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Church-State Separation In Peril Wall's Tumbling Down?

By Arnold Hamilton

Rep. Rex Duncan delivered an unmistakable message in the 2008 legislative session's opening minutes.

Called upon to lead the House in the pledge of allegiance, the Sand Springs Republican first squeezed in an editorial comment, instructing fellow lawmakers "there is no comma between One Nation and Under God."

Duncan's remark not so subtly served notice that religious fundamentalists – especially in Oklahoma – are taking dead aim at the centuries-old wall separating church and state, hoping to establish a Christian theocracy, American-style.

From creating backdoor vouchers for religious schools to forcing creationism into science classrooms to steering even more tax dollars to church-sponsored do-gooders, this year's legislative agenda – promoted by rightwing Republicans and abetted by cowering Democrats – is a zealot's dream.

It's a nightmare-in-the-making, however, for the majority of Americans who say in polls they favor a pluralistic society, but have yet to recognize the political power wielded by a religious cabal working feverishly to create their exclusive version of a heaven on earth.

In Oklahoma, are political leaders pushing the fundamentalist agenda true believers?

Or are they engaging in the crassest of politics, the kind described by former Bush Administration aide David Kuo in his book *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*? A disillusioned Kuo described a Bush team that publicly courted Christian leaders and their followers, but privately derided them as "nuts" and "goofy" – laughing all the way to the White House, twice.

The truth is, Oklahoma's Legislature contains both true believers and opportunists.

It's clear, for example, that Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC, genuinely believes gays, lesbians and others who aren't exactly like her are waging an all-out war against Christianity and its adherents.

Others no doubt find wisdom in playing along, invoking fundamen-

talist buzzwords and phraseology so as not to become targets of religious zealots and risk being demagogued-to-defeat in the next election.

Remember, U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, the Oklahoma Republican and America's foremost climate change denier, built his political career on three political keys: God, guns and gays.

How else to explain the worrisome legislation sailing through both houses this year, hastening the day when if you're not a fundamentalist Christian, you're a second-rate Oklahoma citizen – or worse?

How else to explain politicians from both parties showing up at a suburban OKC Baptist church rally featuring East Texas evangelist Rick Scarborough who contends Hurricane Katrina was God's punishment for everything from homosexuality to removal of the Ten Commandments from government buildings to U.S. support of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza?

Religion long has been a potent force in Oklahoma politics, but fundamentalists have wielded increasing

power the last three decades.

Southern Baptists and other evangelicals once led the fight to preserve the separation of church and state – fearing its demise could result in a loss of religious freedoms or establishment of an official state religion.

Now, they partner with politically like-minded religious groups – including their once mortal enemies, Roman Catholics – to openly influence state politics and strengthen the ties between government and religion.

In recent years, for example, Democratic Rep. Rebecca Hamilton steered more than \$109,000 to favored churches in her south OKC district.

The money, though, was doled out via a sleight-of-hand series of transfers – involving multiple government agencies – that made it extremely difficult to track.

Why? Was it because the transfer of public monies to religious entities is expressly forbidden by the Oklahoma Constitution? [See Article II, Section 5.]

The money was first delivered to the

Oklahoma Department of Commerce for "economic development and community projects," then routed to the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

Finally, ACOG dispensed \$13,500 to Sacred Heart Catholic Church, \$60,000 to Exchange Baptist Church, \$8,000 to the Cross of Calvary Baptist Church, and \$25,000 to Birth Choice, a Catholic Church ministry.

Despite the constitutional questions, lawmakers became even more brazen last year in funneling taxpayers' money to religious groups.

Then-House Speaker Lance Cargill's so-called Transformational Justice Act [HB 2102] earmarked at least \$100,000 to the state Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives for church groups that develop programs aimed at helping reduce the state's staggering recidivism rate.

Moreover, the bill signed into law by Democratic Gov. Brad Henry establishes a permanent revolving fund for the program – meaning a mechanism is now rooted in Oklahoma law to ensure the unimpeded flow of state tax dollars directly to religious groups.

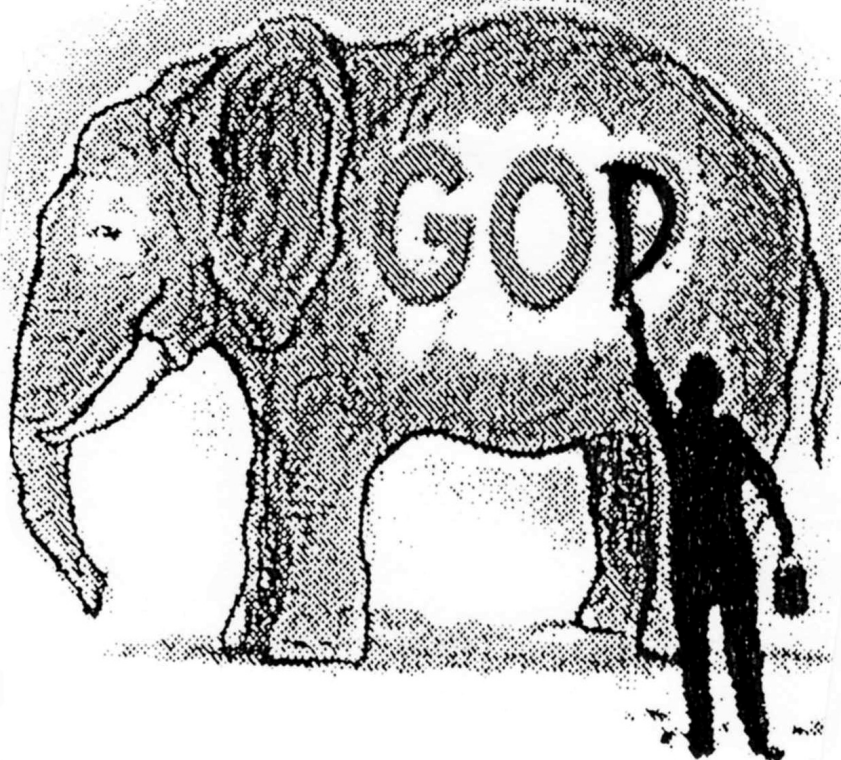
This year, Cargill authored another bill that strengthens the ties between government and religious groups.

HB 3143 would give birth to the "Compassionate Care Task Force," aimed, the former speaker said, at coordinating "roles that charitable, voluntary, and faith-based organizations could play in providing free health services in medically underserved communities."

The measure – approved 76-20 in the House and now awaiting Senate action – creates another vehicle for religious fundamentalists to eventually get hold of taxpayers' money to fund their operations.

Two other measures are even more egregious, not only poking serious holes in the wall separating church and state, but also creating enormous headaches for the state's public schools.

SB 2093 includes a provision that would create a back-door voucher system, taking millions of dollars out of the public schools and funneling



Observations

Fiasco

While GOP Sen. Glenn Coffee, co-leader of the Senate, was voting to reduce the property tax cap from 5% to 3%, minutes away at the Capitol a bevy of educators were holding a press conference.

Coffee, in a written statement, said SJR 59 would not harm the schools, adding that his children are in public school.

Educators flatly contradicted him, saying that the first year impact would be \$25 million because the measure, if approved by the voters, obviously would reduce property taxes going to schools.

Coffee didn't mention CareerTech, which receives 70% of its funding from the property tax. SJR 59 would devastate that program, already crippled by Republicans in the Legislature. County government would also be damaged.

While the 5% cap has been badly abused, the answer isn't SJR 59 – another tax cut pushed by Republicans under the guise of helping homeowners.

Only two Democrats voted for it, Debbe Leftwich and Tom Ivester. If the Senate leadership had been doing its job, it would have never reached the Senate floor, without a hold-harmless provision.

Leftwich said it is the No. 1 issue with voters in her district but she said it could have been approached in a far different manner.

Sen. Harry Coates, the Seminole Republican, was the only member of the GOP to vote against the measure.

The measure didn't have the emergency clause, which means senators will see it again.

Because it is a referendum, it bypasses the governor and goes directly to a vote of the people.

Big Brother

If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear.

Is that why some state legislators want everybody carrying a gun – even

students on college campuses, even 18-year-olds.

Before long we will not only be robbed of the last vestige of privacy but everyone we meet may be packing.

Police video cameras are on numerous city streets and sidewalks. Bush has also authorized government access to phone calls, bank cards, Internet searches and he wants to track us with national ID cards.

This Orwellian situation simply crept up on us. Nobody voted for it; no legislature even debated it. These increasingly sophisticated technological devices for tracking individuals are largely unknown to the public at large.

What you don't know can hurt you.

It turns out that Orwell was right: innocent people really do have something to fear from a society run by Big Brother.

Cash Cows?

According to a breakdown from the Federal Bureau of Prisons, 50,238 inmates are Roman Catholic, 53,013 say they are Protestant and 150 proclaim atheism.

The breakdown shows there are 11,587 Muslims, but only 539 Mormons. More than 28,000 say they believe in God but have no religious affiliation.

We mention this because some politically-motivated folk see the prisons as cash cows.

In Oklahoma it's disgraced ex-GOP Speaker Lance Cargill who wants taxpayers to foot the bill for a prison ministry.

As noted by the Feds, there are plenty of chaplains working today in the prisons at no cost to taxpayers. This includes Muslim chaplains. Would Cargill finance them?

A federal court in California has decreed that the state can't discriminate against non-Christian ministries. A federal court in Michigan has ruled the state was wrong in seizing non-



Christian materials.

The wall separating church and state takes an awful pounding from fanatics, yet it endures – thanks to the courts.

Hurting Kids

According to the American Lung Association, 6.8 million children in the United States under 18 have asthma. The chronic lung condition is the third leading cause of hospitalization among children under 15 and, in 2005, resulted in approximately 679,000 ER visits for that age group.

Asthma keeps kids out of school – 12.8 million lost days in 2003 – and off the playground, eroding their quality of life and causing them to fall behind in the classroom.

Deaths are rare, but they happen; asthma killed 141 kids under 15 in 2004. There are effective medications to treat it, and with regular doctor visits kids can avoid attacks and minimize the impact of the disease.

The bad news is that hundreds of thousands of kids with asthma can't manage their condition properly because they lack health insurance.

The math is as simple as it is cruel. When you increase the number of kids without health insurance – it jumped from 7.5 million in 2005 to 8.3 million in 2006; Bush's SCHIP vetoes will definitely reinforce that trend – you automatically increase the number of kids who have asthma and no coverage. Oklahoma is fifth nationally in the percentage of uninsured kids.

The number of children with asthma and no health insurance is 759,000.

Never in the history of this great country has there been a meaner, sorrier president than George W. Bush.

KOSU Soaring

Good news for fans of National Public Radio. KOSU is featuring a fabulous new line-up 5 a.m. to 4 a.m. Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Saturday and 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Sunday.

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Of course, Morning Edition, All Things Considered and Fresh Air will be featured but prepare yourself for

some pleasant new surprises.

Check their excellent web page at www.kosu.org for the entire line-up.

What would America do without NPR and PBS? Commercial local radio, national radio and TV broadcasts are, for the most part, pure trash or "infotainment."

President Bush is attempting to cripple public broadcasting with a huge cut in their appropriation. It will never happen as long as Democrats control Congress and have to pass his budget.

Bush knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Bush Again

The Bush Administration says it cannot be sued for abducting, imprisoning, and torturing innocent men suspected of terrorist ties because such lawsuits might reveal "state secrets."

It's an old, old dodge but a German citizen, Khaled El-Masri, who was kidnapped several years ago while on vacation in Macedonia and "beaten, drugged, and transported to a secret prison in Afghanistan for harsh interrogation" begs to disagree.

Five brutal months later, the CIA realized it had the wrong guy, and dumped poor El-Masri somewhere in Albania.

Later, he tried to sue, but the administration insisted – and a federal court ruled – that any attempt to get legal redress for this injustice would pose a national security risk.

We point out that the judge was a Republican appointee.

Other innocent victims caught up in the CIA dragnet have also been denied their day in court – on bogus grounds.

The world already knows about the CIA's "extraordinary rendition" program. What Bush wants to shield from public view is "grave executive misconduct."

Remember when we were a nation governed by laws?

Should the president and CIA really be able to imprison whomever they like, without explanation or consequence?

How ironic that Bush rails against Iran while that is precisely the model he is pushing in America.

We can't get rid of him too soon.

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

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

Observerscope

Republican House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, said he has found \$200 million and the education shortfall will be fixed. Wow! Was it just misplaced?

Dart: To Rep. George Faught, R-Muskogee, for his anti-sex education bill, killed largely due to the factual debate of Rep. Doug Cox, R-Grove. Faught is yet another homeschooler meddling in public education.

Republican Rep. Sally Kern, in a tirade against gays, says they are worse than terrorists. If this loon touched a Bible in faith, she would get a third-degree burn. Judge not.

Laurel [!]: To U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, signing on as a co-author of legislation to create a new GI Bill, long overdue for today's veterans.

Former Gov. David Walters has been asked to chair the Rules Committee at the Democratic National Convention. Good choice by Howard Dean.

Dart: To the Oklahoma House of Representatives for approving GOP Rep. Sally Kern's bill to mix religion with public education. Quran, anyone?

Oh no! Not another negative first place for Oklahoma! We lead the nation in non-medical use of prescription painkillers by persons 12 years old and older. [Federal report]

Laurel: To ex-Oklahoman Andrew Benton, President of Pepperdine University, named to head the American Council of Education. He plans to vigorously fight unfunded federal mandates.

Democratic Lt. Gov. Jari Askins said the rumor that she would not run for governor is just that – a rumor. She says there is no question she can raise the money.

Dart: To GOP Sen. Jim Inhofe, telling the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber luncheon that "rumor has it" that Barack Obama is a Muslim. Obama is a practicing Christian.

Those who study American history know that America's problem with illegal aliens is nothing new. Ask any Indian.

Laurel: To state Sen. Andrew Rice, D-OKC, for his bill to provide insurance coverage for uninsured state veterans under age 65. It passed the Senate 45-1.

A whopping 44% of American adults have changed religion or abandoned it. Just 68% of those raised Catholic still identify with the church. Catholics remain 24% of the population.

Dart: To the Tulsa World, naming state Rep. Jabar Shumate, D-Tulsa, one of Tulsa's 10 most influential citizens. This guy went four years without paying his state taxes – a real role model?

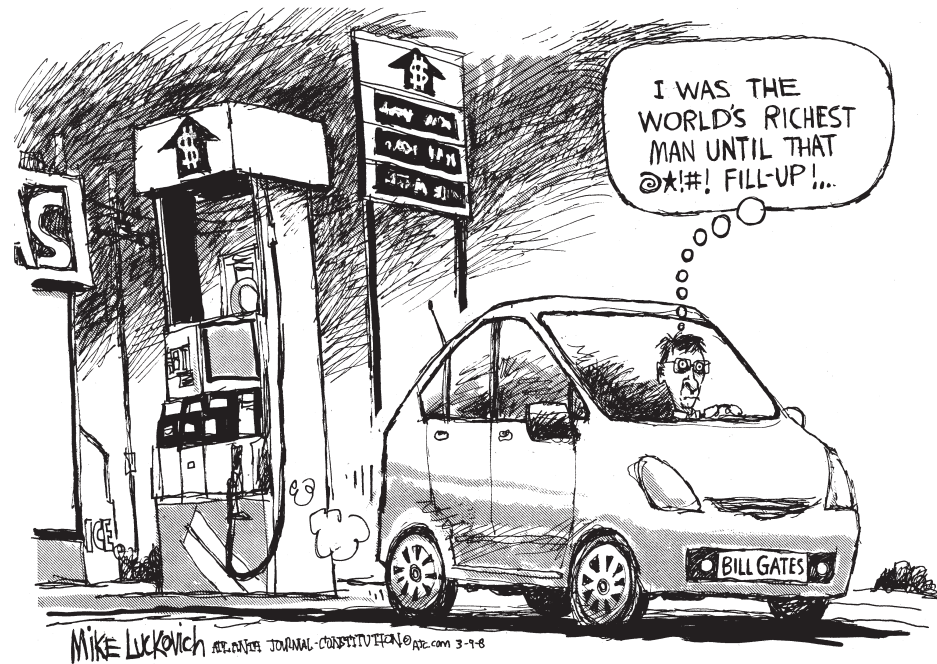
Republicans who control the Legislature keep talking about shrinking government while proposing more government. Now it's a new Information Systems Division by Rep. David Derby's House Bill 3145.

Laurel: To Democrats with the courage to vote against that voucher plan for north Tulsa, costing taxpayers \$5 million so students can attend private and parochial schools. Republicans are driving the Senate agenda.

Tell us something we didn't already know. Oklahoma's congressional delegation ranks 45th out of 50 states in political clout. Check out our members at congress.org.

Dart: To the Legislature for chronically underfunding public education – \$41 million short for administration, let alone being dead last in the region on teacher salaries. The HB 1017 fund is \$37 million short.

Legislators are passing funding bills that can't be funded since the \$700 million in tax cuts have left the state \$114 million short this session. The inheritance tax elimination was advanced by a year, a \$31 million hit.



Dart: To Oklahoma City leaders, promoting welfare for billionaires. The SuperSonics owners want \$60 million to move the team here. Senate Democrats said absolutely not.

We mourn the March 7 passing of retired OU journalism professor Junetta Davis, 82, a fiery advocate for women's rights, social justice and other liberal causes. She kept us at the Observer on our toes, too!

Laurel: To Rep. Sue Tibbs, R-Tulsa, for her bill giving the governor no more than 30 days to act on paroles for non-violent inmates. Gov. Brad Henry's procrastination is legendary. The House voted 98-1 for it.

That U.S. Chamber backed attack by the so-called Center for Union Facts on Tulsa Public Schools is one long lie. Teachers can't strike, this is a right to work state and teachers don't hire and fire other teachers.

Dart: To Rep. Jason Murphey, R-Guthrie, whose bill that would allow the carrying of guns on campus college campuses easily passed the NRA-owned House. He never attended a campus college.

The cash-strapped Department of Labor says it would cost \$200,000 to inspect water park rides – money it doesn't have.

Laurel: To Oklahoman reporter John Greiner for revealing that the state's employee retirement system is spending tens of millions on elected officials' pensions for years they were not elected to their offices.

Memo to Gov. Brad Henry: Please veto that pathetic so-called merit pay plan [House Bill 3390] by Republican Lance Cargill if it reaches your desk. As Rep. Jerry McPeak noted, it's another unfunded mandate.

Dart: To Republican U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, one of only 13 senators voting against a bill to modernize the Consumer Product Safety Commission to protect children from dangerous toys.

The term-limited State Senate OK'd 12-year term limits for statewide elected officeholders. Most dream of being governor. Heaven help us.

Laurel: To Neal McCaleb, premier citizen activist, inducted into the American Indian Festival of Words Circle of Honor.

As bad as the law is, 88% of Oklahoma's 1,789 schools meet No Child Left Behind standards compared to a national average of 70%.

Dart: To the state House GOP, rewarding bigoted Rep. Sally Kern with a standing ovation as she arrived for caucus. Why would any gay man or woman register as, vote for or give money to a Republican in Oklahoma?

Supreme Court Justice Marian Opala used a newspaper interview to rip his colleagues over a new plan to close public access to some court records. Surely he isn't still steamed over losing an age-discrimination suit against his fellow justices.

Laurel: To former OKC Schools Superintendent Dr. Arthur Stellar, recipient for the 14th consecutive year of the Horace Mann League's Ambassador Award. Stellar is now superintendent of Taunton, MA schools.

The Disappointment editorial page whines of "selective outrage" over Rep. Sally Kern's anti-gay tirade. Someone who can talk slowly needs to explain to them that Kern is an elected official. MSNBC's Keith Olbermann is un-elected – just like wingnuts O'Reilly and Limbaugh.

Dart: To the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, homeschoolers who hustle non-stop for vouchers. Guess what? Bush's huge D.C. voucher program is a total flop, making vouchers even more irrelevant.

"My biggest challenge is how much [bill] reading is involved ... My other biggest surprise is how many legislators don't read them." – Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester.

Laurel: To the Bill Johnson Correctional Center, receiving the prestigious American Correctional Association Award for the successful treatment of felony drug offenders.

Bless the Great Plains Technology Center, donating 45 computers to Jones High School, replacing those lost in a recent fire.

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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

I am very disappointed in the way Hillary has acted recently. She is treating Obama as if he were a Republican, or worse.

This is no way to treat a fellow Democrat during the primary campaign. To say that she and John McCain have years of experience, whereas Obama has a speech from four years ago, is a complete travesty! In fact, Obama's years in the Illinois Legislature plus his U.S. Senate time is far greater than Hillary's elected time.

Nobel Prize-winning journalist Samantha Powers called her a "monster." Maybe this is a little strong – but I'm mad as hell, too.

In fact, I'm so mad that if she does win the primary, I'm not even sure that I can force myself to vote for her. I know it's a shame for a lifelong Democrat to be put in this position, but I see her actions as extreme party disloyalty – enough to brand her as a "heretic," and she should be treated as any "heretic" – i.e. given her walking papers.

J.A. Gowman
Oklahoma City

Editor, The Observer:

At the beginning of Sen. Jim Inhofe's current term, he was vehemently opposed to a buyout at Tar Creek. His solution was to spend millions to replace contaminated soil which exceeded the value of each residence or lot. No attempt was made to move structurally sound houses to a new location.

The news now is that total funding is available to relocate the entire affected community.

Does the 90% buyout rate reflect owner satisfaction or "let's get the hell out?"

It is also noteworthy that a private salvage contractor is planning to move and rehabilitate many of the condemned houses.

It must be an election year.

Tom Birbilis
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

Your editorial "Deflating School Critics" is one of your best. Your list of myths and facts is a good report. I'd like to add one more detail, if I may.

For five years, I was State Architect for Florida's Department of Education in Tallahassee. I found that private schools were in most cases exempt from building codes written for educational facilities before anyone dreamed of large-scale "privatization." Standards for classroom light-

ing, types of construction, amounts of playground space, and many other requirements could be ignored first by religious schools and then by other private schools.

The most depressing example I saw was a private school with hardly any windows, a playground so small that it looked like a chain-linked penitentiary yard, and mechanical equipment loud enough to drown out a teacher's voice. Decisions affecting capital investment involve lots of money. These represent, in my opinion, great temptations for people with ulterior motives [often overlooked by Republicans] to defeat children by giving them ugly buildings.

Harry Compton
Bartlesville

Editor, The Observer:

I am very intrigued by the recent rumblings from David Boren. First he holds this flashy, highly publicized powwow at OU to discuss the problems our country faces and advise on what should be done to correct them. Now, he is running full-page ads and signing parties to promote his book which, apparently, contains more of his insight and guidance on how to address the massive problems our country is facing.

My question to Mr. Boren is, "Where have you been for the last seven years?" Why didn't you speak up when Bush and Cheney were creating this disaster? Where were you when we were getting bogged down in this quagmire in Iraq?

David Boren is a Rhodes Scholar, a university president, a former U.S. Senator and a former governor, but it took him this long to figure out what Bush and Cheney were up to.

He should have called me. I've known for a long time. And I didn't wait seven years to speak up about it.

Deborah Lewis
Garland, TX

Editor, The Observer:

An open letter to Rep. Sally Kern, R-OKC:

I have read your response – defending comments you recently made – that "at the heart of this issue is my, and your, right to free speech." That is not the issue. The issue is that an elected official has used a public forum to make demeaning and bigoted statements directed at a specific group of people. Words do matter and do have consequences.

With freedom of speech comes responsibility. Is it arrogance or stupidity that allows one to claim that homosexuals are the biggest threat to our



nation, even more so than terrorism or Islam, and to claim public schools don't teach facts – they just indoctrinate the students? Such words have real implications.

My God is a loving God. I believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. I believe that every person deserves justice, equity and compassion. I believe in my pledge of liberty and justice for all. I speak out for traditional human values. I hope you join me.

Ron Wasson
Oklahoma City

Editor's Note: For more on Rep. Sally Kern's remarks, see Public Forum on Page 9.

Editor, The Observer:

The CIA steadfastly maintains that it does not go in for torture. But there is no escaping the evidence. In the book *Whiteout*, the authors describe in great detail the documented savageries in this area that go back decades, starting with the recruitment of Nazi torture technicians. The 1950s saw an increasing obsession with brainwashing and sensory deprivation.

The CIA supplied the interrogators for the program in Vietnam. Witnesses in Congress in 1972 testified that the torturers cut off fingers, ears, and testicles, used electroshock, shoved wooden sticks through the skulls and into the brains of some prisoners and rammed electric probes up the rectums of others.

Bart Osborn, a US Army Intelligence officer, told Congress in 1972, "I never knew in the course of all these operations any detainee to live through his interrogation. They all died." In 1968, in the prison outside Saigon, Vietnam, CIA psychologists – frustrated by their failure to break their captives – performed horrifying atrocities.

The CIA is no different now from what it was over 50 years ago. Despite the overwhelming evidence in the psychological literature that torture does not work and that the victims will confess to anything to stop the torture, the CIA continues to use it.

The psychological term for those who enjoy torturing others is sadists. Maybe the CIA should give its applicants psychological tests to determine if they are sadists or not. Maybe it does.

B.A. Geary
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

It's a damning indication of how poorly things have gone for the United States during its five-year misadventure in Iraq that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the leader of Iran, which had been Iraq's long-standing mortal enemy, can drive in broad daylight through the war-ravaged city of Baghdad and spend the night at the presidential palace, but George W. Bush can't.

Mr. Ahmadinejad was greeted with lavish ceremony as he became the first Iranian President to visit Baghdad, a trip showcasing Iran's great and growing power in Iraq and how severely the U.S. effort to remake Iraq into a Western-friendly democracy has gone awry.

Now after five years of Bush's war, nearly 4,000 American deaths, 28,000 wounded, and \$1 trillion spent, Ahmadinejad strolls into Baghdad in an un-armored vehicle on public roads and then rails against George W. Bush in his speech mocking the deaths of so many Americans.

The Republican candidate for president, John McCain, says the surge is working and things are going great in Iraq and he vows to continue the policies of George W. Bush, keeping us in Iraq for "100+ years." In fairness to John McCain, I'll concede that not long ago, to illustrate his point, he also took a brief tour through Baghdad. Of course he was wearing body armor, was accompanied by half of the 101st Airborne, while numerous gunships circled overhead. That was pretty convincing.

It's obvious that things are working great in Iraq for Iran, but here in America we continue to bleed our treasury and serve up American lives so that Republicans can continue the worst foreign policy blunder in our history.

The fact is [yes, it is a FACT] that 100% of the claims, and assurances from George W. Bush to back them, that started his war, turned out to be 100% false, and the Republicans want 100 years more.

Republicans are resting their presidential hopes on the blind ignorance of Americans. It's their only chance to retain the White House. But they are aware that Americans went to the well twice and elected George W. Bush, so they may have a point.

Kenny Belford
Tulsa

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Frosty's Notebook

Big Oil Welfare

"House OKs \$18B in new taxes on big oil companies." That was typical of headlines in Oklahoma newspapers and across America.

A careful reader would learn that the Democratic-controlled U.S. House passed a bill seeking to roll back two lucrative tax breaks for the five largest U.S. oil companies.

Excuse me? Since when is rolling back tax breaks the same thing as "new taxes?"

One of these tax breaks "helps manufacturers compete against foreign companies." Huh? Since when do oil companies "manufacture" anything besides super-profits?

One of two major tax credits involves oil and gas extraction outside of the country. Outside of the country? Whose brilliant idea was this?

The story in plain English: While American families pay their taxes, Big Oil pays lobbyists and lawmakers to give them tax breaks.

The Oklahoma State Senate has voted to extend a \$25 million a year welfare check for companies drilling deep wells. Chesapeake is rolling in profits and legislative handouts.

State and federal tax exemptions deprive government of money to pay for everything from education and bridges to health care and veterans' benefits.

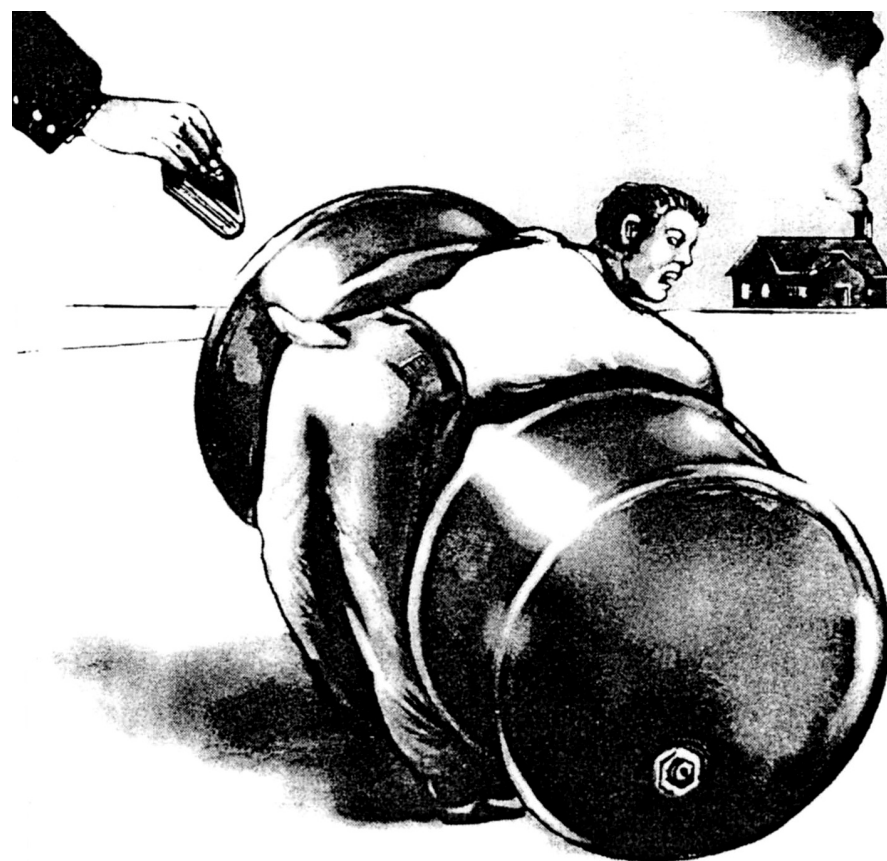
Welfare for the rich also deepens a root cause of our country's economic and foreign-policy woes – abject dependence on oil, most of which doesn't happen to be buried under our soil.

Revoking the two federal tax breaks is projected to cost the five largest U.S. oil companies \$1.8 billion per year over the next 10 years.

These companies hauled in \$123 billion in profits last year. Common sense includes simple arithmetic: ending the tax breaks will trim Big Oil's profits by a mere 1.5%.

Oklahoma's craven congressional delegation voted against the rollback, claiming it would "punish" the oil industry, a move decried as "wrongheaded and spiteful."

The White House, always beholden to Big Oil and its deep Republican pockets, claims the bill unfairly takes aim at the oil industry. Bush says he will veto it if it



reaches his desk. Similar bills failed to clear the Senate twice last year.

It's past time to talk common sense. The U.S. House bill did not levy "new taxes;" it voted to revoke two fat tax breaks.

It's not "spiteful" for the American people to demand that Big Oil pays the going rate on its profits – we pay Big Oil's going rates every time we fill up at the pump.

The problem is not only that we are being ripped off at the pump, but also that we are ripped off again when Big Oil recycles a faction of its profits into buying tax breaks in Washington and Oklahoma.

Over the next decade, the U.S. House bill would redirect the \$18 billion into support for wind power, solar energy, and energy conservation.

This would be a small step toward fiscal and environmental sanity. Unfortunately it will only be a moral victory.

Singing The Prison Blues

More than one in 100 adults in the United States is in jail or prison, an all-time high that costs state governments \$50 billion a year and the federal government \$5 billion more.

No state is worse than Oklahoma – fourth in percentage of men locked up, first in females. Oklahoma's system is now at 98% capacity – nearly 25,000 prisoners.

With more than 2.3 million people behind bars, America leads the world in both the number and percentage of residents it incarcerates. Far more populous China is a distant second, according to a study by the nonpartisan Pew Center on the States.

Is the Legislature paying attention? Not according to Sen. Richard Lerblance, D-Hartshorne.

As the Senate was prepared to pass yet another felony statute, it was too much for Lerblance, co-chair of Oklahoma's Sentencing Commission.

This session alone has 73 bills proposing enhancing sentences or creating new felony statutes, he said. Oklahoma is spending \$22,000 a year to incarcerate a prisoner.

The Legislature should check with New York City, which a few years ago was sending 25,000 people to prison. Now it averages 7,000 a year.

They realized that the city was going broke putting people in jail who didn't belong there. Now they are only locking up violent and career criminals.

The growth in prison population is largely because of tougher state and federal sentencing imposed since the mid-1980s.

Minorities have been particularly affected: One in nine black men ages 20 to 34 is behind bars. For black women ages 35 to 39, the figure is one in 100, compared with one in 355 for white women in the same age group.

Jim Inhofe's Nukes

Senate legislation supported by Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, would award massively expensive loan guarantees – potentially a virtual blank check from taxpayers for nuclear power plant construction.

Even without the new legislation there's plenty of federal money being doled out. NRG Energy, an energy wholesaler in Princeton, NJ, applied to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for a license to build and operate a two-reactor nuclear plant near Bay City, TX.

The NRC predicts 19 similar applications in the next 18 months. If approved, they will be eligible for loan guarantees under the Energy Policy Act of 2005. President Bush is all for it.

Pro-nuclear groups herald the coming flood of applications as proof that nuclear energy makes economic sense. Nonsense. The only reason investors are interested: government handouts. Absent those subsidies, investor interest would be zero.

The report compiled and analyzed data from several sources, including the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics and Bureau of Prisons and each state's department of corrections.

It did not include individuals detained for non-criminal immigration violations.

Although studies generally find that imprisoning more offenders reduces crime, the effect may be less influential than changes in the unemployment rate, wages, the ratio of police officers to residents and the proportion of young people in the population.

In addition, when it comes to preventing repeat offenses by nonviolent criminals – half of the incarcerated population – less-expensive punishments such as community supervision, electronic monitoring and mandatory drug counseling might prove as much or more effective than jail.

The Oklahoma Legislature has made a lame beginning with alternatives, including mental health courts. Are you tired of hearing that the Oklahoma County jail is Oklahoma's largest mental hospital?

Florida, which has almost doubled its prison population over the past 15 years, has experienced a smaller drop in crime than New York, which, after a brief increase, has reduced its number of inmates to below the 1993 level.

There is no question that putting violent and chronic offenders behind bars lowers the crime rate and provides punishment that is well deserved.

This year the Corrections Department said it needed a minimum of \$30 million in supplemental funding but received only \$24 million. That's the way it has been under both Republicans and Democrats for 15 years.

Please, Lord, this election year send us men and women with common sense. Amen.

A cold-blooded examination of the industry numbers bears this out. Tufts economist Gilbert Metcalf concludes that the total cost of juice from a new nuclear plant today is 4.31 cents per kilowatt-hour.

When he takes away everyone's tax subsidies, however, Metcalf finds that nuclear power is far less competitive [5.94 cents per kwh versus 3.79 cents and 4.37, respectively].

So why does NRG want to build a nuclear plant in Texas? Two factors are in play.

First, the license costs a relatively small amount compared with the cost of construction. Second, the federal government would guarantee up to 100% of the \$6.5 billion to \$8.5 billion NRG might borrow from capital markets [as long as it doesn't exceed 80% of the project cost]. Without such guarantees no investor would lend significant amounts of capital to NRG.

Next time you see him, tell Sen. Inhofe to take a hike.

Still Going At 90

Ed Montgomery A Living Legend

Veteran Oklahoma journalist Ed Montgomery received the lifetime achievement award from the Oklahoma Pro Chapter of the Society Professional Journalists, P.J. Newspaperman Andy Rieger introduced him with these remarks:

When I began my career on the Oklahoman and Times, Ed Montgomery was nearly winding down from the newspaper's Capitol Bureau. My city editor Kay Dyer sent me to get an opinion that had just come out from the state Supreme Court.

I presented myself to the court clerk at the Capitol and informed her that I would like a copy of the opinion. She said it was not yet available ... [adding that] all opinions had to be first released through Mr. Montgomery.

GO GET MR. MONTGOMERY

When I told her that I worked at the same newspapers, she politely informed me that if I wanted a copy, I should go and get Mr. Montgomery and bring him down here with me to get the opinion.

That's the stature Ed Montgomery held at the Capitol. He was the dean of the pressroom. I asked a few of Ed's peers to share their thoughts with me.

His longtime Capitol colleague Ron Jenkins told me that Ed Montgomery is as sure with the English language as any reporter or editor he has known.

He was the same way on the golf course. He drove his golfing partners crazy with his 180-yard drives straight down the middle of the fairway en route to chipping on the green for a par.

He was a steady influence to young reporters. Ron said the strongest language Ed ever used was "Heck No."

HE NEVER MADE MISTAKES

Ed never got in trouble as a reporter because he never seemed to make mistakes. The Capitol Press Corps leaned on Ed in the press room because of his knowledge of everything from grammar to Oklahoma history to baseball.

Besides statehood, much of what has happened in Oklahoma's history has come on his watch. At the Norman Transcript where he went after retirement from the Oklahoman, I once heard a reporter asking him about something that happened around the time of the 1889 Land Run.

Ed didn't belittle them for the question. "Remember, I didn't cover the Land Run. I was on the desk then."



Ed was often seen as a shy and unassuming person. He didn't boast or brag. He could cover anything and cover it well. Politicians appreciated his sense of fair play.

HE PLAYED IT DOWN THE MIDDLE

They didn't always like what he wrote or his newspaper publisher's politics but they had the utmost respect for Ed. Governors and senators seek him out. David Hall, whom the Oklahoman didn't spare any ink on, used to call regularly and talk to Ed.

Fellow reporter Ivy Coffey recalled an incident that was typically Ed. When they were both state staff rovers they were filling out expense accounts from their weekly travels. They turned them into Charlie Bennett, who was managing editor at the time.

Pretty soon Bennett came out of his office and said he thought Ed may have made a mistake on his report as he had listed a minimal amount, 60 cents, for one lunch. Ed's explanation was: "That's about all you can get at Indianola, Oklahoma."

A DEEP SENSE OF FAIRNESS

John Greiner told me that Ed had been his editor, bureau chief, mentor and friend for most of his career at the Oklahoman, which began in 1966.

He has a deep sense of fairness that is reflected in the columns and stories he

See LIVING LEGEND Page 12

Oklahoma Has An Open Transfer Law

By Sandy Garrett

Editor's Note: Proof that the fanatical Republican push for vouchers is a con job is the fact that Oklahoma has an open transfer law. Clip this column by the state superintendent of public instruction, and shove it under the nose of the next person who peddles the Bush line on vouchers.

A little known fact: More than 40,000 students transfer yearly to schools outside of their resident district.

Public school choice in Oklahoma is a result of our state's Open Transfer law, which gives parents the right to choose the school best suited to their child's needs.

Parents who want to request a student transfer for their children for the upcoming 2008-09 school year must submit their application by April 1 - this year on a Tuesday.

In the past, parents had only the month of January to make their request, but in 2006 legislators extended the deadline by two months.

Most parents choose the school district in which they reside. Oklahoma parents transfer their children for a number of reasons, though no explanation is necessary.

SOME REASONS TO WANT A TRANSFER

For example, another district might offer special programs, or perhaps have a particular emphasis in the curriculum, or even be more convenient to the parent's workplace.

Many students in Oklahoma attend elementary district schools, which do not have a high school. Those students must apply for a transfer to an independent district. Transportation may or may not be provided by the school.

Under state law, school districts are required to have an Open Transfer Policy, but situations such as lack of classroom space or insufficient funding for teaching staff may cause requests for transfers to be denied by the "receiving school" in which parents want to enroll their child.

HERE IS HOW OPEN TRANSFER WORKS

The Open Transfer process includes:

- Applications for an open transfer can be found on the State Department of Education's Web site [www.sde.state.ok.us] or at your school's main administrative office.

- Parents must complete and send an Open Transfer application to the receiving school district at which they want to enroll their child [the receiving school district] by the April 1 deadline.

- Applications are taken on a first-come, first-served basis. Once an application is approved or denied by the receiving district, parents are notified of the decision by June 1.

- When an open transfer is approved, parents must confirm with the receiving district by July 1 that their child will be enrolling in the fall. Failure to confirm

enrollment can result in denial of the transfer. But once a transfer is approved, parents are not required by law to reapply annually.

- If the April 1 deadline is missed, parents may apply for an "emergency" transfer, but both resident and receiving districts must approve emergency transfers.

If you have questions about Oklahoma's Education Open Transfer Act, give us a call at 405.521.3472.

Debit Card Coming For Social Security

Oklahoma Social Security recipients are offered a new way to receive benefits - a debit card. They target four million Social Security and Supplemental Security Income recipients without bank accounts.

The cards will debut this spring in four states - Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana - and are expected to be available nationwide by the end of the summer.

Those who choose to sign up for the debit program will receive a MasterCard debit card which will be reloaded each month with benefit payments and secured with a personal identification number [PIN].

The card can be used at ATMs to withdraw cash and at retailers for purchases and to get cash back.

Some usage fees are attached: Paper account statements, for example, will cost 75 cents, and online bill-paying service will be 50 cents per bill.

The first ATM withdrawal each month will be free; additional withdrawals will cost 90 cents each; and some ATMs may assess their own usage fees. International ATM withdrawals will cost \$3 plus a 3% currency conversion fee.

Judy Tillman, commissioner of the Financial Management Service at the Treasury Department, says the debit card is a faster and safer way to deliver funds than mailing paper checks.

In a small pilot study conducted last year in Illinois, 85% of debit card users said they were satisfied.

It is true that debit cards "have a high risk of loss if stolen or abused," says Ed Mierzwinski, consumer program director at U.S. PIRG, a public interest research group in Washington.

"But it's an improvement on getting a check and going to a check cashier and running out of money before the end of the month because of deduction of cashier's fees, or getting mugged on the way out of a check cashier."

\$2 Billion And Growing

Legislature Loves Pork And Politics

Hundreds of tax exemptions, credits and deductions have been approved by the Oklahoma Legislature, many to curry favor with special interest groups.

The House Budget and Appropriations Committee reported out 21 additional exemptions and tax credits. One would exempt gospel singers.

No one questions exemptions for non-profit civic groups, charities and religious organizations or those that stimulate economic activity.

Legislation pending in the Senate would require hundreds of tax incentives to be reviewed to determine whether they are still effective and should be retained or have outlived their usefulness and should be taken out of the state's tax code.

The goal of the so-called sunset bill is to reclaim revenue lost through tax breaks and use it to pay for other incentives – including additional income tax cuts.

LARGEST TAX CUTS IN HISTORY

The Legislature has passed the largest tax cuts in state history in the past three years, more than \$700 million, reducing the top personal income tax rate from 6.65% to 5.5%. This, despite the state owing millions in unpaid bills.

More than \$2 billion in state tax collections are lost annually through exemptions, deductions and credits.

That includes 117 income tax exemptions, 133 sales tax exemptions and a variety of exemptions from property, motor vehicle, gross production and other state taxes.

Tax incentives in effect in 2005-2006 are listed in an Oklahoma Tax Commission tax expenditure report. They include:

HERE'S THE TAX COMMISSION LIST

- The Tax Commission reports \$773.7 million tax exemption in the sale of articles to persons who resell them. Tax Commission officials said the incentive generally goes to retailers who buy items at a wholesale market and then resell them in their retail store, where sales taxes are collected.

- A \$28.2 million nonrefundable income tax credit for taxes paid to another state by residents for personal services compensation.

- A \$13 million sales tax exemption in the sale of newspapers and magazines.

- A \$12 million exemption in the sale of water, sewage and refuse services.

- An \$18.5 million sales tax exemption in tuition and fees paid to private education institutions accredited by the Department of Education.

400 Lives Saved If Providers Step Up

Why aren't all health care providers participating in Oklahoma's electronic medical data sharing network?

If only half of all health care providers would participate in an existing electronic medical data sharing network, within five years the state could save more than \$145 million and avoid more than 400 deaths.

That's according to Sen. Jim Wilson and Rep. Mike Brown who are advocating greater participation in the program. The network – called SMRTNET for "secure medical records transfer network" – was created through federal grants.

"Medical errors are expensive, and they're the eighth leading cause of death in this country," said Wilson, D-Tahlequah.

"We could eliminate many of those mistakes, improve care and save tax dollars if more of our health care providers were taking advantage of this data sharing network."

Brown said greater participation in SMRTNET would result in significant healthcare savings without adversely affecting patients.

Mental Health And Drugs Targeted

A statewide initiative to provide better mental health and substance abuse services to Oklahoma needs citizen input.

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services' "Innovation Center" is sponsoring a consumer study group to develop a set of draft standards to measure involvement of consumers at the individual, community and system level of services.

The group has divided the state into six regions – northeast, northwest, southwest, southeast, central [Oklahoma City] and Tulsa. Each region's leader will be hosting town meetings from now through April 30.

"Consumer involvement is sought and valued by the department," said Innovation Center Interim Director Karen Frensley.

"However, until now, there has been no way to measure individual, community or state level involvement in the transformation process."

The Consumer Involvement Standards team project is designed to gain consumer input on the current draft, with the goal of having standards developed that will result in meaningful consumer involvement."

For dates and survey sites nearest you, contact Jean Wood, Innovation Center transformation agent, at 405.522.1446.

The Oklahoma Innovation Center was established in 2005 as part of a \$15 million federal Mental Health Transformation Incentive Grant to fund research into providing a more "user-friendly" behavioral health system for Oklahomans who need mental health or substance abuse and other addictive disorder services.



- A \$46.9 million property tax exemption for new, expanded or acquired manufacturing facilities.

- A \$94 million sales tax exemption in the sale of natural or artificial gas and electricity for residential use.

- A \$57.5 million exemption in the sale of certain medications, including insulin and medical oxygen.

- A \$33.2 million sales tax exemption in certain agricultural sales, including the sale of livestock, animal feed and farm machinery.

RAILROAD AND AIRLINE EXEMPTIONS

- A \$43.1 million tax exemption for the use of tangible property by commercial airlines or railroads.

- A \$3.3 million exemption for motor vehicle registration fees for vehicles operated by a farmer and used primarily for farm use.

- A \$106 million rebate of gross production taxes from oil and natural gas produced from deep well, horizontal and other kinds of drilling projects.

Sen. Mike Mazzei, R-Tulsa, co-chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, is author of the sunset bill as he seeks to attack exemptions and credits that do not promote economic development.

It is ironic that Mazzei talks out of both sides of his mouth. He voted for SJR 59, a major property tax cut.

Mazzei's bill authorizes a nine-member Incentive Review Committee administered by the Tax Commission and the State Department of Commerce to review hundreds of tax incentives over the next eight years.

Tax credits and exemptions to seniors, veterans, the disabled and low income Oklahomans would be excluded from the review.

"The overhead administrative cost of providing healthcare in our state has risen to over 23%, but other attempts at cutting costs have targeted eligibility, what procedures are covered or reducing provider fees, all of which results in less access to medical care for our citizens," said Brown, D-Tahlequah.

"By utilizing the technology of SMRTNET, we can save millions of dollars without reducing access to healthcare."

The lawmakers said the secure shared medical data network would result in savings through the reduction of duplicate medical orders and lab tests, as well as savings from abuse and fraud.

"We have \$114 million less to appropriate this year. We need to take advantage of every tool at our disposal to find and eliminate waste and save taxpayer dollars," Wilson said.

"This system is already in place – we just need to encourage more health care providers to participate. It's a win-win program for patients, for providers and for our taxpayers."

Little Zachary Motivated

Little Zachary was doing very badly in math. His parents had tried everything. Finally, in a last-ditch effort, they enrolled him in the local Catholic school. After the first day, little Zachary came home with a very serious look on his face. He didn't even kiss his mother hello.

To her shock he marched back to his room without a word, and in no time, he was back hitting the books as hard as ever before. This went on day after day.

Finally, little Zachary brought home his report card. He quietly laid it on the table, went up to his room and hit the books.

With great trepidation, his mom looked at it and to her great surprise, little Zachary got an "A" in math. She could no longer hold her curiosity.

She went to his room and said, "Son, what was it? Was it the nuns?"

Little Zachary looked at her and said, "Well, on the first day of school when I saw that guy nailed to the plus sign, I knew they weren't fooling around."

TABOR Petition: Follow The Law Or Change It

By Drew Edmondson

The taxpayer bill of rights [TABOR] initiative petition was thrown out by the Oklahoma Supreme Court in December 2006 because the process was riddled with fraud, including the illegal use of out-of-state petitioners [non-taxpayers] as circulators.

Oklahoma's multi-county grand jury looked at the tactics of the petitioners, and it also found them to be in violation of a state law that requires petition circulators to be residents [typically, taxpayers] of Oklahoma.

Yet when the multi-county grand jury issued indictments against Paul Jacob, Susan Johnson and Rick Carpenter in October, criticism from their cronies was immediate, accusing my office as the agency that oversees the multi-county grand jury of filing these charges against the will of – you guessed it – taxpayers.

RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT IS OLD LAW

The law requiring individuals who circulate initiative petitions to be residents of Oklahoma has been on the books since 1969. The defendants and their friends don't deny that. They simply say it somehow doesn't apply to them.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court and the multi-county grand jury both independently found these defendants to be in substantial violation of Oklahoma law.

Jacob, Johnson and Carpenter would have you believe that I'm the only one who has a problem with their methodology.

And never mind the fact that thousands of taxpayers who legally signed the petition in question had their voices silenced because the out-of-state circulators did not follow Oklahoma law.

CAN'T DISPUTE IT SO THEY DON'T MENTION IT

The drive's organizers, who are now awaiting trial in Oklahoma County District Court, can't dispute that fact, and therefore, don't bring it up.

The rights of Initiative and Referendum are found in the Oklahoma Constitution and codified into law. They are legislative processes. Some detractors have confused this with a petition for redress of grievances guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Oklahoma has as much right to demand that petition circulators be qualified electors [residents] as they do to put residency requirements on candidates for the Legislature.

COURT RULING SOLIDLY GROUNDED

Regardless of what the defendants and their friends say, the Supreme Court

Fake Civil Rights Initiative Exposed

By Katherine Spillar

Twelve years have passed since Ward Connerly, a Republican businessman, emerged as the public face of the deceptively named "California Civil Rights Initiative" designed to ban affirmative action for women and minorities in public employment, public education and public contracting.

Now Connerly is trying to work his misleading trade in Oklahoma, promoting an initiative petition for a constitutional amendment.

Connerly has the perfect resume for the job: close ties to large Republican donors, and his race. Better than an African-American man waged battle against affirmative action, not the two white male professors credited with authoring Proposition 209 or the white men who would profit from it.

ONGOING ATTACK ON WOMEN, MINORITIES

The passage of Proposition 209 was a critical victory in the ongoing nationwide attack on affirmative action for women and minorities.

Connerly is leading simultaneous efforts in five states to qualify ballot measures for the November election, each claiming to prohibit "discrimination" and "preferential treatment."

These deceptively named "civil rights" initiatives in Oklahoma, Missouri, Colorado, Arizona, Nebraska and are actually designed to ban affirmative action for women and minorities in public employment, public education and public contracting.

THEY USE DECEPTIVE TACTICS

If Connerly and the initiatives' other proponents have their way, the term "affirmative action" will not appear on the ballot or be talked about in the campaign – that's because most voters support the concept.

The debate will instead focus on whether "unqualified" minorities are admitted to public colleges and universities over "more qualified" [i.e., white] students.

What has never been widely reported in the coverage of Connerly's campaigns are his ties to the large public works contractors and construction industry organizations that stand to benefit tremendously from eliminating programs that help level the playing field for women – and minority-owned businesses.

HE SHILLS FOR CONTRACTORS

Connerly, in fact, has spent virtually his entire career consulting – and, through his firm Connerly & Associates, lobbying – for the "good 'ole boys" in the building and construction industry.

Why have the contractors long opposed affirmative action and come out full swing against it? The simple answer is money.

Nationally, hundreds of billions of dollars annually are doled out by the federal, state and local governments to private companies for the purchase of goods and services, including the building of roads and freeways, schools, universities, air-



ports and prisons. The multi-county grand jury agreed, and now my office is charged with overseeing this prosecution.

TABOR supporters should applaud this prosecution. Ironically, some of them don't. Because the Supreme Court found that these circulators broke the law, the state question never made it onto an Oklahoma ballot.

In my mind, it's not too much to ask that people from out-of-state who come here to promote changes to our laws should also have to follow our laws in the process. It's just that simple.

FOLLOWING THE LAWS NECESSARY

By following the laws that govern our petition process, petitioners ensure that every signature is counted, and that every taxpayer is heard.

That didn't happen in this instance because these petitioners broke the law in their efforts to change the law.

Millions of dollars were spent on the TABOR effort. Thousands of Oklahomans signed petitions in good faith. Thousands more man hours were devoted by individuals on both sides of the question.

The time and attention of the Secretary of State, the State Election Board and the Oklahoma Supreme Court were taken up by reviews of the process.

All of this came to naught, because the Court found gross, blatant and overwhelming fraud tainted the entire process.

The multi-county grand jurors took these matters very seriously. So do I.

– The author is Oklahoma Attorney General. This column first appeared in his newsletter.

ports and prisons.

Affirmative action helps ensure women- and minority-owned businesses get a fair shake in the bidding.

In the six years before Proposition 209 passed, those firms received 22% of all construction contracts awarded by the California Department of Transportation [Caltrans], one of the largest sources of public contracts in the state.

In the six years after its passage, contracts to women and minority owned firms were cut in half, resulting in an estimated loss of \$1.4 billion.

In contrast to this drop in revenues for women and minority owned firms, Connerly has been well compensated for his leadership of the anti-affirmative action crusade.

ROLLING IN THE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

An analysis of IRS filings shows that between 1998 and 2006, Connerly and his business Connerly & Associates received a total of \$8.3 million from the two nonprofit organizations he founded in the late 1990s to promote his messages and campaigns – nearly half of the \$17.5 million in total revenues reported in that period by the two nonprofits.

In addition to salary and benefits, Connerly receives expense accounts and fees for speaking, media interviews and consulting. In the last reported fiscal year, 2006, he received \$1.6 million – 66% of the \$2.4 million in revenues his nonprofits generated that year.

The amount of money Connerly receives from the nonprofits is not only eye-popping but may be illegal. Under federal tax law, nonprofits are forbidden from enriching individuals or organizations.

FEDERAL LAW MAY APPLY TO HIS PLUNDER

This provision is meant to ensure tax-exempt organizations serve the public, not private, interest. Violations can result in the loss of an organization's tax-exempt status and monetary penalties.

In fact, Connerly's compensation from his nonprofits has drawn the attention of the U.S. Congress: In August 2006, Reps. John Conyers, D-MI, and Charles Rangel, D-NY, asked the IRS to investigate "possible excessive compensation practices. It appears that [Connerly] may have been paid amounts far greater than the value of any services he may have rendered."

Connerly is unapologetic, both about his crusade and his compensation.

"The attitude most people have is that anyone who works for a nonprofit should not make more than a certain amount, and anyone who makes more than that is enriching themselves," he told Ms. magazine. "That doesn't take into account who the person is. I'm not your typical executive."

© Ms. magazine

Real Terror: Sally's Kern-servative Gospel

Why Kern's 'Free Speech' Is Hurtful

By Lynn Green

Rep. Sally Kern's recent recorded condemnation of the so-called "gay threat" has attracted nationwide attention due to the fact that, unbeknownst to her, someone recorded it and made it a popular Internet download.

Many have condemned the speech, and others have wondered what the big deal is all about.

After all, wasn't Sally simply exercising her right to free speech by expressing a personal opinion?

In order to understand the problem with Sally Kern's speech; let's put the shoe on the other foot for a second. Suppose a gay politician got up and said that the "straight agenda" was a greater threat to America than terrorism. Or that "straight people are trying to "indoctrinate" our two-year-olds. Or straights had "infiltrated" our City Councils.

Surely, people would think that they are listening to a nut who deserves to be ignored and certainly should never be trusted with a public office.

Well, now you may know how gay people feel when someone sees them as a "threat" for asking for the same human rights we all enjoy.

One might say, though, that while the speech might be offensive, it would not constitute threatening "hate speech." Straight people might be insulted or angered by such talk, but certainly not threatened.

True, but then again, straights are in the majority in our society. So let's change our hypothetical situation a bit.

Now imagine that a white couple – living in some country where they are a definite minority, say some place like Zimbabwe – hears a recording of a black politician from that country expressing similar views to Kern's except that this time instead of using the words "gay" or "homosexual," he used the word "white."

Now "white people are greater threats than terrorists" and "white people must not be allowed to indoctrinate our children" or "the white agenda" must be rooted out and opposed by all available means.

Wouldn't, in this case, the feelings of this couple go beyond merely being offended? Wouldn't the fact that these words might incite someone to take direct action against this "threat" cause them to feel what gay Americans feel when

Simple Sally Parrots Her Religious Indoctrination

By Nathaniel Batchelder

State Rep. Sally Kern's YouTube rant on homosexuality is being heard by millions around the world, bringing shame and embarrassment to Oklahoma.

In little more than two minutes, she not only insulted gays, Muslims, non-Christians, and public schools, but also attacked early childhood education [ECE] as simply "indoctrination."

Experts in early childhood development have taught for decades that an infant's brain grows more complex and intelligent if the baby receives four essential ingredients to healthy development: adequate nutrition; love and security; physical touch and attention; and a stimulating environment including speech, colors, movement, music, sounds, and variety.

As an advocate of America's Head Start program, which involves parents and volunteers as well as paid professionals, I assert that children who benefit from Head Start programs go on to be better readers, better students, with greater intellectual potential than children who do not benefit from these services.

Head Start teaches parents about the importance of nutrition, love and security, and physical touch, which they can provide. It offers to children, and teaches parents about, the value of stimulating sights, sounds, and experiences, crucial to healthy brain development.

No wonder Sally Kern opposes it.

To dismiss public schools and early childhood development as mere "indoctrination" to be equated with whatever Sally Kern believes "the homosexual agenda" might be, is uninformed and inflammatory propaganda.

Apparently all her opinions are drawn from her fundamentalist religious indoctrination.

– The author lives in Oklahoma City

they hear a politician in Oklahoma make these statements?

I think they would, and this is why Rep. Kern should realize that words have consequences, especially when they come from someone involved in serving all the people.

– The author lives in The Village

Superdelegates Could Swing Election To GOP

By John Brown

The best way to further weaken our Democratic Party and to ensure four more years of national Republican insanity is to allow political insiders to superimpose their self-interest votes for the Democratic presidential nomination over the proportional vote of the people.

I am disgusted by the specter of political hacks across the nation selling their unearned votes to the highest bidding candidate.

Political plum jobs will be dished out to families, friends and clients of these so-called super delegates.

Over 3,975 of our troops have died and over 29,092 wounded for President Bush's lie of installing a U.S. style democracy in Iraq.

The Democratic Party must not disgrace itself by denigrating its long-standing role as a champion of democracy.

Before the convention, the Democratic National Committee must act to suspend voting privileges of the super delegates and take appropriate action at the convention to permanently remove the ill-conceived super delegate anomaly from the nominating process. We are a party of the people; not of the aristocracy.

Oklahoma has eight super delegates and, at last count, four were supposedly

noncommitted – U.S. Rep. Dan Boren, state party Chairman Ivan Holmes former state Chairman Jay Parmley, and DNC at-large appointee Kalyn Free.

Three of the eight super delegates have announced preferences – Betty McElderry, national committeewoman for Clinton; Jim Frasier, national committeeman for Edwards; and state party Vice-Chair Kitti Asberry for Obama.

The status of the eighth delegate [Senate President Pro Tem Mike Morgan, D-Stillwater] is unknown.

I urge each concerned American to voice his/her protest of any attempt by so-called super delegates to overturn the will of majority Democrats in the nomination process.

Send e-mail [www.okdemocrats.org] or regular mail [George Krumme Center, 4100 N. Lincoln Blvd., OKC, 73105] to the Oklahoma Democratic Party and the National Democratic Committee [www.democrats.org or Democratic National Committee, 430 South Capitol St. SE, Washington, DC 20003] to protest this aberration of democracy.

When the followers begin to lead, the leaders will follow.

– The author lives in Chouteau

What Morality? Poor Pay So Rich Can Play

By Wanda Jo Stapleton

Free Lunch by David Cay Johnston, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter for The New York Times, documents "how the wealthiest Americans enrich themselves at government expense [and stick you with the bill]."

That's why Oklahoma City residents recently experienced a massive transfer of wealth from the poor and middle classes to the super-rich owners of the Seattle SuperSonics. The March 4 sales tax election will raise \$121 million to "fancy up" a practically new building in town with luxury sky boxes, rooftop gardens and more, in an attempt to lure the Sonics to Oklahoma City.

This scheme to enrich one Oklahoma City billionaire and several millionaires will gouge the poor by forcing them to pay more for groceries, utilities and other necessities. Cost to each average Oklahoma City resident will be about \$150.

The Oklahoma City Council shamelessly called for this immoral election even though the cost of groceries is rising at twice the rate of inflation; Oklahoma is one of seven states to fully tax groceries and one of the worst places in the nation for hunger. One in five of our children is at risk of going to bed hungry, according to the Oklahoma Task Force on Hunger.

As a former state representative in South Oklahoma City, I know how poverty, especially in single-parent households, fosters hunger, desperation, truancy, school dropouts, gangs, graffiti, crack, killings, and more.

A USA Today story on June 12, 2006, headlined "Gang activity cited for jump in U.S. homicides," reported, "The Oklahoma City police cited fighting among rival gangs as a major factor in the jump in homicides there, from 39 in 2004 to 54 last year."

In 2007, the Oklahoma Legislature declared in House Bill 1895, "The state of Oklahoma finds that youth and gang violence continues to grow in Oklahoma, decimating the lives of many youths and families in both urban and rural communities," and that "the funding, resources, and programs responding to youth and gang violence are decreasing."

I also know about elderly widows who were full-time homemakers, as society encouraged years ago. They are struggling to survive on their late husbands' meager Social Security based on wages much lower than they are today.

See MORALITY Page 10

Don't Think We Can't Lose This Country

By Alvena Bieri

A LETTER TO AMERICA

By David Boren
University of Oklahoma Press
112 pages, \$14.95

University of Oklahoma President David Boren, former Oklahoma governor and senator, has written a short but important book on America's future in which he lays out why we citizens need to care enough about America to change some of our ways.

The book comes highly recommended by Jim Lehrer of the Public Broadcasting System and historian David McCullough.

Boren's point is simple: We all need to work for a better country.

One thing that would help put that goal into context is basic knowledge of our past and world history.

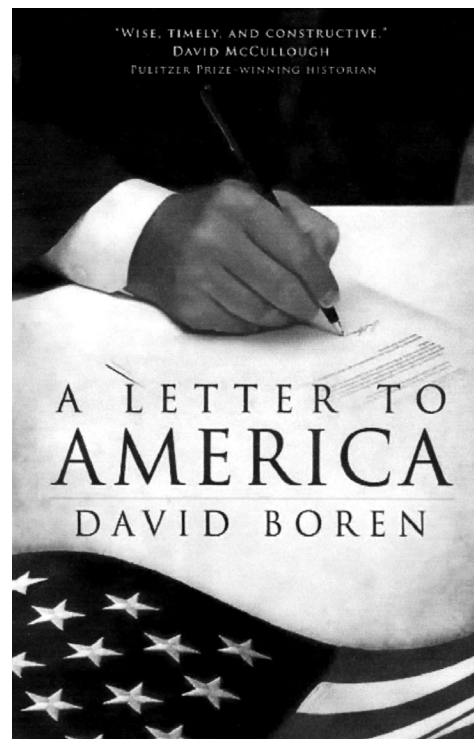
He says that when he questions prospective Rhodes Scholars he finds they are ill informed about history and civics. Only one-third of these college students know that the Constitution established the division of powers. And only 64% could name George Washington as the leader of American forces at Yorktown.

Boren quotes President Abraham Lincoln, who said simply, "We cannot escape history." But that's what we are trying to do every day.

The U.S., with only 6% percent of the world's population, has been a world power for a long time. But Boren, who by the way was chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, believes we need to act now to secure our liberties, a good economic future, and a better opinion from the other countries of the world.

Cooperation between all countries is essential to a good world.

Although he thinks we need to continue to be a strong military power, the "recent war in Iraq has led to a devastating drop in world approval of the United States." Many of us, especially the young, may assume that we will always be the world's leading country. But look again at the ups and downs of history. Empires



“
Boren's point is simple: We all need to work for a better country.
”

do not last forever.

Boren goes on to write of our economic health. He quotes the independent Concord Coalition as saying that by 2020 interest on the national debt will endanger Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. The best thing to do in the meantime is reduce the deficit.

In the chapter "The Disappearing Middle Class," Boren is worried about the shrinking of what we used to think of as a bastion of American values. Among the increased expenses hurting the middle class are medical costs, inflation in general, and the increased expense of college. He calls it "a strong moral obligation to raise more scholarship funds to help offset the rising costs, especially for the middle income family."

But Boren remains optimistic about the future of our country. All of us need to take these issues seriously and participate as best we can in their political solutions.

- The author lives in Stillwater

The Cherokees You Probably Never Knew

By Mike Nobles

A CHEROKEE ENCYCLOPEDIA

By Robert J. Conley
University of New Mexico Press
312 pages, \$24.95

I have long been a fan of university presses. I believe they publish some of the best literature available and do so in a quality based, reasonably priced manner.

They often do not receive the recognition they deserve due to advertising budget constraints but for the reader willing to search them out it is well worth the effort.

This book is a good example of the quality offerings from such presses.

The author of this unusual and informative reference book is a native Oklahoman currently living in Norman.

PROLIFIC AUTHOR IS HALL-OF-FAMER

He is a prolific, award-winning writer having authored some 70 books and been the recipient of two prestigious Spur awards from the Western Writers of America and is an inductee into the Oklahoma Professional Writers Hall of Fame.

He is an enrolled member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees and a highly respected Cherokee writer and historian.

This book is an informative, quick reference to many of the people, places, and things that comprise the three remaining Cherokee nations: the Cherokee Na-

tion, the Eastern Band of Cherokees, and the United Keetoowah Band.

The author notes it is intended for the average reader seeking information regarding the Cherokees and that is one of the things that makes it so appealing.

NUGGETS OF NEW INFORMATION

It is not an overly technical, rehash of information readily found elsewhere but rather an effort to provide the history of little known legends, the importance of tribal women, cultural and political terminology, towns and areas of migration, and people such as artists, contemporary Indian scholars, chiefs, celebrities, and outlaws.

It's all here. Everything from the Cherokee Nation Constitution to an extensive entry for Max Evans, a noted writer who refuses to use his Indian heritage for professional gain because he does not want to "be tempted to become a ... professional Indian."

The entry for Cherokee Tribes discusses the little known six state-recognized tribes in addition to the three federally-recognized tribes. The Cherokee Celebrities entry provides information about the likes of Johnny Cash, Val Kilmer, President Bill Clinton, Oral Roberts and a host of others that will amaze the reader.

This is a must-have book for any reader remotely interested in Cherokee Tribal history. It is a delight to read and a welcome addition to the literature of a proud nation.

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

A Breathtaking Ode To Oklahoma

By Norm Rourke

OKLAHOMA

A Portrait Of America
By Rilla Askew, Carl Brune, Scott Raffe and Libby Bender
University of Oklahoma Press
368 pages, \$49.95

"...Oklahoma is more than just another state. It is a lens in which the long rays of time are focused into the brightest light ... Here all the American traits have been intensified. The one who can interpret Oklahoma can grasp the meaning of America in the modern world." - Angie Debo

Libby Bender, Carl Brune, Rilla Askew and Scott Raffe have captured all this and more, offering this collaborative ode to Oklahoma, its stereotypes and its surprises.

Most of all, it's a wonderful book of photography about the people, places and doings of Oklahoma.

Every ethnic, cultural and historic aspect of Oklahoma is represented in this large collection. All are shown in the 350 beautiful color and black and white photographs.

It is a book that will - should - adorn every coffee table not just for looks, but to be looked at over and over.

Introductory comments by Edna Ferber and Michael Wallis are included. An ending essay by Oklahoma author Rilla Askew completes the collection.

- The author lives in Beggs

MORALITY

From Page 9

Now single parents and elderly widows will be forced to pay so the wealthiest can play. What happened to morality?

Johnston points out that the preamble to the U.S. Constitution declares that government's job is to "promote the general welfare."

He also lists the precepts of "liberty and justice for all." One precept he writes about says: "A society that takes from the many to give to the few undermines its moral basis and must in the end collapse."

- The author, a former state representative, lives in Oklahoma City

Corporate Altruism Starts At Home

By Jim Hightower

What's good for Bank of America is good for America, right?

Well, that's what this huge banking conglomerate is telling the White House and Congress. These bankers have quietly been circulating a proposal in Washington that they've dubbed the "Homeowners Preservation Corp."

They assert that they are concerned about the little folks who've been caught up in the subprime mortgage collapse, so they're urging a government bailout that would allow these hard-pressed borrowers to refinance and keep their homes.

Wow, what altruism!

Uh ... did I mention that Bank of America has several tons of these bad loans hanging over its corporate head? Did I mention that it has already pocketed huge fees for packaging billions of dollars worth of these risky mortgages into intricate, unregulated financial schemes that are now collapsing? Did I mention that Bank of America is presently taking over Countrywide Corp., America's largest huckster of these subprime mortgages, which will essentially be bankrupt if it doesn't get a bailout?

ALTRUISM? TRY SELF-SERVING

Corporate altruism, you see, starts at home.

Gosh, it seems like only yesterday that these high-flying bankers were working with George Bush and the Congress to deregulate their financial operations so they could engage in "financial innovations" like subprime mortgages.

But - oops! - now that their laissez faire adventurism is pinching their bottoms, they're suddenly pleading for a heavy dose of socialistic intervention into their free enterprises. Indeed, banking buccaneers are now telling Washington that some \$739 billion of their home loans are at risk of defaulting. So, please, they cry, intrude!

Thousands of modest-income Americans were duped and even defrauded by such subprime pushers as Countrywide and Bank of America. The White House and Congress should be helping the dupees - not the profiteers who did the duping.

DELIBERATELY DECEITFUL DRUG ADS

Four out of five doctors recommend that you not believe any advertising that makes claims based on the opinions of four out of five doctors. Or, for that matter, ads based on the opinions of even one, well-known doctor.

Take Dr. Robert Jarvik, one of the pioneers in the development of the artificial heart.

You might have seen him on TV throughout the past couple of years touting the healing power of Lipitor, a cholesterol drug made by Pfizer. The pharmaceutical giant has paid the doctor \$1.3 million to shill for the drug.

In one of the ads, Jarvik is depicted as an athletic rower, skimming in his boat across a mountain lake. The implication is that he is full of vigor, thanks to the cholesterol-clearing power of Lipitor.

JARVIK'S AND PFIZER'S PHONY BALONEY

Jarvik's endorsement of the drug oozes credibility - until you realize a few facts not mentioned in this \$250 million ad campaign.

Big Oil Profits While Alaskans Still Suffer

By Jim Hightower

How time flies. For example, think back to 1989. Hillary Clinton was the obscure first lady of Arkansas. Roger Clemens was pitching for the Boston Red Sox and had never even heard of steroids. And the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Alaska's Prince William Sound, causing the worst oil spill in U.S. history.

Nineteen years later, Exxon has merged into ExxonMobil, and it has prospered enormously, banking \$40 billion in profits last year alone - the richest year for any corporation in history.

Back at Prince William Sound, however, the picture is not so rosy, for Exxon's malfeasance devastated the ecology, the economy and thousands of lives there.

In an area that's dependent on fishing, the waters are still polluted with some 85 tons of Exxon's crude. Herring - which was the main catch for local fishing families, accounting for half of the yearly income for many of them - has essentially been wiped out by the spill. The economic stress has led to bankruptcies, divorces and suicides.

DEEP POCKETS DEEP SIX LOCALS

Meanwhile, ExxonMobil has deployed a battalion of \$600-an-hour lawyers to stiff the locals, keeping the people's lawsuit stalled in America's corporate-biased court system.

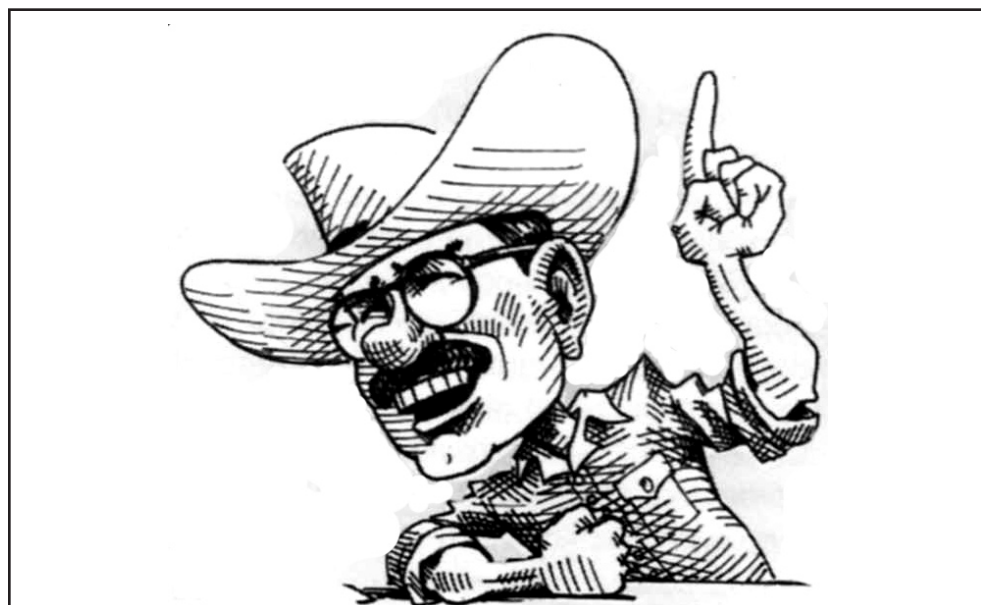
Nearly two decades ago, a jury awarded \$5 billion in punitive damages to some 33,000 victims of Exxon's spill, yet the oil giant has not paid a penny of it. In various appeals courts, the corporation got the sum cut in half - and its lawyers are now asking the Supreme Court to reduce the penalty to absolute zero.

So, 19 years after its tanker dumped 11 million gallons of crude into the lives of thousands of people, ExxonMobil is pulling every legal trick to avoid a punishment that would amount to only three week's worth of its 2007 profits.

And Exxon's top executives, living in luxury 3,000 miles away, wonder why people despise Big Oil.

IRONY: IRAQ EMBRACES IRAN

At last, the president has been greeted in Iraq by an outpouring of hugs, kisses



Editor's Note: With this edition, America's foremost progressive populist Jim Hightower joins the Observer's stable of regular contributors. Born into a North Texas family of tenant farmers, working folks and small business operators, Hightower co-founded the Agribusiness Accountability Project [a public interest entity focused on corporate power in the food economy] and was twice elected Texas Agriculture Commissioner. He also was a national coordinator of the 1976 Fred Harris for President Campaign and was editor of the Texas Observer. He is a renowned author, public speaker and humorist. His latest book - Swim Against The Current: Even A Dead Fish Can Go With The Flow - tells the stories of more than 50 American mavericks that are bucking the system. As the late Molly Ivins so eloquently put it, "If Will Rogers and Mother Jones had a baby, Jim Hightower would be that rambunctious child - mad as hell, with a sense of humor."

One, that's not Jarvik rowing so robustly across the lake. It's a stunt man posing as the doctor, who apparently doesn't row at all.

Second, while Jarvik touts the cardiovascular benefits of Lipitor, he is not a cardiologist.

And, even though he has a medical degree, he is not licensed to practice medicine. What he is, is a marketable medical name, having been, as the ad put it, the "inventor of the artificial heart."

Oh, that's the third hicky on Jarvik's testimonial. He is not "the inventor." A large team at the University of Utah worked on the heart device back in the early 1980s, and they credit two others as deserving of the "inventor" honor - not Jarvik.

A top Pfizer executive says the corporation regrets that the ad led to any "misimpressions." But that's exactly what this direct-to-consumer ad campaign was designed to do.

Drug companies spend some \$5 billion a year on ads to "misimpress" us - and it's time to rein in their deceit.

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and rose petals - just as the Bushites predicted would happen when they invaded that country in 2003.

Unfortunately, though, it is not George W. getting the love treatment from the Iraqis - it's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran.

O, bitter fate! O, the bile and gall of political irony!

The very man whom Bush considers the devil incarnate, the one he accuses of promoting terrorism in Iraq - that man is being lauded by Iraq's leaders, who were supposed to be grateful to Bush, not Iran.

IRAQIS FETE AHMADINEJAD

Has Bush not sacrificed the lives of nearly 4,000 American troops to try to impose a Western-style democracy in Iraq? Has he not committed trillions of dollars from our public treasury to war and nation-building in Iraq? Has he not sacrificed America's good name and his own political standing in his hell-bent effort to make Iraq a bulwark against Iranian dominance in the Mideast?

Yes, yes and yes.

Yet, Ahmadinejad is the one getting hosannas from the very government that Bush put into power. Indeed, the Iranian is the only foreign leader to be given a full-dress state reception by the Iraqi government - including red-carpet treatment at the president's palace.

Contrast his loving reception to George W.'s own furtive trips to Iraq, where he has to be rushed in under total secrecy and fearful security, then rushed out again before the people even know he's been there.

And while the Bushites frantically scramble to get even the weakest concessions from the Iraqi government that our troops are so valiantly defending, Iraq's prime minister threw himself at Ahmadinejad, declaring, "There are no limits to the cooperation that we are going to open up with our neighbor Iran."

So, all of America's sacrifice in Iraq comes down to a victory for Iran. Way to go, George.

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Campaign '08

Like It Or Not, Now Is Time To Discuss Race

By Colin T. Bent

I believe that the Democratic Party has been fractured by the tactics of the Clinton campaign in which race has become a covert instrument.

I am mentally torn as to whether this debate on race should be conducted at this particular time.

I do believe, however, that this national discussion on race has never been held and if our nation is to advance beyond the ignorance of racism that we must dig it up, uncover it and remove it once and for all.

We have a hypocritical approach to race and nowhere is that hypocrisy more evident than within the Democratic Party where our so-called liberalism precludes us from noticing its ugly existence.

RACISM STILL A PROBLEM

But I have news: racism is everywhere; it has not left us yet. How else could we hear such silly pronouncements coming from Bill Clinton, Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell and former U.S. Rep. Geraldine Ferraro, members of the most inclusive political party in the U.S.?

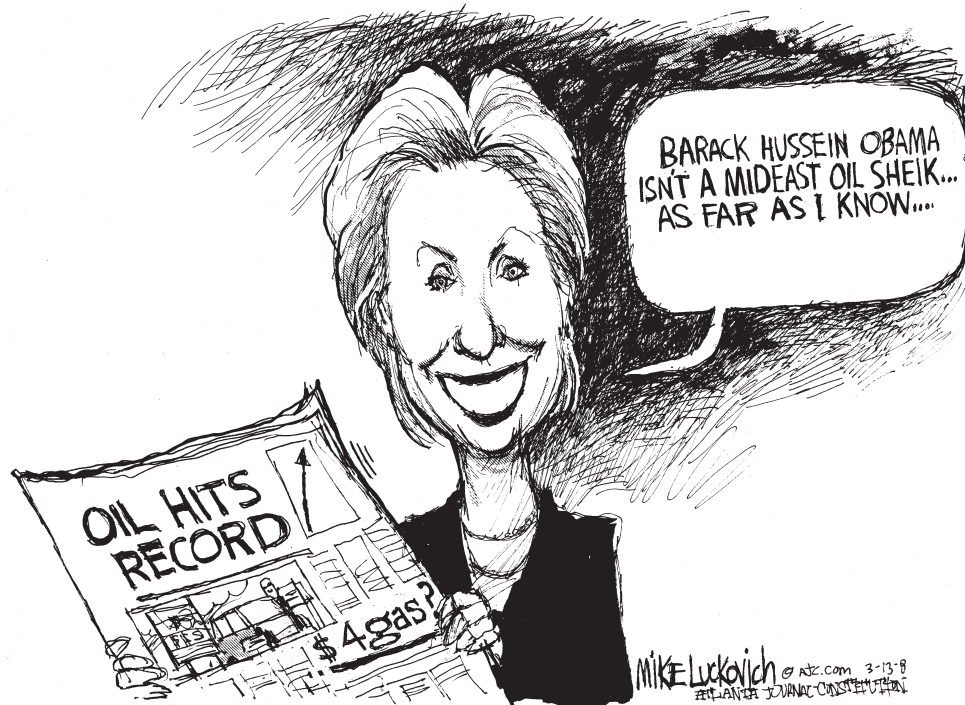
So I am forced to believe, unlike many others, that what is happening is a good thing. It has served to expose the hypocritical nature of many within the Democratic Party, peeling away and uncovering the true nature of Democrats and Republicans alike.

Republican John McCain is supported without alarm by those religious zealots who call for Armageddon and the demolition of Islam and the people who adhere to that religion.

Barack Obama, on the other hand, is ordered to reject those who support him who are not toeing the "nice Black Man" line.

BLACKS AREN'T PLOTTING AGAINST WHITES

This position needs to be exposed for what it is and our white brothers and sisters need to assure themselves that black people do not sit around all day,



dreaming about the extinction of the white race.

Yes, it is uncomfortable for this ugliness to rear its head but it is good that the debate is taking place within the Democratic Party because it is there that the hypocrisy exists concerning race.

We know that the Republican Party has a history of racial intolerance and we know how overtly 'anti' anyone but themselves they are, but Lord knows we never expected this to come out of our own party and least of all from the "first Black president" and his family.

So let the judgment begin in the House of the Lord, as the Bible says, and let it begin now!

- The author lives in Tulsa

LIVING LEGEND

From Page 6

has written during his long and outstanding career.

John said of Ed: Ed could sit in a long meeting and spot the real story where others could not. He then could write that story in a way that easily captured the reader's attention and informed the reader about the topic.

John said he learned more Oklahoma history from Ed than he did in studying the subject in high school.

Ed also can tell you the location of just about every town in Oklahoma. This was based in part on being a state rover for the Oklahoman at one time during his career. He also can tell you the history of many of those same towns.

ED IS A LIVING DICTIONARY

He can spell any word, and he is one of the few newsmen who liked Algebra and could use it when it was necessary for a story.

"I like Algebra because you can always check your answer," he once said.

He has a great sense of humor. One Friday when it was really cold, John Greiner asked Ed about his weekend golf plans.

"Ed, I guess you won't be able to play golf Saturday because of the weather."

He answered, "I like it when it's cold. It keeps all the amateurs off the golf course."

He loves Connie, baseball and bird dogs.

Ed could talk to anyone about baseball. When most people talk about the players on a baseball team, they start by naming the catcher and work their way through the infield and outfield.

Not Ed. In talking about who played for his beloved 1934 St. Louis Cardinals, he went through the batting order - few can do that.

RECITING CASEY AT THE BAT

Not only does he know baseball, he can recite the poem, "Casey at the Bat," in its entirety. He knows more verses of that poem than you knew existed.

His longtime friend Bob Farquhar said in this day and age of advocacy journalism, Ed is someone who still thinks gathering the facts [hard work, if you do it right] and letting the reader make up his/her mind is more important than giving the reader his opinion.

Bob said Ed is the best friend he has in the world. No doubt others feel that way about him, too. A real friend is not that easy to come by. It's someone, for example, who stands by you no matter what.

Like when Bob was just breaking into the newspaper business back in the late '60s at the Oklahoman. He chewed out E.K. Gaylord over the phone when he thought he was talking to Gaylord Shaw at AP.

FOR HIM IT ISN'T JUST A GREETING

He genuinely cares. Anyone can ask how you're doing. Ed really wants to know.

Bob says Ed is the kind of guy who makes sure you have a set of golf clubs to use [and a place to sleep] when you come calling from the East Coast. And agrees not to beat you too badly.

Bob said Ed:

- Keeps you in line when you're writing bad Gridiron script.
- Can talk baseball for hours, especially if it's about the Cardinals.
- Perseveres, even when you go overboard about Oklahoma football.
- Tells you for your own good when you're off base.
- Can talk Oklahoma politics with the best of them. [Just don't get him riled up. When his lip starts to quiver you're in trouble.]
- Always orders grits - a taste I never acquired - when you go to breakfast after a round of golf.
- Won't let anything get in the way of being a good friend - not even the fact that he is a liberal Democrat and you are a conservative Republican.
- Can attest to this day that he was present when you got your only hole-in-one.

FROM AN OLD TYPEWRITER TO A COMPUTER

Anyone who knows Ed knows he is far more comfortable at the keyboard of an old typewriter than at the keyboard of a computer.

A few years ago Bob was determined to get him hooked on a PC. They shopped for one together, set it up for him, arranged his files so he'd be able to correct his copy whether he was writing a column or a news story or a book.

Bob was pretty pleased with himself until he learned several months later he was still using that old typewriter.

"Bob, I'm using the computer," Ed insisted. "After I write my column on my typewriter I copy it into the computer."

Even though he's now 90 years young, Ed still has a fire for competition. At the Transcript when we started promoting upcoming content the day before it was published, Ed's weekly column was an easy tease for the Monday morning paper.

One day after we'd done it for a few weeks I asked Ed how he liked it. He said he didn't like it. I asked him if he was embarrassed.

"No," he said. "You let the competition know what we're writing about and they could get a story out and have it at the same time as we do."

That's Ed. Ninety years young and still worried about getting beat on a story.

Fridays With Frosty

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

KOSU-FM

Oklahoma's Public Radio

91.7 Stillwater/OKC
101.9 Okmulgee

107.3 Bixby/Tulsa
107.5 Ketchum/Tulsa

John McCain's Very Own Farrakhan

By Joe Conason

Whatever their true private beliefs, presidential candidates in America are constantly required to provide proofs of faith, often through their connections with various religious figures. Benedictions from the pulpit bestow an aura of righteousness – except, of course, when the pastor or minister is a disreputable kook whose endorsement should be an embarrassment.

In recent weeks, both Barack Obama and John McCain have suffered exactly this kind of indignity, under very different circumstances. And their contrasting responses revealed not only aspects of their own characters, but also the enduring prejudices of the national media covering this year's campaign.

For an African-American politician seeking to attract voters of all ethnicities and persuasions, there could hardly be a less desirable supporter than Louis Farrakhan, the aging leader of the Nation of Islam.

As the media never tire of reminding us, Farrakhan is a habitual bigot whose utterances have repeatedly denigrated Jews, Catholics, Caucasians and homosexuals, among others, seeking to inflame his followers against these supposed enemies.

FARRAKHAN'S WACKY WORLDVIEW

He detects conspiracies of "international bankers," whose machinations he blames for all the world's troubles dating back to World War II. He looks forward to a time when the Holy Land will be "cleansed by blood," as he exclaimed in a sermon not so long ago.

He warns that the evil ones ruling the planet will someday be destroyed for their sins, while those who obey his admonishments [and tithe to his organization] will be saved.

Well aware of Farrakhan's record, since both of them reside in Chicago, Obama forthrightly rejected the support of the unsavory minister.

Unfortunately his own Christian pastor, Jeremiah Wright, has chosen to associate himself with the Nation of Islam, which may well create problems for Obama – but at least he has clearly separated himself from the poisonous Farrakhan philosophy.

HAGEE'S RECORD: BIGOTRY, EXTREMISM

By contrast, McCain went out of his way to accept the endorsement of a Christian pastor with a deeply disturbing record of bigotry and extremism. That would be John Hagee, a Texas televangelist whose career is chronicled in *God's Profits: Faith, Fraud, and the Republican Crusade for Values Voters*, a new book by investigative reporter Sarah Posner.

As Posner reveals, Hagee is the kind of evangelical minister who has anticipated the end of the world for decades now, even as he promises untold riches to those who tithe to his ministry.

He is an ardent warmonger who, like Farrakhan, seems to imagine a Middle East cleansed by blood – except that in his fantasies, the Christians will be saved while everyone else burns. [The saved won't include members of the Catholic Church, however, an institution he despises and denounces as venomously as Farrakhan does.]

McCain Declines To Rebuke Bigot Hagee

Republican presidential nominee and U.S. Sen. John McCain said he was "honored" to receive the endorsement of the one of America's foremost bigots, televangelist John Hagee, a raging anti-Catholic.

Hagee is well known for his anti-Catholic smears such as past suggestions that the Catholic Church gave Adolf Hitler inspiration and support for the Holocaust.

In a letter to McCain's campaign, Catholics United asked the senator to distance himself from Pastor Hagee's anti-Catholic comments and reject the endorsement.

McCain refused, saying he doesn't necessarily share all the viewpoints of those who endorse him.

HE HAS DEFAMED CATHOLICS FOR YEARS

Hagee has a long history of criticizing the Catholic Church. In his book *Jerusalem Countdown*, Hagee has a chapter entitled "Centuries of Mistreatment" where he makes derisive claims against the Catholic Church.

In one alarming and unsubstantiated passage, Hagee suggests that Hitler's attendance at a Catholic grade school produced Hitler's anti-Semitic worldview. He failed to note that Hitler was a Catholic in his youth.

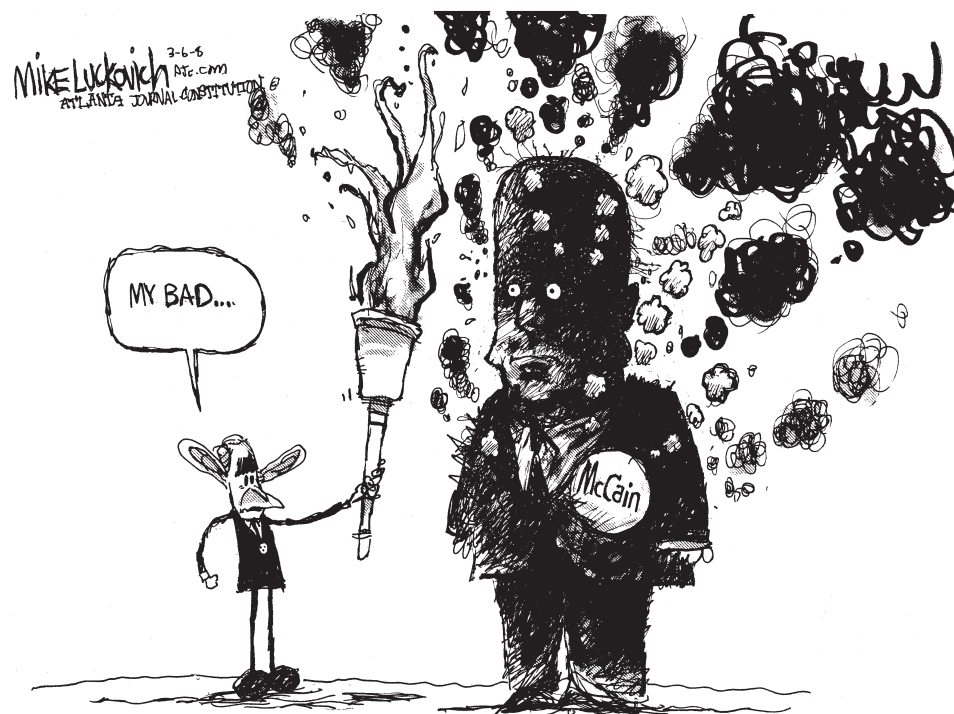
This rhetoric is part of a pattern of behavior employed by Hagee to discredit the Catholic faith.

Despite McCain's support from Hagee, Catholics have been a prominent focus of the McCain campaign. This past December, his campaign launched an initiative a so-called Catholics for McCain.

'HE IS WILLING TO SELL HIS PRINCIPLES'

"By receiving the endorsement of an outspoken critic of the Catholic Church, McCain once again demonstrates that he is willing to sell out his principles for a chance to win the presidency," said Chris Korzen, executive director of Catholics United.

"We hope Sen. McCain will take the principled position of publicly and unequivocally distancing himself from Pastor Hagee's anti-Catholic comments. In-



THE PASSING OF THE TORCH

But the perspectives of these two self-proclaimed men of God resemble each other even more closely in certain ways.

HAGEE'S ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

Hagee, too, promotes hatred of homosexuals and demands that women submit to men. And he also imagines a conspiracy by international bankers, the Bavarian Illuminati, the United Nations, the Council on Foreign Relations and other shadowy groups to deliver America into the hands of Satan.

All that verbiage is merely code for traditional anti-Semitism, as Hagee surely knows because, like Farrakhan, he blames the Jewish people for their own persecution, including the Holocaust, as he explained a few years ago in his book entitled *Jerusalem Countdown*.

Yet, for reasons that seem more related to race than reason, the assorted inanities of Hagee are acceptable while those of Farrakhan are not, at least in the higher circles of the Republican Party and the national media.

No matter how many times Obama rejects the Nation of Islam leader, a television anchor or debate moderator will demand that he do so again, if only to mention their names in the same breath.

PANDERING TO 'AGENTS OF INTOLERANCE'

Meanwhile, McCain escapes the hard questions that should be asked about his embrace of Hagee, whose ugly words and mad prophecies ought to repel him.

Eight years ago, the San Antonio minister was among the political preachers, including Pat Robertson and the late Jerry Falwell, who denounced McCain and proclaimed George W. Bush to be the Lord's chosen candidate.

Back then, the Arizona Republican proved his maverick courage when he rebuked them all as "agents of intolerance."

He has sought to court their favor ever since – and it is sad to see him genuflect now to the same kind of demagogue he once mocked.

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tolerance and bigotry do not belong in American politics."

Catholics United joins a growing number of Catholics, such as Bill Donohue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and Deal Hudson of Inside-Catholic in speaking out against Hagee's anti-Catholic rhetoric.

In a letter sent to the McCain campaign, Catholics United asks Sen. McCain to address this issue by publicly distancing himself from Pastor Hagee's anti-Catholic comments and by rejecting this endorsement.

McCain declined.

Divining McCain's Dream Ticket

By Kenny Belford

John McCain, knowing he may have to overcome the possibility of facing a dream ticket from the Democrats, has been exploring his options trying to come up with an alternative.

Here's the short list of his Republican dream ticket:

John McCain and Larry Craig connecting with each other could bring forth a bold wide stance to their ticket.

John McCain and Tom DeLay could run on ethics, showing America the value of embracing the dark side.

John McCain and David Vitter showing the fun and pleasure of wearing Depends and diapers.

John McCain and Mark Foley campaigning on their "no child's behind" platform.

– The author lives in Tulsa

Spending More On Prison Than School

"Today I have to remind myself that I can't bring my cell phone, shouldn't wear boots and definitely should not carry scissors," writes Donald Moore in New Youth Connections magazine.

That's because every Monday and Wednesday, once class at his regular school ends, he attends evening classes at George Westinghouse CareerTech High School to catch up on credits.

While the school is only 10 minutes away from Brooklyn Tech, which he regularly attends, the two couldn't be more different.

When Moore gets to Westinghouse, the first thing he sees is a line of kids waiting outside that continues deep inside the school until it finally reaches the cafeteria where students must go through metal detectors.

GOING THROUGH A SEARCH

Students are required to empty all change, take off belts, and place keys in the plastic bin. If a security guard finds a cell phone, it's confiscated.

With 900 kids and only two metal detectors, students can wait in line up to 20 minutes after classes have begun.

At Brooklyn Tech, where Moore doesn't have to undergo metal detector searches, 72% of the students are white or Asian, while at Westinghouse, 94% of the students are black or Hispanic.

Still, with all that security at Westinghouse, black and Latino kids are far more likely to get in trouble with the law.

BEING TREATED LIKE A CRIMINAL

As a black teen that has experienced being treated like a criminal while trying to get an education, Moore knows how discouraging the police presence in schools can be for everyone.

Every time he is required to pass through security searches, he feels worse about himself and cares a little less about passing a test.

According to Chloe Dugger, a field organizer for the New York Civil Liberties Union Police Accountability Project, police surveillance at schools is "moving students, particularly students of color, out of the school system and toward the criminal justice system."



This must make it a good thing that for the first time ever, in five states, more is spent on prisons than on colleges, according to a new report from the Pew Project on the States. Oklahoma is among them.

INMATES AND THEIR COST STAGGERING

Last year alone, states spent more than \$49 billion on corrections, up from \$11 billion spent 20 years earlier. Oklahoma is spending \$22,000 per inmate, with 25,000 incarcerated.

Oklahoma ranks 37th in what it spends on a student in public school. Teachers are paid dead last in the region, 48th nationally.

However, the recidivism rate remains virtually unchanged, with about half of released inmates returning to jail or prison within three years.

A close examination of the most recent Department of Justice data found that while one in 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 is incarcerated, the figure is one in nine for black males.

For black women in their mid- to late-30s, the incarceration rate has hit the one-in-100 mark.

Pew also found that in the last 20 years, inflation adjusted general fund spending on corrections rose 127% while higher education expenditures rose 21%.

Public Education Network

Alaska's Oil-Happy GOP Pols Caught

By Nancy Lord

Suite 604 of the Baranof Hotel in Alaska's capital city, Juneau: Grainy video captures state legislators drinking with executives of VECO Corp., the state's largest oil-field service company. Then money changes hands.

The corruption of Republican Alaskan politics had long been suspected, but the FBI's hidden camera proved it.

Last May, VECO's two top executives pleaded guilty to bribing legislators to pass a favorable oil-tax law.

The unfolding scandal has tarred the state's entire congressional delegation, including Republican Sen. Ted Stevens – a relentless proponent of opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

BOGUS CONSULTING FEES PAID

VECO officials testified that they paid \$243,000 in bogus "consulting fees" to Stevens' son Ben, the former president of the state Senate.

According to the Anchorage Daily News, the younger Stevens also collected tens of thousands of dollars from fishing companies that benefited from federal laws and funding overseen by his powerful father.

VECO also supervised the extensive remodeling of a house belonging to Ted Stevens, for which the company seems to have neglected to properly bill him.

The rest of the Alaska delegation isn't faring much better.

Junior Sen. Lisa Murkowski, also a Republican, bought some prime Kenai River real estate from a developer for far below its value – returning it once the deal became public in the Wall Street Journal.

PUTTING IN THE FIX FOR A CONTRIBUTOR

McClatchy newspapers report that veteran Republican Rep. Don Young is under investigation for his ties to VECO and for a \$10 million earmark favoring a Florida contributor.

Yet to be determined: Whether VECO was fronting for "the three big boys," as BP, ExxonMobil, and ConocoPhillips are referred to on the surveillance tapes.

VECO executives mention "producing" for their "clients," and a recorded phone call with the president of ConocoPhillips Alaska raises questions about how much others in the oil industry knew of VECO's bribery.

However the scandals fall out, environmentalists can actually look forward to a cleaner brand of politics emerging up north.

Squeaky-clean governor Sarah Palin called the Legislature into special session and got a new oil-tax law that raised taxes and tightened loopholes.

A new statewide poll shows both Don Young and Ted Stevens trailing likely Democratic challengers in this year's election.

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Major Health Report Is Being Suppressed

The Center for Public Integrity, a public interest investigative journalism organization, has obtained copies of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] study of environmental and health data in eight Great Lakes states that was scheduled for publication last July 2007.

The report, which pointed to elevated rates of lung, colon, and breast cancer; low birth weight; and infant mortality in several of the geographical areas of concern has not yet been made public.

A few days before the report was slated to be released, it was pulled. Meanwhile, at precisely the same time, its lead author, Christopher De Rosa, was removed from the position he held since 1992.

The Center for Public Integrity is asking why.

The study, "Public Health Implications of Hazardous Substances in Twenty-Six U.S. Great Lakes Areas of Concern" was developed by the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry [ATSDR] at the request of the International Joint Commission, an independent U.S.-Canadian organization that monitors and advises both governments on the use and quality of boundary waters.

The CDC report brings together two sets of data: environmental data on known "areas of concern" – including superfund sites and hazardous waste dumps – and separate health data collected by county or some smaller geographical regions.

Since 2004, dozens of experts have reviewed various drafts of the study, including senior scientists at the CDC, Environmental Protection Agency, and other

federal agencies, as well as scientists from universities and state governments, according to consumeraffairs.com.

As many as nine million people – including residents of Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and Milwaukee – may be at risk from exposure to pollutants including pesticides, dioxin, PCBs [Polychlorinated Biphenyls], and mercury, according to Sheila Kaplan, an investigative journalist who covered the story for the Center for Public Integrity.

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

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George W. Bush Is Rigging U.S. Science

By Annalee Newitz

Over the past eight years, the lives of millions of people in the United States and beyond have been endangered by the U.S. government.

No, I'm not talking about the war in Iraq. I'm talking about the quiet, systematic war the government has been waging against science.

You may have heard about gross examples of the government censoring scientific documents.

For example, it was widely reported last year that a government regulatory group censored at least half of the statements Centers for Disease Control director Julie Gerberding was set to make at a congressional hearing about how climate change will affect public health.

PANELISTS HAD A CONFLICT OF INTEREST

You may also have heard about the scandal in 2004 when a whistleblower at the Environmental Protection Agency revealed that five of the seven members on a panel of "independent experts" stood to gain financially from shutting down a scientific investigation of a controversial mining technique called "hydraulic fracturing."

The panel claimed that in its expert opinion, the technique didn't require regulation, despite many scientists' concerns that it might pollute ground water.

These are the stories that hit the headlines. There are hundreds more where they came from, and many of them are documented meticulously in a study released recently by the Union of Concerned Scientists [UCS] "Federal Science and the Public Good."

TRUTHFUL SCIENTISTS WERE FIRED

The UCS report documents, in chilling detail, how agencies have fired scientists who disagreed with government policies.

For example, in 2003, experts in nuclear physics were dismissed from a panel within the National Nuclear Security Administration.

They blew the whistle on how the George W. Bush Administration's beloved "bunker buster" weapons aren't very effective.

Scientists who spoke out against the administration's stem cell policy were booted from the President's Council on Bioethics.

Worse, the government has falsified scientific studies to bolster its policies and under-gird its ideological positions.

MOST EGREGIOUS EXAMPLE

Perhaps the most egregious example of this was when the EPA lied outright to Americans that the air around ground zero directly after Sept. 11 was safe to breathe.

In fact, according to the UCS report, the EPA made this statement without even testing the air.

As a result, the authors of the report write, "thousands of rescue workers now plagued by crippling lung ailments continue to feel the impact of this public deception."

There's also an example of the Food and Drug Administration inventing a fake study to support its decision to approve the drug Ketek, along with many oth-



ers.

Both the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act require the EPA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to base their decisions on "the best scientific data available."

BUSH CROWD IS BREAKING THE LAW

Yet the UCS has documented countless examples of both agencies, as well as others, refusing to take into account the latest research on climate change, animal populations, and systems biology.

It would be intriguing to see a lawsuit based on the fact that these agencies aren't using "the best scientific data available," but the UCS doesn't suggest that as a remedy.

Instead, the report concludes by looking to the future of federally funded science, suggesting ways the next presidential administration might remedy the failures of the last.

First on the agenda would be to bring a scientific adviser back into the cabinet. [Bush dismissed this adviser from the cabinet.]

ADVICE TO THE NEXT PRESIDENT

The UCS suggests that the next president repeal Executive Order 13422 which gave an obscure regulatory body known as the Office of Management and Budget a lot of control over how regulatory agencies handle science.

Currently the OMB has the power to revise the findings of scientists within those agencies, despite the fact that the OMB has no scientific expertise.

Finally, the UCS asks that the government extend protections to whistleblowers within the government who come forward to report on the very kinds of abuses the UCS has reported [often with the help of whistleblowers who lost their jobs or worse].

Hopefully the next presidential administration will relegate this report to the status of historical document instead of a warning about our future.

Science is crucial to the management of the nation, and without it we're no better than a medieval kingdom.

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Court Ruling On Guns Due In June

Guns, one in the trilogy of God, Guns and Gays, are central in a pending U.S. Supreme Court opinion – how much power the government has to keep people from owning them.

Nowhere is that divide more pronounced than in the gap between Americans' beliefs about their rights under the Second Amendment, and how courts have interpreted the law.

Nearly three out of four Americans – 73% – believe the Second Amendment spells out an individual right to own a firearm, according to a Gallup Poll taken Feb. 8-10.

Guns rights are central to Oklahoma beliefs, being carried to the extreme this year.

One bill that was introduced – but ultimately, not considered by the full House – would have allowed 18-year-olds to carry guns. The House did, however, approve a measure that would allow honorably discharged veterans and law enforcement-trained individuals to carry concealed weapons on college campuses – a proposal opposed by most students, faculty and administrators.

FEDERAL COURTS OK GUN CURBS

For years federal judges have seen the Constitution differently, allowing a range of gun-control measures imposed by governments seeking to curb gun violence.

Lower court judges overwhelmingly have ruled that the right "to keep and bear arms" isn't for individuals, but instead applies to state militias, such as National Guard units. That's what the Second Amendment says.

The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly declined to hear appeals of those rulings, fueling the debate over gun control and tension between the law and public opinion. There is a new court majority in place.

Now, in a benchmark case that arises against a backdrop of election-year politics, the high court will take its first definitive look at the Second Amendment.

DECISION COULD RESHAPE THE GUN DEBATE

However the nine justices rule in the case, their decision will reshape the na-

tional debate over guns, a conflict that pits images of America's history of frontier liberty against concerns about public safety.

The case tests the constitutionality of a handgun ban in Washington, DC, where in 1976 officials imposed one of the nation's strictest gun-control laws in response to alarming levels of gun violence. The justices heard arguments March 18; and a ruling is likely by the end of June.

If the court decides there is an individual right to bear arms, it will be a huge victory for the National Rifle Association [NRA] that is all-powerful in Oklahoma.

It also likely would discourage new gun regulations and inspire challenges to other gun restrictions.

FEDERAL FIREARMS LAWS THREATENED

The possibility that the DC dispute could jeopardize a range of federal firearms laws – including those banning individuals from owning machine guns and those establishing rules for transporting weapons – has led the Bush Administration to take a step back from its strong support of gun rights.

In 2001, the administration reversed decades of Justice Department positions when then-attorney general John Ashcroft said the Second Amendment did cover an individual right to have guns.

Now, with the DC case before the Supreme Court, the administration isn't taking such a hard line on an individual right to own and use guns, a stance pushed by the NRA and its allies.

Instead, the White House is urging the justices to adopt a legal standard that would protect an individual right to own guns but protect federal firearms laws.

PRO-GUN ADVOCATES PREACH SAFETY

Gun control was a recurring issue in the 1990s and deeply divided Democrats and Republicans, as Democrats typically favored strict controls and Republicans stressed that people would be safer if they were allowed to arm themselves.

Ironically, the recent mass killing on an Illinois campus was perpetrated by a

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Nobel Laureate: War Cost Is \$3 Trillion

By Kevin G. Hall

When U.S. troops invaded Iraq in March 2003, the Bush Administration predicted that the war would be self-financing and that rebuilding the nation would cost less than \$2 billion.

Coming up on the fifth anniversary of the invasion, a Nobel laureate now estimates that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are costing America more than \$3 trillion.

That estimate from Noble Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz also serves as the title of his new book, *The Three Trillion Dollar War*.

The book, co-authored with Harvard University professor Linda Bilmes, builds on previous research that was published in January 2006.

The two argued then and now that the cost to America of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is wildly underestimated.

OTHER COSTS MUST BE INCLUDED

When other factors are added, such as interest on debt, future borrowing for war expenses, the cost of a continued military presence in Iraq and lifetime health-care and counseling for veterans, they think that the wars' costs range from \$5 trillion to \$7 trillion.

"I think we really have learned that the long-term costs of taking care of the wounded and injured in this war and the long-term costs of rebuilding the military to its previous strength is going to far eclipse the cost of waging this war," Bilmes said in an interview.

The book and its estimates was the subject of a hearing by the Joint Economic Committee of Congress. The White House doesn't care for the estimates by Stiglitz, a former chief economist of the World Bank who's now a professor at Columbia University.

DECORATED MARINE WELCOMES THE BOOK

Rep. John Murtha, D-PA, a decorated Marine Corp colonel and Vietnam veteran, welcomed the effort to quantify how much the wars will cost taxpayers.

"It's astounding that here we are about to mark the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, and this administration still refuses to acknowledge the long-term costs of the war in Iraq," he said.

By any estimate, the Bush Administration's predictions in March 2003 of a self-financing war have proved to be wildly inaccurate.

Stiglitz cites operational spending to date of \$646 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and – working off estimates from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office – presumes that spending on these wars over the next decade probably will amount to another \$913 billion.

THEY HAD TO REVISE THEIR ESTIMATE

Stiglitz and Bilmes first estimated war costs of \$1 trillion in January 2006. Their research proved controversial and sparked debate about the costs of replacing equipment used by the regular armed forces and National Guard.

In the new book, they offer a figure of \$404 billion for replacing equipment, planes and tanks and bringing military hardware back from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Stiglitz said that too much of the public debate had been over the wars' opera-

Mental Health Bad For Our Soldiers

By Jon Soltz

Release of the Army's latest mental health survey provides very little to be happy about. Despite all the talk about how wonderful things are in Iraq, the overwhelming majority of troops in Iraq continue to say that morale in their units and their own morale is low.

Just 11% reported that their unit's morale was "high or very high." Only 20% said their own morale was "high or very high."

Afghanistan, which is quickly becoming the "forgotten war" for Bush/McCain, is finding a worsening of the mental health among our troops there.

Preliminary reports are that there has been a rise in the amount of troops in Afghanistan reporting depression. In Iraq, troops report the same level of depression as last year.

Combined, the findings are highly troubling. What it tells any person with an elementary school education, for all the talk of success in Iraq, the troops aren't feeling that, at all.

At the same time, we're crushing our troops in Afghanistan, who have done heroic work there with little help, but now are feeling increasingly overwhelmed.

The report is so bad, that apparently one of the conclusions is to consider sending more mental health workers to the war front.

That's right. Rather than deal with the root cause, repeated and extended tours, we're going to send counselors to the field. We're joking ourselves if we think that will keep our troops from severe mental injuries.

At any rate, the press, which has treated Sen. McCain with kid gloves so far, should bring these findings up with him.

– The author, an Iraq War veteran, is co-founder and chairman of VoteVets.org



tional costs while the real budget strains would show up only years from now.

"The peak expenditures are way out," he said, noting that the peak expenditures for World War II vets came in 1993.

OTHER INDIRECT COSTS ESTIMATED

The pair estimated that future medical, disability and Social Security costs for veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan range from a best-case \$422 billion to what they call a more probable long-term expense of \$717 billion.

It's why the two call in the book for creating a Veterans Benefits Trust Fund to set aside money in a "lock box" to pay for future health-care needs of Iraq and Afghanistan vets.

Although veterans' health care amounts to a future promise, they said, it isn't an entitlement and instead is funded through discretionary spending. In the future, funding for vets will compete with other government programs.

"We should not have an unfunded entitlement program like this," Stiglitz said. "This is more like deferred compensation ... We require corporations to put money away but we don't require the government to put money away, and we should be doing that ... so when the focus turns away to some other problem, veterans aren't given the shaft."

THERE ARE TWO MAIN CATEGORIES

The book divides war costs into two main categories: budgetary and social. The budgetary costs are the more quantifiable spending on operations, equipment, future benefits paid to veterans and the like.

In a best-case scenario they total about \$1.7 trillion; in a more probable scenario almost \$2.7 trillion.

When a soldier is killed in combat, they said, the U.S. armed forces pay a \$100,000 death gratuity and make a \$400,000 payment to his or her survivors in the equivalent of insurance for an unexpected death.

If these men and women had died in private-sector employment or in some kind of disaster, compensation to family members generally would be settled in court after determining what economists and lawyers call "the value of statistical life."

This measures the economic contribution that a person would have made over

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Overlooked Victims: Guantanamo Guards

By James Randerson

The guards at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp are the "overlooked victims" of America's controversial detention facility in Cuba, according to a psychiatrist who has treated some of them.

In some cases, a tour of duty at the camp has made guards suicidal and prompted a variety of psychiatric symptoms, from depression and insomnia to flashbacks. The guards' testimony also provides a harrowing insight into the treatment of prisoners.

Professor John Smith, a retired U.S. Air Force captain, treated a patient who was a guard at the camp.

"I think the guards of Guantanamo are an overlooked group of victims," Smith told the American Academy of Forensic Sciences annual meeting in Washington, DC. "They do not complain a lot. You do not hear about them."

GUARDS, DETAINEES COMMIT SUICIDE

The patient ["Mr. H"] is a national guardsman in his early 40s who was sent to Guantanamo in the first months of its operation, when prisoners captured in Afghanistan were beginning to flood into the camp. Mr. H reported that he found conditions at the camp extremely disturbing.

In the first month, for example, two detainees and two prison guards committed suicide.

The taunts of prisoners and the things his superiors required him to do to them had a severe psychological impact on Mr. H.

"He was called upon to bring detainees, enemy combatants, to certain places and to see that they were handcuffed in particularly painful and difficult posi-

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Tough-On-Crime Is Making Us Sick

By Sean Consalves

Doctors recommend people get the flu shot this time of year. I recommend folks get inoculated for the get-tough-on-crime bug before the campaign season gets in full swing.

The highly contagious mental malady prevents people from thinking clearly about crime and punishment. It's how we get legislation like the Aid Elimination Penalty [AEP] provision in the Higher Education Act [HEA] that bars students with drug convictions from receiving federal financial aid for college – apparently to teach them a lesson.

By “them,” in this case, we're talking about disproportionately disadvantaged students. Rich, stoner kids don't need financial aid.

The push to repeal the provision from the HEA was dropped in Congress despite the efforts of the Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform.

THEY WON A VERY SMALL VICTORY

They did get one small victory in getting the law amended so that the AEP applies only to offenses committed while a student is getting financial aid.

Still, an estimated 200,000 students have been denied financial aid because of AEP, as Congress moves toward reauthorizing the bill, AEP and all.

It's just one of the many strains of the get-tough-on-crime virus that attacks the popular political mind, re-defining “justice” as an institutionalized form of making sure “those” people get what they “deserve.”

In his 1966 study of the American penal system, Dr. Karl Menninger discerned a diagnosis, offering two simple observations that exposes the get-tough-on-crime approach for what it is: an irrelevant distraction in dealing with the “crime problem.”

MOST CRIMINALS ARE NEVER CAUGHT

First, Menninger observed, most criminals are never caught, meaning convicted criminals – the people in prison – are only the minority of lawbreakers foolish enough, brazen enough, poor enough or unlucky enough to get caught.

And, of the minority of offenders who are behind bars, not even all of them are guilty, as we are reminded with alarming frequency by periodic news reports of yet another wrongly convicted inmate later exonerated by DNA evidence.

It was true in 1966 when Menninger wrote *The Crime of Punishment* and it's true today.

According to the most recent figures I could find, the FBI's 2002 Crime Index Offenses Cleared data, law enforcement agencies, nationwide, had a 20% clearance rate for all crimes.

CLEARING CRIME RATES

For violent crimes, the clearance rate was 46.8% [for murder it was 64%; aggravated assault, 56.5%; forcible rape, 44.5%; and robbery, 25%] compared to 16.5% for property crimes, excluding arson.

Given the official numbers, we can see that a symptom of the get-tough-on-crime bug is the idea that “the crime problem” will be significantly impacted by meting out punitive justice to the minority of criminals who are actually



caught.

Secondly, and more importantly, Menninger reminds us, most convicted criminals will eventually be released. We remove law-breakers from society to merely punish and humiliate them for their crimes because they “deserve it,” and then release them as economic and political pariahs.

WAREHOUSING PEOPLE, MAKING THEM WORSE

By doing stuff like denying drug offenders financial aid for college, the only thing we've done is warehouse workers in labor camps that double as crime universities where penitentiary professors teach their pupils the tricks-of-the-trade.

Arguing about whether the criminal justice system should be about retribution or rehabilitation is beside the point.

Because it won't change the reality that if you put people with problems in a place that makes them worse-off, then turn them loose on society without any resources, the only thing you've done is exponentially increase the chances of that person becoming a repeat offender, guaranteeing many more future victims.

NO VICTIM SHOULD BE NEGLECTED

Menninger's medicine goes right to the heart of the get-tough-on-crime rationalization: “Doesn't anybody care about the victims?” cry some demagogues, with melodramatic flourishes. “Why should all this attention be given to the criminals and none to those they have beaten or robbed?”

“This childish outcry has an appeal for the unthinking. Of course no victim should be neglected. But the individual victim has no more right to be protected than those of us who may become victims. We all want to be better protected.

“And we are not being protected by a system that attacks ‘criminals’ as if they were the embodiment of evil.”

Until the “crime problem” is diagnosed and treated as a “social safety problem,” as Menninger suggested, we'll keep having these get-tough-on-crime policies creating more future victims. Inoculate yourself.

The author is news editor of the Cape Cod Times

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GUANTANAMO

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tions, usually naked, in anticipation of their interrogation,” said Smith.

On occasion he was told to make prisoners kneel, naked and handcuffed, on sharp stones. To avoid interrogation the prisoners would often rub their wounds afterwards to make them worse so that they would be taken to hospital.

INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES TROUBLING

Some of the techniques used by interrogators resulted in detainees defecating, urinating, vomiting and screaming.

Mr. H told Smith he felt profoundly guilty about his participation. “It was wrong what we did,” he said.

The prisoners also threatened Mr. H. “They would tell him they had networks of people throughout the world,” said Smith. “If he did not take letters out and mail them then they would see to it that his family suffered the consequences.”

When he returned to the U.S. he was suffering from panic attacks, insomnia, nightmares, flashbacks and depression.

PRISONER GNAWS OFF ARM, HANGS SELF

Another guard whom Smith treated described an incident in which a prisoner had hanged himself in his cell after partially gnawing his own arm off. The prisoner lost a substantial amount of blood but was cut down by guards and survived.

Amnesty International UK spokesperson Neil Durkin pointed out that the psychological trauma inflicted on the Guantanamo inmates should not be overlooked.

“With numerous suicide attempts and reports of Guantanamo prisoners on the edge of psychosis, we are extremely concerned that even those eventually released from the camp will be mentally scarred for the rest of their lives,” he said.

“Over 200 of the Guantanamo prisoners are now held in solitary confinement – and after years of detention without charge or trial this is taking a heavy toll.”

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT ON GUARDS

There have been few scientific studies of the psychological effects of working as a prison guard, but classic experiments in the 1960s and 1970s showed how

easy it is to prompt ordinary people to perpetrate extremely cruel acts given the right conditions.

In the so-called “Stanford prison experiment” in 1971, college students were asked to act out roles as guards and detainees in a mock prison in the basement of the university's psychology department. Both groups quickly adapted to their roles and the guards became increasingly sadistic and cruel in their treatment of the prisoners.

The results were so shocking the experiment was stopped early.

“It's not that we put bad apples in a good barrel. We put good apples in a bad barrel. The barrel corrupts anything that it touches,” the experiment's author Dr Philip Zimbardo is quoted as saying on the American Psychological Association's website.

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the rest of his or her life if they hadn't died.

They settled on a statistical value of life that they say the Environmental Protection Agency uses when people are killed in environmental disasters: \$7.2 million.

There have been 4,456 U.S. military fatalities in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001 to Feb. 26, 2008.

The direct cost to the Pentagon from these deaths has been \$2.2 billion, but if lives are valued as they are outside the armed forces, the researchers conclude, the hypothetical economic cost rises to more than \$30 billion.

Include contractors killed while working for U.S. operations and the number rises to more than \$50 billion.

In a best-case outlook, the social and societal costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars would be \$295 billion; \$415 billion in a moderate-realistic case scenario.

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Kids Start Caring About Civic Issues

By William Wells

Her neighborhood, with its police cameras and abandoned buildings, isn't known for inspiring hope. Yet, 18-year-old Ariel Williams feels empowered.

She's lobbied her state lawmakers to increase education funding. She and other students traveled to Iowa in December to campaign for presidential candidates. And now she can't wait to vote in November's election.

These are the sorts of results that happen when civics education is creative and engaging, according to a new study.

"I've always been a real cynic when it comes to politics. At first, we didn't think we had a say," Williams says of herself and other students in her Advanced Placement government class at North Lawndale College Prep Charter High School on Chicago's impoverished West Side.

ENGAGING KIDS POLITICALLY

She's also part of the Mikva Challenge, an organization that works to engage students politically. "Now I finally realize that I have a voice."

Too often, however, those kinds of opportunities aren't available to students, say researchers at Mills College and the University of California-Berkeley, who compiled the findings.

They determined that white, college-bound students – most often at wealthier high schools – have the greatest access to civics lessons that can strongly influence interest in voting.

"It's a stark illustration of how unequal political participation is in America," says Peter Levine, director of the University of Maryland's Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, also known as CIRCLE. "We need to have a discussion in this country about our priorities and make sure democracy is one of them."

SURVEY COVERED 142 HIGH SCHOOLS

CIRCLE released the findings on behalf of the researchers, who used data from the International Civic and Citizenship Study and their own surveys to compile a national sample of 5,548 students at 142 high schools. The surveys were done from 2005-2007.

Among other things, their analysis determined that students in wealthier districts were twice as likely to study how laws are made, and about as likely to participate in school-sanctioned community service activities.

While youth voting is surging in some sectors, study co-author Joseph Kahne worries that many young people remain disengaged, especially those with less education.

Exit polls from the Super Tuesday primaries found that nearly 80% of voters in the 18- to 29-year-old bracket had attended at least some college. Overall, about half the general population in that age group has attended college.

WHY HIGH SCHOOL IS SO IMPORTANT

"It's a big part of why high school is so important," says Kahne, dean of the school of education at Mills College.

While the lack of civics opportunities for low-income students is indicative of



larger social ills, he says teachers can do some basic things.

They can, for instance, find local issues that interest students and teach them how to address those issues with their community and elected officials.

At North Lawndale High, students have gone to Chicago Board of Education meetings to voice concerns about the access military recruiters have to their personal information.

Providing a forum for political discussion that isn't highly polarized also is key, says Katy Harriger, head of the political science department at Wake Forest University.

"There's this hunger for opportunities to have authentic dialogues about issues without it being a battle," says Harriger, co-author of *Speaking of Politics: Preparing Students for Democratic Citizenship through Deliberative Dialogue*.

MORE KIDS ENGAGING IN POLITICS

She noted efforts in her home state of North Carolina and elsewhere to get more students involved in the political process. In California, for instance, officials are staging mock presidential elections this year.

In Illinois, the Chicago Board of Elections Commissioners plans to take voting machines into classrooms to show students how they work.

In some ways, Harriger says it's simply a matter of demystifying the process. "One of the things that keeps them from participating is not understanding how the system works," she says.

At North Lawndale High, government teacher Jill Bass has tried to get students from all walks of life involved in a Student Political Action Committee that deals with school and community issues.

"They're not all athletes; they're not necessarily scholars," Bass says.

Many students at the school, including sophomore Darlisa Scott, come from families that don't vote.

"To me, they don't really care," Scott says of her family. "They say it won't make a difference if you vote."

But now that she's been to Iowa to work on a presidential campaign, she wonders if some of her newfound enthusiasm for politics might just rub off.

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High Court To Rule On Employee Rights

By Warren Richey

Employers, managers, and supervisors wield enormous power in the workplace over the lives and well-being of their employees.

Congress has recognized that sometimes this power can be abused by managers who retaliate if they don't like something that employee has said or done.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in two cases examining how, when – or even if – employees can fight back against such abuses of power.

The high court examined whether a U.S. postal worker can claim retaliation in a lawsuit under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act because she says her supervisor refused to let her return to her old job because he didn't like her personally. Instead, he hired a younger, less experienced worker.

HE BLEW WHISTLE ON RACIAL PREJUDICE

The justices also heard the case of a former assistant manager at a Cracker Barrel restaurant who alleges he was fired in retaliation for his repeated complaints about racial prejudice by his supervisor.

In both cases the laws cited do not explicitly authorize legal action in response to an act of retaliation.

Lawyers for the employees say retaliation is a particularly virulent form of illegal discrimination and thus falls within the scope of the U.S.'s civil rights laws even when those laws don't specifically mention retaliation.

Lawyers for companies and supervisors counter that if Congress wanted to authorize lawsuits to punish acts of retaliation, it would have written it into each statute.

COACH WON IN EQUAL TREATMENT CASE

In 2005, the high court ruled 5-4 that a girl's high school basketball coach could sue the school board for allegedly retaliating against him after he complained his female players were not receiving equal access to sports equipment and facilities.

He sued under Title IX, which bars gender discrimination in education. Title IX does not specifically mention a cause of action for retaliation, but the majority of justices found that retaliation was a form of discrimination outlawed under the statute.

The decision was written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. She has since retired, and it is unclear how newer members of the court, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito, will view the issue.

Legal analysts say they are watching these cases to see how broadly or narrowly the high court reads the statutes.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT CASE

The court has also agreed to decide a third retaliation case, which has not yet been set for oral argument. It involves a woman who was fired after she was asked to provide evidence against a co-worker accused of sexual harassment.

Her retaliation lawsuit was thrown out because she had never filed an underlying sexual harassment suit.

The high court's granting of three similar cases in such a short period of time is unusual, legal experts say, and suggests that the issue of retaliation is of some importance to the justices.

What remains unclear, they say, is whether the court will decide these cases in ways that expand civil rights protections or narrow them.

"These are statutes that are supposed to work for real people," says Jocelyn Frye, general counsel of the National Partnership for Women and Families.

"We don't want the justices to distort the laws to a level of abstraction so they become unworkable. Many of us have grave concerns about the two newest additions to the court," referring to Roberts and Alito, both on the far, far right.

Mom's Threat Works

A pastor tells this one: "After a worship service at First Baptist Church in Newcastle, KY, a mother with a fidgety 7-year-old boy told me how she finally got her son to sit still and be quiet. About halfway through the sermon, she leaned over and whispered, 'If you don't be quiet, the Pastor is going to lose his place and have to start his sermon all over again!' It worked."

Does Spitzer Case Pass Smell Test?

By Edwin E. Vineyard

Bringing down Eliot Spitzer was quite an accomplishment for the feds in the Bush Administration.

Let us overlook for a moment the fact that it was indeed Spitzer himself who was caught arranging a meeting with a prostitute, and the negatives that entails. Let us look for a moment instead at just how and by whom this feat was accomplished.

Who did it? How? Why? Perhaps the answers are not all in, but some are.

If we had confidence that our federal system of justice works objectively and free of political considerations, then we would not now be raising questions.

But we need to be reminded of the backdrop of the unsettled controversy over politicized U.S. District Attorneys, the Attorney General's resignation, and the departure of Karl Rove from the White House.

EVIDENCE: U.S. ATTORNEYS POLITICIZED

Evidence indicates that the prosecution powers of district attorneys had been perverted into political vendettas against Democratic politicians in key races. Congress cannot get its subpoenas or contempt citations enforced by the Bush Justice Department to ferret out the details.

The prior Democratic governor of Alabama is in prison on what appears to media analysts as trumped up charges and crooked political prosecution. Media observers are calling for his release, and discipline for those involved in that process. This, too, is a part of the backdrop.

Now, what are we told about how Spitzer's indiscretions with the prostitution organization were found? Was there some local investigation of the prostitution ring where his name appeared as was true of other similar political cases in Washington? No?

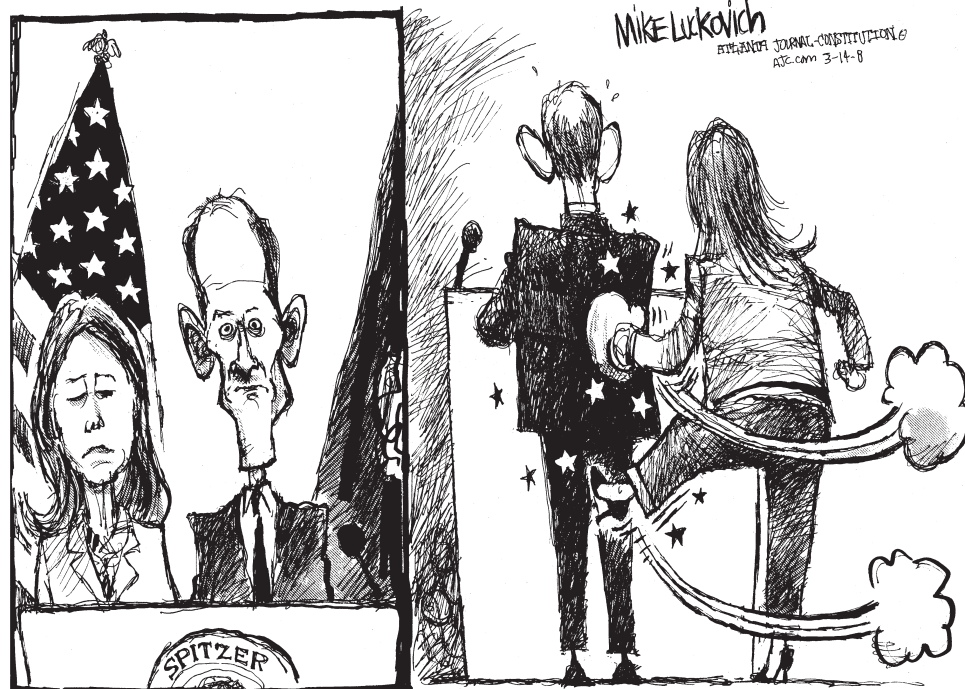
Then just how did all this start? Was Spitzer a federal target? The answer is "Yes," acknowledged by government spokespersons.

SELECTIVELY SNOOPING ON PUBLIC FIGURES

Apparently the laws designed to track drug money, organized crime activity, and tax evasion are applicable to any of us writing checks or transferring cash in amounts of \$5,000 [or perhaps less]. So, the IRS and the Justice Department can use this law selectively to snoop on public figures and any private citizens upon whom they desire to keep check. They admit doing so for Mr. Spitzer, a government figure.

This "routine" IRS check, which we had believed happens selectively to criminals or randomly to everybody, led to calling in the Justice Department and the FBI to launch a full scale investigation of these transactions.

Finding that the funds had gone to suspicious entities that turned out to be fronts for prostitution, the FBI and federal prosecutors then sought and obtained a federal judge's permission to wiretap of the governor's telephones, and monitor



his e-mail mails and text-messaging.

Sure enough, with all these resources brought to focus on Mr. Spitzer and his private affairs, they eventually wound up with his voice endangering the nation by arranging for services to be provided at the Mayflower Hotel.

WHO'S ACTIVITIES ARE MOST SUSPICIOUS?

Do we really believe that Spitzer has been caught and is probably guilty of procuring services of prostitutes as alleged? Sure.

Do we believe that his bank just happened to report Spitzer's account for suspicious activity without a flag? Do we believe that federal tax officials just happened to be looking over his bank reports and spotted Spitzer's transactions accidentally?

Do we believe that the IRS involves the whole federal machinery to investigate any and all such transactions for just anybody? Do we believe that Spitzer's prominence as a Democratic political leader had nothing at all to do with his records being examined, or with full federal investigative and prosecutorial power being brought to focus on his personal affairs?

It would take a huge measure of credulity to answer "yes" to these questions. But if we cannot answer "yes" with any certainty, then we must raise the more significant questions of selective prosecution and political subversion of the federal regulatory and justice system.

If indeed the federal justice system has again been brought to bear upon either a guilty or an innocent individual for personal, partisan, or political reasons, then this is by far the most serious offense involved.

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

SEPARATION

From Page 1

the money into religious schools.

HB 2211 would create opportunities in public schools for religious majorities to force-feed their views to students of minority faiths - and require schools to accept religious tenets such as creationism as a satisfactory academic response.

The Senate bill would give a tax credit to those donating money for private-school scholarships for students wanting to leave their poor-performing urban schools.

The tax credit, though, would further erode state revenues - lawmakers approved \$700 million in tax cuts in recent years - that fund public schools and

GUNS

From Page 15

"model student" who was "admired by faculty and students alike," according to the university's president.

NO EMPHASIS FROM CLINTON OR OBAMA

Neither Hillary Clinton nor Barack Obama has focused on gun control in their campaigns for the Democratic nomination.

When asked specifically about it in public forums, they voice modest support for new regulations and quickly add that the Second Amendment protects people's gun rights.

At a debate in January, Clinton acknowledged that she had dropped her support for the licensing of new gun owners and registration of new guns, which she advocated in 2000 when she ran for the U.S. Senate in New York.

She endorsed reinstating an assault-weapons ban, then added: "I believe in the Second Amendment. People have a right to bear arms. But I also believe that we can common-sensically approach this."

Obama also said he no longer supports broad licensing and registering of firearms, as he did when he was in the Illinois Senate. Flip meet flop.

Republican nominee Sen. John McCain has needed no such finessing of the issue - he's for unfettered gun ownership.

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other essential state services, hampering efforts to improve low-performing schools.

In Arizona, a similar plan shifted \$200 million from public to private schools.

The provision is a dream-come-true for religious schools that long coveted an infusion of taxpayers' dollars to underwrite their programs.

Kern's HB 2211 was given the lofty title the "Religious Viewpoints Antidiscrimination Act," but it actually would create a system that could lead to religious discrimination in public schools.

The measure would require schools to guarantee students the right to express their religious views - without penalty - in class, their homework or in a public forum.

For example, the bill's provision that would create "limited public forums" could provide platforms for students to proselytize their schoolmates. Imagine the potential for mischief and unrest at school assemblies: Christians trying to convert Jews, Muslims trying to convert Christians, Wiccans trying to ...

Further, the measure would enable students whose religious beliefs conflict with scientific facts or theories to express their religious beliefs as fact - without being penalized academically.

The wall separating church and state is teetering. Heaven help us if it falls.

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