wilson is sitting in the tub with a couple of Playboy bunnies who are wearing nothing. Charlie is watching Dan Rather on a news program.

To lots of people in my region, among the moral lapses mentioned here, the most severe was watching Dan Rather!

DAN RATHER GOT CHARLIE'S ATTENTION

After viewing Rather's report on Afghanistan he is convicted that he needs to use his position as a Congressman from Texas to help these freedom fighters. He uses his influence to double the secret support given to the people fighting the Soviet Union.

Joanne Herring, a wealthy anti-Communist leader, learns about Charlie's efforts. She meets with Wilson and tells him he needs to keep up the effort. She encourages him to help the freedom fighters defeat the mightiest army in the world, destroy the Soviet Union and end the cold war.

[Charlie responds that he does not have time because he has Dairy Queens to worry about in Lufkin!]

Wilson takes up the cause and the rest is a history most of us did not know about. The war is secretive with the U.S. giving increasing aid to the fighters to the tune of almost \$200 million a year.

AVOIDING WORLD WAR III

Our government did not want to get directly connected with the freedom fighters for fear of engaging the Soviet Union in a world conflict. Thus Charlie conducted a secret war with the aid of a rogue CIA agent not officially recognized as conducting foreign policy.

Another interesting moral dilemma happens in Egypt when Wilson gets a belly dancing woman friend to dance before the Egyptian in charge of Soviet stashes of arms. This works, and using Soviet weapons is done to further hide the American involvement in the war.

Eventually President Reagan allows Charlie to get Stinger missiles that the Afghans use against Soviet helicopters. This ends the war and the Soviets retreat, defeated. And as a result of the war their economic system is dealt a deathblow.

During this legendary story, Wilson is almost derailed by an election. Word gets out about the cocaine use and Charlie becomes known as "cocaine Charlie."

BLACK VOTERS HELPED END COLD WAR

Loyal Democrats voted against Charlie in his election during this period and

As Attack Dog, Clinton Usurps Veep's Role

By Danny M. Adkison

Things have finally shifted to the real election. Prior to super-duper Tuesday each major party still had more than two possible contenders vying for their respective party's nomination. In that situation the media couldn't keep up and so it focused on something else: a discontented ghost.

That phrase "discontented ghost" is not mine. It's the Framers'. And you might be surprised to know they were referring to Bill Clinton.

Specifically, Alexander Hamilton used this phrase, when writing as Publius in Federalist Paper 72, to describe former presidents who were barred from the presidency. In that essay he gives five reasons why there should be no limits on the number of times a person could be elected president of the United States.

After noting that a limit would encourage incumbents to have sleazy views he adds the following: "Would it promote the peace of the community to have half a dozen men who had had credit enough to raise themselves to the seat of the supreme magistracy wandering among the people like discontented ghosts and sighing for a place which they were destined never more to possess."

We don't have half a dozen discontented ghosts [only half that many], but there is one that has been getting a lot of media attention recently.

It seems Mr. Bill Clinton has found an end-run around Publius' prediction that presidents limited to a certain number of terms would be destined forever to "sighing for a place which they were never more to possess." Instead of "sighing" Mr. Clinton is doing all he can to get his wife elected. If successful, he may not just be the Comeback Kid; he may be the Comeback King.

But for all he brings to Mrs. Clinton's campaign to be the next president, he also brings some of his "discontent." His recent actions have caused many Democratic Party leaders to question his strategy in not only promoting his wife but criticizing her opponents [principally Mr. Obama].

Tom Daschle, former Senate Majority Leader, denounced Mr. Clinton's conduct. Rahm Emanuel, an Illinois representative, told Mr. Clinton he needed to tone down his rhetoric. And after Caroline Kennedy endorsed Mr. Obama in the New York Times, Sen. Ted Kennedy did the same [after, it was reported, he too



he almost lost his seat. He went to bed that night thinking he had lost his place in Congress.

What saved the candidate was the black voter precinct in Lufkin. The black voters of this city had always been loyal to Charlie.

You might make the case here that the black voters of Lufkin, TX, saved the world from Communism and ended the cold war.

The point being that ethical possibilities abound regarding voting our "values."

So-called Christian conservatives could have messed up a secretive war that did not cost one drop of American blood.

Wilson lamented the fact that we did not go and help the people of the region rebuild their schools and hospitals. Thus, these peoples never knew who helped them – producing a Taliban, 9/11 and Iraq.

FOREIGN POLICY ISN'T SO SIMPLE

Foreign policy is complicated and simply voting for the candidates who share our values regarding abortion and gays oversimplifies the issue.

The picture of Roosevelt and Churchill standing next to Stalin is an ethical case in point.

Wilson claims that many of his friends who helped defeat the Soviets are now in the Taliban.

Being recently gravely ill, my family sought out specialists to help me recover from the dangerous meningitis. They wanted doctors who had knowledge and training. I doubt they cared what these physicians believed about the Lord's Supper or Baptism.

'VALUES' AREN'T BLACK-AND-WHITE

Voting values is a complicated thing. John Kennedy, never known for his abstinence, probably saved the southeastern United States by not invading Cuba. We now know they had missiles. That might be a moral value to consider along with some of the rest of our Christian issues.

One author said the reason why people liked Charlie Wilson was because he did the one thing politicians were not supposed to do. He told the truth.

Christians might consider some of these concerns as they go to the polls to voice their concerns this fall.

– The author is pastor of First Baptist Church, Onalaska, TX

had told Clinton to tone down his criticism of Obama].

Rep. Charles Rangel of New York, one of Mrs. Clinton's supporters, noted publicly that Mr. Clinton needed to back off, stating emphatically, "He's got to."

The New York Post called the Clintons a "two-headed monster." One Democratic pollster stated that Mr. Clinton's "harsh style hurt Sen. Clinton." Dartmouth Professor Linda Fowler noted that "Voters don't like the idea of a co-presidency." That comment, along with Gail Collins' op-ed piece on this is the most revealing of all. Ms. Collins, writing in the New York Times, described Mr. Clinton's role as "Chief Attack Dog."

Everybody knows who a president's Attack Dog is. It's the vice president. Just ask Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. Or for that matter, Dick Cheney.

Mr. Clinton has repeatedly argued that he wouldn't even think about being Hillary's vice presidential running mate. His position is that the Constitution wouldn't allow it even if he were desirous of such a formal role in her administration.

Although we have no precedent to guide us on this point, Mr. Clinton is probably right. The Twenty-Second Amendment limits a person to being elected no more than twice to the presidency. Clinton has been elected twice. But that amendment doesn't say anything about a limit for serving in the vice presidency.

There is language in the Twelfth Amendment, however, that does pertain to the question. The final sentence of that amendment stipulates, "But no person constitutionally ineligible to the office of President shall be eligible to that of Vice-President of the United States."

Still, given Mr. Clinton's recent behavior on the campaign trail, is there really any doubt as to whom Mrs. Clinton's vice president will really be?

One thing seems certain: if Mrs. Clinton gets the Democratic nomination, her vice presidential running mate will not be Mr. Obama. Looked at the other way around, however, Mr. Obama might want to add Mrs. Clinton to the ticket were he to be the Democratic Party's nominee.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

CAMPAIGN '08

Swiftboaters Have Obama In Cross-Hairs

By Joe Conason

For the next month or so, the conservative valentines will arrive every day at the headquarters of Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

The Illinois senator's image will be illuminated by the bipartisan aura of admiration from prominent Republican commentators and strategists, as they savor the promise of his victory over Hillary Clinton, long the object of their hatred. He may well imagine that they really like him – and surely some of them do, at least for now.

Such happy feelings are easily conjured these days, when William Kristol hopes Democratic superdelegates will do "the good deed" of pledging their ballots to Obama, when George Will urges Democrats to choose Obama as "the party's most potentially potent nominee," and when Peggy Noonan promises that Obama will be "bulletproof" against Republican attack.

Meanwhile, in the bleaker precincts of the blogosphere, lesser figures prepare to welcome the Democratic front-runner should he secure his party's nomination. Evidently, they will celebrate his triumph with poison gas and bombshells rather than confetti and champagne.

If you listen closely, you can already hear the test rounds exploding.

WHAT'S WAITING FOR OBAMA

The target is Obama's favorable but hazy persona, which Republican operatives must redefine in negative and even threatening terms. Assuming that the Republican nominee will be Sen. John McCain, they will aim to contrast his tough, aggressive stance against Islamist terrorism with his opponent's alleged weakness and naivety.

But as usual, they will do worse, spreading slurs and smears that depict Obama as a dupe or even a sympathizer of Islamic radicals.

False accusations about Obama's religious affiliation have surfaced in anonymous e-mail campaigns, with little impact so far. But the easily denied charges about his supposed Muslim upbringing are gradually giving way to more concrete allegations.

The latest round involves his political intervention in Kenya, the home of his late father, where violence between ethnic and partisan factions has erupted in the wake of a disputed presidential election.

'SWIFT BOATING' ALREADY UNDERWAY

As usual, the right-wing narrative melds half-truths and lies with facts to create a seamless indictment.

Leading conservative blogs and publications charge that Obama recklessly aligned himself with opposition leader Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement.

Followers of Odinga, a member of the minority Luo tribe, have perpetrated horrific atrocities against members of the Kikuyu tribe because incumbent president Mwai Kibaki and the nation's ruling elite are Kikuyu.

One of the worst incidents occurred in the village of Eldoret, where dozens of Kikuyu Christians burned to death when they sought shelter in a church that was then set afire by their rampaging pursuers.

These events are set within the broader story line of an alleged Muslim plot to overthrow the Kibaki government, which is friendly to the United States and the



West, and replace the secular constitution of Kenya with sharia law, creating a haven for al-Qaeda – which blew up the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi a decade ago and still operates there, according to American diplomats.

YET ANOTHER FORGED DOCUMENT

During the Kenyan election, the Christian evangelical movement in Kenya circulated a "memorandum of understanding" allegedly signed by Odinga and a group of Muslim clerics that would commit his government to instituting Muslim strictures against pork and alcohol, setting up sharia courts and ending cooperation against terrorism with Western governments.

Denounced as a forgery by Odinga and Muslim authorities in Kenya, which it almost certainly is, that document nevertheless still circulates via the Internet and is quoted by American publications.

The point is to raise questions about Obama and his connections with Odinga – who claims to be his cousin – and to infiltrate those doubts into the mainstream media.

It is true that Obama, whose family is Luo, lent support to the opposition leader during a visit to Kenya two years ago – and that they have maintained contact ever since.

While that gaffe infuriated the Kibaki regime, it proved only that Obama lacked diplomatic expertise.

OBAMA'S CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE

During the current crisis in his homeland, he has tried to play a constructive role by taping radio announcements for the State Department that urge both sides to stop fighting and resolve their differences without violence.

Yet the outlines of the coming assault on his fitness and character are clear enough, just as the Swift Boat campaign against John Kerry opened fire many months before the public noticed.

The Kenya tale is a single aspect of a multifaceted strategy to portray Obama as a callow politician with dubious associations, who cannot be trusted with power. He will be subjected to the same ruthless treatment as the last Democratic nominee.

Let's hope he is better armored to withstand the incoming fire.

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Superdelegate Solution? Bad Then And Now

By Susan Estrich

A century ago, actually about 26 years ago, the powers in the Democratic Party decided it was time to take back control of the nominating process from the often derided crazies who had been leading the party straight down the tubes with their choices of McGovern and Carter. Of course, Carter did win, but that was in 1976.

By 1982, when the Democrats were in full swing rewriting the rules, all anyone could seem to remember was the debacle that was 1980, which seemed to have all too much in common, at least as measured by the results, with the debacle that was 1972.

The prevailing wisdom was that the problem was all the fringe types who came out of the woodwork every four years to dominate the caucuses and primaries, leaving the "regulars," the "elders" and the establishment heading out the door in an effort to avoid the various disasters that were the quadrennial conventions – where loony platforms were debated and outsiders with no chance of winning were nominated to lead the party.

"Fringe types" was code for feminists, gays, minorities and crazed environmentalists. What we needed, in many minds, were more white guys with cigars.

HOW SUPERDELEGATES CAME TO BE

Of course, not everyone bought into the conventional wisdom. I was a member of the then-current Rules Commission drafting committee, staffed by an array of self-described "rules junkies," most of us put in place by the two rival power centers in the party at the time, the Kennedy camp and the Mondale camp.

The other assumption, this one quickly proved wrong, was that Kennedy, Carter's 1980 challenger, and Mondale, his long-suffering vice president, would face each other for the nomination in 1984.

In that calculus, Mondale was the establishment candidate and Kennedy was

the insurgent, and so my marching orders from on high, or from Harold Ickes anyway, were to oppose the effort to create a category of superdelegates allowed to come to the convention unpledged, without having to run for a delegate spot and not bound by the results of their state's contests.

The reason "we" were against superdelegates was, quite transparently, because we thought they would be overwhelmingly for Mondale. But you couldn't say that, not exactly, not out loud, so I created a principled argument in support of the outcome we thought would help us.

KEEPING WHITE MEN IN POWER

My principled argument was that the category of elected officials and party leaders would, contrary to the rules governing the Democratic Convention [which only two years earlier had voted to require itself to be equally divided between men and women, and to reflect the diversity of the party], be brimming with white guys.

You're going to let white men decide who the nominee will be, I argued, loudly and full of conviction, to anyone who would listen. It's not democratic. It's closing up the system when we should be opening it up.

Exactly, more than one person said to me. About time, others muttered.

That was, dare I say, the idea. Take it back from the crazies and give it to the guys.

To make a long story short, the Kennedy and Mondale people cut a deal while I was stranded in North Carolina, waylaid by the Air Florida disaster on my way to the critical party meeting to consider the rules change.

By the time I got there, the deal was done, and even my old friend Maxine Waters' fiery rhetoric extolling democracy wasn't about to derail it.

See SUPERDELEGATES Page 15

Gay Rights Record Mixed

Just How Big Is McCain's Tent?

By Deb Price

"No, no, no," Mitt Romney supporters cried out at the Conservative Political Action Conference as he announced he was ending his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination.

A short distance away, a very different reaction could be heard at the Washington, D.C., headquarters of the gay Log Cabin Republicans: "We did it!"

Romney had run a hard-right campaign. It was a losing strategy.

Despite Romney's barrage of attacks on Sen. John McCain, primary voters picked the Goldilocks of the GOP presidential field:

In essence, McCain had said: "This side of my party is too soft. That side of my party is too hard. My own spot is just right."

MCCAIN'S TIGHTROPE ON GAY RIGHTS

McCain, a fiscally conservative hawk, has voiced support for gay Americans, yet he has a mixed record on gay rights.

Log Cabin hasn't endorsed McCain but actively worked to defeat Romney, who had done a U-turn away from his days as a Senate candidate, when he had boasted he could do more for Massachusetts' gays than liberal lion Edward Kennedy.

Log Cabin's high-risk, very public strategy of running TV and radio ads attacking Romney – even though he had a credible shot at becoming president – demonstrated the group's trademark chutzpah and integrity.

But now Log Cabin finds itself at another defining moment: Can it persuade soon-to-be-nominee McCain, who will need the support of both conservatives and moderates, to at least remain mildly gay-friendly, a spot where the group likely could endorse him?

LOG CABIN SAID NO TO BUSH

Four years ago, Log Cabin refused to endorse President Bush because of his full-throated advocacy of an anti-gay constitutional amendment.

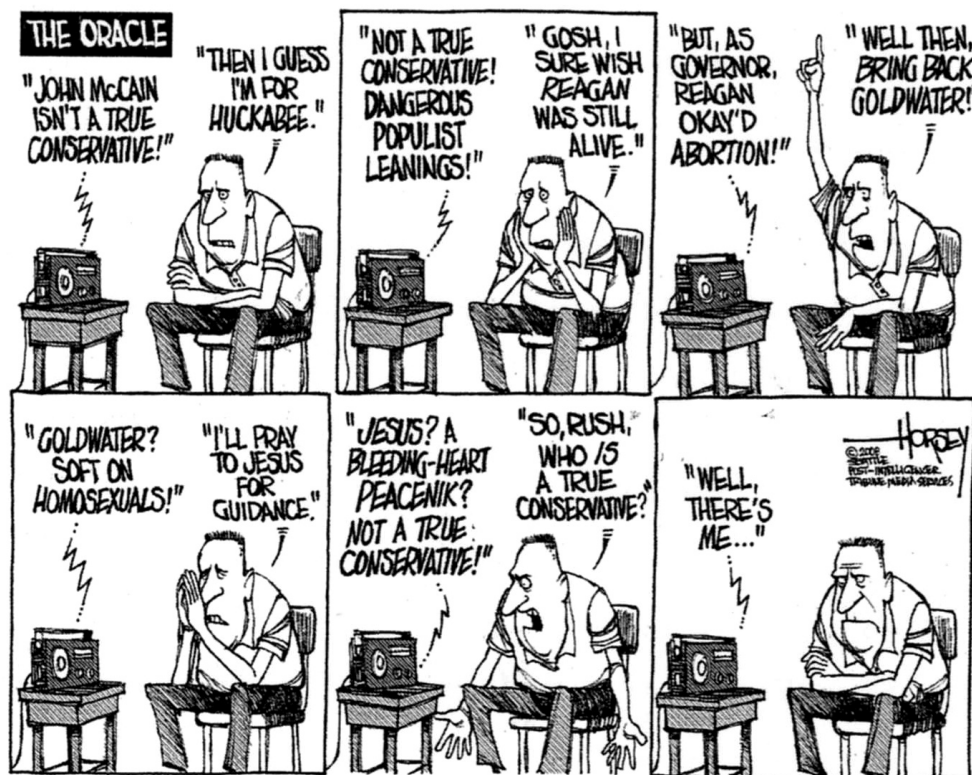
Now, Log Cabin President Patrick Sammon says: "It's good news that Sen. McCain is on track to win the nomination because he believes in a big tent Republican Party. His record is not perfect, but there are definitely positive signs."

Here are highlights:

Pluses: McCain met with Log Cabin in 1999 during his earlier presidential bid and expressed distaste for anti-gay discrimination. He's hired openly gay Senate and campaign staffers.

MCCAIN SUPPORTED KOLBE

When U.S. Rep. Jim Kolbe, a fellow Arizona Republican, came out in 1996, McCain rushed to supportively declare that Kolbe "has the respect and appreciation



of most Arizonans."

In response to a push by the gay Human Rights Campaign, McCain adopted a written policy saying he doesn't discriminate against gay employees.

And, in both 2004 and 2006, he voted against and spoke out against amending the U.S. Constitution to ban same-sex marriage.

During the recent Florida primary, his campaign placed anti-gay "robo" calls against Romney. The plus is that, according to a knowledgeable source, McCain never saw or approved the script, and senior staff stopped them.

MCCAIN'S DARK SIDE ON GAY RIGHTS

Minuses: He opposes gay marriage, campaigned for an unsuccessful amendment to Arizona's constitution in 2006 that would have prevented recognition of coupled relationships other than male-female marriages and has said he'd support amending the U.S. Constitution if federal courts order gay marriage.

He voted in 1993 for Don't Ask, Don't Tell and still opposes lifting that ban on gays serving openly in the military. In 1996 votes, he supported denying spousal benefits to married gay couples and opposed outlawing anti-gay job discrimination.

Log Cabin helped to defeat McCain's chief rival. We'll soon see whether the maverick McCain works to create a big tent party that values all its members.

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Huckabee Hounds Irrelevant Issues

By Jordan Ruud

I always tended to agree that politicians are out of touch with the public, until recently.

At a rally in South Carolina in mid-January, Republican candidate Mike Huckabee ignored the issue of this insignificant little war in Iraq and cut right to the chase: the state's right to fly the Confederate flag!

Clearly the rest of the country, concerned more with war and recession, hasn't yet caught up to Huckabee's pioneering politics.

A few days later on Huckabee's whirlwind tour of the South, he spoke in Atlanta, saying of abortion: "There cannot be a geographical distinction when it comes down to something that is either right or wrong. Abraham Lincoln said over 100 years ago that if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong."

ELOQUENT POLITICAL VISION

Well, OK, an eloquent political vision, based on absolute values at a federal level and states' rights where states have rights, or something.

And then there's the intriguing plank of his campaign involving the necessity to "amend the Constitution so it's in God's standards rather than try to change God's standards."

It's easy to look at a remark like this as political pandering. Huckabee is a canny man [and devoted to his job. Just consider the fact that he lost 110 pounds for the sake of being able to talk to reporters without sounding winded], and he knows what he's up to.

But it's unfortunate that we've gotten to a point where a candidate can put forth a palette of political philosophies as muddled as this and still get any support from the public.

EVEN RON PAUL REACHES OUT

Even a figure as dubious as Ron Paul, a past master in political idealism taken to bizarre extremes, at least has the capacity to make some bid to the wider public, not pandering to a klatch of religious extremists.

In South Carolina, Huckabee also disparaged those who "have been in charge of all the problems of this country and haven't fixed them."

Some would say he's talking about Republicans; others, that he's talking about politicians in general and just doesn't realize it.

I doubt that there is a politician who can fix "all the problems of this country," and the idea that Huckabee is the one to do it is a little baffling.

PANDERING TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Pandering to the religious right is nothing new. Even a figure as broadly ap-

pealing as Barack Obama has done so recently, facing the lie that he is, or was, a Muslim.

But the degree of openness with which Huckabee's been playing some of the most oppressive constituencies in America is a little dismaying. It's as though he's not ever going to bother with trying not to sound divisive.

In any case, no one should be fooled by his claims about godliness and integrity. If Americans were to take the original, unprecedented route of favoring a candidate who might appeal to more than a fringe of bitter extremists, I wonder how much longer Huckabee's campaign would last.

Moral bankruptcy certainly isn't a prerequisite for running as a Republican these days, but it's also not an impediment.

- From the University of Tulsa Collegian

SUPERDELEGATES

From Page 14

Of course, the Democratic National Committee then made things better, or worse, depending upon your perspective: They added themselves to the deal as superdelegates.

While the DNC is indeed equally divided, hack is a proud term for many of its long-term members, of whom I was one.

When you're talking about the DNC, you're talking about Capital-D Democrat, not small-d democracy. These are people who get picked, not elected.

And now we finally face the point of the exercise.

Most years, being a superdelegate has just meant having a shortcut to a credential and some party invites. Mondale needed the superdelegates to win in '84, but that was because it was a three-man race and a plurality wouldn't do it.

This is the first time the race on the ground has taken on the appearance of a tie, and the superdelegates look to actually be, potentially, decisive. That was, of course, the whole purpose.

Still, it's hard to blame my old buddy Donna Brazile for not wanting the power that is being given to her, as one of them. The truth is they shouldn't have it. Wrong then and wrong now. But unintended? Not even close

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'I Was There' Columnist Slams Clinton Unfairly

By Barbara Santee

In his Feb. 10th New York Times column "Next Up for the Democrats: Civil War," Frank Rich criticized Hillary Clinton's national town hall meeting with 21 cities held the night before Super Tuesday.

He said that "not a single African-American questioner" was included during the program, implying that there was a deliberate move to ignore African-Americans and their concerns.

He went even further by saying that "African-Americans were reduced to also-rans. One black woman, the former TV correspondent Carole Simpson, was given the servile role of the meeting's nominal moderator, Ed McMahon to Mrs. Clinton's top banana."

Sen. Clinton is running for president. The moderator isn't. Would Rich have had Carole Simpson in a "starring" role? I have no idea what he thought a moderator should be doing since he said that Simpson was in a "servile" role.

WOULD HE HAVE CALLED GIBSON SERVILE?

In that case, all moderators are in a "servile" role. If the moderator had been Charlie Gibson, would Rich have accused Hillary of discriminating on the basis of race because the role was not filled by an African-American?

And would he have called Gibson "servile." I think not.

I was one of the people who attended the town hall meeting in Tulsa. We were not a hand-selected group of fawning groupies. We were made up of independent-thinking people who had received a notice of the meeting from various sources and wanted to hear Sen. Clinton's plans in detail since the media very seldom gives us that information.

The media focus on polls, election results and "he said/she said" conflicts rather than addressing the meat of the issues.

IT WAS A CROSS-SECTION OF VOTERS

We had heard about the meeting from friends, from e-mails, from co-workers, etc. And we were a cross section of America - whites, blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, young, old.

I sat next to a woman who said she thought she'd vote for Obama but hadn't made up her mind. So we were not a bunch of ideologues groveling at Hillary's feet.

As for the questions asked, they were selected in a very democratic way. Before airtime, the group was asked if anyone wanted to ask Sen. Clinton a specific question. Over a dozen people stood up and stated their questions, which were written on a blackboard.

ENTIRE GROUP VOTED ON QUESTIONS

Then the entire group voted on which question[s] our Tulsa contingent would ask. We were told that the person who posed the question would go on camera to ask Hillary directly.

We selected one question regarding reforming FEMA, with several backup questions that had received the most votes. The questioners, as it turned out, were all men and only one woman.

I did not see that as sexism because we were voting on the merit of the ques-

Hate Radio Losing Its Rightwing Clout

As the 2008 campaign roars, conservative talk radio is ratcheting up radical rightwing rhetoric. Last year, hate radio successfully convinced conservative lawmakers to vote against comprehensive immigration reform.

Indeed, these rightwing hosts have been welcome figures in the White House for the past seven years, invited to exclusive gatherings with President Bush and granted coveted interviews with high-ranking officials.

All that good fortune is changing. These talkers have launched a campaign against Republican presidential candidates and any position perceived to be too progressive.

As Super Tuesday results showed, hate radio has begun to lose its effectiveness. The American public voted against the wishes of the radical right wing and rejected a third term of the Bush administration.

ON IMMIGRATION

Keeping undocumented - and sometimes even legal - immigrants out of the United States is the top issue for hate radio. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, said that "hate radio" had hijacked the political discourse on immigration with "xenophobic, anti-immigrant" rhetoric.

That same month, then-Republican Sen. Trent Lott charged: "Talk radio is ruining America." An adviser to former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee piled on, stating, "Rush [Limbaugh] doesn't think for himself."

Limbaugh, in particular, has aggressively gone after comprehensive immigration reform, blasting the failed bipartisan McCain-Kennedy bill.

Sen. John McCain "has stabbed his own party in the back I can't tell you how many times," said Limbaugh.

Yet as conservative pundit Bill Kristol noted on Fox News, right-wing radio has been unable to convince the public that immigration is the paramount issue. Voters are instead more concerned about an economy teetering on recession.

ON GLOBAL WARMING

Hate radio is still resisting the scientific consensus that man-made global



tions, not on the sex of the questioner. The same would certainly have been true of any African-American participant.

I don't remember how many African-Americans asked questions, but I think one may have. A Native American asked a question. And there were African-Americans in the audience who had the same opportunity as everyone else to ask any question of concern.

LIVE ON THE HALLMARK CHANNEL

Because the town hall was being shown live on the Hallmark channel, Sen. Clinton had to give a sign-off speech when that program ended. And, yes, it happened before she got to all 21 states.

Would Rich have had the program end in mid-sentence, without her giving any kind of statement acknowledging that the program was ending? That doesn't make any sense.

Unfortunately, Oklahoma's question did not make it on the air. However, she continued to answer questions from the remaining states that did not make it on the program.

Although the Hallmark program was only one-hour, she answered questions for 2 1/2 hours until she had answered the questions from every state. I was amazed at her energy, humor, intelligence, and grasp of a wide range of issues.

SHE WAS NOT TOLD WHAT QUESTIONS

She had no idea what questions were going to be asked because these were generated on the spot from each one of the state groups. To bring up the issue of "planted" questions, as Frank Rich did, is absurd.

It is obvious that he has a strong anti-Hillary bias, and I am disappointed that he didn't take the time to speak to any of us who actually attended that filming to find out more about how these town halls were structured and conducted.

His implication that Hillary Clinton is a racist is ridiculous and beneath contempt. He needs to question his own motives because his article was extremely sexist. Hillary Clinton seems to be a Rorschach test for people. Unfortunately,

Rich's comments told me more about his hang-ups than it did about Hillary's!
- The author lives in Tulsa

warming is a real and urgent danger. CNN's right-wing pundit Glenn Beck continues to attack former Vice President Al Gore, airing a documentary last year entitled, Exposed: The Climate of Fear.

"Al Gore's version of climate change has no longer become science," he said. "It's dogma. And if you question it, you are a heretic."

He has repeatedly hosted discredited climate change skeptics to pretend that there are still questions about the cause of global warming.

Limbaugh has gone after the McCain-Lieberman bill, a modest proposal that sought to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

LOSING SIDE ON THIS ISSUE, TOO

But again, hate radio is on the losing side of this issue. According to an Environmental Defense poll, 81% of South Carolina's Republican voters believe the United States should reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

GOP pollster Frank Luntz has called climate change "the single biggest vulnerability" for conservatives.

The No. 1 issue for Republicans is the economy, with four in 10 ranking it first. Although 52% of Republicans say the economy is doing well, that number is down from 66% earlier this year and 82% last June.

Limbaugh has taken aim at McCain, who voted against Bush's tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 because he said they overwhelmingly benefited the wealthy.

Flip-flopping McCain now supports making them permanent. He has proven during the campaign that he has no permanent convictions.

Limbaugh, however, is unforgiving.

THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER ON-LINE

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Damn Congress For Supporting The War

By John Cory

On September 21, 2007, Sgt. Gerald Cassidy died alone and forgotten in all the body counts and statistics of war, political polls and campaign strategies.

He was unconscious for days before dying like crumpled and discarded newspaper, barely noticed, simply brushed aside with yesterday's lies.

Sgt. Cassidy did not die in Iraq or Afghanistan. He died in America, at a new medical unit in Fort Knox, America, where we support the troops, according to every single lapel-flag-pin-wearing politician and pundit on the airwaves.

And yet, Sgt. Gerald Cassidy died neglected and unnoticed.

Shame on us.

SENATORS BUSY CREATING MORE VETERANS

Oklahoma's U.S. senators were too busy creating more veterans and condemning free speech to notice Sgt. Cassidy. And the President was too busy stealing healthcare from children to have time for someone like Gerald Cassidy. It takes a lot of concentration to rob a child. Adults are easy.

When Cassidy died, he took another piece of America with him. How many more pieces can we lose before we become totally lost ourselves?

Yesterday's lies kill and wound our troops, and yet Congress, afraid to face the truth, continues to fund and support the great lie of war.

So look closely, my friends, and ask yourselves, how it is that we manage to find increasing amounts of money for war but continue to reduce funds for the care of our wounded and suffering troops?

Shame on us.

ANYONE RECALL LINCOLN'S WORDS?

Have we forgotten our promise to veterans, in Lincoln's words, "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan?"

Are we so penny-wise and pound-foolish as to begrudgingly buy the bullets yet refuse to pay for the bread and bandages needed for the survivors?

Or have we become so jaded that we view the flood of returning wounded as a burgeoning market in the for-profit healthcare industry with war as the ultimate profit generator?

Members of Congress, go to Dover AFB and don't tell me they won't let you in, you're congressional members elected by "We the People," for crapes sake!

GO TO DOVER AND MEET THE CASKETS

Go to Dover and meet a plane of caskets and serve as pallbearers for the entire load. Carry them gently and with love for the price they have paid and send them home to their loved ones with a tear and a kiss.

Rich Countries Damage Poor Environmentally

The environmental damage caused to developing nations by the world's richest countries amounts to more than the entire Third World debt of \$1.8 trillion, according to the first systematic global analysis of the ecological damage imposed by rich countries.

The study found that there are huge disparities in the ecological footprint inflicted by rich and poor countries on the rest of the world because of differences in consumption. The authors say that the west's high living standards are maintained in part through the huge unrecognized ecological debts it has built up with developing countries.

"At least to some extent, the rich nations have developed at the expense of the poor and, in effect, there is a debt to the poor," said Richard Norgaard, an ecological economist at the University of California-Berkeley, who led the study. "That, perhaps, is one reason that they are poor.

"You don't see it until you do the kind of accounting that we do here."

ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE LINKED TO CONSUMPTION

Using data from the World Bank and the U.N.'s Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the researchers examined so-called "environmental externalities" or costs that are not included in the prices paid for goods but which cover ecological damage linked to their consumption.

They focused on six areas: greenhouse gas emissions, ozone layer depletion, agriculture, deforestation, over-fishing and converting mangrove swamps into shrimp farms.

The team calculated the costs of consumption in low-, medium- and high-income countries, both within their borders and outside, from 1961 to 2000. The team used U.N. definitions for countries in different income categories.

Low-income countries included Pakistan, Nigeria and Vietnam, and middle-income nations included Brazil and China. Rich countries in the study included the U.K., U.S. and Japan.

THERE ARE STRIKING DISPARITIES

The magnitude of effects outside the home country was different for each category of consumption. For example, deforestation and agricultural intensification primarily affect the host country, while the impacts from climate change and ozone depletion show up the disparity between rich and poor most strikingly.

Greenhouse emissions from low-income countries have imposed \$740 billion of damage on rich countries, while in return rich countries have imposed \$2.3 trillion of damage. This damage includes, for example, flooding from more severe storms as a result of climate change.

Likewise, CFC emissions from rich countries have inflicted between \$25 billion and \$57 billion of damage to the poorest countries. Increased ultraviolet



Open your home or a community center somewhere and prepare a meal for several families who have lost their loved ones in this war, or who have wounded to tend to.

Feed them the fresh baked bread of compassion and a warm supper of empathy and recognition for their fulfillment of duty, honor, country.

Take their children in your arms and listen to them tell you how much they loved their daddy or mommy or uncle. And weep for yourselves that you never met them.

IT IS NOT MEANT TO BE A MEDIA EVENT

Do this all without cameras, campaign advisers and media consultants. We'll know about it - trust me. We will know. And if you're afraid, remember duty, honor, country as defined by Gen. MacArthur, because it applies to you as well.

And then, by God, if you truly want my vote, you will go to Westfield, IN, and you will embrace the loved ones of Sgt. Cassidy and ask for their forgiveness on behalf of a grateful nation.

And you will listen as they tell you all about him and show you their family photo album, not just the ones of him in uniform, but the boy and teenager, and the man who lived duty, honor, country.

Then you will go to his graveside and place a wreath with the promise that you will never forget him. And on the ride back across the Indiana snow, you will write the beginning legislation that will never let this happen again: The Gerald Cassidy Veterans Bill.

That night as you drift off to sleep, you will hear the whispered lullaby: "War is a waltz, a dance with the Devil on the bones of Angels." And you will understand.

Then you can sleep the good sleep, knowing you have begun to put an end to yesterday's lies that led us into a civil war.

levels from the ozone hole have led to higher healthcare costs from skin cancer and eye problems. The converse figure is between \$580 million and \$1.3 billion.

The team published their results in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

'HUGE INJUSTICE' TO THE POOR

"We know already that climate change is a huge injustice inflicted on the poor," said Dr. Neil Adger at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research in Norwich, who was not involved in the research.

"This paper is actually the first systematic quantification to produce a map of that ecological debt. Not only for climate change but also for these other areas.

"This is an accounting tool that allows you to say how much the high-income world owes the low-income world for the environmental externalities we impose on them," he said.

The team confined its calculations to areas in which the costs of environmental damage - for example, in terms of lost services from ecosystems - are well understood. That meant leaving out damage from excessive freshwater withdrawals, destruction of coral reef, biodiversity loss, invasive species and war. So the researchers believe the figures represent a minimum estimate of the true cost.

"We think the measured impact is conservative," said co-author Thara Srinivasan, who also is at Berkeley. "And given that it's conservative, the numbers are very striking."

© The UK Guardian

And The Winner Is ...

An Israeli doctor bragged, "Medicine in my country is so advanced that we have learned to take a kidney out of one man, put it in another, and have him looking for work in six weeks!"

A German doctor snorted, "That is nothing. We can take a lung out of one person, put it in another, and have him looking for work in four weeks!"

A Russian doctor boasted, "In my country, medicine is so advanced that we can take half a heart out of one person, put it in another, and have them both looking for work in two weeks!"

The American doctor says, "You guys are way behind. Seven years ago we took a man with no brain out of Texas, put him in the White House, and now the world's richest country is broke."

Yo Bush! Stimulate My Interest Rate!

By Nomi Prins

All the cheery bipartisan photo-ops accompanying the Bush-Congress stimulus package won't change the economic condition of the majority of Americans. That's because it's not based on reducing living costs.

As long as expenses such as health care, traveling to work, tuition and carrying debt rise faster than average income, personal financial stability remains under attack.

Pride notoriously goes before the fall. In corporate economics, so does unregulated recklessness. Six years ago, the subprime mortgage market was a third of the size it is now.

As the stock market tanked and money became cheap, borrowers jumped at targeted campaigns extending credit at exorbitant, adjustable rates.

Investment banks packaged their higher-interest loans, effectively trading the homes underlying these loans for profit [the more subprime the loan, the bigger the commission]. We know how that story ended.

NOW HAPPENING TO CREDIT CARD MARKET

The same cycle is happening in the credit card market. First came exuberant marketing. According to market research firm Mintel International Group, credit card mail offers surged to 5.3 billion in 2007, up 41% in the first half of the year versus the first half of 2006.

Direct mail to subprime borrowers doubled compared with 2005. Such solicitations produce increased borrowing, delinquencies [late payments] and defaults – which led to credit card companies and banks begging the Fed for rate cuts and Congress for tax rebates, calling it stimulus.

They pretend that customer extortion is acceptable, even as signs of customer pain grow.

DOWNWARD FOR CREDIT CARD INDUSTRY

According to the rating agency Fitch, performance in the \$2.5-trillion consumer credit card market will deteriorate noticeably throughout this year.

The American Bankers Association noted 2007 delinquencies are nearing early 1990s levels, and delinquencies at the end of the year rose faster than in the beginning, signaling more financial erosion to come.

Meanwhile, supermarket banks started adding credit card and auto loans to their list of write-downs – the losses that had at first been due only to subprime mortgage problems.

When JPMorgan Chase took a \$1.3-billion hit due to bad subprime investments in mid-January, it set aside another \$2.3 billion to cover future losses from mortgages, home equity loans and credit cards.

CITIGROUP SETS ASIDE BILLIONS

Citigroup set aside a larger chunk of change, \$5.1 billion, for the same purpose.

Then there are student loan debts. Sallie Mae, the nation's largest student lender, announced a \$1.6-billion fourth-quarter loss and set aside more than half a billion dollars to cover future losses.



A month earlier, it stated that people attending less “traditional” schools would get fewer loans.

In the auto industry, too, delinquency rates are approaching all-time highs, according to Global Insight, an international research firm. AmeriCredit Corp., a subprime auto lender, cut its 2008 earnings forecast by 42%.

Have banks, credit card, student loan and auto lenders learned anything from the subprime mortgage crisis? The answer would be yes if they reduced interest rates and fees, and offered borrowers the opportunity to repay loans at lower rates, even over longer periods.

FEES ARE SKYROCKETING

No such luck. Default interest rates have risen above 30% even for those with high credit scores, and fees are skyrocketing.

Part of the reason that the subprime crisis got out of control was that banks and lenders levied interest rates at higher levels than borrowers could afford.

New York State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo is investigating whether they also lied about that risk to the public. That same antiquated logic – increasing charges for people least able to pay – reduces the chances of getting any payment at all, and increases those of more future losses.

Americans took out \$1.2 trillion in home equity loans between 2001 and 2006. Half of them used that money to pay off credit card debt. Whether unwise or necessary, with the decline in home prices, that income source is now unavailable.

CONSUMER DEBT WILL INCREASE

Meanwhile, consumer debt will increase as long as income is stagnant or declining and living costs are escalating.

The solution is not to hand out several hundred bucks a head and urge the public to “buy American” to prop up the corporate economy. It's to regulate exorbitant rates and unrestrained, nontransparent lending and trading practices.

It's to work toward increasing average incomes and decreasing the costs of corporate commandeered health care, energy and education.

Level the playing field for all, and the overall economy will prosper.

– The author is a senior fellow at the public policy center Demos and author of *Other People's Money and Jacked: How “Conservatives” Are Picking Your Pocket [Whether You Voted For Them Or Not]*

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Making It Through A Grist ‘Green’ Day

By Tara Lohan

There are a lot of books out there about how to green your life, but the folks at Grist took a stab at their own version [Wake Up and Smell the Planet]. It opens:

“We bet we can guess what your morning routine looks like: You gently click off your solar-powered alarm clock, crawl out of your hemp sheets, don organic cotton slippers and a recycled fleece robe, and shuffle across your bamboo floors to the bathroom, where you bathe in rainwater and botanicals harvested from your own garden.”

Not quite? Good! The book is a reality check of sorts for the average eco-minded individual or those looking to get more green. The narrative follows the course of the day and provides information about everything from shaving tips to car choices to kitty litter disposal.

As their editor's describe the book: “It's a guide to making it through your day with your values – and your sanity – intact. And it's proof that you can help the planet and have a little fun along the way.”

Hey, if you can't laugh at global warming, what can you laugh at, right?

And if you think you're pretty eco-conscious already, there are still some fun facts to learn. Here are some of my favorites:

- “Some 20 billion diapers are buried in U.S. landfills per year, representing about seven billion pounds of garbage.”
- You can flush dog poop down the toilet but not cat poop [and ironically, it seems you can potty train cats, but not dogs – drat!].
- “There is a Green Wi-Fi project, which has developed a solar-powered wireless router that can run for up to four weeks even in prolonged periods of gray skies.”
- Burning a single gallon of gas produces 20 pounds of CO2.
- Lunch boxes are hipper than Tupperware.
- “Americans are said to throw away enough aluminum in three months to rebuild our entire commercial air fleet.”
- “The average dishwasher uses about 15 gallons of water per load, while the average dish-washer [that would be you] uses about five gallons of water per minute at the sink.
- The U.S. airline industry uses 53 million gallons of jet fuel each day.

Some of the information in the book is pretty easy – like changing your shampoo. But you can also take things to a higher level by considering your larger environmental impact in the way you travel and eat and how your place of employment operates. The sky is the limit.

– The author is a managing editor at AlterNet

Inside Scoop On Bush Library

The George W. Bush Presidential Library is now in the planning stages. You'll want to be the first at your corporation to make a contribution to this great man's legacy. The library will include:

1. The Hurricane Katrina Room, which is still under construction.
2. The Alberto Gonzales Room, where you can't remember anything.
3. The Texas Air National Guard Room, where you don't have to even show up.
4. The Walter Reed Hospital Room, where they don't let you in.
5. The Guantanamo Bay Room, where they don't let you out.
6. The Weapons of Mass Destruction Room [which no one has been able to find].
7. The Iraq War Room. After you complete your first tour, they make you go back for a second, third, fourth, and sometimes fifth tour.
8. The Dick Cheney Room, in the famous undisclosed location, complete with shooting gallery.

Plans also call for:

9. The K-Street Project Gift Shop where you can buy [or just steal] an election.
10. The Airport Men's Room, where you can meet some of your favorite Republican senators.
11. Last, but not least, there will be an entire floor devoted to a 7/8th scale model of the President's ego.

To highlight the President's accomplishments, the museum will have an electron microscope to help you locate them.

Turn The Bush Plan Upside Down

By Greg Palast

Here's your question, class: In his State of the Union, the President asked Congress for \$300 million for poor kids in the inner city. As there are, officially, 15 million children in America living in poverty, how much is that per child? Correct! \$20.

Here's your second question. The President also demanded that Congress extend his tax cuts. The cost: \$4.3 trillion over 10 years. The big recipients are millionaires. The number of millionaires happens, not coincidentally, to equal the number of poor kids, roughly 15 million of them.

OK class: what is the cost of the tax cut per millionaire? That's right, Richie, \$287,000 apiece.

BUSH CITES POOR CHILDREN

Bush said, "In neighborhoods across our country, there are boys and girls with dreams. And a decent education is their only hope of achieving them."

So how much educational dreaming will \$20 buy? George Bush's alma mater, Phillips Andover Academy, tells us their annual tuition is \$37,200.

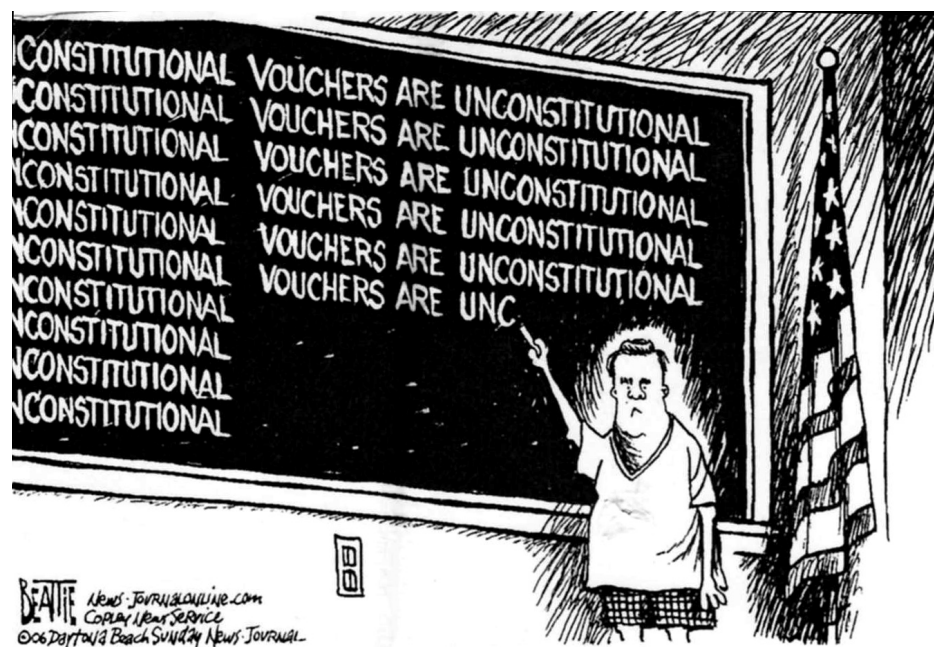
The \$20 "Pell Grant for Kids," as the White House calls it, will buy a poor kid about 35 minutes of this educational dream. So they'll have to wake up quickly – \$20 won't cover the cost of the final book in the Harry Potter series.

If you can't buy a book nor pay tuition with a sawbuck, what exactly can a poor kid buy with \$20 in urban America?

HOW TO PROVIDE A BRIEF DREAM

The Palast Investigative team donned baseball caps and big pants and discovered we could obtain what local citizens call a "rock" of crack cocaine.

For \$20, we were guaranteed we could fulfill any kid's dream for at least 15 minutes. Now we could see the incontrovertible logic in what appeared to be quixotic ravings by the President about free trade with Colombia, Pell Grant for



Kids and the surge in Iraq.

In Iraq, General Petraeus tells us we must continue to feed in troops for another 10 years. There is no way the military can recruit these freedom fighters unless our lower income youth are high, hooked and desperate.

CALL THEM DEMOCRACY ROCKS

Don't say, "crack vials;" they're "Democracy Rocks!" The plan would have been clearer if Bush had kept in his speech the line from his original draft that read:

"I have ordered 30,000 additional troops to Iraq this year and I am proud to say my military-age kids are not among them."

Of course, there's an effective alternative to Bush's plan that won't cost a penny more. Simply turn it upside down. Let's give each millionaire in America a \$20 bill, and every poor child \$287,000.

There's an added benefit to this alternative. Had we turned Bush and his plan upside down, he could have spoken to Congress from his heart.

– Greg Palast is author of the New York Times' best-sellers *Armed Madhouse* and *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*

Eighth Time Not Charm For Bush's Vouchers

By Erika Lovley

When President Bush proposed a \$300 million Pell Grants for Kids program in his State of the Union address, education lobbyist Marc Egan was not surprised.

For seven straight years, Egan has fought various Bush Administration grant programs giving private school scholarships to low-income children.

Each year, Congress has pulled up the drawbridge, warning that a voucher program would divert taxpayer money from public schools.

The eighth time will not be the charm, Egan predicts.

"I was a little surprised it was mentioned in the State of the Union, because vouchers have no support in Congress," he said. "Why the administration is still trying is a bit of a mystery."

THE SAME PROGRAM WITH A NEW NAME

Also in his budget to Congress, Bush highlighted the program that mirrors previous voucher plans that received little support from Democrats and only limited backing from most Republicans.

Still, the latest proposal has ruffled the feathers of dozens of education groups and teachers unions in the National Coalition for Public Education.

They contend a voucher program would siphon vital funds from already struggling public schools. Civil liberties groups also worry it would allow the government to subsidize religious schools.

Education policy veterans, such as National Education Association lobbyist Joel Packer, expect the program could be followed by funding cuts to the No Child Left Behind law, a signature Bush program that requires public school students to read and perform grade-level math by 2014.

HE CONTINUES PLAYING TO HIS BASE

Packer said Bush is consistent in his beliefs.

"I'll give him that. But I don't see the president putting a vast amount of effort into this again."

The administration had offered a similar provision in the original No Child Left Behind bill in 2001, but Democrats blocked it.

The law currently provides a school choice program, the Public School Choice Provision, but it's used by only 2% of students.

Education lobbyists are quietly crafting attacks against the proposal, in case lawmakers don't reject it in the appropriations process.

Some say advocates could instead tuck it into reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind law, while others predict that such a maneuver could scuttle the reauthorization.

NCLB IS STILL NOT REAUTHORIZED

Since the law was not reauthorized in September, interest groups have been pushing Congress to revise the controversial legislation. And the intense fight has stalled the legislation.

More than 1,000 members of the National School Boards Association lobbied for reauthorization – and against vouchers.

American Federation of Teachers lobbyists, working against vouchers, met with freshman members of Congress who may be unfamiliar with the voucher process, in hopes of rallying Republican opposition.

People for the American Way lobbyist Tanya Clay House said the Pell Grants for Kids proposal is a regurgitation of the administration's former grant programs, repackaged with an enticing name.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE REAL PELL GRANT

The federal Pell program, which gives need-based grants to low-income college students, is one of the nation's most successful and recognized education grant programs.

In the past, voucher programs have been proposed under many names, including Opportunity Scholarships and Promise Scholarships.

"A voucher is still a voucher," House said. "I hope this is something that would never see the light of day."

Private schools and religious groups that support school vouchers say Bush's inclusion of the Pell Grants for Kids program in his State of the Union address will drive a national conversation on vouchers as a solution to failing schools.

Vouchers have also been backed by a circle of Republicans, such as anti-NEA Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, and some conservative think tanks, such as the far right Heritage Foundation.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PROGRAM HAS FLOPPED

The federal government is already funding the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program in Washington, which is up for reauthorization this year. It has been a dismal failure.

The program, providing 2,400 students with school choice options, is based on older state programs such as the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, which gives vouchers of about \$6,000 to more than 18,000 students each year.

But pro-voucher groups still have a staggering climb ahead. The Democratic chairmen of the Senate and House education committees, Massachusetts Sen. Edward M. Kennedy and California Rep. George Miller, have rebuked the plan.

"The president didn't commit the resources to expand educational opportunity," Kennedy said in a statement.

"Instead, on top of a \$70 billion shortfall in funding for his own education reforms, he again proposed to siphon scarce resources from our public schools to create new voucher programs. Vouchers are not the answer for students, schools or our nation."

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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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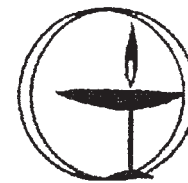
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