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Bills Pile Up But Who Cares? Republican Priorities

By Frosty Troy

“Demagogue, n., a person who tries to stir up the people by appeals to emotion, prejudice, etc., in order to win them over quickly and gain power.” — Webster’s Dictionary

Tax cuts, especially for the state’s wealthy, are the golden calf of the Republican Party, no matter who they hurt.

Case in Point: Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, is a non-stop shill for tax cuts at any price.

Be reminded that Gov. Brad Henry and the three previous legislative sessions have cut taxes nearly \$900 million. This was possible due to record tax receipts.

Gov. Henry complains that he has been excluded from budget talks between the House and Senate. [Don’t hold your breath before Henry uses the power of the veto.]

With the downturn in collections this year, new Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, said not once, but twice that the income tax would not be revisited this year.

Apparently Terrill, a non-stop media stalker, didn’t get the word, or assumed it was Cargill’s window dressing. Terrill, who chairs the Revenue and Taxation subcommittee, pushed through an accelerated income tax cut – \$68 million a year.

His bill, which won backing of flip-flopping Speaker Cargill, would slash the tax rate to 5.5% in 2008 and 5.25% in 2009. [The ‘09 cut would require revenue to grow 4%.]

Only five Democrats voted for it – Terry Harrison of McAlester, Scott Inman of Del City, Jabar Shumate, Lucky Lamons and Eric Proctor, all of Tulsa.

Only one Republican voted against it: Terry Ingmire of Stillwater.

The bill passed the House 60-39. The Republicans hold a 57 to 44 majority.

In the wake of the vote, Terrill said, “Any surplus by definition is overtaxation.”

That wild assertion is pure demagoguery. The state has no surplus, despite Cargill’s asinine statement: “With a quarter-billion dollars in ex-

cess revenue this year, it’s only right that taxpayers should get some of that money back.”

The Republican-dominated House didn’t stop there. They also approved elimination of the Franchise Tax – millions more in lost revenue.

Excess revenue? The state owes the Teachers Retirement System \$30 million it borrowed several years ago but didn’t repay.

Excess Revenue? The state owes the Police and Firefighter Pension Fund \$35 million.

Excess revenue? On the day the House passed the bill, public education was pleading for \$58 million due to the deliberate shortfall on the \$3,000 teachers salary hike last year.

Excess revenue? The Corrections budget was shorted by as much as \$80 million. They are dangerously short of manpower and facilities.

Excess revenue? More than 8,000 students are on a waiting list for CareerTech services. Requests for new programs are on hold for lack of funding.

Excess revenue? Then-GOP Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin headed the Tourism survey that revealed it would take \$100

million to bring the state’s lodges and recreational facilities up to adequate.

Excess revenue? There are more than 2,800 developmentally disabled children on the state Department of Human Services [DHS] waiting list.

Excess revenue? More than 3,000 seriously mentally ill are still on a waiting list for treatment.

Excess revenue? DHS is still 150 child welfare workers short, despite an epidemic of child abuse and child murder.

Excess revenue? State pensions are in the red by more than \$10 billion, including Teachers Retirement which is more than \$7 billion in the hole – second worst in America.

None of these immediate concerns include Oklahoma’s pathetic funding of public education – 46th per pupil. Or the sorry salaries: 48th lowest in America.

Consider that Oklahoma has the highest percentage of seriously mentally ill persons in America, but has only 200 active treatment beds.

Add to these woes the vicious treatment of retired teachers, denied a 4% cost of living increase last session while all others got it. Retired teach-

ers received a pathetic 2% – despite surplus funds available to treat them fairly.

Democratic leaders are warning that the Republicans are going too far, failing to grasp that a downturn in the economy would leave the state forced to cut vital services.

Democrats still don’t get it.

Republicans are unimpressed and would welcome a fiscal shortfall because it would require reductions in state services.

It was Republican Sen. Randy Brogdon of Owasso who spearheaded the so-called Taxpayers Bill Of Rights [TABOR].

It was not only financed by out of state interests, paid petition circulators were also imported – a crime.

The state Supreme Court tossed the petition but Attorney General Drew Edmondson, a Democrat, failed to prosecute even one illegal circulator.

Don’t believe the Daily Disappointment/Republican baloney that Oklahoma is a high tax state.

Oklahoma is the third lowest taxed state in the nation in combined state, local and federal taxes.

If Republicans really wanted to do something to help the economy and those most in need of a boost, they would raise the \$5.15 minimum wage.

It was last raised 10 years ago and is only worth \$3.40 today. It is estimated that 37,000 Oklahoma families exist on the minimum wage.

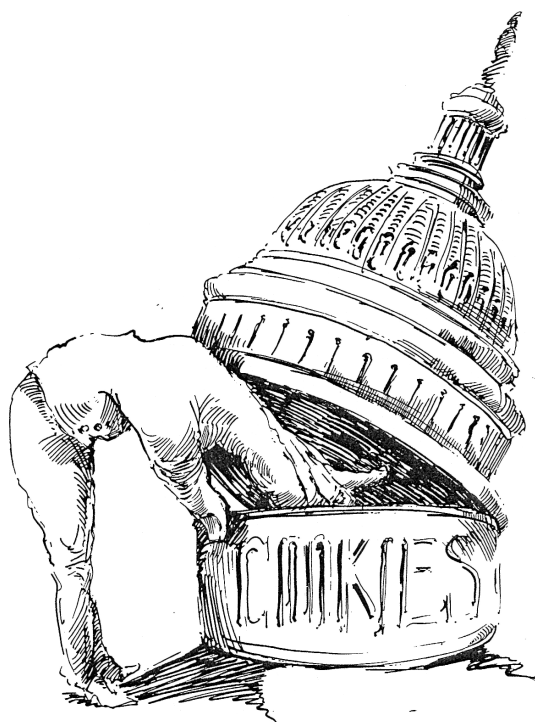
Instead, the evenly-divided state Senate killed Democratic Sen. Debbe Leftwich’s amendment that would have raised it over three years – \$5.85, \$6.55, \$7.25.

Senate Republicans – a wholly owned subsidiary of the reactionary State Chamber of Commerce – voted against it.

The deciding no vote was cast by Democratic Sen. Tom Ivester of Elk City.

Cargill has vowed to cut the size of state government but he doesn’t specify where.

A good place to begin would be a reduction of Republicans in the Legislature – beginning with Terrill.



Observations

Rotten Idea

One of the sorriest ideas to come out of the Legislature this year is legislation creating more charter schools.

House Bill 1589, by Republican Rep. Tad Jones, would allow the development of charter schools by the Oklahoma Department of Education, cities and certain higher education entities.

Under current state law, only individual school districts and CareerTech boards may sponsor charter schools—just as it ought to be.

Schools are already being robbed enough by this Legislature [we're 46th in what is spent on a child's education] without creating new charter schools.

"Charter schools give teachers and administrators the opportunity to be more innovative and apply fresh, new ideas for teaching Oklahoma students," said Jones. "They also provide parents and students with more choices and a broader range of opportunities."

Hogwash! Some are so corrupt they have been closed – most recently half a dozen in Texas.

Wouldn't you know it – Jones' bill is one of the items on the Republican Year of Ideas agenda.

If Jones and his Republican colleagues were truly in support of public education, they would have expedited passage of the \$58 million deficiency created by them last year when a \$3,000 pay raise failed to include the related costs.

We hope all the educators in Claremore who voted for Jones are aware of his pursuits. Make sure if the new charter schools come about they don't cherry pick the public schools.

Danney Goble

Oklahoma lost one of its finest historians and sharpest wits with the recent passing of Danney Goble at the much-too-tender age of 60.

Goble was perhaps best known for his biography of former U.S. House Speaker Carl Albert – *Little Giant* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in

1990 – and his seminal work *Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New State*.

But to those who worked closely with him over the years, including journalists who relied on his keen insight to provide important context for their stories, Goble was a master storyteller – often hilarious, occasionally ribald.

He loved his home state, but wasn't a Chamber of Commerce-style, hear-no-evil, see-no-evil cheerleader. He was well-familiar with Oklahoma's warts and foibles and he wasn't afraid to discuss them. He authored, for example, the state task force report on the long-covered-up 1921 Tulsa race riot.

In the early 1990s, his wit almost got him fired from OU's Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center. In a Dallas Morning News interview, he suggested tongue-in-cheek that for many southeastern Oklahomans the day wasn't complete without an RC cola and a Moon Pie. It was meant to be an endearing take on the region's Deep South roots, but it triggered a firestorm that included his denunciation on the floor of the Oklahoma House.

Carl Albert himself came to Goble's defense to keep the matter from being blown disastrously out of proportion.

For years afterwards, the ever-gracious Goble always returned calls from the Texas reporter [now the Observer editor] with a standard opening line: "What are you going to do to me today?"

The question now is, what will Oklahoma do without Danney Goble?

SciFi

Shades of science fiction! A Tulsa state senator has authored a bill to prevent microchips from being inserted into anyone against their will.

State Sen. Brian Crain, R-Tulsa, said his idea comes from viewing information on the Internet about a company that offers microchip technology for use in hospitals, nursing homes, pris-



ons and other facilities.

Spokesman at the Oklahoma Health Department, Department of Corrections and Oklahoma Hospital Association say they know of no one getting microchip implants.

Kevin Pipes of the office that regulates nursing homes and other long-term care facilities said he had been told that it would require a doctor's OK to implant anything under someone's skin.

Rebecca Moore of the Oklahoma Association of Health Care Providers said other devices are available to keep track of wandering patients and she has only heard of microchips being used to keep track of animals.

Why in the world introduce legislation that clutters up the statutes?

Phony Debate

On June 8, 2006, as Congress mulled a measure to repeal the estate tax, Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California rose to oppose the proposal.

"Now is not the time," the Democrat declared, "to place the interests of a small number of millionaires ahead of millions of working families."

She continued in this vein for over 1,100 words, then yielded the floor to Sen. Mitch McConnell. The Kentucky Republican took the opposite point of view, declaring the levy "one of the most destructive, unfair taxes ever conceived by government."

Then more senators took their turns at the microphone, arguing one side or the other: Mike Enzi, Tom Harkin, Lamar Alexander, Carl Levin, John Kerry, Orrin Hatch, Conrad Burns, Gordon Smith, Barbara Mikulski, John McCain.

Barack Obama called the proposal "the Paris Hilton tax break," which probably prompted some chuckles in the gallery.

Or would have, had he actually said it! Though all that activity appears in the Congressional Record, none of it really occurred. Only eight senators participated in the debate; the others – everyone listed above – pasted their remarks in later.

What looks like a long exchange of ideas is in effect a series of press releases composed by the senators or their staffs, dropped into the Record to look like they were spoken aloud on the floor.

In theory, such additions are supposed to be underlined or marked with a black dot – a rule added after Rep. Hale Boggs, D-LA, somehow managed to give a speech on the House floor while he was dying in an Alaska plane crash.

If you go to the Congressional Record's website and examine its account of June 8, you will find no sign at all that when Sen. Feinstein begins

to speak you have exited history and entered a loquacious fantasy.

In the grand scheme of Washington's deceptions, this may seem like small potatoes. But it's blocking an effort to make Congress' proceedings more accessible to ordinary citizens.

Myth Buster

Many thanks to the Rev. Andrew Tevington for his column in the Oklahoman debunking the canard that Muslims are promised virgins if they sacrifice their lives.

Tevington, who is also an attorney, researched all three basic sources of religious instruction: the Quran, the Sunnah and various hadith that further explains the Quran.

In fact, both the Quran and the Sunnah provide for peaceful coexistence with all people of other faiths.

The virgin myth is widespread – make yourself a human bomb, blow yourself up killing enemies, and you wind up in paradise with virgins at your beck and call.

The Quran doesn't preach violence except to fight back when they are driven from their homes.

Tevington is assistant pastor at OKC's Church of the Servant.

Test Mania

For more than a decade, the debate over high-stakes testing has dominated the field of education. A provocative new book by Sharon Nichols and David Berliner provides a fresh perspective on the issue and powerful ammunition for opponents of high-stakes tests.

Drawing on their extensive research, the authors document and categorize the ways that high-stakes testing threatens the purposes and ideals of the American education system.

Their analysis is grounded in the application of Campbell's Law, which posits that the greater the social consequences associated with a quantitative indicator [such as test scores], the more likely it is that the indicator itself will become corrupted – and the more likely it is that the use of the indicator will corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor.

Nichols and Berliner illustrate both aspects of this "corruption," showing how the pressures of high-stakes testing erode the validity of test scores and distort the integrity of the education system.

Their analysis provides a coherent and comprehensive intellectual framework for the wide-ranging arguments against high-stakes testing, while putting a compelling human face on the data marshaled in support of those arguments.

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SPEAKERS BUREAU: To book Founding Editor Frosty Troy for your Chamber banquet, convention or other gathering, contact Helen Troy for rates and availability. Telephone: 405.525.5582. E-Mail: ftroy@fullnet.net. U.S. Mail: P.O. Box 53371, Oklahoma City, OK 73152-3371.

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy
ftroy@fullnet.net
405.525.5582

PUBLISHER

Beverly Hamilton
405.478.8700

EDITOR

Arnold Hamilton
ahamilton@okobserver.net
405.478.8700

ART DIRECTOR/WEBMASTER

Kyle Williams
405.478.8700

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

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

- Adapted by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

The latest Oklahoma poll shows that John Edwards is favored by Oklahoma Democrats, John McCain by Republicans and 56% of all likely voters say they definitely would vote against Hillary Clinton.

Laurel: To Rep. Shane Jett, R-Tecumseh, for this jewel during the immigration debate: "I looked up Rep. Randy Terrill's bill on the Internet, and guess where it was trumpeted on — *Oklahoma KKK*. They're very proud of it"

Not again! Former state Sen. Gene Stipe has been nailed by the FBI for yet another round of laundered campaign contributions. He's on parole — which will probably be revoked.

Dart: To the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee for killing a bill that would make it illegal for anyone younger than 21 to purchase tobacco. Smoking related illness kills 430,000 Americans each year.

High school sports are taking a toll on our youth — 1,442,533 injuries last year. Football leads, followed by boys' soccer, girls' soccer and girls' volleyball. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]

Laurel: To Sen. Ted Kennedy's pledge to block Bush's cut in special education grants. Plenty of money for war but Bush cuts back where America's most deserving children are concerned.

Sen. Patrick Anderson, R-Enid, is author of SB47 that would provide that if you fail to have your insurance verification in your car, the car can be seized and sold at auction. Dumbest bill yet.

Dart: To the lack of consolidation of municipal services in Tulsa and Oklahoma counties. Example: Oklahoma County has 14 fire departments.

The Bill of Rights does not come with an asterisk reading "unenforceable during time of war." — Gene Healy of the Cato Institute.

Laurel: To Rep. Al McAffrey, D-OKC, for his HB 1991 that would create a statewide program to redistribute to needy Oklahomans the unused prescription drugs from nursing homes and other group homes.

Talk about a global empire. The U.S. now has 737 military bases spread across the globe, along with 2.5 million U.S. personnel.

Dart: To Sen. Joseph Lieberman's false charge that Bush's critics "undermine our troops." He is an authentic turncoat more in love with Bush than with the facts.

The richest 2% of adults in the world own more than half of all household wealth. The poorer half of the world's population own less than 1%. [UN Study]

Laurel: To the New York Times for publishing a report on what the war is costing — \$200 billion annually; universal health care would cost \$100 billion, universal preschool for three year olds and full-day for four year olds, \$35 billion.

One in seven Oklahoma high school students is overweight and another one in six is in danger of being overweight. More than 1.5 million adults are overweight — 500,000 are obese. [State Health Department]

Dart: To the news media for ignoring a comprehensive poll of 6,000 troops by *The Military Times*. It shows only 38% support the war and only 35% approve of Bush's handling of the war.

Beware your donations to the American Cancer Society and Easter Seals, two groups that do the poorest job in spending your money. [Forbes' annual report on nonprofits]

Laurel: To the AFL-CIO for suing the federal government to compel a rule requiring employers to provide protective equipment for 20 million workers. More than 400,000 have been injured and 50 have died since 1999.



All schools in England are getting copies of Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Too bad America's public schools aren't as lucky. Today's kids will pay the price for global warming if it isn't addressed.

Dart: To our tax cutting governor and Legislature while more than half of all babies born in the state are paid for by Medicaid — 55% of 51,157 births last year. More than 35% were born to unmarried mothers.

A sales tax holiday exempting clothing and shoes from sales tax was approved by the state Senate over the objection of the Oklahoma Municipal League, which says cities will lose an estimated \$16 million.

Laurel: To both GOP and Democratic candidates for president for denouncing the foul mouth and vicious diatribe of Ann Coulter, darling of the GOP Far right.

We mourn the loss of Warren "Doc" Jordan, an OKC advertising executive who helped *The Observer* in the beginning with generous ads. He was 75.

Dart: To religious organizations clamoring for some of the \$464 million Bush has won for faith-based groups. Messing with separation of church and state could well backfire.

Lawmakers are eyeing a massive tax hike for Tulsa. SB 605 would allow the city to increase property taxes \$28 million for fire protection already covered by city sales taxes. If it passes, look for OKC to want in on the deal — a possible \$32 million jump.

Laurel: To new Rep. Anastasia Pittman, D-OKC, for hitting the ground running. Her bills to combat HIV/AIDs and create a statewide gang taskforce are badly needed.

Freshman Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, won Senate passage of his bill to grant income tax deductions for those supporting relatives over 70 years of age.

Dart: To busybody Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, for her bill to require doctors performing abortions to have clinical privileges within 30 miles of the location. She is utterly obsessed with other people's bodies.

We applaud Tulsa municipal government for protesting the increasing number of sales tax exemptions, now costing the cities and towns \$1.7 billion a year. There are now 132 exemptions — many purely political.

Laurel: To Democrats who voted against GOP Rep. Ken Miller's so-called Taxpayer Bill of Rights. It was appalling to hear Miller deny it was TABOR-Lite. This garbage is opposed by most businesses in the state.

Probably the stupidest bill of the legislative session is one requiring driver's licenses of sex offenders to say they are registered sex offenders. The only problem: That would include urinating in public, mooning, streaking, having consensual sex with a 17 year old. Dumb!

Dart: To the disintegrating Oklahoma black family. Latest evidence: 673 out of every 100,000 black juveniles are in prison, for whites it is 196.

Physicians need to be more aggressive in treating women for heart disease, according to an OU Physicians report. In Oklahoma, it is the No. 1 killer of women, with 7,000 dying each year.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals for rejecting the Libertarian Party's claim that Oklahoma laws unconstitutionally restrict new political parties' access to the ballot. They could muster only 26,461 signatures, about 1.3% of registered voters.

Lisa Pryor is going out in a blaze of glory as Oklahoma Democratic Party chairman. Faced with a final \$500,000 debt, she went to work and reduced it by 90%!

Dart: To the mindless state Senate for killing Sen. Kenneth Corn's bill to protect the Teachers Retirement system from further tax cuts. Some \$57 million will be lost over the next four years. The system is more than \$7 billion in the red.

Laurel: To Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, for his fiery opposition to vouchers, saying they would harm the public schools. The pandering House just voted to give OHLAP scholarships to homeschoolers.

Just think — If adulterers McCain, Gingrich and Guigliani were in Michigan, they could get life in prison for cheating on their spouses.

Somebody who can talk slow enough should tell Rep. Paul Weselhoft, R-Moore, that OSU veterinarian Dr. Paul Demars says banning pit bulls is not the way to solve the bad dog problem.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I'm more than a little tired of these people talking like \$7 an hour is a monster wage raise.

I was in Edmond High School in 1938 and was offered a job at the Wide-Awake Café for \$1 and one meal a day. I jumped at it. They made the best hamburgers that friends from that time still talk about – that was my meal, my choice.

Now at \$7 an hour for five days, the pay is \$280 a week plus taxes. That's \$275 more than I made 69 years ago. Hot dog! That's what I call progress!!

Too many companies have moved out of the United States to keep from paying a decent wage. They deserve no respect, and no one put it better than Will Rogers on June 28, 1926:

"If America is not good enough for you to live in and make money in, why, then you are privileged to go to some other country. But don't ask protection from a country that was not good enough for you. If you want to make money out of a country, why, take out their citizenship papers and join them. Don't use one country for money and another for convenience."

No one could say it better.

Norma Aloe
Midwest City

Editor, The Observer:

Our indivisible nation is primarily composed of two diametrically opposing groups, conservatives and liberals. The chasm between the two is increasing and conciliation appears impossible.

One possible solution is to divide the country into two nations. The conservative nation would be made up of those states that voted Republican in the last two elections and the liberal nation made of Democrat states.

The conservative nation could then abolish all those hated liberal social policies and entitlements. Social Security, Medicare, Occupational Safety and Health Act, minimum wage, child labor laws, 40-hour week, veterans' benefits, civil service retirement and all those welfare programs could be eliminated.

Conservation could be ignored and no natural resources left for our posterity. Leave our children a large national debt and gutted world.

IRS and income tax could be replaced by a wage tax. Schools could be structured their way, science and mathematics could be replaced by theology.

Absolutely no separation between church and state. Democracy replaced

by theocracy. They could be engaged in a perpetual war. No gun control. Life would be wonderful

The liberal nation could work toward social issues such as universal health care, conservation of our world, caring for the poor, balancing the budget, progressive income tax, accepting people as God made them, using diplomacy to avoid war, striving for peace and prosperity. Surely you would not desire to live in such a wretched nation.

Joe Forgy
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I appreciate your coverage of Molly Ivins. It is undoubted that readers everywhere will be less informed now that she is gone. An irrepressible force, her twangy "take" on serious issues facing Americans sometimes startled readers, usually cutting to the bone of political correctness.

I was saving this for my "obit" [and don't know if I am the author or shamelessly stole it], but either way I want to gift it to Molly.

A couple of folks were visiting and one said, "I heard that so-in-so died." The other replied: "Maybe so, but I don't have to believe it, if I don't want to."

That is my position of Molly: I don't have to believe it, if I don't want to.

I imagine that Molly just got a better deal from "Fred" and is yet covering us all from a higher latitude. Personally, I'm looking forward to her next byline.

Larry D. Dobie
Claremore

Editor, The Observer:

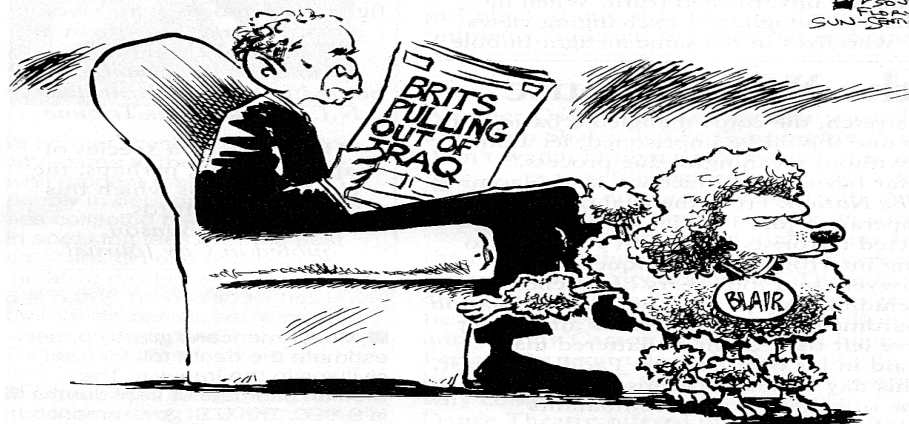
Ricky Martin, who had a monster hit with the recording *Living La Vida Loca* was apparently a Republican conservative. He was actually the headliner at George W. Bush's 2001 inaugural ball.

After viewing the incompetence, the lies, the needless war with no end, the erosion of civil liberties in America and the rank corruption, he's apparently had a change of opinion.

It's entirely possible he's still a Republican conservative, but his view of George W. Bush has certainly been altered. Performing in a concert, he made reference to George W. Bush then gave him the middle finger salute.

That's a tad more aggressive than the off-the-cuff remark made by one of the Dixie Chicks several years ago. I suppose it's possible he chose that

BUSH'S POODLE



symbolic gesture as a tribute, recognizing that George W. Bush has spent six years doing to America what the salute represents.

I've never been a big Ricky Martin fan, but I think I'm becoming one.

Kenny Belford
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

I would like to express my [add 95% of all inmates] opinion on the prison overcrowding issue. Why don't the people making the decisions at the D.O.C. just do away with the 85% rule.

Most of us deserve the good time that we earn by no misconducts, keeping our level four, and just trying to do the time so that we may be reunited with our families.

Others like me who are considered violent offenders but there was no violence involved at all in the charges. We need to help more than the non-violent offenders.

We think that this will work for us all and D.O.C. with the overcrowding problems. We beg for help from all of the American people to see us as human beings and not as animals.

We have all made mistakes and sinned in our lives and you all know it. Please help us to get this message out to the public.

Benny Trinidad
Lexington

Editor's Note: For many offenders the law requires an inmate serve 85% of the sentence before being eligible for parole.

Editor, The Observer:

Millions of gallons of livestock feces and urine containing hydrogen sulfide gas, arsenic, ammonia, phenols and pathogens can definitely be hazardous, contrary to three bills currently under consideration by Oklahoma legislators.

These bills are House Bill 1470 by Rep. Terry Hyman, D-Leon; House Bill 1517 by Rep. Dale DeWitt, R-Braman; and Senate Bill 126 by Sen. Richard Lerblance, D-Hartshorne.

This short-sighted legislation would grant special privileges and slash the cost of properly disposing of livestock waste for out-of state, large-scale factory farming corporations at the expense of Oklahoma citizens' health and property rights.

If legislators pass any one of these bills, an unscrupulous factory farmer could literally mix livestock waste with plutonium, pocket the profit, damage his neighbors' health and property, pass the cleanup costs along to taxpayers and still meet the "non-hazardous" definition.

It's likely that legislation like this would keep our attorney general from seeking Superfund dollars to clean up abandoned Concentrated Animal

Feeding Operations [CAFOs] or making any animal waste polluter responsible for damage under Superfund laws.

This is just not right. Oklahomans don't want CAFOs next to their homes, family farms and businesses, especially if safety regulations are no longer adequate. Our centennial year is the wrong time to compromise clean water, clean air and private property rights in Oklahoma.

Jackie Gaston
Yukon

Editor, The Observer:

As I read the article by Froma Harrop, "Improving Medicare's Drug Plan the VA Way" [Jan. 25], I was struck by the numerous references to "seniors" and "taxpayers," as if they were two separate groups. What sort of education has this writer had?

I am a senior, but I also am a taxpayer, and I am definitely concerned about the tax burden of the Medicare drug plan, one of the strangest, most confusing pieces of legislation ever.

To prohibit the government from negotiating for lower drug prices is appalling, and I expressed my views on this matter to our elected representatives when legislation was in progress.

I resent the implication that senior citizens are out for a free ride when in fact they are sharing the tax burden even in retirement. Incidentally, I chose to continue working until I was 71½ years old.

Emma Rose Moore
Vinita

Editor, The Observer:

One recent Monday morning I dropped by Mayor Cornett's office at OKC City Hall. I spoke briefly to the Mayor's assistant, David Holt.

Holt laughed at me and at the idea that there was any reason to fight for Union Station. He told me, "You're so far behind the times." He said they'll be down there tearing all that up in a few weeks and nobody will have to worry about it anymore.

When I reminded him that they were supposed to have torn it up more than a year ago but we stopped that, and we intend to stop this, too, he sort of went crazy.

He started saying, "What are you gonna do – tell me what you're gonna do?" He said if we're going to "engage in a little civil disobedience," he's got "a thousand cops" he'll put on us.

I told him I saw no reason to tell him anything – that he and his boss obviously aren't interested in doing the right thing. I told him they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

So, there you have the office of the honorable Mick Cornett.

Tom Elmore
Oklahoma City

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Frosty's Notebook

What Free Press?

It's amazing that even the Daily Oklahoman and papers of that rightwing ilk are still supporting Bush, given his record on a free press.

Bush's tenure has been a dark time for journalists. The administration has accused the media of aiding terrorists, declared that it has the power to prosecute journalists for publishing classified information, and consistently granted preferential treatment to rightwing outlets such as Fox News[?].

The war in Iraq has made journalism more dangerous for reporters all over the world. Additionally, this administration has restricted access to information about our government and its policies at an unprecedented level.

The Bushites have classified a record number of documents and is withholding records that the public has the right to view under the Freedom of Information Act [FOIA].

Oklahoma's newspapers have just finished "sunshine week" with emphasis on access to government documents. Yet the Daily Disappointment editorial page cretins have yet to challenge Bush on the same subject.

The Freedom of Information Act is approaching its 41st year in existence. In an age of blogging and citizen journalism, the American public's ability to access the federal government is more important than ever.

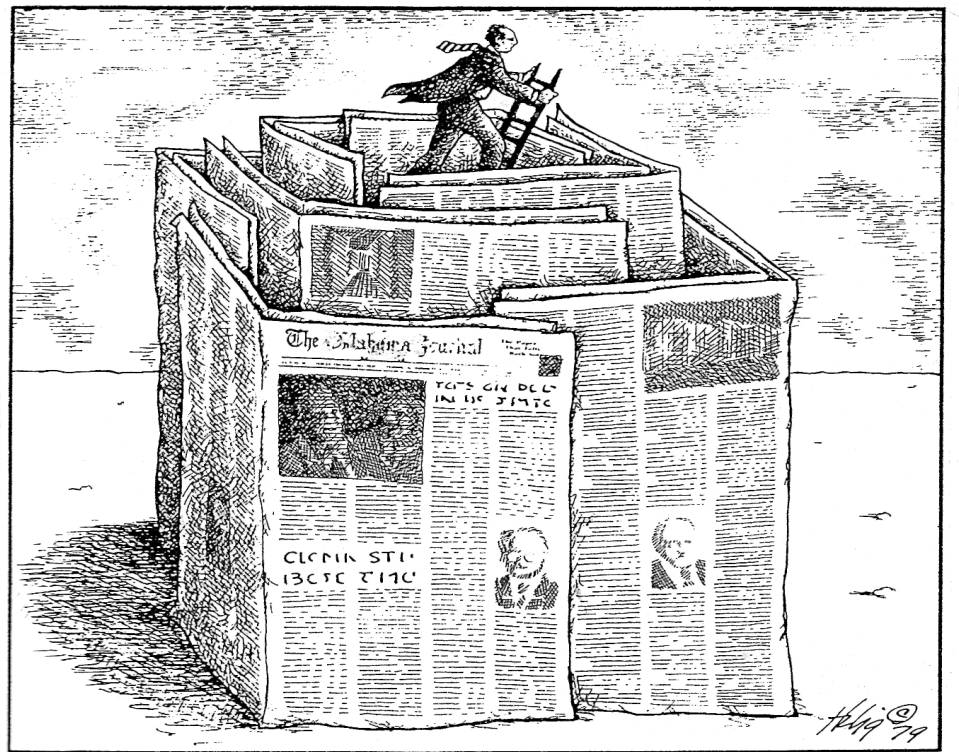
Yet 69% of Americans believe that the government is too secretive. Congress is debating several critical pieces of legislation that will increase government transparency.

Bush administration officials have shown little respect for journalists, blaming them for the White House's own failures. Instead of acknowledging the disastrous conditions in Iraq, President Bush has often attacked the media for covering too much bad news: "We're making good progress in Iraq."

When the New York Times published a story about the Bush administration's secret program to track terrorist financing, Vice President Cheney accused the paper of making "the job of defending against further attacks more difficult by insisting on publishing detailed information."

Press Secretary Tony Snow [ex-Fox shill] went even further, suggesting the New York Times had undermined Americans' "right to live."

Bush's domestic policy adviser Karl Zinsmeister called journalists "whiny and



appallingly soft," wishing "there would be a very loud explosion very nearby just to shut up their rattling."

More recently, in the leak of undercover CIA operative Valerie Plame's identity, former Cheney chief of staff Scooter Libby was convicted of perjury and obstruction of justice when he attempted to falsely blame the media – specifically, NBC's Tim Russert – for the White House's leak of Plame's identity.

The Bush administration has aggressively gone after journalists – and people who provide information to journalists – attempting to punish them for publishing information unfavorable to the administration.

Under Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, the Justice Department has pursued journalists' sources in cases ranging from a terrorism investigation of Islamic charities to the alleged vandalism of a police car.

Remember the words of Justice Hugo Black: "The guarding of military and diplomatic secrets at the expense of representative government provides no real security for our Republic."

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Since the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy went into effect, the Pentagon has dismissed more than 11,000 service members, many of whom have key specialty skills such as training in medicine and language.

At a time when the military faces a readiness crisis, the Pentagon can ill-afford to dismiss two service members a day as it is doing under the current policy. The time is right for repeal.

Recent polling shows a large majority of military personnel are comfortable with gays and lesbians, and nearly a quarter of veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars knew that someone in their unit was gay.

High-profile military leaders, such as former Joint Chiefs Chairman John M. Shalikashvili, have called for repeal. Retired Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy, the first woman to achieve the rank of three-star general in the Army, also called for repeal of the law, saying it is "a hollow policy that serves no useful purpose."

The truth is, something's wrong with this ban, according to retired Marine Staff Sgt. Eric Alva, the first American soldier to be seriously wounded in Iraq.

"You're asking men and women to lie about their orientation, to keep their personal lives private, so they can defend the rights and freedoms of others in this country."

Healthier Kids

Bravo to Rep. Jeff Hickman, R-Dacoma, for House Bill 1601 to require physical education in all public schools.

His bill doesn't come a moment too soon to strengthen physical fitness among Oklahoma students. Polls show that 95% of parents want physical education in the public schools.

The 2006 National Association for Sport and Physical Education, along with the American Heart Association, said the percentage of people ages 6 to 19 who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980, now totaling more than nine million.

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy reports the percentage of Oklahoma teenagers "severely overweight or obese" has risen 300% in the past 20 years. The national report also said that the "percentage of students who attended a daily physical education class has dropped from 42% in 1991 to 28% in 2003."

Recess does not count in the 60 minutes of physical education currently required for students in grades K-5. Hickman's bill encourages but does not require at least one 20 minute recess each day for K-5 students, and recommends physical activities be incorporated into other parts of the regular school day.

A Fit Kids Physical Education Task Force would also be established if the bill is signed into law to study physical education requirements and P.E. curriculum in grades K-12, and make recommendations prior to next year's legislative session.

One of the problems with P.E., music and drama is that they are being crowded out by the sorry No Child Left Behind law which requires more and more tests, gobbling up more and more of the school day.

The Urban Institute estimates 65,000 lesbian and gay Americans are currently serving in the United States Armed Forces.

It is time to allow these heroes to serve their country openly and without fear of dismissal.

Last December, Zogby Interactive polled service members who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan on their views on homosexuality.

Seventy-three percent of those polled were comfortable around gays and lesbians, 55% said the presence of gays or lesbians in their unit is well known by others, and 21% of those in combat units knew for sure that someone in their unit is gay.

Another poll found a majority of junior enlisted service members believe gays and lesbians should be allowed to serve openly in the military, up from 16% in 1992.

There has been a seismic shift among the military and the public in favor of welcoming gay patriots in our armed forces.

Approximately 800 of those who have been discharged under Don't Ask, Don't Tell were specialists with training in occupations identified as critical.

Once and for all – stay out of other people's bedrooms!

Poor Kids

Helping poor children in the dawn of their lives is a no-brainer since those who grow up poor cost the economy \$500 billion a year.

They are less productive, earn less money, commit more crimes and have more health-related expenses, according to a new study.

A whopping 37 million Americans live below the official poverty line, defined as \$19,350 a year for a family of four.

Oklahomans need to consider the report carefully since one out of every four Oklahoma children lives in poverty – one of the worst rates in the nation. Investing significant resources in poverty reduction would not only be cost-effective, it would salvage lives otherwise lost.

Poverty experts testified before the House Ways and Means Committee as the report was released.

The new chairman, Rep. Charles B. Rangel, D-NY, said the experts were appearing "not as bleeding hearts, but to calculate the costs of poverty to our economy and society."

For a decade, Washington has focused on sweeping welfare changes passed in 1996 that imposed time limits and strict work requirements on welfare recipients. Crucial poverty-related topics were neglected.

We avoid this issue at our peril. Pay now or pay later.

Wisecracks

"A great many people think they are thinking when they are really rearranging their prejudices." – Edward R. Murrow

"In America," said Gore Vidal, "half the population doesn't read the paper. Clearly, they are the intelligent half."

Grandstanding On Immigration Reform

By Arnold Hamilton

State Rep. Randy Terrill crow's that his immigration reform package is the nation's toughest – a model that other states will want to adopt.

House Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, cites its passage as one of the session's major, early achievements – “something we're very proud of.”

What is lost in all the chest thumping is this: Some three-fourths of HB 1804 already can be found in federal statutes. *It's not new. It's already the law.*

Further, one of its signature provisions – penalties for employers that knowingly hire illegal immigrants – may actually violate the federal government's 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. *In other words, it may be unenforceable.*

“IRCA ... established preemptive language on states' ability to fine employees,” said a newly-released Report of the Task Force on Oklahoma Illegal Immigration Issues.

Can you say political grandstanding?

ANTI-IMMIGRANT STAMPEDE IS ON

No matter. The anti-immigrant stampede is on. Some lawmakers are feeling such heat from xenophobic constituents that they wouldn't dare express reservations publicly about the package, much less vote against it.

The bill sailed through the House with far more votes than even the always-optimistic Terrill expected – 88-9. It now goes to the Senate, where few changes are expected.

“There's a consensus on most of the bill,” said Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, the bill's Senate sponsor.

One provision that may not survive: A repeal of the in-state tuition waiver for undocumented students, many of whom were brought this country as small children by parents looking for work.

“There will be no ban on them being admitted [to state colleges],” said Terrill, R-Moore. “The issue is whether they'll be treated like a foreign student paying non-resident tuition.”

ONLY SO MUCH MONEY FOR HIGHER ED

Terrill said he is “open” to discussing the matter, but is “pretty steadfast” in opposing in-state tuition breaks or any taxpayer-funded scholarships or financial aid for undocumented students.

“This is a zero-sum game,” he said. “There is only a fixed amount available [for higher education]. We don't have an unlimited pot of money.”

A survey of Oklahoma colleges found 246 undocumented students enrolled in 2005-06. They received .023% of the \$96.8 million in state financial aid and tuition waivers given to all Oklahoma students.

Two years ago, illegal immigration wasn't even a significant issue for most Oklahomans. Ambitious politicians beat the drums so loudly and so long that it's now the No. 2 issue in statewide polls, behind only education. It feeds a deep, ever-present strain of nativism that does Oklahoma anything but proud.

The majority view: The dangers posed by 83,000 improperly documented immigrants in Oklahoma cooking meals, busing tables, cutting grass, roofing houses, installing sprinkler systems and working in hog farms can no longer be ignored.

BILL WORRIES BUSINESS EXECUTIVES

Business leaders, however, are worried about the measure's effect on the Oklahoma economy. What happens if many immigrants pack up and move elsewhere? Who's going to fill thousands of hard-labor positions at hog farms in the remote Panhandle, for example?

The employer penalties also are troubling to business leaders, though the



1986 federal law – passed at the behest of President Reagan – seems to prevent the state from imposing fines.

“The provisions of this section preempt any State or local law imposing civil or criminal sanctions [other than through licensing and similar laws] upon those who employ, or recruit or refer for a fee for employment, unauthorized aliens,” it reads.

It's also laughable that proponents claim they are plowing new ground on the issue. As state Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, pointed out during House debate, 75% of the bill's provisions already are federal law. Other lawmakers in both houses said they arrived at similar conclusions when analyzing the package.

The influx of undocumented immigrants is a problem in need of a solution – a comprehensive federal solution.

Oklahoma's approach is like putting a band-aid on a severed hand. It can't begin to deal with the underlying reason for illegal immigration: poor economic conditions in Mexico, Central America and elsewhere. It can't secure America's borders from a steady stream of immigrants desperate for hope, for a better way of life.

Terrill hinted ominously that illegal immigrants may be fleecing state taxpayers out of \$1 billion. He touts as fact, figures from the Washington-based Federation for American Immigration Reform that illegal immigrants cost Oklahoma's taxpayers more than \$200 million – even though a representative of the anti-immigrant group told a House committee last fall that its numbers are estimates of estimates.

IMMIGRANT WORKERS DON'T DRAIN COFFERS

There was no mention of new studies in Texas and California that indicate illegal immigrants actually put millions more dollars into public coffers than they take out.

The reality is, most improperly documented immigrants spend their time hiding, trying to avoid detection, hoping to keep paychecks rolling in – not trying to scam the system.

[Most, not all. Yes, there are some bad apples taking advantage of the sieve-like southern border to import all manner of criminal activity. This isn't going to stop them. They're chasing American dollars.]

Unless cooler heads prevail in the Senate or Gov. Brad Henry suddenly locates his veto pen, the Legislature is on the verge of transforming state and local law officers into full-time immigration enforcement agents.

That ought to be a real comfort to those with a Latino surname or accent – or those whose skin isn't pearly white.

For more coverage of the immigration reform debate in the Oklahoma Legislature – including a listing of how lawmakers voted on the bill – check out the Observer Blog at www.okobserver.net

Oilfield Assessment Compromise Adopted

Legislation that requires a fair system of assessment and taxation of oilfield equipment without harming local school funding has passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

State Rep. Ryan McMullen, D-Burns Flat, who helped forge a compromise on the issue, said the legislation shifted from the most contentious issue of the session to one of the biggest achievements.

To address the concerns of oilfield producers, local schools and all other landowners, McMullen authored an amendment that removed the section of House Bill 1485 exempting oil field equipment from property tax.

At the same time, the amendment left in language creating a uniform valuation system.

“We've had some extremely contentious, partisan battles in the House lately, but this is an example of how lawmakers can work together on a bipartisan basis for all Oklahomans,” said McMullen.

ADKINS' BILL WOULD HAVE HURT SCHOOLS

In its original form, House Bill 1485, by state Rep. Dennis Adkins, R-Tulsa, would have exempted several categories of oilfield equipment currently being taxed.

The bill was introduced due to long-standing complaints from oilfield producers.

“Currently, a piece of oil field equipment – say a natural gas compressor – will be valued at \$100,000 in one county and the exact same piece of equipment will be valued at \$500,000 just across the line in a neighboring county,” McMullen said.

“This huge disparity is quite simply unacceptable. We need a uniform standard, helping to ensure that everyone gets a fair shake.”

However, in its original form, officials believe House Bill 1485 would essentially reduce oil and gas industry taxes to schools and counties by anywhere from \$11 million to \$65 million per year.

That provision of the bill was opposed by a wide range of groups, including education organizations, county governments and agricultural groups.

DIVERSE GROUPS WORK TOGETHER

McMullen joined agricultural organizations such as Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association, and Oklahoma Grain and Feed Association in opposing the oilfield exemptions because they believed other property remaining on the rolls [mostly land used for agricultural production] would face a greater tax burden to pay local school bond indebtedness.

“This compromise helps the oil and gas industry address a legitimate grievance without slashing funding for our schools,” McMullen said. “Under this plan, oilfield equipment on the tax rolls will stay there, but the way counties assess the value of that property will become consistent across the state.”

Shelley Shelby, director of legislative services and staff attorney for the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, called the compromise “a huge victory for schools” in an e-mail sent to education officials.

“The uniform assessment language remaining does not hurt schools, nor will it shift a property tax burden onto anyone else,” Shelby wrote.

Once amended, House Bill 1485 passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives on a 78-23 vote. It now is in the state Senate.

CareerTech Grads Boost The Paycheck

A study reveals students who complete full-time programs in technology centers can expect to earn significantly more than those with no education beyond high school – \$2 billion more in income.

The study was by economist Mark Snead, examining the impact of CareerTech's full-time programs by estimating lifetime income gains.

Snead, director of the Center for Applied Economic Research at Oklahoma State University's William S. Spears School of Business, constructed a lifetime income model to estimate the portion of wage gains realized by full-time completers that can be attributed to career training.

The model was based on findings from existing research along with Census Bureau and Oklahoma Employment Security Commission wage survey data. The model was applied to more than 1,680 students completing full-time training programs.

ECONOMIC IMPACT IMPORTANT

"It is important to measure the economic impact of CareerTech education and training because of the public's investment and the role of technical education in fulfilling the state's economic development mission," said Phil Berkenbile, state director of CareerTech.

The study revealed that those completing full-time programs earn an estimated hourly wage of \$10.47, or about 12% more than those of similar age with no education beyond high school.

Hourly wage rates of \$12.46 are significantly higher for adults, average age of 30 years, who complete full-time programs at technology centers than those completing high school, average age of 18 years, who earn \$7.58.

Nearly one of five Oklahoma workers age 18 and older report having completed a vocational or technical program, the most common level of educational attainment beyond high school of Oklahoma workers.

CAREER-TECH ADDS PUNCH TO PAYCHECK

Other key findings indicate the typical 25-year-old who completes a CareerTech full-time program can expect to add more than \$152,000 [in current dollars] to their lifetime earnings stream, when compared to those completing no additional education beyond high school.

The programs offering the highest reported post-training hourly rate are MRI



technician, \$25.78; respiratory care, \$24.27; radiology technician, \$22.17; physical therapist assistant, \$18.10; database administrator, \$17.93; law enforcement training, \$16.45; orthotics/prosthetics technician, \$15.84; and aviation maintenance, \$15.52.

In addition to individual income gains, the study also computed impact on a statewide basis, said Berkenbile.

At each technology center about 400 students completed full-time programs in FY02 and added an estimate \$61.4 million [in current dollars] to their lifetime earning stream.

ADDING TO THEIR LIFETIME EARNINGS

For all the 1,680 students completing full-time training, it is expected that they will add about \$1.8 billion to their lifetime income stream. For those who stay in the state, about \$1.1 billion of added income is estimated to be earned in Oklahoma.

According to the study, income gains will produce sizeable yearly economic ripple effects and support an estimated \$990 million in future earnings for other workers, or a total income gain of more than \$2 billion as a result of training.

Some of the other benefits of training include faster entry into the labor force for young workers and an increase in the likelihood of becoming a professional or manager. Vocationally trained workers also experience lower rates of unemployment than workers with only a high school diploma.

Trust Is Created For Healthy Choices

A new coalition has been formed, dedicated to protecting natural resources and coming up with solutions to the state's huge population of obese people.

It was announced at a Capitol news conference by House Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, and it includes some who have been adversaries in the past.

If the coalition has its way, Oklahomans will soon see more high-quality recreational areas, greenways and parks under a measure supported by a coalition of conservation and health advocacy groups under HB 2108 by Cargill.

"Improving our quality of life and protecting natural resources in Oklahoma must be a part of our efforts to boost the state's economy," Cargill said.

"Not only will increased outdoor recreational areas encourage healthier families that are more active, but we'll also foster stronger communities with this measure."

OKLAHOMA HAS A JOB TO DO

He said the state needs to do more to make Oklahoma a livable and attractive location, helping recruit new businesses.

"We've made progress to improve Oklahoma's quality of life over the past several years, but we can do more. My hope is that this measure will spur more per-

manent green space, parks and recreational areas across the state."

The measure has widespread support among conservation, health advocacy, and agricultural organizations – including The Nature Conservancy, the American Heart Association, the Oklahoma Farmers Union, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the Wildlife Federation, The Sierra Club and The Poultry Federation.

A 'WIN-WIN' FOR OKLAHOMA

"This is a win-win for Oklahomans, by encouraging conservation and providing more locations for outdoor physical activity," said Michael Fuhr, state director of The Nature Conservancy.

"We'll see a healthier environment and healthier citizens as a result."

HB 2108 would organize a trust fund overseen by individuals appointed by the speaker, governor and Senate president pro tempore and would include the heads of affected state agencies.

The trust fund would be used for conservation acquisitions and nature preserves, as well as conservation easements to allow land to remain in private ownership.

Hazardous Waste Crisis Is Avoided

A compromise on hazardous waste solved one of the knottiest problems facing the current legislative session.

Senate Bill 709 by Sen. Ron Justice, D-Chickasha, declares manure as a non-hazardous material. Sounds funny, eh? It is a deadly serious issue.

Attorney General Drew Edmondson is involved in a lawsuit against the eastern Oklahoma poultry industry because chicken manure is threatening the Illinois River.

He felt Justice's original bill declaring chicken manure as non-hazardous would undercut his lawsuit.

From Justice's point of view, the issue was jeopardizing Oklahoma's \$5 billion livestock industry.

Due to the controversy and misunderstanding surrounding the legislation, the bill was amended to include a definition of manure that was agreed on by representatives from the Attorney General's office, the governor's office, various agriculture groups and the Department of Environmental Quality.

DEFINING MANURE BY LAW

Under provisions of the bill, manure is defined as any feces, urine, or other excrement from livestock and would include non-hazardous bedding, compost, or raw materials mixed with the excrement as well as any process water associated with the excrement or materials.

Answering questions about the impact on the state's rivers and lakes, Justice

explained that manure is made up of three elements: nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium – all of which are plant nutrients; and if manure is used properly, it should stay in the soil and not end up in the state's rivers and lakes.

"I don't think that by declaring this as a non-hazardous material would have any detrimental affect on the clean waters of our state," said Justice.

"If it's used properly, if you use best management practices and by that I mean they're using the product according to the recommended rates just like we would use any other fertilizer, then those nutrients would cause the grass to grow more efficiently and, therefore, put a better buffer zone to hold back any erosion that would contaminate the lakes and rivers."

IT COULD STILL BE HAZARDOUS

Under the measure, individuals could still have manure classified as hazardous if they felt there were elements in the product that were hazardous, but it would be on a case by case basis.

"This is simply to classify the materials so that if there are problems with it, if there are elements in the manure that someone believes are hazardous, then we can deal with those on a specific basis," said Justice.

"But it would protect the product so that it can be used, because to classify all animal waste as hazardous would have severe implications for our state."

The measure passed by a vote of 38-8, and moved on to the House of Representatives.

Our Alternative Ed Nationally Famous

Oklahoma has created a nationally recognized model for statewide alternative education – one that last year saved state and federal social services \$163 million.

The average Oklahoman has probably never heard of the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center [OTAC], yet its annual evaluation of the statewide alternative education programs shows it to be tremendously effective.

The evaluation is based on four independent sources of information: observational data collected during site visits by OTAC staff, student surveys, student focus groups, and student outcome data.

In 2005-06, Oklahoma's Statewide Alternative Education Academy Grant Program recorded 10 years of educating disaffected and at-risk students.

IT CONTINUES TO ADAPT

Oklahoma's nationally recognized model continues to adapt to changing populations, increase resources for teachers, and expand the concept of alternative education as it was first envisioned for these students.

Statewide Alternative Grant Program Participation 2005-06 included 248 programs serving 467 districts. Total students served: 12,263.

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

Eight of the criteria were rated on a four-point scale, from "notable" to "non-compliant." Ninety-five percent of programs were in compliance, at least to a minimal degree, with all 17 criteria.

Almost half of the programs [48.4%] were rated as Appropriate/Accomplished or better on all criteria and 17 earned notable ratings on all [or all but one] criteria. Seventy programs had at least one noncompliant rating this year.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Alternative Education is designed to serve students in grades 6-12. Enrollment in alternative education increased as grade level increased. Of the students served, 87.3% were in high school, and seniors comprised the largest group.

Two thirds of the program participants were more than one year over age for grade. Students were referred to alternative programs for a variety of reasons.

As in previous years, the principle reason for referring students was academic deficiency. The racial and ethnic background of the students in the state-funded alternative programs was similar to the racial and ethnic distribution of all students in Oklahoma public schools.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

In order to determine program effectiveness, Statewide Alternative Programs collected data on five variables highly related to dropping out of school. The data collected for each student included grades, courses passed, absences, disciplinary referrals, and achievement test scores.

Two types of analyses were conducted: pre-post analyses, involving only students enrolled in alternative education programs, and treatment comparison group analyses.

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

Recovered dropouts and pregnant and parenting teens were most likely to drop out. Alternative education students' scores on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests were lower than those of traditional education students.

This was most likely due to a combination of student factors and program characteristics.

STUDENTS IMPROVE ON THE VARIABLES

When the outcomes of the students were compared to a comparison group of students who were on waiting lists, alternative education students showed improvement on each of the variables.

The comparison students' performance declined in all but one.

These findings have been consistent each year that the program has been eval-

Retirement Fund Bill Clears House

House Joint Resolution 1039 by state Reps. Tad Jones and Joe Dorman calls for a vote of the people to amend the Oklahoma Constitution to redirect excess mineral income currently going to Oklahoma's Commissioner of the Land Office.

Under the proposal, the teachers' retirement system could begin receiving money upon passage by a vote of the people and cash would continue to flow into the retirement system until it is 80% funded. When the fund reaches 80%, money would flow back to the permanent trust of the School Land Commission.

Currently the system is only 49% funded, making it the second worst-funded state retirement system in the nation.

"This may be one of the most important proposals we consider this year," said Jones, R-Claremore. "Our plan would solidify a very unstable retirement system without forcing cuts to any state services."

Jones and Dorman noted the plan would benefit teachers with no harm to public school funding. The plan would give an additional \$43 million to the retirement system. At the same time, education is scheduled to receive yet another



uated, but the effect sizes were stronger this year. The differences between the two groups were substantial.

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

State law requires \$10,000 base funding per district. Because of budget cuts, the minimum was decreased to \$9,667. More than half of the districts [54.8%] were funded with this amount.

AVERAGE COST PER STUDENT IS LOW

Districts serving fewer than 10 students were required to form or join a cooperative unless they were granted a waiver. The average state cost per student per year in alternative education was \$1,876.

Local funds often supplemented the state dollars. The average cost per student-year in cooperative programs was \$2,267; in single-district programs it was \$1,570.

There was a wide variation in per-pupil costs across programs. A majority of the school districts contributed local funds to the programs but a substantial number did not.

Is the Alternative Education program cost effective? Using the evaluation database as a basis of estimation, we can calculate that a minimum of 1,214 students enrolled in alternative education were recovered dropouts.

Of these, 364 graduated this year and a total of 815 [63.92%] had a positive exit status. Positive outcomes included graduating, continuing in the alternative program, returning to traditional school, or earning a GED.

Using the dropout cost developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association [Johnson, 2001], we can estimate the amount of savings to the state for those recovered dropouts who graduate.

Cost to state and federal government is based on lost income and tax revenue, increased job training, welfare, unemployment, and criminal justice costs.

A WHOLE HOST OF ASSISTANCE

Financial assistance also includes housing, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Medicare and Medicaid, Food Stamps and WIC, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Unemployment Compensation, and the Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

The IRDA guide suggests that each dropout costs state and federal assistance programs approximately \$200,000 over a lifetime. If this figure is multiplied by the estimated number of recovered dropouts that graduated from alternative education, this calculation produces an estimated savings of \$72.8 million to taxpayers.

The potential savings of \$163 million to the state and federal social services which accrued from successfully recovering 815 former dropouts was almost 10 times [9.61%] greater than the state's budget for the Alternative Education Academy program for 2005-06.

– For more information contact Kathleen McKean, Ph.D., Director, or Kelly Langley, Ph.D., Coordinator of Program Evaluation Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center, 123 E. Broadway, Cushing, OK 74023. Phone 918.225.1882.

record appropriation this year, including money for teacher pay raises.

House Joint Resolution 1039 passed the House by a vote of 98-3.

In a separate, similar issue, state Rep. Terry Ingmire, R-Stillwater, passed legislation [House Bill 1595] to help modernize investment strategies to increase potential income to the commissioner of the Land Office.

Both measures now await action in the state Senate.

Postponed MLK Events Re-Set

Oklahoma City's Church of the Open Arms has rescheduled its celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's life. Nationally-renowned theologian Dr. Randall C. Bailey, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Hebrew Bible at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, will speak March 31 at 7 p.m. and April 1 at 10:45 a.m. at the church, 3131 N. Penn. The events also will honor human rights activists Clara Luper and the Rev. Orra Compton. The commemoration originally was set Jan. 14, but was postponed because of wintry weather. For more information, go to www.openarms.com or call 405.525.9555.

PUBLIC FORUM

Police Hogtied By County And State

By Jeannene Cooper

An open letter to David Prater, Oklahoma County district attorney:

On the 19th of February, our Honda Accord was stolen from our driveway. It was a week to the day when it was found and it was a total loss. This was a car that had been cared for since 1996 so that it would outlive us.

This car was beat-up, torn-up and abused so bad that it was totaled by the insurance company. Our little car was in perfect condition when it was stolen but the insurance company did not reimburse us for the full value.

We had to go into our savings to enable us to purchase another car. An expense that ended our savings.

We gave a policeman two papers that were found in our car among all the trash they created. I found a 7th grader's name on both of them along with his telephone number. The officer said that he would take them, but they really couldn't use them.

PLEASE EXPLAIN THIS TO ME

Oh really? One was a note to his parents, with the teacher's name on it.

But no, we cannot ask where this teacher teaches. The police are under the HIPPA laws? How can they do their job? Please explain that to me.

Now I have to worry about them returning and taking this car. Gee, I could really sleep well now if I still believed that the Oklahoma City police were doing their job.

I was told by one officer that the city did not bother with stolen cars, that they have been and still are not looking for car thieves. It's too much trouble and they have no room in the jails or prisons.

I suggested that we should build another prison, but he said that the people would not stand paying for an additional prison ... while their cars and homes were being wrecked by criminals?? So what are the citizens supposed to do? We



have no recourse but to purchase a gun and do the job ourselves?

This officer also told me that "we should move someplace else and have a garage to put our car into."

ARE WE THE PROBLEM?

That sounds like we're the problem because our car is not in a garage?

It's just our fault? Not because those that are supposed to be here to help the people, but say, that it's not their concern, nor the concern of the state or the city of Oklahoma City.

I would like to know how many drug users are in jails and/or prisons because they are guilty of possibly killing themselves with drugs. We have people in jail and prisons that are only guilty of damaging themselves, not another person.

They put these people in jails and prisons to protect them from themselves? Explain that please.

I assume that we could have just gone out and taken someone else's car and that would be just fine with this city, as long as we don't get caught driving it. And, if I left my drivers license in it, you might return it to me, but I would not be challenged as to how it got in that car. Not even questioned about the license being in a stolen car?

I'm not mad at our police. As far as I'm concerned, the blame lies on the state and this city. They are everyone's problem.

- The author lives in Oklahoma City

Pauline Mayer Was Fine Public Servant

By George J. Johnson Jr.

This is dedicated to the life and services of Pauline E. Mayer, one of the first matriarchs of Oklahoma Human Services.

There is no doubt that she lived out the role of chaplain in the lives of thousands of human services professionals in the department during her career.

Pauline E. Mayer died Jan. 24 in Coalgate, OK. She was 93.

Mayer, a Coal County native, born in Lehigh, Sept. 11, 1913, had the first and last word on child welfare and all children's issues for nearly five decades at OKDHS.

She worked throughout southeastern Oklahoma on the development of a social services system for Oklahoma beginning in 1934, when the Department of Public Welfare was established by Article XXV of the Oklahoma Constitution.

THESE TWO RAN THE DEPARTMENT

Many who knew her said Mayer and co-worker Vera Alder ran the welfare department. Alder was the long-time secretary to former OKDHS Director Lloyd E. Rader.

Mayer was among the first "visitors" [social workers] hired one month after the Department of Public Welfare started in August 1936. Her grand salary then was an amazing \$150 per month. One of the criteria back then for working in the department was having reliable transportation.

Mayer went wherever the department needed her. During her tenure, she served as county director in Bryan, Pontotoc and McCurtain counties and had a short

tour of duty as acting county director in Seminole County.

At the state office she worked in the Administrative Review Unit, Medical Assistance and Eligibility Control Unit and served as chief of the Children's Bureau.

SHE WAS STRICT AND TOUGH

She was known for being strict and tough. The last years of her career were spent serving as chief operating officer for OKDHS Social Services and Children's Programs.

She officially retired in April 1980; however, special assignments and projects kept bringing her back on the OKDHS payroll until June 1983.

The Pauline E. Mayer Children's Shelter in Oklahoma City bears her name, as does the Pauline E. Mayer Group Home for teenage mothers. The staffs daily carry on her lifelong legacy of caring for Oklahoma's children who have been abused or neglected.

One little-known fact about Mayer was that she was a cattle rancher and remained close to the family cattle business all her life.

She last was in the pasture with the cattle Jan. 1, 2007, four days before she became ill.

The trails she blazed are dotted with the works of today's human services professionals who are dedicating their lives to Oklahoma's needy and vulnerable children and families.

- From the DHS newsletter

Homeless Beggar May Be Troubled Hero

By Nadine Jewell

That homeless man standing on the street may be a forgotten veteran. He may have returned from war with mental scars that only he can feel, then united with a family that could not understand or tolerate his changing moods.

Service members went to battle with high ideals and proudly served. The downside of these courageous men and women is that some saw too much in war that changed them forever.

Many have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. As a result, they may feel alienated, angry, and can't adjust at home. They may believe they are losing their minds or have mental problems.

They are embarrassed to talk about their experiences or their feelings, can no longer cope with civilian life, cannot hold a job, or relate to their spouses or families.

They are haunted by their nightmares when they can sleep. Some drink to try to drown the pictures of war that constantly swirl in their minds. Without jobs, without support, the penniless are forced to the streets to suffer or beg.

They either do not know how they can get assistance from the VA or are unable to try. They believe to seek help would mean they would have to talk about the terrible things they are trying to forget.

Leaving these poor souls on the street without psychological help is a disgrace, but our laws prevent picking them up and forcing them to get help.

All Americans should insist that every veteran is informed about the benefits they have earned. We have thousands of service men and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as from previous wars, who are experiencing PTSD. The military has instituted programs to help the service personnel with problems with they return home.

But these problems linger and often return. We need to ensure our honorable vets obtain continuing help, when needed, so they will not have to turn to the streets.

Families and friends should be aware that our returning military have gone through life-changing experiences. If they detect symptoms of PTSD, they should encourage the veteran to seek help from the VA.

Local veteran service organizations can assist the men/women or the families to obtain help.

It is also important that we query our elected Congress members about their stand on veterans' issues. Stay informed about their votes to see if they truly support the sacrifices of our troops.

And don't turn your head when that homeless person with the ragged Army jacket begs on the corner. If you can't afford a dollar or two to thank him for his service, at least give him a smile and tell him, "Thank you."

- The author lives in Norman

Schools Are Victim Of House Politics

By Frosty Troy

Education First! That was the Republican battle cry when Republican Frank Keating was governor. Until that time, education was always the last major appropriation, often plundered for other projects.

GOP legislators hung posters on all their doors. A band of teachers rallied in the rotunda, then went door to door, asking legislators to pass a bill requiring that the education appropriation be the first passed.

The heat on Democrats was so intense that they passed the bill.

Check that Republican crusade against today's scofflaw leaders in the House. They knew the deadline for school districts was March 9.

Not only was education on the back burner, the leadership didn't come up with an early supplement of \$58 million needed to cover the mandatory \$3,000 pay increase shortfall in 2006.

SUPERINTENDENTS DIDN'T HAVE AN APPOINTMENT

Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, refused to see any of the more than 150 superintendents because "they didn't have an appointment."

Angry superintendents and school board members raged through the Capitol. Despite talks, Senate and House leaders remained mum. The House wanted another big tax cut - \$68 million in each of the two succeeding fiscal years.

Short-changing public education is nothing new in the Oklahoma Legislature, which is why the state ranks 46th in what it spends on a student's education and 48th in teacher salaries.

Thanks to lack of funding, some of the major provisions of Gov. Henry Bellmon's superb reforms [House Bill 1017] have gone by the wayside, including class size restrictions.

In fiscal 2005, public schools won 37.5% of the budget. In 2006 it was 35.7% and in the present year it's 35.4%. Public education receives only about 30% of its total budget from local funds.

HIETT CHEATED THE RETIRED TEACHERS

Most of today's legislators voted for nearly \$900 million in tax cuts in the past three years. When they doled out 4% raises to all state employees, then-GOP House Speaker Todd Hiatt refused to go more than 2% for retired teachers.

Without the entire \$58 million, teachers and support personnel would have been terminated by the hundreds, especially in districts where the associated costs are heavy, such as Union Public Schools with a \$1 million deficit.

There was more than enough surplus money available to cover the deficiency in February. Many Republican members say privately they would have voted for an early supplemental but would not challenge their backsliding leadership.

HERE IS THE BREAKDOWN

The State Board of Education calculated the un-funded mandates, documenting what the Legislature owed:

- Flexible Benefit Allowance for certified staff, \$10 million; for Support Staff \$6 million.
- Increase in certified staff not receiving the \$3,000 raise in 2006, \$3.5 million.
- Employer costs required by the Federal Insurance Contributions Act [FICA] and Teachers Retirement funding, \$21 million.
- Employer costs related to the 50-cent per hour salary increase for FICA and Teachers' Retirement contribution for full-time or part-time support personnel: \$2,826,000.

Too Many ATV Debates Without Their Helmets

The statistics are alarming: Thirty-three fatalities involving all-terrain vehicles in 4½ years. More than half those killed were under age 18.

Nearly 1,600 injured during the same period in ATV mishaps. Forty-one percent were 17 or younger.

Still, the same Oklahoma House of Representatives that requires minors to wear helmets when driving or riding on motorcycles couldn't muster enough votes to demand the same safety gear for those aboard heavier, more powerful ATVs.

The best the House could do was a milquetoast measure that would mandate minors wear helmets on public property, such as the 12 state parks and an unknown number of municipal parks that permit off-roading.

The House approved HB 1686 on an 82-16 vote. It now goes to the state Senate for consideration.

The bill's author, Rep. Bill Nations, D-Norman, wanted minors driving or riding ATVs to always wear helmets, but couldn't overcome opposition from ATV enthusiasts and dealers nor from farmers and ranchers.

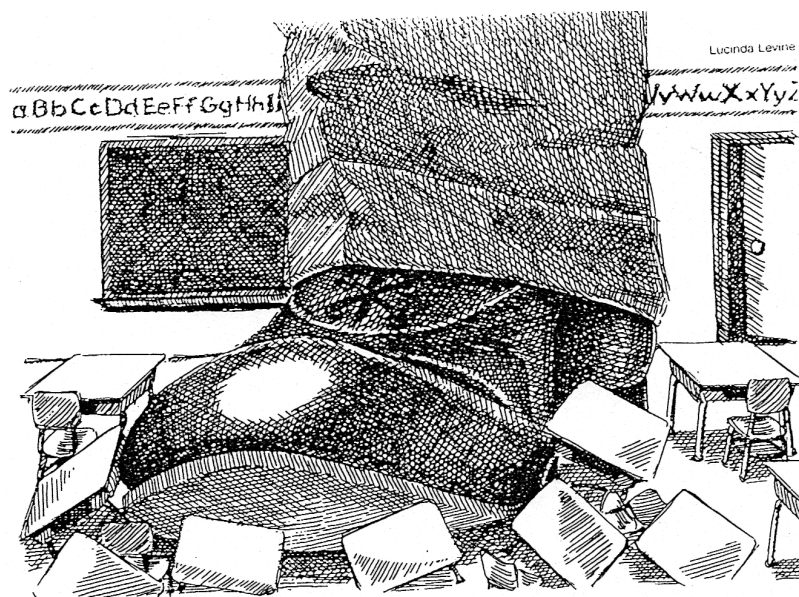
Even so, Rep. Daniel Sullivan, R-Tulsa, hailed the measure, saying it "reaches a very excellent compromise on how to deal with this troubling issue."

Others aren't so sure.

State Rep. Jeff Hickman, R-Dacoma, complained the restriction would create enforcement headaches for the three state rangers assigned to his district's Little Sahara State Park - especially on Okeene rattlesnake hunt weekends when 30,000 or more visit the park.

He also argued that helmets wouldn't help prevent most fatalities since they occur when ATVs roll over, crushing the drivers or riders.

Finally, Hickman noted: "I don't know that it's our job to tell parents how to



- The \$3,000 pay raise for federally paid certified personnel, \$14,000,000.

The House Democratic Caucus joined school superintendents from across the state in calling for the deficiency act to be heard on the House floor.

First school district impacted by inaction in the Legislature was Catoosa, threatening the jobs of six certified staff and 21 support personnel.

HOUSE DEMOCRATS NAME THEIR PLAN

House Democrats dubbed their plan Honesty In Funding Education Act. Many school districts were forced to spend money out of their operational budgets, a dangerous move that could be costly in the years ahead.

"I served on the interim study that looked into solving this problem," said Glen Elliot, superintendent from Burlington Public Schools. "The total money needed for school districts across the state is \$58 million.

"We were told we were going to get this funding after the 2006 session. We are still waiting for the funding for the un-funded mandates."

In a shot at the speaker, Elliot said GOP Rep Chris Bengé [House Appropriations chair] should offer the \$58 million "as one of their 100 Ideas ..."

"The only thing stopping the bill from being heard on the House floor was the Republican Leadership," said former school superintendent Rep. Ray McCarter, D-Marlow.

THEY CLAIM THEY ARE FEDERAL TEACHERS

The House leadership was taking an odd position, pointing out that some teachers are "federal" teachers. That's their excuse for not funding the \$21 million.

Darrell Adcock, superintendent for McCurtain Schools stated, "Why don't House Republicans want to pay what they owe? The bill passed last year stated that the school districts had to increase all teachers' salaries by \$3,000.

"They are all Oklahoma teachers and all certified by the state of Oklahoma. There is no such thing as a 'federal' teacher. Our children are getting short-changed. We made plans based on monies owed to us," he said.

School boards and school superintendents across the state were in the same quandry. The State School Board Association sounded the early alarm to no avail.

"We made our budgets and encumbered our monies based on what the state said they would give us. They left us high, dry and broke," Clinton Superintendent Perry Adams said.

Oklahoma has the fifth best qualified teachers in America, according to the annual Quality Counts report. The state is well below the national dropout rate and leads the nation in early childhood education.

Too bad the state doesn't have a Legislature to match.

raise" their children. "At some point parents have to have common sense."

Of course they do. But that never stopped the state from banning minors from using tobacco or alcohol. Or from requiring parents to strap their youngsters into child restraint seats.

"The bill is not about telling parents how to raise their children," Nations said. "The bill is about giving tools to parents to do what they know is right."

Ex-Legislator Hits 'Prior Restraint'

Republican House Speaker Lance Cargill is illegally using "prior restraint" on information going to legislators, according to a former legislator.

Wanda Jo Stapleton, who represented an Oklahoma City House district for 10 years, has contacted an attorney.

She said she was "manhandled" by two House employees. She was escorted out of a House hallway when she refused to quit circulating a pro-choice flier.

Her attorney, Rhonda G. Rudd, said in letter delivered to Cargill she needed no "permission" to pass out her fliers to House members' offices.

Cargill is in violation of both the Oklahoma and the federal constitutions, according to Rudd.

A House clerk who read the flier said it would have been OK to circulate it if she had sought permission.

"Speaker Cargill, your written procedure is not only unconstitutional, it is a serious abuse of power invested in you by the people you serve," Rudd wrote.

"Had you objected to my client's flier, you could have challenged it either verbally or legally."

Stapleton said she would take "the appropriate steps" in pursuing her rights.

In A Do-Nothing Job, Cheney Among Worst

By Danny M. Adkison

One of the first subjects I ever wrote on for scholarly journals concerned the office of vice president of the United States. The reason was simple. I wrote my dissertation on the topic.

One famous historian who made some interesting observations on the vice presidency was Harvard University's Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who died recently at age 89.

Reading the New York Times obituary of Schlesinger made me want to revisit the vice presidency, particularly the Cheney vice presidency.

I didn't have a copy of Schlesinger's book containing his thoughts on the vice presidency. It was a rather rare find. That's because Schlesinger added his vice presidency observations as a kind of addendum to an existing book of his [*The Imperial Presidency*, first published in 1973].

Back when I was publishing what I thought were groundbreaking articles on the subject, it was not that easy to get a copy Schlesinger's vice presidency piece [I think it only appeared in one edition of his book].

SCHLESINGER: ABOLISH VICE PRESIDENCY

So with some doubt about any success, I headed to the OSU library, and sure enough, the library did not have the edition of the book, either. I settled for checking out a later book he wrote [*The Cycles of American History*, first published in 1986].

I had read the reviews of this book when it was published and assumed it was a kind of summation of much of Schlesinger's earlier writings [including those on the vice presidency]. Thinking I was already familiar with these I never read it. I wished I had. It is an excellent book and Schlesinger even devoted an updated chapter on the subject of the vice presidency.

Even more surprising, Schlesinger referred to not just one, but two articles I had published on the subject.

It seems that Schlesinger and I had reached the same conclusion about the office: It should be abolished. That, however, is not very likely ever going to happen. That means that we need to understand what makes the office so important.

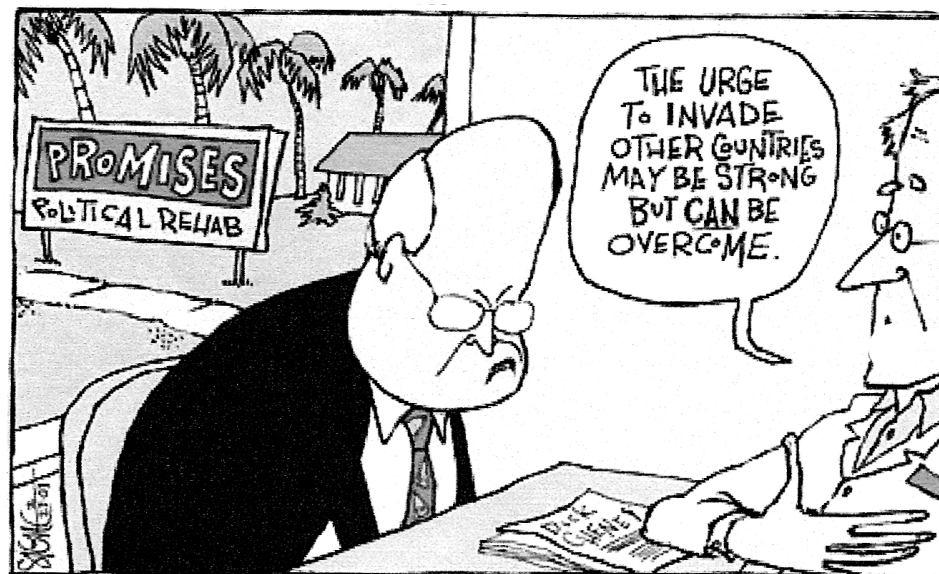
Enter Dick Cheney.

HARSH, BUT TRUE: CHENEY LOUSY

Dick Cheney has to be one of the worst vice presidents of all time. That may sound harsh, but it should be understood in the context of the historical evolution of the office of vice president.

The point is, the office has tended to attract low-caliber individuals. So, to say that Cheney is bad is really a mere restatement of the fact that he was vice president.

If one tries to object by bringing up the name of Thomas Jefferson or John Adams, those two vice presidents shouldn't count since they came prior to the amendment [12th] that forever changed that office.



Schlesinger knew this. In spite of the fact that the office had, in recent decades, increased in trappings, it was still a do-nothing job.

In spite of the fact that vice presidents now routinely attend cabinet meetings and in spite of the fact that vice presidents now have an office in the White House [both relatively recent developments] the office is still one, as Schlesinger put it, of "make work."

WHO'D WANT THE JOB, ANYWAY?

More importantly, Schlesinger concluded, "The vice presidency cannot be made a working job."

The fact that anyone would even consider taking the position of vice president reveals a character flaw.

And even if one refused to accept that premise, there can be little doubt but that the office is, again in the words of Schlesinger, "a maiming experience."

So why would anyone want to be vice president? They wouldn't. Anyone who says they aspire to this office is lying. What they want to be is president.

This is what makes Cheney's acceptance of the job so revealing.

Given his medical condition and the conditions under which he accepted the vice presidency, it was obvious that Dick Cheney was not ever going to be a presidential candidate.

So, the one reason any rational person would have for taking the position was not present in his case.

Is it any wonder that the result was a vice president who has refused to accept reality and admit that invading Iraq was a mistake? That Iraq did not attack our nation on 9/11? That Iraq was not developing, as explained by Cheney, weapons of mass destruction? That leaking the identity of our nation's CIA operatives to the press is a very serious matter?

There will, no doubt, be many more such questions for historians to address. Unfortunately, Schlesinger will not be one of them.

His legacy, as one of America's greatest historians, will, however, outshine that of some of our nation's leaders.

- The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

Lies About Liberals Reach New Heights

By Karen Webb

Arianna Huffington, Ted Kennedy and Joe Biden are divorced from the reality of what's going on in Iraq. They are wedded to a deluded perception of the war, unwilling to acknowledge widespread and irrefutable evidence to the contrary.

Sound like anyone you know? No, I'm not talking about President Bush - though it's certainly true of him as well. I'm talking about the mainstream media, and their relentless depiction of the Iraq war as a left/right issue, even as the facts give lie to this hoary framing.

According to a LA Times/Bloomberg poll, 60% of Americans oppose Bush's escalation of the war, and 65% want to "withdraw right away" or "withdraw within a year."

Other polls reach the same conclusion: Iraq is simply not a right vs. left issue. But you'd never know it from watching the pundits on television.

HOWARD FINEMAN LAYS AN EGG

Here's Howard Fineman on Countdown with Keith Olbermann: "... That's the tension that people like Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden are caught in as they try to move to the left on the war without taking themselves out of the mainstream of the country."

Of course, what Fineman means by "left on the war" is being in favor of ending the war, and against Bush's handling of it. No Democrats need worry that taking those positions will take them out of the mainstream.

Don't tell that to Candy Crowley.

Here was her cobweb-covered analysis of Ted Kennedy's anti-escalation measure: "What Senator Kennedy is going to do is lay down the liberal view of things, which is to say, he will say, look, no additional troops and additional money for additional troops, unless Congress approves."

JUDY WOODRUFF GETS IT WRONG

The "liberal view of things?" More like the view of things of almost two-thirds of the nation. Likewise Judy Woodruff on Meet the Press saying Iraq is "a huge problem for the Democrats. Their base wants the United States out of Iraq yesterday."

So anyone who wants out of Iraq belongs to the Democratic base? Someone

should give Howard Dean a raise for doubling the size of the party.

What makes this moldy messaging so disturbing is that ferreting out the truth of the matter wouldn't involve complex analysis. It would just require a glance at Capitol Hill.

Is Chuck Hagel, co-sponsor [along with Carl Levin and Joe Biden] of the Senate resolution condemning Bush's surge plan, a "liberal?" Is he "left on the war?" Is he "part of the Democratic base?" Is he "out of the mainstream?"

Or how about North Carolina U.S. Rep. Walter Jones? After enthusiastically supporting the war, Jones has become a harsh critic of Bush's Iraq policy. According to the media framing, that would make Jones a "liberal," right?

He's actually the proud owner of a 93% rating from the American Conservative Union for his seven-term voting record.

SEN. SAM BROWNBACK IS A LIBERAL?

Then there's Sen. Sam Brownback, who, upon returning recently from Iraq, announced, "I do not believe that sending more troops to Iraq is the answer. Iraq requires a political rather than a military solution."

This flaming liberal has a 100 overall rating from the American Conservative Union, and is considered one of that group's "Best of the Bests."

Brownback spoke at the second annual conference of pro-life bloggers in Washington. Boy, are the pro-lifers going to be shocked when someone as "liberal" as Brownback shows up.

When the macro framing of the war is so warped, it makes productive discussion of how to deal with Iraq even harder.

The encouraging thing is that while so many in the mainstream media continue to believe that being in favor of ending the war means you're a "left-winger" and "out of the mainstream," a growing number of politicians don't.

How long will it take for the media to recognize reality and drop their outdated, obsolete, and thunderingly inaccurate framing of the war debate?

Iraq is not about right and left. It's about right and wrong - and the vast majority of the public clearly knows this. It's time for the media to catch up.

- The author lives in Moore

BOOKS

Oklahoma History Can Still Surprise

By Alvena Bieri

YOU KNOW WE BELONG TO THE LAND

The Centennial History Of Oklahoma
By Paul Lambert and Bob Blackburn
Oklahoma Heritage Association
239 pages, \$39.95

The fun and excitement of the Oklahoma centennial is ongoing.

One of the most colorful books celebrating this year-long event is this new history published by the Oklahoma Heritage Association. Two of the most successful historians around, Paul Lambert and Bob Blackburn, both authors of many publications about our history, put it together.

It opens with some poems by N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa from southwestern Oklahoma, and a foreword by David Boren.

I suppose it would sound stupid to say that a lot has happened in the history of Oklahoma. And my guess is that many Oklahomans don't have a firm concept of even the highlights of our history.

WHO CAN IDENTIFY CHARLES HASKELL?

I would be afraid to go to downtown Stillwater or the OSU campus and ask the first several people I met, "Can you name our first governor?" I hope they would all say, "Oh, yes, that was Charles Haskell."

But I'd be pleasantly surprised if they did!

Anyway, as they move through our rich and interesting history, the authors center on outstanding individuals of the past.

One of these is J.J. McAlester, for whom the town is named. We learn that he fought on the side of the Confederacy in the Civil War, then found a profitable market for various construction materials as the frontier opened.

He helped get a railroad to that part of the state, then started a coal mine. Mining turned out to be a major industry in Pittsburg County. He was also Oklahoma's second lieutenant governor.

OKLAHOMA'S FRONTIER HITCH

The Hitch family of Guymon is another frontier success story. The first Hitch, James K., was born in Tennessee. Ladd and Paul have followed the family tradition of business success in farming and ranching. The older Hitch first went into cattle raising in southwestern Kansas where he and his wife lived in a small sod house.

Champion Of The Opressed Or Satanic Psychopath?

By Norm Rourke

BILLY THE KID

The Endless Ride
By Michael Wallis
W.W. Norton & Co.
315 pages, \$25.95

In his new book, Tulsa author Michael Wallis offers a different view of a young Billy the Kid who made his mark primarily around the southern region of New Mexico Territory.

Wallis begins with Billy's birth in New York City. "If, indeed, his birthplace was New York, no records that can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he ever lived there have been uncovered."

The Lincoln County War in southern New Mexico Territory brought Billy into prominence. Miguel Antonio Otero, two-term governor of New Mexico Territory, said of Billy, "I liked The Kid very much. Nothing would have pleased me more than to have witnessed his escape. He had his share of good qualities and was very pleasant. He had a reputation for being considerate of the old, the young and the poor; he was loyal to his friends and above all, loved his mother devotedly."

Otero was one of many Hispanics who held Billy in high esteem. Billy respected them, was fluent in their language, and loved their culture, their food and one of their own.

The Lincoln County War would put him at odds with political and economic competitors.

His participation in the war would cost him his life. He would be shot down by a man who himself had walked the thin line of right and wrong, a man who had a reputation of his own.

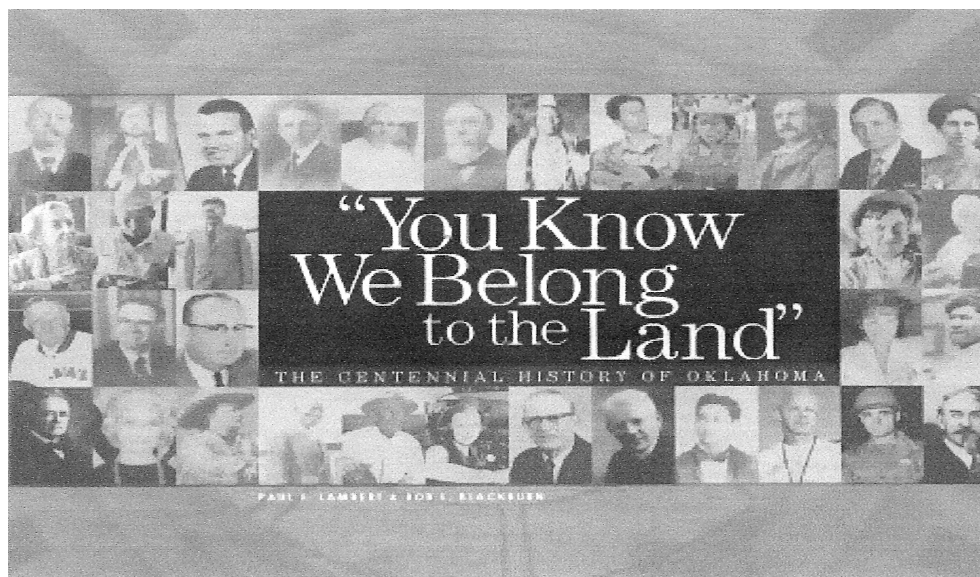
Billy the Kid, The Endless Ride is well documented and researched. Wallis provides much needed background on Billy's beginning - something most writers ignore.

In so doing, we learn more about the young man who would become a historic personality.

Wallis concludes: "No matter how the story is told, Billy the Kid lives on. Whether he is described as El Chivato, champion of the oppressed, or a Satanic psychopath, he remains irrepressible, mysterious, and lethal.

"His ride across our popular imagination will never end."

- The author lives in Beggs



They lived through droughts and blizzards and ended up on Coldwater Creek south of Guymon where the ranch headquarters are now.

It's interesting to learn that by 1893 they had a big orchard there, too. By 1900 they had almost 5,000 acres for their 10,000 head of cattle. And they went on prospering from there.

At the other end of the state, the Native Tribes were producing many leaders, scholars, and poets.

We read about Sequoyah, the marvelous linguist who invented the Cherokee alphabet; of Alexander Posey, the Creek journalist; of historian John Hope Franklin's father who started his son on the right path to success.

NO IGNORING THE TULSA RACE RIOT

In a sadder story, there is a photo of the Greenwood District in Tulsa during the race riot of 1921. And, of course, the Mayo Hotel and the Boston Avenue Methodist Church are shown as important landmarks.

Thinking about the oil money of Tulsa brings up more stories like E.W. Marland's rise to wealth in Ponca City.

Tom Slick, "The King of the Wildcatters," may not be as familiar. He discovered the Cushing-Drumright oil field, and by 1929 was the largest independent oil producer in the whole country. His name is very appropriate for an oil man, I think.

The authors missed out on reporting the major renovation of the Skirvin Tower Hotel in downtown Oklahoma City, but they have other good stories about our capital, starting when it was in Guthrie.

GUTHRIE'S MAGNIFICENT PAST - AND PRESENT

Most of Guthrie's downtown now is on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Carnegie Library where Haskell took his oath of office.

Then there was Anton Classen, for whom the street is named. He made the Run of '89, started a law practice in Guthrie, then moved to Edmond and on to Oklahoma City. He helped get the teachers' college at Edmond [now University of Central Oklahoma] started as well as Epworth College [now Oklahoma City University].

Lambert and Blackburn have touched on many more creative Oklahomans, including athletes and politicians.

There's a sketch of Alice Robertson of Muskogee, the first woman elected to Congress from Oklahoma. Ironically, she went to Washington at a time when women didn't even have the right to vote, and she did not believe they should.

As we can see, Oklahoma history is full of surprises.

- The author lives in Stillwater

The Remarkable Painted Desert

By Mike Nobles

THE PAINTED DESERT

Land of Wind and Stone
Text by Scott Thybony, Photos by David Edwards
University of Arizona Press
96 pages, \$14.95

This relatively short book will take the reader from the Grand Canyon to the Petrified Forest National Park in a landscape rarely seen by the traveling public, even those that take the Petrified Forest exit off Interstate 40.

The Painted Desert runs some 200 miles across northeastern Arizona and most lies within Indian country, the Navajo Nation. It contains not only the largest collection of petrified wood in the world but an abundance of natural beauty, scientific phenomenon, and an intriguing history within its windswept, sandy, difficult landscape.

Not only is there a discussion of the geology, paleontology, anthropology, and human history of the area but just enough personal stories and insights to make the reader think author Scott Thybony is sitting with them sharing a cup of coffee and his experiences in this national treasure little known to most travelers.

In addition to the book being a real pleasure to read, thanks to an award-winning writer and his highly readable literary style, but the photographs are strikingly beautiful and are a credit to David Edwards, himself a 16-year veteran of photographing for the likes of National Geographic.

This is a worthy addition to the University of Arizona Press series, Desert Places. But beware, after reading this book the reader is liable to just have to order the others in the series. They are that good and inexpensive to boot.

- The author, is cofounder of A Gathering of Writers, lives in Tulsa

NCLB Is Leaving Children Behind

By Paul Cummins

Recently I was asked to join three others in a radio interview concerning the pros and cons of the No Child Left Behind debate. The others were temperate, balanced and guarded in their judgments.

One, from the Fordham Institute, offered several intelligent insights and speculated that it is probably too soon to render an accurate assessment of the program's efficacy.

The other two interviewees were public school principals who, I believe, were trying to be fair and politically careful in not leveling any harsh criticisms.

When asked by the moderator, Warren Olney, what's good and what's bad about the bill, both stated that it was good to design clear standards and to identify, by groups, who is and who isn't measuring up.

When addressing the "what's bad" question, they suggested—rather guardedly that perhaps not enough resources were being allotted to enable the schools to really succeed, and that some teachers may believe that the test narrows the curriculum too much and forces them to teach to the test.

ANSWERING THE RADIO SOUND BITES

In the face of all this politeness, I felt compelled to fire away with both barrels as best I could, given the sound bites that radio compels one to issue.

So, unlike the other three, I intemperately, unguardedly and one-sidedly made the following comments about No Child Left Behind [NCLB]:

- In fact, NCLB does force the teachers to teach to test; consequently it squeezes the joy out of teaching for both teacher and student.

- It narrows the curriculum to math and reading because those are the areas tested. The arts, human development, physical education, community service, environmental education, field trips and other electives are given short shrift, at best.

- Several teachers I have spoken with even say they are so depressed by the pressure and narrowness of the test that they are about to quit the field. In reality, I have yet to talk to one classroom teacher who has had anything positive to say about NCLB.

INNER CITY SCHOOLS HUGELY UNDERFUNDED

- I will say quite boldly what one of the two principals only alluded to, namely, that public schools – particularly inner-city schools – are hugely underfunded. Overcrowded classes filled with non-English-speaking students, bereft of books and supplies, need dramatic increases in funds.

In Los Angeles, for example, the per-pupil spending is \$7,000-\$8,000 per year; by contrast, quality private schools – which offer what public schools should but cannot provide – spend more than \$25,000 per pupil.

What Testing Is Doing To Students

By David Keyes

Soon it will be test day. My second-graders will clear off their desks, sharpen their No. 2 pencils, and sit down to take their annual standardized exams. This is supposed to help schools close the achievement gap, but it has many unintended consequences.

The tests will take two-and-a-half hours, though that is not the only time devoted to them. We have a rigorous test prep program that starts in October.

At first, my students were excited when I passed out their shiny test prep books, but it wasn't long before excitement was replaced by groans.

The work was boring – wee-sentence passages reminiscent of Dick and Jane. I struggled to keep my own groans inaudible.

Also, the test prep program completely changed the classroom culture I worked so hard to establish.

I put a lot of effort into convincing my students it is OK to make mistakes.

I use open-ended tasks so they can work at their own level.

A VERY DIFFERENT MESSAGE

In writing, I might expect a well-edited paragraph from one student, two simple sentences from another. The test prep program sends a very different message: Each question has one correct answer, which all students must find.

My students quickly forgot my mantra that mistakes were OK. The X's next to their wrong answers speak louder than my words.

Test prep has also hurt my efforts to get students to work together. In one assignment, I put students in groups to read about the lives of famous African Americans.

On the way to lunch, they excitedly bombarded me with facts about Harriet Tubman, Jackie Robinson, and Martin Luther King Jr.

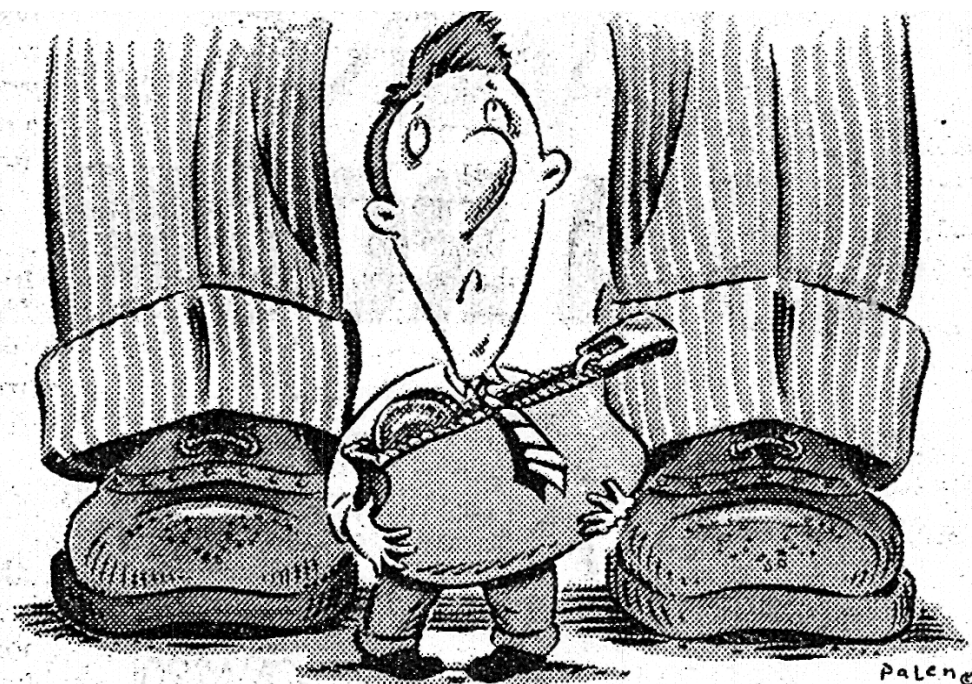
This excitement vanishes when we get out our test prep books. Perhaps it has to do with the file folders students must put between themselves so they don't copy each other's work.

THEY GUARD THEIR ANSWERS

The engagement I see when they work together is replaced by animosity as they guard their answers.

Students who get correct answers clench their fists and exclaim, "Yes!" while those who make mistakes yell, "Stop bragging!"

I try my best to stop this behavior, reminding students that bragging hurts people's feelings, but my efforts are futile.



Unlimited billions for Iraq, but not enough for our children. But that is a rant from previous blogs – a rant I will no doubt continue to hurl into the tax-cuts void.

- The real problem is that students are disengaged from their education, and disengaged students ultimately drop out, as more than 50% do in large urban and poor rural schools. The antidote to dropouts is a rich and diverse curriculum offered under improved teaching conditions.

CUTTING CLASS SIZE OUGHT TO BE PRIORITY

- If we really wanted to see that no child was left behind we would cut class sizes by half in inner-city schools, which would require hiring 100% more teachers in those schools, and we would obtain top-quality additional teachers by providing a pay increase of \$25,000 a year across the board.

If prison guards can make \$75,000 to \$100,000 a year, why can't teachers? These changes would, of course, demand increased revenue that would, alas, require everyone – including wealthy individuals and corporations – to pay their fair share of taxes. Good luck!

So I say, fine, let's test children periodically and let's set high standards for our schools and our children. But beyond testing, let's realize that diagnosis is just the beginning.

To solve problems, you need to be willing to go the whole way down difficult roads, and to do this will require a far greater commitment than the federal government and civic leaders have given any indication they are willing to make.

Our teachers and inner-city schools are facing overwhelming and heartbreaking odds, and we are letting them down.

– The author blogs for Truthdig

Recently, two struggling students who had failed to get a single answer right all week broke down in tears.

Last week, I was the one crying – not over a test, but a biography of Hank Aaron I was reading to them. His story of growing up in poverty. When I said, "This book is making me cry," my students at first didn't believe me. But then they looked closely at my eyes. "He is crying," they whispered to each other.

They became as engrossed as I was. Some asked me to read the hateful letters fans sent to Aaron again, which prompted an engaged discussion on racism.

All cheered when I read about his mother coming onto the field after he broke Babe Ruth's home run record.

PRETEND LETTERS TO HANK AARON

Afterward, I planned to have them write pretend letters to Hank Aaron.

But one asked if he was still alive. "Yes," I said.

"Can we actually send the letters to him?" she asked.

What a great idea! I felt fantastic as I walked around watching them compose their letters. They talked excitedly with each other about what they wanted to say.

Students who normally struggled to put two sentences down on paper were going onto the back of the page. It was the pinnacle of my year.

One student wrote, "I liked when you got hate letters and you still ignored them."

Another said, "I think you were brave because when you got death threats you still tried to beat a White man's record."

A third student began similarly. Then, out of the blue, she added. "I'm in second grade and I'm about to take the tests. I am nervous."

How had this thought gotten into her letter? It was completely unrelated to everything else she had written. Was her test anxiety so deep that it came out at random?

I'm anxious, too. I have nightmares that when my students sit down for their tests, it will all be too much – the months of dogged work, the file folders separating them, the desperate search for the right bubble to fill in and the entire class will erupt in tears.

If that happens, I'll probably join them.

– The author teaches second grade in Bel Pre-Elementary School in Silver Spring, MD

Scalia Junketeering All Over America

Why is the special commission charged with recommending revisions to the Model Code of Judicial Conduct of the American Bar Association flip-flopping around on some of the most important aspects of the code, which the states use to set standards for their courts?

Since judicial independence is under heightened political attack from the Right, the ABA should be doing everything it can to shore up public trust.

For decades, the code's overarching charge to judges has been to avoid not only actual impropriety, but also the appearance of impropriety.

The commission quietly adopted changes in the final report that the standard for judicial conduct should be a guideline, not an enforceable rule.

When the misguided switch came to light, the panel reversed field again and went back to the previous formulation. But that does not excuse the fact that the panel was following internal politics, not sound legal principle.

The change might have eluded public attention if Robert Tembeckjian, the administrator of the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct, had not protested.

Mark Harrison, chairman of the ethics panel, said just days ago that the "appearance of impropriety" standard was vague and unfair.

STATE CHIEF JUSTICES HAVE SPOKEN

Judges interpret rules like that all the time, and the Conference of Chief Justices, made up of top state judges, unanimously endorsed the appearance of impropriety as a basis for disciplinary enforcement.

Even the proposed code revisions have serious deficiencies. They fall well short of ending the festering scandal of expense-paid judicial seminars that are held at desirable resorts and underwritten by private interests.

The ABA should limit reimbursements for accompanying spouses.

There should be no free rides or free lunches or breakfasts or dinners. Justice Antonin Scalia's conflicts are notorious.



The rules on when a judge must bow out of hearing cases also need work. At the federal level, judges must recuse themselves when they have any financial interest raising a potential conflict.

That is far preferable to the model code's approach of letting state judges decide for themselves whether their financial conflict is minimal enough to stay on a case.

There is a real danger in relying on this commission's judgment.

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Bush Is Viciously Attacking Workers

President Bush will veto the Employee Free Choice Act [EFCA], which has strong bipartisan backing in Congress. It would make it easier for workers to form a union.

Under the current law, "even when a majority of workers ask for union representation, their employers can force them to undergo an election process" administered by the Bush administration's viciously "anti-worker" National Labor Relations Board.

Roll Call reported, "Deep-pocketed corporate lobbying groups have joined together to defeat the EFCA."

Speaking before a business lobby group, Vice President Dick Cheney announced that Bush will veto the EFCA legislation.

CURRENT SYSTEM IS UNFAIR

The current union organization system is tilted against America's workers.

Each year, over 20,000 U.S. workers are illegally fired, demoted, laid off, suspended without pay, or denied work by their employers as a result of union activity.

Under the Bush administration, American workers have seen union levels –

and their wages – steadily drop:

- In October 2006, Bush's National Labor Relations Board – easily the most anti-worker labor board in history – issued a decision that will deny the right to organize to as many as eight million workers in 200 occupations.

- In 2000, 13.5% of all wage and salary workers were unionized. In 2006, just 12% of workers were in unions.

The portion of private sector workers covered by union protections has fallen steadily from 23.2% in 1979 to 8.5% in 2005.

- In 2004, 92% of employers forced workers to attend "mandatory captive audience meetings" where workers often had to "listen to hours of anti-union presentations by corporate representatives."

- The median hourly wage for American workers has declined 2% since 2003 – after factoring in inflation – even though average worker productivity "has risen steadily over the same period."

Unions ensure a better standard of living for working Americans. Workers represented by unions earn 28% more than non-union workers and are 62% more likely to have medical insurance through their jobs.

Is America's Poverty A Sign Of Decay?

By Cecil Acuff

In Africa, the masses of the poor live in the harsh climate areas of the nation; those who are rich or comfortable in varying degrees live near the coasts or areas where the climate is mild.

In Payne County, only those "poor" people live outside the towns and cities.

In the state of Oklahoma, fewer and fewer people are living in the arid northwest and in the timbered southeast. Those with sufficient means live in the cities and larger towns in the mild climate of the central, north-central, and the northeastern part of the state.

In the United States, everyone with sufficient means lives somewhere near the coasts, or in the areas of moderate climates; all others in the cold north-central at some level above.

America is known as a predominately Christian nation. Jesus ministered to the poor, who will always be with us, but God will always take care of all those who believe in Him.

WHERE WERE THE CHRISTIANS?

In one of the lesser-populated areas of Oklahoma, a single, middle-aged man of limited means and income and a professed born-again Christian attended and worked diligently in an evangelical church of 100 or so members. He attended regularly and faithfully gave his meager tithes for 8 to 10 years.

One fall, this man contracted a severe case of pneumonia; not life-threatening, but debilitating.

After about the third week, no one from his church had visited – the pastor finally paid a visit only after being asked by the man.

Today, that man is disillusioned and sad. He agrees whole-heartedly with those who say that an America, which has 47 million poor and countless others near-

poor is not a Christian nation.

Each segment or entity of American society takes care of only a small segment of its members – the richer or more powerful. The others are forced to the less desirable areas of the richest nation in the world, which regularly professes to be compassionate.

SIGN OF THINGS TO COME

As the years, decades, and centuries go by, America so very imperceptibly grows toward an Africa of untold millions of poor, starving, and diseased people in the undesirable parts of the country; the rest in the middle.

The trend started soon after the United States became a nation, and is accelerating increasingly more rapid with each passing decade: what force is there to stop it?

America is trying to spread its message across the world in order to become an empire. No empire has lasted more than 400-500 years.

So in the coming centuries, the proudest, richest, and most powerful nation in the world will ever so slowly become a nation of millions of utterly wretched people ruled by a few of the most arrogant people.

It's enough to bring tears [and has] to caring, compassionate people.

Few will read this, no one will comment; why should they – that far, far future means nothing today. It's the old NIMBY factor, not-in-my-backyard, "if it doesn't affect me, who cares?"

A country started over 200 years ago with such exciting promise will sink, with imperceptible slowness, over the centuries, to the depths of utter, utter despair.

The ultimate "man's inhumanity to man."

– The author lives in Perkins

Bush Mocking The Law With Signings

Editor's Note: Ever since the days of James Monroe, presidents have used signing statements to comment on new laws. Over the nation's first two centuries, such statements had challenged a total of 600 statutes. The Bush administration alone has challenged 800 statutes.

This staggering total, and the way the White House has used them to essentially claim that Congress has no power over its decisions, has alarmed constitutional scholars, lawyers, and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. Below, a sampling:

SARBANES-OXLEY ACT OF 2002

The Law said: Corporate whistleblowers giving information to government agencies or Congress will be protected from retaliation.

Bush said: Only whistleblowers who squeal directly to the congressman or a committee that is investigating the relevant issue will be protected.

This interpretation, said Sen. Charles Grassley, R-IA, means the statute only applies to people "who are lucky enough to find the one member of Congress out of 535 who happens to be the chairman of the appropriate committee who also just happens to already be conducting an investigation, even though the problem identified may not have come to light yet."

POST-KATRINA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT REFORM ACT OF 2006

The Law said: Future FEMA administrators [unlike patronage appointee Michael "Heckuva Job Brownie" Brown] must have some background in disaster management and "not less than five years of executive leadership and management experience."

Bush said: The statute "rules out a large portion of those persons best qualified ... to fill the office" and will be ignored.

USA PATRIOT IMPROVEMENT AND REAUTHORIZATION OF 2005

The Law said: The Justice Department's inspector general must investigate "any improper or illegal use" of expanded powers provided by the act, including the FBI's use of National Security Letters that force businesses to turn over sensitive customer information.

Bush said: He'll withhold any information whose release he deems harmful to "foreign relations, national security, the deliberative processes of the executive, or the performance of the executive's constitutional duties" – in other words, any



information that might be worth knowing.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATION ACT OF 2006

The Law said: Detainees in U.S. custody will not be subjected to "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment."

Bush said: The administration will use whatever interrogation tactics it sees fit.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT OF 2002

The Law said: Congress will be briefed before launching a "special access" [read: "black"] program along the lines of the National Security Agency's surveillance efforts.

Bush said: Special-access programs are none of Congress' business; he'll inform lawmakers when he chooses, "as a matter of comity."

POSTAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2004

The Law said: First-class mail will be protected from warrantless searches.

Bush said: We don't need no stinking warrant to open your mail.

– By Daniel Schulman @ Mother Jones

Gonzales Is Failing The American People

During the hearing on his nomination as attorney general, Alberto Gonzales said he understood the difference between the job he held – President Bush's in-house lawyer – and the job he wanted, which was to represent all Americans as their chief law enforcement officer and a key defender of the Constitution.

Two years later, it is obvious Gonzales does not have a clue about the difference. He has never stopped being consigliere to Bush's imperial presidency. If anyone, outside Bush's rapidly shrinking circle of enablers, still had doubts about that, recent events should have erased them.

First, there was Gonzales's lame op-ed article in USA Today trying to defend the obviously politically motivated firing of eight United States attorneys, which he dismissed as an "overblown personnel matter."

HIS OWN IG EXPOSED FBI VIOLATION

Then his inspector general exposed the way the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been abusing yet another unnecessary new power that Gonzales helped wring out of the Republican-dominated Congress in the name of fighting terrorism.

The FBI has been using powers it obtained under the Patriot Act to get financial, business and telephone records of Americans by issuing tens of thousands of "national security letters," a euphemism for warrants that are issued without any judicial review or avenue of appeal.

The administration said that, as with many powers it has arrogated since the 9/11 attacks, this radical change was essential to fast and nimble anti-terrorism efforts, and it promised to police the use of the letters carefully.

Like so many of the administration's promises, this one evaporated before the ink on those letters could dry. FBI director Robert Mueller admitted that his agency had used the new powers improperly.

THE BUCK STOPS WITH HIM

Gonzales does not directly run the FBI, but it is part of his department and has clearly gotten the message that promises [and civil rights] are meant to be broken.

It was who repeatedly defended Bush's decision to authorize warrantless eavesdropping on Americans' international calls and e-mail. He was an eager public champion of the absurd notion that as commander in chief during a time of war,

Bush can ignore laws that he thinks get in his way. Gonzales was disdainful of any attempt by Congress to examine the spying program, let alone control it.

The attorney general helped formulate and later defended the policies that repudiated the Geneva Conventions in the war against terror, and that sanctioned the use of kidnapping, secret detentions, abuse and torture.

He has been central to the administration's assault on the courts, which he recently said had no right to judge national security policies, and on the constitutional separation of powers.

His Justice Department has abandoned its duties as guardian of election integrity and human rights. It approved a Georgia photo-ID law that a federal judge later likened to a poll tax, a case in which Gonzales's political team overrode the

objections of the department's professional staff.

The Justice Department has been shamefully indifferent to complaints of voter suppression aimed at minority voters. But it has managed to find the time to sue a group of black political leaders in Mississippi for discriminating against white voters.

We opposed Gonzales's nomination as attorney general. His resume was weak, centered around producing legal briefs for Bush that assured him that the law said what he wanted it to say.

More than anyone in the administration, except perhaps Vice President Dick Cheney, Gonzales symbolizes Bush's disdain for the separation of powers, civil liberties and the rule of law.

Senator Arlen Specter, the senior Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, hinted very obliquely that perhaps Gonzales's time was up. We're not going to be oblique. Bush should dismiss Gonzales and finally appoint an attorney general who will use the job to enforce the law and defend the Constitution.

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Supreme Court Gives Gore's Oscar To Bush

Just days after former Vice President Al Gore received an Academy Award for his global warming documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, the U.S. Supreme Court handed Gore a stunning reversal, stripping him of his Oscar and awarding it to President George W. Bush.

For Gore, who basked in the adulation of his Hollywood audience, the high court's decision to give his Oscar to Bush was a cruel twist of fate, to say the least.

But in a 5-4 decision, the justices made it clear that they had taken the unprecedented step of stripping Gore of his Oscar because Bush deserved it more.

"It is true that Al Gore has done a lot of talking about global warming," wrote Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the majority. "But President Bush has actually helped create global warming."

In another setback for the former vice president, a group of scientists meeting in Oslo, Norway said that Gore was growing at an unsustainable rate.

"The polar ice caps may be shrinking, but Al Gore is clearly expanding," said Dr. Hiroshi Kyosuke of the University of Tokyo.

The scientists concluded that if Gore continues to expand at his current rate, he could cause the earth to spin off its axis by 2010, sending it hurtling into the sun.

"Here's an inconvenient truth," Dr. Kyosuke added. "Al's got to stay away from those carbs."

Elsewhere, after foreigners received a record number of Academy Award nominations, CNN anchor Lou Dobbs proposed building a 12-foot high fence around the Kodak Theater.

2008 Candidate

Religious Right Is Looking For A Hero

By Patrick Healy

Having lost Congress and faith in President Bush, social conservatives are holding out for a hero in the 2008 Republican presidential campaign. But who? And what kind of hero?

Is it Rudolph W. Giuliani, whose support of abortion rights is anything but heroic to social conservatives? Is it the hero against gay marriage in Massachusetts – Mitt Romney once championed gay rights?

Or is it a hero of wartime, John McCain, who has also betrayed them on issues like federal judicial appointments?

Eleven months before the first presidential caucuses, social conservatives are in no mood to compromise; many don't want to settle for McCain, nor can they abide Giuliani.

They want a true believer, reliably opposed to abortion rights, gay rights and gun control, tough on immigration and a supporter of conservative judicial appointments.

THE MANTLE OF RONALD REAGAN

But are any second-tier contenders strong enough to carry the mantle of their idol, Ronald Reagan – and also, strong enough to win?

Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas strongly opposes abortion rights and gay marriage; former Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas is a Southern Baptist minister who talks about religion and civic life; and Rep. Duncan Hunter of California appears to have solid conservative credentials.

Yet all three are largely unknown beyond their states and Capitol Hill.

The same goes for Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado, who appears to be a one-issue candidate, focused on fighting illegal immigration.

Gone is the sense that social conservatives are a unified bloc. The movement that rose with the candidacy of Reagan in the 1970s is now fractured over both its messengers and its message.

THEIR ISSUES ARE BEING OVERLOOKED

The issues that social conservatives care about most are often overshadowed by Iraq and terrorism, energy and taxes. And if their vote splinters in 2008, their political potency could be sapped.

If these voters split into factions for different Republican candidates, either Giuliani or McCain could slip through the middle [while wriggling around the so-called values issues], uniting enough fiscal conservatives and national security conservatives – and moderate and liberal Republicans – to win the party's nomination next year.

Giuliani, for one, is definitely starting to shade his support for abortion rights in hopes of assuaging opponents.

"A fractured movement is Rudy Giuliani's dream," said Paul M. Weyrich, chairman of the Free Congress Foundation, a conservative research group. "What I hear constantly is, 'We've got to beat Hillary; we can't allow her to be president.'"

"What I'm hearing is, 'We hate him, we don't agree with his positions, we feel



that his personal life is a travesty – but on the other hand, he probably could beat Hillary.' I hear this over and over again. I keep telling people, don't fall for that."

SOCIAL CONSERVATIVES MAY STAY HOME?

Weyrich, a far right political strategist, knows that if social conservatives are torn on Election Day, many may stay home, and the consequence might be another Clinton presidency.

So a moment of political reckoning for social conservatives seems inevitable. Will they give ground on their issues in order to elect a Republican?

"I don't see social conservatives making compromises to win in 2008," said the Rev. Donald Wildmon, founder of the American Family Association, a conservative Christian broadcaster and advocacy group.

Nor should there be, according to Gov. Huckabee. In recent interviews, he has artfully tied his religious devotion to broader social concerns. For instance, on NPR, he said that reclaiming a nation for Christ was not a matter of proselytizing.

SOCIAL ISSUES ABOVE IRAQ

Brownback, meanwhile, has told some allies that he will not allow Iraq or economic issues to distract him from talking about social issues. Indeed, in a speech last month, he listed reviving faith among Americans and opposing same-sex marriage as examples of his priorities.

Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, has tried to explain his conversion on abortion rights, from support to opposition, with a made-for-television story: As he listened to a Harvard researcher discussing stem-cell science, and the destruction of embryos, he saw the anti-abortion cause in a new light.

"Romney has a one-way, one-time migration on abortion to explain," said Grover Norquist, the head of Americans for Tax Reform. "Senator McCain, meanwhile, was a Reaganite on taxes and then drifted for six years and now wants to come back. Same on guns. Same on judges. He was a two-way migration on several issues, and a lot of conservatives will have a hard time with that."

In a survey of voters in the 2006 elections, the Pew Forum found that so-called values issues like opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion rights mattered the most to white evangelical Protestant voters.

Forty-five percent of them ranked values issues highest; 17% chose the war in Iraq; and 12% cited illegal immigration.

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Sticks And Stones Will Help Hillary

By Susan Estrich

Newt says she's nasty.

Geffen says she's ambitious.

The name-calling part of the presidential campaign is clearly in full swing. Next thing you know, someone will tell us she's not pretty enough to be president, and maybe that will be "news," too. After ambitious and nasty, could ugly be far behind?

Is this really the best the Clinton critics can do?

If Hillary Clinton were running for Miss Congeniality, she'd have reason to fear the latest rounds of criticism being lobbed at her and her campaign. "Miss United States" may not be in her grasp, but so what?

Since when is being "nice" the basis for being president? Since when does the nicest candidate win?

POLITICS IS A CONTACT SPORT

As Newt surely can tell you, politics is not a nice business. It does not reward those who can't take the heat, won't throw the mud back, or are lacking in either toughness or ambition.

Truth be told, you have to be frightfully ambitious to be willing to put up with the humiliations of being a presidential candidate, and more than a little nasty to be able to give as good as you get in the process. Those who aren't don't make it.

What comments like these reflect is a view of Hillary in which her biggest weakness is thought to be her personality: It's not that she's unqualified or inexperienced or wrong on the issues, but that people don't like and trust her.

There are at least two problems with this view of the world and how Hillary fits in it.

The first is that it doesn't accurately describe the universe of Democratic primary and caucus voters who will decide whether she makes it to the finals. In

Democratic circles, the Clintons are heroes, not horrors. Hillary is a rock star, not a witch. The problem she faces is not her personality, but her positions. Barring some new scandal, there is only one thing that could cost her the Democratic nomination, and that is the war in Iraq and her initial support for it.

IT'S THE ISSUES, STUPID

The way many Democrats see it, it's not that she was nasty, but that she was wrong and won't admit to it. Maybe that's related to ambition, but the issue most Democrats focus on relates to the question of policy not personality.

The second problem with attacking Hillary's character is the potential of such attacks to backfire and win her more points than they cost her. I know plenty of women who don't like Hillary, but they like seeing her attacked for being overly ambitious or mean even less. Backlash voters, you can call them.

One of the biggest factors in improving Hillary's standing among women in her first Senate race was the perceived sexism in the attacks on her by her opponent. Criticizing a successful woman for being too ambitious is one of the oldest tricks in the book. What powerful woman hasn't faced that kind of attack? Show me a successful woman over the age of 40 who isn't considered, at least by male critics, to be "difficult."

If you want to help Hillary win support among women, just keep calling her names. The more you attack her like this, the more you humanize her.

Sticks and stones aren't the only things that can hurt you. Name-calling isn't as innocent as the nursery rhyme suggests. But it depends on what the names are and who's making the attack. "Hillary the Hawk" may not be electable, but that won't be because she's "ambitious" or even "mean" – particularly not when it's male moguls and much-hated Republicans who are doing the name-calling.

Thanks, Newt.

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\$1 Of Every \$5 **Health Care Costs Are Out Of Control**

Health care is expected to account for \$1 of every \$5 spent in the United States in another decade.

That means a rise in out-of-pocket expenses, such as the co-pays for medicine, from about \$850 this year to about \$1,400 in 2016, a 5.3% annual increase.

The cost of health insurance is projected to rise even more quickly during that same time – 6.4% annually.

Over the coming decade, spending on health care will continue to outpace the overall economy. By the year 2016, it will total nearly \$4 trillion, economists at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said in a recently-released report.

Today, the number is closer to \$1 out of every \$6, or \$2 trillion.

INCREASED TESTING IS CITED

Consumers are spending more on the latest treatments, despite their rising costs. For example, federal officials cite a significant increase in the use of imaging to detect blockages or other diseases.

Income will also play a significant role in the greater health spending.

Historically, when income rises 1%, health expenditures go up about 1.5%, officials said.

“What that indicates is a desire to purchase good health,” said John Poisal, deputy director of the government’s National Health Statistics Group.

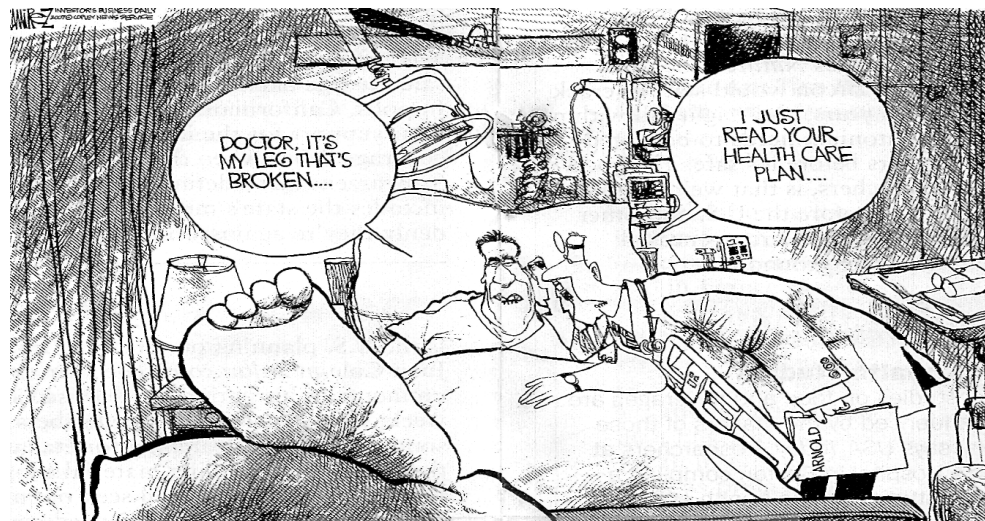
Dr. Mark McClellan, an analyst who used to oversee the Medicare and Medicaid programs, said greater spending on health care has its benefits.

People are not having heart attacks because they’re taking medicine that lowers their blood pressure and cholesterol. They’re surviving cancer because of more frequent exams and new treatments.

IT GOES TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE

“Greater health care spending is having a tremendous impact on the length and quality of people’s lives,” he said. But the United States could be doing much better.

“We know that much of the spending is going to treatments that are unneces-



sary or lead to medical errors, so we’re not getting nearly as much value as we should,” McClellan said.

Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt said the rising costs are creating anxiety for everyone, as well as a political will to change that trend.

“America’s per capita health spending is the highest in the world,” he said. “There is simply no place on the economic leader board for a nation that spends a fifth of its domestic product on health care.”

MORE INFORMATION IS NEEDED

The administration is pushing government agencies, insurers and health care providers to make information available that would help consumers become good shoppers.

For example, Medicare lists the percentage of pneumonia patients at various hospitals who received a timely antibiotic, an indicator of the quality of care.

The economists said their study doesn’t determine how much the rising costs will affect the average American family. There are too many factors involved, particularly when the federal government accounts for about half of overall health spending through programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The economists also predict that government programs will gradually replace employers when it comes to providing health insurance for millions of Americans.

“We are moving incrementally away from traditional sources of insurance, such as employer-based coverage, to a system comprising more federal and state government-provided health care,” said the economists, whose report will be published in the journal Health Affairs.

Woman’s Wal-Mart Plan B Experience

By Tashina Byrd

You won’t believe what happened to me when I went with my boyfriend to Wal-Mart to buy Plan B [the “morning-after pill”] after our condom broke.

The pharmacist laughed in our faces and told us, “We have it on hand, but there’s no one here who can dispense it.”

My name is Tashina Byrd, and this happened to me at my local Wal-Mart in Springfield, OH.

It can be embarrassing to share a private, personal experience like this, but I don’t want other women to be subjected to the humiliation and anger I felt when the pharmacist laughed at me.

That’s why I’m asking for your help today. I recently sent a letter to Wal-Mart CEO H. Lee Scott Jr., urging him to change company policy to guarantee that pharmacies fill requests for Plan B without delay, just like they do for any other over-the-counter medicine.

You’ve already proven that together we can make Wal-Mart do what’s right for women. Last year, because of pressure from pro-choice activists, Wal-Mart reversed its discriminatory policy against stocking Plan B.

Now, it’s time to ensure that they not only stock it but also sell it without delay or inconvenience.

In the end, I was lucky. I found another pharmacy that stocked Plan B and was

willing to sell it to me. But what would happen to a woman who lives in a rural area – where Wal-Mart is often the only pharmacy – where the nearest drugstore could be 60 miles away or more? What if the second pharmacy refused, too?

Access to emergency contraception shouldn’t require multiple pharmacy visits. To ensure other women don’t have an experience similar to mine, join me in urging Wal-Mart to change its policy today!

Editor’s Note: Wal-Mart has indeed changed its policy after a horrendous outcry of complaints.

Waking Up For Church

One Sunday morning, a mother went in to wake her son and tell him to get ready for church, to which he replied, “I’m not going.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“I’ll give you two good reasons,” he said.

“One, they don’t like me, and I don’t like them.”

His mother replied, “I’ll give YOU two good reasons why YOU should go to church. You’re 59 years old, and you’re the pastor!”



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Standing Against W's Distorted Patriotism

By Edwin E. Vineyard

The Militant Moderate has always been patriotic.

As a young lad, he thrilled to see the flag waving from the pole at the courthouse, the school on the hill, and the campus of the college a short bike ride out of Wilburton.

As a 17-year-old volunteer in the U.S. Navy in 1944, he thrilled to the sound of taps in the evening as they lowered our flag on the training base.

I love that flag. We still have in our possession the flag which was presented to my mother for my brother, who was killed in war and interred in the military cemetery at Nettuno, Italy.

Some of us still feel chills when we hear the Star Spangled Banner or a spirited rendition of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. We revere our history and the stalwarts who made it. We love freedom in America.

BUSH'S 'MISBEGOTTEN WAR'

I am angry at George W. Bush for taking my wonderful flag and making it a political poster for his misbegotten war. I love the flag, but I do not support his wrongful war.

There is nothing patriotic about this Iraq war. Somebody should make that clear to him, and to those 30% who still support him.

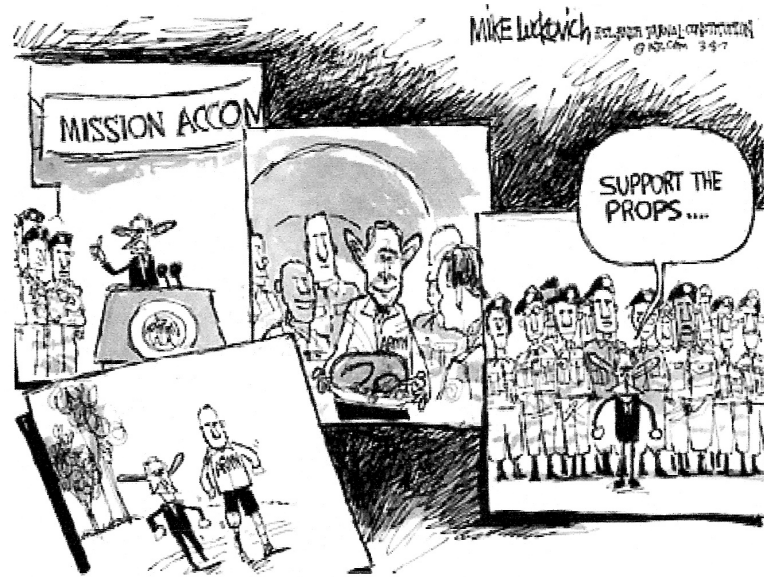
The Militant Moderate must confess that he is troubled by all the ribbon symbols saying "Support the Troops." It seems that there is some trickery at play with that. Somebody is trying to equate supporting the troops with supporting the war.

If it is a bad war, then who wants to keep our young men and women in harm's way? Many of us support the troops by clamoring to get them out of Iraq.

I become sick at heart when I hear a soldier in Iraq say, "We are fighting them here to protect our people at home." I am saddened when I hear a bereaved parent say, "He died to protect our country."

THE POLITICIANS KNOW BETTER

But I become livid when I hear politicians saying, "We are fighting them in the



streets of Baghdad, so we will not have to fight them in our streets in America." They know better.

The Bush Iraq misadventure has been a war based upon falsehoods and deception. It continues to be so. Some have become obsessed and delusional about it. They are still trying to equate this war with patriotism. As the saying goes, "That dog won't hunt."

PATRIOTISM IS OPPOSING THE WAR

Supporting the troops in a wrongful war demands difficult mental gymnastics. It begs the question: How does one find nobility within and amongst the ignoble? Many democrats are trying to do this. In some strange way, maybe it could be there – but it is not visible from here.

The Militant Moderate has come to the conclusion that being a patriot now requires one to oppose the ruin of his beloved country by the reckless actions and policies of George W. Bush and his friends.

This is indeed a patriotic struggle, but not as defined by the ruling business, religious, and political coalition.

This is my country. I will defend it against all enemies, both foreign and domestic. We took that oath before when we went off to war in our youth.

Now, we need to swear it again.

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

The Power Of One [Percent]

By Nathaniel Batchelder

I have calculated that if just 1% of Oklahomans would communicate with just one of their Congress members, just once a month, that would result in 30,000 communications each month.

Divided equally among our seven members, each member would receive 4,285 communications every month. A call, a fax, a letter. Are you willing to communicate with Congress 12 times each year for peace? Only Congress can stop the war.

An activist once said, "A year ago I didn't know my Congress member's name. Now, my Congress member knows my name."

It could be you.

For four years, beginning in January of 2003, two months before the Iraq war began, there have been peace walks, rallies, speakers, events, fliers, posters, videos, editorials, peace newspapers, emails and websites.

Thousands of bookmarks have been circulated carrying the names and contact information for Oklahoma's members of Congress. We publish them in every issue of the Peace Strategy newspaper.

Many people feel passion for peace and outrage against the war. Many people contact their Congress members regularly. They really do. Just not enough.

Too few translate their passion into actions which could make a difference

– politically – in ending the war. It's curious. Why don't we?

I am sustained by a vision of a world in which universal human rights are paramount; where economic justice insures that everyone who works receives a living wage; where environmental sustainability is a key factor in all public and private policy-making; where war is considered obsolete as a tactic for resolving differences.

I believe most people agree with my vision, or at least wish the world were more like it.

Imagine if just 1% of Americans would contact their member of Congress, just once a month, for peace. That would be 3 million communications every month – 5,217 communications to each member, each month.

In the U.S. today, there must be a rise of passion translated into political action by a lot more people, or else those with the most money will see to it that our individual liberties continue to erode, that taxes will be paid less and less by those with wealth and more and more by those with less; where human rights and environmental sustainability will continue to run a distant second behind corporate and military policy.

And war will remain a first choice of wealthy nations to get what they want.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

Returning Home, A Long Wait For Help

By Andrew Weaver and Ray McGovern

The California Nurses Association reported that in the first quarter of 2006, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs "treated 20,638 Iraq veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder, and they have a backlog of 400,000 cases." A returning soldier has to wait an average of 165 days for a VA decision on initial disability benefits, and an appeal can take up to three years.

This is unacceptable and reprehensible.

The saying "War is hell" doesn't begin to describe how horrible it has been for tens of thousands in our military in Iraq and Afghanistan. War inevitably involves witnessing and sometimes engaging in gruesome acts of violence. It is a shocking confrontation with death and devastation. It is normal for human beings to react to war's psychic trauma with profound fear, anger, grief, repulsion, helplessness and horror – or with emotional numbness and disbelief.

Trauma is the Greek word for "wound." Just as a physical wound from combat can cause suffering in the body, psychological trauma can cause acute suffering of mind and spirit.

It is not surprising to find that an assessment of more than 220,000 military personnel returning from Iraq published in the April Journal of the American Medical Association found that nearly one in five has significant mental health problems. Repeated tours of duty increase the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder by 50%.

At the same time, we are hearing disturbing news reports that these traumatized soldiers are not receiving the mental health care they urgently require. In

January, National Public Radio journalist Daniel Zwerdling did an extensive story on the military's treatment of personnel returning from Iraq who suffer from emotional problems, including PTSD.

Veterans coming home stated that their superiors have harassed and punished them for seeking help for psychological problems triggered by their service in Iraq. Several of the soldiers' supervisors acknowledged the callous treatment.

A recent national study by the Government Accountability Office found that most of the troops who show signs of PTSD were not referred to mental health professionals, despite Pentagon claims, in NPR's report, "that providing support to soldiers with emotional problems is a top priority" and "that resources are being made available to returning veterans."

If the same disastrous pattern unfolds that affected Vietnam-era veterans, and these PTSD sufferers do not obtain appropriate and timely assistance, tens of thousands will become unnecessarily and tragically addicted to drugs or alcohol, and many may commit suicide. Besides the 58,000 lost in combat, we lost tens of thousands of Vietnam-era military personnel to suicide and drugs.

The American people must actively advocate and demand appropriate treatment for veterans who have been psychologically wounded by war.

– Weaver is a United Methodist minister, research psychologist and author in New York City. McGovern was an Army officer and a CIA analyst and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.

© The Baltimore Sun

Uninsured Kids Fare Worse In U.S.

By Richard Wolf

Hospitalized children who lack health insurance are twice as likely to die from their injuries as those with insurance, a new study reports.

Uninsured children also are less likely to get expensive treatment or rehabilitation and are discharged earlier, says the study by the health care advocacy group Families USA.

The report was sent to congressional committees that are considering ways to help some of the nation's 47 million uninsured people, including nine million children, get coverage. A federal-state program created in 1997 that has insured more than six million children is up for renewal this year.

One out of five children in Oklahoma is uninsured, a problem tackled by Gov. Brad Henry and this session of the Legislature. A measure approved in the Senate would add 42,000 children to Medicaid.

"The clear implication is that when kids get sick or hurt, insurance matters," said Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA. "As is true throughout our health care system, children without health insurance receive less and inferior care."

ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT DATA

The Families USA study comes from an analysis of government data for 2000 and 2003. The data were adjusted to control for age, health, severity of injury and other factors.

J. Mick Tilford, associate professor at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, said the data he studied for the Families USA report included 25,000 uninsured children with general injuries and 6,500 with traumatic brain injuries. Compared with insured children, he said, the uninsured had 327 "excess deaths" over two years.

Hospitals and their emergency rooms are the only option of uninsured children and adults. They are supposed to treat patients regardless of ability to pay.

Some costs eventually are paid by the uninsured, and some are passed on to other patients. In 2004, more than \$25 billion in uncompensated care was borne by hospitals, according to the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured.

EMERGENCY ROOMS LAST RESORT

Hospital emergency rooms are "the last resort of care," said Molly Offner of the American Hospital Association, which also disputed the study. "They're clearly covering patients who need care and can't afford to pay it."

Studies by the Institute of Medicine, the American College of Physicians American Society of Internal Medicine and the Commonwealth Fund have shown higher death rates among the uninsured.

The Institute of Medicine and the Center for Studying Health System Change found evidence of lesser treatment and fewer surgeries in hospitals, but children were not studied separately.

Many studies show that the uninsured are less likely to have doctors, get preventive care and seek timely treatment. The American Hospital Association cited

Americans Favor Mental Health Equity

The vast majority of Americans [89%] – including Democrats, Republicans, managers and employees – want to end insurance discrimination against people with mental health needs, according to a new survey by Mental Health America [MHA].

MHA released the findings a day before Reps. Patrick Kennedy, D-RI, and Jim Ramstad, R-MN, kicked off a series of nationwide forums sponsored by Mental Health America and The National Alliance on Mental Illness.

They want to move the country closer to federal mental health insurance equity legislation after decades of advocacy.

"For too long, insurance companies have offered limited or negligible mental health and substance abuse coverage," said David Shern, president and CEO of Mental Health America.

"The myth propelling mental health inequity in insurance coverage that improving coverage would bear too much cost to businesses instead robs U.S. businesses and governments of millions of dollars each year and costs our society productive citizens."

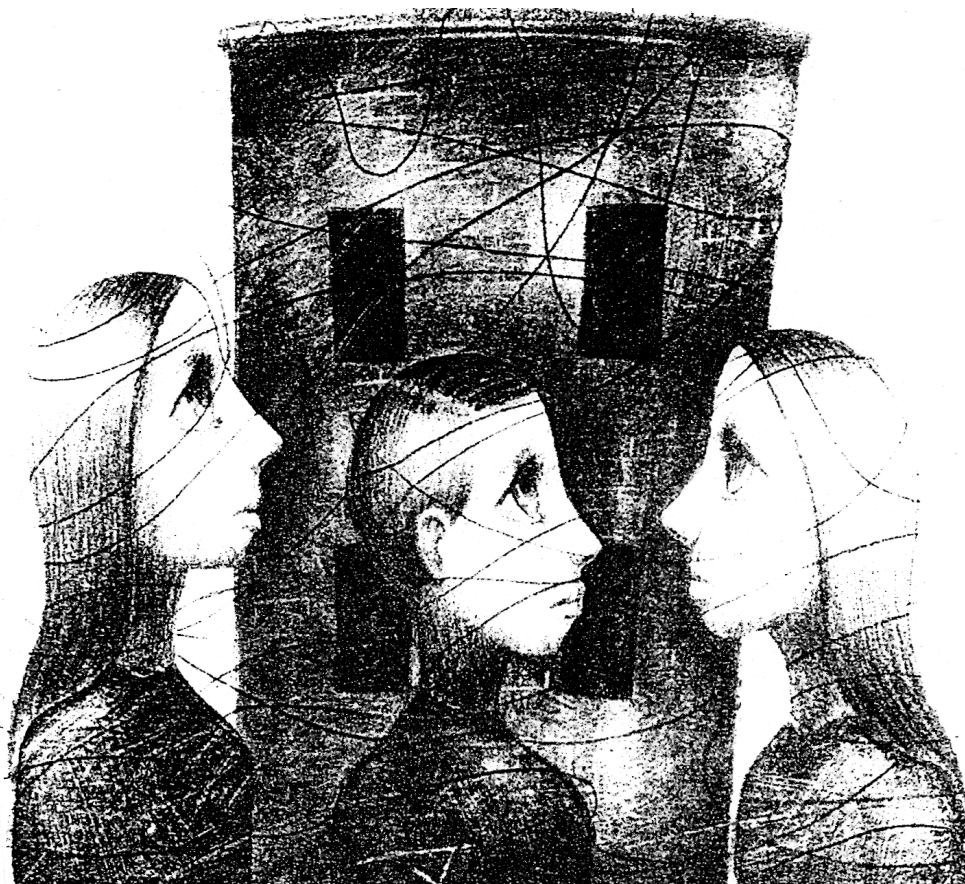
Nearly all Americans [96%] think health insurance should include coverage of mental health care. Only 2% said health insurance should not cover it – 89% assert that insurance plans should cover mental health treatments at the same level as treatments for general health problems.

Only 8% feel they should not cover them equally. A large majority [74%] believes that insurance plans should cover substance abuse treatments at the same levels as treatments for general health issues.

More than 23% feel that they should not be covered equitably. The public demand for mental health equity is bipartisan – 83% of Republicans and 92% of Democrats want equitable health insurance.

Employees and employers alike [89% respectively] want health insurance coverage for mental health treatments to be equitable to general health treatments.

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those factors in its own report.

A FEW FACTS FROM THE STUDY

"Children's health and well-being are compromised needlessly," it said. Families USA findings for uninsured kids admitted to hospitals:

- Those with general injuries were more likely to die in 26 of 29 states studied. They were 44% less likely to go into rehabilitation.

- Those with traumatic brain injuries were 32% less likely to receive aggressive treatment known as intracranial pressure monitoring. On average, they were discharged after five days, rather than eight days for insured patients.

- Those with appendicitis were 18% less likely to get a more expensive laparoscopic appendectomy.

- Those with middle-ear infections were 57% less likely to get ear tubes surgically inserted.

"It's a pattern," researcher Tilford said. "You look at stuff by insurance status – boy, you find differences."

It doesn't pay to be poor in America, only major country in the world without universal health care.

© USA Today

Concerned About Your Diet?

For those of you who watch what you eat, here's the final word on nutrition and health. It's a relief to know the truth after all those conflicting nutritional studies.

1. The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

2. The Mexicans eat a lot of fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

3. The Chinese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

4. The Italians drink a lot of red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

5. The Germans drink a lot of beer and eat lots of sausage and fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than Americans.

Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is apparently what kills you.

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