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Successful Against All Odds Deflating School Critics

By Frosty Troy

From agenda-driven editorials, TV newscasts, talk radio and televangelists – public schools are maligned today with a ferocity usually reserved for serial killers.

Why? What is it about this 200-year-old institution that makes it a lightning rod? Is it the tool of gluttonous unions described by Rush Limbaugh? Is it the “place of darkness” described by the late Jerry Falwell?

Name one other institution that flings its doors open to all comers – public education is a perfect microcosm of America, warts and all.

Every autumn the miracle of America takes place when the doors of those 88,000 schools are flung open, serving the genius and the retarded, rich and poor, average and developmentally disabled.

You will find here the loved and unloved, the washed and unwashed. Everything America is or ever hopes to be depends upon what happens in public school classrooms.

It's time for an update on the actual status of public education, not the drivel you hear from Republicans in the Oklahoma Legislature and elsewhere.

Outside of the inner cities and rural pockets of poverty, America has a superb public school system – one of the best in the world.

Myth: Teachers teach only nine months – why do they bellyache about low salaries?

Fact: Repeated studies show this isn't true, that the average teacher, if you count hours, does in 9.5 months what it takes many regular 40-hour workers to do in 11.5 months.

Myth: America spends more money on public education and gets less bang for the buck than any other country.

Fact: America is 14th among the 16 industrial nations in public school [K-12] finance.

Myth: American kids score less well than kids in almost every other country.

Fact: This is the biggest canard of them all. Compare apples to apples. America's smart kids are as smart as those in any other country.

The math and science portion of

the SAT is at a more than 30-year high; the ACT is steady despite an additional three million students taking it last year.

Myth: Twenty-five percent of students drop out, evidence of how ineffective public schools are.

Fact: More horse hockey. Any child who drops out is a living tragedy, but don't forget that more than 80% stick it out or come back to finish.

Nearly 700 dropouts wanted CareerTech training this year but were denied it by the Republican-controlled Legislature.

Add to the graduation rate more than 500,000 general equivalency diplomas [GEDs] last year and America is among the best-educated nations in the world.

Myth: We have kids graduating from public schools who can't even read their diplomas.

Fact: You bet! They are among 6.1 million special education kids – many will never read well but they're getting their chance based on whatever gifts they bring to school.

It's the best unreported story in America. It's also the largest unfunded mandate from the federal government.

Myth: Unions are running the public schools.

Fact: If that's true, then why do American public school teacher salaries rank 22nd among the 33 industrial nations of the world?

Myth: The Parent Teacher Association [PTA] is a tool of teacher unions.

Fact: This had to be dreamed up by someone who has never been to a PTA meeting. I ought to know. I am not only a PTA veteran but I hold the National PTA's Distinguished Service to Children Award.

Myth: Teachers are recruited from the dregs of college graduates.

Fact: Nearly half the teachers in America have master's degrees. The political climate is so hateful toward public schools, a third quit within five years. Who can blame them? The committed stick and most are magnificent.

Myth: Public educators are afraid of

competition – that's why they oppose charter schools and vouchers.

Fact: The National Education Association [NEA] has endorsed charter schools but only a nitwit public educator would favor vouchers, which suck funds from one of the most poorly funded public school systems in the industrial world.

Even the charter school movement is hardly the howling success predicted – on average their students score below public school kids in the same community.

Myth: Kids can't read today because schools don't exclusively use phonics.

Fact: America's fourth grade readers just outperformed every country in the world except Finland. [National Assessment of Educational Progress]

Phonics is great but it isn't the only way to learn to read. Some students require a blend that includes whole language instruction – as any good reading teacher will tell you.

Myth: Look how few American kids make it through college.

Fact: Only Britain, Finland, the Netherlands and New Zealand have a higher college graduation rate.

Myth: Entering test scores prove public schools don't adequately prepare students for college.

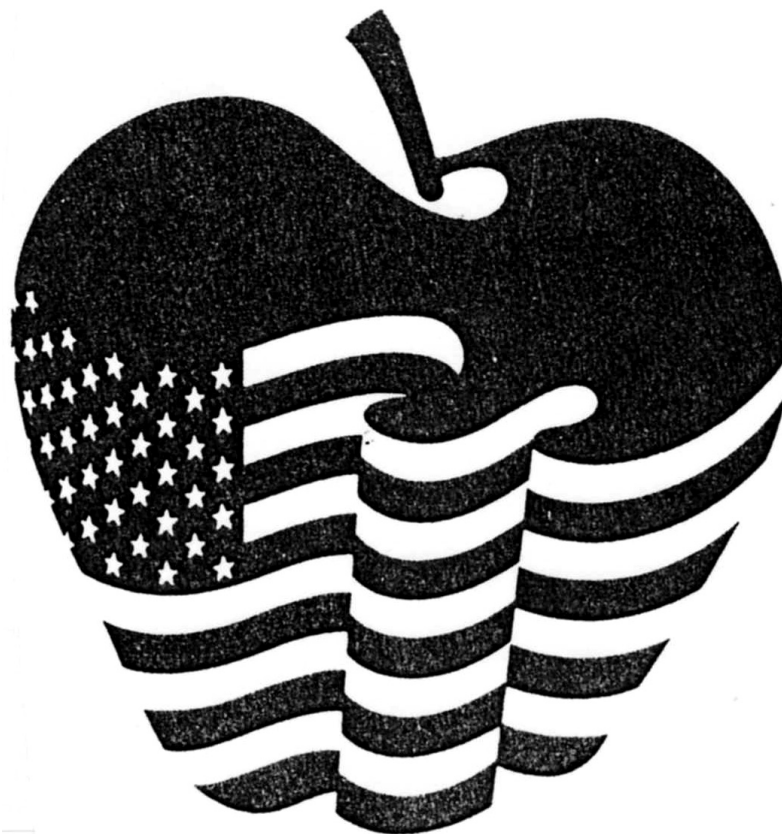
Fact: Any senior can take the SAT or the ACT. As many as 17% of those taking the SAT last year had never made above a C.

The College Board, which owns the SAT, decries constant misuse of test data by critics with an anti-public education agenda. Three out of four test takers this year scored higher than the national average.

Myth: How sad today's kids don't have to take the rigorous courses provided in the “good old days.”

Fact: I wish somebody who could talk slow enough would explain to the likes of Rush Limbaugh that the percentage of high school graduates taking core courses has increased 48%.

Critics who think textbooks are soft ought to check today's math, science and social studies texts. They make yesterday's stuff look like kindergar-



Observations

Dead Wrong

A lame attempt to defend the Bush zero funding of CareerTech was the lowlight of a PR visit to Oklahoma by his Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings.

Her appearance at the state Capitol contained the usual blather in defense of No Child Left Behind [NCLB], discredited by both parties in Congress but hyped by rightwingers everywhere.

The Bush budget would have contained last year's [Perkins Act] CareerTech figure, \$1.16 billion, but he dropped it. Congress is expected to restore it.

When asked about it, Spellings double-talked about how it wasn't working very well – the perfect definition of NCLB. Oklahoma has the foremost CareerTech program in the nation, one heavily supported by both educators and business leaders.

Of course she's paid to propagandize, but just like her boss, Spellings visited only one public school, an elementary school on Tinker Air Force Base.

Disappointment

There are two things to watch when you're reading the Daily Disappointment: What they tell you – and what they don't.

• When Ralph Nader inexplicably offered himself yet again as a candidate for president, the Disappointment headline declared: *Ralph Nader says he expects lawsuits.*

The headline referenced an obscure quote late in the Associated Press story that – without context or explanation – mentioned past Democratic lawsuits aimed at keeping Nader off the ballot in some states.

The Tulsa World also ran an AP story on Nader's candidacy that did not mention lawsuits. The World's headline: *Nader announces for presidential race.*

The Oklahoman's not-so-subliminal message: There's a lawsuit epidemic. It neatly fits the paper's editorial

quest to padlock the courthouse door for average Americans and protect big business and the wealthy.

Don't think for a minute the paper's editorial policy no longer seeps into the news columns, just because Edward L. Gaylord is gone.

• In its breathless campaign to extend OKC's one-percent sales tax for Ford Center renovations, the paper was conspicuously disinclined in both news stories and editorials to mention its financial interest.

Gaylord's daughter and newspaper co-owner Louise is married to Seattle SuperSonics Chairman Clay Bennett, who has petitioned the National Basketball Association to move the franchise to Oklahoma City.

Journalism ethics demand a newspaper routinely inform its readers of its financial interest in stories it covers. Especially in a case like this when it urged taxpayers to finance improvements that would significantly improve the team's – and the Bennett-Gaylord – bottom line.

Do As They Say

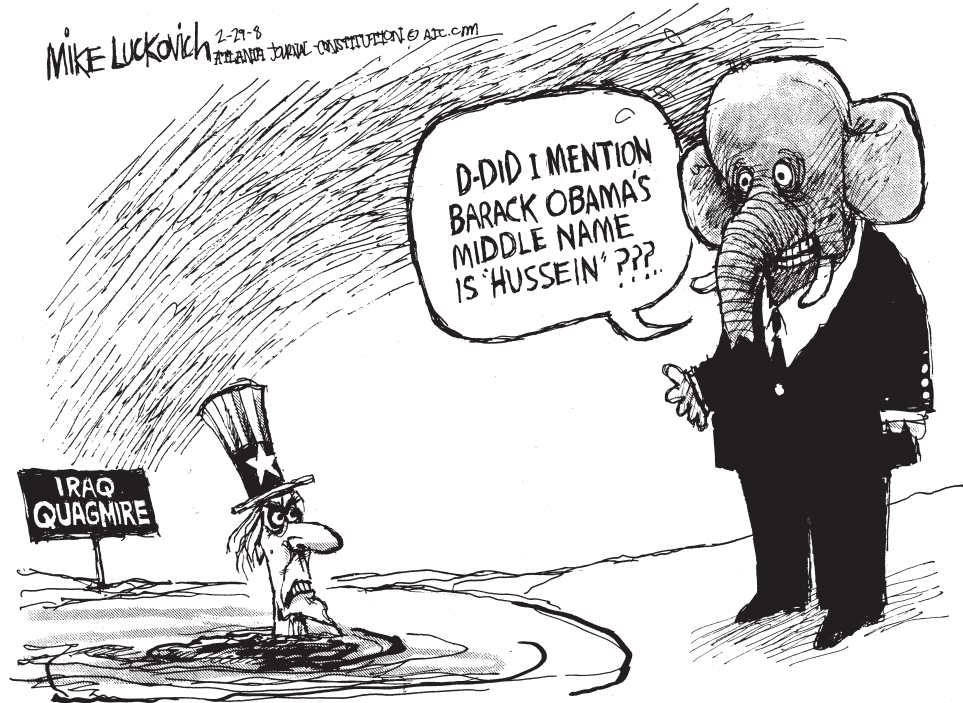
Barack Obama is promising that if elected, he will see to it that every American has the same health care provided to members of Congress by the taxpayers.

Did you know that on the first day in Washington a new member of Congress is invited to sign up for health care. The recommended program is the "Cadillac plan," which features a \$250 deductible and covers "everything," including pre-existing conditions.

Congress, with a neat salary of \$165,200 plus perks, has insulated itself from one of the biggest financial pressures face by ordinary citizens – health care.

All federal workers, members of Congress and their dependents are eligible for the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.

For less than \$1,000 a year, members of Congress also use the office



of the Capitol's Physician, where a \$2 million per year staff of nearly 20 doctors, nurses and technicians is on duty.

For serious operations, it's top-notch government facilities at Bethesda Naval Medical Center.

How does the congressional plan compare to Medicare? A study by the Congressional Research Service showed the prescription drug benefit of the most popular federal-employee health plan was worth 42% more than the standard Medicare drug plan.

Unlike most Americans, members of Congress and their dependents often get to keep their health plans in retirement with built-in cost of living increases.

Retirement? The congressional pension provides that members of Congress may retire as young as 50 if they have 20 years of service [including time in the military], or at age 62 with just five years of service.

The average Congressional pension totals \$53,500. Several dozen former members are pulling down \$100,000 a year or more, thanks to long tenures on the Hill.

Congressional pensions come with annual cost-of-living adjustments. Congressional pensions are twice as generous as comparably paid corporate executives.

Little wonder that a Congress that turns its back on universal health care while sopping up socialized medicine ranks below Bush in public esteem.

Leaders?

If you are one of those preening legislators bragging about \$700 million in tax cuts, never mind the 1,634 Oklahomans on the disability waiting list at the State Department of Rehabilitation Services.

In fact, the agency had to announce it was no longer accepting any new applicants until funding is available to pay for the services.

This is another tragic example of a leaderless Oklahoma, more interested in playing to the crowd than serving truly needed Oklahomans.

The mental health program is in shambles, corrections cries out for help, people are being killed on inadequate highways and sorry bridges.

Add to that list the lack of funding for child welfare services and gross under-funding of programs to address domestic violence.

Don't let the governor or any legislator kid you – the Tax Foundation

reports that in combined local, state and federal taxes, Oklahoma was 50th lowest before that first tax cut was made three years ago.

The federal Rehabilitation Act requires Vocational Rehabilitation and Visual Services programs to categorize clients in groups based on the impact of their disabilities on employment.

DRS was initially forced to place some applicants with less significant disabilities on waiting lists beginning on Jan. 19, 2007.

We are paying a far greater price since disability services include preparing the disabled for work.

Coincidence?

If you think only Republicans are involved in the pay-for-play at the State Capitol, guess again. Check out Democratic Sen. Susan Paddock of Ada.

She is author of Senate Bill 1858, a tax exemption for anyone buying Pre-Paid Legal Services! This came after the Pre-Paid Legal folks put \$20,000 in her campaign coffers.

It was too much for Sen. Mike Johnson, R-Kingfisher, who stated the obvious.

If people can't deduct legal fees from taxes, why allow them to deduct legal insurance premiums? "That's pretty inconsistent," he said.

Democrats mumble constantly about her votes on Republican initiatives – including so-called tort reform. Her hubby is a Republican doctor.

Fairy Tale

You couldn't help noticing that the Republican primaries turned into a Ronald Reagan worshipping contest.

John McCain has fallen all over himself to praise Reagan as a political demigod who never compromised his conservative principles.

Barack Obama even got in on the act, but quickly said he meant only Reagan could deliver a good speech.

The GOP's Reagan fairy tale ignores that federal spending doubled during his presidency, and he raised the annual federal deficit from \$73 billion to \$153 billion.

Too bad Republicans, but it's hard to find any "unshakable set of principles" in the Reagan mess. More of his administration were indicted for felonies than any president in history.

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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

Our deepest sympathy to Billie Letts on the loss of her beloved husband Dennis to lung cancer. Their contribution to the arts is exceeded only by their love in service to Oklahoma.

Dart: To legislative Republicans who won't be satisfied until there is no Workers' Compensation Court. In fact, claims have decreased since 2000 from 19,086 to 14,930.

The Observer helps people think. We don't tell them what to think. We welcome letters and articles with diverse viewpoints, free of personal attacks. Fire away!

Laurel: To Sen. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, for legislation to lower annual property tax rate increases from 5% to no more than 3%. It's about time a decent lid was applied.

Please, please, please notify us at least two weeks before you move. The post office is killing us with charges for changes of address!

Dart: To Rep. Tad Jones, R-Claremore, for his phony attempt to extend the public school year by taking away teachers' critical professional days.

Despite ongoing federal criminal proceedings, the GOP instituted impeachment proceeding against State Auditor and Inspector Jeff McMahan. Gee, it must be an election year.

Laurel: To the AP for reporting a list of fat-cat state sales tax exemptions – including \$13 million for newspapers and magazines. TV, radio and billboard advertising are also exempt.

Somebody at the Oklahoma City Post Office doesn't care for Hillary Clinton. She mailed a powerful campaign piece to OKC voters but it wasn't delivered until Feb. 16. The election was Feb. 5.

Dart: To Senate Republicans who finally got their wish – K.C. Moon has quit as director of the Sentencing Commission. His crime? Telling the truth about prison conditions. He's now working for the Corrections Department.

We don't care where the money comes from, paying OU football coach Bob Stoops a \$3 million bonus is obscene. It adds to his \$3 million salary, highest in the nation.

Laurel: To teacher Anita Hughes and the Drummond Public Schools' Academic Bowl team for winning their 11th straight state championship, 12th overall.

Oklahoma leads the nation as a percentage of the population who say they are evangelicals – 52%. [Pew Forum national poll]

Rep. Jabar Shumate, D-Tulsa, wants to give doctors practicing in poor urban neighborhoods \$15,000 per academic year. He could help pay for it if he had paid his taxes.

Dart: To Sen. Randy Brogdon, R-Owasso, criticizing the Oklahoma Supreme Court for judicial activism. Someone read him the state Constitution – their job is to interpret it.

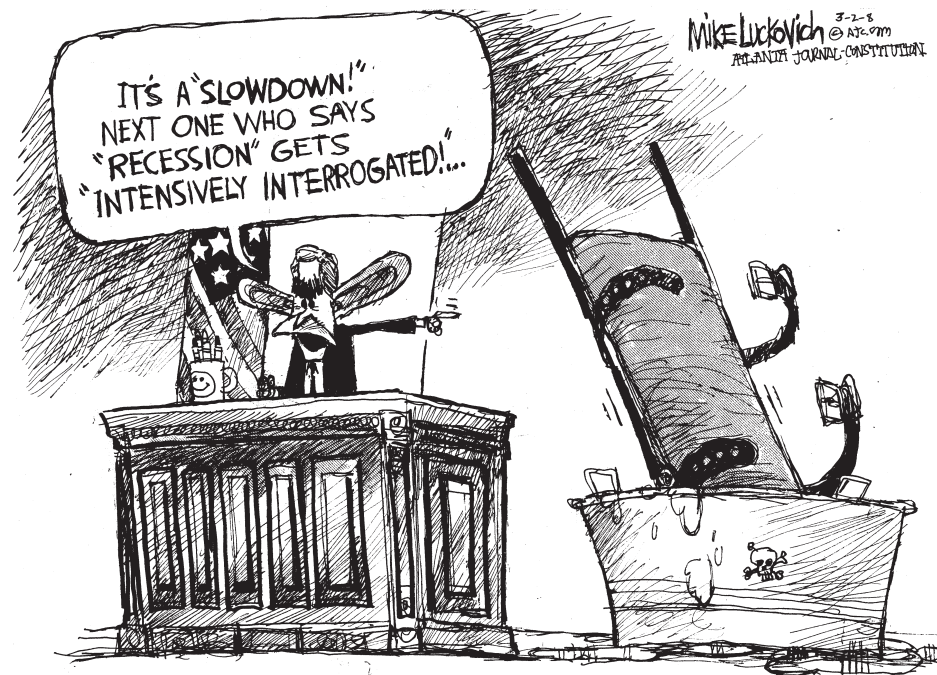
Both the Republicans and Democrats are busy passing tax cuts or exemptions despite a \$114 million revenue hole. If Barnum & Bailey is looking for clowns, we know where they could start.

Laurel: To Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson, R-OKC, for a bill to come up with a single high school graduation number. Three or four are floating around, and that's a disgrace.

How to streamline and consolidate state government? Why, create a new agency – the Office of Accountability is proposed for the Legislative Service Bureau by Sen. Glenn Coffee, R-OKC.

Dart: To GOP legislative leadership for cutting net funding for public school operations by \$13 million in the past two years while operating expenses went up 16.6%.

At least one member of Oklahoma's congressional delegation has seen the light. GOP Sen. Tom Coburn told a district forum it was a mistake to go into Iraq. Can he talk Bush into an exit "strategy."



Laurel: To Democrats on the Senate Rules Committee, voting to kill Sen. Randy Brogdon's bill to let voters decide whether to set 12-year term limit on statewide offices. Voters already make that decision.

Thanks to the likes of U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, the state ranks dead last in the "environmentally friendly" ranking of congressional delegations.

Dart: To those pushing for consolidating the State Medical Examiner's office with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation. Independent medical evidence is critical to a fair trial.

Rep. Gary Banz, R-Midwest City is author of HJR 1080, calling for a state constitutional convention. Maryland and Arkansas did, and corporate money rewrote the documents. Voters killed both new versions.

Dart: To George W. Bush for a budget that calls for zero funding CareerTech at a time when America is desperate for tech-savvy employees. This loss would be \$1.16 billion. Dems told him to take a hike.

Don't hold your breath awaiting passage of House Bill 2222 by Rep. Mike Reynolds, R-OKC, to increase the Ethics Commission budget by 70%. At present they are borrowing paper from other agencies just to get by.

Laurel: To Edmond school teacher K.C. Williams, named Teacher of the Year, and Marlow High School named School of the Year. Both awards were from the Oklahoma State Supreme Court.

Shades of the late Rep. John Monks who was furious because a turnpike rest stop was selling items made in Japan. Sen. John Sparks, D-Norman, has SB 2070 requiring state agencies and public schools to buy flags only made in America.

Dart: To the Oklahoma Commission on Consumer [?] Credit, naming former legislator Butch Hooper, lobbyist for the Pawnbrokers Association, as administrator. Pawnshops already have two seats on the commission.

Insurance would not cover mammograms or prostate cancer screening if GOP Rep. Ron Peterson's House Bill 3111 had been in effect when the Legislature mandated them. He would curb mandates.

Laurel: To Sen. Todd Lamb, R-Edmond, for his drive to require far more security for public schools – including three drills a year and not just one. It can happen here.

A bill wending its way through the Legislature will help put a stop to sleazy, often corrupt, initiative petition campaigns. The latest is out-of-state carpetbaggers pushing an anti-affirmative action petition.

Dart: Legislators lining up with tax exemption bills – even one for gospel singers – while Sen. Mike Mazzei is holding hearings trying to eliminate unwarranted tax breaks. Go figure.

Wonder why the short-handed DHS foster parent program is in trouble? The pay is \$365 to \$498 a month, depending on the child's age.

Laurel: To Suzanne Tate, appointed executive director of the Oklahoma Arts Council, replacing the retired Betty Price. Tate has been deputy director. It's an excellent choice.

State Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, wants to mandate that insurance companies cover autism. His bill is named "Nick's Law" after a 10-year-old boy whose family policy won't cover him.

Dart: To yet another charter school failure – this one in Dallas where 70 students were abandoned and taxpayers were stuck with a \$700,000 bill.

Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, is sponsor of House Bill 2444 that would create a no-gift list so lobbyists and others would know who not to favor. He has refused all gifts since his election in 2006.

Laurel: To Gov. Brad Henry for calling for legislation requiring all tax scofflaws to be posted by name on the state's financial web page. Bravo!

Rep. Mike Shelton, D-OKC, wants to require day-care centers to carry liability insurance. He cited the case of a 3-year-old child who suffered brain damage while in the custody of day care workers.

Has anyone broken the news to disgraced Rep. Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, that he no longer is House speaker? His photo-op news conferences away from the Capitol attract few reporters and scant coverage.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I was not at all surprised when I read the results of the study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The study says a great many Americans are changing religion or abandoning organized religion completely.

I resigned from my church several years ago when it became clear that it would be necessary for me to bow down to King George Bush in order to be a Christian in this country. No thanks. My relationship with God has little to do with the church, and many churches have little to do with God.

The politics and hate mongering coming from the pulpits in this country are shameful. God must be so embarrassed.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

With all due respect to Dean Rader, my family and I voted for Sen. Clinton in the Oklahoma primary because at that time, she seemed the more electable of the two candidates. We are very tired of the current situation and Sen. Clinton seemed at the time to be our best hope.

This was our reasoning at the time and I am certain that there were many, many more Okies who voted for Sen. Clinton with the same motivation.

Mike Rogers
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

Frosty Troy addressed a long overdue topic in last month's Observer, namely marijuana. I agree with everything in his well-written commentary.

He shows the practical, financial, and logical reasons why marijuana should be legalized, taxed, and regulated.

One item that was neglected in this article was the problem with young people being prosecuted for marijuana possession and then denied access to federal student financial aid to attend college. When that happens, all of us suffer. When someone is kept from furthering their education, it leads to a lower paying job and less tax paying capability. We've just shot ourselves in the foot.

Also neglected in the article was the use of medical marijuana and the prosecution of medical marijuana users. Denying patients the right to use marijuana when it alleviates their ills is unconscionable.

We, as Democrats, should be ashamed that we do not stand up to the unreasonable and illogical popu-

lar opinion and insist that our legislators do the right thing.

We must educate the population, and yes, the young people, with accurate information rather than just telling them not to do something. We must educate our legislators in the fact that in continuing with the status quo, we are ruining lives, devastating families, and keeping capable people from working and paying taxes.

First educate yourself on this subject and then the public. At that point our lawmakers must be made to do the right thing.

Legalize, tax, and regulate!

Rae Weese
Broken Arrow

Editor, The Observer:

Laurel: To two Oklahoma Gold Star fathers – both outspoken advocates for ending the Iraq War and bringing the troops home – John Scripsick and Warren Henthorn, whose sons were lost in Iraq. They are featured on the front page of the website of the national organization Gold Star Families Speak Out [www.gsfo.org].

Nathaniel Batchelder
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I think Ann Curry of NBC is as uninformed as the idiot blond who thinks Europe is a country. In her interview with George and Laura Bush, did Curry really say that even his critics think he has done more for Africa than any other president?

He may have done more to Africa, but I wouldn't necessarily say it was always to help. Limiting condom information, demanding they teach abstinence-only in order to get aid for AIDS patients. Give me a break.

She was joking, right? He isn't even close to doing as much as Jimmy Carter has done for Africa and Jimmy Carter hasn't killed hundreds of thousands in pre-emptive wars, either.

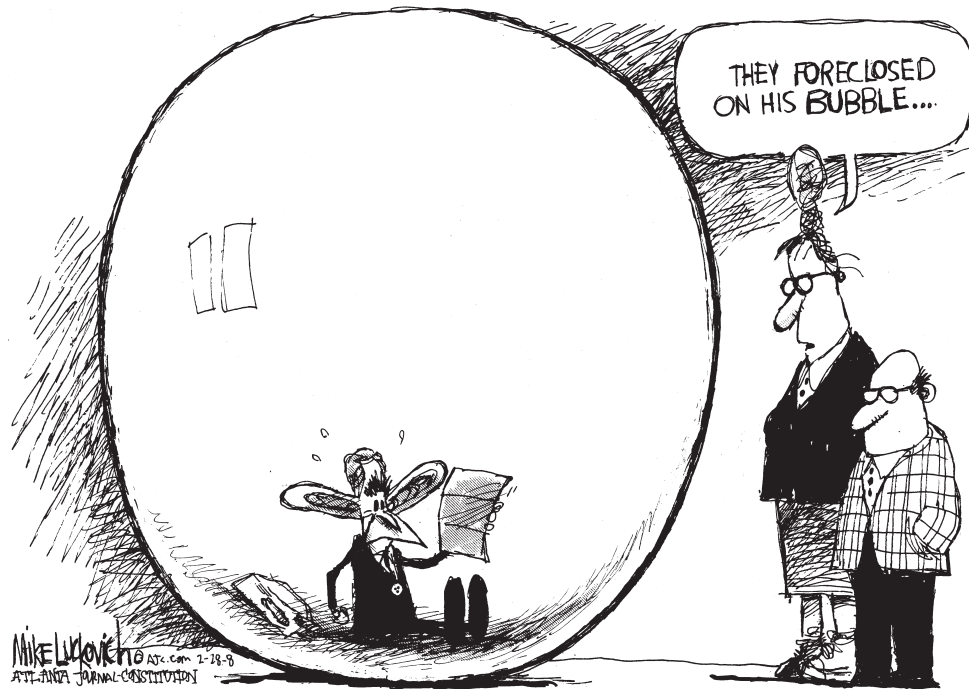
Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

The inmates are definitely in charge of the asylum.

A so-called "cost of living" adjustment is made annually to my social security benefits. In 2008 they were increased 2.3%. On the other hand, Medicare costs increased 3.1%. Core inflation [excluding food and energy costs] in 2006 was 2.5%, in 2007 4.1%. Regrettably, the bulk of my living expenses relate to food and fuel.

In 2007 food costs increased 4.9%,



gasoline 29.6%, medical care 5.2%, building materials 18.9% and airfares 10.6%. Some in government feel Social Security benefits are too generous and wish to tie cost of living to wage inflation. In 2007, average weekly wages, adjusted for inflation, fell .9%.

On a more personal note, I purchase U.S. silver eagles in January as Christmas gifts for grandchildren, a grandniece and grandnephew. Five, six and seven years ago, I paid \$7 apiece. This year, the cost will be \$18.85 for each. That's an increase of 169%.

A good investment you say? No, merely a response to the disastrous fiscal effects this Republican administration has brought down on our heads. Our \$9.3 trillion national debt is up from \$5.6 trillion only 7 years ago!

Tax cuts, allegedly to spur growth [the often discredited "trickle-down" effect] have led to a growing division of "haves" and "have-nots," a rapidly deteriorating infrastructure, explosive growth of the uninsured and homeless, a cheapened dollar, defaults and repossessions in the housing industry and troubled banks and financial institutions.

So much for the canard conservatives are fiscally responsible and liberals big spenders. In my own view, terrorist threats pale in comparison.

And now government proposes to ride to our rescue with a \$170 billion tax rebate intended to "kick start" the economy.

I suspect an "unintended consequence" when many will take their rebate checks and trot down to Wal-Mart to purchase cheap, foreign-made products which will, of course, enhance their economies, but not our own, and, naturally, add to the national debt.

If I didn't have a sense of humor, I'd cut my throat.

Robert Nilson
El Reno

Editor, The Observer:

Media financial reporters – including some on Bloomberg and CNBC, etc., whom you would think to be somewhat sophisticated – really need to learn a very, very basic financial truism. It would make their dire reporting much less dangerous as to how it affects and influences the uninformed listeners or readers.

As the stock market fluctuates, some days going through exceptional throes of buying and selling activities,

one vital, important fact gets entirely overlooked.

And it is this: For every single share sold there was and is a buyer, buying. There was always and forever this fact. It's the very nature of the market.

If reporters could digest this, there would be, hopefully, less negative impact on the public than by using terms like panic, pandemonium, crashes, etc.

The buyer is an all-important player; and often the more intelligent one.

Homer Hulme
Chickasha

Editor, The Observer:

An Open Letter to Michael Gerson:

In making your "depressing stroll through the derelict funfair of the Clinton years" [as you put it,] you failed to mention that ALL of your litany of so-called Clintonian "deceptions" were indeed thoroughly vetted by none other than Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr, a highly partisan Republican [appointed by Jesse Helms & Co.] who spent more than five years and more than \$50 million taxpayer dollars employing more than a hundred top-notch lawyers pursuing the very charges you cite [and more] and all he "discovered" was the evidence that Linda Tripp BROUGHT TO HIM regarding Bill Clinton's dalliances with Monica Lewinski. Starr found absolutely NOTHING ELSE to bolster your specious charges.

Your "litany" against the Clintons doesn't hold water, save the Lewinski business. Your time would be better spent investigating who really ordered Abu Ghraib, what really goes on at Guantanamo, what "rendition" is all about, what was the substance of the Cheney meeting with U.S. energy czars back in 2001, what goes on with all the extra-legal electronic surveillance conducted by this administration, what are all these Bush "signing statements" about, and what is the full and complete record of George W. Bush's military service. That's just for starters.

There's much more, but that should keep you busy for a while.

Final thought: what if a highly partisan Democratic special prosecutor had five years, \$50 million dollars and a hundred top-notch DC lawyers to examine the past seven years of the Bush Administration? Doubtless, there would be sufficient evidence for impeachment AND removal from office if only time would allow.

Frank Silovsky
Oklahoma City

**Frosty Troy's
Commencement Address**
*Students and their parents need to hear
an up-beat send-off. No politics. A word
portrait about this wonderful state*

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But Hurry! Frosty's calendar fills fast**

Frosty's Notebook

Nader

I have a long and checkered relationship with Ralph Nader. It began with his column. The Observer was the only Oklahoma paper willing to carry it – and we did it gladly because it was superb.

Three decades ago you didn't hear the word "consumer" very often. That's when Nader and his youthful band of "raiders" zoomed into the spotlight.

His column was dynamite, causing me the loss of several advertisers, including an Ada car dealer. Nader documented every charge he leveled.

Nader arranged for my wife Helen and I to receive the prestigious Joe A. Callaway Award for The Observer, a fiercely independent publication willing to take on Oklahoma greedheads and errant politicians.

My daughter Marti subsequently interned with the Nader group in Washington and was impressed by the enthusiasm and the kind of change they were fighting for.

My break with him came when Nader announced for President in 2000, ending up costing Al Gore Florida, handing the White House to the most incompetent commander in chief in history.

Nader, still in denial, has announced at this late hour he will run for president as a third-party candidate. My daughter's cat Buddy has a better chance of being the next president.

He's criticizing the top White House contenders as too close to big business and pledging to repeat a bid that will "shift the power from the few to the many." What "many?"

Same song. Second verse. Could be better but gonna be worse. Nobody is kidding anybody – he will only take votes away from Democrats. Republicans will take out ads for him.

Nader, 73, said most people are disenchanted with the Democratic and Republican parties due to a prolonged Iraq war and a shaky economy.

He has always had an inflated ego which at times overshadows his intelligence.

Of course when he said tax and other corporate-friendly policies under the Bush administration have left many lower- and middle-class people in debt he was dead right.

The problem is that Nader can only worsen conditions if, in a close election, John McCain gets to the White House. McCain is for vouchers and retaining the huge tax cuts for the super rich.

"You take that framework of people feeling locked out, shut out, marginalized and disrespected," Nader said. "You go from Iraq to Palestine to Israel, from Enron to Wall Street, from Katrina to the bumbling of the Bush Administration, to the complicity of the Democrats in not stopping him on the war, stopping him



MIKE LUCKOVICH ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION @ATF.COM 2/26/08

on the tax cuts."

How could the Democrats "stop" the war? They don't have the votes and Nader knows it. They can't override a single veto. Nader knows it.

Their Senate margin is so thin, all they can do is block bad Bush initiatives.

Nader also criticized Republican candidate John McCain and Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton for failing to support full Medicare for all or cracking down on Pentagon waste and a bloated military budget.

That's unfair. Clinton wants a single payer plan covering every American. Obama has a fig leaf of a plan that does not cover all Americans.

I laughed out loud when Nader told an NBC interviewer that he would accept no funds from corporate types. He would draw none and he knows it.

Nader also ran as a third-party candidate in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. He is still loathed by many Democrats who call him a spoiler and claim his candidacy in 2000 cost the party the election by siphoning votes away from Al Gore in a razor-thin contest in Florida.

Nader vociferously disputes the spoiler claim but it's a truth no matter how many times he denies it.

After the Florida fiasco I drew a blizzard of letters demanding that I drop Nader's column. I dropped it but not because of the complaints. The Nader I had known had drifted over to the ego side of his personality. His credibility was gone.

He won 2.7% of the national vote as the Green Party candidate in 2000, his percentage dropped to just 0.3% as an independent in 2004, when he appeared on the ballot in only 34 states.

I am saddened by Nader's decline. Alas, he is a self-made man and worships his creator.

A Dream Gone Awry

When you've lived as long as I have, of course you have regrets. But life doesn't give you any do-overs.

One of my regrets is that I didn't make Eagle in the Boy Scouts. Don't laugh. For me it was a really big deal.

When I was a boy growing up in McAlester, the Boy Scouts was the place to be. I could hardly wait until my 12th birthday so I could join. I had brothers who were already members of St. John's Troop One.

I was passionate about scouting, receiving the God and Country Award and qualifying for the Order of the Arrow. I loved the hikes even though I was allergic to poison oak and poison ivy.

Each spring one of my daydreams was about going to Camp Tom Hale in the hills above Wilburton. I made it for three summers. I earned, among others, knot tying and life saving merit badges there.

When the Korean War broke out, I had earned 18 merit badges, making Life Scout, needing only three more to make Eagle. I had even mastered Morse Code.

As an altar boy I took seriously the Catholic Church's militant stand against

Blaming The Messenger

How about the meltdown by Rep. Don Armes, R-Faxon, terming the Oklahoman a liberal publication?

In a letter to his colleagues, he called the media the enemy and wrote "they absolutely hate the fact that we control the House."

Wonder why he's upset? He was one of five legislators warned by the Tax Commission for failing to file state income tax returns. The Oklahoman's crime? It reported the warnings.

"We are all under the microscope, and the media will stop at nothing to tear us apart," Armes wrote. "They want us and our leader. Plug in any name or face you want into that speaker's chair. The attacks are not going to stop."

Did he know something? After he wrote his letter Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, stepped down when it was revealed he had not filed his state taxes for two years.

Cargill's likely successor, Rep. Gus Blackwell, R-Goodwell, also stepped aside when it was reported he has been late in paying taxes.

Communism. I knew the moment I heard that North Korea had invaded South Korea that I would fight them.

Fast forward to the spring of 1952. I was in Korea along with my brother Kevin. My brother Johnny had already rotated out and was home.

On Feb. 18th, Kevin was killed on Heartbreak Ridge, winning the Silver Star. I accompanied his body home, one of the saddest journeys of my life.

After life returned to nearly normal and I was preparing for college, I went to see Bill Edwards, local executive of the Boy Scouts of America. I told him I needed to finish three merit badges to earn my Eagle status.

He was genuinely sad when he told me that during my Army duty, the rules had changed – no adult could attain Eagle status.

I was shocked and bitterly disappointed. No exception, not even for a veteran with a Bronze Star? No.

I remember the words of President Jimmy Carter at his farewell press conference when a reporter cited the many bad breaks that were not Carter's fault.

"Son," he said, "did someone tell you life is fair?"

It isn't.

Armes urged House Republicans to "saddle up," put aside their differences and fight to keep control of the House. He wrote that Republicans had started to reform the state and should keep at it.

"We have to put our egos aside and fight like crazy to make sure the bigger goal is realized," Armes wrote. "We are all elected officials, rock stars, big dogs, whatever. Oh, and I almost forgot, we are all going to be governor."

Blackwell told a Woodward radio station: "We have in the House, quite frankly, people who have marital problems, people who've had drinking problems, people who have drug problems, people who are openly homosexual, people who have all sorts of problems.

"And they represent the cross section of the voters who put them there ... If the qualification for office is that your property taxes are paid on time, then we're going to have sad leadership in the state."

Obviously, Armes and Blackwell would prefer that the media not report the news if it harms politicians. Gene Stipe would agree.

State Tax Cuts And \$\$\$ Consequences

By David Blatt

Although Oklahoma's economy continues to show signs of decent growth, the state budget is in rough straits.

The latest certification by the state Board of Equalization reveals that the state will have less funds available for appropriation in FY '09 than in the current year.

The state is already straining to support the pressing budget needs of its correctional facilities, highway and bridges, public schools and colleges, retirement systems, and social services networks.

Without adequate resources to address these essential needs, our families, businesses and communities will be directly affected by underfunded services.

IT'S THE TAX CUTS, STUPID

The current budget situation is, to a considerable extent, a clear and foreseeable consequence of the tax cuts enacted by recent legislatures.

Between 2004 and 2006, elected officials responded to robust revenue collections – fueled by a strong national economy and a surging energy sector – by approving a set of large and permanent tax cuts.

Figure 1 shows the effect on revenues of the largest tax cuts from this period, which primarily involved cutting the personal income tax and phasing out the state's estate tax.

What is perhaps most noticeable about the tax cuts is that they were structured so that their revenue effects swell out over time, much like the balloon payments common in the recent home mortgage crisis.

OKLAHOMA'S INCREDIBLE SHRINKING REVENUES

The revenue loss from the cuts almost doubles between FY '07 and FY '09 alone, and will continue to grow until the cuts are fully implemented in FY '11.

State revenues typically decline only in the midst of an economic downturn. In Oklahoma's case, however, revenues have begun to fall even as the economy remains strong.

Figure 2 confirms that tax cuts are the primary cause of the state's current budget woes. During the initial years of the economic upturn [FY '04 – FY '06], revenues grew in line with, or more strongly than, the state economy, as measured by state personal income.

Then, as the tax cuts phased in, revenue growth slowed in FY '07 to 4.1%, even as personal income grew a robust 7.7%.

Despite current forecasts of decent, if somewhat slower, economic growth in

Retiring After 46 Years

Dr. Randall Raburn A Superb Educator

He has dedicated his entire career to education. Now, after 46 years of service, Dr. Randall Raburn is passing the torch and leaving behind his legacy.

Effective June 30, 2008, Raburn will retire from the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration, where he has served for the past 13 years as executive director.

"It has been a privilege to work in the field of education for almost five decades. I have enjoyed my time as teacher, principal, superintendent, and executive director," he said. "I leave with no regrets – only hope for the future of public education."

Raburn's passion for his job as executive director of CCOSA and the Oklahoma Association of School Administrators [OASA], has been evident in his many accomplishments for the association and for education in Oklahoma.

He set a goal for CCOSA to become the No. 1 provider of high quality professional development for school administrators.

HE WORKED TIRELESSLY

He has worked diligently to promote high professional standards for school administrators, and has helped grow the association in the last decade to over 2,500 members.

Long-time friend and colleague Bill White, CCOSA administrator, commended Raburn's dedication to the profession.

"Randall has impacted the lives of countless school children as teacher, coach and administrator and an untold number of adults as advisor, educational leader, and friend," White said.

In addition to representing school administrators, Raburn has been the voice at the Capitol for all educators on such issues as school funding, taxation, teacher retirement system, equity, and other education issues.

A GOAL OF QUALITY EDUCATION

His determination to promote quality education has always been motivated by his love for students, and his respect for teachers, school administrators, support staff, and parents.

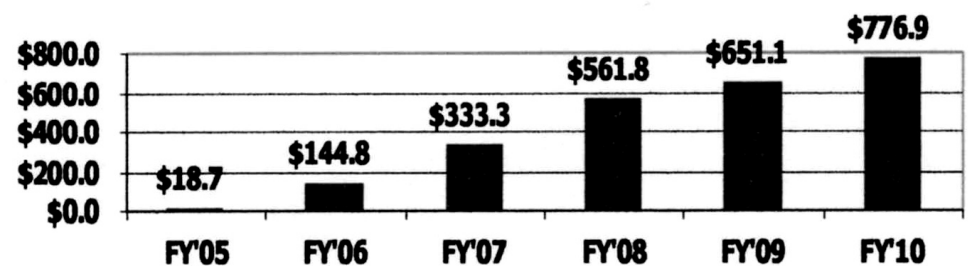
"Throughout my career, I have always placed a great emphasis on instruction," Raburn said. "I believe that for our students to be successful in life, we must provide them with a quality education."

"This means advocating at the Capitol and in our communities to support and improve our educational system."

During his tenure at CCOSA, Raburn, in collaboration with other organizations, has been instrumental in leading the charge on several major legislative

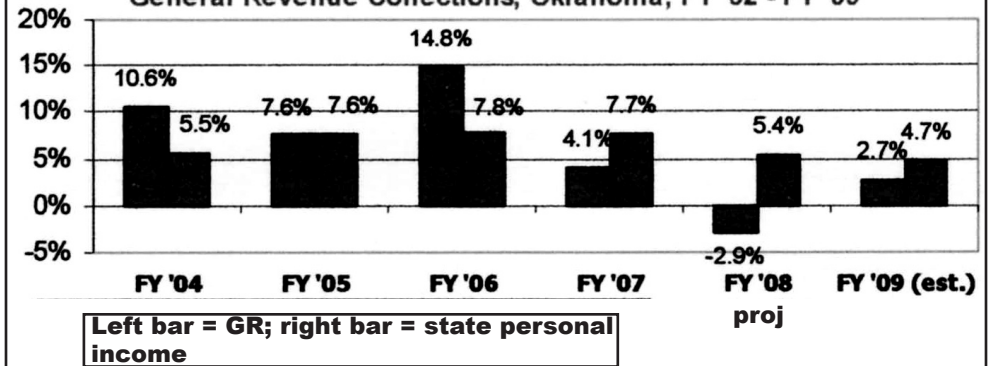
THE OKLAHOMA OBSERVER, MARCH 10, 2008, PAGE 6

FIG 1: Lost Revenues from Select Tax Cuts Enacted 2004 - 2006
FY'05 through FY'10 (in \$ millions)



source: Oklahoma Tax Commission

FIG 2: Annual Change in State Personal Income and
General Revenue Collections, Oklahoma, FY '02 - FY '09



Personal income projections for FY '08 and FY '09 based on OSU 2008 Oklahoma Economic Outlook

the state, general revenues are now projected to fall by 2.9% in FY '08 and to recover by only 2.7% in FY '09.

INCOME TAX COLLECTIONS DOWN 9% NEXT YEAR

In particular, individual income tax collections – normally the fastest growing revenue source in a strong economy – are projected to decline by over 9% in FY '09 compared to their peak in FY '06.

By contrast, state sales tax collections, which have been affected only minimally by tax cuts, are projected to grow by 17% between FY '06 and FY '09.

If personal income tax collections had grown at the same rate as sales tax collections since FY '06, the legislature might be looking at \$630 million more in next year's budget than under the current certification.

These lost revenues would have allowed for funding of critical needs that the current budget situation now puts in jeopardy.

– The author is chair of the Alliance for Oklahoma's Future. For additional information and analysis on Oklahoma budget and tax issues, go to www.ok-budgetalliance.org.

issues that may have long-term positive effects for educators and education.

Passage of the "Educators Extended Service Incentive Program" improved retirement benefits for 25,000 teachers and 2,000 school administrators making retirement benefits for educators similar to those of other state retirement systems.

Led by Raburn, legislation that strengthened certification standards for school administrators was passed. CCOSA, the Oklahoma School Board Association, and the Organization of Oklahoma Rural Schools prepared a lawsuit on behalf of 300 school districts that challenged successfully the constitutionality of legislation that gave exemptions to oil refineries for adding equipment to meet federal guidelines for quality air, saving over \$10 million for schools.

HE SERVED SEVERAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Before becoming executive director of CCOSA and OASA in 1995, Raburn served as superintendent of the Edmond School District for seven years from 1988 to 1995. Other superintendent positions include Mid-Del Schools [1987-88], and Sapulpa Public Schools [1979-1987], and Central High Public Schools [1970-73]. He served as assistant superintendent of Mustang Schools from 1973-1979.

At Central High, before becoming superintendent, he was principal for two years and teacher for five years. He started his career in teaching in 1962 in Lipan, TX.

Raburn has been honored with numerous awards including being inducted into the College of Education Hall of Fame at Oklahoma State University and the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame.

He was recognized twice as the Administrator of the Year by the Oklahoma Association of School Administrators. He has received the University Council for Education Administrator's Excellence in Educational Leadership Award on two occasions.

Raburn and his wife, Margaret, a retired academic advisor at Rose State College, will continue to reside in Edmond and remain active in their church and community. The couple, married for 44 years, plans to do some traveling in retirement.

The Oklahoma Observer salutes him and thanks him for a lifetime of public service.

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Cargill's Crew Bids House Adieu

Two members of disgraced former Speaker Lance Cargill's political family are moving out of the House.

Rep. Rob Johnson, R-Kingfisher, is eyeing a new home at the Corporation Commission, hoping to evict incumbent Democrat Jim Roth in November.

Rep. Trebor Worthen, R-OKC, is giving up his Capitol address in favor of what is often a nomadic existence as a political strategist.

Among Cargill's staunchest allies, Johnson and Worthen retained their leadership posts under new Speaker Chris Benge – Johnson as majority whip, Worthen as elections and redistricting subcommittee chair.

But both also won considerable enmity in a GOP caucus that splintered over Cargill's resignation, forced because he failed to file and pay his taxes promptly and because he is target of an ethics investigation of alleged campaign finance irregularities.

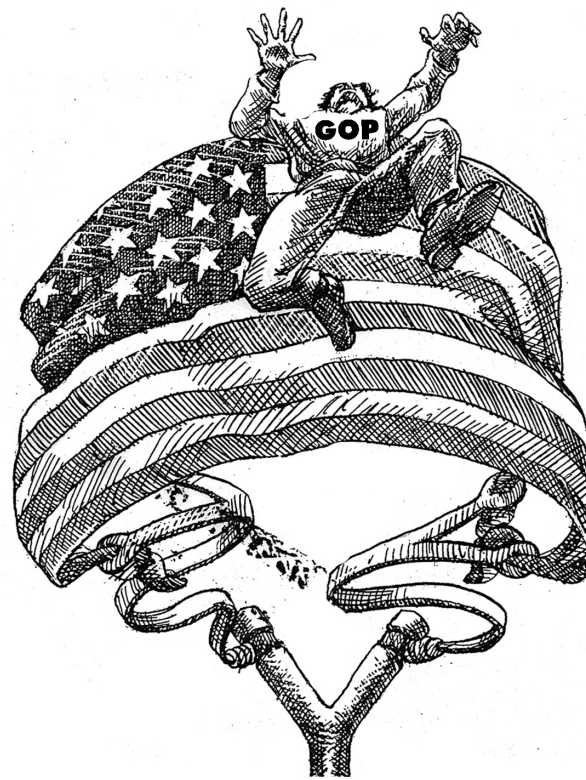
The departures put in play two House seats that Democrats consider winnable – especially in a presidential election year when widespread dismay over the incumbent Republican could boost Democratic fortunes in what otherwise would be a solidly Red State.

It's hardly far-fetched that Democrats could pick up at least one of the two seats, helping close the gap on their 57-44 House disadvantage. After all, it's always easier to win an open seat than to depose an incumbent.

Further, Worthen's and Johnson's re-election victories two years ago give Democrats hope.

Worthen won by only 278 votes out of 8,226 cast – in an area where his father, Robert, was elected nine times, a run that ended only because of term limits.

Johnson, meanwhile, did not dominate a district where his family name –



thanks to a successful Kingfisher car dealership – carries considerable weight. In a three-way race, he garnered only 726 more votes than his Democratic and independent foes in an election in which 10,960 total votes were cast.

For Cargill, the loss of two key lieutenants further dampens his dreams of a Lazarus-like return to power in state government – a Fairy Tale scenario that plays out in his mind alone.

PUBLIC FORUM

Purpose Driven Politics: It's No Game

By Lynn Green

Editor's Note: Oklahoma County Democratic Party Chairman Lynn Green delivered these remarks at a weekly party luncheon in OKC in late February.

Before I begin, I would like to reflect on why we are involved in this business called "politics."

I first got involved in union politics when I ran for the job of political director of the American Federation of Teachers in 1996 and then ran for the position of county secretary in 2003.

But like most of you, I have been involved in various activities long before that.

Some times, politics can seem like a game or sport we play. We engage ourselves in contest, we work to win votes like so many points on the scoreboard, and we hope that through our efforts we win and the other guys lose.

Someone like me, who was never athletic, can be rightly accused of using politics as a "sports substitute."

But that's really just the surface stuff of what we are doing, the method to get what each of us earnestly desires: a society where human dignity is upheld as our highest goal, a society where "justice for all" is more than just words we mumble over when we say the pledge to the flag.

We must always be aware that our actions have real purpose. What we do and whom we elect may mean that a child, born into poverty, can be vaccinated

against preventable diseases, and that child can receive the pre-school education she needs to stand on equal footing with any other child in this state.

Our work may mean that a family can stop using the emergency room doctors as their primary care physicians. That a soldier who has fought in a war he didn't create can find healing for wounds of both body and mind. That a single mother who works a full-time job does not find herself at the end of each month falling further and further into debt and despair. That an elder, a member of the Greatest Generation, having built this Great Nation we all love, does not have to choose between buying groceries and buying prescription drugs.

When I was a lad growing up in a preacher's home, we had Sunday School attendance contests and membership drives trying to increase the people attending church. We were frequently reminded that what we were doing was more than just a numbers game to out-do other churches. We were admonished, "There are Souls in our Goals."

Well, when you are asked to take part in a political activity, talk to strangers in person or over the phone, volunteer time and effort, give money, remember when you are asked to take part in a political drive of some sort, There are lives in our Drives.

I know you will do your part.

– The author is a public school teacher who lives in Oklahoma City

An Open Letter To The Torturer-In-Chief

By Karen Webb

Mr. Bush,

I am the same age you are and I never thought I would see the day when the United States of America used my tax money to torture people, and did it in my name.

But then you say it is all right under the correct circumstances, which means we have to let you decide those circumstances.

The United States of America wants to execute six men as war criminals that were interrogated using waterboarding, but you think you are above all the laws of man and think God has given his blessing on it.

I really hope there is a hell, because it is there for you and yours.

You are giving permission for it to be used on our soldiers when they are captured, but you probably think the enemy should ask you first.

I hope the entire world brings you up on charges because you are a war criminal. I think that you think anything is all right, under the correct circumstances. If Laura stands at your side on this she deserves everything they give you. There is no way I could allow my husband to torture.

Anyone who uses torture in my name deserves the worst sort of punishment, and I am praying for the day you are tried and convicted.

John McCain has said the Democrats will lead us astray. The Republicans in Congress have allowed you to do this and they deserve to be defeated, every single one of them.

There will never be a day when I ever even consider voting for a Republican, nor will I attend any church where the pastor has not been in complete opposition to

anything you have ever thought about doing to a prisoner or anyone else.

I am not in favor of the death penalty, but I think I could come to approve of it under certain circumstances.

You deserve to be convicted in a world court. Really, execution is too good for you. Better life in prison, where we get to watch you on TV everyday for the rest of your life.

You took kids to war on completely false intelligence and I think you knew it. Now, you are torturing people because you think it suits your purposes and is justified. Hitler thought he was justified, too.

– The author lives in Moore

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How Feds Robbed The Indian Trust

By Michelle Chan

Across Indian country, two things are never in short supply: Rich natural resources and endemic poverty. That paradox is driving a long-standing battle between indigenous people and the government trust that holds money generated from their lands.

A class-action lawsuit, *Cobell v. Kempthorne*, targets a federal trust fund that handles revenues from activities like oil drilling and logging on land owned by individual Indians and tribes.

The trust's financial operations – covering more than 56 million acres and dating back for more than a century – have left a spectacularly messy paper trail.

Many beneficiaries say they are in the dark about how much has been paid out and what is still owed, and charge that the system has drained wealth from Indian communities.

BENEFITS WERE NOT PAID TO INDIANS

"We know that the government collected our money, but it hasn't been paid to us as individual Indian beneficiaries," says Elouise Cobell, a Blackfeet Nation member who initiated the suit in 1996 on behalf of several hundred thousand account holders.

The battle is finally drawing to a close. On Jan. 30, U.S. District Judge James Robertson ruled that the trust's finances are beyond salvaging.

Calling for a settlement, he denounced the Interior Department's "un-repaired, and irreparable, breach of its fiduciary duty over the last century."

The decision builds on a 1999 ruling that ordered a management overhaul and a complete accounting to comply with the trust's original mandate and federal reforms enacted in 1994.

TRUST IN CHRONIC DISARRAY

The department has spent years retooling its accounting systems, but various court reviews found the trust in chronic disarray.

Not only are financial records inaccurate or missing, critics say, but many landowners have little information on their lands and lease activities, or even the value of their assets, aside from sporadic checks issued by the government.

The system disbursed about \$300 million to individuals and \$500 million to tribes last fiscal year, and holds hundreds of millions in individual account funds.

THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT THE SWINDLE

Whatever the exact amount that has been unpaid, Cobell says, evidence of a swindle is strewn across Blackfeet territory. Though the earth is replete with oil, timber and other resources, she says, "there is poverty all over the place."

Around the turn of the 20th Century, the government established the trust system to manage lands on behalf of Indians, based on the presumption that natives lacked the competency to control their resources.

Today, the government says the trust functions primarily as an institutional conduit for land-based revenues, produced under agreements between landowners and business interests.

ANCESTORS WERE UNCOMPENSATED

But the trust looks different from Jay Dusty Bull's spread, which spans about 8,500 acres near Browning, MT. To the 23-year-old Blackfeet member, his family's grazing leases provide a financial boost but hardly compensate for the theft his ancestors suffered.

"A hundred years ago, were our Indians, who didn't speak English, who couldn't



read or write, given that same opportunity?" he says. "No. 'Sign an X here. Here's \$40.' Billions of dollars could have been taken off of our land 100 years ago, and we don't know."

Defending its ongoing accounting work, the Interior argued that a "statistical sampling" of records for several thousand transactions had uncovered only a small percentage of errors, and that "additional work would neither produce a better result nor be cost effective."

GALE NORTON HELD IN CONTEMPT

But official probes haven't been so reassuring. In 2002, U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth held then-Secretary Gale Norton in contempt for failing to initiate the historical accounting process years after Congress had mandated it.

The Interior Department, he wrote, had "indisputably proven it is either unwilling or unable to administer the trust competently."

Court-appointed Special Master Alan Balaran reported similarly dismal findings. Inspecting a Dallas branch of the Minerals Management Office in 2003, he noted the "chaotic" disorganization of financial documents, along with the "unexplained presence of an industrial shredder" before office staff forced him to leave.

Outside the courtroom, advocates have pressed Congress for legislation to completely overhaul the trust's management and accounting systems.

For many landowners, balancing the government's books would be one small, overdue counterweight against a legacy of injustice.

Fred Harris Update On Kerner Report

Little progress has been made in reducing poverty, inequality, racial injustice, crime and media inaccuracy over the last 40 years.

The Eisenhower Foundation has released an update of the seminal Kerner Commission report.

"Although there are some notable exceptions, we give America a D+," said Eisenhower Foundation Chair Fred Harris, an Oklahoman at the time and one of the only two living members of the original 1968 commission.

"But the good news is we know what works and our solutions fit American values of freedom through opportunity to every citizen," Harris said.

MORE MIDDLE CLASS BLACKS, LATINOS

Among the notable exceptions the update concludes that compared to the late 1960s, substantial African-American and Latino middle classes have emerged, the number of minority entrepreneurs has greatly expanded, and there are large numbers of minority local and state elected officials.

Nevertheless the U.S. still has a long way to go. In terms of wealth, America is the most unequal country in the industrialized world and the report notes that poverty has deepened for those who have remained poor.

The proportion of the poor below half the poverty line was about 30% in 1975 and 43% in 2006. The child poverty rate is no exception. Racial disparities are more acute today, the update notes.

IMPORTANT CAUSES OF POVERTY

The Kerner Commission found in its original report that unemployment and under-employment were the most important causes of poverty, yet African-American unemployment has continued to be twice as high as white unemployment during each of the four decades since 1968.

Stressing "we're all in this together," Harris and Foundation President Alan Curtis called for policies advanced by the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, DC.

They include tighter labor markets through strengthening of the Humphrey Hawkins Full Employment Act and passage of the Employee Free Choice Act for union organizing.

BENEFIT THE POOR AND THE MIDDLE CLASS

They also called for passage of an Employment Training and Job Creation Act "that will benefit not just the poor but also workers and middle class citizens."

The update also advocates the Education Equity Act proposed to provide all public school students an equal chance and to reorient federal college aid back to a more grants-based system.

The report was released on the first anniversary of the bipartisan 1968 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders convened by President Lyndon Johnson and popularly referred to as the Kerner Commission, after then-Illinois Governor Otto Kerner.

INCLUSIONARY PROCESS

The release kicked off an inclusionary process that will gather reaction from scholars, political figures, private and public sector leaders and communities from around the nation before issuing a final report later this year.

The findings are particularly salient as the presidential race has engendered a public conversation on the role of government, poverty, inequality, race and crime.

For more information and copies of the executive summary please contact Marc Goumbri at 202.425.8397.

BOOKS

No 'Straight Talk' On Iraq War Cost

By Joe Conason

THE THREE TRILLION DOLLAR WAR

The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict
By Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes
Current Affairs
192 pages, \$22.95

As a presidential candidate, John McCain stands out not only for his vocal endorsement of the unpopular war in Iraq, but also because one of his own sons is a Marine Corps officer on active duty there. He supports the war, even at the price of his own career or the life of a child he loves.

Yet although the senator from Arizona is obviously no chicken hawk, he carefully avoids "straight talk" about the real costs of this war in dollars and debt.

Like every other politician who agrees with the Bush policy of prolonged war and occupation, he still pretends that we can spend hundreds of billions on this endless misadventure without collecting enough tax revenue to pay the actual costs.

Hundreds of billions?

Sorry, but that vague estimate is probably far too modest, according to a new book by Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and author Linda J. Bilmes. They warn that the war's "true budgetary cost," excluding interest, "is likely to reach \$2.7 trillion."

THE REAL COSTS OF WAR

Aside from the price of munitions, contractors, transport, fuel and other fixed costs, their calculations are based on the government's continuing obligation to provide medical care and disability payments for the thousands of wounded Iraqi and Afghanistani veterans over the coming decades.

Those costs represent a moral debt on which we cannot default – and they will grow larger every day that we maintain the occupation. Even if the war could be ended immediately, the fiscal obligations incurred by the invasion and occupation will continue.

Beyond the mandatory disability payments, medical and psychiatric care and additional benefits to which our vets are entitled, the nation will face years of increasing military budgets to restore the equipment and readiness of our battered armed forces, especially the Army and the National Guard.

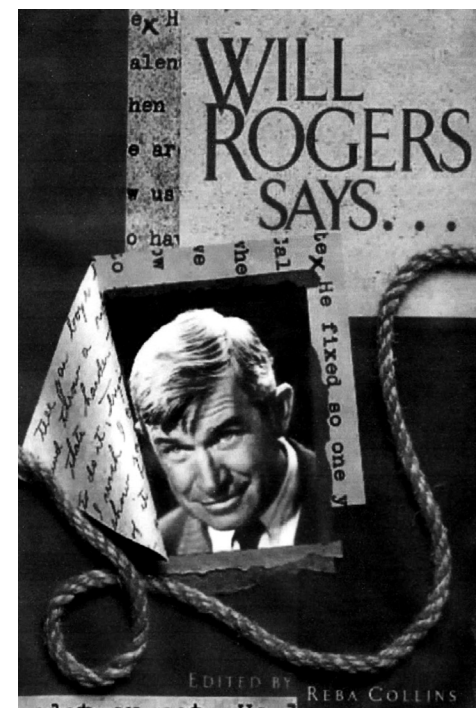
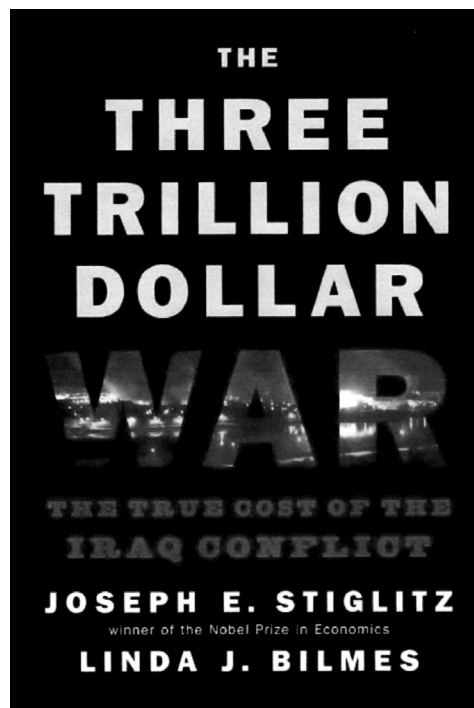
Even in the "best-case" scenario envisioned by Stiglitz and Bilmes, with our troop presence declining rapidly, the U.S. commitment in Iraq is still likely to cost no less than \$400 billion over the next several years, on top of the \$800 billion or so that we have spent to date.

REALISTICALLY, IT WILL COST TRILLIONS

Those figures, which don't include veterans' benefits, add up to \$1.2 trillion.

What the authors call their "realistic-moderate scenario" for a prolonged presence in Iraq will cost twice as much or more.

Having served at the highest levels of the federal government, both authors understand that the Bush administration's war budgeting has been a travesty – aided and abetted by lawmakers such as McCain, who have gone along all the



way.

Instead of accounting honestly for the war's costs and requesting the necessary funds to pay for them, the White House has routinely used "emergency" supplemental requests as a device to hide the truth. The emergency process prevents the Office of Management and Budget as well as congressional staff from thoroughly reviewing the data.

Inevitably, they explain, this lack of transparency and competence has resulted in waste, fraud and corruption in payments to contractors, most of them politically wired, while essential equipment and veteran care remain underfunded.

PAYING WITH CREDIT, NOT CASH

Compounding the disgrace is the fact that the Bush administration and Congress financed these "emergency" budgets by borrowing, rather than raising taxes, as the United States has traditionally done in times of war.

The Bush administration has insisted on reducing taxes, with most benefits accruing to the wealthiest individuals, while piling on debt for succeeding administrations and generations [and leaving the nation's infrastructure to rot away, too].

Politicians like McCain who have cooperated in this outrage should tell us why they still call themselves "conservative."

Back in 2001, when he was still in his maverick phase, the Arizona senator voted against the Bush tax cuts. Today, he says that he objected to the budgetary flimflam that cut taxes without reducing program costs, but at the time he claimed to worry about the excessive premiums for the very rich.

MCCAIN CHANTS GOP TAX MANTRA

Now, he runs around promising "no new taxes" just like every standard right-wing Republican.

In an unguarded moment, McCain once confessed that he doesn't know much about economics.

Even he should be able to comprehend the disastrous fiscal effects of the Iraq war, which its proponents originally promised would cost us almost nothing.

Perhaps he should ask an economist to calculate the real cost of occupying Iraq for a hundred years, as he imagines – and how many generations will pay dearly for this mistake.

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Will's Witicisms Never Lose Their Punch

By Mike Nobles

WILL ROGERS SAYS ...

Edited by Reba Collins
University of Oklahoma Press
86 pages, \$12.95

"Never in our history was we as willing to blame someone else for our troubles." – April 28, 1935.

In excess of 25 million visitors from around the world have trekked to Claremore, OK to visit the Will Rogers Memorial and they keep coming at the rate of some 500,000 a year.

You know, Claremore "... a town that reached its enviable position through hard work, perseverance, and water that will cure you of everything but being a Democrat." [April 1929.]

They come to view the films in which he starred, to see the mementoes of his life, and to read some of the two million words he wrote that are contained in 22 volumes of his collected writings.

DEMAND FROM WILL'S FANS

This gem of a book was prepared by Dr. Reba Collins, Director Emeritus of the Will Rogers Memorial and staff in response to a never-ending string of inquiries from fans of Will Rogers throughout the world.

I have read the book twice now and continue to find quotes and remarks that are humorous, insightful, inspirational and best of all as relevant and pertinent today as the day they were written.

Rogers had the almost singular, uncanny ability to write to, and for, what he characterized as the great normal majority.

Perhaps the reason his writings are so timeless is his claim that "Every gag I tell must be based on truth. No matter how much I may exaggerate it, it must

have a certain amount of truth." [March 12, 1932.]

ETERNAL TRUTH IN WILL'S WITICISMS

How else to explain after reading one of his statements today the reader is likely to smile and say, "You know, that is so true."

For example, in this age of the so-called super information highway it is interesting to read Rogers take on publicity: "We are living in an age of publicity. It used to be only saloons and circuses wanted their name in the paper, but now it's corporations, churches, preachers, scientists, colleges, and cemeteries." [June 23, 1931.] Yes, you read it right, 1931!

Space does not permit me including the myriad statements worthy of the reader's attention. Taxes, presidents, war and peace, military service, women and religion are just a few of the topics included in this wonderful collection.

This book is a must-have for any reader interested in the wit and wisdom of Will Rogers. Buy two and give one to a friend.

– The author, cofounder of A Gathering of Writers, lives in Tulsa

Fridays With Frosty

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

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Coburn Again

Packing Heat In National Parks

By John Rosenthal

A sound and bipartisan public lands bill is being held up in the Senate in behalf of the gun lobby's attempt to overturn decades-old safety regulations barring people from carrying loaded guns in national parks.

Owners are now required to keep their guns unloaded, disassembled and stored when in national parks and wildlife refuges.

Sen. Tom Coburn, Republican of Oklahoma, is threatening to block the public lands bill unless it includes his amendment to allow the packing of live firearms in the parks.

There is no justification for such a change. Coburn's office is reduced to offering a scenario out of a "Death Wish" movie: "Guns locked in your trunk are of no use when a rapist is attacking your family."

PARK RANGERS ARE OPPOSED

A coalition of retired park rangers has warned that wielding live firearms would increase the risk to public safety and more easily empower game poachers than family vigilantes.

The Coburn amendment is another attempt by the gun lobby to extend laissez-faire gun rights to college campuses, churches and workplaces even as the nation suffers firearm fatalities and rampages that take 30,000 lives a year.

The Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, is right to oppose it as a poison-pill intrusion into the lands bill, which – among a multitude of useful and largely non-controversial provisions – would authorize new wilderness areas and safeguard historic and cultural sites from coast to coast.

PANDERING TO THE GUN LOBBY

The temptation for lawmakers to pander to the gun lobby is never-ending, and 47 senators are on record in favor of tolerating loaded weapons in the parks.

At least their position was expressed in a plea to the Interior Department, where a hearing process would presumably encourage open public debate.

The Coburn amendment is the gun culture's dangerous end-run around the public interest.



Coburn isn't alone. The Oklahoma House is home to an equally bizarre wing-nut – Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie. His bill would allow any licensed student to carry guns on campus.

Remember, the guy who just did the mass killings on an Illinois campus was a "model student" admired by both faculty and fellow students.

We know the gun lobby is all powerful in Oklahoma but if this bill makes it to his desk, Gov. Brad Henry ought to veto it to protect campus lives, not save them.

Have You Had It With Gun Violence?

By John E. Rosenthal

Let's get this out of the way. I am a gun owner and a staunch supporter of the Second Amendment. What I do not support is extending the rights embedded in the Second Amendment to terrorists, criminals, and children.

In the wake of a horrific campus shooting at Northern Illinois University, where 21 students were shot, we're reminded again that national gun laws must be strengthened.

Sadly, gun laws have only been weakened since the massacres at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech. To be sure, these headline-grabbing mass shootings may not have been preventable.

But beyond the headlines, consider this news: 83 Americans die each and every day from gun violence. And much of that violence is very preventable.

FEDERAL LAW HAS MANY LOOPHOLES

Current federal law allows an unlimited number of easily concealable handguns and military-style weapons to be sold privately in 32 states without a criminal background check or an ID.

Why do we take such a hands-off approach to these dangerous weapons? The National Rifle Association [NRA] and the gun industry lobby are a big part of the answer.

You have to show ID to purchase alcohol or cigarettes. But if you want a Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifle [capable of penetrating steel and taking out an armored vehicle from more than a mile] you need only to show up at one of 5,000 legal gun shows and fork over the cash – no ID or background check required!

TERRORISTS STOCKING UP ON WEAPONS

It is well documented that al Qaeda, Hizbullah, and IRA terrorists have exploited this loophole in U.S. gun laws to purchase military-style weapons from "private sellers" at gun shows.

In a recent radio debate with me, an NRA official confirmed that the organization is opposed to uniform criminal background checks for fear they will "shut down gun shows."

The NRA says that not even people on the suspected terrorist watch list should be barred from purchasing guns because – are you ready for this? – "we do not know how people are put on the list" and "many times people are victims of mistaken identity."

MOST AMERICANS WANT BACKGROUND CHECKS

Eighty-nine percent of Americans said they wanted mandatory background checks for anyone buying a gun, according to a 2007 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and The Tarrance Group survey.

But the NRA has continually blocked such common-sense legislation as mandatory background checks and five-day waiting periods to buy a handgun.

NRA policies handcuff national law enforcement's ability to effectively regulate private gun sales, gun shows, and even the sharing of crime-gun trace data within the law enforcement community.

By putting guns into the hands of terrorists, criminals, and the mentally ill, the policies of the NRA helped create a society where defense by guns becomes

mandatory.

MONEY SPEAKS LOUDER THAN COMMON SENSE

Meanwhile, the bank accounts of the NRA leaders and lobbyists are enriched and congressional coffers are replenished. Gun manufacturers reinforce this cycle by investing in the NRA.

According to Federal Elections Commission Reports the NRA has spent more than \$22 million on congressional candidates in order to support its agenda during the past four election cycles.

In 2004, the NRA spent nearly \$4 million to re-elect George W. Bush. Immunity from lawsuits and freedom from consumer protection regulations and manufacturing standards are just a few of the benefits delivered by the NRA and provided by a complicit president and Congress.

YES, IT CAN BE SUCCESSFUL

Massachusetts stands out as an example of a state that has successful gun violence prevention legislation. Along with 17 other states, it has enacted background checks for all gun sales.

Only Hawaii has a firearms fatality rate lower than that of Massachusetts. Hawaii is fortunate; bordered by water, it is less accessible to gun traffickers than Massachusetts, where more than 60% of guns traced to crime come from out of state.

Bay State neighbors New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine are three of the top four crime-gun source states for Massachusetts, where guns are easily purchased by prohibited buyers without a background check or an ID.

BACKGROUND CHECKS ARE POSSIBLE

Most law-abiding citizens like me buy guns from federally licensed dealers required to perform background checks.

Incredibly, federal law allows criminals and terrorists who can't pass background checks to easily buy guns from private individuals in 32 states without detection.

The bloodshed in our communities and schools is largely preventable. Of course, not every law is going to stop violence completely, but shouldn't we help prevent the tragedies we can by weeding out the criminals?

It is time for reasonable people – the majority of Americans who agree with me – to insist that Congress enact sensible and consistent federal laws that require criminal background checks for all gun sales in the U.S.

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Making Corrections

A boy was watching his father, a minister, write a sermon.

"How do you know what to say," he asked.

"Why, God tells me."

"Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?"

USA Killing Field

Prayers Will Not Stop Gun Pandemic

By Tim Rutten

It was a particularly grim and bloody February on one of the world's great killing fields – the United States of America.

Los Angeles paused for the largest police funeral in its history when it buried Officer Randal Simmons, a 51-year-old father of two and the LAPD's first SWAT team member to die in the line of duty.

Simmons was shot dead and Officer James Veenstra was badly wounded when they, along with others in their unit, rushed into a San Fernando Valley home where a disturbed young man had killed three members of his family and was believed to be holding others hostage.

In Oxnard, an eighth-grader walked into a classroom and fatally shot a classmate in the head, apparently because the boy was gay.

MODEL STUDENT OPENS FIRE

At Northern Illinois University, a model graduate student walked into a lecture hall, shot five students to death and wounded 16 other people before committing suicide.

There have been three other campus shootings since Feb. 8, including one at Louisiana Technical College, where a woman shot two students to death before killing herself.

Earlier in the month, a gunman in Kirkwood, MO, burst into a City Council meeting, killed five people and wounded the town's mayor.

A few days before that, a gunman herded five women in a suburban Chicago clothing store into a back room and shot them all to death in what authorities believe was a botched robbery.

THE UBIQUITY OF GUNS

All these wrenchingly tragic crimes are linked by a common factor – the ubiquity of guns in America.

Given that we're in the midst of the most hotly contested presidential campaign in recent memory, you'd think that all this bloodletting might become a campaign issue.

If you thought that, you'd have reckoned without regard to the gun lobby's near-total victory among the politicians of both political parties.

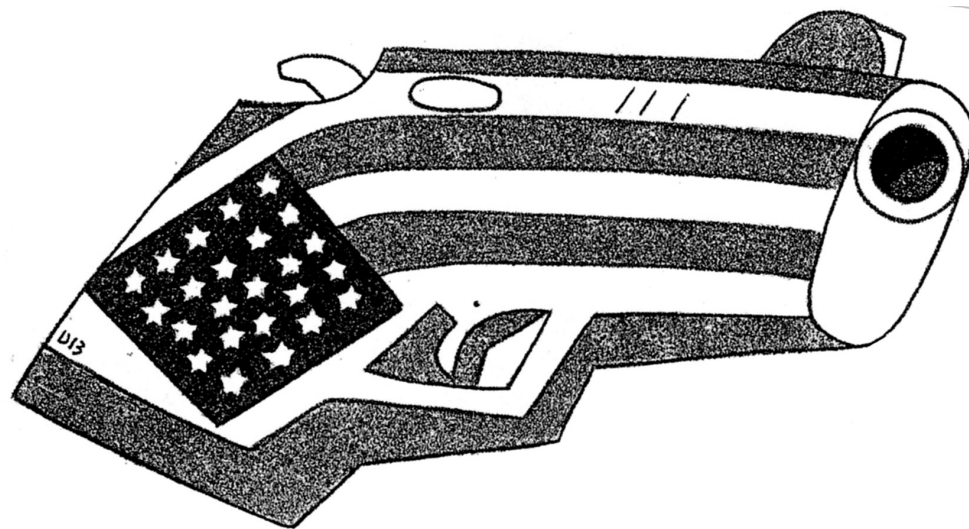
The Second Amendment fundamentalists who cluster around the National Rifle Association the most successful single-issue constituency in modern American politics.

GUNS CONFER POWER ON THE UNSTABLE

The truth is that guns make the malicious, the malcontent and the mad powerful. They confer the power of life and death on the demented and deranged – and yet we do nothing.

There are more guns circulating in the U.S. today than ever before, somewhere around 250 million, according to projections by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

The only one of the candidates who even nodded to the Illinois college massacre was Sen. Barack Obama, who happens to vote an easy drive from the campus.



Campaigning in Wisconsin, he said his "prayers" were with the victims and their families, then quickly added that he believes the Second Amendment confers an "individual right" to gun ownership.

REPUBLICAN JUDGES OPEN FIRE

The reason for that bob and weave is that the latter point is the gun lobby's current cause celebre. Over the years, 11 of the 13 federal appellate districts have held that Second Amendment rights are collective, pertaining, as the Constitution says, to the maintenance of "a well ordered militia."

Recently, however, a court in the District of Columbia struck down that jurisdiction's handgun ban, ruling that the Second Amendment confers individual rights to gun ownership. The case – District of Columbia vs. Heller – is before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Vice President Dick Cheney, 55 senators and 250 members of the House have filed a brief supporting the individual rights position to which Obama hastened to show such deference.

CONCEALED WEAPONS ON CAMPUS?

It isn't as if our lawmakers aren't willing to do something to protect our students, however. Twelve state legislatures – those in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington – are considering bills that would allow students who obtain concealed-weapons permits to carry guns on campus. Presumably, they'll only fire in self-defense.

Confronted with this sort of social idiocy, it's hard to know whether to chortle or choke.

How many times can we really stomach another politician telling us – as Obama did and President Bush did after Virginia Tech – that their "prayers" are with the victims of that day's gun-inflicted atrocity?

WE NEED MORAL COURAGE NOT PRAYERS

Prayers won't bring the dead back or make the living safer. Our children don't need prayers; they need leaders with a modicum of moral courage.

Nobody is asking anybody to commit political suicide. But it would be better than edifying to watch just one of these dreary temporizers exhibit a fraction of the courage Randal Simmons, James Veenstra and their comrades showed when they put themselves at risk for people they believed were hostage to violence.

At the moment, we are a nation held hostage by the pandemic of gun violence. We need leaders brave enough to admit that, and to offer our children something more than a collective shrug and the chance to join the arms race that has made our school campuses a killing ground.

© Los Angeles Times

Student Is Shot For Coming Out As Gay

Oxnard, CA, is a mostly working class town near Ventura, about an hour north of Los Angeles. In a junior high classroom there Feb. 1, Brandon McInerney, 14, shot a classmate, Lawrence King, also 14, in the head.

Police say the killing was premeditated and that McInerney shot King because he'd recently had started to wear makeup and jewelry and had proclaimed himself gay.

Several students said King and a group of boys, including the defendant, had a verbal confrontation concerning King's sexual orientation a day before the killing.

Politics Vs. Nutrition

Just in case you wondered about the connection between politics and nutrition ...

Two alligators were sitting at the side of the swamp. The smaller one turned to the bigger one and said: "I can't understand how you can be so much bigger 'n me. We're the same age, we was the same size as kids. I just don't get it."

"Well," said the big 'gator, "What you been eatin', boy?"

"Republicans, same as you," replied the small 'gator."

"Hmm. Well, where do you catch 'em?"

"Down at 'tother side of the swamp near the parkin' lot of that country club."

"Same here. Hmm. How do you catch 'em?"

"Well, I crawls up under one of them big SUVer's and wait fer someone to unlock the door. Then I jump out, grab 'em on the leg, shake the livin' crap out of 'em, and then eat 'em!"

"Ah!" says the big alligator. "I think I see your problem. You ain't gettin' any real nourishment. See, by the time you get done shakin' the crap out of a Republican, there ain't nothin' left but credit cards and a gun!"



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Say It, Obama: 'I Am A Proud Liberal'

By Eric Alterman

Four years ago, National Journal, using comically flawed methodology, calculated that John Kerry was the Senate's "most liberal" member. Today, they've decided it's Barack Obama.

What happened next was like clockwork: ABC News's The Note introduced the story as "one of those titles Obama could live without" because, well, you know ... it kind of sounds like "leper."

Covering a rally for the Illinois senator, an Oakland Tribune reporter quoted Republican National Committee spokesman Paul Lindsay observing, "Barack Obama claims to unite the country, but his new distinction as the 'most liberal' member of the Senate confirms that he's only uniting the extreme left-wing of the Democrat Party."

LIBERALS HAVE TO DENOUNCE EXTREMISM

"It's true enough that this is a moment when the Democrats are called upon to reject extreme liberalism [whatever that might be] and to embrace moderation," Michael Kinsley sagely observed four years ago, "but that is only because every moment is such a moment."

"This is basically not a liberal country," explained John Harris, then political editor of the Washington Post and now an editor of the professedly apolitical tip sheet Politico.com, in May 2005. "It's a conservative country."

Well, that's that.

Space precludes a complete recap of all the problems with the MSM's [mainstream media] assumptions here, but let's start with the fact that National Journal rankings are nonsense.

CHECK HIS REAL RECORD, NOT FAKERY

Obama is not "more liberal" than Bernie Sanders, Russ Feingold or Ted Kennedy, as any sentient individual could attest. The fact that Obama finished No. 16 three years ago, and No. 10 two years ago, implies that he moved sharply left during his presidential run.

The truth is, he merely missed a lot of votes. National Journal did not distinguish between important votes and silly ones, however, and so the missed votes skewed the results beyond recognition.

Had the magazine used the far more respected ranking system devised by political scientists Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal, Obama would have ranked around No. 11 this year and No. 21 in the previous Senate.

Of course, that's not going to matter come November.

GEORGE W. BUSH MADE FUN OF KERRY

"Senator Kerry is rated as the most liberal member of the United States Senate, and he chose a fellow lawyer who is the fourth most liberal member of the United States Senate," George W. Bush joked four years ago. "Back in Massachusetts, that's what they call balancing the ticket."

Kerry ran away from the label, telling USA Today about the Massachusetts liberal tag: "People know it's a lot of malarkey."

So, alas, did John Edwards. Asked by ABC's Ted Koppel, "Are you a liberal?" he responded, "No. I don't believe in labels, first of all. I don't think they mean anything. I think what John Kerry and I are is mainstream America."

NEW BOOK COMING ON LIBERALISM

As I like to think I demonstrate almost to death in my about-to-be-published book, *Why We're Liberals: A Political Handbook for Post-Bush America*, if you look at issue after issue, whether economic, social or foreign-policy related, the majority position is actually the "liberal" position.

One needs to add caveats when it comes to abortion and perhaps national security, but even here the conservatives cannot claim credit for anything more than scaremongering among the American majority.



But therein lies the catch. Scaremongering – as George W. Bush and Dick Cheney have so convincingly demonstrated – is perhaps the only remaining area of conservative competence, thanks largely to media cowed by its transparent tactics.

While many on the left, including Hillary Clinton, prefer to let sleeping words lie and allow the right its victory over "liberal" and thereby adopt the moniker "progressive" in its stead, I think this is a mug's game.

DEMOCRATS DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE

The label will be forced on Democrats regardless of their preference, and weaseling out of it will only make them look wimpish, as it did Kerry.

Rather than shying away from the L-word, Democrats should embrace it proudly, while ensuring that their definition is the one that carries the day.

In an age of conservative collapse, it needn't be so difficult. Look, for instance, at Jonah "Liberal Fascism" Goldberg.

Speaking to New York's Liberal Party in September 1960, Jack Kennedy proclaimed, "What do our opponents mean when they apply to us the label 'liberal'? If by 'liberal' they mean, as they want people to believe, someone who is soft in his policies abroad, who is against local government and who is unconcerned with the taxpayer's dollar, then ... we are not that kind of 'liberal.'"

KENNEDY DEFINED REAL LIBERALISM

"But if by a 'liberal' they mean someone who looks ahead and not behind, someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions, someone who cares about the welfare of the people – their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights and their civil liberties – someone who believes we can break through the stalemate and suspicions that grip us in our policies abroad, if that is what they mean by a 'liberal' then I'm proud to say I'm a 'liberal.'"

Obama has not yet responded to the National Journal survey, but his campaign spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, has taken the smart, Kennedyesque tack.

"The Democratic Party needs to nominate someone who shows a clear contrast with where Republicans are, on issues like the war in Iraq and the economy and the influence of lobbyists on Washington," she explained.

"One of the reasons he's received such strong support is because he's drawn the starkest contrast on those issues."

Say it, Barack. Say it loud, and say it proud!

John McCain's Political Quagmire

By Joe Conason

Within weeks, the number of American troops killed in Iraq is likely to reach 4,000, assuming that the average number of fatal casualties per day remains steady.

It is an arbitrary number, given meaning by the fact that the nation may briefly take notice, but a day will come in this presidential campaign when Sen. John McCain must explain what he thinks we have gained by the sacrifice of those men and women.

Anticipating that prospect must make McCain uneasy. Speaking to reporters on his campaign bus the other day, he worried aloud that unless he can persuade voters that current policy is succeeding in Iraq, "then I lose. I lose."

Almost immediately he regretted his candor and asked for a quick rewrite. "If I may, I'd like to retract 'I'll lose.' But I don't think there's any doubt that how they judge Iraq will have a direct relation to their judgment of me, my support of the surge," he said.

MCCAIN'S REASONS FOR WORRY

As the presumptive Republican nominee – representing the continuation of a presidency that has fallen from favor with as many as eight out of 10 Americans – McCain has ample reason to worry.

His forthright support of President Bush, the war and the escalation of the past year is unlikely to endear him to independent voters who otherwise admire his

maverick image and reform record.

They still feel betrayed by the exaggerations and lies that led us into war. They don't want to spend any more lives or money on this misadventure.

Against that overwhelming public sentiment, McCain insists that he can see "a clear path to success in Iraq," with American and civilian casualties declining and Iraqis assuming responsibility for their own security. The Arizona senator evidently realizes that his recent prediction of a century-long American occupation did not go over well.

100 YEARS WAR ISN'T ACCEPTABLE

"All of us want out of Iraq," he told the Associated Press on Feb. 25. "The question is how do we want out of Iraq?"

Yet, even while he uttered those soothing words, the Pentagon was preparing a new deployment schedule that proves the path to success is far from clear. The "surge" in U.S. combat forces has not led to stability, but to a terrible dilemma for American commanders in Iraq. The current level of combat troops is not sustainable, but reducing that level is likely to provoke increased violence.

For the moment, the White House hopes to maintain enough force strength to forestall the inevitable reckoning until some time after Election Day.

Certainly the troop escalation helped to revive McCain's fortunes in the Re-

See QUAGMIRE Page 13

Limbaugh Trying To Wreck The GOP

By Eric Boehlert

Rush Limbaugh, the marauding Frankenstein's monster of the Republican Party, is on the loose again, causing all kinds of political damage with his signature off-balance swings.

As has become his custom recently, the pain from Limbaugh's rampage is being felt by his creators – his enablers inside the GOP.

Limbaugh and the rest of his Get-John McCain brain trust – Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Michelle Malkin, and campus instigator Ann Coulter – have been tripping over themselves to get in front of a microphone [preferably a television one] to denounce the Republican Party's nominee and to suggest that perhaps conservatives should even vote Democratic come November.

After years of watching Limbaugh and his various band of midnight riders within the Republican Noise Machine launch countless, hateful crusades against liberals and Democrats, it's extraordinarily satisfying to watch the Republican Party leadership discover what it feels like when Limbaugh sets his venomous, factually-challenged sights on their own front-runner.

TIRADE IS WELCOMED BY DEMOCRATS

For progressives, the sprawling GOP brawl is what blogger TRex would call a schadenfreude sundae. What could be more enjoyable than watching McCain get bogged down in the far-right swamp?

Answer: Watching a handful of rightwing pundits come to the belated conclusion that Limbaugh is a dunce.

Or, as one Weekly Standard blogger put it, the Limbaugh-led response to McCain is "unhinged and at times spectacularly disgraceful."

Dinesh D'Souza concluded, that, yes, Limbaugh is an "egomaniac" who "has grown accustomed to conservative bigwigs worshipping at the Shrine of Rush."

Really? Limbaugh is spreading misinformation? He's wallowing in demagoguery while bordering on megalomania?

THEY ARE PLAYING FOR PLAUDITS

He and his pals appear to be far more interested in the number of media mentions they rack up than they do in advancing the conservative movement? Ah, what a tangled web the GOP weaves.

Wonder how McCain and the Republican Party minions enjoy following behind Limbaugh's broadcast each weekday with a bucket and shovel, cleaning up the mess spread all over the floor. Enjoy!

This is what Republicans created. They wanted Limbaugh to be an attack dog and to chew up and spit out his or the party's opponents. They wanted him to label Democrats as traitors ["What's good for al Qaeda is good for the Democratic Party in this country today"], to label them abhorrent and mentally deranged.

WHEN THE SHOE WAS ON THE OTHER FOOT

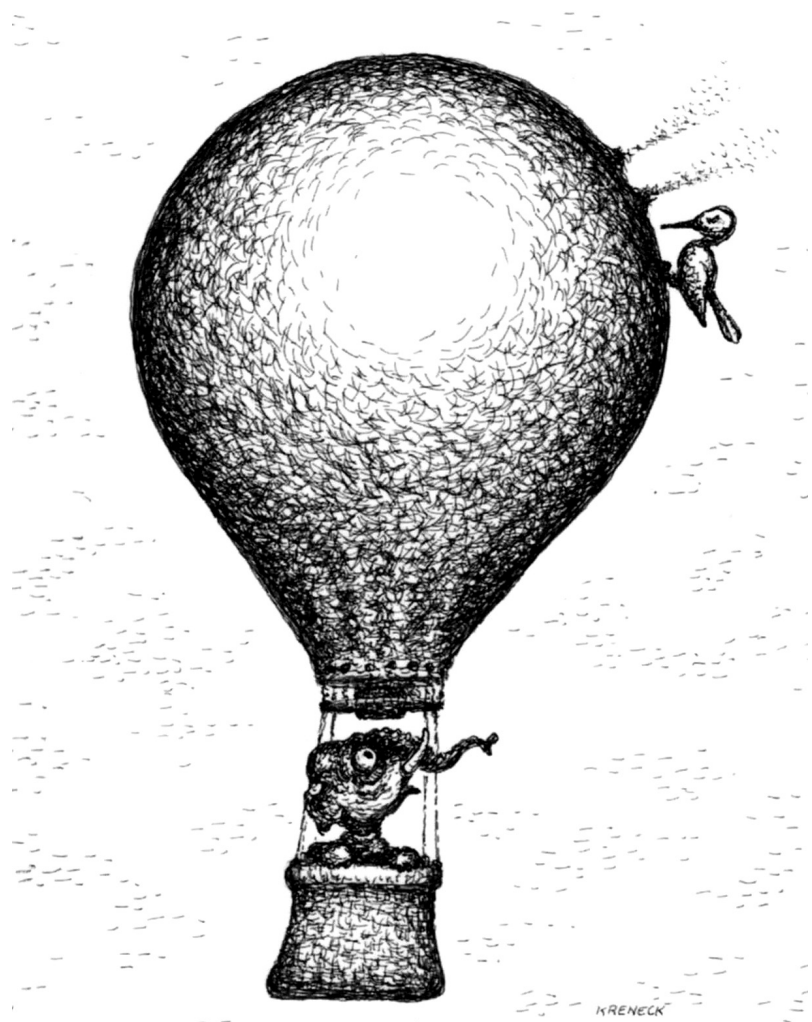
They wanted Limbaugh to ignore any semblance of decency when demonizing the other side. Indeed, there has been virtually no offensive line that Limbaugh has crossed that Republicans have not dutifully justified or explained away.

Even last year when Limbaugh denigrated members of the U.S. armed forces, calling military men and women who criticized the war in Iraq and advocated withdrawal "phony soldiers," what did the GOP do? It rushed to Limbaugh's defense.

It really was rather sad to watch former Sen. Bob Dole write a letter to Limbaugh trying to reason with the talk-show host about whether candidate McCain was sufficiently conservative.

HE WANTS LIMBAUGH TO CALM DOWN

Or when McCain himself suggested that the talk show hosts simply "calm down." Or when Bud McFarlane, former national security adviser to President



Reagan, took to the pages of The Wall Street Journal to urge Rush and his angry pack to "be rational."

Rational? Where have these Republicans been for the last decade?

The Noise Machine doesn't do rational. Was Limbaugh being "rational" when he toasted photos of the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib as "good old American pornography?"

Was Malkin being rational last year when she attempted to Swift Boat a traumatically injured 12-year-old boy? Was Coulter being rational – well, ever?

If there's one thing the Republican Noise Machine is allergic to, it's reason. And decency, and respect, and rational behavior.

SILENCE AMONG REPUBLICANS

Fact is, every time Limbaugh causes a controversy these days, the Democratic Party's political fortunes rise just a little bit – such as when he's treating McCain like a bum, or degrading phony soldiers, or mocking actor Michael J. Fox for allegedly faking the symptoms of his crippling Parkinson's disease while appearing in a Democratic-sponsored campaign ad.

What's so spectacular for the home team is that Limbaugh's crusade to demolish McCain stems from the radical right's fervent desire to cleanse the Republican Party of those who are deemed to be insufficiently pure in their conservative beliefs.

And it's not just the candidates. Limbaugh has been clear that his deep disdain for McCain is driven by the fact that he might attract voters in the fall – the wrong voters – who do not adhere to the radical right's litmus test of right and wrong.

What Limbaugh and company are doing with their diatribes is launching political correctness into the stratosphere, and in the process herding voters toward the Democratic camp.

© Truthout

QUAGMIRE

From Page 12

publican primary contest, quelling any dissent among his rivals [except for the indefatigable, unelectable Rep. Ron Paul].

ONLY REPUBLICANS BUYING SURGE HYPE

Yet the escalation appears to have had little political impact outside the GOP, despite all the promotional hype. If McCain is truly depending on the surge to elect him in November, he won't find the data reassuring.

In national surveys, many Americans agree that sending more troops has improved conditions in Iraq. But those same surveys show that the temporary improvement has not changed their opinions about the war.

A substantial majority believes that invading Iraq was a mistake, that we should bring the troops home within a year and that the Bush administration has handled the war badly, or very badly.

For months we have heard little discussion of the war, as the primaries diverted us with the ephemera of push polls, plagiarism and Fred Thompson.

WAR DEBATE WILL RE-INTENSIFY

Sooner or later, the debate over the war will intensify again, offering its leading senatorial advocate an opportunity to tell us: why the invasion was justified, given the absence of weapons of mass destruction; what he expects the continuing occupation to accomplish; when those objectives will be achieved; and why the installation of a Shia regime so closely linked with the mullahs in Iran is worth the sacrifices that we all mourn.

So far, McCain has preferred angry sound bites to substantive argument. He regularly accuses Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and the Democratic leadership

in Congress of wanting to "wave the white flag of surrender," a demagogic cliché that ought to be beneath him.

But it is important to remember that on the subject of military conflict, the venerable veteran is not always rational. He has said we should have pursued "victory" in Vietnam, although we lost 10 times as many Americans there as we have to date in Iraq.

Perhaps someone will eventually ask him a simple question: How many dead is too many in this war?

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**DRUG CAUSING MOST PROBLEMS ... ALCOHOL
DRUG CAUSING MOST DEATHS ... TOBACCO**

AND THE REASON WE HAVE A DRUG WAR IS ...?

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Love Your Country?

Top Five Objectives For True Patriots

By Paul Buchheit

Throughout history, some of the most respected defenders of liberty felt that patriotism implies thoughtfulness over blind acceptance of the norm.

Socrates, Henry David Thoreau and Martin Luther King Jr. all encouraged active efforts to improve one's country by adhering to the highest standards of behavior, by government and by the citizens themselves.

There is certainly room for improvement in America. Here is a list of candidates for thoughtfulness over blind acceptance.

HOW WE SPEND OUR MONEY

The United States is responsible for almost half of the world's annual military expenditures of over \$1 trillion, yet President Bush approved another record increase in the U.S. defense budget for 2008. The total estimated cost of the Iraqi and Afghanistan conflicts is now \$811 billion, much more than the \$518 billion spent on the Vietnam War. Congressional Democrats estimate that the average American family of four has contributed over \$20,000 to the war in the Middle East.

As 40% of each American citizen's tax bill – about \$5,000 a year – goes for military equipment that protects us from Cold War enemies, we spend only one-tenth of 1% of our GDP on infrastructure [in 2005], compared to 9% for China.

The American Society of Civil Engineers gave D to D- grades to our drinking water, navigable waterways and energy power grids. Every time our power structures go out or our roads and bridges crumble, the money needed to fix them is being spent in Iraq, or on unstable allies in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia.

WHAT WE GIVE TO THE WORLD

According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service, nearly half of the guns sold to developing countries in 2005 came from the United States.

In 2006, 20 of the top 25 recipients of U.S. arms sales in the developing world were declared undemocratic or human rights abusers by the U.S. State Department's own Human Rights Report.

The United States sold weapons to 18 of the 25 countries involved in active conflicts. We have armed both sides in conflicts between India and Pakistan, Iran and Iraq, Greece and Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel, Peru and Ecuador, China and Taiwan, and Israel and the rest of the Middle East.

In Saudi Arabia, the United States provided arms to protect the monarchy from other Saudis who were also armed by the United States.

THE PEOPLE WE IGNORE

As we fight for freedom in the Middle East, people in Nigeria live with 24-hour gas flaring and air and water pollution caused by our own oil companies, while angry young men roam the streets with guns because they can't find jobs.

Ten-year-olds in India get whipped as they work without pay in textile factories making our clothes. Children in the Congo work 12-hour days digging tin oxide out of dusty, toxic mines for pennies a day so that we can have our cell phones.

A young Congolese boy named Muhanga Kawaya tells us what children have to endure to dig out minerals for our cell phones.

"In the hole you have to crawl and squeeze and suck in your belly to make it through. The next danger is the huge rocks above; often they bury us and once they move, it's instant death. Then there's the darkness. And there's no air. Once you get down more than 200 feet, the airflow stops altogether. It's up to you to figure out how to breathe.

"And then, when you do finally come back out with the cassiterite, the soldiers

Quarter Of Women Victims Of Violence

By Will Dunham

About a quarter of U.S. women suffer domestic violence, U.S. health officials report, with ongoing health problems that one activist likened to the effects of living in a war zone.

Some men also experience domestic violence, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey found.

The CDC said 23.6% of women and 11.5% of men reported being a victim of what it called "intimate partner violence" at some time in their lives.

The CDC defined this as threatened, attempted or completed physical or sexual violence or emotional abuse by a spouse, former spouse, current or former boyfriend or girlfriend or a dating partner.

The CDC estimates that 1,200 women are killed and two million injured in domestic violence annually.

Many of these women have other long-term health risks and problems, the CDC said.

"It confirms that living in a dangerous and stressful environment has long-term health impacts. It's like living in a war zone," said Rita Smith, executive director of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, an advocacy group.

More than 70,000 people in 16 U.S. states and two territories – Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands – responded to the CDC survey in 2005.

In Oklahoma, more than 25,000 cases of domestic abuse were reported – 38% higher than the national rate per 100,000 population.

Black women were most likely to report domestic violence than whites or Hispanics, but it was most frequent among multiracial, American Indian and Alaska



are waiting to grab it at gunpoint. Which means you have nothing to buy food with."

OUR LIFESTYLES

We Americans have 5% of the world's population but use 25% of the world's oil. The average American home has increased from 1,000 square feet to 2,400 square feet since 1950, even though the average family size has steadily decreased.

Our big vehicles average fewer miles per gallon than 20 years ago, yet we're driving 24 more miles than in 1980. We use as much gas idling in traffic as the annual output of Equatorial Guinea, the third-largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa.

The "ecological footprint" measures the amount of land and water needed by a human to support his or her consumption and waste.

The average person in the world has an ecological footprint of 5.5 acres. Except for the three million people living in the United Arab Republic, the United States has the highest ecological footprint in the world, with each of 300 million people requiring almost 25 acres.

If everyone in the world consumed at the U.S. rate, we would need five planet earths to sustain us.

INCOME DISPARITY

According to numerous recent studies. Income and net worth have actually been dropping for all but the top 10% of American households since the 1970s.

An average two-income family today has less disposable income than one-income families had 30 years ago, largely because of escalating home mortgage, healthcare, and child-care costs.

Some oil company and military defense executives made up to \$100 million in 2006. Some hedge fund managers made over a billion dollars in 2006. An individual who worked for 50 years, making \$50,000 a year, would realize total lifetime earnings approximately equal to one day's work for a hedge fund manager.

See PATRIOTS Page 15

native women.

Women of all income and education levels suffer such abuse, although it was more frequent among the poorest and those who attended but did not graduate from college. "Perhaps one of the factors at play here is the high prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses, and dating violence," said Michele Black, a CDC epidemiologist who helped write the agency's report.

Black said she could not say whether domestic violence rates were rising. The results were comparable with those of a 1995 government survey that found that 24.8% of women and 7.6% of men reported suffering domestic violence.

The CDC said women who suffer domestic violence are three times as likely to engage in risky sex and 70% more likely to drink heavily than other women.

They are also twice as likely to report that their activities are limited by physical, mental or emotional problems and 50% more likely to use a cane, wheelchair or other disability equipment, the CDC survey found.

These women also were 80% more likely to have a stroke, 70% more likely to have heart disease or arthritis and 60% more likely to have asthma.

Kiersten Stewart, director of public policy for the Family Violence Prevention Fund advocacy group, said the CDC figures broadly fit other assessments that about a quarter to a third of U.S. women experience domestic violence.

Stewart endorsed the CDC's call for doctors to ask women about possible domestic violence if they are showing signs of stress or other symptoms indicating possible violence.

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Today's Worker Is Treated Abominably

By Paul Wildman

These are not good times for American workers. Real wages are lower today than they were before the recession of 2001, and barely higher than they were 35 years ago.

Health insurance is more expensive and harder to obtain than ever before. Manufacturing jobs continue to move overseas.

The unions whose efforts might arrest these trends continue to struggle under a sustained assault that began when Ronald Reagan fired striking air-traffic controllers in 1981, in effect declaring war on the labor movement.

This is a story with which you are probably familiar. But these are in no small part symptoms of a larger transformation of the relationship between employers and employees, in which Americans increasingly sign away their humanity when they sign an employment contract.

DRUG TESTING A MATTER OF ROUTINE TODAY

Let's take just one component of today's work environment that most people have simply come to accept: drug testing.

An article published last year on Time magazine's web site titled, "Whatever Happened to Drug Testing?" reported that in the last decade, the proportion of employers testing their employees for drug use has declined to 62%, after having exploded to over 80% in the 1990s.

That's right – "only" 62% of employers make their employees pee into a cup [or fork over a lock of hair, the current state of the art]. The recent decline notwithstanding, the fact remains that most Americans work at places where drug testing is standard practice.

But the classic justifications for drug testing – that it will reduce accidents, absenteeism, and overall productivity – turn out to have very little support.

ROUTINE TESTING HAD REVERSE EFFECT

When this study was released 10 years ago, it got a certain amount of attention for what the authors referred to as a "surprising" finding. In their survey of high-tech firms, they found that those that performed drug testing on their employees had lower productivity than those that didn't test.

Forget all the rhetoric about pot-addled employees missing work and stumbling their way around the office.

There is an ideology inherent in the way employers treat their workers, one reflected in the relative amounts of attention paid by the news media to labor issues and the ups and downs of the stock market.

Wall Street, of course, makes heroes out of executives who cut benefits and sack workers, like the monstrous "Neutron Jack" Welch, formerly of General Electric.

JACK WELCH A CORPORATE BARBARIAN

A corporate barbarian of the first order, Welch pocketed hundreds of millions of dollars while firing more than 100,000 employees, then went on to write a se-

Unions Up For First Time In 30 Years

By virtually every indicator, 2007 was a dismal year for American workers. Job growth slowed, unemployment jumped and wages lost what little ground they had gained against inflation since 2003.

There is one sliver of good news: The percentage of American workers who belong to a union rose for the first time in three decades.

The Labor Department reported that the number of workers belonging to a union grew by 311,000 to 15.7 million.

That means union members increased from 12% of the American work force in 2006 to 12.1% last year.

In the private sector, unions' share of workers inched ahead from 7.4% to 7.46%.

While the rebound is tiny, and might yet prove to be a statistical mirage, it is the first recorded increase in organized labor's ranks since the 1970s, when almost one in four workers belonged to a union.

There is little doubt that American workers need unions. Wages today are almost 10% lower than they were in 1973, after accounting for inflation.

The share of national income devoted to workers' wages and benefits is at its lowest since the late 1960s while the share going to profits has surged.

The decline in unionization has been a big part of the reason that workers have lost so much ground.

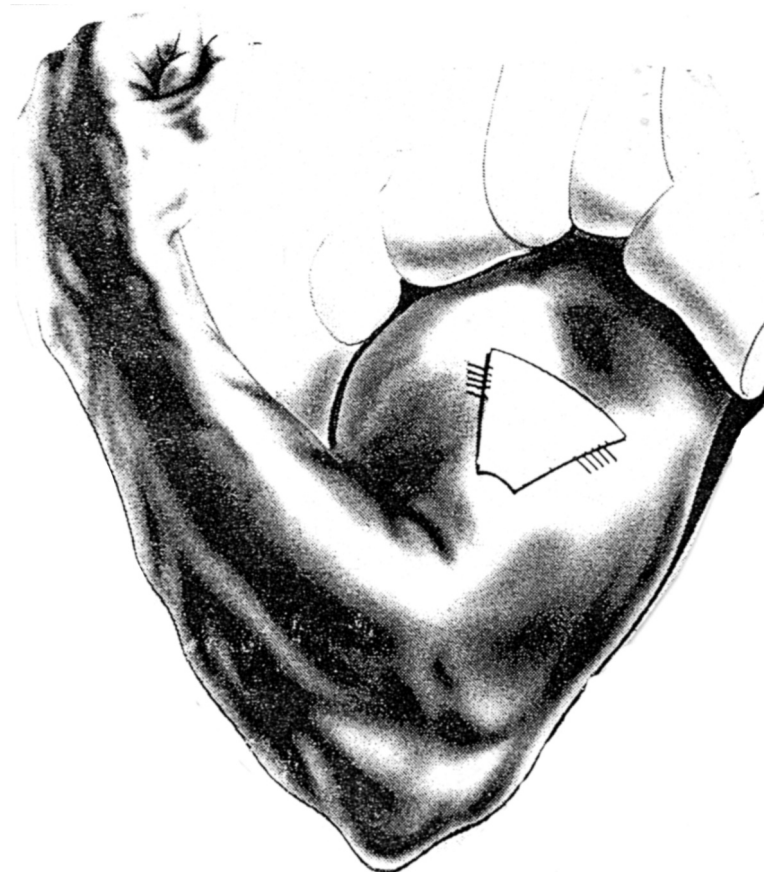
The future of organized labor is not cause for great optimism. Employers have become more aggressive about keeping unions out.

Competitive pressures from globalization, deregulation and technological change have resulted in the loss of many union jobs.

Indeed, unionization rose last year partly because of the slow pace of job creation in non-unionized sectors of the labor market.

The jump in unionization rates in the construction industry, for example, was partly attributed to the steep decline in residential construction, where there are fewer unions, while the more heavily unionized commercial construction sector remained strong.

Still, the uptick offers hope that the renewed emphasis on organizing workers by some of the nation's largest unions – like the service employees' union, the Teamsters and others that split off from the AFL-CIO to form the Change to Win coalition – might start paying dividends despite the difficult odds.



ries of best-selling books gobbled up by junior executives looking for the secret battle plan to slash their way to the top.

He's just one among many; another such executive, who laid off 9,000 people when he was CEO of Halliburton, later became vice president of the United States – Dick Cheney.

There is no labor section of the newspaper to tell the stories of the families devastated by layoffs and the workers ground down by the daily parade of indignities.

REPUBLICANS APPLAUD CORPORATE WORKPLACE

The Republicans certainly know the kind of workplace they admire. It's one in which power – not values, principles, or fairness, but raw power – determines how people are treated.

They find deeply troubling anything that constrains employers from exploiting their workers to whatever degree they see fit. They despise unions precisely because they alter that balance of power in the worker's favor, providing some check on the ability of organizations to intimidate and humiliate, underpay and overwork.

So far, Democrats haven't articulated their vision of what a progressive workplace in the 21st Century is supposed to look like – and what they're willing to do to create it. I'd be eager to hear.

– The author is a senior fellow at Media Matters for America and author of Being Right Is Not Enough: What Progressives Must Learn From Conservative Success

A bill that would have made it easier for unions to organize workers died in the Senate last June.

Congress should take up this issue again to stop companies from using threats and other aggressive tactics to keep organized labor out, and to help win workers their rightful share of the economic pie.

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PATRIOTS

From Page 14

Taxes make it worse. When Social Security and sales taxes, transportation fees, and utility charges are included, the typical wage earner pays about a 40% overall tax.

The hedge fund manager pays a 15% tax. In addition, every taxpayer contributes about \$500 a year to the tax cuts for the richest one percent of Americans.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

A 2007 poll by BBC World Service and the Pew Research Center show how the global view of U.S. involvement has continued to deteriorate.

Opinions of the United States have soured not only in Middle Eastern countries but also among traditional allies such as Germany, France and Britain. Perhaps most disturbingly, polls are beginning to indicate that anti-Americanism is being directed not only at the U.S. government but also increasingly at the American people.

We need to make changes. But what can we do? Find a presidential candidate who has the guts to stand up to the military and the arms exporters; who will ensure that multinational companies respect human rights laws; and who will cancel the tax cuts and capital gains breaks for the wealthy.

While we're complaining about government, we need to take a good look at our own unceasing demand for the consumer goods and comforts that make us many times better off than the great majority of people in the world.

– The author is a professor with the Chicago City Colleges, co-founder of Global Initiative Chicago

Independent Media Institute

Credit Cards Are Ravaging Clients

By Carl Levin

As a senior citizen living on a fixed income, paying down a credit card debt of several thousand dollars looked like a tall challenge to Millard Glasshof.

But Glasshof is the kind of person who does his best to pay what he owes – so for years he faithfully sent Chase bank the minimum payment of \$119 a month to pay down a credit card debt of \$6,400.

By October 2006, he had the balance down to \$4,800. Then, after another year of on-time payments, Mr. Glasshof's balance was still \$4,800.

If you're wondering what happened, then buckle up for a wild ride into the abusive practices of some credit card companies.

That's the journey the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations – which I chair – has been on for the past year, and what we've found is nothing short of outrageous.

CREDIT CARD FIRMS RAVAGE CUSTOMERS

Glasshof is one of more than 1,000 folks who wrote to us about unfair treatment from their credit card companies. Here's what happened to him:

Despite the fact that Glasshof made every payment, Chase ordered a computerized review of his account that decided he was at risk of defaulting.

The bank used that as an excuse to hike his interest rate from 15% to 27%. The bank hit him with the 27% rate out of the blue, with absolutely no notice.

And if that wasn't enough, they applied the new rate retroactively to his old balance. Outraged yet? Here's the best part – or, depending on your perspective, the worst:

HE RECEIVES A CONFUSING LETTER

In August, Glasshof got a confusing letter from Chase that seemed to say his minimum payment would change. So he called Chase and asked about it.

They advised him that he could pay \$111 a month instead of \$119 – a reduction that could make a difference for a senior citizen on a fixed income.

So Glasshof started sending in \$111 a month – whereupon he got hit with a \$39 fee for, you guessed it, not paying enough.

The result: Over the last year Millard Glasshof paid Chase around \$1,300. About \$1,100 of it went to his new interest rate, and almost \$200 went to those bogus fees.

THEY LEGALLY CHEATED HIM

All told, the credit card company made off with \$1,300 of Glasshof's money and didn't reduce his debt by a nickel.

The financial highjinks may be confusing, but what happened to Millard Glasshof is as clear as day. He played by the rules. The credit card company scored big.

So you and I need to play by another rule we live by in America – fighting for people who don't have a voice.

That's why I've introduced legislation to put an end to unfair credit card prac-



tices like the ones I've described.

I think people like Millard Glasshof deserve to have advocates on Capitol Hill who are every bit as determined as the lobbyists working Washington for the credit card companies.

HIS WEDDING CREDIT PROVED VERY COSTLY

There's Wesley Wannamacher, a young man from Ohio who charged \$3,200 to help pay for his wedding – and was hit with fees and interest that raised his debt to \$10,000.

And there's Bonnie Rushing from Florida, who saw the interest rate on her Bank of America credit card jacked up to 23% from 8% just because she had opened credit accounts with two merchants to take advantage of introductory discounts – bills which she paid immediately.

People like these are part of what's become an all-too-familiar story in George W. Bush's Washington: They're playing by the rules while some of the most powerful game the system.

The chance to help average people who play by the rules but still get socked has always motivated me. So on their behalf, I'm fighting back – and the credit card bill is just one example.

The legislation I've introduced in the U.S. Senate would ban credit card companies from assessing the abusive fees and sky-high interest rates they've used to make billions – and which make it harder for millions of Americans to climb out of debt.

– The author is the senior U.S. senator from Michigan

Higher Ed Gap Slows Economic Mobility

By Erik Eckholm

Economic mobility – the chance that children of the poor or middle class will climb up the income ladder – has not changed significantly over the last three decades, according to a new study.

Authored by scholars at the Brookings Institution in Washington and sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the research warned that widening gaps in higher education between rich and poor, whites and minorities, could soon lead to a downturn in opportunities for the poorest families.

The researchers found that Hispanic and black Americans were falling behind whites and Asians in earning college degrees, making it harder for them to enter the middle class or higher.

GROWTH TRENDS ARE OMINOUS

"A growing difference in education levels between income and racial groups, especially in college degrees, implies that mobility will be lower in the future than it is today," said Ron Haskins, former Republican official and welfare expert who wrote the education section of the report.

There is some good news. The study highlights the powerful role that college can have in helping people change their station in life.

Someone born into a family in the lowest fifth of earners who graduates from college has a 19% chance of joining the highest fifth of earners in adulthood and a 62% chance of joining the middle class or better.

In recent years, 11% of children from the poorest families have earned college degrees, compared with 53% of children from the top fifth.

THE DREAM ALIVE BUT FRAYED

"The American dream of opportunity is alive, but frayed," said Isabel Sawhill, another author of the report, "Getting Ahead or Losing Ground: Mobility in America." The report is available at economicmobility.org.

"It's still alive for immigrants but badly tattered for African-Americans," said Sawhill, an economist and a budget official in the Clinton Administration. "It's more alive for people in the middle class than for people at the very bottom."

The report and planned studies constitute the most comprehensive effort to examine intergenerational mobility, said John E. Morton of the Pew Trusts, who

is managing the project. It draws heavily on a federally supported survey by the University of Michigan that has followed thousands of families since the late 1960s.

BLACK CHILDREN FACE BLEAK FUTURE

A chapter of the report found startling evidence that a majority of black children born to middle-class parents grew up to have lower incomes and that nearly half of middle-class black children fell into the bottom fifth in adulthood, compared with 16% of middle-class white children.

The small fraction of poor children who earn college degrees are likely to rise well above their parents' status, the study showed.

More than half the children born to upper-income parents, those in the top fifth, who finish college remain in that top group. Nearly one in four remains in the top fifth even without completing college.

Evidence from model programs shows that early childhood education can have lasting benefits, Haskins said, although the Head Start program is too uneven to produce widespread gains.

In addition, he said, studies show that many poor but bright children do not receive good advice about applying for college and scholarships, or do not receive help after starting college.

"If we did more to help them complete college," Haskins said, "there's no question it would improve mobility."

© Truthout

It's Inflation, By George

A tour guide, showing a tourist around Washington, DC, pointed to the place where George Washington supposedly threw a dollar across the Potomac River.

"That's impossible," said the tourist. "No one could throw a coin that far!"

"You have to remember," replied the guide. "A dollar went a lot farther in those days."

N-Word Should Not Be Banned

By Max Rameau

In a move designed to garner headlines instead of results, municipalities across the country, including the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners [BCC], propose criminalizing, albeit without penalties, the use of the n-word.

Like so many other acts debated and passed by government bodies, this one will take up time, space and public interest, but will have no beneficial impact whatsoever on the lives of poor, black people.

Like every other word in any other language, the n-word is a string of letters combined to make a particular sound, which is associated with a specific meaning.

This is not an attempt to minimize the importance, value and impact of words or language, and that goes double for this word.

IT'S THE DEVASTATING HISTORY THAT COUNTS

What makes this word so ugly and harmful is not the combination of letters or even the enunciation [either ending with "a" or "er"], it is the devastating history of actions and impacts associated with the word.

Let's be blunt. It means lynching. It means hundreds of white people, including children, gathered to watch a black man, a human being, dragged, beaten, hung from a tree and cooked alive. It means grinding poverty.

Today – not 30 years ago, but today – blacks are disproportionately poor, hungry and die of illnesses which do not kill whites. This is true all across planet earth and all over the United States.

ONE WAY TO DEFINE THE WORD

It means police harassment and brutality. Being pulled over by the police for lesser, or no transgressions; being shot 41 times after going for your wallet; it means a toilet plunger; it means a disproportionate number of black people arrested, convicted and imprisoned.

Why do other ethnic slurs, such as "cracker," fail to engender the same passion as the n-word? That's easy: There is no widespread association between those words and murder, torture, abject poverty, discrimination and other inhumane impacts.

The word is highly problematic, to be sure, but the word is not the problem. If all we had to do to end racism, sexism, poverty and oppression was to ban a few words, this would be a wonderful planet, full of happy people with a delightfully limited vocabulary.

WHAT ABOUT RACIST COLLATERAL DAMAGE?

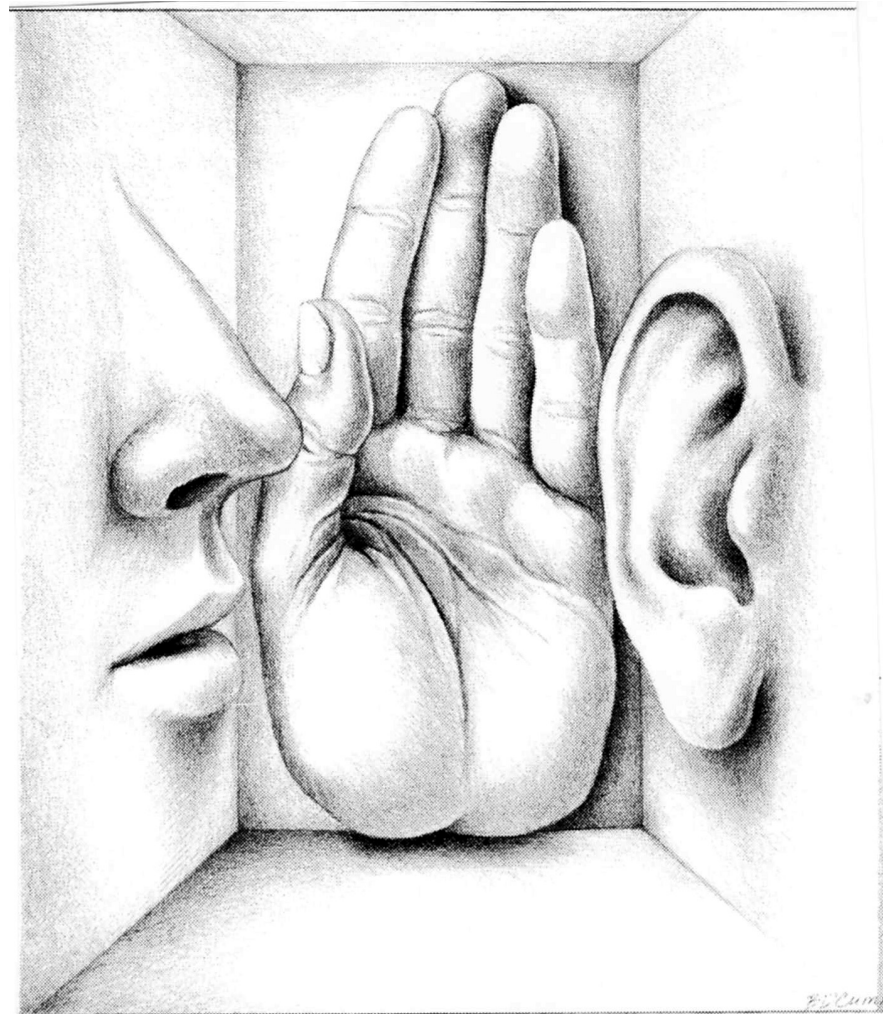
However, banning the n-bomb does not ban the racist collateral damage that word has come to represent. In the final analysis, what is so harmful and degrading to the black community are the racist sentiments, actions and impacts, not the individual words that brutally encapsulate those sentiments, represent those actions and foreshadow those impacts.

This is not a defense of the use of the n-word, but it is a call to stop fighting for symbols as a means of drawing attention away from the fact that you are not fighting for anything of substance.

If forced to choose between getting rid of the word and getting rid of the very real impacts and conditions the word represents, most sane and rational beings, of any race, would vote to keep the word.

The truth is that if everyone stopped using the word tomorrow, we would still have poor, hungry, undereducated and unemployed black people living in squalid slums.

Society as a whole, and the black community in particular, must condemn and sanction people who use racial, sexist, homophobic and classist epithets. However, as it relates to racism, it is not the government's job to control what people say, it is their job to stop racist actions and correct or change the impacts of those actions.



The use of this, or most other, words spends valuable time, money and brain-power on a fight that, at the end of the day, is symbolic at best and irrelevant at worse.

FOCUS ON WHAT CAN BE CHANGED

What is so infuriating is that local governments do have the power to change the conditions that give the n-word such horrific value to this day, but are not trying to change the conditions over which they have power, only the symbols over which they have none.

It is insulting to think that the government bodies contemplating a symbolic ban on this word are the same ones that consistently divert tax dollars earmarked for the black community over to wealthy white business interests.

I submit that banning the latter activity will do more to defend the integrity of the black community than banning the former.

If elected officials really want to defend the black community, they should think creatively.

HOW ABOUT ENDING POVERTY?

Instead of banning a word, governments can end the degradation of the black community by banning poverty. Instead of stealing public money, feed and provide housing for the poor black people who should not be called by the n-word.

Those who used the word in the past did not want to hire black people. Show your opposition to the word by providing jobs for those same black people.

Stop police brutality and the criminalization of the black community. Racists used the police to intimidate and attack the n-people, a practice that has not significantly abated.

The only thing worse than being robbed by someone who calls you the n-word is being robbed by someone who calls you buddy. Don't just stop use of the word, stop the exploitation and oppression.

– The author works with The Center for Pan-African Development

© Movement Vision Lab

A Secular Nation Treasures Religious Freedom

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Religious freedom has been a treasured tenet of American democracy. Since the founding of our nation, religious freedom has been highly valued.

In our churches and in public gatherings we have consistently offered prayers of thanks to our God for the privilege of being born and living in a nation where one is free to worship as one pleases.

One would then wonder why Americans do not understand that a nation that treasures religious freedom is a secular nation.

America is NOT a Christian nation, and it never was.

It is a secular nation offering – nay, assuring – freedom of worship to a diverse array of religions – the most popular being Christianity.

Secular is not a bad word.

THEOCRATS HARD AT WORK

Other than in the First Amendment, the Constitution governing our wonderful country has only one reference to religion, and this was to prohibit any religious test for public office.

It is strange that more than 200 years later we find people publicly questioning candidates on their religious commitment, demanding such as a qualification for our vote.

While our president is busy trying to impose a secular democracy to end sectarian strife in Iraq, many of his party supporters are busy trying to impose religion into our government, its institutions and agencies, thus creating strife at

home.

Strangely enough, many Americans see nothing wrong, or even incongruous, about that.

AMERICANS NEED HISTORY LESSONS

According to the First Amendment Center, Americans have some interesting ideas and beliefs:

- 65% believe that our nation's founders intended this to be a Christian nation.

- 58% want teacher-led Christian prayers in the public schools.

- 43% endorse school holiday programs totally Christian and devout in nature.

- 50% favor teaching the Bible as "factual" in history classes.

- 28% think that freedom of worship does not apply to any groups the majority believes to be "extreme."

- 55% believe that the Constitution establishes a Christian nation.

Of course, Mormons, Quakers, Catholics, Mennonites, and Baptists may have been thought to be extreme at certain times and places in our history.

Bible reading, prayers, and devotionals imposed by any public authority quite obviously fall within the prohibition of "establishment" of religion in the first amendment, and the U.S. Supreme Court has appropriately ruled so.

See SECULAR Page 18

America Is Not A Christian Nation

By Jon Meacham

John McCain was not on the campus of Jerry Falwell's Liberty University for very long – the senator, who once referred to Falwell and Pat Robertson as “agents of intolerance,” was there to receive an honorary degree but he seems to have picked up some theology along with his academic hood.

In an interview with Beliefnet.com, McCain repeated what is an article of faith among many American evangelicals: “The Constitution established the United States of America as a Christian nation.”

According to Scripture, however, believers are to be wary of all mortal powers. Their home is the kingdom of God, which transcends all earthly things, not any particular nation-state.

KEEP ALOOF FROM THE PRINCES

The Psalmist advises believers to “put not your trust in princes.” The author of Job says that the Lord “shows no partiality to princes nor regards the rich above the poor, for they are all the work of his hands.”

Before Pilate, Jesus says, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

And if, as Paul writes in Galatians, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” then it is difficult to see how there could be a distinction in God's eyes between, say, an American and an Australian.

In fact, there is no distinction if you believe Peter's words in the Acts of the Apostles: “I most certainly believe now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears him and does what is right is welcome to him.”

JESUS' KINGDOM IS RADICAL

The kingdom Jesus preached was radical. Not only are nations irrelevant, but families are, too: He instructs those who would be his disciples to give up all they have and all those they know to follow him.

The only acknowledgment of religion in the original Constitution is a utilitarian one: the document is dated “in the year of our Lord 1787.”

Even the religion clause of the First Amendment is framed dryly and without reference to any particular faith. The Connecticut ratifying convention debated rewriting the preamble to take note of God's authority, but the effort failed.

A pseudonymous opponent of the Connecticut proposal had some fun with the notion of a deity who would, in a sense, be checking the index for his name: “A low mind may imagine that God, like a foolish old man, will think himself slighted and dishonored if he is not complimented with a seat or a prologue of recognition in the Constitution.”

PLAIN LANGUAGE OF COMMON SENSE

Instead, the framers, the opponent wrote in *The American Mercury*, “come to us in the plain language of common sense and propose to our understanding a system of government as the invention of mere human wisdom; no deity comes down to dictate it, not a God appears in a dream to propose any part of it.”

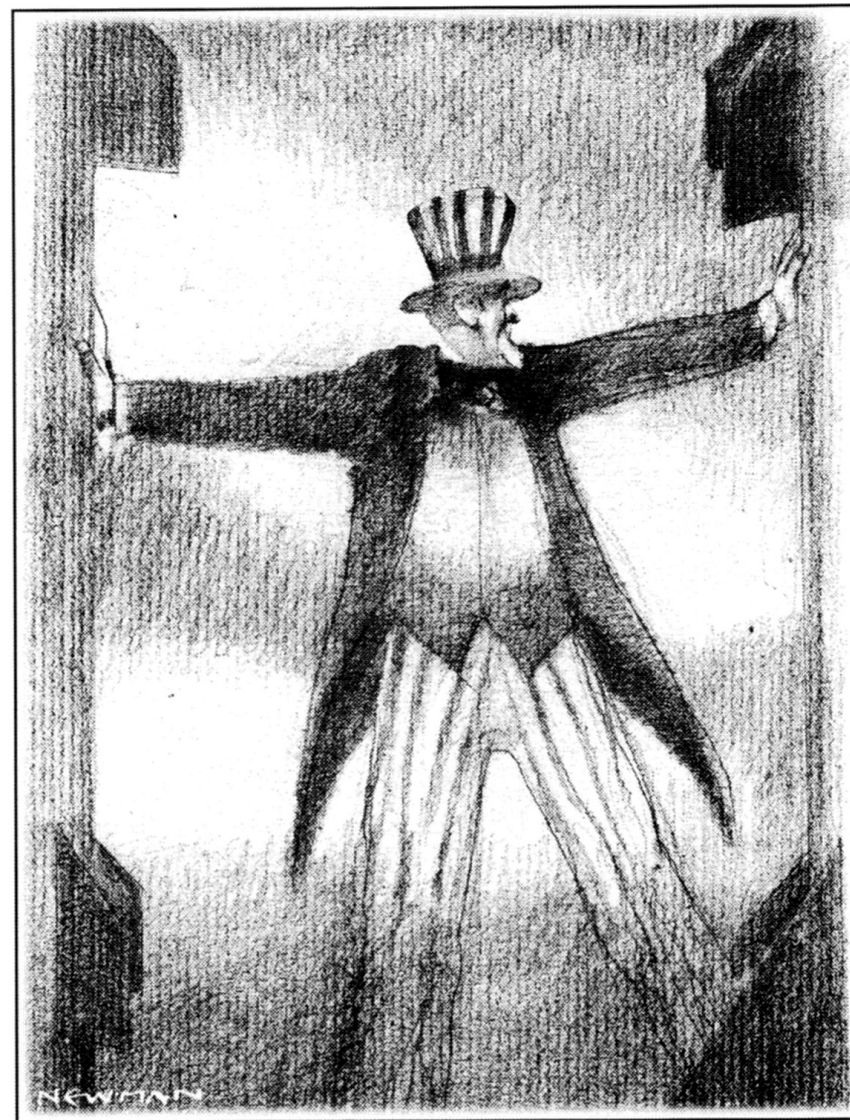
While many states maintained established churches and religious tests for office – Massachusetts was the last to disestablish, in 1833 – the federal framers, in their refusal to link civil rights to religious observance or adherence, helped create a culture of religious liberty that ultimately carried the day.

Thomas Jefferson said that his bill for religious liberty in Virginia was “meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mahometan, the Hindu, and infidel of every denomination.”

ACCEPTANCE AND RESPECT

When George Washington was inaugurated in New York in April 1789, listed among the city's clergymen were 14 Rabbis – a sign of acceptance and respect.

The next year, Washington wrote the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, RI, say-



ing, “Happily the government of the United States ... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance ... Everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

Andrew Jackson resisted bids in the 1820s to form a “Christian party in politics.” Abraham Lincoln buried a proposed “Christian amendment” to the Constitution to declare the nation's fealty to Jesus. Theodore Roosevelt defended William Howard Taft, a Unitarian, from religious attacks by supporters of William Jennings Bryan.

FOUNDERS WERE NOT ANTI-RELIGIOUS

The founders were not anti-religion. Many of them were faithful in their personal lives, and in their public language they evoked God. They grounded the founding principle of the nation – that all men are created equal – in the divine. But they wanted faith to be one thread in the country's tapestry, not the whole tapestry.

In the 1790s, in the waters off Tripoli, pirates were making sport of American shipping near the Barbary Coast. Toward the end of his second term, Washington sent Joel Barlow, the diplomat-poet, to Tripoli to settle matters, and the resulting treaty, finished after Washington left office, bought a few years of peace.

Article 11 of this long-ago document says that “as the government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion,” there should be no cause for conflict over differences of “religious opinion” between countries.

The treaty passed the Senate unanimously. Sen. McCain is not the only American who would find it useful reading.

– Jon Meacham, the editor of *Newsweek*, is the author of *American Gospel* and *Franklin and Winston*

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SECULAR

From Page 17

Mixing the teaching of religion into science has also been ruled against.

FOUNDERS DEMANDED SECULAR GOVERNMENT

The vast majority of Americans at the time of the nation's founding held Christian beliefs and values, but this never was a Christian nation.

Instead, the majority at the time of the nation's founding insisted on a secular government, which in turn guaranteed religious freedom for all.

Nothing in the Constitution has changed. Our practices have had to change as these have been found in conflict with our Constitution.

The Constitution protects the rights of an individual or minority from the whims of a majority.

When one examines the beliefs of Americans, as illustrated by the polls above, one must be ever grateful for the protections that great document gives to the freedoms with which we are blessed.

CRIMINALIZING OPPOSING BELIEFS

Various religious activists are constantly trying to obtain the enactment of their beliefs into law, and to criminalize conduct contrary to their religious beliefs.

Even though a majority of citizens might agree with the religious tenet involved, citizen voters must be extremely cautious about imposing these upon others through secular laws and punishments.

Thank God that America is not a theocracy where religion and government are

blended. America has treasured the principle of separation of church and state. Our religious freedoms have been protected by this principle.

Churches have always been defensive against the encroachment of government into their affairs. Christian people should be equally careful about the encroachment of churches into political and governmental affairs.

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

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Tricks Mask Low Wages, Inequality

By Glen Ford

U.S. employment numbers have been doctored into meaninglessness, as have all indices of economic growth or decline. Not only is the public incapable of making sense of the nation's cooked books, but Americans also have no idea what "class" they belong to.

Almost everyone that is not on public assistance insists they are "middle class" – but where is the true middle? It's actually a lot further down the income ladder than most folks think, perilously close to what is defined as poverty.

The rich long ago discovered that keeping everybody else deluded and disoriented about the real structures of wealth and income allows them to do whatever they choose. If nearly everybody's in the "middle," then nobody is anywhere.

New federal data show that income inequality in the United States is higher than anytime since World War II, possibly higher than just before the stock market crash and Great Depression of 1929.

AMERICANS AVOID ECONOMICS

Americans like to complain about the economy, but they don't like to hear or read economic news – and that's understandable.

The United States and its media are ruled by huge corporations that have for many generations deformed American English to make the language incapable of making any sense of economics.

That way, subjects like vast economic inequalities cannot not be intelligently discussed among the general public – and the rich can keep on getting richer without the rest of us knowing how, or why.

The greatest damage the rich have done to American economic discourse and to the English vocabulary is their purposeful misuse of the term "middle class."

All the politicians and corporate pundits and commentators and so-called journalists throw the term around, constantly, but never give it any specific value or definition.

RICH MISLEAD ABOUT MIDDLE CLASS

"Middle class" has become anything you want it to be. Republicans tend to describe people with incomes as high as \$200,000 per household as middle-class when in fact folks making that much money are in the upper 2% of the population, nowhere near the middle.

Corporate propagandists have other tricks to make it appear that Americans are better off than they really are. They prefer to use "average" income data, which throws the very rich like Bill Gates – who's worth more than the Gross National Products of at least 70 countries – into the same mix as you.

Because the rich are so dramatically better off than most people, their incomes pull the average way up, making the figure meaningless. The real middle class makes about \$15 dollars an hour, and dropping.

PAINTING A PHONY PICTURE

Economists and phony journalists in service of the wealthy also prefer to cite "household" income, rather than individual wages, as measurements of economic standing.

The more people in the household above the age of 14 that hold jobs, the better



things look. The fact that real wages went down 2% between the years 2000 and 2005, might not show up so dramatically, if two or more family members are out there hustling, taking on different jobs at different wages over time.

The truth becomes obscured, which is exactly how the rich folks like it. And almost everybody except those who are on public assistance goes around calling themselves "middle class," with not a clue as to where the "middle" is.

The real "middle" among American wage earners, after deductions for child support and, if you're lucky, payments into a 401 (k), is \$30,881 a year.

DEFINING THE REAL MIDDLE CLASS

That's the real median wage – not the misleading average wage – meaning half of employees make more than \$30,881, and half make less.

Not very impressive, is it?

A family of four with one wage earner making \$20,000 is officially in poverty in the United States, which is not very far away from the median wage of a little over \$30,000. And we haven't even talked about health care costs and the ever-rising price of housing.

At the same time, the number of millionaires is at a record high, nearing eight million.

No wonder the rich take such pains to scrub the language clean of a vocabulary that could explain how they are stealing the wealth of the nation and the world.

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SCHOOL CRITICS

From Page 1

ten.

Myth: Public schools locked God out of the classroom.

Fact: The U.S. Supreme Court banned sectarian prayer. Schools that have ignored that opinion have lost every single court case. Student prayer is not illegal – it happens every time there's a final exam. The Supreme Court has held that a moment of silence is legal.

Myth: Most teachers are secular humanists.

Truth: Oh really? Public educators lead all other professions and occupations in teaching Sunday school. [Parade Magazine national poll]

Myth: Public schools don't teach values.

Fact: Define values. More than a third of students receive their only hot meal of the day in public schools. For thousands, the only hug they get is in public school.

Teachers last year spent an average of \$586 of their own money for things such as workbooks and pencils for poor children.

In first and second grade, teachers averaged spending \$1,003 on their

students. Thousands of teachers sponsor everything from drama to chess clubs on their own time, usually with no reimbursement.

Myth: The National Education Association only seeks higher salaries for less work.

Fact: The NEA spends huge sums of money on grants, scholarships and programs to support reform efforts and quality schooling initiatives.

You will search in vain for a list of positive programs financed by the critics such as the Heritage Foundation or the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

Myth: School boards have outlived their usefulness. Parents ought to run the schools.

Fact: More than 77,000 school board members are parents and community leaders. Few are reimbursed for their time and selfless efforts.

Myth: Administrators are overpaid and underworked.

Fact: To the contrary, they are a taxpayer bargain. Given the number of employees and plant size, they earn about a third of that a similar executive earns in the private sector. And

they don't get bonuses or stock options.

Myth: Why not voucher students who want it since their parents pay taxes and should have the right to direct some of that money to private or parochial education?

Fact: Private education would suck \$33 billion a year out of public education. Use your brain – do you get money back if you don't use the public library?

Do you get your share of taxes back to secure private security if you don't like the cops? If you're a pacifist do you get back that portion of your taxes that go to the military and veterans affairs?

Myth: We don't need school boards – they just get in the way.

Fact: Examples of waste, graft, corruption and illegalities are already emanating from hundreds of charter schools and voucher programs – which have no schools boards and thus no accountability.

Myth: Catholic schools do a better job with less money.

Fact: It's unfair to compare the average Catholic per pupil cost with that

of public schools.

Public schools are required to provide regular education, vocational education, special education, counseling, dropout prevention, alternative education, attendance control, bilingual education, compensatory education, after-school athletics, regular student transportation, student activities, health and psychological programs, food services, security and violence prevention and much better employee benefits – such as a living wage and retirement programs.

Who are you going to believe, the critics or the consumers?

The Gallup Kappan Education Poll showed again that an overwhelming percentage of parents whose more than 50 million children are in public schools award them honors' grades.

Only 20% of those who have no connection with the schools awarded them honors. They get their information from the popular media – the sorriest possible source.

It's time public educators and those who support public schools take off the gloves and pound the naysayers with the truth.

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