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Galvanized By Budget Snub Defiant Democrats

By Arnold Hamilton

For six weeks, they were the Dysfunctional Democrats.

Splintered. Disoriented. Powerless. And worst of all: Ignored.

In Speaker Lance Cargill's supposedly kinder, more transparent state House, outnumbered Democrats were almost as irrelevant as Republican gadfly Mike Reynolds – often dismissed with rolling eyes and smug grins.

Not anymore.

Irrked that legislative leaders crafted a nearly \$7 billion state budget in secret and then forced an all-or-nothing vote on it just 54 hours later, House Democrats rebelled.

They joined forces with Gov. Brad Henry – also snubbed by the cabal – to derail the spending package and demand a seat at the negotiating table.

"We didn't have to do a whole lot of whipping to get our caucus together on this one," said Burns Flat Rep. Ryan McMullen, the Democratic Caucus chairman.

The budget scrum produced at least three significant developments:

- In his fifth year in office, the Kumbaya governor bowed his neck and uncapped his veto pen against a significant piece of legislation. It was an uncharacteristic pushback that may signal a new willingness by Henry to tap a wealth of political capital that comes from an 83% statewide approval rating.

- It took 52 days, but House Democrats finally found their groove – and their power – in the Republican playbook.

For eight years, former Gov. Frank Keating and the GOP House minority wielded outsize influence through the gubernatorial veto, backed up by disciplined, lockstep legislative voting.

Keating vetoed a record 302 bills. None was overridden.

When Henry announced he was vetoing the spending package, 43 of the 44 House Democrats stood with him in the Capitol's Blue Room – more than enough votes to sustain the veto. [The missing Democrat was absent only because of a medical issue.]

- The legislative troika that devised the budget – Cargill, Democratic Senate President Pro Tem Mike Morgan

and Republican Co-President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee – had no backup plan.

It's clear they didn't think Henry had the backbone to veto a measure that included a traditional Democratic favorite: a teacher pay raise. And they calculated – incorrectly, as it turned out – that House Democrats were fractured to the point of irrelevance.

The most surprising of the three developments was the emergence of House Democrats.

As a caucus, they were MIA [Missing in Action] until the budget showdown, rarely joining forces against any significant measure – no matter how ridiculous or bad. With a 57-44 deficit, their power is in uniting against kooky legislation from the GOP's hard-right fundamentalists.

Individually, though, some Democrats did challenge the Republican machine – Warner Rep. Jerry McPeak, for example, was among several who pushed hard for emergency education funding; Oklahoma City Rep. Richard Morrisette took on the speaker in pursuit of stricter ethics rules; and Seminole Rep. Ryan Kiesel fought anti-abortion zealots working to restrict the professional judgment of emergency room physicians.

The budget process didn't unite House Democrats immediately. In fact, during floor debate, they looked Keystone Kops-ish when McMullen – waving his hands frantically – tried to dissuade Morrisette, already up and speaking, from pursuing a parliamentary attack on the bill. At another point, House Minority Leader Danny Morgan of Prague tried a similar tactic – only to realize he had jumped the gun and was pressing his point on the wrong bill.

There were signs, though, that House Democrats were coalescing against the budget. While only 16 Democrats opposed the bill on final passage, 40 voted against the Senate amendment that incorporated the spending plan devised behind closed doors.

The 40 "no" votes encouraged Henry that a veto could be sustained. The governor's reservations about the spending plan – and his willingness to employ the veto – similarly emboldened House Democrats.

The following week, when the governor returned from spring break vacation with his family, House Democrats were truly united for the first time all session – adamant that with

44 seats representing 1.2 million voters, they deserved to be at the negotiating table.

Henry was in a similar position: He had won re-election in a landslide and enjoyed an 83% approval rating in the Tulsa World/Oklahoma Poll, but wasn't included in the budget discussions.

Henry and House Democrats met in the governor's second floor conference room to discuss their options. They agreed to stand together.

The legislative leaders' budget was dead.

Cargill, Coffee and Mike Morgan expressed surprise at the veto – and at House Democrats' resolve.

There were rumors that some House Democrats were offered legislative incentives to peel off – but McMullen and Danny Morgan expressed confidence all 44 would keep their very public pledges to sustain the governor's line-item veto.

In the end, the only alternative plan for legislative leaders seemed to be retaliation, blocking consideration of House Democrats' bills.

Cargill also tried to tar House Democrats as "the Gridlock Gang," but it didn't seem to stick, as evidenced by the fact it didn't immediately capture the imagination of headline writers at the state's major newspapers.

Much of the credit for the Democrats' success belongs to the soft-spoken Danny Morgan and the youthful McMullen.

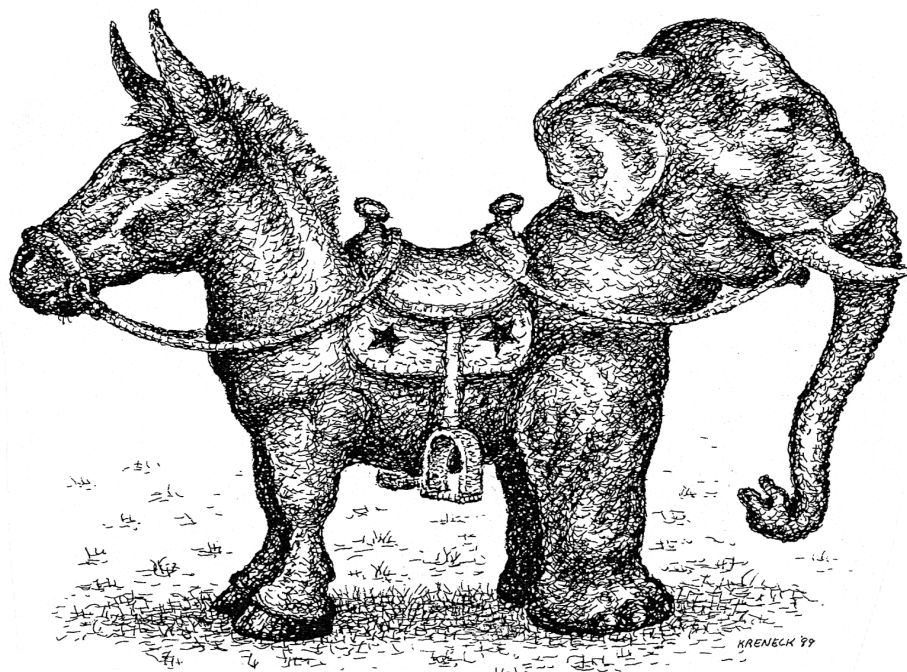
They managed to unite – and keep united – an ethnically, geographically and philosophically diverse group. Think of Will Rogers' famous line: *I belong to no organized party. I am a Democrat.*

Whether the Henry-House Democrats coalition lasts beyond this session remains to be seen.

But there is reason to believe it will: Democrats are anxious to reduce their 13-seat deficit in the House. The involvement of a hugely popular governor in the 2008 campaign would help.

And while Henry insists he isn't interested in an eventual U.S. Senate race, not many buy his demurring. It

See DEMOCRATS Page 19



Observations

Why Do It

Why do we spill so much ink defending public education? Because there is a vast national conspiracy led by Republicans, think tanks and major corporations to promote vouchers.

Their motive? They deplore teachers and support personnel because they exercise the right to form unions to fight for their rights. The AFT and NEA are a bulwark for public schools.

In 1832, Alexis de Tocqueville came to America to assess the notion that our democracy was a beacon for the world. His astute observations remain a classic guide to America's success.

American prosperity, he concluded, was founded on several conditions unique to this society. We did not let class determine a person's stature.

A ruffian with a good idea and a work ethic could exchange places with a son of wealth who felt innovative thought and labor were beneath a gentleman's dignity.

Our system of public education, raucous as it was, provided the skills and knowledge that our citizens could employ to take advantage of a classless and mobile society.

Unlike old Europe, we did not fear an educated proletariat. Despite our flawed application of these principles, opportunity, mobility and education remain the pillars supporting American democracy, and education makes the others worthwhile.

In the truest sense, we do not pay taxes to support the education of our individual children, we pay taxes to support the role public education plays in civilizing and enriching our society.

Writing today, de Tocqueville might note the erosion of our public schools and the roles played in that by racism, failed discipline, missing parents, rote teaching and testing gone berserk.

He would be confident in our defense of public education. He would argue that it was not within the American character to shrink in the face of challenge.

He would expect that we would tax ourselves sufficiently to provide for the common educational good.

Public education is one of the bed-

rock guarantees that America will continue down freedom's road. It is everything America is or ever hopes to be.

Good Ideas

Here is an excellent idea that ought to become law: HB 1035, by Rep. Gus Blackwell, R-Goodwell, and Sen. Todd Lamb, R-Edmond, proposes a constitutional amendment to abolish the Alcoholic Beverage Laws Enforcement Commission, transferring its duties, powers and responsibilities to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation as of July 1, 2009.

The bill is part of the movement toward government consolidation. HB 1035 passed the House in a vote of 91 to 9.

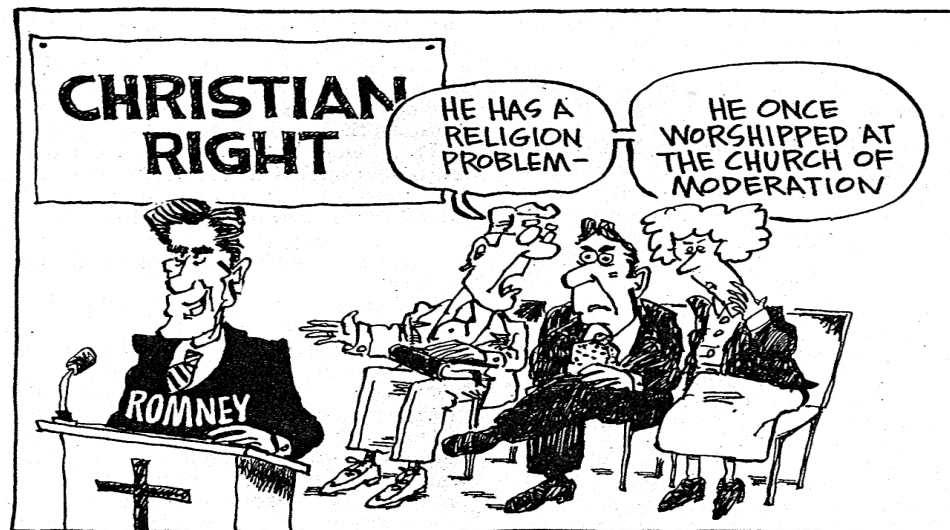
Another bill that ought to become law is HJR 1020, by Rep. Jeff Hickman, R-Dacoma, and Sen. Harry Coates, R-Seminole. The proposed constitutional amendment would authorize licensed wine makers that produce less than 8,000 gallons of wine annually and are licensed by the ABLE Commission to receive orders for, sell and ship the wine they produce directly to consumers over age 21.

It also would remove language that previously allowed Oklahoma wine-makers to sell and ship wine directly to retail package stores and restaurants.

One to worry about is the unintended consequences of a Senate bill relating to under-age access to bar areas, SB 1016, by Sen. Randy Bass, D-Lawton, and Rep. Mike Thompson, R-Oklahoma City.

It would prohibit a mixed beverage or beer and wine licensee from allowing a person under 21 years of age to sit at the bar of the licensed premises.

Effectively, the bill would remove the "designated area" language that currently allows restaurants to operate bars with a designated area for individuals 21 and over and replace it with a prohibition against persons under 21 sitting at the bar.



BY WASSERMAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

However, as written, the language might allow those under 21 into bar establishments but simply prohibit them from sitting at the bar.

Religions

This is truly a polytheistic country. The new Congress for the first time includes a Muslim, two Buddhists, more Jews than Episcopalians and the highest-ranking Mormon in congressional history.

Roman Catholics remain the largest single faith group in Congress, accounting for 29% of all members of the House and Senate, followed by Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Jews and Episcopalians.

While Catholics in Congress are nearly 2-to-1 Democrats, the most lopsidedly Democratic groups are Jews and those not affiliated with any religion.

Of the 43 Jewish members of Congress, there is only one Jewish Republican in the House and two in the Senate. The six religiously unaffiliated members of the House are all Democrats.

The most Republican groups are the small band of Christian Scientists in the House [all five are Republican], and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [12 Republicans and three Democrats] though the top-ranking Mormon in the history of Congress is Nevada Sen. Harry Reid, the Democratic majority leader.

Baptists divide along partisan lines defined by race. Black Baptists, like all black members of Congress, are Democrats, while most white Baptists are Republicans.

Because 2006 was such a good year for Democrats, they have regained their commanding advantage among Catholics, which had slipped during an era of GOP dominance.

In the new Congress, two-thirds of all Catholic members are Democrats. By contrast, after big Republican gains in 1994, 44% of Catholic members of Congress were Republicans.

Homeschool

We defend to the death the right of families to homeschool, but it is disgraceful that this is the only state where home schooling is wholly unregulated.

Consider Little Axe where mom said her boy was being homeschooled. The school offered homebound help and textbook but mom said no.

The boy was found months later in an old refrigerator behind their house. He had been beaten to death.

The Republican House passed legislation funding home schooling via

stay at home moms, despite the fact there are absolutely no checks. What about a millionaire hiring a nanny?

When a Tulsa administrator saw that the law said he was responsible to see that all school-age children in the district were in school he sought information on home schooling.

He withdrew when his inquiry was met with blazing opposition from homeschooling parents.

A juvenile public defender of our acquaintance said GOP legislators ought to have to listen to a parent of a chronic truant or juvenile delinquent telling the judge the kid was home-schooled. It's a constant dodge.

Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, the one man bad bill machine, also rifled through House Bill 1299 under which homeschoolers would be eligible for the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program [OHLAP].

OHLAP pays the college tuition of students from families earning less than \$50,000 per year who take a rigorous college curriculum, maintain a 2.5 grade point average and exhibit good behavior.

HB 1299 would allow home-school students who, in addition to meeting all other eligibility requirements, score a 22 or higher on the ACT to apply for OHLAP scholarships.

That's why we think this would be good law. They have to meet standards. Oklahoma needs many more college graduates.

The Big Lie

The Daily Disappointment editorial page continues to print a flat lie concerning last year's special session. Once again they have claimed "an embittered group of term-limited Democrats held the state hostage over a budget deal."

Fact: It started with OU President David Boren going in the back door of the governor's office to offer a plan that would have halved the \$3,000 teacher pay raise and a 4% pay raise for all state employees.

Incredibly, instead of checking with Democratic leaders in the Legislature, Gov. Brad Henry went to then-GOP Speaker Todd Heitt who gleefully signed off on the sorry Boren plan and went public with the "agreement."

Enraged Democrats, who then held a slim lead in the state Senate, rejected the plan and that caused the special session - where teachers were given their promised raise and state employees got their long overdue pay hike.

Somebody who can talk slow enough needs to explain it to the Daily Disappointment editorial page.

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

FOUNDING EDITOR

Frosty Troy
ftroy@fullnet.net
405.525.5582

PUBLISHER

Beverly Hamilton
405.478.8700

EDITOR

Arnold Hamilton
ahamilton@okobserver.net
405.478.8700

ART DIRECTOR/WEBMASTER

Kyle Williams
405.478.8700

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

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

- Adapted by Thomas Wolfe

Observerscope

Know how to break Democratic Co-Senate Leader Mike Morgan's nose? Kick Republican Co-Leader Glenn Coffee in the butt.

Laurel: To President Bush for continuing the fight for a guest worker program – the only thing that will work. Mexican immigrants sent \$23 billion home last year – mostly from the U.S. You can't deport 12 million people.

Of all the political pork pouring out of the Capitol this year, none is smellier than the GOP's "unnamed private consultant" \$1 million audit of the Department of Corrections. Thanks, governor, for killing it.

Dart: To the less-than-talented Disappointment cartoonist Lange who continues to draw cartoons showing Oklahoma is a high taxed state. That's totally false.

It is with sorrow we report the death of a great Oklahoman, Dr. Garland Godfrey, who dedicated 40 years of his life to education. He changed the face of the University of Central Oklahoma that he headed from 1960 to 1975.

Laurel: To the 83 Catholics in Congress for voting for stem cell research, with 46 voting no. Slowly but surely the Catholic Church is being dragged into the 21st century. [Voice of Reason No. 1, 2007]

Despite a flat state constitutional prohibition against giving tax dollars "directly or indirectly" to religious ministries, House Bill 2101 would create a revolving fund for the state Office of Faith Based Initiative. Are you listening, ACLU?

Dart: To the House Agricultural Committee for reporting out SB 709 declaring animal waste is not hazardous, which could threaten the Tulsa watershed.

The lottery isn't living up to expectations because of limited prizes. Pay-out nationally is 65% but in Oklahoma it is only 53%, according to lottery chief Jim Scoggins.

Laurel: To House Speaker Pro Tem Gus Blackwell for saying he would fight GOP State Chairman Tom Daxon's proposal to kill the lottery, thus eliminating as much as \$80 million a year for education.

In a letter to an Observer subscriber, GOP Sen. Tom Coburn said he would support a \$15 per hour minimum wage if accompanied by tax cuts for small business. Yes, and the sun rises in the west.

Dart: To the Daily Disappointment for using a booming page one headline to report on a major tax decrease: Want To Pay Less? That's not objective headline writing, but what would you expect?

Legislative folk ought to get on the same page with the state Department of Education. State Sen. Kathleen Wilcoxson, R-OKC, says the state graduation rate is 68%. The Department says it is 82.4%.

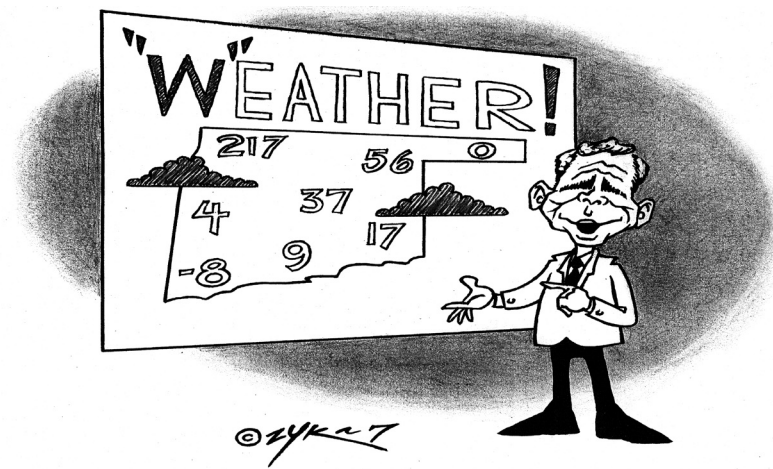
Laurel: To the Legislature for pushing a tough task force to take on the state's growing gang problem – 6,000 in Tulsa and OKC, 3,000 in Lawton.

Fundamentalist Oklahoma has the third highest divorce rate in America. The state ranks fifth in white intimate partner murder. For blacks, the state is third.

Dart: To the state Senate GOP for killing a minimum wage bill while 27 other states have raised it – even Arkansas now pays \$7.15 per hour. The \$5.15 rate has been in effect 10 years. Remember the vote next election day. No guts, no glory.

Morgan Quinto Press study shows a direct correlation between education and household income. Only 21.9% of Oklahomans have degrees. The household income is \$38,895 – 43rd lowest.

Laurel: To ex-Gov. Frank Keating for blasting the Bush crowd for firing eight nonpartisan federal attorneys. Keating is perfectly positioned to talk about a lack of ethics.



BEING AS WRONG AS HE HAS BEEN AS PRESIDENT, BUSH IS MORE THAN QUALIFIED FOR A NEW CAREER...OKLAHOMA TV WEATHERMAN!

State Sen. Tom Ivester, D-Elk City, has every attribute of a dog except loyalty. He was the only Democrat voting to kill the minimum wage bill – joining all Republicans.

Dart: To Oklahoma oilmen Tom Ward and Aubrey McClendon who have a 20% stake in the Seattle Sonics where they have given more than \$1 million to Gary Bauer's bitterly anti-gay Americans United to Preserve Marriage.

There are charter schools and there are charter schools. The Texas Legislature has a bill to close 60 under-performing charter schools. Oversight is a blessing, not a curse.

Laurel: To Oklahoma's excellent child-care programs, ranking sixth nationally by the Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. Eat your heart out Brandon Dutcher.

Talk about petty politics. The GOP is killing virtually all Democratic bills in committee in retaliation for Gov. Henry's veto of the budget bill. It will backfire politically.

Dart: To inexcusable hospital infection deaths – 90,000 a year, with 40% coming from catheters. It is costing hospitals \$30 billion a year. [Centers for Disease Control]

Thirty Oklahoma Democratic legislators endorsed John Edwards for president just as Sen. Barack Obama was arriving for an OKC fundraiser – 1,100 paid to hear him.

Laurel: To Tulsa's Community Action Project for a report that proves it is dumb for the Legislature to make more major tax cuts at this time. Republicans wrongly claim it "stimulates" the economy. No, it "stimulates" the affluent.

Disgraced former Criminal Court of Appeals Judge Steve Lile is pleading "stupid conduct" for padding his travel claims and letting his "secretary" make questionable office purchases. Unique defense.

Dart: To the Legislature, failing for 15 years to increase funding for the fight against domestic abuse. Oklahoma had 65 deaths in 2006, 11 deaths so far in 2007. Oklahoma has the 14th worst record in the nation.

Oops! We incorrectly moved Gen. Tommy Franks from Hobart to Kiowa. He is reportedly coming home to run as a rightwing Republican for governor. He encouraged Bush to invade Iraq.

Laurel: To Al Gore for keeping his cool while Oklahoma's Sen. James Inhofe made a national ass of himself in a U.S. Senate hearing on global warming. Inhofe is increasingly referred to as "the climate crank."

Mary Jo Nelson, first-rate Oklahoman journalist, has died at 80. She will be remembered as a fearless, crusading reporter who helped preserve OKC's Skirvin Hotel.

Dart: To Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, for touting and endorsing the Republican \$1 million audit of the Corrections Department. This is a GOP political ploy.

The rightwing Wall Street Journal has slammed the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce. One reason: The Chamber didn't support The Taxpayer Bill of Rights [TABOR]. The Journal deserves a goose egg.

Laurel: To the Oklahoma Gazette's Ben Fenwick and Scott Cooper for a superb piece proving "tort reform" is pure Republican fakery. We haven't lost doctors, we've gained them!

The radical rightwing Club For Growth, big promoter for killing Social Security, has given an award to Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-OK, for defending economic freedom. What next, a John Birch Society commendation?

Dart: To black leaders beating up on Bill Cosby for telling the truth. The Associated Press reports that "more than two-thirds of all births among blacks are to unwed mothers." Martin Luther King would weep.

So much for the "greatest country on earth" wherein 12.1 million children [one out of six] live below the poverty line, with 17.9% going hungry, worst rate in the Western world. [Children's Defense Fund]

Laurel: To Tulsa World Capitol Reporter Angel Riggs for pointing out that the so-called full supplemental for education is still \$17.5 million short. So much for the legislative leaders ballyhoo.

It's a miracle! Twenty-four Democratic members of the evenly divided state Senate can stand erect without spines! All Senate Democrats are Republican enablers.

Dart: To Rep. Ken Miller, R-Edmond, for his attack on state Treasurer Scott Meacham. Meacham recommends Miller read the Ten Commandments, especially the one about bearing false witness.

THE OKLAHOMA Observer



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Letters

Editor, The Observer:

Retired Army General Tommy Franks is getting ready to spend \$15 million for what he calls a leadership institute and museum in Hobart. One of its goals will be to "enhance decision making through a critical study of history." Wow, that would be great!

I hope this includes a close study of America's past wars as we moved steadily toward becoming the empire we are today. How about drawing a moral lesson from our invasion of Cuba and the Philippines in 1898? What were the real lessons of two world wars? Then there were Korea, Vietnam, and now Iraq. Shouldn't it be obvious in 2007 that George Bush and his cronies are much more interested in the economics of oil than they are in spreading freedom around the world?

Franks makes another interesting comment - that "Hobart is a place that has core American values and beliefs." I know my grandparents who settled north of Hobart in 1902 did. Their beliefs were a mix of Methodist and Mennonite ideas. They favored waging peace, not war. Can we learn from history? I hope so.

Alvena Bieri
Stillwater

Editor, The Observer:

All the bills had to make it to the floor by March 16 or they have to wait until next year. I heard about a few of them today.

The minimum wage will not be raised so the poor lose out, but they can stay on assistance.

The governor's bill aimed at getting more of the working poor health insurance didn't make it.

No more money and no health insurance, but there is good news - the poor in Oklahoma will have a watermelon!

Watermelon is on the way to becoming the Oklahoma State Vegetable and we are about to have a state pot or cooking utensil, the Dutch Oven.

All the important things made it out of committees. Please, don't be making fun of us.

Karen Webb
Moore

Editor, The Observer:

My father always told me that actions speak louder than words. What the Oklahoma legislature said to Oklahoma's disabled veterans March 21, 2007, spoke volumes about how they REALLY feel about us. Unfortunately, what was done to Oklahoma's

disabled veterans was an egregious insult. March 21st was supposed to be Veterans Awareness Day complete with much appreciation for Sooner veterans and their families. Those speeches rang hollow for those disabled veterans who were in attendance.

Three dozen disabled veterans were made to wait 1½ hours lined up in a hallway outside the House of Representatives' chamber, where a joint session of the House and Senate was supposed to honor Oklahoma's veterans. Just before we were to enter the chamber, Capitol Sergeants-At-Arms informed us that only seven wheel chairs/scooters would be allowed to enter. Then, they allowed only three more chairs to be added.

The remaining 26 veterans were turned away and were not allowed to witness the ceremonies because all other seating was filled while the veterans waited in the hallway. To those allowed in it appeared there was abundant room to accommodate more veterans.

These rejected disabled veterans came from all over the state. They made a special effort to visit their state Capitol. They came to be seen and heard and to experience the promise of a grateful state. What they got was nothing more than lip service.

Mike Simmons
Norman

Editor, The Observer:

Some of us tend to do away with things that are slightly damaged. Instead of repairing them we say: "Well, I don't have time to fix it, I might as well throw it in the garbage can and buy a new one."

Often we also treat people this way.

We say: "Well, he has a problem with drinking; well, she is quite depressed; well, they have mismanaged their business ... we'd better not take the risk of working with them."

When we dismiss people out of hand because of their apparent woundedness, we stunt their lives by ignoring their gifts, which are often buried in their wounds.

We all are bruised reeds, whether our bruises are visible or not. The compassionate life is the life in which we believe that strength is hidden in weakness and that true community is a fellowship of the weak.

Allison Weaver
Portland, OR

Editor, The Observer:

My Irish father, the late garment

SOCIAL SECURITY



WMD's



KATRINA



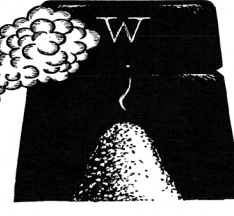
"SCOOTER"



"SPEEDY"



...POOF!!



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LIAR ! LIAR ! PANTS REALLY ON FIRE ! !

cutter Chester Dennis, said, "No one replaces your mother."

That's why former Sen. John Edwards and his wife, Elizabeth, lost my vote for president when they elected to continue campaigning while her days are numbered.

The cancer of Elizabeth's has returned and so should her husband, a traveling salesman.

Maybe I'm old-fashioned but I believe one's family comes first. Both parents should be spending her precious time with their young children rather than pressing the flesh with strangers.

I base my vote for president on the good judgment of the candidate. In this regard, John Edwards comes up short.

Virginia Blue Jeans Jenner
Wagoner

Editor, The Observer:

As a retired teacher, I received a 2% raise in my pension in 2005-06. I know that this raise came from the Oklahoma Retirement System. That doesn't make any sense to me.

The raise should have come from the General Revenue Fund. While other pension plans were raised by 5%, we got only 2%.

Out of the 42,000 retired teachers and support personnel in Oklahoma, there are 10,000 who receive \$51 to \$727 a month. They have to pay insurance premium of \$310. How could anyone survive on such a low income?

It is not fair that educators and other support personnel [who probably taught your children] should be rewarded for their services with such a poor pension!

Last year, legislators passed a benefit that will raise superintendents and other higher wage retired educators to \$7,000 to \$9,000 a month.

This, of course, severely cut into the already strained teacher retirement system. [The retirement system is funded at 47%.] If you retired with \$4,000 a month, your income went up \$80. It just doesn't seem fair.

It is estimated a surplus will be generated again this year.

Last year, of the \$1 billion surplus, retired school employees, which includes teachers, bus drivers, coaches, etc., received not one penny of the surplus.

Funds to raise pension incomes and to pay insurance benefits need to come from a different source other than the Oklahoma Teacher Retirement System.

Carolyn Seiter
President, Cleveland/McClain
OK Retired Educators Association

Editor, The Observer:

This is great. Oklahoma can be even more famous once the world becomes familiar with "the Inhofe Scale."

Last night one of the local TV stations had a report on a shortage of skilled labor in the Tulsa area. Several area employers were bemoaning the fact that they were now hiring folks that were not really qualified for the jobs.

Seems there is a shortage of educated and motivated employees. The reporter mentioned that some companies might not move to Tulsa if the image was that we were a backward and under-educated people.

The idea occurred to me that if a poll were conducted in the far away reaches of this country of what came to their minds when they thought "TULSA," it would probably be "Oral Roberts."

And after reading this article, I'd now have to say a close number two would be "Jim Inhofe!"

Can't you imagine Tulsa's location on a list of places for companies to move where they could find a community of enlightenment?

Larry Hicks
Tulsa

Editor, The Observer:

According to the Washington Post, Bush's invasion of Iraq was no accident, it was on his mind long before he was elected to office, and was plotted long before the 9/11 attack on the WTC.

Bush was intent on invading Iraq, and told the BBC in November 1999, "It's time to finish the job," speaking of his father's action in Iraq.

A couple of weeks later Bush stated, "If I found that in any way, shape or form, that he was developing weapons of mass destruction, I'd take him out."

Later in his first Security Council meeting after taking office he told his staff, "Go find me a way." In order to accomplish this dastardly deed, Bush propounded several lies in order to get permission from Congress and the American people.

In order to get his way, Bush refused to allow the inspectors to complete their investigation for those weapons, which he knew didn't exist.

He finally admitted two things: That Saddam had nothing to do with the 9/11 attack and that there were no WMDs. He has never admitted that he lied in the first place.

At the cost of so many of our brave military lives, and even more of the Iraqis, impeachment should be a given. That might just help us get our country back to some normalcy.

G. M. Kesselring
Van Buren, AR

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Frosty's Lexicon

Oklahomans baffled by political hijinx will find this handy, dandy guide useful in deciphering the antics.

Bipartisanship: Code word for letting Republicans write 100% of the legislative program. This word gives the governor cover to miss the most important month of the session.

Two Party System: In Oklahoma it consists of Republicans and Demopublicans, with Republicrats on the ascendancy because a lot of the elected Democrats are afraid of their own shadow.

Committee System: A legislative creature designed to give all members input. It was shelved by Speaker Lance Cargill and his little cabal who run the House.

Interim Study: A device often used to avoid dealing with critical, i.e., a \$1 million "audit" of the Corrections Department this session rather than fully funding the operation.

Three Branches of Government: A constitutional myth wherein the Legislature ignores the Judiciary.

100 Ideas: A creation of Republican House Speaker Lance Cargill designed to put out a Republican agenda under the guise of finding issues that would improve Oklahoma.

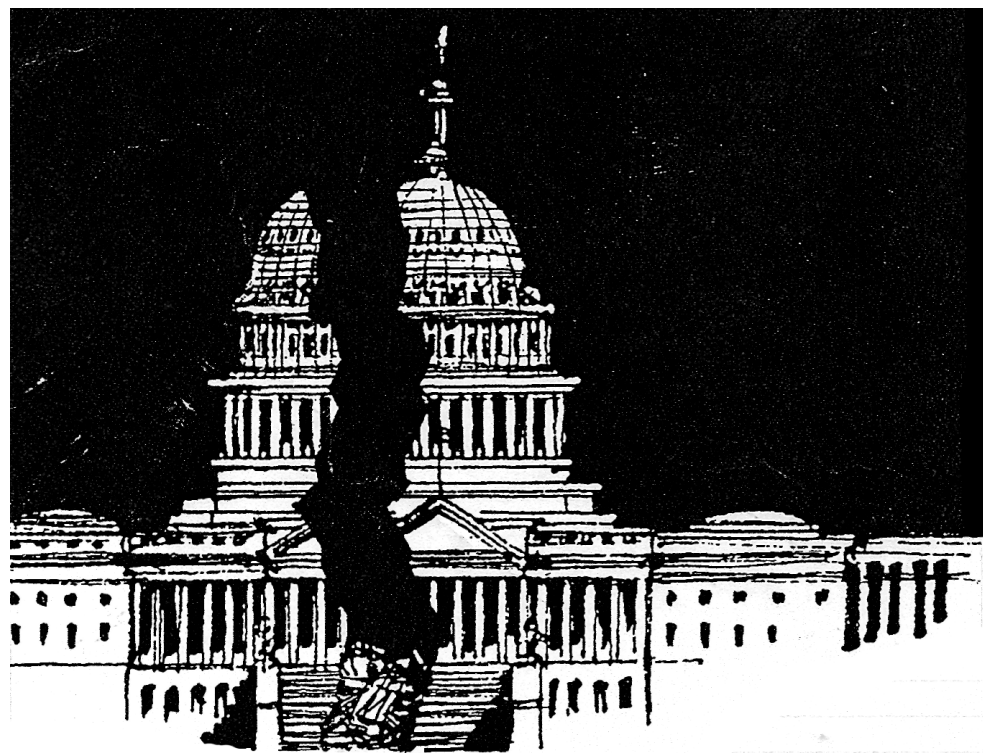
Tax Reform: More crimes are committed in state government under the guise of "reform" than any other. For Republicans, it is most often used to take care of their rich buddies. For Democrats, it is used to take care of ordinary folk.

Tort Reform: A misnomer if there ever was one. Invariably it is an attack on the right of ordinary folk to access the courthouse. Pushed constantly by the GOP. Designed by corporations for corporations.

Vouchers: A code word for slipping public education dollars to private or home schools. They are variously disguised as "opportunity grants" and "scholarships."

Education Reform: A legislative vehicle used to send even more unfunded mandates to the 46th most poorly funded public education system in America.

Special Interests: Lobbyists – more than 230 of them this year – swarming the fourth floor Capitol rotunda, usually seeking special privileges for their clients



BIPARTISANSHIP

or tax cuts. Worst of the lot is the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce.

Oklahoma Turnpikes: A system of excellent roads designed to be paid off with toll revenue, except bond holders are rewarded by extending the system of constantly reworking it.

Freedom of the Press: Available to anyone who owns a press – or a corny TV station, or a radio station featuring far right clowns as talk show hosts – particularly motormouth Rush Limbaugh.

Woollybugger: An item privately slipped into legislation and only discovered after adjournment – if ever. All-time champion was Rep. Cleta Deatherage.

Political Courage: A phrase you hear often but seldom is practiced. This year's champion: Rep. Richard Morrisette, D-OKC, who refuses to leave any bad issue unchallenged.

NCLB Is Hurting Kids

I keep telling people that George Bush is all lip-service when it comes to public education. His goal, as it was as governor of Texas, is to voucher every kid in America.

His No Child Left Behind was designed for that, deliberately setting up some of the best schools in America for failure. His brag that NCLB works was put down hard in the March 14 issue of Education Week. They cited facts – he uses hot air.

If you have doubts, check a new report that tracks federal spending on children from 1960 to 2006 and makes projections up to 2017 based on current policy.

Children will see their share of federal domestic spending decline from 15.4% in 2006 to 13.1% in 2017. So much for Bush's claim that schools are doing better than ever financially.

As a piece of the gross domestic product, spending on children will slide from 2.6% in 2006 to 2.1% in 2017, according to the Urban Institute.

Their study reports on historical trends in federal spending on children, looking across over 100 major federal programs, including tax credits and exemp-

tions.

Thirteen major programs enacted between 1960 and 2006, which include Medicaid, the earned income tax credit, and food stamps, comprised 65% of federal spending on children in 2006.

As a share of federal domestic spending since 1960, children's spending declined from 20.1% to 15.4%. Meanwhile, spending on the automatically growing, non-child portions of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid nearly quadrupled from 2.0% to 7.6% of GDP [\$58 billion to \$993 billion] over the same time period.

Over the next 10 years, children's programs are scheduled to decline both as a share of GDP and domestic spending, because they do not compete on a level playing field with these rapidly growing entitlement programs.

George Bush is no friend to most of the children in America. What would you expect from a so-called college graduate who is famous for saying: "We need to ask ourselves as a nation: Is our children learning?"

Wal-Mart

How big is Wal-Mart? At Wal-Mart, Americans spend \$36,000,000 every hour of every day. This works out to \$20,928 profit every minute!

Wal-Mart will sell more from Jan. 1 to St. Patrick's Day [March 17] than Target sells all year.

Wal-Mart is bigger than Home Depot, Kroger, Target, Sears, Costco and K-Mart combined.

Wal-Mart employs 1.6 million people and is the largest private employer in America.

Wal-Mart is the largest company in the history of the world.

Wal-Mart now sells more food than Kroger and Safeway combined, and keep in mind they did this in only 15 years.

During this same period, 31 supermarket chains sought bankruptcy [including WinnDixie].

Wal-Mart now sells more food than any other store in the world.

Wal-Mart has approximately 3,900 stores in the U.S. of which 1,906 are Super-Centers; this is 1,000 more than it had five years ago.

This year, 7.2 billion different purchasing experiences will occur at a Wal-Mart store. [Earth's population is approximately 6.5 billion.] Ninety percent of Americans live within 15 miles of a Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart, although a great success story of business that has brought cheaper goods to our homes, is also a symbol of America's decline and the decline of the American middle class. Wal-Mart does not make anything. It only sells items that are made in China, et al.

Historians say the great empires of the past – Rome, Greece, England and the Dutch – fell from within when they quit making things and started buying things.

Thanks to Barbara Santee of Tulsa for sending along the statistics

Great Nuns

One of the great pluses in my life were the years I spent as a student with Benedictine nuns as my teachers.

It is amazing, even in old age, that so much of what I am was formed by those precious years. Most of them were way ahead of Vatican II.

Audiences of educators across America have heard my story of why I became a writer – Sister Mary Andrew praising a poem I wrote for the St. John Siren.

Now comes the news that another of that great order, Sister Emily Hurter, has celebrated her 100th birthday, and 55 years as a teacher and principal. My dad was a great fan of hers because she believed an important part of education is discipline.

Once, after something I had written annoyed her, she wrote me to say that my dad would be disappointed. That really stung!

My greatest gift from the Benedictines was the ability to think for myself, to be able to disagree even with the Church if it is done with respect.

One of the saddest events of my life is the loss of nuns in education. This is partly the fault of the Hierarchy, partly due to cultural changes.

One of the highlights of speaking across the country occurred in Columbus, OH. I had mentioned my time with the Benedictines. After my remarks a woman bounced up to the edge of the stage.

"Get down here and get your hug!"

I popped down and she hugged me, explaining that she was a nun but had quit teaching in a high dollar suburban Catholic school to teach in a rough, inner city school.

"I feel more like I am doing God's work," she said.

All of them do.

Henry Kills Flawed Republican Budget

By Frosty Troy

Flanked by 43 of 44 House Democrats, Gov. Brad Henry used his line-item veto to wipe out the \$6.8 billion Republican budget – one backed by 24 turncoat Senate Democrats.

The governor nailed it when he told a press briefing that the so-called budget is flawed, the product of a closed-door process.

GOP House Speaker Lance Cargill and Senate co-leaders Mike Morgan and Glenn Coffee crafted the budget in secret.

The governor said its provisions would threaten public safety because a \$9.1 million supplemental for corrections is far short of the minimum needed \$47 million.

He also cited lack of education funding, nothing for the beleaguered Teachers Retirement System, and the possibility of double-digit tuition increases.

THEY HINT OF SHUTTING DOWN GOVERNMENT

Cargill and the Senate axis hinted that state government would be shut down. If that remote possibility occurs you can kiss goodbye Republican gains in the Legislature.

After announcing his vetoes, the governor called for leaders of each House and Senate caucus to begin immediate budget negotiations with the executive branch.

Icing on the governor's cake was a solid 44-vote minority of House Democrats that can easily sustain his vetoes. It takes 68 votes in a 101-member House to override.

A smiling House Minority Leader Danny Morgan, D-Prague, shared the podium with the governor. He said all Democrats had pledged allegiance because Cargill refused to allow any Democratic input.

He said any fair-minded person would consider the GOP budget flawed.

HENRY LEFT WITH 'NO OTHER CHOICE'

The governor said he did not exercise his veto authority "lightly, but given the flawed process and the flawed product it created, I had no other choice but to strike down the spending bill to protect taxpayers' best interests.

"I know tempers are short and emotions are running high, but instead of wasting valuable time with tit-for-tat statements and political gotcha games, I would urge all legislative leaders to come together and immediately begin budget negotiations with the executive branch and their fellow lawmakers. I ask legislative leaders to put aside the political rhetoric and look on this as an opportunity to work together in a true bipartisan fashion."

Cargill and the Senate axis blasted Henry in a news conference called after his ended. Mike Morgan said the governor was showing up at the 11th hour.

What 11th hour? There are two months left in the session. In fact, the small cabal secretly crammed it through when Henry was on spring break with his family.

After reviewing the 148-section bill, Henry said he determined that the legislation did not do a good enough job of using available revenue to meet state priorities.

"If I had approved this as the blueprint for the final budget, our prison system would be in danger of coming under federal control and public safety would be jeopardized," Henry said.

"Students at our colleges and universities would be facing double-digit tuition hikes, and teachers would once again be left wondering whether their pay would ever reach the regional average as promised or whether they would have a pen-



sion when they retired."

LEGISLATURE BACK AT THE STARTING LINE

The governor's vetoes struck down approximately \$6.8 billion of new spending in the general appropriations portion of House Bill 1234 and a \$1 million supplemental appropriation to the Legislative Services Bureau for a Corrections Department audit.

The governor approved approximately \$92 million in emergency funds for a variety of state interests including public schools, prisons, career technology centers and college scholarship programs, among other things.

"Schools, prisons and other critical need areas are getting the emergency funds they must have to operate. Unfortunately, this legislation does not provide adequate funding for corrections and public safety, so we will have to address their additional emergency needs very quickly," Henry said.

This is not the first time a governor has chosen to veto an omnibus state budget bill early in the legislative session. In 2001, then-GOP Gov. Frank Keating vetoed major portions of a general appropriations bill, citing the same concerns echoed by Henry today – a flawed process excluded the governor's office and many lawmakers and produced a substandard budget product.

THE SAME DIRE WARNING DID NOT COME TO PASS

In 2001, legislative leaders predicted Keating's veto in late March would lead to a government shutdown, but no such emergency ever materialized.

In fact, the governor and legislative leaders successfully worked together to craft a new budget bill in the final two months of session, and the Legislature even adjourned a day early with lawmakers giving the session high marks for its accomplishments.

Henry believes the same thing can happen this year.

"Predictions of a government shutdown are nonsense, as Gov. Keating and previous legislators have demonstrated in the past. With more than two months left in the legislative session, there is plenty of time to address state priorities and write a budget that addresses the needs of all Oklahoma taxpayers," said the governor.

Rumor had it that checks were being made to see if any of the Senate Democrats were still registered as Democrats. They sold their votes to Republican leader Coffee, who has to be laughing all the way home.

State Is Hotbed Of Domestic Violence

By Debbe Leftwich

In Oklahoma, it's a felony to write a hot check – but it's a misdemeanor for a man to beat his wife.

In Oklahoma, it's a felony to steal \$50 worth of groceries – but it's a misdemeanor for a man to break his fiancée's jaw.

In Oklahoma, it's a felony to own or sell a fighting rooster – but it's a misdemeanor for a man to blacken his girlfriend's eye.

When you look at the laws on the books in Oklahoma, the sad truth is that this state seems to value property – things – over the lives, health and safety of mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, co-workers and friends.

What is wrong with this picture?

Everything.

Domestic violence escalates, so what kind of a message does it send when the first time a man is actually charged with domestic violence, he merely faces a misdemeanor?

BILL WASN'T EVEN HEARD

The message we should send is that it is wrong and it will not be tolerated. I filed a bill this year to make sure that domestic violence would be prosecuted as a felony on the first offense. The bill wasn't even heard in committee.

In 2005, I carried a bill to ensure victims of domestic violence and sexual assault had some level of economic protection – that bill was heard in committee – it passed overwhelmingly in committee and on the Senate floor, but it never even got a hearing in the Republican House.

I, for one, am tired of politicians who claim they are "pro-family" or "for family values" but then cast votes that tell me they don't really value the women and children in those families at all.

Domestic violence and sexual assault occurs in every socio-economic category. It happens in the worst of neighborhoods, and it happens in the very best. It doesn't discriminate between people who are white, black, Native American, Hispanic or Asian. It certainly doesn't matter what a person's political affiliation is.

OKLAHOMA'S UGLY RAPE EPIDEMIC

The facts are these: Oklahoma has a 38% higher rate of rape than the national rate, and it is going up every single year.

Oklahoma is seventh in the nation for women murdered by men. The No. 1 cause of death for pregnant women is homicide. This year alone, there have been 11 deaths in 11 weeks attributed to domestic violence in Oklahoma.

As a society, it seems we are finally realizing how damaging sex crimes against children are, and as a result, we have stronger laws on the books than ever before to protect children from the monsters who prey on them.

Yet, when a child's mother is beaten by another kind of monster, the law does not do enough to protect her.

It is time to create policy and statutes that will stand as proof that we do indeed value the women and families of Oklahoma. Until that time, claiming to be "a family values" state is nothing more than hollow rhetoric.

– Sen. Debbe Leftwich, D-OKC, represents District 44

Confessions Of A Born Politician

By Lynn Green

I eagerly await the day that researchers involved in the Human Genome Project announce that they have discovered the "Political Gene." I can think of no other reason why some of us become so politically involved. I am one of those whose political gene is dominant.

My political tendencies manifested themselves very early. In 1960, I had my classmates in the 3rd grade vote on which of my two best friends would be my "very bestest friend." Since I personally favored one over the other, and I knew my parents favored Nixon over Kennedy, I ran one as a Republican and the other as a Democrat. Thus I not only took part in my first campaign, but my first "push poll" as well.

It is easy to become cynical about politics in our time. In fact, that has long been the case. Aesop is supposed to have said, "We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office."

My childhood faith in politics and politicians has gone through many tests. For example, my first adult campaign helped to elect an underdog candidate governor of Oklahoma. Years later I watched that same man, then a U.S. senator, vote to confirm a U.S. Supreme Court nominee whom I ardently opposed.

POLITICS MIRRORS LIFE

Politics is like that: glorious one moment, appalling the next, very much like humanity as a whole. Politics is, after all, a human enterprise; therefore, we should not be surprised that it displays all of the generosity and compassion humans are capable of showing as well as the cupidity and cruelty endemic to our species. The same body politic capable of creating Social Security and Civil Rights legislation can also reward corporate greed and deny some Americans their rights because of their sexual orientation.

So why do folks like me, and many of you, keep at it year after year, election after election? I believe it comes down to our faith in the possibility of justice,

Accurate Sex Ed Pushed By ACLU

By Tanya Cox

The ACLU of Oklahoma believes our children should be taught unbiased, age-appropriate, medically accurate information in their sexuality education curriculum.

While some schools are empowering students with information that abstinence is best, but if you choose to have sex here are the risks and here are tools to prevent STDs and unintended pregnancies, others are only teaching abstinence-only-until-marriage sex education.

These types of curricula leave out crucial information that is needed for our children to make educated and informed decisions. Our goal is that school districts provide abstinence-plus or a comprehensive sexuality education. We need your help.

The ACLU of Oklahoma believes one way of attaining this goal is for parents, students, or concerned citizens to host a "house party." Ideally, a gracious host will invite 10-15 of his or her friends that have an interest in a particular school district.

The host will distribute information that shows why abstinence-only-until-marriage is not as effective as many would like us to believe. The group will

the only true purpose for any society. After all, any political decisions from the school board to the federal government must be examined in the light of whether or not the choice enlarges the realm of justice.

IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT JUSTICE

We should always ask this question, "Will or will not this action allow more of our citizens to enjoy their right to dignity?" For human dignity is the true measure of a just society.

I also believe that, despite setbacks, defeats and occasional reversals, we are making progress towards securing justice for all. The task, of course, is far from finished. What justice we have achieved happened because a body of people, usually an elected body, had the courage to do a just political act.

Because I believe in justice, I must be political. Therefore, I am proud to say that I am a politician.

- The author wrote this essay as part of a Lenten study series at his church, Mayflower Congregational, in Oklahoma City. His minister, the Rev. Robin Meyers, urged members to use NPR's "This I Believe" series as a model to write an essay of 500 words or less that expresses a belief they hold.

discuss ways to introduce an abstinence-plus or a comprehensive sexuality education in the school district.

The ACLU of Oklahoma can be present at the house party as well so the host will not be overwhelmed.

We have many resources and movies to show how others who have implemented this type of curriculum in their school district.

For those who are unsure of the type of sex education being taught in your school, the ACLU of Oklahoma encourages you to first ask the administration to provide you with the curriculum.

If that does not work we would be more than happy to assist you with an open records request to obtain the information. If inaccurate information is being taught we ask that you contact us.

The ACLU of Oklahoma has lots of resources that we would be more than willing to share with you if you are interested in hosting a house party. If you are interested in hosting or just want more information, please contact me at 405.525.3831.

- The author is ACLU program coordinator

Military Support For GOP Is In Free Fall

By Bonnie Erbe

The Los Angeles Times reports that the Military Times' annual poll of active-duty service members found support among them for the Republican Party is dropping significantly. So significantly, in fact, that the 30-year trend of "Republicanization" of the military has reversed and is in a free fall.

The Times reported on a one-year decline of 10 points from 56% to 46% from January 2006 to January 2007 among active-duty service personnel who self-identify as Republicans. The year before, a 4-point drop cut Republican identification from an all-time high of 60%.

One has to infer the Iraq war is taking its toll on Republican supremacy not only at the voting booth but also among the good and honorable folks actually doing the fighting.

Only during the past several decades has the military moved right as a voting bloc. My father-in-law, a career Army major in World War II, was a Democrat, although not particularly partisan, as was the case with his generation.

The Times reports that all that started to change in the 1970s. The rightward shift was dramatic: In 1976, 25% of civilians characterized themselves as Republicans, while 33% of military officers were Republicans - a military-civilian "gap" of only 8%.

By 1996, the military-civilian gap on party affiliation had grown to 33%; while 34% of civilians self-identified as Republicans, so did a whopping 70% of military officers.

Not long ago, I was speaking with a conservative Republican congressional staffer who told me all her friends from high school now serving in Iraq were becoming more and more vehement in their opposition to the war. I explained to her that friends of mine [both military wives] remain vehemently loyal to Presi-

dent Bush on the war effort.

"Are their husbands in Iraq?" she asked. "No" was my answer. "That's the difference," she explained.

These polling data bear out her argument. My impression was erroneous. Hers was correct.

How To Call The Police

George Phillips of Meridian, MS, was going up to bed when his wife told him that he'd left the light on in the garden shed, which she could see from the bedroom window.

George opened the back door to go turn off the light, but saw that there were people in the shed stealing things.

He phoned the police, who asked, "Is someone in your house?" and he said "no." Then they said that all patrols were busy, and that he should simply lock his door and an officer would be along when available.

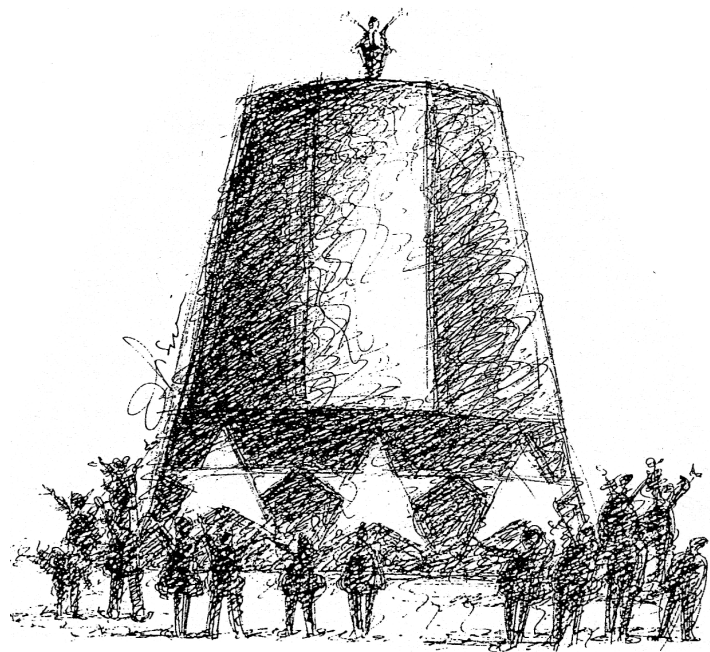
George said, "OK," hung up, counted to 30, and phoned the police again. "Hello, I just called you a few seconds ago because there were people in my shed. Well, you don't have to worry about them now 'cause I've just shot them all." Then he hung up.

Within five minutes three police cars, an Armed Response unit, and an ambulance showed up at the Phillips' residence and caught the burglars red-handed.

One of the policemen said to George: "I thought you said that you'd shot them!"

George said, "I thought you said there was nobody available!"

[True story, don't you love it!]



Not-So-Wise Raid On School Trust Fund

By Edwin E. Vineyard

How often those spending time around the Capitol have heard the expression: "The Legislature, in its wisdom." This may simply be a cliché statement, but quite often it is a facetious remark heard on chamber floors, in committee rooms, courthouses, classrooms, and in other venues where legislative acts wield power for good or bad.

In their wisdom the two chambers have passed identical bills addressing the problem of under-funding of the teachers' retirement system in a wrong-headed fashion. In HJR 1039 and SB 1104 the legislature seeks to take away money going to the public schools and to colleges and universities in school land revenue and give it to an under-funded retirement system. This is a non-solution to a problem of past legislative neglect.

In fairness, there are several other solutions offered, some of which have passed one or the other house and some still lodged in committees. But when observers were quizzed as to whether this is a serious move by the Legislature, the answer received was: "Dead serious!"

These bills speak glibly of "surplus oil and gas revenue," but there is no such thing as surplus funds in Oklahoma educational institutions. All are needed.

THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF SCHOOL LANDS

School lands were set aside in the Constitution in trust for the benefit of public schools. Other specified lands were set aside for the "exclusive benefit" of named colleges and universities. These were to remain in perpetual trust, free of political reach, and the income used "exclusively for the benefit of" those schools and colleges.

These bills would create a referendum vote to amend the Oklahoma Constitution to raid those trust funds.



Oklahoma University, Oklahoma State University, Langston University, Northern Oklahoma College and regional universities are among the thirteen affected colleges. All public schools are affected. In some colleges, school land income may be pledged already to paying building bonds.

If this referendum were to succeed, which is doubtful, there would likely be a protracted and expensive legal battle through the state and the federal courts. The school land grants were written into the state's Constitution in exact language as prescribed by the Enabling Act under which the Constitution was written for Oklahoma to become a state. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that a state may not change the terms of federal land grants given to schools by act of Congress.

This is not an appropriate solution to the problem of past legislative neglect of the retirement system. Attempting to confiscate these constitutional trust funds is the wrong way. Breaking faith with trusts is a poor way to do state business. There are other, better ways.

- The author, former president of Northern Oklahoma College, lives in Enid

Republicans Kill Help For Uninsured

State Rep. Chuck, Hoskin, D-Vinita, says he is "extremely disappointed" that lawmakers did not schedule a vote on legislation to reduce the number of uninsured Oklahomans.

"I'm very disappointed we didn't hear a bill that would have helped thousands of working Oklahomans without creating any additional costs for the state," said Hoskins.

"Not to put down anyone's legislation, but we found time to hear bills naming watermelon the official state vegetable and the Dutch Oven the official cooking pot of Oklahoma.

"It's hard to believe we didn't have time to hear a bill that could have reduced the number of Oklahomans without health insurance."

Currently, an estimated 600,000 Oklahomans do not have health insurance coverage. House Bill 1747, by Hoskin, would have expanded the Insure Oklahoma program to cover more working families.

A BIG BOOST FOR SMALL BUSINESS

The program helps small businesses with 50 or fewer employees pay for health insurance coverage for workers. House Bill 1747 would have expanded the program to cover employees earning up to 200% of the federal poverty level [about \$40,000 per year for a family of four].

House Bill 1747 passed out of the House Public Health Committee in February but did not receive a vote on the floor of the House before the deadline.

As a result, the bill is effectively dead for the remainder of the legislative ses-

sion.

Under Insure Oklahoma, participating employers and employees pay a portion of their health insurance premiums with the state picking up the rest of the tab. The state pays 60% of the cost, employers pay 25% and employees pay 15%.

Currently, the premium assistance program limits eligibility to employees earning no more than 185% of the federal poverty level.

ONLY 2,000 COVERED BUT 50,000 ELIGIBLE

Hoskin noted the program, which is funded by the tobacco tax increase approved in 2004, has the funds to cover up to 50,000 people but fewer than 2,000 are currently enrolled.

"All we were trying to do was extend the benefit to more working families," Hoskin said. "It's a shame we haven't been able to fill all 50,000 slots given how many Oklahomans desperately need health care.

"Small business owners truly strive to provide insurance for employees, but struggle to pay the bills. The Insure Oklahoma program is one of the best ways to help those companies and their workers."

Gov. Brad Henry, who included House Bill 1747 in his agenda this year, estimates the legislation would allow up to 118,000 more Oklahomans to qualify for assistance.

"Hopefully, we'll get another shot at reviving this bill in another form before the session ends," Hoskin said. "Our hard-working families and small businesses are counting on us."

Citizens Asked To Speak Up On Water

As part of the update and expansion of the Oklahoma Water Plan, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board [OWRB] and the Water Research Institute at Oklahoma State University [WRI] have announced a series of hearings to give citizens the opportunity to provide input on the water needs for the future of Oklahoma.

"The WRI is excited about the process we are about to embark on and we look forward to hearing from Oklahoma citizens," said Mike Langston, WRI assistant director.

"The stakeholder input portion of the water plan update is a unique endeavor designed to allow citizens a voice in planning for the future of Oklahoma's water resources."

The Water Research Institute at Oklahoma State University will be conducting 42 local input meetings throughout the state. The purpose of the meetings is to record issues, concerns, questions and suggestions citizens have regarding Oklahoma's water resources.

The first meeting will be April 12 in Beaver at the Beaver County Fairgrounds Pavilion at 1107 Douglas. The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. and is open to all area citizens. Participation by all parties interested in the future of Oklahoma's water is encouraged.

"We all use Oklahoma water whether in our homes or to make a living," said Jeri Fleming, WRI stakeholder communications specialist. "I think most of us take water for granted, that it will always be at our fingertips, but that may not be the case if we don't start thinking about the future now."

The Oklahoma Water Resources Board is required by law to develop a comprehensive water plan and update it every 10 years. This is the third revision of the

plan. The WRI is working with the OWRB to facilitate stakeholder input into the water plan.

Information sheets about water law as well as some regional and statewide issues will be available prior to the April 12 meeting. A record of discussion and all reports will be posted on the WRI website.

Citizens will have the opportunity to make comments at the meeting or may fill out an input form and turn it at the meeting. The input form will also be available on the website or can be faxed or mailed.

"We want the process to be fair, inclusive and transparent," Fleming said. "There is no set agenda for the water plan now. The agenda will be set by the people of Oklahoma."

Fridays With Frosty

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



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He's Afraid Of Gore

Live Earth Concert Opposed By Inhofe

By Elana Schor

Fresh from his face-to-face tussle with former Vice President Al Gore, Sen. James Inhofe, R-OK, is vowing to stall Gore's hotly anticipated Capitol concert to draw attention to global warming.

Inhofe's belief that climate change is "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people" is common knowledge in the Capitol.

Environmental groups cheered the new prospects for carbon-capping legislation when he ceded the Environment and Public Works Committee gavel this session.

But Inhofe's parliamentary powers can block indefinitely the resolution that would permit Gore to choose the Capitol's West Front for the U.S. leg of his seven-continent Live Earth concert tour

It is a collaboration between Gore and promoter Kevin Wall, who masterminded previous blockbuster charity concerts Live Aid and Live 8.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-NV, attempted to pass the authorizing measure for Live Earth by unanimous consent.

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-KY, raised an objection on the floor, seeking more time for his side to look at the resolution.

INHOFE: 'NO COMPROMISE'

Inhofe appeared to see little room for an accommodation that could allow the concert to go forward. "There's no compromise. Either we change the rules or we don't."

Inhofe added that other members share his concerns such as Sen. Bob Bennett, R-UT, ranking member of the Rules Committee, which has jurisdiction over the concert resolution.

Democrats "may not be willing to stand up to Al Gore, but many of them found it just as objectionable as Republicans do," he said.

[Inhofe swears he didn't block the event, but he would have, if given the chance. Another senator beat him to it.]

Inhofe's latest petty challenge to Gore comes after their forceful exchange during a hearing in the environment committee, when Chairwoman Barbara Boxer, D-CA, stepped in to stop Inhofe from dictating terms of Gore's response.

Gore declined to sign a personal energy usage pact proffered by Inhofe.

MALL ALREADY BOOKED

The Mall is already booked during the July 7 date slated for Live Earth, so the exigent need to secure use of the Capitol led Rules Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein, D-CA, to support unanimous passage, Rules staff director Howard Gantman said.



"They have made it clear that they're opposed to it," Gantman said of the GOP. "They're blocking passage of the bill. As far as next steps, if Republicans wanted to discuss their opposition, we would do so."

Chad Griffin, an adviser to Live Earth, was taken aback by Inhofe's objections to using the Capitol to promote environmental health.

The West Front was used to inaugurate Earth Day in a 1990 event, for which Gore, a former senator, sponsored the authorizing resolution.

"This is a totally non-partisan event," Griffin said, noting that Reid cosponsored the concert resolution with Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-ME.

CONCERT WON'T COST DIME

The Capitol concert would be free of charge, incurring a \$5 million cost to Live Earth. Promoters would recoup that amount if they were forced to choose another venue, Griffin said.

Reid added language to the resolution ensuring that the Capitol Police would be reimbursed in advance for their estimated \$1.5 million in security costs.

"It was a priority for Live Earth that the taxpayers not pay a single dime" for the show, Griffin said. "Given that, we remain optimistic."

Snowe, a longtime supporter of carbon emissions curbs who co-chairs an international climate-change group, said she was surprised the concert idea had become controversial among her colleagues.

She expressed hope that concert organizers would not be forced to move the U.S. performance out of Washington if the Capitol proves impossible.

"That would certainly provide an unfortunate message on behalf of the U.S., that somehow we're languishing in our desire to combat the problem," Snowe said. "We should be a leader in this endeavor."

Reid remains optimistic that the climate-change fight can come to the Capitol dome, spokeswoman Liz Oxhorn said.

- The Hill

Gene Stipe Makes Oklahoma History

By Happy Lowry

When I was just a kid I remember my mama being outraged about corrupt Oklahoma politics.

When she really got riled, she always brought up two things. First, was the condition of our state roads and highways [which were even worse than today] and second, "those things" that McAlester's state Sen. Gene Stipe was up to.

Stipe's district was heavily populated by state employees and many of these people worked at the McAlester state prison.

It takes loads of money to run a large prison. The local economic benefits were enormous in Pittsburg County and this gave the local state senator a lot of clout.

Stipe, being the popular local senator he was, always found a way to take care of his constituents and this really helped when it came to fund-raising.

STIPE'S POWER AND INFLUENCE GREW

Having more money than he needed, Stipe had a penchant for sharing the extra with other politicians. Through the years, his power and influence grew even more as he gained invaluable state Senate seniority.

The fact that Oklahoma politics back then was often corrupt didn't hurt Stipe one bit in Oklahoma. Gene Stipe was the biggest daddy of them all.

From way, way back, it was common knowledge that Oklahoma's county commissioners got kickbacks from road suppliers. This was generally ignored because the pay of a county commissioner was "so low." After all, the poor guys had to "make a livin'."

Since our Oklahoma attorney general never seemed to get around to doing much about the situation, in the late 1970s the FBI stepped in.

On tape, they caught an asphalt supplier arranging kickbacks for one county commissioner. As it turned out, this fellow supplied almost all our counties with road asphalt.

FBI TURNED BRIBER INTO SNITCH

The Feds gave him a choice that was hard to refuse ... cooperate with further investigations or call Leavenworth home for a spell. Guess which one he chose?

With him now wearing an FBI wire, the Feds got what they needed to start filing charges on a bunch of these guys. Oklahoma has 231 county commissioners, and since they had the goods on over 200 of them, the filings had to be stretched

out to keep from overloading the courts.

It was a hoot to watch! Every night on the TV news, some new charges were filed against a county commissioner somewhere.

When the trials were finished, over 200 of them went to prison. Several of these "good ole boys" were so popular with the local folks that barbecues were held to see them off to prison. Boy, howdy, those were the "good ole days!"

However, McAlester's county commissioner walked "scot-free." Guess who his lawyer was? Gene Stipe.

A few years ago, the FBI caught Stipe in some kind of white-collar crime and he was convicted. My mama was real pleased.

FBI HAS NAILED HIM AGAIN?

Now, the FBI says they've caught him again. While under house arrest, he had allegedly been channeling funds illegally to some politicians.

Two that he channeled money through third parties to were Gov. Brad Henry and U.S. Rep. Dan Boren.

If Stipe was looking for some kind of help from these two, he was barking up the wrong tree. Given the stature, character, and reputation of these public servants, there is not any reason they would want anything even remotely connected to the ex-senator.

Consequently, they donated the money to charity. Perhaps, Stipe dreamed they might help him get a pardon.

You've gotta give the ex-senator credit. He is extremely loyal to the old, old ways of Oklahoma's political past. Doing his best to keep his brand of politics alive.

- The author is from Sapulpa, by way of Tulsa and hometown Henryetta



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Reflections Of A Freedom-Fighter

By Barbara Santee

I am extremely humbled and grateful for this wonderful honor, especially coming from people whom I love and respect and have worked with for many years.

The Angie Debo award has been given to David Walters, to Bernest Cain, and Keith Smith, activists I greatly admire; and I do not at all put myself in the same category with these people, and certainly not in the category of Angie Debo.

I decided to look at Angie Debo's biography because, although I knew a little about her incredible work, I didn't know enough

She believed in pursuing the truth, wherever it led her, and if the powers that be didn't like it, that really didn't bother her. People tell me I'm a whole lot like that.

Well, you almost have to be if you're going to head up a pro-choice group in Oklahoma! It also helps to wear a bullet-proof bra most of the time! A friend asked if being a blue person living in a red state made me purple. I said, yes, purple with rage!

A SHARED PURSUIT OF TRUTH

Angie Debo's North Star was the truth, and that's what guided her. And even though she pursued her truth by writing books about the mistreatment of Native Americans, my truth carried me down a different path.

I haven't written any books, but I have several in my head that haven't been written yet because I'm too busy trying to put out political fires. And as you all know, many of those fires are right here in the Oklahoma Legislature.

People often ask me if I had a game plan for my life because when one looks at the path I took, it appears there was one. When 90% of your life can be seen in the rearview mirror, you begin to take stock and look at what you did, you cherish your victories but you still wonder if you did enough, if you made too many mistakes. And I made a lot of mistakes!

But the one thing I was never wrong about was that North Star of mine. It is a fundamental element of my life that has never changed, and it's the most basic thing that makes me an American.

I've thought about this a lot. What is it that makes us all Americans? What is it that motivates our young people to go to a God-forsaken country, whether it is Vietnam, Afghanistan or Iraq, to give their lives to protect their fellow Americans? Where does this dedication to one another come from? What's the common denominator that makes us brothers and sisters?

It isn't because we're a democracy because half of us don't even vote [and it's doubtful we still have a democracy, considering the vote tampering of the last two presidential elections and a Supreme Court that selected our president in 2000].

It certainly isn't a common language. Not everyone in this country speaks English. It's not universal public education because many Americans go to parochial or religious schools, are home schooled, or have very little or no schooling at all. It absolutely is not race. Although we were once considered to be a nation predominantly white, that quickly is becoming untrue.

Religion? Nope. Religion and race are two of the most divisive issues in this country, yet a black soldier will just as easily sacrifice her life for a white soldier as she would for a black one. A Jewish soldier will drag his Protestant or Catholic brother to safety, while putting his own life at risk.

THE TIE THAT BINDS US AS AMERICANS

So what is the glue that holds us together as Americans? What is the siren song that brought most of our ancestors to these shores, and that still beckons to people so strongly they are willing to die to come here?

A promise. A promise of freedom, of liberty, of justice for all. A promise that is imbedded in the Constitution, in the Bill of Rights, in the Pledge of Allegiance. My North Star has always been that promise.

But it is only a promise, and not a certainty unless we make it a certainty. When my star is threatened by overreaching and power-hungry politicians, by

Gore Is Challenged On U.S. House Floor

By Karen Webb

As Al Gore visited with former colleagues on the House floor, Republican Rep. Lynn Westmoreland, R-GA, argued that the Democrat was violating recently enacted ethics rules rescinding floor privileges for former congressmen working as agents of a foreign government.

Banning the former VP from the house floor seems a bit harsh. Reagan went to work as a paid lobbyist for Japan, but I am sure the GOP would have let him speak. Westmoreland gets loopier.

"Because Gore serves as an adviser to Britain on climate change," Westmoreland said, "he shouldn't have been allowed."

Oh my God, the British? I thought the British – or at least their leadership – are on our side.

"It is in total violation of the House rules," Westmoreland, a third-term lawmaker, said in an interview after raising a parliamentary inquiry on the issue. "They don't even pay any attention to their own rules."

What an idiot.

"The Foreign Agents Registration Act, which Congress passed just before World War II to combat German propaganda, requires people working to influence U.S.



"We must fight for [freedom] every single day, and that is more true today than at any other time in our history because the enemy is not from without or from religious extremists in Iraq or Iran, as the Bush propagandists would have you believe. It's from within."

Santee Wins ACLU Award

Tulsa's Barbara Santee, one of Oklahoma's foremost activists and non-stop defender of individual rights, has won the ACLU Angie Debo Civil Liberties Award.

The ACLU of Oklahoma honored Dr. Santee at its recent Bill of Rights Celebration at Oklahoma City's Clarion Meridian Convention Center.

Named for the late Dr. Angie Debo, a noted educator, author and activist, the award is given annually to an individual whose actions during the year or throughout a lifetime have helped to preserve individual freedom in Oklahoma.

This year's award to Dr. Santee is right on target. As former Oklahoma director for the National Abortion and

Reproductive Rights Action League and a past member of the ACLU's state board, Santee has spent decades defending reproductive choice and religious liberty.

She also manages the online list service for the Progressive Alliance, which distributes valuable information about civil liberties, environmental concerns, and other social justice issues.

"Barbara Santee is a true-blue freedom fighter in the red state of Oklahoma," said ACLU of Oklahoma Executive Director Joann Bell. "She works tirelessly, often against overwhelming odds, and her actions are consistently marked by humor, class, and determination."

self-righteous and self-satisfied religious zealots, by smug and greedy corporate executives and lobbyists, I fight like hell to make sure its light is not extinguished by their efforts.

Love and freedom are the most basic needs on earth for the human spirit and the most precious; but without freedom, there can be no opening of the human spirit and mind to incredible possibilities – no justice, no fairness, no true knowledge, no hope, certainly no peace.

It wasn't wealth that made this country great. It was freedom. Freedom is what made the wealth possible. Many other nations have had the abundance of natural resources that we've had, but they didn't become the leading economic power in the world as we did.

Why? Because they didn't have the freedoms we have. They were stifled by repressive religions, fascist rulers or ancient cultural traditions. Without the freedom to explore, to innovate, to invent, create, think differently, be different, to make mind-numbing mistakes, to achieve glorious ends, to go down paths untrod, and imagine things never seen, we too would have been an intellectually and creatively stagnant nation.

And if we ever lose that freedom, everything else will be lost, including our wealth.

This is especially true now as we flounder to find our new place in an ever-changing world seeking to establish a new global pecking order where we just may not be the top dog anymore.

See SANTEE Page 17

policy under the direction or control of a foreign principal, such as a government or political party, to register as foreign agents."

The problem is, Westmoreland is being controlled by a big puppeteer from somewhere no one has ever gone before. He could have been here talking about chipmunks.

"What this had to do with is the House rules," he said. "The Democrats are allowing their rules to be violated because he won an Oscar."

Earth to lunatic with the IQ of a chipmunk: Before he won the Oscar he spent eight years in the U.S. House, eight years in the U.S. Senate and was Vice President for eight years and he actually won the popular vote and would have been president in 2000 if the Supreme Court had the brains God gave a turnip.

He spent 16 years in Congress before Westmoreland's first election to anything. I didn't mean to insult chipmunks.

When was the last time a former VP was banned from the House floor?

How about never, you idiot. Because he won an Oscar? Words fail me, but this Georgia cracker has the brains of a Saltine.

– The author lives in Moore

BOOKS

And Now, The Rest Of The Oklahoma Story

By Mike Nobles

ALTERNATIVE OKLAHOMA

Contrarian Views of the Sooner State

Edited By Davis D. Joyce

University of Oklahoma Press

272 pages, \$19.95

Every now and again a book comes along that makes you proud to be called an Okie. A book that celebrates the diversity, courage and sacrifice of a special kind of people whose unselfish and often controversial contributions ultimately resulted in pride, faith, and hope in a sometimes uncertain future.

This is such a book.

The University of Oklahoma Press has published the long awaited companion volume to the highly acclaimed *An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before* by noted scholar and author Davis D. Joyce of Tulsa. His earlier volume has become a hard-to-find classic and I predict this one will be a best seller as well.

The book, in 14 essays written by such diverse observers as university professors, best-selling authors, and writers of all persuasions, contains viewpoints that typically are not found in textbooks or so-called mainstream publications that discuss Oklahoma history.

That is, these are contrarian voices ranging from progressive and libertarian to populist and radical. It's all here.

From such diverse subjects as race, religion, gender, popular music, economics, and the power industry, the reader will learn of the successful efforts to

For These Baileys, A Not-So-Wonderful Life

By Alvena Bieri

POSITIVELY AMERICAN

Winning Back the Middle Class Majority One Family at a Time

By Charles Schumer with Daniel Squadron

Rodale Press

288 pages, \$24.95

Right now the welfare of America's middle class is the subject of several books.

Sen. Byron Dorgan's *Take This Job and Ship It* is a good recent one and, of course, Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* is now a classic.

Now comes Sen. Chuck Schumer talking about winning this vital group back to the Democratic Party, but what he says describes our whole social structure in which the middle class is losing out economically.

He had the good idea of creating an imaginary but realistic middle class family to illustrate his ideas. He named them the Baileys, and they live near New York City with their three children.

The husband works full-time, and his wife part-time, and they make about \$75,000 a year. That doesn't sound bad to me, but the senator says that amount of money would be equivalent to \$50,000 in most of the rest of the country.

The Baileys are already worried about how they are going to send three children to college.

Then Schumer, D-NY, analyzes what he believes are their social and political ideas.

For one, they believe that hard work is still rewarded with success. He imagines then that their parents were New Deal Democrats but that they voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980, the first time they were old enough to vote.

Now they are "up for grabs" and may think of themselves as independents. They feel left out of politics, believing that our government pays far more attention to the rich and the very poor than to those in the middle.

Schumer says, "Joe and Eileen Bailey are all the men and women whose lives are not a desperate struggle to survive but a challenge to improve."

It's funny and somehow comforting that in a little side note Schumer has the right attitude about the best way to spend money. He reports that he and his staff on their travels around the country during a campaign often stay at a Motel 6 – a good choice, I think.

But Schumer does not seem to have many firm answers for the issues he raises at the beginning of the book. And he had trouble resisting writing long accounts of his campaigns.

But in the second part of his book, he presents what he calls some "50 Percent Solutions."

They do cover many problems. He wants a national goal to be increasing math and reading scores in our public schools by 50%, reducing our dependence on foreign oil by that amount, cutting the high rate of childhood obesity, and several other good goals, not all of them exactly political.

But he does not mention raising the minimum wage or starting a universal health care system.



"The book ... contains viewpoints that typically are not found in textbooks or so-called mainstream publications that discuss Oklahoma history."

stop the building of the Black Fox nuclear power plant; the bittersweet results of an Oklahoman's involvement with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War; the surprising link between Woody Guthrie and the musical genre known as Red Dirt; and a host of other issues not necessarily being touted by promoters of the Oklahoma Centennial celebration.

The essays dealing with religion in Oklahoma are sure to raise some eyebrows and engender contrary views.

Davis Joyce deserves much credit for bringing to life these wonderful essays about an Oklahoma that is real ... and important ... and truly inspiring. The book will give the reader an alternative view of Oklahoma history that will inspire and perhaps encourage others to continue the progressive streak in Oklahoma that refuses to die.

The contributors are real, the message is hope and pride, and the result is stunning. A must have for any Oklahoman hoping to know the complete history of this wonderful state.

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

Still, we wish that every senator and representative in Washington would adhere to the spirit of his conclusion about his public service – "I've been hired by Joe and Eileen Bailey of Everytown, USA. They have given me their trust. Their future is at stake. Our country's future is at stake. It is up to us to do everything we can to make sure that we and our children have a future that is positively American."

– The author lives in Stillwater

A Chilling Tale Of The Blizzard Of '88

By Norm Rourke

THE BLIZZARD VOICES

By Ted Kooser

University of Nebraska Press

64 pages, \$9.95

...He wandered
ahead of the wind and was found
that spring when it thawed
twelve miles
southeast of his home...

The Blizzard of 1888 that slammed into the Great Plains [January 12-13] was one of the most devastating weather events in history. Former Poet Laureate and 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry winner Ted Kooser skillfully tells the story.

From historic records and eye witness accounts, Kooser uses the voices of men and women to tell the chilling tale. The event was also called the School-children's Blizzard because of the many children and teachers who were trapped in rural schools during the bitterly cold days of the blizzard.

Here are the haunting voices of the men and women who were teaching school, working the land and tending the house when the storm arrived and changed their lives forever.

A woman's voice: "...The wind/was so bad the men took turns/at the driving [mules] while others/laid in the wagon boxes./None of them died, but some lost/fingers and toes that day..."

These are the remembrances of a hearty people who faced a terrible winter storm that seemed to come from nowhere. The *Blizzard Voices* is good story telling presented in a unique way.

Anyone who says they don't like poetry never read Ted Kooser [or Billy Collins]. Kooser is a master of communicating through poetry. His clarity of structure and word choices makes poetry enjoyable and readable.

Twelve line drawings by Tom Pohrt give graphic renditions of the people and conditions during the blizzard.

– The author lives in Beggs

This Front-Loader Is A Real Lemon

By Danny Adkison

Are you a fan of front-loading? No, not washing machines, but presidential elections. You shouldn't be. While there are some advantages to front-loaded washing machines [more about this later], the political phenomenon called front-loading is a bad development. And right now 2008 is shaping up as a front-loading disaster.

To understand front-loading you have to start with New Hampshire. New Hampshire is probably the most important state in the nomination phase of a presidential election. That's because the New Hampshire primary is always the first one of the year. They have a state law that stipulates that if any other state sets its primary on the same day as, or earlier than, their primary, then the date they have specified for their primary will automatically move to seven days earlier. This law caused them to hold their 2004 primary on February 1.

This has served New Hampshire well, and other states have decided to follow suit. While New Hampshire will continue to hold the first presidential primary, other states have over the past few presidential elections been moving closer to the front of the election year in an attempt to reap the same benefits.

Front-loading began after so many states switched to the method of using presidential primaries to select delegates to their national nominating conventions [rather than what are called caucus/convention meetings].

Bill Mayer, a political scientist who has written extensively on front-loading, made the point as to how fast front-loading developed with the following observation: Six weeks into the 1976 presidential election less than one-fifth of the delegates had been selected in primaries; in 2004 nearly 60% of the delegates had been chosen by the end of week six and nearly 75% by the end of the seventh week.

Before we examine the disadvantages of front-loading, let's see how 2008 is shaping up.

New Hampshire's presidential primary will held on January 22. By the end of February, thirty-one other states and Washington, D.C. will have selected delegates for the Democratic and Republican national conventions [held, respectively, in late August and early September].

This means that approximately 62% of the delegates will have been selected prior to the month of March.

Back to the advantages of front-loading washers. One of the advantages of the front-loading type is that there is no agitator in the center. You can wash more clothes per load. Political front-loading has something in common with this but it should not be considered an advantage.

That's because one of the major consequences of front-loading is to force more candidates to announce early and, thus, there is less agitation later over who the party's nominee will be. Candidates are forced to announce that they are entering the race and to begin heavy campaigning very early in the election cycle [actually,

It's About Running With This Mate

By Susan Estrich

There's only one reason a man with a wife with incurable breast cancer and two small children at home should be running off to run for president.

Not because he wants the job, or even because she wants it for him.

Because she wants it for them.

Of course, the obvious explanation for why a man whose wife's cancer recurs would keep running is that he's too ambitious to give it up. After all, presidential candidates never see their wives anyway. Why let it interfere with a campaign that is going well enough? We're used to political marriages that put family second to ambition.

But I don't think that's it in John Edwards' case. First of all, it's not true. He was willing to give it up. Second of all, he didn't have to give it up forever, just for this time, against two very strong contenders no less.

THE EASY WAY: DROP OUT NOW

The easiest thing for John Edwards the ambitious would-be president to do would be to go home and take care of his wife, and run in four or eight years as the sympathetic widower – or better yet, the husband of a survivor. At 53, he has time. It's what people would expect him to do, what many who know him expected him to do. It would serve his ambition just fine. The person it doesn't serve very well is Elizabeth.

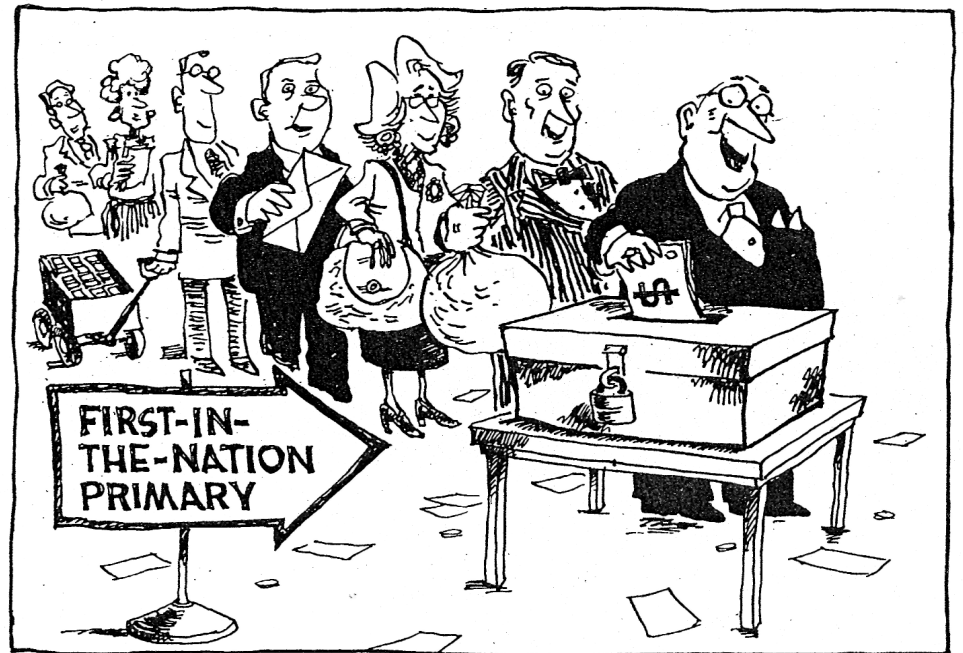
This presidential campaign isn't just his dream, it's theirs. This may be the strongest marriage on public display in some time. My bet is, she convinced him.

The question facing John Edwards was easy because he has more chances, but Elizabeth Edwards faced a harder one. Do you give up the one chance you may ever have for the dream that was theirs because of cancer?

Cancer changes everything, as Leroy Sievers' wonderful blog for NPR, www.npr.org/blogs/mycancer, highlights every day. But the ultimate challenge it poses is to keep living. I read Leroy's blog because the people there are so alive and so wise about the gift of life.

WHY NOT PURSUE THEIR DREAM?

John and Elizabeth have a dream, and they're going for it. And why shouldn't they? Because cancer may limit her days? So they can go home and have every-



as we have seen, it has already started].

Front-loading has all but made dinosaurs out of candidates who lie in waiting while the other candidates beat themselves up and then try to emerge as a consensus candidate.

With front-loading you can forget this strategy. You need to win and win early.

This means, in addition, voters are deprived of the time they may need to really "get to know" a candidate, or to have candidates "come from behind" after having proven themselves on the campaign trail.

Which brings us to the second similarity front-loading machines have with political front-loading.

Front-loading washers cost more. Likewise, political front-loading puts a premium on candidates who can raise large amounts of money early in the election [as we've seen, real early]. Do well in one of the later primaries and rely on contributions to pick up and start gaining the Big Mo? Forget it. This strategy won't work with front-loading.

The Economist, which seems to always accurately capture the pulse of American politics, recently pointed out two important points concerning the front-loading phenomenon.

First, since so many states [including Oklahoma] have selected Feb. 5 to hold their primaries, the candidates will not be spending much time in any of them.

Secondly, and more importantly, for the same reason, the outcome in New Hampshire [and the few other states prior to Feb. 5] take on an added importance since how a candidate fares there will, in all probability, carry over to the primaries on Feb. 5.

If true, 2008 may become the election year that causes Congress and the major political parties to finally do something substantial about the front-loading problem in time for the next presidential election.

– The author teaches constitutional law at Oklahoma State University

one wait for her to die so her husband can get back to politics? Living with cancer is about living, not dying. It's a reason to go for it, not give up. To live more, not less.

At least that's my guess as to what she thought, what he thought, why they're going forward instead of going home. This is a stay-at-home mother making a stand for not staying home.

The question is: Will the country let them? Will they treat him as a candidate, or a man who should be home with his sick wife? Will they take her appeals as an endorsement of her husband's qualifications, or proof of his single-minded ambition?

At another time, it might have been different. But you'd be hard-pressed to find an American family that hasn't been touched by cancer, faced its own version of the Edwards saga. It's not just easy to relate, it's too easy. Even so, it all depends on what people think is really going on with John and Elizabeth; not so much how sick she is, but whether this is really what she wants and whether she can convince people of that.

In other words, it depends on Elizabeth Edwards, one of the smartest women I know. I don't blame John Edwards for not wanting to give up the chance to run for president with her by his side.

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Condi Rice Did It Secret Meeting On Oil Before Invasion

By Greg Palast

Four years ago the tanks rolled for what President Bush originally called, "Operation Iraqi Liberation" – O.I.L. I kid you not.

And it was four years ago that, from the White House, George Bush, declaring war, said, "I want to talk to the Iraqi people."

That Dick Cheney didn't tell Bush that Iraqis speak Arabic ... well, never mind. I expected the President to say something like, "Our troops are coming to liberate you, so don't shoot them." Instead, Bush told, the Iraqis, "Do not destroy your oil wells."

Nevertheless, the Bush Administration said the war had nothing to do with Iraq's oil. Indeed, in 2002, the State Department stated, and its official newsletter, the Washington Post, repeated that State's Iraq study group, "does not have oil on its list of issues."

OFFERING THE OIL MINISTRY POSITION

But now we've learned that, despite protestations to the contrary, Condoleezza Rice held a secret meeting with the former Secretary-General of OPEC, Fadhil Chalabi, an Iraqi, and offered Chalabi the job of oil minister for Iraq.

It is well established that the president of the United States may appoint the cabinet ministers of another nation if that appointment is confirmed by the 101st Airborne.

In all the chest-beating about how the war did badly, no one seems to remember how the war did very, very well – for Big Oil.

The war has kept Iraq's oil production to 2.1 million barrels a day from pre-war, pre-embargo production of over four million barrels. In the oil game, that's a lot to lose. In fact, the loss of Iraq's two million barrels a day is equal to the entire planet's reserve production capacity.

UNDER CLINTON OIL WAS \$18 A BARREL

In other words, the war has caused a hell of a supply squeeze – and Big Oil just loves it. Oil today is \$60 a barrel versus the \$18 a barrel price under Bill "Love-Not-War" Clinton.

Since the launch of Operation Iraqi Liberation, Halliburton stock has tripled to \$64 a share – not, as some believe, because of those Iraq reconstruction contracts – peanuts for Halliburton.

Cheney's former company's main business is "oil services." And, as one oilman complained to me, Cheney's former company has captured a big hunk of the rise in oil prices by jacking up the charges for Halliburton drilling and piping equipment.

But before we shed tears for Big Oil's having to hand Halliburton its slice, let me note that the value of the reserves of the five biggest oil companies more than doubled during the war to \$2.36 trillion.

THEY FOOLISHLY PUT IT IN WRITING

That was the plan: putting a new floor under the price of oil. I have that in writing. In 2005, after a two-year battle with the State and Defense Departments, they released to my team at BBC Newsnight the "Options for a Sustainable Iraqi Oil Industry."

Now, you might think our government shouldn't be writing a plan for another nation's oil. Well, our government didn't write it, despite the State Department seal on the cover. In fact, we discovered that the 323-page plan was drafted in Houston by oil industry executives and consultants.

Immigrant Children Imprisoned Illegally

The ACLU filed lawsuits on behalf of 10 immigrant children being held illegally in a Texas medium-security prison that has been converted into a "Family Residential Facility."

Approximately 400 people are currently detained at the T. Don Hutto facility in Taylor, TX – half of them children.

The lawsuits filed against Michael Chertoff, secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, as well as six officials from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] charge that these children are being imprisoned under inhumane conditions while their parents await immigration decisions.

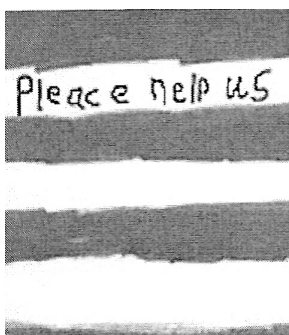
In a facility that is still functionally and structurally a prison, children are required to wear prison garb, detained in small cells for 11-12 hours each day where they cannot keep food and toys, and denied all privacy – even when using the toilet.

According to legal papers, some children did not go outdoors in the fresh air during the whole month of December 2006.

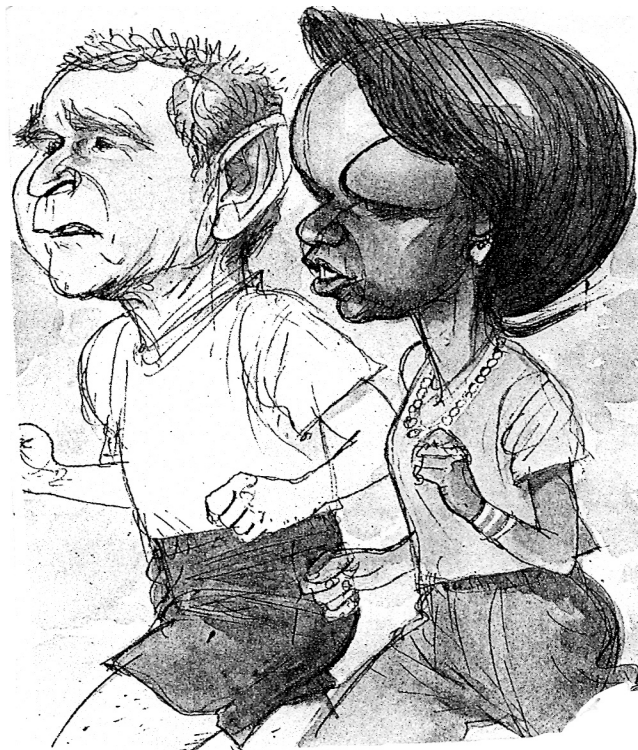
Despite urgent needs, many children lack access to adequate medical, dental, and mental health treatment, and are denied meaningful educational opportunities.

Guards frequently discipline children by threatening to separate them permanently from their parents, and children are prohibited from having contact visits with non-detained family members.

"The choice is not between enforcement of immigration laws and humane



Drawing by a child detained at Hutto.



The suspicion is that Bush went to war to get Iraq's oil. That's not true. The document, and secret recordings of those in on the scheme, made it clear that the Administration wanted to make certain America did not get the oil. In other words, keep the lid on Iraq's oil production – and thereby keep the price of oil high.

THE REPORT USES OIL JARGON

Of course the language was far more subtle than "Let's cut Iraq's oil production and jack up prices." Rather, the report uses industry jargon and euphemisms that require Iraq to remain an obedient member of the OPEC cartel and stick to the oil-production limits – "quotas" – which keep up oil prices.

The Houston plan, enforced by an army of occupation, would, "enhance [Iraq's] relationship with OPEC," the oil cartel.

That's undoubtedly why Condoleezza Rice asked Fadhil Chalabi to take charge of Iraq's oil ministry. As former chief operating officer of OPEC, the oil cartel, Fadhil was a Big Oil favorite, certain to ensure that Iraq would never again allow the world to slip back to the Clinton era of low prices and low profits.

In investigating for BBC, I was told by the former chief of the CIA's oil unit that he'd met with Fadhil regarding oil at Bush's request.

HE COULD PROVE HE DIDN'T MEET WITH CIA

Fadhil recently complained to the BBC. He denied the meeting with the Bush emissary in London because, he noted, he was secretly meeting that week in Washington with Condi!

Fadhil, by the way, turned down Condi's offer to run Iraq's oil ministry. Ultimately, Iraq's Oil Ministry was given to Fadhil's fellow tribesman, Ahmad Chalabi, a convicted bank swindler and neo-con idol.

Whichever, Chalabi is nominal head of Iraq's oil industry in Baghdad, the orders come from Houston. Indeed, the oil law adopted by Iraq's government last month is virtually a photocopy of the "options" plan conceived in Texas long before Iraq was "liberated."

In other words, the war has gone exactly to plan – the Houston plan. So forget the naive cloth-rending about a conflict gone haywire. ExxonMobil reported a record \$10 billion profit last quarter, largest of any corporation in history. Mission Accomplished.

– Greg Palast is the author of the New York Times bestseller, *Armed Madhouse: From Baghdad to New Orleans – Sordid Secrets and Strange Tales of a White House Gone Wild*

treatment of immigrant families," said Lisa Graybill, legal director of the ACLU of Texas. "There are various alternatives under which both can exist."

Great Advice, It's All True!

If a dog was the teacher you would learn stuff like:

When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.

Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride. Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.

When it's in your best interest, practice obedience. Let others know when they've invaded your territory.

Take naps.

Stretch before rising. Run, romp, and play daily.

Thrive on attention and let people touch you.

Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.

On warm days, stop to lie on your back in the grass.

On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree.

When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.

No matter how often you're scolded, don't buy into the guilt thing and pout. Run right back and make friends.

Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.

Eat with gusto and enthusiasm. Stop when you have had enough.

Be loyal. Never pretend to be something you're not.

If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it

When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently. – Author Unknown

Lunch Lady Getting Kids To Eat Healthy

By Jennifer Wolcott

Despite hate mail and threatened hunger strikes, a California chef sticks it out to help kids build a better relationship to food.

Ann Cooper is not your typical lunch lady. She is more likely to wear a chef's toque than a hairnet and her roasted chicken and potatoes bear no resemblance to nuggets and Tater Tots.

The former chef, who spent much of her 30-plus-year career working in white-tablecloth restaurants and catering for celebrities, is now best known as the "Lunch Lady" in Berkeley, CA, schools.

In cafeterias there she has tossed out fried, frozen, and sugary foods and replaced them with fresh, seasonal, and mostly organic meals.

Oklahoma could use her. The state ranks fifth in childhood obesity. Some schools are fighting fat but overall the problem remains.

Driven to reform school lunches as concerns grow over childhood obesity and diabetes, Cooper gets up at 3:30 each morning to begin cooking school lunches by 5 a.m.

HER BOOK IS AN INSPIRATION

Somehow, she also eked out time recently to write *Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children*, which offers inspiration, guidance, and recipes to those wishing to duplicate her efforts in their own school districts.

Cooper is motivated by more than alarming health reports. She believes there's a direct correlation between what kids eat and how they perform at school, that knowledge of food is integral to one's education, and that all children deserve delicious and nutritious meals.

She has gotten off to an impressive start. When she began working as director of nutrition services for the Berkeley Unified School District [BUSD] in the fall of 2005, about 95% of the cafeteria food was processed. Today, 95% is made from scratch.

BUSD encompasses 16 schools and about 9,000 students, roughly 4,500 of whom buy lunch at school each day. That number has been growing recently, but Cooper doesn't always get high-fives for her efforts.

HATE MAIL FROM SOME OF THE KIDS

"I have received hate mail," she says. "Kids speak up if they don't like something."

She recalls a group of fifth-graders who told her: "Ms. Cooper, we hate your food. We're going on a hunger strike."

Their biggest complaint was her recipe for grilled-cheese sandwiches, which used fresh-baked, whole-wheat bread and quality cheddar cheese.

Cooper invited these students into the kitchen to learn how to make bread and taste cheeses other than the day-glo-orange variety they craved.

Eventually, they came around, and by the following year, they told the incoming group of fifth graders: "You are so lucky. We fixed all the food here for you."

Bush Continues To Push Vouchers

By Anne Farris

With the landmark 2002 No Child Left Behind [NCLB] education law due to expire in September, Congress is instigating changes that include federal school vouchers to private and religious schools and increased funding for after-school tutoring, some of which is provided by religious organizations.

Congress began holding a series of hearings on NCLB that will continue over the coming weeks. Members in both the Senate and House introduced legislation to improve NCLB, which has failed to meet its original goal that all students meet minimum standards of academic achievement.

Rep. Howard McKeon, R-CA, introduced a bill that includes vouchers, \$4,000 per student, offered to students who want to leave public schools and attend private schools – over which states have no control.

JUST ANOTHER VOUCHER SCHEME

The bill, the Empowering Parents Through Choice Act, closely tracks a proposal made earlier this year by President Bush to expand NCLB programs to let students transfer to better performing public schools or receive private, after-school tutoring.

President Bush has also urged lawmakers to fund vouchers but Sen. Edward Kennedy and Rep. George Miller have said vouchers are definitely not going to be part of the renewal.

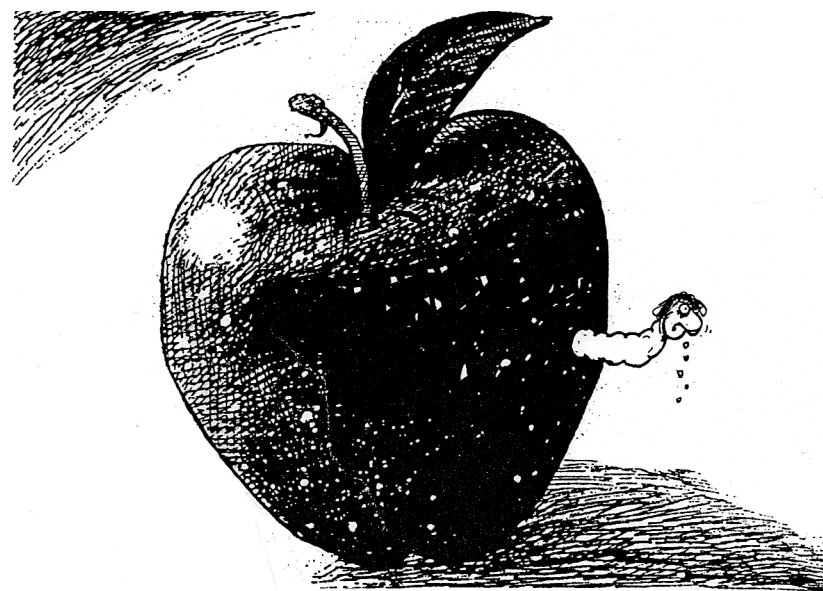
Kennedy has called vouchers a "non-starter." They also were rejected by Congress even when Republicans were in control.

Vouchers have been proposed as a way private and parochial schools could rob the public schools of billions of dollars. When a voucher system was adopted for Washington, DC, more than 6,000 students were "cherry picked" by private and parochial schools.

STATE STANDARDS, NOT NCLB STANDARDS

A second bill, entitled the Academic Partnerships Lead Us to Success Act [A-PLUS], would allow states to develop their own academic standards rather than comply with current NCLB requirements.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Peter Hoekstra, R-MI; Sen. Jim DeMint, R-SC; and Sen. John Cornyn, R-TX, would give states the option of providing the secretary of education with a "Declaration of Intent" to assume responsibility for the education of their students.



High schoolers are her toughest sell, says Cooper. Berkeley High School allows students to leave campus during lunch, and many of them head for the nearby strip of fast-food joints. But some stay to enjoy Cooper's menu. "The salad bar is becoming more popular," says Mateo Aceves, a senior who raves in a phone interview about the choices of fresh ingredients, including a variety of greens, beets, and feta cheese.

THIS FRESHMAN LOVES THE SALAD BAR

Freshman Ilama Wexler puts it this way: "I don't care if it's not cool among freshmen to eat from the salad bar – if only because they want to leave school. I love it."

Perhaps Mateo and Ilama are especially enthusiastic since they have worked in the garden where the salad-bar vegetables are grown.

As students at the Martin Luther King Junior Middle School in Berkeley, they participated in the nationally acclaimed "Edible Schoolyard," where students grow and cook the food served in their cafeteria.

The program was started in 1995 by Alice Waters, cuisine pioneer and owner of the legendary Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley.

Many say that involving children in the process of growing and cooking their meals – and learning about food in the classroom – is essential to Cooper's goal of changing their relationship to food. But first one must enlist the support of adults.

Most significant, they write in their book, is bringing about change on the national level. Beginning with Reagan's presidency, the USDA-approved National School Lunch Program, which was signed into law by President Truman in 1946, has been under-funded, they say.

Public school lunches are today subsidized at a rate of \$2.42 per child, which includes payroll and benefits [about 60% at most schools]. In the end, about \$1 is spent on school lunches per child.

It's no wonder, Cooper says, that school districts buy meals as cheaply as possible, which typically means processed, fast-food choices sold by corporate giants backed by the USDA.

The states would receive federal financial support, but advance their own individual policies. One section of the proposed law allows for federal money to be spent in a manner that provides for "more equitable participation" of private schools, its students, and staff.

In other spending matters, Senate Democrats have proposed a fiscal year 2008 budget resolution that provides \$18 billion more on domestic programs than the president proposed in his budget. Bush's budget would cut domestic programs to finance his war.

U.K., U.S. Worst Places For Children

The U.K. and the U.S. are the worst places for children's quality of life and the Netherlands and Sweden are the best, according to a report on 21 industrialized countries by the United Nations Children's Fund.

The UNICEF report uses 40 indicators to gauge children's well-being. The study found no solid relationship between the wealth of a country and children's welfare.

The U.K. ranks poorly in factors such as quality of relationships, behavior, health and safety, according to the report. The country has the worst levels of youth drunkenness and teenage sexual relations.

The U.S. ranks last in health and safety, with the highest rates of relative child poverty and teenage obesity, according to the report. Only 60% of U.S. children live with both parents, compared with 90% in Greece, the report said.

"For the last two decades, we have failed to invest in children," said Jonathan Bradshaw, a University of York professor who helped to compile the U.K. numbers data. "It's a pretty bleak picture."

A Department for Education and Skills representative said UNICEF data for Britain are a few years old and don't reflect recent improvements such as a drop in teenage pregnancy.

While some factors might have improved, others have worsened, such as child obesity rates, said Rob Williams of the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Swedish youth are least likely to be bullied and Dutch children are most likely to report themselves satisfied with life, according to the UNICEF research.

America Could Fall **Yes, Nation's Debt Affects All Of Us**

By John F. Ince

Sometime in the next year Congress will start going through its periodic rituals and related public relations charades in an effort to absolve itself of any blame for raising the federal government's debt ceiling.

With Bush and cronies having added over \$3 trillion to the national debt, the country's credit card tab now stands at \$8.8 trillion.

This represents an astounding increase of over 45% since Bush came into office in January of 2001.

And all this fiscal profligacy took place during the years when the Congressional Budget Office originally forecasted record surpluses of approximately \$2.5 trillion.

And there is no end in sight to the deficits.

More alarmingly, we now rely on foreigners to finance over 40% of this debt with the lion's share coming from the Asian central banks.

In FY 2006 the current account trade deficit is on track to set yet another record, on the order of \$700 billion. To put this in perspective, billionaire investor Warren Buffet points out that "15 years ago, the U.S. had no trade deficit with China. Now, it's \$200 billion."

IF U.S. DOESN'T CHANGE COURSE

If the country does not change course, the rest of the world could end up owning \$15 trillion worth of the United States. That's equal to the value of all American stock.

Is it a natural state of affairs for the world's richest nation to be borrowing from the world's poorest nations, to the tune of over 6% of its gross domestic product? Harvard Economic Professor and former Chief Economist at the International Monetary Fund, Kenneth Rogoff, doesn't think so.

Rogoff goes on camera in the recently released documentary film, *TIMEBOMB: America's Debt Crises, Causes, Consequences and Solutions* and says, "This is not a normal state of affairs. And it's certainly not something we expect to see from the world's richest country."

"Back when Britain was on top they were lending money to the world, but we're borrowing from the rest of the world."

TRADE DEBT EXCEEDS WAR COST

"Our current account trade deficit is now more than our defense spending and incredibly we've been borrowing from the rest of the world like this for several years now."

"I think we're going to reach a point where the rest of the world decides that they don't want to lend to us. And that can be kind of traumatic."

Bush's deficit strategy will be getting critical review from the people who matter most - global investors, not Congress.

There are renewed signs that global investors may be getting concerned about the level of U.S. borrowing.

Recently the Chinese, holders of about \$1 billion in U.S. treasuries, set up a new agency of their central bank to take a hard look at their investments overseas, and their continued financing of U.S. deficits may come under close scrutiny.

A MONUMENTAL EMBARRASSMENT

If global investors were to begin to balk at picking up the tab for American excesses, it would be a monumental embarrassment to the United States.

More palpably, it would force the Fed to raise interest rates to make the T-bills marketable. That, of course, would have serious effects for the U.S. economy, the stock market and the real estate market. Could this be the beginning of the unraveling? Perhaps.

Oil producing nations are also awash in capital and, as long as the dollar remains the default currency for petrodollars, they view the dollar as a safe bet. But these conditions can't continue indefinitely and no investor wants to be the last to react to bad news.

BIG PICTURE IS NOT A ROSY ONE

Nobody knows for sure how this will play itself out, but the big picture is not a rosy one for the American economy.

In the past year the median sales price for a home in America actually declined and homeowners are starting to feel the hangover of over \$1.5 trillion that Americans have extracted from the equity of their homes with interest-only loans and the easy money the banks are throwing at them.

The derivatives market, despite having been racked with scandals, is still highly leveraged and due for a "correction." And the stock market has turned jittery on news from China and spiked oil prices.

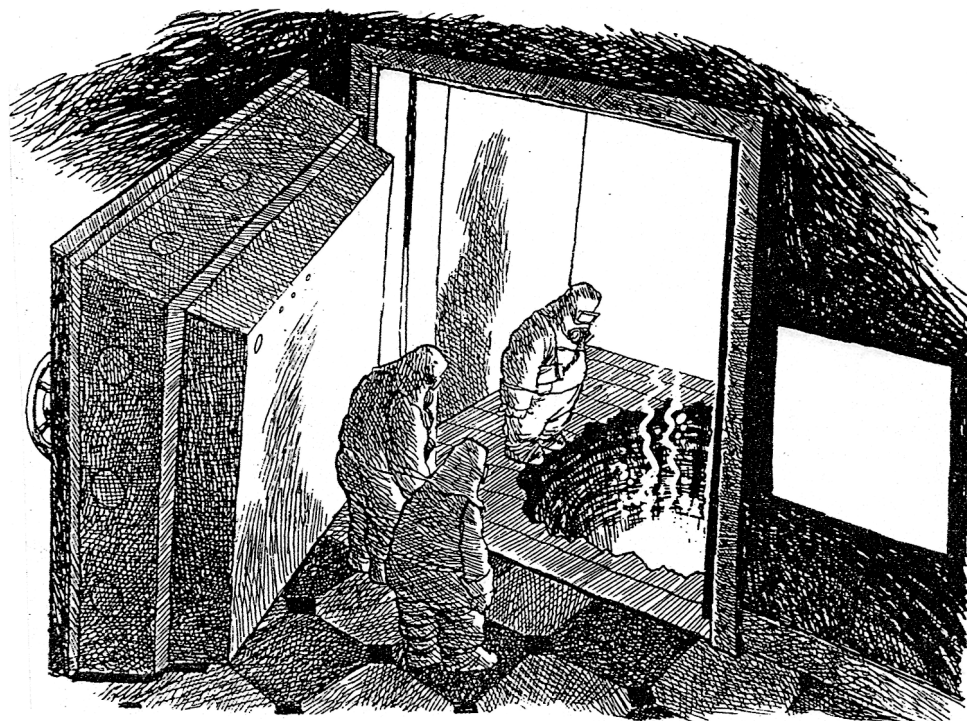
These are serious issues and their implications go well beyond the cold numbers that politicians and economists like to manipulate to their advantage.

Here are four reasons why America's debt load is today the most serious issue facing this country:

WILL WE STILL BE A WORLD LEADER?

First and most fundamentally, as America borrows more from foreigners, we are jeopardizing our stature as a world leader. The lessons of history are clear. A nation's borrowing from abroad is generally a precursor to decline.

Harvard Economics Professor Benjamin Friedman says in the *TIMEBOMB* doc-



umentary, "Historically, whichever country has been the world's leading lender, deploying its capital for use around the world, has always accrued a particular kind of influence in world affairs, whether it's the Dutch in the 17th Century, or before that the Spanish in the 16th Century, or more recently the British from the mid-19th Century through the 20th Century or the United States in the great part of the 20th Century after World War I."

WHAT DEFINES A WORLD LEADER

"Again and again it has always been the world's leading lending country that has been the premier country in terms of political influence, diplomatic influence and cultural influence."

"It's no accident that we took over that role from the British at the same time that we took over the job of being world's leading lending country."

Today we are no longer the world's leading lending country. In fact, we are now the world's biggest debtor country, and we are continuing to wield influence on the basis of military prowess alone.

America's standard of living will surely take a tumble. When the dollar takes a fall on the global exchange, as it must eventually, everything Americans buy from abroad will cost more.

MANUFACTURING BASE EVAPORATED

With America's manufacturing base all but evaporated, virtually every industry sector will start to feel inflationary pressures.

Inflation would force the Fed to raise interest rates further, which will have effects throughout the entire economy, forcing many businesses large and small to the brink of insolvency and raising unemployment.

The high deficits are putting the assets of all Americans at risk through inflation. In short, America has been living beyond its means for too long and the reckoning is looming.

The consequences of delaying action to address the root causes of the problems are serious and long-lasting. The time for action is now.

- John Ince is a former reporter at *Fortune* magazine and the producer/director of a new documentary about America's debt crisis

GI Sexual Assaults Are Up 24 Percent

Reports of sexual assaults involving members of the U.S. military increased by 24% in 2006 over the previous year, the Pentagon has reported.

In an annual report to Congress, the Pentagon said the increase may have been due to a change in the military's policy, allowing victims to report alleged assaults confidentially.

"There were 2,947 total reports of alleged sexual assault cases involving members of the armed forces," the report said.

"Reports increased by 24% from 2005, which may reflect victims' increased confidence in the reporting structure," it said.

But the report said the extent to which the new policy encouraged more service members to report sexual assaults was not clear since 2006 was the first full year it was in effect.

In total, 756 reports of sexual assaults were made confidentially in 2006 compared to 435 the previous year.

Criminal investigations were completed on 2,277 sexual assault reports and commanders took action in 780 cases. There were 292 court martials, most of them from cases reported in 2005, the report said.

"Studies show that sexual assault is the most underreported violent crime in society," said Cynthia Smith, a Pentagon spokeswoman.

"So the department placed special emphasis on removing barriers to reporting and creating a climate of confidence that the armed forces will address all aspects of sexual assault," she said.

"We expected those efforts, as well as increased training and improved victim services, would prompt many more victims to come forward, and we expected the numbers to increase this year."

Is The American Worker Doomed?

By Jay Richards

Not since the Great Depression has the American worker faced such a bleak future.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, incomes for the lowest income quintile have declined during the past decade and the gap between the rich and the poor grows bigger each year. In essence, the rich are getting richer – and the poor are getting poorer.

It's high time for a change.

Much of the reason incomes have declined in the working class is because of the decline of labor unions. In 1953, 36% of private-sector workers were union members – which is the primary reason the United States has a middle class today. Millions of Americans are currently enjoying the benefits of unions.

According to a story in The Washington Post, fewer than 8% of Americans belong to unions today. Where is our country headed when only 8% of the workforce is represented by unions?

DEMOCRATS SHOW A RAY OF HOPE

Despite this grim picture, the Democratic Party has shown a ray of hope in recent months. On March 1, the U.S. House of Representatives made history when it passed the Employee Free Choice Act.

For years, labor unions and workers have been working to get Congress to pass this long-awaited bill.

According to the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, this bill will do three things to get our country back on track.

First, it will strengthen penalties for employers who violate workers' rights to join a union.

Second, it will allow a neutral party to determine a first contract if the company and employees cannot reach an agreement.

Third, it will enable people to form unions when a majority of employees indicate in writing that they want one, which would return to the employees the choice of whether to form a union.

One reason we see a decline in union membership is our economy's changing from an industrial economy to a service economy. Historically, most trade unions represented industrial workers – such as steel, iron and copper miners.

Anger In An Immigrants' Town

By Froma Harrop

Iowa Republicans are peppering their presidential hopefuls with pointed questions about illegal immigration. Media reports tend to characterize these discussions as a Republican-base thing, but the reality is otherwise – as careful positioning by Democratic candidates would suggest. The immigration free-for-all is driving nearly everyone crazy.

New Bedford, MA, is worlds away from Iowa, particularly its Republican strongholds. It is ocean-blue Democratic and votes every two years for liberal Rep. Barney Frank.

But when federal immigration agents raided a local plant and took away 361 illegal workers, Frank didn't get up and give the speech about illegals doing work Americans won't do.

You don't say that in New Bedford, a depressed factory and fishing town with a magnificent work ethic and an unemployment rate of 9.4%, the highest in Massachusetts. [The day of the raid, the copper company founded by Paul Revere in 1801 added to the misery by announcing plans to leave town.]

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACTORY JOBS

For the city's beaten-up working class, factory jobs are diamonds. After the raid, 400 people immediately applied for the openings.

Frank blasted the Defense Department for awarding over \$100 million in contracts to Michael Bianco Inc., which, it appears, was flagrantly employing illegal workers to sew military backpacks and other gear. Frank also quoted a Michael Bianco competitor who called him after the raid, saying, "Now I understand how they kept outbidding me."

This is hardly an anti-immigrant town. Up to 40% of New Bedford's 100,000 residents are foreign-born, the great majority here legally. And while there's sympathy for the arrested workers – mostly women from Central America – there is also widespread disgust at what was allegedly going on at Michael Bianco and the lenient treatment of its owner, Francesco Insolia.

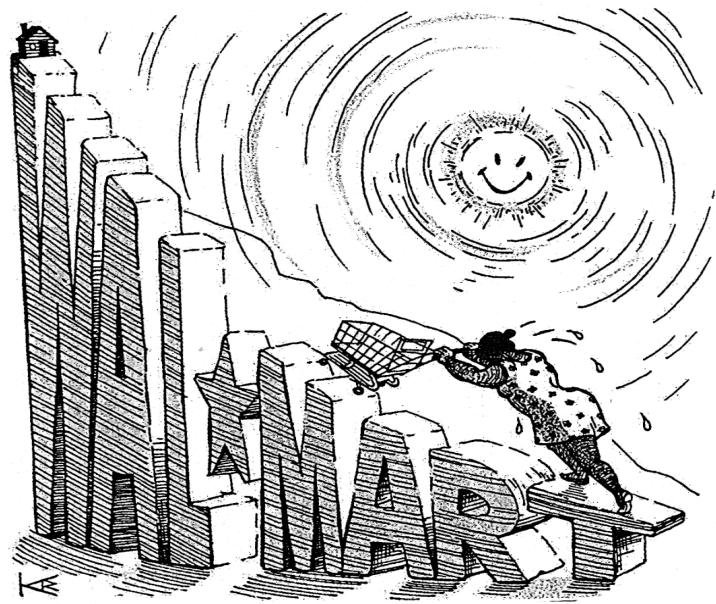
Where to start? The pay was minimum wage, no benefits. Employees said that Insolia would fine them \$20 if they used too much toilet paper or were a minute late. He charged them 25 cents for a Tylenol. Heat was frequently off in mid-winter, and the emergency back door chained.

FAT DEFENSE CONTRACT WITH TAX BREAKS

Insolia worked all angles. Upon landing a fat defense contract in 2004, he trotted to New Bedford City Hall for his special tax break. The city agreed to forgive \$80,000 in taxes over five years if he retained 65 jobs and created 85 new ones, with preference given to "qualified New Bedford residents."

Insolia himself lives in a posh Boston suburb and has a second home in Palm Beach. The cost of providing services for his illegal workforce, naturally, fell on the threadbare taxpayers of New Bedford.

Mayor Scott Lang is frustrated by a federal government that ignored illegal immigration for 15 years but has not reimbursed his city for its costs. And he holds



Service industries have fought, illegally in some cases, to block their workers from joining unions.

WAL-MART FIGHTING UNIONIZATION

Jessica Moser, spokeswoman for Wal-Mart, has been quoted saying, "While unions may be appropriate for other companies, they have no place at Wal-Mart."

Oh, really?

So the largest retail company on the planet, the largest private employer in the United States and a company whose reputation relies on low prices [because of low labor costs], feels that unions are not "appropriate" at Wal-Mart?

Wal-Mart is the shining example of why unions are necessary in contemporary American life. It is difficult for college students to understand, because Wal-Mart prices are so low. But, it is important for us to realize why they are so cheap and why the company can afford to sell its goods for low prices.

Congress is making progress with union membership, but there are things we can do, too. We can refuse to shop at a store that hurts its workers. More than 138 million Americans shop at Wal-Mart each week. Consumers hold the power in a market economy. We have the power to stand up and say "no" to Wal-Mart and other companies that refuse to allow their workers to unionize.

Don't sell your soul and your integrity for low prices. Don't be the consumer they want you to be.

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contempt for employers who exploit the vulnerable workers while undercutting New Bedford's reputable manufacturers.

"How about a year in jail for every illegal immigrant you employ?" Lang said to me. "That would drive them out real fast."

At the same time, Lang was shocked by the fed's rough handling of the illegal workers, some of whom were temporarily separated from their children. "I asked Julie Myers [who heads U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] whether there were any humanitarian guidelines," he said. "There weren't."

Insolia and his managers face felony charges, but unlike the illegals being held in detention centers, they're out on the streets. A federal judge even gave him permission to travel to Puerto Rico on business.

It doesn't matter what party you affiliate with: This is not a pretty picture. And anger over the immigration mess is clearly not just an Iowa-Republican thing.

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Third Of U.S. Jobs Pay 'Low Wages'

By Jessica Azulay

A new analysis has found that some 44 million American jobs – about one out of every three positions in the United States – pays \$11.11 per hour or less.

The report, published by researchers at a think tank called Inclusion, also says those jobs are less likely than higher paying work to include benefits like health insurance, retirement accounts or paid time off. Inclusion is affiliated with the progressive Center for Economic and Policy Research.

According to the report, the median wage for men in the U.S. is \$16.66 per hour, which means that half of men make more than that wage and half make less. The researchers defined low-wage jobs as those paying less than two-thirds of the median male wage.

"In short," wrote the researchers, "our preferred definition of low-wage work is any job that pays substantially less than the job held by a typical male worker."

The researchers' analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics found that the occupation with the most low-wage jobs is retail sales. Of the 4.3 million retail-sales workers in the country, half made less than \$9.20 per hour, according to the report.

Low-wage jobs are also concentrated in the fields of food preparations and serving; building and groups maintenance; healthcare support; personal care; and farming, fishing and forestry occupations.

The economists plotted low-wage work over time since 1979, and found that in the late 1990s low-wage jobs began paying more until 2001, when their wages were up by 5% over 1979's figures.

But, according to the report, since then, low-wages have fallen back to almost the 1979 levels.

GOP Is Cratering Under George Bush

By Janet Hook

Public allegiance to the Republican Party has plunged during George W. Bush's presidency, as attitudes have edged away from some of the conservative values that fueled GOP political victories, a major survey has found.

The survey, by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, found a "dramatic shift" in political party identification since 2002, when Republicans and Democrats were at rough parity.

Now, 50% of those surveyed identified with or leaned toward Democrats, whereas 35% aligned with Republicans.

What's more, the survey found, public attitudes are drifting toward Democrats' values: Support for government aid to the disadvantaged has grown since the mid-1990s, skepticism about the use of military force has increased and support for traditional family values has decreased.

The findings suggest that the challenges for the GOP reach beyond the unpopularity of the war in Iraq and Bush.

IRAQ IS ONE OF THE BIG FACTORS

"Iraq has played a large part; the pushback on the Republican Party has to do with Bush, but there are other things going on here that Republicans will have to contend with," said Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Center. "There is a difference in the landscape."

A key question is whether the trends signal a broad and lasting change in the balance of power between the national parties or a mood swing that will pass or moderate. It remains to be seen whether Democrats can capitalize on Republican weaknesses and achieve durable political dominance.

"This is the beginning of a Democratic opportunity," said Illinois Rep. Rahm Emanuel, chairman of the House Democratic Caucus. "The question is whether we blow it or not."

REPUBLICAN POLLSTER OPTIMISTIC

Whit Ayres, a Republican pollster, said the situation would improve as attention shifted to choosing the GOP's 2008 presidential nominee.

At that point, "we will have a far more level playing field than we have today," Ayres said.

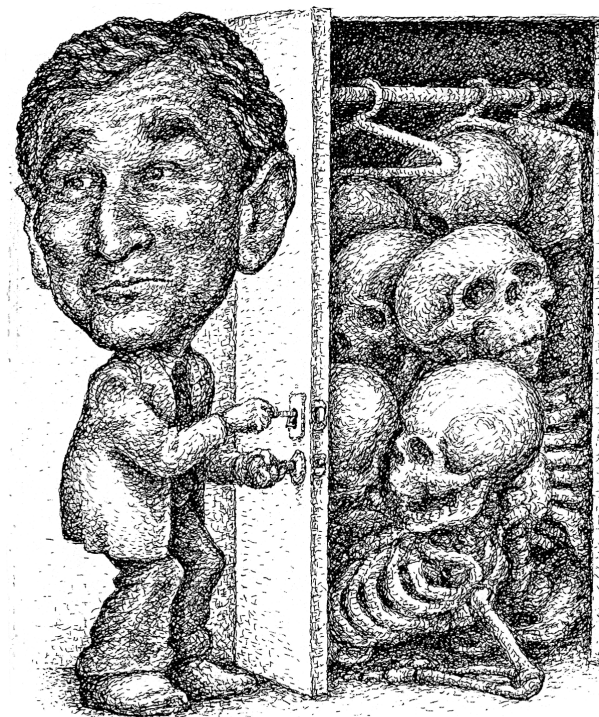
But other Republicans fear the poll signals a clear end to an era of GOP successes that began with Reagan's election in 1980, saw the party take control of Capitol Hill in 1994 and helped elect Bush twice.

"There are cycles in history where one party or one movement ascends for a while and then it sows the seeds of its own self-destruction," said Bruce Bartlett, a conservative analyst and author of the 2006 book *Impostor: How George W. Bush Bankrupted America and Betrayed the Reagan Legacy*.

END OF THE GOP CONSERVATIVE ERA?

Bartlett added, "It's clear we have come to an end of a Republican conservative era."

The current gap between Republican and Democratic identification – which Pew measured by counting people who said they leaned toward a party as well as those with firm allegiances – is the widest since Pew began collecting data on



party allegiance in 1990.

As recently as 2002, the two parties were tied, with each drawing support from 43% of those surveyed. But Democrats have gained an advantage over Republicans almost every year since.

Kohut said the spread between the parties mostly reflected the defection of independents from the GOP more than a more favorable assessment of the Democrats.

DEMOCRATS HAVE LOST SOME FAVOR

The survey found that the proportion of those expressing a positive view of Democrats has declined since January 2001 – when Bush took office – by six percentage points, to 54%. But the public's regard for Republicans has cratered during the Bush years, with the proportion holding a favorable view of the GOP dropping 15 points, to 41%.

Although Republicans rode to political power calling for smaller government, support for government action to help the disadvantaged has risen since the GOP took control of Congress in 1994.

At that point, a Pew survey found that 57% said the government had a responsibility to take care of people who could not take care of themselves; now, 69% said they believed that.

On the other hand, support for Bush's signature issue – a strong, proactive military posture – has waned since 2002, when 62% said that the best way to ensure peace was through military strength. In the recent poll, 49% said they believed that.

On social issues, the survey found that support for some key conservative positions was on the decline. For instance, those who said they supported "old fashioned values about family and marriage" dipped from 84% in 1994 to 76% in the recent survey.

Support for allowing school boards to have the right to fire homosexual teachers has dropped from 39% in 1994 to 28%.

© Los Angeles Times

SANTEE

From Page 10

When we value money, safety, or anything else more than we value freedom, then we will lose our freedom. When intellectual inquiry and scientific integrity are sold out to political demagogues and religious zealots, we will lose our freedom.

AMONG THE CURRENT THREATS TO FREEDOM

- Scientific Research – The controversy over stem cell research came out of the abortion fight, and the feds withdrew government funding for those programs. As a result, other countries are pulling ahead of us in this area.

And there is the denial of global warming. Our senator, Jim "the Greatest Hoax" Inhofe, is himself the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the voters of Oklahoma!

- Medicine – Pharmacists refuse to sell emergency contraception and some hospitals will not give EC to a woman after she has been raped!

The Bush-appointed director of the FDA's Family Planning Division supports abstinence-only sex education and is against the use of birth control! Amazingly, he was an improvement over Bush's appointment to head up the FDA's Office of Women's Health. That guy was a veterinarian!

- Education – Creationism is being pushed into biological and science textbooks all over the country and Bible classes are being added to school curricula masquerading as history.

- Museums and Zoos – In Tulsa, we had a big battle two years ago when a creationist demanded that Bible verses be put near the evolution display at the zoo. I contacted all of the activists I knew, and got them to a meeting of the Park Board. I made large tags for people to wear that said, "Don't Monkey With Our Zoo."

ORGANIZING AND SPEAKING UP WORKS

When the members of the Park Board looked out at the sea of tags in that room, they voted against the creationism display. We won! Now the evangelicals are opening their own creationist "museums" depicting the geological history of the world based on the Bible, and not on science.

- Government – There are the so-called "faith-based programs" that give mil-

lions of taxpayers' dollars to fundamentalist churches to run social programs that adhere to no professional standards and have no oversight. Abstinence-only programs are getting half of a billion dollars – billion with a B – to teach programs that have been shown do not work.

This is the administration's political payoff to right-wing churches that will use this money for propaganda to criminalize abortion and bash gays.

- Judicial and Legal – We have seen the nomination of judges who are political hacks and not judicial scholars that will pack the court for decades with ultra-conservative judges.

Then there is the recent scandal of the U.S. attorneys who were fired because they would not do the bidding of petty politicians. These attorneys swore an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States, not the Bush administration.

U.S. ATTORNEYS WORK FOR US

Although the president may appoint them, after their appointment, they do not work for Bush. They work for the American people. Corrupting the law to fit Bush's political agenda is not a part of their job description. When that happens, it's called obstruction of justice.

Freedom is not free. It never has been. It is a fragile flower watered by the blood of patriots.

We must fight for it every single day, and that is more true today than at any other time in our history because the enemy is not from without or from religious extremists in Iraq or Iran, as the Bush propagandists would have you believe. It's from within, from the religious extremists here and the corrupt politicians who do their bidding. It's from other Americans who will take your freedom away in a New York minute, and are trying to do that even as I speak.

We must never permit that to happen. Our star must never go out. As Thomas Jefferson said, "The price of Freedom is Eternal Vigilance." Be vigilant, my friends. Be very, very vigilant.

– Excerpts from Dr. Santee's address, accepting the ACLU of Oklahoma Foundation's Angie Debo Civil Liberties Award

America's Ignorance Is Breathtaking

By Mark Morford

Behold, this bizarre demographic. Behold this odd and simmering and rather shockingly large hunk of the American population because chances are very good that at least some of them live right next door to you and breathe the same air and steal your parking spaces and often don't shower for six days at a stretch.

And maybe, just maybe you should be painfully, dreadfully aware of them because they are – in their quiet, seemingly innocuous way – far more deadly than any gay evangelical preacher or meth-lab gang-bangers and far more frightening than chicken-flavored soap bubbles for dogs and far more disconcerting than Britney Spears' barren skull.

They are, in short, the deeply uninformed. The inexplicably ignorant. The wondrously numb, the disconnected, the way, way out of touch. And they are, apparently, legion.

Let me be clear. I am not speaking merely about the ideologically lopsided and the intellectually misshapen. I am not speaking of, say, those armies of happy blank-eyed red-state 'Merkins who only read NASCAR-themed Harlequin romance novels and only drink Hooters-branded energy drinks [real products, both] and who like to bury their gay sex fantasies under mountains of happy homophobic sing-along God-fearin' megachurch denial.

Nor am I speaking of your average Bush-lovin' bobbleheads who appear to get their worldly information by way of licking the stuff found on the bottom of the rocks in front of Fox News HQ and then tripping for three days while watching "The O'Reilly Factor" from the bathtub. Everyone knows about them. And no one really takes them seriously anymore.

'DUH, WHAT'S GLOBAL WARMING?'

No, I am speaking of a group far more mysterious and far more bewildering. And they number, in fact, in the tens of millions, or fully 13% of the American population, if this recent, 46-nation poll is to be believed. Here is one way you shall know them: They have never heard of global warming.

You read that right. According to this ACNielsen poll, there are, right now, upwards of 40 million bipedal adult Internet-using Americans living in this nation who have never, not even once, seen a program about the most dire issue facing the planet today. They have not read about it in a newspaper or seen photos in a magazine or heard about it via an award-winning documentary or seen monkey-like Republican presidents deny its existence and spit on science and mock the simply insurmountable pile of evidence in the name of oil profits and flagrant cronyism.

Who are these people, you ask? Are they, say, millions of forgotten, heavily medicated shut-ins across the land? Are they the disregarded elderly? People living in the backwoods of Louisiana or Appalachia and therefore we can't expect them to actually read or watch television or care much about the health of the planet [except, of course, to take part in a broad, 46-nation Internet survey] because they're simply too busy hunting squirrels and making fire and picking their teeth with dinosaur bones?

Or perhaps they are the very young and the desperately teenage, so packed to the skullcap with screaming hormones they can barely navigate the American education system much less name the current president or flirt well on MySpace or understand how many tons of greenhouse gases are pumped into the sky to crank out one PlayStation 3. You think? Does this explain it?

U.S. LEAST CONCERNED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

Verily, it does not. Not by a long shot. Not when, for example, fully 95% of Latin America has heard of global warming, and 75% think it's a "very serious" issue. Not when the United States ranks dead last among all 46 nations in its concern for the issue of dire climate change.

No, there is something more sinister at play here. Something darker and just a little disquieting. Do you know what it is? I don't, either. Do you ask, as I do, how the hell can this be? What sort of people are these? How can this survey be ac-

Outspoken Catholic Bishop Is Sacked

In his last Mass as pastor at the inner-city parish in Detroit where he had served for 23 years, Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton told his parishioners that he was forced to step down as pastor because of his lobbying efforts on behalf of the victims of sexual abuse by members of the clergy, a stance that put him in opposition to his fellow bishops.

The archbishop of Detroit, Cardinal Adam Maida, sent a letter to the parish, St. Leo, saying Bishop Gumbleton, 77, had to be removed because of church rules on retirement.

But as Bishop Gumbleton, who had already retired as a bishop, told his parish, there are many pastors even older than he who are allowed to continue serving.

"I'm sure it's because of the openness with which I spoke out concerning victims of sex abuse in the church. So we're all suffering the consequences of that, and yet, I don't regret doing what I did because I still think it was the right thing to do," he said, as the congregation rose and erupted in applause.

NATIONALLY KNOWN AS A MAVERICK

Bishop Gumbleton, though he never led a diocese, is known nationally in church circles as a maverick. He co-founded the peace ministry Pax Christi and accompanied antiwar delegations to Haiti and Iraq. He broke ranks with church



curate? How can anyone even moderately attuned to the culture not have heard of global warming, even once? Is it not part of the popular lexicon? Is it not being used to sell sexy white jeans, fer chrissakes? What, pray tell, gives?

Here is what we do know: The United States is, by far, the world's worst contributor to the root causes of global warming, and yet we are the least concerned about it. Read that again: Despite how the United States pumps more pollutants and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than China or India or Russia, a scant 42% of us see the problem as "very serious." Even China and India, those irresponsible mega-polluters of the developing world we like to scoff at for their flagrant industrial waste, are far more concerned and more universally informed.

WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT US?

It's enough to make you look at George W. Bush and want to slap him across the face with the razor-sharp paw of a dead polar bear. It's enough to make your heart shudder as you wonder who the hell we are, really, as an ostensibly proud people, as a supposedly "unified" nation, a global leader, a role model to the planet. Is the great United States really just some sort of moral joke? Are we really leading the world in anything except warmongering and defense spending and sexual hysteria and cool iPod accessories?

Sure, the overall lack of concern is understandable. After all, the vicious GOP spin machine has been working like a rabid dog for the last six years to demonize science and mock environmentalists and sneer at the Kyoto protocol and force eminent scientists to bury their dire findings lest Dick Cheney visit them in the night with a box of rat poison and a shotgun sneer.

And then there's this: Only 13% of congressional Republicans see global warming as a human-caused issue, compared to 95% of Dems. That's right, despite the National Academy of Sciences, despite the AAAS and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, despite the U.N., despite every reputable [and often, very conservative] scientific body on the planet, half of our own Congress snickeringly denies humans have had anything to do with global warming. Ah, how proud they must be.

EXPLAINING THE INTELLECTUAL 'BLACK HOLE'

But while that level of willful, greedy ignorance is relatively easy to explain, this weird hunk of gaping blindness, this intellectual black hole, isn't quite so easy to figure out.

Except for this: Maybe it's the end result of the great, chronic dumbing down of the American mind. Possible?

Maybe our 13% blindness rate is simply the brutal upshot, the logical conclusion of all the endless stripping of school textbooks of fact and perspective, of the push for silly literalist Christian dogma at the expense of true awareness, of the systemic neoconservative drive to get Americans to stop asking questions and stop thinking for themselves and to hate and mistrust the media [except, of course, Fox News], and wouldn't you be better off just enjoying your Wal-Mart candy corn and your "Everybody Loves Raymond" DVDs and just turn off your brain because it's all just far too complicated and messy and suspicious anyway, so really, why care at all?

And oh, those dark storm clouds? Pay no attention to those. Those are just God's happy lint balls. Go back to sleep.

© SFGate

teaching by preaching in favor of acceptance of gay men and lesbians and the ordination of women.

He lobbied in favor of a bill in Ohio to extend the statute of limitations and allow victims of sexual abuse to sue the church many years after they were abused.

He said he spoke out because he had been abused by a priest as a teenage seminarian and knew how hard it was to speak publicly even decades later. Bishops in Ohio opposed the bill, which failed.

In his brief remarks at Mass, Bishop Gumbleton told the parish that after he turned 75, he had sent a separate resignation letter to Cardinal Maida asking to stay on as pastor at St. Leo's on a year-by-year basis. He said he was surprised by his sudden replacement.

"I did not choose to leave St. Leo's," he said. "It's something that was forced upon me."

Mary M. Black, a parishioner at St. Leo's, said: "Almost universally, everyone in the parish is hurt and angry and upset and bewildered.

"He talks after Mass with people, and he is there ahead of Mass to say the rosary for anybody who has problems ... He was a pastor in the truest sense of the word."

Military Ban On Gays Is Hurting Us

By Alan K. Simpson

As a lifelong Republican who served in the Army in Germany, I believe it is critical that we review – and overturn – the ban on gay service in the military. I voted for “don’t ask, don’t tell.” But much has changed since 1993.

My thinking shifted when I read that the military was firing translators because they are gay! According to the Government Accountability Office, more than 300 language experts have been fired under “don’t ask, don’t tell,” including more than 50 who are fluent in Arabic.

This when even Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recently acknowledged the nation’s “foreign language deficit” and how much our government needs Farsi and Arabic speakers.

Is there a “straight” way to translate Arabic? Is there a “gay” Farsi? My God, we’d better start talking sense before it is too late. We need every able-bodied, smart patriot to help us win this war.

CONSIDER THE PREVIOUS REASONING

In today’s perilous global security situation, the real question is whether allowing homosexuals to serve openly would enhance or degrade our readiness. The best way to answer this is to reconsider the original points of opposition to open service.

First, America’s views on homosexuals serving openly in the military have changed dramatically. The percentage of Americans in favor has grown from 57% in 1993 to a whopping 91% of 18- to 29-year-olds surveyed in a Gallup Poll in 2003.

Military attitudes have also shifted. Fully three-quarters of 500 vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan said in a December Zogby Poll that they were comfortable interacting with gay people.

MILITARY PERSONNEL APPROVE

Also last year, a Zogby Poll showed that a majority of service members who knew a gay member in their unit said the person’s presence had no negative impact on the unit or personal morale.

Senior leaders such as retired Gen. John Shalikashvili and Lt. Gen. Daniel Christman, a former West Point superintendent, are calling for a second look.

Second, 24 nations, including 12 in Operation Enduring Freedom and nine in Operation Iraqi Freedom, permit open service.

Despite controversy surrounding the policy change, it has had no negative impact on morale, cohesion, readiness or recruitment. Our allies did not display such acceptance back when we voted on “don’t ask, don’t tell” but we should consider their common-sense example.

Third, there are not enough troops to perform the required mission. The Army is “about broken,” in the words of Colin Powell. The Army’s chief of staff, Gen. Peter Schoomaker, told the House Armed Services Committee in December that “the active-duty Army of 507,000 will break unless the force is expanded by 7,000 more soldiers a year.”

FELONS OK BUT NOT GAYS

To fill its needs, the Army is granting a record number of “moral waivers,” allowing even felons to enlist. Yet we turn away patriotic gay and lesbian citizens.

The Urban Institute estimates that 65,000 gays are serving and that there are one million gay veterans.

These gay vets include Capt. Cholene Espinoza, a former U-2 pilot who logged more than 200 combat hours over Iraq, and Marine Staff Sgt. Eric Alva, who lost

DEMOCRATS

From Page One

would be a definite plus for any future candidacy if he enjoyed the support of a loyal cadre of House Democrats spread across the state.

With budget-writers headed back to the drawing board, a mystery remains: Why did Mike Morgan and Senate Democrats play along with a budget process driven by Cargill and Coffee?

Morgan repeatedly appeared with Cargill and Coffee to not only defend the process, but also the product.

Some believe the affable Morgan was hoodwinked, others that he delivered payback to Henry for siding with former GOP House Speaker Todd Hiett in last year’s regular session budget battle.

A few wondered if the term-limited Morgan is eyeing future employment that would require access to Republican legislative leaders. Can you spell l-o-b-b-y-i-s-t?

No matter the reason, some Democrats privately insist Morgan has for-

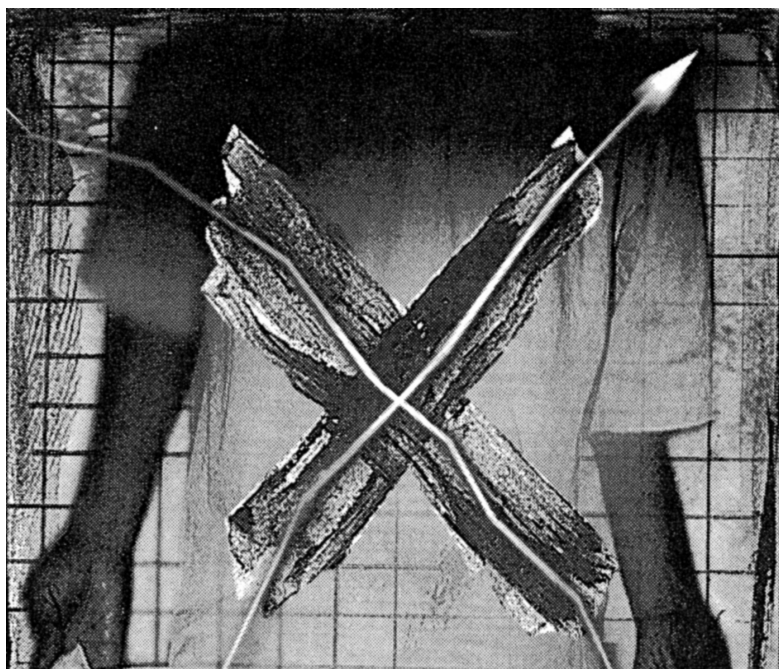
feited any chance of winning the party’s nomination for higher office, if he had any such ambitions.

Imagine the attack ads: Morgan flanked by Republicans Cargill and Coffee, badmouthing the most popular Democratic governor in state history.

All 24 Senate Democrats joined the 24 Senate Republicans in unanimously approving the budget, but Senate Democrats are far from sanguine about the matter. Several attending a Cargill-Coffee-Morgan news conference looked as if they’d been sucking lemons.

All Cargill, Coffee and Morgan had to do to avoid this mess was toss a few bones to Henry and House Democrats. Instead, they overconfidently hopped aboard the Arrogance Express. It jumped the tracks.

And in the process, it awakened House Democrats from a long slumber.



his right leg to an Iraqi land mine.

Since 2005, more than 800 personnel have been discharged from “critical fields” jobs considered essential but difficult in terms of training or retraining, such as linguists, medical personnel and combat engineers.

Aside from allowing us to recruit and retain more personnel, permitting gays to serve openly would enhance the quality of the armed forces.

WAS THIS HERO ‘IMMORAL?’

In World War II, a British mathematician named Alan Turing led the effort to crack the Nazis’ communication code. He mastered the complex German enciphering machine, helping to save the world, and his work laid the basis for modern computer science. Does it matter that Turing was gay?

Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said recently that homosexuality is “immoral” and that the ban on open service should therefore not be changed. Would Pace call Turing “immoral?”

Since 1993, I have had the rich satisfaction of knowing and working with many openly gay and lesbian Americans, and I have come to realize that “gay” is an artificial category when it comes to measuring a man or woman’s on-the-job performance or commitment to shared goals.

It says little about the person. Our differences and prejudices pale next to our historic challenge. Gen. Pace is entitled, like anyone, to his personal opinion, even if it is completely out of the mainstream of American thinking.

He should know better than to assert this opinion as the basis for policy of a military that represents and serves an entire nation. Gen. Pace later apologized.

Let us end “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

This policy has become a serious detriment to the readiness of America’s forces as they attempt to accomplish what is arguably the most challenging mission in our long and cherished history.

– The writer was a Republican senator from Wyoming from 1979 to 1997

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Hume’s Attack On Murtha Is Wrong

By John Gordon

As a World War II Veteran, I deeply resent Brit Hume’s remarks about Rep. John Murtha being senile and not knowing what was going on in Iraq.

It is an insult to every military combatant to hear this coming from Fox News and they should request that he apologize for making such remarks.

Hume had other priorities during Vietnam like letting other people do his fighting and now he slams someone [Murtha] who served in his stead in Vietnam because Hume can’t extricate his lips from George W. Bush’s backside.

Hume was born in Washington, D.C., where he attended St. Albans School. He obtained a student deferment from the Vietnam War draft. In 1965 graduated from the University of Virginia.

He had other priorities during Vietnam such as letting other people do his fighting, and now he slams someone like Murtha who served in his stead in Vietnam.

Hume is married to Rhoda Kim Schiller Hume, Fox News’ vice president and Washington bureau chief.

Hume married to his boss. What a nepotistic load of crapola. I guess his wife sent him to trash Murtha for serving in Vietnam for Brit.

– The author lives in Moore

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